

COLLATERAL STARDUST
Chasing Warren Beatty
And Other Adventures
From the Rock Tumbler of Hollywood

By
Nikki Nash

PROLOGUE

“Nash. Looking good,” Mitch said. Which meant I looked like crap. I had no make-up on, I hadn’t washed my hair, and my armpits smelled like cilantro. Thinking about it just made me sweat more and I was sure Mitch would soon ask: “What’s that smell?”

I was wearing platform shoes, corduroy pants, and a flowered polyester shirt. He had a mustache, feathered blond hair, and was wearing bellbottoms. We look like we were going to a 1970s costume party. Except there was no party. And these weren’t costumes.

It was 1974.

We were at the Old World Restaurant in Beverly Hills, where Mitch was the manager, and I was the hostess.

“Shut up,” I said. “I think I broke my finger.” I’d injured my finger earlier in a Judo class at the Y but that didn’t stop me from showing up to work, but I hadn’t been able to take a shower and unfortunately tonight I’d come face to face with the man I’d been obsessed with for the last six years.

It was a warm Sunday evening in April. I was nineteen. Listless and longing. *Bennie and the Jets* was the #1 song that spring, but what made me swoon was Joni Mitchell's Help Me. I was always falling in love.

Although not with Mitch because he was a doofus.

The restaurant was usually slow on Sunday evenings. I went to the prep station, got a plastic water glass, filled it mostly with ice, and stuck my index finger in. Holding the cup—my injured finger submerged—I sat a few people. No one asked me about the glass I was carrying around. It became second nature and I forgot about it.

When it slowed down I went to the bathroom. I slicked back my hair into a ponytail, pinched my cheeks like someone from the 1920s, and came out.

Mitch stepped in beside me as we walked.

“Your boyfriend's up front,” he said. This was his go-to comment about any guy sitting solo— young or old—as if Mitch knew I was perpetually looking for a boyfriend.

“Oh, Goody,” not getting my hopes up once again.

Mitch didn't reply. He just smiled.

I walked to the front of the restaurant, and holding the glass in my right hand—finger submerged—I grabbed a menu with my left hand and turned to find one man sitting alone at a table in the corner.

It was Warren Beatty.

I froze. My face flushed.

Dammit! Why tonight? I'd developed my secret obsession with Warren Beatty when I was thirteen—I'd even gotten the damn job at The Old World when I was nineteen as I'd been told he came in occasionally—and tonight, a year and a half later, he finally comes in? I'd had it all mapped out: how I would meet him and we would become lovers and friends and we'd know each other our entire lives. And although I didn't have all the particulars, I knew Step One in my plan was to meet him.

But not like this.

Warren was reading a newspaper he'd folded into a smaller rectangle as if he was focused on something important. Or maybe he was tidy and didn't like a lot of paper flapping around. Or maybe he wanted people to see his face. I sure wanted to see his face. He was beautiful.

Trying to will myself into invisibility, I placed the menu on the table as quietly as I could.

"Your waiter will be right with you," I said blandly.

He looked up. "Thank you." That voice. I was hearing that voice fifteen inches away from my face. More like my torso as I was standing and he was sitting. But he was expelling sounds and molecules in my direction and they warmed me. Until I remembered I looked like crap.

He smiled. I half-smiled and turned to walk away. My brain was misfiring all over the place: that's him, I'm holding this stupid glass, and he talked to me. What had I said to him?

I could go upstairs and hide. I'd let Mitch handle things.

This was NOT the way I wanted to meet Warren Beatty. I'd almost met him three years before when my parents dragged me to a party in Westwood. But I knew I was still too young, so I'd made myself invisible to him. And although I was now old enough, this had not been Step One of

my plan: dirty hair, no makeup, smelly armpits. I prayed he had already forgotten me. I almost made it out of the front room and out of his sight.

“Excuse me, Miss?” That voice shivered down my back.

Could I just keep walking? Let me just keep walking.

But what if this was my only chance? I’d worked here for a year and a half waiting for him to come in. I was tired of waiting. And here he was.

I turned around to face him.

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