

Bones

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## THE LAST BAR FIGHTER

They call me the Boneman.

I'm the meanest, baddest, drunkest motherfucker to ever step foot into a bar. I live my life according to nobody's rules by my own, and I only have two - drink and kick ass. I do both with a passion and a fury and a frequency unmatched by any man before, and should you dare run out of whiskey while I'm sitting at your bar, woe be to you. I'll smash my glass against your face. I don't give a fuck's fuck if you're old or young, man or woman, I'll leave you bloody and crying on the barroom floor with a mouth full of bourbon-brown glass shards, and I'll kick the ass of every single man in there who made the unfortunate mistake of stopping in for a drink at the same watering hole as yours truly.

I've been drinking and fighting for two decades now and I've kicked more ass than a dirty dog has sniffed. I've kicked more asses than barstools have held. I've kicked so much ass that farts run from me. I know more about kicking ass than Charmin knows about wiping them. Bars take out hefty insurance policies for two things - fire, and me.

I'm 34 years old. The last twenty years of my life have been hard liquor, shattered glasses, and kicked asses. And I don't plan on dying anytime soon. The world, as I see it, is full of small dicks and idiots, and I intend to kick every single one of their asses.

Allow me to introduce myself. I'm the Boneman. I'm the meanest, I'm the baddest, and I'm the drunkest, and when I sit down at the bar, you best get the fuck up.

Now, with that out of the way, I shall begin to tell you my tale. The story of a whiskey drinker in a world gone Vodka, the story of an asskicker in a world gone pussy, the story of the world's last barfighter and his quest to find his princess.

. . .

The quest begins in a shitty Southern town which will remain unnamed, as I may one day find my way back there, and I'd prefer to not have a hungry mob of raging rednecks awaiting me. Plus, as far as I know, the cops never found out just who the hell I am.

They don't know me, just my legacy.

I arrived into town on a hot steamy afternoon after an eight day journey of trekking along the side of a lonely highways, hitching rides from chatty truckers, and squatting in the backs of pick ups with Mexican crop pickers. I had spent the previous week in jail on charges of drunk and disorderly, and I promptly skipped town on my release rather than wait for the court case. I wouldn't be going back there any time soon. No matter, it wasn't my kind of town anyway. The women were cold and large, and the bars reeked of piss.

I entered this new location in my usual fashion, on foot, kicking up road dust and the long-forgotten empty 32 oz soda cups, so beloved by construction workers and gum-chewing fat moms, that lay dead and brown in the weeds along the sides of the highway exits. I had two twenties in my pocket, not enough to cover an evening of heavy drinking, much less a room in even the sketchiest motel. But another night of sleeping in the bushes beside the road or with the dumpsters behind a soul food restaurant was just not an option after this week's long trek, and so it seemed I'd have to fuck myself into a pub slut's warm bed, or fight myself into a jail cell's. Neither were terribly appealing scenarios, but both would provide a real toilet to shit in, and after these past eight days, that alone would be worth the potential crabs or cavity search.

Shortly after stepping off the exit ramp, right past the dirty blue graffiti-covered sign that told me there's a Hardees and a fill-up station two miles to my left and a Taco Bell a mile to my right,

I spotted what I was looking for. My eyeballs hadn't been busted bad enough yet for me not to still see good, and I knew exactly what that worn down, leaning shack resting along the side road with the pick up trucks lined up and down, two deep, was - a bar. I wouldn't need to walk much further before I'd be sitting down to a cold bottle of beer and a shot of something strong. If all went well, I'd be able to walk out of there with a good buzz and empty pockets, and if they went real well, I'd be doing so with bloody knuckles and someone else's money in my pants.

Big Jake's Roadhouse was its name, according to the faded sign out front with the painted skunk in a tight jean skirt and big titties welcoming me to the spot for the South's Coldest Beer and Loudest Guitars. Yeah, that'll work.

A bar, a pub, a tavern - they all mean essentially the same thing, but with each having its own distinctive quality. A roadhouse, on the other hand, is a bit different. It basically means "all of the above," but full of rednecks. Any yuppie dumb enough to step into a true, red-blooded roadhouse is sure to receive, at best, a cold stare by the hunching patron he sits down next to, and worst, a broken nose on his yuppie face. Jake's was no different. My kind of place.

