

CHAPTER 6:

*Hunter's Defiant Note, and Double Trouble:
The Mayor vs. the Senate Page*

JANUARY 18, 1986

Three months after being laid off, I got a message on my machine from the O'Farrell. I called Vince in the morning. He said, "Jim asked me last week, 'Whatever happened to Simone?' So he'd like to have you back, and I don't think Art would object too much. What you should do is come down here and catch the two of them together. Call me this afternoon and maybe they'll be back by then."

I talked to my two best friends for strategy and dressed with care—as hot as I could but with a serious conservative edge befitting an accused—black suede Yves St. Laurent heels, marquissette pin, black jacket, short red dress to show off my legs. Spraying on a discreet amount of "Paris," I tried to summon up a smile in the mirror. With long dark hair and green eyes, I still looked too serious and idealistic, for a stripper. Clearly reflected in the glass was an ex-schoolteacher with an addiction to the outrageous. Unmistakably, I was a woman who was old enough to know she was deeply in love.

I felt a sea of mixed emotions. Being away from the place for awhile had given me a clearer perspective. Now I knew that walking into the O'Farrell was like crossing a border into a principality as foreign as Shangri-La, with its own unique customs, and a constantly changing party-line point of view that necessitated denial. Jim and Art Mitchell were kings there, and games were played for power. Women were encouraged to prove how hot and uninhibited they were, while the men measured their sexuality by their number of conquests. Once

I stepped back through those doors, I had to deal with life on their terms, no matter how fanciful, harsh, or strange it might seem. Once I was within Mitchell territory, I'd be living on X-rated time.

I was going back. There was no question about it. I drove shivering with fear, keeping a sudden sense of nausea in check. Dealing with a pair of countercultural entrepreneurs bent on a pornographic crusade wasn't easy. Would I get to tell my side of what led to the argument? I wondered. What would they do to try to make me crawl? Everyone had to do some penance to come back to the O'Farrell—it's a ritual, and part of the game. Thinking, they're not going to break me, and thinking, what more could happen, what do I have to lose? And thinking, I haven't been this broke in the last five years, I pushed open a mirrored glass door and felt the slightest chill.

Inside the plush lobby, past the box office and the king-size fish tanks, was the staircase to the executive offices of Mitchell Brothers. Moving past the photo of a sleek Marilyn Chambers used to promote *Behind the Green Door*, I ventured in on the thick green carpet of the inner sanctum. Vince, tall with wavy brown hair, sat behind the roll-top desk from which he cleverly administered the entire operation. He was Machiavellian, yet at times, benevolent; feared yet cultivated by the dancers; implicitly loyal to the brothers and adept at defending them. "Simone, you came at a good time," Vince greeted me. "They're in there."

"Simone, it's good to see you," said Dan O'Neill, notorious since the 60's as an underground cartoonist, and longtime O'Farrell groupie. A disreputable hat, irreverent overgrown mustache, and long hair heightened his whimsical expression. Just beyond him was Rocky, Art and Jim's bearded cousin, a tough-looking, quiet good old boy, who worked there as a janitor.

Three dancers in lacy lingerie, rhinestones and heels, perched on the edge of the pool table. The pretty California girl-next-door types,

whose clean-cut image and sexy magnetism have been so essential to the success of all Mitchell Brothers productions.

Jim Mitchell was just inside the door. They were having a drunken spaghetti feed and had already half-eaten a dried-up, out-of-season game bird they shot early that morning, to destroy the evidence. A faint odor of marijuana hung in the air.

“Simone, you’re back,” Jim turned toward me, steel-eyed. Ralph Lauren casual, he was bald with a trim mustache, slightly overweight but powerful, a man who clearly savored the accouterments of success, and his position of authority. Half-drunk at the moment, Jim was seductively forceful in his touch. Referring to my argument with Missy, Jim stated, “In these cat fights, the rule of thumb is, both kitties have to go because it disrupts things for the other kitties. It doesn’t matter who started it.” Jim sounded typically sarcastic, but was relishing the King Solomon aspects of his role that day, having been able to banish, being able to pardon, “But you have friends in high places. And since Christianity, we believe in giving a guy a second chance, so we’d like to have you back. Art, Simone’s here.”

“Party Artie,” devastating, bearded and slender, walked over with the assured style of an outlaw, and gave me a kiss. It was polite. I didn’t want it polite—I wanted it passionate. Art kept love intense and compelling, he was a flawless player in control of an ever-changing, unfolding game. A game I had to win. I followed him longingly with my eyes down to the other end of the pool table. Art stretched out on the floor like an animal, on top of one of those padded cloths used to cover packing crates.

“Help yourself . . .” Jim suggested. “Have some spaghetti.”

Vince came in. “Yeah, you can have some of that,” he snickered, pointing to a paper plate of parsley.

