



Fairy Tale Interrupted: A Memoir of Life, Love, and Loss

By RoseMarie Terenzio

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Don't miss the *New York Times* bestselling, behind-the-scenes story of an unlikely friendship between America's favorite First Son, John F. Kennedy Jr. and his personal assistant, a blue-collar girl from the Bronx. Featured in the documentary *I Am JFK Jr.!*

From the moment RoseMarie Terenzio unleashed her Italian temper on the entitled nuisance commandeering her office in a downtown New York PR firm, an unlikely friendship bloomed between the blue-collar girl from the Bronx and John F. Kennedy Jr.

Many books have sought to capture John F. Kennedy Jr.'s life. None has been as intimate or as honest as *Fairy Tale Interrupted*. Recalling the adventure of working as his executive assistant for five years, RoseMarie portrays the man behind the icon—patient, protective, surprisingly goofy, occasionally thoughtless and self-involved, yet capable of extraordinary generosity and kindness. She reveals how he dealt with dating, politics, and the paparazzi, and describes life behind the scenes at *George* magazine. Captured here are her memories of Carolyn Bessette, how she orchestrated the ultra-secretive planning of John and Carolyn's wedding on Cumberland Island—and the heartbreak of their deaths on July 16, 1999, after which RoseMarie's whole world came crashing down around her. Only now does she feel she can tell her story in a book that stands as “a fitting personal tribute to a unique boss . . . deliriously fun and entertaining” (*Kirkus Reviews*).

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Editorial Review

Review

“A window into the time a president’s son tried to make it in New York publishing, in the final giddy years before the Internet changed everything.”

—*The Washington Post*

“Terenzio doesn’t dwell any longer than necessary on Kennedy’s death . . . but she was in his apartment that night and has a story to tell.”

—*The Boston Globe*

“Amazing revelations. . . . *Working Girl* meets *What Remains* in this behind-the-scenes story.”

—*Good Reads*

“No one is better at observing the affairs of a magazine than the boss’s assistant: with *sprezzatura* to spare, Terenzio delivers tantalizing accounts of staff cattiness and celebrity dealings. . . . A case study of the fascinating relationship between the often unsentimental executive who requests the impossible and the loyal, fiercely protective assistant.”

—*Macleans*

“Candid. . . . Terenzio deftly reconstructs the wonderfully addictive yet strange and high-pressure world in which she worked. . . . She chronicles her time with Kennedy within the glorious but often brutal bubble that encircled his world, and what he taught her about living.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“A memoir of the late nineties, and an era gone by. . . . A suitably emotional ending, an up-close-and-personal account.”

—*Celebrity Books*

“*Fairy Tale Interrupted* joins a long list of books about one of America’s most tragic families. It’s probably one of the most personal and heartfelt narratives. . . . It makes Kennedy more human and shows a lovable side that should be regarded as sweet tribute to his memory.”

—*Austin American-Statesman*

“Captivating . . . told with style and grace.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

About the Author

RoseMarie Terenzio was John F. Kennedy Jr.’s executive assistant from 1994 until his death in 1999. The founder of RMT PR Management, a public relations and talent management firm in New York City, she

served on the board of Reaching Up, a nonprofit organization founded by John F. Kennedy Jr. in 1998. Visit her websites: FairyTaleInterrupted.com and RMTPRManagement.com.

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Fairy Tale Interrupted

CHAPTER

1

Two types of people exist in this world: those who are obsessed with the Kennedys and those who aren't. My big Italian family from the Bronx sat squarely in the latter camp. My dad, a staunch Republican, had no patience for the family synonymous with the Democratic Party. And my mom was too busy to care about politics on any side of the aisle at all.

Obviously, I understood why it created a major stir when John F. Kennedy Jr. first started calling the offices of the Manhattan public relations firm where I worked, PR/NY, but it didn't give me the same thrill as it did Liz, the office manager, and Tricia, the receptionist, who would giggle and exchange meaningful glances whenever he was on the line. To me John was just a political type; I would have been more interested in meeting his celebrity girlfriend Daryl Hannah.

