

## The Sunset Bar

I stopped at this bar, late one night, slightly depressed and full of shit. As I walked in, the door read the SKI ROOM. The neon sign outside said RAJI'S. So I was not really sure what the name was but, I figured it had to be one of the two. I actually prefer the SKI ROOM rather than RAJI'S. As I walked in, all the patrons turned their heads to see who was invading. Since I was a shy guy, I pretended to be more interested in the vending machine rather than getting to the bar for that first glorious drink of Kessler and Coke, short. Always short and stiff as possible.....Double shocked even. My favorite snack that I always received from the vending machines was peanut butter and cheese crackers. I do not know why but, I always had this thing for peanut butter. For my senior dissertation, one of my main props was a pack of peanut butter and crackers. This was because peanut butter contains aflatoxins and aflatoxins can cause cancer. This was what our senior seminar subject was about, the big C., Cancer. ( A tumor doubles in size every 60 days!) So I put fifty cents in the vending machine and got my sticky prize. As I turned to make my way to the bar, I saw an individual, a black man dancing to the jukebox. He was really loving that Motown! Not once looking up to see what was going on, he just kept snapping his fingers and dancing.....A patron named Bob introduced himself and pointed to the guy at the jukebox and said he's always doing that.....people call him "the jukebox man". Bob invited me to sit down for a drink, moving the stools and making room for his new found friend. The stools were nice, black, and comfortable. There was 14 to be exact around the bar. Bob waved the bartender over, who I might say was a beautiful Thai woman. Bob said he wanted to buy me a drink, asking me my name. I told him Jack. Bob told the bartender my name. The bartender nodded and said her name was "Q". I told her "I would like a Kessler and Coke, short". I took a bite of my cracker as Bob broke into a stutter and said

" so wwhaaat do you do JJJack ?"

" not much ..... I play a little music, film lake turnovers, and mix it in with just a pinch of limnology for a spicy flavor. "

" I'll dddrink to ttthat !", blistering into a stutter. He put his drink in the air and proceeded to cheer everybody in the bar. There were only about 8 people in the bar + the bartender who had a smile that could kill.....or at least create wonderful looking babies. Everybody seemed to have had plenty to drink. The guy sitting next to Bob kept squawking about how he had a billion dollars.

" I just made a billion dollars today ..... a million dollars !", as he looked at me.

" So how did you make that !", I asked sarcastically.

" I do it all the time.....everything I touch turns into a trillion dollars !" He was definitely fucked up. He about fell off his stool yelling out to everybody from Sunset to Hollywood Ave. He kind of seemed like a guy that was once in the KKK. He didn't like anyone looking at him for too long or he would tell you he would go get his pistol from

his winnobego and shoot you. I could tell he especially didn't like or trust the Thai folk. It seemed the more he got drunk the more belligerent he would get.

"Give me another drink you bitch!", yelling at Q.

"Your cut off.....you understand.....you can't speak to me that way!"

"I'd like to pet your pussy.....you stinking gook!"

Everybody in the bar told the billionaire to "shut up!" and finally his attention was drawn away from the young Thai woman. She always seemed too just wipe it off and eventually, just serve the bastard! I guess it came down to the money. He was so wasted he couldn't even remember where his wallet was.....on the ground..... by another soul, whose hands were so beat up that his face made Tom Waites look like he's seen a little less street life than this guy. The dude's name is Eric's Balls..... I could see it tattooed on his fingers. His fingers just reached the wallet, when the billionaire's eyes caught him. Eric said

"I was just gettin'it for ya' Jerrine-a-dream"

"Buy this man a drink" Jerry said ( to him).

Q yelled from the end of the bar.....

"I can't serve you any more!.....you want the vice squad or the ABC citing me with a violation."

"Bitch" Jerald barely getting it out.

"I've got a billion dollars and I'll buy a billion of you!"

