

# One

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FADE IN:

INT. KITCHEN—REGENCY HOTEL,  
NEW YORK CITY—DAY

It's the height of the breakfast rush at the Regency's world-famous You-Can-Kiss-Our-Ass-If-You're-Not-Rich-and-Powerful dining room. THE CHAMELEON slips quietly into the busy kitchen. His sandy hair is now dark, his skin copper. He blends right in, just another nameless Puerto Rican in a busboy uniform. He goes totally unnoticed.

THE CHAMELEON HAD stared at those words in his script hundreds of times. This morning they were coming to life.

His movie was finally in production. “And action,” he whispered as he entered the Regency kitchen through a rear door.

He did not go unnoticed.

“You!” one of the black-tied, white-jacketed waiters yelled. “Get out there and top off the coffee cups at table twelve.”

Not exactly what he’d scripted, but so much better than he could have hoped for. Like most New York actors, The Chameleon knew his way around a restaurant kitchen. He filled one chrome carafe with regular coffee, another with decaf, and pushed through the swinging door into the dining room.

The cast of characters was even better than he had expected too. Today was the start of Hollywood on the Hudson week, the city’s all-out push to steal more film production business from LA. So in addition to the usual East Coast power brokers, the room was chock-full of Hollywood assholes chewing on multimillion-dollar deals and hundred-dollar breakfasts. And there, holding court at table twelve, was none other than Sid Roth.

If you could go to prison for destroying careers, families, and souls, Sid Roth would be serving a string of consecutive life sentences. But in the movie biz, being a heartless prick was a plus if it translated into the bottom line, and over the past three decades Roth had turned Mesa Films from a mom-and-pop shop into a megastudio. The man was God, and the four other guys at the table were happily basking in His aura.

The Chameleon began pouring coffee when Roth, who was regaling his tablemates with a Hollywood war story, put

NYPD Red

a hand over his cup and said, “Get me another tomato juice, will you?”

“Yes, sir,” The Chameleon said. *One tomato juice and a featured cameo coming up for Mr. Roth.*

He was back in less than three minutes with Roth’s juice. “*Muchas gracias, amigo,*” Roth said, and he emptied the glass without giving his waiter a second look.

*And vaya con Dios to you.* The Chameleon went back to the kitchen and disappeared through the rear door. He had ten minutes for a costume change.

The men’s room in the lobby of the hotel was posh and private. Cloth hand towels, floor-to-ceiling walnut doors on each stall, and, of course, no surveillance cameras.

Half a dozen Neutrogena makeup-removing wipes later, he went from swarthy Latino to baby-faced white boy. He traded the waiter’s outfit for a pair of khakis and a pale blue polo.

He headed back to the lobby and positioned himself at a bank of house phones where he could watch the rest of the scene unfold. It was out of his hands now. He only hoped it would play out half as exciting as writ.

**INT. REGENCY DINING ROOM—DAY**

Camera is tight on THE VICTIM as he feels the first effects of the sodium fluoroacetate. He grabs the edge of the table, determined to fight it off, but his legs won’t hold him. Panic sets in as his body goes into catastrophic betrayal and his neurological center goes haywire. He experiences a full-blown seizure, vomiting

violently, flailing his arms, and finally crashing face-first into his mushroom-tomato frittata.

“How do you know he’ll order a frittata?” Lexi had said when she read it.

“It doesn’t matter what he orders,” The Chameleon said. “It’s a placeholder. I just had to write something.”

“Oatmeal would be better,” she said. “Maybe with some berries. Much more cinematic. How do you know he’s going to do all that . . . what did you call it? Catastrophic betrayal?”

“It’s a guideline. I won’t even know who the victim is till the last minute. Most of it is improv. All we want is for the guy to die a miserable, violent death.”

Sid Roth delivered. The vomit, the panic in his eyes, the spastic seizure—it was all there. Instead of falling facedown, he took a few blind steps, crashed into a table, and cracked his skull on the base of a marble column when he hit the floor. There was lots of blood—a nice little bonus.

A woman screamed, “Call 911!”

“And cut,” The Chameleon whispered.

All in all, a brilliant performance.

He texted Lexi as he walked toward the subway. Scene went perfectly. One take.

Fifteen minutes later, he was on the F train reading *Variety*, just another blue-eyed, fair-skinned, struggling New York actor heading to his next gig—a 9:00 call at Silvercup Studios.

## Two

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THE FILM BUSINESS in New York needs chameleons, and he was one of the best. It was all on his résumé—the Woody Allen movies, *Law and Order*, the soaps—at least a hundred features plus twice as many TV shows. Always in the background. Never saying a word. Never upstaging. Blending, blending, blending.

Not today. He was sick of being a face in the crowd. Today he was the star. And the producer, and the director, and the writer. It was his movie—the camera was in his head. He pulled a handful of script pages from his pocket.

INT. SOUNDSTAGE—SILVERCUP STUDIOS—DAY

We're on the set of another piece-of-crap IAN STEWART movie. The scene is a 1940s wedding re-

ception. Ian is THE GROOM. THE BRIDE is DEVON WHITAKER, all tits, no talent, and half Ian's age. The happy couple steps onto the dance floor. A hundred WEDDING GUESTS look on, trying to act happy for them. EDIE COBURN, playing the jealous EX-WIFE, enters the room. She's filled with rage. The guests are horrified. The camera moves in close on one of them. It's the real star of this scene. It's The Chameleon.

His cell phone vibrated, and he grabbed it. Lexi. Again.  
“Guess what?” she said.

“Lex, you can’t keep calling me every five minutes,” he said. “I’m in a no-phone zone. The AD is a total hard-ass about it.”

“I know, I know, but I had to call,” she said. “It’s all over the Internet that Sid Roth is dead.”

“Baby, it’s been three hours,” The Chameleon said. “Some guy at his table was tweeting it before Roth hit the floor.”

“Yeah, all the stories say ‘apparent heart attack.’ But TMZ just said he was poisoned.”

“TMZ is full of shit. They’re a bunch of tabloid trashmongers. Everything they print is a lie.”

“But it’s true.”

“They don’t know that it’s true,” he said in a harsh whisper. “They won’t know anything till the autopsy. But they don’t care. They just put out whatever garbage will get eyeballs on their website.”

“I didn’t mean to upset you.”

“It’s not your fault. It just screws up the flow of my script. The way I wrote it nobody is supposed to know about the poi-