

Chapter 23
DESPERATE TIMES CALL FOR ...
(*THE DESPERATE HOUSEWIVES*)

Just minutes before reaching Marcia Cross' house, I received a text message from my friend Rex. "Have you seen this story about Marcia that just broke on Perez Hilton?" read the text, with a link to the tasteless gossip columnist's web page.

Oh crap! With a sense of dread, I pulled over to the side of the road and brought up the web page, which revealed newly resurfaced photos of a young Marcia caught outdoors entirely in the nude. Even though they were extremely tasteful—artistic even—they were clearly taken in private and never intended for public viewing.

Rex had presented me with a moral quandary: ignore or exploit to land a shady exclusive? Having a fairly good sense of my track record by now, you can probably guess which option I chose. But I did wrestle with the dilemma throughout the interview up until the very last minute. "God, this is going so well," I told myself. "Do I go there and risk ruining everything?"

With Marcia introducing me as promised to her precious twins—who made a rather grand debut in the arms of their two nannies—and the actress opening up freely about turning to costly in-vitro fertilization to help her become a mom at age 45, I fooled myself into thinking she might also be open to discussing those personal photographs taken so long ago.

I was dead wrong. A hint came when she mentioned how she'd recently dealt with pesky paparazzi at the neighborhood park she enjoyed visiting with the twins: "I tell them I will *kill* them." (Perhaps an intentional warning to mind my own manners.)

But my time had come to either shit or get off the pot. And I regrettably chose to take an epic crap right there on the polished, lemon-scented hardwood floors of Marcia's lovely living room.

I closed my notebook, folded my hands on my lap and said quietly, "There's just one last thing I need to bring up."

"And what's that?" Marcia asked, already on guard, with Heidi stepping in close like a protective lioness.

"The news story that broke this morning on Perez Hilton."

“What’s Paris Hilton?” Cross asked.

“*Perez* Hilton,” I corrected.

Cross was genuinely not familiar with the gossipmonger, which only made me further respect her. But it also made this already awkward moment even more drawn-out and excruciating.

“It’s a celebrity gossip site,” Heidi (Marcia’s publicist) explained to her client.

“I never read any of that,” Cross said. “In fact, I told Heidi I’d fire her if she ever brought any of that stuff to my attention.”

I didn’t doubt a word she was saying. And just as soon as I let Marcia know about the nude photos, she got up off the couch and returned to her kitchen, signaling that the interview was over. I apologized, trying to explain that my editor would be expecting me to ask.

“No, Will,” Marcia corrected. “This was *your* decision. You made the choice.”

And you know what? She was 100% right, and I felt about the size of one of her baby girls, who by now had been whisked upstairs and out of my sight. Making the most of her master’s degree in Psychology, Marcia was able to see right through me. No editor had asked me to pose this question. It was residual tabloid brainwashing that pushed me to cross Cross by pushing her buttons just to seek a potential buzzworthy scoop.

“Are you planning on putting *that* in the story?” Marcia asked as I said my goodbyes.

“I haven’t decided yet,” I told her.

“Well, I’d be horrified if you did.”

Ultimately, no mention was made of the photos, so I’d destroyed a perfectly lovely day for absolutely no reason. And I knew my twelfth-hour blunder was all she and Heidi would take away from my visit.

I should have just left then and there with some remaining shred of dignity intact, but I ended up making things even worse.