

FEARING PHIL COLLINS

The problem with going outside is that Phil Collins might be out there somewhere. He could be lurking in the beaten up Commodore across the road. He might be in the meat aisle in the grocery store. Just as I'm desperately trying to figure out whether it's cheaper to buy two lots of 500g mince at \$5.78 or one kilo at \$11.86 he could strike. He could attack and then...then it will all come back; the horror, the chaos, the pain. Violent waves of fear washing over me, consuming me, swallowing me in a vast ocean of furious pommy terror.

They thought I was crazy, for a long time, but I showed them. I proved to them all that the danger was real. And now everyone is just as terrified as I am that Phil Collins will find me and attack me.

And so they should be.

The first time it happened I was at Janet's BBQ. I grew tired of trying to make small talk with some snooty South-side soccer mums and went to the bathroom. And there he was. Waiting for me; his voice searing through my brain. Before I even knew it I was writhing on the floor, lost in a violent storm of scorching pain that I thought would never end. When I woke up in hospital and tried to explain they thought I was insane.

Until it happened again.

And again.

And again.

The last time was just a few weeks ago. A teenage mother and her two kids found me lying face down in a pool of my own blood right outside a 7-11. Can you believe that? TWO kids? Jesus honey what were you thinking? But that's beside the point. I have to stay away from him, at any cost.

I haven't left the house in two weeks now. I have to be sure. My sister Elizabeth has been bringing me food, bless her heart. Still, it's almost a favour to her

as well, her donating some of her groceries. You should see the size of her. She's like Rosie O'Donell on widescreen.

The phone rings and I snatch the receiver up quickly. I'm so desperate to talk to another human being I might not even hang up if it's a telemarketer.

"Hello?"

"Hi...Cynthia?" I don't recognise the voice.

"Yes...who is this?"

"It's me? Will? From the other week? We met at Grace's little garden party soiree." That's a particularly charming euphemism for what could more accurately be titled 'Grace's summer sugar daddy/gold digger meet and greet.' "Listen, I'm sorry I didn't call you earlier, we've just done this merger that's been an absolute nightmare..." The word 'merger' sends a quick shiver down my spine. Merger is the kind of word that doesn't get bandied around by no-hopers. Merger is a rich man's word. 'Merger' is to aristocrats what 'Datsun' is to deadbeats. It's a word that promises wide screen TVs, all the high heels a girl could dream of and bubbly from here til the apocalypse. There's worlds within that word.

"I'm frightfully sorry...I know you've probably forgotten all about me..." 5'7, thick black hair, green eyes a little too close together, slightly too much CK one, Dior watch, YVS shirt, Armani shoes...

"I think I remember you, more or less."

"I do apologise for not calling earlier, you must think I'm terribly rude..." With money like that my dear, you can get as Humphrey Bogart as you like so long as some of it's ending up in my pocket at the end of the day.

"Would you be interested...in...that is...do you want to...if it's not too much trouble of course...perhaps...a film? Or dinner? Both?"

"Yeah, Will...it's just..." I glance out the window. Outside everything is still. Quiet. Static. I'm not sure whether that's unnerving or reassuring. There's no way to be safe. But then, if that's the case...wouldn't it be better to just enjoy myself? I'll have to be careful...stay away from public places...

"Will...I'm not sure that I'm much in the mood for going out and about of late...there's...well let's just say crowded places bother me. But...if you were interested in something...more intimate? Perhaps dinner at your place?"

"Well...certainly if that's what you prefer. I could always have Vanessa whip something up."

“Your...daughter?”

“Oh goodness no I’m afraid I’ve never been one for children. She’s my maid.”

Cha-ching! A rich man who doesn’t require an incubating service for his offspring in exchange for the contents of his wallet. This is the golden ticket, no question.

“Perfect!”

We talk details and I am struggling to scribble down his address as dollar signs swim in my mind. For the rest of the evening I watch the home shopping network and plot out the winter wardrobe that I am going to put together as soon as I work my way into this guy’s wallet. At one point I think I hear the intro to *Another Day in Paradise* in a commercial and I have to stab the mute button before the terror begins.

