

SPiN

# Prologue

## You Ain't That Good

**T**<sup>AP, tap, tap.</sup>  
What the hell? It's way too early for housekeeping.  
*Tap, tap, tap.*

My head is too heavy to lift off the pillow, my tongue too tired to speak. I try to *will* the tapping to go away. Perhaps, I think, if I just concentrate hard enough . . .

*Tap, tap, tap.*

What the fuck? I open my eyes, and they burn like hell. I see an outline of two figures against the TV screen. An anchorwoman's muffled voice talks about the morning commute. I hear the time: 6:17.

*Tap, tap, tap.*

Jennie's crouched over the Ligne Roset coffee table, impeccably dressed. She's wearing her usual uniform: a tiny black dress with a cardigan sweater. And I can smell her from where I lie. I haven't even taken my morning piss, and I can smell her: day-old smoke nesting in hair burned by a blow-dryer and Thierry Mugler "Angel" seeping from her pores. I want to bury my face in the pillow to escape the stench, but any movement would show signs of consciousness, and, frankly, I don't want

to deal. Not after last night. So instead, I'm forced to lie here, caught up in all that is Jennie.

*Tap, tap, tap.*

My eyes now able to focus, I see my prepaid phone card lying on the table: a gift from my mother, a less-than-subtle reminder to call home. When my mother stood in the checkout line of her local Sam's Club with this plastic card in hand, I doubt she imagined it would be used to cut lines by her darling son's boss.

Jennie straightens up and stares in the mirror. She's tan. I guess you would call it that. She resembles a carrot from her daily dose of Mystic Tan. She pats down her harshly dyed hair to smooth out any strays. She looks just like she does when she's walking one of her clients down the red carpet, and the sun is only now beginning to rise.

"Fuck," she says in a tone that is equal parts Long Island hell-raiser and Upper East Side Empress. "These fucking morons can never get it right."

Yesterday she had her L.A. hair guy, Jacob, come to the hotel and give her another blow-out. Ninety dollars for every time she blows out her hair; which is every day. I don't get it, but then again, I don't get Jennie.

"That fucking Jacob," she says, petting her head feverishly, pulling her blond hair, exposing the jet-black roots. "You would've thought he'd be good since he's black, you know, since he has to deal with kinky hair every day. Not this one. He has no business working in Randolph's salon; Weave-City or some other ghetto place, maybe."

I can feel her watching me in the mirror. I shut my eyes tight, her image emblazoned in my mind. She's only a few years older than me, but she looks a full decade older. Jennie

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is twenty-eight, nearly five-foot-eleven, but that varies depending on her shoes, and slender—and by slender I mean bloblike with no visible muscle tone. Her frame, especially her unusually wide shoulders, is akin to a rugby player's. People don't know what she does, who she works with, or even who she is; but they have seen her in pictures with Madonna and Britney, so that must mean she's somebody.

*Tap, tap, tap.*

She's going to be wired for days.

Through squinted eyes I glance at her hands. Considering her large stature, they're shockingly stubby, and fat. She has the hands of an ogre; an ogre with French tips. I first noticed them when she was flipping through the guest list at a Gucci fragrance launch. "Jesus," I gasped when I saw them, quickly covering by complimenting her rings. She looked at me suspiciously like she always did; but I quickly changed the subject, and she went back to uninviting guests after they'd already RSVP'd; the social future of half of New York rested on those stumpy little fingers.

I want out. I've had enough of this shit. But I simply hate confrontation. So instead I just lie here, hoping for a house to land on this wicked witch of the red carpet. Or at least for her to go back to her own room.

Though she knows there is no way I could possibly still be asleep with the noise that she's making, I still pretend, knowing she'll be barking orders at my first noticeable twitch. She thinks of me as one of the maids she had while growing up, and I'm just as expendable. It doesn't matter that I work on her biggest accounts or that without me she wouldn't have a clue as to what's going on with any of them. To her, I am as useful as the person who pours her coffee.

Someone knocks at the door. Jennie quickly disposes of her morning treat before answering. Jacob, the human hair dryer, comes in.

“Okay, let’s try this again, shall we?” Jennie says condescendingly. She turns to Adam, and smiles. “Get out of the way so he can do me.” Instead of sitting on his empty twin bed, Adam sits at the foot of mine. He is unnaturally attractive to anything with a pulse, and is well aware of this. His shaved head and chiseled face are only outmatched by his lean, sinewy body.

“Is it cool to turn this on?” Jacob asks quietly, hair dryer in hand.

“Yeah, why?” she says with a sneer.

Jacob nods in my direction.

“Fuck him,” she says. The hair dryer goes on, and my respite is over. I sit up in bed, pretending to be waking up at that very moment. Her long, painted, strawlike hair is being pulled like Silly Putty, so hard her eyes well with tears. For a moment, I wish I were him.

