

Lemon Garlic Tilapia

by
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A man sits at a bar. He drinks and speaks. The bartender listens.

DAN: THE MAN AT THE BAR

I'll tell you one thing; it's easier to give advice than to take it.

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

Don't I know it.

Dan finishes his drink.

DAN

Every one loves me. I'm serious. I went to the to the grocery store last week and I'm looking for frozen tilapia. (beat) Ever have tilapia?

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

Never had the pleasure.

DAN

It's fish. It's white and flaky. Really nice. I gotta great recipe for lemon garlic tilapia.

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

Let me guess: it's tilapia with lemon and garlic.

DAN

Fuck you.

They laugh. Mike pours Dan another drink and pours one for himself as well. They clink glasses. They drink.

DAN

Butter and parsley.

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

What?

DAN

Lemon, garlic, butter, and parsley. Get some tilapia next time you go shopping. You'll thank me later.

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

I'll do that. Hey! Uh-oh. What if they run out? I better close up shop right now. See ya!

Mike takes a step or two, pretending to leave the bar.

DAN

Then don't get it. I don't care. It's your loss. Anyway, I was in the middle telling a story. Until you interrupted.

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

I interrupted?

DAN

What? I interrupted myself?

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

Yeah. You did.

DAN

Let me give you some advice: the customer is always right.

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

Paying customers are always right.

DAN

You gonna let me tell my story or what?

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

Go ahead, mister customer. I'm done interrupting.

DAN

Thank you. So, I'm in the store and I run into Jimmy. You know Jimmy?

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

Vascotti?

DAN

Who?

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

Jimmy Vascotti.

DAN

Italian?

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

Yeah.

DAN

Jimmy Vascotti? What kind of a name is that for an Italian guy? Jimmy's an Irish name.

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

Oh, it's mandatory, huh? Only Irish people can be named Jimmy?

DAN

I don't know any Italian Jimmies. Do you?

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

Jimmy Durante. Jimmy Roselli. Jimmy Fontana. Jimmy Garoppolo. Jimmy Vascotti.

DAN

You're not getting a tip if you keep this shit up.

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

I wouldn't get a tip from you if I gave you a blow job.

DAN

That's because you use your teeth. All three of them. Anyway, I see Jimmy Callahan. Remember him? He's a lawyer now. He went to St. Mary's with us. He left in the sixth grade? They kicked him out? Remember? He had to go to public school. Jimmy Callahan. (beat) He could fart whenever he wanted to.

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

Ohhhh ... that Jimmy Callahan! He's a lawyer now? Get the Hell outta here. He was none too bright. He looked like a communion candle. He had a tiny little head.

DAN

It grew.

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

Good for him.

DAN

So, Jimmy sees me and hugs me. He says, "how the fuck are you?" I haven't seen him in years, right, and now he's so happy to see me he's humping me in isle six right next to the Cheerios.

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

Did you give him a tip?

DAN

Yeah, your wife's phone number. You're interrupting again, wiseass. So, we start talking about this and that, one thing leads to another, and all of a sudden he's inviting me over for dinner to meet his family. I haven't seen this bastard in decades and suddenly he can't get enough of me. This sorta stuff happens every day to me. Wherever I go people love me.

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

You're a lovable guy, Dan.

DAN

Yeah ... I'm a lovable guy.

Dan tries to make a bird out of a cocktail napkin and pathetically throws it like a paper airplane.

DAN

So, if I'm so lovable then why doesn't my own son talk to me anymore?

Mike pours Dan a drink.

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

I don't know, Dan. He will one day.

DAN

I'm running out of days.

Mike pours himself a drink.

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

Ain't we all.

Dan tries again to make a bird out of a cocktail napkin and, again, he throws it pathetically.

DAN

I didn't kill his mother.

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

No one says you did.

DAN

Yeah, well, he thinks so.

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

That's his problem. Not yours.

Dan drinks and then slams his drink down onto the bar.

