

Chapter Twenty-Three—The Transformation

It had been almost nine hours since I first entered the SSCP house. Yet Celia and I were still talking and laughing like two college students pulling an all-nighter. And though I'd already learned so much about what was going on behind-the-scenes for the past few months, none of it was sinking in as reality yet. I was in a wonderful dream, filled with altruistic celebrities and magical adventures, and I never wanted to wake up.

So as night turned into morning, Celia and I were still chatting away. We'd each dozed off a few times, allowing our bodies to relax on the couch or a chair or the floor or a combination of each. But our energy levels wouldn't allow us much downtime, and we both found ourselves waking up frequently to ask one more question, or give one more bit of insight. I was wired so tight, my bandwidth was at maximum capacity.

Once the magical hour of nine o'clock rolled around, Celia called her friend Henry, who was more than happy to drop everything for his favorite female client. She explained to him she was going to a costume party, and wanted to go as a man. Henry seemed to love the idea, and asked if he could bring his assistant Bilbo along to help. She agreed, and they made plans to be at the house by one o'clock.

Throughout the morning, Celia filled me in on various aspects of the SSCP, including my particular "storyline."

"Do you remember when you went to your storage locker," Celia began cautiously. "And someone tried breaking into it?"

Another piece of the puzzle.

"Uh...yes." I said, shaking my head. "But how did you know about that?"

"Because the men who handled the break-in worked for the SSCP. Or to be more specific, they were bodyguards who worked for Rosie O'Donnell. She donated them for the day."

"Were they the beefy guys in business suits?"

"Yes. The SSCP got word you were going to your storage locker, which meant it was a perfect opportunity for someone from the *other side* to do you harm."

"Why would they want to do me harm?"

“I don’t know, but the attacks on *The Chosens* had started becoming more frequent. That’s why Unity had to leave so suddenly. There was a particularly nasty incident in Sydney that needed her attention.”

“*Sydney?* As in Sydney, Australia? The SSCP extends that far?”

“Yes. We’re not limited to the United States. Though most of our work in Australia is carried out by locals. Sometimes even Nicole, Russell or Toni Collette when they’re in town, though that’s pretty rare these days.”

Celia stopped speaking for a moment. It appeared as if her thoughts were a million miles away. (Or at least as far as Sydney.)

“I was supposed to go with Unity to Australia,” she said. “But then...something else came up, and I couldn’t make it. Unity said she understood, but I felt terrible about it.”

Celia looked as if she might burst into tears again. I needed to keep her focused on something other than Unity.

“So back to the storage locker,” I said quickly. “One of those bodyguards was waiting for me when I got back from loading the Jeep. He started asking me all kinds of questions.”

“Yes. He said you tried to employ some kind of karate moves on him.”

“OH MY GOD! Is there anything you people don’t know?”

“Very little. Anyway, he was one of the guys who found someone breaking into your locker. Or rather, *they thought* someone was breaking into your locker. Later, it turned out that person actually owned the locker next to yours. But by then, it was too late.”

“What do you mean?”

“Have you ever heard the expression, *Attack first, Ask questions later?* Well, that’s exactly what they did.”

“That whole experience was bizarre. And creepy.”

“I imagine it was. In our defense, it all happened so quickly. You only made the decision to go to the storage locker the night before, so there wasn’t a lot of time to properly brief the bodyguards.”

“How did you find out I was going? Do you have my phone tapped?”

Celia didn’t answer the question directly, but skirted the issue with a different kind of explanation.

“I’ll admit the SSCP still has some kinks to work out in the system. Like maybe establishing some boundaries or guidelines for the outside people who help us out. I can assure you that Rosie was furious when she found out about the storage locker incident. She made all the bodyguards complete a course in anger management before they could come back to work for her.”

“What happened to the person they beat up? There was blood all over my locker.”

“The guy was taken to a hospital and released within hours. And of course, he got a nice settlement to make up for the mistake. It was an unfortunate incident, but it’s not the worst thing that’s happened.”

“Oh? What’s the worst thing that’s happened?”

“Not now.” Celia said, wearily. “I can’t talk about this anymore. I’m exhausted. Do you want to go home, take a nap and come back? My transformation into a man is probably going to take three or four hours.”

“Are you kidding?” I said quickly. “This is the most interesting and exciting experience I’ve had in years. I don’t want to miss a minute of it. And I definitely don’t want to pass up the opportunity to witness your manly makeover.”

