

Sister Act

"Well, Emily, it's all your fault. You know that, don't you? I'm still deciding if I'm ever going to speak to you again!"

I was hurt. Jesse was my big sister. *"But ... it wasn't my fault, I swear! I just turned around, and ..."*

"And my own sister did it!"

It had started out innocently enough. I'd seen an ad in the newspaper for an open casting call. Somebody was making a movie here in town, at the West Edmonton Mall, and one of the scenes required a whole bunch of extras. Anybody could apply.

I called Jesse to see if she was interested. I thought it would be fun.

"Come on, Jesse! It will be a blast. It's just a couple of days. And Brad Pitt is in the movie ... maybe we'll get to see him!"

My sister Jesse is currently a stay-at-home mom, and will be for at least the rest of this year. At some point in the future I suppose she'll get a teaching job, but right now she has lots of free time. How hard can being a mom be, right? I figured she'd jump at the chance to be in a movie with Brad Pitt.

"Well, I don't know, Em ... I suppose Cole could look after the baby for a few days. But ..."

She wasn't sounding too enthusiastic. I guess having seen the actor who played Severus Snape while she was working in London had made her a little jaded. But Brad Pitt! Come on! *"Jesse, it will be fun. We can be in a movie together!"*

"But don't you have classes?"

"No, this is Reading Week. And who ever actually reads during Reading Week!? I'm going to be in a movie. And you are too!"

"And speaking of college, do you have any idea yet what you're going to major in?" It was Jesse's favourite question. My mother's too.

"Well, the psychology course I'm taking this semester is pretty interesting. I was sort of thinking about maybe becoming an animal psychologist ..."

"What?!"

"You know, sort of like a vet, but dealing with animals with psychological problems ..." I was just stringing her along. I really had no idea what I wanted to do. I could feel Jesse rolling her eyes at me. She did that a lot. *"But Jesse ... the movie ... we really should do it!"*

I eventually talked her into it. I think that what really made up her mind was the fine print in the ad that I'd shown her. It said they were looking for extras of all ages, including mothers with

babies. That did it. The thought of Gracie being in a movie was too good an opportunity to pass up.

So we showed up at the casting office downtown the next day. We walked into the waiting room thinking there would be hundreds of people there, but surprisingly, there were only a few dozen. Jesse and I eventually got to talk to the receptionist.

“The Brad Pitt movie? Yes, we’re still looking for a few more extras.” She looked at me. *“Would you mind wearing a blonde wig? We’re looking for someone young and not too ... uh ... intelligent. I think a blonde wig would do it.”*

I wasn’t too sure what to make of that. But I said yes. Of course I did. Brad Pitt.

“I have a baby. And a stroller!” Jesse was jumping up and down. She wanted in. She was hooked.

“Perfect! Can you both be at the mall tomorrow morning at nine? They’re going to do a few preliminary run-throughs. Perhaps even film a few scenes, if everything works out”.

We signed some forms, and both of us left the office with smiles on our faces. We were going to be in a movie!

I don’t think either of us slept much that night. Jesse picked me up early. Gracie was in the back seat, cooing happily.

“Cole thinks this is really stupid” Jesse said. *“But I think it’s just because he doesn’t like Brad that much. He’s more an Arnold kind of guy!”*

“Do you think we’ll get to see him? Brad, I mean?”

“I hope so. Maybe he’ll even say something to us.” I didn’t know about Jesse, but I was holding out for a kiss. But she continued. *“And what’s that on your neck? A tattoo?? Emily, are you crazy?”*

“Like it? I did it this morning ...”

“Mom is going to kill you! You know how freaked she got when you got that lip piercing ...”

“Hah hah! Relax, it’s fake. But I figured Brad would like it!”

Jesse looked at me a little wistfully. *“You know, we probably won’t even ...”*

“Hey ... what’s that you’re wearing?” I’d just noticed that Jesse was wearing an extremely low-cut blouse. And her hair was ...

She looked a little embarrassed. *“Well, you never know ... Brad might see us ...”*

We both were laughing as we pulled into the mall parking area near the entrance they were going to film at. We could tell it was the right place by all the trucks, lights and cables strung around the area. There were people rushing all around. We got out of the car and loaded Gracie into her stroller. She looked happy.

A security guard asked us why we were there, and then directed us toward a large group of people milling around near the entrance. A young guy with a three-day old beard and a bullhorn jumped up on the back of a truck and started yelling.

“OK, you people are all extras. We want you to walk into the mall, through those doors there, in groups of two or three, and just walk to the end of the corridor. You can talk to each other, if you want. But don’t look at the lights, or the cameras”.

