

What Happened to Delia Grayson

Betsy parks her car in a sunny spot next to the park and, looking in the rearview mirror, meets the eyes of the cockapoo in the back seat. “I hope you’ll be warm enough here in the sun, Dee. I’ll leave the window cracked for air, but it’s awfully cold out. I haven’t seen Miranda since that dinner with your scientist friends. What was that, over a year ago? So I may be a while. Her daughter got engaged, which I already know, but I’ll have to act surprised and hear all about it. You know how Miranda likes to talk.”

The dog whimpers.

“I can’t just let you run around the park alone, Dee, if that’s what you were hoping. Somebody might steal you or you’ll end up at the pound. Just enjoy the view out the window. After lunch, we can go for a walk.”

Dee watches Betsy cinch her new hand-me-down, cashmere coat tightly around herself and head toward the shopping district. I loved that coat, Dee thinks, but it’s not as warm as my new silky fur. She leaps over the center console and steps in a few dainty circles on the front passenger seat before curling up for a nap. She likes the smell of the leather and even the slight fragrance of family butts. Ah, how things have changed. Dee is overcome with her good fortune and falls right to sleep.

Minutes later, in a dark, busy restaurant lounge, Betsy and Miranda embrace, each woman breathing in the familiar fragrances of the other’s beauty products while trying to gauge who’s put on weight. The hostess stands by politely, then leads them to a booth in the back of the dining room. It’s a popular restaurant for business lunches, and most of the tables are filled with men.

“May I take your drink order?” the hostess asks as the women hang their coats on the nearby stand. The waitstaff here is very efficient.

“Are we drinking or abstaining today?” asks Betsy, hoping they’re drinking.

“Drinking.”

“Should we order a bottle?”

“Might as well, you know us.”

“The house chardonnay?” says Betsy.

Miranda grabs the wine list off the table and glances down it. “Bring the Talbott.”

The hostess nods and heads toward the bar as the two women settle in across from each other.

“So, how was Christmas?” asks Betsy, hoping to get Miranda talking about herself and put off her own news for as long as possible.

“It was so exciting. Andrea got engaged to Conner. Finally. And she is over the moon. You know how she’s been planning her wedding since she was ten, but now she’s really focusing.”

“Sounds expensive,” says Betsy.

“Oh, it will be,” says Miranda with glee. “The Vera Wang dress of her dreams has already been purchased. Andre flipped over the price, and I got angry. ‘Don’t get started,’ I warned. Mother and Father put aside plenty for her to have just the kind of wedding she wants. And she wants it to be at the house, so that’s already a huge savings except that I want the barn finished and all the lawns torn up and resodded.”

“Oh come on, Miranda. Resodding the lawns? That’s ridiculous.” Betsy can put up with most of Miranda’s trust fund baby ideas—she’s been hearing them since

college—but she does challenge her friend when it comes to environmental issues.

“Who’s going to look at the grass?”

Miranda sighs. “That’s what Andre said, it’s just that I want everything to be perfect.”

Betsy senses it’s useless to argue. “So when is the wedding?”

“September twenty-first, so save the date. And Andrea asked if you think Bonnie will want to come.” Bonnie is Betsy’s daughter and as much as Miranda and Betsy had expected and urged their children to be best friends like themselves, the girls never hit it off.

“She’ll be in Japan teaching English!” announces Betsy with pride.

“Wonderful!” says Miranda and doesn’t follow up with any questions. Betsy’s feelings are hurt. She takes a long sip of wine, then hides behind her menu and sticks her tongue out at her friend. This kind of childishness always makes her feel better.

After looking at her own menu, Miranda asks, “And what about Delia? Do you think she’d come? I haven’t seen anything about her in the news lately.”

“Why don’t we order,” says Betsy, not lowering her menu.

When the waiter arrives, Miranda says, “I’ll have the salmon, baked potato, no sour cream, and the asparagus please.”

“The same,” says Betsy, and as soon as the waiter is out of earshot she says to Miranda, “Delia’s a dog now.”

Miranda leans forward conspiratorially and whispers, “What happened? Bad facelift?”

“I’m speaking literally. She’s a dog. As in woof woof.”

“Shut up.”

“Seriously. Remember that couple she brought to dinner last year when we had you and Andre over? They were bioengineers, and they were fundraising?”

“Sure, I remember. I didn’t understand a word they said, but we wrote them a hefty check.”

“Well, they changed Delia into a dog.”

Miranda gasps, her hand on her chest. “Isn’t that risky?”

“Maybe. But she wasn’t their first client. They’ve now turned a lot of women into dogs, and there are hundreds on the waiting list.” Betsy is relieved to have finally said it. She pours more wine into both of their glasses.

Miranda waves the hostess over and says, “We’ll be wanting a second bottle.” Then to Betsy she whispers, “What the fuck?”

“I know, I know. It was a real shock, believe me. But she explained it all to Guy and me in advance and I had to agree with her, it was a good option.”

“But she had it all, Betsy. Everything! The looks, the smarts, the success, the men, the whole package.”

“That’s what we always thought, right? But it turns out the whole package included a lot of pressure and some pretty gross stuff. She said every good role she got — at least all the early ones—required sex. And not the nice kind. Really demeaning shit.”

“Oh my God, just like in the news now every day. She should have come forward with everyone else! Hashtag me too and all that.”

“She threatened to come forward years ago. Twice! And twice she got bought off by different lawyers and signed non-disclosure agreements. After you do that you can’t really speak out unless you want to give the money back. The first settlement bought

her penthouse. Remember when we stayed there? And the second one paid off my mom's mortgage and for a lot of my college. Remember how impressed you were that I was Delia Grayson's sister?"

