

SMOKE

Written by

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Draft 2

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JACK

My name is Jack. I am the proprietor of Pork In Your Bun. The best American BBQ this side of St. Louis. I'm building a portfolio for investors wanting in on my eventual franchise. My specialty is the pulled pork in a sesame seed bun, though we sell twice as many baby backs. Go figure. Trying to figure out what Americans want is like trying to reason with a crocodile. It can't be done. All you can do is wrestle with it and make sure you don't get eaten in the process.

JACK (cont'd)

I think I've been an entrepreneur all my life. Always dabbled in small businesses. Before this, I ran my own boutique end of life services contracting establishment whereby I would assist people in ending their lives with dignity according to their own conditions, on their own terms. I did that for a few years until I met this one bloke who proved a real bugger to kill. He helped me see the value in helping people reach their potential. So, I moved to America and tried to join the clergy. Didn't take. Too much whining, I suppose. Everyone telling me their problems. I'm a problem solver, not a problem listener. So, I thought, How else can I make Americans happy? And that's how I opened up Pork In Your Bun.

JACK (cont'd)

Things were going well, financially speaking, but then, well, life has a way of catching up to you. No matter how far you move, turns out, you can't run away from your past. Cuz it has a way of finding you, and crawling up out of the gutter, to pull you back in.

MUSIC

DIANE

I was in my office when I heard about it. It's still clear in my head, the way it unfolded that day. I have these large windows overlooking Central Park. And I could see one of the towers my company was developing. I remember thinking, If that tower fell right now, the top of it would just barely touch the edge of the park. Strange thought to have, isn't it? Every New Yorker, we'll always feel that sense that something's missing. That sense that something important's been taken from us. It's like everything else in our lives. We don't appreciate while it's here, and when it's gone, that's all you feel. That sudden emptiness. That a piece of you is missing.

DIANE (cont'd)

I got the call. Danny had been killed. Near his vacation house in Jersey. He was out on his boat, fishing, and there was an explosion. The investigation concluded it was an accident, but...I have people. They told me different.

DIANE (cont'd)

Took me fifteen months to track him down. Fifteen months. It usually takes me a week to find someone who doesn't want to be found. So, this was a professional. And, yes, Danny had enemies. But he was generally safe because everyone knew, his enemies were my enemies. I'm not someone you want to cross. Unless you're tired of living.

DIANE (cont'd)

And his absence left a vacuum. In me. And there's only one way to fill that space.

DIANE (cont'd)

Someone killed my brother. And I was going to find him. And kill him.

INT. STUDIO

PAUL

From QRX you're listening to The Big Loop. I'm Paul Bae. Today's episode: "Smoke." We begin with Part One.

INT. MUSIC

JACK

That's how we greet our customers. "How'd you like my pork in your bun?" It's a fun little bit we used to do, set the tone of the place. You know, don't take things so serious. But a few of my employees got roughed up by some nasty diners who didn't appreciate the joke. So for the safety of our staff, we changed it to, "What can I put my sauce on for ya?" They usually want it on their baby backs. It soaks up the sauce nice.

JACK (cont'd)

It was the second to last client I'd ever taken on before seeking a career change. This bloke had terminal cancer. Lived in New Jersey. Wanted me to come all the way out there to take him out. Said he had about six months left to live. Had no family to really speak of. His wife had died two years prior in a boating accident. I think it was his third wife. His kids hated him so couldn't care less. So, he had two stipulations. First, make sure he dies at sea, so he could be with his wife. Which really didn't make sense in any metaphysical terms, right? Like, if you believe in an afterlife, it's not like where you die has any bearing on where you spend eternity. And I told him that. But he said, he was sure she was waiting for him there in the harbor. And then they'd go off taking in the rest of heaven, like tourists in the afterlife. He was even wearing socks with sandals when we talked, so he was ready.

(MORE)

JACK (cont'd)

Anyways, he had a second condition: make sure it's instant. No pain, no suffering. Didn't want to see it coming. Well, unless he's out on his boat every day, that's gonna be a tough one, ain't it? So, I told him, You need to start enjoying the water. Every few days. And he did just that.

FADE OUT MUSIC

DIANE

You ever go to a dog shelter? All these mutts lined up in cages. This look in their eyes waiting for someone, anyone to love them. That was Danny. Took him three tries. First wife cheated on him.

