



# Three Roses

## How it began

I met her when a girl friend brought her over to my 16<sup>th</sup> floor apartment overlooking DC from the South.

She was standing there with her coat still on, impatient, waiting for her friend to finish trying to convince me to host her party her overlooking the monolith of Washington. She had short brown hair cut in a DA like girls wore in the 60's. Though her figure was masked by the London fog her long neck promised to lead to good things...

I told Trish, the one begging for a party room, to call a couple of our mutual friends in penthouses on *my* phone and see if they would host for her. My phone, because I wanted time to really meet her friend. I stood silently behind her at the floor length window facing North until she sensed me..

“Great view isn't it?”

“Umhmh.” Kind of a throaty voice, like she had a cold. She didn't turn but kept staring at the Monument in the distance, 10 miles away.

“It looks like a shining sword at night.”

“I bet!”

This was going nowhere. “What was your name again?” I remembered it was Sherry but I couldn't conjure anything better – plus I was going for indifference in tone. “It's Cheri, with a ‘C’ and an ‘I,’ C H E R I,” she said turning to face me. She looked up at me, with her head tilted down and from under blonde brows. No makeup for her – just like she came out of the wash... She finished her evaluation too quickly and turned back to the view.

“Aren't you scared by the height standing close to these windows?” she asked.

“Nope. Got Cherokee blood.” I lied. “I stood here the night hurricane Arlene spun through. She put a crack all the way to the foundation in the bricks but didn't break my windows.”

Hugging herself she said, “I guess, if you can get you mind not to panic long enough to register the fact that it is safe here.” She looked down and shied back from the glass pressing briefly against my chest.

“Sorry. I was ok until I looked down at the cars.”

She smelled nice. The warm fragrance of her from inside the too warm winter coat was familiar.

“Emeraude!”

“What?”

“You're wearing Emeraude by Coty... and it suits you. The scent is recognizable, but not overpowering. Coty made it sexy, seductive – the smell of an herb flowered oriental myth. I've heard it doesn't attract bugs either.”

She laughed. “So have I seduced you then?”

“Hey. I'm not easy, but I can be had.”

“If I want you you mean?”

“Yeah.... I guess that is the hard part. Getting you to *want* to seduce me.”

“That is? or That would be? ‘That is’ means to me it's where you're trying to go what you want to achieve, your goal, where ‘That would be’ leaves your goal uncertain. You meant – ‘That would be’ the hard part, right? The uncertain goal.” She had a coy grin on her face and her cheeks colored a bit.

“Which do you want it to be?”



# Three Roses

“Don’t leave it up to me. If you do, you must know I’ll leave with Trish. I admit I’m intrigued by a guy who knows fragrance, knows who makes it, and can describe one so uniquely. Not the bug part!”

“That is’.”

“That is what?”

“That is’ my certain goal is whatever sends Trish home alone.” I grinned and all the tension went out of both of us. The deal was struck and either ‘That is’ or ‘That would be’ would have achieved my goal...

She turned back to the window and said, “Hold me.” I did. That’s how it began.

## The break in the middle

This section of the tale needs some setup... Cheri had become a fixture in my penthouse. On workdays she used her apartment near her work as a base, sometimes leaving my place after a casual evening of wine and TV to sleep closer. She could sleep later and do her morning ablutions five minutes from work.

I think she had had a few stutter-steps earlier in her love life and was overly cautious. After a few months her caution proved problematic. She had reached the ‘*I should be the only focus of your attention*’ stage. Hence, one night after doing the deed several times, I got out of “our” bed in “our” penthouse leaving her to sleep and went off to a Civil War reenactment – well, that was apparently too much. I came back to an apartment sanitized of Cheri schtuff and sans Cheri. She had even cleaned the apartment, presumably to remind me of some of her added value.

That weekend I dragged on my sweats and went somewhat depressed down to the volley ball courts. Shock of shocks, there was Cheri. Looking ‘G O O D, good’ on *my* sports ground. After the apartment thingy it seemed obvious she wanted a clean break. It soon became clear she wasn’t done and had other designs.

I beckoned to her, since she was sitting with some of the resident “brown bodies” most normal folks shun as gigolos.

“What are you doing here?” I whispered.

“Hey I have every right to be here. You brought me down here and introduced me around to all these folks. They want me to play with them...”

“Yeah. I bet they do!” I muttered, not meaning what she meant. I glanced at the crowd she had left, now straining to hear our conversation.

“What?”

“Nothing. Don’t talk so loud.”

“Why not? I have nothing to hide.”

