

## Friday lunch with Sam

THE restaurant was modern and expensive, but not yet busy. She arrived at least ten minutes late and came to my table.

‘James?’

‘Jason.’

‘Sorry, Jason. You found it, good, not been here before, but I’m told the new chef’s food is outstanding, not got yourself a drink yet? What do you prefer, Jason? Jace? Jay? something else?’

‘Jason’s fine.’

‘Great. Lovely to meet you.’ She held out her hand.

‘I’m Sam Cagle, we spoke on the phone.’

She sat down, took out her phone and put it next to her wine glass

‘Let’s get straight to it, I prefer candour and honesty and, let me warn you, there’s not a lot in this business.’

‘That’s -,’

She held up her hand.

‘Let me finish. This is a ‘Friday lunch’ which means, sorry, I’m not taking you on, but might later, so I’m not actually wasting your time, and you’ll get a splendid lunch, they say the porcini risotto is to die for!’

‘So -?’

‘Yes, I’m afraid, but I can -,’

A waiter appeared

‘Two kir royale, please, and what are you having, James, sorry, Jason? Oh, he’ll have one, too, so three kir royale please and some bread and olives. Thanks. Where was I?’

‘You said -,’

‘Yes, what I can do is give you some tips about what publishers are looking for and -.’

Her phone buzzed.

‘Sorry, I’ve got to take this. Dan, I’m busy, what?’

I could not hear what Dan was saying.

‘I told you, you never look properly, it drives me mad.’

Dan said something.

‘No, he can’t bring his new girlfriend, we don’t even know her!’

More from Dan.

'I don't care, it's no! Tell him! Look, I'm busy, talk later. Get the car packed so we can leave as soon as. Don't forget anything! You know what you're like!'

She ended the call and put down the phone.

'Sorry about that, James, we're off up-state to our cabin later, and it's always such a bloody production number. Where was I?'

'You said -.'

'Yes, of course. What was I saying?'

'You could give me -.'

'Right, and don't get this wrong, but are you gay?'

'Er, no.'

'Don't worry, doesn't matter, but it does help these days, for some reason gay writers sell. Bisexual, but no don't worry, just a thought. I read some of your manuscript, but -.'

'But what?'

'But it, you know, just seems to be about 'people'.'

'What's wrong with -?'

'Nothing, but what sells is issues, not people, well, people, yes, but people involved in issues, eco stuff, dystopian futures, global corruption, the destruction of mankind, that kind of thing, readers love it, and trashy romance, of course.'

'But -'

'I'll be upfront - ah, here they are -' she took one of the three kir the waiter set down on our table '- they keep saying we shouldn't drink, I know, but life's too bloody short.'

'And we might all be dead by next Tuesday.'

'What? Oh, very good.'

She sipped her kir.

'Heaven, just heaven! And I'm not driving! Where was I? oh -.'

Her phone buzzed again. She rejected the call.

'What many writers starting out don't realise is this, it's a serious business, it's about making money, and although an agent can tell you that, a publisher won't, they'll give you all kinds of crap about literature and being passionate about it and yada, yada, yada, but if you want their interest, and my interest for that matter, you'd better believe it.'

'What did you think of my -?'

'Oh, I loved it, I'm sure I did, but 'people', you see, and as I said -'

Her phone buzzed again.

‘Damn, I’ve got to take this, sorry. Yes, Dad, what!’

I couldn’t hear the other party.

‘Oh, no! Oh no! She can’t!’

More talk from the other side.

‘Jesus, Dad, you and Mom pick your moments, but I’ll have to come now, we’re off to the cabin later, be about fifteen to twenty.’

She hung up.

‘Sorry, James, I just have to go, something’s come up. Think about what I said and keep in touch, order what you like and charge it to me.’

She drained the first glass of kir.

‘You have the other one, we’ll be in touch. Ciao.’ And she was off.

I did have the porcini risotto, followed a champagne peach verrine and a cheeseboard, with two large glasses of St Emilion and a Sauternes with dessert. It was all certainly to die for, though I then I found Sam Cagle had not yet set up an account.