

Brian Dennis Hartford

WITHOUT



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2 Marietta Court Ste A #117
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CHAPTER

1

Charlotte sat across from me as we prepared to dine at one of West Hollywood's most beautiful restaurants, Café La Bohème on Santa Monica Boulevard. I had reserved a table upstairs in the crystal booth seating area for us, center table. I wanted to ensure we had privacy, yet have a clear view of the entire restaurant and its patrons below. I was starving.

La Bohème was a favorite of mine; a small slice of modern 1930s-era France; with its neo-boudoir like soft Gothic, candle-lit, red velvet feel. It brought back memories of more simple and glamorous times. It was eloquent, sensual; a perfect place for a first date.

I was nervous. She looked so beautiful. Her powder blue eyes, the way her mouth seemed to always be about to whisper something; a great secret, maybe? A want, a message, a longing of some kind that she was unable to articulate, lacked the power to actuate, I believed.

Her long, pure blonde hair flowed lightly around her soft, rounded face. Its natural golden hue glowed angel-like in the low lighting. I couldn't help but to melt at the sight of her. And I couldn't help but know that we had met before.

I had come across her quite accidentally while shopping at the Santa Monica Place Mall. I noticed her instantly through the Coach Store window. Her soul beckoned me and I knew that I had to meet her. She was cute, beautiful, a bubbly mid-western blonde full of ambition and love for life.

I watched her as she compared attaché cases for her job. She worked as a finance and securities lawyer for the firm Sandalwood and Associates. I could not resist her radiating charisma the minute I walked in to meet her.

I stood frozen; enamored by the way she so delicately fretted over her dilemma. The black conservative one, or, the classic brown and Coach emblomed canvassed one? The latter was a little flashier and defiantly more stylish.

I watched as she bit at her lower lip, standing with her right ankle slightly bent, her full weight on her left leg. I could tell money, too, was a bit of an issue. I stood spellbound watching while she ached over her decision. Then I finally spoke.

"Black...with the gold buckles," I said smiling at her finally working up the courage.

"It's classic, classy, will go with everything, and makes the statement that you are a professional," I told her as I watched her blush, looking back at me in surprise.

I remained entranced as we stared at each other in a knowing, eager silence.

"Well... OK...," she managed to finally speak softly.

"Black, then?" she asked again, a confirmation really.

Her voice was articulated, clear, calming, thoughtful, and seemed to soothe me; to draw me in.

“Yeah, the black one!” I confirmed to her once again.

I fidgeted internally over the vision of her, wanting this moment to last.

“Well, you two, would you like me to ring that up?” Ihsan the store manager interrupted, bringing me out of the trance I was in.

“Gift wrapped, or...?” Ihsan smiled and winked at me as she gently took Charlotte’s choice for purchase from her hands.

Charlotte smiled, then blushed, realizing what had been occurring, our interlocking stare; the instant infatuation.

“Oh...yes...sure, yes...,” she said shyly, slowly, then promptly spoke up.

“Oh, yes, I’m sorry! Yes, please, I like this one, if I may...but no gift wrapping, I’ll be using it today for work. This afternoon, I have court.”

Charlotte looked back at me again, waiting for me to approve.

“Yes, this one!”

I nodded assuring both Charlotte and Ihsan.

I felt flush realizing what I had said was in reference to Charlotte; “This one.”

Ihsan was fluttering about, laughing and kissed me on the cheek.

“So, this one... then... Ianthe?” she quietly exclaimed as she glided playfully behind Charlotte pointing at her and laughing again.

I rolled my eyes at Ihsan and pursed my lips to her.

“Yes! This one!”

I stood tall, condemning her obvious irritation at my intrusion into all this, hands on my hips; scowling at her in playful defiance.

“Ring it up!”

I ordered playfully twirling my finger at her. “And my usual discount, please, thank you!” I sternly confirmed, feigning annoyance.

I turned back to Charlotte smiling, closing the distance to talk more intimately.

Ihsan always liked to fuck with me when I flirted with anyone but her. But that’s the kind of relationship we had; fun, flirty, friends with benefits. However, I had detected a bit of jealousy in her in that moment, maybe a little bit of resentment even, over my “moving in” on Charlotte.

