

Chapter Forty-Three—A Shocking Conclusion

The next few pages are going to sound totally implausible, but bear with me. You've come this far on my preposterous journey, so why not go all the way, right? Besides, this is really what happened, despite what you may think.

Adam Wordon, founder of the SSRS and sworn enemy of the SSCP, was standing behind the podium preparing to respond to George's presentation. His forehead was covered with perspiration, and long lines of sweat were pouring down the sides of his face. He stared at the audience with a strange macabre smile, as if he were channeling Jack Nicholson as *The Joker*. Or Jack Nicholson in *The Shining*. Or Jack Nicholson as Jack Nicholson.

His eerie demeanor was further enhanced by the presence of a slight twitch, which sent sweat flying in all directions whenever it occurred. And he was mumbling, too. At least that's what it looked like from where I was standing, though I certainly couldn't hear what he was saying. Not until he finally leaned forward and practically yelled into the microphone.

"I'd like to say..." Adam began, his scratchy voice quickly turning into a cough.

He stopped speaking for a moment to clear his throat, and I could hear whispering in the audience. Guests were beginning to get restless, and who could blame them? George's presentation had totally sidetracked the purpose of the event, and now a demented looking electrician with a serious case of "sweat, mumble and twitch" was stretching it out even longer.

Adam stepped closer to the podium so he could adjust the microphone. I'm not sure why he did this exactly, because the mic didn't need adjusting. It was the kind that's already attached to the podium, so all you have to do is speak and your voice can easily be heard.

Be that as it may, he felt the need to adjust it, and that's when the unbelievable part comes in. Because as soon as Adam grabbed the metal neck of the mic, his body started twitching more than normal. His eyes bulged out in an expression of confusion, and he began to mumble again.

George, Celia and me all exchanged glances, though none of us were really clear as to what was happening. True, Adam looked a little stunned, but that could easily be attributed to nerves. It was only after fifteen or twenty seconds, when he suddenly fell over on the floor, that anyone realized how *shocked* he actually was.

Adam's fall was followed by a collective gasp from the audience, no doubt wondering whether this was an intentional part of George's strange presentation or not. It wasn't

until a pair of EMT workers rushed on stage that the seriousness of the situation became apparent to everyone. This was definitely not part of the act.

While Adam was being examined by the EMT workers, George tried to keep control of the proceedings by adlibbing some kind of explanation for what was going on. He had to do this without the use of a Mic, however, as the technician had cut all power to the podium immediately after Adam fell over. (Probably sensing there was some sort of connection between Adam's peculiar pulsations and the podium's concurrent power surge.)

After a few minutes, the EMT workers carried Adam's limp and lifeless body offstage on a stretcher. A male Production Assistant then handed George a wireless mic, disconnected the podium and quickly rolled it off stage, allowing the presentation to finally continue as originally scheduled. Unfortunately, Rick and I didn't get to watch the rest of the evening's ceremony as we were backstage with Bert waiting for the ambulance to arrive.

"Is he going to be okay?" I asked Rick, after he talked briefly with the EMT workers.

"Hard to know," Rick answered. "Right now he's stable, but they're still not clear what's wrong with him. They think the podium might have somehow electrocuted him."

"You mean he was *fried*?" Bert blurted out. "Oh geez, I'd better tell the Chef not to serve *Bananas Flambee* for dessert. The fiery presentation would probably not be in the best of taste."

As Bert disappeared for a few moments, I turned my attention to Rick.

"What do you think Adam was planning to say?" I asked. "Did he give you any sort of indication while he was in the booth?"

"He never spoke to me," Rick responded. "But he did seem to be in a very weird place mentally. And when Celia asked me to bring him backstage, he didn't even protest. It was like he'd resigned himself to whatever was about to happen."

"So this still isn't over! After all the angst and trouble trying to make sure tonight went like clockwork, we still don't have any closure! I mean, what if Adam decides to talk in the ambulance? Or in the hospital? How can we prevent that from happening?"

"You can't. But I don't think Adam's going to be talking any time soon. He's almost comatose at the moment."

"Just my luck."

