

True love endures through time and turbulence. In the first chapter of *Freefalling*, we meet Charlotte in the depths of Lewy Body dementia. This is the second most common form of dementia than can include hallucinations and intermittent episodes of confusion interspersed with clarity. Over time, the confusions go deeper and occur more often.

**The Eagle Crest Assisted Living
2019**

TITLE

Chapter 1

2019

Charlotte leads with her breasts as she enters the lobby. Still striking at seventy-five years old, no one can convince her she isn't still competent and attractive.

"Good morning, Miss Charlotte. Lookin' lovely in that blue," Carla says with the concierge phone cradled on her shoulder. A hint of jasmine perfumes the air as Charlotte approaches.

"Peacock blue." Charlotte pulls a dried flower from the bouquet on the welcome desk. "Brandon's favorite color on me."

"Makes sense. Brandon your assistant?"

"No, No," she says, her inward smile as she rearranges the newspapers on the marble coffee table. "That's Christopher." Color rising in her cheeks, she gives Carla a slow, knowing wink, "Brandon's my special man."

Carla's eyes dart to the housekeeper roaming the lobby. She lifts her eyebrow and shares an 'oh boy' glance.

Charlotte's gaze flows to the housekeeper too.

"Oh Kelli," she coos. "I'm so happy to see you. How are you doing today?"

“Just fine, Miss Charlotte,” the petite woman says, tucking her chin in deference but turning slightly away--aware she’s getting pulled into a ‘favor’. But Charlotte presses on. *Today is too important. Iron fist, velvet glove.*

“I was wondering if you or someone on your team could dust the baseboards and make sure this area is vacuumed before noon. Could you get that done by then?” Charlotte dramatically sweeps her hand over the area. “This oriental rug is beautiful, but it catches lint so easily.”

“Sure...” she says, with her ‘no thank you’ lips. She holds up her clipboard with its pencil dangling on kitchen string. “But the schedule is second floor commons today.”

“That’s good too.” Charlotte lifts her chin ever so slightly, nodding imperceptibly to elicit agreement. “It’s most likely to be seen by our guests. A good first impression is essential.”

Kelli looks at Carla with a ‘here we go again’. Charlotte is accustomed to quiet resistance. *A little sugar goes a long way.*

“I’ve noticed you’ve done a great job making the place look beautiful for our visitors. I’m not complaining.” Eyes direct as her jaw tips, “It’s just a few details.”

Not as willing to play along as Carla, Kelli backs toward the grand staircase rising to the aviary seating area, “I’ll get to it as soon as I can.”

Charlotte raises her eyebrows, says, “Oookay.” *I don’t think these people realize I know what I’m doing here.*

Catching her reflection in the mirror, she brushes a blackened eyelash off her cheek.

“You are beautiful, My Love. You have always been that way to me.”

"Darling! Yes!"

"Charlotte. Did you say something?"

That syrupy feeling floods her body. She smudges the mirror with her finger as she reaches for Brandon. "Yes, oh yes, my love." She drifts into a trance.

Sliding on the glass, her finger dives into the space where love survives. She opens her hand and feels Brandon reaching for her as she moans. She longs to swim deep but his fingers float away. Her eyes fix on the handprint. "May I have the window spray?"

Carla looks around for help. Trying to move her toward the chair, "Maybe you'd like to rest before you do any more work."

Charlotte reaches for the window cleaner. "I'll get this done." *Family coming. Smudges. Mirror and door handles...* Rubbing the glass, her body rolls with the rhythm of her cloth.

Charlotte sees Eddie the maintenance man wander in. Cozies up to Carla. His gaze swings toward Charlotte. He pulls back, his soft inquiry near Carla's ear, "She havin' a bad day?"

"She's focused on details. Few minutes ago, she seemed to be slipping again. Looks okay now. She's having visitors," Carla's voice drops lower. "But not who she thinks."

Eddie's voice soft with sadness. "That guy? Bradly? Braxton?"

"Brandon," Carla whispers.

Yes, Brandon. Any minute now Brandon is coming back. She smiles to her reflection.

Charlotte zeros in on Teddy Bear Eddie. His pressed blue maintenance uniform impeccable.

“Just the guy I was hoping to see.” She wobbles but catches herself. Touching the gold necklace, she locks her gaze to his. “Could you do me a *really* big favor?” She places the dusting cloth on Carla’s desk. “The Eagle Crest sign needs cleaning up before our guests get here.” Leaning into him, “My friend and I share the Eagle as our totem bird. Once you polish that sign, it’ll be easy for him to understand why I’m here.”

