

The Celebrity

by Jeremy Holland

I love reading about myself. There's nothing more gratifying than seeing my name in the paper, knowing so many people are interested in who I am and what I do. It reconfirms my existence on this strange world, if that makes sense. I guess that's why, the first thing I do every morning, is read a memo prepared by my personal assistant that details what articles my name's appeared in because, quite frankly, I can think of no better way to start my day.

The first item I read is about my sworn-enemy who is now seeing one of my exes. Next I see the apartment above the man who I think might be my true love is available. The third and final bit of news is about my last co-star filing a restraining order on his stalker. That's it, not one direct mention of me. I take my eyes off the paper and stare out of my window at blue sky and sparkling ocean. Today's news has me fuming and I crumple up the memo. The only reason my sworn-enemy and ex make the papers is because of me. I mean, who fuck are they really anyway? The distant relative of some dead tycoon and a child of a long forgotten crooner. They're talentless nobodies.

I scream in frustration.

My Shih-Tzu, Pinky, jumps up off her bed and barks.

My personal assistant runs in. "What?"

"It's been a week and there's been nothing about me in any of the papers."

"You only been out of rehab two weeks."

"Then why aren't they writing about how good I'm doing?"

“A lot's been happening in the news lately.”

“Who cares? I was ranked the sexiest girl alive last year.”

“I know. Your publicist called. He suggested stopping by the AA meeting to pick up a sobriety pin for some positive press.”

“Good idea. Get the water ready for a shower. We can make the eleven o'clock meeting.”

“Will do,” my assistant says and leaves.

My attention shifts to what I'm going to wear as I toss the wadded memo on the floor and scan my thousands of outfits stuffed in my walk-in closet. The choices and the options overwhelm me. Do I want to look sexy but reserved, somber but stunning, eye-catching but discrete? It's really all too much and I shout again.

Pinky barks.

My assistant rushes in. “What?”

“Is the water running?”

“Yes.”

“Okay, pick me out something while I shower. All this deciding is giving me a headache. Also, let Pinky out for a bit, I think she needs to piss.”

The AA meeting takes place behind a coffee shop off Sunset Boulevard. Known for its notorious attendees, it's a paparazzi hot spot and the best place to go for those in need of some quick publicity. I walk in to a lineup of celebrity mug shots sitting in a circle and take a seat between an on-probation rock star and a T.V. actor who recently got fired for berating a costar and calling him a fag. He isn't a drunk, but blames his boorish behavior on alcoholism, otherwise no one would hire him for being a homophobe.

Why am I here? Because my last movie ran over-budget and the producers said the few days I'd called in sick after a night of partying resulted in millions in loses. Seriously, who hasn't pulled a sickie? Jesus, I'm just a twenty year old girl. What do they expect me to do: sit at home and watch TV on a Saturday night? Anyway, my manager said my rep for professionalism had taken a major beating and put me in a luxurious rehab-spa to demonstrate I was serious about my career. The move paid off and he lined me up for the lead in a love story set in a concentration camp as my role. It has Academy awards written all over it. The only thing is that my contract stipulates I attend these god-awful meetings for insurance purposes and take a drug test next week.

Like all AA meetings, it starts with each of us standing up, stating our names and addictions. Some share tales of debaucherous nights leading to a life changing crash; others detail how the twelve-steps help them resist temptation. I say nothing. I'm not like any of these junkies. I've never been arrested by the police or woken up in a gutter. The worst I've done is blow off a shoot because of a headache. Of much more concern to me is the fact that I haven't read about myself in days, and that means no one else has either. And if no one's reading about me, people will start forgetting about me, and I can't have that.

For lunch my assistant and I head to a world renowned celebrity haunt. Before stepping out of my SUV, I check out my reflection in the rear-view mirror, apply some red lipstick and toss my wavy, blond hair for that just-right look. Next are the oversized, diamond studded, sunglasses to shield me from what awaits. The rapid clicks, flashes and shutters of cameras blast like fireworks as my sandal hits the pavement. Some of the 'razzi bark things like I'm diseased, or I'm boring in the sack; others make comments about my estranged father selling my childhood story for six figures. An actress since I was eleven, I let their comments slide, flash a smile

and flip my hair so they catch my good side as I walk on by and enter the restaurant.

The maître d' rushes over and seats us at an exclusive patio table along the picket fence. I sit with my back to the street to size up the crowd but before I get a chance to take stock of who's who, a smiling waiter arrives.

I pay nobodies no mind and nod over to my assistant to order.

"She'll have a salad, dressing on the side and a grilled halibut," she says. "And I'll just take a salad."

