

Prologue

Why was he feeling like this? It wasn't as if he had done anything wrong - he was just so nervous - he couldn't help it - here he was, hosting a VERY important event - he should be mingling with his (now) fiancée yet he found that he couldn't take his eyes off her - it wasn't to do with the fact that he was entranced by her (at least that's what he kept telling himself), it was more to do with the fact that he just couldn't relax - he was watching nervously, constantly waiting for her to slip up - to do something - oh no! Not tonight of all nights! He silently pleaded, she suddenly stopped and caught his eye - a mischievous grin on her face - he held his breath half nervous/half excited - there was nothing he could do - it was a waiting game.

Chapter One

When you are told that someone close to you has died - they say you through five stages: shock, numbness, anger, grief, acceptance. Charles Roster had yet to experience the other four - was he numb? Yes of course he was, he had been his father. Was he shocked? Not really, considering his father's lifestyle: whiskey and smoking had been his devices, angry? How could he be angry when it had been self-inflicted? Time and time again he had been warned, but, like most men his age - he had refused to listen - and that was why - here, on a Thursday afternoon - they were hosting a wake in their grand house. He surveyed the guests - all in little groups murmuring; it was strange - when someone close to you died - people treated you like a total stranger - they either completely avoided you or they said something completely unhelpful.

'How are you coping darling?'

He turned and smiled at his fiancée, Grace Livingston - she was the daughter of a VERY successful fashion designer duo who's clothes had even been worn by the royal family; she too, had a knack for design and many notable people were approaching her for ideas.

'I'm fine.'

'Are you sure?'

'Yes!'

'No you're not - of COURSE you're not - but you will be.'

'And all that will be down to having you by my side my darling!'

Suddenly the family butler appeared and whispered something in his ear, a shiver shot down his spine, he turned and smiled. 'Thank you Davies - I'll see to it.' He put down his champagne.

'What is it?'

'Oh the telephone.' He lied. 'He kissed her on the cheek, shan't be long.' Disentangling himself - he headed out into the corridor - once he was clear, he stopped and headed out into the garden, as his eyes adjusted in the dark, he suddenly noticed a cigarette light, straightening himself up, he marched towards her.

‘What are you doing here?’

‘Came to give my condolences.’

‘A card would have done just as well.’

She grinned mischievously. ‘Yeah but a card doesn’t exactly have the personal touch does it? You OK?’

‘You have to go.’

‘Still not doing the touchy -feely thing then huh? It’s Okay - you can cry if you want to.’

‘Look, I’m okay! We don’t do touchy feely in my family, you know that. You have to go.’

‘In minute...’

He surveyed her for a minute, desperate to change the subject. ‘How was Paris?’

‘Enriching - you’d have loved it.’

‘I HAVE been before...’

‘Yeah - of course you have.’

He watched her, a feeling of dismay and intense desire was building up within him. ‘I HAD hoped that you would have obtained a degree of maturity - obviously not!’

‘Oh but darling!’ She purred. ‘Just think how boring that would be.’

‘May I?’

‘Kiss me first.’

‘What?’

‘You heard!’

He could have done ANYTHING at that point - he could have called for security to frog-march her out or chucked her out himself - but he secretly enjoyed the rebellious feeling that was building up within him - the idea of doing something so out of character. Slowly, he pushed her against the ivory covered wall and pressed his lip against hers.

‘Oh come on! You can do better than that!’

‘Anna - I’m in the middle of a wake and-’

But it was too late - she had undone the first couple of buttons of her blouse and had put his hand inside, he felt her thin, lacy bra and stroked her nipple, she teased his lips urgently with her tongue and began to undo his trouser zip, just as he dived his tongue into her mouth, they suddenly heard laughing, he jumped away and quickly looked around.

‘Will you just relax?’

He turned to her and watched her straightened up, reluctantly regaining his sense. ‘You have to leave.’

‘Fine! I’ll call you.’

‘No Anna - you won’t.’

‘What?’

‘I’m getting married.’