Upon entering I was greeted by the familiar untrusting looks from the dirty cover-all'ed , hairy-backed fatsos at the bar who'd turn their heads slowly over to observe the stranger that just violated their comfort zones, then back down to their depressing mugs of warm Budweiser. There was a good twenty feet or so of wooden floor between me at the entrance and the long, unremarkable bar that stretched along the back wall. Six males in stools were crouched over it, their backs and fat ass cracks staring at me. Four of them sat together on one side of the bar, construction workers drinking off today's paycheck. An empty bar stool separated them from the other two guys - one pony-tailed, the other bald, on the opposite end. All were white. Which was a promising sight to a bar fighter.

To my right, past the jukebox and cigarette machine, were three pool tables, each surrounded by a group of three or four guys, ages spanning from early twenties to probably late fifties. All white. Most smoking. The rest chewing Skoal. All but two of them wore tank tops. A scrawny young one wearing a pathetic patch of thin blond hair under his nose that he probably called a

mustache, who was leaning over the table with a pool stick, broke his concentration on the cue ball to leer up and over at me with a scowl. That scowl, that gap-toothed scowl with the smoking cigarette dangling out of it, was going to cost him an extra special beating by the Boneman.

I scanned the tables and counted the men - 3, 4, 4. Eleven in all. Add the six at the bar and we had seventeen. That made thirty-four fists. I've dealt with worse.

The other side of the roadhouse held an empty stage and a dark dance floor with a few scattered fold-up chairs thrown slapdash across it. Must be the spot for the South's Loudest Guitars that the big-titted skunk had been bragging about.

Manning the bar was a young woman named Sally, or so I gathered from the broad, bearded construction worker in the group of four waving his empty mug at her and yelling for "anutha, Sally!" Sally wasn't anything to brag about. A drunken fuck, for sure, but nothing to change your life over. Middle-aged, or at least she appeared so. Half of her years spent drinking and smoking and serving drinks and smokes to all the assholes who patronize a bar like Jake's had left her looking a bit haggard. Her hair was pulled back in a ponytail, with sweaty strands that got loose protruding out above her ears. Her tight black Jim Bean t-shirt covered a set of breasts that would be impressive were they not countered by the muffin top of belly fat that swelled out over her tight jeans. Sally's face was pretty but gaunt, with the wrinkled pale skeleton skin one gets from a life of sucking down Marlboros. All in all, she was rather sad in her averageness, and this was a good thing, as I aimed to bed her and earn myself a night of free drinks, free sex, and a clean pot to piss in. Should a fight not break out first.

I walked across the room, my dirty, worn boot stomps echoing off the walls. Good. I wanted to be heard. I wanted to be noticed by all the sorry fucks who hadn't sized me up yet. I pulled the remaining stool out from under the bar, letting its rickety wooden legs screech across the floor, and sat down. In between big bearded loudmouth on my left and ponytail on the my right. I could see both eyeing my reflection in the Michelob Light mirror behind the bar. Good. Stare

away, boys. Mentally measure dicks. Do what you gotta do. When the time comes, we'll see what makes a man.

Sally ashed her cigarette and sauntered over to me.

"Whatcha drinkin', hon?"

"Shot of well whiskey," I replied. "And some of that coldest beer I've heard so much about."

I smiled. She smiled back. She liked me. No surprise. I'm not a bad looking guy. Nothing to change your life over, of course, but weathered living hadn't done me so wrong. My face was hardened, but my eyes were a bright blue. When they weren't red. And they alone made up for the crooked boxer's nose and uneven cheek bones. A girl like Sally would get a look at the eyes and would see right past the misshapen mug that had protected my brain matter from so many fists and flying bottles. I kept my hair short cause I could cut it myself that way, and so no one could grab hold of it in a battle, and next to ponytail on one side of me, and fat haggard bearded gutter-jockey on the other, hell, I could almost pass for dignified.

She turned to get my drink. Her ass was not bad. Not bad at all. Of course, after spending last week walking highways and the week before in a jail cell, just about any female ass to me would look like a t-bone to a fatty. As she poured the beer, I pulled my two twenties from my jeans and placed them on the bar top in front of me.

This move with this dollars, it had two goals. One, to gauge Sally's experience behind the bar - understand what kind of woman I'm dealing with. And two, because I wanted the fellas at the bar to see it. Let that money stare them in the fucking faces. I would even leave it on the bar when I went for a piss. Give them an opportunity to man up and swipe it, or let it be, and possibly prevent Hurricane Boneman from tearing through the place.

Sally returned with my drinks, grabbed the top bill, rang it in the register, and returned to place the change on top of the remaining twenty. She was good. Experienced. Understood that her tip pile and her payment pile were the same pile, and every beer she served me that didn't get added to the register meant more rent money for her. I liked Sally. I was already looking forward to a good breakfast tomorrow.

