

INSURANCE FRAUD, MURDER, THE FBI, IRANIAN
TERRORIST, MARTIN SCORSESE AND OTHER FUNNY
BEHIND-THE-SCENE ADVENTURES ON THE MAKING
OF AN NYU STUDENT'S FIRST FEATURE FILM!

HOW I GOT TO DIRECT MY FIRST FEATURE FILM....
(AND WHY YOU'LL NEVER GET TO SEE IT!)

BY MARK RICHARDSON

I have decided to come out of hiding, finally, in spite of the death threats that continue to linger over me, to tell my side of the story. Like most sad tragedies, this one begins in a bar...

Well, ok, so it was more like a fancy restaurant. Still, they must have been desperate when they offered me the bartender's job at Gotham Bar and Grill on East 12th street. I didn't know the difference between a Gimlet and a Gibson, nor could I pronounce half the wines the three star establishment proudly offered. But the margaritas at Gotham came out of a machine like at Dairy Queen and the bar had a Mr. Boston's Bartending Manuel under the counter so I figured I could get by. Frankly, I had more important things to worry about than whether a drink got a lemon twist or a lime wedge. Namely; how to get my first feature film financed.

I was in my last year of film school at NYU and was in a hurry to have my talents discovered by the powers-that-be in Hollywood. I was 32 -- a decade older than most my classmates.

Soon I was going to have to scratch the word "young" out of my bio, next to filmmaker. I had no connections in the film world. No one in my family was in the business and the only important filmmaker I had ever met was Ron Howard -- but that was 27 years ago when he was still Opie and we played sandlot baseball together -- a shaky contact at best. No. My only hope was to direct a dazzling debut feature film that would win the Palme d'Ore at Cannes. I had already written the script; "Live Bait", a smart, sultry thriller ala "Body Heat" and "Blood Simple" with a Muddy Waters soundtrack. "Live Bait" was going to be my calling card to Hollywood -- my ticket on an express train to film directing success. Money was my only obstacle but I convinced myself somewhere, somehow, someone would enter my life to help me get my film made. One night that someone showed up at Gotham Bar and Grill. His name was Mephistopheles...

Actually, his name was Eddie. Eddie wasn't one of the restaurant's wealthy patrons I considered asking to invest in my film. He was simply an antique dealer's assistant, the bar manager's roommate. The bar manager introduced us. "Eddie here works for a guy who's got a ton of money and wants to make a movie... You should talk to him." Just like that. A year later I was on my way to Hollywood to unveil my debut feature film. It was that simple.

Well, ok, so it wasn't that simple. As it turned out the movie I un-spooled before the film community wasn't "Live Bait", as I had originally planned it was a goofy, inane movie called

"Golddiger", a down-right bizarre story of a crazy Jewish Iranian antique dealer who builds a robot that brings peace to the Middle East by thwarting an elaborate forgery/insurance fraud. I'm told the film is out on video but I wouldn't know. Like I said, I've been in hiding. Hiding from the wrath of a crazy, Jewish Iranian antique dealer locked up in a federal penitentiary for forgery and insurance fraud. Hiding from the FBI and a Muslim death threat and, oh yes, hiding from a notorious murderess... But, I suppose, I'm getting ahead of myself...

Sure, I told Eddie, handing him over a fresh B&B at no charge, I'll talk to your boss. (Are you kidding? I'd marry his boss's daughter if it meant getting my film made -- and I was already married!) We agreed I would drop by the antique store the next day to meet Eddie's boss, my angel-in-waiting; Jack Shaoul. As we shook hands I made a mental note of what new clothes I was going to need for the French Riviera come next May.

The next morning with a clean copy of "Live Bait" under my arm I entered Universe Antiques. The store was on Broadway near Union Square -- 3000 square feet packed with life-sized marble sculptures, bronze figurines, fin de siecle paintings and Tiffany lamps of all shapes and sizes. Jack Shaoul was in the back haggling with a customer over the price of one of the lamps. At first sight, Jack reminded me of a cartoon character. He stood about 5'4" with a cropped mustache and wild, Bozo-like black hair that stuck straight out on either side of his round, balding head. Jack had a loud, bellowing voice and was cursing furiously that the customer was trying to screw him on the price.

