

Tim on Broadway

Season One

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Table of Contents

One 3
Two 11

One

I put down my donut, picked up my iced coffee and took a sip. The extra-extra cream and extra-extra sugar gave me a nice little rush. It wasn't quite as good as Starbucks' but being unemployed I had to make the best of my homebrewed pot.

I had my cell phone cradled in the crook of my shoulder, talking to my best friend Julia. "With my Kindle," I said, "I can read them without people staring at me on the subway."

"I still can't believe you like girly romance books," Julia said. I could hear her slurping her own coffee, probably an iced Double Mocha Grande being that she was at our old Starbucks in Salem. "You're the only guy I know that has every Chippendale Publishing book ever released."

I didn't really but I didn't want to quibble over details. "Oh my God," I said, as a bit of powdered sugar sprayed from my mouth and landed on the blanket I had covered over me. I was getting ready to watch TV. "I almost forgot to tell you."

She slurped some more of her coffee. "What?"

"Guess who's doing a comeback concert?" I brushed the sugar dust off the blanket.

"Who, Cher?"

"No," I said, raising my voice.

"I don't know. You got me," she said, and from her muffled speech, I could tell she was eating, probably a slice of carrot cake or a blueberry scone. I know what Julia likes. When she eats desserts, she usually goes for something that has a vegetable in it or some anti-oxidant fruit, because, of course, they're healthier than my powdered donuts.

I pulled the blanket closer to me. "Carolyn Sohier," I said. "She's finally coming out of seclusion and doing a concert."

"Carolyn, who?" I heard the clinking of the fork against the plate. *Carrot cake I bet.*

"Carolyn Sohier, you know the singer that was in *Witches of Salem*, that movie we saw the night I slipped on the ice in Danvers? And she was also on Broadway in—"

"Oh, her. That movie was terrible." I could practically hear her nose wrinkle in disgust.

Julia was brutally honest. "Well, I liked it," I said. "She's an amazing singer."

"She didn't even sing in that movie," she said, with her voice trailing off at the end.

"Well, it wasn't a musical. But she did sing the theme song. Remember, we saw her on last year's *America's Got Divas*. She was the guest judge."

"I suppose you'll want me to go with you," she said.

I clicked the remote control. "We'll see. Tickets are expensive. She's decided to come out of seclusion, out from her Greta Garbo cocoon. It's a one-night only performance up in Bar Harbor."

"Maine? Who the fuck gives a comeback performance in Maine? Bar Harbor, nonetheless. What, is she going to come out on stage riding a moose?" She laughed.

My neck was beginning to ache. I rubbed it. "I guess that's where she lives. It's a benefit of sorts."

"So are you going to take the train or bus your ass up here to see her?"

By *here* Julia was referring to New England, where we had both grown up.

"You wanna go?" I asked.

"You mean will I go?" Julia wasn't a huge fan of divas like I was, but she knew I had no one else to go with and wouldn't travel alone.

"C'mon you like her," I said. "You even said her rendition of that Barry Manilow song was better than his."

"Is that the song she sang when she shit herself on stage?"

"Whatever," I said and tossed the remote onto the seat cushion next to me. Julia was referring, of course, to Carolyn's fairly well-publicized stage fright. Carolyn had suffered a particularly bad spell several years back and, well, embarrassed herself on live television. It was pretty sad. Julia thought it was funny.

I turned as an ambulance's siren rang out from the street below, followed by a blare from its horn. I hated the sound of ambulances. I got up to shut the window as it took a turn down Charleston Place.

"Five floors up and it sounds like the cops are right next door," she said. "I don't know how you can stand living in New York City."

"It was an ambulance and I'm in Brooklyn."

"Whatever."

I looked at the wall clock, a gift I bought myself. It had logos from nearly all the big Broadway shows over the past two years. "Shit. It's almost time for *America's Got Divas* and I haven't even set the DVR."

"Alright, I'll let you go. Besides, I should check the dryer." She was at our old Starbucks across the Laundromat. "Oh and how are you going to come up with the money to buy tickets for this reclusive diva? Didn't you just get done telling me you've already spent this week's and next week's unemployment check?"

I didn't want to get into it. "Javier," I said. "He's finally going to pay me the money he owes me this week."

"Oh, God. Not Javier." I knew her well enough to know that she was probably rolling her eyes as she said it.

"Shut up," I said, with no real force behind it. Julia could be such a bitch. She was always reminding me of the things I did wrong, which were plenty, and the things I should be doing to better myself, which, quite honestly, were spilling out of my inbox.

