

# 1. Persistence Pays Chapter 1

“Why can’t we come in?,” I asked the large man standing in front of us. He was wearing a dark suit, and he was tall and strong. He was blocking the door to Zara’s Nightclub. We could hear the loud dance music behind the door. We wanted to go in!

I had lost my job the other day. I needed to have a night of fun! I didn’t want to have a lot of stress, so we had to find a way to get inside!

The tall man was a bouncer; his job was to let the “right” people in, and to keep everyone else out. He pointed to his clipboard and frowned. “Your name isn’t on this list.”

I looked up at him. He was at least six inches taller than me.

“How do we get on that list?”

My friends--Nate and Aaron--and I had dressed up. We had driven across town to come to Zara’s. The new club was famous and we wanted to check it out.

But, the bouncer did not reply. Instead, he looked over my skinny shoulder. There was a long line of people behind me.

“How do I get in?” I asked again and I snapped my fingers. I was trying to get his attention.

“You don’t,” he said. He waved the next guest in the line to come forward. She was a beautiful blonde girl. When I saw her, I had an idea...

“Wait, wait!” I protested. “Our girlfriends are already inside!” It was a lie. Aaron looked at me in a strange way. Perhaps he thought, “Is Jack crazy?”

“Jack, what are you doing?” Aaron yelled in my ear. He was a good-looking guy, but he was also shy. He never took any risks.

“Be quiet,” I whispered back. I didn’t want the bouncer to hear.

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But, he did hear us. He rolled his eyes and tried to ignore me again.

“No, really,” I persisted. “Our girlfriends are inside, waiting for us.”

He lifted a red velvet rope to let the blonde girl pass.

“Thanks Bruce,” she said as she walked by him. I could smell her perfume. I wanted to follow her in, but Bruce, the bouncer, shook his head at me.

“Are your friends really inside?”

“Yes,” I answered. “Our girlfriends!”

His expression was doubtful. He rubbed his bald head, then he lifted his clipboard again. “Okay. What are their names?”

“Their...names?” Well, I didn’t know their names...because they didn’t exist! “Uhh...”

“You’re done,” he said. He smiled and he pushed me aside.

“Next!”

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We could not get in, so we left Zara’s. We went across the street for coffee.

“That was dumb, Jack,” Aaron said, and he took off his jacket. He had put on his favourite clothes to come out. With his good

looks and clothes, he could be an actor, but his attitude was always negative.

I felt bad because it had been my idea to go out. Everyone knew it was impossible to get inside Zara's without a reservation...and reservations were impossible to get! But, I had wanted to try.

Nate ordered his coffee black, along with two chocolate-glazed donuts. Nate was very different from Aaron. He was more adventurous and happy. Nate loved to eat sweets like cakes and candies, so he was a bit overweight.

"I'll have the same," Aaron told the waiter. "But, unglazed donuts please." "And what would you like, sir?" the waiter asked me.

"I would like to know how to get into that nightclub," I told him.

"You can't get in there. Not without a reservation...or a date," he said. "Unless you are a female, of course. It is easy for the girls to go in. They want more girls inside."

"Why?" Aaron asked.

"Because the guys will go there and spend money!"

I nodded. "That's unfair."

The waiter shrugged his shoulders. "Maybe, but that's life. If you want to go to Zara's, you will have to find someone to go with you. You want to order anything?"

"Just coffee with milk. No donuts." I looked at my friends.

"Who eats donuts at nine o'clock at night?"

Nate and Aaron exchanged looks. “We do,” they said together. I sighed and crossed my arms. It looked like I was going to be spending the evening with these two.

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After our coffees (and donuts) were finished, we paid our check. I noticed three girls sitting at a table. They were talking. They were also finished with their food and drinks.

“Guys, look,” I said to my friends. “What if--”

“No,” Aaron said, cutting off my sentence. “Jack, let’s just go.”

“Wait. What, Jack?” Nate asked. “Do you want to talk to them?”

