

# THE CARLTONS SERIES

Pilot Episode: *Portofino*

"Do they like it here -- this place?" Came the response: "They have to like it. They invented it."

by

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\* The Carltons 'Jet-Set' Series is a collection of vignettes within a continuous serial, a snapshot of an elegant, and unbridled set savoring excessiveness. The Swans and Stags, ten flawed characters — 'heaven's anointed,' led by John and Charlotte Carlton who pursue an aesthetic existence after the pandemic in the *New Roaring Twenties*.

The series is for entertainment, but also advertising and potentially ... for metaverse.

FADE IN:

EXT. LA THUILE, ITALY - MORNING

We are looking at gorgeous snow-covered mountains surrounding a quaint alpine village that, for centuries, has kept its identity unchanged.

INT. NIRA MONTANA HOTEL - COSY BAR - MORNING

A fire crackles in the corner fireplace. Chet Baker croons. On the leather sofa, the INTERVIEWER, a sumptuous blonde, scribbles in a leather note pad.

CHARLOTTE

A woman who has inspired me of late?

CHARLOTTE CARLTON is a worldly woman in her middle thirties. A raven-haired Catherine Deneuve possessing a modern kinetic design and perfect combination of vulnerability and power.

CHARLOTTE

Daisy Knatchbull. She's the first female tailor on Savile Row.

Dressed in suede trousers and oversized caramel Vicuña sweater, Charlotte sweeps aside her good and thick mane from her enormous mint-green eyes, gesturing toward the bottle of Dom Pérignon.

JOHN CARLTON, thirty-five, slender, and darkly handsome, replenishes Charlotte's coupe. His hair is trimmed neatly, but with a feel of loose ends. We like him.

Beside John is TOM HUSTON, thirty-nine kicked back in an Eames chair staring out the picture-framed window. He is sun-kissed and ruggedly handsome -- think McQueen. But if we look behind those stumbling blue eyes and pay attention down the road, something gnaws at him.

CHARLOTTE

You're laughing.

Says Charlotte with a husky, thrilling voice.

INTERVIEWER

I love the fact champagne is your morning beverage.

CHARLOTTE

Champers is a devilishly lovely habit... a delightful way to start the day.

Wearing not a slick of make-up, Charlotte has a naturalness that draws one's gaze toward her.

INTERVIEWER

And what is your morning beverage?

JOHN

Darjeeling with a spot of milk.

INTERVIEWER

And you?

TOM

(in a rough whisper)  
Double espresso.

CHARLOTTE

And...

TOM

Habanera pepper. My mom was Mexican, claimed it cleansed the soul.

Smiling, Tom searches the Interviewer's eyes.

INTERVIEWER

So. Back to the group. The Swans and Stags. You're a circle of friends who scamper around the globe...

TOM

Savoring experiences.

JOHN

There are ten of us. We are close, yet vastly dissimilar--

CHARLOTTE

--That's why it works, darling.

INTERVIEWER

And you're the pied piper of this hedonistic and wildly social group.

CHARLOTTE

When I like something I give  
everything away... my soul, my  
being. Boredom terrifies me.

As Charlotte nibbles provocatively on her burgundy-painted  
nail, light reflects on her dazzling platinum three-carat  
diamond ring.

TOM

She's cursed with a carpe diem  
philosophy.

JOHN

Sometimes we hit the scarce, unique  
destinations, but routinely...

CHARLOTTE

Portofino, Patmos, Gstaad -- all at  
peak season, of course. St. Barts  
for New Year even though I despise  
that notoriously terrifying runway.  
But now, now that we are emerging  
from this dreary, drab, mask-  
wearing nightmare, it will be  
glorious--the New Roaring Twenties,  
I say. Time for the woke to wake  
and embrace debauchery and  
recklessness.

JOHN

I suspect it will be a bit of a  
party.

CHARLOTTE

A bit? We're going to see sexual  
extravagance and loosening of  
sexual mores similar to the  
legendary liberation of what Fitz  
labeled, 'the most expensive orgy  
in history.'

(re: Tom's phone)

That receives messages?

Tom receives a text on an archaic Nokia. What the others  
don't realize is Tom's phone is a disposable, a 'throwaway'  
call some spies.

TOM

Caggie wants us to meet 'em in  
Belize. I gotta run.

INTERVIEWER

One last question, if you don't mind. How long have you known each other?

Tom lowers himself into the chair with restless eyes.

CHARLOTTE

Oh, Gawd. What? Fourteen years?

Withdrawing a circular colorful compact replicating Fernand Léger's *The Village*, Charlotte peers at her reflection, evening her lipstick with her finger.

JOHN

Be fifteen in June.

INTERVIEWER

And how did you meet?

CHARLOTTE

Actually, I met Tom at a children's literacy gala in LA. My date left me and Tom, being the devil he is, offered me a ride home on his motorcycle.

TOM

'65 Indian is not a 'motorcycle.'

CHARLOTTE

Anyway, we ended up in a wrecking yard off Olympic. I was absolutely horrified. Turned out John was hosting a Capote-esq 'Black & White' soirée in this dreadful bunker.

JOHN

It was an old speakeasy.

CHARLOTTE

I distinctly remember two things about that evening. The entrance was beside a green seventy-eight Stingray. And John. I thought he was so beautiful.

