

Blood red love/1

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It was Thursday evening and Charlie rolled her eyes at Tina, who was giggling with excitement as she checked herself in the mirror behind the bar. Once she had made sure her hair and makeup were in place, she bounced off to the inner room of 'The red lady'. 'The red lady' was a better-than-average bar, even though it was located in the seedier part of town. The interior was all made up of dark wood, rich fabrics in deep colours and bras details. It was the epitome of the romanticised idea of a speakeasy. And it was where Charlie worked, for now. It was a good place to work, most of the time. Jenni Termane, the owner, made sure the girls who worked in the bar didn't get hassled by the customers. Unless they wanted to. She paid a decent hourly wage and the tip you earned most nights could rival that of a manager position. The uniforms, although sexy and somewhat lacking in fabric, weren't as bad as some places. A short-sleeved silk blouse with a puff would have looked classy if it weren't for the plunging neck line which showed more of Charlie's cleavage than any other garment she owned. The little black pencil skirt was short, but covered her ass, unless she bent at the hips. The thin, black nylons and black pumps tied it all together. Sexy but classy. The reason Tina was skipping towards the inner room was the regular Thursday meeting which was just getting started. A group of men, all hot and gorgeous, met in the inner room every Thursday. The gossip was they were mafia, meeting on neutral ground. Others said they were spies, trading secrets. Who ever they were, the girl serving them always got a hefty tip. Which made all the girls fight over who would be the lucky one. As the men obviously had money, the girls' secondary aim was to snag one of them as a boyfriend, or sugar daddy. Charlie didn't want anything to do with the Thursday club. She didn't need a group of dark and brooding men in her life. She definitely didn't need to be caught up in some illegal shit. Charlie had been more than happy to let Tina serve them without a fight. Meanwhile, Charlie was tending to the other customers. Thursdays weren't busy nights, there were a few regulars and one or two newcomers. Charlie was helping Jenni, who was behind the bar. She was putting away clean glasses when Tina came running out, tears flowing down her face and ruining the perfect makeup. She was sobbing, and both Charlie and Jenni hurried towards her and ushered her behind the bar.

"What happened? What did they do to you?" Jenni asked and looked the crying Tina over, trying to find injuries.

"I hate him. I can't go back in there, don't make me," Tina sobbed.

"Who? Did he touch you? I will get Robert to deal with him if he did," Jenni said in a dark voice. Robert was the doorman for the evening. He was the classical bouncer, big as a house with muscles that threatened to bust through the too small shirt he was wearing. He always had a scowl on his face and together with a nasty-looking scar which ran across the right side of his face, he looked intimidating. In truth, he was a kind man, but he didn't talk much. But when he

did, it was to let one of the guests know they were in trouble or to say something sweet to one of the girls who worked there. Charlie always felt safe on the nights Robert worked.

“No,” Tina wailed. “He said I had fat thighs, and I shouldn’t flirt as I looked like a pig with constipation,” she cried. Charlie sighed and handed Tina one of the clean rags to wipe her face with. Jenni poured her a two finger tequila and made her drink it.

“You need to get yourself some thicker skin, babe,” Jenni told Tina. “Go wash your face and put yourself together, then you can help me out here. I know you’re not interested in working the inner room, Charlie, but tough luck. Tina, did you at least get the drink orders?” Tina nodded and handed over her pad as she fled to the bathroom. “Sorry,” Jenni told Charlie. Charlie shrugged. She could handle it for a night, especially if the tip was as good as everyone said. Jenni started filling a tray based on the scribbles on Tina’s pad, and before Charlie knew it, she was heading for the inner room. The room was dimly lit. At the round table in the centre of the room, six men sat playing cards. They all looked up at her when she entered, most of them with a smirk. Charlie realised they knew they had driven Tina away, and she guessed they were now going to try to do the same to her. Well, they could try, but they would fail. She looked at the drinks on her tray and then at the men around the table. She had become fairly accurate at deducting who would drink what at the bar. The three whiskeys were easily placed before three of the men, as was the beer. No one objected. She looked down on her tray and found an Old fashioned and, she paused, was that a Cosmopolitan? Had Jenni made a mistake? She looked at the two men left. A brown-haired man about her age, handsome with a cruel smirk on his face. She could see him ordering the Old fashioned to impress others. She shifted her eyes to the last man and her gut clenched. Fuck, he was hot. His blond hair was styled in a way that looked like he hadn’t put a thought into it, his ice-blue eyes watching her intently. The way the dark suit fit over his body, she guessed he would be fit if it were to come off. There was no way a man like him would order a Cosmopolitan. She placed the pink drink down in front of the brown-haired man and then the last drink in front of Mr Ice-Blue-Eyes.