“Damn it, Jacob! That fucking hurts!” she finally says. He stops momentarily as she studies her hair in the mirror. “It’s still kinky!”

“If you’d let me—”

“Go!” she shouts.

“What?” he says, wounded.

“Go. I’ll do it myself,” she insists.

“B-b-but . . .” he says.

“OUT!” she shouts.

“I still need to be paid,” he says, rebounding.

“Send a bill to my office in New York. I don’t have cash on me,” she lies, and ushers him out the door. I’d heard this before.

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He might as well forget getting paid for three months, if at all. She grabs a blow-dryer from the bathroom and sits back down in the chair in front of the mirror. "Taylor, I need you to do my hair."

I kick the sheets off, and like a robot I get out of bed and walk toward her.

"Good morning, Sunshine!" Adam gleams. *Yeah, I'm sure it is for you, Adam. You're not about to be emasculated as you blow-dry your boss's hair.* I walk past her.

"Where are you going?" she barks.

"I have to pee," I grumble as I slam the door.

"Lose the attitude," she says through the door.

I stare at myself in the mirror while I stand at the toilet. I need a new job. I look down at the sink and see the selection of complimentary Kiehl's products the Mondrian gives to their guests. Maybe the Mondrian is hiring. No, Jennie will kill any job prospects. I'd witnessed it before. Lacy, another faceless twentysomething, quit almost immediately after I started. When Merrill Lynch called about her previous work experience, Jennie told them she was incompetent and had a drug problem; neither, of course, was true. The job wasn't even in a competing field, still she sabotaged Lacy. When I was in school, I was told that it was against the law to talk disparagingly about past employees. But of course the law is only a minor detail to Jennie, something easily sidestepped.

I stick my hand out midflow and get it nice and wet. I glance at the mirror again, as I watch piss splash on my palms and roll down my fingers. I know I should be repulsed; the old me would have been sickened.

"Taylor!" Jennie yells.

After zipping up, I avoid the sink, but move the faucet with my elbows to pretend I'm washing away with the expensive soaps. Then I open the door, and walk out like normal.

I stand behind her, my hands still wet, and pat her hair down with my urine-soaked hands. That's the closest I will ever come to pissing on Jennie Weinstein. I continue to smooth out her curly hair.

"Did you use the patchouli soap?" she asks.

"Yes, why?" I say innocently.

"You smell like a lesbian," she says, disgusted, yet strangely delighted with her taunt.

I turn on the blower as she's about to say something. Adam is scanning the *New York Post* online.

"Our item is in," he shouts over the blow-dryer.

"Read it to me," she shouts back. Between the blow-dryer, the shouting, the TV turned up to the max, and the fact that it's not even seven o'clock, my head is going to explode.

"Daily Dolce is closing down their Wooster Street restaurant, leading to speculation the ubertrendy boite fell because of owner Jonathan Edendale's costly drug habit and his penchant for 'anything in a skirt.'"

I see her mouth moving in what is most likely a laugh. It looks more like a pig at a trough.

"You are so fucking good!" Adam shouts.

"He should've done my brother's party for free," she snickers back. I turn off the blow-dryer.

"What are you doing?" she asks.

"I think I'm done here," I reply. Oh yeah, I'm *done*. I was *done* months ago. Jonathan Edendale's wife had a baby three months ago, and everything in that Page Six piece is bullshit,

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manufactured by my illustrious boss to get even. Oh yeah, I'm definitely done.

"I guess you are," she says, checking out her pee-ridden head in the mirror. I sit back down on the bed next to Adam.

"You should be a hairdresser," she says, patronizing.

"No, I don't have the patience to deal with assholes," I say. She ignores it, and Adam nudges me.

"Chill," he says under his breath. Jennie gets up from the table and grabs her purse.

"You ready, Adam?" she asks. She takes a cigarette from her Prada purse. She loves cigarettes. I think she would eat them if she could. I wish she would. Truth be told, she'd be as big as a house if she didn't smoke. Ashes fall all over the carpet and desktop. She treats the room as she does her employees: like one big, giant, ashtray. I know: I'm bitter, but soon you'll see why.

Adam grabs a leather-bound black folder. "Where you guys headed?" I ask.

"We have to do a walk-thru with Jackie's label and breakfast after," she snips.

"Jackie? She's my client," I say, a bit panicked.

"*Your* client?" she says angrily.

"You know what I mean," I say.

"You better lose the attitude, Taylor, real quick," she says.

"I'm sorry. It's just that I brought Jackie in, and I thought I was going to be a part of her entire launch."

"You are part of it. You're just not needed right now," she explains.