JOHN

I was drugged with her presence.

CHARLOTTE

He reminded me of Cary Grant, which is why he awoke in my cabana at the Beverly Hills Hotel the following afternoon, despite the incident in the men's room.

JOHN

Please, don't remind me--

The Interviewer notes the trio's unique dynamics.

TOM

She flew into some kinda rage.

INTERVIEWER

Yes, I have heard stories of your infamous performances.

JOHN

People tend to make more of them than they actually are.

CHARLOTTE

Our disagreements are simply delightful screaming matches.

TOM

More like an atom bomb going off.

CHARLOTTE

Aren't you late for something?

And in her private rebellion fashion, pats Tom's leg while kissing John's cheek with her disturbingly sensuous mouth.

GO TO:

INT. SHANGRI-LA - CABIN - CRESTED BUTTE, COLORADO - MORNING

We are looking at Bloomberg computer terminals atop a massive wooden desk. Very old mahogany. Tom is in a leather chair. We see a discolored family PHOTOGRAPH and surmise the young boy beside the Cessna is Tom.

He rises and says into the phone:

TOM

Let's fly.

Tom cradles the receiver. Sporting Ralph Lauren's country collection and Lucchese boots, he swaggers toward us...

## LIVING ROOM

The rustic elegance of a finely furnished mountain lodge. Leather sofas by a crackling fire, a billiard table; balls racked. Tom strides under the timber-lined vaulted ceiling, and out the front door...

## EXT. SHANGRI-LA - PORCH - MORNING

He is greeted his loyal Collie.

TOM  
Hey, there, Max.

Now, we are seeing through Tom's eyes: panoramic splendor bordered by towering peaks and most incredible scenery in the entire West. There are twenty peaks topping 13,000 feet; spectacular waterfalls cascading down.

We swivel to view the Shangri-La, two-story luxurious mountain retreat nestled on a sprawling cattle ranch. There's a corral beside a massive barn; some WRANGLERS break horses.

At the corral, Tom takes a chestnut stallion, a gorgeous, sturdy creature, from a cowboy, sees the saddle cinch needs tightening. With his boot in the stirrup, he grabs onto the saddle horn, swinging himself into the saddle. Taking the reins, Tom's sole focus is the horse beneath him.

## EXT. COLORADO GRASSLAND - DAY

Tom gallops over a sprawling pasture. His stallion thunders across a creek, full gallops up a hillside.

## EXT. HUSTON'S HANGER/AIRFIELD - MOMENTS LATER

Tom dismounts, and drifts across the runway to a GULFSTREAM G650. Folks, this isn't just any bird -- this is a brawny baby that travels 7,000 miles at Mach 0.925 in 14.5 hours.

Tom climbs aboard. WHEELS UP.

## EXT. PRIVATE AIRFIELD - SOMEWHERE - MORNING

Through the mist of morning, taxis the Gulfstream. It comes to a rest. Stairs extend. Tom steps off, sporting a black leather Belfast jacket.



EXT. ISTANBUL, TURKEY - BOSPORUS RIVER - DAY

WHAM. Now we're soaring high above Istanbul, zipping along the Bosphorus. Then things go slightly fuzzy, surreal--

EXT. FREIGHTER/BOSPORUS - CONTINUOUS

Three MEN aboard the freighter -- all cock and balls -- boys of *D-Circle*; adrenaline junkies. They are mid-thirties, who we'll call BOB, SAM and FRANK. Tom steps into view. Sam cuts him a cunning grin.

Frank synchronizes and distributes GPS WATCHES for the challenge: fifteen minutes to make the 'drop point' and retrieve the winning token. By their expressions -- could be tricky.

A CLOCK. Second hand sweeps, as we pull back--

NOW WE'RE ON THE SHORES OF THE BOSPORUS

All is quiet save for lapping water against the freighter gliding into view. We see a CARGO CONTAINER hoisted high above the freighter, dangling in mid-air -- suddenly the doors EXPLODE OPEN -- out soars four BMW R1200 -- sailing over the water -- BOUNCING to the ground -- roaring engines--

EXT. SHOTS OF ISTANBUL STREETS/CHASE - CONTINUOUS

QUICK SHOTS: four BIKERS racing through narrow, jam-packed streets. Horns. PEOPLE shout. Bikes zip down sidewalks, past a mosque.

On Tom. He pins the gas... bike SOARS a mound of crates. Slams hard on the ground. He maneuvers the BMW with dazzling coolness. Glancing over his shoulder, Tom sees:

A POLICE CAR blazing through an intersection. Meanwhile...

Frank's viewpoint -- CHILD darting in front of him. He jams the brakes, fishtails. Skids into a wall -- CRASH!

TIGHT ON A SPEEDOMETER: '90 mph.' Tom maneuvers the BMW... skates the curb. Passing SAM and BOB, heading the opposite direction, Tom picks up another cop CRUISER.

Tom on a straightaway feels the engine's boost. Up ahead is a PORTABLE WOODEN CART rolling into his path. Tom swerves, guns the bike -- that was close. Bikers near the 'drop point.' They just have to cross--

EXT. THE BOSPHORUS BRIDGE - CONTINUOUS

The 16th longest suspension bridge span in the world.