Ihsan was forty-five, Iranian born, had money, was very intelligent, and very sexual. Ihsan had been a possibility for a deeper relationship, until I met Charlotte that day.

I had swung a fifty percent discount on the attaché case and a handful of freebees and samples which seemed to thrill Charlotte more than the discount, or her new bag. I would owe Ihsan a nice dinner, possibly more.

In return for hooking her up at Coach, Charlotte insisted on buying me a coffee and we hit it off right away. She was smart, adorable and very funny in both mannerisms and thought. She had me laughing almost the whole time, not so much for her sense of humor, as funny as she was, but in the way that she did things, approached life, the innocence of her being.

I found her alluring in the way she placed our order, and then clumsily poured me sugar and cream, making sure that my coffee was perfect, just as I had wanted.

She was just so damn funny as she gingerly, hurriedly wiped down our little table and my chair with a handful of napkins. She was delighted over how I pulled out her chair and seated her. Like a perfect lady.

I laughed even more as she fretted over the fact that she had wanted me to have the Christmas themed cup like hers. It was April and the coffee shop was attempting to phase out its special run holiday season cups like they always did. She kept offering to switch cups.

I just laughed, cupped her face in my hands and whispered. “No, but thank you sweetie for being so thoughtful.”

She fawned at that, that I appreciated her.

We soon found ourselves sitting in silence staring into each other’s eyes in nervous anticipation, seeming not to need words. Each longing, remembering something to say, but neither knew what.

It was clear to the both of us this was going to go somewhere and so agreed to a first date for that Friday night; tonight. It was a struggle for me to wait this long.

I knew Charlotte was deeply attracted to me from our first meeting and had a hard time not demonstrating it now as she leaned forward in her chair, posturing with a straightened back while slightly condensing her shoulders inward which assured me a view of her near perfect C-sized, soft white breasts. Her skin glowed as her breasts bubble up over the top of her slinky black Ann Taylor dress.

I could tell that she long to touch me. I felt the tip of her high-heeled shoe gently, but deliberately touch my calf from time-to-time testing the waters for full contact. I smiled back at her, she was so silly.

“This place is so beautiful!” Charlotte exclaimed looking around excitedly.

“I have always wanted to come here but...,” she trailed off in thought looking down at all the stylish, well-dressed people below.

We listened for a moment to the murmur of their conversations, the clinking of dinnerware, and the occasional intimate toasts between friends and lovers.

I thought it funny that she seemed to think herself unworthy of this, this treatment, this place. But it’s what I had noticed about her right away. She was humble, thankful, unassuming despite the way in which she carried herself. It was evident she had breeding, a good upbringing, a first-rate education, and wanted for nothing.

She was happy, glowing, excited. I was glad to be able to give her this experience. She had mentioned during our coffee date that she always wanted to dine here, but she was practical, conservative with her money; just staring out really, in life and wealth.

“You look so beautiful...,” I managed to finally tell her. Afraid I might sound stupid at stating the obvious. I sipped at my drink, a smoked Manhattan in its crystal-clear glass with a large, square ice cube. It calmed my nerves, the first date butterflies.

“Well, thank you!” Charlotte replied, sounding a little nervous also.

“But I’m...not, I, well ...you are so...”

I could detect a rise in her heart rate. She had become flush, her face and neck turning slightly red.

It was funny actually; two drop dead gorgeous women both thinking that they are not good enough for the other.

“So...what...?” I asked of her.

Charlotte blushed and seemed afraid for a moment, then relaxed, sitting back; her hands clasped in her lap.

“You’re, well...,” she squirmed, looking at me rolling her eyes playfully. “Really fucking hot!” she blurted out enthusiastically, approvingly as she blushed again.

I busted out laughing, smiling, allowing myself to straighten up and show case my goods playfully like a model on the runway; then sat back again, smiling back at her. She was adorable in every way.

“Well..., I paused looking her over. “I’m not so sure about that anymore.”

She giggled as we both relaxed further, our first date tensions slipping away; an old comfort creeping in.

We looked into each other’s eyes again for a while in silence. It was clear to both of us already how this night was going to end.

“So, what is it that you do, Ianthe?” Charlotte finally asked, anxiously taking another large sip from her wine while slowly looking me over with her big, bright eyes.