His thumbs are hooked in his trouser front pockets so his fingers dangle lower--she recognizes the stance and perks up. His gaze curious but conflicted. He’s attracted even if, 30 years her junior, he isn’t sure why.

His nostrils flare, taking in her scent. No one needs to remind her the signs of attraction.

Something darts at the edge of her vision. A small man with dark eyes and wearing the same navy blues strides into the lobby, grabbing a red-swirled peppermint from the crystal bowl on the reception desk. Charlotte releases Eddie’s gaze with an encouraging nod--*go on now...you know what to do.*

“Oh, Jeff, I’ve got a project for you.”

The small man flinches.

Eddie idles close to Jeff as if to settle him.

“I’m not doing her projects again,” Jeff mumbles. “She *lives* here. She ain’t running her five-star hotel anymore.”

Charlotte smooths her blue camisole so the V-neck dips deeper and closes in. Eddie steps between them, planting his feet. “I know, I know. She’s not wrong though. The sign needs to be cleaned up.”

“You wouldn’t notice that shit if she wasn’t telling you what to do.” His face red, “This is craziness. Better when she’s staring out the window all day.”

“Hey,” Eddie lays a quiet, firm hand on Jeff’s shoulder. “Watch your mouth.”

“Sorry” he says as he kisses her head. “It was hard to pull away from the all-staff meeting today.” A shadow crosses his voice. “Charlotte.”

Brandon, are you sad? She feels warmth at her crown, as she floats deep below the surface. *I’ve been waiting to see you, Darling.*

“Aunt Charlotte, it’s Christopher. He’s here to visit.”

Brandon is... Christopher? What Christopher? She sinks in the sea of confusion.

Then she takes in the stout comfort shoes and French blue uniform pants with stripes up the side. “Oh...” *Yes, Margaret, she comes from work.*

Where’s Brandon?

Huddled in the rose velvet chair gazing out the window, she hears sounds and begins to surface again. “...see you soon,” she answers.

“I’m here now, Charlotte,” his voice, yanking. She finds a tall man. Not Brandon. This man she recognizes but doesn’t know. Her eyelids struggle under the weight. *A fancy gold bracelet.* A man’s cocoa-colored wrist. *Manicured nails.*

Emerging, she tries to focus. She squints into the light.

“Charlotte.” He pulls off his grey cashmere jacket placing it over the arm of the sofa.

“I’m here to see you.” Then moves to the rocker.

Her chin lifts. *Not Brandon. Nice shoes...* A flash of straight white teeth, cologne punctuating his gestures, the light around his head glares too brightly to see his eyes.

Even so, *is he Christopher?*

“Christopher came over for a visit.” It’s Margaret--that irritating high-pitched voice at odds with the weighty body. “Would you like some tea?”

Charlotte turns back to the window. Dropping down, she fades again. *Christopher, not Brandon.*

Christopher mouths words towards Charlotte’s niece, Margaret. “Has she been like this all day?”

Charlotte wanders into the hum of voices trying to find words.

“It’s a long spell.” Margaret’s eyes fill. “The Lewy Body dementia creates episodes like this more often.” She wipes her nose with a tissue. Tosses it. Then plops on the sofa. “And they last longer now.”

Charlotte floats closer trying to find the words.

“Even in a few days, I see a difference.” Christopher bows his head, spinning the ring on his finger. “I feel so helpless.”

But Charlotte glides deeper again. Surrenders to the silence. Voices are mere vibrations.

A knock. "Who's there?" calls Margaret as a girl in pink scrubs enters the room. She looks barely graduated. *Amy, dancing Amy*. Charlotte floats up to the surface. The pretty girl pulls a purple squiggly bracelet on her wrist to open the medicine cabinet.

"Not sure if this will help, but the nurse said to try," the aide says as she pulls out pills and fills a glass with water. "Here you go, Charlotte." She places the pill on Charlotte's tongue then sets the glass on her lip.

Charlotte stares in the girl's eyes. Tongue still extended. The pill sits.

"Come on, Charlotte," Amy coaxes. Charlotte closes her eyes and allows the water to flow down her throat. "Good girl," she charms.

She swishes water in her mouth. "Thank you."

Christopher sees a break. "Well, hello Charlotte."

Charlotte turns to him. "When did you get here?" she slurs.

"Few minutes ago," he protects her dignity. "Thought I'd swing by to see how you're doing." He glances towards Margaret. "I was happy to run into this wonderful niece of yours on the way in."

Charlotte turns to the sofa. "Margaret," her eyes widen, "You're here too," she smiles.

Lewy Bodies, those deep waves of confusion, move out to sea. For now.