On Tom leading two bikers across the bridge. Suddenly -- a car BRAKES -- Bob sees red lights inches ahead. He jerks, swerves, CRASHES into the guardrail -- but the fun doesn't end there -- BMW goes PLUMMETING off the bridge and into the river! SPLASH!

Tom's bike pulls ahead. Sam guns his throttle. The 'drop point' is seconds away. Tom and Sam's bikes are neck-and-neck. Suddenly Sam gives a swift KICK to Tom's bike. Tom wobbles and rocks; almost loses it. But doesn't. Sam does. Goes tumbling end-over-end.

EXT. DROP POINT - DESERTED PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Tom's bike screeches to a halt. He sprints like hell to recover the TOKEN in a phone booth. Sam speeds into view.

SAM  
(on Tom w/ token)  
Damn it, Huston!

A taxi zips up. Bob and Frank inside, frantically waving.  
SIRENS GROW LOUDER. Tom and Sam spring into...

INT. TAXI - CONTINUOUS

A look of supreme satisfaction plays on Tom's face. Sam releases a deafening laugh.

SAM  
Ha, ha! Talk about a fuckin' shot  
of adrenaline!

BOB  
Who's up for cocktails at Duke's?

TOM  
Gotta pass.

SAM  
One drink, you pansy.

FRANK  
Tomorrow's your birthday.

Huston with something like a smile--

EXT. COLORADO COUNTRY SIDE - MORNING

The sun is peeking over a stunning mountain range, casting amethyst hues on the majestic Rockies. We're looking down onto a dirt road. The roar of an engine breaks the silence.

A man zips below us on a vintage Indian motorbike.

EXT. SHANGRI-LA - MORNING

Tom dismounts the bike. He settles on the porch steps. Max nudges his nose under Tom's hand, who squints, leans back, and turns his head as if appraising something, or someone.

Then we glimpse her, a voluptuous figure wedged into a cotton dress.

TOM

Thought you weren't coming.

INTERVIEWER

Someone had to deliver this.

Tom takes the cream ENVELOPE embossed with 'CC' in cobalt blue Edwardian script from the Interviewer. He opens the envelope. The card, written in distinctive green ink, reads: 'I'm inviting you for a birthday dinner tomorrow.'

Off Huston's grin, we hear upbeat MUSIC and see...

EXT. SEAPLANE/BOAT - PORTOFINO, ITALY - DAY

Plane's wings dip toward the quaint pastel-colored houses surrounding La Piazzetta, the iconic cobbled square overlooking a tranquil harbor and myriad of gleaming yachts. Plane skims the turquoise Mediterranean met by a glossed-wood vintage Riva Aquarama *Happy Days* runabout.

A fashionable COUPLE disembarks and steps aboard the BOAT. We recognize it is John and Charlotte. The Riva's dual engines roar to life, transporting the couple toward...

EXT. HOTEL SPLENDIDO - DAY

Four-story building. Epitome of Italian glamour beautifully landscaped with wisterias vine and flowering window boxes. Nestled on a verdant hillside overlooking the seafront. There is a large deck with a pool surrounded by bathing beauties.

INT. HOTEL SPLENDIDO - SUITE - DAY

A door swings open, exposing an acre-sized suite sumptuously decorated. A king-sized bed faces the veranda's postcard slice of the Mediterranean. Charlotte, in a flowing yellow floral-printed dress, enters.

CHARLOTTE

God, darling, isn't fantastic to back!

John and FRANCESCO, sixties, sporting a tailored white suit and black tie, come behind.

Charlotte's eyes fall instantly upon a silver-framed PHOTOGRAPH of her and 'daddy' in Normandy on her night table. She snares the frame, exchanging it with one from John's night table of her and 'mummy' at Balmoral castle. A flicker of a smile appears on her lips. Overcome by a fond memory, the reverie subsides as quickly as it begun.

CHARLOTTE

Be a dear, open the Champers.

FRANCESCO

Before I forget...

He says, snatching a leather-bound aged BOOK beside a hand-cut crystal ice bowl holding five bottles of DOM atop a marble-topped credenza.

FRANCESCO

The Golden Book.

Charlotte takes the book holding signatures of the who's who like the Duke of Windsor and Hollywood elite, signing with a silver Mont Blanc in her signature green ink, 'It's glorious to be back at my little sumptuous haven in heaven. Adoringly J&C.'

FRANCESCO

Per your request, the soirée begins at eight.

Pops open a Champagne bottle.

FRANCESCO

Everything is set for this evening.

He proffers Charlotte a coupe of bubbly. John passes.

CHARLOTTE

Have the guest arrived?

FRANCESCO

Everyone except Mr. Huston and Ms. Kyung.

Charlotte pivots and cuts a concerned glare to John.

CHARLOTTE

By chance, did a letter arrive for me?

FRANCESCO

Not that I know, but let me check the front desk.

JOHN

Here you are.

John slips folded BILLS into Francesco's palm.

JOHN

Please let Holden and Elisabeth know we'll be down shortly.

FRANCESCO

Certainly, sir. Do ring if you desire anything.

And Francesco exits. Charlotte discovers a yellow silk scarf tucked into her lingerie drawer. She fastens it around her neck, gliding onto the...

VERANDA

...peering at the infinity pool set against sensational views of Portofino's hamlet and turquoise ocean.