O’Neill helped me to a serving of this horrible white spaghetti, red sauce with bird gizzard cooked into it, which I felt I had to taste as

some kind of sacramental gesture. The girls were looking through the new *Playboy* and pointed out a small photo. “Oh, there’s Missy. Miss Congeniality.” Missy—the kitty who had me fired.

The office looked the same—it was dominated by the pool table, fishing relics, mementos, and a poker table reminiscent of Art and Jim’s Depression-era, Okie gambler father, J.R. Mitchell, who schooled them well in living outside the law.

Art got up off the floor, came over to me, and said, “I want some of that pussy,” in his rich Oklahoma drawl, lawless, always melted me completely. I put my plate down and followed him down the hall, into a scene from one of his movies.

He closed the door softly, then pulled me onto his lap, and I told him, “I really missed you.”

“No,” Art said, as I looked into his sultry indecent brown eyes, “you mean you love me.”

He pulled my red dress up and slipped into me, while pressing his head to my breast, “Keep your mouth shut and I’ll fuck you in secret,” he said. Fat chance. “Be the slave to love that you are, Simone,” he said, stealing a line from the dreamlike Bryan Ferry hit song.

“I still love you, Art,” I said as he was coming. “I’ll always love you.”

“Is whoever’s fucking you fucking you right?” he asked.

“I’m not seeing anybody,” I hugged him.

Art said, “Enjoy your spaghetti.”

I went right out to the manager, Vince, who asked, “What happened?”

“I think I can come back,” I replied.

Vince told me to call Monday and O’Neill kept offering me his chair. But I didn’t want to sit down, I wanted to leave. Vince said, “By the way, did you ever see Hunter’s note?” Hanging down over the window were six sheets of yellow lined paper all taped together,

penned in a large defiant scrawl by Hunter Thompson. I tried to lean over Vince to read it.

The first part deplored the evils of the business and then over and over he was asking whatever happened to his friend Simone, the spirit of the O'Farrell, the most creative girl act, what evil bastard was responsible for this hatchet job on his good friend Simone. All this really heartwarming stuff.

Vince said, "You know, there're probably five or six versions of that story, one of them's over there, I'm saving that for the archives."

"I never told anyone my story," I said. "But I don't care, if I can come back."

And as I turned and walked away I heard O'Neill say softly, "And now we have a gorilla."



The weekend floated by. I had the confidence that I was getting my job back at Mitchell Brothers, the money tied to it, and hopefully even Art. Maybe everything would be the way it was before—before some of Missy's lies led to my being laid off. I had no idea at the time what crazy stories she had concocted. Someone thought it was advisable to separate us during the preparations for the new movie epic.

I was nervous going back to work that first night. You never knew what they might have in mind. As soon as I got upstairs Vince, in a Yale sweater, asked me snidely, "What shows are you doing tonight, Simone, are you doing the gorilla show?"

I told him no, I was doing Mayor Feinstein and my TV dinners show.

Art was there, over in the side dressing room flirting with some dancers, but I ignored him. Because I didn't have to dance for awhile, I put on some black satin lingerie and went downstairs into the audience to make some tip money.

At the bottom of the stairs I ran into the Ultra Room girls—Lisa, wearing just a glistening gold chain belt and black patent heels, and her partner, in thigh-high boots of black leather.

“This is just like the *Twilight Zone*, you know, how suddenly you’re out and then you’re back in here again,” I joked.

They laughed.

After the local dives I had been exiled to briefly, the O’Farrell audience seemed like heaven. No great cloud of smoke. Nobody visibly drinking or passing out. No one doing handjobs in the back. Nobody grabbing me so hard I had to physically struggle with them to get away. A clean-cut, well-heeled bunch of customers, with a tad more intellect and sophistication. Finally, it was time to go upstairs and get ready.

For my first show that evening; I chose my imitation of then mayor, now California Senator Dianne Feinstein. I played her as a wide-eyed innocent discovering her wild side. Having done this show hundreds of times, it didn’t take me very long to get ready. I got my props together, including a white plastic dildo with a red valentine sticker, which I would brandish for a few moments at the beginning of Tony Bennett’s “I Left My Heart in San Francisco,” my last song. I made sure the toy cable car I would play with—that would be the Mayor’s ultimate turn-on—fit snugly with my “Mayor’s Office” sign and everything else inside the briefcase. With black fishnets under the suit, new highway patrol sunglasses, a negligee over my arm and my music cued, I was ready to go on.

Art appeared all of a sudden with three male visitors who were going to watch my show from the tech booth above the stage. He introduced me as Dianne Feinstein. I smiled and said hello, then Art pulled me away. Grabbing my briefcase first, I went down the stairs to the deserted side of the stage and found him, jeans already unzipped.