

Introduction

December 4, 2005

And now we're drunk at a restaurant, trying to sober up but really just postponing the inevitable cab ride home. Letting the drunken madness of the night settle in - awaiting the collapse into bed or the sloppy, beer-goggled sex that will result from a Saturday night out on the town. And I'm totally hoping to get laid, as the tired waitress leads us giggling, stumbling to our seats. I'm holding hands with the hottest one - or, at least, the one with the biggest tits. The way she's¹ acting right now, squeezed into the booth with me, nice and close with her hand on my arm, I'd say I stand a good chance of gettin' some - but still, we're gonna have to hurry up. I'm too drunk to stay awake that much longer - I know I'll get to that point where all I wanna do is pass out. Luckily, I'm not there yet... but the clock is ticking.

It's a diner we're in - Formica counters, a teal vinyl booth, mini-jukeboxes at every table, lots of crazy 50's crap² on the walls. I've been here before - not with these chicks, of course - but Dino's³ is open 24 hours and in the heart of the "bar district", making it a perfect sobering-up place to go to once all the bars close. There's a big sign in the window out front saying, "Free Refills On Coffee" - they're practically going out of their way to attract the drunk crowd.⁴ I know I've stumbled in here many times before - club sandwich and onion rings would be "the usual" if any of the waitresses ever remembered me. And there's a specific reason for this meal - the way it works is, I eat all the onion rings first, then either a quarter or a half of the club. The rest will be taken home in a doggy bag - thrown in the fridge, and it'll be the first thing I eat tomorrow morning, after I (hopefully) send this chick home and drink a pot of coffee. There's nothing better than cold chicken and mayo for hangover food.

But we're here in the booth - the three chicks are all talking about some inside joke thing⁵ until I start paying attention and I scream, "Hey!" in a specific imitation of Harry Carey, and now they're all looking at me, stopped talking, and I say, casually, "So what're y'all ordering?" Of course, I slur the words so

¹And I say "she" here, because I've totally forgotten her name.

²And plenty of spaghetti and Moe-balls.

³Dino's obviously being the name of the diner. Another reason I love coming here is that I can pretend this diner is the one they're talking about in the song *The Boys Are Back In Town*.

⁴The drunk crowd is divided into several separate groups. There are the University kids (all frat-boys and slutty chicks), Yuppies, Hipsters, The Skids (all the "artsy" kids who wear too much black leather and dog collars) and then every other Joe Horny who's trying to pick up.

⁵Or it could be something that we were talking about earlier. But I'm totally distracted - drunk off my ass - at the point where I have to listen really hard to what other people are saying, otherwise, they all come off sounding like adults in a Charlie Brown cartoon. (Which, really, just sounds like a single trumpet with a warbling mute.)

that "ordering" sounds like "orring" but they get the gist of it, and they're all seriousness now, as they open their menus for the first time and plaster concern on their faces as they decide which has the fewest carbs, or lowest calories. . .

The waitress is here - giving us all waters. "You gonna need a few minutes?" she monotones, while passing out those enormous 24 ounce red diner plastic glasses. Someone from my table says, "Yes" and I ignore everyone as I take out the thick straw from my glass, pinch the two ends with my thumb and forefinger, and start twisting it like a crank.⁶ With my fingers shaking from the tension, I turn to my⁷ chick and hold it out to her.

She's obviously intrigued, but there's concern and confusion as she raises an eyebrow, saying, "What's this?"

One of the chicks across the table - Antonella, I think her name is - immediately starts instructing her friend in a maternal voice, "You snap it with your fingers." And Antonella is repeatedly sticking her index finger into her thumb and flicking it outwards. Pointing at the straw, she flick flick flick flick's her finger, saying, "You just snap it. Like this. See?" and she flicks her finger again, and again, faster and faster. Flick flick flick.

And the chick next to me - who must be the dumb one of the group⁸ - slowly, after looking at the straw, then Antonella's flicking finger, then back at the straw, finally gets it and daintily makes a circle with her thumb and index finger, raises it above the straw and gives a weak little flick. The straw doesn't break.

The other chick - Sarah - wanting to get in on the action⁹ starts chirping, "Hey. Hey. Lemme try. Hey. Dude." And I look over and she's got her finger all ready, so I lean over the booth, holding the straw with my shaking hands up close to her. She snaps it and first try it goes *POP* so loud that the chick beside me - who either hasn't seen this juvenile trick before, or is too drunk to remember - gives out a little yelp, like a wounded puppy. Both Sarah and Antonella start laughing uproariously at her. The chick, being a drunken good sport starts laughing as well.¹⁰

The chick - who's name, I now remember, begins with an "M" I think. Like, "Mary" or "Margaret" or something like that - she whines out a, "Ohmigod you guys. That scared me sooo much."