I combed my black hair back with my fingers. “We can try. Why not? Come on, I just lost my job. Do me a favour! What is the worst thing that can happen?”

Aaron stared at me, but Nate punched him in the arm. “Come on, Aaron!” he said. “Jack is right. We can ask them. Perhaps they will want to go with us to Zara’s. If we get inside, they can stay with us. Or, they can leave us if they want to.”

The girls were watching us. One of them, a girl with red hair, leaned over the table. She whispered something to her friends and they nodded. None of them were smiling.

I felt a lump in my throat, but decided to go forward. I walked over to their table. My friends stayed behind me.

“Hi, my name is Jack Cruz. No relationship to Tom Cruise,” I said, making a bad joke.

“Clearly,” the redhead said. Her friends laughed, but I laughed with them. A little.

“Would you like to go to Zara’s with us? The bouncer would not let us in,” I said. “But maybe, we could get in with dates.”

The smallest of the three girls said, “Dates? We don’t even know you!”

“I know,” I said. “But let’s just try! Don’t you want to see inside Zara’s?”

The girls looked through the window at the long line in front of the nightclub. Then they looked at each other.

“We don’t need you to get inside,” said the redhead. “But...I guess we can help you boys out. By the way, my name is Caprice.”

## **Chapter 2**

“Let me talk to the bouncer,” I said, as the six of us left the café.

“No,” Caprice said, “Let me. You couldn’t talk your way in before.”

I began to protest, but Nate nudged me in the ribs. “She’s right. Give her a chance.”

We started walking toward the back of the line. Caprice grabbed my hand suddenly. We ran toward the bouncer. The others followed us. They did not understand her plan.

“Excuse me, Bruce?” she shouted, waving her hand in the air. She stopped only inches away from the intimidating bouncer. “You’re Bruce, aren’t you?”

“Do I know you?”

“You were supposed to let my boyfriend in earlier,” she said, pointing at me. “What happened?”

“His name wasn’t on the list...”

“The list? Do you mean the fake list?” she asked, grabbing at his precious clipboard. He pulled it away from her and held it up, but she was persistent. “Get real! It’s a bunch of fake names on a piece of paper.”

“How do you know?” Bald Bruce asked, as he bent down to get closer to her. Perhaps he did not want the rest of the line to hear. “And, so what if it is fake?”

“Do you know a woman named Zara Bernhart?”

Bruce stiffened. “The owner?”

“Yeah, the owner.” Caprice reached into her handbag. She took out a photograph and her driver’s license. She showed both to the bouncer and his face turned pale. “I’m Caprice Bernhart. Zara’s my mom.”

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“That was awesome,” I said, brushing my black hair out of my eyes. “I had no idea who you were!”

“Were?” Caprice said, leading me to the bar. “I still am! What are you

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having?”

Several customers were trying to get the helpless bartender's attention, but when he saw Caprice, he walked over to her.

“Nice to see you!” he shouted over the music. “Can I get you something?”

“A Coke,” she said, “and...” She looked at me.

“Me, too.”

“What?” the bartender asked. “Sorry, I couldn't hear you, man!”

“I'll have a Coke too!” I yelled.

Caprice seemed surprised by my order. “Don't you drink alcohol?” “I'm underage,” I said, smiling.

“I hope not,” she said, “or we're both in trouble.” The bartender brought over our sodas. We took them to a table in a vacant corner. “Your friends disappeared.”

“I see one of them on the dance floor,” I said, pointing to Nate. He was dancing with the smallest of the girls. “They seem to get along! Look, they are smiling.”

“What about the other one?”

“Aaron? He's...gone!” I could not see Aaron anywhere. I took my phone out of my pocket because I wanted to check my messages. Perhaps he had sent me a text message. Yes, he had texted me! “Looks like he decided to go home.”

“Hey, guys,” said the third girl, as she walked over to our table. “What's up?”

“Where were you?” Caprice asked. “Did you scare Aaron away?”

