

Artistic Temperament

Jared Hernandez

“So, what’s it about?”

“Hard to say. I guess if you’re going to put a gun to my head it’s about two lost souls searching for a place to be in this harsh reality we call life.”

“That’s a fancy answer. More for the critics. What’ll you tell the public?”

“It’s an action packed tale of two kids shredding through the world kicking asses along the way.”

“Great. That’s great stuff. What’s it really about?”

“It’s about my unhealthy obsession with ground beef.”

She laughed loudly. I’m starting to pick up some vibes from this reporter. I can’t remember her name. Jenny? Ginny? Something like that. Her low cut top is driving my crazy. These young journalist types are all the same. All afraid they don’t have what it takes to make it, so they overcompensate by letting their tits hang out for the world to see. I’ve seen it a hundred times, and I’ll see it a thousand more. Not that I’m complaining though. She is gorgeous. She reminds me of a girl I knew in college. Brown hair, blue-green eyes, and incredibly soft looking lips. I think she can tell I’m flirting with her. I haven’t taken off my sunglasses the entire time we’ve been sitting here. I can’t tell if the sun is out anymore. This third glass of wine is starting to burn my stomach a bit. I should’ve taken her up on that offer to buy lunch. I didn’t want to seem like a freeloader. She keeps crossing and uncrossing her legs. I don’t know if she’s trying to drive me crazy, but she is.

“When are you going into production?”

“The end of the month. We’re just waiting on the final round of financing to come through. That’s mainly why I’m here.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, people don’t usually let you make movies for free.”

“I heard you were here to support Stanley’s movie.”

“That, too. Of course. I’m going to give Stan whatever help I can. If the shoe was on the other foot, he’d probably do the same for me.”

“Have you seen his movie yet?”

“Um...not the final cut.”

“Are you two still close?”

“It’s getting a little late,” I say, staring at the place where my watch should be.

“Did I touch a nerve of something?”

“No, I just have somewhere to be.”

I pull my cell phone out. I pretend I have a message and spend a minute holding the phone up to my ear. She is politely going over her notes while I do this. I notice she has this weird sort of rash-like thing on her neck that is starting to look disgusting. I can’t believe I didn’t notice it before.

"I've got to get going," I say as I click my phone shut.

"Okay. Do you think I could ask just one more question?"

"I'm extremely late as it is. Contact my agent, maybe he can set something up for the end of the week."

I stand up, hoping she will get the point. She stares up at me, this bitchy look on her face. She mumbles something about hoping to see me soon. I can tell she's trying to work up the courage to ask me out. I tell her again to talk to my agent. She nods and forces a smile. She gets up to shake my hand. Her hand is clammy. What is wrong with this girl? I can't believe that I was thinking of taking her back to my hotel room ten minutes ago. She thanks me very graciously for the interview. I try to smile. I turn my back on her. I walk out of the restaurant as fast as I can. When I'm outside I see her gathering up all her stuff. I smell the hand that I just used to shake hers. It smells like some sort of disease. This bitch isn't good enough for me. I can't wait to see the bullshit she writes about me. I try to remember her name. I don't even remember the name of the magazine she works for. I should have just pretended I didn't see her hand.

The hotel lobby is filled with industry types. They are all standing around trying to look cool. I spot this actor who had a small part in my first movie. He has since become a big star when the sex tape featuring him with a young heiress was conveniently leaked right before the opening of his new movie. All I can remember about him is how he could never remember his lines. I'm moving quickly, which isn't easy considering how many people are in my way. I hope that actor doesn't spot me. I'm not in the mood to pretend I give a shit what he's been up to.

I eye the elevator, which is full. I decide to take the stairs instead. No movie star would ever be seen taking the stairs.

My room is dark. Ellie is still sleeping. She should be up by now, so I'm not trying to be quiet or anything. She starts to stir when I open my beer. I look to see if there's anything to eat. There is a bag of free healthy looking snacks that looks like some sort of animal shit. She sits up and looks at me.

"Is there any real food left?" I ask her.

"We had real food?"

