

## THE DIRTY TRICKSTER

*Campaign tips from the man who has done it all.*

BY JEFFREY TOOBIN

A sign inside the front door of Miami Velvet, a night club of sorts in a warehouse-style building a few minutes from the airport, states, "If sexual activity offends you in any way, do not enter the premises." At first glance, though, the scene inside looks like a nineteen-eighties disco, with a bar, Madonna at high volume, flashing lights, a stripper's pole, and a dancer's cage. But a flat-screen television on the wall plays porn videos, and many clubgoers disappear into locker rooms and emerge wearing towels. From there, some of them go into a lounge, a Jacuzzi room, or one of about half a dozen private rooms to have sex—with their dates or with new acquaintances. Miami Velvet is the leading "swingers' club" in Miami, and Roger Stone took me there to explain the role he may have played in the fall of Eliot Spitzer, the former governor of New York.

For nearly forty years, Stone has hovered around Republican and national politics, both near the center and at the periphery. At times, mostly during the Reagan years, he was a political consultant and lobbyist who, in conventional terms, was highly successful, working for such politicians as Bob Dole and Tom Kean. Even then, though, Stone regularly crossed the line between respectability and ignominy, and he has become better known for leading a colorful personal life than for landing big-time clients. Still, it is no coincidence that Stone materialized in the midst of the Spitzer scandal—and that he had memorable cameos in the last two Presidential elections. While the Republican Party usually claims Ronald Reagan as its inspiration, Stone represents the less discussed but still vigorous legacy of Richard Nixon, whose politics reflected a curious admixture of anti-Communism, social moderation, and tactical thuggery. Stone be-

lieves that Nixonian hardball, more than sunny Reaganism, is John McCain's only hope for the Presidency.

Over the years, Stone's relationships with colleagues and clients have been so combustible that his value as a messenger has been compromised. Stone worked for Donald Trump as an occasional lobbyist and as an adviser when Trump considered running for President in 2000. "Roger is a stone-cold loser," Trump told me. "He always tries taking credit for things he never did." Like Nixon, Stone is also a great hater—of, among others, the Clintons, Karl Rove, and Spitzer. So what happened at Miami Velvet one night last September, he said, amounted to a gift.

"She was sitting right over there," Stone told me, pointing to a seat at the bar, as we sipped vodka from plastic cups. (Miami Velvet is B.Y.O.B., to avoid the trouble of securing a liquor license, so Stone had brought along a bottle of the brand p.i.n.k.) "We were just having a casual conversation, and I told her I was a dentist," Stone said. "She told me she was a call girl, but she wasn't working that night." Miami Velvet prohibits prostitution on the premises, a point that is emphasized in the four-page single-spaced legal waiver that every one must sign to be admitted. (Another house rule, which is reinforced by signs on the wall, is "No means no.") "She told me she had a very high-end clientele—she kept using the word 'high-end'—athletes, international businessmen, politicians," Stone said.

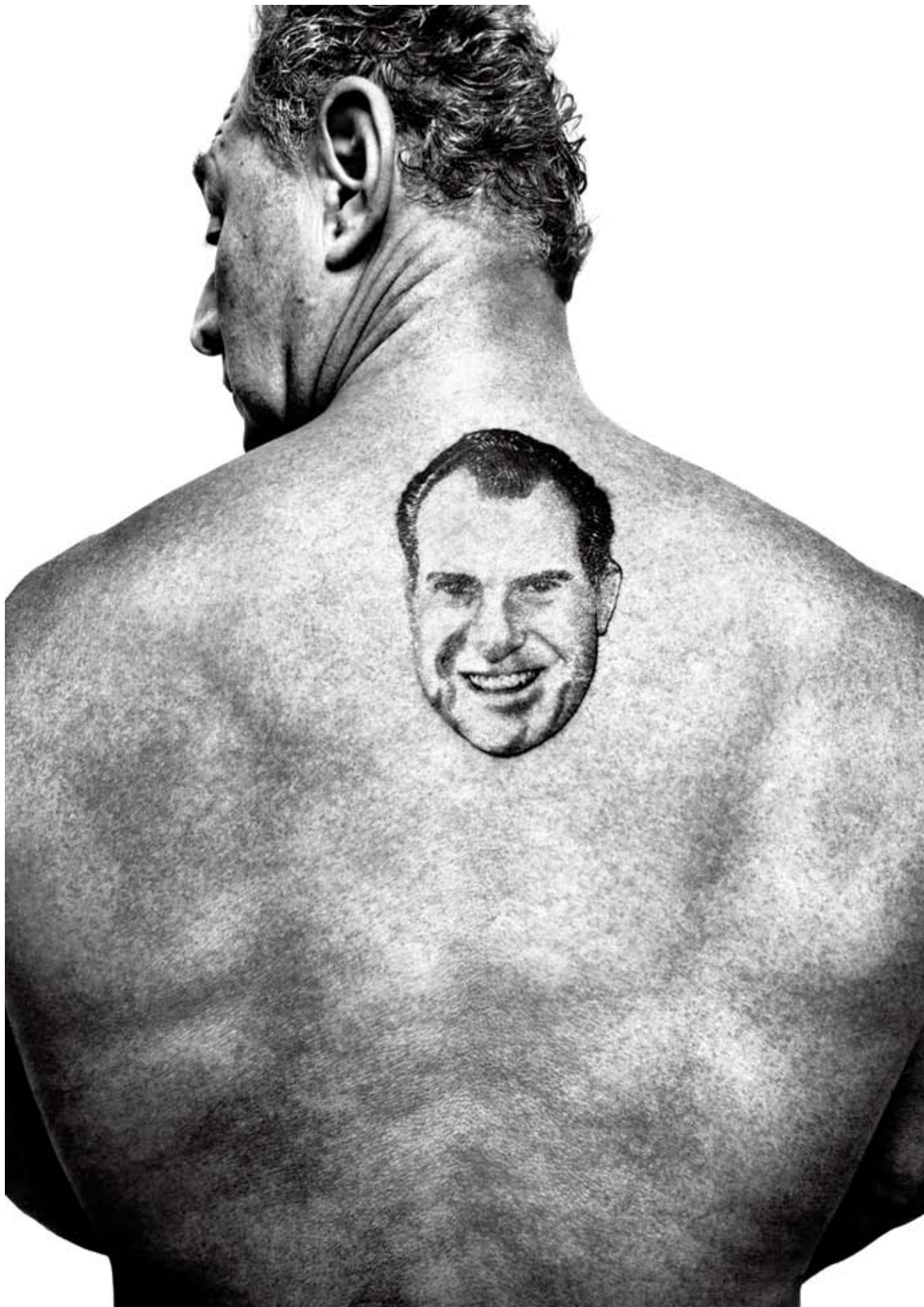
"Like who?" I asked her, "Stone went on. "She named a couple of sports guys, some car dealers I'd heard of because of their commercials, and then she said, 'I almost had a date with Eliot Spitzer, the governor of New Jersey.'" Stone laughed. "She didn't know much about politics. So I asked her, 'Did this guy have a

