

Poolside

By Hunter Ellis

“The Ultimate Guide to Male Grooming.” You read the title of the article in the issue of GQ lying in your lap. You notice there is no breeze at all this afternoon. Did you even apply sunscreen earlier? You rub your shoulder to check for any semblance of greasiness. You only feel beads of sweat that have formed in the thirty minutes since you arrived. For some reason not knowing whether you will burn upsets you. Bored, your eyes return to the magazine. While flipping through the grooming article your friend taps you on the shoulder.

“Jake, I’m awake. Just talk to me,” you say.

“Yeah, I know, but check out the hard body across the pool. She’s got a nice, firm ass.”

The woman Jake is referring to is lying on her stomach attempting to get rid of any visible tan lines on her shoulders and back. Her bikini top is unfastened. She is fairly brown and evenly tanned other than the tan lines from her top. You wonder how you haven’t noticed her at the pool before. Half of her face is buried in a blue and yellow striped towel, but it is enough to confirm her features for you. Her nose is small and flat, and reminds you of a child pressing their face up against a window. You notice that her short, cropped brown hair is styled in a loose bun, almost like the dignitary’s wife on page 36.

“We should totally ask her if she wants some sniff. Maybe she has some friends in the pool or something.”

Your eyes return to the open page in your lap. As you feign interest in reading the magazine your eyes fall down on another article title that reads, “The Ultimate Tie: What is a ‘power tie’ and how it could change your life.” You close the magazine and notice that Jake has been looking at you waiting for an answer for over ten seconds. Why must your friend always act this way when he wants something?

“Alright.”

“Alright, what?” Jake says with a hint of curiosity behind his reply.

“Let’s ask this girl if she would like to do a few lines and get a drink at the club house,” you say with a degree of poignancy in your voice. Jake tries to hide the grin that forms in the right corner of his mouth after you finish speaking.

You were wrong. The woman’s hair looks more like the flight attendant from a flight you took a few months ago to St. Louis. Jake cocks his head in your direction as he always does when he wants you to take the next action. As you move toward the empty chair next to the woman opens her eyes and rolls over - naturally reacting to the loss of her direct sunlight. In this process, her unfastened top shifts downwards revealing her areolas. The dark red circles juxtapose with the pale of her breast. You notice that she blushes slightly while fastening her top and shifting it in place.

“My friend and I noticed you from the other side of the pool. We think you look like the sporting type. Would you like to do a line and get a drink? Our treat,” you say without the slightest hint that you just saw this woman’s breasts.

“I suppose it depends. What’s the catch?”

“You enjoy some good coke. We enjoy the company of a beautiful woman and the world continues to spin.” The words flow effortlessly from your mouth. Three weeks ago, you used a similar line to get to third base with one of the lifeguards in the kiddie pool.

“Yeah, sure.”

“Did you come with any friends?” says Jake.

“No. My father is playing golf so I thought I would work on my tan.”

“Do you know when he is going to finish up?” you say.

“The woman stares towards the entrance and squints. You can tell she can’t read the clock’s minute hand from this distance. “I’d say two hours or so,” the woman says.

“Let’s go, then,” you say. The three of you walk towards the clubhouse.

You are in the men’s game room on the lower level of the clubhouse. The room was empty when you found it, but you aren’t too concerned about anyone walking in anyway. There is a television mounted on the far wall tuned to CNN. The reporter is discussing some new Regan economic stimulus package. The S&P is up 100 points. You take a seat at one of the tables in the back of the room.

“Hand me that checker board, Jake,” you say.

“Jake, huh? Nice name,” the woman says.

“So what do they call you?” Jake says.

“Sabrina.”

“I like it.” You pull the coke out of your pocket and take a nearby knife in order to arrange the pile into thin lines. There is enough coke for eight lines.

“Sabrina, step right up and prepare for a fantastic high.” You hand her the rolled twenty. She presses her finger against her right nostril and inhales with the other. Her eyes bulge open for nearly five seconds as she feels the sharp sting inside her nostril. Her small nose tingles as you rub the powder from it with your index finger. Immediately she snaps out of her buzz and grabs your wrist. The next moment your finger is in her mouth. She laughs as you take the twenty and bend down to complete the same ritual.

“Why haven’t we seen you around here before, Sabrina?” says Jake.

You finish snorting two lines of coke and take a sip from your Beefeater gin and tonic. Your ears perk up slightly in response to the cocaine hitting your brain and also to hear Sabrina’s response to Jake’s question.

“Honestly, I’m new to the area. We only joined the club two weeks ago. I used to live out in Vallejo. My uncle bought a house down here in Brentwood a few years back. He’s very successful. My dad fell in love with the area and bought a place in the Palisades.”

“Oh wow,” says Jake.

“Yeah, I was pretty excited to move, actually,” says Sabrina. You hold out the twenty. Sabrina bends over and does another line. Four lines down. Jake does three over the course of five minutes. You share the last one with Sabrina – as close to fifty-fifty as possible.

Continuing her previous thought, “I hated the private school I was at. Now that I’m a junior, it is good to meet a few nice people before heading off to college. Everyone is so uptight Upstate.” You notice that Sabrina’s mojito is three quarters empty. Coke always makes you thirsty. It seems to be the only negative side effect. You explain the situation and go to the bathroom before heading to the bar to order more drinks.