And so there I sat for the next few hours, at Big Jake's Roadhouse, chasing down a shot of whiskey (I'd order a well, Sally would bring me a Jack instead) with a beer, getting drunker and drunker, while beard on my right and ponytail on my left did the same. My dollar pile diminished much more slowly than the beers in my mug did. Things were going quite well, and it was looking like it was going to be a violence-free night. A welcome change, tell you the truth.

But that was before the band started playing.

I hadn't given too much thought to the band members when they showed up as the skies began to darken, and the neon window bar lights began to glow, challenging the nighttime stars with their buzzing reds and whites and blues. Just a graying long-haired guy lugging a couple of guitar cases and an overweight, goateed bald man delivering a drum kit one piece at a time. Nothing unique about a good American bar band, and while I hadn't seen any singer yet, I really couldn't give a shit.

Even when 10 pm came and I was good and sauced up, and gray hair struck the opening licks on his guitar, and goatee stomped on the kick-drums, and the college kid bassist with the backwards ball cap joined in to finish out the rhythm section, I paid little attention. I was focused on Sally. Staring at her through cloudy eyes, saying dumb shit, making her laugh, like I'd been doing all night.

But then I heard the voice.

I didn't need to turn around and face the stage to know that there was an angel creating those sounds that emanated from the low grade speakers. Sally, who was standing across the bar from me, saying something sexy, disappeared. The words that left her mouth never made it to my ears. She disappeared. Beard and ponytail beside me disappeared. The bar, the drinks, the dollar bills, disappeared. The only thing that existed at the moment, in my liquor reality, was that voice.

That beautiful, angelic, feminine Southern voice.

I had to see her. Had to see this gift from the heavens producing that sweet sound. I turned. Up there on stage, standing square in the center, in between ball cap bassist and gray haired guitar, holding a microphone up to her mouth, was the angel. She was unlike anyone I'd ever seen before. Absolutely stunning. Her curly brown hair flowed down to her shoulders, partially blocking my view of the lips that opened and closed and released those precious sound waves. Wrapped around her shoulders was a jean jacket, which was open in the front, revealing a perfect set of breasts behind a pink bikini top, showing the world what could, but never would by any mediocre man, be had. Her jean jacket drifted down to her waist and into a short tight jean skirt, which opened at the bottom to release two flawless, long white legs covered in fish net stockings. My eyes followed those legs down to her pink high heels, the left one tapping erotic on the stage floor, and then back up to her shins, her knees, her skirt, her navel, her breasts, her neck, her face. Her face was as beautiful as her voice. She was perfect. A goddess. A princess.

I wasn't the only one entranced. Beard and Ponytail had spun their stools around to watch. The boys at the pool tables had all stopped their games to stare across the barroom at her. Their cigarettes, forgotten, smoked aimless and alone in the ashtrays. One of the tables, the one with the scowling scrawny kid from my initial entrance, was unoccupied. Scowler and his tank-topped troupe had quit mid-game, moving to the dance floor to stand at the foot of the stage and gaze wide-eyed and open-mouthed at the siren who had the entire room hypnotized.

The song came to an end. And the beauty spoke.

"Good evening, ya'll. Thanks for coming out tonight. We're Princess Kitty and The Southern Knights."

"Goddamn right!" howled Scowler, and the room erupted in a chorus of hoots and hollers.

Princess Kitty laughed into the microphone, and the drummer banged his sticks together, yelling "One Two Three!" and the guitarist blasted out the opening riff of an old Skynrd classic. The crowd went nuts. In a bar like this, Skynrd's a no-brainer.

Princess Kitty opened up her pipes again and filled the room with her other-wordly sounds. Scowler and his gang of goons began to dance, banging their heads and bouncing up and down,

tank tops flapping off their shoulders, in that ridiculous way that juveniles with no appreciation for good music do. I hated Scowler, and on any other day, motherfucker would be laying on the floor with two broken legs for dancing like that, but there was an angel in the room this evening, and so I intended to behave.

Of course, intention means shit when you live by your fists, and you just have to let your mind go where it needs to go and try to keep your teeth and your balls away from the steel toed boots when that inevitable time arrives that your fists decide they're ready to beat some ass.