My attention changed to a German babbling to himself and a guy named Ted, the newspaper reader. Bob tells me he reads the paper constantly at the bar. I grew fond of the fact I could always find him with a free paper to read and/or quote. The German, on the other hand, seemed perfect for any occasion. Drinking, crafting wood for a stage, and a little philosophy. He was a brother I never had.....my psychiatrist .....the side of a barn where I could kick my futball( ideas) around and get a little wise advice or response.....hmmmmmm.

The German would only show up when he felt he was done with usual craft, wood. He would drink till he was blue in the face and then he would lose his bike. He kept spares at home in case such an occurrence would happen. I think one time he told me had 13, to be exact. Some were for speed and some were for caring supplies.

"Oh' why don't you speak your mind?" he would say. Then he would answer himself as if he was talking to several people inside him.

"The mind is a woman's passion." I would talk to him for hours because he was always filled with stories about the olden' days, when he used to mingle with the stars and folks of the like.

At a corner of the bar, Ted would be in a political dispute that would last anywhere from a second to the whole time he was in the bar. He would turn to one guy.....

"These politicians are full of shit. I'm not going to vote for any of them."

"They are all a bunch of crooks!" he would say to the next guy.

Then there was Smilin', Redbud, and The Milkman. Their names were fairly descriptive of how they looked or what characteristics stood out most about them. The Milkman always had scotch and milk. I could tell he had an ulcer or a stomach problem similar to mine. But I still drank the hard stuff. Smilin' seemed un-intimidated by just about anything. He would smile in the face of danger. And last but not least, Redbud, he

reminded me of my high school buddy that I went through a lot of shit with in the younger years . Still I was only 30 compared to these older guys but, I still seemed to be able to relate to them in mind.....

At least in my mind. They would occasionally tease me for my age but, I soon learned to take the pain.

“ Turn this shit off !” Redbud would say about my music. The Milkman would request a little Motown and Smilin’ would get “Smile” by Tony Bennett.

This became a day in day out occurrence while other grifters/drifters would pass through the bar. The grifters were the prostitutes and peddlers that would barter anything they could get their hands on. The prostitutes ranged from regulars to an occasional beautiful woman that every joe in the bar would home in on , when and if she was noticed free for a fare. A fare ranging from gentle conversation to 50 bhat..... There was one prostate who’s name was Jane. She was an oversized blonde with schizophrenia. She occasionally cried and sometimes laughed. And every bartender was her girlfriend. There was also another prostitute named Connie. She was always asking for money for a phone call. For crack. And her hair changed shape weekly. Red, blue, long, short, and falling out..... Connie would never pay you back for anything and Jane always got a free drink from a UPS Representative, Charles. Charles was nice, spending lots of money on the bartenders that listened to his day-in and day-out, “ Say you love me’s”. Basically, there were miles and miles of folks that pop-up here and there. People like Mike, the red hair pool player that usually lost. The Russian cane lady that used to be a nurse way back when. The Mexican who drank Tequila until he fell down, still wanting more , and Vern who always came to the bar at 12:00am not a second early or later ..... Everybody would wait for the **Big 86** to happen. Who was going to be the next one to get thrown out of the bar. For a day or more. People got sent home all the time. Some daily. Some weekly. And some would never come back again.

The reality was everybody made there own reality. And the reality would change daily depending on how much one drank. Some drank a beer an hour. Some drank a beer a minute or a drink a minute. (“Drink” meaning a mix drink.) Some would put water in their drink and some would put soda in their drink. I always preferred soda. Patrons usually used water because they thought they were re-hydrating themselves as they drank. The shots were basically egashigradra’s ( the hungarian’s) and/or chaiyo’s ( the thai’s) that everyone was willing to drink after a big speech was given. Patrons would stay anywhere from 10:00 am to 6:00pm or From 6:00pm to 2:00am. Or any hours in between. And if you were lucky, you could hang out a 1/2 hour before opening time or a 1/2 hour after closing time. A couple of times I stayed from !0:00am to 2:30am. I still managed to drive home after 15 to 30 drinks. Money was no object. Objects weren’t even objects. The girls were. But don’t touch an Asian’s head. Her face was so soft that I wanted to put my cheek against hers. And the smell.....?