The waiter looks at me and winks as if I'm just some chick at a bar he's looking to pick up. I hate when wannabe, pretty boy actors think they can seduce me for their own career advancement. I let my glasses slip down my nose and glare. I remember the scene in my last movie where I kill the psycho who holds me captive so he gets the idea what I'd do to him.

He looks away. "And to drink?"

"Water please," my assistant replies.

"That's all you're going to eat?" I ask her as the waiter leaves.

"Yeah, need to watch my weight. Summer's coming up."

"No you don't. You're not that fat."

"Thanks."

"I didn't mean it like that. It's just... I gotta be careful what I eat because my career depends on it but yours doesn't."

"Yeah, I guess."

"So order something else. I'll treat you to a lypo if you want. Have to do it myself for my next role anyway. Hate diets and not going bulimic again."

"Really, I'm not hungry."

“Okay, suit yourself. So what you wanna do after lunch?”

“Well, we should probably go over your lines. Filming starts next week.”

“Nah. I don't want to throw myself into the role of a Holocaust victim yet. Let's go shopping. I have that party tonight and I wanna get something to impress.”

“Okay.” My assistant suggests we walk to this great boutique she knows around the corner. She always does what I want so I decide to let her win this time and after lunch we head there on foot. I hate walking because it's so boring and slow. Get me from A-to-B quickly and comfortably is my motto. Plus, I'm a klutz and sure enough, my high heel catches something.

Continuous bursts of cameras catch me stumbling. Thanks to my assistant grabbing my arm, the paparazzi don't catch me falling on my ass. Still, I can see the headlines tomorrow: star staggers home drunk after a night of partying. “Fuuuuck!” I scream.

“Don't worry about it,” my assistant says as she props me up. “I'm sure more interesting things will happen between now and tomorrow.”

I take a deep breath and face her. She always knows what to say to calm me down. A flash in a window catches my eye and I see the cutest shirt of a famous revolutionary's face covered in yellow rhinestone. “Let's go in here,” I say and walk in to an airy and bright boutique.

The shop assistant has the same slack-jawed, wide-eyed expression of recognition I've seen a thousand times. If they have someone to turn to for a whispering reconfirmation, they do. If they don't, they look at you dazed and confused. “Ca... caa... can I... Can I help you?” she says. Oh, and they stutter.

“How much is that shirt in the window?” I ask.

“T... tw... two... hu... hun...”

I don't have time for her to spit it out, “I want one of those in a small. What else you got?”

My assistant whispers in my ear, “There's a girl here with a cell.”

“Also, do me a favor. Either take that chick's phone or ask her to leave,” I say it loud enough for the girl with the cell to hear it. She shoots me a withering look that changes to the shock of recognition. She shrieks and runs out with a story to tell her friends about what a bitch I am. She doesn't get it; it's not personal. It's just that camera phones mean going from famous to infamous in seconds, making image control near impossible.

After shopping I decide to pay my hairdresser a visit because nothing gets your photo splashed in the magazines like a new look. And while my hairdresser tints, snips and combs my hair, we gossip about my sworn enemy. I guess she had been in earlier and said how she couldn't wait to see my face when she showed up with one of my exes at the grand opening of a new club tonight. She really is such a snitty bitch.

Three years ago we were best-friends-forever. I was just coming off my breakout hit in a wholesome family comedy. At the same time, she was using her granddaddy's fortune to become famous. She was a lot of fun and liked doing the same things as me, so we hung out a lot and talked about doing a movie together. The problems between us started when her boyfriend at the time dumped her and called all the rags to spread rumors that we were a couple. I mean, oh my god, you gotta be fucking kidding me! Like I'd touch him if he was my unique organ donor and I needed a transplant.

Anyway, rather than talk to me, my now ex best-friend waged war through her media contacts, providing intimate and embarrassing details about drug filled nights, eating disorders and mental crashes.

Not a person to take shit from anyone, I counterattacked, revealing she once had sex with a security guard in a bathroom stall, gave her dog Valium to keep in quiet on hungover mornings, and took laxatives to stay skinny. And for the better part of a year we've been at it on the back pages of the national and international papers, boosting our name recognition in the process because nothing gets attention like a feud. So you see, tonight should be interesting.

To avoid my new look being revealed before my grand reappearance in the Hollywood scene, I sneak out the back of the salon and hop in my black SUV. "Love what you've done with your hair," my assistant says pulling on to street.

"Thanks. Anyone call?"

"Your publicist. He's arranged for a limo to pick you up and take you to the club tonight."

"Okay. You coming?"