“Would you gentlemen like something else? Something to eat perhaps?” she asked.

“What happened to your pretty little friend? I liked her,” Mr Cosmopolitan said. Charlie knew then he was the one who had made Tina cry.

“I asked her to switch,” Charlie said, holding the business smile in place, it had become second nature to always smile while at work.

“I don’t think I have seen you before, baby doll. Are you new?” a man old enough to be her father asked, giving her a smirk.

“No, I just haven’t had the pleasure of serving you on Thursday nights. That’s why I asked my friend to switch,” Charlie told them.

“I’m happy you did, it will be good to have something so delicious to rest my eyes on during the evening,” the man said. Charlie couldn’t help it when one of her eyebrows shot up. What did the man think, that they were still in the ninety-fifties?

“That’s sweet,” she said and turned around to leave.

“Don’t go just yet. Come sit on my lap and bring me luck,” a voice called out. It was a heavenly voice, strong and dark and full, with a hint of rasp. It did things to Charlie that no voice should have a right to do. She turned around and saw the smirk on Mr Ice-Blue-Eyes’ face.

“Are you sure I would bring you luck?” she asked.

“Have pity on our friend. Vidar has been losing all evening. It’s not like you can make it worse,” Mr Cosmopolitan said. Charlie had no polite way out. She made sure her smile was in place as she walked towards Vidar. Strange name, she thought as he grabbed her and pulled her into his lap. He smelled wonderful, Charlie thought before she could stop herself. She needed to get her head back in the game.

“What’s your name? Or should I just call you waitress?” Vidar asked.

“You could, but it’s far more likely you will get my attention if you call me Charlie,” she told him. She thought she saw his lips twitch, as if he wanted to smile. But instead, he grunted. His arm was around her waist to keep her in place as he played cards with one hand. Charlie had never seen the game before and was lost on the rules.

“Isn’t Charlie a boy’s name?” Mr Nineteen-Fifties asked.

“It’s my name, and I’m not a boy,” Charlie said. There was a round of chuckles from around the table.

“You can say that again,” the man next to Vidar said. He scanned her body and his eyes got stuck on her breasts. Charlie wanted to roll her eyes at him, but settled on ignoring him. The game continued. Charlie couldn’t understand the rules, but it seemed like they were playing in two teams, three in each. And it looked like Vidar’s team was winning. After three wins in a row, Vidar and his teammates laughed and taunted the other around the table.

“Looks like you are a good luck charm, Charlie. Come sit on my lap,” Mr Cosmopolitan said, patting his leg like she was a dammed dog. Vidar’s hand temporarily strengthen its grip on her hip, but then let her go.

“It would be a relief. She may bring good luck, but she is on the heavy side,” Vidar told the others and there was a round of laughter. Fucking idiot, Charlie thought. She deliberately walked around the table with more sway to her hips. If he was going to make fun of her, trying to make her feel bad about herself, she could show him what he was missing out on. “Before we start the next round, I want a new drink,” Vidar added. Charlie stopped just before she was about to sit

down on the other man's lap. Her skin was crawling at the very idea of sitting in his lap, but she tried to make sure not to show it. But now she had an excuse not to.

"Of course, the same as before?" she asked.

"Yes."

"And everyone else?" Charlie asked. They all ordered another round of the same drinks, and Charlie made her way out to the bar. Jenni eyed her as she walked up to her.

"Everything going okay?" Jenni asked. Charlie shrugged.

"They are all assholes, but there's nothing I can do about it. I'm not their fucking mother," she said. She took the moment Jenni needed to fix the drinks, to breathe and relax. She told herself to focus on not losing her temper. It was bad to lecture or yell at any customer and it would most probably get her fired. Do it to a room of mobsters and she would be worrying about losing her life.

"Tina has calmed down. Do you want me to send her in?" Jenni asked.

"No. But thanks for the offer. I can do this. It's one night of my life. I can suck it up," Charlie said with a smile and she even gave Jenni a wink as she walked back to the inner room with a tray full of drinks. She handed them out with a steady hand and hoped everyone had forgotten about her sitting in Mr Cosmopolitan's lap.