beard?'" (Jon Corzine, the governor of New Jersey, has a beard.) No, the woman said, he was a skinny bald guy—a description that fit Spitzer. According to Stone, the woman told him that Spitzer had reached her through her escort service, which listed her as a brunette, but she had dyed her hair blond. So the agency referred the governor to a dark-haired colleague, the woman said, who met up with Spitzer in Miami.

"I asked her what her friend said about Spitzer," Stone told me. "She said he was nice enough, but the only odd thing was that he kept his socks on. They were the kind that went to the middle of the calf, and one of them kept falling down."

Stone said that he decided, after hearing the story, to keep the conversation with the woman to himself for the moment. But there was never any doubt that he would eventually deploy it. As Stone puts it in one of the many rules he lives by, "He who speaks first, loses."

Stone spends most of his time in Miami these days, but he's still greeted warmly by the staff at the "21" Club, the venerable former speakeasy on West Fifty-second Street. "I love it here," Stone said, as we settled into a corner table. "It's like time stopped in about 1975 in here—my kind of place." What appeals to Stone is not just the red-meat-and-red-wine gastronomy but also the jackets-required formality. Stone has had his suits tailor-made since the nineteen-seventies, partly because he has a bodybuilder's physique, which makes it difficult to buy clothes off the rack, but also because he is fastidious about what he wears. He owns more than a hundred suits. For many years, he bleached his hair to an almost fluorescent yellow, but he now keeps it a more banal brown. For dinner, he wore a chalk-striped double-



breasted suit, a starched white shirt with a spread collar, and a silver-colored tie, and, outside the restaurant, a homburg. His outfit comported with two of the rules in his book, “Stone’s Rules for War, Politics, Food, Fashion, and Living,” which he hopes to publish soon: “Never wear a double-breasted suit and a button-down collar” and “White dress shirts after six.”

Stone ordered a Stolichnaya Martini. “The key to a good Martini is you have to marinate the olives in vermouth first,” he said. “Nixon gave me the recipe. He said he got it from Winston Churchill.”

Stone did not grow up in such rarefied company. He was born in 1952, half Italian and half Hungarian, and was raised in Lewisboro, New York. His mother wrote for the local newspaper, and his father dug wells. Before he was a teen-ager, a neighbor gave him a copy of Barry Goldwater’s book “The Conscience of a Conservative,” and Stone was hooked. In 1965, when he was thirteen, Stone was taking the train into New York to work weekends on behalf of the ill-fated mayoral campaign of William F. Buckley, Jr. “The key thing about Lewisboro is that it is just across the border from New Canaan,” Stone said, referring to the wealthy Connecticut suburb. “So early on I saw myself as living in kind of a bridge between two cultures, the white working class and the white upper class.” In Stone’s political world view, both groups are, or ought to be, united in opposition to the meddling hand of government.