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

Hey! Don't break the glass again or -

DAN

My fuckin' son won't talk to me! It *is* my fuckin' problem. Seven years. It's been seven fuckin' years and -

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

I know! I know, Dan. We all know! The whole town knows. He won't talk to you and there's not a Goddam thing you can do about and it sucks and it's wrong and -

DAN

I'm gonna go to his house right now and tell him -

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

Don't do that. The last time you did that he called the cops.

DAN

He called the cops on his own father. Can you believe that? The son of a bitch called the fuckin' cops! I didn't kill his mother. I didn't fuckin' kill her. She just fuckin' died.

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

We know!

Dan throws the glass.

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

Don't do that Dan. I hate having to kick you out.

DAN

Shit. I'm sorry, Mike.

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

Yeah, I know.

DAN

I'm a lovable guy.

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

I know.

DAN

I'm gonna go get me some tilapia.

*Dan stands briefly, but is stopped by a vertiginous spin.
He sits again.*

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

Not a good idea right now.

DAN

I'm hungry.

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

Here! Have some peanuts.

He slides him a bowl of peanuts. Dan starts eating them.

DAN

Everybody loves me.

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

That's right. Everyone does.

Dan throws a peanut at Mike.

DAN

Why does he think I killed her, Mike?

Dan throws another peanut at him.

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

I don't know. Stop that!

DAN

Yes you do.

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

I wasn't there. I don't know. Nobody knows.

DAN

Don't fuck with a fucker, Mike. You know. (beat) Shhhit. (beat) You know. (beat) You got any Tylenol?

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

Yeah.

Mike reaches under the table, grabs a bottle, pops the top, and places two Tylenol on the bar. Dan gestures that he doesn't have anything to wash it down with. Mike grabs a glass and pours him a drink. He pours too much, so he pours some back in the bottle. He gives the drink to Dan. Dan pops the Tylenol and drinks the drink.

DAN

Thanks. (pause) You know. Tell me. Tell me, Mike. Tell me. Go ahead. Tell me. Tell me again, Mike. Tell me why my own son -

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

Because you were last one to see her alive and you were too fuckin' drunk to call 9-1-1. (he stares at him) You just sat there and ate your fish.

DAN

I just sat there.

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

And you did nothing.

DAN

That's right. I did nothing. I, I didn't do a goddam thing. I did nothing wrong. See? That's what I'm talking about. That's the reason. That's what I've been sayin.' I was just too fuckin' drunk. Me? Too fuckin' drunk. Holy shit!

Dan starts laughing and laughing. He is noticeably drunk.

DAN

I gotta recipe for fish. You know that? You throw it in a pan with a shit load of butter. A whole lotta butter. Don't skimp on the butter. Then you throw in some garlic. A whole loaf of garlic. You can't ... you can't stop the good stuff. Know what I mean, Mikey? People don't follow through. They leave things out. You can't do that. No waste. Don't waste life. Got it? And then you grind up some lemon peels. I used to throw lemon peels in the trash. Not anymore. I cook 'em. I fry 'em up with the fish. You don't waste that shit. I used to waste that shit. Not anymore. I don't waste anything. I'm ... I'm conshee ... conscientous now. I cook it. I'm a good cook, Mike. I really am.

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

I know you are.

Dan gulps down a bunch of peanuts and presently starts choking on them. He grabs his throat in distress. Mike pours himself a drink. Dan's breathing is becoming labored. He begins to turn red. Mike drinks his drink, calmly watches Dan, and thinks. Dan, in distress, returns the gaze. Finally, Mike slowly walks around the bar and gives Dan a few back blows, dislodging the peanuts. Dan's breathing normalizes. Mike gently takes Dan's arm.

DAN

Where we going? To get the fish?

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

Later. We'll get the fish later. Let's have you lie down in the back. Sleep this one off.

DAN

You gonna sleep with me, Mikey?

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

Not this time.

DAN

Remember how we always slept together, Mikey?

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

Yeah. Every Saturday night.

DAN

Fuckin' shadow puppets. And snot bubbles.

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

Then mom would yell at us.

DAN

Yeah.

They start to walk.

DAN

You still love me, right?

MIKE: THE BARTENDER

Everybody loves you, Dan.

They exit. End play.