

Chapter Twenty—Apples and Origins

I followed Celia into the kitchen, where she began to fix us a fresh pot of coffee. I guess she figured her explanation was going to take a while.

“First of all,” Celia began. “Nothing I tell you can ever leave this house. You have to promise me that.”

“I promise,” I said, holding my fingers up in the Boys Scouts salute.

“Didn’t you drop out of Boy Scouts?” Celia asked, smirking.

It was true. I dropped out when I was still a Cub Scout, right before I was to advance to the level of Webelo. But with a name like Webelo, and my propensity for artistic expression, I decided the label might incur a slightly different connotation when referring to me. So to spare myself countless years of endless teasing, I dropped out right before the annual Soap Box Derby tournament.

But how would *Celia* know that? It’s not like I talked about it every day. Or ever, for that matter. I think I might have written a blog entry about it a couple years ago, and maybe I’d mentioned it once to Unity, but...

Of course. Unity. Celia. What was their relationship? I needed to get clarity on the connection between Tree and Sympathy and a seemingly endless supply of celebrities that somehow knew the intimate details of my personal life.

“I’m very confused as to how you know so much about me.”

“Yes, I’m sure you are,” Celia said, smiling. “And I intend to tell you. But first, I really need you to swear that whatever you hear remains a secret forever. Once you learn the truth, I’m sure you’ll understand *why*. But I need your buy-in before I can even tell you that.”

Could this really be happening? Could I really be standing here, negotiating terms with one of the most powerful and beautiful women in show business? And she was a strong woman, too. Not at all what I pictured from her persona on the screen. The real Celia had fire and passion. So why didn’t it ever translate into her movie roles? Her body certainly translated well.

“I can’t imagine anyone would ever believe me, but yes, I promise not to say anything. I never break a confidence to make a confidence.”

“I know,” Celia said. “That’s one of the things I like about you.”

I shook my head in disbelief. How could she know anything about me? And why would she even care? Celia picked two apples out of a fruit basket, washed them off and began slicing them into sections.

“Okay,” Celia began. “I guess the best place to start is with George Clooney.”

“*A very good place to start,*” I sang, quoting a lyric from “The Sound of Music.”

Without missing a beat, Celia continued singing the song with her own version of the lyrics.

“When you read you begin with A-B-C. When you’re me, you begin with George Clooney. George Cloo-ney. The start of this story just happens to be, George Cloo-ney.”

The quick comeback to what I thought was an obscure musical theater reference not only surprised me, but also caused me to burst out laughing. Almost maniacally, too, which was a little weird. But I couldn’t help it. The whole thing was surreal. Here was this gorgeous, totally flawless woman, spewing out comic comebacks like the best of them. It almost didn’t seem fair that she could be so funny and stunning at the same time.

“You liked that?” Celia asked, smiling. “I’ve been studying improvisation with The Groundlings. One of my specialties is making up song lyrics.”

“That was very good,” I said, gushing like a regular fan. “And quick too.”

“Yes. But no one cares if I’m funny,” Celia said, as she arranged the apple slices on two small plates. “They only want me to take off my clothes. Or wiggle around in a bikini. I’m so bored with that. I just want to do a good romantic comedy.”

Once again, I found myself in the strange position of listening to Celia talk about her career aspirations.

“That’s why I’ve been looking through scripts lately. I refuse to do another movie until I find one that actually makes me a funny character.”

“I’ve always thought your characters were sort of funny,” I said, trying to sound positive. “Or campy, one of the two. But you’re definitely an icon in the gay community.”

“Yeah, I know. My hair and make-up guys tell me all the time. Which is really great and all. But I don’t always want to be a joke, you know? I want to be *in on* the joke, not the joke itself.”

“I know exactly what you mean.” I agreed. “Because for the last few months, I’ve felt like the biggest joke and I’m not even sure what the joke is. Or why I’m the punch line.”

