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# Jamaican Cowboy

Euzebiusz Wasowicz

I remember all the lies, all the lies I learned to love. Hearing them was only part of the satisfaction. Consciously watching them unfold in front of me was the actual gratification. This wasn't because I felt that my mute truths that I internalized were right, nor was it the natural feeling that manifests when you are totally *fucked*, like those times during adolescence when you've broken something running around the house. It was because I had a chance, a chance of accepting the circumstances to which others were oblivious, like a chess move that inevitably forces the opponent's queen into the line of fire. I had a chance not only to save myself, but also to right wrongs that had been long unaddressed.

I could have saved people and I didn't, and you shouldn't look down at me out of spite or disappointment. I'm not a superhero or a guardian of the greater good. I am, I was, just a kid lost in fear, and in retrospect, I wouldn't change a single thing except for meeting that Jamaican cowboy.

We rarely had to wait for a light to change in the East Village. By now, we had mastered the intricacies of walking in the city without stopping, except occasionally to fix the shoestrings of Jordans and the cuffs of our garments, or to unapologetically appreciate the objectified

beauty of a much older, unobtainable woman on the block. Nothing suits a young man's heart more than the yearning for a woman he may not have.

Realistically, we never waited, but tonight some Somali yellow cab driver had hit yet another Caucasian biker who could not maneuver around the city in part because of his small-town past life somewhere in Minnesota. This gentrifier, showing his inexperience in city living through his hipster garments, was now doing his best to gather himself, with the fright of a deer in his eyes, while the Somali was yelling at him in French. A bunch of other recently gentrified idiots were standing in awe, with that same fear in their eyes, showing their discomfort and their concern that a physical altercation would lead to someone getting shot or otherwise hurt, all the wrong stereotypes of New York that outsiders believe. To us, this was just another Friday night in Alphabet City.

The group of fifteen-year-olds I was a part of acted like other kids from New York, yelling jokes out loud and hubristically laughing at the Caucasian, like that one kid in middle school who wore fake sneakers to class and got chewed out at the table. I knew this from experience. We stood without concern, passing



Layout by Andrew Wallman. Illustration by Jocelyn Citlali Enriquez.

around a blunt and a New England in a black bag that was always too slippery and whose contents ended up peeking out the top every couple of seconds, eliminating the chance that our underage drinking would be inconspicuous. Some of us still had backpacks on, while others were dressed in their best attire, prepared to hit a "free," a term commonly used to acknowledge a party with the absence of parents at someone's apartment. Either way, every component of the outfit, from brands to folds on Japanese denim, had to be on point. This all depended on where this free would be taking place as well. If the rich Jewish kids of the Upper West Side were hosting their soiree, one might wear their best three-quarter polo zip up. If the heads from Park Slope told us to come

through, we'd wear as many white Air Force 1's as we could. Indeed, tonight we were staying in the village, hitting a free a couple blocks away and hoping one of us could finally get at the hot girl from the grade above us.

Although I was one of the kids with a backpack, I was still on my way to this free. I wanted to be ready for anything that could happen. From blunt wraps and coke vials to countless empty MetroCards and that six-pack of condoms I had never used that had probably expired by now, I carried my entire collection of teenage vices at all times. It was never a sign of confidence, but putting up a front and acting the part was something I had grown to be good at. Indeed, along with carrying a small pocketknife in the side pocket of your back-

pack, this was something you needed to learn quickly after the first time you were jumped around the corner from your home where your family was enjoying their daily activity of watching a TV show. Imagine this happening while your skull is getting pressed against concrete and everything you have is on the line, even your life.

Anyway.

Before we knew it, the Lance Armstrong from Minnesota got back on his bike and pedaled away, continuing his senseless life in this monster of a city like all of us did. The Somali finally cooled off and swerved away down Avenue A, leaving only burned rubber on the crossing and going about his life the same way the biker did. We continued our lives the same way, crossing the same street we'd walked past for eight years now, forgetting the existence of both the biker and the cabdriver whose lives were as noticeable to us as a bee in the summertime. We went about our business that way, except I never made it past the first crosswalk stripe. I might've never even taken a step off the curb, although this doesn't really matter. I was called from behind by a voice so vastly distinct that my instinctual curiosity forced me to look over my shoulder. The voice of the stranger fit his look; he was a man of medium height who resembled a bum as much as he did Lenny Kravitz.

"Young man, come ova, lemme chat with ya."