And so it was, when Scowler leaped up off the dance floor, grasped his gangly hand towards Kitty singing above him, and pulled her pink bikini top down off her left breast, exposing her nipple to the crowd. She just stood there for a moment, her tittie hanging out for all the horny bastards to salivate over as Scowler bounced back into his crowd of cronies, waving one hand in the air while the other clutched onto his crotch in that way that the gangsta kids do it. And so it was, as Kitty broke from her shock to spin around and protect what remained of her modesty and gray hair guitarist stopped playing and mouthed, "What the f..." and Scowler slapped his buddies five, that I initiated my next bar fight.

Kitty barely had time to scream, "Son of a bitch!" before I was up and off my bar stool and charging towards the bastard with the pussy peach fuzz mustache and Taz tattoo. Scowler didn't see me coming. But his overweight cohort did.

"Dude! Bouncer!" Fat and Ugly yelled.

Scowler could only wish the snorting bull coming his way was a bouncer. But it wasn't. It was the fucking Boneman. And the Boneman was looking for blood.

Scowler shit his pants on the exact moment that I pounced on him and my fist shattered his nose. He fell backwards, with me on top of him, my left hand clutching his tank top, the other curled into a tight ball, repeatedly pounding his nose, eyes, mouth. By the time he hit the floor, there were already two puddles there waiting for him - one from the blood splashing out of his face, the other from the shit streaming out of his shorts.

It didn't take long for Scowler's buddies to wake up, man up, and jump to their boy's defense. They piled on top of me, the four or five of them raining down with fists and boots.

It didn't feel good, of course, but I'm a big old boy, much bigger than these kids, and I was wearing a pretty strong whiskey forcefield at the time, and so when I heard Kitty's voice screaming through the speakers, "Get off him!", I decided I'd stay down and let them wail on me a bit. You know, for a little dramatic effect. Ladies love the underdog.

In the corner of my eye, in between the boot stomps and fist pounds, I noticed a most spectacular sight. All the other rednecks in the bar, the ones who had nothing to do with this particular fight, had exited their stations - their barstools, pool tables - to take a free swing at the jaw of the next closest man. You see, a fight in a bar is a contagious thing. And when you take a group of humans who's mental capacity is a stone's throw away from that of a wild dog's, a small fight in the middle of the dance floor is all it takes to turn the entire bar into a romper stomper. These idiots were transforming Jake's Roadhouse into a brawl house, and in doing so, were turning the odds in my favor. I was no longer a stranger to these parts. This was all very good.

Then I felt the crack against my jaw. A hard hit. Hard enough for the lights to go out for a second. The warm blood that began to flow from the pulsating ball of hurt growing quickly on my face revealed that it wasn't a mere fist that had gotten me, but a fist wrapped in brass knuckles.

It was Fat and Ugly standing right above me, his fist raised up behind his shoulder, poised for another strike, the bar lights flickering off the metal rings. I rolled off of Scowler's gasping, bloody body as the fist came down, missing my head by inches and crashing down into Scowler's shoulder. The sound of his pained screams couldn't cover the loud, nasty crack of his shoulder snapping. Ouch. I pushed myself up off the floor against the force of Scowler's crew who continued to ram their boots into my back and beat me with pool cues.

I made it to my feet, and with a swing of my hand, I swatted three of the redneck flies away from me, providing a clear path to Fat and Ugly. He just stood there terrified, a dipshit deer in headlights, as I raced to him, cocked my arm back, and swung a blow to his face so hard he

literally spun in 360s before toppling to the floor, his brass knuckles skittering across the hardwoods over to the bar. The weapon slid underneath the boot of Ponytail, who was trapped in a headlock by one of the construction workers. This place was getting out of control. Ponytail's bald friend was stepping backwards towards the pool tables, away from two of the other construction workers who were prodding at him with broken bottles. Baldie was making a mistake by going back there, as it too, had erupted into chaos. Pool sticks were cracking over heads, bloody rednecks were flying over pool tables, bottles were smashing against walls, backs, faces. It was an absolute circus. These fuckers were beating on their friends - the guys they were laughing with and bumming smokes to just minutes ago. Crazy bastards didn't give a shit! It looked like every single man in this place was fighting! Fucking beautiful. I could account for each drinker I'd scanned when I'd stepped in here except for one...

BAM!

