

Private Conversation 2304

Paul enters the coffee house.

He goes to the counter and orders a coffee.

Paul: Cappuccino, please.

Paul receives his drink and pays the barman the money.

He goes to a table and sits down. He looks around and notices Joe.

Joe was a friend who has stopped talking to him.

Joe is sitting alone and looks in Paul's direction and sees him.

He doesn't react one way or another.

Paul stands up and walks to Joe's table.

Paul: Mind if I join you?

Joe: if that's what you want to do.

Paul: That doesn't sound too friendly, Joe.

Joe: What do you expect.

Paul: Can we talk about it?"

Joe: I'm still angry about what you did.

Paul: Just let me get my coffee and we can have a chat. See if we can sort a few things out. I think you've misunderstood my motives.

Joe doesn't respond.

Paul walks back to his table and picks up his cup of coffee. He returns to Joe's table and sits down opposite him.

Joe: What brings you into this neck of the woods?.

Paul: Are you wondering how pleasant or unpleasant to be towards me, Joe??

Joe: I was really pissed off with you, you know.

Paul: And now?

Joe: Not so much, now.

Paul: You heard the news then?

Joe takes a sip of his coffee.

Joe: Yes, I read about their arrest in the local paper and their conviction. She was very beautiful, you know.

Paul: You were mesmerised by her; her beauty was only skin deep.

Joe: I was really angry with you for introducing her to Harry. I was devastated; I was in love with her...

Paul: You thought you were.

Joe: She was fun to be with.

Paul: She was manipulative and dangerous and so was Harry.

Joe: I didn't know Harry.

Paul: Are you still in love with her?

Joe: I felt as though I'd been deceived twice, once by you and then by Della. I heard from Gerry that you had introduced them to each other. Why did you do that?"

Paul: To save you.

Joe: How did you know Della and what she was like?

Paul: She and some of her friends were neighbours before we moved to Fulham. They were all on the make. The only one who hadn't been inside was Della. Everyone who knocked around with her seemed to be sent down for a time.

Joe: Why didn't you warn me?

Paul: You wouldn't have listened and she would have probably have had me done over, Joe.

Joe: You could have given a hint, Paul.

Paul: A hint! It would have gone straight in one ear and out the other. You were too smitten. I knew how she led men on to get what she wanted.

Joe: Was it that obvious?

Paul: Not to some men and Harry was just as smitten as you.

Joe: I miss having someone to talk to, having conversations like we did, Paul.

Paul: Would you like another coffee, Joe?

Joe: That would be nice, thank you.

Paul stands up and goes to the bar and orders a coffee. He chooses two chocolate eclairs oozing with cream and takes them to Joe.

Paul puts them on the table and goes back to the counter, and waits for the coffee.

Paul returns to Joe and hands him his cup of coffee.

Joe has devoured more than half of the chocolate éclair.

Paul: Enjoy.

Joe: Just like old times.

Paul: You know you've meant something special to me ever since we were at school.

Joe: I know, I've told you things about me that I've never mentioned to anyone else, Paul.

Paul: Me, too.

Joe: That's what buddies are for as the Americans would say.

Paul: You know where that word derives from, Joe?

Joe: No, tell me.

Paul: It was when soldiers used to have to share a bunk, they were called bunkies, which became buddies for obvious reasons. I think it was during the American Civil War

Joe: Really! Aren't you a book worm of information?

Paul: Is that a question, Joe?

Joe: Purely rhetorical. Anyway, we've never shared a bed.

Paul: I know but I like you a lot, Joe.

Joe: What's that supposed to mean?

Paul: I feel very protective towards you.

Joe: Well, I was very angry when I found out that you introduced that guy to Della.

Paul: It was for the best, Joe.

Joe: You went behind my back.

Paul: You might be in prison now if I hadn't.

Paul puts his hand over Joe's hand and holds it there.

Paul: Sorry. And I've missed you.

Joe: What's that supposed to mean?

Paul: I'd like to get to know you better.

Joe: We know a lot about each other already. So, in what way would you like to know more about me?

Paul: It's difficult for me to say.

Joe: Spit it out, then. You've always been good at that.

Paul: In a more romantic way. More intimate. I think you're very handsome, Joe.

Joe: What are you saying?

Paul: I'd like to sleep with you. There I've said it.

Paul takes his hand off Joe's hand.

Joe: You want to go to bed with me? And you said, sleep!

Paul: Well sleep as well, afterwards.

Joe raises his voice.

Joe: Look! I'm not like that!

Paul: Don't shout, Joe, please.

Joe: I'm shocked! I don't do things like that!

Paul: Well, you're twenty-eight and so am I. You're not attached, are you?

Joe: Thanks to you.

Paul: Della's not the marrying type; she just strings men along until they fall for her scam schemes. Haven't you learned that yet?

Joe: O. K. you saved me but...

Paul: Can't you be bi-curious just for one night just to see what it's like?

Joe: I don't think so. I'm not like that, Paul.

Paul: Look, Joe; I've fallen in love with you. Think about it. Come to my place Friday night at 8 o'clock; I'll have dinner made and a bottle of wine.

Don't worry, I can always have the other half of the stew the next evening if you don't turn up. I'm leaving now. So, if you don't come I'll know I've destroyed our friendship forever. Don't make your decision now; think about it. You're the only reason I'm still living in Hammersmith. I hope to see you on Friday but if I don't I'll understand.

Paul stands up without finishing his coffee or eating his éclair and walks out of the coffee house.

Joe stares at the chocolate éclair. He picks it up, feels it and puts it back down on the plate. He picks it up for a second time and starts to lick some of the cream off it. How he eats it or stops eating it, and walks out the coffee house, will indicate whether or not he goes to have dinner with Paul.

The End.