Celia laughed, and then hugged me. A warm affectionate hug between old friends. And after our long night’s journey into day, she really did feel like an old friend. In fact, at the moment, she felt like my only friend. My only close friend, anyway.

The doorbell rang promptly at one o’clock. And I mean promptly. Celia and I had been taking a little catnap and hadn’t heard the car drive up. But as soon as she opened the front door, the house took on the energy of a bohemian nightclub.

Henry and his tiny assistant “Bilbo” stood dramatically posed on the doorstep, surrounded by a large collection of make-up cases, boxes, backpacks, and dressing bags. Their colorful attire and flamboyant mannerisms were as cliché as they come, but the height difference between the two was what made their appearance so comical. Henry was practically twice the size of Bilbo.

“Celia Darling!” Henry bellowed in a raspy voice, before bursting through the door in a puff of smoke. He was holding a long cigarette holder in his right hand, which he waved around like a baton, giving him the appearance of a male Cruella de Vil.

Henry scooped Celia up in his arms, kissing her ad nauseum, as the smoke billowed around them like a tornado. The tiny assistant known as “Bilbo” adhered himself to Celia’s legs in a gentle bear hug. In gay terms, they “dropped so many feathers,” you’d think they were poster children for Purdue Chicken.

“Thank you so much for coming,” Celia said, smiling.

“Why of course, Sweetie,” Henry said, twirling the cigarette holder until it dropped an ash in a nearby plant. “Anything for my most favorite client in the world.”

“*Anything?*” Celia asked with an arched eyebrow.

“Of course, Darling. What?”

“No cigarettes in the house, I’m afraid.”

“Bitch!”

Celia laughed, as Henry stabbed the cigarette out on one of Bilbo’s backpacks.

“Girlfriend,” Henry said. “When you told me you wanted to become a man for this costume party, I laughed so hard I had a baby.”

“Finally a reason for those child bearing hips,” Bilbo quipped.

“Oh shush, you,” Henry said, hitting Bilbo on the head. It was a gentle tap, possibly even affectionate. But since Henry was over six feet tall and Bilbo was a little more than three, it had the uncomfortable appearance of a Master slapping his dog.

“I’m so glad you could come,” Celia said, as the two men began hauling their assorted bags and boxes into the house.

The massive collection of clothes and cosmetics, combined with Henry and Bilbo’s heightened energy level, gave them the appearance of two Mary Kay sales reps on speed. (Or is that redundant?)

“And who might you be?” Henry asked, as soon as he noticed me cowering in a corner.

“This is my friend *Bruce*,” Celia answered, turning to wink in my direction. “He’s going with me to the party tonight.”

Celia obviously wanted to keep my real name a secret. She couldn’t risk Henry or Bilbo possibly mentioning me someday to another celebrity, as it could get her in big trouble with the SSCP. Naturally I played along, and assumed the role of “Bruce.” (I was sure my high school acting experience in numerous Rogers and Hammerstein musicals would definitely come in handy here. Minus the singing, of course.)

“Bruce, you’re a lucky man,” Henry said, eyeing me up and down. “I suppose you’re going as a *woman?*”

Henry gave such dramatic emphasis to the word “*woman*” that it almost sounded as if he was accusing me of something. My blank expression caused him to explain the question.

“Well, Celia’s going as a man,” Henry stated matter-of-factly. “So I just assumed you’d be going as a woman.”

Henry stared into my eyes. I tried to think of something clever to say, but I was severely tongue-tied. I felt like Henry could see right through me. As if he knew I wasn’t *Bruce* at all, but a big faker. He reminded me of all those “no bullshit” type of gay men I’d encountered in Manhattan. The kind that always made me feel inferior. Like they knew something about style, about living, about being gay, that I’d somehow missed.

“Bruce is going as himself.” Celia said, saving me from having to improvise an answer. “I’m the only one who’s dressing up.”

“Oh.” Henry said. “I thought you said this was a costume party.”

“It is for me,” Celia responded with a sly smile. “For everyone else, it’s just a party.”

Henry raised an eyebrow and pursed his lips, giving Celia the once-over.

“What are you planning, Miss Thing?” Henry asked, shaking his index finger in her direction.

“I’m trying to infiltrate a gay event.” Celia burst out. “No one can know I’m a woman.”

Henry and Bilbo looked at each other for a moment, and then burst out laughing.

“Is that all?” Henry said, as he began assembling his collection of bags, boxes and backpacks, using the kitchen table as his workbench. “I thought this was for something serious.”

