



PUBLIC AFFAIRS

The Choices We Make...



ELIZABETH FERRY-PERATA

Public Affairs
The Choices We Make...

By Elizabeth Ferry-Perata

Copyright © 2018 by Elizabeth Ferry-Perata. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without the written permission of the publisher except in the case of brief quotations or except where permitted by law.

The information contained in this book is intended to be educational and not for diagnosis, prescription or treatment of any health disorder whatsoever. This book is sold with the understanding that neither the author nor publisher is engaged in rendering any legal, psychological or accounting advice. The publisher and author disclaim personal liability, directly or indirectly, for advice of information presented within. Although the author and publisher have prepared this manuscript with utmost care and diligence and have made every effort to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the information contained within, we assume no responsibility for errors, inaccuracies, omissions or inconsistencies.

ISBN-13: 978-0-9990232-8-0

Printed in the United States of America

For more information about special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact 3L Publishing at 916.300.8012 or log onto our website at www.3LPublishing.com.

To Mom and Dad – Thank you for always believing in me!

Part 1: Unbreakable Love

CHAPTER 1

Ella grabbed a blue pen from the drawer of her dark Cherrywood desk and wrote the word “calm” on the bright yellow, sticky notepad on her desk. Peeling it off, she stuck it on the folder in front of her. Narrowing her eyes, she picked up a picture that sat on her desk and studied the eyes, which stared back at her. *Yes, calm.* That one, simple word came straight to her mind when she first saw those blue eyes that stared back at her in that photo.

Charles “Charlie” Grady was the man in the picture. Although the color profile picture was a few years old, it didn’t change the fact that those eyes had a calming effect on her. Of course, what she thought and what the public perceived were two separate matters, and she had been called in to clean up the mess created by the person in the picture.

“Ella? Your four-o’clock is here,” Ella heard her assistant say through the phone intercom.

“Thank you, Nancy. Please show them to the conference room and provide some refreshments.”

“Will do,” Nancy said and disconnected.

Ella looked at the photo once more. She closed the front cover and reached over to grab her legal pad and some pens. She rummaged through her side-desk drawer and found some Mentos. Unwrapping the container, she placed a mint in her mouth and chuckled. *Maybe this will be a short meeting. Oh, what the hell! Wishful thinking.* When she got called in, Ella knew these meetings never lasted less than two hours. *At least I didn’t make any plans for this evening.* She knew better. Ella walked around the desk and headed to the door. She stopped, turned around and smiled. At least these meetings had financially helped her out.

Located on the 15th floor of a high-rise in downtown Santa Monica, Ella’s office was spacious with her desk placed at an angle facing the door. She wanted to be able to see who was out in the office when she worked late at night after her receptionist left for the day. Late nights spent at work were commonplace in Ella’s busy professional life.

She sighed and looked around. Her office was inviting. Dark-wood bookshelves loaded with classic literature lined one wall. She

treasured her books – all classics from Shakespeare to Steinbeck. On the eye-level shelf she had placed books and family pictures. Her added touch though was her wet bar that sat squarely next to the bookshelf. She smiled at it in pride. The bar was something added prior to moving in. She knew that her clients loved to drink, and she wanted to provide them with these accommodations.

The other two walls featured ocean-side windows. In the evenings when she stayed late, she enjoyed watching the sunset over the ocean where the ships sailed by the marina. She had fond memories of ship-watching. She, her sister Grace and her grandmother took evening sojourns to the waterfront. She loved these trips. Grandmother, or “Memaw” as they called her, told stories as they watched and imagined where these ships had been and where they might go next. Memaw was a fantastic storyteller with a brilliant, creative mind. She and her sister would sit in rapt attention hanging on her words.

Ella’s mind returned to the present. She felt proud of accomplishing the creation of this workspace. She knew her long, grueling hours of working for others finally helped her earn her place in the public relations (PR) world. Ella launched her career right after beginning college. She knew she always wanted to go into public relations. She worked her tail off in high school and got a full ride to UCLA where she earned her bachelor’s degree in communications and her master’s in business administration. She then applied to work with the top PR firms in Los Angeles.

Her efforts resulted in an internship working with Verona and Associates, a prestigious agency known for representing some of the biggest names in business and entertainment. She was introduced into a world where the likes of Jay-Z or Adam Levine were commonly seen in the hallways. Some days she found herself shaking hands with someone as famous as Christopher Nolan, screenwriter, director and producer of major blockbusters like *The Dark Knight*; to willful and petulant actors and actresses who demanded things like “room temperature Evian” or insisted the office smell of “white lilies” when they were in the room. The egos and creativity swirled together to create this magnificent, surreal

world that most only dreamed of working around. Ella loved it – all of it including the time when a midget known for a famous role on an HBO series tried to make out with her in the office in front of everyone. It was ridiculous, but she wouldn't change a thing about it.

