

TELEPHONE CALL TO MY MOTHER

IT STARTED SEVERAL months ago when I called my mother with the good news.

“Mom, I’m thinking about writing a book.”

“Really? What are you going to write about?”

“Me and my wonderful life.”

“That’s a great idea. You can write about all the people you met and how you used to go to the set with your father and about the time they put the ears on you.”

“Mom, I’m not going to write about that.”

“What? Why not?”

“Because nobody wants to hear about that crap. I’m going to write about the dark times, about the times when I was down and out, about the times when I could barely survive, like when you and Dad were out of town on some *Star Trek* press junket and I was strung out on the floor of that men’s room downtown, when I almost OD’d and was passed out in my own vomit in that stinking men’s room with the toilets overflowed and shit everywhere and the glaring lights and the bums and the flies and me on the floor passed out with a needle in my arm.” My mother’s about to have a heart attack over the phone.

“Tha . . . that . . . that never happened to you!”

“No, Ma, I know. But that’s what people want to hear.”

POWER LUNCH

I GET UP at 5:45 AM and drive Jonah, my fourteen-year-old son, down to the beach for Surf Club. We get there and meet up with Scott, a middle school teacher who runs the club. While Scott is getting into his wetsuit he asks me what's been going on. I tell him I've been writing my memoirs, covering everything from my recovery from drugs and alcohol to the raising of my teenage kids. I tell him I'm also writing about my attempts to re-create my personal and professional life after the crash and burn of my marriage and my directing career. Scott says this all sounds very interesting and that he knows a literary agent he can put me in touch with if I'm interested. Yeah, I'm interested.

So Scott writes an e-mail to this agent telling him he should meet me because I have an interesting story to tell and that "growing up the son of a celebrity had some funny and touching hardships." I don't know where the hell he got that crap, because I never mentioned anything about that growing-up stuff. Just his sales pitch, I guess, but it worked. Richard, the agent, jumps at the chance, saying he's a "big *Star Trek* fan" and that "Spock is, like, the John Lennon of the group" and that he looks forward to having lunch with me.

The following week, I meet this guy at Factor's Deli on Pico. Richard is tall, well over six feet, which is pretty tall for an agent. He's wearing all black, shirttails out, hip-and-groovy

black-framed glasses. We're sitting at a table on the back patio and it's sunny and hot out there. There are umbrellas at each table but it's still cooking. There's a bleached blonde with huge breasts sitting with an older woman at the table behind Richard and she's checking me out, which is totally distracting. Suddenly, I picture the two of us rolling around in bed together—the blonde and me. But I've got to stay focused here because Richard's with a heavyweight agency and I don't want to blow my big chance.

I let him do all the talking: He's thirty-three, was raised in Toluca Lake, and is from a wealthy Jewish family that made their fortune in kosher foods. He was a successful child actor until he grew up and wanted to stop. He went to law school but discovered that people became guarded when he told them he was a lawyer, so he decided not to practice. He managed to get himself into this literary agency and now he wears all black. He's recently married, his wife's an attorney, and they live in Silver Lake. I manage to slip in that I'm also an attorney and that after practicing for seven years, I started directing TV shows. Now I teach filmmaking and raise my teenage children. He tells me the baby-boom generation is like that: We were handed everything on a silver platter and then spent decades trying to "discover ourselves." He says that his generation has been paying the price for that trip of discovery ever since.

Hmmm.

I'm not quite sure what he means by all that but it kind of sounds insulting. Especially from a child actor-turned-attorney-turned-agent.

And what about that bleached blonde? I mean, what would happen after we finished up in bed? Would she want me to take her to dinner? What if we bumped into my kids? I mean,

she's so clearly inappropriate for me, what if we bumped into *anyone*?

Lunch arrives and I refocus on Richard. He takes a couple of bites from his Reuben sandwich, then launches into what he thinks this book should be about. He tells me we should start off with my childhood and what that was like before getting into the *Star Trek* years. Then we'd go into how my life changed after the show started airing and segue into life thereafter with particular attention to the 1970s, when the show became a hit in syndication. He goes on and on about how this story is playing out in his head, about how I can bring a whole new perspective to a phenomenon that's been a pillar of pop culture for more than forty years. And there are dollar signs. I swear I can see dollar signs in his eyes as he explains how he's going to shop me to all the major publishing houses. He thinks he's going to get some bidding war going when he starts sending out the manuscript—to be written by a hired gun I'll be working “closely” with—and that the book will be entitled something catchy, like *My Life with Leonard* or *Son of Spock* or maybe *I Am Not the Son of Spock*.

