

Chapter Thirty-Eight—The Supper Club

The art deco inspired Supper Club on West 47th Street in Manhattan was the site for this evening's gala ceremony. The venue was originally the site of the Edison Theater, which housed the all-nude musical "Oh Calcutta!" for many years before slipping into disrepair. The space was then renovated and reopened as a club, featuring weekly dance parties, rock concerts and a plethora of corporate events.

The cocktail hour for this evening's event would start in the aptly titled *King Kong* room, and then spill over onto the second level of the club, which had a balcony overlooking the main dance floor. Tonight the floor was set up for a banquet, with elegantly dressed tables and chairs filling the area. The gathering would be fairly intimate, maybe two or three hundred people, but the guest list was packed with celebrities. John Travolta and Kelly Preston, Meryl Streep, Ben Affleck, Jennifer Garner, Matt Damon, Jennifer Lopez, the list went on and on.

George had arranged for me to be a waiter for the dinner portion of the evening, so I could spy on the partygoers and make sure everything ran smoothly. George had also been working with a film editor all week to create a new version of his "Tribute Video," which he wanted to show this evening in place of the regular version. George's adaptation had a slightly different slant to it, however; a slant that hopefully would be enough to stop the SSRS from carrying out their plan.

My job was to keep an eye on the control room to see if anyone from the SSRS tried to switch the tribute films. If they did, I would then have to switch it with the new version George created. A courier service had delivered the DVD copy of George's film to my home earlier in the day, and right now it was tucked safely inside my tux jacket, patiently waiting for its moment in the sun.

George was taking a real risk by showing his modified version of the film tonight, particularly because the audience was to be filled with so many members of the SSCP. Members who might become confused or even upset by what the video contained. But George was convinced this was the only way to curtail Adam Wordon and the SSRS.

He was also convinced that I'd have to go to the ceremony in some kind of disguise. Masquerading as a waiter would help me keep a low profile, but I still had my facial features to contend with. I couldn't risk having any of the SSCP or SSRS recognize who I was or it could ruin everything.

I also couldn't let anyone see the horrible volcanic eruption taking over my left eye. The bruised skin where Brit had punched me was a colorful collection of purples and reds, with some yellows and greens thrown in for good measure. It wasn't a very appetizing sight, and certainly not something you'd want to look at while you were eating. (Unless you happened to be bulimic, in which case my sickening appearance might be very helpful.)

On our way home from Manhattan that afternoon, Celia and I had stopped at a local costume store and picked up a black eye patch to help hide the inflammation. I thought the patch made me look sort of debonair. Like a British spy. Or Moshe

Dayan. But then Celia insisted I also wear some kind of wig to further obscure my features, and that's when my outfit started losing credibility.

Celia settled on two different styles of hair: a black shaggy mop, reminiscent of the Beatles when they first came to America; and a long blonde shag that made me look like Shirley Jones on "The Partridge Family." We settled on the short mop. Though with the addition of the eye patch and the black tux, the combination made me look like a half-hearted Zorro.

"I look ridiculous," I said, as I examined my reflection in the mirror.

"You look fine," Celia assured me. "Just don't make eye contact with anyone."

"That won't be hard, considering I only have one eye."

"Maybe you should try walking with a limp, too" Celia suggested. "Or hunch over like you have osteoporosis."

"I don't think adding a limp or a hunch is going to make me inconspicuous. It might make me look like Quasimodo, but that's not really what we're going for, is it?"

"Okay, no limping. But try to avoid being seen by any of the SSCP. For this plan to work, they've got to be as surprised as everyone else."

When Celia and I were dressed and ready to go, we got in my PT Cruiser and headed back to the city. My stomach was doing flip-flops, because I knew a great deal of tonight's success depended on me. Not only that, but I would have to mingle with members of the SSCP without being recognized. Members of the SSCP that included some of the most famous and glamorous people in the world.

I felt my pants pockets to make sure I had my phone with me, just in case there was an emergency and I needed to contact George or Celia. I also happened to have Brit's phone on me as well, so I was doubly protected.

When we arrived at the Supper Club, I quickly separated from Celia and walked to the service entrance to assume my role as a waiter. I was to find Bert, the Captain of the catering team, and he would make sure I had total access to the venue.

As I entered the main room, I nearly ran into a guy who was practicing some ballet steps near the doorway. I asked him where the Head Captain was, and he pointed his outstretched toe toward a tall good-looking man of the Latin/Italian variety. I walked over to Bert and introduced myself, and after a brief conversation, we were soon off to the men's locker room to exchange my regular black tux jacket for the evening's special uniform--a red velvet waist coat overly adorned with fringe and gold buttons.

