

Chapter 24

FLYING FUR

(ELLEN DEGENERES)

And even though I knew better, in a moment of weakness at a John Varvatos store on Melrose, I chose to purchase a tuxedo with a real fur collar when I found one in my size on the sale rack. Today, I fully understand that this was not only an unethical purchase, but perhaps even worse: a huge waste of money, as the tux looked completely ridiculous on me. As was typical, I just hadn't properly thought things out. And the first time I wore it, boy did I ever get a lecture!

It was backstage at the Shrine Auditorium for *The People's Choice Awards*, where I was on assignment for *USA Today*. As always, I was on the lookout for celebrities to interview, and across the room I spotted lesbian power couple Ellen DeGeneres and Portia de Rossi. It was January 2006, quite early into their relationship, and there was deep fascination with these two, so I couldn't let the opportunity go by without trying to land some quotes for the article I'd be writing.

I'd spoken with Portia many times during her years on *Ally McBeal* and *Arrested Development*, but this was my first-ever time meeting Ellen. Fortunately, when the *Enquirer* was trying to "out" Ellen back in the '90s, it was (not surprisingly) the female reporters who were sent out to the "girl bars" she was rumored to frequent. Shrewdly, the *Enquirer* never directly outed Ellen as gay. Rather, as was their style, they just printed a series of articles asking, "Why can't Ellen stay out of gay bars?"

I know—so ridiculous, right? Especially considering there were several closet cases right there on the *Enquirer* staff—my own self included!!

When I approached the ladies and introduced myself as a reporter for *USA Today*, both Ellen and Portia were very pleasant—a total reversal from the looks I used to get when I'd revealed my allegiance to the *Enquirer*. When I asked about the Christmas presents they'd recently exchanged, they gamely clued me in: a black Porsche for Ellen and a silver vintage Mercedes 280 SL for Portia. How charming.

It took me a moment before I realized Ellen was gently stroking my jacket's fur collar.

"This is lovely," she said. "It's not real fur, is it?"

Gulp!!

This was a moment when it would have behooved me to lie my ass off, but dumb naïve me decided to tell the truth.

“It is,” I said, cringing sheepishly. “It was on sale at John Varvatos, and I just thought it was so beautiful.”

Ellen instantly recoiled, pulling her hand back in horror as if I’d told her the fur had been harvested from a skinned Snuffleupagus. Portia also took a step back.

“Oh,” said Ellen. “I liked you, but now I don’t like you so much.”

With the fur about to fly, I suddenly felt as though I might become the one skinned alive.