Flying High

The Adrien English & Jake Riordan Christmas Interview
It takes longer to locate them than I'd planned.

LAX is always busy and four days before Christmas it’s a madhouse straight out of Dickens. People arriving. People departing. So many people. I see security guards arguing with holiday travelers armed with poinsettias and gaily wrapped parcels never designed to fit into overhead bins. Overhead, the fuzzy holiday music is interrupted for nearly unintelligible announcements of delayed flights and requests for missing passengers.

At last I track them down to Terminal 7 and Wolfgang Puck Express. For a moment I hang back, observing them.

They’re sharing a margherita pizza and a couple of Sam Adams. There is also a Caesar salad but neither of them is paying it any attention. As a matter of fact, they’re neither of them paying much attention to anything but the other. Their casual body language mirrors each other, their gazes rest on each other’s faces as they talk.

Jake wears black jeans and a black shirt. His hair is a fraction longer and he’s put on a little weight since the summer. He looks healthy and relaxed. He hasn’t lost the old, instinctive alertness, though he hasn’t spotted me yet.

Adrien is wearing jeans and a cashmere sweater over a white tee. The blue of the sweater picks up the blue of his eyes even from this distance. It doesn’t look like he’s put on weight but he’s lost that tired, fine-drawn look.

As I near their table, Adrien nudges Jake’s foot with his own. He says something and Jake laughs. Private joke, clearly. They look like a couple who share a lot of private jokes. They look like a couple.

Jake glances my way, then does a double-take. “Christ. Not you again.”

Adrien’s head turns my way. He blinks, his old reveal for processing new information.

“I thought we were done with you.” Though Jake doesn’t speak loudly, I still get a couple of curious glances from the crowded tables. I smile weakly, feeling as unwelcome as Lt. Columbo popping back for “just one more thing.”

I make my way through the maze of tables, chairs and luggage. “Me too. But this won’t take long. I just wanted to ask a couple of quick questions. Where are you off to?”

LAX is always busy and four days before Christmas it’s a madhouse straight out of Dickens.
The question is for Adrien, but again it’s Jake who answers. “London. An old fashioned traditional English Christmas with the family.”

Whose family, I wonder? Lisa has always been rather mysterious about her background. I say cautiously, “That sounds like fun.”

“Sure,” Jake drawls. “Midnight Mass at St. Paul’s, the National Ballet’s Nutcracker, pantomimes, Christmas lights in the West End, Christmas carolers in Trafalgar Square, and Christmas Day lunch at someplace called Galvin at Windows. Nonstop fun from morning till night.”

No comment from Adrien who downs the rest of his beer in a gulp. Jake watches him and his mouth quirks a little in that way he has. “You’re going to sleep the whole flight, aren’t you?”

“If at all possible.” Adrien’s smile is wry -- and it is all for Jake. The look he turns on me is direct and a little cynical. “Go on. Ask.”

“Well…”

“Let’s cut to the chase. I already know the big question. Is Jake still doing the clubs?”

Jake looks ceilingward.

“Jeez, there are other questions, you know. Readers like you guys. They hope things are going well for you. They want to know that you’re happy and well.”

A young and leggy teen with dark hair, blue eyes and a wicked jaw very like Adrien’s pauses at their table. “Lisa says we should move to the gate now.”

Adrien’s expression softens -- as does Jake’s watching him. “We’ll be there,” Adrien assures the girl.

Emma nods and returns to a table tucked against the wall. I spot Lisa, Bill Dauten, and Lauren finishing up lunch.

“So the whole family is headed for London? I don’t see Natalie.”

“Natalie bailed at the last minute.”

“Oh. Did she and Angus ever...?”

Jake grins at Adrien. “Machiavelli here is doing his best to delay the inevitable. He’s got Natalie house-sitting and taking care of the dog while Angus shop-sits and takes care of the cat.”

“Is that going to work?”

“Maybe not, but at least the dog won’t be spending Christmas in a kennel.”

“Or the cat,” Adrien puts in.

“Right. Ten minutes to blast off,” Jake warns me. “You better ask your questions.”

“Okay, okay. Have you two moved in together yet? It’s been five months since...well, since the shootout on the beach.”

Jake looks at Adrien.

“Sort of,” Adrien answers. “We’ve got a house full of boxes, mostly still packed. And people keep shipping us furniture.” He throws a quick, exasperated look at the table where Lisa is offering a forkful of something green to a leery looking Bill Dauten.

“That’s the house Lisa used to own? The house in Porter Ranch?”

Adrien nods.

“It’s nice furniture,” Jake observes. “It’s just that it would be nicer if we were picking our own.”

“Why aren’t you?”

Adrien says, “We are. Well, we plan to. But we’ve been busy. I was in the middle of renovating the bookstore and Jake was in the middle of selling his house and setting up shop.” All at once he looks younger and happier. “He’s working out of Cloak and Dagger books now. The other half of the building. In fact, he got a big industrial espionage case two months ago, so that’s another thing that’s eaten up a lot of time.”
He’s smiling at Jake who smiles briefly back before contributing, “And there was the investigation into Argyle’s death.”

“Oh. How did that go?”

“Argyle left a letter,” Jake sounds a little weary. “That simplified things for everybody Me in particular.”

