

Disclosure

There was myself, Bernie and Phoebe. The party had sort of wrapped itself up, and we were the last ones awake, huddled together on the long arm of an L shaped couch. There was still this soft buzz between the three of us - you could tell that nobody wanted to go to sleep just yet.

"I've got a game," said Phoebe.

"But it's pretty full on, don't play if you're not willing to be completely open and honest, also, you might hear something you wish you hadn't."

"Sounds good to me," said Bernie.

"Yeah, I'm up for it," I chimed in.

"Okay, so here it goes. We each have to tell a story, a real story, about something you've done that made you feel like shit, and I mean really feel like shit," said Phoebe.

"That's easy, how about the time I sculled that bottle of homemade vodka in Koh Samui, I didn't crawl out of bed for like a week," chuckled Bernie.

"No, no you idiot, I mean something that made you feel emotionally like shit, but not like a relative dying or something like that, this has to be a regret, something that you still think about sometimes, something that will probably stay with you forever," said Phoebe.

"And of course whatever's said here tonight, stays here," Phoebe reassured, giving us each a stern look.

"Sounds intense, but I'm still in," said Bernie.

"Me too," I said.

"Awesome, so who's up first?"

1.

"I'll go, I guess," I said exhaling slowly.

"So um...did you guys hear about Stuffy's mum?" I asked hesitantly.

"Stuffy? The crippled kid from school?" Bernie replied.

"Ow!" cried Bernie as Phoebe slapped his chest with the back of her palm.

"You don't say crippled, you ass, Bernie. It's *disabled*."

"Yeah the disabled kid, he's the one." I said.

"Do you guys remember how his mum was at school practically every day helping him out with his books and things?"

"I remember," replied Phoebe.

"Yeah, me too," said Bernie.

"Well she died, just the other day." I said with a shake of my head.

"And you...killed her! Holy Shit Ash, that is a big secret, no wonder you feel guilty," Bernie chortled.

"No, you shit Bernie, I didn't fucking kill her."

"Ow!" Said Bernie as Phoebe hit him again.

"Stop being a twat and let him talk Bernie."

"Alright, alright just don't hit me again, sheesh, please go on Ash," said Bernie with a wave of his hand.

"Anyway as I was saying, Stuffy's mum died the other day."

"How'd you find that out?" asked Phoebe with a concerned look.

“Spencer sent me a text. But you guys know him, that cold hearted piece-of-shit, he sent it as though it was a joke, as though *what’s poor Stuffie going to do now? Ha ha ha*,”

“That sick bastard, Spencer, he truly is a piece of shit,” replied Phoebe in disgust.

“Yeah, yeah he is, but, back to my story.”

“I remember this one time in school, must have been in year eleven or twelve, because for some reason getting to class on time was an important thing. And do you guys remember how Stuffie used to always ask someone to help him carry his books up the stairs, because he always had that crutch with him on one arm to help him walk? And how that person was always five minutes or so late to class, but the teachers didn’t care because you were helping him out?”

“Yeah I remember, I loved helping him, so that I could wag some class,” Bernie responded, leaning back with a big grin.

“Well this one time I remember we had chemistry or biology or something like that, and for some reason I really didn’t want to be late that day. We were standing in the corridor by our lockers and Stuffie asked me to carry his books for him. I looked at him, stared straight into his eyes, I looked right at him, and then I looked at that metallic crutch of his, gripped tightly in his right arm and digging into the skin of his arm, I stared right at him and at that crutch and I said:

“I would, Stuffie, but I’ve really got to get to class today, I’m really sorry mate.”

“And then I turned around, and at that moment I swear he was still saying something, probably something along the lines of:

“Come on man, please, I need help, this bag is heavy. “

“But I just turned, I turned and I ran to class.” I added shaking my head in regret.

“And I’ve never forgotten it, it’s always been there weighing on the back of my mind.”

“And now, now his mum’s gone, and he’s all alone, just like he was that day, when I left him standing by himself in the corridor with a big fucking bag filled with books.”

“Fuck guys, I mean, god damn it.” I added with my head down and a croak in my voice.

Phoebe put her hand on my shoulder.

“Maybe you should call him Ash, see how he’s doing?”

“Yeah maybe I will Pheeb, thanks, maybe I will.” I replied, placing my hand on top of hers and gave it a gentle squeeze.

2.

“All right, my turn I suppose,” said Phoebe.

