

quick. Matilda is giving a final debrief. We're just about ready to start.'

Sophie nodded and turned and headed off for the gallery – a huge wood-panelled room that sat as something of a go-between, separating the servants' quarters and the main house. For smaller occasions, the gallery was used for dinners or drinks receptions, but today it was more like a store room with dozens of tables crammed with food, drinks, glasses, plates, cutlery, all waiting to be deployed to the gathering masses somewhere beyond.

Matilda, the most senior of the waitresses at Drifford House, who, like Pamela, was a full-time live-in employee, had already wrapped up by the time Sophie walked in, and the group of young men and women all dressed up in their suits and black dresses were busy getting trays of drinks ready.

Sophie slunk across the room, head down to avoid Matilda's watchful eye, heading for a

familiar face. Maisie. Sophie had known her, loosely, for years. Maisie had been in the year above at primary school, but had moved on to a state-run comprehensive afterwards, rather than the expensive Highmount that Sophie's parents had splashed out on.

'What did I miss?' Sophie said.

Maisie gave a little smirk. Sophie wasn't sure why.

'Just what you'd expect. How privileged we should all feel to be here today. How we're about to meet the great and the good. How we get to keep any tips we're given, which can be very generous, particularly if your skirt is short enough and your smile wide enough, and your blouse unbuttoned just enough.'

Sophie's eyes wandered down. Maisie's blouse was buttoned up right to the neck.

'Keep them keen,' she said with a wink.

Sophie screwed her face up.

'Oh, come on,' Maisie said. 'The fact you're

here at all suggests you know exactly what you can get out of an event like this. It's down to you how far you want to take things. How much you want to make from these cretins.'

Maisie thanked the pourer then carefully lifted the silver tray from the table and headed away.

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Sophie didn't believe herself to be naive, at least no more naive than other eighteen-year-olds, and yes, she'd heard plenty of rumours about the Redfearnes' notorious summer balls. Of course, such rumours had to be taken for what they were; little more than tabloid stories. But still, Sophie realised there had to be some truth to it all.

Yet she'd still willingly signed up for this. What did that say about her?

What it said was: where else could an

eighteen-year-old expect to make two hundred pounds a day in salary, plus however many hundreds more from the punters just by smiling and flirting a little every now and then?

Determined to make the most of it all, Sophie had taken the first arse-pinch in her stride. Hadn't even bothered to turn around and glare at whoever had done it. The second one too. She'd not flinched when a guy who must have been in his seventies stuffed a twenty pound note into her bra strap just above her breast.

The third arse-pinch though, the guy went for a longer squeeze, as she was busy refilling his champagne glass for the umpteenth time. She squirmed to try and release his grip and when that didn't work she 'accidentally' sloshed champagne down his suit arm.

That got him to let go.

The guy, a pot-bellied and heavily tanned balding man in his forties, stepped back and

was clearly gritting his teeth ready to give her some grief.

‘I’m so sorry,’ Sophie said. ‘Let me fetch you a cloth.’

She turned and hurried off before he said anything. She glanced at the clock on the wall as she went. Not even six p.m. What the hell were these wankers going to be like in a few hours’ time?

She didn’t bother to go back with a cloth. Instead she headed into the library with her bottle and for the next hour went to the gallery and back each time, rather than to the ballroom where the arse-grabber had been. Matilda wouldn’t be impressed if she saw, but Sophie needed some respite, and she was happy that the guests in the library seemed a notch or two lower on the loutish stakes.

But then later, as Sophie was heading along the portrait-covered corridor to the gallery for a new bottle, she saw the arse-grabber up ahead,