*And Adam is going with you because?* I want to scream. But I don't, instead offering, in my typical kiss-ass fashion, "Okay,

no problem. I'll start creating the tip sheet here while you guys are doing the walk-thru."

She walks for the door and the smell returns. It's sweet yet dirty; perfumed garbage. Adam smiles. "See you later, bro."

"See ya," I say with a smirk. Something isn't right.

She opens the door, turns back, and says, "I forgot the combination to your safe, and I need to get my Cartier watch out of there before the event tonight. Call hotel security and have them open it for you."

"Do I get to keep what's inside?"

She looks at Adam, then back at me, and says, "You ain't that good."

"Okay," I say, already reading the *New York Post* online. The door slams shut. Temporary freedom. I pick up the phone while reading in Page Six about the alleged rape at Crobar. Was this story real or planted? Who the hell knows anymore? Gossip writers don't know because the publicists give them the stories. The publicists don't refute the story because it gives their client publicity or at least allows them to barter for a story on another client. One big game. No wonder I don't know my head from my ass anymore.

"Hi, this is Taylor Green in 622." God, I hate the sound of my own name. It's too theatrical, too gay-sounding. No doubt a result of my grandmother Ethel's persuasive powers over my mother. "Yeah, could you send someone up to open the safe? I've forgotten the combination, and now it's shut down altogether . . . Thanks." Even at this hour, I'm still able to muster up the required pleasantries.

I sit back down on the bed and look around the room. The heavy curtains are pulled to block the looming sunlight. Normally, I would rush to open the drapes to start my day. But not

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today. I'm exhausted. It's been one helluva trip. The TV glows against the stark white wall. Adam's clothes are scattered throughout the room, while mine are neatly folded in my suitcase. God, I'm so uptight. You'd never know that I was staying in a four-hundred-dollar-a-night room in an Ian Schrager hotel. At present, it looks more crack den than like Phillipe Starck.

I open the closet door to make life easier for the guy coming to open the safe. Wooden hangers line the rods. A striped button-down shirt and a pair of black pants from Banana Republic hang next to my Tommy Hilfiger jacket, the remnants of a Midwestern boy's regimented dress code.

"It looks like the Gap threw up in here," Adam said when he first saw my closet in New York. He's right, but a trendy job affords me nicer things now. I wear Varvatos, and have a leather YSL jacket that was meant as a freebie for Ryan Phillipe, but never quite made its way to him. Wearing clothes not meant for me, working in a job that isn't me, in a poser society that doesn't accept me; and until now I couldn't see any of the signs telling me to leave, or at least that's the way I learned to spin it. So good at my job I learned to spin myself.

I hear a gentle tap on the door. I answer it and a burly man in beige enters the room.

"Can I see your ID, please?" he asks.

"Sure," I say. I catch a glimpse of myself in the mirror. I look like hell: my hair looks like a bird's nest, my skin is breaking out from stress, and I look like I haven't slept in days, which I haven't, thanks to *her*. I grab my New York driver's license from the desk.

"Here you go," I say, handing it to him. He nods and goes into the closet. I sit down on the bed and wait for him. Once again, I'm waiting on Jennie, fixing her mistakes.

The safe opens and he pauses, staring quietly into the metal box.

"I know, it's pretty amazing, right? I've never seen something so beautiful either," I say.

"Sir, we have a problem here," he says as he turns to face me. "Problem?"

"Please remain seated. I need to make a phone call," he says, his eyes following my every move.

"Um, okay, sure. What's the prob—"

"Sir. Could you please be quiet?" he says, his tone changing. I stop talking and begin to sweat, though I don't know why.

He picks up the phone and dials. "Hi. Becky? This is Larry from security, and I'm in 622. I'm going to need some assistance up here. Could you please phone the police and let them know I have a situation?"

"Police? Situation?" I say shakily, standing up.

"Sir, sit the fuck back down," he says, throwing me onto the chair.

"Okay, okay. I'm sorry, but could you please tell me what the problem is?"

He walks back to the safe and pulls out three eightballs of cocaine.

For a moment I'm outside myself, watching a burly man holding cocaine and a half-dressed skinny boy sitting frightened in a chair. I start to tell him that the drugs aren't mine; that if he knew me, he'd know that I'm not someone who does drugs. In fact, I've only tried drugs twice, and that was very recently and thanks to my addict of a boss. If he also knew that my mother was very religious, and would crucify me herself if she thought I did drugs, he'd know that they couldn't possibly be mine. But I don't say any of these things

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because I know any explanation will be futile. I've seen these drugs before. I know where they came from, and I was there when they were purchased. It doesn't matter that the drugs aren't for me. I don't know the specifics of *how* the coke wound up in my safe, but I sure as hell knew *why*. This wasn't going to end well . . . for any of us.

