

Didi episode 8

"Charlie?"

"Didi. Sorry to bother you around dinner time but I just got my hands on some tickets for *The Ghost Train*— if you are interested."

An instant conversation ran around Didi's head.

Should I squeal with excitement or is that too obvious? Should I take some time to answer to match his level of enthusiasm to date. Should I laugh and tell him I need to check my calendar? Should I say I have a previous engagement but I'll try to get out of it?

In the end, Didi was a guileless girl and hated pretense in any form.

"I would love to see it with you, Charlie."

"Great!"

Didi could have sworn he sounded relieved.

"It's tomorrow evening at the Old Vic. Shall we meet outside since I am on the other side of the river and go to dinner after?" There was a pregnant pause. "Just the two of us?"

A feeling akin to a sunrise blossomed in Dodo. "I would like that very much."

"I'll let you get back to dinner then. Until tomorrow."

Didi sat for a full minute holding the earpiece in her hand, soaking up the sunrise.

"Well?" asked her father when Didi returned to dinner.

"Charlie is taking me to a play at the Old Vic tomorrow evening."

Her mother reached a hand across the table and squeezed. "How marvelous darling."

"And we are going to dinner after—just us."

"Even better," said Lady Dorchester. "Now, what are you going to wear?"

Having searched her sister's extensive wardrobe, Didi chose a silver, sparkly gown that fell from the hips in jagged edges to just above the ankle. Narrow straps graced the shoulders and she matched the gown with a winter white, wool coat that flaunted an enormous fur collar that tickled her ears.

The gown had a matching bandeau with a large silver plume which posed a problem. She had no experience of placing a bandeau headband and Lizzie was still away with Dodo. Her mother offered her own maid, but she was over sixty. Still, it was better than nothing.

Between them, they maneuvered the band over her exuberant blonde curls that were styled à la Marlene waves, after which she applied make-up, using the magazine suggestions she had used before. When it was all finished she felt like Cinderella after the fairy godmother has waved her wand.

"Oh, darling!" gasped her mother who had come to spy on Didi before she left. "You look devastating. Charlie doesn't stand a chance, poor man."

"That is the point, Mummy. I need to outshine his memories of Dodo."

Her mother grabbed her by the shoulders. "Which is more beautiful, a sunset over the ocean or snow sparkling on the mountains?"

Didi stuttered. "W-well, both."

"Exactly!" said her mother, touching the end of Didi's nose. "That is you and Dodo. Different, but equally stunning."

"I needed to hear that," said Didi, her eyes prickling.

Lady Dorchester had insisted that Didi use the car and chauffeur to get to the theater, and she was glad as the temperature was sliding to freezing point. As the car rolled to the curb, she looked out, scanning the well-dressed crowd for one handsome academic. Not seeing Charlie, she glanced at her watch and noticed that they were a little early.

"You can drop me here," she told the chauffeur. "I would imagine we'll be done by ten. If you could return to take us to dinner. Otherwise, until then you are free."

The middle-aged chauffeur slipped out of his seat, ran around the car and opened the door. A light dusting of snow had begun to fall and Didi wrapped the fur collar tightly round her neck, running for the red carpeted stairs.

As theatergoers pushed past and out of the weather, Didi continued to search the street. A bobbing black umbrella caught her eye and as she stared, Charlie stepped under the awning and closed the brolly with a shake. His eyes shone in the lights from the theater sign as he scouted the crowds, his striking features flushed from walking in the cold air. She wanted to call out, but also wanted to witness his reaction when his eyes connected with hers.

An older woman knocked his arm going up the steps and he lifted his hat to her as she passed. As he replaced it over sharply cut, light hair, their gazes at last collided, and attraction walloped her in the chest. She hoped the light in his eyes meant she looked like someone he could not live without.

She waited as he ran up to her, kissing both cheeks like the French.

Progress.

"Have you been waiting long?" he asked. "I came up by train and had a devil of a time getting a taxi.

"You mean there were women waiting, and you let them go first," she grinned.

"As a matter of fact...I decided it might be quicker to walk."

"Always the gentleman. Remember how you helped us with the flat tire on the way to Farrington Hall when Marcus had no inclination? That is one of the things I have always like about you."

Her comment caused him to beam from ear to ear making her knees weak.

"Shall we?" he offered his arm and led her up the steps. The lobby felt warm and cozy in contrast to the cold winter weather outside.

"Shall we check our coats?" He gently gripped the shoulders of hers and helped her slip out of the comforting, white wool. His hand grazed her bare shoulder, causing a dizzying reaction in her stomach.

"Wow! You look...amazing," he said as he held the coat and she turned to him.

"Why, thank you, kind sir," she giggled.

For a second he hesitated. Was he finally going to kiss her?