It wasn't all fun and games. Ella worked her ass off. When the account executives said go get me a pesto sandwich or chai tea from the local Coffee Bean and Tea Leaf café, she ran. She never questioned. She did everything and anything. One day she might drive 30 minutes to a producer's office to personally deliver a media kit and sizzle reel or the next she would be on the phone doing follow-up calls with magazine editors. She was persistent and tireless. Two years later and given some of the best recommendations from her account supervisors and she was off to another agency called Pitbull (one word) in the role of account manager. It was quite an accomplishment for such a young woman. Here she worked on what was widely known as “clean-up” jobs for badly behaved celebrities who other publicists avoided like they were death itself since these people's reputations were mostly unmanageable. Ella though relished cleaning up what her manager called “fucked-up messes.”

That job tested Ella's patience. One day might be spent touting the latest drug addict's rehab plans to the next day dealing with an out-of-control, doped-up heroine fiend who called her “fuck face” just out of spite. She kept her cool with each one of them. Even on her worst day when a well-known coke-head vomited on her desk, she managed to maintain her calm. For three more years, she put in her time, sharpened her skills, and amped up her contact list. Once she knew the right people and could call just about any TV producer, radio show head, or magazine editor and get a call back, she knew it was time to strike out on her own.

Now here she was today. She grinned and walked out of the office. She saw Nancy leave the conference room and walk straight toward her. Nancy's long, blond hair cascaded down her back. She had blue eyes and typically towered over every woman in the room. She was 5'9 with an hour-glass shaped figure. Nancy was a forty-

something-widower who lost her husband around the time that Ella opened her PR firm. She needed a job to support her two teenage children, Sam, 13 and Shane, 17, and Ella needed an administrative assistant. *It was a match made in heaven!* Ella thought. Not only was Nancy an efficient and reliable assistant, she was charismatic and made everyone feel right at home.

When Nancy approached Ella, she rolled her eyes and said, “So the story that I heard was poor boy couldn’t hold himself together because he just found out his father was banging his girlfriend; which by the way I find complete bullshit. Poor boy couldn’t care less what beautiful girl he was fucking – he only cared that he caught his dad doing her.” Nancy then added, “I did set up the refreshments and make sure there was fresh ice. If nothing else, I need to get home and pick up Shane from practice.”

“Thank you for everything Nancy. Have a good evening! If we sign tonight, I will place the contracts on your desk. Make sure they get shipped to the right places tomorrow.”

“Sure thing,” replied Nancy as she quickly exited to head home.

Ella smoothed her beautiful, chic, fuchsia-colored pencil skirt and walked forward. She entered the conference room straight away with her regal elegance and confidence on display.

“Good afternoon, gentleman,” announced Ella as she walked in the room.

Charlie Grady was tall about 6’2 with broad shoulders and bulging biceps that pushed against his tight, black t-shirt. He wore dark designer jeans that clung snugly against his lean waist and a sexy leather belt that gripped it together. Ella glanced at his size 15 shoes. *Man, big feet. I wonder if what they say about his feet match up with his ... ?* Embarrassed, Ella immediately looked up and wanted to run her hands through his wavy, dark hair. His gorgeously famous blue eyes stared at her and knocked her to her senses. He looked like a lost, scared little boy. Those wide eyes weren’t those of a confident movie star who could get any woman on the planet. Instead what stood before Ella was a guy who could only be described as a tortured soul. She suddenly realized the whole “Dad-

banged-my-girl” PR crisis was very real to him. This realization softened Ella and she felt sympathetic about the poor guy’s situation. She gently smiled.

CHAPTER 2

Charlie looked over to where the sound of the soft voice came from the doorway. In walked a woman whose angular cheekbones and symmetrical, chestnut-colored eyes created perfect beauty. Small at 5'2" with long, chocolate-brown hair that waved gently down her back, Charlie nearly lost himself when he saw her. His eyes were drawn down to her plump, pink lips – yes! She was by all standards a complete knockout.

Standing up, he walked over and reached his hand out. “Hi, my name is Charlie.”

“Ella,” she smiled.

She reached over to shake his hand. Charlie felt her soft hands. He instantly felt himself become hard. Turning away from her, Charlie allowed his lawyers, Joe Schiffer and Sandy Saltzberg, to shake her hand as well.

His father hired Joe and Sandy many years ago when Charlie was a young boy. Joe was short, bald with a big belly. He was loud and loved to take his clients to famously expensive LA restaurants like The Ivy. There he would run up a couple thousand-dollar tab while consuming expensive bottles of fine wine and eating only the best foods like a glutton. He didn't look like much with his lumbering weight and heavy mouth breathing, but his sharp wit and dead-on quips could put anyone in his or her place all the while laughing and not realizing they had been shot down. Then Sandy would come in slinging unequivocal truths. Sandy, tall, wiry and noticeably fidgety, didn't say much while his partner laughed his way through negotiations and discussions, but the moment something required his attention he came in like a brilliant and fast gunslinger. One comment or single observation could bring an entire room to silence. Mouths would drop and eyes would be widen. Yes, Joe and Sandy made quite a deadly legal duo – and Charlie's family got rich from their efforts.