*You fucking bitch, you ain't that good.*

**Jennie Weinstein  
Public Relations**

Cordially invites you  
to the grand opening of

**domino**

**Friday, March 3rd 10P.M.  
11 Gansevoort Street  
New York City**

Please RSVP to Mia Cadelo  
(212) 555-0100  
*Mia\_Cadelo@JWPR.com*

This invitation is *nontransferable*

# 1.

## The Birth of the Yes Man

**M**Y weakness for the world of celebrity can be traced back to the days of “Calling Doctor Love” and “Beth” by the band KISS. Their music was a commercially intoxicating mix of head-banging rock anthems driven by infectious hooks, pop ballads powered by loud guitars, and overly sentimental melodies that wailed through my speakers. More importantly, they were total badasses. As a scrawny eight-year-old, I would dance in my room for hours, screaming at the top of my lungs that I wanted to “rock and roll all night,” or at least until my eight o’clock bedtime. I would fall asleep dreaming that I had suddenly and inexplicably become best friends with the band, a friendship that usually involved the lot of us going to Shakey’s and gorging ourselves on breadsticks and pizza. In my mind, this was the life of a rock star.

But at the same tender age of eight, I learned the harsh reality of stardom. Inside one of the album jackets was an order form for official merchandise, a flyer that had all things KISS: hats, embroidered jackets, T-shirts, jean-jacket buttons, shoestrings, and to my delight, KISS makeup. I imagined my friends driven insane with jealousy when I strutted my way to the

monkey bars in full Peter Criss makeup. I was going to be the shit at the Montessori school. I sat at my mother's kitchen table and asked my grandmother Ethel to help me fill out the order form while my mother was working at Roland's department store. Ethel floated me the eighty-nine bucks without reluctance, since, after all, it was going to the "arts" as she called it (had I asked for the same dollar amount for some Chicago Cubs memorabilia, I would've been out of luck). And so I ordered every available item: the tour jacket, the baseball cap, the Dr. Love T-shirt, and yes, the makeup. Excited to the point of nearly pissing on myself, I had no idea how I would survive the grueling four to six weeks for delivery.

Four weeks came and went, and then six. Then eight. Finally, three months later, and still no official KISS merchandise. The devastation set in. My heroes, such as they were, had let me down, and there was no consoling me. My mother, Elizabeth, didn't even try.

"The sooner you get your head out of the clouds and realize that people are a disappointment, you'll lead a much happier existence," she told me. Not exactly the "let's go eat a peanut-buster parfait at Dairy Queen" kind of speech you'd expect a mother to give to her dispirited eight-year-old. I had stopped expecting those pep talks long ago.

My father left my mother two weeks before my fourth birthday. I don't think he said good-bye. He told me he was going to the store, and I never saw him again. His timing was as perfect as his irresponsibility. He disappeared two months after my mom's dad had passed. We moved in with my grandmother Ethel temporarily until my mom found work at the only department store in town. She had given up college when she married my dad, and so was forced to work retail for

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minimum wage alongside the sixteen-year-old high-school dropouts.

After my father left, my mother found herself a new man: Jesus. Jesus did not approve of KISS, or any men who wore makeup, or most of the people with a Beverly Hills zip code. To my mother, nothing could take me further away from the Lord than the sinners of Hollywood.

Ethel, on the other hand, felt otherwise, and tried her best to cheer me up after the KISS fan-club debacle. One morning when my mother had to do inventory at the department store, Ethel led me into her bathroom, a place I'd only walked past, a place I was never EVER allowed inside. I paused before entering, not sure if it was safe to proceed. The room looked like someone had filled a hose with Pepto-Bismol and sprayed every last corner. She lowered the toilet lid with the crocheted pink cover, and sat me down. She opened a large Le Sportsac makeup bag and grabbed a giant sponge that looked like it had already been used to scrub a pickup truck before I arrived. She pulled a large, mysterious tube of translucent glop from her bag and began to slather it on my forehead.

"Where did you get this?" I asked.

"You're lucky to have a grandmother with such a colorful past in the theater, my boy," she said. I hated when she slipped into that dramatic stage voice. She sounded like Kathleen Turner. In her youth, my grandma Ethel (as in Merman, she always reminded anyone who might remember) lived in New York, working as a dancer and actress. Growing up, I was fascinated by Ethel's stories of New York City. She had lived in Greenwich Village, and was a working dancer and actress for several shows "that were so Off Broadway you could consider it New Jersey," she said. She knew firsthand the allure of show

business. In fact, she relished her time as a dancer and would have continued it had she not met my grandfather, who swept her off her feet. After “falling in love,” which she now refers to as a “stumble,” she was forced to move back to the Midwest, where she remains in “the hellhole” that she currently calls home. She often points out that the other Ethel also made mistakes. Remember Ernest Borgnine? Don’t worry, I didn’t either until I looked him up.