I saw that they were a little grayer now in the low light, like the gray of the frozen, North Sea ice.

We had not gotten that far in our first conversation over coffee, discussing my profession, my life. I was content to just let her ramble on about herself; to take her in and experience her personality, her thoughts, and actions.

I leaned slightly forward, closing the intimacy gap between us. Both elbows on the table; my left arm down upon the crisp, white table cloth, reaching in her direction; open to a touch, to interlock our fingers if she so desired, the other gently swirling my drink.

“I’m retired mostly but still dabble in the stock market and model once in a great while,” I mused.

“Wow, a model?” Charlotte exclaimed, flushing a bit over the fantasy that all have of dating a model at least once.

“For whom?”

I choked for a moment. I had revealed something about myself. Would she find me, recognize me, the photos through the years, the fact that I had never aged?

“Elle Magazine and Sports Illustrated, mostly; 2012 and 2014 were my last shoots,” I paused. “But like I said, it’s been a while.”

“Oh! I love Elle magazine! I’ve been a subscriber since I was sixteen.” Charlotte countered. “What issues?” she asked inquisitively.

I sank back in my chair; shit! I thought, of course she had.

“Fall 2012, Chanel evening-wear,” I added. “Slinky black leather dress and boots...,” I trailed off.

“And the Sports Illustrated?” she inquired.

“Yeah, cover shot actually, girl in the gold bikini, Hawaii, June 2014.” I squirmed hoping she would draw a blank.

“Not ringing a bell, but...but I don’t ever look at Sports Illustrated.” she said rolling her eyes at the idea of sports articles and such silly manly things.

I sighed out in relief.

“Well, cool, Ianthe, I’ll look you up later. Check ya’ out, if that’s OK?” she blushed.

I sighed, chuckling to myself and hoping she would forget to do so.

“Sure, sweetie-pie, I don’t mind.” I winked back at her.

I sat quietly, thinking for a moment, wondering what an internet search would reveal of me, photos from many, many years ago; decades to be more precise.

I chuckled again, would she make the connection? I thought of my early 1900s Chanel and Lanvin photo spreads. I really need to do an internet search, see what is out there. I thought to myself in that moment. Then catching myself, the look I might have been reflecting, I chuckled to myself, lost in personal thoughts.

“Immortality...,” I thought aloud and smiled, “Immortality...” as I took another long sip of my drink.

Thankfully, Charlotte seemed to ignore my personal private joke. The word “Immortality”.

“So... retired then?” she asked more curious, probably over my reaction.

“Yes, retired, I’ve made my money in stocks actually.”

“Stocks?” she queried.

“Yes, stocks! Gold mostly...” I replied, knowing she’d want to know what kind.

“Do you make a lot of money, in gold?” she asked innocently, putting her empty wine glass down.

“Yeah, a lot!” I smiled back at her, smirking a little.

In truth, I owned more than just stocks in gold. I had my hand in everything. My wealth was beyond compare. It had no equal, at least on this world anyway. A vague estimation would be in the billions, a trillion or two actually of non-earth precious metals held in private vaults.

“Wow, my portfolio really sucks, I should have you look at it sometime...maybe I should get into some gold!” she gleamed.

It was an invite to a follow-on date already. And yes, I thought, get into some Gold! I couldn’t help but to smile devilishly at the thought of her in my bed.

“Sure anytime.” I said enthusiastically, leaning forward again finishing my drink.

“So, do you like being a lawyer?” I asked Charlotte seizing the chance to make this about her and to hide my truths.

“Yes, it’s interesting work. I’m challenged daily. Besides daddy said that I had better put that Stanford degree to work after spending all that money,” she giggled again biting at her lower lip.

We laughed together. She was so damn cute.

I was feeling more and more aroused in her presence. She glowed in a way I had not experienced in a great while. Her body and soul drew me in, made me long for her. Images flashed in my mind of a frozen sea, I wondered over them, a memory of which I could not fully recall.

“Awesome!” I replied. “It’s good that you’re doing what you want to do. So many aren’t these days...That you are helping others...” assuring her I thought her work was important. That she was important.

We sat for a moment in silence looking into each other’s eyes; contemplating us. This thing, our coming story.