“I guess so,” she said. Then she looked at me. “By the way, what’s your name again?”

“Jack,” I said. “And I’m sorry, you are...?”

“I’m Susan. The other girl’s Aisha. Anyways, your friend was weird!”

“He’s not weird, he’s shy,” I said. “As The Smith’s song goes, ‘shyness is nice, and shyness can stop you...’”

“‘...from doing all the things in life you’d like to!’” Susan finished. “I love

that song!”

“Really? They are one of my favourite bands--”

“Hey, you scared away your boyfriend,” Caprice said to her friend. “Leave my date alone!”

Susan smirked. She was unhappy. “Fine. I’m going to the bar,” she said, “and I’m putting my drinks on your tab. You will have to pay for them later!” She walked away. She went to stand in the crowd in front of the busy bar.

I was happy to hear myself called a “date.”

“Thanks again for helping us,” I said. “It was a hard week for me. It was difficult because I lost my job this week.”

“Oh, that’s terrible! What was your job?” She looked uncomfortable.

*Why did I tell her I’d lost my job?* I thought.



“Actually,” I said, pointing at the bar. “I did that. I was a bartender.”

She bit her lip. She was thinking of something. “So,” she said at last, “Is Zara’s everything you dreamed of?”

I looked around the club. It had an expensive disco lighting system. It also had very loud audio speakers on the walls. A professional DJ was playing the best music, and the dance floor was packed. But, there were also plenty of seats for people to sit and talk.

“I love it,” I said. “I would love to come here every week.”

“Is that a hint?”

“Yes,” I said. “I mean, if you want to act like you are my date again. I would love to call you...if you give me your phone number.”

Caprice grinned and put out her hand. I reached out to take it, but she stopped me. “No, give me your phone.”

“Oh.” I handed over my phone. She took it and added herself to my contacts list.

“So now you have it. Don’t post it on the Internet. It’s private.”

Immediately, I dialled her number. I watched her phone light up. “Now you have my number too,” I said. “You can put mine on the Internet. I don’t mind.

Nobody ever tries to call me.”

“Your mother doesn’t own a nightclub,” she said. “Does she?”

“I don’t think so,” I said, laughing. “Listen, I really want you to know...I did not know who you were when I talked to you in the café.”

“I believe you,” she said. “I know you weren’t just trying to use me.”

“Well, I was trying to use you,” I admitted, “but I was very honest about it.”

This time, she laughed and looked away. *Maybe I need to shut up*, I thought.

“I need to get going soon,” she said. “I told my roommate I would be home before eleven.”

“You should live for yourself, not for others,” I said. “I read that on a card or something.”

Caprice gave me a wide grin. “I agree one hundred percent! But, my roommate lost her keys to the apartment. Do you think she should wait outside while I stay here with you?”

I made an innocent face. “I don’t mind if she waits.”

“Typical male,” she said, standing up. “You have my number.”

“You have mine,” I said, getting up with her. I wanted to walk her to the exit. “Let’s see who calls the other first. We could place a bet.”

For a moment, her face turned serious. “Never bet against me or my family, Jack. We have a history of never losing.”

## Chapter 3

I waited three days before calling her. It was a long three days. It was hard to wait.

“You lose,” Caprice said when she answered the phone.

“We didn’t bet, remember? I was wondering...what are you doing tonight?”

She paused. She did not say anything for a moment. “My parents are having a small party at home. Some business partners are coming to their house. They want to talk about the nightclub. They are curious how it is doing.”

“Are you going to go?” I asked.

“Yes, because they want my opinion. They want the opinion of a younger person. Maybe you should come over too!”

I laughed about that. “No! You want me to meet your parents? And you want me to talk about my opinion of their club?”

Caprice didn’t laugh with me. “Yes. I want you to come. Why not? I think you are a very honest person--”

“But, you do not know me!”

