

## PRT 378- "Dinner Date"

1...2...3...breathe...1...2...3...breathe...

This is what I kept telling myself over and over as I tried to put my make up on. It was the night of the double date that would be seen 'round the world (if the tabloids had a say...and they usually did).

That knot in my stomach felt like it was the size of a bowling ball. I did NOT want to do this. The idea of being with Rich and while I watched Jon and Dot together made me sick. The only thing that kept me going was the thought of being in Jon's arms at the end of the night, when all was said and done.

I had just put my dress on when my phone rang. It was Mina, which was shocking. She had some nerve to call me after what she did. What did she want? Oh, just to say that Mia was Nemesis. Yeah, sure. Whatever. Nice try Mina.

Anyway, I finished getting dressed just as I heard my doorbell. I went to answer it. It was Rich.

"Hey." He said.

"Hi." I replied.

"You look nervous."

"More like pissed, but it'll pass. Are you ready to get this over with?"

"Yeah. You realize we have to act like a couple or she'll get suspicious, right?"

"Yeah, yeah. I know."

"OK. Then let's do this."

Jon

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I finished buttoning my shirt and looked in the mirror at my hair. I don't think I had ever dreaded anything as much as I was dreading this dinner. When I saw Michelle with Rich I knew it would drive me crazy. I would want nothing more than to take her in my arms and hold her...but I would have to sit back and watch and even pretend to be happy for them. If I acted annoyed or upset at all Dot would know the truth. All the acting classes I'd taken couldn't prepare me for the performance I'd have to put on tonight.

Dot came out of the bathroom.

"Can you put this necklace on me?" she asked.

I nodded, "Yeah, sure."

"Thank you." She said when I was done, "You ready?"

"Sure."

"You ok?" she asked.

"I'm fine. Why?"

"You look uneasy. This isn't a problem, is it?"

"How do you expect me to act? Michelle is still my ex-wife. This is going to be uncomfortable." I said.

"That's true, but she's with Rich now so we have to learn to accept them together."

"I know."

"And you're seriously ok with it? You have no lingering feelings?"

"I care about her, you know that...but no, I'm not in love with her if that's what you're getting at."

"Then tonight shouldn't be a problem."

"No problem at all."

"Good." She said as she took my hand. We went downstairs. The kids were in the TV room.

"OK, Stephanie is in charge. The money for the pizza is on the counter and both of us will have our cell phones on us so you can reach us should you need to." Dot said.

"I can't believe you two are seriously doing this." Steph said.

"I can't believe Michelle is seriously dating Uncle Rich." Jesse echoed.

"I think they make a cute couple. I'm happy for them." Dot said looking at me. I forced a smile. I knew she was testing me, just waiting for me to slip up. "Anything you kids need before we go?" Dot asked. "No, we're good." Steph said. "Ok, remember, the boys need to be in bed by 9." "Excuse me?" Jess asked. "Not you, the young boys." Dot clarified. "Ok, just checking." "Everyone behave for Steph. We'll see you later." I said hugging each of the kids. Dot grabbed her purse and we headed out.

We got to the restaurant. Mich and Rich were already there. We went over to the table and sat down.

"Hey guys." I said.

"Hi Jon, Dot. Nice to see you both." Michelle said politely.

"Likewise."

"What have you two been up to?" Dot asked.

"Work. A lot of work." Rich said.

"Yeah, as you know the guys have their projects to release and I'm in the final stages of getting my new album finished." Michelle said.

Dot nodded, "Oh, so you're working on a new album. How's that coming?"

"Pretty good. I'm pleased with what we've done so far."

"What's the feel of the album?"

"It's a lot of where I am in my life. There's several songs about my ex-hus...oh, I guess with an annulment he's not my ex-husband. We were never married." Michelle said softly.

Dot reached over and touched her hand, "It's ok. I understand what you mean. You really loved RJ didn't you?"

Mich nodded, "Oh so much. I really thought RJ and I would last forever. But he obviously didn't feel the same way... life goes on."

"I'm sure letting it out on the album has been cathartic."

"Oh absolutely. It definitely helped me deal with the pain."

"And you must be doing some better if you're dating again."

Michelle nodded, "Yeah. I decided I just had to get back out there and move on."

"So how did you and Rich hook up anyway? I thought you two were always just friends."

"Dot, stop interrogating her." I said.

"I'm just making small talk." Dot said.

"It's ok, really. It's a fair question. We have been friends for awhile and one day we were hanging out and I just felt something I hadn't before. I didn't want to risk my friendship with Jon...or more importantly Rich's friendship with Jon so I really wanted to make sure Jon was ok with this. He was and so here we are." Michelle replied.

"Sounds like you all handled this well." Dot said.

"I tried. So, how's Stephanie Rose doing?"

"Better. We got her in private school and she has an internship at a local designer. She seems to be much happier."

"Good. I was concerned about her." Michelle said.

"I know. And I'm sorry I was so hard on you before. I know Steph put you in a tough spot and you did the best you could. I am thankful you kept her safe."

"Don't worry. If it were my daughter I probably would have lashed out too."

Michelle and Dot were getting along...this was too weird.

"Any plans to have kids anytime soon?" Dot asked.

I nearly spit out my wine. Partly because the idea of Michelle having a baby right now scared me as I was the one sleeping with her most and partly because I had met her future daughter...I'd done her future daughter. I managed to swallow my wine and cover my reaction somewhat.

"Um, I don't think the time is right. I mean...I want one...I almost was a mother but..." Michelle stumbled.