SUITE

Meanwhile, John is sifting through items in the dresser drawers; medal from the Pope, silk pajamas, monogrammed handkerchiefs, handmade toothbrushes, personalized martini shaker, and salted peanuts. He opens a pack and pops a few nuts into his mouth.

JOHN

Perhaps she felt best to bring it.

Charlotte leans against the doorframe, frowning.

CHARLOTTE

Didn't you hear him? She's not here.

That is Charlotte; able to turn it on and off like a water tap.

JOHN  
Neither is Tom.

John lays out azure, white pinstriped silk Turnbull & Asser pajamas bedside.

CHARLOTTE  
Tom, I know will show.

JOHN  
And I bet she will.

CHARLOTTE  
Your forever optimism is repulsive.

JOHN  
More realist. Besides, it's a refreshing trait you adore in me.

CHARLOTTE  
(with mock enthusiasm)  
Oh, yes, terribly so.

Charlotte splashes into the suite and snatches a silver tube from her handbag. She scribbles in crimson Dior lipstick: 'Drink More Champagne' across the ornate gold gilt mirror.

At that moment, John sweeps her up and tosses her onto the bed. She shrieks when he falls atop her, but rolls atop him, sliding out of her dress, burying her head in his neck.

CHARLOTTE  
Love me.

The height of passion comes quickly. John holds Charlotte in the afterglow like a rare piece of china. She wiggles free to straddle his waist. John caresses her firm, swelled breasts.

CHARLOTTE  
See. What we have right here;  
money can't buy.

Untying the yellow scarf from her neck, she kisses John. Then flooded with a rush of liveliness, she stands straight with her long brown legs and beautiful body tanned.

CHARLOTTE  
That was fiendishly delicious!  
Give me three minutes to shower and dress. What are you doing?

Inert on the bed, John shrugs his shoulders, hinting at something deeper we don't know.

JOHN

Nothing.

He notes the cold beauty of her face and looks away. Charlotte brushes her locks from her eyes and skips like a colt into the bathroom, shouting:

CHARLOTTE (O/S)

Spunky is going to kill us!

Off John's frown, we hear...

ELISABETH O/S

If you want a glass of champagne in a luxury hotel, there should be someone to pour it.

EXT. HOTEL SPLENDIDO - TERRACE BAR - DAY

Sitting at the prime table sipping Lillet on the wisteria-covered veranda overlooking the bay is ELISABETH FARNESE CAPET. She is a stately blonde of forty, lithe with delicate features.

Parked opposite is a tall, grievously thin dandy of forty in vibrant shirt and trousers. HOLDEN ASHCROFT FRASER holds his cigarette oddly, though elegantly, between his ring and middle finger.

HOLDEN

I heard Oswald's declined your Amex Black.

(Elisabeth balks)

Truthfully, I wasn't aware that was even possible. Listen, I spoke with Hari Van Riesen...

ELISABETH

Good grief. Now there's a crashing bore.

HOLDEN

Nevertheless, he has your best interests at heart. Come on, Spunky. We are worried.

ELISABETH

Only because neither of you is incapable of minding your own business. You're worse than two old Norland nannies.

HOLDEN

You urgently must rein in some of your expenditures.

Elisabeth gives a dismissive wave. The idea of reining in her expenses is simply out of the question.

HOLDEN

Suit yourself, but the last thing you want are well-placed rumors floating about you being destitute.

ELISABETH

Look at these.

Whisking back her hair to reveal stunning Van Cleef & Arpels, sapphire and diamond earrings.

ELISABETH

Would someone destitute own these?

Elisabeth looks away and gazes at the harbor, wistfully, then leans forward, taking Holden's hand in hers.

ELISABETH

But you mustn't say anything -- to anyone. I trust you won't.

Stabbing out his cigarette.

HOLDEN

Your secret is safe with me.

INT. HOTEL SPLENDIDO - BAR - CONTINUOUS

We hear a TAP clicking of heels mixed with the splash of piano keys. Charlotte breezes into the bar flooded with glorious sunlight. In a red, white polka dotted sundress, swinging her clutch like a spoiled schoolgirl, she is keenly aware the impact her beauty has on the male persuasion.

John notices every man in the room turn to look at her, catching the scent of lingering Floris No. 127 perfume.

Monochrome portraits of some of the many stars who've graced the bar with its classic, black-and-white checkered tile floor line the wall.



From behind the bar, the dark-haired young BARTENDER, shaking a glimmering cocktail shaker, says:

JEFF  
Hello, Mrs. Carlton.

CHARLOTTE  
Hullo, Jeffrey dear.

Charlotte glides onto...

TERRACE BAR

...to the table where Elisabeth rises wearing a stunning turquoise Fendi dress. Kissing Charlotte's cheeks.

ELISABETH  
There you are.

CHARLOTTE  
Did you see who is at the piano?

JOHN  
He looks faintly familiar.

John is sporting white trousers, blue linen shirt, and Tod's coffee-colored driving shoes with a gold clasp.

CHARLOTTE  
It's Juan Felipe. From Ibiza.

ELISABETH  
How could you forget Juan?

Elisabeth laughs loudly with Charlotte as if sharing a private joke.

CHARLOTTE  
The noble from Basque. Never mind.  
Let's sit down. I desperately need  
a drink.

Charlotte tosses her Harper's Bazaar's embroidered clutch atop the table.