I didn't want to be reminded of the humiliating experience I had had with Javier, the bagger at The Good Barn, my former place of employment. In short, he got me fired. "He's getting money from his student loan," I said. "He is going to pay me back on Wednesday."

"We'll see about that. Didn't I tell you not to give him that money? Didn't I tell you you'd probably never see it again? But no," she said, holding onto the vowel a bit longer than necessary. "You still went off and gave it to him after giving him a BJ in the beer cooler behind Produce. He's going to ruin your wholesome, good-natured reputation."

I sighed heavily. I think she preferred me to be a virgin and felt my having a relationship would interfere with our friendship. Plus I didn't want to rehash the beer cooler experience again.

We were silent for a bit. I could hear her scraping the last of her carrot cake, or whatever it was, from her plate.

I was leaning against the windowsill with my back to the street. "The walk-in beer fridge," I said, "isn't really behind Produce. It's more or less behind the deli."

She laughed. She always marveled at my ability to avoid what's important and focus on the picayune. The conversation then went on to her describing the store layout to make sure she had it right in her mind. For she always had to be right.

I sat back down on the couch and Dixie, my cat, jumped on my lap. I clicked the remote over to channel 851 while Julia went on about how the cereal aisle had been where she had gotten hit

on by some guy in black leather pants the last time she visited. She was always boasting about how big her boobs were and how they attracted men. They were really just fat. And I don't think men were all that attracted to them. But who am I to know?

I listened to her drone on and popped the rest of the donut into my mouth.

"Alright, I'll leave you be," she said but before she finished she spouted, "Oh, wait," which I flinched at. "There's a cute guy going into Chase's Laundry."

I pictured her at our old corner table, which looked out at the Laundromat, peeping out the window. "What's he look like?" I asked.

"Um, dark hair, I think. Tight jeans and a Red Sox cap." I could picture her wiggling in her chair like she used to when we played this game.

While we had waited for her clothes to dry, we used to sit across the way at Starbucks, drink coffee till we were bouncing off the wall, eat pastries and watch for cute guys doing their laundry. We'd fantasize about dating some, as if we, and our two-tons-of-fun, ever had a chance of scoring with them.

"What show would he take me to?" I asked.

"Um, maybe *Joseph*," she said. "Or perhaps *Godspell*, something with a religious bent."

"Okay, not bad."

"But obviously you'd have to go to a Red Sox game with him first," she added.

"Uh, forget it," I said and threw my hand up. I wasn't really a sports guy. Though someone once told me I looked like Russell Adams, a pitcher for some Midwest baseball team— I can't remember which one. I had no idea who he was and had to look him up. I was shocked by the comparison; he was once a contender for People magazine's sexiest man of the year. *Maybe that expression*

about a face only a mother could love wasn't true in my case, I thought as I paged through the magazine. Nah. There's no way I could ever be that good looking. Except for having the same shaggy brown hair, high cheekbones, dimples and similar green eyes, I didn't see much of a resemblance. I was five-foot nine about an inch or two shorter than Adams. And then the obvious, I was much heavier.

Julia and I laughed a bit more. I was always making her laugh. One of the reasons I think she liked me so much. We said our goodbyes and hung up.

I set the DVR on to record. I didn't want to have to sit through the commercials.

Julia, what a trip. We go way back.

Julia and I grew up together in the same neighborhood. We have been friends since second grade, which was when her parents moved from Peabody to Salem.

We even went to college together: She was a year ahead of me but in her junior year did some business co-op thing so we wound up graduating the same year.

During college while she worked at an ice cream parlor, I had this part-time gig at an insurance agency in downtown Salem. The owner was a customer of my dad's. I helped manage some of the back office details. The hours were flexible and the extra money helped.

Julia has always been like a big, pain-in-the-ass sister to me. But I still love her.

After I graduated from Salem State with a degree in Elementary Education, I discovered I hated kids and definitely didn't want to be a teacher. I had been talked into majoring in education by my parents who thought the stability of a pension would serve me well. "You're good at math. Teach it," they had suggested.

I got a job at the Witch Dungeon coordinating field trips and was sometimes called in as a substitute teacher for the school department.

Both jobs sucked.

I was still living at home at the time but would sometimes spend the weekend with Julia. She had landed a good job in Boston and had her own apartment in downtown Salem, near the aforementioned Starbucks and Laundromat.

I have always loved theater. At least a couple of times a year, my mother and I would take a bus from Boston and go to New York to see the shows. These trips started when I was a kid and continued, until...

My mother died shortly after I graduated from college.

Ugh, more on that later.