Celia looked at me with a sympathetic smile, before pouring us each a cup of what smelled like very strong coffee. After drowning mine in milk and sugar, we headed back into the living room with our coffee and apple slices to get comfortable. Sitting across from each other on the couch, our legs curled up beneath us, I felt like we were having one of those International Coffee moments you used to see on television commercials. (Ah, Jean Pierre!)

“So it all began with George Clooney?” I asked, trying to get our conversation back on track.

“Yes. It was during the filming of the movie *Oceans Eleven*. The first one of the series. Everyone was in it. Brad Pitt. Matt Damon. Bernie Mac. Elliot Gould. Julia Roberts. The list goes on and on. It was known all over Hollywood as one of the hot films to be a part of because everyone was having such a great time doing it. And because the actors were all friends and had a lot of free time, they began to concoct these silly pranks. You know, to keep themselves amused during the endless hours of downtime. Like Matt would send George a strip-o-gram, or Julia would call up Elliot pretending to be a casting agent. Little stuff like that. And I was privy to all this, because I happened to be in town at the same time shooting my first movie, *The Woman with a Limp*.”

I cringed when she said *The Woman with a Limp*, because the film was internationally panned when it first premiered. Not only because it had one of the worst film titles in history, but also because the word “limp” actually referred to the flaccid state of the husband’s penis.

And though the film wasn’t remotely pornographic, it certainly did nothing for the film’s leading lady Gretchen Crimper, who thereafter became known as the first human antidote to Viagra. The reputation wasn’t really fair, as the title was based solely on the character she played. But Hollywood is not really known for being fair, and Gretchen Crimper quickly faded from view like yesterday’s larva.

Celia Westend, on the other hand, catapulted to fame as the sexy chambermaid who finally gets the husband’s limp genitalia into an upright position. And so, in an odd twist on Gretchen’s fate, Celia became known as the only woman who could give even a eunuch an erection. Through no fault of her own, she was typecast as the sexy bimbo from that day forward. And though it certainly made her a millionaire a few times over, the pigeonholing also stilted any sort of range she might have.

“So anyway, one day we’re all sitting around in George’s suite and Julia’s bitching about all the negative tabloid coverage she’s getting, and Matt is bitching about some female fans who are stalking him, and Bernie’s bitching because he *doesn’t* have any female fans stalking him, and then Carl Reiner says something about how we should start stalking the fans. Give them a taste of their own medicine.”

“Everybody laughs and gives their own scenario of what they’d like to do. And then before you know it, a group of them are actually planning a little experiment in how to

stalk a fan. Nothing sinister or anything; just a little intimidation to give them a taste of their own medicine.”

“Interesting concept,” I offered, though I wasn’t exactly sure why she was telling me all this.

“After reviewing some possible candidates, the group decided to focus on Matt’s set of stalkers. These girls seemed like the best candidates because of their consistent ability to get past security and into Matt’s hotel rooms. He’d once found them nude in his bathtub, then under silk sheets in his king-size bed, and finally in his hall closet dressed in nothing but a bow. These girls were not only aggressive, they were also very resourceful.”

“So George called in some police experts they were using as consultants for the film, and everyone grilled them on stalkers and how they operate. The stuff we found out was shocking, not to mention disturbing. To this day, I check every closet, nook and cranny of my hotel rooms before I feel comfortable in them. You just never know.”

“I can’t even imagine what it must be like to have someone stalking you,” I said, trying to show a sense of compassion. “It must be awful.”

Celia stared at me for a moment, before uncomfortably clearing her throat and continuing.

“The stalkers they decided to follow were these two wealthy twenty-two year old girls, fresh out of college, and living off their trust funds. The girls felt they had nothing to lose by breaking into a hotel or taking other kinds of risks, because they knew their Daddies would always bail them out. Which is what I personally hate about rich spoiled girls. They do whatever they want because they can. I mean, occasionally you’ll run into someone who gets caught like Libby Grubman. Or she’ll run into *you*. But most of the time, these girls can get away with murder. And probably have.”

