

At Her Table (Excerpt)

by
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FRIEDA

You came in at the perfect time! We were just discussing our passions. Why not tell us about your fabulous work!

ALFRED

Well, I'm a photographer, and Georgia is-

GEORGIA

Well, I am an-

FRIEDA

Surely, SHE can speak for herself?

GEORGIA

I am an artist.

Awkward silence.

ANAIS

Well, how wonderful!

DIEGO

What medium Georgia?

GEORGIA

Painting. Landscape. Flora. New Mexico is my home and my muse, for the most part.

ALFRED

She also paints amazing New York skyscrapers.

GEORGIA

I much prefer the desert. The solitude of land for miles.

ANAIS

I've been to New Mexico once. It's gorgeous. Do you ever feel lonely surrounded by so much...I don't know...emptiness?

GEORGIA

Not at all. There's a lake. The mountain that lives outside my window, Pedernal, speaks to me in images. There's a garden, rattlesnakes, dogs. I much prefer the company of quiet life to things that are brash.

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FRIEDA

How long have you lived there again? You should see it! Stunning!

GEORGIA

Long enough to feel at home.

HENRY

Alfred, do you live in New Mexico as well?

ALFRED

No, I've been to visit, but I'm a city man.

GEORGIA

Aside from doctors a stone throw away, I think he prefers having the ability to have whatever he wants when he wants it. Isn't that right Alfred?

Uncomfortable glance between Georgia and Alfred as they move slightly apart.

GEORGIA

So, Frieda, please, what you are working on? It's been so long!

FRIEDA

Still self portraits. I am my own muse. Diego occasionally inspires me as well.

GEORGIA

I love your work. It's been exciting to follow. So unique.

FRIEDA

I paint what I know. And I know myself. My body. It's pain, the challenges, the fear. How I see myself from the inside out. I don't know if I told you about the accident, when I was young? No matter. My body is still recovering.

DIEGO

It was awful, she was riding the bus-

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FRIEDA

Diego! This is not your story to tell. When I was eighteen, I suffered an accident, riding the bus home. I was impaled by a metal pole. I probably should have died. Instead, I paint that suffering.

ANAIS

Are you always in pain?

FRIEDA

My pain and I have become such good companions it almost feels like love. We have grown used to each other over the years. We bicker, we argue, then we make peace, for a time.

GEORGIA

I'm so sorry for your suffering. I can feel it in your work.

DIEGO

She's genius! Here, take a look!

Diego takes out his cell phone again.

HENRY

Diego, I thought you were a modern man. That phone is simply archaic.

FRIEDA

See? I keep telling him.

DIEGO

I'm not one for modern comforts. I prefer things less civilized. Ah, here we go.

Diego passes the phone around the table.

GEORGIA

Your work is so unique. I'm not sure I've seen anything that comes close.

ALFRED

Exceptional.

HENRY

Remarkable.

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ANAIS

So much affliction, yet so alluring, almost sensual. How awful it must be to live in such discomfort, yet look at the beauty it inspires.

FRIEDA

(Frieda gestures to her body.)
As I said, we have an understanding.

GEORGIA

Anais, what do you do?

FRIEDA

Yes! I almost forgot to circle back to you!
Something about your writing, and “proclivities”.

ALFRED

You’re a writer then?

ANAIS

Yes. Henry as well. We often work together.

ALFRED

Novels, short stories, journalism?

ANAIS

We write primarily fiction.

HENRY

But ours is a specific, acquired taste.

GEORGIA

How’s that?

ANAIS

We write...eroticism.

HENRY

Eroticism? As in, erotic?

ANAIS

Yes.

FRIEDA

Fascinating!

DIEGO

They write about sex!

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FRIEDA

Diego! Hush! Let them talk about their art!

HENRY

I'm not sure anyone qualifies it as 'art'.

FRIEDA

Oh, but the erotic, the coupling of two people in dire passion, how could it not be art?

ANAIS

It's not really accepted as 'literature'. Some people find it gauche. Those who love it...

GEORGIA

I think that's fantastic. What are you working on now?

HENRY

She's writing a collection. It's exquisite.

ANAIS

He often gives me more credit than I deserve.

HENRY

She often underestimates my admiration.

FRIEDA

What are the stories about?

HENRY

What aren't they about is the better question.

GEORGIA

How do you choose eroticism?

ANAIS

Well, Henry and I found a benefactor who offered to pay us to write these short pieces, for his own satisfactions. I have never shied away from the concept of pleasure-

DIEGO

(musing aloud)

I'll bet you haven't-

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FRIEDA

Diego, hush!

ANAIS

Needless to say, we accepted, and that is how this journey began. I have about ten stories. I'm planning for a few more.

HENRY

Her writing is breathtaking.

DIEGO

What kind of pairings? Men and women, I suppose? Women and women?

FRIEDA

He only says that because he is hoping for the latter. Diego has a penchant for women who love women.

ANAIS

Yes, it seems most men have that fantasy. But what's not to love, whether you're male, female, trans, non-binary? Women are the heart of the world, and the pinnacle of strength. They are beauty in motion-

FRIEDA

Soft, nurturing, tender-

GEORGIA

Compassionate, sensitive, graceful-

ANAIS

You both sound as if you speak from experience. But these days, who hasn't dabbled in coloring outside the lines, or foregoing them at all?

FRIEDA

Well, if Diego isn't careful, he might get what he wishes for me permanently one day.

DIEGO

And what do I wish for you, mi amor?

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FRIEDA

I think we both know you want for me want you are always wanting for yourself.

ALFRED

Do you have something you could read? A passage, a quote? I would love to hear your work read out loud.

HENRY

I have something on my phone, a draft...

He hands Anais his phone.

ANAIS

Here, let me see. Ah, yes. I just sent this one to my publisher. "At first he made no motion. His sex was quivering, and he was tormented with desire... Marianne grew desperate. She pushed his hand away, took his sex into her mouth again, and with her two hands she encircled his sexual parts, caressed him and absorbed him until he came. He leaned over with gratitude, tenderness, and murmured, 'You are the first woman, the first woman, the first woman...'"

Diego fans himself with a coaster or napkin.

DIEGO

I feel like the room just rose about ten degrees. Does anyone need a drink? It seems we all do.

ANAIS

What s your pleasure, Diego?

DIEGO

That's a dangerous question. (Pregnant pause.) What is everyone having? Frieda? Georgia?