I turn towards her, drunk smile on my face, heavy-lidded eyes, tipping over towards her as I ask, "Haven't you seen that before?" And, again, slurred, it comes out "Ha-int you seenat a'fore?" M throws up her hand to her mouth and hiccups - which makes Sarah and Antonella laugh harder. M shakes her head no, grabs the sugar, and starts pouring it into her water.

⁶I used to do this in grade 9, whenever I'd throw out my lunch my mom made for my and went to McDonald's. Their straws are, quite honestly, the best reason for ordering a drink. Once twisted, they make the loudest *pop* I've ever heard.

⁷I say "my" - because this is the chick I've got the best chance of nailing. Too bad I've no idea what her name is.

⁸Who they just keep around because she's pretty (which reflects well on them) and has no problem getting men for all 3 of them. But tonight, it's just me - and I'm not sleeping with them - so I imagine their either pissed at her (the chick next to me) and I'm thinking they're gonna try to cockblock me soon enough.

⁹And, I'd like to think, who's trying to seduce me.

¹⁰She has the exact same reaction as Julia Roberts in *Pretty Woman* when Richard Gere snaps the jewelry box down on her hand. This makes me Richard Gere. Cool. He was hot in *American Gigolo*.

I'm about to make some crack about her hiccups¹¹ but the waitress comes back and interrupts my thoughts by asking, "Are we all ready here?" And it takes me by surprise - because I didn't see her coming - and my thought about M disappears forever.

We go around the table - Sarah gets a chicken pita, Antonella gets a chicken Caesar salad, ... Whoever gets some chicken strips and, painfully aware of my advanced state of inebriation, I carefully enunciate, "One club sandwich on white with a side order of onion rings." The waitress nods, writes something down and grabs our menus.

M hiccups again and starts chugging down her sugar water. I'm annoyed at the waitress - I had this great joke all setup, something about hummingbirds¹² - but it's gone now. And Sarah across the table says, "Mad,¹³ that's not how you get rid of hiccups. You need to drink your water upside down."

Antonella cuts in, "No no no. The sugar thing was right - except you don't put it in water, you're just supposed to eat it."

And I totally tune out. Which is so easy to do - I look at one of the advertisements on the wall, and their voices immediately turn into background noise. I exhale forcefully through my cheeks - my body is divided into two needs right now; the need to get laid and the need for sleep. Which is a Homeresque¹⁴ battle - as my body is on the side of sleep, and my consciousness is on the side of sex. And my body is trying to get me home - it's sapping my energy as I sit here, sending a buzz into my feet, which is slowly creeping up my legs. But consciousness is trying hard to get laid - and it keeps saying, "Just be smooth. Once we're done eating, you can take this chick back to your place." Because, aside from the body buzz in my legs, my entire body is a raging hard-on. I am a walking cock - looking for a warm depository, preferably one that moves and moans. All I wanna do is fuck, and I can feel my dick strain against my jeans. Good thing I'm in the booth, because standing right now would be revealing.

The chicks are still arguing about hiccup cures as I put my arm on the table and lean my chin into my palm.¹⁵ My head feels like it weighs 100 pounds, as I try to keep my eyes open - which is tough, my eyelids are leaden, relentless in their attempt to fall down - and keep an attentive look on my face. Because, I mean, I started drinking around 6:00 yesterday. That was (Holy Christ) over 8 hours ago. This is insane - I mean, this is like going in for a shift at Roasted.¹⁶ No wonder I'm so fucking tired - lesse, 10 to 11, 11 to 12... yeah, that's 16 hours of being up.

With this new information,¹⁷ I'm surprised I haven't passed out already. I

¹¹And it's fucking genius! Oh man. That's hysterical.

¹²Which doesn't sound funny, but I forgot what I was thinking about - so it might not have been about hummingbirds at all.

¹³Mad? Shit! That's right! Her name is Madeline. Whew! Thanks Sarah, you totally saved me there.

¹⁴In the sense that this battle is a large, rhyming epic. Not a cartoon dad strangling his son.

¹⁵The table is the only thing keeping my head up right now. It's my head, propped up by my chin, which is propped up by my hand, which is propped up by my elbow which is firmly propped up by the table. But, if this table were to move, or shake in any way, my face would go smashing down - I have that little control over my enormous head.

¹⁶Roasted: The coffee bar I used to work at. Shifts were 8 hours long with 30 minutes for lunch. So, my situation now is as if I was in Roasted on Saturday, and instead of serving coffee - I had to drink beer. That's my job - drinking for 8 hours. Yeah, it's pretty retarded.