The big bearded construction bastard. The "Anutha, Sally" son of a bitch from the bar. Whatever he used to hit me in the back had come down on me with the force of a Dodge Ram. The wooden seat of a bar stool, it was. I knew the feeling well, the way the rounded corner of the seat gets you right in the small of the spine, knocking the wind out of you, turning your legs to rubber, your torso into a stinging inferno of seared nerve endings. The force of the hit sent me flying forward before I could fall, and I tripped over the writhing body of Scowler (damn Scowler again!) and fell face first onto the elevated stage. My head hit the pine flooring with a crack, and again the lights went out. Damn, I was getting my ass kicked out here! My eyes involuntarily closed and the ringing in my ears became deafening. Consciousness was slipping away, and that was bad. Real bad. I could feel my body begging me to just stay down, just snooze for a couple seconds. Just enough to allow that horrid ringing to subside. This was the dangerous moment. The moment when you give up. The moment when you lay down to die. When you wake hours later in a jail cell with a migraine and pants soaked in piss. I forced my eyes open. And I witnessed a glorious sight.

The pink stiletto heel of Kitty's shoe.

My face pressed against the stage floor, bloody drool leaking from my mouth into a pool that soaked my cheek, I stared at that foot. I could smell it. It smelled like Christmas. What was she still doing here? She was standing up on stage, gazing out at the battlefield that was once her concert hall, frozen in fear and frustration. The microphone dangled by her waist, hanging from the cord she held curled loosely in her fingers.

"Hey! Hey! Big Man, wake up!"

It was her voice. I forced my tired eyes to look up past her feet, got a quick glance of her fishnet stocking'ed knees, and my eyes closed again.

"Hey! Wake up!"

Her again. But closer. Real close. I could feel her breath against my face, feel it drifting into the throbbing crevice that had earlier today been a piece of my cheek. It was a healing breath. I opened my eyes. There she was, face to face with me, her eyes just inches from my own. She had knelt down to me. The princess had gotten down on her knees to speak to me.

"You gotta get outta here," she said. "These guys are going to kill you."

I opened my mouth to speak.

"Kitty! Come on!"

That wasn't me. It was Gray Haired Guitarist. And he was pulling her away.

"Kitty, let's go. This place is a shit storm!"

She got up and stepped away with Gray Hair, only to turn back to me once more.

"Thank you for what you did," she said. "What's your name, warrior?"

"They call me the Boneman," I murmured, half to her, half into the floor. "I'm the meanest, drunkest..."

"Kitty, let's go!"

They ran off towards stage left. If they were going to get out of here, they were going to have to get to the door in the back of the bar. And that meant going straight through the anarchy of flying fists and bottles and bar stools that was once Big Jake's Roadhouse. They'd never make

it. Kitty would be swept up in that mess only to have God knows what happen to her. Those two were going to need a little assistance.

It was the inspiration I needed. I pushed myself up off the stage floor until I was standing. Wobbly, sure, but standing. I turned around and saw what I expected. Big Boy, the fat bearded construction worker, a good fifteen feet or so from me. Holding on to his new favorite weapon, the bar stool, by one of its legs. Holding it out, the seat of it staring at me, like he was a backwoods lion tamer. He was smart. He had a weapon with a reach, and he was using it to keep the one real threat of the place at bay. Big Boy was holding me hostage with a bar stool.

I knew what I'd have to do. And it was going to hurt. I inhaled deeply, sucked in as much air as I could, then crouched forward with my right shoulder pointing out in front of me, and I charged toward the big son of a bitch. Full speed.

Big Boy swung with all his force. Put all his weight behind it. The bar stool crashed into my shoulder and exploded like a hand grenade. Something popped. My shoulder, most likely. I'd have to worry about that later. For now, at least, Big Boy was weaponless. And even better, he was about to hit the floor. My forward motion had carried me through the unpleasant contact with the stool, and then through the big bastard like a linebacker through a referee, knocking him flat on his fat ass.

I hadn't expected him to go down so easily. Expected the hit to slow me a bit. And when it didn't, I found I couldn't stop moving. Found myself running full speed directly towards the bar, towards the walrus-looking guy with the handle-bar mustache who had Ponytail's ponytail clutched in his hand, and was yanking it downward, smashing the back of the poor guy's head into his knee. I dove. Flew up towards the top of the bar. And as I did, I reached out and palmed the back of Walrus's skull like a basketball. I slammed him down, face first, into the bar top as I flew over it. I landed hard on the other side on top a pile of broken glass, and immediately jumped back up to my feet. Walrus laid there, sprawled over the bar in a growing pool of his own nose blood, like an alcoholic at last call. Ponytail stood where he was, staring at me blankly, trying to make his foggy brain calculate why his head was no longer getting

knee-fucked. Poor sucker. I curled my fist and popped him square in the nose. He went down. I heard a noise beside me. I spun, ready to strike. Nothing. I looked down.

