



FIFTY WAYS TO LEAVE YOUR LOVER

By

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Conrad Lucas heaved himself up to a standing position – blocking out the Houston skyline – and leaned forward against his Texas-sized desk. He stared at Doug the way a chained pit bull would eye a stray toddler.

“Not ONLY are you moving back in with my sister, Wainwright, you’re gonna take her along on that business trip to New Orleans next week – and you’re gonna propose. Have I made myself crystal-fucking-clear?”

Lucas had connections to every good guy/bad guy west of the Mississippi. Defiance would mean having to leave town and never being employed at a lending institution again – if he was even allowed to live.

Doug coughed. “Uh, yes, sir. Completely.”

His boss gave a grunt of satisfaction and sank into his massive leather chair. “When you two get back here, I’d better see a rock on my little sister’s finger that’s heavy enough to throw her back outta whack.”

She’ll get a big one all right, Doug thought. And hopefully the skinny, blonde dingbat would choke on it.

He’d tried every way – short of hiring a hit man – to get out of his relationship with Charlene. As that Paul Simon song said, “There must be fifty ways to leave your lover.” Doug had left the little fool countless times, but her suicide attempts and stalking tactics, along with threats from the filthy rich Lucas family, always forced him back into her waiting arms.

And now he was going to propose.

“New Orleans is so romantic, hon,” Charlene gushed. “I just know this trip will be good for us.”

Doug grimaced as they entered their spacious, fifth floor hotel room. It had a wrought-iron balcony that overlooked rowdy Bourbon Street.

“Let me freshen up and then we’ll go to Antoine’s for dinner.” Charlene kicked off her high heels and headed for the bathroom. “Is that okay, hon?”

“Lovely.”

They’d only be in town for three days. He’d have to spring the hefty diamond on her before Wednesday. Doug figured he might be able to get through the ordeal if he drank enough Hurricanes.

Doug often wondered what had caused Charlene to become so obsessed with him. He was just an average guy, after all.

Didn’t matter now anyway. It was Tuesday - he would have to do “the dirty deed” right after dinner.

When his business meeting wrapped up, Doug took a cab back to the hotel. But instead of heading up to his room, he decided to roam around the Quarter. He was bound to enjoy the sights more without the magpie tagging along.

Noisy Bourbon Street was teeming with happy tourists. The humid air smelled like beer and spicy cooking. Doug could hear the upbeat strains of a Zydeco tune wafting out of a smoke-filled tavern.

It wasn't long before he happened upon a fortuneteller's shop. Colorful voodoo dolls were lined up on the other side of the window, and he paused to take a look, grinning.

If only it would work.

A pretty black girl opened the door of the little shop and motioned for him to step inside.

"Madame Lafay can help you, sir. She can cast spells for love and money - whatever you need. Come see."

Too hard to resist. And he was in no hurry to get back to the hotel.

The spell Doug chose was meant to turn a lover's heart to stone – end a hopeless relationship. He felt silly having a gris-gris bag in his pant's pocket, but if it actually worked, it would be worth far more than the \$50.00 he'd spent.

There were OTHER spells, but if something happened to Charlene, Lucas would undoubtedly hold him responsible.

This mojo was much safer.

Doug rode the elevator up to the top floor of the hotel. Charlene was waiting for him in their suite, dressed to the nines. Chanel No. 5 hung thick in the air. A little table – smothered with china, crystal, and silver – had been set up near the open balcony doors.

Charlene smiled as he crossed the room. Doug thought she looked like a movie star.

He leaned down and kissed her. When he stepped back, her smile faded. Her face now wore an expression of puzzlement mixed with irritation.

"You're late," she said.

That was the sexiest voice he'd ever heard. Doug wanted to sweep Charlene up in his arms, carry her over to the bed, and make love to her in every position under the freaking sun.

"The meeting ran late." What an idiot he'd been, to keep her waiting like this. "I'll make it up to you sweetheart – I promise."

"Forget it. I don't know what I thought I saw in you, but it's over. It's time we faced the truth."

Doug couldn't believe his ears. He dropped to his knees in front of her. "Charlene, honey, you don't mean that. We were meant to be together."

She laughed. "I can't even stand to be in the same room with you."

Charlene tried to step around him, but he jumped up and blocked her path. "No, I can't live without you." He took the black velvet box out of his coat pocket and showed her the six-karat diamond. "Marry me."

She snatched the ring from him and ran out onto the balcony. "Here's what I think of your proposal."

Doug reached her before she could throw it, but he'd rammed up against the rusted railing with too much force. Charlene was struggling, trying to hold on to the diamond, when a section of the wrought-iron gave way, sending her over the edge.

Doug grabbed her left hand.

"I don't need your stinking help, you spineless moron." Charlene reached up and dug her long, pointy fingernails into his flesh.

Doug screamed and let go. He watched Charlene fall away from him. He saw the gris-gris bag that had been hidden around her neck.

He watched her body break on the sidewalk. There was only one thing left to do.

Doug jumped.

THE END