

Chapter 19

WANTED DEAD OR ALIVE

(BRITNEY SPEARS)

[Accompanying a Hollywood paparazzo on a high-speed pursuit of Britney Spears.]

To make sure he got his photo, paparazzo Mel Bouzad had at least one of his photogs parked 24/7 outside Spears' hilltop Malibu home awaiting her departure. The waiting seemed to go on forever until our stomachs all started growling. Bouzad begrudgingly drove us to Duke's, an oceanfront tavern just down the road. And sure enough, just as the waitress was bringing our meals to the table, a call came in at 1:15pm reporting some activity back at the Spears compound, indicating her departure was imminent.

"Brit's on the move!" announced Bouzad, grabbing his fries and dropping a wad of cash on the table before making a mad dash to his car. There'd be no waiting for anyone to catch up, he let it be known. And I had no doubt he'd be perfectly fine just abandoning us there in the parking lot if we didn't get our asses in gear. So, as much as I was dying to dig into my clam boat sandwich, I knew we had to rock and roll. Ah, the life of the paparazzi.

By the time we pulled out of Duke's, Bouzad had discarded his barely touched lunch and was on the phone trying to hire a helicopter. Yes, an actual HELICOPTER!!! It's like this guy was Bruce effin' Wayne!! Word came in that the Federlines were already on the Pacific Coast Highway headed south in her black Mercedes G500 SUV, with a trail of *seven* paparazzi in SUVs already in hot pursuit. This was not good news for Bouzad, because the more competition on Britney's tail, the less likely he'd be to get anything exclusive. But in Bouzad's mind, it was still worth the stakes of a high-speed chase. And oh how the speed climbed ... and climbed. By the time the caravan reached the 405 South, we were driving at speeds in excess of 90 mph, with all the reckless paps weaving in and out of lanes, crossing double yellow lines and illegally swerving into the carpool lane trying to dodge expendable "civilians." While I personally found it both thrilling and frightening, Britney appeared completely undaunted. Sitting calmly in the passenger seat with her bare feet propped up on the dash while slurping up her slushy, this was just another day at the office.

Then, as so often happened with Spears, nature called. Kevin suddenly pulled off the freeway and into the nearest gas station.

“Girl’s got a weak bladder,” explained Bouzad, who had sped straight through red lights to make sure he didn’t lose sight of his prey.

While Britney hurried to retrieve the restroom key from a gas station attendant, we studied Federline in his wife beater, dangling a cigarette out his window and waiting for his lady to return. Bouzad made no attempt to hide his animosity.

“All Kevin wears are those wife beaters,” he told us, annoyed with K-Fed for failing to diversify his wardrobe so that Bouzad’s photos might command a higher price. “They’re both trailer trash ... and you can print that!”

There was no mistaking just how much Bouzad was getting off on this thrilling game of cat and mouse. At one point he radioed one of his boys and told him, “If we get this picture, I’ll pay for the next lap dance.”

I started to get the feeling that Mel was intentionally laying it on extra thick so I’d paint him in my article as a fearless rogue. Everyone seemed to be playing a role in this insane melodrama, including our leading lady, who appeared to be choreographing her every move so that her pursuers could get what they wanted. When she emerged from the bathroom to discover a little girl waiting outside with her autograph book in hand, everyone seemed in agreement this was an irresistible photo op that could benefit all.

But Bouzad was relentless. He wanted more, more, MORE!!