“Women have intuition about people, Jack. Can you meet me by eight?” \*

We met outside her apartment. We took her car to her parents’ home. The home was a giant mansion. There were two stories and twenty rooms. I counted the windows.

“What are you doing?” she asked me. She drove her car up the large driveway.

“I’m counting the windows.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. I am trying to see where the restroom is.”

*That was a dumb thing to say*, I decided. I’d never been to a rich person’s house before. Now I was going to have dinner with rich strangers. The strangers

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were this girl’s parents!

I had good reasons to be nervous.

“Don’t be nervous,” she said. She was getting out of the car.

“Just be yourself.”

“What does that mean? People always say that! ‘Be yourself, be yourself.’ Of course I will be myself!”

“Okay, never mind,” she said. She closed the car door hard.

“You are acting weird. Be somebody else.”

“Sorry. This night is weird. I don’t know what to say to your parents.” She knocked on the door. A butler answered. A butler!

“Hi, Jeeves,” she said.

*You’re butler is not named Jeeves!* I wanted to say.

“Very funny, young lady. Come inside. And welcome, mister...?”

“Hi, I’m Jack Cruz,” I said. I held out my hand.

The butler shook my hand. He said his real name was Pete, not Jeeves. He took us to the large living room. There were a dozen people sitting on sofas. Two of them stood up. They walked over to Caprice and me.

“Hi darling,” said a beautiful lady. She looked like Caprice, but she was older. “Is this your new friend? Hi, I’m Zara.”

“I’m Jack,” I said, and I held out my hand again. She did not shake my hand. Instead, she gave me a big hug. A handsome man with grey hair was standing behind her.

“My wife likes hugs,” he said. “But I’ll shake your hand.” His handshake was like Superman’s. “Call me Ismael.”

I remembered the joke about the butler’s name. I thought he was making a joke too. “Ismael? You are funny! You cannot fool me again,” I said.

“No, it isn’t a joke,” Caprice said. “My dad’s name is Ismael.”

Zara laughed out loud. “I like your friend, Caprice,” she said. “Please sit down, Jack. Let’s chat.”

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We talked for a few minutes in the living room. Then, we moved to the dining room. Dinner was a delicious chicken curry. After dinner, we started to talk about their nightclub business.

“What was your impression of the place?” Zara asked.

“My impression? Well, the first thing I saw was the bouncer. He was not rude, but I do not think his reservation list is real.”

“You think the reservation list is fake? Why do you think that?”

Caprice and I smiled at each other. “I told him it wasn’t real,” Caprice said.

“Many people want to come to the club,” Zara said. She was moving her pearl necklace around her shirt collar. “We have to be careful. We cannot let everyone inside. There isn’t enough room for everyone.”

“There is another reason,” Caprice’s father said. “Some people want to come, but not spend money. Other people come to spend money. It’s a business. We want customers with money.”

“What do you think about the inside?” Zara asked. “Did you like it?”

I remembered the poor bartender. He was trying to help too many customers. I had been a bartender too. I knew it was a hard job.

“I liked the inside, but you need an extra bartender,” I said.

“Your guy needed help. He had too many customers. There was a very big crowd. I felt sorry for him.”

“Do you know any bartenders? Do you know anyone who needs a job?” Caprice asked. Zara and Ismael waited for my answer.

“Hmmm, yes. I do know a bartender that needs a job,” I said.

“And he works cheap.”

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By the end of the week, I had a new job--at Zara’s Nightclub! My girlfriend, Caprice, came to visit me often. I became friends with the other bartender, Dennis. I also became friends with Bruce, the bouncer.

“I can’t believe it. You are lucky, Jack,” Aaron said one night. He was shaking his head.

“Lucky?” I asked. Aaron was sitting alone. He sat beside Nate and Nate’s new girlfriend, Aisha. “You’re wrong, my friend. Luck was not the reason. Luck had nothing to do with it. It was persistence. In this life, persistence is the only way to get anything.”

“Luckily,” Caprice said, holding my hand, “Jack has plenty of that!”