“This is the most bizarre event I’ve ever worked on,” Bert exclaimed, as he rejoined our group. “And I’d never have guessed this Adam guy was such a generous person. When I saw him earlier in the evening, he acted like such an arrogant ass.”

“Looks can be deceiving,” I surmised.”

“I’ll say,” Bert said, turning to Rick. “I thought your boyfriend here was going to be part of some awful prank. But then he turns out to be a beneficiary of some secret philanthropic organization. I mean, how cool is that?”

“Yeah, I’m just full of surprises.”

“And what about Lacie Fromage? Was she part of the act as well?”

“No, she was one of the surprises.”

“Very bizarre,” Bert said, before murmuring something else that was barely audible.

And even though I couldn’t hear the exact words Bert whispered, there was something about the sing-songy nature of his delivery that struck a chord with me.

“What did you just say?” I asked.

“What? You mean *very bizarre*?”

“No, the other part. What you whispered under your breath.”

“Oh,” Bert laughed. “It was an expression my sister always used. *This would never happen in Cuba*. Not that she would know, really, ‘cause she’s never actually been there.”

Okay, this was too much of a coincidence, right? Maybe that phrase is used more commonly than I thought.

“Is Bert your given name?” I asked quickly. “Or is it short for something else? Like Humberto, maybe?”

Bert looked at me with a shocked expression on his face.

“Yes,” he said, starting to look visibly nervous. “I never go by Humberto though. How could you possibly know that?”

“And do you have a sister named Ramona who lives in Plainfield?”

“Are you a psychic?” Bert asked, astonished. “Or a witch of some kind?”

“Hardly. I just happen to live next door to Ramona and she always talks about her brother Humberto. So when you said her famous line about Cuba, I put two and two together.”

“You know Ramona?” Bert asked with wide eyes.

This launched us into a fifteen-minute discussion about his sister, which Rick graciously stood by and listened to. I was happy to hear how excited Bert was to talk about Ramona. Apparently he’d missed her just as much as she’d missed him, but their damn Cuban pride had kept them from contacting each other. (*His words, not mine.*)

“I know she’d love to see you,” I said. “I think I’ve been a poor substitute for her *real* brother, although I did manage to educate her on a few things. Well, me and the World Wide Web.”

By that time the ambulance arrived to take Adam’s body to the local hospital, many of the guests had already begun filtering out of the main room. The SSRS table was now completely empty. In truth, they were the first ones to leave, perhaps interpreting Adam’s accident as a clear signal that tonight’s scheduled operation was over.

Once the ambulance left, Bert excused himself and went back to his many Captain duties, leaving Rick and me alone once again.

“What’s wrong?” Rick asked, after Bert left. “You don’t look very happy.”

“I’m not,” I said, half-smiling. “It’s like we’ve won the battle, but the war still isn’t over.”

“What war? What are you talking about?”

“Nothing. Come on, there’s some people I want you to meet.”

The rest of the evening was spent mingling with a number of celebrities, many of whom were still confused as to why I was being represented as a protégée of the SSRS. Not that it mattered. They still came up and talked to me, asking me different questions about my life and what I liked to do.

At one point, when Rick and I were talking to Celia, Julia Roberts pulled me aside for a private tête-à-tête.

“So are you really happy I got you involved in all this?” Julia asked, her smile threatening to take over her entire face.

“Yes,” I answered without hesitation. “But what about Adam? And the SSRS? What do you think they’ll do now?”

“I have no idea,” Julia said, a twinkle in her eye. “But I wouldn’t worry about it . This is your night. Just enjoy yourself.”

“I am. Or at least I’m trying. This whole experience over the past year has definitely reinvigorated something in me. Even with all the craziness, I have a much more positive outlook on life now.”

“I’m glad to hear that. It means my instincts about you were correct.”

“I must admit, I’ve always been curious as to why you picked me. Out of all the people you come across on a daily basis, why me?”

Julia took a deep breath before answering.

“When I first saw you in that meeting at the Ad Firm, there was just something about your presence that intrigued me. You didn’t seem to fit in with the rest of the group. And I mean that in a good way. But then you didn’t speak. I wanted to know why.”

“It was forbidden. Which is why I was promptly fired after you left.”

“You were fired because you spoke to me?”