"Remember how long it took me to believe you? You didn't look anything like her. You still don't!"

"So I have been told my whole life, thank you very much, and I was always jealous, but now I have a lot more perspective."

"I had no idea she used sex to get parts."

"Oh come on, we kind of knew. Remember when we stayed with her right after graduation and she was all furtive about why she had to go out alone, and she came back in the morning looking like she'd been run over by a truck, and she said, 'Girls, don't try to be beautiful. Beauty stinks. Beauty hurts. Beauty is a curse,' and we just thought she was being dramatic, and we went out and spent the day shopping while she slept. Remember?"

"I remember. And when we got home she was in a baggy sweat suit making spaghetti. We wanted her to take us out to clubs, but she made us stay in and play cards."

Betsy is conscious of how much she likes having her friend's attention. Even though, once again, it's only because she's Delia's sister. She pours herself more wine and says, "Anyway, when people started coming forward about Cosby then Weinstein, she started to relive her own experiences. It was like she got PTSD."

"A lot of the women coming forward signed those agreements and they're not giving any money back."

“Guy told her that. He told her she could come forward now, but she never wanted that kind of publicity. Not for herself, and not for our family.”

Miranda says, “How did your mom take it?”

“Well we never told her about the sex, so she was furious about the change. Dee showed up for the first time in dog form at Thanksgiving.”

“Wait, stop, when you say ‘dog form,’ what exactly do you mean?”

“She’s a cockapoo.”

“Like a *real* cockapoo?”

“Like the most beautiful cockapoo you’ve ever seen.”

“I think my cousin had one of those, I can kind of picture it. They don’t shed right?”

“Right.”

“And she went to Thanksgiving? Can she still drive?”

“She rode with Guy and Bonnie and me. Of course she can’t drive. She’s a dog! And mom doesn’t like dogs. She never let us have one growing up.”

“She’s more of a cat person? Maybe Delia should have gone cat.”

“This group doesn’t make cats, just dogs. Just cockapoos, in fact. Something about their DNA makes the transfer easier. I don’t understand too much about it, but they definitely don’t do cats and you can’t become a golden retriever or a pit bull, just a cockapoo and only if you’re a woman.”

“Interesting. So what did your mom say?”

“She accused Dee of being ungrateful for everything she had sacrificed for her, of throwing her life away, but she did it in private, in the kitchen so no one could hear her. I still don’t think my aunts and uncles know.”

“What did Delia say in her defense?”

The waiter brings the salmon and both women take a couple of bites. Betsy says, “Delia can’t talk anymore, Miranda. I keep telling you, she’s a dog! She just cocked her head and stared while Mom carried on, and then she went and laid down under the kitchen table.

After I explained to mom that Delia’d sold everything and put all the proceeds that were left, after the transformation, into accounts for the two of us, it calmed her down a little. Then she said, ‘Well, I still don’t want her on the furniture.’ Then we brought the turkey out to the dining room and it hit me that Delia would never be helping us serve dinner again, or drying pots, or bringing dessert. I felt kind of sad.”

“Yeah, that’s tough. I don’t know what I’d do if my sister became a dog. So did she eat at the table?”

“Of course not. She stayed in the kitchen. But while we ate, she did jump up and lick out the turkey pan, and I fed her a bunch of leftovers from my plate afterward. Then she snuck into the living room and watched football on the couch next to our cousins. I never get to watch football on Thanksgiving! So there I was jealous of her again.”

“Is your mom still mad?”

“Not really, she bought Delia a fancy collar for Christmas.”

“That’s nice.”

“But Dee doesn’t want fancy anymore. She wouldn’t let me put the collar on her, and when we took her to Pet World to buy a bed, she picked out the simplest plaid cushion. She just wants to sleep and run around outside when she’s awake. She chases squirrels, and Bonnie tosses a ball for her sometimes. She’s in great shape.”

“That’s not surprising, she always was.”

The women eat their salmon in silence. It's flaky and moist. "Heard anything from Lois?" Betsy finally asks, steering the conversation into new terrain.

It's only as they're parting ways out in front of the restaurant that Miranda returns to the topic of Delia. "So do we invite Dee to the wedding? I mean do dogs go to those sorts of events?"

"I don't think it's necessary, Miranda. With a brand new lawn, it would just be asking for brown spots."

"Oh, good point. Do give Dee my love though."

When Betsy lets her sister out the car, she apologizes for taking so long. "I'm a little drunk, Dee, I need a long walk before I drive."

Delia bounds into the park and pees at the first tree she comes to then ambles on. Betsy follows. They never get too far apart. Betsy's freezing and ties her scarf over her ears. She's glad Dee doesn't need a leash so she can keep her hands deep in her pockets. Dee continues at a good clip until she reaches the other side of the park and then heads out the gate and walks to the corner where she sits and waits for the light to change.

They cross together into a ritzy neighborhood of old brownstones. There's hardly a soul on the streets and not much traffic, but when Dee runs up the steps of one particular building and squats, Betsy gets nervous and turns to walk back toward the park, donning the large pair of sunglasses left in one of the coat pockets.

After Dee finishes defecating on the welcome mat, she prances down the steps and catches up with her sister, wagging her tail happily.

That evening Guy calls down to the station and has them look up the brownstone's address. Turns out it belongs to a director Delia worked with in the past. He's got a show currently on Broadway. Betsy reminds Guy how Delia had hoped to get the female lead.

The director said she was too old.