MUSIC

DIANE (cont'd)

But I guess he had it coming. Wasn't like he was the best husband. I was seven years younger than him but three times smarter. I guess that's why Dad left me the family business. When Danny was passed over, it was like all the birthdays Dad ever missed were rolled up into a concrete ball and smashed him in the chest with it. Right in his heart. Like a needy puppy. I wasn't needy. Not at all. Which is why Dad respected me. He called need a weakness. So Danny was weak. He tried in his second marriage. But Danny had habits that can drive you up the wall. Little things. Like cutting his toe nails at the dining table. Imagine a dozen of those types of things every day from your husband. And you don't find out about these habits til after you say "I do." So she left him, too. So, with Irene, he got lucky. Real lucky. But then, the boating accident. It... It hurt him. Worse than the other times. In divorce, there's an element of choice. Of control. Not in death.

## MUSIC CHANGE

JACK

I asked him for his postmortem preferences. Does he need to have his body intact for an open casket? Can I drown him? Or can I blow him to pieces. And when I said that, his face lit up. And he said, "That's how Irene would like it. Yeah. Blow me up to all the corners of the earth. But not Boston. I don't want any of me in Boston." So, I bought him a new fishing rod. To take his mind off of everything. I need my clients to relax, to settle in. Or, why do this at all? He could just shoot himself in the head. Granted, he was Catholic so suicide was out of the question. Most of my clients were Catholic. Which probably explains why I was interested in joining the clergy. I felt in my duty as a personal end of life services contractor that I played a somewhat ceremonial role, not much different from that you see in a priest or shaman. I'm taking you from one stage of life to the next. With the help of bullets, or explosives, or whatnot.

DIANE

When I heard the news that he'd been killed in an explosion on his boat, I knew it was a message. For me. In my line of business, why wouldn't I think that? Since I took over the business, I've kept a book. A brown leather journal, and in those pages, I've written the names of all my enemies. And one by one, I've crossed out those names.

JACK

The one secret to success? Focus. Whatever you do in life, whether it's providing end of life services or smoking ribs in the cooker til the meat's falling off the bone, you have to have single-minded focus on your goal. Or you get burnt. My goal was to franchise. Until that investor walks through the doors of Pork In Your Bun, I need to keep my eye on the path to that goal. Every successful person you see has one obsession, and everything they do, is with a focus on that obsession.

DIANE

When I started, I had over fifty names on that list. But, tick, tick, tick, it was like checking the boxes on a form. What Dad never told me, was how easy it would be. Because if you had enemies, all it took to get rid of them, was the will. As long as I wanted to, I can tick off your name, remove you from my book. And I did. Because that's how you build an empire. So, I took out that book, and went through all the remaining names. One. By. One. And strange thing: I came no closer to finding Danny's killer. So it became no longer a question of will, but philosophy. Here was a man, or woman, who lived in the shadows. A special type of assassin, tied to no one, belonging to nothing. Like air.

MUSIC

JACK

I opened up my first BBQ joint just over a year after that job. Placed ads with my face everywhere. Because I realized, I wasn't just branding my establishment. I was branding myself. So, whenever people saw my face, I wanted them to think of my meat.

DIANE

After eight months, we tracked him to Australia. To a pub where he had done some work. After another three months, we were able to pick up on his scent. He left behind a trail of bodies leading from the Australian outback to Spain and France and London. He was obviously a man of considerable skill. And finally, after thirteen long months of searching, we traced him right... back...here. To New York. He was here. Plying his lethal trade.

JACK

And for the first six months, I worked in the kitchen making my sauce. And don't ask me for what's in it. It's a trade secret, like my other skills. I'm highly protective of it. In fact, one night, I arrived at work a little earlier than usual, and I saw someone snooping around. I guess word got out to my competitors. Corporate espionage. Company secrets. Well, there's only one way to deal with that.

DIANE

I sent one of my men after him. To a BBQ joint. It was obviously a cover for him. Probably a place to launder some of his cash.