“Partly. But I think the real reason was all the negative stuff I said about their campaign idea. Apparently those kinds of comments didn’t make me a very good *team player*.”

“That was brilliant,” Julia laughed. “You summed up exactly what I was thinking. I knew right then you’d make a great candidate for the *Chosen* program.”

“It’s still hard to believe my whole experience with the SSCP actually started on the day I got fired. I thought it was the worst day of my life. But in retrospect, I guess it really marked the beginning of something much bigger. Because now I finally have a place where I fit in. And a group of people I really care about. And it’s all because of you.”

Without thinking, I leaned over and hugged Julia. To my relief, she actually hugged back. A warm affectionate squeeze from America’s Sweetheart. Life was good.

I then introduced Julia to Rick, and the three of us talked for another fifteen minutes before a very giddy Cameron Diaz whisked Julia away to another group. Celia then continued to introduce both of us to various members of the Hollywood elite, including Ellen and Portia, who acted like we were already old friends.

I also got a chance to have a very pleasant conversation with Miss Oprah Winfrey. She was sitting at the same table as Unity, who gave me an extremely affectionate hug when I finally got over to her.

“You were wonderful, Henson,” Unity gushed. “Very eloquent. And tonight, I think your voice was as strong as I’ve ever heard it.”

I wasn’t sure whether Unity was referring to my actual speaking voice, or to my “inner voice” that influences everything I think and feel. All I knew was that she was proud of me and considered me a success story for the SSCP. I guess I was finally beginning to live up to my potential.

And that’s pretty much how the evening went. Of course, there’s so much more I could tell you about all the famous people I met, and all the amazing conversations we had. But then I’d sound like I was boasting, and I certainly don’t want to bore you with that. So I’ll just sum up the rest of the night by saying it was the most memorable and thrilling event of my life, and an experience that will never be repeated.

And somewhere among all the excitement, Rick and I shared a warm and intimate kiss that told me everything was going to be okay. And you know what? For the first time, I felt it actually was.

As for Adam, his future was sealed the moment he touched the microphone to speak. For as you know, before he came to the stage Adam had spent the previous twenty minutes or so wrapped in duct tape and rope. This made his arms and hands especially moist, which under normal circumstances would be perfectly fine. But apparently the wiring in this particular microphone was having “issues.” So when Adam touched the mic with his clammy hands, he actually sent a bolt of pure electricity throughout his entire body.

The coroner would later reveal that Adam’s comatose state was the result of a massive heart attack, brought about by a history of high blood pressure and bad dietary habits. The shock from the microphone was also a contributing factor, though it only served to exacerbate the inevitable. Adam was a ticking time bomb. And apparently he knew it too, which is why he was so keen to launch “Celebrity Outings” before his time expired. He wanted it to become his legacy.

And now, in an ironic twist of fate, he was in a coma and George’s vision of the SSRS would serve as his defining achievement. A false epithet, to be sure. But he wouldn’t be the first person in entertainment to get credit for someone else’s work. Remember Milli Vanilli? Or most of the Partridge Family kids?

For a short period of time after the event, I was considered a “suspicious character” in the investigation of Adam’s electrocution. Apparently the microphone that contributed to Adam’s demise was not having “issues” until after I’d purposely pulled the electrical plug out of its socket. The resulting power surge set off a series of technical events that somehow affected the wiring in the podium’s microphone. Rick tried to explain it all to me, but I don’t have a lot of retention when it comes to technical jargon.

I was eventually cleared, of course. But the whole investigation made me feel somewhat responsible for Adam's passing, even if it was all a terrible accident. Like Dorothy Gale, whose house inadvertently landed on the Wicked Witch of the East, my accidental contribution to Adam's termination was a strange pill to swallow.

As for some of the other characters in my sordid little tale, not everything went so smoothly with the SSRS transition. Some of the disgruntled members did make attempts to extort money from George, though none of them had enough hutzpah to go the distance. Once George called in his lawyers, they usually dropped their threats pretty quickly.

They also dropped any involvement with the SSRS. Without Adam's presence, the group eventually disbanded and the old version of the SSRS website was never seen again. George figured out a way to point the URL for the group's original website to his newly updated version. So not only would the group not be able to access the old site, but my famous Jacuzzi footage was finally off the Internet for anyone to view. (The SSCP kindly took it off their site as well.)

