

Chapter Forty—A Major Disaster

“I’m waiting,” Adam said, as he cocked the trigger of the gun.

To say I was scared would not accurately describe my state of mind at that moment. There were so many thoughts running through my head that I was having a hard time focusing on an answer to Adam’s question. Why had I switched the DVDs? What possible explanation could I give him that might seem plausible?

“You’re not going to shoot me,” I said, changing the topic and displaying a sense of courage I’d never had before. “Because everyone would hear the noise. And then you’d never get to show your precious movie.”

Adam reached into his pocket and pulled out a silencer, which he effortlessly attached to the end of the gun. When he was finished, he smiled and pointed the gun back at my chest.

“I’m afraid I’ve thought of everything,” he said smugly.

What a Prick!

“So now you’re going to add murder to your growing list of offenses? Getting revenge against George Clooney isn’t enough for you any more?”

Adam seemed confused by my questions, which meant I temporarily had the upper hand. If I could just keep him distracted until the technician came back, maybe I could figure out a way to get myself out of this.

“I know about the SSRS and what you’re planning to do here this evening,” I said, boldly.

“What? How could you?” Adam asked shakily. He was starting to lose some of his fire.

“I can’t believe you’d want to destroy the very man who tried to help you. What possible satisfaction can you get from exposing the SSCP?”

“SHUT UP!” Adam screamed at me. “I don’t know what kind of game you’re playing, but you have no idea what I’m capable of.”

“Yes I do. Attempted kidnapping, assault and battery, breaking and entering, robbery, malicious slander...The list goes on and on.”

“How do you know all this?”

At that moment, all the lights in the club suddenly popped back on. The technician must have found the wall socket I'd pulled the plug from, which meant he'd be back in the booth any second now.

"I'll give you one more chance," Adam said, as he crouched below the lighting board to hide himself from being seen from the control room window. "How do you know about the SSRS?"

Adam didn't get to finish the sentence; because the control room door suddenly swung inward with so much force, it knocked him off his feet.

"What the--?" the technician blurted, before noticing Adam scrambling on the floor in front of him. "What are you doing in here?"

The technician was only halfway through the door when Adam jumped up, grabbed his arm and pulled him forcibly into the booth. Then with a swift kick of his foot, Adam slammed the door shut, and adjusted his position so he was now pointing his gun at both of us.

"Make an announcement!" Adam spit at the technician. "Apologize for the temporary lighting mishap and let people know the presentation is about to begin."

"Who ARE you?" the technician asked, looking at me for some kind of explanation.

"DO IT!" Adam screamed, kicking a nearby chair to emphasize his anger. "And if you call out for help, or give any indication you're in trouble, I'll shoot the fat off your body faster than liposuction."

The technician was visibly shaking, and for the first time I actually felt sorry for him. His attitude earlier had been one of arrogance and self-importance, but now I could see that he was genuinely terrified.

However, the technician's fear did not stop him from putting his best foot forward when it came to making the announcement. Once again he sounded much different when speaking over the loudspeaker than he did in person. His polished and professional announcer voice was a sharp contrast to the slovenly body it inhabited.

I looked out the control booth window just in time to see Rick walking by. He was wearing one of the waiter uniforms, which perhaps fit him better than it should. He didn't notice me as he passed, because it probably never occurred to him to look up. Being elevated, the booth window was higher than his normal line of vision.

"Give the geek the DVD," Adam shouted at me. "Now!"

I did as I was told and handed the technician the DVD I'd swiped earlier from the player. This was definitely not turning out as I planned. But with a gun pointed at me, there was not much else I could do.

Adam instructed the technician to remove the current DVD from the player and replace it with the one I'd just given him. As soon as the tech removed George's DVD, Adam snatched it out of his hand.

"I can't imagine what this might be," Adam said, examining the DVD closely. "But I'm sure it will make excellent late night viewing."

Adam stuffed the DVD into an inside jacket pocket. Perhaps the same pocket he'd recently pulled the gun out of. I couldn't believe what was happening. I had one little task to complete, and I'd totally blown it. Adam was going to get his ultimate revenge, and it was all my fault. I'd let everyone down. Celia. Unity. George. Julia. Myself.

I looked around for something that might give me a way out, when I noticed Rick walking back toward the booth. *Please look up at me, please look up at me!* I practically willed my thoughts into Rick's mind, hoping that any latent psychic power I might have would surely come forth this evening.

Adam was watching me closely, so I couldn't really signal Rick or knock on the glass to get his attention. And even if he looked up at me, what could I really do? Adam would surely notice if I tried mouthing the word "HELP," or sent smoke signals using the fog machine. And at this point, who knew what Adam was capable of. He was crazy, that much was clear. And crazy people with guns are never a good combination at parties. Or anywhere, for that matter.

"Just go about your normal business," Adam said to the technician. "As long as you run the show exactly as planned, you won't get hurt. But screw up even once, and I start shooting the fat. Literally. Got it?"

The technician nodded, and sat down in front of the control board. He put on a pair of headsets, and adjusted the mic.

"I'll be listening to every cue you call," Adam warned. "So don't try anything brave."