By this time, I was sweating so profusely that the white goo dripped down my face, and I looked like some sort of creepy clown.

“Okay, not to worry, not to worry; we had a fella like you in the chorus of *West Side Story*, a real sweaty pig,” she said. She grabbed one of my mother’s favorite red guest towels and wiped away the dripping white mess. Then, clutching a bottle of Ban Roll-On deodorant (lavender-scented), she began to roll it all over my face. She blew on it for a few minutes. Her breath permeated a mixture of Baileys Irish Cream and wintergreen Certs. I politely asked her to stop blowing on my face, and she began reapplying the white face makeup. Within minutes my face was stark white. She covered my lips with candy-apple-colored lipstick, my eyes with her black eyeliner, and the pièce de résistance: tiger stripes on my cheeks. I looked at my reflection in the mirror. I looked less like KISS drummer Peter Criss and more like a character on *Geishas Gone Wild*. But I appreciated the effort, and I prayed the kids at school would as well.

A half hour later, I got out of Ethel’s car, and stepped onto the playground in full makeup. In retrospect, the look would have been much more convincing had I forgone the chinos

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and polo. Less than five seconds passed before I felt an apple hit the back of my head. A few moments later, a punch in the face from Tommy Salinger, causing the eyeliner to get in my eyes. Before classes started I was sent home, bleeding, embarrassed, and with a nasty eye infection. I hated KISS.

Fifteen years later, my thirst for celebrity returned with a vengeance.

I was standing on the wrong side of the velvet ropes desperately trying to get into the opening of Manhattan's hottest new restaurant, Domino. I'd been invited to the opening by my upstairs neighbors, a lesbian couple named Lauren and Allison.

When I had arrived in New York, it had quickly become apparent that Midwestern charm meant jack to New Yorkers. The prevailing attitude seemed to be: "Just do what you have to do and save your pleases and thank-yous for the county fair." I got to New York at the end of June, with a humidity level that rivaled Rio (a comparison that would be more powerful had I actually ever traveled there), and little knowledge of city navigation. Imagine sitting in a steam room fully clothed with a hat and scarf on, and that's what it's like in New York at the end of June. That I had arrived wearing a pair of jeans, a long-sleeve T-shirt, and a sport jacket from the Salvation Army did not help. I wanted to look New York cool but succeeded in looking Midwest stupid; I lacked only the fanny pack. When I arrived at the apartment I had subletted from one of my grandmother Ethel's old theater friends—a place on West Eighty-sixth Street between Columbus and Amsterdam, right across the street from a housing project—I was looking more like a junkie than one of the project's newest residents. Lauren was the first one

to help point me in the right direction. For a moment I considered the remarkable possibility that she might be hitting on me. Lauren had a pinup-girl look about her. With her jet-black hair, she definitely had a Betty Page thing going on. Her body was tight, and slightly muscular. *Yeah, I can see myself with that.* Then Allison stuck her tongue down Lauren's throat. Allison was taller than Lauren and had a pixie haircut that made her look like a teenage boy. She was striking, yet didn't have Lauren's smoldering sexiness. They were the first real-life lesbian couple I'd ever encountered, and they quickly took me under their wing as their adopted child. I gladly accepted.

Allison had just turned thirty and was the senior vice president of original movies for Showtime, hence the invitation to the restaurant opening. Allison's seen her fair share of partying, but she's been nesting ever since she landed Lauren. I shamelessly begged them to take me when I saw them reading the invitation in the elevator. They had looked at each other, then at me, and with pity agreed.

As we waited in the cold March air, the rumblings in line were that Leonardo DiCaprio, Tobey Maguire, and Lukas Haas were in the ultraexclusive third-floor lounge. Flashbacks of Peter Criss drumming a KISS anthem swirled in my head, and I wanted very badly to be part of Leo's "pussy posse," as the tabloids called it. This was my first real party with actual celebrities! It was taking every last bit of strength to keep from turning into a screaming eleven-year-old girl.

We inched closer to the front of the line, and were held momentarily so Sandra Bernhard and Patricia Velasquez could be ushered inside. While we waited, Allison explained to Lauren and me that for a New York City restaurant to survive, it must create the right kind of buzz. A publicist would have been

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hired to cultivate the *crème de la crème* for a series of tastings that had been orchestrated to boost business. “For these types of things to work, there has to be some type of celebrity connection attached,” Allison continued. “Why else would a food critic want to visit another so-so restaurant? But if they believe they’ll get a chance to mingle with some entertainment-industry elite, they’ll line up for hours. It’s rather pathetic,” she finished.

“Um, that’s Mr. Pathetic to you, thank you,” I replied, smiling. Anybody who was somebody was there, and I needed to cross over finally from the anybody sideline. Even though I had a powerful lesbian duo with me, I still was very nervous that we wouldn’t be allowed past the velvet ropes.