It was funny to see Liz and Tricia get excited about anything. The two pretty hipsters shared a blasé attitude toward most aspects of life, including work. But I saw a hint of triumph on the face of whoever got to shout "John's on the phone" to Michael Berman, cofounder of the firm and the man who gave me the best job I'd ever had.

Michael started PR/NY after convincing his partner, Will Steere—whom he met while both were at the big international PR firm Burson-Marsteller—to take a chunk of Burson's business and go out on their own. During my interview in the office, decorated with that brand of sleek minimalism that makes you feel fat and poor, I thought, I'm definitely not sophisticated enough for this. But Michael was able to get past my outer-borough accent—and my outfit, a red pleated skirt and black-and-white polka-dot blouse that made me look as if someone threw me into a sales rack at Strawberry, spun me around, and set me loose.

Working at PR/NY was so different from my last job as a junior-level publicist at a midtown PR company that mainly worked with book publishers, where our offices were small and dingy and the big perk was getting to charge ten dollars a week at the local deli. Will and Michael, meanwhile, were young, rich, and good-looking.

Michael, in his jeans, nice shirts, and ever-present tan, ate at Nobu, ran with a celebrity crowd, and dated a well-known interior decorator. Michael could talk to anyone about anything, and he drove the business aspect of PR/NY because he was great at strategy. I worked harder than anyone else in the office to prove to him that I belonged there, that he hadn't made a mistake in taking a chance on me. If Will needed me to run an errand, I was on it. When Michael told me to revise a press release twenty times, I did it without attitude.

So when JFK Jr. called the office, to me it was no different from Christopher Reeve or any other celebrity calling for Michael. Other than enjoying watching Liz and Tricia get silly at the sound of his voice, I didn't give him much thought until the day he unexpectedly arrived at PR/NY.

Without knowing who was waiting, I buzzed him in, as I always did when someone rang the bell, and

punched in the code to open the door. But as I tugged on the handle, he was pulling on the other side, so neither of us could open it. We both released the door, and I reentered the code, then stood back and waited for the person to open the door. Nothing. Oh God, I thought. This isn't that complicated. I punched in the code one more time and pulled, just as he decided to pull yet again.

"You have to let go of the knob," I said, getting more frustrated.

"Sorry," came the muted reply.

Once again I entered the code and was finally able to open the door, discovering to my horror that I had just snapped at John F. Kennedy Jr.

"Hi," he said casually.

"Hi."

He was much better looking in person than in any photograph of him I'd ever seen—and he didn't exactly photograph poorly. Wearing a court-jester-type knit hat, John was accompanied by a large, drooling German shepherd that looked sad and not too friendly.

"Is Michael here?" John asked. Although I felt like dying, I pulled myself together and walked John inside. The previous summer, John had left the assistant district attorney position he'd held for four years, and he first started coming into the PR/NY office about once a week, and then every other day, sometimes more. By the spring of 1994, it was as if he and his slightly demented rescue dog, Sam, worked at PR/NY—only none of the staff, except for Michael, knew what he was doing there. Even Will had no idea. But you didn't ask Michael anything, even if you co-owned the company. Discretion was his stock-in-trade.

Will was a dyed-in-the-wool Republican raised in the wealthy Connecticut town of Darien, and every day he wore a perfect suit and a different Hermès tie, which stood out against the low-key vibe in the office. One of my first days on the job, I asked him if he had an important client meeting. He looked at me like he didn't understand the question, as if that were the only proper way to dress.

Will seemed to feel it was his political duty to get a rise out of John, and he loved to greet John with a condescending "Hey, Junior!" anytime he walked in the door. John refused to take the bait, and instead nodded hello and headed into the conference room with Michael.