"I guess that's a no." I slam the refrigerator door closed.

"You didn't eat at your interview?"

"That wasn't an interview. It was more of an inquisition."

"What happened?"

"Just some stupid questions. Wasting of my time. I swear that is the real job of the press. To stop hard working people from doing what they are supposed to do. They need to all get a life." I chug the rest of my beer, which is a big mistake. I need some food in me.

"Can't you call down and get some room service or something?"

"We've got to be at the dinner in an hour. Are you sure you want to eat now?"

"I guess I can wait." I lie on the bed next to her. I try to put my arm around her. She says she's too hot. I stare up at the ceiling, trying to get my head to stop spinning. She is lying in the fetal position.

"Did Tony call?"

“I don’t think so. I didn’t check to see if we have messages.”

“Don’t bother.”

“Are you still not finished?”

“I haven’t even started yet.”

“You said you were going to write it on the plane.”

“I was distracted on the plane.”

“What was her name?”

“Who?”

“Your distraction. What was her name?”

“It wasn’t that.” I change into my super serious, authentic mode. “I told you that’s all behind me. There was this actor on the plane who was talking my ear off all the way across the Atlantic Ocean. That’s what happened.”

She got out of bed. She put on one of those great free bathrobes that you get in these fancy hotels. She opened the sliding door and stood out on the balcony. “It’s beautiful down here.” I haven’t ever been here before so I agree with her. I haven’t had much of a chance to look at the surroundings though. I’ve had my sunglasses on the entire time.

“I had this terrible dream last night,” I say.

“Yeah.”

“Can I tell you about it or are you too busy?”

She shuts the door and sits on the edge of the bed. She gestures for me to proceed in her own smart ass way.

“Thanks for your attention. I was going into this professional looking building. A bank maybe. There was this big group of security guards around the door. They were all wearing bulletproof vests. They all had these huge machine guns. The main guy kind of looked like Woody Harrelson. I don’t know why I was there, probably to see you. I told the guys that I wanted to come in and they let me. The Woody guy walked with me though. Step by step. He led me to this room with all these other people in it, like a holding tank almost. They were all wearing nice suits. They all looked nervous. I remember thinking that I wasn’t safe in here. These people were way too nervous for me to be safe. Woody left me there. I don’t know why he would bother walking me to this room when he was just planning on leaving me there. Anyway, I’m in there for a few minutes, then out of the corner of my eye I see this guy come storming out of a room on the other side of the building. He’s wearing a ski mask, but there are holes for his eyes and mouth. He has a machine gun. He starts shooting into the room. I hit the floor right away. I can see all the people around me getting shot. There’s blood all over the place. I’m down on the floor but I still don’t feel safe so I start sliding on my back across the room. I wind up in this pile of bodies. My side really stings when I get over there. The guy has been shooting all this time; I think I’m probably hit by now. I decide I’m just going to be still. Play dead. Maybe he’ll leave me alone. I can hear footsteps coming over to us now. That was it. When I woke up my side hurt.”

“Where did the security guards go?”

“What?”

“All the security guards that were there when you went in? Where did they go?”

“I don’t know.”

“They weren’t doing their job then.”

I lift my head up to look at her. She is serious. She tells me that we should start getting ready for the dinner now. I nod. I wait until I hear the shower running to start digging through her purse. I can’t find those little blue pills. I put my head back on the pillow. There is a new kind of pain coursing through my skull now. It’s much worse than before.

We get to the party late. Ellie took forever to get ready as usual. They sent over this local driver guy to take us there. He was stoned out of his mind. He couldn’t stop looking at Ellie in the rearview. “Signora es belisima,” he kept telling me. At first I would smile and nod at him. After a while I couldn’t bring myself to fake the smile anymore.