"They're hideous, aren't they?" Bert whispered. "I think they were rented from a touring company of *Hello, Dolly!*"

"I'm like one of those monkeys you might find with an organ grinder," I said, as I perused the outfit in a nearby mirror.

"Maybe you should work in the King Kong room then," Bert suggested. "You'll fit right in."

After changing my jacket, we were soon off on a quick tour of the premises. Bert was very polished and professional with a sarcastic sense of humor; I liked him immediately. He was also very good at filling me in on some interesting tidbits regarding the club's illustrious history.

"Here we have an old supply closet that was actually used as a temporary jail during the days of the Speakeasy. If someone didn't pay their tab, or got in some kind of trouble in the club, the bouncers would throw him in here until he sobered up."

"They threw people in a closet?"

"Not just any closet," Bert assured me. "It's sound-proof and can only be opened from the outside. So once you're in there, you're stuck."

"I know a lot of people who would love a closet like this. The Religious Right, for example."

Bert smiled, and led me down the hall to the kitchen, where there was a flurry of activity.

"So how do you know George Clooney?" Bert asked, as he popped a small crab cake from a nearby tray into his mouth.

"I don't really know him," I said honestly. "He's sort of a friend of a friend."

"And that's why he wants you to pose as a waiter tonight?"

Yikes. I hadn't anticipated answering any questions. How should I explain this one?

"Uh...Well...I'm sure you've heard how much George loves practical jokes. I'm part of a gag he's pulling on someone."

"Is that why you're wearing the eye patch?"

"No. Actually, the eye patch covers up a bruised eye."

"So then the wig must be part of the gag, right?"

"Is it that obvious?"

"Only to someone who knows anything about hair. Or synthetics."

"It's supposed to be a disguise."

"I've seen Oriental rugs that were less obvious."

"I'm glad you find this so amusing."

"Relax. Nobody's going to be looking at your hair. They'll be too intoxicated with the eye patch."

Bert was interrupted by a blond waitress, who needed his opinion on some final preparations for the evening. She looked at me for a brief moment, scanning the eye patch and hairpiece, and then looked away and sneezed. Or maybe she giggled, I'm not sure. Bert politely excused himself, and I was left to wander the club alone, keeping my one good eye open for anyone who might seem suspicious.

Without the use of my left eye, I only had a partial view of my surroundings. At any given moment, I could basically see half of anything in front of me, and some peripheral vision of what was to my right. But that's where it ended. Anything to the left of my vision was obscured in darkness. So someone could be standing right next to me and I wouldn't necessarily know it. Unless I turned my head of course, which I had to do on a rather frequent basis to make sure I wasn't missing anything.

Up in the King Kong room, the cocktail hour sounded like it was already in full force. The music and chatter seeped into the main room every time a waiter came through one of the connecting doors. I imagined that Celia was now mingling with all her friends and fellow SSCP members, and I wanted I could go in and watch the proceedings.

But tonight was not about me. I had to stay in the background, in the shadows if I could. And I was ONLY to contact Celia if there was an absolute emergency. Like if I suddenly lost the use of my other eye.

I kept myself busy by walking up and down the various levels of the venue, checking out the space. The other waiters must have been confused by my lackadaisical behavior, perhaps considering me flagrantly irresponsible. After all, I was dressed like a waiter, and I was reporting to Bert like a waiter, but I wasn't actually doing any waiter-like activities. I walked around, I sat down for a while, I drank some Perrier. But I didn't actually pick up a napkin or a glass, or help with any of the prep work or set-up.

To keep the other waiters from getting annoyed by my presence, I decided to plant myself on the mezzanine level to keep a close eye on the control booth. This was the area where the technical director of the show would be running cues for all the lights, sound and visuals. Including the aforementioned Tribute Video the SSRS planned to sabotage by replacing it with their own acidic version.

This was also the area the guests at the cocktail hour would spill into, once the King Kong room became too crowded. There was a separate bar set up in one corner to accommodate the overflow.

"Excuse me, Waiter?" a male voice said somewhere to my left.

I whirled around to find myself face to face with Paul, the evil realtor from Plainfield and member of the SSRS. The sudden realization that I was facing a known enemy caused me to go into my *Disguise Mode*, which is a combination of improvisation and character work, neither of which I was particularly good at.