"No. Spending time with my man. We haven't seen each other much lately and he's cooking me a romantic dinner."

"Ah, how sweet. Wouldn't you rather come to the party?"

"Maybe next time."

"Suit yourself."

Looking out the window onto L.A. traffic slowing inching its way through intersections, I find my mind drifting to the ex-boyfriend who has the apartment available above him. I can still remember the first time I saw him at a premier. I was running with the EDC (eating disorder crowd) at the time and he commented to a reporter how he preferred girls with a little meat on their bones when she asked why he was single. The next day I woke up, ate a hearty breakfast and didn't take a laxative. You see that's the thing with me, I can stop anything and change course, just like that, given the right

motivation.

Two weeks after the interview, I “accidentally” bumped into him at a bar to show off my new curves. He took me home and it was bliss. The following day we went on a hike, had a picnic and watched a movie at home. But that was the problem. He was a homebody by nature and I'm a social animal, so like concentration camp love, it was doomed from the get-go. Although, I often wonder if we'll be together once I tame my wild streak. I guess that's why even to this day, when I think of him, I feel a tinge of regret for cheating on him with the bad boy British music journalist. I'm just such a sucker for the English accent.

I stop dwelling on past loves when we enter my beach house to the familiar sight of an envelope with my name scribbled on it. I bend down and pick it up off the foyer floor. Dry rose peddles float to the ground and I pull out a handwritten note. *I didn't appreciate the way you treated me today. But I understand. Your sworn enemy and asshole ex-lover have been saying horrible things about you. They are both jealous of your talent and beauty. They will get their comeuppance. Love truly, Your biggest fan.*

My stalker. You're a nobody in Hollywood if you don't have one. Most of the time they are harmless, keeping their obsessions to their wet-dreams and fantasies. But sometimes it progresses to something creepier and psychotic. So far, mine has just stuck with letters and calls. They still haven't identified who it is, and the fact that the note mentions meeting me today freaks me out a little. So to play it safe, I call my bodyguard and make sure he comes tonight.

Tossing the note on the an end table, I flop down on my couch and turn on the flat screen T.V. to see if anyone has reported about the AA meeting. A foreign news correspondent follows the megastar couple on their quest to adopt their twentieth kid from a remote jungle high-definition clarity. I change the channel and the breaking news reports that the ex-president and his new porn-star girlfriend are set to sell their sex-tape for millions. A quick succession of

presses skips past the images and stories of war, death, destruction and corruption. Nothing about me.

Bored, I turn off the T.V. and look at my assistant, "Sure you don't wanna go tonight?"

"Positive," she replies.

"But can I call you if I need anything?"

"Sure. But only if it's really, really important. The last time you called wanting to know where the remote was, I was in the middle of dinner with my boyfriend. He wasn't too happy."

"Men. They're so demanding."

"Please, only call if it's super important."

"Okay."

"Want me to take Pinky?"

"You mind? Think she likes the company."

"Not at all."

"Also, stay till the limo arrives. Don't want to like be alone right now."

"Yeah, okay. Why don't we go get you dressed to impress?"

"That's a *brilliant* idea," I say in my best cockney accent.

There's nothing like putting on some good music, breaking open a bottle of wine and dancing as you try on outfits to make all your worries go away. It makes time pass as if in the movies as day cuts to night to the sound of a limo honking. I haven't been out in six weeks and my body is bubbling with excitement as I scamper down the stairs and out the front door of my house.

For tonight's ensemble I have chosen a tight black dress that makes my stride more like a awkward shuffle. Together with my

raven hair and blood-red nails, the look is a little dark and goth I know. But with my name linked to the new tragic love for the next twelve weeks, I figured it was a perfect for filming. The driver holds the door open and I jump in to find a surprise. Under the dim lights lining the inside a girl sits in a sparkling silver dress. She smiles uncomfortably, "It's been a while."

"Yeah it has," I reply sliding on the couch across from her.

"Heard you were in rehab."

"Yep. Needed some me-time." I reach for the bar and fix a drink of top-self vodka and fresh-squeezed juice as the limo heads off. "You look healthier."

"Yeah, cadaverous is so last year. Healthy-skinny is in. Looks like you've put on a few pounds too."

I light a cigarette and blow a cloud of smoke. She coughs. "That's right you don't smoke," I say and press on the button to open the sun roof. "Why you here?"

"I haven't been in the public eye for a few months, so my publicist figured a night out with you should change that. Although, I haven't read anything about you in ages."

"Like I said, laying low. Start filming a sure-fire-award-winner next week. I think you were up for the same role, right?"