Because Michael and John were both on the board of Naked Angels—a nonprofit theater company in New York supported by celebrities such as Marisa Tomei and Sarah Jessica Parker—Liz, Tricia, and I decided the most obvious explanation for their meetings was that they were planning a fund-raiser. But their conversations often became heated; we'd see John gesticulating wildly, water bottle in hand, through the slightly open door. And they were always careful to collect the papers spread across the big wooden table before they left the conference room. I was as curious as the next person but figured John was none of my business. That is, until he made himself my business.

A few months after John had become a regular at the office, I came into work one morning really hurting. The night before, I'd made the mistake of drinking free cocktails at a launch party for a start-up company that delivered anything—movies, condoms, ice cream—to your apartment day or night. As usual, Frank was along for the ride.

I met Frank Giordano, my soul mate, in college, where it was love at first sight. I was walking out of the cafeteria when I spotted a gorgeous guy—six foot two, thick hair, dark-brown eyes—wearing all white and propped against a yellow Riviera. Frank knew the effect his stunning appearance had on people and often used it, almost comically, to his advantage. With him, nothing was off-limits.

We connected instantly, and from that moment on, we were completely inseparable. We did everything together, except have sex. I had never met anyone like him: gorgeous, charismatic, a sweet soul. Hardly ever in a bad mood, Frank was always on a mission to make sure everyone around him was having a good time. After college, I moved with Frank into his mother's home, a gigantic house in Bronxville, New York, until I got the call every New Yorker dreams about, one asking if I'd be interested in a rent-stabilized apartment. Frank convinced me to take the place (he wasn't only my best friend and confidant but also my real estate broker) even though it was the most vile, dank, dark three hundred square feet of grime I had ever seen. He promised he would transform the place for me, and he did, stripping and bleaching the floors and repainting. By the time I moved in, the walls were a crisp white and the wood floor felt smooth beneath my feet. There was a little kitchen, a built-in bookcase, a bed, and a bathroom—all for me.

I had no idea what to do with all this privacy. Growing up in a two-story house on Garfield Street crammed with my mom, dad, great-grandmother, grandma, older sisters Anita, Andrea, and Amy, and two dogs, I wasn't used to alone time. Someone was always in the bathroom, on the couch, or in front of the fridge. Outside wasn't much better, with neighbors hanging out their windows and screaming at one another.

But Frank didn't give me a chance to feel lonely. As soon as the apartment was ready, he called all our friends and told them to come over to my new place. I cranked the stereo that Michael and Will had bought me as a housewarming gift and poured everyone drinks before we headed out for a night of dancing at Rouge. When we called it quits around 4:00 a.m., I didn't have to wait for a train at Grand Central or have Frank drive me home. We just hopped in a cab and within minutes were in my new apartment. As far as I was concerned, I had arrived.

Frank, always my first call in the morning and last call at night, loved my new life even more than I did. He came as my date to many events, like the launch party for the Manhattan delivery service, where we drank several Speedy Deliveries, the party's signature cocktail, and ended up at a gay bar drinking margaritas.

After mixing way too much booze, the next morning I tried in vain to settle my queasy stomach and pounding head with a large coffee from the cart outside the office building. Wearing a pair of extra-large sunglasses, I could smell the alcohol wafting from my pores. The worst part: it was only Monday. (Frank and I loved going out on Sunday nights, because that's when people who lived in the city went out.) I couldn't imagine getting through the morning, let alone the week.

All I wanted to do was get into the cozy confines of my office and hide out for the rest of the day. My love affair with my office had started the minute I arrived at PR/NY. The view was of the building's air shaft, but its location at the back of the building gave it a snug quality, where a girl could feel safe calling her friends to bitch about bad dates, have a good cry when she lost a client or, like this morning, nurse a particularly bruising hangover.

As I passed through reception, the light streaming in the windows and bouncing off the white walls felt downright debilitating. Making a beeline for my office, I kept my sunglasses on and held on to my coffee as if it were a life raft. I relaxed a bit at the thought of momentarily resting my head on my desk, and opened the door to my cozy little office.

