

Things We Keep To Ourselves - **Dissertation Sample**

I see her come into the leisure centre, dressed for the gym, taking in the new setting. The bag she carries is light and I imagine the weight of the thin rope on her shoulder. She lifts her chin to show off her cheekbones, wandering her gaze through the water bottles, before picking one of translucent purple. Her dress sense is silky—Calvin Klein—and her posture is assertive as she walks to the reception and speaks to Martha like an old friend. She is forward, taking a pen from the inside of the desk, showing off a ring on her wedding finger as she writes. I assume she is engaged or married. She hands the paper back and her tongue touched her teeth as she says *Thanks*. Her gaze is angelic as she makes a quick glance in my direction, before disappearing into the gym.

I wipe my sweaty brow and adjust myself back to the job at hand, swing my whistle around my finger and look at the family in the water. There are five of them. The three kids are slowly drifting towards the deep end. My focus is the youngest. The kid claps on the surface, her armbands slowly causing her to go adrift into deep water, whilst the dad leans against the wall, mum's legs wrapped around his waist. I can't really ignore a child floating into danger whilst mum and dad dry-hump.

'Can you please take your kid into the radius of the shallow end and try to stay with her this time.' Cue an obvious fake smile.

'Why?' The dad says. 'She's got armbands.'

And I'll throw you out. 'Just stick to the rules, please.'

The woman grumbles, collects the straggling child, leaving the dad to adjust his trunks.

I exit poolside thirty minutes later and asked Martha if she knew her.

'Never met her before, but she seemed nice.' Martha squints. 'Why?'

'No reason,' I say and I am met with a *Mmhmm*. 'Andy about?'

Andy is in the office, eating a hot dog from the snack bar. 'Adam! How are we doing? You look a little sweaty.'

'It's like a greenhouse on pool,' I say.

'Yeah, I forgot to mention the air vents are blocked,' he says. 'Need to get someone in.'

But not until next year. I ask if any jobs need doing because it's better to ask.

'The sport set-ups were done by last night's lot. Martha needs to hop out for an hour if you wanna watch reception?'

I agree and here I am, smiling and waving at customers coming in and out. Someone tries to buy a pair of goggles from me—I spend about five minutes trying to work out how to make the transaction, much to his displeasure.

'All good out here?' Andy leans against the office door and I tell him it's going swimmingly.

He clicks his fingers, 'Ha, swimming pools, I get it', before swaggering back to his chair to resume his dedicated ninety-hour *Minecraft* world.

'Hey, Lifeguard.'

It's her, the Calvin Klein girl. Again, she leans on the desk, *confident*, and widens her cheeks. 'I wish I could get paid to go on my phone.'

'Oh, I do, it's part of the profession.'

'Is that so?' She takes a flyer for opening times and reads it like a magazine and elegantly moves her index finger along Monday. 'Is the yoga class only on Mondays?'

'It is.'

She sighs and says, 'Hashtag brrrr Mondays' to let me know she is on Instagram.

'Best day of the week,' I mock, and she responds with a squinting tease.

'I'll have to reschedule my bookings,' she says.

'You can do that so easy?'

She places a hand on her chest and holds out her shoulders. 'As the owner of her salon, one may do as she pleases.'

'My apologies. Have a free coffee voucher for my ignorance.'

She likes that. 'You are pardoned.'

A customer queues behind and folds his arms impatiently, 'Tick tock'.

She sees him and looks back to the flyer. 'I think I will book in for Monday.'

'Do you have a membership?' She knows I already knew.

'I do.' She takes it from the inside of her phone case.

'You're booked in, *Emilia*.'

'Why thank you—' She leans over the desk, forward, and holds my lanyard—'Adam.'

She sees me glance at her ring and slips her hand away.

'Will you hurry up?'

'You come in every day, John. The pool isn't going anywhere,' I say.

He grumbles. Emilia steps to the side because she didn't want to leave yet.

I let John through and hear him mutter something about it not being like this in his day.

'Have a great swim!' I say loud enough for his feeble hearing aids to hear.

Emilia tuts, 'Old people' and turns to my hair. 'When was the last time you got your hair cut?'

'Week and half ago,' I say.

'Really?'

'Yeah, it grows fast.'

She dithers her gaze at another customer coming in. 'You should come to me instead. I bet I can stop that happening.'

'How much are we betting?' I say.

She shuffles the bag on her shoulder. 'Come and find out.'

I go and find out a couple hours later. I walk into her salon and wait at the front desk. Someone with heavy fake tan comes over and makes a judgement of me. 'Hey, I'm Mindy, have you booked?'

'No, but I'd like to make one with Emilia,' I say.

'Oh, she isn't here.'

'Will she be in soon?' I didn't come to be looked after by Mindy.

She pouts her lips and looks at the diary and runs her finger over the bookings. 'Hang on, she'll be back in like thirty.'

'Like thirty is fine.'

Mindy notes down my name and offers me a seat. I make acquaintances with the sofa and observe the space. It is mirrors and chairs and overpriced hairspray and a slogan across the wall says *WE WILL DYE FOR YOU!*

She offers me a drink—iced coffee—I say I'm not a fan and open up Instagram instead. By search, her name comes up first. I tilted my phone at an angle that no one can see and scroll.

Yesterday she was sitting in a cafe with a leaf-shape frothed coffee. The previous week she was somewhere in the countryside dog walking. She doesn't have a dog, but she volunteers for a local dog shelter. The rest of her feed is her customers' finished hair and then there she is with Mindy, joint partners to Carter Salon—this is their first year in business. Emilia travelled across America two years prior and judging by the food on display, she loves peanut butter and jam—jelly if you're feeling American. And then I think back to the ring on her finger. I can't find any sign of a partner. It must have been a fashion choice, she wouldn't be flirting with me otherwise.

I roll my head back and feel bones crack, staring at the low ceiling because that is much more interesting.

'Hey, Lifeguard.'

I spiral around. Emilia holds a box that she was dying to put down.

'Hi.'

'Hi.'

'Have you been waiting long?'

'I've been waiting short,' I say and that makes her smirk.

'Short? You've been here nearly half an hour,' Mindy says.

Emilia gives me a look that says *Ignore her*. She walks close by—vanilla—and offers me a seat at the far end before disappearing into the backroom. I hear glass clinking as she unloads the batch and the *pchittt* of hairspray tells me she's fixing herself up, even though she doesn't need to.

She reappears, folding her lips with Vaseline. 'So, what will it be?'

I tell her to decide and she says, 'Well, as we're going for dinner tomorrow—'

'We're going for dinner?' I say, flattered.

'Yes, that new restaurant on East Street. Eight?'

'How about seven fifty-seven?'

There is a Keira Knightly essence to her smile as a black cape comes over my front and I feel her touch for the first time. It is as though we've just fought pirates and I am Orlando Bloom, waiting at the end of the deck.