That single hypnotizing sentence, with the accent of Bob Marley himself, only amplified my yearning to know who this strange man was. Jamaicans usually never made it far into Manhattan, let alone into the East Village. Beyond the accent, my eyes instantly noticed the cowboy boots on his feet. Those shin-high dark beige leather boots clicked as he took two small

steps towards me. His jeans, fitting loosely, looked as though they had seen the early 2000s, though this was more than a dozen years later. In contrast, his fitted tee from a popular modern line screamed the polarity of his character, with every clink of metal bracelets, chains, and buttons singing a song of reggae and trend mixed together. His expression, seemingly unshifting, proclaimed the confidence of a man who had experienced everything this world had to offer and then some. His eyes, dark as his skin, perpetually glared and were locked in place, widening and shrinking to the tune of that accessorized look. It was as enviable as it was overwhelming, as is often the case with older men with wise natures.

The confidence of the Jamaican cowboy was now rendered in my own body. The hypnotic spell was working its magic, the way a parent lulls a child to sleep.

As I exuded my newly inspired confidence, we were now facing each other, his shoes pointing directly toward me, which said more about this new dynamic than words ever could have.

By now the rest of my entourage had crossed the street and, after a brief moment of comedic relief, they stared at me from across the white rectangles, making gestures of riding and lassoing horses that emphasized their youth. They went about their business, patiently waiting for me to return to them with new jokes that would undoubtedly become the highlight of the night.

My conversation with the Jamaican cowboy didn't last long. He told me about his profession of being a veteran modeling agent whose resume showed "too many young stars to chat about." He called himself a man of the future, looking for talent in every nook and cranny of the city, although he never called himself a

futurist; for some reason, his accent wouldn't let the word flow off his lips correctly, although seeing as his age and knowledge were mixed with modern teenage styles, I would have much preferred the label "Renaissance man." Regardless, he wanted me to come in the following Monday, casually noting that I could bring a parent if I felt inclined to, yet in a way that urged me not to. I took his card in contemplation, and we continued our day the same way as usual.

My excitement put me on the train and sent me to that agency on Monday. Having caught the interest of a man who by profession sought to find beautiful people stroked my ego and forced me to go, despite the humiliation from my friends over what I was signing

**"It seemed like overnight, and certainly it was within weeks, that my daily life changed in every sense."**

up for. This was the reason I didn't tell anyone where I was going, including my parents.

Once the elevator doors opened on the third floor of a random skyscraper in Midtown, I immediately noticed the unicorn in the room. The Jamaican cowboy stood out like a black sheep, although he did happen to be the only person whose skin didn't blind my eyes in the glare of sun coming through the window. It seemed as though this man did not belong among the white bureaucratic-esque employees, all of whom seemed to work like parts of a well-oiled machine. No, the Jamaican cowboy was a wild card, one that somehow happened to work and yet, as I was soon to learn, produced more problems than solutions.

As he wiped his nose with two fingers, inhaling at the initial touch, the Jamaican cowboy clicked his way toward me at a near-speed walk-

ing pace. He seemed strangely determined to get to work and, more important, determined to work with me. From his back pocket, without uttering a word, he took a collection of stapled papers curled into themselves. He passed them to me and quickly took out a pen, pointing to a seating area a couple of feet away. I sat down and opened up the pages, which read "Red Model Management Contract." I was as excited as anyone could have been and proceeded to sign that contract, a contract that might as well have come from the Devil himself.

It seemed like overnight, and certainly it was within weeks, that my daily life changed in every sense. The time I had spent at thrift stores with the entourage was now replaced with tight leather pants and cameras, and the

mission of buying cheap bottles of vodka was replaced with champagne toasts in rooms filled with models. The biggest change was the amount of time I now spent with the Jamaican cowboy, which amounted to more than I spent with my family. Yet I was blinded by the wonder of attention from a man I was convinced would make me a star.

The lies started coming in stacks. I would come to the agency after hours and spend time alone with him. He taught me the history of modeling and showed me models he wished to steer me toward looking like as a means of getting me those jobs he endlessly mentioned that I was going to book. He would call me in on countless occasions and do just this, sometimes with him even picking up the camera and getting more shots.

I should've known what was headed my way.

The Jamaican cowboy would text me throughout the day, eventually noting that he was talking with big-name brands to get me a job. To help, however, he asked me to send pictures of myself, shirtless and sometimes in underwear, to show my “dedication” to the job to the casting directors. Considering that I was a kid from New York City, for whom life lessons had come much earlier than for those living in other places, I immediately understood what was going on. *Why would he spend so much time with me? Why did he rub his nose and often take trips to the bathroom that brought his eyes back to life? Why, of all the kids walking down the street that day, had he chosen to stop me? And now, why was he asking for pictures of me nearly nude?*

“I found myself replaced by a taller, whiter, more effeminate version of what I saw in the mirror.”