What the . . . ?

John and a man I didn't recognize were piling my possessions into a cardboard moving box. Adrenaline surged through my body, instantly curing my hangover. No longer weary or nauseous, I was mad—and confused.

“Oh, hey—” John said.

“Excuse me,” I said, cutting him off. “What are you doing? And who are you?” I pointed at the handsome, silver-haired man in jeans and a fitted T-shirt who was wielding an industrial vacuum cleaner like a pro.

“This is Effie. He works for me and my family, helping with—”

“Why is he touching my stuff?”

I whipped off my sunglasses and got into a staring match with Effie.

“Michael said it was okay for me to move in here,” John said.

“Well, it's not okay,” I said, spinning around to address him directly. That's when I noticed that not only had they taken down my bulletin board without asking but, in the process, they had ripped one of my most treasured possessions: my Howard Stern head shot. I was crushed.

I thought Howard was a god. I admired how he disguised intelligent dialogue about political and social issues as a radio show about farts and strippers. Plus, he made me laugh out loud every single morning. Brilliant, unpretentious, and funny, Howard spoke my language. And anyone who knew me knew I loved him. That's why a colleague from my old job asked his friend, a producer at K-Rock, where Howard did his show, for the irreplaceable head shot, which was now ruined.

“We can figure this out,” John said.

“Figure this out? Clearly we're not figuring out anything, because you have already packed everything up,” I said.

“I'm sure we can find some sort of solution,” he said.

“I don't know why you need an office, anyway. You don't even have a job.”

“Michael!” John said loudly.

“Maybe you get away with this everywhere else you go, but not here.”

“Michael!”

Despite my show of bravado, insecurity welled up inside me at the realization that somebody more important could just walk in and take everything away from me—my amazing office, job, and new life in Manhattan. I should have been prepared for this. But I wasn't ready for defeat.

Michael shouted for me to get into his office. I left John and his butler boxing up my life and slowly took the

ten steps to Michael's office. This was serious. No one ever went in there except to have their review. He was the kind of boss who left you alone. He always had your back, even if a client was unhappy, but he wasn't a micromanager. Instead, he taught by example about what worked and what didn't in PR.

What the hell had I been thinking, telling off John F. Kennedy Jr.? Was I insane? Oh well, I thought. My time at PR/NY was fun while it lasted. . . . Starbucks, here I come.

I stepped into Michael's immaculate office. He sat behind his sleek desk, with all his perfect pens arranged in an elegant leather cup and a box of wheat grass placed neatly in the corner. His hands were clasped in front of him, and he had a big smirk on his face. He wasn't angry; in fact, he seemed to be thoroughly enjoying the drama. Michael never kissed John's ass and was apparently pleased to see someone following his example.

"You know, Rose," Michael said, amused. "You could be arrested in some states for the way you just spoke to him."

"Why is he taking my office?" I whined.

"He's working with me now. Let's be realistic. You really think I'm going to give him the smaller office? You're going to be just fine. What he's doing isn't infringing on your turf. In fact, it has nothing to do with you. So let's get on with it."

I got the message and left his office, grateful to still have my job. Even though Michael had found my outburst funny, I knew I had to keep my Italian temper in check, since it could get me in a lot of trouble. If I got into a fight with a guy I was dating, I had no problem walking out and leaving him in a restaurant. If I didn't like what somebody was saying to me on the phone, I hung up. During one particularly heated fight with Frank at his apartment, I pulled everything he owned off his bookshelves and dumped a garbage bag of clothes he'd left at my house in a heap on the floor. I don't remember exactly what triggered the blowup, but I ransacked his place; it looked like a crime scene when I was done with it.

My anger issues were the by-product of a tense childhood in a chaotic environment that was ready to explode at any moment. And the woman holding the lighter to the powder keg was Marion, my Sicilian mother. Talk about an Italian temper.