But the price continued to come down. Now the man was trying to screw Jack's wife and kids, too. Finally, flushed with anger, Jack agreed to a price; \$15,000, down from 40. "I don't ever want in here again, you bastard!" Jack yelled at his customer on his way out. The man merely shrugged. Eddie introduced us. At 40, Jack still had a boyish appearance and his eyes twinkled like a child's as he greeted me warmly although I could tell he was still mad. "I hate my customers," he said through his heavy Middle Eastern accent. Why'd you sell it if it was such a bad deal? I asked. Jack waved it off and chuckled. "Aww... It doesn't matter. I got it for nothing... It was a fake. Serves the sonofabitch right... So, ah, ah,--" "Mark", Eddie offered. "Mark, right. Eddie here tells me you are a filmmaker..." "He's won awards, Jack." Eddie had read my resume. My last film had won several student awards including; Excellence in Directing, Editing and Cinematography. What I didn't bother to mention was that at NYU if you simply finished a film you stood a good chance of winning something. Hell, they handed out seven or eight awards for every category. "I want to make a movie." Who's going to pay for this movie? I asked, getting right down to business. "I'll pay for it, don't worry..." Well then, I said with my most confident smile and began to pull out my screenplay, it just so happens-- But Jack cut me off. "I hate this fucking job. I want to make a movie and make a lot of money and make lots of movies. Comedies! I like comedies. Everybody likes comedies." Technically speaking, "Live Bait" WAS a comedy, albeit a very dark one. "So? Do you want to make my movie?" Don't you want to read the script first? I asked finally setting "Live Bait"

on his desk. "What's this?" Jack asked, surprised. The script, I answered. "No!" he cried, and reached under his desk bringing out a massive bound manuscript, which shook the desk as it crashed down. "THIS is the screapt!

Jack Shaoul indeed had a script. "The Long Island Expressway" was over 300 pages long. He hadn't written it, actually, he had dictated it. In his car. To and from work on the Long Island Expressway. "I have lots of scripts. 23 scripts" 23? "Sure, -- look!" He pointed to what looked like dozens of New York phone books collecting dust on top of a tall glass showcase. "Read them all! They're all funny!" I suggested it might be smart to start with one and looked down at the huge script towering over my own on his desk. W-What's it about? I asked, unable to hide my disappointment.

"It's very funny. It's about this guy and he, he, a tree falls on his roof and it's raining and the tree makes a hole and the water is coming into the bedroom and Kristina is yelling at me 'fix the roof, fix the roof. I'm getting wet!' But I don't want to get out of bed, you know because it's late and, and cold, and, and--" I tried to stop him. "And he patches the hole with diapers because, you know that was all he could find because he was asleep and he didn't know he had diapers..." Time out. Get to the story. "I'm telling you the story. It's about a guy and he hates his job, you know, he's an antique dealer and he finds a statue that is solid gold and and Eli tries to get it from him, that bastard, and and and--" Maybe I'd better just read the script, I told him. "Yeah,

yeah, you read the script. It's funny."

Don't misunderstand me. I had no illusions as I sat on the steps under the statue of George Washington in Union Square and gingerly opened Jack's screenplay. I expected it to be bad. How bad was the question and it didn't take long to find out. I put the script down around page 50 still in the middle of the opening scene. Kristina, Jack's wife, was looking for the diapers to change little Cindy while Jack was in the shower getting scolded by hot water when his three other mischievous kids all simultaneously flush toilets. I was being offered the chance to direct the stupidest movie ever written... or dictated. Never! No way. uh uh... I don't care if I WAS broke and they were about to repossess my unfinished film and that I couldn't pay my student loans or that our car had thrown a rod and had to be junked and that I was 32 with no job prospects and... and... I retrieved the epic script and reluctantly read on.

