

Shoot the Dog
by
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*Sometimes to free yourself of the leash, you just have to shoot
the dog.*

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

Lights up on a downtown bar/lounge called Awful Al's. The year is 2004. A bar is on stage, with mid-thirties African American bartender, JAX, standing behind it wiping down the counter. A college boy, DANNY sits at the bar nursing a drink.

DANNY

Another amaretto sour?

JAX

Really?

DANNY

Yea, why?

JAX

No reason. I just didn't realize you were the kind of guy who likes to waste his time.

Danny is amused. The bar phone rings.

JAX

Excuse me. Awful Al's. Hey what's up, Stewball? Nah, I told you, I'm gonna skip out on that tomorrow. Why? Because I got better shit to do that's why. Oh don't start with that bullshit again. I got a real job. Yes, I said real. Of course you're still my boy. No, I'm not turning my back on...Come on, don't be like that. Alright, whatever. Unlike your lazy punk ass, I've got a fucking business to run.

Jax hangs up the phone. Danny is staring at him.

What?

DANNY

Who was that?

JAX

My best friend since I was four.

DANNY

Oh, I can tell you guys are close.

JAX

Yea, well time changes things. People go different paths, you know?

DANNY

Yea, I do actually.

JAX

So what turn of the path led you into Awful Al's? I've never seen you in here before.

DANNY

Never been. But my girlfriend comes here a lot. I was hoping to see her.

JAX

Kid, I hate to break it to you, but if you need to sit around in a bar by yourself all night in hopes of seeing your girlfriend, you need to seriously reevaluate your relationship.

Danny gestures in agreement.

JAX

Knew it had to be problems with the old lady though. Young college boys like you only drink alone when their trying to get laid or when their crying cuz they can't.

DANNY

Yea well right now that's the least of my problems.

JAX

Not getting laid is never the least of anybody's problems.

DANNY

Well maybe I'm not just anybody.

JAX

Kid, everybody is anybody at your age. You probably still haven't figured out the proper direction to wipe your ass.
(holding out his hand)

Jax.

DANNY

(shaking it)

Danny.

JAX

Personally, I prefer front to back.

(beat)

So tell me about this girl you're waiting for.

DANNY

Honestly? She's a bitch.

JAX

Well, tell me how you really feel.

DANNY

Well, she is.

(pause)

I know, why am I still with her right?

JAX

I didn't say that. I love the feisty ones. Some of my greatest loves have been total bitches.

DANNY

Yea well I don't think feisty does her justice. She has this rare talent for knowing exactly how to piss people off. I think she enjoys it too.

JAX

She gets off on it, huh?

DANNY

I think she does.

JAX

And you do too...don't you, kid?

Beat. Danny half smiles shyly.

Yea, I see that smile. Yea you do. When they're all wild-eyed and the blood rushes to their cheeks, their arms folded, just screaming. Damn that's sexy.

DANNY

Yea.

JAX

So what's the problem then?

DANNY

She cheated on me.

JAX

What? And you're still sitting here waiting for her to walk through the fucking door? Christ, that's the problem with you young Mama's boys today. No backbone. Your girl's out there messing around with some dickhead while you spend your nights thinking of names for your first born and jacking off to The White Stripes. You think girls are into that?

DANNY

So what am I supposed to do?

JAX

You grow some balls, that's what you do.

DANNY

Meaning?

JAX

Meaning, you tell her to keep her legs closed when she's not around you or you're kicking her ass to the curb...after you kick the ever-loving shit out of the punk she's hooking up with of course.

DANNY

I can't do that.

JAX

Sure you can. You're a pretty big guy.

DANNY

No I mean I couldn't say that to her.

JAX

Why the hell not?

DANNY

What if she won't stop?

JAX

Wow, kid you're pitiful.

DANNY

Maybe.

JAX

And you're OK with this? Kid, you need to stand up for yourself.

DANNY

Easier said than done.

JAX

That's why it's called "taking a stand." Otherwise it would be called sitting back on your ass and eating Planter's Peanuts while other people decide how your life turns out.

DANNY

That's pretty specific.

JAX

I never really believed in generalizations.

DANNY

Right.

JAX

Look kid, I didn't get to where I am in life by letting people push me around. If you go through life doing what other people want you to do, you wind up living other people's lives. And have you seen some of the fucked up losers in this town?

DANNY

Well this isn't exactly the same as fighting with your friends over which dance club to go to on a Friday night.

JAX

Oh you think that's what that was all about huh?

DANNY

Wasn't it?

JAX

Sure it was kid. We were fighting over which strip club actually. They wanted to go to a classy joint uptown, but me, I like the places with the dirty hos. You know, the real nasty ones. You feel me?

DANNY

(missing the sarcasm)

Uh, yea sure.

JAX

Wow, kid. And you say your girlfriend is the bitch? You are one sad little college boy.

DANNY

Thanks.