Stone moved to Washington to attend George Washington University, but he became so engrossed in Republican politics that he never graduated. He was just nineteen when he played a bit part in the Watergate scandals. He adopted the pseudonym Jason Rainier and made contributions in the name of the Young Socialist Alliance to the campaign of Pete McCloskey, who was challenging Nixon for the Republican nomination in 1972. Stone then sent a receipt to the Manchester *Union Leader*, to “prove” that Nixon’s adversary was a left-wing stooge. Stone hired another Republican operative, who was given the pseudonym Sedan Chair II, to infiltrate the McGovern campaign. Stone’s Watergate high

jinks were revealed during congressional hearings in 1973, and the news cost Stone his job on the staff of Senator Robert Dole. Stone then moved into the world of political consulting, to which he was temperamentally better suited than government service. He co-founded the National Conservative Political Action Committee, which spent money in support of candidates, including Chuck Grassley, of Iowa, and Dan Quayle, in Indiana, who were instrumental in the G.O.P. takeover of the Senate.

Stone revels in his Watergate pedigree, noting almost apologetically that he was never accused of breaking any law. “The Democrats were weak, we were strong,” he told me. (Stone’s rules: “Attack, attack, attack—never defend” and “Admit nothing, deny everything, launch counterattack.”) In Nixon’s later years, Stone organized a series of dinners at the former President’s home in New Jersey, where groups of journalists would listen to the great man’s monologues about world events. “Of course a lot of the journalists hated Nixon, but they were always blown away by how smart he was,” Stone said.

It was Stone’s preoccupation with toughness that led to his enduring affection for Nixon. “The reason I’m a Nixonite is because of his indestructibility and resilience,” Stone said. “He never quit. His whole career was all built around his personal resentment of élitism. It was the poor-me syndrome. John F. Kennedy’s father bought him his House seat, his Senate seat, and the Presidency. No one bought Nixon anything. Nixon resented that. He was very class-conscious. He identified with the people who ate TV dinners, watched Lawrence Welk, and loved their country.” (Rule: “When I hear the word ‘culture,’ I reach for my revolver.”)

Although Stone shares many of Nixon’s resentments, his own tastes have always tended to more Rabelaisian pleasures than “champagne music” and Salisbury steak. Not long ago, Stone went to the Ink Monkey tattoo shop in Venice Beach and had a portrait of Nixon’s face applied to his back, right below the neck. “Women love it,” Stone said.

Nixon recognized the effectiveness of anti-élitism—a staple of American cam-

paigns even today—as a core message. “Everybody talks about the Reagan Democrats who helped put the Republican Party over the top, but they were really the Nixon Democrats. The exodus of working-class people from the Democratic Party was started by Nixon. The realignment was delayed by Watergate, but it was really Nixon who figured out how to win,” Stone said. “We had a non-élitist message. We were the party of the workingman! We wanted lower taxes for everyone, across the board. They were the party of the Hollywood élite.” Stone went on, “The point that the Democrats missed was that the people who weren’t rich wanted to be rich. And Jimmy Carter was viewed as an appeaser.” (Rule: “The Democrats are the party of slavery; the Republicans are the party of freedom.”)

Hank Sheinkopf, the veteran Democratic political consultant, who has known Stone for many years, values his political insights. “He was able to use the Democratic teachings on voter turnout and class warfare and turn it against us,” Sheinkopf told me. “He knew what populism was in reverse. He thought like a Democrat and dressed like a plutocrat. He once said to me, ‘Are you black? Are you Hispanic? Are you gay?’ When I said no, he said, ‘Then why the fuck are you a Democrat? You should be with us.’”

Stone detests Hillary Clinton’s politics but admires her pugnacity. He wrote recently on his Web site, an erratically updated collection of observations called Stonezone.com, “I must admit she has demonstrated true grit and Nixonian-like tenacity in the face of adversity.” Stone particularly admires Clinton’s attempt to hang the “élitist” tag on Barack Obama. “It’s a good idea,” he said.

**I**n 1976, Stone was named national youth director for Reagan’s first, failed run for the Republican nomination. Four years later, after serving on various young-Republican task forces, Stone asked the leaders of Reagan’s next campaign for the toughest assignment they had. They made Stone, who was in his late twenties, political director of New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. The region hardly looked like Reagan country, but Stone found a new mentor to help him. “I was invited to a party by a

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*"The drug has, however, proved more effective than traditional psychoanalysis."*

socialite named Sheila Mosler, and Roy Cohn was there," Stone said, as the captain delivered an order of "21"'s steak tartare. "Roy was a Democrat, but he was an anti-Communist and a master of public relations, and he wanted to help me with Reagan. He told me to come see him at his town house.

"When I got there, Roy was in his bathrobe, eating three strips of bacon burned to a crisp and both halves of a devilled egg," Stone went on. "He started telling me how he was going to help me set up the Reagan campaign—everything from union endorsements to office space. He told me to ride down to the courthouse with him. He had a young lawyer with him, and it was clear that Roy knew nothing about the case he was going to argue. But he knew it didn't matter. He used to say, 'Don't tell me the law. Tell me the judge.' Roy knew how the world worked." Following Cohn's lead, Stone played hardball for Reagan, challenging George H. W. Bush's New York primary delegates on a variety of technical grounds, getting many of them disqualified. A couple of years later, Cohn threw Stone a thirtieth-birthday party in a private room at "21."

Like Stone, Cohn combined conservative politics with an outré personal life.

