

**From *ALWAYS HIT ON THE WINGMAN...and 9 Other Secret Rules for Getting the Love Life You Want* by Jake. Copyright 2012 Conde Nast. Published by Hyperion. Available wherever books are sold. All Rights Reserved.**

## **Introduction**

**by Jake**

If you're reading this, you're probably interested in men. And you're probably, on occasion, *confused* by men. On behalf of all guys, let me say: We're sorry. Men *are* confusing. How do I know? I once made a living trying to explain them to millions of women. I learned a lot—and what I know, you should too. It's criminal you don't already! But let me explain.

Even before I became Jake almost 10 years ago, I always knew who he was. The famous pseudonym masks a guy who writes for *Glamour* every month about how men think. I used to see women reading his column on the subway to work and, before that, in the dorms in college. I even remember seeing my girlfriend read it when I was in high school. What did I think of Jake before I became him? I can recall somewhat jealously imagining him as this worldly, sexy, somewhat jaded guy who seemed to know everything about women. And that is basically who I imagined myself to be years later, as I approached my big 3-0 in the beginning of a new and already very different century. I had a theory back then that there were two kinds of men in the world—the ones who fantasized about falling in love, and the ones who fantasized about the perfect one-night stand. Since I was the former, I figured I was one of the good guys. But I can tell you now that I was the dating woman's basic nightmare. Notice I didn't say "total nightmare" or "freakishly evil man." Just an average, serial-dating, commitment-phobic kind of nightmare. Just a nightmare the way most men are nightmares. In my case, I had a dating shtick—though I'd never have admitted it at the time. And my shtick went something like this: I'd meet a girl, develop a crush, convince her to date me, we'd go out for cocktails, maybe accompany each other to a party, get a movie night going, find a regular brunch place on Saturdays, figure out what her favorite position was and what mine was, meet the parents, start leaving our stuff at each other's places.... At which point I'd start to get a little restless.

I'd begin to think, *She's giving me early warning signs that she wants us to get more serious, maybe live together, but I'm not desperate to do that, so something must be wrong. She must not be right for me.* And I'd break up with her. Then I'd repeat the whole cycle. I was both a player and a romantic—unwilling to make myself vulnerable but disappointed that I couldn't seem to fall in love. Enter a *Glamour* editor named Jill. On the morning I got her phone call, I was a hungover mess, hunched over an egg-and-cheese in my cubicle at work. Before I could find a pen to write down Jill's name, she was getting down to business, telling me she'd heard about me from some friends, read some of my stuff and thought I might make a good Jake. Did I want to try out for the column?

I wasn't sure if I wanted to. I asked her to let me think about it, and then I hung up and did some research. Jake, I found out, is a serious institution. The column debuted in 1956 "to bring a man's point of view into each issue of *Glamour*," as the editors put it. The first guy to wear the mantle—and one of a small minority who have since revealed their identities—was Bud Palmer, a former Princeton University basketball star and Renaissance man (he's been credited with helping invent the jump shot, and he later became a Navy pilot and sports announcer). Bud, being a mid-twentieth-century gentleman, devoted most of his columns to instructing "ladies" and "gals" on how to be alluring to men with "more

imaginative vocabularies, experimental cooking, flaring skirts, enough perfume” and the like. But his columns were sharp, insightful and, underneath all that fifties-era vocab, often timelessly wise. By entreating women to seek adventure, stop worrying so much and *enjoy* dating, Bud-Jake paved the way for subsequent generations of Jakes to have a more equal exchange with women. From the Sexual Revolution to the fall of Hippysdom; the age of disco to the age of AIDS; *When Harry Met Sally* to *Sex and the City*, Jake was there. I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t a little intimidated by the Jake column’s storied past. Plus, I worried that if word leaked out about my true identity, no one would ever sleep with me again. Who wants to see their sexual performance discussed in a column with an audience of 12 million? Ultimately, though, I decided to try out for the gig, which I saw as a flattering opportunity to satisfy what a Jake from the mid-1980s, Laurence Shames, once described as “a tremendous hunger among women to have a man explain his real feelings—because millions of guys either cannot or will not say what’s on their minds.” I had always agonized over my love life, after all. Why not get paid to do it? I wrote the tryout piece, and I was given the job.

[...]

In the beginning, I wrote about what I knew, which was basically the first three months of a relationship...especially the sex part. I knew a lot about *those* months. In one column I revealed what men tell their friends about a girl after a date—which is whether or not we slept with her. Period. In another I listed the things men fake in bed (the depth of our emotions, that we never get tired, that sex with condoms is just as good). As *Glamour* readers got to know me better and better, they began writing me letters and e-mails, sharing what it was like to be on *their* side of the dating fence. By my second year on the job, I almost felt as though I was in a relationship with my audience. At this point, my readers had become familiar with my aforementioned dating shtick, and while some women told me they appreciated getting an honest glimpse into the brain of a commitment-phobe like me, plenty of others scolded me for my caddish behavior. I was glad that they cared enough to write, but I shrugged off their criticism. *Just telling it like it is!* I’d say to myself. *You don’t like it, you should date women instead!* I might have gone on like this forever—or at least until I started watching Cialis commercials with more interest—but the year I turned 33, two women came into my life and changed everything. The first was my newest *Glamour* editor, Genevieve, who had a way of calling me on my game that was both unnerving and exciting. “Go deeper!” was her standard note on my columns. And once: “You’ve never admitted to a woman how confused you really are, have you?” A few months after Genevieve began editing/counseling me, I met a very unusual woman I code-named “Orange Blossoms” in the Jake column (she wore this insanely intoxicating orange-blossom perfume). I liked her. I mean, I didn’t just like her—I was obsessed. I wanted to apply for a job where my sole duty would be to sit across from her and stare at her face all day. Readers of the Jake column saw me fall in love with someone in a way I never had. And then they watched me slip into my old patterns. The deeper I got with Blossoms, the more fixated I got on how awesome it would be to be single again; women on the street would hypnotize me with their shiny hair or low-cut tops or sheer unknowability. How I longed for my old independence. (Granted, if I was a commitment phobe, as clichéd as it is, Blossoms was a commitment freak: She would have been fine getting married two weeks after we met, and she had a thing for asking me questions like, “Why did you say ‘Good morning’ instead of ‘Good morning, I love you?’”) Feeling trapped, I stalled. I obfuscated. I wrote about my stalling and obfuscating in my Jake columns, and I received what seemed like thousands of e-mails and letters from readers who told me they’d been with too many guys like me, and that I needed to

