

The Last Supper

“Oh my gosh, what is that smell?” I shout, enticed by the delicious aromatics filling the air, and start to salivate as I make my way into the kitchen. My shopping bags are heavy, the twine handles digging into my skin. I set them on the counter with a thud, and wince at the sound of clinking glass from inside the one labeled *Anthropology*.

“Yes, Mom, he’s excited to meet you too,” Emily responds.

My eyebrows furrowed in confusion until she turned toward me, frying pan in hand, with her phone huddled in between her shoulder and her cheek. I repeat my question, this time in a whisper, and I am answered with a swat to the mouth by a pair of tongs in my girlfriend’s hand.

“Of course, we’re all looking forward to it. See you tonight...yep...okay.”

Emily responds to her caller, her words accompanied with faux composure and excitement in the hopes of concealing her anticipation to end her conversation, and moving as though her cell phone is burning a hole in the side of her head.

“Bye, Mom,” she finally taps the red button at the bottom of the screen and lets out a big sigh. “What do you mean ‘what is that smell’,” she retorts, her face growing redder by the second.

“You just thought you’d go shopping for gifts at the last minute and totally forget about what’s happening tonight? Has it simply slipped your mind that my whole family is coming over for Christmas Eve dinner tonight? The *Joneses*. Are you completely unphased by the fact that my parents are impossible to please, our roommates are entirely juvenile, and we have a four course dinner to prepare for *seven*?!”

“Dude, chill out. Your mom will love Cooper. He’s great with parents.” Christian chimes in, as he and Matt strut into the kitchen to find open spaces on the counter to jump up and sit on.

“Yeah Emily, seriously, do you doubt my charm?” I joke, batting my eyelashes at her. She shoots me a dirty look and smacks Matts’ fingers away from the now half empty plate of her sister’s favorite hot honey chicken wings. “Okay, I’m sorry,” I sympathize, “I know how important this is to you. Is there any way I can help?”

“Actually, yes,” Emily begs, “I think I can manage the rest of the supper courses, and Christian said he would help me with the drinks. Cooper, do you think you could handle the

dessert? It's strawberry cheesecake, my mom's favorite. I have the recipe right here, all you need to do is follow the instructions. ”

Matt grabs the ginormous cook book off the counter with his devilishly sticky fingers, and flips to the cheesecake recipe. “Here. Easy. You got this, bro. I’ll help you out. Emily and Christian are going to the store to get stuff for the drinks, let’s just get this in the oven by the time they’re back.” Emily gives me a relieved smile, and I take the book as they grab their keys and head out to the store.

“Okay, grab the cream cheese out of the fridge. Have you ever made a cheesecake before?” I ask my friend, grateful for his help as I am the last person to be trusted in the kitchen.

“Well, no, but how hard can it be? It’s right here, basically all it is is mixing all the ingredients together, and baking it at 375 degrees.”

“Alright, I’ll preheat the oven. Collect the ingredients and then we’ll start to mix,” I decide. I click the buttons on the oven until I reach 375, and make my way to the island to see what Matt found in the pantry. A plethora of baking ingredients stand on the marble countertop and my eyes are met with sugar, vanilla, salt, eggs, sour cream, cream cheese, and...anchovies?

“Dude, what are these?” I ask, holding up the jar of gross-looking silver fish.

“Look, Emily just said to follow the instructions. It’s her mom’s favorite recipe, I’m not going to be the one to change it. Isn’t she, like, super boujee?” Matt asks. I shrug and nod, still unsure of the addition of this grotesque ingredient.

“Exactly. Rich people eat weird stuff like this all the time. My aunt married this stock broker from Beverly Hills, now she’s always posting pictures eating snails and fish eggs and stuff. It’s gross. Trust me, it checks out,” he assures me. “Now come on, let’s hurry. They’ll be back soon and Emily will want to clean up before they arrive.”

We spend the next hour referring to the recipe, mixing together our ingredients and adding it to the pre-made graham cracker crust. We top it off with the jar of our fancy secret ingredient, and place it in the oven. Matt puts his oven-mitted hand in the air for a high five, and we use the remaining 45 minutes left on the timer to shower and change before our guests arrive.

I button the collar of my old, much too tight formal shirt, and start to gel my hair with the products Emily set out for me last night with a post-it labeled “*NONNEGOTIABLE*”. I’m on my second attempt to gel my hair in a way that doesn’t make me look ridiculous when I get a call from Christian.

“Hey Coop, look, the store was crazy and we’re stuck in a really bad jam right now, and it might not clear up for a while because of the holiday traffic. Emily said-”

“Emily says her parents told me they’re five minutes away and you need to meet them without me!” Emily interrupts from the driver’s seat in a panic.

Yikes. This isn’t good news. After a shaky deep breath, I assure her that everything is under control. She doesn’t need to be there, and I will have them won over by the time she arrives.

“And don’t worry,” I soothe, “The dessert is almost out of the oven, and I know your mom is going to love it. I’m just glad we had her fancy ingredient in the pantry.”

“Wait, what?” Emily asks, “Cooper, what fancy-” *ding-dong!*

“Emily, relax. I got to go, your family is here. I’ll see you soon.” I hang up the phone, and rush downstairs.

“Matt, come on! They’re at the door. Remember, be on your best behavior. Oh! And get the cheesecake out of the oven!” I shout, smoothing my tie as I prepare myself to open the door.

I turn the knob with my sweaty palm and am greeted with three, not particularly friendly faces. Emily’s sister, a smaller version of Emily, only with brown hair instead of blonde, and wearing a necklace that surely costs more than what I make in a year. Mr. Jones, smelling of cigars and sporting a business suit devoid of a single wrinkle. And, her mother, standing front and center, pouting at me with her deep red rouge, as though she’s already waiting for me to make a mistake. But, alas, we have recreated her very favorite dish. What’s there to be scared of?

“Come in, please!” I encourage. As they walk in, I notice Mrs. Jones raise her nose to the air and start to sniff.

“Um, Coop?” Matt mutters, appearing from the kitchen and now tugging on my sleeve.

“What,” I spit impatiently. He brings my attention to the cookbook he had brought out, and I watch in horror as he begins to unstick the hot honey-coated cheesecake recipe from the anchovy pizza recipe right behind it.

“Oh my gosh,” She wails, “What is that smell?”