Naturally, I attempted to handle the situation as swiftly as possible. I told him my discomfort with doing near-nude photography at age sixteen and asked to stick with jobs that needed someone in clothes, although I somehow knew the photos had never been going to a casting director anyway.

There were no more invites to events, no more of the casting calls that had previously been sent out every day, and most important, no more attention from or quality time with the Jamaican cowboy. His attention led me to believe I was someone and that he would make me someone: a star.

After months of lacking the confidence that had once been granted through a life I had been exposed to, I decided to see if there was a way I could have both. It felt as pathetic as it sounded. It was a degradation of a young soul and the first true loss of character. I went

to that agency again, hoping my reappearance would interest that Jamaican cowboy once more.

To my surprise, which in retrospect speaks to my gullibility, I found myself replaced by a taller, whiter, more effeminate version of what I saw in the mirror. He was a carbon copy, and seeing him beside my agent made me understand the spell I had been put under for so long. Nevertheless, after grasping what I now knew was the truth, I changed my agenda. The only way I could make my agent desire me the same way he once had was through giving him what he wanted, which I knew was unacceptable. Yet I also knew what I could learn from this experience and that the only way I

could get out of this place was through a valid excuse to terminate a contract, for which his confession would suffice.

I played the part and put up a facade that attracted the Jamaican cowboy once more. I used social media as a way of enticing him, and when it worked, I put my grand plan into action. After a short conversation with the Jamaican cowboy, a vulnerable and disconcerting interaction that I initiated, I was once more invited to the agency after hours. I hated myself for resorting to a new low, yet knew this was the only way I could get out. As I entered the elevator, I unlocked my phone and began a recording. Indeed, this was the only time I feared this man and what could happen if this plan did not work. Once the door opened and the Jamaican cowboy greeted me with the same empathy he’d shown over a year ago, I reciprocated. His scheme never

changed, and within half an hour he decided we should take pictures for casting agents.

Shoeless. Shirtless. Pantless. In that order.

As I stood there, a few inches away from complete nudity, I looked at my pants, which I had tossed over the couch arm to continue the voice recording. As I did, the Jamaican cowboy clicked his way toward me once more.

“Pull them a little, wontcha, show that ass.” Simultaneously, his hand reached toward the right side of my waistband.

“George, don’t do that.”

“My Kuba, how can’t I? Look at you, beautiful Polish boy.”

“I don’t want to, and I told you I’m not getting naked for you.”

“Kuba, you know who dis for. It’s the industry, baby.”

You get the point.

I maneuvered my way out of the situation shortly afterward with no concern for my safety. His disappointment was inevitable, and recorded. I put my clothes back on and told the Jamaican cowboy I’d see him soon, a lie of my own. I stepped into that elevator more excited than I had been the first time.

Shortly after that, I emailed the owner to ask if I could meet with him regarding some concerns I had been having. After a couple of emails of my convincing him, he made some time for me to come in on a day that the Jamaican cowboy was out. Without delay, I made my way to the agency for the last time.

Here I was, sitting on the couch in the waiting area in contemplation of my next chess move. For everyone else in the agency, nothing was different. The parts of the well-oiled machine were moving as they always did, unbothered by and unconcerned with what they

could not control, guided only by their yearning for paychecks and success. And who could really blame them? As I snapped back from this internal contemplation, I found the owner standing a short distance from me, indicating that I should come to his office.

“Are you seriously telling me George is trying to fuck you? That’s not possible; you’re a guy, and we don’t do that at this agency.”

I could anticipate the disbelief even before my master plan unfolded. A male complaining about his treatment in the entertainment world was neither trusted nor believed, seen as a breach of masculinity that meant you were a pussy. I guess a part of me thought that given that I was sixteen, someone would consider the possibility given the circumstances. In any case, there was no doubt once I pulled out my phone and began to play the recording of the Jamaican cowboy saying I should come over to see him this weekend to fuck—hard.

The owner didn’t say anything after that. Neither did the Jamaican cowboy. The contract was shredded, the final handshake was exchanged, and I walked away a free man.

Looking back, I never really did resent the Jamaican cowboy. I learned more from his antics than I had my whole junior year of high school. I didn’t resent the owner for his lack of belief, or the other members of the machine who kept their heads down. In truth, the only emotion I felt was deep heartache, and not for myself.

That heartache came up only when I sat in the waiting room directly across from the elevator into which, time and time again, I saw boys younger than me enter, showing the same excitement I’d once felt, oblivious to the test they would soon face.