

AVOCADO TOAST by Nancy Fraser

EXCERPT

Chloe Taylor sorted through the last few co-op contracts, happy to see three of the five holdouts had finally signed on the dotted line. If they were going to make this work—rebrand and revitalize an area that was far off the recognition map—everyone had to come on board.

Even Sam Morgan.

The grumpy relic was her staunchest naysayer, a man badly in need of being dragged by his thumbs into the modern world of marketing.

She doubted Mr. Morgan even owned a computer, much less had internet out at that farm of his. If he could only see what she'd created. Appreciate the hard work she'd put into revitalizing the entire county, and especially the area known as Plentiful, then maybe he'd fall in line with the others.

Rumor around town was that his health was failing. Madelyn Pickard, bookkeeper for the co-op, had mentioned Sam's nephew was coming back to Plentiful to help him out with the spring harvest.

Perhaps the younger Morgan would be more amenable to her sales pitch. Maybe he'd hold more sway with his uncle than—what had Sam called her—a prissy city girl with high falutin ideas.

Who even talked like that anymore? Obviously, a man still stuck in the early to mid-twentieth century.

"Mom! Where's my backpack?"

Chloe turned away from her computer and met the frantic gaze of her eight-year-old daughter, Jessi. "Last time I saw it, the straps were draped over the arm of the chair in the family room."

"I just looked," Jessi assured her. "It's not there."

Chloe pushed herself to her feet intent on helping with the search. "I thought you'd finished your homework already."

"I did. But I left a granola bar and half a cheese sandwich in there, and I don't want it to get all gross."

Navigating an immediate U-turn, Chloe made her way to the corner of the spare bedroom. Jessi followed closely on her heels.

“There’s your culprit.”

“Boomer, no!” Jessi screeched. “Not my new backpack.”

Strips of red corduroy material lay spread out on Boomer’s dog bed. The only remaining sign of Jessi’s cheese sandwich was the plastic baggy. The wrapper from the granola bar was torn to pieces with no more than a few crumbs left clinging to the shiny silver paper.

“That’s the third one this school year,” Chloe pointed out. “You’ve really got to be more careful what you leave in your bag, and where you hang it up when it’s not in use.”

“I’m sorry, mom. I’ll use my birthday money to buy a new one.”

“How about we split the cost?”

Eagerly, Jessi accepted. “That would be great. Thanks, mom.”

“Go set out your clothes for church in the morning. Then, take your bath and get into your pajamas. We’ll watch a movie before you go to bed.”

“Can we have popcorn?”

“We’ll see. Now scoot while I clean up this mess and pack away my laptop.”

Once she’s discarded the remnants of Boomer’s thievery, Chloe returned to her desk in the cramped den and gathered up the signed contracts, adding them to the files for the Plentiful Fresh Food Cooperative. The two unsigned contracts were placed in her briefcase for her scheduled Monday meetings.

Her hard work on the co-op’s website had finally turned Abel Marks around and she expected he’d sign at their nine o’clock appointment.

Then, with everyone else in place, she’d make yet another appeal to Sam Morgan. Surely a man who’d been in business for what seemed like forever wouldn’t want to be left out in the cold to fend for himself when everyone else was benefiting from her aggressive campaign. *Would he?*