While ordering the next round of drinks you feel the full effect of your buzz come on. You hand twitches slightly. You strike up conversation with the bartender to help pass the time. He says something about a dead Canadian goose on the seventeenth hole this morning. Talking bores you. You walk over to the window and pretend to stare out. An eternity passes before the bartender informs you that your drinks are ready. You check your watch. Only ten minutes have passed. You add the three drinks to your parent’s tab.

Navigating the small hallways between the bar and the game room proves quite a feat. Pressing open the door to the men’s room, you discover two new men talking to Jake and Sabrina. The two men are in their late sixties and dressed in seersucker pants and yellow Polo shirts. One man wears a visor that reads, “Ping: Southern California Cup Semi-Champions ‘83.”

“Hey, Steve,” says Jake. You distribute the drinks accordingly.

“Thanks, Steve,” Sabrina says while winking at you.

“You two are some fine gentleman,” the older golfer says, “bringing such an attractive, well-behaved lady into the game room.”

“Yeah, I approve,” the other says.

“You two are too kind,” Sabrina blushes slightly as she goes for the inaugural sip from her second mojito.

“Do you boys want to play some cards or get something to eat?” says Sabrina.

Jake throws a glance that can only be described as a deer realizing that the car it is about to collide with is not going to be made of paper-mâché. Thirteen years of friendship has made a few things constant in your relationship with your best friend. When things are getting awkward a cold stare and slightly opened face mean it is time to leave.

“I’m afraid we will have to postpone this game for another day, fellas. We are going to go take a dip in the pool,” you say.

“It was nice meeting you two,” the older golfer says while we exit the room.

You hear one of the older man say to his friend that he could go for some Valium and a Jack and Coke before dinner as the door swings shut.

Walking back to the pool you notice the lifeguard you had a romantic foray with a few weeks back. She looks younger than you remember. You usually like them feisty but what were you thinking with her? She barely looks 15. The lifeguard merely waves in your direction as you walk past. You try to remember her name. Was it Kate? No, it must be Kelly. You aren’t positive. You say, “Hello,” and back toward your chair. The GQ has blown open to a new article. The title reads, “Get the woman of your dreams in two dates.” When did the breeze roll through?

“Let’s go into the deep end,” Jake says.

“Good idea,” you say. Sabrina has let her hair down. It stretches down past her shoulder blades.

You jump into the pool. The first moment the water wraps around your body creates a great stir inside your brain. You wonder what it would be like to live underwater. A splash next to you confirms that Jake has entered the pool. As your head pokes above the crest of the water a lifeguard blows a whistle. You put all effort of focusing on her frame.

“Hey, watch out. This is a diving board area. Swim further away,” the lifeguard says.

You submerge once more sinking to the bottom of the pool by letting out most of the air contained in your lungs. Sabrina swims by, waving her hand at you. She motions for you to come up to the surface.

“Hey, we have to get out of the pool,” Sabrina says, “a bird just fell out of the sky and landed in the pool. The lifeguards have to get animal control out here and so the pool is closed until then.”

Jake is climbing the ladder to exit the pool to your left. You swim up behind Sabrina to get out. Your buzz makes your afternoon feel much worse. Sabrina grabs the sides of the ladder and steps out of the pool. A steady stream of water forms down her tanned backside as she walks over to her towel.

You check the time on the clock on the wall across the pool. It is half past four. “So what else are you up to tonight, Sabrina?”

“Dinner with my family.”

“You said you live out in the Palisades? My friend has a concert this Thursday in Bel Air. He’s in a punk band. Would you be interested? Of course you can come to the after party,” you say.

“Yeah, I’ll give you my number.”

“Sounds good. Oh, and bring a friend if you want,” you say, “You need a ride home or anything?”

“My sister is coming by to pick me up in fifteen minutes. Thanks though.”

“We’ll see you Thursday if not before,” you say.

“See ya, Sabrina,” Jake says.

Walking past the lifeguard stand, you overhear the lifeguards talking about the bird. Apparently, this isn’t the first time this week a bird has just fallen out of the air above our pool. You look back over to Sabrina’s chair and notice that she is wringing the water out of her hair. A small child is crying as the mother holds her hand and walks past you.

Once you get to your chair, you towel off and collect your things. Jake throws on an old t-shirt and you decide to drape the towel over your shoulders. As you exit the pool, you finally see the bird floating in the water on its back. The bird’s wings are spread, leading you to believe it was caught in some struggle. Can birds get rabies? Or was it

cancer that finally got to this bird? What was the CNN reporter saying about an economic stimulus plan?

“Hey, do you have your lighter on you?” Jake says.

“It’s in my car.” You walk across the hot parking lot to your BMW 528e without saying another word. The rubbery tar of the parking lot beneath your toes smells like fuel on days that are this hot.

Driving home, Jake goes on a rant about the music the radio stations aren’t playing. As usual, he continues his own rebuttal with simple “Yeahs” and “Okays” thrown in where necessary. At the stop light, you look over to an S&K store. The sign reads, “Power Ties Fifty Percent Off!”

The light turns green and you pass through the familiar intersection noticing stores that you can’t remember ever seeing before.

“Jake,” you interrupt, “Has that boutique always been there?” You point towards the storefront as you pass it.

“Yeah? Why?”

“I must have never noticed it before.”