man up already.

Wrote one 26-year-old reader from Syracuse, New York: “Why can’t guys see that wanting to be with a woman they love and admire is a gift and an honor rather than a commitment to a lifetime of heartache, pain and arguments? Oh, yeah, you’ll get those things too, but hey, at least they’ll be with someone you love and who loves you back. Life is short. Are you going to get to your deathbed worrying about all those shiny attractive women who passed you by on the street, or are you going to think about the one that got away? I bet you dollars to doughnuts you will think about the latter.”

Whew, did Ms. Syracuse have my number. But did I listen? No. I did what I always did. I broke up with Blossoms. People like to say, “Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.” Not true. Insanity is when your meatloaf talks to you and you’re convinced that last week you were abducted by aliens. When you keep doing the same thing and complaining about how it makes you miserable? That’s called being a dumbass. And eventually, my readers showed me that. After I wrote the column about my breakup, I started getting even more mail. A *lot* of mail. My readers wanted to know: Why had I broken up with Blossoms? Why did I break up with everyone? Why was I always the one in control, not the women I dated? And, the question that really got me thinking: What on God’s green earth was it going to take for me to commit to a woman? After a lot of sleepless nights and some consultation with Genevieve, who I’d started to call my Significant Editor, I wrote a column where I answered that question as best I could: It was going to take getting outside my comfort zone—not by breaking up with the next woman I fell in love with, but by staying with her long enough to figure out what it was that scared me so much about commitment. Judging by the mail, that was the most popular column I ever wrote. Meanwhile, readers weren’t writing in just to comment on *my* problems. They had plenty of their own, and they needed good advice. The majority who wrote in wanted to know how they could get their boyfriends—a lot of whom seemed a lot like *me*—to be better, more committed partners. “I can call him anytime, day or night, and he’ll come running for sex,” wrote one woman of her so-called boyfriend, “but he keeps me at arm’s length emotionally.” Another admitted: “I’ve grown very cynical with each heartache. I no longer believe in happily ever after.” And from another: “Is there any reason I should make an effort to save my relationship if my guy appears to be more interested in playing video games with his pals than being with me?” What could I say? If I couldn’t fix myself, how did they expect me to fix their boyfriends? The best I could do was tell them, as often as possible, that they didn’t need to settle. The second most popular column I ever wrote was probably the one where I told women: “Relationships aren’t supposed to suck. You deserve to be loved, to be paid attention to, to gaze across the room, see your boyfriend and think, *God, am I lucky to be with that guy*, and to know he’s thinking the same about you.” I wanted to be that guy, and the fact that my friends out there in reader-land seemed to believe I had the potential to make a woman happy, in spite of my recent F-up with Blossoms, was about the only solace I had. “One day,” wrote a reader from Shreveport, Louisiana, “you will meet a girl who you will not have to explain your weird habits to; she will just look at you and laugh and shake her head and say, ‘Whatever!’ And she will be confident enough in herself that she won’t have to be given an explanation when you need some time to yourself.”

I loved that letter, but back in the world where I had a name (and it wasn’t Jake), I was going through a pretty rough time, a period in the metaphorical wilderness. It was awful. Since the breakup with Blossoms, food didn’t taste right anymore. I literally wandered the streets at night.

I would go on dates with terrific women but find myself totally uninterested. Over the next three months, I got more depressed. Sure, I was free to go see a crap Keanu Reeves movie by myself and eat greasy Chinese food afterward without having to call someone and explain why I'd rather be with an egg roll than with her. But the more I thought about it, the more I had to admit that what I really wanted was to snuggle up in bed with Blossoms. (Yeah, "snuggle." I said it. You have a problem with that?) Faced with all the freedom I supposedly craved but didn't actually want, I found myself wondering: Who's the smart guy now? I might still be wandering around dazed and confused today if I hadn't finally run into Blossoms at a real-estate open house. I was checking out a "charming 1 BR" (I figured since I was constitutionally unable to be in a serious relationship, I should at least find a nice place to spend the rest of my days alone) when who did I see standing in the bathtub and inspecting the showerhead? Yes, Blossoms—wearing the body-huggiest blouse she'd ever worn, I might add. I convinced her to take a walk with me, and I soon realized she wasn't the same person I'd broken up with. "I thought you were responsible for making me happy," she told me, "and responsible for when I wasn't. That wasn't fair." I'd never seen her so strong, and suddenly I wanted nothing more than to be with her, to love her, to make her happy.