

Chapter Nineteen—The House Across the Street

“Crap!” Celia blurted out. “What are you doing here?”

“A better question would be, what are *you* doing here?” I shot back.

“You can’t be seen here. You have to go.”

“No way,” I said, pushing my hand against the door to keep her from closing it. “I need some information and I need it now.”

“I don’t know anything. Now please go.” Celia tried to shut the door, but I wedged my body up against it.

“Why are you here? Why did you buy me a car? How do you know Unity Kingsmill?”

The last question seemed to hit a nerve with Celia.

“Don’t you see? I’m not allowed to tell you anything,” Celia protested. “That would ruin everything. I’m in enough trouble as it is. If they ever found out I talked to you...”

“If *who* ever found out? *Who* are you talking about?”

“Please...I really like you, but I can’t...” Celia said, her eyes watering. Was she really about to cry, or was she just acting?

“Listen, I need your help.” I pleaded. “I just got a call from Unity and she’s in trouble.”

Celia’s face turned white and her eyes bulged to enormous proportions. She looked around furiously, darting her eyes in all directions, before grabbing my arm and pulling me forcibly into the house. After slamming the door, Celia began attacking me with questions.

“What did she say? Is she okay? Where is she? You have to tell me fast, and then you have to leave. I’m expecting company and you can’t be seen here. Especially *you*.”

“Why?”

“Stop asking me why. I’ve already told you a dozen times that I can’t tell you anything. Now where is Unity?”

Celia’s inquisition was a little distressing. After all, the entire reason I came over to this house was to find out *where* Unity was, and the one source I thought would surely know

just confirmed that she actually doesn't. Not a good sign. I was no closer to having my questions answered than I was five minutes ago.

Or was I?

"What did Unity say? Is she coming back?" Celia pleaded with me, her beautiful face filled with distress.

And though I was beginning to feel sorry for her, the level of anxiety Celia was exuding suddenly gave me an idea. A brilliant idea, actually. If the great Celia Westend didn't know Unity's whereabouts, that means she wouldn't know if I was lying about them either. This might be my only chance to gain the upper hand and barter with her for some information.

"I'm not telling you anything about Unity until you tell me why you gave me a car," I said defiantly. "And what my connection is to the people in this house."

"What?" Celia said with surprise, obviously not used to such blatant opposition. "That's not fair."

"No, what's not fair is how screwed up my life is right now. And how all these strange things keep happening to me, and I have no explanation for them. I need some answers, Miss Westend. I feel like I'm going crazy."

Celia's face relaxed a little, and I could tell she was considering what I said. I took this as my cue to continue pleading.

"Someone connected with this house had my old portfolio. The portfolio of artwork that I brought with me on my very first visit to Unity's house. But here's the strange part that I just can't figure out. The artwork somehow fell out on the train ride, and I left the empty portfolio in someone's car, so how is it possible that they both magically reappeared fully intact right here on your front lawn?"

Celia began to speak, but I interrupted her. I was on a roll and needed to get this off my chest.

"Then I keep thinking I see celebrities coming in and out of this house. Oprah. Nicole. Ben. Jennifer. And countless others. And if that isn't strange enough, many of them appear to be spying on me. And then today, my house was broken into and..."

"Your house was broken into?" Celia asked, interrupting me. "When?"

"This afternoon. Surely you must have heard the alarm."

"No. I was out this afternoon. Damn. That's another thing I'll get blamed for."

“Why would you get blamed?”

“Was anything stolen?”

“Yes. A statue from Sleeping Beauty, where Prince Phillip is dancing with...”

Celia did not let me finish the sentence. She grabbed my arm, and quickly pulled me into one of the bedrooms.

“What the...?” I almost screamed.

“Shhhh...they’re here. You have to hide. I can’t explain now, but they can’t know you’re here.”

“Why? Who are they?” I asked, while Celia shoved me into a large clothes closet.

“Some friends. But promise me, no matter what you hear; you’ll stay in this closet until they’re gone. Promise me.”

Did she just ask me, a gay man, to stay in a closet? Didn’t she realize how ironic and insulting that was? Not to mention tacky.

I heard the front door open, and someone entered the house.

“Hello, hello? We’re here.” A familiar voice yelled from the living room.

“We brought the beer.” Another one yelled.

Celia was visibly shaking. She had to greet her friends, but wanted to make sure I wasn’t going to move from the closet first.

“If you do this, I’ll tell you everything,” Celia said, as she held up her hand and gave me the Girl Scouts salute. “I promise.”

Something about the innocence of the gesture made me agree to her terms. I mean, it was the official Girl Scout salute. You can’t fight something as powerful as that.

As soon as I said yes, she shoved me against the back wall and closed the door in my face. So adding insult to injury, she not only forced me back into a closet, but she stifled my freedom of speech as well. Where’s LAMBDA when you need them?

“Celia? Come out, come out, wherever you are,” One of the male voices said. “We’re not going to bite, unless of course you want us to.”

I heard Celia close the bedroom door, and walk into the living room. She screamed and giggled with delight at the sight of whoever had arrived. Within moments, the laughter grew in volume, as all three friends expressed their mutual appreciation for each other.

“I wrote you a song,” I heard one of the men say.

“Oh Adam, that is so sweet,” Celia responded.

Adam?

“Chris wouldn’t let me bring my ukulele, so I’ll have to sing it a cappella,” the one named Adam continued.

“You ain’t singin’ nothin’,” The one named Chris responded. “We came here to cheer Celia up. Not bore her with your white trash ditty playing.”

Celia and Adam laughed, as did I, because now I was pretty sure I knew who these two famous men were. Adam Sandler and Chris Rock. Only ten or fifteen feet away from me. Two of the funniest men in show business, and I can’t even witness an impromptu comedy show.