“Come on Cheri. This is my world and you are – well *were* -- my girl. It’s embarrassing for you not to be here with me. It’s an ego thing.”

She crossed her arms in front of her, taking that defensive stance of hers. “Macho Clarke! You don’t want me alone, don’t want to get serious, don’t want a relationship, and you can leave me after sex to go off for the weekend with a bunch of *Hysterical Historicals*. I wake up and find you gone – the last straw.”

“Come on. You moved out so why hang around.”

“Not for you. You don’t want what I have to offer. Bill over there, on the other hand”, pointing with a head tilt, “appreciates me toughly.”



# Three Roses

“He’s one of the brown bodies you were so critical of last time we were out here. He’s a male whore, girl.” My voice was involuntarily turning to a hiss.

“Well you don’t want me.”

“I never said that. I just said I didn’t want a serious relationship.”

Turning she said, “Well you won’t have one!”.

She walked away in that impish provocative way she did when she felt she had won a point. I wanted to shout “You dumb bitch, you’re demeaning and hurting yourself to strike at me” but I just glared. She went over and flounced on his lap and took a drink from his glass of wine, the whole time eyeing me, too close for him to see it.

I was about to leave when the two of them started packing up. They left, arm-in-arm toward Bill’s building. I felt sick. She was drinking, and a little kissy-face, a touch or two and she would be an uncontrollable sex machine I had trained. He would have what I cared for, what I wanted, and then he’d dump her.

At least I limited myself to one girl at a time. How was I to save her from herself? I proceeded to get plowed on Annie Green Springs, Mountain Pink.

## The Solution and End

*You need to take this first magical part of the story on faith though it can boggle the mind but I believe it to be true.*

Once I have ascertained a girl is one of my chosen few, I give her a ring. It has a spell (Ju-ju) placed on it by my hand. My maid and Au pair in Panama was born an Obeah princess on the Island of Barbados; British island Voodoo. She taught me well, and, without detailing how, I will say that I can create an aegis talisman to ward, shield, and link the recipient owner to me as I wish forever. Any precious metal item can be used. It doesn’t require belief on the part of the recipient, nor that they do keep it forever though that is best. It just demands a onetime free will acceptance of the gift talisman knowing what it is; a yes. It is pristine white magic from the Big Guy or the angels – was never sure...

Soon after we met, I told Cheri a contrived tale of a ceremony using roses, a bell, a book, and a candle. I included that I had received my small pinky ring with a ghost-like image staining the silver for my warding. She so coveted that pinky ring!

The day after the volley ball incident, with my ‘Mensa matter’ fully engaged, I hatched and began my plan.

The first plan step; I waited and met her outside her office.

She walked out, head down, grubbing in her purse for her keys. She looked up and saw me. “What do *you* want?”

I felt scourged by her tone, “To talk.”

“So talk.” again the bite.

“Not here. Not now. May we have a goodbye dinner - with just you and me.”

“I’m not going back to your place. I know I can’t say no to you. You’ll make me melt and...I’ll belong to you again...”



# Three Roses

Cutting short her concerns I said, “I meant in public. A place you’ll really like –you always wanted me to take you. AND,” more gently, “you do belong to me – and you always will.”

Not meeting my eyes, she played with her keys for a moment, just a moment. “Ok but no sex.”

“That’s your call. You know I never do anything I’m told not to – or am not dragged into.” I grinned. “One simple ‘No.’”

I think not listening and wanting to get it over, she said “When.”

“Tomorrow night’s Friday. How about then? I’ll pick you up at your place – You’re not at Bill’s are you?”

“Not ‘til Saturday.” She looked down at the keys and her cheeks colored. “The other day at volley ball I was rotten. I’m sorry I...”

“You won’t ever do it again, trust me.” She looked hard in my eyes trying to gage my meaning. Satisfied she asked, “What time?”

“Seven. We’re going to DC. Wear your white dress.”

“K. Seven.” She touched my arm softly as she left.

The next day was busy with more of the plan.

First I went to the silver smith who made my ghost ring and picked up the twin to my ring I had ordered sized to Cheri’s finger.

Then I tripped to the florists to get three crystal vases with 1 long stem scarlet red rose water sealed in each.

Next stop was an Indian brass shop for a handled brass candle lamp and a small tuned brass bell. I also got a leather covered journal and a gold leaf covered long burning candle. Bell, book, and candle!

Then a West Indian shop for herbs, grasses, and fixings. I went home and did some Obeah ‘mahgics dem’ on the ring.