“This is one I’ve been holding on to for a long time, since I was thirteen in fact.”

“And before you say anything Bernie, no! It has nothing to do with sex you sick bastard.”

“Ha ha great minds think alike,” smirked Bernie.

"Idiot," said Phoebe.

"Anyway, I think you were in my form class, Ash, so you might remember when this happened. It was in a religious studies class, which was also the same classroom as our form class, I remember that my allocated desk was in the back left hand corner of the room, and I often found myself so damn bored in that class that I spent a lot of time either doodling or resting my head on that desk.

As you guys probably remember, there was plenty of graffiti on those desks from other kids, and I must have seen the writing on my religious studies desk a million times. One of the big ones read: *Jenna is Gay* in thick, faded permanent marker. And there was a Jenna in my form class, Jenna Lissauer, do you remember her Ash?"

"Yeah, yeah I do, she was nice, kind of quiet, and if I remember right, practically inseparable from that horrible, obnoxious, rich girl Donna Gandel."

"Yes, that was her, and their friendship comes into play in this story as well. Anyway, I doubt either of you guys ever noticed, as guys aren't particularly observant when it comes to friendships between girls, but back in those days I was fairly decent friends with Jenna and Donna. We didn't really socialise outside of school, or anything, but if I ever I found myself feeling a bit stranded at lunchtime or in a free period, I could always rely on finding the two of them somewhere, chatting away like there was no tomorrow, and they always politely let me join side in on their conversation without any fuss whatsoever. But, anyway, back to my story."

"There I was, in one of those god awful religious studies classes, lazing at my desk having recently finished colouring in all of the letter Os in my textbook, when absent mindedly, I began re-colouring in the letters of this graffiti that said *Jenna is Gay*. Then, when I had done that to a satisfactory level, I guess I must have felt like there was still something missing, so I added in the words *with Donna* in my regular hand writing, not with any malicious intent or anything, I mean it's not like I was pissed at them or anything. I just did it 'cause I was bored and I was doodling. And as soon as the bell rang for the end of class I completely forgot about what I'd done, like I did pretty much every other religious studies class."

"A couple of days later, once everyone had arrived in form class in the morning our form teacher Mr. Isaacs called for everyone to be quiet. He was standing at the front of class with Jenna standing right next to him, she looked pretty upset. And then he said something like this:"

"I like to think that you're a good bunch of kids, I do. However, someone in this class has gone out of their way to write something hurtful about another member of this class. And that person, whoever they are, is not a good person. A good person does not go out of their way to hurt other people for no reason. Whoever did this to Jenna, whoever wrote those things about Jenna on that table in the back, is pathetic, because they need to make others feel bad just so that they can feel better about themselves."

"And then he dismissed us, and I remember standing there in class, completely dumbstruck. And you know what, despite what he said I knew that there was absolutely no chance that I was going to own up to it. In fact I remember feeling how everyone else in class must have felt; wondering who it was and making wild speculations. I even approached Jenna, I walked right up to her and asked her what it said, even though I knew. I remember seeing how red her eyes were, she'd obviously been crying. She said that she didn't want to repeat it but it involved Donna. And I remember joking with her, suggesting that she compare the handwriting of everyone in class with what was written on the desk and she could find her culprit. I said that. Even though I knew that I was the one that did it. She said it was no good, she had already scrubbed it off."

"And I know that it's not that big a deal in the grand scheme of life and all of that, but it still eats at me, till this day, I mean how was I able to act like that after seeing how my actions harmed someone

I considered to be a friend? Mr Isaccs was right - a good person wouldn't do that. And what does that make me? What else am I capable of?"

"Shit, so that was you Pheeb?" I asked.

"I remember that, I remember all of the boys were having a laugh about it, and I felt so sure that it was one of them, I never would've guessed it was you," I said.

"Well it was. Alright Ash! Maybe you don't know me as well as you think you do." Phoebe said turning away from me.

"Pheeb, regardless of how you might see yourself, I don't think there's anything that could change the way I see you," I said trying, to comfort her.

"Awww how sweet, do you guys want me to leave?" Mocked Bernie.

"Shut up Bernie! Phoebe and I said in unison, before laughing.

"Thanks Ash," said Phoebe with a slight smile.

"Alright then, Mr. Bigshot, it's your turn Bernie," said Phoebe.

"Alright, can do guys. Here it goes."

