

It May Be a Day, It May Be Forever

Every time the door opened and more people came into the bar a gust of cold air came blowing in behind them. I was sitting next to the door and I could feel the cold run all through me and I tell you now I liked it a lot better than I liked the people. They were all acting like it was something special just because it was New Year's—there were people playing pool, there were people talking and laughing, everybody was drunk, the bar was all smoky and noisy. They were all full of shit. I just wanted to sit at the bar and drink beer and feel cold. I just wanted to be left alone.

“Happy New Year, man,” the guy next to me said when I looked around. He was black, young, a kid. He smiled and lifted his bottle at me.

“Go fuck yourself,” I said.

He jolted back like he'd been slapped.

“Yeah, fuck you,” I said. “Just leave me the fuck alone.”

“Fuck you,” he said. He was a wiry little guy, not much bigger than me. He was a junkie, maybe, or a drunk. Or maybe he just wanted to get his ass kicked. I was pretty well fucked up myself, so I didn't care.

“No, man, fuck you *first*, motherfucker.” I shoved him

off his stool. When he got his balance he came up to shove me but I was ready, had the knife out, and I stabbed up and in. It hit him on the top inside of his arm, in the bicep.

“Shit,” I said. You always want to make your first shot a good one. The kid was stupid, though—he could’ve hit me with a bottle with his other hand, or he could’ve run away, or he could’ve done a lot of things, but he didn’t do anything, he just stood there looking like a stupid fucking piece of shit.

I pulled out the knife and stabbed him in the chest. The pretty-boy bartender dropped a bottle and that was the first I knew that people were looking at me. The kid was just standing there.

I started to get pissed off.

I pulled out again and stuck the dumb fuck in his belly. Then I pulled up and ripped him open, gutted him like a fucking fish, and it made this great sound—ripping, tearing, not just his stupid red flannel shirt but his skin, too, his belly was opening up and his fucking guts were pouring out the gash and it all sounded like the end of the fucking world. He was the second or third or fourth guy I’d stabbed that night and the sound that came out of him was like nothing I’d ever heard before. My knife hit something hard and I could feel his insides pumping and the feeling tingled up my arm into me and I felt like it was my heart that was going to explode instead of his. It was like nothing I ever felt before, either, and I knew the piece of shit was going to die.

For a second or so I didn’t know what to do. I took a breath and looked the black guy in his red eyes and he just looked surprised. It was like he couldn’t see me, like I wasn’t even there. He was as good as gone. I pulled on the knife with my tingling arm but it was stuck.

“Hey, hold it!”

It was hard to tear myself away from the kid, but I let go of the knife and turned around. Some other stupid fucking college kid in a blue shirt was standing there with a pool cue. A pretty big guy but he looked scared. I took two steps forward and punched the fucker good, right between the fucking eyes.

I fucking coldcocked the cocksucker with my right hand. He took a step back and keeled over onto a table and then rolled to the floor and the table turned over too and there were all these bottles rolling around and breaking and I was happy because it was like we were in a fucking movie, a TV show, a western. I laughed.

I said, "Fuck you, cowboy."

I looked around and the dumbfuck I stabbed was still standing there, only now there was blood dribbling out his mouth. He had one hand on his chest and the other on a barstool. Blood was running from his belly down his pants and some yellow and gray shit, I guess it was his guts, was poking out around his stupid shirt.

"Hey, man, give me back my fucking knife." I put my hand on his shoulder—it was the first time I'd touched the stupid fuck and he felt all soft and trembly—and I grabbed the handle of the knife and pulled. I pulled hard and it came out slow. There were bits of red cloth and bloody crud on the blade and I wiped it off on my jacket.

"He's limp! Travis! He's limp!" I heard this from behind me. I guess Travis was the fucking cowboy with the pool cue. Good fucking deal. The asshole tried to fuck with me.

The bartender was still staring at me. He was scared shitless, he just stood there with his pretty hair and his mouth open like he was waiting for me to stick my dick in it.

"Don't fuck with me, man," I said.

He didn't say anything. I could hear cowboy Travis's friend talking to him. The stabbed guy was standing there, only now he was wobbling a little bit. My beer was still on the bar so I grabbed the bottle and took a long drink. I was really thirsty. There was a mirror behind the bar and I looked in it and could see everybody in the bar looking back out at me. I could see me looking back out at me. I looked in the mirror and put the knife back in my jacket pocket.

I said, "So just don't fuck with me, okay?"

Nobody said anything. Nobody did anything. Nobody fucked with me. I finished the beer and pitched the bottle

behind the bar and it smashed into some other bottles and that sounded good, too. Then I was out the door and the air was clear and cold and I was away from all those assholes.

I walked a couple of blocks down to the river and lit a cigarette. The city was lit up nice and it was cold and dark so there wasn't anybody around to bother me. You could hear sirens all over the city, though, and pops from bottlerockets and firecrackers going off for the New Year. I stood there smoking and after a while I saw a car on the other side of the river come around a corner and swerve and smash quietly into a building. Fucking drunks. I smiled and threw the butt into the grass by the river and I headed home.

My sister Berta was still up. She was sitting on the floor watching some stupid movie on TV and it smelled like she'd been smoking some weed. The house was hot. The lights were turned down and there was all this blue light from the TV and some flashing red lights from the Christmas tree in the corner. I could hear the gurgling from Mom's oxygen machine in the other room.

"Be quiet," she said. "Mom went to bed and Monica's asleep, too."

"Aw, fuck them," I said. I went on into the kitchen and got a beer.

"What's wrong with you?" Berta asked.

"Nothing." I came back into the living room and sat on the couch. I opened the beer and took a drink and it tasted good. I was still thirsty. My hand was sore and starting to swell up from where I'd punched the cowboy.

