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**BOBBIE
ON
THE ROCKS**

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CHAPTER ONE

I was buying loneliness when the most beautiful man I'd ever seen before walked in and sat down next to me. He ordered a Black Sambuca and soda.

"Lots of ice," he said.

I wet my bottom lip. I was drinking something boring: a house gin and ginger – not because I wanted to but because it's all I could afford. As of 10:07 that morning, I had officially heard from my deep-pocketed father's lawyer, a man by the name of Walker Leroy Putterman, who informed me of my new unfortunate circumstances.

"You've been cut off," he said. "Your father loves you!"

Loving me meant leaving me destitute without prospects or a whole hell of a lot of experience in the world to dig my elbows down and work up a grease sweat. I gagged and sobbed and choked on snot, more for appearances sake really, though I was upset. My hands weren't fated for grime and I didn't want them to rust or chip like the blue-grey carvings of Michelangelo. I panicked as any heiress to a large fortune who'd just been financially decapitated would and took refuge in a boozier hole-in-the-wall called The Fontana.

Back at the bar, my thigh brushed against this man strategically. He didn't react but rather corrected his stool position so as not to brush. In my spoiled nature, that put me quite out. I flagged the barman, who's name I didn't bother learning, for a top up.

"Wait no," I began, "gimmie a White Sambuca and bubble-water please."

Bullseye. The pretty boy looked left, left at me and I smiled my heart-ripper grin for him.

"What are you playing at?" He asked.

"I'm not much for games," I murmured. "I always lose."

"Not many people like liquorice," he said. "It's a very acquired taste."

"So am I."

My wit was winking and he seemed to be enjoying the banter. He ordered another round and began describing to me the process of distilling Sambuca, which I only partially paid any attention to. Inside the fretful part of my brain was uncoiling a string of thoughts connected to my foreboding homelessness. My digs cost roughly five thou, give or take a penny or two per month for the fun club. Life expenses ran a little deeper, but to look at me you wouldn't think I ate so well. I exist on more of a liquid diet, if you get my meaning and so far in life it's got me and the rest of the Raventhal's along just fine. Foo, I better pay attention in case he asks me a question.

"...so it is extracted all the way from there and surreptitiously brought back here and wrought out to dry and wither like a raisin. That's why the flavor's so rich."

"Mmm," I mmm'ed.

"Bobbie?" A voice behind me called my name. Usually when this tupa thing happens I stay as still as possible and make no sudden movements – like a meercat on the defense from some feline in the wild.

"Quick! Play dead with me!" I whispered to Sambuca-Man.

"Bobbie Raventhal?" The call came again, and it tagged on my glorious last name which if anyone knows means etiquette-wise I was slain. Jolly good show, old boy... you win; Must show good face and be cordial so as to protect the Raventhal reputation. I spun around and

feigned a happy front. Then genuine surprise caught air in my lungs when I saw who my caller was.

“Watney Corso!” I squeaked.

It took only Watney seeing my face to wrap his arms around my waist and nuzzle his smutty chin into my neck. He smelled me like a man drinking air. I felt a touch naked.

“I thought you were in London!” He exclaimed. “When did you get back?”

“I thought you were in the loo,” I said – little private joke – remind me to bring it up later on account of a scolding that need be done, but now’s not the time nor the place.

He giggled, wickedly. “I like it when we’re both wrong.”

Sambuca-Man cleared his throat obnoxiously and I remembered my manners, “Oh Watney, this is...uh....um...this is...”

“Mi—”

“Not important,” interrupted Watney and I smacked his arm chiding him for being rude. “Well he’s not with you is he?” He continued, “Your body language is unfamiliar.”

“How would you know?” I shot back, a little more indignant than intended.

“My name is Miller Fortinger and you, Sir, are quite the brute!”

I apologized on Watney’s behalf.

Watney tutted, “Don’t do that for me, I thank you. If I was sorry, I’d say so.”