JACK

He was a big guy. He bent over to check out my stove and that's when I saw it. The handle of a Glock under his jacket. And I knew then: someone really wanted my sauce. So, I snuck up behind him, gave him the old one-two. Knocked him unconscious, tied him up, cut off his index fingers to remind him to never come after me with a gun. I asked him if he was right handed or left. He didn't seem quite sure so I had to cut off both. And then I dumped him in the trunk of a car in a strip mall in Edison.



DIANE

He was obviously on to us. But it was strange, the way he just kept showing up at that BBQ place. As if daring us to get him. A challenge.

MUSIC STOPS

DIANE (cont'd)

I admired that. I hadn't seen a challenge, a real challenge, since I first took over the business. One of my Dad's former partners took a run at me. Sent four of his boys to my home. And I was waiting for them. You don't get to sit in this chair without knowing what it takes to get here. And what people will do to sit here instead of you. I remember the night they came for me. I didn't even need a gun. Just my wires. Sliced open the first guy's neck. Next guy was a knife to the balls, then choked him out. The last two kept trying to taunt me, calling out, "Here girlie, girlie, girlie. Here girlie, girlie, girlie." I stuck a knife through the back of his head. And the last one... Well, I let him run a bit. Let him think he was safe. He got in his car, and I was already in the back seat. Wrapped that wire around his neck, and whispered in his ear, "Just know that after you die, I'm slicing off your balls and feeding them to the gators at the zoo." I never did that. But I did remove all their balls. Just to send a message. "Don't. Mess. With. Daddy."

JACK

About a week later, I'd closed up the shop and as usual, was last one out. I say lead by example. That's what I do. So I went to my car, and as soon as I got in, I could smell something different. Years in the Aussie outback trained me to hunt using all my senses. You don't just shut that off because you're in New York. I sat in the drivers seat, and saw in the rear view mirror someone in the back seat. Pure amateur move.

(MORE)

JACK (cont'd)

Whenever I engage in a back seat maneuver, I make sure to mask my scent, to roll around in whatever materials I'm going to be hiding in. Leather seats? Okay then, I'm rolling around in a leather goods factory for a few hours before the job. You can't go into a situation like this with a whiff of the Calvin Klein cologne you wore last weekend. Anyways, I took off my shoe and used it to block this guy's piano wire he tried to wrap around my neck. And I got my keys in my hand and attempted to disengage the wire from him. Instead, I sent the key back through his eyeball. It was one of those long car keys. A hazard, really. Well, he starts screaming, so I jump in the back, make quick work of him. Tie him up, drive him down under the bridge in his own car, and start interrogating him. He won't talk. So whoever hired him must be scared shitless of his employer. Cuz I had my knife hovering over his other eyeball and he still wouldn't talk. So, I left him hogtied in the trunk of his car under a bridge with a note on his chest saying, "Try harder, mate." Left him there to be found. But I guess I forgot to engage the emergency brake because I saw him on the news the next day as the police dragged his car and body out of the water.

DIANE

It was my best man. And this... Australian... he dispatched him, blinded him in one eye, as if he were a rag doll. And then drowned him in his own car. And he wasn't even trying to hide. This was a level of brazenness I'd never encountered before. And I wanted to see it for myself. So, I gathered my crew, and went...to him. I needed to do this myself. Because no one stands in Daddy's way. No one.

INT. STUDIO

PAUL

When we return, the conclusion of  
"Smoke," after these messages from  
our sponsors.

MIDROLL PROMOTION

DIANE

Tick, tick, tick...

Muffled explosion.

JACK

I'm always the first one there. I got  
in through the back entrance in the  
alley to unload my truck. And I put  
my key in, and immediately noticed  
something was off. The touch of the  
thing. A bit stiff. Then--

More explosion echo.

DIANE

I was sitting across the street in  
the car. I watched him drive in the  
alley. Then, two minutes later, an  
explosion. Smoke. There was no way he  
would have survived that explosion.

JACK

The bomb was apparently inside the  
kitchen, rigged to the door lock. But  
we'd had some break-ins recently so I  
replaced the door with a thick sheet  
of industrial steel I'd just used for  
another pet project. I suppose that  
protected me from the worse part of  
the blast. I woke up in a pile of  
bricks on the other side of the  
alleyway. My truck was a write-off.  
And my restaurant. The first ever  
Pork In Your Bun. It was up in  
flames. And...to be honest, I started  
laughing, right. Cuz the sight of a  
BBQ establishment being barbecued.  
Well, the irony wasn't lost on me. I  
think I laughed for about twenty  
minutes. Because the joke is:  
everything you build will end up in  
ruin. Everything. You could be the  
best painter in the world.