HOLDEN  
Whoever he is, he certainly does a  
bang-up rendition of *Fly Me to the  
Moon*.

John and Charlotte take their places at the table.

CHARLOTTE

Sorry, we are late, John misplaced something.

HOLDEN

I can merely imagine what.

CHARLOTTE

Take your mind out of the gutter, darling.

Charlotte plucks the cigarette from Holden's hand, takes a pull. A WAITER replenish the ice bucket with a bottle of Lillet rosé and a ninety-eight Dom.

ELISABETH

Lillet, for me, please. And put this all on my room.

JOHN

My. That's awful generous.

Holden throws a perturbed glare to Elisabeth who catches it and kicks his shin.

ELISABETH

It's the least I can do considering you bought the memorable round at the Ritz last month.

Elisabeth, leaning her head against Charlotte's shoulder. The pair speak like spies.

ELISABETH

Is that offer still open to store some of my paintings?

CHARLOTTE

Oh. Sure. Absolutely.

ELISABETH

I was finally able to purchase that Modigliani sketch from Dominic Mortimer and I think it's best to not have it, or others, lying about.

CHARLOTTE

I always assumed the goal was your own museum to showcase those glorious works.

ELISABETH

Curatorship involves preservation.

Lowers her glasses and studies her.

CHARLOTTE  
Spunky. Troubles again?

ELISABETH  
Oh, dear, stop. Absolutely not.

CHARLOTTE  
You are my best friend. If you are  
I'm thrilled to help.

ELISABETH  
This is why everyone loves you.

CHARLOTTE  
Are we speaking temporarily, or--

ELISABETH  
--Your vault at Geneva Freeport.

Eyebrows go skyward.

CHARLOTTE  
Oh. Fine. I'll arrange it all  
next week.

ELISABETH  
But this is strictly *entre nous*.

Charlotte answers with a crafty wink, eavesdropping on John  
and Holden's *tête-à-tête*.

JOHN  
Truthfully, I don't know how he  
does it. I did the Dakar once and  
my body and bones still haven't  
healed.

Holden leans back and chuckles.

HOLDEN  
The one absolute about Tom is that  
he never surprises. If at this  
moment he dropped from the sky with  
a Purdey tumbler of aged Laphroaig  
in hand, I wouldn't miss a beat.  
Does he know?

JOHN  
About this evening? Charlotte sold  
it as an intimate dinner.

HOLDEN  
You believe he bought it?

Charlotte's eyes Elisabeth send a message on her phone.

ELISABETH  
Have you spoken to her since the  
Sazerac night?

CHARLOTTE  
Briefly.

ELISABETH  
Then why didn't you tell Tom not to  
invite her?

CHARLOTTE  
He didn't. I did.

Elisabeth tilts her head and studies Charlotte.

JAM TO:

EXT. ITALIAN MOTORWAY/OCEAN ROAD - DAY

We are looking at a winding, panoramic coastal highway. You can literally see for miles in every direction. The rev of an ENGINE builds to a guttural bark --

WHOOSH. Flash zips past. Coming into frame is a '61 Jaguar E-type roadster -- clutch is dumped. Tach needle climbs toward 5000 rpm -- Sheer drops on either side. Jag barrels toward a curve -- tires grip, squeal -- come close to the edge -- very fast now, as we --

GO BACK TO:

EXT. HOTEL SPLENDIDO - TERRACE BAR - DAY

Charlotte snubs out her cigarette. Elisabeth tries to read the secret she conceals behind her eyes.

CHARLOTTE  
It's a drawn-out issue I don't care  
to get into.

ELISABETH  
If you ask me, I'm no fan. And I  
certainly don't see what Tom sees  
in her.

CHARLOTTE

For starters her mystic. That Oriental erotica she oozes. You must admit she is a magnificent specimen.

ELISABETH

Hence why she never misses an opportunity to steal a look at herself in the mirror. I would have wagered you'd be the wee bit jealous.

CHARLOTTE

If I was envious of Tom's stable of beauties, I would have no time to do my nails.

ELISABETH

And the company she keeps. Surrounding herself with a consortium of fawning parasites, broken-down Hollywood types, maharajahs--

CHARLOTTE

Don't forget art world honchos.

ELISABETH

Fuck you.

CHARLOTTE

She did steal Templeton.

ELISABETH

She didn't 'steal' him, I let him go.

At that moment, Elisabeth's phone pulses with an incoming message. Elisabeth reads it. Like that, her face pales.

ELISABETH

My Gawd.

CHARLOTTE

What is it?

ELISABETH

I, I, I can't believe it.

HOLDEN

Come on. Get on with it, you have us all on our edges.

Elisabeth tosses her phone atop the table and leans back with a pained expression.

ELISABETH

Caggie Deveraux has been arrested  
in Belize.

CHARLOTTE

What? (scoffs) I don't believe it.

ELISABETH

Penelope wouldn't have sent it in  
jest.

CHARLOTTE

I was with her last week at ribbon  
cutting ceremony for her children's  
charity.

ELISABETH

That's not even the dreadful part.  
She is being held on suspicion of  
murder.

John leans across the table and whispers:

JOHN

Are you referring to Lord  
Goldwater's daughter-in-law?