“It is serious,” Celia assured him. “I just can’t tell you why.”

“Well, we’re going to make you the best looking man this side of Bruce. How’s that?” Henry said, smiling at me.

And with that, Henry and Bilbo began the transformation process. For the rest of the afternoon, they used their magical wizardry skills and a ton of make-up and prosthetic pieces to convert the famous face of Celia Westend into something a little more masculine.

They built up her forehead a bit, and filled in the cheeks and chin to take away some of the soft round lines. Adding stubble and facial hair completed the road to ruggedness. Within hours, Celia had lost a lot of her feminine beauty for a decidedly more manly appearance. Not necessarily a man I’d be attracted to, but a man nonetheless.

The only odd part about her appearance was the presence of two large protruding breasts, which instantly negated any of the make-up wonders created above them.

“Now about those...” Bilbo said, pointing to Celia’s chest. “We’re going to have to strap them down, and it’s not going to feel pleasant.”

“Nothing can be worse than wearing a corset,” Celia declared. “If I can survive that, I can survive anything”

Celia was referring to her role in the dreadful *Gone with the Wind* rip-off she made several years ago called *Her Master’s Drapes*. The story revolved around a Southern Heiress whose family goes bankrupt during the Civil War. Despite numerous obstacles, Celia’s character finally saves the day by fashioning elegant dresses out of old plantation curtains.

There aren’t enough syllables in the word “horrible” to effectively convey how bad this movie was, or how ridiculous Celia looked in the period costumes specially created for her by Bob Mackie. The hoopskirts were enormous, with huge shoulder pads and tight corsets that practically pushed her bosoms up to her chin. And with the liberal and inappropriate use of sequins and feathers to give her outfits that extra glitz, she looked more like a hooker than an heiress. Which is probably why the film was so hotly protested in the South. With so much controversy and a litany of bad reviews, “Her Master’s Drapes” quickly faded from movie theaters, much like Celia’s southern accent after the first few scenes of the film.

And now Celia was getting into another kind of corset, but for very different reasons. While I looked the other way, Henry and Bilbo went through the painful process of tightly wrapping Celia’s chest with a large roll of gauze and tape. Once they’d covered her sufficiently, I felt more comfortable in observing the process.

“Anyone who says your tits are fake should be buried alive,” Henry mused while wrapping. “Because for the real thing, these are as perfect as they come.”

As Celia suffered in silence, Henry entertained us with a non-stop soliloquy of all the latest gossip and dirt from Hollywood. He rarely directed any of his conversation toward me, and always seemed surprised when he looked over in my direction.

“Oh, you’re still here?” He said several times, before deciding to ignore me completely.

Bilbo, on the other hand, kept glancing in my direction at every opportunity. I didn’t notice at first, because of his stature. Then once, when I was focusing on the bandage wrapping, I caught him staring at me from beneath Celia’s breasts. She was sitting on a bar stool, so his head came up to just under her chest level. This gave him the perfect vantage point with which to observe *me* while I was observing *her*.

“Bilbo, watch what you’re doing,” Henry said, slapping Bilbo again on the head. “You’re giving the bandage too much slack.”

“Oh my God. This hurts,” Celia cried. “I feel like I’m going to pass out.”

“We’d much rather have you *passing out* than *falling out*, am I right?” Henry retorted. “No one wants a man with large bouncy breasts. Unless he’s a Chubby Chaser. And you are definitely not Chubby enough for that.”

“Speaking of Chubbie,” Bilbo chimed in. “Aren’t you going to need one of *these*?”

Bilbo pulled out a large orange-colored dildo from one of his bags. It was conveniently shaped like a penis, though the bright orange color made it look more like a giant Popsicle. It also had ribbing and other strange protrusions bursting from the sides, giving it a deformed look that was definitely not appealing.

“Ewww,” Celia squealed. “Where did you get that?”

“It’s from Bilbo’s personal collection,” Henry said, obviously disgusted. “We couldn’t find anything else in such a short amount of time. But honestly, a plane old sock will work just as well.”

“I don’t think I need a penis, thank you.” Celia laughed.

Henry and Bilbo stopped working and stared at Celia.