Edwards interior, night. Karen Greenbaum-Maya

The flashbulbs polluting the sky tell me that we’re almost there. I still have my sunglasses on. I just can’t bring myself to go in there with the whites of my eyes exposed. I feel like I’ll be found out if I do. Ellie pulls out her compact. She’s got to make sure that she’s exactly perfect. These pictures that are taken tonight will be in newspapers all around the world tomorrow. Maybe I should throw a drink in her face? That would take all the make-up right off. It would make her eyes all red. She would have to find some other sucker to be her meal ticket then. Some other Hollywood asshole to further her career. We’re a dime a dozen after all.

I don’t throw a drink in Ellie’s face after all. There would be no point I decide. We get out and do our little routine down the avenue of photographers. Ellie is

much better at this than I am. She will be great at being famous one day. I still haven't taken to it. They scream my name. Ellie tells me which camera to look at. I'm just sort of in a daze of white light. I start to think about what kind of food they'll have for us tonight. Ellie won't eat hers, she's on a diet this year. We get in the place after a while. The orange glow of the interior lights is a welcome change from the flashes of lightning outside. These young model types take our coats and lead us to our table. I'm supposed to be sitting with Mr. Yarlsburg, the studio head. He's not at our table though. I'm forced to sit mostly with various cameramen and sound guys that I've been meeting with over the last month. They smile broadly, their plain wives on their arms. This is the highlight of their lives. I almost throw up when I realize that.

They serve this pasta kind of thing on a huge plate with all these little designs on it. It looks more like a piece of modern art than dinner. There is so much room on the plate. Why can't they just give us a little plate? I devour the food and start on Ellie's. She's too busy smiling to notice that her food is gone. I eat most of bread that was for the table. I can handle a drink now, I think. I go over to the bar. I make my way to the front and order vodka and coke, no ice. There are some really young kids hanging around the bar talking about movies.

"I don't think there is really anything essential about American cinema now."

"What are you talking about?"

"That's the way it's always been. You know it, you just don't want to admit it."

"What about the Golden Age of Hollywood? Jimmy Cagney? Humphrey Bogart? I suppose those guys are a bunch of hacks?"

"Give me Jean Gabin over Cagney any day."

"What about all the great American movies in the 70's? That was an exciting time to be in the business."

"Every single idea that came out of Hollywood in the 70's had already been explored in Europe by Truffaut and Goddard in the 50's. I'm thinking of trying to remake Jules & Jim, I think it would play well set in the inner city. We could get Jay-Z to do the soundtrack."

I get my drink and walk away. These two guys are full of life. They're straight out of film school. Nothing will compromise their art. Wait until they get a glimpse of the real world.

The table is in an uproar when I return. It seems I had just missed Mr. Yarlsburg. I ask Cameron the cameraman if he was looking for me. He says he didn't ask. I down my drink. I think I should try to make my escape now. Enough people have seen me to know that I was actually here. Ellie will find a ride with someone, she always does. I flag down one of the models and ask her if she can bring my coat. She gives me a flirty look. I tell her she looks like a young Ingrid Bergman. She doesn't know who that is. I tell her I think I may have a part for her in my next movie. She smiles. I tell her she should stop by sometime soon. We can discuss her career in detail. She goes off to get my coat. I stand in a corner trying my best to look inconspicuous. I'm not trying to look for Yarlsburg, I'm sure he is looking for me. I try not to stay in one corner for too long. Immobility is how they get you. I turn a corner and find a beautiful fountain. It looks like something out of an old

movie. There is a couple sitting on the edge. She is a young actress, I can't remember her name. She was in that robot movie that was a big hit. She casually slips out of her dress and into the fountain as he watches with masturbatory glee. She is totally naked, without any shame. I can see the flashbulbs clicking already. She acts embarrassed when she sees the first photographer. It still takes her a few minutes to cover herself up. Tomorrow she will be the most downloaded thing on the Internet. I want to put my arm around the young man she was with. He won't understand that publicity comes first around here. Besides he must have some idea of what's going on. She must have a new movie premiering here.

The fountain room has got to be the nicest room in the place. There is an old abandoned bar at the far end of the room. I take a seat on the stool. There's not a bartender, but there are a few bottles behind the bar. They look dusty, but I don't think that good liquor goes bad. Usually it just gets better. I pour myself a tall vodka. I sip it gently. I look at the fountain and think of the young woman who was there just a few minutes ago. I wonder if she would like a part in my next movie.

