

ESQUIRE HOLLYWOOD FASHION PIECE

"THE PATHFINDER"

written by

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December 8, 2003

FADE IN:

EXT. THE BELVEDERE PATIO - DAY

Under dappled sunlight, legendary producer MAX MONAYHAN is holding court.

MAX

There are three things a picture needs. One, it's gotta have heart. Two, it's gotta have action. Three, it's gotta have a hell of a twist. Something you never saw coming. And Jamal, your book here...

Max taps a thick manuscript on the table, labelled "The Pathfinder."

MAX (CONT'D)

...it's got all that in spades.

Max shares the table with JAMAL BRYSON, who is still finishing his \$19 egg-white frittata. From his tweedy suit to his bookish glasses, he looks every bit the East Coast intellectual.

Max is suddenly worried --

MAX (CONT'D)

Jesus. I hope you don't take offense to that word -- spade.

JAMAL

Why would I?

MAX

It used to be an insult to your people. Y'know. Spade. Darkie. Colored. "Call a spade a spade."

JAMAL

Actually, that phrase comes from Erasmus. It's a Greek proverb: "I have learned to call wickedness by its own terms: A fig, a fig, and a spade a spade."

MAX

See, kid. It's that big brain of yours, full of knowledge. That's what let you write a masterpiece like this. I mean, with the Redcoats, and the lakes and the Cherokees...

JAMAL

...Iroquois...

MAX

...indigenous people. Whatever. When the studios read this book, they're not going to see little red savages. They're going to see gold. Oscar gold. And for that, they're going to pay a king's ransom.

The busboy, SCOTT PEARSON, reaches in to fill their water glasses with more Pellegrino. He's casually eavesdropping on their conversation.

MAX (CONT'D)

Mark my words, Jamal. By sunset tonight, we're going to be fielding offers from every water tower in town. They don't deserve a read this good. But I'm going to make you a millionaire, kid.

Finished pouring the water, Scott takes a glance at the manuscript, catching the title. We can see the wheels turning in his head as he heads back to his station. His trip carries him past

ANOTHER TABLE,

where TWO MEN are eating salads. Ever-animated "Charlie's Angels" director McG is having lunch with his agent.

MCG

I don't want to be known for putting Cameron Diaz in short-shorts and having her hot-wax a Corvette!

(beat)

I mean, not just that.

AGENT

What I'm hearing is that there's another McG you want to share with the world.

MCG

Thank you!

CUT TO:

EXT. ROOFTOP POOL - A LITTLE LATER

As you'd expect, the beautiful view is the perfect backdrop for the BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE who lounge here. It's a swimsuit calendar without all the annoying dates.

CARMEN RUIZ, the sexiest cabana girl in Beverly Hills, carries a stack of towels past Scott, who has his feet up on a chaise. She notices him reading a three-page fax.

CARMEN

What's that?

SCOTT

Coverage.

(off her look)

It's like a book report for studio executives.

CARMEN

What's the book?

He sits up, excited.

SCOTT

Best Picture, 2006. It's got everything: heart, action, a hell of a twist...

CARMEN

(reading the title)

The Pathfinder.

SCOTT

It's incredible. It's "Master and Commander" without the boat. Or, or...

In the dim recesses of his mind, a light bulb goes on.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

It's an American Braveheart!

She takes the fax from him.

CARMEN

Where did you get this?

SCOTT

CAA. I know a guy who's on a desk there.

CARMEN  
 (knowing)  
 Which one of you was on the desk?

SCOTT  
 You do what you have to. And I  
 would kill for a movie like this.  
 Can you imagine, if this was my  
 first producer credit?

CARMEN  
 It says here Max Monayhan is the  
 producer.

SCOTT  
 Monayhan is a dinosaur. I just  
 have to convince Jamal Bryson to  
 dump Count Hackula and go with a  
 passionate visionary.

CARMEN  
 Or a busboy.

SCOTT  
 This town, Carmen -- it's all about  
 perception. I just need to project  
 the right image.

At just that moment, McG's agent walks past, talking on his  
 cell phone.

AGENT  
 No, you type it! I didn't get a  
 Blackberry just to get carpal  
 tunnel.

Scott's eyes narrow. A plan is forming.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL MEN'S ROOM - DAY

We SWEEP ACROSS the veined marble floor until we come across  
 a thin trail of blood. It trickles from the half-naked body  
 of McG's agent, now deceased. He has been stripped down to  
 his designer underwear.

IN THE MIRROR

Scott finishes dressing himself in the dead man's suit -- a  
 perfect fit, and stylish at that.

CUT TO:

INT. MAX MONAYHAN'S HOTEL SUITE - DAY

A beautiful COURT REPORTER with glasses reads back what she's just typed.

COURT REPORTER

"So it was me, Angie Dickinson and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. Angie's got a 6 a.m. call for "Police Woman" and we still haven't found an all-night pharmacy in Barstow."

Dressed in dashing pajamas, Max shares his king-size bed with a bevy of BEAUTIFUL HONEYS. His stories demand an audience.

MAX

So I tell Kareem -- and you have to remember, he's still dressed like a nun -- do you think Larry Hagman knows how to milk a goat?

Max's cell phone RINGS. Climbing off the bed, he motions to the ladies that he has to take the call. He starts walking to the other room.

MAX (CONT'D)

(on phone)

You got Max! Oh. Hey, Tommy.

He shuts the door behind himself. This won't be a pleasant call.