“Not need a penis?” Henry cried, grabbing his chest in horror. “How could you make such a naïve statement? A penis is the *one thing* that truly separates men from women. If you don’t have a penis, you can’t be a man. You can’t act like a man. You can’t feel like a man. You can’t look like a man. A penis, even a fake one, is necessary not only to create the physical framework of the male physique, but also to help you create the right mental framework necessary to pull this off. Believe me, Honey, nothing will make you feel more like a man than having a big piece of meat hanging between your legs. Or a small piece of meat, depending on your personal preference.”

I listened in amazement to Henry’s theory on what it takes to be a man. Particularly the part about determining your own penis size, as if anyone is ever given such a choice.

“When gay men are at a party, “ Henry continued. “There is always some crotch-watching. And you don’t want to have a *package* that shows nothing. Right now, you invert a little in your pants and that alone could give you away as a woman. You need something out there in front telling the world that you’re a man and you’re damn proud of it.”

“Just look at Bruce,” Bilbo said with a smile. “He looks like he has a nice package.”

At first I didn't realize who Bilbo was referring to, until I suddenly noticed everyone staring at my crotch.

"Okay, Okay." Celia said, smiling at me. "I'll wear a penis. Only I don't want something big. I just want to be an Average Joe."

"Well, there's nothing wrong with Average." Henry said. "Is there, Bilbo?"

Bilbo smiled and hit Henry with the orange dildo. Not to be outdone, Henry picked up a bottle of moisturizer and began squirting it on both Bilbo and the dildo, covering each in the creamy goo. It was a rather funny sight, although the mess it created was not so funny.

I went into the kitchen for some paper towels and a sponge to help clean up, while Bilbo ran off to the bathroom.

"Why don't I just use this?" Celia asked, as she began rolling one of her socks into a round ball.

"Not like that," Henry said, grabbing the sock and immediately unfolding it from the circular shape Celia had created. "You don't want it to look like inflamed testicles. It's a *piece* of meat, not a meat *ball*."

Henry rolled the sock length-wise into a tight formation. Then he grabbed Celia's pants, and shoved the sock down the front of her leg. Celia jumped at the sudden invasion of her crotch area, but did not stop Henry from finishing his job. He pushed and prodded and shaped and curled the sock inside Celia's pants, until it had the appearance of a rather nice flaccid penis. Not too obtrusive, but not too hidden either. All in all, a nice package.

Celia stood in front of the living room mirror, striking various poses as she examined the way her crotch was affected by movement. She seemed fascinated with the new addition to her body, and even started talking to herself in the mirror like Robert DeNiro in "Taxi Driver." *Are YOU looking at my crotch? Are you LOOKING at my crotch? Are you looking at MY crotch?*

It was fun watching Celia get into character. The process of becoming a man was not going to be an easy one. Especially with two flamboyant gay guys as her Coaches.

"Be cockier, as if you're the hottest dude at the party." Bilbo would say.

"But not too cocky," Henry corrected him. "There is nothing more unattractive than an arrogant Queen."

"That's funny coming from you," Bilbo shot back. "You make Helen Mirren look like Courtney Love."

“Oh, shut up, you Little Hobbit, or I’ll eat you for dinner.”

“Boys please,” Celia cut in. “No catfights. I need to concentrate.”

“Always make eye contact,” Bilbo said, turning to Celia. “If you don’t, people will know you have something to hide.”

“That’s right,” Henry agreed. “You have to believe in who you are, and then others will as well. Even if you think people suspect you’re a fraud, you can never let on that you are.”

“Right. Think Ashley Simpson.”

“Or Ryan Seacrest. Or anyone from the Bush administration.”

“What do you think Bruce?” Celia asked, turning in my direction.

Henry and Bilbo held their breath waiting for my response, though I’m sure my humble opinion couldn’t have been that important to them.

“I like it,” I said optimistically, causing both Henry and Bilbo to expel a short gasp of air. “But is there any way we could have some kind of practice run in a public place before we go to the party? You know, to work out any kinks in your appearance.”

Celia, Henry and Bilbo looked at me in silence, and then at each other. There was some kind of information being psychically passed between them. Celia was the first to speak.

“That’s a brilliant idea, Bruce,” Celia exclaimed. “It’ll be like method acting. I’ll experiment acting out the part, and then I’ll be perfect for the real performance.”

“Good show, old Boy,” Henry said, taking on a fake English accent. “But where should we go?”

“Not a Mall or any place crowded,” Celia said. “I think that would be too much. But maybe someplace a little out of the way, where I can just relax and try out the character.”

“I know the perfect spot,” I said, smiling.

Next Episode: Mama Madrid

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