From the best I could figure out, "Long Island Expressway" was an inane, goofy comedy about an antique dealer on the brink of financial ruin who comes across a priceless gold statue that eventually brings him and his family great riches despite the efforts of a nefarious bad guy named Eli, another Iranian antique dealer who would stop at nothing to get the gold statue. The epic finale had Jack trying to hold on to his prize while he fought off Eli, a greedy mayor, a notorious and flamboyant trial lawyer named Richard Golub and an angry rabbi. They are on top of a skyscraper in midtown Manhattan with tanks rolling across 57th street, S.W.A.T. squads scaling the building, helicopters buzzing

overhead and an entire bus load of money-hungry Hassid's clamoring up the stairs. Not only was the script the worst thing I've read, it was the meanest. It was full of spiteful, racist digs at blacks, Chinese, Russians, you name it -especially Jews. On top of that there were shit jokes on nearly every page. And I mean the real, stinky gooey stuff. The man loved doo-doo riffo.

That's an expensive movie you've written, I told Jack. "Did you think it was funny?" Jack was sitting in our apartment at the dining room table -- the only place one could sit since editing equipment and an unfinished film took up the rest of the space. I decided to be diplomatic. My passion was for Cassavettes and Scorsese, I told the Middle Eastern antique dealer, not Earnest goes to Camp in Tehran. He needed a special kind of comedy director for this. I couldn't begin to do his script justice. I thanked him and declined. My wife, Yancey, sighed with relief. Jack had given her the willies. Yancey alleges I have a gift for attracting weirdoes into our lives -- like on our honeymoon in Jamaica when I naively accepted a tennis game with a stranger only to find ourselves trapped in his house one night on a desolate mountain top listening to voodoo chants from machete-wielding gypsies down below... But that's another story.

I returned my attention to new prospects to finance "Live Bait" and to finishing up my student film in time for NYU's next film festival. And to memorizing the ingredients to some of the more challenging drinks my customers were requesting -- which was anything not straight out of a bottle. Finally, "Stray Dogs", my thesis film was almost done and the inevitable was upon me. It

was time to show my rough cut to Marty.

Martin Scorsese had agreed to give a workshop for a small group of NYU students. I was invited into this group, I suspect, by accident. There was another Mark Richardson out there somewhere. I know this because I was receiving his student loan bills on top of my own. I kept waiting for this other guy to appear and take his rightful place. But he never surfaced so every Wednesday night I joined eight other students from NYU to gather in Scorsese's office where he would come down from editing "The Last Temptation of Christ" and work with us on our individual projects. Scorsese had liked the last film I had made -- said it reminded him of a really BAD late-night TV movie. I thanked him profusely for the compliment. Now, though, I sat next to him at his editing table with sweaty palms as he began to view my latest creation. I was confident he would like it. Well, no, I was confident he would at least find the editing lean and mean with no fat to spare. Instead, he picked up a grease pencil and sent me home to cut out a third of my film. I was devastated. Yancey consoled me by presenting me with my latest AND past due bills, which added up well beyond what I could possibly make slinging drinks. The Steenbeck had to go. Big deal. Scorsese had hated my film. What did it matter whether I finished it now or not? I decided what I needed more than anything was a distraction. A distraction that paid good money.

I won't direct your film, but I'll produce it for you, I told Jack. I was back inside Universe Antiques. If he really intended to make his movie he'd need a good producer and I could do the

job, I told him. And if my first outing as a professional filmmaker was going to be as a producer, not a director -- so be it. I decided that producing a screwball comedy about a Jewish Iranian antique dealer, if produced well, was as good a calling card to Hollywood as any. "Why won't you direct my film?" Because... I don't know how to make the kind of movie you want, I said, still being the diplomat. But I'll find somebody who would, I told him. Somebody who can direct stupid comedy. "It's not stupid." Whatever.

Entering into Jack Shaoul's world was like entering the world of Oz as governed by Federico Fellini. I set up a production office in the huge vacant loft above the antique store. Jack owned the loft. He once owned the whole building until he lost all but the second floor to his present landlord in a nasty court battle. Jack hated his landlord so much he made a music video portraying his landlord as an evil Hassid who Jack kills repeatedly throughout the long, grating rendition of 'I Shot the Sheriff' re-titled; 'I Shot the Landlord'. Jack sings the song by the way. Watching the video for the first time was downright scary.

