

Biog

by

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DESCRIPTION

Capella Secrest, biographer extraordinaire, finds herself on the receiving end of the search for the “Rosebud” that makes a life a biography.

CHARACTERS

- CAPELLA SECREST, biographer
- NIGEL HAMILTON, assistant

SETTING

- Office

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Scene 1

The office of CAPELLA SECREST, biographer. She rips a handful of manila file folders from her briefcase, holds them over her head, as if ready to slam them down. Which she does.

NIGEL HAMILTON, her assistant, sits to one side.

NIGEL

So he wouldn't give you—

CAPELLA

The prick.

NIGEL

—what you wanted?

CAPELLA

The prick!

NIGEL

I see—the prick.

CAPELLA throws the files one by one on the floor. Papers scatter.

CAPELLA

He said he would give me the diaries—I need the fucking diaries—and then he doesn't.

After the first one or two folders, CAPELLA gives NIGEL a look. He kneels down to pick up the folders as she continues to toss them.

NIGEL

Capella—

CAPELLA

Keep the papers straight—

NIGEL

—this is not the first time someone—

CAPELLA

He said he would!

NIGEL

And you're mad—

CAPELLA

Pissed—straight—

NIGEL

—that he changed his mind—

CAPELLA

Operatically pissed—

NIGEL

Because he wouldn't just hand over to a perfect stranger—

CAPELLA

I am not a stranger—

NIGEL

—the record of his most intimate thoughts—

CAPELLA throws down the last folder. She opens a wooden box on her desk and takes out an intricate derringer.

CAPELLA

He asked me to write the damn thing—his “legacy”—Christ!

NIGEL

He has family.

CAPELLA

His family? They’re more the stranger than [!]
—

NIGEL

But still—

CAPELLA

You should shoot them all for me—

They pause, look at each other. NIGEL continues cleaning up.

NIGEL

Family, I am sure, he mentions once or twice in those diaries—

He stands up.

NIGEL

Perhaps he is actually being careful about their feelings—

NIGEL puts the folders on the desk.

CAPELLA

I find that unusual. Unnatural.

NIGEL

Could you put that away? Last time—

CAPELLA does not put it away.

CAPELLA

He hired me to write the biography. He knew who he was getting, so why all of a sudden—Christ!—why won't—he give me—what—I want—

NIGEL sits down.

NIGEL

What makes you think there's anything in them? Please, don't point—he doesn't strike me as—

CAPELLA

There's always something—

NIGEL

But everyone you've spoken to—transcribed by—
(points to himself)
—lists him a very ordinary man—

CAPELLA

No one is ordinary.

NIGEL

Except he seems to be exactly that: the honest public servant, the loving husband, the mostly okay father—all in all, we shall not see his like [again]—

CAPELLA

Boring—

NIGEL

For Capella Secret, biographer extraordinaire—

CAPELLA

For anyone—

NIGEL

But not for him—for the "him" who pays your bills.

CAPELLA

Are you telling me I'm wrong?

NIGEL

Could you point that somewhere else—

CAPELLA

Nine biographies, my Nigel—it's not loaded this time—

NIGEL

Appreciate it, though, if [you]—

CAPELLA

The market has spoken—

NIGEL

Being called “The Proctologist” is hardly a nickname that would warm—

CAPELLA

And I get a deep warm feeling when I look at my bank account—
my “proctology” is what makes people buy—

NIGEL

So his forty years of distinguished service and devoted
husbandry—

CAPELLA

It's never that—

NIGEL

So his forty years of distinguished service—

CAPELLA

Never.

NIGEL

Why not?

CAPELLA

“Why not?” he asks. Because there's always a Rosebud.

NIGEL

(imitating Orson Welles)

“Rosebud.” That Rosebud?

CAPELLA

The least known thing about a person—the thing really tucked away—that holds the most truth about [that person]—

NIGEL

No it doesn't—

CAPELLA

That's what they want when they buy “a good read”—greatness—feet of clay—and to see them crash in all their gory glory—

NIGEL

But do you—

CAPELLA

They all do—

NIGEL

But do you believe this—Rosebud—

CAPELLA points the derringer to the ceiling, cocks the trigger, then fires. NIGEL tries not to jump at the sound, but he does. CAPELLA puts the gun back in the box.

