

## Rob Me Again

By Katherine Jamieson

On a drizzly Sunday evening my first summer in New York City, I was walking in Chelsea when a man rode up beside me on a bike. *I really don't want to bother you*, he began, a baleful look in his brown eyes, *but this ridiculous thing just happened to me*. He explained that the costumes he had designed for a Broadway show had accidentally been locked in his apartment, and he had lost his keys. He just needed to borrow a little money so he could get in touch with his assistants and sort the whole thing out.

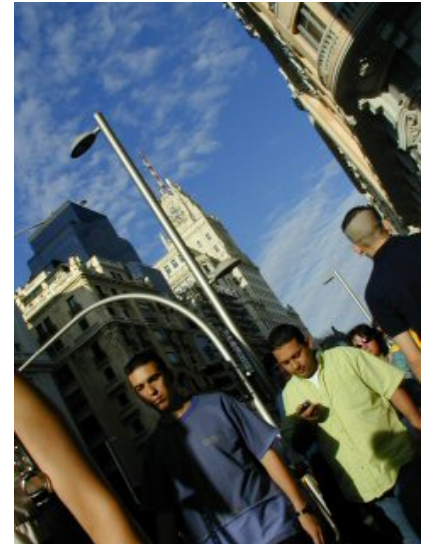
The glamour and urgency of the man's dilemma charmed me, and I agreed to lend him the money. We went to a deli where I broke a larger bill by buying a pack of gum I did not want; I laughed and offered him a piece. The man was poised and grateful throughout, assuring me that I was "doing a service for the theater world." I gave him the address of my office in Midtown and he promised me that someone would return the money Monday morning, first thing.

Monday came and went with no rushed assistant appearing at my cubicle, no complementary front-row tickets, no appreciatory bouquet of flowers for a small but life-saving loan. Tuesday, nothing, and as I returned to my computer terminal each day it began to dawn on me that the biking costume designer might have been a biking crook after all. I did not feel angry, though. My first impression of the man lingered, and I could not separate my subsequent disillusionment from the romantic circumstances under which we had met. I wanted to believe that it was possible for a bored, entry-level employee living in a cramped apartment to brush up against a famous costume designer. For a moment, he had made me feel like I had an important place in the workings of a city where often I felt I had no place at all.

Three years later, in Soho, a light rain was falling, giving everything a washed-out, grayish tinge, as I wended my way from West Broadway to Broadway. A man rode up beside me on a bike. *I'm so sorry to bother you*, he began breathlessly. I looked at the brown eyes with a yellow, feline cast, the deeply creased face, a short ponytail pulled to the back of his head. It was the same man.

I stared at him, dazed by the coincidence. It dawned on me that I had been granted a rare opportunity to redeem my naiveté years before. There were people everywhere: I could accuse him loudly of trying to scam me, flag down a police officer. But I did nothing. As he went on and on, animated by the drama of his own fabrication, I felt sad for him, for me. He was so sincere; I did not want to call his bluff. He may not really have been in the theater but he was a great actor.

About half way through, a voice broke in: *Don't believe that guy, he practices that story in front of the mirror*. We both turned to face a young, lightly bearded man on the street corner. Something inside me crumpled, and when I looked back at the man, the creases in his face seemed even deeper than before. Perhaps it was just because his cover had been blown, or perhaps it was hearing an outside confirmation that he was lying, a fact that he may have, by this time, forgotten.



Our intimacy had been breached; the story had to end. I looked one last time into the man's wide, bright eyes, pained now, and as he turned his body, lifting up on his bike, I could see a damp spot on his jeans from the rain. For a moment, I wanted to reach out and stop him from going, tell him I still believed his story. I wanted to say, *Don't you remember me? I helped you before, but you forgot to return the money*, and for him to chuckle and tell me that it was all a big mistake, his assistant had come to my office but the doorman wouldn't let him in. I wanted him to tell me something, anything different than that he had robbed me then, and here he was, trying to rob me again.

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