

Excerpt from:

CHAPTER 11 - Local Strangers

Sacha passed over the salad as Hawke continued talking about his parents. ‘They’re a bit old school,’ he said lifting a large spoonful of lettuce and swamping his plate in vinaigrette dressing.

‘Hardly,’ snorted Sacha. ‘I mean, look at the way they live.’

‘Well, I’ve always thought it’s a bit eccentric. It’s not the kind of lifestyle I see myself living.’

‘Why?’ she asked, slicing through a piece of lean beef and dragging it with her fork through the gravy.

‘It’s a bit odd. I mean three adults living together like that.’

Sacha shrugged. ‘They seem happy. It works ... for them.’

‘I sometimes wonder if it was just a fall-back position and they hadn’t really thought it through,’ he said.

‘What makes you say that?’ she asked, looking up from her plate.

Hawke was silent for a moment, chewing his food. He swallowed before launching into his view of the world. ‘After Mila died. Well, without your mother, Alex was lost.’

‘Sure it was a dreadful, dark time. Dad was so depressed at one point I was terrified he might off himself too,’ she said. ‘I sort of blamed myself for him ending up living with your parents.’

‘How come? That’s not your fault,’ smiled Hawke.

‘It kinda is, and I always worried about your dad and how he copes with another man in their home. Fred’s quite flat-lined, if you know what I mean,’ she tried to explain.

‘So he didn’t seem to mind Alex moving in with all of them together. But I was the one that told Amira how scared I was about Dad. He went for weeks without getting out of bed. He seemed to be a shadow of himself, even when your Mom visited. Amira used to light up his day, but there was a patch there where I was too scared to phone him in case he didn’t answer.’

‘Nah, it’s not your fault. Mom was over there every day. She organized his life for him. It was as if she were channeling Mila and smoothing out his domestic life like she always used

to do,' reassured Hawke. 'But look at them now. It's only been a few years, and the three of them have never been happier.'

'I know we've all talked about it before. But do you think they're just perfect friends?' asked Sacha. 'I mean, they've known each other since school, so it stands to reason. Do you think they're actually lovers?'

Hawke heaved a sigh and fixed his eyes on Sacha. He gradually stirred his fork amongst the remaining food on his plate.

'Well? What's said in New Zealand, between us, of course, stays in New Zealand. Seriously,' she asked, 'what do you think?'

'You can't repeat this to your sister,' Hawke said and looked around the room, half expecting Suzie and Bruno to spring from the woodwork. 'In the beginning, I saw it as an empathy thing. Both my parents wanted to help Alex, and I just assumed it was a temporary measure to get him over the initial shock and grief. So I didn't think much about it. Hell, let's face it, these four adults have been part of our lives, and their own lives for all of our lives.'

Sacha laughed. 'Impressive. After the second glass of vino too.' She took a sip from her glass and looked steadily at Hawke sitting opposite, struggling to find a reasonable way to avoid the conversation. 'Come on. No one's judging here. It's just you and me and if you tell, I will too, and then we'll both know what we really think. I'll tell you, and it's a little more than just *odd*.'

'Ok. Yup. I think they've been lovers for years. Probably most of their lives too!' He said triumphantly at having finally spat it out.

Sacha squealed in delight, clapping her hands together. 'I knew it! I knew it all along,' she repeated.

'Hey, but what does it matter? They're happy and, I for one, don't care and don't want to know,' he stated, defying her to continue with her line of questioning.

'Hasn't it bothered you? Nah maybe that's too strong a word. Haven't you wondered if all three of them sleep together or not?'

'No!' He was emphatic. The immediate image of Alex sleeping between his two parents in their marital bed made him more than a little uncomfortable. 'Let's not go there.'

'Don't be like that,' she pleaded.

'No,' he repeated.

'This is just our *secret squirrel* conversation. Come on, Hawke. No one else will ever get to hear this.'

‘You know what,’ he said with authority. ‘I honestly think Amira loves both Fred and Alex.’

‘But ...’ interrupted Sacha.

Hawke held up the flat palm of his right hand, in Barbara Woodhouse dog training style, stopping Sacha in her tracks. ‘I believe my mother sleeps with them both but in their own bedrooms. There are three double beds in their house, and one is obviously Alex’s room. You must’ve seen that?’

Sacha nodded, waiting to hear the full reveal of Hawke’s take on her father, his parent’s permanent house-mate.

‘It’s kinda civilized really,’ Hawke said. ‘Think about it. They’re old now. All over fifty so they aren’t teenagers anymore. We all know Amira and Alex used to be lovers back in the day. But she married Fred in the end. My parents are married and were lovers. All three of them have that connectedness about them. That ESP type of understanding.’ He paused. ‘Don’t you think?’

Sacha leaned back in her chair and regarded Hawke carefully. ‘Yeah, they all seem very close. All three of them.’

‘So who cares? In the end, I don’t care if they sleep with a nest of snakes as long as they’re happy and enjoying life,’ Hawke said. ‘At their age, I bet there’s not much going on anyway.’