Brit was charged with several counts of assault, as well as breaking and entering, burglary, attempted murder and several other crimes. He was sentenced to seven years in a maximum-security prison, where he is now the star of a new type of *reality show* called "You're My Bitch!"

Paul the realtor, also known as *Purgatory Paul*, was not charged with any kind of crime related to the SSRS. However, his Realty business took a nosedive after he was caught stealing some priceless antiques from one of his rental properties. The subsequent investigation revealed this wasn't the first time Paul had lifted a client's possessions. So after his forthcoming trial, he may also be joining Brit on "You're My Bitch!" And this is one reality show neither of them is likely to come out a winner.

Lacie Fromage has not been heard from since the night of her now famous tar and feathering. The video clip showing Celia pouring the Chocolate Fountain all over Lacie's feather dress was YouTube's "Most Downloaded Video" two months in a row. I guess for an aging beauty queen, that kind of public humiliation is a little too much to bear.

Ironically, Celia is more popular than ever and even earned the respect of some prominent studio heads because of that stunt. She is now one of the hottest actresses in Hollywood, with the envied position of having first refusal on a number of A-List film properties. And because of her request, most of them are comedies.

Ramona and her brother Humberto had a very happy reunion, although she still refuses to call him *Bert*. "It just doesn't sound right," she'd say, as Bert would roll his eyes. They may not agree on everything, but at least they're speaking again. And sometimes, I can even hear their passionate conversations all the way over at my house. (Currently,

Ramona is also the Vice President at a local chapter of P-FLAG, though I'm sure she intends to run for the Presidential position the next time an Election Day rolls around.)

My friend Patty from the post office still entertains me with her countless tales of the Internet, and has even started her own blog called "What's Out There?" which gives weekly summaries of everything she's discovered on her various surfing adventures. (Not surprisingly, Ramona is one of her most avid readers.)

And as for Rick and me, we're doing great. He's helped me tremendously around the house, patching up walls and fixing my plumbing issues. (No pun intended.) We've also done a lot of painting, and the inside of the house is now very colorful. Like living in a big cartoon. I love it!

On weekends, we hang out with Bob and Barney or some of Rick's friends. JezeBall, Unity, and the Two Jakes sometimes join us, and we all have a great time together. It's nice to have this kind of extended family.

Celia visits whenever she's in town, which is at least every other month. And of course we keep in contact by phone and e-mail. She's like the little sister I never had, and I am forever happy I know her.

All in all, my experience with the SSCP definitely changed my life. Not because of all the wonderful things they did for me; but because they helped me find something I thought I'd lost a long time ago—ME. And for that, I will always be grateful.

(As I was writing this final page in my journal, Celia called me from Los Angeles. She and George had been talking and they wanted to know if I could help them out again. Apparently there was some kind of problem with the SSCP operation in London, and she wanted to know if I could fly over with her to investigate? The word "YES" didn't come out of my mouth fast enough.)

But first, I want to close out this chapter of my life before I begin a new adventure. And so we come to the end of my tale, a year in the life of an SSCP Chosen. At this point, you may be wondering why I'm allowed to tell this story if the SSCP is still supposed to be a secret. Why would George and Julia and Celia allow such an obvious breach of their code of silence? Well, as Unity always told me:

"Somewhere between experience and imagination is a really good story."

And so I'll leave you with that. My story is unbelievable, I know. And though I may not fully understand everything that happened to me over the last year or so, one thing is certain. *It Happened in Plainfield.*

The End

Note from Author: I want to thank everyone who took the time to read this story. I truly appreciate your support for my work. Please take a moment to let me know what you thought about the story, the characters, and how it all played out. You may either sign my Guestbook (*link at bottom left on website*), or send an e-mail to comments@ithappenedinplainfield.com Either way, I'd love to know what you think.

Also, if you'd like to be informed about my future writing projects, please send your e-mail address to comments@ithappenedinplainfield.com

Thanks again. And don't forget. Henson lives on in his blog "Henson's Hell," which can be accessed at <http://www.hensonshell.blogspot.com>