

“Hey, *Paul!*” the bartender called out to me, waving his arm to get my attention and then pointing down to two bar stools—occupied by two lovely customers with empty glasses before them. I sidled my way through the crowd to reach the corner of the bar where Charlie, the bartender, waited for me. “Two seats, Paul,” Charlie said. “These ladies are just cashing out.”

I squeezed in between the tightly packed bar stools, hanging over the bar to hear Charlie above the loud talk, laughter and music. I was also hanging over one of those ladies: a gorgeous blonde whose lap was obscured by her ample bosom—from that angle. She seemed just my type.

“Maybe, we don’t have to leave—just yet,” the attractive blonde said to her companion, while looking up and studying my eyes.

“Yeah, we do!” her pretty brunette companion responded, as Christine squeezed between the blonde and the brunette to get up to the bar.

The young ladies gathered their belongings and surrendered their seats. The blonde rubbed against me as she moved away from the bar, giving me a smile as broad as her.... Christine took her stool and immediately ordered a scotch and soda. I kept watching that blonde sashaying slowly, rhythmically, down the corridor—looking back at me, with that broad smile. Maybe I could excuse myself for a couple of minutes... and....

“Paul? *Paul!*” Charlie demanded my attention. “C’mon, pal, what’s it gonna be? It’s *unbelievable* here, tonight, and I gotta keep moving.”

“Sorry, Charlie,” I apologized for my inattentiveness. “I’ll have what she’s having. Listen, thanks for spotting for me.” Noticing the look of disapproval on Christine’s face, I added, “The seats, I mean!”

“Not a problem!” Charlie returned, already at the other end of the bar.

Christine gave me a smirk and said something I couldn’t hear, through the din. I pointed to my ear and said, “*What?*”

“*Quiet, huh?*” she nearly shouted off my ear. “*Cozy and quiet, you said!*”

“So, I forgot it’s Saint Patrick’s day!” I shouted back. “Hey, it’s an Irish town!”

“Now, about...,” I started.

“*Don’t even start!*” Christine cut me off. “We can’t talk, here. I can’t even *think*, in here!”

“Well, if the noise is too much for you, we could go somewhere else,” I offered.

“No, let’s just have our drinks and listen to the band,” she said.

“But I really need to talk to you.”

“Not *now!*” she insisted, turning in her seat to watch the band—and avoid my stare.

Turning back toward the bar, she replaced her half-finished drink onto the cocktail napkin and—looking straight ahead, and not over toward me—announced, “I want to dance.”

She bolted from her seat and started edging her way through the crowd standing three to four deep around the bar. I lost sight of her within seconds, but pushed and apologized my way through the crowd until we were reunited on the edge of the small, parqueted dance floor, not much wider than the cramped bandstand it fronted. Without looking into my face, Christine turned toward me and draped her left hand over my shoulder. I took up her right hand in my left, and we began to move to the music.

They were playing something from “Phantom of the Opera;” that was a switch. But it was nice. And it didn’t require any display of talent, on my part. That tiny dance space was so crammed with bodies, you couldn’t make any moves that approximated dancing, anyway. We just kind of rocked—rhythmically—in place, wrapped in each other’s arms: while bashing, scraping and bumping up against everyone in proximity to us. It was like working your way through a “mosh pit,” in slow motion.

She didn’t look up at me; and she wouldn’t talk. So I Just hung on to her—and hung

over her. I really liked the way she smelled. I mean, when you're jammed in with a lot of people in a place like that—with clouds of tobacco smoke, and booze-breath, and distinct body odors (not to mention overabundant perfume and cologne abuse)—you tend to shut down your sense of smell, deliberately. Then, if you come across a subtle fragrance—delicate but delicious—it startles your sense: like discovering a single rose in an endless desert.

I started to realize how truly charming Christine is: with her mouth shut. The band continued with a medley of "Phantom" tunes. And when the name "Christine" was sung, she looked up into my eyes, warmly—not affectionately, but warmly. Sometimes, that's all a man needs. I started feeling something for her.