About a year after my mother died, my dad put the house on the market. He wanted a condo in Peabody. It was then that I decided New York was where I'd rather be.

And it was the best decision of my life.

I think.

Since moving here, I've seen Willemijn Verkaik, the original Elphaba, in a limited engagement of *Wicked*; saw the premiere of *Follies* with Bernadette Peters and got an autographed copy of the playbill from all the cast members of *Sweet Home*— including Matthew Caulfield's.

Let me tell you. Getting Matthew Caulfield's autograph was a major score. I have always had a big crush on him. I had won backstage tickets from a trivia contest with Broadway Kibitz, the place to go for anything related to New York theater.

I was also a shareholder in the crowd-source funded gay version of *Grease*. It cost me \$2,000 to become a member but it was so worth it, even though the show didn't do well. It closed after the actor who played Russo— aka Rizzo in the straight

production— had a tiff with the actor who played Sandy and broke his collar bone. Remember, this was the gay version so Sandy was some skinny blonde guy, the male equivalent of Olivia Newton-John.

And just recently I saw the Divine Miss M, Bette Midler, in *I'll Eat You Last*, which was fantastic. She is one of my favorites. Talk about divas. Bette is also Carolyn Sohler's idol. Another reason I love Carolyn.

After grabbing myself a refresh of iced coffee, I got back under my favorite blanket, pulled it up to my chin and settled down for *AGD, America's Got Divas*.

"She sucks," I said to the TV and threw Freihofer's donut box at it. Vanessa, one of the final three, was mutilating "And I'm Tellin' You" from *Dreamgirls*.

Two

Javier Kevin Rodriguez.

It's kind of a strange name but it comes from being part Latino and part German. And, may I add, one-percent gorgeous. His father is from Venezuela, which is where he gets his dark hair and olive complexion. But his killer blue eyes come from his mother. Despite him being a bit of punk, I find.. I should say *found* him irresistible.

My little crush on him began the day he came back, during spring break, to work at The Good Barn, which is his uncle's store.

I was the head cashier, and had been for about three months at that point. Our paths never crossed over Christmas break.

I should have known better, kept my distance and followed the company handbook. Though, to be perfectly honest, he was the one who was "repeatedly making sexually suggestive gestures," not me.

Ultimately, that summer, the off-duty-unwelcome-conduct-of-a-sexual-nature was determined to be my fault, and I was terminated.

Kipp, his uncle, and I worked out a deal. Neither of us wanted sexual harassment on our rosters. "Laid off," read the pink slip.

But at least I could collect.

Well, let me tell you. My conduct was not *unwelcome*. But be it as it may, I left so as not to suffer any further embarrassment to me, The Good Barn, or to Javier.

Despite what I told Julia, I didn't lend Javier money *after* our "conduct of a sexual nature."

I lent it to him in order to have a "conduct of a sexual nature."

I'm embarrassed to even admit it. But I lent him money because he said if I did, he would let me blow him.

I feel like such a fool.

But a man that's seventy-five pounds overweight doesn't get hot looking guys taking an interest in him very often. Okay, not often... how about ever?

I haven't told anyone I paid him to let me do... to let me do him. Even Dixie doesn't know. But after many insomniac nights, sometimes it's best to get things off your chest.

When Javier came back that summer, I was assigned to be his team lead.

Perhaps because he was favored by his uncle or because of his charm, he got away with murder. He was late nearly every day, goofed off in the stockroom throwing around rolls of paper towels like they were footballs and was always hanging out with the guys in Receiving even when he was supposed to be up front helping me bag.

Sometimes I get nervous around beautiful people. I'm more comfortable with those that are flawed, like me and Julia. I don't know if it was that but I found it difficult to reprimand him. Then again, I find it hard to scold my cat.

He knew he was good looking too and always dressed impeccably. He was dating some rich girl, named Sue, from Long Island but she was abroad for the summer. So apparently he felt liberated to fool around.

One time, after I was coming out of the stock room, I caught him making out with Cheryl, one of my better cashiers. I told

Kipp, but as always when it came to Javier's indiscretions and unruly behavior, his uncle looked the other way.

Javier's flirting with me didn't really start till the night a bunch of us went out for drinks at The Grip, a bar not too far from the store. Somehow he invited himself along, saying his fake ID would get him served.

Up until that point any "conducts of a sexual nature" were just me fantasizing about him in the privacy of my own home. I had found him very alluring. Who wouldn't with a guy that cute?

