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As Charlie rushed home, she texted James to ask how she should dress. To her relief, he texted back, letting her know she should keep it casual. She arrived home and pulled out her pinned hair as she stripped out of the formal work clothes and looked at the mess her earlier clothing emergency had caused. She spotted a floral, cotton dress which had big roses in lilac on a cream background. That would do, she thought. The three quarter sleeve and flowy skirt made her feel girly and playful. A good mood for a date. After being pinned back all day, her chestnut hair needed some fluffing to let its wavy texture relax and fall naturally to its shoulder length. She checked her makeup and found it would work. She just had time to dig through the mountain of clothes for a sweater to take along and to find a purse to stuff the important things in before the doorbell rang.

"Hi, James," she said as she opened it and saw him standing outside. He looked sexy in a pair of jeans and a long-sleeved t-shirt that showed off his fantastic body.

"Hi, Charlie. These are for you," he said, holding out a small bouquet of lilacs.

"Thank you, I love them. Let me just put them in water. I'll only be one minute," she told him and walked back into the apartment. "I would invite you in, but the place is a mess," she told him over her shoulder. She heard him chuckle. After placing the flowers in water and taking in their scent, she walked back to the front door.

"You look beautiful," he told her.

"Thank you, you look sexy," she honestly said.

"Sexy, huh?" he commented as he watched her lock her door.

"Oh, you know very well that you would look sexy when you put on that outfit," she teased him. He laughed and, like a gentleman, held open the door to the passenger side of his car for her to get in. She was relieved they still could be relaxed around each other. She had feared the new dynamic would have made things awkward. But they talked and laughed as they always had. It made Charlie relax and enjoy herself. James parked the car and Charlie realised where they were.

"Matilda's burgers?" she asked. "I haven't been here in years."

"It was always your favourite," he told her. It was true. When they had been kids and teenagers she would always pick Matilda's burgers if she got the choice. "Do you want me to take you someplace more fancy?" he asked, sounding a little worried.

"No way, this is perfect," she told him with a smile. He smiled back and helped her out of the car. They walked into the restaurant and nothing much had changed from how Charlie remembered it. They took a seat in a booth and looked over the simple menu. When the waitress came, Charlie ordered what she had always ordered, as did James.

"How was your day?" he asked.



"Good, I ran a couple of errands and I secured a freelance gig that will keep me out of the bar for a while," she told him.

"Really?" he asked. Did he sound disappointed? Charlie must have misinterpreted the tone, she thought.

"Yeah, I start on Monday and will only have time for a shift or two at the bar during the week," she said. She knew better than to tell him where she had got the job. If he had been adamant she should quit her job at the bar, as it put her in the vicinity of Vidar. He would most likely not be thrilled that she had started to work for him.

"You know, if you need it, I can lend you the money. Then you wouldn't need to work," he offered. She smiled at him.

"That is sweet of you, James. I appreciate it more than you know. But it's a lot of money and you shouldn't have to be out that kind of sum. You don't make that much, even after your promotion. I will tell you what I told Huxton and Lilly when they offered to do the same. I am grateful, but I will manage. It means a lot to me to know I have people around me that will support me. That is more valuable than the money," she told him. He shook his head.

"You are too stubborn for your own good. But I can respect it." She gave a snorted laugh.

"Like you had a choice," she said, and they both laughed. They enjoyed their burgers. The booths may have become more run down than Charlie remembered, but the burgers still tasted amazing. "Thank you for bringing me here. I really like it," she told James.

"You know me too well, you know all my bad sides so I need to really impress you if I'm going to have a chance at a second date," he said as they walked out to the car. "I was thinking we could drive to the park by the river, take a walk and maybe have some ice cream," he suggested.

"Hamburgers and ice cream? You really are pulling out the big guns. I'm in," she told him. The park was full of people who were out for an evening walk, families and couples mixed with dog owners.

"I hope Huxton didn't give you too much of a hard time when you asked to take me out," Charlie said. She would hate to be the reason the two friends fought.

"Just the usual big brother stuff. I can see where he is coming from, so I don't mind. It helped that he thinks you need to start dating again, and he knows I wouldn't do anything to hurt you," he told her.

"Yeah, he has been nagging me for a while. So what about you? I haven't heard Huxton saying anything about you dating lately, either. Don't tell me you have hit a slow patch?" she joked. He smiled at her.

"I haven't been dating much the past year," he confessed.

"Why not? Did something happen?" James had always been popular with women, and he had taken full advantage of it. Not that he had been a real player or treated women badly. He had always been open with the women he was dating what he was after, something non-permanent and fun. He had always been too restless to settle down.

"Kind of. This woman I have known for a long time had me reevaluate a lot of things in my life. Maybe there was more to life than a long series of short-term relationships. It didn't help when your brother decided to settle down and start a family and be disgustingly happy," he told her.

"He is annoyingly perfect in that aspect," she agreed. "So what happened with the woman?" she wanted to know.

"I didn't want to ruin years of friendship, so I didn't do anything about it. I thought it would go away if I ignored it long enough. Then I realised I was being an idiot. So I finally managed to ask her out, and she said yes," he told her and reached out and took her hand as they were walking.

"Oh," Charlie said and felt herself blush. She hadn't made the connection until then. James chuckled.

"You are adorable sometimes," he told her. "How about some ice cream?"

"Sounds amazing, my treat," she answered. Charlie realised she hadn't resisting him holding her hand as they headed for the ice cream cart. And it felt empty when they let go as they took the ice cream cones and took a seat on a bench.

"Have you talked to your dad?" he asked.

"No," she said.

"He has reached out to me. I think he has reached out to Lilly as well. He is getting desperate," James told her.

"I don't want to talk to him. He hasn't even apologised," she insisted.

"How can he do that if you don't talk to him?" Charlie gave him a look, and he raised his free hand to show he wasn't going to press the matter. "Just expect him to do something," he said. She nodded. She would think of a solution. The mood was dampened by the conversation. But once their ice cream was eaten, they had recovered, and the date continued.

It was a little after eleven in the evening as James parked the car outside her building and followed her inside. Charlie stopped outside her door and turned around to face him with a smile.

"I had a really nice time. Thank you for asking me out," she said.

"It was the best evening in a long time," he said. He was moving closer to her. Charlie knew she should have wanted him to kiss her, but she wasn't sure she did. "Does that mean I get a second one?" he asked. She smiled.

"It does if you want it. I'm not free until Friday and Saturday next week," she told him.

"Can I take you out on Friday? Maybe to someplace a little more adult? Drinks and a dinner?" he suggested.

"I would like that. Please drive safe," she said and gave him a kiss on his cheek. He nodded and waited for her to get inside before he left. Charlie looked at the disaster that was her bedroom. She sighed and got started cleaning up the mess and at the same time, she tried to figure out why she felt so divided. She had liked her date with James. He was nice, hot, and he

cared for her. She should want to end the evening with a hot and heavy session. Sure, her bedroom had looked like a mess, but it wouldn't be the first time James had seen something like that. No, her hesitation had other reasons. She needed to try to figure out what it was before next Friday.

Camille Dvorak

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Maybe a certain hot blonde boss? Silly girl.

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