I couldn’t get over Celia’s great sense of humor, which was nicely scattered throughout her commentary. I took another sip of coffee and let the warm liquid flow down my throat, gently relaxing the rest of my body on its way to my stomach. This had to be one of the strangest and most amazing moments in my life. Sitting across from Celia Westend and getting a first hand look into the intimate lives of celebrity stalkers. Or stalking celebrities. Katie Couric would kill for an interview like this. (And probably has.)

“The first task was to find out some information about the girls. Luckily, they’d left their personalized calling cards on numerous occasions, which listed their names and individual cell phone numbers. And if you know the right people, a cell phone number is all you need to get a little background information. Within a few hours, we knew where the girls lived, where they liked to shop, who their boyfriends were, and a bunch of other helpful details.”

Celia paused for a moment, and then let out a big giggle.

“Listen to me,” she said, leaning in and touching my arm gently. “I sound like I was a big part of the process, when in reality all I did was sit back and watch. Sometimes I wasn’t even around when something happened, but they’d always fill me in later on what I missed.”

“So what did they do to the two girls?” I asked, anxious to hear how George Clooney and the gang might try to thwart a pair of stalkers. Or how George and the gang might do anything, really. Or just about George, forget the gang. Sigh.

“The first part of the plan involved the boyfriends of the two girls,” Celia continued, unaware that I’d been momentarily distracted by a Clooney attack. “Matt contacted each of the boyfriends separately and told them he was a part of a new hidden camera TV show and asked if they’d be interested in playing a prank on their girlfriends? Naturally, they said yes. So the next weekend, when the two couples went out to dinner, Matt showed up as well.”

“Just as the couples were about to dig into their entrees, Matt walked up to the table and sat down right next to one of the girls. At first, she was so excited she didn’t know what to do. She began giggling and screaming, and generally making a fool of herself. But Matt just stared at her, which eventually made the other girl a little jealous. So jealous in fact that she apparently threw some of her Spaghetti Pompadora all over the giggling friend’s white Chanel jacket.”

“And that’s when it got ugly. The two girls began screaming and throwing pasta at each other for several minutes before they were finally apprehended by a group of waiters. The boyfriends, who still believed this was all part of a hidden camera show, just sat back and laughed. It was only later, after Matt left and no hidden cameras were revealed, that they began to question the validity of the prank.”

I was chuckling all through Celia’s narrative. Her facial expressions and physicality when talking about the various people was very entertaining.

“Do you want some more coffee?” Celia asked, pointing to my empty cup.

“Yes,” I said. “I find this all so fascinating. I’m still not sure what any of this has to do with me, but it makes for great entertainment.”

“I’ll get to you,” Celia replied, grabbing my cup and heading back into the kitchen. “But first, you should know how it all started.”

“How what started?” I said, jumping up to follow her.

“Patience, Henson. Good things come to those who wait.”

“I’m nearly forty,” I replied. “How long do I have to wait?”

“Don’t you think you’ve had good things happen to you?” Celia asked, turning to me with concern.

“Well, lately, yes. But there always seems to be something else behind it. I’m just not sure what.”

Celia poured us each another cup of coffee, and I immediately doused mine with so much cream and sugar that I was sure Celia might die from shock.

“How can you eat all that?” She asked. “Don’t you know how bad it is for you?”

“I like my coffee with a lot of sugar and creamer,” I answered, somewhat defensively. “In fact, I really don’t like coffee at all. I only use it as a reason to drink the sugar and creamer.”

Celia laughed, causing her to spill some coffee onto the floor. As she bent down to wipe it up, I was aware of a warm feeling coursing through my body. A warm, fuzzy feeling. And all because I’d made Celia Westend laugh. Me. Little Henson Ray from New York City, now living in Plainfield. (Well, maybe not *Little* Henson Ray. I’m actually a little over six foot tall. Or didn’t you know that?)