The most special gift was to be able to walk the Thia bartender to her car at the end of her shift. I occasionally did this hoping I would get a goodnight kiss but, it never happened..... A perfect smile or punch in the right arm was all I would get. The Thai bartenders enjoyed good conversation and sport and when all else failed drinking. The conversation ranged from confessional conversation to build-me-up and

break-me-down conversation. I seemed to get a little of everything. For some reason I think the girls knew that I was in the bar for other reasons. Yes, them. Women the sole reason for me to exist on this planet. Asian. Thai even. Soft, delicate, like the taste of good wine, the smell of the morning after. Sex.

I grew very fond of the Thai girls and friends. They always seemed ready for some action. Sometimes I would take a couple of the girls out to eat at a Thai joint. We would usually go to the restaurant where Pucky worked. This was next Jumbo's Clown Room on Hollywood Blvd. I would usually go out to eat with Oar and Tam. Tam loved to eat. We would give her whatever was left and she would gobble it up. Smiling. Oar was always worrying about her weight. She would hardly eat. She would be so weak in the day that I would try to make her eat every chance I got. She didn't realize that her body was so perfect. It reminded me of a temple. To go where no man has gone before. I found myself thinking about Oar all the time. Before I would go to bed. In the morning. In the middle of the night. I tried telling her about my dilemma but, I think she thought I said this to everyone. But the reality was that I was having extremely strong feelings for this woman. I start getting off work and I would head right to the bar mainly just to look at Oar. She had me right where she wanted me. I didn't care about anything else. ( and I still don't ) My alcohol consumption became overwhelming and I was drinking all the time. And thinking about Oar, what would it be like to be with her. She would make me a proud man. The only problem was I was drinking so much that I started to forget about my job, my music, my friends, etc. I think she thought I was going crazy or something..... My stomach would hurt so bad sometimes that I drank more to get rid of the pain. Sometimes I could barely get out of bed. Let alone make it to work. ( but I got out of bed just to see her.)The job became second to her. I wasn't even sure if she knew how much I liked her. I wanted her to know that I wanted to be with her forever. But every time I tried to talk about it, she would just rub it off, she probably thought I was just another drunk telling her that he was in love with her. I kept trying to quit drinking but, the overwhelming need for me to see her kept me drinking in the bar. It was the only way I get to see her. The bar patrons began to notice the drool on my upper lip and I soon became the 1,000,001th guy to fall in love with Oar. Everybody knew. I didn't really care though. I wanted her ! She would tear me apart in front of everybody to see how much I could take. Then when no one was looking she would almost be like a friend that I always wanted. Day-in day-out Tequila shots and Kessler and cokes. My head was so confused and everybody wanted me to be the gay guy. ( As Americans who aren't gay say, 'it takes one to know one, Rocky')But a man, like myself, lived to be with a woman like Oar. Strong. abrasive, silly, child like yet responsible. She was always taking care of everyone else. I think everyone was draining her. She always seemed to be helping someone out. She was always tired and exhausted. Never relaxed. I just wanted to take care of her but, she wouldn't let me. To her, I was just another drunk and everybody who was around her egged that thought on. The bar patrons would tell me to forget about her, the girls would try to make me think of them, and the drink was drinking me. How was I doing? "Fantastic, simply amazing !" "What is this?" Oar would say to me if she did not understand a word or phrase. She wanted me to quit drinking but, for some reason I thought she wanted to keep an eye on me. She started cutting me off and telling me to go home. " Come back later, to help me close." (And me and about 20 other guys would show up to help her close. I guess I felt I had to except it. I didn't what to show her any

act of violence or jealousy because I've been taught that violence is a means to an end and a hitter like myself knows he has to keep his cool.) And for some reason I would do exactly as she said. For some reason I started to feel some kind truth going on between us. I felt she was trying to tell me something. I knew then, I never wanted to let this woman get away from me. And that the drink would never drink me again.

**The End**