‘Oh yes! To Miss high and mighty posh snooty-snotty Livingston! I *do* read *Watch* magazine you know!’

‘Well - then you know why this has to end.’

She frowned. ‘Just remind me...’

‘Oh for goodness sake!’ Then he realised he’d said it too loudly.

She giggled.

‘Is this amusing to you?’

‘A little bit.’

‘Well...funnily enough it isn’t for me!’

‘Oh come o-’

‘Look! I’ve got responsibilities now! My father’s just died...’

‘Has he *really?*’

‘Look, I just feel I have to start taking things more seriously!’

‘Never bothered you before!’

‘No but *everything’s* changed! Can’t you see? I can’t act so reckless anymore!’

Suddenly, they were interrupted by another sound of laughter. He stepped back.

‘Look, I’d best go inside.’

She smiled, slyly. ‘Congrats by the way! I’m sure you’ll make her a *very* happy woman!’

‘Don’t! And it’s “congratulations” you know I hate abbreviations.’

‘Whatever! So what’s she like, are you in love with her?’

‘She’s...very suitable.’

Anna grinned. ‘That’s not what I asked.’ She stubbed out her cigarette.

‘Anyway - see ya!’ And that was it, she was gone.

Charles watched her go, shook his head at her flippancy and headed back indoors.

Chapter Two

Anna put the finishing touches to her dress and stood back; she felt a shiver of excitement - she always did before fashion shows - nothing gave her more pride than to see her work being paraded before millions of photographers; stepping back, she took out a cigarette and lit it; suddenly, she had an idea and took photo of the dress before typing out a text message to Charles:

“Look! Want me 2 design wedding dress? lol! ;-)”

Grinning to herself, she took a quick look round before digging in her secret draw.

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Charles was in town on business - to tell the truth, he was glad to get out of the house - all the talk about weddings was starting to make him to feel claustrophobic. Suddenly, he felt his phone blip - taking it out, his eyes widened as he stared at the text ; what the hell was wrong with her? He decided that the best thing to do was to ignore it; trying to concentrate on the task in hand, however his phone blipped again - demanding his attention. Sighing, he took out his phone and stared at the photo of a very pretty dress and read the text that accompanied it; mixed feelings rose within him - he was annoyed that she didn't seem to get the message and leave him alone - yet thrilled at the same time; he bit his lip, knowing that he wasn't far from her studio. No - keep going! Just walk straight past. He was approaching her door, he paused and looked at it, suddenly, almost without realising it, he tried the door handle, pausing, he looked up the street before heading upstairs.

The place was deserted but he could hear her bustling around.

‘Hiya! Tea?’

‘Err...no thanks, not stopping.’

She popped her head out and held up a spliff. ‘You sure?’

His eyes widened as he took a step towards her. ‘What the *hell*?’

‘Oh do go all self-righteous on me! You’ve tried it before!’

‘Look - I’ve got to get back -I only came up here for a meeting and -’

‘Great! You’ve finished you can unwind then!’ She looked at him, seductively and slipped her arms around his neck. ‘Unless...there’s something else you’d rather be doing...’

He swallowed. ‘Look - I - I’ve got an evening dinner to attend.’

‘What time?’

‘Eight o’clock.’

‘Well...it’s only two now - that’s six hours.’ She held up the spliff. ‘Come on.’

He felt his mouth go dry and licked his lips.

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A while later - Charles was on cloud nine and was just staring into space - he had completely forgotten everything; pure bliss and pleasure filled his brain.

Anna - who had removed her blouse and bra had loosened his tie, undone his shirt and had snuggled into his chest. ‘There, you can’t tell me you don’t feel better.’

Charles breathed in, wanting to retaliate but found he couldn’t.

‘What time’s your fancy dinner?’

‘Mmm?’

‘Dinner?’

‘Oh - not until nine.’

‘Oh you’ve got plenty of time.’

‘That’s not the point Anna - it stays in the system for days and-’

‘You’ll be fine! You have been in the past.’

‘Yes well I wasn’t so much in the spotlight then.’

