

Spin

By Warren Florence

It's one of those muggy July nights in New York where the sweat dribbles along your ribs until it absorbs into your shirt. Some other guy could pull off the sweaty, sexy look if he came staggering from one of the surrounding dance clubs with "hot babies" under each arm, so Jake lives for. But I just crawled ten minutes late from the urine-reeked subway in my new white Banana Republic stretch shirt with my first non-buttoned collar flapping away. Add a nervous, quick-paced sweat to stale subway heat and I'm completely stuck to my shirt.

I find the place, a loungy-cool cigar bar in SOHO, and Jake with an arm stretched out over the next bar chair, drinking wine and laughing through his Letterman tooth-gap. His body moves in synch with his chuckles. I've only seen him in a good mood, like the-world-is-literally-for-the-taking kind of good mood. Because it is, he says, since he's played the game better than just about anyone in the entertainment industry. Which is great for me because that's why I've come to New York—to become a writer and producer. Jake's my foot in the door. It's finally going to happen after writing a few magazine pieces here and there and teaching tennis lessons to make up the rest of my rent. He sees me coming in, waves me over.

Breathe deep, I think. Be cool.

I walk into a conversation about this chick he's been seeing. I know the girl he's talking about because she sat by the court watching him play tennis a few days earlier. She's cute.

I'd apologize for being late, but I don't want to bring it to his attention.

Hey, what's happen'n, man? he asks of his new writer and development man. Order whatever you want, because it's business tonight, he says as he showcases the bar with wide-open arms like of one the Price Is Right girls. It's on his dime, then, which is good because I've got about forty bucks in my pocket to last me until I get paid next. Whenever the hell that is. And seventeen dollars of it is going toward next week's subway Metro card. At least I'll be able to get around, if not eat pasta and potatoes once, if not twice, a day. And I'm in luck...

You hungry? I'm starving, he self-answers. Coming from a big man—a former junior Canadian hockey player and now some 235 plus pounds, a man who circles his conversations around his successful

history in the record-producing business but who's now deep into producing and writing his own movie scripts and sit-com episodes—Jake doesn't look like he's gone more than an hour without food or the stress of paying his bills. Jake's also a Renaissance man who takes trips to Cuba just for the best cigars to showcase them here in his cigar bar, and houses his expensive wine collection in a big specially-made wine warehouse out of the city. And he suggests I come out to his summer Hampton house where he chills when his writing teams get together for brainstorming sessions. Of course, success comes with a price. His three-thousand square foot apartment is too small and he constantly worries about whether the gooks or wetbacks in the neighborhood are going to strip his Jaguar or Grand Cherokee down to nothing but parts for shipping overseas.

Whatcha got there? Port? Let's have a little. See if you know what the hell you're talking about, I bluff, thinking a little shit early in the relationship would help seal trust and friendship. And, to fit in to get a job, I act like I do this everyday. Though I'm sure he's guessed by now I know nothing about wine, which makes him laugh even harder. I'm a Sam Adams guy.

That's just the type of self-deprecating humor I like, he says. I sit one space away to give him the obvious space he needs. If I'd sat right beside him, he'd probably look at me like a guy who should step down to the next urinal in the john. I ask if he's packing tonight, which for him means cigars. He pulls a few stogies from his stuffed leather briefcase. You've never had anything finer than this right here, he says, sniffing its length. You smoke cigars, right?

I quickly rattle off, Yeah, yeah, yeah. Then I give'm a look of, Dude, I've-smoked'em-all. But not quite: I've had about five in my entire life and didn't know until the third cigar that I wasn't supposed to inhale.

You've been smoking crap, he tells me. You're about to smoke your first real cigar. He lights it up, hands me a heavy silver lighter.

I puff away on mine. And you know, it's got a flavor I can't quite make out. It's all right. Obviously better than whatever *I have had* before.

I'm ordering us duck and a few apps, he says while moving chairs away, enough room to walk to the kitchen. He's not fat, really, just a big, solid cat with thick shoulders who moves fast when he has to on the tennis court, where we first met. He comes back. I'm having Steve make a bunch of stuff for us to eat up here, his says slapping his hand on the bar like Norm on Cheers. Only Jake's better dressed, very confident

and bright, and sporting the new Upper East Side preppie version of hair spawned first by Julius Caesar, then by George Clooney and soon thereafter New York's gay community. His jet-black hair is short, pushed forward from the crown, then neatly spiked in the front.

You eat meat, right? he asks, concerned. Just to make sure I do. Because he'd probably go back in the kitchen and tell Steve to dig up all the plants in the Amazon, fly them up here and cook them down to a nice stew for me. From the little I've known him, he's the kind of guy who insists on taking care of every detail, from ordering to introductions, because, as he insists, he knows what's fresh and who's who. He's the kind of guy who's happy to help someone out in his television writing dreams. He's just the kind of guy, who's going to tell me later tonight that he wants me to start off by writing treatments, pitches which basically hook the network programming executives.

Hey Mike!

Yeah, Jake?

Jake starts thumbing my direction. This guy's writing some crazy sex and high altitude stuff for Forum.

Mike pauses, then whispers over to me, having stopped in the middle of making a drink, You mean that Letters stuff? Bro! Have I got a couple of stories for you.

They all do: Mike the bartender; Steve the chef; Jake the multi-millionaire producer; Christy the dark-haired, green-eyed, lesbian cocktail waitress; Pedro the dishwasher...they all have their stories and start sharing with me in full detail about all the "fine bitches" who can't seem to get enough of them. My editor told me once, sarcastically, Didn't you know? Every woman is a nymphomaniac who can never get enough. Honestly, I wouldn't email home to my South Carolina mom about writing soft porn-ish stuff, or "erotica" as my editor suggests. But fantasy writing comes kind of easy to me. It's daydreaming on paper.

HOURS GO BY LIKE THAT THE NEXT NIGHT, with Jake putting me in the center of attention. I dream of rent relief, dating possibilities, an occasional weekend trip out of the city, and visits home more frequently than just the holidays. Capping tonight's chatter of business ventures and show ideas and developing characters, he finally circles his way back around to his grand plan: taking over the development division of a billion-dollar Japanese electronics, video games, and music empire.

As I start to put the story together, Jake is in his early thirties, married but without kids. Has no plans for any. Though he loves his dog. He's made more than five million since he was twenty-five, but spends it as fast as he gets it. Jake envisions making entertainment more affordable, like reducing taxes...

...because, he says while slurring, the entire market—with athletes, actors, politics—is way over valued. He continues...They're sticking it hard to the families. He goes on. It's not good for the long run. But no matter if the economy tanks, if Bush wins, stupid people will still spend money on new CDs and DVDs and Friday night dates to the mall for seven and nine o'clock movies. You know? But it's all good, man, he says. The entertainment industry isn't going anywhere, because it's too tied to dreaming and the heart and inspiration. People need that stuff.

I wave my hand in the air and drunkenly expound, We're going to change everything!

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