Last, a trip to the Palm restaurant on 20<sup>th</sup> and M streets in DC was next. As an analyst for Booz Allen Hamilton I had dropped thousands in the Palm for sales lunches and dinners. I called in a favor from Charles, the Maître ‘D. I gave him one rose in a crystal vase, the ring, and instructions for when we arrived – and a fair chunk of change.

All was in readiness. At seven I showed up at her place. She looked great. When we got in my ‘Vette I handed her the first crystal vase and rose from under the back deck. Did she remember the tale? Was she too drunk that night?

“It’s beautiful. But what am I going to do with it?”

“Bring it in with you. It suits you. We can put it on the table at the restaurant.”

The ride to DC was quiet. She sat like a little girl going to church, the rose held in both hands in her lap. When we got to the Palm, Charles met us at the door. The Palm is informal, sectioned off in booths, and has caricatures of famous people painted all over the walls. There are three premium seatings on a raised platform in the back of the main room reserved for “specials”. Standing at the door Charles snapped his fingers and two waiters appeared with a lace linen table cloth, real silverware in a presentation walnut box, fine china, and crystal settings; all for two. Charles escorted us to the platform so we could enjoy the preparations. When the setting flurry was completed Charles turned to Cheri.

“May I?”, he asked indicating the rose Cheri now clutched like a shield. The deference a place the Palm was showing us humbled her.



# Three Roses

“Sure.” She handed him the vase and he placed it carefully on the table.

Charles offered her a hand up to the platform. The two waiters held our chairs and seated us. Charles disappeared when we were seated and returned with the sommelier toting Champagne. He had the second vase and rose which he presented to Cheri with a deep bow and flourish. He was earning his tip.

Smiling happily and a bit embarrassed Cheri laughed. “For me?” She cast a knowing glance at me. “You did this you dog” it said. Did she remember yet, I wondered.

He placed the rose next to its twin on the table making a production out of adjusting ‘just so’ and balancing the scene of two roses.

The sommelier popped the Taittinger 1954 and served two glasses, as if to royalty. He mentioned that it was a 1954 vintage; a fine year for Chardonnay grapes on the hillsides of Champagne. I noted it was coincidentally Cheri’s birth year and that 1954 must be great for everything, provoking agreement in all the staff as they closed and left us together.

“A toast.” I raised my glass.

“To what? What’s all this about?”

“A toast to you in thanks for being mine?”

“Being...? I thought you didn’t want to get serious.”

“I don’t. I won’t. Being mine isn’t being serious. It doesn’t imply a physical relationship. It is simply a fact. Some girls – you are one of a select few – are mine. So I toast to thank you.”

“I guess in a way I will never, I mean *never* forget being yours even if it may end.” She still held the glass in two hands, thinking.

I shrugged. “The toast?” I raised the glass.

“To being yours? I guess...”, she answered and drank.

“We still have champagne in the glass. You give a toast.”

“To you and your caring. And to the two beautiful roses.”

“I’ll drink to that.”

She drank tipping the glass high. “Hey!”, she said looking in the glass. She pinched the small silver ring out of the dampness at the bottom of the glass.

“Put it on.” I said.

“It’s yours?”

“No. It’s yours. Put it on your right ring finger.” She did. “Never be without it, never take it off unless you have to, and never tell anyone what it means.”

“What? What does it mean?”

“What did you toast when it first appeared?”

She twisted it on her finger looking at the ghost face stain.

“This is yours.” It was a statement.

I held up my hand showing mine on my pinky. She took my hand inspecting it closely.

“They’re the same.” she said.

“Do you accept it?” I pressed.

“Yes. How could I say no. But what does it mean?”

“They *are* the same and serve the same purpose.”

“What’s that?”

Propitiously, we were interrupted by the arrival of the Steak La Palm, Lobster La Palm, Fries La Palm, and Asparagus LA Palm. An excellent Pinot Noir complemented the well-appointed meal and every attention the excellent staff could provide.



# Three Roses

Finished Charles had the valet bring the Vette. And thanked us to the car.

“Where are we going now?” she asked.

“Where do you want to go?”

“Where the other rose is.” she said, looking pensively down at the roses she held.

“It’s with the bell, book, and candle.”

“I know I shouldn’t – and you knew I would... Didn’t you?”

I smiled. She leaned against me and closed her eyes. We went to the penthouse. We lit the candle. We rang the bell. We wrote in the book.

She will always wear the ring on the ‘*widowed*’ finger and when asked about it, she will only smile, eyes looking up into memories.

Three Roses. Cheri, with a ‘C’ and an ‘I’!