(MORE)

JACK (cont'd)

Your painting will eventually fade away. Marble sculpture? Arms break off and it eventually crumbles to dust. Written a poem? Who gives a shit about poetry? It's all for naught. So, I laughed. I laughed as I brushed myself off, I laughed as I walked home, and when I got there, I started laughing again as I took out my kit. My special work kit. Cleaned my guns. Sharpened my knives. I hadn't used it in a year or so since that last client in London, but I figured, someone wants me out of business. So I took the fight. To them.

DIANE

I still remember when I got the call. "Daddy. He's alive." What do you do with someone who refuses to die? This was someone...quite special. A singular talent for survival. Or the luckiest bastard in the world. But I know people like him. I grew up watching them. And I knew this: someone like him would want to bring the fight to me.

MUSIC

JACK

Well, I thought about it, and then realized that's exactly what they'd expect me to do. So I did the opposite, and waited. At home.

DIANE

I waited for a week, and my men told me he hadn't left his apartment. For a week. It's obviously a trap, so I continued to wait.

JACK

I was going stir crazy. I was nearing my last can of soup waiting. And then I thought, maybe I'm wrong. Maybe they're waiting for me. So my initial instinct which I was now doing the opposite of was actually right and my opposite was wrong.

DIANE

I had enough. I gathered my men and went to him.

MUSIC ENDS

JACK

It was around four in the morning when it began. I heard them coming from a mile away. The door burst in. They tried to sneak in where they think I'd least expect it: through the front door. Here's the thing: I always expect the unexpected. They were in my environment. They were in trouble.

MUSIC

DIANE

Five of my men went in first. I was watching from the hall. They burst through the door. And then this steel door came sliding across the opening. It locked the rest of us out.

JACK

You ever see that movie The Professional? Cuz you should. Brilliant stuff, that. It's got the symbolism of the plant to show his loneliness but nurturing spirit. Gets a bit creepy with Natalie Portman, but he probably knew she was going to be hot one day. Who knows? But the point is, it gave me the idea for that: isolating them in my space a group at a time. So, I made quick work of them. I threw a smoke bomb in the middle of them. But I guess I mislabeled them. Because this huge explosion went off. It was an actual grenade. Poor buggers.

DIANE

Then the steel door slid open. It was all smoke. The explosion took out the first group. So I sent in the next five. The last one stood holding the door open. But then--

JACK

Yeah, I accidentally hit the CLOSE button and that poor bugger was crushed instantly by the steel door. Just mashed in his skull like a pumpkin. I was trying to activate the sprinkler system. I should probably start wearing reading glasses. Anyways, I figured out my mistake and hit the sprinkler button. Make everything nice and slippery. I had on my rubber booties and was crouched up on a table in the next room. And I yelled out, "Don't move. Or you're toast." I meant it kind of literally cuz they were now standing in a bit of water and I had wires running round the living room. Well, I guess the explosion jarred some of the wires loose and they activated without me. Fried all of them.  
(snaps finger)  
Just like that.

DIANE

He was relentless. The steel door opened again and I could see everyone laying there. And that was it. Like, that, he'd taken out ten of my best men. What was I supposed to do? Run? Diane Agostini does not run. I'd rather die with a bullet in the front of my skull than with one in my back. So, I walked into his lair.

JACK

You know who it was? Diane Agostini.

MUSIC ENDS

JACK (cont'd)

You ever see her on the news? She's, like, the CEO of the biggest restaurant investment group in New York City. I couldn't believe she was there standing in my living room. Talk about timing!

DIANE

And he did the strangest thing.

MUSIC

(MORE)

DIANE (cont'd)

He started apologizing. For the mess. He's got this luger in his hand and he's a blubbering mess. And I'm not sure what's going on. To be honest, I was stunned. Because he came up to me with this silly grin on his face, and--

JACK

I took her to the kitchen where the explosion didn't rip everything to shreds. And I sat her down at my table. And started panicking because, well, I'd eaten all the food and there was nothing to serve her.