CAPELLA

People's lives are a mess, Nigel—a laughable mess—take yours, for instance—

NIGEL

Not worth [taking]—

CAPELLA

But I can come along and make someone's life—even your life—make sense—I find the unseen that explains the seen, I describe the turning points where, at one moment, you're just plain ordinary and the next, you're fucking Paul on the fucking road to Damascus. Does life go like that, really—Rosebud, pivotal moments, turning points—who cares? In my books they do, and that's why people love them: they get gossip, they get faults, they get cracks, they get arc, they get to judge—they get a tale told by not an idiot, signifying something—the pogroms in Kiev against her grandparents lead to S&M and bondage later that feeds her cutting-edge abstract expressionism—it all gets puzzled together.

NIGEL

Even if it doesn't, really.

CAPELLA

That's why biography is an art.

NIGEL

But he won't give you your paints, so to speak.

CAPELLA

I'll get them—there are always workarounds—someone to lean on, someone to reward—

NIGEL

So his forty years of distinguished service and devoted husbandry—

CAPELLA

To be explained away.

CAPELLA knuckle-raps the box that holds the derringer.

CAPELLA

Are you with me on this?

NIGEL

"This" meaning—

CAPELLA waits.

NIGEL

Of course.

CAPELLA

Good—now go—you have work to do for me—the game is afoot.

Transition. Music.

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Scene 2

CAPELLA's office, late. NIGEL enters carrying a package wrapped in brown paper and string. He turns on the desk lamp, puts down the package. He unties it: a bundle of journals. He opens one, leafs through it, does so to several of the others. He sings or hums Aretha Franklin's "Respect".

NIGEL

Oh, the secrets revealed hereby—

He re-ties the bundle, picks it up.

NIGEL

Better put you to bed—she'll want to pump you dry in the morning.

NIGEL either goes off-stage, opens a locked desk drawer, or opens a safe. In either case, he finds and reads a couple of manila folders. Intently.

NIGEL

That bitch. That bitch.

He reads some more.

NIGEL

How did she find out about— Who told her that?— I don't even remember—

Sputters to a stop. He rearranges the papers, closes the folders, put them back, comes back to the desk. He thinks. He thinks. He turns off the lamp.

Transition. Music.

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Scene 3

CAPELLA rips a manuscript out of her briefcase, holds it over her head, as if ready to slam it down. Which she does.

NIGEL sits to one side.

CAPELLA

You think I wouldn't find this?

NIGEL

I didn't make it hard to find—just like the folders on me—

CAPELLA

Nobody will publish it.

NIGEL

Somebody will. You can't get to everybody.

CAPELLA

“Shoot The Widow”—

NIGEL

“Lying About [Life]”—

CAPELLA

The title?

NIGEL

From you—

CAPELLA

I never [said]—

NIGEL

When a famous person dies, you called everyone holding onto a piece of information the “widow”—and of course shooting them—an impulse not unknown to you—would make it easier to get what you wanted.

CAPELLA

Who'd you shoot?

NIGEL

Didn't have to. Many who had been—touched—by you parted willingly with their scraps. Though I am proud of the birth certificate—

CAPELLA opens the derringer box, takes out the gun.

NIGEL

—that took some real sleuthing—and so, according to your Rosebud, your being illegitimate—the bastard—explains why you are [such]—

CAPELLA

None of this is ever going to get out.

NIGEL

It may be too late.

CAPELLA walks to NIGEL, presses the gun against his head. NIGEL doesn't move. CAPELLA waits. Then she pulls the trigger. NIGEL falls to the ground, bleeding but alive and in pain. She tosses the gun back into the box.

CAPELLA

The powder charge in the blank certainly won't do damage to a thick skull like yours.

NIGEL, bloodied, struggles to his feet. They stare at each other.

CAPELLA

It's well-written.

(points to wound)

Meant to be shocking, not deadly. I mean it about the writing.

NIGEL

I've been learning from the best, apparently—Christ, my ear—

CAPELLA

Wounds around the head always bleed the most. A lot of blood in a small area. And the research—sourced, defensible. Don't wipe— So what am I going to do with you, my well-trained Nigel? How do we write up the life we're sharing at this moment?

They stare at each other.

NIGEL

Could I get a bandage first?

CAPELLA

Would you like some help?

NIGEL

From renowned Capella Secret? Whose last name, if swapped around, spells “secrets.”

CAPELLA

I have never noticed that.

NIGEL laughs. They stare at each other.

NIGEL

I will bandage myself, thank you. And then we’ll talk.

CAPELLA closes the lid of the derringer box.

CAPELLA

I think that would be in order.

NIGEL goes to leave but watches CAPELLA. CAPELLA opens up the derringer, shakes out the casing, replaces it with another round, and shuts the gun. She slips it into her coat pocket. She waits, then takes it out of her pocket, puts it away, shuts the box. She notices NIGEL. They look at each other—perhaps they smile.

