

Bait & Switch
by Pan

Brad beamed at his soon-to-be wife, Chelsea. She was simply radiant.

“I cannot wait to be married to you,” he said gently. She rolled her eyes.

“You’re just excited for the honeymoon.”

The young man nodded. He couldn’t deny - the honeymoon was definitely something he’d been thinking about a lot.

Chelsea was a virgin. Well, with him, anyway.

He’d been confused when she’d explained it.

“It’s simple,” she’d said, smiling softly at him. “I’ve had sex before - I’m a modern woman, after all. But I want to be with you for the rest of my life.”

“Me too,” he’d said, beaming back at her. He’d never met anyone as beautiful - as kind and loving and generous and *sexy*. “So why...”

“I’m a virgin,” she said. “For you, I’m a virgin. And I always knew that once I found the man of my dreams, I wanted to wait until the wedding night. Does that make sense?”

It didn’t. Not really. But as he stared into her eyes, he was unable to vocalize why.

His thoughts would often drift away when he stared into Chelsea’s eyes.

He’d never forget the first time they’d met. She’d been shopping with her mother, Bertha. She was the opposite of her daughter in so many ways - where Chelsea was slim, Bertha was large. Where Chelsea’s skin was flawless, Bertha’s was pocked and marked.

Where Chelsea’s voice was light and airy, Bertha’s was deep. Gravelly.

Almost...sinister.

Bertha had noticed him first, actually. Brad was used to getting attention from women - he was tall, handsome. Muscular. And wealthy - his parents had died when he was young, leaving him a multi-multi-million dollar fortune. He’d never worked a day in his life, spending his time in the gym, or picking up on Venice Beach.

Until he’d met Chelsea, marriage had never been a consideration. He was extremely happy with his playboy life - days in the gym, evenings picking up, nights in the bed of the gorgeous women he met on the boardwalk.

Until he’d met Chelsea.

“Hello,” Bertha had said, leering at him. His first thought was that she resembled a toad of some kind - her eyes somehow managed to simultaneously bulge *and* squint at him, and he took half a step back in revulsion.

“I don’t have any change,” he’d replied instinctively, recoiling again when Bertha’s mouth opened in a cackle, drawing his attention to her hairlip.

“Chelsea,” she’d hissed. “Get over here and meet...”

“Brad Davidson,” he’d responded, surprised to hear his name passing his lips. After his parents’ death, the family lawyers had warned him of the risks his fortune carried - grifters, identity theft, people wanting to extract his wealth and exploit it. He was always cautious, sometimes even using fake names with the women he took home with him.

Why had such a small prompt made him give his real name?

“Brad,” the hag-like woman echoed. “Chelsea, come and meet Brad Davidson.”

That was when he’d seen her.

His first impression had been surprisingly reserved - she was pretty, sure, but no more pretty than the average woman he saw on the streets...and nothing compared to some of the models and

actresses he'd taken to bed.

And then she lowered her sunglasses, and Brad's life changed forever.

As soon as he looked into her large blue eyes, he realized that he'd underestimated her. She wasn't just pretty, she was *gorgeous*. Stunning. The single most beautiful woman he'd ever met.

The single most beautiful woman he'd ever, ever meet.

"Hi," he croaked, his voice inadvertently sounding like the young woman's mother.

"I'm..."

"Brad," she said for him, her voice like the footsteps of a fairy. "I'm Chelsea."

"Right," he said. "Um. Yes."

"Go on," Bertha said, nudging him. "Ask her out."

Brad's eyes widened. A woman like this...a *goddess* like Chelsea...she wouldn't deign to dine with someone like *him*, would she?

For the first time since he'd left school, Brad felt unsure of himself. A woman like this, she deserved so much better than him. She deserved...

Well, he couldn't even imagine the kind of man that would be worthy of a gem like Chelsea. But he knew that it wasn't he.

"Go on," she smiled. Her eyes seemed to sparkle, her skin somehow glowed. "I'll say yes. I promise."

"Do you, um..."

"Yes," she said, and the rest was history.

She'd put her sunglasses back on while he took her to the most expensive restaurant he could find, and after forty minutes, he'd regained enough self-confidence to ask her back to his place.

"It's on the beach," he'd said, his heart skipping a beat when she raised her eyebrows.

He'd managed to impress her. He, a simple millionaire, had managed to impress *her*.

That was when she'd lowered her sunglasses again, and explained her position.

He'd proposed on the spot, of course. When the most perfect individual you've ever met tells you that she's waiting for marriage - marriage with *you* - you don't hesitate.

To his great relief, she'd understood that he didn't have a ring in her size. He'd given her the only ring his father had ever worn, his marriage ring. He'd learn later that it was worth more than the house Chelsea had grown up in.

He'd wanted to get married as quickly as possible - later that day, if possible - but Chelsea had insisted they take it slowly. His stomach filled with butterflies when she told him that she wanted to get to know him - *him!* - before they took the plunge.

"Yes," she said, moving her sunglasses back up. "Two weeks ought to do it, I think."

And what a two weeks it had been. Despite her stance on sex, she'd insisted that she - and her mother, to his disappointment - move in with him, and that she share his bed each night.

It was a good thing she did, too. After a full night's sleep, he'd often wake up with doubts, confusion. Why had he decided to marry this near-stranger? Why had he sided with her (against his many, many lawyer) and agreed that a pre-nup was completely unnecessary?

Why had he signed over the deed to his house to her horrible mother?

But as soon as he rolled over and met his fiancée's beautiful, entrancing eyes, his doubts vanished, and he was once more filled with an unwavering knowledge that yes, this was the right thing to do.