I quietly slid down the wall of the closet, eventually landing on the floor. From the sound of the talking and laughter, it appeared as if the closet and I were going to become intimate friends. I felt around for a flashlight or something that might illuminate my stay, but there was nothing on the floor except boxes and envelopes. I wasn’t sure what the boxes contained, but maybe one of these items would give me a clue as to what this house was used for.

I slid the closet door open a little to let in some light. Thankfully, Celia hadn’t shut the bedroom door completely, so there was a small amount of light seeping in from the living room.

With the added illumination, I could now see that this pile of papers and packages I was sitting on was actually someone’s mail. And some of it was unopened. But why would it be here in the closet? (Unless it was gay-related material, in which case its placement might have significant meaning.)

I skimmed through the items. There were several big packages that had already been opened, a few Priority Mail envelopes, and some smaller letters and magazines. Except for the magazines, it looked very much like the contents of the portable shopping cart I used during my frequent trips to the post office.

I picked up one of the packages and read the inscription:

TAS41
PO Box 555SR
Grand Central Station
New York

I stopped reading. I nearly stopped breathing. This address was written in my own handwriting. In fact, as I looked around at the other packages and envelopes, they also appeared to be written in my handwriting. And they were all addressed to TAS41, which was one of my best returning customers on eBay. But how did the boxes I'd mailed to NYC end up at the bottom of a closet directly across the street from where I lived?

The laughter from the living room continued. Celia seemed to be having a very good time, while I remained sulking in a closet, surrounded by the discarded remnants of my eBay auctions.

This was really too much. I felt like the victim of a giant conspiracy, or like that character Jim Carrey played in the movie *The Truman Show*. Everyone seemed to be in on the joke except me.

My frustration grew into irritation, which soon evolved to anger. I was sick of sitting in this closet. I was sick of not getting a straight answer from anyone. I was sick of feeling like my life was spinning out of control.

I opened the closet door enough to squeeze out of it, and then as quietly as possible made my way over to the bedroom door.

I pressed my face up to the doorframe, and cocked my head so that my eyes could see through the slight vertical gap between the door and its frame. It was an odd angle, but it provided enough of a view to see what was happening.

There on the couch sat Chris Rock, Celia Weston and Adam Sandler. Celia had turned some music on, and they were drinking beers and eating popcorn. A simple little get-together between old friends. Except these old friends happened to be some of the most famous on the planet. And here I was, peeping at them like a stalker.

Chris was currently entertaining the group with some kind of story. It was obviously a very funny story, too, because both Celia and Adam were in hysterics. I couldn't really hear what Chris was saying, but at one point he got up from the couch and pressed himself against the wall. He flapped his arms and legs wildly, but still remained glued to the wall.

I wasn't sure why this was so funny, because it seemed like a pretty lame gag from my vantage point. But I couldn't really hear what Chris was saying either. Celia and Adam were both laughing so loud they drowned out most of his dialogue.

I watched as Chris wiggled a while longer, before pressing his hands and legs against the wall, and then pushing himself away with tremendous force. The action caused him to fall onto Adam's lap, which made Celia scream even louder.

Immediately Chris jumped up, and I noticed he had a large banana shoved between his legs at crotch level. He grabbed the banana and screamed. "Ow! I got stuck in an airhole. And now I have a rod like Pinocchio."

OH MY GOD! This wasn't just a joke. This was a story about me. Chris Rock was imitating me on the night I got stuck in the Jacuzzi. But how could he possibly know about that? And even more importantly, was this going to be the basis of some new routine in his comedy act? Was I now going to be immortalized as the guy who got his prick stuck in a Jacuzzi air hole? (My mother would be so proud.)

I moved away from the door, feeling a little sick.

And that's when I saw the two huge display cases on the other side of the room. Each case was filled with plastic toys and comic books and other memorabilia. This must be where TAS41 displayed all the items he'd won from me. And yet, as I examined the contents, I noticed that it also contained some of the items I'd sent to my other two big auction winners-- OceanView22 and KillingTimenTX. It was like a mini museum of my eBay auctions.

And there were pictures too. Pictures of me working in my garden with Ramona, or of me walking to the post office, or of me sitting on my side porch reading. All the pictures were individually displayed in beautiful frames and neatly distributed among the collectibles, giving the entire assemblage the appearance of a shrine.

My mouth felt very dry and I couldn't seem to swallow. Dizzy. I was getting dizzy. I knew I was dangerously close to having another fainting spell, but I couldn't do it here. Not with the chance that I might fall out into the living room.

I'd promised Celia not to show myself. So even though Chris's reenactment of my painful experience was like a knife in the heart, I had to honor my promise. If I didn't, I might never get any answers. And now I wanted them more than ever.

So with all the strength I could muster, I staggered back into the closet and shut the door. I barely managed to get myself to the floor before the spinning and the flashing lights overwhelmed me. I was still conscious, sort of, but completely worn out. I didn't want to keep thinking about this. All I wanted to do was run away and hide, which was a little impossible at the moment. So I did the next best thing. I slept.

It wasn't until Celia woke me up several hours later that I realized just how deep a sleep I'd been in.

Celia looked down at me, handing me a glass of water.

“I’m sorry it took so long,” She said sweetly. “I tried to get rid of them, but they just wouldn’t go.”

“What time is it?” I asked, feeling very disoriented.

“It’s two clock in the morning,” She replied. “But since you kept your promise, I’ll keep mine as well. I’m ready to tell you all I know.”

Next Episode: Apples and Origins

SIGN UP FOR FREE E-MAIL REMINDERS! Now you can be notified by e-mail every time a new chapter is added. Simply send your e-mail address to comments@ithappenedinplainfield.com. We'll make sure you're one of the first to know when a new episode is posted.