

OSCAR & JOSEPHINE

written by
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Chapter Twenty Two

With his little arms slung over the balcony, he listened to Josephine's movements in the new lounge room behind him. After the remains of the party that had moved out almost immediately and into a new apartment block in the centre of town. Josephine liked it for its own antique quality with cream walls and swirling designs on the bricks outside. They had shutters over the kitchen sink, a view of the town from their third story, and a smell of coffee rose up from the town square only a block away. It pushed up in the wind, and filled the room.

"We must get away from these people," Oscar called back to Josephine who was beginning to unpack their things. "They do nothing for me."

"You search for such trivial pursuits. Be open because they're nice," she replied, placing a lamp down onto the stand and pushing it into the socket. She left the switch to be flicked by Oscar, still not daring to touch it herself. "I plan

to stay here, because although Lola isn't the most respectable ladies of the town she is my friend and that's enough for me. When was the last time you had a friend Oscar?"

"Oh well lets see..." Oscar counted on his small fingers. "There was Angus yesterday. I don't really feel so friendly with boys who haven't actually got a developed brain."

She sighed. "So pessimistic."

"Coming from a woman who won't move into the new time frame."

"I am," she insisted. Though she sounded angry, her spite was soon smothered by the renewed feeling of growth and cleansing. It didn't matter what Oscar said, it never had. It was his own shift into the new ways that caused her to want to shake his little body but now they were moving together as one the haze before her vision had cleared.

"Let me join them." Oscar said, pointing to the old men playing chess in the courtyard below. His brown eyes narrowed thoughtfully, sadly, down onto their old grey hair and folding skin. "Let me be there companion and die by their sides. I would prefer to be around men who know what I do. Who have lived what I lived."

"So go."

She had stopped her unpacking now, a fresh brush of bumps slithered up into his collar and he knew she was watching him. He even felt her grief. "I almost gave an old man a heart attack for telling him I had lived through both world wars, and proved it to him. I'll not do it again."

"So stop swapping war stories and play chess. They'll appreciate talent. You're as cute as a button."

"I am old, Josephine. I cannot hold onto things, they always pass me by. In five years boys who resemble me soon laugh at me, and then they pinch my

cheek, and then they have boys like me. You can hold on and pretend. There is no possibility for me.”

Chapter Twenty Three

The last clutch of the old ways almost hung Josephine like a chicken with a rope around her neck. It was the last pieces of her old life that she had to rid herself of, after working so hard to move into the new, but she felt it was the one thing that may, in the end, defeat her. She had never felt to be a strong person, nor a courageous one, and Oscar was the one that had lead them out from the old and dark and into the new money, the new possibilities.

Philip was a gentleman who lived beneath their apartment and had come to help whenever they needed a facility fixed. The electric sockets, the plumbing, cracks in the walls. After a month of meeting Philip he began to help Josephine carry her grocery bags up the two flights of stairs to the third floor and into their apartment. He was never a threat. On the contrary, as Josephine’s eyes looked up and saw Philip coming down with his hands out, ready to help her, she felt a kick start to her heart. The smile she gave him was new and young, again a new embrace into the 1980s.

“I hope it wouldn’t be rude of me to ask you to a movie some time?” Philip finally blurted as she was putting away the coffee. Her smile hadn’t disappeared once since seeing him that day. It only grew wider, though hidden to herself as she faced the cupboard, and then she forced herself to regain control and turn to him looking quite placid. She’d been approached by so many men over the years that it seemed like nothing but a merry-go-round of hope and denial, hope and denial. Hope on their part, denial on hers. But Philip had clear blue eyes and blond stubble on his chin. He had never once been discourteous with her, it was as if he had adapted to her old mannerisms and shaped himself to

have walked out from the 19th Century and toward her. Of course, sometimes he slipped. His laugh was vociferous and unkempt, and he pried into her personal business so often. Day by day his questions would release one more weave of her tightened life and he would peek in. His attire, obviously. As were his hand mannerisms full of expression and exuberance, as if he could never just keep his hands in his lap.

Because of his fluctuating old and new she couldn’t say no. The first man in almost fifty years to accept him, right after that cad who had tried to reach up her skirt back before 1940. He was a soldier and thought it was his right to have any woman he wanted. It was the only time she had ever stabbed someone, and she never looked back.