"Fancy running into you here," I hear a voice say. I turn around to see who is talking to me. It's Stan. He's wearing his little fancy tuxedo that I'm pretty sure I gave him. He's got a great tan.

"Stan the man. Long time no see." We shake hands. He's got this little smile on his face. The kind of smile that used to piss me off when we were working together.

"You look good," I tell him.

"Thanks. So do you. The Italian air has a positive affect on you."

"I've never been here before. I'm not sure how much I like it."

"You've just got to give it a chance. I'm thinking of buying a home here. Depending on how well the next movie goes."

"Yeah. The next movie."

"I just wrapped the final cut the other day. I'll have to send you a copy. I would love to get your input."

"Sure. Just send it to my agent. He'll make sure I get it."

"He's my agent too."

"Oh, that's right. I forgot you're in the big time now."

"Listen, I don't want to have this conversation right now."

"Should we have it outside?"

"I don't know what you think I've done to you. I really don't. I saw a chance to make something of myself and I took it. There isn't a man alive who wouldn't have done the same."

"We had a deal. There isn't a real man alive who wouldn't honor a deal he made."

"I just came over to say hello and to wish you well. I didn't anticipate walking into the O.K. Corral."

"I'll tell you something, Stan. I don't need your help. I never needed your help. I would have done just as well on my own. You're just a sycophantic little puppy dog dick who saw some tails he could grab onto. That's all you fucking are and all you'll ever fucking be." I take a swallow of my drink, wanting to make sure that those last words have a chance to sink in. Stan keeps his same smile through my whole tirade.

“How’s the new script going?”

I try to take another sip, but it’s empty. Ellie’s been talking. “Just fine. Just great.”

“I’m glad to hear that. Oh, by the way, I had lunch with Yarlzburg earlier. He is looking forward to seeing something. Enjoy the party.”

He pats me on the back as he’s leaving the room. I watch him as he’s leaving. He has a spring in his step. I don’t think I could watch his next movie. I’m sure he just stole all of my ideas. I watch the fountain pour water rhythmically out. I take my barstool and throw it as hard as I can at the waterspout. It breaks off. Water is shooting all over the room now. I finish my drink and leave the room. I wouldn’t want to get all wet.

The hotel room is cold. There is nothing on the hundred channels that this hotel provides. Anything that might be worth watching is in Italian. I don’t understand Italian. I hear the card slide into the lock and Ellie comes in. She looks tired. Maybe she just looks drunk. I haven’t gotten used to all of her looks yet.

“You left me there.”

“Sorry.”

“Sorry? That’s it. That’s all you’ve got to say to me.”

“Is there something else you’d like to hear?”

She slams the door shut. She locks herself in the bathroom. I think I can hear her crying in there. I think about going over to the door and seeing if she’s okay. I don’t get off the bed though. After a few minutes she comes out in this huge sweat-shirt. She sits down beside me.

“I take it you didn’t have a good time?” she asks.

“I had a great time. Best party I’ve ever been to.”

“Yarlzburg was looking for you.”

“I wouldn’t expect anything else.”

“He said he’s coming by tomorrow to see the finished script.”

“He’s gonna be pretty pissed.”

“Don’t you care? You’re going to lose that whole advance he gave you.”

“He’s gonna be even more pissed when he finds out it’s all gone.”

“I don’t know why I stay with you.”

“I don’t know why either.”

“I should just leave.”

“You should.”

I flip channels trying to find something to take my mind off this bullshit. I come across this zombie movie. It came out a few years ago. I can’t remember what it’s called.

“I never understood why these zombies wear pants. They’re zombies. They don’t have a need for pants. Sometimes they don’t wear shirts, but they always have pants. Even if they just have rags it always covers the naughty pants parts. You think someone would make a realistic zombie movie one time.”

“How can there be a real zombie movie? Zombies are fake,” she says.

“Believe me, they’re real.”