But I couldn't let Paul know who I was, so I instinctively hunched over as Celia suggested earlier, and for some reason adopted a slight English accent reminiscent of Marty Feldman in the movie "*Young Frankenstein*." Why I did this, I don't know. But I panicked, and so this was the first thing that came to mind.

"Yes, what can I do for you, Gov'ner?" I said in my best cockney. (Which, as you can imagine, was quite cartoonish.)

"Oh...I...uh..." Paul stammered, no doubt taken aback by my strange appearance and odd mannerisms. "I was looking for the bathroom."

"Down the hall and to your left, Mate."

"Thank you...Mate," Paul said, turning away quickly.

I watched as he walked down the hallway to the bathroom area. Before he turned into it, he looked back at me. Or was he looking at the control booth? Maybe Paul was the member of the SSRS responsible for switching the tribute videos. And maybe this is when he planned to do it. If that were the case, it would be my pleasure to screw it up for him.

I decided to hide myself from view so I wouldn't stop Paul from carrying out his task. In the corner, I noticed a doorway partly obscured by a set of curtains. I hid behind the curtains and peeked out through a small opening. It was wide enough for me to see out, without anyone seeing in. After several minutes, Paul emerged from the bathroom and walked slowly down the balcony to the control booth area. He kept darting his head around to make sure no one was watching, and then quickly turned the knob of the control room door.

"Hey, that's private," said a scraggly looking man coming up the staircase. The man was dressed in black and wearing a baseball cap, which I assumed must be the official uniform of the technically savvy.

"For Supper Club employees only," the man continued, chomping on a large piece of Chicken Satay. "Can I help you with something?"

Paul flinched. This was not going to be as easy as he thought.

"I was wondering about the video portion of this evening," Paul began. "I'm on the committee, and I wanted to make sure the Tribute Film is all set to play."

"Nope. Haven't gotten it yet," the scraggly man said, opening the control room door. "So you'd better tell your committee to get the DVD here ASAP."

"Right, right." Paul said, backing up. "I'll do that right away."

The scraggly man turned and entered the control room, shutting the door in Paul's face. I almost laughed, as I imagined what Paul must be thinking at that moment. If the DVD wasn't there yet, he couldn't make the switch. His plan had been foiled, at least for the time being. Unfortunately, if he couldn't make the switch, than neither could I. We were both currently at an impasse.

I watched as Paul went back to the cocktail party in the King Kong room, and then removed myself from hiding.

"So that's where you are," Bert said, appearing out of nowhere. "Is this part of your gag, to skulk about in dark corners and scare people?"

"No. Not really. I was just...getting into character."

"Interesting," Bert said, without the slightest hint of amusement. "Listen, I hate to impose on you, but some of the wait staff is getting a little suspicious about your inactivity. Rather than explaining to everyone why you're actually here, would you mind folding some napkins to keep up the charade?"

"No problem. As long as I can do it from up here."

Bert agreed and set me up at a small table on the other side of the balcony. From this vantage point, I had a clear view of anyone entering the second level, while still being far enough away not to draw attention to myself. Bert quickly showed me how to fold the napkins properly, and then left to presumably take care of more important matters.

I watched the scruffy looking technician fiddling around in the control booth. He appeared to be talking to himself, but I couldn't hear what he was saying through the glass window. I guess the control booth must have been sound proof as well.

I unconsciously padded my coat pocket where I'd put the DVD earlier, and was somewhat surprised when I didn't immediately feel it. Surprise turned to anxiety when I reached into the pocket and found it empty. Until I realized why it was missing. I'd forgotten to take the DVD out of my regular tux jacket when I'd exchanged it for this special red and gold version. No big deal. I'd just have to go back and get it.

Without finishing my folding, I hurried back to the locker room where I'd left the other jacket. Only it wasn't hanging on the rack anymore. In fact, none of the clothes on that rack were anywhere to be seen. In a panic, I began running around the locker room, opening every locker and bag I could find. But my tux jacket was nowhere to be found.

I quickly spotted Bert on the main floor, and ran over to him.

"I can't find my tux jacket," I practically screamed. "The one I came in with. It's not in the locker room."

"Are you sure?" Bert asked gently. "Where did you hang it?"

"I hung it on the clothes rack with the other tux jackets. It has a very important DVD in it."

"Oh." Bert said simply. "I'm afraid we might have a problem then."

"Why is that?"

"Because that clothes rack was put on a laundry truck twenty minutes ago. It's probably halfway to Newark by now."

Next Episode: Attack of the Feathered Feline

Only Five Chapters Left!