My mother was usually working two jobs, carrying the family's financial load while trying to raise four kids in direct opposition to the way she was raised. My grandparents were not exactly stellar parents, and when they split up, my mother was bounced around like the kid no one wanted. She was determined to do a better job with her kids, and that was a huge amount of pressure. My sisters, Anita, Andrea, and Amy, are older than me by seventeen, ten, and four years, respectively; they helped raise me and were always much better at dealing with our explosive household than I was.

When I was six years old, I made the mistake of complaining about my Christmas gifts. I had actually received something I loved, a doll that blinked her eyes when I moved her. My aunt Rita always bought me a doll for Christmas because she knew how much I loved them. My other gifts were all practical—socks, sweaters, shoes—so the baby was my big present. But the day after Christmas is always a major comedown, and like many kids, I was poised for a meltdown when I dragged myself and my new doll into the kitchen and announced that I had nothing to play with. I whined and cried until my mom eventually had enough. She put down her cup of black coffee and took a deep pull on her Kool cigarette.

“Enough already!” she yelled, then snatched the doll from my hands and slammed it against the wall, shattering its torso, twisting its limbs, and sending the blinking eyes into a permanently cockeyed stare. And then she threw the mangled body at me as I wept and begged her to stop.

“If you don’t stop, I’ll really give you something to cry about,” she threatened.

On another occasion, my mom had spent all day Saturday cleaning and had left my room in immaculate condition. Two days later, she came in to find the floor littered with clothes, the bed unmade, and books and papers scattered everywhere. She was silent, which was a lot scarier than her yelling, and then she began snatching T-shirts, jeans, and sweaters from the floor and tossing them into my doll’s crib. I watched as my mother pulled the crib over to the window, lifted the screen, and dumped the contents onto the front porch. For a moment, I thought I’d be next. But my mom walked out of the room without a glance in my direction. Racing downstairs, I grabbed a garbage bag and headed out to collect my stuff, humiliated, as a small group of neighbors who had already gathered to check out the action stared at me. The people on our block liked nothing better than a little domestic disturbance.

The main source of frustration in our home revolved around us never having enough money. Between the two of them, my parents always seemed to have ten jobs. Secretarial work was Mom’s mainstay, but she also cleaned doctors’ offices and worked at a perfume factory in the Bronx where fragrances such as Charlie and Jontue were manufactured. Her winter coat reeked of those scents. My dad sometimes cleaned offices with her. He also worked in a liquor store during the day and as a bartender at night.

Despite all the jobs, we never had two dimes to rub together. If the car broke down, we could either get a new transmission or pay the electric bill; if tuition was due, we could either pay for school or pay the phone bill; if the boiler broke when we were low on cash, we went without heat. Those trade-offs were the one constant in my childhood.

My father, Anthony, worked every bit as hard as my mother; he saw himself as something of an entrepreneur, but his businesses were not successful. He opened a deli that went bust because his partner walked out; a pizza place that went bankrupt, leaving my parents buried under a fifty-thousand-dollar debt; and a candy shop on the corner, which also sold cigarettes and newspapers, that he had to shutter.

My mother, the breadwinner for most of our lives, became extremely anxious in the face of money problems. The financial burden was all on her shoulders—she was responsible for the family and she knew it. When she felt trapped, she lashed out. And with a husband who wasn’t making enough to support four daughters, let alone reduce a mountain of debt, she always felt trapped.

Despite feeling trapped, my mother was fearless. Once, even the Catholic Church made it onto my mom’s shit list. I was in the third grade at St. Dominic’s, the Catholic school attended by generations of my family for over sixty years. The school had implemented a new policy that if your family didn’t pay your tuition on time, you didn’t get your report card. Up until then, the shame of not getting that little yellow card had been reserved for kids who failed a class. And that had never been me. But after overhearing the screaming matches between my parents about tuition checks, I knew I was a candidate for embarrassment that term. So there I was in class, shitting my pants as Sister Mary Josephine slowly worked her way through the alphabet, calling kids up one by one to claim their report cards. I felt the hard-backed wooden chair pressing into my spine as she reached the R’s, then the S’s, before intoning in her liturgical voice all the names beginning with T. No Terenzio. As soon as the bell rang, I raced out of that room, past my concerned friends, and ran the three blocks to my house.