"You didn't go to Tommy's party?"

"Yeah, but it sucked. So then I went to some bars but there were all these fucking drunks around." I thought of the guy I'd stabbed, his red eyes.

"You should've stayed home," Berta said.

I was staring at the TV. This monster—or something, I guess it was a monster, this thing—that looked like a giant golf ball was chasing people around in the dark. Every time the Christmas tree flashed a static line jumped across the

screen and it seemed like the people in the movie jumped, too.

“So what’re you doing here, anyway?” I asked after a while. “Couldn’t you get Mom to watch Monica?”

Berta turned around and looked at me. I couldn’t see her face very well but all of a sudden she sounded mad.

“No, I couldn’t,” she said. “Somebody has to stay home and watch Mom, forget about Monica. And you were out fucking around so I had to stay in.”

“Aw, fuck you.” I was tired of fighting. It was probably a big mistake to come home but I didn’t have anywhere else to go right then. Fucking home. How stupid.

“No, Jesse, fuck you. You’re never any help with Mom, you’re always off fucking around, you’re—”

I threw the can of beer at her and it hit her in the face and bounced off squirting foamy white beer all over. It barely stunned her. Berta was quick. She was up off the floor and over the coffee table and on me almost before I could do anything. She caught me good in the eye with her right hand and grabbed my hair with her left. I squirmed away and hit her good with my sore right hand and got up off the couch. Berta was screaming. She got up and jumped at me again and hit me once or twice but I managed to turn her around and grab her by the tits and throw her back down on the couch. I sat down on her chest and hit her two or three times in the face but she kept on screaming.

“Wha—wha—what’s this?”

I looked up and Mom was there in her wheelchair, oxygen tube running from her nose back out to her tank. She looked even grayer than normal in the light from the TV.

“Fuck you, Mom, this ain’t none of your business.”

“Call the cops!” Berta yelled. I put my hand over her mouth and she bit me.

“Bitch!” I hit her good.

“Jesse....” Mom gasped.

“Mom,” I said. “Go back to bed. You just got out of the fucking hospital.”

I got up off the couch and stepped onto the coffee table instead of over it but the piece of shit was made of wood and broke underneath me. I stumbled across the room to Mom.

“This is all your fucking fault, okay?” I said. “So just get the fuck back to bed.”

“I...I...I....” Mom made noises like the air going out of a big balloon. It sounded like she was never going to stop so I kicked the side of her wheelchair.

“Shut up! Go back to bed! This all your fucking fault!” I shook my fist at her. I kicked her chair once more but I guess I kicked too hard because the wheelchair went over and Mom rolled out onto the floor and she looked up at me scared.

“You think I asked for this shit? Huh? You think I want to live with you fuckers? You think I fucking asked to be fucking born? Fuck you, this is all your fucking fault, you fucking bitch!”

Then I saw something move out of the corner of my eye and before I could jump there was a fucking huge explosion in my shoulder and it really, really fucking hurt—I was seeing fucking stars and I didn’t even get hit in the head. I went down.

It was Berta. She’d snuck around to the closet and gotten my softball bat, a big gold aluminum 36-ounce Worth Ball Buster, and she’d hit me with the fucker. Bitch. Berta was a pretty good ball-player and had a good swing but I managed to roll away before she hit me again.

“Shit!” I scrambled back across the floor and got up.

“Don’t fuck with Mom!” Berta was waving the bat like she was waiting for a good pitch to come across the plate.

“Fuck you!”

She faked a swing and I fell for it and then there she was with the real thing and it caught me in the same spot on my shoulder, only not as hard. I stumbled back against the TV and knocked it over and the fucker sort of exploded or shattered or crashed or something with sparks and smoke and then the only light in the room was coming from the damn flashing Christmas tree. Berta swung again and I jumped back and

knocked the tree over and some of the balls popped when they broke on the floor. The lights stayed on, though. Mom was on the floor gasping and then I could hear little Monica crying. I took another step back.

“I’m sick of your shit, Jesse.”

Berta still had that fucking bat. I could see her when the red lights flashed. She swung but missed because the tree was between us and then she swung again and got me on the arm. This time, though, I was ready and I grabbed the head of the bat. I got it with both hands and jumped over the tree at her. Berta had a better grip on the handle but I was stronger than her even though my shoulder was fucked up.

We spun around the room trying to get the bat away from each other and then Berta slammed into a door frame and let go. I got the handle of the bat and clubbed her hard on the knee and she went down with a scream.

“Fucking bitch!” I yelled. “What the fuck are you doing?”

I kicked her four or five times where her balls would’ve been if she’d had any. Then I stepped back and caught my breath. I was leaning on the bat. Little Monica came into the room and ran across the floor to Berta. Monica was crying and Berta and Mom sounded about the same, both gasping for air.

“Shit!” I said. “What the fuck is wrong with you people? Are you all fucking crazy?”

I threw the bat across the room. It smacked into the wall and the head stuck in the plaster. For a moment the whole bat stuck out from the wall and then it tilted down and fell to the floor.

“Jesus, you people are really fucked up, man, you know that? You’re fucked!”

I walked to the door and left the house. That was just one more stupid kind of thing to do, I guess, because I really didn’t have any place else to go. I just wanted to get away from those people. I walked a couple of blocks down the street and stood under a streetlight and lit a cigarette. I was pretty banged up—my face hurt, my hand hurt, my arm hurt,

my shoulder really fucking hurt. Fucking Berta could fight.

I finished the cigarette and took a breath and headed on downtown. I didn't have anything else to do. I don't know why this kind of shit happens to me. All I know is it was a really fucked way to start a New Year.