A young woman pulled Jesse and I aside. She looked into the stroller and smiled. *“Oh, what a cute baby! But you know she won’t be in the shot, right? You’ll be in the background ...”*

Jesse looked a little crestfallen. But the woman continued, looking at me. *“You’re going to be the blonde? OK, here’s your wig. And some gum.”* Apparently I was being cast as a dumb blonde. I could handle that. Anything for Brad. *“Is that tattoo real?”*

I told her it wasn’t. *“Get rid of it, OK?”* I noticed Jesse smirking. *“You two will be in a close-up shot as you’re entering the doors. Don’t look at the cameras. Got it?”*

I knew about not looking at the camera. I’d acted in a few videos in high school, and the cameraman was always yelling at us *“Don’t smile. Don’t look at the camera. Act natural! Emily, don’t walk so fast!”* It hadn’t helped that the cameraman had been my father. At least I hadn’t giggled every time the camera was aimed at me, the way Jenna and Melanie had.

And Jesse had had some experience too, although it had been accidental. I still laughed when I thought about how Jesse had appeared, for about three seconds, in an un-erased taped-over segment of a video my father had shown to her video-making class. She’s been in the bathtub with me. She’d only been about six years old, but I guess naked is naked. She still hasn’t let him forget about it.

I washed off the tattoo, and tried on the wig. It fit perfectly. Then some little guy in black leather stopped us and brushed some white powder on our faces. *“It’s to, like, cut the glare, you know? You’re too, like, shiny!”* Before he moved on to someone else, he looked again at Jesse. *“You’re the ‘young mother’, right?”* Jesse nodded. He reached up and attached the top three buttons of Jesse’s blouse. *“There. Much better!”* And he scuttled away.

Jesse was scowling as we moved towards the entrance. People were lined up ahead of us, entering a few at a time after being waved in by a woman with a clipboard. We waited our turn.

“Em ... we’re supposed to talk to each other. What are we going to say?”

“Well ...” I thought for a moment. *“You could tell me how stupid I was for paying twenty dollars for that fake tattoo.”*

“And you could tell me why I spent \$120 for this blouse ...”

“What? That much? You should have gone to Smart Set ... I still get discounts!” I’d worked there for a year before starting college. I still had nightmares about rude parents and their obnoxious kids.

We were moving closer to the doors. There was a large crowd of people, being let through in ones and twos. We had some room in front of us, mostly because of the stroller Jesse was pushing. Gracie was awake and burbling happily to herself.

As we approached the doorway, there was some kind of disturbance behind us, but the crowd was pressing too closely to turn around. Then it was our turn.

The woman waved us through. Jesse went first. There was a big smile on her face.

When it was my turn, just as I stepped through the door, someone right behind me gave me a sharp push, and I stumbled. Catching my balance, I turned quickly to give whoever it was behind me a piece of my mind, and my elbow must have caught him in the face, because he yelped and put a hand over his eye.

I didn't have time to see what damage I'd caused, because as I stepped into the corridor, the lights blinded me. I tried not to blink as I continued forward.

Jesse was just ahead of me, and as I caught up to her, she turned and said excitedly "*Do you think they're filming? Sometimes they do that, you know ... just film it, without telling anyone. Makes it more authentic or something ...*" Jesse was excited. But at least she'd stopped bouncing up and down. And she looked quite demure in her blouse, now buttoned up right to the neck.

I was trying to spot the cameras out of the corner of my eye when we heard it.

"*Cut! Stop! Everybody stop!*" It was a loud booming voice, coming from somewhere ahead of us, behind the lights.

Two guys with long hair and wearing ratty jeans and Spice Girls T-shirts came running towards us. They looked panicked. One was screaming at me. "*What did you do??*"

I looked at Jesse. She looked at me. Gracie snickered. I didn't know that babies could snicker.

"*We didn't do anything, did we?*" I checked the wig. It was where it was supposed to be. My skirt wasn't tucked into the back of my pantyhose. My shoes matched.

The man ran up to me and waved a finger under my nose. "*Look what you've done! Look!*"

He pointed behind me, at a short guy in a suit jacket who was bent over, hands to his face, and moaning in pain.

The two men rushed over and helped him to stand. They pulled the hand away from his eye, which was purple and nearly swollen shut. The guy had a scraggly goatee, and his mouth ... his mouth ...

"*Emily!*" Jesse was yelling into my ear. "*You nearly killed Brad Pitt!*"

"*Killed? What do you mean? He just ran into my elbow ... wait a minute! BRAD PITT?!*"

The injured party in question was glowering in our direction. Out of one eye, anyway. He was, after all, a remarkably good actor. He could glower out of one eye any time he wanted to.

He walked up to us. Glanced once at me, and scowled again. Looked toward Jesse, still scowling. Then he noticed Gracie.

"Hey! What a cute baby!" He smiled, in a squinty-eyed sort of way, bent down, and gave Gracie a kiss.

"OK, you girls are out of here". It was the finger-waving guy. Apparently he was the director.

Three or four big beefy guys protectively hustled us back out of the mall. We were sort of glad for the protection. The rest of the extras, still lined up outside the door, were glaring hostilely in our direction. They must have seen Brad enter and run into my elbow.

We were sort of in a daze as we made our way back to the car. Jesse said something about never forgiving me, but I knew she didn't mean it. We're sisters, after all. Gracie was still chortling away to herself in the stroller. Then we both stopped, and looked at each other.

"He kissed Gracie!" We both shouted it at the same time, and gave each other a high-five.

Cole never did understand why Gracie never got her bath that week.