When my mom got home from work later that night, the first thing she saw was my tear-streaked face.

“What happened?” she asked.

I told her about the humiliating report-card incident.

“How dare they? After I’ve put four kids through that school!” she screamed. “Your father’s whole family went there, too. They should be ashamed of themselves.” She lit a cigarette and blew smoke from her nostrils. “I’m going to let them know what I think of their Christian spirit.”

My mother called the rectory the next morning and demanded to speak to the bishop, to whom she calmly explained the circumstances. “We’re having a hard time, Bishop, but you know you’ll get the money. I’ve put four kids through the school, and I hope you’ll make an exception.”

“I’m sorry, Mrs. Terenzio. This is the policy and it applies to everyone.”

Wow. He clearly had no idea who he was dealing with: Marion Terenzio did not mess around. She told him exactly what she thought of his Christian spirit and slammed the phone down.

That Sunday, we went to mass at St. Dominic’s, as always. When I was a kid, that little sand-colored brick church, with its spire, heavy stained-glass windows, and dark interior, had all the majesty of a real cathedral; it seemed like St. Patrick’s to me. Although, in truth, it was a small neighborhood church in a devout blue-collar outpost.

The mass on that particular Sunday was dedicated to celebrating the arrival of our new bishop, the same man responsible for the new “no tuition, no grades” policy. Beforehand, the bishop stood in the church vestibule, decked out in his pink-and-gold habiliments and smiling benevolently. With my father and sisters and me in tow, my mother tried to blow past him without a word, but the bishop stopped her.

“Good morning, Mrs. Terenzio,” he said, putting his ring out for her to kiss. With a crowd of congregants gathered behind her in the receiving line, my mother shot the clergyman a look of utter disdain.

“Bishop,” she said evenly, “you can kiss my ass before I’ll kiss that ring.”

She then marched us to the front of the church, where she prayed before God and the bishop without a shred of guilt or remorse.

My report card was waiting for me at school on Monday morning.

Twenty years later, on the heels of my own holier-than-thou battle with John, I decided to follow my mom’s example and ignore him. John may have won my office, and I may have had to put up with him at work, but that didn’t mean I had to like him or even acknowledge his existence.

It took a while for the guy who got whatever he wanted to take a hint. Every day, he would walk or Rollerblade past my office, greeting me with a cheerful “Good morning.” And every day, I refused to respond or even make eye contact with him. I’d hear him coming, and just before he popped his head in to say hello, I would quickly pick up the receiver and pretend to be on the phone, thinking, Fuck you. Have fun in your new office, buddy.

I know it seems immature to be that rude to any coworker, let alone to John Kennedy, but it was a matter of pride. When I feel slighted, I don't back down. As it turned out, John was the same way—although his approach was very different. He said his chipper hellos each morning, seemingly oblivious to my ignoring him. John couldn't relax his perfect manners: they had been instilled in him at a very early age, just as my tough exterior had been. So the standoff went on for weeks.

During that time, John settled in to PR/NY, though none of us had any idea what he was doing there. He brought in an intern, a daughter of a family friend, to answer his phone and open his mail. She clearly had a crush on him and decided to bond with Sam, as if that unstable dog might be the way to John's heart. One day she was lying on the floor with Sam—yes, rolling around the office floor with a scary dog that snapped from time to time—and he bit her face. She refused to go to the hospital. Blood, rabies, whatever, Sam was John's dog, so it was all fine and good, just a scratch, nothing to worry about. . . . People were insane around John.

