

Blood red love

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The card game was in full swing and since no one paid her attention, Charlie turned to leave.

“Where are you going? I need some luck,” Mr Cosmopolitan called to her. Charlie turned around and smiled at him as she walked to where he was sitting. He patted his lap again and Charlie took her seat even though she would have liked to refuse. She knew she could refuse. Jenni would never force them to something that made them feel uncomfortable. But if Charlie were to cater to these men, she would make sure to get the biggest tip she could out of it. Unless they put their hands on her, if they tried, they would regret it. The only talking was regarding the card game.

“Charlie, what is that short for?” the man to the right of Mr Cosmopolitan asked. He looked right at home in the setting of the bar, like an old-time mafia boss. His brown eyes glittered with what Charlie interpreted as mirth and his black hair was slicked back.

“Who says it’s short for something? It can just be the name my parents gave me,” she said.

“I’m presuming your parents were aware they had a girl when they chose your name,” he chuckled. “Charlotte?” he asked. Charlie wrinkled her nose.

“Nope, thank god for that,” she said, earning a round of chuckles from almost all the men. Everyone except for Vidar. He was just staring at her when he didn’t look at his cards.

“Carolina?” the man stuck in the fifties asked.

“No, that would possibly be even worse,” Charlie said. As the men played cards, they kept trying to guess her name. No one guessed the correct answer. Vidar was still not participating, but he would watch her, making her more nervous than Mr Cosmopolitan. As another three games were played and they announced a winning team, Vidar was on the winning side this time as well, while Mr Cosmopolitan was not. Charlie got up from Mr Cosmopolitan’s lap, even though he objected.

“Do you gentlemen need more drinks? Some food?” she asked. They ordered another round of the same drinks and when Charlie brought them, Mr. Fifties tried to smack her ass but missed. Charlie had become far too skilled at avoiding things like that since she started working in the bar.

“It’s time for us to talk business. Get lost,” Vidar said.

“Come back in an hour with another round of drinks,” the man sitting between Mr Cosmopolitan and Vidar said.

“Yes, sir.” Charlie quickly made her way to the bar, happy to get a break from the intense back room.

“Back so soon?” Jenni asked.

“They decided to talk business, so I have been dismissed for an hour,” Charlie told her.

“Take a break while you can. They have been unusually demanding of your time,” her boss said and Charlie gratefully took a can of coke and headed back to the staff room. She got her phone out of her locker and sank down onto the couch. Sixteen missed calls from a blocked number. Charlie didn’t need to look to know who had called. She did anyway, because why not torture yourself a little? ‘Dad’ the listing said, there were also a couple from ‘Rose’. Charlie wasn’t deluded enough to think her stepmother had tried to call her. More likely, her father had figured out she had blocked him and tried calling from his wife’s phone. She sighed and turned the phone off and sipped on her coke. After ten minutes, she decided she wasn’t going to be able to shrug the funk the calls had got her into. She emptied the last of the can and decided the best distraction would be working. For almost an hour, she helped Tina tend to the customers. They had got one of the rare tourists that sometimes heard of the bar and decided to come and take a look at it. The couple sat down at one of Charlie’s tables and she amused herself by talking to them while they simultaneously tried to take the bar in and look through the drink list. They ended up ordering drinks Charlie was pretty sure they wouldn’t enjoy. But they would get the atmosphere of the place, so it might be worth it to them. As she gave Jenni the order, Jenni handed her a tray with drinks. Charlie realised it was the drinks for the inner room. The hour was up. She took the drinks and headed back, knowing Tina would cover her tables as well. She knocked on the closed door and waited until she heard an “Enter” from the other side.

“I’m here with your drinks, as ordered,” she said as she handed them out. She got some gruff “Thank you”. Mr Cosmopolitan tried to put his hand up her skirt. Charlie quickly slapped his hand away and was about to turn around and tell him off when the man sitting next to him slapped the back of his head.

“Don’t be fucking crude, Millard,” the man said. Mr Cosmopolitan, whose name apparently was Millard, glared at the other man.