With invitation in hand, we inched closer and closer to the velvet ropes.

“You’re going to get a stiff neck,” Lauren teased.

“I’m so nervous,” I said, bouncing slightly on my toes.

“I’m not good at these things either. It’s more Allie’s thing than mine,” she said.

“Whatever! When we went to that screening the other night, you practically begged me to go. I didn’t even know what that so-called art-house movie was supposed to be . . .” Allison jumped in.

While they argued over who loved their status more, I stood in front of them adjusting and readjusting the wristwatch my mother had given me for Christmas a few years before. I knew she’d saved up for quite a while and had used her employee discount at Roland’s to get me that watch. It was Gucci, with a leather band and gold trim. Unfortunately, its fashion shelf life had worn out roughly four years ago.

“Name?” a woman screamed. She stood in a black trench

coat with what appeared to be nothing on underneath. She was so sexy even her cigarette seemed like an invitation to get naked. I imagined that she could have been very pretty, probably gorgeous, but hard partying and heavy smoking were masking the beauty. She was, as it turned out, a city-hardened twenty-six.

“Christina Miller,” the girl in front of me said in a Long Island accent.

The doorwoman looked her over and didn’t even bother to check the list. “Nope, you’re not on my list.” She brought her cigarette to her lips and took a long drag and blew the smoke in the girl’s direction. “Next.”

“But I’m sure I was put on the list,” the not-quite-Versace-clad girl whined.

“Try T.G.I. Friday’s,” the door diva proclaimed. The young woman slinked away, fighting back tears.

As I waited on the sidewalk, I was in awe of the brazenness of the guardian of the velvet rope; had she never read about public stonings? Drive-by shootings? A bitch slap?

“Did you see that? We’re never getting in,” I said.

“Don’t worry, we’ll be fine,” Allison said leisurely. “If there’s any problem, I’ll just show them my business card, and that will be the end of that.”

“I don’t think it matters to these people,” I replied.

“I’m with Taylor; I say we bail,” Lauren chimed in. “I’m not prepared to be assessed and rejected by some Boston College dropout.”

“I didn’t say we should bail!” I said loudly. “We can’t leave! Julia Roberts and P. Diddy are supposed to be here!”

“And what does that mean to you?” Lauren snapped. “As if you’re going to be sipping Cosmos with them!” I ignored her

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and turned away, but she had given me the visual of sitting comfortably with Julia, discussing her reasons for doing *Mary Reilly*. To this day it weighs heavily on my mind.

“Are we done here? I’ve got half of the Upper East Side waiting to get in, and you’re polluting the air with your noise,” the door bitch said. She came at us like a bat out of hell, spiked heels smoking. Her Gucci perfume caused my eyes to water. “Name?”

“Allison Jacobs, VP of Movies and Minis at Showtime. I’m sure I’m on the list if you could be so kind to check for me.” Allison held out her business card, but I knew she had made a fatal mistake; she had been polite.

“Nope, not on here,” the doorwoman said, without removing her eyes from Allison’s.

“You better check again, or this could get ugly,” Allison said as she took a step closer. This was better, I thought, but much too late.

“Oh honey, look in the mirror,” the vixen said. “You’re a few days past ugly.” In one swift motion, Allison lunged at the ropes taking a swing, nearly landing a left hook. The door girl did not flinch. Clearly, she had seen worse.

“Security, get these people out of here; they’re not on my list.” Two huge, burly security guards came toward us.

“Wait!” I shouted. I had prepared for a situation like this, having caught a glimpse of a name on her clipboard while she berated the previous woman. “Could you check the list again? I’m certain my name is on it.”

She gawked at my bloodshot eyes. I had her attention. Her face appeared calm, but in a bipolar kind of way: serene but ready to snap at any minute and make an example of the three of us. I proceeded with caution, “Kyle Milton.”

She looked at me and paused before looking down at her clipboard. I nervously began to spell the name, "M-I-L-T . . ."

"I know how to spell!" she snapped, then looked back up, stunned. It was as if I had just puked all over her new Louboutins. She regained her composure and looked long and hard at the three of us.

"Well, are you going to unhook the rope or do you want me to try my uppercut? And this time, I promise I won't miss," Allison said, looking directly into the woman's eyes.

"I'll open the ropes, but not for you," she said to Allison.

"But I'm on the guest list!" I said, hearing the ice crack below my feet.

"As unfortunate as that may be for everyone inside, that is true. But Ellen and kd Lang here are not. And you, Mr. Milton, don't have any pluses," she said, pleased.

I turned to Lauren and Allison. Lauren whispered, "Go."

I did not protest: They knew me far too well.