I drive to Will’s in silence. Can’t risk the radio. Phil might be waiting for me. I could play tapes I suppose, but the only ones I have are *the best of Culture Club* (which would have to be blank in order for the title to be accurate) and *German for Beginners* which, much like most German tourists, has spent a little too much time in the sun.

I pull up outside the house and have to check three times that I’ve got the right address. I feel like the Fresh Prince of Bel Air, except Caucasian and with mammarys. I dash on a little more Armani *Diamonds* on all the hotspots, check my cleavage is amply displayed and touch up my make up before stepping out of the car and making my way to the entrance.

The door is answered by a small but pretty Hispanic girl who I assume must be Vanessa. She smiles and says:

“Welcome Miss Cynthia, please come in.” Oh yes, I could get used to this. I walk through the grand double oak doors and straight into a house that looks like it should be named ‘Chelsingham Manor’ or something equally ostentatious. I look up the ballroom stairs flanked by spiral staircases and inspect the classic modern French interior design. Yes, this will do nicely. I’ve been surveying the windows (oversized duplex frames with interlacing iron support struts) and the Persian rug that appears to be genuinely hand woven for a solid few minutes before I even realise that Will has been standing there smilingly sheepishly for the entire time.

“Oh! I’m so sorry Will! How lovely to see you! I was busy being enchanted by the lovely décor.” I gush obsequiously. No time for half measures here, this could be the jackpot.

I rush over and kiss him gently on the cheek and hold back a grin when I see his skin flush a rosy pink. Good. He’s nervous. That makes my job that much easier. He’s not the most handsome of men; podgy, squinty eyes, terrible haircut, but that’s only to my advantage. Rich attractive men tend to develop a god complex, they can be tough nuts to crack. Rich homely men tend to want to be quick to demonstrate the magnitudes of their bank accounts to make up for the shortcomings of their physicality. Suits me fine, I know which I prefer...

“L-l-lovely to see you Cynthia. Vanessa’s nearly finished putting the entrée together, care to join me in the living room for a drink?”

“Love to!” I take his arm in mine. This is a key manoeuvre: eager, but not too sensual.

He pulls back the grand white and gold doors to reveal a lounge room that could comfortably house the Queen and her entourage a dozen times over. Vast bookcases line the walls which reach at least fifteen feet high, the floor is covered in a rich red plush carpet and the liquor cabinet...well...it looks as though it could keep a girl and her friends going for a solid decade of high class debauchery. Occupying a large portion of the room is a grand piano large enough to have an orgy on.

“Do you play?” I ask feigning interest in my best oh-my-you-are-just-so-talented-you-are-impressing-me-to-death voice.

“Oh well, you know. A bit. A few pop songs, I occasionally cannibalise some of Mozart’s simpler pieces when I’m feeling adventurous.” He moves over and reaches out to touch the keys. “I could...”

“NO!” I yelp a little too loudly. “No, thankyou. I’m dying for that drink...” He hasn’t totally bought it. I can see the confusion clouding his face and it doesn’t disappear even when I pull my most practiced Liv Tyler pout. He moves to the liquor cabinet and fetches us both wine. We clink glasses and I pretend to listen to what he is saying as I start to make plans for the parties I’ll be holding here in the summer. Who to invite, who not to invite, who to invite specifically so I can rub their faces in it.

We chat, I plot, the evening is going well. I might even let this guy seal the deal this evening if he plays his cards right. Right now however, I need to leave him alone for a little while, let him sweat a little. Make sure he’s anxious, nervous, eager.

“Excuse me, I have to use the little girl’s room?”

“Oh yes...up the stairs, past the billiard room and third door on the right.” The billiard room? Is he living on a Cluedo board or something? Who has a *billiard* room anymore?

Not that I really need to use the bathroom that urgently, I just wanted a chance to scope out the rest of this little palace. Crystal chandeliers...oh my set to motion sensors! Very classy. Expensive looking art...multiple studies...guest bedrooms...this is just delicious...here’s the billiard room...one...two...three. Here we are.

