

1_AMBIANCE_NOTHING LIKE A FRIENDSHIP

Married, mother of none. Diva of the fashion consulting world! Personal shopper at Vanilla Rose Boutique and owner of Bleu Diamante Fashions, guaranteed to put your style on top. One hundred seventy pounds of mocha chocolate rolled into five feet and eight inches of woman. Wife of Eric Caldwell, daughter to Alexis (my step-mom) and my father, Jerry Richardson, best friend of Naomi Blankenship and Paige Dougherty. Those were the words most people would use to describe me.

But if I were to take out a personal ad, the description would sound more like: emotional, lonely, unloved, desperate thirty-two-year-old woman seeking, no, scratch that...maybe not seeking, but craving, yeah, that was more like it, craving personal attention. Yep, that's me, Ambiance Lorraine Caldwell. And this is my story...

I stepped out of Naomi's car and went to the trunk to remove my bags. While waiting for our friends, Jon and Sharon, to return to the vehicle, I decided to show Naomi what I had purchased in the market earlier. It was taking Jon and Sharon a while to come back with their lunch. Naomi was sitting in her new, navy blue Mustang trying out the Pandora radio feature. She was proud of the features and the horses it sported underneath the engine.

We were parked close to a nice, charcoal sports car. Just as I tried to open the back door and swing my big behind in, I accidentally bumped Naomi's car door against the sports car. *Oops*. I looked to make sure I hadn't dented either one. Assured that I hadn't, I closed the door back and decided to get into the front seat instead. When we first arrived, Naomi had pulled in forward. The car next to us was parked in reverse. The sports car's passenger side mirror and Naomi's car door were making it complicated for me to squeeze my booty in.

Just as I prepared to slip inside the front passenger door, the driver's side door of the other car opened and a gentleman stepped out. *Uh-oh*. My heart began thudding, I knew he was coming to check the damage to his car. I was ready with attitude to check him and let him know there was nothing scratched on his precious vehicle. One day I would have a new, beautiful car to be protective over the way Naomi was about hers and the way I was sure this gentleman was about to be. Not that I shouldn't have had a newer model car to be proud of, but finances didn't allow it at the moment. But that was another story.

"Excuse me, ma'am."

"Yes?" I questioned, turning around. He was dark-skinned and appeared to be six-foot-three. He smiled a crooked, beautiful white smile at me. I looked at the patio situated just above where we were parked. There was a group of young college students sitting up there who were about to witness me getting checked. I decided to forgo the attitude I planned to toss his way and come humbly, not wanting to create a scene. I was too grown for all this attitude mess anyway, and I definitely didn't want anyone to witness my impending humiliation. I peeped down into the car, and Naomi was still consumed with her new sound system.

"I noticed you when you were standing at the back of the trunk. You're a beautiful woman, and I just wanted to see if you would be interested in exchanging names and numbers."

Huh? That wasn't what I was expecting. Was he for real? I was not looking my best today. My long, thick hair was a bit frizzy from the July heat. My waves were not popping.

"Well, I don't think so."

"Why not?"

"I'm not looking to get involved with anyone."

"We can just be friends. I really would like to get to know you. I mean, I've been sitting in my car for a moment checking you out. It was something about you that captured my attention when you were at the trunk. And no, it wasn't when you hit my car," he mentioned with a laugh, after noticing my eyes growing wide.

"Sorry about that," I mumbled in embarrassment.

"No worries. Here, just take down my number, think about it, and if you feel cool, give me a call. Just friends, nothing more. I promise."

I looked down at my phone and contemplated. Friends? Uh-uh, I couldn't do it.

"No, I don't think so. But I'm really complimented by the attention," I replied.

"Well, can you just take my business card? My name's Nick, by the way. Can I at least know yours?" he asked, handing me his card, which I promptly slipped into my pocket. I would toss it in the trash can later. I didn't want to be rude.

"I'm Ambiance."

"Hmm, Ambiance, I like that. It fits a beautiful, mocha woman such as yourself. I hope you change your mind," he said in a rich, deep bass voice. Looking into his slanted, dark-colored eyes was like looking into a pool of sin. I could tell with his one gaze what he wanted to do to me. Yes, I knew I needed to end this conversation quickly. He looked like the devil in a suit. I wasn't interested in getting involved, but I wasn't blind, either. I would be foolish if I tried to deny that I found him very attractive.

His sexy voice and fine body, and just the way he looked at me, let me know it wouldn't be nothing like a friendship. No, he definitely wanted more.

"Have a great day, beautiful," he said by way of goodbye. He touched my wrist lightly, and I felt my heart flutter. It made me think of all the things I had been desiring but could not find in my life. Any man who had the power to awaken every sensual nature of my innermost being at just the touch of my wrist was no good for me.

I waved goodbye to him and turned back to the car. Jon and Sharon chose that moment to walk up with their bags in hand. We were headed back to the office park they worked in. Jon and Sharon worked in the Imperial building with Naomi. I worked in a little boutique across the street from the office park. Because it was such a beautiful day for a luncheon, we had decided to eat at a little park near our workplace. They were chit-chatting a hundred miles a minute.

We had all shared lunch time whenever we could for the last three years. Jon and Sharon worked together at the same consulting firm. They had met Naomi when their office building had an after-hours soiree for the Christmas holiday one year. Naomi and I? We went way back, like high school way back. And she had introduced me to the two of them.

They hopped into the car, and I took over the front seat where Jon had previously been sitting.

“Ambiance, who was that fine chocolate specimen you were talking to?” Jon asked, turning to stare out the car as it peeled out of the parking lot.

“Some guy talking about a business deal. He was giving me information from his business card about an upcoming seminar in real estate. Nothing much, nothing I’m interested in,” I lied.

“Hmph, looks like he was definitely interested the way he was eyeing you and kept looking back over his shoulder after he walked off,” Sharon stated.

“Whatever. Come on, Naomi. You ready to roll?”

“Yeah, girl,” she stated, putting her car in reverse.

“It’s cool, girl, you can keep it real with us, you know,” Jon stated.

“Yeah, Ambiance. Besides, there’s nothing wrong with having male friends. After all, Jon’s our friend,” Sharon stated.

“That’s different, and y’all know it. Jon is gay, and he isn’t interested in getting with any of us intimately. Sharon and Jon, you two are the devil. Don’t be encouraging her to get mixed up in foolishness. Plus, Ambiance is married, and I’m sure the man isn’t interested in being friends with you *and* your husband,” Naomi chided, looking at me.

My stomach turned at the mention of my marriage. I had no business being attracted to him, or did I?