"Roy was not gay," Stone told me. "He was a man who liked having sex with men. Gays were weak, effeminate. He always seemed to have these young blond boys around. It just wasn't discussed. He was interested in power and access. He told me his absolute goal was to die completely broke and owing millions to the I.R.S. He succeeded in that." Cohn was a role model for Stone. "I'm a total Republican, but I've never claimed to be a Christian-right conservative. They're a large but dwindling part of the Party. We need to get suburban moderates back. Fiscal conservatives and social moderates have been drummed out of the Party. Fiscal conservatives are the glue that holds the Party together. Social issues, unfortunately, do nothing but put voters out of reach for us." (Rule: "Folks want to get government out of the boardroom and the bedroom.")

Stone did not enter the government after Reagan won the election. Instead, he started a political-consulting and lobbying firm with several co-workers from the campaign. The name of the operation went through several iterations, but it was perhaps best known as Black, Manafort, Stone & Atwater, the latter being Lee Atwater, who had worked

briefly in the Reagan White House's political office. The partners made their money by charging blue-chip corporate clients such as Ronald Perelman's MacAndrews & Forbes and Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. large fees to lobby their former campaign colleagues, many of whom had moved into senior posts in the new Administration. There were also less savory clients—Zaire's Mobutu Sese Seko, Angola's UNITA rebels, Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos. Stone and his wife at the time, Ann, became famous for their lavish life style, which included a chauffeur-driven Mercedes and tailor-made clothes. They threw raucous parties for no reason or for almost no reason, like Calvin Coolidge's birthday.

To some people, the idea that Reagan's former campaign operatives would become lobbyists was shocking. In 1985, in what reads like a charming period piece from a vanished era, Jacob Weisberg wrote a profile of Stone in *The New Republic*, which bore the headline "State-of-the-Art Sleazeball." Weisberg said that Stone and his colleagues "have abandoned helping Reagan make conservative ideals reality in order to sell their connections to the highest bidders—whether in service of those ideals or not." Now such connections are so common as to scarcely merit comment. For example, Charles Black ran BKSH & Associates, the successor firm to that original venture, until he took a leave to manage John McCain's campaign for President. And the firm is now a subsidiary of the public-relations conglomerate Burson-Marsteller, whose chief executive is Mark Penn, an adviser to Hillary Clinton's campaign. "So what that means is that Mark Penn is Charlie Black's boss," Stone told me. "And they said I was sleazy." (Black has since resigned from BKSH.)

Stone never much cared for corporate lobbying—or for being part of any large organization—so he stuck to campaign work more than his partners did. (Rule: "No one ever built a statue to a committee.") In 1981, Stone ran his first major campaign on his own, Tom Kean's race for governor of New Jersey against the Democrat Jim Florio. Kean won in a recount.

During the Reagan years in Washington, Stone began cultivating in earnest the image of a lovable rogue. Then, as now, some colleagues and clients found Stone's affectations tiresome, at

best. Ed Rollins, who served as President Reagan's first political director, said, "Roger was a fringe player around town. He always had this reputation of being a guy who exaggerated things, who pretended he did things. Roger was never on Nixon's staff, was never on the White House staff. I don't think you'll find anyone in the business who trusts him. Roger was always a little rat."

According to Douglas Schoen, a co-founder of the Penn, Schoen & Berland polling firm, with whom Stone has worked on political campaigns over the years, and who regards Stone as a friend, "He's not so much a Republican as an actor who likes to assume poses. The show is not a by-product of his life—it is his life." Hank Sheinkopf remains on good terms with Stone, but recognizes his ability to alienate both allies and adversaries. "He wreaks havoc in his wake," he told me. "When he's on, he's the best, but he is really more about his life than his work. I went tie-shopping with him once, down at the old Barneys, on Seventh Avenue, and it was one of the most memorable experiences of my life. It was a time in his life when he was obsessed with Alan Flusser suits and great ties. He bought about ten of the most beautiful and expensive ties I'd ever seen. But he's moved on. Now he's into watch fobs and hats."

In 1988, Stone worked as a senior consultant to George H. W. Bush's successful campaign against Michael Dukakis, which was managed by Lee Atwater. The experience prompts a rare disclaimer from Stone, who is usually eager to claim credit for hardball tactics. "We had an ad running about the furloughs in Massachusetts, with a revolving door, and it was really polling well—a great ad—and none of the prisoners were identifiable," Stone told me. "But then Atwater came in with this version that had Willie Horton's picture—and he said they were going to have an independent group put it on the air." (Horton was a convicted murderer who committed a rape after fleeing while on furlough from prison in Massachusetts while Dukakis was governor.) "I told Atwater that it was a mistake, that we were winning the issue without having to resort to this racist crap. I told Atwater, 'You are going to get linked to this, and it is gonna follow you and George Bush for the rest of your life.' It did." (Atwater died of a brain

