10 Unofficial Jobs Jake Baker has Never Got Paid For

by Jules Archer

1. Sentry.

“If you're gonna leave just do it already,” 15-year-old Jake tells his pa. He holds an arm out and his sister Sally runs to him, shielding her face against his side. Jake thinks it's one of the most serious days in his life and he hates it.

“Oh, Jake, don't say that,” his ma cries, watching her husband, Kevin, stuff his remaining few belongings in a shoddy suitcase. Not that their pa really needs the suitcase; he's been coming and going for so long it doesn't matter. The suitcase's just for show. A final goodbye.

Kevin gives Jake a long look before turning to his wife. “I'll call you.” Then he walks out the door, leaving his family to watch it slam.

“Now, why'd you have to go and say that?” ma asks, her face tired, arms propped against her side.“I didn't make him leave,” Jake says. “And neither did you.”

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2. Travel Planner.

Despite his own messy home life, compared to his best friend Bobby, Jake's family could be the subject of a Norman Rockwell painting. Jake listens to Bobby explain his recent black eye. Bobby's leg bounces a mile a minute, his long fingers intertwined.

“So you ran into a door, Bobby?” Jake muses when Bobby's out of excuses. “Don't think I've heard that one before.”

Bobby sighs and Jake pats his leg.

“You can crash at my place. Only payment is eatin my ma's cookin which is a sacrifice in and of its self.”

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“That's okay, Jake. I oughta go home anyways.”

“I hear Alaska's nice this time of year.”

Bobby just smiles at Jake with those sad black eyes.

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3. Detective.

Jake ponders the back yard.

Brian watches him with an odd frown, puffing away on a smoke. “Easy Jake,” Brian says. “She'll turn up.”

Brian, their older brother, home on leave, had shown up two bright and sunny days ago, tossing a duffel bag Jake's way. Jake figures for someone with army skills he should be able to sniff out their little sister. But one look at Brian tells Jake he's unconcerned.

Brian's always unconcerned.

“Mom's gonna kill me,” Jake says, cupping his hands. “Sally! Hide and Seek's over.”

“Get your ass out here!” That's Brian.

Bored, Sally had asked multiple friends and her brothers if they had wanted to play hide and seek. Apparently, many had nodded yes, none had meant it. She hid, no one searched. An hour later, Jake finally got wise.

Jake surveys the yard, wondering where his sister could have gone when the house next door catches his eye. The neighbor's yard resembles a junk store: a busted truck on the front lawn, a stove, a refrigerator, a banana seat bicycle—

Jake squints at the refrigerator and then takes off for the yard. He doesn't know why but something tells him Sally's crawled inside. Brian follows, striding languidly, and Jake rips the door open. Sally tumbles out, her cheeks flushed.

“Hell! I'm a regular Sherlock Holmes,” Jake crows, pulling Sally to her feet.

“You found me!” Sally croaks with happiness, oblivious to her predicament.

Brian waltzes up. “Sal,” he says. “Before you go crawling into tight spaces, make sure you can get out.”

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4. Nurse Maid.

“So how'd you earn this?” Jake asks, sitting on the bed across from Brian. He scrutinizes his brother's busted face.

“Goddamn, Maggie.” Brian takes the ice pack Jake hands him. “You got any aspirin, man?”

Jake heads to the bathroom. Hunting around, he finds a bottle of aspirin in the medicine cabinet next to two condoms that aren't his. He doesn't want to know who they belong to because they're sure not his.

Shaking off the thought, he pours four into Brian's hand. “You call her fat again, Brian?”

Brian smirks from behind his black eye. He's been home six months Jake doesn't think he's going away any time soon. “She asked if I wanted to get married one day.”

Jake groans, knowing the rest of the story isn't going to end happily.

“So, I told her, sure, *one day* I'd want to get married and that whenever *she* got married, I'd be honored to get an invite.”

Jake laughs. “Brian, you're going to hell.”

“Jake, that crazy broad wants to get married, *to me*.”

“Yeah, believe me, she could do better.”

“Jesus Christ.” Brian hangs his head. “I ain't ready for this bullshit.” He dry swallows the aspirin and stretches out across the bed.

Jake tosses Brian a blanket. “At least she's blonde.”

Brian smiles. “Not really.”

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5. Lawyer.

Jake's never really found the need for a job before. Nothing's interested him enough to keep his attention. Not to mention the fact that after four tiresome years he's finally done with high school and he'd be a fool not to relish his freedom while he has it. His mom provides and Jake's content letting her. Even Brian, who seemed bound and determined to slack the majority of his life, went and got militarized. And it wouldn't be the first time he's shown Jake up.

But now seeing her, Jake figures he needs a job.

Or at least a good cover story.

Jake scoots into the diner, swiping an unattended briefcase resting next to a pair of suits at the counter. It's heavy in his hands as he makes his way over to her booth. She's hunkered down in the seat, drawing on a napkin and smoking. Jake rests the edge of the briefcase on the sticky tabletop causing her to glance up in surprise.

“I'm a lawyer,” is his opening line and he commends himself for his originality.