Oh. My. Lord! Solid marble sink...gold taps with, yes, I think that’s authentic pearl! Dear lord if this bathroom were a human it would be Donald fucking Trump. This is the mother lode! I wonder how long before I can move in...my record is still two weeks. It might be time to set a new standard.

I sit down on the throne and I’m just getting comfortable when I look up and see an object facing me that fills me with abject fear and hideous confusion. My first thought is:

‘Who the hell puts a gold record display in their lavatory?’ Which is closely followed by: ‘He’s here. He’s here in this house. I have to get out. There he is staring at me...those awful English eyes and pallid visage. Like some sort of crooning vampire with bad dress sense. I have to get out.’ The cover of *No Jacket Required* stares at me with Phil’s face drenched in sinister sanguine. It’s an omen. He is coming for me. I leap up and burst out of the bathroom and I’m planning to head straight out the front door when I hear soft eighties synth pads swelling through the air. I’m too late.

I can feel it coming in the air tonight... His voice intones like some sick reaper’s taunt. Nonononono! I run down into the lounge room, find the stereo and tear it savagely out from the wall then smash it onto the floor. It explodes into a glorious blast of silicon and silver. I heave my breaths in huge violent gulps and stare at the tangled mess lying at my feet, realising that my pipe dreams of champagne breakfasts and fields of Prada are now just as shattered as this complex mesh of wiring and plastic.

“WHAT THE HELL!” Yells Will in horror. “Good lord woman are you on drugs?”

“Will! I’m...I’m so sorry...I can explain...”

“I hardly think that’s possible...you’d best leave.”

“NO! Please....just....” I can almost feel the diamonds falling through my fingers, nearly see the limos filled with Armani and Versace driving off into the sunset.... “I didn’t want to tell you...but there’s something wrong with me.”

“Well I can see that...”

“No, I’m not crazy! At least, not in the way you might think. I have...a medical condition...it’s sort of like epilepsy...”

His face softens slightly from frightened rabbit to jilted puppy.

“Oh...oh...well...I’m sorry...but...why did you smash the stereo?”

“This...condition. It’s nothing to do with lights. It’s music.”

“Music makes you have seizures?”

“Not all music. Just...Phil Collins actually....” His eyes grow wide and the corners of his mouth suddenly plunge into a violent frown.

“Oh God that is not even close to funny! You come here, into my house, destroy my three thousand dollar stereo and then INSULT my taste in music? Who the hell do you think you are?”

“I’m serious! I can prove it! It’s rare, it’s very rare but I promise I’m not lying...” I stare down at the obliterated stereo then look sheepishly back at Will and add: “Well...maybe...not right now...”

“GET OUT!” He yells with his finger dramatically quivering as it points towards the door.

Then I do something I’ve never done before. I beg. I fall down on my knees, risking tearing my sheer silk Dolce & Gabbana dress and I beg.

“Please, I’m begging you... I know it seems strange.”

“What this SEEMS to be is a waste of my time. I’ll thank you to leave immediately!” He turns sharply on his heel and yells:

“Vanessa! There’s quite a mess in the lounge room here...”

I turn away, broken and defeated. Phil fucking Collins has just laid waste to my pipe dream and burned my golden fairy tale castle to the ground. No more days in paradise for me it would appear.

Just as I’m opening the front door and savouring the feel of the plush inch thick Persian rug underneath my heels for the last time I hear Will’s phone ring. He’s got one of those fancy phones that plays actual songs instead of little robotic bleeps that sound like computers playing with xylophones. I hear those familiar, bouncy

piano chords commence and I know what is to come. *I need love, love Ooh, ease my mind...*

I feel the shocks tearing through my head like someone's just shoved my face into a toaster and then shoved that toaster into a bathtub. My legs and arms start flailing...I can hear Will calling out but it's like his voice is a far away radio signal. My head spins, my legs explode into frenzied shudders...and just before the darkness envelops me I hear:

*Right now the only thing that keeps me hanging on
When I feel my strength, ooh, its almost gone
I remember mama said
You can't hurry love
No you'll just have to wait!*