DIANE

He started apologizing for not having expected any guests. Let me be clear: there were ten bodies laying around just a few dozen feet from us. And he lay all these pamphlets down in front of me. And started talking about... barbecue sauce.

JACK

If, once in your life, the stars align and present you with the opportunity to make good, you strike. Well, I'd been given that opportunity a few times. And I'd never fully taken advantage of them. Because I was scared. Or hesitant. Or didn't want to make a fool of myself by seeming needy. Well, Diane Agostini was in my kitchen. And I wasn't going to let her leave without tasting my sauce.

DIANE

And he's going on about how he developed his sauce, and I realize, he has no idea why I'm here. This moron thinks I just happened to be there at this particular time by coincidence. During...this. So he's blabbering on about his restaurant, getting bowls and spoons, and I'm looking around his kitchen. And that's when I see...a photo. Of Danny.

MUSIC ENDS

DIANE (cont'd)  
He's...fishing. Smiling.

JACK  
I noticed her looking at the photo I took of my last American client. So I quickly explain, without getting too specific, who he is. I don't want to scare her away from investing in my restaurant chain, so I just tell her the general story. Of how--

DIANE  
Danny had cancer. And he was going to lose the ability to walk on his own in a few months. So he wanted... he wanted to end his life with dignity. He kept saying that word--

JACK  
Dignity. It's everything. We need to come to each other, remembering that we're offering one another the singularity of our selves. There's no one else like me. There's no one else like you. And there will never be. So, remembering that, we have to honor each other, with dignity. And that, in a nutshell--

DIANE  
--is what he did for Danny. And I suddenly understood. He didn't murder Danny. He helped him end his life the way he wanted to. Fishing. So I asked him, How did he end up...helping him? And he had a very...odd response.

JACK  
I didn't. I had it all planned out. Even went out with him fishing one day where I snapped that photo. To put him at ease. But then one day, while preparing to...you know, execute the terms of his contract, someone else got to him. They blew up his boat. Well, if there's one thing I hate, it's someone interfering in my business. So, I hunted down the buggers on my own. Threw all three of them in the river in a rubber dinghy.  
(MORE)



JACK (cont'd)

I heard the next day some recreational boaters had run them over in the middle of the night, drunk most likely. But the point is, I never fulfilled my end of the contract. Which is why I never withdrew the money he set aside for me. Fifty grand is nothing to sneeze at, and I suppose a lesser man would have withdrawn it since there'd be nothing stopping him. But I'm more than a lesser man. I'm more. I'm a man with honor. And if you don't live with honor, with dignity, why bother living? *That*, that, my friend, is a waste of a life.

DIANE

When I was settling Danny's affairs, I'd noticed a sum of money sitting in one of his accounts. Fifty thousand dollars. This man had been contracted by Danny, to end his life for him. For my... (emotional, but restrained) for my brother.

Takes a moment to gather herself.

DIANE (cont'd)

And because he specifically didn't follow through, he didn't allow himself to get paid. I haven't seen that type of integrity except in... well, except in me. To be frank. I asked him if he would consider working for me. And he asked me the strangest thing. He said--

JACK

What kind of barbecue do you like? Because there's different kinds. There's St. Louis style, which is my style. Lots of sauce, over direct heat. There's Memphis style which uses a dry or wet rub, usually no sauce. Slow cooked. And Texas has got at least four different types of barbecue all in the same state. The point is, we're all just hunks of meat. And the goal of barbecue is not to feed you. There's lots of ways to feed you. The goal is to make you happy.

(MORE)

JACK (cont'd)

And if you can't do more in that capacity than a side or baby back ribs, well, what're you good for? Well, the fact she didn't have a favorite style showed me she hadn't put a lot of thought into making people happy. I told her no offense meant, and I was flattered at her offer, but people like her see barbecue as a business. I see it as a way to connect with things greater than me.

DIANE

He was either the smartest man I'd ever met, or the stupidest. I still can't figure it out. I shook his hand and asked what was next for him. And he pointed at all my men all over the floor, and he said this was a sign for him to move on. To the next chapter of his life. And before I left, he said the strangest thing.

JACK

Do you know if they have barbecue in Idaho?

MUSIC & CREDITS