



If Jack Had

Steven Rappaport

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A violent, urban, first-person account of how an aged, cynical killer finds purpose, passion, and love in a harsh world.

If Jack Had is a pulp-noir novel set apart by the cynicism and dry humor of the narrator, charismatic dialogue, and surprising warmth shining beneath the gritty subject matter.

At the end of his life, Jack has lost his dignity. As a journalist, he had purpose, affecting the intellect of the nation through his words. As a trained killer for a Russian mobster, he was able to play God, affecting who lived and died. Jack is a man who loves power, and at ninety-three, he has lost it at the most basic level. He can only occasionally control his bladder. Without the love of his life, Sara Beth, at his side, and without even the physical capability to lust after another, his daily grind is bleak. In a desperate, harried, and darkly hilarious last effort to regain who he once was, Jack is going to kill himself. But not before he tells his story. Born to an intensely narcissistic mother and a brutally dispassionate father, his origins were less than promising.

The novel's narration showcases Rappaport's pulp-noir influences. Jack's sense of humor is spectacularly and tersely seen in his time spent people-watching, particularly on one of his trips to Tel Aviv: "Every block ... boasted of the special quality of their chick-pea pudding. ... My palate is sophisticated. It all tastes the same."

Jack is a man of dualities. Counter to what one might assume about a hit man who loves his job, Jack is a caring and attentive father and husband. His passionate love for Sara Beth, highlighted by their playful quibbling at the opening of the novel, is captivating, entertaining, and, in its own name-calling way, sweet.

However, the novel falters in its aspirations to capture an entire life of characters in 211 pages. The huge cast is overwhelming, which prevents deeper exploration of the more complex and intriguing relationships.

This varied and stylish novel will delight those looking for a violent urban novel with a heart of gold.

PAIGE VAN DE WINKLE (Fall 2015)

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