He was making me insane, too, and not just because he stole my office. The fact that we still didn't know what he was doing there began to worry me. After several months of his being there, it was obvious he couldn't be working on a charity event. And he couldn't just be renting office space—the place was nice but not that nice. Plus, Michael was distracted from the agency's day-to-day work—he didn't give my press releases the attention he once had or ask about the status of an account. Most worrisome was that no proposals were going out to potential new clients.

About a month after John ousted me from my office, I heard him coming down the hallway toward my new digs. Every single morning, I thought. The guy just wouldn't let up.

“Good morning, Rose.”

Hearing him say my name startled me. He'd never said it before, so I looked up. When I did, he was standing in the doorway giving me the finger. I couldn't help it: I burst out laughing. He finally got me.

The next day, I didn't get a “Good morning” when he came into work.

“What's up, loser?” he said.

“You're the loser,” I replied.

“Well, you're stupid.”

“Not as stupid as you.”

He's kind of funny, I thought.

By the summer of 1994, it wasn't just our little group at PR/NY that wanted to know what John was up to. The press was also beginning to wonder. A year had passed since he left the DA's office, and as far as they knew, he wasn't up to much. The media looked for drama: Was he striking out on his own, or headed for a breakdown? People magazine pounced on the theme with the sensational cover line: “Is he a man with a plan, or a dreamboat adrift?”

I grabbed the magazine, which I had seen on the newsstand on my way into work, and busted it out in our morning sparring session.

“Morning, dreamboat,” I said when he walked into the office.

“Why don’t you take that fright wig off? It’s not Halloween,” he retorted.

“Sorry we can’t all be as handsome as you.”

“Shut up, Rosie.”

No one called me Rosie except my family. But somehow, I didn’t mind John saying it; he was already starting to feel like the older brother I never had.

Our jokes had become a routine, a ritual we both enjoyed, like coffee from the cart or starting with Page Six when reading the papers. John could take it as well as he could give it, which was totally unexpected. And his jokes never felt personal. In fact, they were corny. I loved that our banter had stemmed from John standing up to me after I iced him out. He was as straightforward as I was and had no problem calling people out when necessary. His giving me the finger was just the first of many times I would see him challenge someone.

We were direct with everything, not just humor. When John first came into PR/NY after his mother, who by all accounts had been his emotional rock, passed away in May of that year, I didn’t know what to say. I wondered if I should say anything at all. It’s hard to know how to respond to the tragedy of an office mate. But he looked so somber, I couldn’t pretend nothing had happened.

“Hi,” I said.

“Hi,” John replied.

“Sorry about your mom.”

“Thank you, Rosie,” he said, then gave me a hug, which I wasn’t expecting.

“They say you don’t really become an adult until both your parents are gone,” he told me later.

John always seemed like an adult to me. We often talked about current events, and I’d ask what he thought had really happened behind the biggest story of the day. I liked his even take on the world and his way of putting any story into a balanced perspective. When President Richard Nixon died, I rolled my eyes while telling him that Nixon was my dad’s man (Reagan was his other).

“Nixon was a brilliant man,” John said.

I was shocked he didn’t jump on the bandwagon and shit all over the disgraced president. Intelligent people see both sides of an issue, and John saw value in even the most flawed people, accepting that everyone makes mistakes.

It wasn’t long after the “dreamboat adrift” cover line that Michael called me into his office again. I racked my brain for mistakes I’d made. There hadn’t been much work to mess up; maybe that was the problem. When I got inside, Will was also in Michael’s office, perched on a windowsill.

“Sit down,” Michael said from behind his desk.

Oh, Jesus, I'm getting fired.

"We're selling PR/NY. Will's going to find something else, and I'm—" Michael broke off for a second. "I'm going into business with John."

I knew it. I fucking knew it. Michael was jumping ship.

"Can't you take me with you?"

"It's not a PR thing, Rose. And everything is still up in the air. But don't worry. I've found you a new job."

"I don't want a new job. I want to stay here."

