

Blood red love

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The evening and night went surprisingly smoothly, Charlie thought as she was cleaning up the back room after the men had left. Sure, they had been sexist and borderline rude at times. Millard gave her the creeps, and Vidar was just plain rude and hostile. But there had been a lot of humour and laughing as well.

“Great job tonight,” Jenni said as she came walking.

“Thanks, boss,” Charlie said as she put the chairs on the table, making the room ready for the cleaners that came in during the early morning hours.

“This is your tip for the evening from the Thursday club,” Jenni told her, holding out an envelope that looked stacked.

“Wow, thanks.” Charlie flipped through the bills quickly to get an idea of what she had made. She looked at Jenni. “Are you serious?” she asked.

“Apparently they liked you,” Jenni said, and left. Charlie looked in the envelope again. Without counting, she estimated it was a week’s worth of tip in the envelope. The girls hadn’t been joking when they said the men tipped well. Maybe she would think about doing it again sometime, she thought as she made her way to the staff room and changed into her everyday clothes and got her bag. She said goodbye to Robert, and he asked her if she needed him to walk her to the bus stop.

“Thank you Robert, but it’s just a five-minute walk. I’ll be fine,” she told him and took out her phone. She had another set of blocked calls from her father and two missed calls from her brother. She made a mental note to call him back. Her brother Huxton and his husband Tyson had two adorable twin boys that would be in bed at this hour, so it would have to wait until the morning. She was about to put the phone away when it started ringing. She looked at the display and smiled.

“Hi, idiot,” she said.

“Finally, would it kill you to pick up your phone once in a while, sis?” her brother asked.

“I have been working, I just got off,” she said.

“Dad has tried to call you,” Huxton told her.

“So I noticed.”

“Are you going to call him back?” he asked.

“Would you?” she asked instead of answering.

“I get what he did was bad, but he really wants to fix things,” her brother tried to convince her.

“He knows what he needs to do to fix things. Until then, he is out of my life. How’s the boys?” she asked to change the subject. She knew her brother wouldn’t turn down an opportunity to talk about his sons. There was a heavy sigh on the other end of the line.

“They’re well. Liam is beginning to walk on his own and Aiden is doing his best to knock him over,” her brother chuckled.

“Sounds adorable,” she said.

“It is, when it’s not frustrating that the little tyke is focusing on messing with his brother instead of trying for himself. You should come over for dinner. They miss you.”

“Right, I’m sure they have told you,” she teased. “I would love to. I will check my schedule and give you a couple of dates that work for me. Don’t forget to tell Tyson,” she said.

“I would never,” he objected.

“Right, I guess the three other times was just me dreaming then,” she needled him.

“Judging by the late hour you are getting off work, you are still working at that place,” Huxton said, trying to change the subject.

“Yes, I have told you it’s a good way for me to make money,” she told him with a sigh.

“James tells me there are some bad people frequenting that bar. Money isn’t everything,” her brother pointed out.

“That is easy for you to say, Mr Lawyer. James is sweet, and it’s nice that you care, but I need to do this,” she said.

“Why don’t I call James and he will come and pick you up and take you home? That is the least I can do, and he would be more than happy to do it.” Charlie smiled. James was her brother’s best friend. They had grown up together, and he was like a second brother. The fact he was sexy and worked as a cop didn’t make things worse. Charlie had a secret crush on James through her teenage years. Not that he saw her as anything other than a sister. Even now, she admitted, he looked amazing in his uniform or in the recent transitioning to a suit since he got a promotion to detective.

“Thanks, but no thanks. Let James get his rest. I’m almost at the bus stop and the bus only takes twenty minutes,” she told her brother. After he had called her, she had stopped walking and focused on the call. But the topic reminded her the bus would be there any minute, and she started to speedwalk towards the bus stop. She was almost there as she saw the bus go by, not even slowing down at the empty bus stop. She sighed internally.

“Are you sure? I would go myself, but I don’t want to wake Tyson when he finally is getting an uninterrupted night’s sleep,” her brother said.

“It’s okay, my bus will be here soon. I’ll be home quicker this way than if I have to wait for James. You have done your big brother’s duties well this evening. Go to bed with a good conscience and I will get back to you about dates for dinner,” she told him.

“Are you sure? You don’t want me to stay on the line until your bus get there?”

“No need, it’ll be here any second and I’m in shouting distance from the bar where the mountain of a bouncer called Robert is still on the premises as the boss is counting the revenue,” she told him.

“Okay. Love you, sis.”

“Love you too,” she said and hung up. She had lied to her brother. The missed bus meant a forty-five minutes wait. But she didn’t want him to go into full brother mode. He had a family, and Charlie didn’t want to bother James. Instead, she sat down on the bench and started scrolling on her phone. A car pulled up to the bus stop and Charlie tensed up as she raised her eyes. A black Lincoln Town Car stood in front of her, the back door in level with her. The window rolled down and Charlie found herself looking at Vidar. There was a moment of silence when both of them just looked at each other.

“How long until the next bus?” Vidar asked her. Charlie thought about telling him the same lie she had told her brother. But what if Vidar decided to wait? Then he would know she had lied, and that wasn’t good as he was a valued patron to Jenni. She looked down at her phone.

“Twenty-five minutes,” she told him. He nodded.

“I will take you home,” he said. It wasn’t a question which rubbed Charlie the wrong way.

“Thank you for the offer, but I will wait,” she told him as she watched the driver get out of the car, walk around it and open the passenger door, expecting her to get in. Charlie saw Vidar sitting in the seat farthest from her. He looked relaxed and like he belonged in the expensive car. She didn’t move. He didn’t say anything, he just raised an eyebrow as to question how long she was going to defy him. Charlie felt her resolve weakening. He was a patron and it would be rude to turn the offer down, she thought, getting up from the bench and sliding into the car.

“Thank you,” she said as the driver shut the door behind her. Vidar just gave her a nod and then looked down at a pad he was holding. He looked to be reading something and ignored her presence. Not awkward at all, Charlie thought.

“Where to, mademoiselle?” the driver asked as he looked in the rearview mirror.

“Three, three, eight Hudson Street,” she said.

“I believe that is a hotel, mademoiselle,” the driver told her.

“That would be correct,” she replied. The driver gave her a quick smile and a nod before turning out into traffic. Vidar was focusing on whatever it was he was reading. Charlie watched the city pass her by outside the window and hoped they would get there sooner rather than later. Maybe she should have agreed to let James pick her up. At least that would have been a pleasant drive. She sighed in relief as the car pulled up outside the hotel. Charlie wanted to open the door a flee, but the driver had already exited and it felt rude to not let him do his work. “Thank you for the ride,” she told Vidar as she waited for the driver to open her door. Vidar grunted something and Charlie got out of the car the same second the driver opened the door. “Thank you,” she told him.

“My pleasure, mademoiselle. Have a pleasant evening,” he said.

“You too,” she said reflexively. She stood on the sidewalk and watched the car disappear. When she was sure they were long gone, she walked the block to her apartment. She knew it wouldn’t be impossible for Vidar to find her if he really wanted to. Something told her he had resources at his command that would track her down within an hour if he wished. But at least she felt a little better not leading him straight back to her home.