‘Believe it or not -I *did* bear that it mind - it’s the weakest I could get.’

‘Right...’

‘So...this dinner...’

‘What about it?’

‘It’s to celebrate your engagement I’m guessing?’

‘Yes.’

‘Where is it?’

He turned and looked at her. ‘No-where you could afford.’

‘Is that so?’

Charles sat up, exasperated and did up his shirt. ‘Just don’t ruin this for me.’

Anna reached for her bra. ‘Oh come on-’

‘No I mean it Anna!’

She paused, slightly shocked by his tone of voice. ‘You’ll never do it Charlie.’

‘Do what?’

‘Become domesticated - I know you too well.’

‘Maybe not as well as you think!’

‘Oh but I do - you may act like the perfectly behaved posh boy.’ Here she ran a finger down his chest. ‘But you and I both know the *real* you.’

They stared at each other, Charles felt his mouth go dry and his heart quicken.

‘I-I’ve got to go.’

‘Go on then!’

‘Just stay away.’

‘As you wish!’

‘I *do* wish!’

‘Oh Charlie?’

He paused and turned round. ‘What?’

‘Just a minor, teeennnisy tiny detail...’

‘What?’

‘You came to me. Never forget that - you came to me.’

He stared at her, unable to respond.

Chapter Three

Charles looked in the mirror as he straightened his black tie; he was determined to forget all about his rendezvous with Anna and just enjoy the evening - that was it, no more, finished, now he could just relax and look forward to the evening - tonight was about celebrating his engagement and the one woman he wanted to spend the rest of his life with (at least that's what he told himself.)

'You look very distinguished!'

He turned round and smiled as she walked in. 'And you look utterly divine!' He kissed her hand. 'I really am the luckiest man in the world.'

Grace grinned. 'Well, play your cards right...'

'I'm intrigued!'

She laughed. 'You should be!'

'Grace?'

'Yes?' He pulled her to him and kissed her. 'What was THAT for?'

'Do I need a reason to kiss my fiancée?'

'You softy! Come on, we'll be late.'

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Try as he might, Charles couldn't get his afternoon with Anna out of his head, as they entered the restaurant, he knew that he had to act the part; perfect son, heir and fiancé, he fought the urge to tug at his tie. They sat down at the table and ordered champagne. His mother lifted a glass and smiled.

'I'm not really a one for making speeches but I'd just like to state how proud I am of my son, and how we can't wait to have Grace for a daughter-in-law.' She turned to Charles. 'You have grown into a fine young man and I..' Here she paused. '...And I know I couldn't be prouder And I know your father would be to!' Charles coloured. 'Thank you mother, and If I am it's due to *both* women in my life.'

‘Amen to that!’ His mother and Grace caught each other’s eye and grinned knowingly.

Charles grinned as they all raised their glasses of champagne, just as he took a sip, he suddenly saw a group of people enter...and choked as he saw that Anna was amongst them.

‘Hey! Are you alright?’ Grace patted him on the back.

‘Oh yes, sorry darling, just swallowed the wrong way; what were you saying?’

‘Only toasting out future!’

‘Oh of course! To us!’ He glanced up and saw Anna laughing and joking - they seemed like such a happy crowd, so relaxed and chummy - not all distant, formal and clinical. Suddenly, he felt himself being nudged and someone calling his name. ‘Charles? *Charles?*’

He turned. ‘Yes?’

‘We were just discussing our plans - are you alright?’

He smiled. ‘Yes! I’m fine couldn’t be better! In fact, would you just excuse me?’

Anne was enjoying herself immensely - she knew full well that Charles would see them; in fact that was kind of the point! Poor Charlie! She thought, it can’t be nice for him having to act sooo PC and controlled all night, she thought as she reapplied her lipstick in the Ladies, she glanced at her watch - they would pay the bill and then they had better head off. Sneakily, she glance in her handbag - nothing too heavy, just a bit of a “pick me up” to improve the mood. Just as she was heading out, she bumped into Charles.

‘Hey watch it- Oh it’s you!’

‘Yes! What are you doing here?’

