

June 1, 2017

11:40 a.m.

Within moments of sitting down in an espresso-brown leather recliner on the Martin Global private jet, a steward approached Elle asking if she would care for anything to drink. She ordered a sparkling water and took in her luxurious surroundings. It was remarkable just how far she had come from being the girl with the government-issued lunch card, the one who scoured thrift stores for Izod socks. Sure, like generations before them, Elle and Win had wanted more for their children than they themselves had had growing up, but not necessarily All This.

A private jet hadn't really been a part of their master plan; they had been happy in their simple life. After leaving the Navy, Win had become enormously successful as a pharmaceutical sales rep, the kind doctors trusted and nurses and office workers looked forward to flirting with. Elle went back to school, got her master's degree in social work, started volunteering with the SIDS Alliance, and took a job at a women's shelter. The work was meaningful and fulfilling, and she was good at it. Unlike most of her coworkers—earnest trust-funders whose biggest mistake from their teen years had been weekly trips to tanning booths—Elle could relate to her clients. She understood regret. She was personally acquainted with shame.

After a few years, Win and Elle had saved up enough to buy their first home, a modest brick ranch in an up-and-coming neighborhood. Soon after moving in, Elle had become pregnant with Brynnie. They were thrilled. *They had it made.*

Then Win had come up with his first Big Idea. During sales calls to doctors' offices, he noticed how inefficient the ordering process was. To make his job easier, he developed a

software program to streamline the tracking of pharmaceutical products. It was a genius solution, and Win had an offer to buy his program around the time Brynnie was born.

Overwhelmed with caring for a new baby and terrified she would find Brynnie unresponsive and cold like she had her brother, Elle never knew how much Win had profited from the deal. She only understood that she would never again need to worry about money. *Jackpot!*

At first, not much changed. Elle upgraded Brynnie's wardrobe from Target's Circo brand to Baby Gap. She started treating herself to regular manicures and pedicures and bought some furniture for their house from Pottery Barn, astonished and delighted by her good fortune.

Over time, one seemingly small decision after another, their lives began to change. Four was born, and they decided to buy a larger home. That it was in a more exclusive neighborhood didn't seem to be that big of a deal. Joining the nearby country club followed—Brynnie and Four needed a place to take swim lessons and Elle could learn how to play tennis. Private school? *Why not?* It's what everyone else was doing. A second home on the lake followed; it was cheaper and more convenient than renting a place in the summer.

Not one to stay idle, Win continued working on new innovations, each more successful than the last. He started Martin Global, and on and on it went, until they found themselves at the place they were now: in a private jet headed to Tokyo for one of the largest international deals ever.

Were they Greenwich-hedge-fund-director, Silicon-Valley-dot-com, or Hollywood-movie-star rich? No, they were more your standard Middle America new money, the opposite of old and unassuming wealth. The loud, proud type who bought all the requisite toys associated with their new status: the convertible Porsche, and the boat, and the house in Vail. Still, it had been a mind-numbingly quick hop, skip, and jump from T.J. Maxx to Ann Taylor to boutiques with exposed

brick walls where someone with a name like Chandra offered you cucumber water or champagne, whichever you preferred.

As Elle's children boarded the plane and took seats in leather recliners of their own, she wondered if they realized how lucky they were. Brynnie, yes; she had spent every summer since ninth grade volunteering in a Third World country. But what about Four? Did he realize this was not the way most people lived?

Probably not. How could he? Sure, Country Day required all its students to complete service work, but did picking up litter on the campus of your private school for three hours really count? As much as Elle tried to instill a sense of gratitude in Four, he had still learned how to drive in a \$90,000 car. He had tutors, trainers, and every other sort of professional at his disposal to ensure his success. Could her son understand anything less?

Maybe, but certainly not at that moment. Four was too busy feeling sorry for himself. He didn't want to go to Tokyo. It meant he couldn't play in two lacrosse tournaments, and he didn't want to be away from Tabby. He had asked if his girlfriend could accompany them on the trip, but Elle didn't think it was a good idea. As much as she approved of Tabby, she was concerned that Four was getting too serious about her. Although certain the teens were not yet having sex, Elle wasn't prepared to add that headache to her already long list of worries.

Sulking, Four sat down then stood up again abruptly. "Wait, do they have Ebola in Japan?" Brynnie was incredulous. "Are you kidding me? Seriously?"

"What? Is it so wrong of me to want to know if I'm headed to a country where I might catch a disease that makes blood come out of my butthole? I think that's some *preeetty* important information."

Elle sighed. How could her children be so different? Hadn't she raised them in the same way? Perhaps she had been easier on Four. But why? Was she that afraid of having to shut the eyes of another dead little boy?

Elle tried to be patient, explaining, "There is no Ebola in Japan."

Four tilted his head. "What about that Zika thing?"

Brynnie shook her head in disbelief. "That's South America. When's the last time you read the news, genius?"

Four pulled an issue of *Inside Lacrosse* out of his jacket. "Cover to cover, baby!" He tapped on the magazine with pride. "That's forty-eight pages!"

"Congratulations. I'll be sure to come visit you when you're thirty and living in Mom and Dad's basement, making \$10 an hour stringing sticks at Lax World."

"Savage!" Four flopped down in a recliner and leaned back lazily. "What you don't realize is that people pay top dollar for my stringing."

To Elle's relief, Win stepped in. "All right, you two. Simmer down—"

"*Konnichiwa!*" Win was interrupted by an astonishingly glamorous woman in her twenties waving to them as she entered the jet. She was tall—of course she would be—and looked like an advertisement for Prada in her black leather pencil skirt, open-toed booties, and crepe bodysuit, which exposed the outline of two incredibly perky breasts. She had blonde hair, the same shade as Carolyn Bessette-Kennedy, and it was up in a messy bun, the kind meant to imply it had been casually thrown together, when in fact, it had taken twenty minutes to achieve. She had full lips and a toothy smile. She looked like the type of person who took lifestyle advice from Gwyneth

Paltrow: she probably ate only raw foods and had her vagina steamed regularly. Elle immediately disliked her.

“Oh, hello, Ainsley!” Win smiled and introduced the Prada model to his family. All Elle could manage was an icy, distrustful nod. *Ainsley*? She would have a name like that.

Brynnie was only slightly more enthusiastic, offering a skeptical smile. Four seemed the most pleased to meet Ainsley. His eyes widened in surprised delight, like he had discovered it was a snow day and school was cancelled.

Ainsley’s toothy smile made a repeat appearance. “It’s lovely to meet you all.”

*Lovely*. That’s just the sort of thing someone named Ainsley would say.