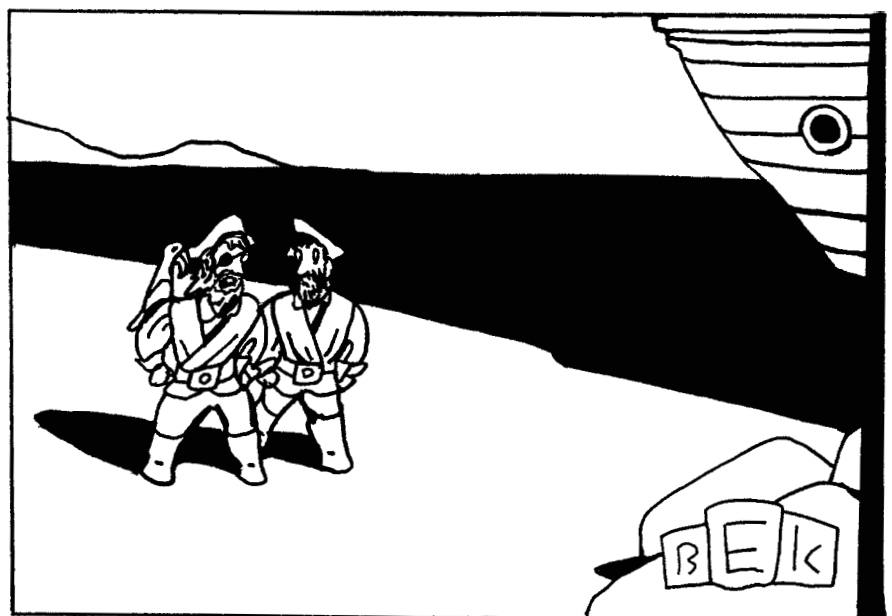
tumor in 1991. Other campaign officials told me that they were not in a position to know what Stone said to Atwater about the Horton ad.) For all his bravado, Stone told me that he shied away from racially inflammatory campaign work. He says frequently, "You know, Nixon was the one who desegregated the schools—not that he ever got any credit for it."

After Bush, Sr.'s victory, Stone returned to his firm, mixing corporate clients and occasional political consulting. He worked on three campaigns for Arlen Specter, the Pennsylvania Republican. He developed a specialty in ballot initiatives, especially about gaming. (Stone doesn't gamble. "The odds are stacked," he told me. "It's a loser's game.") Stone came to prefer working on these kinds of race. "I do a lot of referendums," he said. "They can't talk back. They don't have wives. They don't have friends who tell you how to run the campaign. They are supported by special interests, so there's a lot of money in them." (Rule: "There is only one party—the Green Party.") In the nineties, Stone divorced Ann and married Nydia Bertran, whose father had been a diplomat in pre-Castro Cuba. His wife, whom he invariably refers to as "Mrs. Stone," had family ties in south Florida, and the couple began spending time in Miami.

Stone served as a senior consultant to Bob Dole's 1996 campaign for President,

but that assignment ended in a characteristic conflagration. *The National Enquirer*, in a story headlined "Top Dole Aide Caught in Group-Sex Ring," reported that the Stones had apparently run personal ads in a magazine called *Local Swing Fever* and on a Web site that had been set up with Nydia's credit card. "Hot, insatiable lady and her handsome body builder husband, experienced swingers, seek similar couples or exceptional muscular . . . single men," the ad on the Web site stated. The ads sought athletes and military men, while discouraging overweight candidates, and included photographs of the Stones. At the time, Stone claimed that he had been set up by a "very sick individual," but he was forced to resign from Dole's campaign. Stone acknowledged to me that the ads were authentic. "When that whole thing hit the fan in 1996, the reason I gave a blanket denial was that my grandparents were still alive," he said. "I'm not guilty of hypocrisy. I'm a libertarian and a libertine."

When I arrived in Miami, Stone suggested that we meet for lunch at Versailles, a Cuban restaurant on Calle Ocho, in the heart of the city's émigré community. Stone strolled in wearing a perfectly pressed white linen shirt and a panama hat. In his customary defiance of medical convention, Stone makes sure that his skin is bronzed by the sun twelve months a year. (Rule: "White



*"I'm trying to focus on the treasures in my life that aren't buried."*

shirt + tan face = confidence.”) He ordered a triple espresso, one of four or so he drinks every day.

When I asked why he moved to Miami, Stone quoted a Somerset Maugham line: “It’s a sunny place for shady people. I fit right in.” After leaving Black, Manafort, in the mid-nineties, Stone had operated on his own, hopping from project to project. He ran one of the quixotic independent bids for New York governor of the billionaire Tom Golisano; helped defeat a pro-environment voter initiative in Florida, in 1996; and ran a political campaign in Ukraine. (“I’m the father of the yard sign in Ukraine,” Stone told me. “They say, ‘Comrade is genius.’”) He realized that he could establish his base anywhere he wanted. “I could see the smoke billowing from the Pentagon on 9/11, and after that I decided to get the hell out of Washington,” Stone said at lunch. “That’s when I cut my last ties there.”

Stone’s move to Miami seems almost inevitable. The weather facilitates year-round tanning. And the byzantine politics of the city, with anti-Communism at its core, suits Stone’s temperament. “You are at the nexus of Cuban internecine politics, with family rivalries that have carried over from Cuba,” Stone said. “This is the nexus for Colombian politics, also a hotbed for Puerto Rican politics. It’s all going on right here.”