Jack came to America from Iran by way of boat when he was a boy and grew up believing in the American Dream, which paid off very well for him. He was deliriously patriotic. From time to time, without warning he would shout "GOD BLESS AMERICA!" at the top of his lungs. He was a loving father and husband to his five kids and beautiful, Polish wife, Kristina. They lived in a mansion in Great Neck, Long Island. Jack's only problem with his life was that he hated his job. He wanted to be

free, to be wild and crazy, to dictate scripts and act in his movies and sing and dance in his music videos and make millions off one of his many patented inventions -- like the solar powered car that ran on water that he was working on in his spare time. He was a child at heart. And like a hyper active child when excited, Jack tried to tell you 20 stories all at once -- none of which made sense. He was exhausting. But underneath it all here was a crazy guy determined to make his wildest dream come true. I couldn't fault him for that. My biggest concern, of course, was whether Jack actually had the money to make the film like he said he did. "Don't worry I have the money. I swear to you on my mother's grave." He actually said things like that. He said he owned several buildings in New York and New Jersey. He would take out a second mortgage on one of his buildings. Possibly the one with the Chinese whorehouse in it. The city was giving him a hard time about that one, anyway. Not to worry.

Like all crazy rich people, Jack had an entourage of deadbeats more bizarre than himself hanging around. Like Squid, the 6'8" musician who resembled a bad Halloween costume and doubled as a handyman around the shop when he wasn't creating horrific music to accompany Jack's horrific singing on the numerous tapes Jack was readying to market and insisted I listen to. Jack liked having these "creative" people around. They had all played bit parts in Jack's video and he had promised them all various roles in his movie. My first task was to get rid of one particularly odious little guy who claimed he was my co-producer. He reminded me of a slimy interpretation of Peter Lorrie. What he was supposed to do I had no idea. I left him alone for the time

being and marveled at how he would spend entire days sitting at a desk next to mine on the phone. He hardly ever said a word. He simply grinned and slurped like a deranged ogre. Who was this guy talking to? The answer came with our first phone bill that had over a thousand dollars in sex phone charges. One down. Only a dozen or so to go.

The trickiest one was definitely going to be Richard Golub. Golub was Jack's lawyer. The colorful trial lawyer is known best as the man who defended William Hurt in his palimony suit. He had a reputation of being, in addition to enormously vain, extraordinarily abusive in the courtroom, especially to female judges. Golub had represented Jack in his losing lawsuit against his present landlord. Like Jack, Richard Golub also made a music video. It's also quite something to behold. Defending Ken Russell against a breach of contract lawsuit brought on by Penthouse owner Bob Guccione, Golub took as payment from Russell his directing abilities. Ken Russell agreed to direct Golub's music video. Which he did. Golub's debut rap video, "Public Defender" has himself playing this outrageously vain trial lawyer who berates a judge (female of course) wins over a jury and gets his client out of jail. I swear, I'm not making this up. It's been aired on the BBC. Jack promised Golub a role in his movie. As written, Golub's character had a major roll in the script. The infamous lawyer paid me a visit one day and, twirling his scarf for dramatic effect, proceeds to demonstrate to me how he was going to direct his big courtroom scene in the film. Right down to camera angles and lighting. The most amazing thing was that the dramatic trial scene Golub had

proudly enacted before me wasn't even in the script. "Have you read Jack's screenplay?" I asked him.

"What's wrong with the script the way it is?" Jack cried. Well, for starters, I said, we have to cut out at least 200 pages. "Why?" Why? Because you can't afford tanks and helicopters and buses crashing into the midtown tunnel and... "But I know a guy with a tank!" Great. Second, we have to give the story a story. "It HAS a story! Didn't you ever read it? It's about this guy and he, he gets out of bed in the middle of the night because his wife is screaming at him and, and, he, he steps on little Johnny's fire truck screaming; Aiiiiiii!!" This wasn't going to be easy. "It's funny, all that, no?" Not to me it wasn't. Nor to any of my friends and colleagues who I got to read it. I told Jack, personally, I didn't care how stupid, eh, sorry, how silly the story was, as long as it could be produced for half a million dollars. That, I reminded him, was MY job. It would be the director's job to fight it out with Jack about the story. But no director I knew would touch "Long Island Expressway" unless it was rewritten. Completely. Reluctantly, Jack agreed. I solicited treatments from prospective writer/directors and presented them to Jack. Some of them were clever. Some were actually funny. Jack hated all of them. He simply couldn't understand what was wrong with his script the way it was. I was beginning to feel homesick for my old bartending job.