"I'd rather snort broken glass than give this bitch the satisfaction of going inside," Allison said, loudly enough for the entire line to hear, evoking a few laughs.

"Are you coming in or what?" the door chick barked at me.

I looked back at them one last time. Lauren smiled, and said, "Just give us a full report in the morning." She winked.

The doorwoman reluctantly unhooked the rope and glared at me as I walked to the other side. I will never forget what it felt like crossing the threshold of the velvet ropes for the first time. A burning started in my stomach and worked itself up my spine and into the back of my neck. My face was flushed, and a smile crept across my face. I had beaten the Tonya Harding of velvet ropes. I was in.

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The restaurant was hardly crowded, however. Apparently, having a huge crowd outside your party for everyone to see was much better than having everybody inside for no one to see. I grabbed a Bacardi lemonade—the only drink you could order since Bacardi sponsored the party. It’s difficult to look cool walking around with a Day-Glo drink in a martini glass.

My first move while in the throngs of hipness was to plaster myself up against the wall so as not to be noticed. I was too afraid someone would come up to say to me, “Excuse me, aren’t you the boy from Indiana? Sorry, there’s been some sort of mistake; you’re not supposed to be here. And please, how old is that watch? I see you go to Supercuts. Are you here by yourself? Are you kidding me with that girly drink? Why are you here? Who invited you? GET OUT!”

I sucked on the mint leaves and imagined I was being followed for one of those celebrity profiles on *Showbiz Tonight*. It beat acknowledging the fact that I was standing by myself, and more importantly, allowed me not to break into a full panic attack. I’d suffered a severe panic attack when I was eleven at my neighbor’s thirteenth birthday party. I didn’t know any of her older friends, and when her mom pushed me into the group to make friends, I stood speechless. Speechless was better than what followed; in a panic I threw up all over Bonnie Griffin.

I pretended the crew was instructing me to look like I was “playing it cool,” and waited for people to come to me. The waiters were my assistants, and the busboys my closest friends, who walked back and forth from “the confessional,” where they said really flattering things about me.

I could have stayed there all night, watching the crowd.

Suddenly it was an hour and a half later and I was sitting at a table alone, grinning stupidly and talking to myself after a few too many lemonades. I had to leave immediately.

As I inched toward the edge of my empty booth, I heard two women arguing by the booth next to me.

"I can't believe you're pulling this shit on me tonight, at *my* event," the dark-haired woman said.

"*Your* event? The last time I checked it was my name on the door, not yours," said the peroxide blonde.

"I'm the one that sent out the invitations and called the press to come to this party. It was me who begged these C-list celebrities to show up. You didn't even know the event was tonight until I told you!"

The dark-haired woman stepped to the side, and I could see the blond woman's face: I knew exactly who she was. I had seen her picture on the cover of magazines alongside her celebrity clients. Her name was Jennie Weinstein.

Jennie's tall frame was imposing, and she was nothing special in terms of physical beauty. She didn't quite fit the physical mold of the rest of the pack of waiflike Manhattan publicists. She wore a tight black Prada dress and a pair of black heels. No jewelry except for a Bvlgari watch. To the unobservant, she seemed a simple girl from the Upper East Side. But I knew different.

Since moving to New York, I had read all about Ms. Weinstein, the reigning queen of everything "hip" in Manhattan. Her upbringing had become urban folklore. The youngest of five kids, Jennie was born to a megamillionaire hedge-fund manager father and a shipping heiress mother. She attended the prestigious Nightingale prep school on the city's Upper East Side, and was the most popular kid in school, a girl who liked

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to party. She regularly skipped school and sunbathed with the downtown set by the Piers. She usually managed to make a quick pit stop at home for an outfit change, and to keep up the schoolgirl appearance to her distracted parents. Her industriousness was best evidenced early on by cutting deals with the building's doorman—giving him roughly three hundred dollars a week in return for his silence—so she could go out dancing at places like Area, Robots, and the Palladium. She was a Madison Avenue girl with Tenth Avenue aspirations. She attended Brown University, but rarely studied, graduating by the skin of her teeth. After college, at age twenty-three, having been brought up with other very well-heeled kids (figuratively and literally), all of whom loved to party too, she chose the one job that allowed her to talk on the phone all day to her friends, decide which places would be the next cool spot to hang out, and party more than ever: She became a publicist. Her competition both feared and hated her, and with good reason. She was ambitious, fearless, and irreverent, with nothing to lose and nothing to gain. While staring at her, I felt both excitement and shame that I knew so much about her. It was like a twisted teenage crush.

“Do you honestly think these people came because of *you*? They saw my name on the invitation and knew it'd be a good party. Most of these people here don't know who Heather Richardson is, or give a fuck for that matter,” Jennie trounced.