"Yeah, had too many commitments," she says pouring herself a glass of wine. "Are you still mad at me for hooking up with one of your countless exes?"

"I'm like so over that. Besides, didn't he cheat on you with that French chick?"

"Yeah. So what's, like, the deal? Why did your publicist want this?"

“That's a good question. I had no idea to be honest. I guess he thinks it's a good idea if I'm seen with someone whose not part of the in-scene.”

“Yeah, I can see hanging with real artists might help your rep.” She reaches in her small purse and pulls out a little plastic bag, “Want some candy?”

Rule number one when partying in Hollywood is to do it with someone who has just as much to lose as you if the news gets out. “You've always been good about keeping it on the down-low,” I tell her taking the compact mirror with two lines of cocaine cut on the surface.

“Gotta. Just can't let it be public, you know? I'm still selling to the teenage crowd and it'd kill sales.”

“Yeah, gotta be careful myself. One more bust and no more insurance. So mum's the word?”

“Of course,” she says. “I'm so glad we're not enemies anymore.”

The driver's door shuts. The blood rushing boils in anticipation at my grand entrance. My door opens and I grab my friend's hand. We step out together to the blinding blast of a thousand clicks, flashes and shutters. The murmur of conversation is so loud it's more like a roar. I strain not to blink at the blinding lights and grip my friend's hand tight.

A scene of men and women in their trendiest outfits begging the skinny doorman comes into focus. Two hulking guards flank us and those waiting whisper, “Is that who I think it is,” as another bouncer unclicks the rope. We ascend the stairs leading to the entrance and cross the packed dancefloor to the trailing eyes of people frozen in mid move. Upstairs in the VIP lounge there are no dazed or confused

looks. They know me and I know them. We are the names you read about the every day.

I turn to my friend, "Okay, see you around tonight?"

"Yeah," she replies. We hug and part. Alone for the first time since I'd woken up, I nervously scan the room for my crew. I used to run with fellow famous people but they're also the sources to columnists. And with the line between friend and foe blurry in this town, that's like hanging out with mobsters who have their own hit-men. So, instead of well-known faces, my circle of friends now consists of those not looking to read about themselves or report about me the next day.

My closest friend is my assistant but with her new boyfriend she hasn't been interested in going out much. It'll end soon and she'll be back. After her my next best friend is probably my stylist who I spot sitting on a couch next to my bodyguard. On the other side of him is my manager's daughter or my minder. Strutting over to my posse, I flash a smile at the deejay who is the final member.

Taking a vodka tonic in a water bottle from my stylist, I sit down between her and bodyguard and look at a crowd full of celebrities. My friend in the silver dress sheepishly smiles, disappearing into the main bathroom. My sworn enemy and an ex strut in and sit at a booth. She looks across the lounge and giggles as she leans in to kiss his neck. He snickers and they start making out. I hold up my water bottle and turn to my stylist, "Give me the candy. I'm going to the toilet for a pick me up."

"Okay," she replies.

I get up and head to the small bathroom hidden around the corner for a little privacy and stop at the sight of girl wearing the same shirt I'd bought earlier. Her jaw drops at my entrance revealing her to be a nobody. "How do you know about this bathroom?" I ask.

"I...I'm...I'm your," she stutters.

"Come on. I don't have time for this. Who are you?"

The shrill that is my sworn enemy's voice cuts through the air, "Well, well, so much for clean and sober living."

"What?" I reply.

"See you're still up to the same ol' same ol'."

"See you're still all about my leftovers. Can he last more than a minute yet?"

"Bitch."

"Cunt. Oh, haven't you heard? I'm strictly doing A-list actors now. No more C-list, reality-show, celebrities for me."

"Who? That English actor? I saw him last night hooking up with a Brazilian model."

I glare. I think of something to say and that's when it happens.

The eyes of the girl dressed in my t-shirt flash as she reaches in her purse and pulls out a small pair of nail scissors.

"What the cat got you tongue?" my sworn-enemy says, oblivious to the face behind her lighting up like a Jack o'lantern as the pointed metal blades stab into her neck.

The girl behind her digs and twists. My ex-best friend opens her mouth to scream. She gurgles, clutches her neck and collapses to the ground as the girl yanks the scissors out.

Her bloody hand dangling at her side, the girl smiles. It takes me a second but I finally recognize her as the chick from the store with the cell, "What the fuck?"

"I told you she would get her comeuppance," she says.

“Do you realize what you've done?”

“I thought you'd be happy.”

“Happy? This was supposed to be my big night!” I point at sworn enemy curled on the floor in a growing pool of blood, “Now it's going to be all about her.”