Michael had made me feel as though I was indispensable. He even said in one of my reviews, "You are the prize of my pen." I couldn't understand why he wouldn't want to take me with him.

"There is no 'here' anymore," he said. "I sold the business to another PR firm; all the accounts and you are part of the deal. You're going to work for them."

"What if I don't like it there?"

"Give the new firm a chance. Just go meet them." He handed me a slip of paper with a midtown address, and I arranged to be interviewed that afternoon. But as I made my way uptown to my potential new employer's office, I was furious at Michael for springing this on me at the last minute and still not telling me the whole truth. What was his business with John, and why couldn't he take me with him? In the elevator on my way up to the impromptu interview, I tried to tell myself that perhaps this was for the best. My new job might be even cooler than PR/NY. I had to keep an open mind.

But as soon as the doors opened, I knew there was nothing cool about the place. The reception area was set up like a tiki bar, with wood paneling and colored Christmas lights, in a sad attempt at being "fun" and "hip." I was going from a chic minimalist office to a Las Vegas lounge.

The receptionist sent me in to meet one of the executives, who had a typically drab office with slivers of window that looked out on the misery of midtown workers scrambling to grab lunch and get back to the office with enough time to actually eat it. When the woman stood up and extended her hand, a pungent, stale aroma wafted my way—she smelled like booze.

"Michael told me you're great with clients and really good at booking media."

Yeah, I thought, a prize he was looking to give away.

"I need you to write a press release so I can see your work," she said, slurring her words.

"Right now?" I asked. I was pretty nervous. I already knew I didn't want to work for this lady, but I needed a job. Without saying another word, she got up from her desk and wobbled away to make room for me to use her computer. I sat down in her chair and waited in silence for a few awkward moments. Had she passed out behind me?

"Well, what's it about?" I asked.

“What?” she said.

“The press release you want me to write.”

“Oh, right . . . God is announcing the end of the world, and you have to write a press release.”

She had to be kidding.

“Who is your client?” I asked.

“God.”

I stared at the screen with my wrists resting on the keyboard, fingers poised to type, having no idea what to write. There is no way I’m doing this, I thought as I stared at the blinking cursor. I got up and looked right at her. “Well, if God is your client, then you don’t need me, or a press release,” I said, grabbing my purse and running out of her office.

I ran through the tiki-lounge waiting area to the elevators and repeatedly pressed the down button, hoping she wouldn’t follow me. Nobody was in the elevator, and when the doors closed, I leaned against the wall and began sobbing. I was hysterical. Everything good about my life was slipping away. The job I had been lucky to get and worked so hard to keep was over. I wouldn’t be hanging with people like Michael and John, or even Liz and Tricia, anymore. I would probably lose my apartment and have to move back in with Frank and his mom or, even worse, back home.

I cried all the way from midtown to 26th Street. Somewhere along the way, one of my contacts fell out of my eye, so by the time I got back to PR/NY, I was puffy, crying, and half-blind. I went straight into my office and slammed the door shut.

Moments later, Michael banged on the door and said, “Rose, come on, open up.” But I wouldn’t. I yelled through the door, “Forget it. I can’t believe you’re ditching me like this.”

From the other side of the door, I heard John ask, “What’s going on?” Then there was a low murmur as John and Michael talked about me. I heard one pair of footsteps retreating and gathered that John had returned to his office—which I still thought to be my office.

“Rosie, calm down.”

It was John.

“I think we might be able to figure something out,” he said. I worried he was going to give me a pity talk, but I opened the door anyway. Instead, he sat on the edge of my desk and looked me straight in the eyes. “Why don’t you work for me?”

The fact that I really didn’t want to leave moved John. I would come to understand that he prized loyalty above all. Plus, he liked my sense of humor; I made him laugh, and he wanted me to stick around. . . . Doing what, I had no idea.

“What will you do?” I asked.

John laughed. "I'm starting a magazine."

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