The technician began to nervously call the pre-show cues, announcing to the participants in the Green Room that the show was about to begin.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Rick stop moving. He was looking up at me and smiling. He waved, but I couldn't wave back. I couldn't even smile, because Adam was still staring in my direction. This was my one chance to do something, but what?

Then an idea hit me. Last night when Rick, Celia and I went to investigate the SSCP house, Rick taught us a few hand signals to use in place of speaking. And though we'd

never had the occasion to use them last night, I just might be able to take advantage of the signals right now.

So without calling attention to myself, I brought both my arms up and crossed them in front of me like I was bound at the wrists. This was Rick's signal for needing help.

"What are you doing?" Adam screamed at me.

"Nothing," I said. "I just needed to scratch my chest."

I put my arms down, but I wasn't sure they'd been in place long enough for Rick to understand. I glanced out the window to see if he'd caught the signal, but he was nowhere in sight. Perhaps he thought I was snubbing him because I hadn't smiled back, or maybe he thought I was too busy to talk right now. Either way, my one hope for rescue was gone.

And now that Adam was confident the technician wasn't going to give him any trouble, he once again directed his anger towards me.

"I asked you a question before," Adam said, "How do you know so much about the SSRS?"

There was only one way to answer this.

"Because..." I said, before ripping off my eye patch and wig. "I'm one of your biggest targets."

"YOU?!?!?"

As I expected, my presence had an immediate affect on Adam. He appeared quite disoriented for a few moments, as if he'd just had the wind knocked out of him. This was possibly my only opportunity to overpower him, no matter what happened to me.

So with a burst of adrenaline, I grabbed a large flashlight off the control board and threw it as hard as I could at Adam's face. He easily deflected the attack with his upraised arm, sending the flying flashlight slightly off-course from its original target. Unfortunately, this was the same moment Rick chose to come barging in the control room, just in time to have the flashlight hit him squarely in the forehead.

"Rick!" I screamed, as I watched him fall back into the wall.

The suddenness of the intrusion caused Adam to point his gun at Rick momentarily, which was all the time I needed to take action. I wasn't about to let Adam shoot Rick or injure him any further. Not my man!

So without thinking of my own safety, I ran past the technician and tackled Adam, throwing us both to the floor. His head hit the back wall with a thud, and I in turn fell on top of him, my left elbow smashing into the control board on my way down.

After we hit the floor, it took a few moments to realize that Adam had been knocked out. I grabbed the gun out of his hand and began wielding it around wildly. Not intentionally; I was just shaky and couldn't really see what I was doing. I did, however, see the technician staring at me in fear, possibly wondering if I about to attack him as well.

"Henson!" I heard Rick say gently at my side. "Take it easy with the gun."

I turned to look at Rick, who appeared to have recovered from his run-in with the flashlight. I could already see a swelling where the heavy object hit him. Poor Rick! He'd already suffered so much because of me. What more could I possibly do to ruin our burgeoning relationship?

I handed Rick the gun, and got back on my feet.

"You'd better start the show," I said to the technician. He didn't need to be told twice. Within moments, he was calling the final cues and dimming the house lights for the presentation.

"Thank you," I said turning to Rick. "You really are my Knight in Shining Armor."

"Especially in this get-up," Rick said, referring to the many gold tassels and buttons on our uniforms.

"Ladies and Gentlemen," the technician announced over the speakers. "Please welcome to the stage, our host for this evening, Mr. Jon Stewart."

As the late night host of Comedy Central's *The Daily Show* walked on stage, a burst of applause erupted from the audience. Under normal circumstances, I would have been totally captivated by Jon Stewart's presence. I loved *The Daily Show*, and watched it every night before going to sleep. But tonight, I couldn't even look at him. There was still too much that needed to be done, including getting George's DVD back into the player.

So as Jon began his introductory speech, I opened Adam's jacket to retrieve the DVD. But as soon as my hand hit the shiny surface, I knew I was in trouble. The DVD was still there, all right. Only now it happened to be in several pieces. The fall must have somehow cracked the disk.

I was dumbstruck. After all that trouble, the DVD was useless. And right now, I felt pretty useless as well. My only task this evening was to make sure a DVD got into a DVD player. So simple even a moron could do it. And yet all the obstacles I'd experienced trying to achieve that goal made me wonder if the cards had been stacked

against me from the very beginning. Because no matter how I looked at it, there was no way I could materialize a new DVD out of thin air.

I'd failed my assignment. George would soon be on stage asking for his special film to be played, and all he'd get would be a blank screen.

It made me sick to think about how much I'd let everyone down. And how much I'd put Rick through just to make sure I could carry out this simple little task. All for naught. All that unnecessary energy wasted. All those fights and bruises were now pointless. In one careless and impulsive moment, my actions had totally negated everything I'd been through over the last week. Perhaps even over the last year. What would the SSCP think of me now?

I was so overwhelmed by the gravity of my failure, and the disappointment I would surely cause George, Unity and Celia, I took the only course available to me. I leaned back against the wall and began to cry.

Next Episode—A Troubled Tribute

Only Three Chapters Left!