“I apologise on my... friends’ behalf,” the man who seemed to belong in the fifties said, surprising Charlie.

“Thank you, but there is no need,” she said. “Can I get you something else?” she asked, to change the subject.

“I think we are ready to eat,” Vidar said. The others nodded. It was clear they were regulars as they didn’t ask for a menu, but ordered from memory.

“I’ll be back in about twenty minutes with the food,” Charlie told them, and went to hand the order to the kitchen. She took a look out at the bar and decided Tina could handle it. As she waited for the food to be ready, she leaned against a corner in the kitchen and watched Lilly, her best friend and chef at the bar, work her magic. Lilly was the reason Charlie had started working there in the first place. She had first convinced Charlie to give it a chance and then convinced Jenni the bar would go under if Charlie wasn’t working there.

“Tough evening?” Lilly asked.

“Not really, I’m just feeling a little off,” Charlie said.

“Anything we can help you with?” Leo asked. Leo was Lilly’s helper. He did everything and anything she needed him to do. It was his way of trying to get a foot in the restaurant business without going to chef school. He was a sweet guy, and Charlie knew he had a thing for her. But he was too young for her and too inexperienced. Lilly looked at Charlie and rolled her eyes at Leo’s comment.

“No, that’s okay. But thank you, Leo,” Charlie told him.

“You just let me know if there is anything,” he said.

“How’s Nea?” Charlie asked her friend. Nea was Lilly’s on again, off again girlfriend. Lilly frowned.

“She isn’t talking to me at the moment,” Lilly said as she started to plate the food.

“What is it this time?” Charlie asked.

“Same old thing. She is once again convinced I’m having an affair with you.”

“I’m sorry. Do you want me to take a step back so you can sort it out?” Charlie offered.

“No way, girl. If she can’t see that we are just friends, and have been friends since we were both in diapers, then it’s her issue. Not mine, and certainly not yours,” Lilly said. “There you go, do you need Leo to help you bring it all out?” Lilly asked as she put her final touch on the plating.

“Yes, please, if you don’t mind, Leo?” Charlie said.

“Not at all. I’ll take the big tray,” he told her.

“Show off,” Lilly teased him and winked at Charlie.

“Thank you, Leo,” Charlie said and picked up the other tray. They walked to the back room, and she knocked on the door again and got told to come in. “I have your food, gentlemen,” she told the men as she entered, followed by Leo.

“I’m starving. I have been looking forward to the chilli burger for days,” the man from the fifties said. He rubbed his hands together as Charlie placed his order in front of him.

“We are open all week, if your cravings get too severe,” Charlie told him with a smile.

“Don’t tell him that. Henry will never leave if he realises he can eat the chili burger every day,” the old time gentle men joked.

“Oh, do shut up, Nasir,” Henry said before he attacked the chili burger.

“And who is your lovely helper?” Nasir asked as Charlie had finished handing out the dishes from her own tray and started taking plates of Leo’s.

“This is Leo. He is our chef assistant. I needed some brawns, so I borrowed his,” Charlie said.

“Hello Leo, I’m guessing you know our charming Charlie?” Nasir said, focusing on Leo. Charlie saw Leo blush under the intense gaze and had to hold back a giggle.

“I-I guess,” Leo stuttered as Charlie placed the plate of food in front of Vidar. He was watching her.

“Then maybe you can aid us. We have been trying to guess Charlie’s real name, but have come up empty so far. Do you know her real name?” Nasir asked, still focusing on Leo.

“No, sorry,” Leo answered.

“To bad,” Nasir said and switched his focus to his food. Charlie placed the last plate down.

“We will let you eat in peace. Anything you need?” Charlie asked.

“No, thank you, doll,” Henry said. Charlie found she didn’t take as much offence to his nickname this time.

“I will look in on you in a while. If you need me before then, just use the button,” she said, indicating a door bell looking button on the wall. It led to a buzzer behind the bar. They nodded as Charlie and Leo took their leave. “Thanks for the help, Leo,” Charlie said as they parted, him heading for the kitchen and she for the bar.

“My pleasure, Charlie.”