There, in the bottom corner of the bar crouched Sally the bartender. She was on her ass, arms wrapped around her knees, pressing them to her chest. She stared at me with wide eyes. Part terror, part fury. She hated me, that I could see. Sally might not be the owner of Jake's Roadhouse, but she'd been here long enough. It was her bar. And this strange, bloody guy with the dusty boots and the two twenties had completely and totally fucked it up.

I had but a moment to consider all this before I heard a scream. Kitty! I scanned the place. Across the room, right where the dance floor turned into the pool hall, stood Kitty and Gray Haired Guitarist. They were cornered by some overall'ed, mulleted inbred with a pool cue raised up above his head, poised to strike. I wouldn't be able to make it over there before he could take that thing down onto Kitty and wreck her perfect face. I quickly turned around to the shelves of bottles behind me. Ammunition. I grabbed the nearest bottle. Old Grand Dad Whiskey. Good stuff, when it needed to be. I spun around and hurled that thing across the barroom. It shattered against Mullet boy's head. Direct hit. Damnit, I'm good at what I do.

The Boneman isn't legendary for his fists alone.

Liquor and glass shrapnel covered Kitty and Guitar as Mullet toppled to the floor. Well, it's better than a cue stick in the eye. They looked over at me in... awe? Maybe. I like to think so.

I waved my arms frantically in the direction of the door in the back.

"Hurry! Go!"

They began to move. Past pool table one, that held two half-conscious guys laid flat, slowly lifting their arms in a sleepy attempt to continue hitting each other. Past the jukebox, which had remained blissfully silent. Towards pool table two, on which one of Scowler's young guns stood, a lead pipe of some sort in his hands that he was swinging wildly at no one in particular. He spotted Kitty, and reared his pipe back like a baseball bat. He was going to take her out for sure. Let loose some of his virgin rage on the hot woman he'd never get to touch. I grabbed another

bottle from behind me. Montezuma tequila. Cheap, but effective. The guy on the pool table took a swing. I chucked the bottle. If I missed, Kitty was a goner.

I never fucking miss.

Pool Boy never saw it coming. Crash! Right in the back of the head. He stumbled forward, tried to regain his step, and then backward right into the long Budweiser pool table light that hung by gold chain links from the ceiling. The light held him up for a minute, and he swung there like a drunken boater in a hammock, before both light and unconscious jack-off crashed down onto the pool green.

Again Kitty and Guitar stared over at me. I watched Guitar mouth the words "Holy shit." Well, Guitar was impressed with the Boneman. It was a start, anyway. I don't know about Kitty, but hell, one more bottle throw and Guitar would probably want to screw me. Heh.

"Run!"

They ran. Past table two and towards table three. After that, they'd be just feet from the exit. Safety.

Fuck!

There were only four men still standing in the bar at that point, and they must have sensed that there was something of value left in here. A trophy of sorts, to validate the broken noses and blackened eyes and missing teeth. A pretty young lass that they could yank into the bathroom and do unspeakable things to, their despicable act shadowed by the meelee that had surrounded them.

They weren't bar fighters. They didn't understand the purity of a roadhouse brawl. You see, we bruisers, we're not Romans. We're not conquerers. There are no spoils for the victor. The last standing bar fighter receives no rewards. No pillaging. No raping. A bar fighter fights. That's it. When the bar becomes a storm of fists and bottles, it becomes an arena. Anything goes in the arena. All bets are off. No quarter to those *in the area*. To those in the arena. And only those in the arena. We don't attack the general populace. Bar fighters fight bar fighters.

And those four boners who chose to ignore this rule were going to be punished.

Right now!

I leapt the bar, propelling myself with my arm pushing against the bar top, leveraging me up and over like a pole vault. I landed on the other side, glass and dry wall dust swirling around my boots. I raced across the room towards that final pool table that Kitty and Guitar were trapped behind, surrounded by two guys creeping up towards them from the front, and two from behind.

As I neared the pool table I jumped, landing on my feet on top of it. I ran across in the direction of the guys blocking Kitty's passage. I jumped up off the table and planted my right boot on the shoulder blade of Asshole #1. Before he could collapse under my weight, I swung my left boot up and under the chin of Asshole #2. Number two's head flew back, followed by the rest of his body. Asshole #1, who's shoulder was momentarily, unintentionally, holding my two hundred pounds up in the air, lost his footing. His knees buckled underneath him, and he crumpled to the ground. I fell with him, but remained vertical. I landed, still standing, centimeters away from his face. But not his ear. It was crushed underneath my boot heel. He screamed. I stepped aside, then swiftly punted his face like a football.