¹⁷Well, it's not new, it's been there all along. But, it's among conscious thought now - and

mean, my hands are tingling, my legs are falling away through pins and needles. It's like my limbs are carbonated lead - I can feel individual blood cells passing through my veins - but if I slam my hands down on the table, I can't feel a thing. Which is handy - because the only thing I can hear now is the diner's radio. And I love this song! Holy shit - and the fingers of my free hand start thumbing out a beat on the table. I manage to lift my head off my other hand - and now I've got both of them working. I'm a rock star, far away on stage, drumming out the beat to a stadium full of tens of thousands. Modern Drummer magazine has just named me their "Best All Time Drummer" and my band is the saviour of Rock N' Roll.

"Who's got the chicken pita?"

And I snap out of my reverie to see the waitress towering over me, holding two plates overloaded with food. She hands a plate to Sarah and asks, "Who's got the chicken fingers" and - shit, what's her name again? - the chick beside me raises her hand like she knows the answer to a question in class, and the waitress hands her her food.

"Where's my club sandwich?" is the first thing that pops into my head - and I say it not accusingly, not angrily, but confused.

The waitress, rolls her eyes and says, "I'm just going to get your food."

Phew. "Ok. Thanks." Food will be here soon.

The waitress turns and leaves and immediately, the chicks start talking shit. Antonella spits out a, "Did you see what she did? She totally rolled her eyes at you."

Sarah joins in, "I know! I know. I mean, calm down bitch, it's not like we're interrogating you."

And even though they're both talking to me,¹⁸ I've drifted off again. I don't even care if the waitress was mean or whatever, I just wanna get my food and go.¹⁹ Sleep sounds so good right now - and my song has ended so I put my elbows on the table, and put my chin into the cradle made by my hands. And I'm just staring at these two chicks across from me, my vision blurring in and out of focus like waves. I've stopped all pretences of trying to act interested - which means I've abandoned sex altogether.²⁰

Now Sarah and Antonella, who were leaning over their food, both whispering closely to me,²¹ lean back and start picking neatly at their food. Beside me, a disembodied voice says, "Club?" and I snap my head to the left and find the gigantic waitress putting a plate down at my elbows. And I blurt, "Oh Christ yes." And I grab my plate and tune out everything - reaching across three dinners to grab the ketchup, create a huge blob of it right in the middle of my onion rings - and start shovelling this stuff into my mouth. I can hear nothing else but my chewing. I can feel nothing else but my teeth chomping down on hot greasy batter - and I'm slurping the onions out of each ring - then double-dunking the batter in my ketchup blob and stuffing it in my mouth. My

seeing as how I can't hear any unconscious thoughts, I'm classifying this information as new.

¹⁸Like, directly at me. Antonella is pointing at me with a long, bony finger. I hear nothing.

¹⁹I realize now this means that - in the war between my body and my libido - the body has made serious inroads and is largely winning the battle.

²⁰This is sort of a tip-off that I'm at a very advanced stage of inebriation. For me to sacrifice sex is huge. I'm sure alcohol poisoning comes next.

²¹Not so much as whispering as speaking in a conspiratorial manner. Eyes lowered, volume low enough so that it doesn't carry over to the next booth. Doesn't matter - I can't hear them anyway.

head is hunched over my plate, both elbows on the table - and my face is parallel to the floor, as it hangs, unmoving, about a foot over the plate - as I use both hands to force food in.

Before I even realize it, I'm down to half a sandwich.²² A \$20 dinner - went down effortlessly, as tasteless as cardboard. And now, my mouth tastes awful - a faint taste of ketchup, the grease coats the inside of my mouth - and I try and work up some saliva to swallow the taste - but my mouth is dry and sticky - and I manage to swallow some sour spit. With a wince.

I'm looking up now, looking around - it's time to get out of here. I know it's time to go - because I'm at that nodding off point where my head starts slowly falling down and my eyes are closing at the same time when - "Huh!" - I snap my head back and fling my eyes open.²³ But the chicks are still talking about the waitress, and they've barely touched their food.

Then - out of nowhere - *Won't Get Fooled Again* by The Who comes on. Thundering out of the gate with it's killer chord - it's echoing all around the diner, and people appear to grow respectfully silent as the opening piano bit reverberates around the checkered tiles.²⁴ Only when the guitar comes back in does conversation return to normal levels.

And I hear nothing else - the talking chicks, the clink of dishes, the other drunk people all gradually fade out and are silent. It's like a weird movie montage - where all anybody hears is The Who and I've got to interpret the meaning of the movie through people's movements.

So I say nothing, as I listen to the song - I can feel my chest echo with the bass drum - and watch Sarah across the table talk to Antonella - who's consequently talking to the chick next to me²⁵ and Antonella appears angry about something. So, still with my chin in my hands, I turn and look at the chick next to me who leans over drunkenly, opens her eyes wide to convey honesty and starts pleading her case. Antonella picks at her chicken thing and looks at her sceptically. Sarah, meanwhile - looks at me demurely and when I turn to look at her she looks away.