JAX

See what I mean? You should square off with me right now. Or at least tell me to shut my damn mouth and mind my business.

DANNY

Shut your damn mouth and mind your business.

JAX

All right, it's something. You at least starting to hear what I'm saying?

DANNY

I guess.

JAX

You guess?

DANNY

Yea, I hear what you are saying, but you don't know Jessica.

JAX

Well by the way you are talking her up, it sounds like we'd be best friends.

DANNY

Well, hearing how you are with your other best friends, I'm sure you would be.

JAX

(gets a kick out of this)

You do have a point.

A loud mouthed, thirty-something Indian woman, YASMINE, enters, her attention on something offstage. The men stare at her.

YASMINE

Yea, you're real hard up huh? Bet you didn't get those Calvin Klein jeans peddling quarters on 14th Street! Now get away from my bar!

(closing the door)

Goddamn street hustlers. Give this city a bad fucking name.

JAX

Your bar, huh?

YASMINE

Oh close enough, Jax. Now hook a girl up with a dirty martini.

JAX

You ain't no girl, Yazi.

YASMINE

You're as young as you feel, honey.

(looking at Danny)

Oooh. And today I'm feeling about 18.

(to Danny)

Hey, sugar.

(Silence)

Hey, I'm talking to you sweetheart.

JAX

(pouring two shots)

Young Danny here is having some lady trouble. And he thinks a couple of amaretto sours are gonna make it go away.

YASMINE

(disappointed)

Amaretto sours?

JAX

I know. For real pain it's gotta be whiskey.

YASMINE

Or at least something above 40 proof.

Jax slides one of the shots down the bar to Yasmine.

JAX

(raising his glass)

Here, here.

The two raise their glasses to one another and down the whiskey.

YASMINE

So why is a sexy little college boy like you having lady trouble?

Danny takes a silent, finishing gulp.

DANNY

(shaking empty glass)

Can I get another?

JAX

(making another drink)

Just talk to her kid. Yazzi can make all your pain go away.

DANNY

No thanks.

JAX

Oh, come on. Why don't you tell her why you're here?

YASMINE

Well I can answer that one. He's here to hang out with me. Aren't you, sugar?

Danny lets out a doubtful chuckle. 'Yea right.'

JAX

Uh oh, Yaz. This may be the first time I've ever seen you get the cold shoulder.

YASMINE

Ouch. I don't take kindly to rejection sweetheart.

DANNY

Sorry to disappoint you.

YASMINE

For somebody sitting at the bar by himself it doesn't look like you can afford to be that choosy.

JAX

Come on, kid. Talk to her.

DANNY

I don't want to talk to her. Just leave me alone.

JAX

What kind of college boy are you? A beautiful woman walks into a bar and actually wants your attention and you shrug it off? What is it? Still thinking of that two-timing control freak?

DANNY

Leave her out of this. I just don't want to talk. Everything is cool. There are no problems.

YASMINE

All right, kid. We got it. You're perfect. No problems. Life is wonderful. So Jax, how's my favorite bartender?

JAX

Bartender? Is that all I am to you?

YASMINE

You are the man who takes the time to meticulously pour my whiskey, applying both precision and love into every shot. What more could I ever want in a man?

JAX

White college boy looks.

YASMINE

Yea, well looks only take you so far if they come with a rather annoying inability to hold a conversation. Sitting and staring gets tedious after awhile.

JAX

You really are bad at rejection.

DANNY

I'm not obligated to be nice to everybody.

YASMINE

Obligated? What is that supposed to mean?

DANNY

It means I have the right not to talk to certain people.

YASMINE

Oh ofcourse. The Certain People Clause. How could we have forgotten that one, Jax? That was passed right after the Girls Have Cooties amendment in 1973, am I right?

JAX

Come on, kid. You can't be serious. Tell her you're joking.

DANNY

I don't see what would be a joke.

YASMINE

So this is the kind of people you have in here now, huh Jax?

JAX

Don't listen to him, Yaz. He's obviously just an ignorant little college boy.

DANNY

What's so ignorant about me exercising my rights? My forefathers gave their lives to secure those rights in the Constitution. To ensure I would always have freedom of speech, to choose when I speak my mind and when I don't.

JAX

Uh oh. It's barely midnight and he's throwing the Constitution at us.

YASMINE

Already coming at us with the law, huh, sweetcheeks? Funny, I don't see any badge. No gun. Can't be a police officer. No boring suit with a primary-colored tie. Not a politician. Although, you're probably a political science major. Aren't you?

DANNY

Accounting actually.

YASMINE

(playfully)

Well I guess that makes sense. If I did nothing but add numbers all day I might be an ignorant asshole too.

DANNY

Do I really have to listen to this?

YASMINE

Having freedom of speech can be a real bitch, huh? Or does that law only apply to "certain people?"

(Silence)

Hey, Jax. Fix me another martini. And this time skip the olive juice. Somebody in this bar needs to drink for real.