Then he takes a moment from his grand plans to actually ask me a question.

“So what *was* it like growing up with him as a father? Just tell me like you were telling a therapist at your first session.”

Just tell him like I was telling a therapist at my first session.

Hmmmm.

I've got to stop to think about that one.

Richard digs deeper into his Reuben sandwich. I've never had a Reuben. I don't know, the sauerkraut thing never really appealed to me. I'm having turkey and Swiss on rye with Russian dressing. I didn't realize it was a triple-decker and I've been having trouble fitting it into my mouth. I'm kinda losing

my appetite now anyway, so I just let it sit there knowing I'm going to be asking for a doggie bag. The blonde is having a salad. Great figure, tight white sweater in eighty-degree heat, pointed white pumps . . . her and me on white sheets. We smoke cigarettes when we're done, blowing smoke rings in the air. I haven't smoked in thirty years but I might light one up if she wanted me to. Totally wrong for me, but I still have this fantasy that it could work out, that it could all work out. With the blonde and with Richard.

Got to stay focused here. I'm trying to pretend I'm in a therapist's office and that Richard the Tall is my therapist, when we're actually sitting outside in the back courtyard of Factor's and now it's hot as hell out here. We're under a huge umbrella—but my arm is outside the shade line and it's getting fried. I'm staring at the pickle bowl thinking I should have dressed hipper and not worn my Vans tennis shoes. Too casual for a power lunch. I'm thinking about what to say so I can save this situation and not lose this guy, but I'm not sure I want to get into a whole lot of detail about my life with my father. And now I'm starting to panic a little and I have to fight to stay in control.

“Look, Richard, here's the thing: There have been a lot of positives growing up the son of Leonard Nimoy and plenty of negatives. You have to understand that my father is first-generation American, born to Russian immigrant parents who had nothing when they arrived in Boston. During the Depression, when he was ten years old, my dad sold newspapers on the Boston Common in the dead of winter. When he came to L.A. to become an actor, without his parents' blessing or support, he worked a dozen odd jobs to provide for himself and later for his family. No one gave him anything: Every dollar in his pocket was his. I, on the other hand, was raised in sunny

Southern California and never really wanted for anything. When *I* was ten, *Star Trek* started airing, and in the years that followed, things became pretty comfortable in the Nimoy household. I never had a paper route, I had an allowance. I did well in school but didn't have to work my way through and maybe that was a mistake. When you have a generation gap like that, there's plenty of room for conflict. And it's taken a hell of a lot of work to bridge that gap, and sometimes we're successful and sometimes not.

"But I think it's important for you to also understand that I've spent my entire life struggling to create my own identity. That's one of the reasons I became an attorney until I finally realized that, for me, it was a dead end. So I'm not totally averse to getting into the *Star Trek* stuff and maybe some of the complications of being my father's son. But most of my writings revolve around my life today, in terms of my recent divorce, raising two teenagers, and dealing with recovery after thirty years of substance abuse."

Richard stops eating and just sits there in silence, looking down at his plate. I think he's going into some sort of shock. I mean, I can actually see his face going pale. Those dollar signs are definitely fading as he shifts in his seat, the blood draining from his face like he's about to be sick or something. He reminds me of that guy in *The Crying Game* when he discovers that the new love of his life is really a transsexual.

Richard clears his throat. Then he looks up at me through those black trendy, expensive glasses. His mouth starts to move.

"I didn't know you were a writer."

"I guess Scott didn't tell you. I mean, I have written a number of things about my life growing up and I'm absolutely willing to consider using some of that material. But I'd really like the

emphasis to be on what's been going on over the last three years since I sobered up and moved out of my house."

More shifting in his seat and then he leans back like he's trying to catch his breath. There's some color returning to his face. Finally, he tells me to send him some of my work along with some of my *Life with Leonard* stories. And while Richard halfheartedly insists on paying the check, my mind is already racing about which stories from the past might be appropriate to use along with the more recent stuff I've been writing.

First my mom, then Scott, and now Richard. Everything comes in threes. Maybe I do have to start thinking about that growing-up crap.

The credit card is signed and the lunch is over. We get up to go. The blonde gives me one last going-over with eyes that tell me she's willing. I've been alone for months and I'd really like to sleep with her.

But then, of course, I'd have to kill myself in the morning.