HOLDEN

This is quite scandalous

ELISABETH

Supposedly she was giving the, ah,  
rather portly police chief a  
massage, of all things, by the  
water. The next a security guard  
found her covered in blood, the man  
floating about shot in the head by  
his own pistol.

CHARLOTTE

Good lord!

HOLDEN

I am uncertain what I find more  
perplexing, her charged with murder  
or the massaging the portly chap.

ELISABETH

I heard she carouses with a not so  
posh circle when she's down there.

(MORE)

ELISABETH (CONT'D)

Luca said she goes to this local speakeasy and dances on the bar downing marijuana-spiked cognac.

CHARLOTTE

One has to live one's life. I've been with her at the Crazy Horse--

Waiter approaches.

WAITER

Would you care for another bottle?

CHARLOTTE

Oh! Look at the time! I must run. I have something to take care of.

John rises, perplexed and looks at Charlotte suspiciously.

JOHN

What?

CHARLOTTE

I'll see you both this evening. And you... (kisses John's nose) in the room, say, one hour. Bye now.

They three watch, amused as Charlotte threads with the light grace of a jungle cat between tables, shaking hands, kissing cheeks, breathlessly laughing at the men and ladies fawning over her.

HOLDEN

She certainly is a sight to behold.

ELISABETH

"It's what one expects from the stuff of legends.

Seeing John's exasperated expression and rubs his hand.

ELISABETH

You seem tense. Is something bothering you?

John shakes his head, watching Charlotte fade from view.

EXT. PORTOFINO - COASTAL HIGHWAY - DAY

The afternoon sun is high in the powder blue sky dotted with white cumulus.

EXT. VILLAGE OF PORTOVENERE - DAY

Quaint village. Seagulls swarm above St. Peter's church perched atop a rocky outcropping of the spur of Punta San Pietro.

The *Happy Days* Riva eases through the water below, pulling alongside a wooden dock where a sun-kissed LAD in white shorts and shirt leaps out. Secures the boat to the dock. Charlotte steps from the boat, making her way up a treacherously winding metal FLIGHT OF STEPS attached to the rugged stone.

EXT. ST. PETER'S CHURCH - DAY

Charlotte slips through the chapel's rear door.

INT. ST. PETER'S CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

Charlotte floats past TOURIST, down the aisle with pews on either side, under the soaring ceiling to a corner where she unfastens a thin gold access chain. Her red dress is in stark contrast to the gray and black-rocked area with a dagger-shaped open window overlooking the sea.

The corner is somber and quiet, with a large coin box for those to pay for lighting candles. Charlotte deposits one hundred Euros into the box, removes a votive, and with great dignity, ignites four CANDLES amongst an impressive tier of flickering many. She knells atop a tattered red leather kneeler and prays.

EXT. HOTEL SPLENDIDO - DUSK

The sun's rays stretch like pink skeletal fingers across the sky, casting shadows on stunning yachts, bobbing in the blissful harbor below the hotel.

Faint winds and laughter pull us toward the pool, blazing and sparkling with flickering kerosene lanterns and light strings stretched over the water.

EXT. HOTEL SPLENDIDO - TERRACE/POOL - DUSK

The CARIBBEAN DJ in a funky hat and purple glasses, spins chill tunes beside a well-stocked bar and tables alive with elegant china and stemware and twisted burning candles.

SERVERS in crisp white uniforms offer libations to a smattering of fifty Gatsby-esque GUESTS.



We see a GUEST snap a photo a wooden SIGN that reads: *Kindly refrain from any selfies or post. Yours, Char.* etched in gold.

A murmur of chatter fills the air when Charlotte, in a beaded silk chiffon gown, vintage Halston, threads through the sea of aristocrats, actors, writers, models, and felons; some faces are insignificant, others we will see again and learn about in future stories.

Charlotte winks at Elisabeth. Her beautiful figure cinched together at the waist and overflowing at the chest, poured into a midnight blue sequined Simone Rocha gown beside Holden speaking with CARLA BRUNI. She places her hand on his forearm, throws back her head and laughs.

HOLDEN

Seems the guest of honor is tardy.

As Charlotte breezes past.

CHARLOTTE

He'll be here. Don't you worry.

Holden watches Charlotte creep behind John. She spins him around and kisses his lips quickly.

JOHN

Oh. I thought it was Francesco.

CHARLOTTE

I warned you about mixing with the help. Now, keep an eye out for Kitty Gifford.

JOHN

Wait. What? You invited her?  
Char, her family--

CHARLOTTE

--She's not responsible because they invited a pill that addicted the world. After all, her best friend's been detained for murder, show some compassion.

At that moment, John notes an undercurrent of tension in her eyes. She is watching someone glide down the stairs. We cannot get a clear look at her. The woman splashes through the crowd. And when she does turn her head in our direction, there always seems to be a waiter passing, blocking the view.

Charlotte stiffens at the sight of LEE 'SLIM' KYUNG, a whippet-thin Korean beauty in her twenties.

CHARLOTTE

Oh. You did come

Slim kisses Charlotte's cheeks, pensively. At first glance, she's pretty, at a second willful strength.

SLIM

Sorry, I'm late.

With powder white complexion and eyebrows at a rakish angle, she oozes sophistication in a floor-sweeping black gown with a slight slit that offers a glimpse of her gym-toned abs.

CHARLOTTE

I am thrilled you made it.

SLIM

I'd do anything for Tom.