But I ignored him and so did Fortinger. I looked at my prospect, thinking how funny it was that only seconds ago I had been the pursuivant of this flirtation. I looked again, without all his talking he sure was handsome. Truth is, handsome as he was, and he was, I wanted nothing more than to whisk Watney away into a deep dark speakeasy and gab for as long as the night would hold out. Manners are manners however and I had a name to guard. The Raventhals, you see, are a very stubborn, proud, tight bunch of Neanderthals in drippy diamonds. All seemed to be headed in good direction until the door opened and I felt a sinking in my stomach. A gal prettier than me walked in and weaved her slender arm into the crook of my Watney’s elbow. His eyes met mine in split-second timing, only to divert slightly shame-swathed. I maintained my composure; I have a poker face worth twice my salt. I faked one of my best smiles and tilted my head cordially as he pronounced her name to the pulled air.

“This is Amiretta Applegate Price,” he said. “Ami, this is Bob.”

I spit my drink. I felt withered, like one of Fortinger’s dried up liquorice sticks. She giggled at my expense and to save face I laughed at myself too. If you laugh the loudest, people won’t see you’re made of Swiss cheese.

“Did your parents really name you Bob?” She asked, stupidly but before I could insult her with wit she wouldn’t understand, Watney was a quicker draw to say, “She hates it when I call her than, but isn’t she gorgeous all red-faced and squirmy.”

Fortinger, an obvious gentleman made to object on my honor, but I pressed his shoulder and shook my head that it was all right. Just friendly dandies poking each other with pricks of roses.

“The drink is such a silent devil, is it not?” I said.

Watney leaned over the bar and stuck his finger up for the barkeep and ordered a Gin and Tonic with Cucumber if he happened to have it. Amiretta looked at me the way a person looks at a frog about to be carved up in the name of science. She was dissecting me. I curled my eyes up.

“Wat,” she said and he turned his head and I was happy to see not all the way around. A man who really likes a doll will turn his whole body if she’s important. “You didn’t introduce Miss...Bob’s...date.”

“That’s because he isn’t that. They’ve only just met and I don’t like the look of him much,” he said. “Golly! Our arrival may have just changed the course of history. If not for the interjection, he might’ve become the future Mrs. Raventhal!” He laughed loudly. It cut through the place.

“Why this meanness?” I said, sternly. “What’s gotten into you?”

His eyes met mine in a stare. It lasted too long. Amiretta shook his arm.

“You’re right,” he said. “My most humble apologies. Forgive my silliness. Perhaps the devil drink has sucked me cruel.”

“It is true though,” I began, looking to Amiretta. “This is Miller Fortinger, did I say that right? And he and I have only just been acquainted. He has quite the thorough knowledge of Sambuca spirits.”

I could feel Watney’s incredulous eyes burning me, but I didn’t dare look again. The price of eye-contact seemed heavier now. Amiretta shook Fortinger’s hand, and they said their how-do-you-dos and charmed-to-make-your-acquaintances.

How is it you two met one another?” I asked her.

Her face lit up the way ones does when they’ve been broadsided by infatuation. “Well, see, my father, Lord Hockney Applegate Price of Applegate Price Laudnam and Brine was—”

“I work for her father,” Watney interjected. “We met because I spilled wine on my trousers, and she dabbed my crotch clean of grapes.”

Amiretta’s lips parted, and I supposed she wasn’t ready for Watney to be so honest. She lowered her eyes and clutched at her little purse, and I jabbed Watney in the ribs when she wasn’t looking.

“How charming,” I said.

“I think I’ll step outside for some air,” she said and make for the door.

Fortinger slid over a business card with his name and telephone number on it and stood up, “I think I’ll join her. That’s about all the absurdity I can tolerate for tonight. It seems you two are in the middle of some strange reunion that need not be sullied with unwanted company. I’ll leave you to it. Miss Raventhal is was a pleasure to mee you.” He turned to Watney, “You on the other hand...”

“Ariva-dirche, Mick.” Watney said with a wink and a slap to Fortinger’s back.

“It’s Miller.”

“Yeah, whatever,” he said and I placed a hand on Fortinger’s arm so he wouldn’t use it for violence.

“G’bye Miller and thank you. I but almost thought chivalry was dead.”

I put his card in my purse with no intention of ever using it.

“So long,” he said, then turned on his heel and left.

“You’d better go check on the prim,” I said and Watney sat down. He leaned close to me, close so that his lips were swallowed in my hair.

“Why didn’t you tell me you were back in town?” He whispered, softly. “You could’ve called.”

I shrugged. The truth is, I didn't know why I didn't. Sometimes it's just in a person's nature to disappear.