



A FUNNY THING HAPPENED... BY LESTER COLODNY & SUSAN HELLER

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

~SNAKE EYES~

I am standing in the middle of a casino practically empty of people except for my crew of technicians, lighting men, sound men, grips, a script lady and extras, all assembled from six different cities.

Empty, as in almost shut down.

Only two reasons in the world a casino would almost shut down.

One was the actual end of the world.

The second was Frank Sinatra.

My hero.

I, Lester Colodny, am about to make a film, (okay thirty second commercial), with... Francis Albert Sinatra.

The idol of millions.

The star of stars.

The most famous singer since Caruso.

Sinatra, whose voice wafts me back to memories of magnificent nights with women I have loved, affairs that blossomed and love affairs lost. A man whose lyric tones defined life and love for multiple generations...

I am going to direct Frank Sinatra.

Through my exhaustion I can feel the excitement build as my heart rate begins to crank up. It's 7:30 in the morning and we're good to go.

For days and nights, the crew and I have worked feverishly using a stand-in, to create a scenario that will enchant the world and make multitudes of people beat a path to these Golden Mousetraps.

And after almost a hundred hours of preparation we are waiting for that breathless moment when he appears.

My God.

Me, directing the man who made every memory I have.

Memories that make me want to weep.

Memories that elate me.

He isn't just Frank Sinatra.

He is a hundred recollections, a thousand reminiscences, he is a piece, no, a part of my life.

A kid from Brooklyn is about to work with the greatest star in the world.

I am overcome.

It is too much.

I have to sit down and take deep breaths.

But... there is no Frank Sinatra.

The crew looks at me expectantly.

I look back at them and shrug a little sheepishly.

Time passes. Finally, I send a couple of assistants out to look for him and one reports back that Mr. Sinatra is, "losing his ass at baccarat." Frank had them open up the table so he and his friends could play. Two hours later, Mr. Sinatra deigned to show up (eighty thousand dollars in the hole).

He just stands there.

The silence is palpable.

I say, "Morning Mr. Sinatra. We're ready for your first take. Make-up."

A make-up lady, her fingers trembling, starts to brush Frank's face.

"I don't need none of that shit. Let's do the fucking thing," he grumbles.

None of that shit?

Let's do the fucking thing?

My main man in the universe has said, "Let's do the fucking thing?"

No.

I am wrong.

Must be the fatigue setting in.

I turn to the crew.

"Let's do it," I say.

The commercial is to be shot in one long take.

Thirty seconds long.

"Ready, Mr. Sinatra?"

"Yeah," says Frank sullenly.

Yeah?

He said, "Yeah?"

The camera man says, "Camera."

The sound man says, "Sound."

I say, softly, "Action."

And I watch as Frank Sinatra completely botches the take.

"Cut," I say, quietly.

One of Frank's bodyguards rushes over and hands Frank a drink and a lit cigarette.

I approach them.

"Mr. Sinatra---?" I begin.

"Yeah?" he says.

Yeah?

"We'd appreciate it if you did the commercial the way it was written," I say.

"Whoever wrote that, it was shit," comes out of the mouth of the most famous man in the entire world.

In the universe.

Shit?

Did he say, "shit?"

I must have not heard him correctly.

I say, "I wrote the commercial, Mr. Sinatra."

"Well, you heard me. It stinks."

Stinks? It stinks?

"That's the copy," I say.

"Well, it's rotten."

Did he say...? No. I must have not...rotten?

"Awright, let's do it and get the fuck outta here," he says.

Get the fuck outta here? My first commercial with Francis Albert Sinatra and he wants to "get the fuck outta here?"

I am shaken to my core.

I say, "All right everybody Let's do it again."

But my star, my hero, my idol, is sitting and bullshitting with his pals.

He is smoking.

And drinking.

I say to the star, "Excuse me, Mr. Sinatra, but I'm afraid we can't have any smoking or drinking in the commercial."

"Why?" demands Frank.

Why?

Why isn't there any smoking or drinking in the commercial?

"Because...because...smoking and drinking is not permitted in a commercial."

"What are you talking about? I see television shows all the time. They smoke and drink in plenty of them," he says.

His buddies, his pals, his cronies, all nod.

"They don't permit it," I say, gently. "in the commercials. They permit it in the body of the shows that the commercials surround."

"What did he say?" says Francis Albert.

I said patiently, "There is a ban on smoking and drinking in commercials."

"By who?" he asks.

"Who?"

"That's what I said, you deaf? Who?"

I am beginning to get just a little tired of explaining things to my idol.

"Mr. Sinatra," I said, "I don't know who. I just know that..."

"Whatever," Frank cuts me off.

He drops the cigarette on the rug (that cost the owner of the Golden Nugget thousands) and knocks off his drink in one gulp.

"Let's try it again," I say to the crew, quickly.

Suddenly, I am approached by one of the star's bodyguards.

A big man.

A very large man.

A huge man, in fact.

"Dis is it. You heah? One maw time and the man is troo,"

"I beg your pardon?" I say.

The immense man jabs me.

In the chest.

With a salami sized forefinger.

"You hoid what I said. One maw and Mr. Sinatra is troo."

This is a crucial moment.

A very crucial moment.

Because, if the commercial is not shot in the next take, Mr. Sinatra is "troo."

I take a deep breath and step forward.

With my heart pounding, I look up at this giant and jab my finger into his chest and say, "The man is not troo. He is troo when I say he is troo."

Then, I turn to the crew and said, "Now...let's do it."

"Speed."

"Camera."

"Sound."

I say, "Action."

Mr. Frank Sinatra walks into the commercial, hits his mark, and says his lines.

Dreadfully.

"Cut," I yell.

Mr. Sinatra is walking away from the camera.

I intercept the star.

"Excuse me, Mr. Sinatra," I say, "But you will have to do it one more time."

After all these years, I am talking to Frank Sinatra and what am I saying?

Not, "Can I have your autograph?"

Not, "Thank you for all the incredible songs and music."

I am saying, "You'll have to do it one more time."

And he says, very snottily, "I never do more than two takes. If you don't have it in the can, then you don't have no commercial."

He said, "You don't have no commercial." Just like that. "You don't have no commercial."

I say to myself, "You ignorant slob. You piece of crap. You crude individual. You, who I thought was the quintessence of sophistication. You unconscionable, unmitigated, jerk. You egomaniacal creep."

Aloud, I say, "It was thirty five seconds long, sir"

"So?" he says.

"Commercials can only be thirty seconds long."

"Why?"

Why? Why? You insufferable piece of shit.

There is a long, tense, moment.

Then he says, in a voice that is supposed to sound menacing, "Okay, let's get it over wit.""

Now, we do the commercial.

And Frank Sinatra does the copy on the commercial exactly the way I wrote it.

In one take.

And then, without even a backward glance, he walks out of the casino followed by his entourage.

"Twenty nine and a half, on the nose. Perfect," says the script girl. "Jesus, wasn't he absolutely great?"

"Frank was wonderful," says the make-up girl.

"Mr. Sinatra is the quintessential perfectionist," says the owner of the Golden Nugget, appearing from nowhere.

I look at them all.

From the lofty CEO to the lowly script girl.

Then I shake my head.

My dreams and illusions have gone up in smoke.

But I have the commercial, in the can.

I look at my watch.

It is ten minutes after ten in the morning.

I walk out of the casino to the pool.

It is empty of people.

I dive in.

Clothes and all.