CHARLOTTE

On that, allow me to apologize for my behavior the other evening.

SLIM

The incident has escaped me.

CHARLOTTE

At times I can be a bit melodramatic.

Slim struggles to assess Charlotte's motive.

CHARLOTTE

Tom is a dear friend, and perhaps, well, I am overprotective.

SLIM

Friends look after each other

Her manner is a little uncertain, a little tentative.

SLIM

And regarding that invitation, why you didn't receive one is the event was canceled.

Silently, Charlotte stares straight ahead.

SLIM

Sydney's fallen ill.

CHARLOTTE

Oh. No. That is terrible. Is it serious?

SLIM

It's difficult to tell. He is so reclusive and guarded. He refuses to go to the hospital. Lives alone in that creepy mansion. Only reason I'm privy is that he is selling his awesome collection and has asked me to facilitate.

CHARLOTTE

Yes, I heard. Congratulations. I know the big houses were after that collection. I lunched with Templeton. I am rather interested in a particular piece and would absolutely love to meet Sydney when his health has improved.

SLIM

Are you referring to the untitled Basquiat?

Raising her eyebrow with disdain.

CHARLOTTE

The Joan Mitchell, *No Rain* 1976 he acquired from a dealer in Geneva in eighty-four.

ELISABETH

I was told you were a savvy, yet unorthodox collector. The purchase in Paris of the Richter you lugged up the elevator and hung in the Ritz suite yourself is fabled. I am thrilled to organize a viewing, although I am powerless to arrange an introduction.

CHARLOTTE

The two are integral. I would consider it a personal favor and be willing to help you with whatever you need. Ask about, I take care of those around me.

Her attention is drawn to a message on her phone.

SLIM

I'll do my best to arrange and will revert. I should, though, go find Tom. Oh. Please give these to John, will you? (re: Jag KEYS)  
Thank you again for the invitation.

Charlotte watches the creature breeze toward a bevy of fawning men. John strides up, sliding his hands into his front trouser pockets, rocking back and forth on his heels.

JOHN

See. I told you.

Charlotte cuts a cruel look. She tosses John the keys, which he fumbles.

CHARLOTTE

Why was she driving your car?

JOHN

She needed a ride from the airport and I the car. Worked perfectly.

CHARLOTTE

I wasn't aware you two had been corresponding.

JOHN

What corresponding? We exchanged messages. What's up with you?

Smiles at a striking LATINA across the pool.

CHARLOTTE

Forget it!

JOHN

What did she say? Any news?

CHARLOTTE

I asked her to set up a meeting. If I could get a few minutes alone with him perhaps I can convince him through my lineage to see the letter.

JOHN

Sweet girl, we still aren't for sure one exists.

CHARLOTTE

I am! Well, not for certain, no, but Templeton is confident he keeps it in a safe inside a vault off the wine cellar.

JOHN

But we have no proof. Holden mentioned he's a deluded drunk who wonders madly around that enormous castle since his wife passed.

CHARLOTTE

He is, completely. He's also ill. Hence why I must speak with him.

JOHN

I'm not keen about you putting in all your energy and then it not work out leaving you in another depressive state.

CHARLOTTE

John, I'll go mad if I don't I find the answer. I know you may see it as trivial but... it's my being. It's who... I need proof, otherwise if I say anything I'll be labeled the nut-job for making such outlandish accusations, and ostracized from society.

JOHN

Would that be the end of the world?

John watches Charlotte. She frowns; her mind stabbed with a thousand daggers when instantly an electric smile oils her face. He follows her lighted gaze to...

Tom sports a white dinner jacket, black tie and trousers. He looms atop the steps. He shakes his head at Charlotte, who shrugs and returns a bright smile. She sweeps to the steps to greet him.

CHARLOTTE

There's my birthday boy.

Tom kisses her cheek, as we catch John's scowl. He shakes his head and pads for the bar.

TOM

I thought I said no party.

CHARLOTTE

What, this? This is a gathering of friends.

TOM

I'll let you know right now I'm doing no congo line.

Tom draws a cigarette from his pocket. Charlotte takes the Shangri-La MATCHBOX from his hand and strikes a match. He cups her hand. They share a long look.

Spots his boys from Istanbul. Then sees Slim.

TOM

Regarding the other day. That shouldn't have happened.

All at once, a memory is upon Charlotte, enabling her to indulge in reverie without seeming to do so. She removes a strain of hair from over her eyes. They stare at each other.

TOM

I'm sorry.

CHARLOTTE

There are no mistakes in life just happy accidents. Besides, you have a tradition of misbehavior to sustain; we both do.

She catches his attention drift again to Slim. She gazes deeply into his eyes. He looks content for the first time in many months.

CHARLOTTE

Are you happy?

TOM

There's a fine line between happy and content.

CHARLOTTE

For someone who believes in love everlasting, and yet has still never truly found it, I forever hope you do.

TOM

I'm not, ah, saying she's the one, nor that I have never found love, perhaps I have and it is forever out of my grasp.

Suddenly, a MAN with floppy hair and white teeth shouts:

MAN

There she is, ladies and gentlemen.

Charlotte turns her head, switching on that smile.

MAN

The ringmaster of the Swans and  
Stags.

CHARLOTTE

Darlings. Our birthday boy!