They both nod, but I can see from the way Adrien watches Jake that there’s some trouble there. Not legal apparently, but something. Riordan points at Adrien’s empty glass. Adrien assents. Riordan leaves the table.

“So you do plan on living together?” I ask as Riordan moves out of earshot -- which is a couple of steps given the noise level of the crowded cafe.

“We’re living together now, if you want to get technical. We’re both staying at the bookstore till we get the house sorted out.”

“How is Jake’s family taking it? You two as a couple, I mean.”

Adrien’s lip curls. “There’s a good reason he was afraid his family wouldn’t understand. They don’t. I don’t know that they ever will. I don’t know that it’s in their emotional makeup to understand, but he spoke to his mom last night. She’s trying anyway. I guess that’s something.”

“That was a truly evil laugh. How about Kate? Do you ever run into her?”

The laughter is instantly gone. “No. Jake makes sure that we don’t run into each other. He cares a lot for her, you know.”

They seem to have reached a point of understanding where Jake’s caring for Adrien goes without saying.
I change the subject to something neutral and safe. “What was the housewarming gift that Lisa bought you?”

“What housewarming...? Oh. The Grimshaw. Moonlight at Whitby. It’s a little painting I saw in a gallery--.”

“I remember. Sorry, but we’ve got a lot of questions to get through. Do you know if the Cross of Rouen was ever recovered?”

“No that I heard. I think it’s decorating some mermaid’s living room right now.”

I can see Jake making his way back to us, beers in hand. I ask quickly, “What are you getting Jake for Christmas?”

“A year of rent free office space at Cloak and Dagger and a Dick Tracy wrist watch.”

“Huh?”

“Jake wouldn’t agree to lease a space unless I’d agree to let him pay for it, but if it’s a Christmas gift he can’t really ob--”

“No. I mean, the Dick Tracy watch.”

“Oh. It’s an MSN Smart Watch. For when he’s on stakeout. It’s pretty cool.”

As Jake reaches the table, Adrien rises. “Your turn. Back in a sec.”

Jake hooks a chair leg with his foot and sits down at the table. He places the full glasses next to the empties. I clear my throat. He shoots me that tawny gaze that makes you want to start babbling where you were on the night in question. His dark eyebrows raise in inquiry.

“Do you ever see Detective Chan?” I start with something safe.

“Sure. He tries to throw the occasional business my way. And he’s still part of that writing group that meets at the bookstore.”

“How’s Adrien’s health? He looks a lot better, but I know I won’t get an honest answer out of him.”

“I think he’d surprise you. He’s in excellent health and he’s enjoying feeling strong and energetic and planning for the future. That’s something he never used to do. Plan for the future.”

“He’s not overdoing things?”

“He’s pretty good about pacing himself. He’s a sensible guy.”

I’ve seen Jake with Adrien, and privately I think he must form the supporting pillar of this sensible equation, but all I say is, “That didn’t seem to be the opinion of Dr. Shearer.”

Jake grimaces. “I don’t know what that broad’s story was. She put his back up. He doesn’t take kindly to being bossed around.”

“Ah. Well, that brings me to a rather delicate subject. Is Adrien always--”

“Always?”

“Er, you know. In bed.”

His face changes. “That. Every couple has their own dynamic. Adrien is not a submissive personality. I don’t know the details of how it was with him and Captain Crunch -- and I don’t want to know -- but I’ll guarantee you, Adrien didn’t always play catcher.”

“Does that mean...?”

“It’s means we’re enjoying exploring all the possibilities between us. That’s all. Everything feels new with him. Every day feels new. Every day is new.”

“And you don’t have any regrets?”

“I have lots of regrets, but I don’t regret any choice I’ve made in the past six months. I don’t regret choosing to be with Adrien. That’s one thing I’ll never regret.”

“What about kids?”

Jake’s gaze lowers and he picks up his glass. “There are always tradeoffs. I had this image of
a wife and a family all neatly corralled behind a white picket fence, and the fact is, I didn’t pick that kind of woman to marry -- and I sure as hell didn’t pick that kind of man.”

Across the crowded room, the Dautens are on their feet and gathering their belongings. Lisa is shooting worried looks at our table, no doubt wondering where Adrien has got to.

But there he is, coming toward us -- and he does look much healthier and happier than the last time I saw him. Not just healthy and happy. He looks relaxed.

“Darling!” Lisa waves to him.

He raises his hand in acknowledgement and gives Jake a rueful smile.

Jake watches him too, and there’s something in his expression I can’t quite define. I can’t help asking, “Are you going to be able to be faithful to him? Do you still do the clubs?”

Jake shakes his head. “You do the clubs because you can’t find what you need at home. I’ve got everything I need. I’ve got the answer to needs I didn’t even know I had.”

From overhead comes the announcement that the flight to London is about to board first class passengers.

“What did you get him for Christmas?” I ask because I’m out of time and I suddenly can’t remember the other questions.

“You mean besides agreeing to keep him company during this holiday in hell?”

“Besides that, yes.”

I think for a moment he isn’t going to answer. Jake picks up Adrien’s jacket and turns away to where Adrien waits for him at the café entrance. Then Jake looks back at me and grins. “For Christmas? Two silk scarves and a white peacock feather.”