

ENTERTAINMENT

Special Assignment: Spiv undercover

by spiv ramsey

staff writer

I saw him in the dark little bar, hunkered over a little caramel-colored glass, beady little eyes brooding under snake-oiled brows, constantly alert for the presence of The Media, eagerly anticipating tasting their blood. His Hollyweird Dream Marriage had swerved dead-end close to destruction, due mostly to the inflammation of his actor's ego, and, despite the fact that his pop-art diva took him back, he was looking to put a terrific hurting on any passing journalist in the city, just to soothe his tortured manhood.

One of the advantages of working in print is that nobody knows your face, so I just strolled in like I owned the place, eyes not wandering but remaining fixed, providing the illusion I had a specific purpose for being there, and sat in what could have been my "usual spot", within reach of the dynamic actor. He squirmed, oozing hostility, boring at me through the side of one of his icy little eyes. I pretended not to notice and smiled warmly at the bartender as I ordered a Suffering Bastard (knowing that the man admired borderline alcoholics, whose staying power exceeded his own). I bantered at him

briefly, sharing observations on the state of the economy, sports, and alcohol, usually receiving only gluttal replays in the affirmative. I was getting nowhere, so I stepped over the line:

"So, are you getting your stuff together, or what's the deal?"

With all the graceful swiftness of a drunken mamba he wheeled on me, uttering a heated interrogative between his tiny, sharp teeth. The vessels in his eyes swelled until I thought blood would squirt from them like a horned toad's. The muscles in his face clenched like a gigantic fist, looming in mine. I could imagine all the various endocrine systems in his body girding themselves for another bout of bad publicity.

I remained calm. I've employed the same strategy with crazed Rot-wilers: never let them smell your fear. And always wear your best running shoes. "I said, are you gonna deal with this temper thing, or are you going to let it wreck your marriage?" His body tensed as though actively resisting taking a swing at me, his pinpoint, blood-shot eyes filling with frightened confusion. I could see the tiny wheels turning in his lumpy skull, weighing the conse-

quences of his temper, knowing that every blow delivered against me would be delivered against his marriage. I jumped in before he could regain his balance, a crucial maneuver in these circumstances.

"Yeah, you know what I mean, man." I said soothingly, gently edging him back onto his stool. "The little woman don't get off on that macho crap, but your fans eat it up. Well, which would you rather have, your image or your wife?" His face became a mask of quiet panic as he considered the consequences of losing her, a woman held up to more esteem with one hand than any other in the decade who'd already issued one protective reaction suit, and he sagged as his eyes glazed like those of a man whose rudeness has just snapped.

I asked the bartender, who had been watching nervously, to bring the poor man a refill, which he drained eagerly, his body unwinding like a steel spring as the alcohol slammed into his nervous system. At this point, he cracked open, whining like a lost, snotty little child, face contorting until he looked like a bald ferret, swallowing sobs as he described his predicament to me. It became apparent to me at this point that

besides being a neurotic extrovert, a gin-addled psychopath, and murderously jealous, the young actor was sexually retarded. I thought of his wife, always running around in her underwear, wagging her beautifully sculpted endowments and pitied her. What a waste.

I waited until he had slumped down on the bar far enough to hide his tears and drowned his semicoherent anxieties with three Suffering Bastards. Then I mentioned with an air of modest genius that I knew the solution to his problem. He groggily perked up, hope replacing the few tears that had crept through his pathetic facade. He drunkenly asked me what it was, pawing for my lapel.

"It's simple." I said grinning.

"You don't like paparazzi piranhas taking your picture, so you screw up their shot by making a weird face, get it?" He nodded dumbly, struggling to grasp my idea through his sea of Suffering Bastards. A troubled expression crept across his rodent features as he mused. He turned and asked me what sort of face would be best. I rose, walked behind him and instructed him to look in the mirror with the name of the bar emblazoned on it. He did so blindly, allowing me to jab him in a vital nerve center behind his ear and get a handful of choice, nerve rich scalp. His face wadded up into an agonized mess as he squirmed on his stool, and the bartender paled and drew back, dreading anticipated bloodshed. I

leaned down close to his ear and told him to memorize the way he was holding his features, then make that face whenever he saw those glory leeches closing in. Then I released him and returned to my seat.

To the amazement of the barkeep, he just sat there, straining to maintain his face, then wadding it up again, trying to recreate this new secret weapon. He did this time and time again, then stopped, a dejected expression creeping across his face. I knew immediately what the problem was: he was concerned for his image, obviously not prepared to so easily surrender his feeble toughness, even in the name of continued matrimony. It was time for

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