Finally, Jack and I agreed upon a director. Lee Sacks, a colleague of mine from NYU, had made a hilarious film the year before and was willing to give the script a shot after

brainstorming for a few days with Jack while I played referee. Uh, guys, don't you think we could do without the scene with the army taking over 57th street? It's a little difficult with our budget. "But I know a guy with a tank!" Right. I forgot. Finally, Lee went off to rewrite the script. While we waited, I suffered through the agony of the 1989 NYU Film Festival.

Asking Jack to cut out 2/3rds of his script was one thing. Asking me to cut out 1/3rd of my own film was quite another. But, dutifully, I tried every one of Scorsese's suggestions and, grudgingly, I had to admit he was right every time. At last my thesis film was finished and awaiting its un-spooling at NYU's annual week-long festival. I was emboldened as my little film (along with six or seven others, of course) began winning the coveted awards I would eventually use on my resume.

Jack Shaoul wanted to star in his own movie. Naturally, since he was the main character. I told him it was fine by me if it was fine by our director. Whoever that would be. Lee Sacks didn't work out. When he turned in his first draft of the new script Jack went ballistic. "He's changed everything! Why he change everything? It was funnier the way it was. This thing doesn't make any sense." He was right about that. Lee's script didn't make much sense. But so what? Neither did Jack's script. At least Lee's script was manageable budget-wise and it did have some funny stuff in it. And Lee's previous film impressed me enough to make me think he could pull this off. But unfortunately the deal with Lee fell apart rather abruptly over disputes with his lawyer about money and creative control. Jack acted relieved. "You

direct my movie! I trust you." Thinking I'd put the matter to rest, I invited Jack to come to the screening of "Stray Dogs" at NYU. When the lights came up and we left the theater I pointed out that there had been only one chuckle during the entire 23-minute film. That's the kind of film I make, I told Jack afterwards. For better or worse I don't know how to do silly comedy.

Three months later I had co-written, co-produced and directed my first silly comedy. The day after we finished shooting I found myself slumped down in the second row of one very packed screening room in the DGA building in Los Angeles where "Stray Dogs" was one of the finalists in a national student film competition. I was dead tired. Drained beyond exhaustion from the last six weeks of shooting what turned out to be a mammoth low budget production. Not to mention dealing with Jack. I was also severely hung over from last night's wrap party back in New York. I wanted more than anything just to veg out on a beach and sleep for a week, but the prize for first place was a free car. The prospect of replacing our own car, which died over a year ago, and the fact that they were paying my way made us decide to chance it and go.

The award for first place in narrative film, the final category of the night at the FOCUS awards, didn't take place until nearly one o'clock in the morning LA time and I was still on New York time. The lovely Mary Steenbergen presented the award to me and all I can remember is standing next to her at the podium waiting for the polite applause to finish, so I could ask her if Ron Howard had ever talked to her about playing sand lot ball when

he was a kid. Maybe he remembers me? I played second base. I was the one that didn't laugh at him for showing up in a limousine! I was very tired.

The next day my agents, new ones now, wanted me to stick around for a few weeks, take advantage of the situation and do the rounds but our itinerary called for us to fly out from LA to Charleston that very day. We had rented a beach house on Sullivan's Island and were dearly looking forward to vegging out for a week before going back to New York to begin the editing process of my first feature film. Yancey had co-produced "Golddigger" with me and she looked as tired as I did. Hollywood would have to wait.

Within days of settling back into work on "Golddigger", Hurricane Hugo wiped out nearly the entire island where we stayed in Charleston. If I were smart, I would have taken it as an omen.