Tom waltzes past a six-foot Andes mountain-shaped CAKE glowing with sparklers. Atop the highest summit sits a vintage Land Rover Defender beside a lone figure of a man. Guests applaud and sing "Happy Birthday" that kicks off the party into the wee hours...

And time has passed, almost four hours. It is now one o'clock; the soirée has turned into a roaring drunken bash with women swimming naked in the pool, people dancing, very public erotic acts taking place.

The lights from the pool reflect off Charlotte's face as she catches Tom and Slim teeter into the darkness. Pleasantly inebriated, she bites her lower lip and swings back her hair, falling into Holden's arms, eyeing John across the pool.

As we hear Fleetwood Mac...

SONG

"I've been searching. For a pot of  
gold. Like the kind you find..."

EXT. CARLTON'S SUITE/VERANDA - DAWN

John and Charlotte enter the suite where long white curtains billow and snap from the cool breeze coming through the veranda's open door.

Charlotte strips to black lace La Perla pulling a frayed Rolling Stones tee over her head. She is exhausted. Tossing her dress on the floor under John's neatly hung dinner jacket, she studies herself critically in the mirror.

With a monogrammed silver brush, she runs it through her mane with hard stokes, then like that, strips the bed. With pillows and covers she stalks to the...

VERENDA

...and coils under the lovely moonlight. Pajama-clad, John joins Charlotte. They nibble peanuts.

JOHN

I realize how important knowing...

CHARLOTTE

No, you don't. Since discovering that letter, and even considering the possibility, I question daily who I am. Imagine suddenly looking into the mirror and wondering who is that.

Something deeper simmers under the surface. There's no fanfare here, this is life behind the curtain.

JOHN

About this morning. Is he the reason?

Her expression empties. She rolls her eyes and scoffs.

JOHN

This evening, the way you looked at him, I, I don't know, I, began threading thoughts together; our lovemaking, your hasty departure today.

With tragic eyes and in a pitiful voice, she states.

CHARLOTTE

Tom is not the reason for anything. Yes, I love him! But not the way I love you. Now can we stop? We've talked about this ad nauseam. You must get over it.

JOHN

I give you plenty of room. In return, I would appreciate the respect and courtesy a husband deserves.

CHARLOTTE

You got it in spades. Tom and I share feelings, yes, but nothing has, nor will, materialize. K? And about this afternoon, or... I'm just, I'm just not ready for that. (a beat) How badly will you feel if I don't? If I never want one.

This revelation blindsides him. Instinctively, gloomily, he shakes his head with the confirmation of his fears. Charlotte fans her mane over his chest, resting her head under his chin.



CHARLOTTE

You wouldn't mind truly, would you?  
I realize loving me is not easy.  
Loving you, though, is, and that's  
all I want to do. Go on. Say it.

JOHN

You already know.

CHARLOTTE

I think I could smother being  
domesticated. I like being forever  
your girl. I am. Right? Come on.  
Please. I want to hear it.

He closes his eyelids, eyes roving beneath.

JOHN

I love you.

CHARLOTTE

No. Not like that. Not in that  
spiteful tone. Say it as if you  
truly mean it.

JOHN

I love you.

CHARLOTTE

There. That's better. Now I can  
sleep. Night, night, my John-John.  
Mwah.

Charlotte closes her eyes with a childlike smile. Dawn is breaking. Impressionist hues color the sky. Our couple lay side-by-side with their legs intertwined. They are dead. John caresses Charlotte's hair, her arm smooth and golden. His eyes close sleepily as we sweep over the awaking harbor.

FADE OUT:

THE END

## WHAT THE CARLTONS SERIES IS

Imagine a delicious concoction of Scott and Zelda/Liz and Dick embodying gin-soaked days and fun-filled nights. John and Charlotte are a carefree golden couple madly and lustfully in love, codependents drinking their way through continents, charming and challenging everyone they meet—especially each other. While John's laid-back style and steadfastness offers stability in their nomadic life, Charlotte's zest provides the action. Her talents and energy and intellect markets desire. She's a rare creature to be marveled at, the center of attention with as many detractors as admirers. Although on stage life is glorious, backstage, however, the legendary couple struggle to keep it together, haunted by dark secrets and raucous fights, forever challenged by Charlotte's relentless drive to uncover a family secret.

Among their circle is Tom Huston, an enigmatic masculine creature men want to be, and women want to bed. However, the reader never quite focuses upon him. He remains shadowy and indistinct, giving only a few hints about his background. His adventurous existence, though, pulls us down a rabbit hole into a world of thrill-seekers, spies and beauties, like Lee 'Slim' Kyung, a statuesque Korean art dealer with an abundance of confidence who may hold the answer to Charlotte's riddle. Albeit, Charlotte's possessiveness of Tom could might derail Slim's initiation into the group.

The plot, latent with sexual undertones, excess, turmoil, scandal, and bottles and bottles of booze thickens as the series unfolds; struggle between forms of power develop; some transformations will be spectacular while other slightly less, but beneath the lustrous veneer of the monied at poolside play, lay personal tragedies and secrets when revealed will shatter the illusion and idealism of this radiant world.

Encapsulating the breezy allure of the Italian Riviera, the lustrous playground for the rich and glamorous, Portofino serves as an entrée to the sphere's initial story that offers a promising beginning to an extraordinary taste of the series to come.