‘Having a meal with some mates!’

‘How can you afford this even?’

‘Errr...We DO have jobs you know! We’re splitting the bill.’

‘For the starter?’

‘Ha! Ha!’

Despite himself, he felt his lips twitch.

‘Anyway! How’s it going? Are you clicking?’

‘We clicked ages ago.’

‘God you’re such a liar!’ She reached in her bag.

‘Hey! Hey! You can’t smoke that in here!’

She feigned indignant. ‘Who says?’ Then laughed. ‘*Relax!* I *do* pay attention to the news you know! This is for later.’

‘Later?’

‘We’re heading to a club soon - wanna come?’

‘I can’t.’

‘Why?’

‘What do you mean why?’

‘Look - you’re *miserable!* Even *I* can say that!’

‘I’m getting married soon.’

‘That just reinforces my point!’

‘Look - just - just stay away.’

She paused. ‘...So does that mean you’re not coming to the club?’

He fought the urge not to scream in frustration.

...

It was three o'clock in the morning when Charles distinctly thought he heard a humming sound - still thinking he was dreaming; he snuggled further into his pillow but the humming persisted, opening his eyes, he saw that it was his phone, slowly, he reached for it and looked at the time - four am! Slowly, he glanced over at Grace - she was dead to the world. Very, very gingerly he sneaked into the bathroom and closed the door.

'Hello?'

'Hey babe!'

He heard laughter and screaming in the background. '*Anne??!!*'

'Hey! How's it going?'

He sighed, exasperated. 'Ann it's three in the morning!'

'Yeah, I know! Sorry! Did I wake you?'

'No - we were just having breakfast!!'

'Wow! I knew you people were early risers but *seriously??*' She laughed.

'Are you drunk or high?'

'A bit of both actually.'

Charles paused before asking his next question - he was dreading the answer yet was full of anticipation and a little excitement at the thought of being dragged in.

'Anne what do you want?'

'Oh yes! Do you have the number of a taxi firm?'

'What?'

'A taxi firm - have you got a number for one?'

'Jesus Anne! Why not just dial directory enquiries?!'

'Yeah but it's more fun to call you!'

‘Ha! Ha! You’re so funny!’

‘So?’

‘I’ll give you the number for one.’

‘Thanks.’

Suddenly - he heard her giggle. ‘What’s that?’

‘No - nothing...look just stop it!’

His jealousy heightened slightly. ‘Look I’ll come out.’

‘What?’

‘Well if you and your *friend* need a lift.’

‘...Are you jealous?’

‘What? Don’t be stupid!’

‘Well you sound like it! I know say hi!’

‘What?’

‘Say “Hi” to my friend, look I’ll put you on...’

No - wait, Anne, I-’ But, before he could protest another woman’s voice came on the phone.

‘Hello?’

‘Oh, hello!’

‘You must be Charlie.’

He stiffened. ‘It’s Charles actually.’

‘Nice to meet you.’

‘Yes, you two, look, would you mind handing me back to Anne.’

‘No of course not!’

A moment later. ‘Hi!’

‘Hey, look do you want this number or not?’

‘Fire away! Oh, Saf would you..?’

‘Saf?’

‘Yeah! As in “Saffron.”’

‘What kind of person christens their daughter “Saffron?”’

‘Hey! Don’t be a snob! Her parents were hippies it’s not *her* fault!’

Charles couldn’t help smiling. ‘Whatever - here’s the number...’

‘Great! Saf?? *SAF??* Are you paying attention? He only likes to say things once. No, on second thoughts gimme...look just gimme your phone, we’ll dial it, save time.’ After he read it out, Anna said something to her friend. ‘Ok! Yeah she ringing it now, thanks!’

‘You sure you’re alright?’

‘Yes! Fine!’

‘I’d have come out if you had wanted.’

‘Well it wasn’t an emergency!’

‘Yes! Clearly!’

‘I’ll let you get back to bed - thanks for your help - it’s so sweet you actually care.’

‘Anne?’

‘Yes?’

‘*Try* not to do that again!’