I honestly thought we had a chance to create an unusual little comedy that someone, somewhere would pick up for distribution and make us all look good. Jack was already preparing to become famous while my editor and I struggled to make sense out of the footage we had. In trying to understand everything going on in the story, at one point before shooting, we had made a map on my office wall with index cards. Like a family tree, we followed the script's myriad of zany characters as they overlapped during the course of the story. The map got so big and complicated it took a second wall and a run to the

supply store for more index cards. It starts off simple enough; Jack, the bumbling, good-intention antique dealer who's really an inventor is about to unveil his latest creation; Golddigger, a seven foot walking talking robot that plays with, educates and protects the kids, makes breakfast for the wife, and can weed out gold forgeries at the antiques store. The robot was going to make them rich. Simple enough so far. But like everything Jack creates, the robot never does what it is supposed to do and havoc ensues. Meanwhile, as Jack is fending off creditors, Eli, Jack's neighboring nemesis, is involved in flagrantly fraudulent business practices like insurance fraud, forgeries, arms dealing and black market smuggling. A priceless religious helmet, stolen from a temple, mistakenly lands on Jack's desk instead of Eli's where it was intended. This stolen relic is about to bring on war in the Middle East between the Sunni and the Shiites, each accusing the other of stealing the holy relic they both worshipped. A fifty million dollar reward is offered for the helmet's return. From there it was harmless, wacky fun as the stolen gold helmet sets off a bizarre mad-cap chase through Manhattan's antique district, Chinese massage parlors, auction houses and shipyards. The big climax took place in a foundry with Jack and his son Alex about to be dropped into a vat of molten gold with Eli reclaiming his stolen prize. Until, of course Golddigger arrives to save the day.

The robot part wasn't in Jack's original script. Unfortunately, I gave him the idea. "Jack you say your character is an inventor. But nowhere in the story does he invent anything." From there, Lee Sacks created a robot -- a cute, tiny R2D2-like gadget the

size of a volleyball. It was only meant to be in one or two scenes. But Jack seized the day and created Golddigger. Quite an electrician, Jack built an enormous body suit out of thousands of light bulbs attached to massive battery packs that, when working would light up underneath an armor of gold mesh. Golddigger was a massive walking Christmas tree. And Jack wanted him in every scene. In reality, the actor in the robot suit couldn't do anything beyond raising his arms much less perform any of the many activities required in the script. Not to mention that it took hours for Jack to get the suit to light up correctly. Every light had significance, to Jack at least, and each one was very important. The problem was that they never worked.

Joe Pantaliano eventually played the main character. John Rhys-Davies played Eli and Tony Randall supplied the robot's voice. I was thrilled with my cast. As a consolation prize to Jack for stepping aside as the lead actor, I created a new character, Isaac, Jack's recently immigrated brother who speaks very little English and could be as crazy as he wanted to be. The idea was to keep the real Jack off my back while I was making the film by letting him go crazy which he did with astounding enthusiasm.

When "Golddigger" was as finished as it was ever going to be I made the unthinkable mistake of asking Scorsese if he would be willing to watch my rough cut. He himself had asked me to keep him up on my work. I knew it was dangerous; it wasn't going to be his kind of film, to say the least. But I was counting on him to look beyond the obvious silliness of the movie and see how I had taken advantage of a situation and come away with a film

under my belt. Maybe now he would executive produce "Live Bait" for me. "Golddigger" had been an opportunity, the way I saw it, and Scorsese always encouraged us students to pursue every opportunity. During the viewing of my 2-hour comedy Scorsese chuckled exactly one time. When the lights came up, I felt the size of a pea. I felt like an un-popped corn kernel that had been tossed with disdain on the theater floor where it collected dust balls and spit and mercurial sugars as it rolled towards the front of the stage only to be stepped on by a fat man whose threaded boots still carried traces of rancid dog shit he had stepped into two days ago. That's how I felt as I turned to face my mentor who seemed, perhaps for the first time in his life, utterly speechless. "Ok, so you just wasted a year of your life. Now what are you going to do?" Gee, I don't know. I thought I'd start by committing suicide.

I grant you, "Golddigger" WAS a bizarre movie. It was neither the dark comedy I had wanted to make, nor the goofy slapstick extravaganza that Jack wanted. For the first time in my life I thought seriously about changing my name. Stoically, my wife and I carried the film to LA for the distributors to see. To my relief, and by then surprise, we were made several, albeit low, offers to take the film off our hands. Jack turned them down opting to hold out for Disney to pay him \$4 million for his masterpiece. Politely, Disney declined. I was summarily fired as Jack set out to re-cut his movie the way he thought it should be. The way Disney would want it.

