

THE HERO OF WEEKI WACHEE

Written by

David Zax

david.zax@gmail.com

EXT. WEEKI WACHEE SPRINGS PARK - DAY

JAKE, 14, skinny and pimply, stands in an usher's uniform. He grips a spray hose in one hand, and looks uncomfortable. Behind him is what looks like a run-down theme park: a hot-dog stand, some green space, some benches.

Jake comes to the foot of --

EXT. DOCK

A narrow dock that projects out into a body of water. The water is ringed with trees and, at one end, a low building with a sign featuring giant painted mermaids.

Jake shifts nervously at foot of the dock.

SEYMOUR (O.S.)
Y'alright, Jake?

Jake turns to see SEYMOUR, 65, in work gloves and dirt-stained jeans -- he's been pulling up weeds. He's got a kindly face and coke-bottle glasses.

Jake nods -- unconvincingly.

JAKE
Mr. Fussell asked me to spray down
the dock -- Al's out sick.

SEYMOUR
I seen you tend to avoid the water.

JAKE
Used to swim pretty good. I just --
had a bad experience.

SEYMOUR
I got it, kiddo. Don't worry.

Seymour takes the hose and walks out along the dock, spraying it down. Jake sighs with relief.

INT. MERMAID THEATER ENTRANCE - DAY

Jake and Seymour stand by the door, now in usher's uniforms.

A FAMILY of four approaches, the father holding out the tickets. Jake tears them.

MAN

Where should we sit for the best view?

JAKE

(hesitates)

Uh, I guess, it depends on which mermaid you want to see...

MAN

(puzzled)

All of 'em, I think?

Seymour leans over.

SEYMOUR

Any seat off the center aisle.

MAN

Thank you.

The family hurries in. Seymour winks at Jake.

SEYMOUR

Go on ahead. I'll watch the door.

INT. WEEKI WACHEE SPRINGS PARK - MERMAID THEATER - DAY

A small theater. A nearly empty audience sits in front of a red curtain.

Jake enters and walks to the far right of the audience, sitting in the rear right corner.

The lights dim, and cheesy, tinny harp music pipes in over old wall-mounted speakers.

The curtains pull apart to reveal a series of windows giving onto an underwater landscape.

Three MERMAID PERFORMERS of about 17 glide gracefully underwater, moving in concert with the music. Each holds a bubbling hookah-like air hose, sipping air from it periodically. A TURTLE swims slowly past the mermaids.

Jake, standing in the rear of the audience watches.

Close on: the rightmost mermaid, STAYCEE, her red lipstick matching her red tail, her brown hair billowing in the water.

Close on: Jake -- who clearly loves her.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE DRESSING ROOM

Jake stands still in the hallway with a rolling laundry bin.

The girls exit from their dressing area, laughing and gossiping. One by one, they toss their mermaid wetsuits into Jake's bin.

STAYCEE

Night, James.

She doesn't look at him as she says it, and she immediately returns to the conversation she was having.

The girls walk off down the hall.

JAKE

(quietly, to himself)

It's *Jake*...

INT. LOCKER ROOM

One by one, Jake takes the mermaid wetsuits out and presses them in a drying machine that squeezes the moisture out.

Seymour enters with a thermos of coffee, pours out two cups, and hands Jake one.

SEYMOUR

Girls. Girls at your age. In your -- situation. It's a conundrum! You'll grow into yourself.

JAKE

It'd just be nice if she could remember my name.

SEYMOUR

I can remind her your name.

JAKE

It'd be nice if she *wanted* to remember my name.

SEYMOUR

You know what you should do?

JAKE

What's that?

SEYMOUR

Save the day.

Jake, disappointed with the vague advice, nods politely.

JAKE
"Save the day."

SEYMOUR
Yeah. Just. Save the day.

JAKE
(not helpful)
OK. Thanks, Seymour.

SEYMOUR
Night, kiddo.

JAKE
Night.

INT. THEATER - NEXT DAY

Mid-show: that tinny harp music. Staycee performs as a mermaid, again, seen through the glass windows.

Close on Jake's face, watching, heartsick as before.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THEATER - LATER

The theater's empty now and the lights are on. Jake sweeps.

The muffled sounds of a COMMOTION through a nearby exit door. Jake presses through that door into --

INT. HALLWAY

--the hallway, just as Staycee and the other two girls enter from their dressing room.

Staycee walks down the hall towards the rear exit, scanning the floor carefully.

GIRL 1
You sure you had the necklace on?

STAYCEE
I never take it off!

GIRL 2
That one with the shark's tooth?

STAYCEE

Yeah.

GIRL 2

Could it have fallen off at home?

STAYCEE

I *know* I was wearing it before the show. Oh God, it must've come off during the...

GIRL 1

You don't know that.

STAYCEE

(tearful)

It probably went down the mouth of the spring...

Jake, watching all this, wants to be of help.

JAKE

Sorry to interrupt -- I -- I know a place on Fiddlers Point where you can find a lot of shark teeth.

The girls look at him like he's an alien.

STAYCEE

My *grandpa* gave it to my *grandma* when they got married, before the war. It's not just any --

(to the girls)

Guys do you think -- can we please dive around for it for just a coupla minutes?

GIRL 1

Of course.

STAYCEE

Cause maybe it just fell somewhere in the rocks --

They're already running down the hall, towards the exit.

After a moment, Jake nervously follows.

EXT. DOCK - DAY

The girls run along the dock, pulling off clothing as they go. Reaching the end, they scan the water.

GIRL 1
Where were you today, Staycee?

STAYCEE
God, all over. We did both shows.
It could be anywhere...

GIRL 2
We're gonna find it.

Back at the foot of the dock, Jake braces himself. He pushes himself to cross onto the dock, and heads toward the girls.

STAYCEE
It's like an acre of rock down
there. With a giant hole down the
middle.

GIRL 2
We're gonna find it!

Girl 1 and Girl 2 dive in. Staycee hesitates a moment, plotting her dive. Jake, behind her, sweats.

JAKE
(nervously)
I, uh, just wish I had swim trunks,
you know?

Staycee isn't listening. She dives in.

Jake stands alone on the dock, frustrated with himself.

EXT. UNDERWATER ARENA

As the girls dive down, we get a fuller view of the underwater arena built into the mouth of Weeki Wachee Springs. It's like a little underwater canyon.

The girls swim this way and that, checking under rocks, among undersea foliage, around cheesy faux-aged statuary.

EXT. DOCK

Jake looks at the water, dark, deep -- terrifying. One by one, the girls surface and dive again. The sight spurs him.

He unbuttons his usher's uniform and undershirt, revealing a pale, scrawny chest.