“Then maybe you ought to tell them,” Heather said.

I inched closer as the argument got nearer to my table. I didn't want to miss a word.

“I could hire anyone to do your job and get the same results. Everyone's replaceable,” Jennie snapped.

"I'd like to see you try to find someone who'd put up with your bullshit," Heather fumed.

"I will. You're fired, Heather."

I could barely believe what I was witnessing: the notorious Jennie Weinstein in action! Jennie turned to me.

"Hey, you. Wanna job?" A stunned Heather was motionless.

I felt my stomach churning. I calculated that I was approximately thirty seconds from another Bonnie Griffin incident. I blurted, "Actually I work in PR too, for MPK Publicity."

Jennie stared at me blankly.

"It's a huge firm in Midtown," I explained. "We mainly have corporate clients."

That, of course, was a lie. The truth? MPK Publicity was simply Mitchell P. Kern, a friend of Ethel's, and there were no partners. Mitchell and I did not do corporate PR; we pitched Off-Broadway shows to small theater publications. His office was the size of a walk-in closet.

"Hello?" Jennie repeated. "You want a job?"

"I do, but, I have a job, and—" I tried to respond.

"Well you just quit. Now you work for me."

Heather rolled her eyes. "Well . . . what would I have to do?" I said, regretting the seven previous cocktails.

"Go to the most fabulous parties in Manhattan and hang around a bunch of famous people," she said, and smiled.

"Well, I'd have to give notice and . . ."

Jennie interrupted, "Yes or no?"

"Yes!" I said.

Heather glared at me in disgust and turned to Jennie. "You're too much. I've been with you since you started, and now you replace me with some clueless kid? You'll regret this in the morning when the tequila and nose candy wear off."

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She then turned back to me. “Be careful. Not only does she bite, but she leaves quite a mark.”

Heather stormed off, and I immediately stood up, grabbed Jennie’s hand, and shook it feverishly. “Thank you so much for this opportunity. You won’t regret this, I promise.”

Jennie gave me a confused look. She started to walk away, when I grabbed her.

“So when do I start? Where do I go?”

“All my information is on the Web site. Come by a week from Monday.” And she melted into the crowd.

The party was still hopping, but I had accomplished plenty for one night. I had just landed a job at one of the hottest PR firms in New York City.

*Fuck you, Peter Criss.*

The following morning, I got up early and ran to the newsstand to buy the *New York Post* and read Page Six. Even though I hadn’t spoken to a single celebrity who attended the opening, seeing the party in print made the experience seem real. I hurried to tell Ethel that I was in the same room as all of these famous people. My mom and Ethel may not understand exactly what I do for a living, but they do understand famous people and the newspapers that write about them. Last night, I was at a Page-Six-worthy party.

“When it’s your name in the paper, then I’ll be excited,” Ethel said. She clearly didn’t understand the utmost importance of Page Six to a New York insider these days.

“It’s basically the diary of the who’s who in New York and beyond. The section is scattered with bits and pieces of gossip about anyone and everyone. There are even some private citizens like us who try outlandish stunts just to get their names

in the column,” I explained. “Like the guy who peed off his seventh-floor balcony . . .”

Even as the words escaped my mouth, I found myself bemused at the entire concept of Page Six, bewildered by people’s fascination with gossip columns. What should one make of educated and intellectual human beings consuming information such as where Gwyneth Paltrow gets her hair done while on holiday in St. Barts? (Salon Cristophe, in case you were wondering.) What is it about other people’s business that is such a turn-on?

From a Page-Six party one night to mac and cheese in my apartment with my dog Algebra the next: That was the reality of my life. My Midwestern roots, like the roots on the head of my future boss, refused to go away. So, I was happy to say “YES!” to Jennie, though even then I had a feeling that sooner or later that Yes would bite me in the ass.

The Monday after the party at Domino I showed up to work at ten and waited for Mitchell to arrive. I’d never actually quit a job before, and I’d had excruciating stomach cramps the entire morning. But I couldn’t let my guilty conscience interfere with a shot like this. By eleven o’clock, I had given Mitchell my notice. Needless to say, he wasn’t very happy since I pretty much was the glue that held the office together. However, he did leave me with some interesting and poignant words, “Anyone thinks they can be a publicist these days. These young socialite bitches plug in their laptops and forward their calls to their cell phones and boom! Call themselves publicists. It’s more than just throwing a party or placing an item in Rush & Molloy, Taylor. Not all of us have unending trust funds, especially you. My advice to you is, be careful!”

I think in the back of my mind I knew he was right, but the

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starstruck side of me didn't care. After only knowing Jennie Weinstein for a total of five minutes, I had quit a job that paid decent money, had health insurance, and was stable. Five minutes. I was about to learn just how much I would ultimately sacrifice for Jennie.