I'm told that "Golddigger" is actually out on video now. I've

never seen it. Apparently it's neither my cut nor Jack's cut. It's the distributor's cut. It's been renamed; "There's a Robot in my Closet." I can only imagine. One day, shortly before the FBI started calling me, Jack said to me "You ruined my film, and my life, you know why?" "Why, Jack?" "Because you wouldn't ever give me a chance to get Golddigger's lights to work right... Because of that nobody understands ANYTHING." Maybe he was right.

I found myself back in New York with another bleak winter approaching. I jumped into the long-awaited rewrite of "Live Bait" which had been optioned by a producer who I had great confidence would raise the money to make my movie. I was holed away in the country, enjoying the solitude as I re-emerged myself into a story I felt I truly had a feel for. "She called again..." It was my wife on the phone. "You have to deal with her. I want her out of our lives, immediately." Yancey was referring to a new acquaintance we had met immediately after the disastrous LA screenings of "Golddigger" when we flew to Texas where I was in a good friend's wedding. His bride had gone to Columbia University and one of her classmates had come to the wedding and would I be willing to talk to her because she had a story she wants to talk to you about maybe making a film out of. Another vanity production? Aiiiiiii!, as Jack would say. But, I mean, the groom did ask me to talk to her, she's a friend of the bride's and, besides, she appeared harmless enough! My buddy's bride's friend wanted to talk to me about agents and lawyers and how to protect her story. What her story was, I had no idea. "Don't ask her." the groom said. So I didn't.

After it became awkwardly obvious to all our friends that this woman had latched onto me for the night, I gave her my card and suggested we talk business back in New York, so I could get back to my buddy's reception. "You didn't give her our phone number, did you?" I could tell by the look on Yancey's face I was in trouble. "That woman was involved with a married man and the wife wound up dead!"

Pictures of our new friend Carolyn Warmus didn't hit the front page of the NY Post until a few days later. According to the Post, Carolyn, referred to in headlines as The Fatal Attraction Murderess, allegedly pumped nine bullets into the wife of the man she was having an obsessive affair with and then met the husband afterwards for sex in the backseat of his car. I suppose I couldn't blame Yancey for her objection to this new relationship. Still, I rolled the idea around in my head of getting involved in yet another vanity production; "Fatal Attraction Part II". Eventually, I opted to keep my wife. Alive. Secretly though, I waited for Carolyn to call from prison. She never called. But Jack did.

After Jack fired me he proceeded with re-shooting and re-cutting "Golddigger". After all the distributors passed on Jack's new version of the film, somebody stole a very valuable painting out of Jack's store. Or so Jack claimed as he turned in an insurance claim for \$1.5 million, which would have been about what he owed on the movie by that point. The insurance company was an itty, bitsy bit suspicious of the claim, apparently, and had the FBI come around to Jack's shop to investigate. Before the agents

could show up the painting miraculously was returned and Jack dropped the claim. Only the FBI didn't drop their investigation. Eventually, Jack was tried and convicted before a grand jury of insurance fraud and dealing in forgeries. It turned out that the painting he tried to collect so much money on was a fake in the first place.

"I always treated you good, didn't I?" His voice sounded strained. We had parted ways during a heated, angry argument. Jack would tell anyone who would listen that everything was my fault and that I had ruined his life, and his wife's and his kid's. Vindictively, he had cut Yancey's name off the credits and added himself as director and took sole writing credit. He spit at my name in front of people. Cursed the day we met and wanted nothing to do with me ever again. That is, until he had a hard time finding anyone to be a character witness for him. He was calling me from an upstate federal penitentiary. While awaiting a formal trial, the judge had denied Jack bail. There was talk he would flee the country. He needed somebody to testify that he was an honest man. "Jack, I really don't think you want me testifying under oath about your character, do you?" I asked solemnly, because deep down I couldn't help but feel sorry for this audacious little guy who. I wished Jack luck and asked him, by the way, had he seen a friend of mine in there? She was awaiting a murder trial. Who knows, maybe Jack and Carolyn were already writing, or dictating, a script together.

THE END