Stone’s knowledge of the peculiar world of Miami led to what may be his most enduring political legacy—his role in the resolution of the 2000 Presidential election. *The Enquirer’s* disclosures about Stone’s personal life had made him radioactive in terms of a public role in the Presidential race, but when the contest came down to a recount in Florida his talent for hand-to-hand political combat was too useful for senior Republicans to ignore. According to Stone, James A. Baker III, the former Secretary of State, who was leading the Bush forces, told his aide Margaret Tutwiler to recruit Stone. (Baker and Tutwiler say that they don’t remember this, but that it is possible.) “They asked me to go to Palm Beach County, which was where the first big fight was, but I thought I could do more good here in Miami-Dade,” Stone said.

Stone decided to concentrate at first on “the atmospherics,” as he put it, which in Miami means radio. Several Spanish-

## LOW

It’s not happiness, but something else; waiting for the light to change; a bakery.

It’s a lake. It emerges from darkness into the next day surrounded by pines.

There’s a couple.

It’s a living room. The upholstery is yellow and the furniture is walnut.

They used to lie down on the carpet

between the sofa and the coffee table, after the guests had left.

The cups and saucers were still.

Their memories of everything that occurred took place with the other’s face as a backdrop and sometimes

the air was grainy like a movie about evening, and sometimes there was an ending

in the air that looked like a scene from a different beginning,

in which they are walking.

It took place alongside a scene in which one of them looks up at a brown rooftop early in March. The ground hadn’t softened.

One walked in front of the other breathing.

The other saw a small house as they passed and breathed. The reflections in the windows

made them hear the sounds on the hill: a crow, a dog, and branches—

and they bent into the hour that started just then, like bending to walk under branches.

—Arda Collins

language stations in the city devoted themselves entirely to talk about politics; no print or television outlets could match their influence. The most powerful of these was Radio Mambi, a fifty-thousand-watt station, whose principal owner and on-air voice was Armando Perez-Roura, a Cuban exile who was known as the Cuban-American community’s Rush Limbaugh. Radio Mambi was Stone’s first stop.

“Latin media is unique in the sense that when you buy advertising you also are buying programming,” Stone told me. “If you buy, you get to supply the

guests. So I started buying time, and bringing Mrs. Stone, whose command of the Spanish language is better than mine, around to be the guest. The idea we were putting out there was that this was a left-wing power grab by Gore, the same way Fidel Castro did it in Cuba. We were very explicitly drawing that analogy.” Stone was fortunate, too (as was Bush), because the recount came soon after the Elián González affair, in which the Clinton-Gore Administration enraged many Miami Cubans by agreeing to return Elián, who was six years old, to his father in Cuba. A local politi-

cal consultant sold Stone a contact list of activists who had been working on the González case. “We used the list to turn out crowds whenever we wanted,” Stone said. “We were telephoning the shit out of all the appropriate demographics.”

After our lunch, Stone summoned his chauffeur-driven Jaguar—he owned four Jaguars at the time—to take us downtown, so that he could walk me through the events that concluded the Miami recount. On November 21, 2000, the Florida Supreme Court gave Gore an important victory by ruling that the deadline for recounts would be extended to November 26th. At that point, the top priority for the Gore forces was to get the recounts up and running, especially in Miami-Dade County, which is the most populous in the state. On the Republican side, according to Stone, “The whole idea behind what they were doing was that there had already been one recount of the votes, so we didn’t want another. The idea was to shut it down, stop the recount here in Miami.” By November 22nd, the recount process had begun, in a conference room on the eighteenth floor of the Stephen P. Clark Government Center, a vast concrete office building on a forlorn plaza in downtown Miami.

The scene in front of the Clark center that morning was volatile—which was, of course, exactly how Stone wanted it. Several thousand mostly pro-Bush protesters had gathered on the sun-baked plaza to insist that the recount be shut down. Early that morning, Perez-Roura, of Radio Mambi, had sent Evilio Cepero, a local activist who sometimes worked for him as a reporter, to broadcast from the scene. Cepero urged Perez-Roura’s listeners to join the protest, addressed the growing crowd with a megaphone, and interviewed supporters, like the local members of Congress Lincoln Diaz-Balart and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen. Many held signs that said “SORE/LOSERMAN.” Others chanted, “Remember Elián!”

“We set up a Winnebago trailer, right over here,” Stone said when we got out of the Jaguar and walked about a block away from the Clark center, on First Street. “I set up my command center there. I had walkie-talkies and cell phones, and I was in touch with our people in the building. Our whole idea was

to shut the recount down. That was why we were there. We had the frequency to the Democrats’ walkie-talkies and were listening to their communications, but they were so disorganized that we didn’t learn much that was useful.”

A substantial contingent of young Republican Capitol Hill aides, along with such congressmen as John Sweeney, of New York, who had travelled to Miami, joined in the protest. Thanks to this delegation, the events at the Clark center have come to be known as the “Brooks Brothers riot,” but Stone disputes that characterization. “There was a Brooks Brothers contingent, but the crowd in front of the courthouse was largely Spanish,” he said. “Most of the people there were people that we drew to the scene.”