After the pleasantries were exchanged, all four took a seat at the long conference table. Sandy and Joe sat on one side, Charlie took the head of the table, and Ella sat on the other side that faced the lawyers. Charlie glanced around and admired the spacious conference room. The dark cherrywood conference room seated about 12 people.

Floor-to-ceiling windows also overlooked the same ocean-side view of Ella's office. Charlie saw a sailboat floating on the water. *Sometimes I wish I could just float away.* On the other side, floor-to-ceiling glass partitions separated the entryway of the office. One wall had a TV monitor where it looked like conference calls were held. The opposite wall displayed a painting of purple roses with the initials "NG" scribbled in the lower right side of the painting. Purple glass vases full of fresh purple roses sat on each side of the painting and added an extra touch of class to the adjoining shelf.

"So, gentleman, let's get started, shall we?" Turning toward Charlie, Ella asked, "So, Charlie, please tell me in your own words, why we are here?"

"Don't watch TV much?" Joe glowered at her.

Ella ignored his comment. "I just want to hear from Charlie."

Charlie shifted his head down and wiped his grin off his face. He glanced over at Joe who had no patience for this nonsense and sighed. Joe was a misogynistic prick and Sandy generally worse than his partner. Neither had wanted to use Ella's services, but Charlie's old friend Sal Tomas, a former child star whose drug habits and wild whoring, took him from the A list to the "don't-go-near-him" list had strongly urged him to come see Ella. So, to his lawyers' utter irritation, here they were.

"Shit you all know my family's name ... and ... well that could be good and bad. For many people, they like the thrill of meeting them and trying to get something. I guess that is what Nicole, the girl I was, well, I was, um, seeing, needed. I went over to her house and the doorman let me in her penthouse apartment. I heard some loud rock music. Following the music, I walked in her bedroom to find her bent over the chaise lounge with Daddy standing behind, fucking her. Daddy saw me and said, 'Son, this little bitch sure does love dick.' Laughing, he continued to jack hammer her pussy. I didn't want to watch my girl's porn show, so I went out to Chez Jay in Santa Monica. Yeah, I got a little 'toe-up' and things just ... well ... slammed one of the paps in the head with his camera and told him to 'Squeeze it up his tight, little ass.' A nice reel on *TMZ* and then the bitch ... oh um ... let me rephrase ... the whore who fucked Daddy proceeded to brag about it.

Now I look like a fuck-face that smashes paps' heads in. So, shit yeah! Here we are."

His eyes sparkled at Ella when he said, "fuck yeah" in the most sarcastic tone. She knew that was more hurt than bravado coming out of his mouth. Charlie looked at her and saw an unexpected expression – no judgment or scolding glare.

"Hmm ... so. Bottom line – we have a banged-up Paparazzo and you look like ... oh yes, a 'fuck-face,' which is not a good image for an action hero."

"Well, does Ultraman look like a fuck-face?" smirked Charlie.

"I'm sorry, what?"

"I'm up for a remake of the old Japanese superhero Ultraman. The studio execs were, um ... 'not pleased' over the headlines."

Joe and Sandy looked at each other and glanced over at Charlie – both nodded.

Ella broadly smiled and said, "Well, lucky for you, you have come to right place. As you know I'm relentless about image management and personal brand. What we have here is a personal-brand crisis. People only see your image and when your personal life and image clash, they start to wonder. Is this guy really that sexy, suave action hero or is he, as you say, a 'fuck-face'? I use a very specific strategic and tactical approach to not discuss or dwell on your crisis, but to focus on your humanity and make you a heroic, real-life action star. Of course, I will need your full participation and agreement to do the activities I want you to do."

Charlie glanced over at his lawyers who looked on in disinterest. Then he stared at Ella. "What are we talking about here?"

"We make you Mr. Humanitarian of the year, a real hero for the people. We'll send you out to represent for things like Habitats for Humanity, Make A Wish, yada, yada, yada. Send you on some overseas meet and greet events and charitable marathons. Have you become the face of a cause? And then we'll PR the hell out of it. All your social media will shape that image. The message: I love babies, animals and really care about social causes. I'm a real-life, great guy. We'll have someone ghostwrite a book about your favorite cause or issue and then we'll send you out on the talk show circuit. If the issue

comes up, we'll just laugh ... make fun of yourself. Admit it. You'll look like a douchebag. No shame, but then you'll redirect the conversation to important causes. In just a matter of a few months the whole scandal will be behind you. No one will even care anymore. And just remember, all publicity is good publicity. When the studio execs see their 'Ultraman' really saving the day and being worshipped you're in and it's done."

"Impressive," nodded Charlie who turned to his attorneys.

"Guys?"

Joe smirked, "Yeah ... we'll just have to review the copy and text."

Charlie turned back to Ella. "Can we see a contract and retainer?"

"Of course," replied Ella.

A little later Ella walked the men out of the conference room toward the elevators. Charlie instantly felt the need to protect this woman. As he placed his hand on Ella's lower back, he felt her tense up. As the men entered the elevator, Charlie looked back and smiled. He saw Ella look at him with just a hint of a smile. The doors closed.