"You were?" Dot asked.

"It's not widely known because I didn't want the press involved but when I was with RJ I was pregnant. I miscarried."

"Oh my god, I had no idea. I'm so sorry."

"Yeah, so am I. I loved Aubrey and I never even got to hold her."

“You guys had named her?”

Michelle nodded.

“I had no idea you’d been through so much.”

“Oh yeah, I’ve had my karma for my misdeeds.”

“Michelle, I didn’t mean it like that.”

She forced a smile, “You kinda did. I know I did some horrible things to do...and karma has a way of punishing people.”

“Maybe, but no one deserves to lose a child.”

“Not even me?”

“I’m really sorry.”

“It’s ok, really.”

“So, Rich, did you make those calls I asked about?” I asked, changing the subject.

Rich nodded, “Yeah, I did. It’s all taken care of.”

“What is?” Dot asked.

“A few final details on the book.” I replied.

“Ah.”

“Mich, you ok?” Rich asked as he put his arm around her. It took all my will power not to drop him right here.

“I’m ok.” Michelle replied as she leaned into Rich.

“Good.” He said as he kissed her head gently.

“You two look really good together.” Dot said.

“Thanks.” Michelle said as she looked up at Rich and kissed him.

“What does Ava think of this?” Dot asked, referring to Rich’s daughter.

“Ava doesn’t really know yet.” Rich said.

“Oh really?”

“Right now it’s not that serious. We’re seeing each other, but not exclusively. I don’t want to add Ava to the mix unless it becomes more serious.”

Dot nodded, “Makes sense.”

“Besides, we’re in a good place right now. No complications. Just us. Unless you count the press...anyway, it’s a good place to be and I want to enjoy it while I can.” Michelle added.

“I remember when Jon and I were in that no complications place. It was nice...been awhile since there were no complications.” Dot said as she turned her head and kissed me.

“Yeah, but there’s something to be said for that security of building a life with a person.” I said. I knew I needed to chime in or Dot would catch on to how unhappy I was.

“Yes, there certainly is.” She said as she leaned on me.

I wrapped my arm around her. I could tell this was killing Michelle and that was killing me, but I could only tell because I knew her so well. She was actually masking her feelings very well.

“Yeah, and I hope to have that again someday...for keeps.” Michelle said.

“You’ll find it I’m sure...you deserve it.” Rich said as he kissed her passionately.

“You two are so sweet. Remember when we had romance Jonny?” Dot asked looking at me. And It’s good she was looking at me because I saw Michelle’s head turn quickly when she called me ‘Jonny’. That was Michelle’s name for me and she rarely, if ever, heard anyone else call me that. I couldn’t react to her though. I had to let it go and focus on Dot’s question.

“What are you talking about? I’m Mr. Romance.” I teased.

“Oh you think so?” she asked as she leaned in and put her nose to mine.

“You know I am.” I replied as I kissed her.

I didn’t know what was going through Michelle’s mind, but I didn’t figure she was happy.

Michelle

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I wanted to jump across the table and kill Dot. She was all over my Jonny...guh...ok technically he was her Jon...but...ugh. This sucked.

“It’s nice you two still have romance after so many years.” I forced out.

“Yeah, it is. And Jon really is a romantic at heart...but I guess you knew that.” Dot said.

I just smiled. I didn’t really have a polite reply to that.

“You were with that racer for awhile...Hunter? I’m sure you know what it takes to keep a long term romance going.”

“Yeah, Hunter and I were on and off for...3 years...love isn’t always enough.”

“That’s very true. Friendship and trust is the foundation.”

“Yeah, trust is so important in a relationship, isn’t it?” I asked.

“It certainly is. Without trust there is nothing.” Dot agreed.

“So true.”

“You seem like a really well balanced woman...very different from the kid I knew before.”

I laughed, “That kid was a brat. I’ve grown up. I realized what’s important in life and that all the Hollywood diva hype is just that...hype.”

“I admit, I’m impressed. You turned out very different than I ever would have expected.”

“Thanks, I think.”

Dot laughed, “It’s a complement, I promise. You seem happy and not with my husband. I thought for sure when you did that duet you were trying to get him back.”

“That was purely professional. Jonny needed to hype up his country album and what better way than to work with me?

That’s all it was. I’ve said it before, Jon and I will never be ‘together’ again. Friends, of course, but that’s it.” I said.

“That video looked more than professional.”

“It’s called acting. We discussed this.” Jon said.

“I know. I’m just saying...I was clearly wrong about who Michelle is.” Dot said.

“So does this mean we can all call a truce and be friends?” Rich asked.

“I don’t see why not. Michelle has clearly moved on and she has always been good to my kids. I’m willing to extend an olive branch if she is.”

I nodded, “Of course.”

After dinner we chatted for a bit more before we went our separate ways. Jon and Dot headed home and Rich and I head back to his house.

“You did good.” Rich said as we drove.

I rolled my eyes, “She is such a bee-otch”

“A bee-otch?”

“Yeah. You heard me.”

Rich laughed, “Just the same.”

I sighed, “Thanks for your help. We really sold it.”

“Yeah, well kissing you in front of Jon was not exactly fun.”

“I know. But it’s ok. God, I can’t wait to see him.” I said as we pulled into the driveway.

“The guesthouse should have everything you need. Have fun.” Rich said as he hugged me and handed me the key to the guesthouse.”

“Thanks! You’re the best.” I kissed his cheek and headed for the guesthouse. Soon as Jon got here we’d have a night he’d never forget...