Then both Antonella and Sarah turn to their right, so I turn to my left and - "Fuck!" - that 9 foot tall waitress is back again and as she takes my plate, I say nothing - because I'm focusing on what Antonella is whispering - yes, literally leaning over, mouth cupped - she's whispering in Sarah's ear. The waitress takes all our plates, and I've got my head in my hands - because my head not only feels like it's underwater, but it still weighs heavier than my neck can support - and Antonella sits back down in her seat and, looking slyly, asks a question. (But I can't hear her at all... because "The change it had to come. We knew it all along.") I glance sidelong and see Whatsername nod ferociously in agreement. Again, out of the corner of my eye, I catch Sarah staring at me.

I can feel my hands buzzing against my face - my fingers little trembles of cold skin - and we're at the part of the song where you can hear nothing else but piano. It's like someone turned up the volume for just this song. And this is the best part of the song, where it's like six minutes into the song and you

²²And it's not that I don't realize it - it's that my memory has decided to be very selective about what it remembers. Apparently, it chose not to remember me eating. That must be why I'm still starving.

²³It's exactly like when I fall asleep in class.

²⁴It's either a piano, or a synth, or some weird thing that Townsend did with a guitar.

²⁵What's her name again? Fuck. I knew it like 5 minutes ago.

know they're building for the greatest rock n' roll scream ever recorded. And the piano keeps going and it feels like it's been going forever. Trancelike, each note rocks me back and forth. My eyes are shut now - I have no idea where I am. The world is dark to me, and all I hear are rapid-fire synth. keys going up and down the scale and repeating and repeating and it gets a bit louder and wait this is the best part 'cause this is where the drums come in -

And the world goes black - as I lift my hands to slam them down on the table - I can see a strobe light slow motion diner as pictures that don't make sense flash in front of me. There's Sarah. Flash. There's Sarah's boobs. Flash. There's the top of the table. Flash. This table is really gritty when you get close to it. Flash.

My head bangs the table with such force that it knocks over a water glass. I know this, because I am still committed to slamming down my hands in time with the drums - which I am currently doing - and my right hand is wet.

But the song keeps hammering on, with the drums and the piano combining to a big crescendo and now the diner fades back in and I can hear the girls laughing at me and my face goes red and I shouldn't even be here. Fuck you Matilda²⁶ I don't need to get laid, the only thing I gotta do is get outta here. And you know what, fuck you "the rest of the bar"²⁷, none of you know me. I'm the smartest motherfucker in here. I've got success guaranteed. My life is on easy street. And it's time for me to show it. It's time for me to act like the rock star I am and show these mere mortals what it means to be cool. It's time to get the fuck out of dodge the loudest way possible.²⁸

Now, in time to the song, I drag my head off the table - down to my "strength reserves". Running on fumes now, I push myself up - and it feels like I'm getting out of a pool - and I bring my legs around, stand them up on the booth then get up on the table - and once again the diner goes silent as the song swells to it's dramatic apex and I'm standing on the fucking table and with my eyes open I can see more and more faces turning to look and then I fall to my knees as Roger and I desperately scream out, "YEAHHHHHHHHH!!!"²⁹ my face contorted in painful ecstasy.

And now the sounds of the diner drown out the rest of the song - and it's stunned silence, combined with the hiss from the kitchen and the sound of a fork clattering to the ground.³⁰ From somewhere close to me, a male voices quietly slurs, "Rock on, brotha." And the diner rushes back to life as I stand up on the table and with everyone looking at me now I start dancing on the tables. ("Meet the new boss. Same as the old boss.") I am a star. Everyone loves me.

Except, I hear a male waiter start yelling, "Hey! Hey!" with fire in his voice. So I panic, and start running across the tables now, heading for the door.³¹ I almost slip on a plate of food as I kick everyone's drinks and food out of my way - this is a mad rush for the door now, everyone else is a blur as I see the tables fly by me. The only two things in focus are the waiter who's now running at me and the front door. And I've made it to the final table as I let myself fall to

²⁶Or wait. Mary? No. Marguerite? No. MaMaaAh Fuck it.

²⁷Or diner. Wherever the fuck I am. Whateverfuck all y'all.

²⁸Shit. This is gonna be hysterical!

²⁹Mmm! Mmm! Mmm! Yeah! Yes! God yes! Fuck. That wail is so orgasmic, man. If I were in hell and had to choose one scream to listen to for the rest of eternity - it'd be this one.

³⁰They don't know whether to laugh or yell at me.

³¹I had to find the passage back to the place I was before.

the floor and I've beaten the waiter to the door by several strides. I tearass out the door and into the warm night. He's far behind me as I burn towards a cab stand. He's nowhere in sight as I try and catch my breath. And I'm heaving as I say, "Mason and Bay." And I look behind me as the engine roars to life.
And I see the waiter come flying around the corner.