MAX (CONT'D)

(on phone)

How are my balls? I'm 60 years old, Tommy. They're lower than they used to be. Uh-huh. Really. Sure, I still prefer them attached. Listen, Tommy, by nine o'clock tonight I'll be able to cover the spread like I-Can't-Believe-It's-Not-Butter. See I got a line on a hot book, and this one's a sure thing. This kid is a fucking...

EXT. TENNIS COURTS - DAY

SCOTT

...genius. That's what your book is.

Scott has cornered Jamal after his match. With his new power suit, Scott looks every bit the industry player.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

But no matter how many people read your book, twenty times as many will see the movie. So do you want a schmuck like Max Monayhan putting your work out into the world?

JAMAL

Don't see how it makes much of a difference. My words are still my words.

SCOTT

And it's that kind of poetic truth that makes your work so powerful.

Scott puts his hand on Jamal's shoulder. Jamal bristles.

JAMAL

Listen, my grammy used to run the church potluck. She was a generous woman, but she had one rule you didn't challenge. "'Less you can bring something to the table, you ain't getting a meal."

Jamal shoulders his racket and leaves.

INT. HOTEL BAR - NIGHT

Depressed, Scott twirls the ice in his pricey scotch as he confers with Carmen, who's now serving as bartender. The room has a nice collection of BEAUTIFUL YOUNG WOMEN mixed in with the FOREIGN BUSINESSMEN.

CARMEN

I read the coverage.

SCOTT

It's great, isn't it?

CARMEN

Yes. It is great. It's also a novel by James Fenimore Cooper.

SCOTT

That's okay. You can have more than one thing with the same title.

CARMEN

You don't understand. Jamal Bryant did not write this novel. He took an old novel by Cooper and put his name on it.

SCOTT

So, what, he sampled it? Like when  
a d.j. plays part of a...

CARMEN

No, he stole the entire thing. The  
only thing that got played was you.

It takes a beat, but he finally understands what she's said.

SCOTT

That deceitful little fuck!

CARMEN

...says the busboy masquerading as  
something he's...

SCOTT

Okay. But the book is still good.

CARMEN

Sure.

SCOTT

I mean, the book is great!

CARMEN

I wouldn't push it.

Scott bites his lip. This means he's thinking. (Scott isn't  
really that hard to read.)

SCOTT

This Cooper guy, do you know if he  
has an agent?

CARMEN

He's dead, Scott.

SCOTT

(intrigued)  
Really?

CARMEN

James Fenimore Cooper. He wrote  
"Last of the Mohicans."

SCOTT

Michael Mann wrote that.

CARMEN

Based on the novel by James  
Fenimore Cooper.

SCOTT

Okay. What I'm hearing is that directors really respond to his material.

EXT. HOTEL LOBBY - NIGHT

Scott sits across from McG, pitching him the concept.

SCOTT

And when you add in the Redcoats, and the battles and the intrigue...

MCG

It's an American Braveheart!

They double high-five. Meanwhile, in the background, we see police tape being strung as CORONERS wheel away a corpse.

MCG (CONT'D)

Okay, one thing. Did you kill my agent and steal his suit?

SCOTT

Yes.

MCG

Cool. I just think we gotta be upfront about stuff.

INT. HOTEL DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Max hangs up his phone. This time, it's not a cell phone, but an old-school hotel phone, brought right to the table.

Jamal takes a seat across from him. Notes Max's wry-serious expression.

MAX

The whole town is on to you, Jamal. I just got off the phone with Katzenberg. Twenty years, he's never seen anything like what you just pulled off. You're in for a storm, buck-o.

Jamal takes a long beat. He looks Max straight in the eye. Then, with a polished calm, he tells his tale.

JAMAL

Three days ago, I was making \$9.50 an hour shoveling stale popcorn at the Tarzana 20-Plex.

(MORE)

JAMAL (CONT'D)

When was the last time you were at a real movie theater, Max? People pay seven bucks for something that costs seventeen cents, then spill half of it on the floor while watching some bad Saturday Night Live sketch stretched out to 83 minutes. Repeat this observation day-in, day-out for a couple of years and you realize nobody wants an original idea. They want the same shit they saw last year, but with a new guy and a hotter chick.

Max is amused by Jamal's sudden candor.

JAMAL (CONT'D)

Is this book a fraud? You bet. But that's Hollywood. It's corporate greed disguised as artistic ambition, full of whores selling handshake deals instead of handjobs. When the truth about this book comes out, I'll be branded a liar. You bet. And the next week, everyone will want to talk to the liar about Hollywood. I didn't do this to play the system. I did it to destroy it.

Max smiles.

MAX

Kid, I just sold your book to Paramount. Two million against four, with a fat piece of the back end.

A long beat. Jamal's expression is inscrutable.

Finally...

JAMAL

(matter-of-fact)

I also want to direct.

MAX

Tough shit, kid. We got McG to do it.

Clicking off his cell phone, Scott takes a seat beside Max.

SCOTT

But we got you first crack at the script. McG's got a lot of notes.

(MORE)

SCOTT (CONT'D)

I set up a lunch tomorrow at Piazza del Sol.

MAX

Jamal, you met Scott? He's going to be the associate producer.

SCOTT

Executive producer. Associate producer is a glorified dogwalker.

MAX

It's being negotiated.

Max picks up his wine glass. Motions for them to do the same.

MAX (CONT'D)

At the end of the day, all that really matters is the work, am I right?

JAMAL

Absolutely.

SCOTT

To "The Pathfinder."

They CLINK glasses and share a drink.

A beat later...

MAX

Honestly, I'm not crazy about the title.

CUT TO BLACK.

THE END