The short engagement. The marriage. The transfer of property. Each was unquestioningly, undoubtedly the best possible decision he had made. For himself, for his new family.

For love.

They'd spend the day together - Chelsea spent most of her time tanning on the balcony, her perfect body soaking up the rays, her eyes covered by sunglasses.

Brad would just sit and watch her, fantasizing about what their honeymoon would be like, what that body would feel like against his. Around his.

Every half-hour or so, she'd lower her shades and make eye-contact with him. And at night, before they went to sleep, she'd sit beside him, staring into his eyes, muttering...well, he wasn't sure what she was muttering. Whatever women muttered while staring into their fiancé's eyes, he supposed.

It was all perfectly normal. Everything was normal. This was what love looked like.

The only fly in the ointment, as far as Brad was concerned, was Bertha.

Big Bertha, he mentally called her.

In his entire life, he'd never met such an odious woman. Where Chelsea was a little drop of heaven, Bertha was a puddle of hell. She was short, squat, and smelly. Her voice made his skin crawl, and if he looked at her for more than a few minutes, he could practically feel his libido melting.

When she wasn't cackling at alt-right videos on youtube, she was picking at her toenails, or calling for Chelsea to bring her an iced tea.

Her daughter was a goddess, but *Chelsea* was waiting on *Bertha*. To Brad, it made absolutely no sense.

The worst part, however, was the way she looked at him. Chelsea rarely gave Brad more than a second glance; in a moment of low self-esteem, he'd asked if she found him attractive.

"Sure," she'd said - hardly the gushing review he'd been hoping, but as she lowered her sunglasses, his worries melted away.

Bertha, meanwhile, would regularly squint at him with unabashed lust. It was clear that she appreciated the good care he took of his body. She always found him when it was time for his nightly push-ups, and would all but slaver over his form as he counted them out.

"Looking good," she'd once grunted. "I can't hardly wait."

Her attention was one of the least unpleasant things he'd ever encountered...but if being around Big Bertha was the cost to cohabiting with Chelsea, it was one he'd pay a thousand times over. Every time he looked at his one true love, his heart smiled. At her advice, he'd changed his number - to one that his lawyers couldn't call him on - and hired someone to filter their worried letters out of his mail.

"They just want to tear us apart," she'd insisted, her blue eyes twinkling.

He couldn't agree with her more.

Finally, the big day arrived. Brad was practically thrumming with excitement - he'd spent more than two hours staring into Chelsea's eyes that morning. Just two straight hours of gazing into his beautiful bride's perfect blue eyes, while she muttered under her breath, and her awful mother sat beside them, breathing heavily in excitement.

"Today's the day," Bertha gurgled. "I can't friggin' wait."

He'd let Chelsea choose her own wedding dress - she'd gone with a simple blue dress, to match her eyes. It wasn't the most flattering outfit he'd ever seen her in, but she was gorgeous enough to make a cloth sack look like the height of fashion.

"No white, my virgin bride?" he'd asked, wincing when she lowered her glasses and shot him a withering look.

"I told you," she'd replied coolly. "I'm only a virgin *for you*."

“Of course, dear,” he babbled in apology. “Sorry.”

Brad could barely believe his eyes when he saw Big Bertha in the small chapel he’d rented for the day. To avoid the lawyers finding them, he hadn’t invited anyone, and - to his surprise - his wife said that her mother was the only person who, quote, ‘had to be there for this to work’.

Big Bertha, in a characteristically stupid and odious move, was wearing *the exact same type of dress* as his bride.

The same cut, the same color. And where Chelsea’s decision not to wear stockings had resulted in a stunning display of her long, smooth, perfect legs...Bertha’s legs were hairy, covered in warts, and had huge varicose veins running up the sides.

Opening his mouth to object to the parody of womanhood standing in front of him, Brad remembered the reaction he’d gotten when he’d questioned the color of his blushing bride’s dress, and decided not to comment.

“Are we ready?” the priest asked, looking back and forth between the two women in confusion.

“Uh huh,” Bertha said, stepping forward to stand next to Brad at the altar.

The young man’s eyebrows raised in confusion. He opened his mouth to object, turning to face Chelsea...

...but quickly found himself lost in her eyes.

Those eyes.

Brad blinked twice, then refocused his attention on the woman standing beside him.

His wife, Chelsea.

Who else would it be?

He stared into her green eyes, confused. They...they didn’t seem to have the same draw they normally did.

They even had a strange...squint to them.

But of course this was Chelsea. She was standing in front of him, decked out in the blue dress that he’d sworn had looked much better on her a few minutes ago.

Brad didn’t look, but he knew that Bertha was standing behind him, the only witness to their marriage.

Of course she was.

He didn’t need to look. He knew for certain she was standing there.

“Are you ready?” Chelsea said, an odd leer coming across her face.

No, Brad reminded himself, not a leer. A smile. A gorgeous smile, just like she always had.

He loved her. He thought she was gorgeous. He would be happily married to her, forever.

These thoughts were running through Brad’s confused brain, occupying all his mental energy. He didn’t even realize it was his time to speak until his wife nudged him.

“I do,” he said.

“And do you...” the priest started. Brad tuned out, until it was his wife’s turn to reply.

“I do,” she said, her voice sounding...her voice sounding like her mother’s.

No. No, that couldn’t be right.

Something had gone horribly wrong.

“I now pronounce you,” the priest started, and Brad looked down at his wife’s legs.

His wife’s hairy, wart-covered, veiny legs.

“...man and wife. You may now kiss the bride.”

As Brad’s new wife moved in to deliver a kiss he’d been looking forward to for what felt like forever, he could feel her hairlip pressing against him.

Oh no.
What had he done?