3.

"So do you guys remember how I volunteered to be a tutor at that summer school for high school kids a couple of years ago?"

"Yeah, didn't you tell us that all of the tutors just got drunk and slept with each other?" I asked.

"Yeah, man, it was awesome!"

"Damn it! Bernie, I said not a story like that!" exclaimed Phoebe.

"It's not like that, I swear Pheeb, geez why don't you ever just give me a chance."

"C'mon Pheeb let him speak, we had our turn."

"Alright, alright, but he better not be a dick about it."

"So anyway as I was saying, it was during that period while I was tutoring at the summer school, and yes the other tutors and I were getting trashed most nights after class, and yes I did hook up with a few of the girls that were tutoring. But this is related to that, so just hear me out."

"It was after one of those big nights out, and one of the other tutors, Jono and me were on our way home. We walked to the Flinders Street taxi rank together and waited at the back of a pretty long line. I remember it being kind of cold for December, but the beer we'd drunk was keeping us warm. And we got to discussing some of the tutors we had hooked up with at the summer school:"

"Dude seriously, Bernie, you have to try Alisha, I mean seriously man you have no idea, that girl is nuts!"

"Alisha? You fucked Alisha? Seriously man? Man when did that happen?"

"You remember that night, I was making out with her and Emily at the same time at The Clyde, it was after that!"

"Ah yeah, man that was crazy, I was a bit busy with Lucy at the time, but did I tell you that later that night I caught the train home with Emily and fucked her in the back of my car outside the train station?"

"You did? Ha ha, man that is some crazy shit, those girls are fucking nuts!"

"Have you had Lucy yet by the way?"

"Nah man I've been meaning to, but haven't had the chance yet, it'll happen sooner or later though, mark my words, ha ha man."

"That Alisha though, fuck man I'd love a go at her."

"Wasn't she fucking that guy Raph over at South Lawn as well?"

"Yeah she was and then he saw her making out with me and Emily and got all jealous, but she wasn't having any of it."

"Seriously man you have to go there, she'd definitely be up for it!"

"Dude, Ash you have to, as my friend I want you to try her out, you have to."

"I want to, man. And dude, you should have a go at Emily if you get a go, she was pretty nuts, let me come inside her without a condom and all!"

"Ha ha shit dude, that is some nasty shit!"

"Ha ha, yeah we're so going to hell man!"

"So there we were, two drunk kids, arms over each other's shoulders, boasting about the girls we'd fucked, our nuts filled with testosterone, convinced that the world was ours. And then this young couple standing in front of us at the taxi rank turned around. They were maybe five years older than us. They waited for Jono and I to stop laughing and then they said:"

"Yeah, you are going to hell" the man said.

"Yeah, why don't you just shut the fuck up, you're both disgusting," the woman said.

"And we just looked at them in response, turned to face one another, and burst out in uncontrollable laughter again. They turned back around and we mumbled imitations of them under our breaths, until our cabs showed up and Jono and I split ways."

"But on that cab ride home, that couple's comments began to nag at me. And I know I was pretty drunk, but for some reasons I just started crying. And I couldn't stop. And I'm sure the cabbie was used to that kind of thing 'cause of all the drunks he probably picked up, but still, I was embarrassed. There was just something about their words that really hit home, you know? I mean there they were, two decent people, out enjoying a night together, in love, or not in love, whatever, and there I was, this piece of shit who takes everyone and everything for granted, uses whatever girls that come his way and then speaks about them in public as though they were nothing. "

"Anyways that was it, that was the lowest I've ever felt, and it nags at me to this day. And I know I'm still not great with girls, not great with the things I might say, the showing off and all, but I'm working on it, I want to be better, I don't want to be that guy that was standing at the taxi rank anymore."

"Bernie, I didn't realise," said Phoebe.

"I'm sorry for being so hard on you all of the time, I didn't realise you were trying to change."

"That's alright Pheeb, I know I can be a right dick sometimes," Bernie said smiling at Phoebe.

“That was a good game Pheeb,” I said.

“Yeah, cheers for suggesting it Pheeb,” said Bernie, seemingly back to his old self.

“No worries guys, but now I think it’s time for bed,” said Phoebe.

“Yeah I’m knackered, sweet dreams you two,” said Bernie.

“Goodnight guys,” I said.

And we slept like that - the three of us huddled about one another on the arm of that couch, closer than we had ever been.