I had talked about him to Julia. She was tired of hearing about me and my unattainable crushes: Matthew Caulfield; Joey, the football player from Salem State- I know I said I wasn't into sports, but I liked him; Santino Fontana from *Billy Elliott*; and Mark, the barista at the Salem Starbucks with the buns of steel. The list went on and on.

"Unattainable, unattainable," Julia would say to each one as I went through my fantasy boyfriend league. I could just picture her with her long, brown hair pulled back with those glass-balled bands she wears atop her head. They were more appropriate for a ten year old rather than a twenty-eight year old junior accountant.

I could imagine her pushing up her constantly drooping Coke-bottle glasses to keep them from slipping down the bridge of her nose as she slurped on a Frappuccino.

With Julia, I didn't get into all the gory details regarding Javier. I just didn't want to hear her haranguing.

Anyway, that night at the pub it was pretty crowded.

I hadn't been there before. Its sports' decor wasn't really my thing.

A group of us crammed into a booth that had been made into one by an overly joyous hostess who lifted a divider between two. We were situated at the back end of the bar. Javier and I sat next

to each other. He was wedged between me, the partition and then a guy from Receiving.

I hate having to sit at booths. I can barely fit in them and this one was particularly tight. Apparently fat people were not appreciated at The Grip. I looked around. I had to have been the biggest person there. I must've stuck out like a sore thumb.

I don't usually do workplace get-togethers but when I heard Javier was going I got as giddy as a seventh-grade schoolgirl-like I was going to an N'Sync concert back in the day.

After an hour or so at The Grip and two or three pitchers of some Belgian beer, Javier announced to the table that he needed to "drain his vein."

Straight men can be so crass.

I took his broadcast as a cue to uncork myself from the table. While out, I figured I'd go too. After all, shoving myself back into the booth only to have to get back out upon his return was too much work. I suppose I could have slid down toward Hank, from Receiving but he was kind of big and mean and I figured Javier wanted to chat with him.

The bathroom was tight, two urinals and an out of order stall.

As I had got there first, I was already aiming my stream at the picture of the little bee at the bottom of the urinal when Javier came in.

He came over and stood at the shorter urinal next to me, unzipped himself and started to pee. "So Tim, I hear you're gay."

Shocked by his boldness, I veered off course from my bee target and nearly pissed on the floor. "Oh?" I hadn't told anyone at work. "Who told you that?"

He spit into the urinal. "I don't know... just heard a rumor you were gay. Don't worry about it," he said. "No big deal. Just so you know, I'm fine with gay people."

"Oh... okay."

He cut a fart then laughed. "Sorry, man," he said. "Hey, my roomie is gay." His body shook; apparently he was shaking his private with vigor.

"They got 'em at RIT too, huh?" I said, referring to Rochester Institute of Technology.

He laughed, flushed and I then met up with him at the sink.

I washed my hands while he looked at himself in the mirror. He wiped at an imaginary spot on the edge of his mouth. "From what I hear, gay guys give the best blowjobs," he said.

I inhaled some of my own spit and began to choke.

He looked at me in the mirror and smiled. His teeth were brilliant white. "I didn't mean to startle you." He then grabbed his crotch, adjusted his package in that all-too-straight way that guys sometimes do. Though he seemed to hold himself a little bit longer than what I had been accustomed to seeing. I was shocked by his statement. *Is this a come on? Not that I would know.*

He then pulled up his sagging pants. It could have been my imagination but it looked like he had a slab of kielbasa or something traveling down the right leg of his khakis. "Let's go get some more beer," he said and headed back out.

I stood there by myself for a few seconds longer, then washed my face and recomposed.

After a couple more pitchers of the Belgian stuff and a few shots, the night actually became fun. Suddenly I didn't care about my stomach resting on top of the table. No one else seemed to notice.

After some pithy comment I made, which I can't remember, Javier gave me a hug. "Ain't he the best?" he said. "Tim, here is my bud." He hugged me tighter.

I felt the prickliness of his spiked hair brush against my cheek. He leaned his head onto my shoulder.

I turned my head toward his. The smell of his hair gel and the fresh soapy scent of spring on his face made me want to get even closer. *Oh, God.* If I had had another drink in me I think I would have kissed him right then and there.

Now, to most normal people, a friendly hug and respectful acknowledgement wouldn't have meant much, but to me, someone who's practically a virgin (Does buying a go-go boy in Vegas count?) it was a big deal. I practically melted in his arms.

After that night, I knew I was in trouble. I was falling for Javier Kevin Rodriguez, the straight boy punk bagger on break from Rochester Institute of Technology.

But that was all a couple of months ago. I've grown since.

I think.