My little acrobatic performance had done the trick. The two jerks that were coming up behind Kitty paused, stunned. Good. I grabbed Kitty by one shoulder, Guitar by the other, and yanked them past me.

"Go! Run!"

They broke for the door. They made it. I didn't turn to watch them. Just heard the door swing open, then close lazily behind them. So much for romantic endings.

With Kitty and Guitar no longer between us, I was left standing face to face with the two remaining uprights in the bar. My princess was gone. Safe, yes. But still, gone. And these two were going to suffer for it.

Apparently they knew it, too. And so they both turned and ran from me, in a desperate attempt to make it across the entire room to the front door. No chance. I grabbed the one sole pool cue off the wall and made chase. I caught up to them before they even made it to the dance floor.

I swung the cue.

Snap! It broke in two over one of the guys' heads. He went down. The other one continued to run as his buddy twitched on the floor, grasping at his hair, screaming at the sharp pain and insane itchiness that comes with a smack like that.

I raced after the last guy. He was fast. Made it to the door. I lunged at him. My boots left the floor. My body went horizontal. My injured right shoulder hit him in the small of the back. His body snapped backwards as he smashed into the door, ripping it completely out of its hinges, and fell forward, landing atop the door and out into the starry night of the exterior of Big Jake's Roadhouse, home of the South's Coldest Beer and Loudest Guitars. At least according to the big-titted skunk in the jean skirt that leered down at us.

I pushed myself up off of the asshole lying there groaning on the dead door. I stood there above him for a moment in the now wide open doorway of Jake's, glancing out at the night sky. It was pretty out here. Quiet. Inside too. I turned to step back in, to get one last look at my latest demolition zone. And before I had a chance to focus my sore eyes, I felt two big meat hooks grip around my neck. Tightly. I couldn't breathe. It was Fat Bearded Big Boy, going for one last try at the guy who'd just turned his favorite watering hole into a shit hole.

And he was strangling the holy hell out of me.

Instinctively, I grasped my own hands around his neck, and I pushed. He stumbled backwards into the bar and I followed. We continued in that fashion, two large men connected by two pairs of bloody, scraped paws wrapped around two thick necks, one man moving backwards, stepping over and onto the unconscious hillbilly bodies on the floor, the other following, pulled along. Gripping tightly onto each other. A game of oxygen chicken. Who would go out first? We kept moving, a two-man conga-line, across the dance floor and into the pool room, until Big Boy's back crashed hard against the jukebox.

It began to play.

"I Will Always Love You", by Dolly Parton.

Big Boy, gasping for air, lunged forward, sending me backwards now. He pushed, gripping tighter and tighter into my neck, sending me tripping across the bodies, back onto the dance floor. Using all my remaining strength, I swung him around by the throat. We began circling the floor like that, two battered bar fighters quickly losing consciousness, spinning slowly to the soothing notes of Dolly as she sang, "and I... will always love you..."

We both paused. Looked at each other. Smiles crossed our cracked lips. We were dancing. Fucking dancing together! Choked laughter began to croak out from our mouths. Two dudes slow dancing atop a floor of blood, barf, shit, and glass. Ridiculous.

I took a quick step backwards, then swung my arms as hard as I could to my left, releasing my grip on his throat. Big Boy lost his grip as well, and he went sailing away from me, across the dance floor, and head first through the side of the jukebox.

The music stopped.

Joke over.

I dropped to my knees, gasping for air. Sucking, trying to get my damn lungs to inflate again. I fell forward onto my hands and remained there on all fours, like a cat coughing up a hair ball, wheezing and hacking, gurgling blood. Damn, that son of a bitch had actually tried to kill me. Man. Finally I began to breathe freely again. Still remaining there on my hands and knees, I looked around the room. It was a disaster area. Every man in here was on the floor, unconscious or rolling back and forth, moaning like a zombie. The place was covered in broken glass, broken pool sticks, and broken bones. The walls were splattered in blood. It was absolute carnage. A massacre scene. Not a bottle in the place remained intact... except... except for the shining bottle of Jack Daniels that stood upright in the middle of the room. It stood there, staring at me, an unopened bottle of Tennessee whiskey that would taste absolutely wonderful right about now. Might dull some of the pain that was growing stronger and stronger in my back, shoulder, throat, face, and fists.