At one point on November 22nd, Stone said, he heard from an ally in the building that Gore supporters were trying to remove some ballots from the counting room. “One of my pimply-faced contacts said, ‘Two commissioners have taken two or three hundred ballots to the elevator,’” Stone said. “I said, ‘O.K., follow them. Half you guys go on the elevator and half go in the stairs.’ Everyone got sucked up in this. They were trying to keep the doors from being closed. Meanwhile, they were trying to take the rest of the ballots into a back room with no windows. I told our guys to stop them—don’t let them close the door! They are trying to keep the door from being closed. There was a lot of screaming and yelling.” (In fact, the Gore official in the elevator, Joe Geller, was carrying a single sample ballot.) The dual scenes of chaos—both inside and outside the building—prompted the recount officials to stop their work. The recount in Miami was never re-started, depriving Gore of his best chance to catch up in the over-all state tally.

As is customary with Stone, there is some controversy about his precise role. “I was the guy in charge of the trailer,



and I coordinated the Brooks Brothers riot,” Brad Blakeman, a lobbyist and political consultant who worked for Bush in Miami, told me. “Roger did not have a role that I know of. His wife may have been on the radio, but I never saw or heard from him.” Scoffing at Blakeman’s account, Stone asserts that he was in the trailer; he said that he had never heard of Blakeman. (Rule: “Lay low, play dumb, keep moving.”)

Four years later, Stone played a similar role in Bush’s reelection campaign. In September, 2004, CBS News aired what it said were newly discovered documents in a report suggesting that George W. Bush had dodged military service in Vietnam. The authenticity of the documents was quickly challenged, and the focus in the news media shifted to whether CBS had been bamboozled into using forgeries, not whether the charges were true. In a CNN interview, Terry McAuliffe, then the head of the Democratic National Committee, seized on a New York *Post* item citing a “hot rumor” that Stone—“an old dirty trickster from the Nixon days,” in McAuliffe’s words—had forged the documents, presumably to embarrass CBS and help Bush. It was a measure of Stone’s reputation at that point that a top Democrat had attempted, on such slim evidence, to link him to a campaign transgression.

“It’s so rare that I’m accused of something that I’m not guilty of that I felt I had to respond,” Stone told me. Rather than simply deny his involvement, Stone went on cable news to deepen the controversy and lob his own accusation—equally baseless—that the Democrats were somehow involved with the documents. (A Stone rule, borrowed from Gore Vidal: “Never pass up the opportunity to have sex or be on television.”) In an interview with CNN, Stone said, “The real question here is, what is the complicity of the Kerry campaign, or what did Max Cleland know and when did he know it?” (Cleland, a former senator from Georgia, was an aide to John Kerry.) Recalling the episode, Stone said that his problem with the potentially forged documents was practical, not moral. “It was nuts to think I had anything to do with those documents,” he said. “Those papers were potentially devastating to George Bush. You couldn’t

put them out there assuming that they would be discredited. You couldn't have assumed that this would redound to Bush's benefit. I believe in bank shots, but that one was too big a risk." Still, Stone was happy to put his seamy reputation to work for the Republican cause. "I definitely saw the opening to be a good party man," Stone said. (Rule: "Nothing is on the level.")

When we first met in Miami, Stone brought along an old friend, Michael Caputo, who has assisted him in various projects over the years. Caputo grew up in upstate New York, where his family runs an insurance business that had a dispute with Eliot Spitzer when he was attorney general. As a form of revenge, Caputo had started two Web sites—spitzerfile.com and newyork-facts.net—that collected negative press stories about the new governor. With help from a friend who had run computer projects for the Pentagon, Caputo and Stone located the e-mail addresses of many journalists and other prominent people in New York and sent them news of Spitzer's woes. "The left has done a better job of dominating the new space," Stone said. "We're weak on the Web. The whole thing was a labor of love."

It was, in short, Stone's idea of entertainment. "I thought Spitzer was punk,

and I wanted to fuck with him any way I could," he said. (Rule: "Hate is a stronger motivator than love.") By the middle of 2007, his Spitzer bashing had become a business, because Stone was hired in June as a consultant to the New York State Senate Republicans.

On August 6th, someone whose voice sounded a great deal like Stone's left a message on the office answering machine of Bernard Spitzer, the governor's eighty-three-year-old father. The caller referred to a possible investigation of loans made by the elder Spitzer to his son's campaigns. "If you resist this subpoena, you will be arrested and brought to Albany," said the caller, who went on, "And there is not a goddam thing your phony, psycho, piece-of-shit son can do about it." Private detectives hired by Bernard Spitzer traced the call to Stone's wife's telephone, but Stone, however implausibly, denied leaving the message. At first, he claimed that on the night of the call he had been attending the Broadway show "Frost/Nixon," but there was no performance that evening. Stone also suggested that his landlord, a Spitzer supporter, had set him up, or that a standup comedian and impressionist had imitated his voice. As a result of the controversy, Stone had to relinquish his position with the State Senate Republicans.

"They caught Roger red-handed

lying," Donald Trump said. "What he did was ridiculous and stupid. I lost respect for Eliot Spitzer when he didn't sue Roger Stone for doing that to his father, who is a wonderful man."