We made small talk for a few more minutes, mostly about food, and then trekked back to our spots on the couch so Celia could continue her story.

“The second part of the plan involved the girls’ favorite spa, Angel Wings. They apparently went there every week for a facial and manicure, as well as other services such as colonics and waxing. For this task, Matt got assistance from his good friend Ben Affleck. They somehow finagled their way into the Spa’s scheduling book to find out when the girls were receiving their next series of colonics. And, pardon the pun, that’s when they made their move.”

“With the help of a star-struck receptionist, they were not only able to gain access into the spa, but also into the highly private area known as *Colonicville*.”

I winced at the name, imaging a series of t-shirts and beer huggies proudly bearing the logo of *Colonicville*, available for purchase in the rectum-themed gift shop.

Celia took a sip from her coffee and then continued.

“You can probably guess what happened next. The girls are in mid-irrigation, the most compromising of positions, just as Matt and Ben enter with cameras flashing.”

“How humiliating.”

“Yes. But it worked. They never bothered Matt again.”

“Wow, that’s amazing,” I said, smiling. “I never knew Matt had a stalker club. I would have signed up years ago.”

“Oh, you wouldn’t need to stalk him. He’s a big fan of yours. I’m sure he’d love to meet you.” Celia paused before adding: “Someday.”

I felt like the air had stopped moving. Or maybe I’d stopped breathing. I could have sworn Celia just said Matt Damon was a big fan of mine. But that’s impossible. I must have heard her wrong.

“I’m sorry. Did you just say Matt Damon was a big fan of mine?” I had to be sure.

“Oh, yes. So is Ben. And of course, you know, Julia just adores you. It’s always Henson this and Henson that. She’s completely obsessed.”

To make sure I wasn’t hallucinating, I stuck one of my fingers in my ear and began to rub around the edges. Maybe there was an overabundance of wax clogging my hearing. Or maybe I was having a stroke, or some kind of flashback from my 8-layer cookie experience, and I was only imagining Celia talking to me.

“Henson?” Celia said, rather loudly, interrupting my paranoid daydream. “Are you okay?”

“Oh, you’re still here,” I said absently. “I thought maybe I was hallucinating.”

“I know this all must seem a little strange, but trust me, it will eventually make sense to you. I hope.”

Celia cocked her head, searching the air for what she might say next.

“So where was I?” Celia asked, before immediately answering herself. “Oh right. Matt’s stalkers. Okay, so everyone had such a fun time planning and strategizing and executing these little pranks, they decided to expand their horizons. Why not follow around an ordinary person, maybe one of the film staff, and see what they do? Just like people follow around celebrities, they would pick out a random person and everyone would take turns staking them out.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. Because they were bored? Because it sounded like a fun idea? Maybe they wanted to see how the other half lives. The ordinary people.”

“That’s what we have Reality Television for. To exploit the ordinary people.”

“Yes, well, this was before most of that. And it’s not the same thing anyway. You can never learn about someone from a TV show the way you can from personal contact or exposure. There’s no editing to hide or exemplify flaws. It’s just raw and real, and its right there in front of you.”

“You sound like an advocate.”

“I was. I thought it would be a great acting exercise, to follow someone around and study them. That was my motivation for doing it. The others, I’m not sure. At the time, I was just starting out and they were already very famous. Maybe they wanted to see what it was like to examine someone under a microscope, to know everything about them even when they don’t know you’re watching. Or maybe it was a kind of revenge, a way of getting back at the millions who watched and scrutinized them on a daily basis. Whatever the reason, it ended up creating something much bigger than any of us expected. Something that took on a life of its own. And now...”

Celia’s eyes began to fill with tears.

“Now?” I asked, wondering why the sudden change in mood.

Celia wiped her eyes and looked me straight in the face, before adding more weight to my already burdened shoulders.

“I’m afraid you might be in terrible danger.”

Next Episode: The SSCP

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