I crawled over to it, plopped onto my ass next to it. Picked it up, twisted the cap, brought it to my mouth. The beautiful brown liquid flowed down my throat like a river, and was just about

the best damn thing I'd ever tasted. I gulped and gulped and finished off about a quarter of the bottle before taking it from my lips. I let out a loud gasp of orgasmic delight.

*AAAAAAHHHHH....* Damn it, that stuff tasted good. I'd be taking it with me, for sure. Could finish it as I hiked along the highway again tonight, for I'd not be spending any more time in this town. Man, I hadn't even made it a half mile past the off-ramp, and already it was time to leave. And speaking of leaving, there's no time like the present...

"Don't move, mother fucker."

A girl's voice.

I looked up, the neck of the JD bottle still clutched in my hand. It was Sally. She was standing behind the bar, and she was pointing a gun at me. A big fucking gun. A revolver or some shit. I don't know anything about guns, but it was one of those long silver suckers that Dirty Harry carried. If she decided to pull the trigger, that thing would take my head clean off. No doubt about it.

"Stay right where you are," she commanded. "Make a move, and I'll blow your fucking brains out."

I just looked at her, silent.

"Come into my bar, fuck shit up like this... How dare you. Kicking all my customers' asses..."

I laughed.

"That's funny?" she sneered. "You think that's funny? Look at this place! Look at what you've done! We'll see who's laughing when the cops show up! We'll see who's laughing when he's getting ass-fucked in one of our cells down here!"

Wow. She had a mouth on her.

I slowly lifted the bottle.

"Don't move!"

I tilted it up to my lips.

It's a situation such as this when you can really measure the size of your own dick.

When you can stare down the barrel of a gun and take a pull of whiskey while you do so, you are the dictionary definition of bad-fucking-ass.

I stared at her as I sucked the juice out of the bottle. Gulping it down. Glug, glug, glug. Goddamn, it tasted good. I stared at her, and she stared back. Fire in her eyes. She hated me. Wanted to kill me. So bad. I'd spent the night sweetening her up, only to drop her like a turd in a toilet for Princess Kitty, and to add insult to injury, then went and destroyed her bar and all of her paying drunks. Oh yeah, she wanted to kill me. Fortunately for me, she wasn't a killer.

But she was a fighter. Because, by pulling that gun on me, she had entered the arena. Had agreed to the pact. Anything goes in the arena. Her decision, not mine.

Her mistake.

I pulled the bottle away from my mouth, and moved to put it back on the floor. And then, suddenly, I arched back, threw my arm forward, and sent the bottle flying towards her face.

It soared through the air, spinning over and under, liquor spraying out in a brown pinwheel.

Sally panicked. Threw her arms up to protect her eyes. The gun went off. The Schlitz mirror behind me shattered. The bottle smashed into her forearms. Glass and whiskey sprayed her face. She went down. I heard the gun clack clack clack across the floor behind the bar.

She shouldn't have pointed that thing at me.

I pushed myself up. Stood up on my feet. Now it was time to get the hell out of Dodge. But first, a little compensation for my troubles. I walked up to the bar. Hopped over it. To the cash register. I pounded down on it with my fist - once, twice - until the drawer popped open. I pulled out all the bills and stuffed them into my pocket. I looked down at Sally. She lay on her back, her arms limp at her sides. Broken, maybe. Fractured for sure. Her eyes were pointed up at me. They weren't full of hatred anymore. Now it was all fear. And surprise, I guess.

What? I'd just torn her entire bar a new asshole, and she expected me to act like a gentlemen when all was said and done? Nope, not on my watch. I'm a bar fighter.

I hopped back over the bar. Walked across the room, stepping over bloody unconscious rednecks on my way to the open doorway to the outside. I stepped over Asshole #1 who still lay limp on the flattened door.

Outside it was warm and calm. The stars bright tonight. It was good walking weather. Which was fortunate, cause I had a lot of walking to do.

But...

For the first time in my life, I had a destination to walk *to*. I didn't know where yet, but I would. I would find out. Cause Kitty and The Southern Knights would be playing another roadhouse gig somewhere, and I intended to be there. I was in love with the sexy, sweet-voiced Southern girl in the pink bikini and jean jacket, and I was going to prove my love to her.

And woe be it to any man who stood in my way.

For the last twenty years, I had lived according to a single mantra - me against the world, one bar at a time.

But not any more. I had a new mantra now.

A new quest.

I was the world's last real bar fighter, and I had a princess to find.

To be continued...

Bones

July 20, 2007