Flipping the doodled napkin over, the girl arches a brow. “Really? By the looks of your clothes I'd say you belonged in the gutter.”

Jake clutches his chest. “You really cut me to the core, sweetheart, you know that?”

“I think you handle that all on your own.” She smirks, ashing her cigarette. “So, what do you practice?”

“Animal law.”

“I don't really want to know what that means.” The girl wipes her lanky hair out of her face, staring at him. She's cute, with big blue eyes, and if Jake squints just right she could be blonde, so he figures he'll give her a chance.

“Yep, at the firm of *Whogivesashit*.”

She laughs and extends a hand. “I'm Kathy.”

“The name's Baron Chesterfield the fifth.”

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6. Bouncer.

“Ma. Was it him?”

His ma laughs, an angry sad sound. She pulls out a sauce pan and dumps a few cans of chicken noodle soup in it. Sighing, she faces her son. “Yes, Jake. And I know he said it wouldn't happen again and stupid me, I believed him.”

Reaching out, she hugs her son. “But no more. I know now. Kicked him to the curb.”

Jake eyes her split lip. “Where does he live?” She hesitates and Jake raises his voice. “Ma, tell me.”

Resigned, she gives him the address. “Don't get into trouble, Jake. I ain't got bail money for you.”

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7. Interviewer.

“Where are you going?”

“To a movie.”

“Appropriate content?”

“I—I think so. Something with singing…dancing…”

“There're no clowns in it, correct?”

“Clowns? I don't—”

“Jake!” his sister snaps, running down the hall. “Leave him alone.” Sally links her arm through a guy who looks suspiciously too much like James Dean for Jake's taste.

Jake smirks. “Hell, it's your very first date, Sally. Thought I'd pass along some ol' Jake Baker wisdom. Now just where is my camera?”

“You can keep your wisdom to yourself, jackass.” Now it's Sally's time to smirk. “Besides, it may be my first date, but it ain't my first time.”

Both Jake and Sally's date blink.

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#8. Designated Driver.

How he got roped into this he doesn't know. But suddenly Jake's the responsible one, driving Brian around town after a night of bar

hopping. Fresh from his most recent break-up with Maggie, Brian's crowing in the backseat about how glad he is to be rid of her and Jake's wishing he would have left him at Bar #2.

“There are two things you don't get sentimental about in life when it gets old and you give it away,” Brian slurs. “A car and a woman.”

“Hell,” Jake reminds him. “You're going to hell.”

Brian tries to light a cigarette and can't focus. “I miss her man. She was *so* nice.”

“I know you do, buddy. Now shut the hell up.”

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9. Architect

Kathy sips her coffee as Jake stutters, “S-So I was thinking…that maybe we could…get a place.”

Always cool (which is why Jake loves her), Kathy raises that perfect eyebrow. “As in together?”

“You know that's what I mean. Jesus, Kath, break my balls.” Jake's never done this sort of serious planning before and she's not making it easy.

“It's always fun watching you sweat.” Kathy smiles, lips closed, for fear of showing the one crooked tooth she hates. “But,” she continues. “I think we should do it. I'd really like someone to share the rent with.”

Kathy laughs, seeing Jake's mortified face. She reaches over to squeeze his arm. “I'm kidding! You know I'm your girl.”

Jake begins to breathe easier. He loops his thumbs through his belt loops like John Wayne. “You got that right, little lady…” Then Kathy brushes her hair away from her face and Jake realizes something he's been in denial about for a couple of years. She's not blonde and Jake couldn't care less.

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10. Student.

Jake flips the burger and watches it sail into the air. Like a pro, he catches it with his spatula, slapping the burger right back onto the grill. The BBQ looks a little dull so he figures he'll liven it up with some news.

“I'm going back to school,” Jake announces, expecting gasps.

Instead, a snort comes from left field. “You're lying. You've never had a real job in your life,” Brian says, walking up with Maggie.

Maggie dangles a big sparkly thing from her left hand and Jake face palms. “Aw, say it ain't so, Brian!”

Brian laughs as Maggie curses Jake out. “What're you doin to me, Brian?” Jake hisses, glancing over his shoulder at Kathy who's talking with their ma. “Now Kathy's gonna want one.” Brian shrugs his shoulders in a *not-my-problem* type of way.

“It'll make you hon-est,” Maggie sing-songs.

Jake cocks a brow. “Apparently so. Brian tells me you're not a real blonde.”

As Maggie turns her wrath to Brian, Jake darts out of the way, joining his sister on the front porch. Sally's smoking and reading a book. “I believe you, Jake,” Sally says without looking up.

“Thanks, Sal.”

“What're you goin back for?”

“Make some real money; get Kathy a bigger ring than Maggie.”

Grinning, Sally shakes her head. “No, what major, dummy?”

“Just trade school. Learn something useful. Maybe how to fix broken wires or something.”

“You mean…like an electrician?”

Jake finger guns Sally. “You see, that's why I need you around. You give me all these bright ideas.” He wraps an arm around his sister. “An electrician it is.”