Looking forward there was a potential with Philip she wouldn’t deny. Surely she would break his heart, but it was only a movie.

Chapter Twenty Four

Fire and light surrounded them at the small café, candles sat upon the ledges that stuck out of each wall. Perfectly romantic, Josephine thought with her own sparkling inclination of hope. Across the table Philip’s eyes gazed at her, illuminated into deep cyan until she felt like she were being tugged in gently, and seductively, against her will. She had been attracted to men, many men, but being open to these feelings frightened her. Instead of allowing him to place his hand upon hers, as she rested it on the table, she looked down into her plate of pasta and wound it about her fork.

At one point of the conversation, three hours after their meal and still in the same candle lit table, he gaped at her with his mouth. His skin was smooth in the light, shaved and clean.

“How do you know so much?” he blurted. He laughed at himself and sat

back into the seat as if he were being stupid, but at her intent stare upon his reaction he stopped, and then leaned forward again. “Tell me.” It was obvious she was keeping a secret from him in those enormous brown eyes.

“I can’t... really.”

“Let me guess.” She felt drawn to his infectious smile as it grew up on one side of his thin lips. Mind ticking over, he drummed his fingers on the table. The sound was the only one in the room as all other customers had dissolved away into the night and the waiters were cleaning up. “You were a science project for Nasa?”

Her laugh made him blush. She enjoyed doing that to him, and finally her hand went out to the table. Quickly he took this gesture and linked his own warm fingers into hers, and held on. Her heart gasped, her lungs clenched, the blood rushed up into her face until she felt as hot as if she were pressing her face near the candles.

“No of course not. Your parents made you read text books as a child? Just like your little brother. Smart as a whip he is, I swear it that’s the truth. It’s the only explanation for the both of you.”

Squeezing his hand gently, triggering another small heart attack in her chest, she smiled at him. Her secret was still whispering at him behind her eyes, but she was holding on.

“I am simply a miracle of life.”

“Strangely,” he replied, “That makes complete sense to me.”

Chapter Twenty Five

The thought of Oscar only escalated Josephine’s good mood as she was tagged onward behind Philip toward the docks, just before dawn the next morning. They hadn’t returned home yet, and she had no desire to sleep or to see Oscar’s disapproving face at least until midday.

He pointed to the white and green vessel floating in the dock. A monster looking thing with a great metal spine and body, and a quarter deck that was surrounded by windows- causing it to give the impression that it was peering out into the world, and planning to make an attack. It towered over the other grey, bleakness of the docks and lifted its head to the rising sunlight.

“Lovely,” Josephine lied, not able to keep her the dryness from her tone. He laughed at her, and brushed her hair from her face as if unveiling a piece of beautiful art. They had stopped walking. Josephine couldn’t believe that after so many years on the Earth did she still feel like a young flushed face lady. His hand was in hers and he was pulling her closer. The energy of his body wired her, electrified her sensations, but she couldn’t look at him in the eye. Her shyness had taken over and slipped a shadow on her face she didn’t like. She could never really see him, could see? I cannot hold onto things. They always pass me by. Oscar’s child-like voice echoed in her head, met with the emotion of disappointment that grew in her stomach. Crushed down beneath the tight stretch of her corset.

“I will find out your secret Josephine. You are so different from any other woman I have met. It’s not your intelligence or your beauty,” at this she looked further down to his shoulder but his finger tipped her chin up toward him. “There is a quality that I can’t place. You’re so... feminine. A lady. I don’t know what your childhood was like but instead of a loose 70s child you remind me of... Dickens. Austin.”

“Unlike you, who were released into the wild as a teenage,” she jeered, gathering all the courage she could to look at him. In the cool whispering wind of the morning her mouth tingled against Philip’s warm breath.

“Yeah. The 70s were wild, I’ll give you that. I just hope you can appreciate me for that and not being so much of a gentleman like that I expect you to want.”

Into her core his eyes were reaching. Unable to look away she did her best to hide the most secret part of her, while allowing him to interrogate all her other hidden shadows. They were being whisked away, cleaned out, the cobwebs disappeared and the sunlight was coming in. She was terrified to feel alive.

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