The brouhaha over the phone call did little to faze Stone. Some weeks later, he was approached by a pair of F.B.I. agents who may have been in the early stages of an investigation of Spitzer. (Stone says that he doesn't know why the F.B.I. sought him out.) Stone declined to speak with them, but on November 19, 2007, Stone's attorney wrote to the agents and recounted the story that the woman had told him at Miami Velvet, including the part about the socks. ("Perhaps you can use this detail to corroborate Mr. Stone's information," the letter states.) Four months later, Spitzer resigned, after it was revealed that he was a client of the Emperors Club V.I.P., a prostitution ring.

In Stone's mind, this turn of events suggests that he may have played a key role in forcing Spitzer out of office. (He takes satisfaction in noting that a recent New York *Post* report about another prostitute allegedly patronized by Spitzer corroborated the claim that he preferred to wear his socks during sex.) But, as is usually the case with Stone, there is ample reason for skepticism. The F.B.I. declined to comment, but it appears that the bureau was investigating Spitzer because of suspicious money transfers, including some that ultimately went to the Emperors Club; Stone's significance, if any, in that case is hard to assess. Moreover, Roger Portella, the manager of Miami Velvet, told me that his records showed that until our visit earlier this year Stone had not been in the club since 2005. When I asked Stone about this, he said that on the occasion of his conversation with the off-duty prostitute he had come with another Miami Velvet member, and thus did not give his name. "Whether it started with Stone, or he contributed to an ongoing investigation, we have no idea," a member of the Spitzer camp told me. "There is a lot of crazy stuff around the edges of this case. Stone is one part."

In any event, in the months leading up to Spitzer's surprise resignation, Stone did offer his friends cryptic hints of what might be coming. "Roger guaranteed me that Spitzer wouldn't last," Douglas Schoen said. "When the call to the father



*"I hope you don't mind changing planes in midair."*



happened, and he was fired, he said, 'I will last longer than Spitzer will.' I had no idea what he was talking about at the time—no one thought there was a chance that Eliot was going to lose his job. But of course Roger was right."

At times, Stone's real party seems to be the vaudevillian rather than the G.O.P. Earlier this year, Stone created an independent political group, known as a 527, to criticize Hillary Clinton, and he dubbed the organization Citizens United Not Timid. The group had no real operations and existed mostly so that Stone could refer to its acronym. I suggested that this was juvenile. "I thought it up in a bar," Stone said. "I was having fun!" (Rule: "Get your carbs from booze—not potatoes, rice, pasta, or bread.") His Jaguar was, at that moment, passing the federal courthouse in Miami, where he had just been sued for trademark infringement by an actual political organization that used the name Citizens United. "It was unbelievable," Stone told me. "We spent a whole half a day in court on this stupid thing. And at the end of the day I announced that I had a new name: Citizens Uniformly Not Timid."

Ultimately, the process—the battle—interests Stone more than the result. Four years ago, he says, he gave advice (free) to Al Sharpton during his run for President, seeing in the Reverend a temperamental, if not a political, kindred spirit. And though Stone remains a Republican, he engages in the sport of seemingly hating many members of his own party, whom he regards, he says, as élitists. After his work for Golisano, Stone nursed a grudge against George Pataki, Spitzer's Republican predecessor, and Stone seems to be gearing up for an anti-Jeb Bush campaign, should the former Florida governor decide to run for President in 2012. "Jeb is waiting in the wings? Over my dead body," Stone said. "The Bushes have brought us to ruin twice—first 1992 and now. I'll see you in New Hampshire to stop it. I'll wait for him."

For the moment, though, Stone must be content to watch the current Presidential race from the sidelines. His only prior dealing with John McCain was bumpy. "I was doing some lobbying for Trump's airline in the eighties, and he was competing for landing slots at La-



Guardia against America West Airlines, so I went to see McCain about it in his office at the Capitol," Stone told me. "I made an offhand comment that it wasn't surprising that he was backing America West, because they were based in Phoenix. He stood up and said, 'What the fuck are you talking about? Get the fuck out of my office!' But I didn't take it personally. I supported him in 2000, and I support him now."

McCain's route to victory, Stone believes, is a Nixonian slash-and-burn campaign against Barack Obama, the likely Democratic nominee. "Obama and his wife are élitists and they're weak," Stone told me. "They don't share middle-class values. Middle-class Americans are proud of their country, and they are not. He thinks he's going to sit down with Iran and Hamas. How do you know he's not going to shake hands with a suicide bomber? You can't sit down with people

who don't want to sit down. All he's going to do is raise taxes, which is going to give the government more money but it's not going to create any jobs." Stone added, "McCain himself should not run a slash-and-burn campaign, but a slash-and-burn campaign will have to be run by others." (Rule: "Use a cutout.")

When Stone talks about politics, formulating arguments that candidates can use, he tends to ramp his voice up to a snarl, the way that the message on Bernard Spitzer's answering machine sounded. It's like an actor running lines. But, when he switches back to an analytical mode, Stone immediately turns cheerful, full of love for the game. "Remember," Stone said. "Politics is not about uniting people. It's about dividing people. And getting your fifty-one per cent." (Stone's rule: "The only thing worse in politics than being wrong is being boring.") ♦