

TOUCHY SUBJECT

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CW - Strong Language

1 INT. O'NEIL'S TAVERN - COUNTER - ALMOST MIDNIGHT

In a mid-western suburban dive bar with no theme. Outside, a tattered half-lit marquee reads: "O'NEIL'S TAVERN".

In the background, "Takin' Care Of Business" by Bachman-Turner Overdrive plays off a cheap speaker.

The place is surrounded by a noisy gravel lot and a trilling inland marsh. Inside, it's almost completely empty except for:

Two young men who barely look of age sit at the grimy counter, drinking bottled beers - in the middle of a conversation.

JASON

You what?

JOHNNY

We took a hike up Mount Sentinel-

JASON

In January?

JOHNNY

I swear I almost got frostbite.

They turn to face two men who've entered.

JASON

'Bout time. What took you guys so long?

The taller man who's just a couple years older than all of them speaks with a cool, somber tone with a faded English accent:

JEROME

Just having a smoke. Relax.

JACKSON

(imitating)

Yeah, re-lax. What're 'ya a parole officer, man?

Everyone finds a seat. A middle-aged woman in a tank-top comes over to ask:

BARTENDER

What're we havin', boys?

JEROME

Do you have, like, uh... a
cosmopolitan or like any Amaretto-

BARTENDER

You mean like a margarita?

His order grabs the attention of the rest.

JASON

A what? The f- what are you
ordering?

JEROME

Shut up.
(to the bartender)
Not you, just something sweet,
please... thank you.

BARTENDER

I can do a 'Sex on the Beach'.
How's that?

JEROME

Lovely.

JASON

(imitating his accent)
Lovely.

Jackson snickers, and Jason even gets a smirk out of Johnny
who asks for another bottle.

She finishes the cocktail and pops open a bottle.

While Johnny's slurping, Jackson roughly pats his shoulder
to get his attention, dribbling beer on his pants.

JACKSON

Where's A.J.? Thought he was with
you guys?

JOHNNY

(wiping his mouth)
No, I haven't seen him at all.

The screen door creaks open, interrupting the story.
Everyone turns to look.

A skinny young figure walks in, grinning and already a
little inebriated.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Oh, hey, what's up Aubrey?

They all turn back to their drinks.

Except Jason who studies Aubrey.

Cleaner lines. Fitted jacket. Skinny jeans. Confidence.

Subtle contour.

He clocks it instantly:

JASON
(to Aubrey)
Are you wearing makeup?

Aubrey doesn't flinch.

Everyone turns back, putting the story on pause again.

AUBREY
Relax.

It's just concealer, I'm breaking out bad and had a... uh, date.

Jackson grins as he's already rolling out a slur in their ear:

JACKSON
Faggot! What took you so long,
we've been waiting.

The bartender rolls her eyes and comes back down to the crew.

She looks Aubrey up and down with a raised eyebrow.

BARTENDER
And for you, hun?

AUBREY
Do you have a Yellow Chartreuse?

BARTENDER
Uh, what-what?

AUBREY
Just any top-shelf, thank you.

Aubrey flashes a wad of cash. Jerome and Jackson notice.

JACKSON
Hey, you getting all us something,
Daddy Warbucks?

AUBREY
Don't you have a job?

He doesn't answer.

Now, Jason is nosy, and looks at Jerome for insight, who responds:

JEROME
(sarcastic)
Drug dealer.

JASON
Why don't you tell them what you told me?

JOHNNY
Oh, yeah, that's right.

The other guys on my dorm floor carved the floor number into some guy's—

JASON
What? No, the—

JOHNNY
(over)
Where were you at again, A.J.?

AUBREY
In the city, uh, night classes, remember?

The bartender sticks a straw in an orange cocktail, and pops open another beer for Johnny.

JOHNNY
Uh, no, I don't. What are you studying again?

AUBREY
Business.

Just business, still figuring stuff out.

Aubrey's phone buzzes. They glance at it, smile — something private.

Jerome leans in over Jason's shoulder, who's peeking at Aubrey.

JEROME

Told 'ya. Drug dealer.

He laughs, and pats Johnny on the back who spills from his second bottle.

JEROME (CONT'D)

Weren't you telling us something?

Johnny swallows and looks confused:

JOHNNY

I was?

(realizing)

Oh, that's right!

He continues with his story.

Aubrey's phone lights up with a notification as Johnny continues with indiscernible drunken antics.

Jason peeks. A blurry Instagram story – a dancer spinning under neon. Tagged: JANE. Location: KIT KAT LOUNGE.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

I accidentally cut my thumb open.

Almost passed out looking at it.

Jason's jaw tightens.

He looks up at Aubrey. And for the first time, he studies them like a stranger.

Under the hot incandescent lamps, a few specks of glitter appear above Aubrey's cheekbone as they sip from a straw.

The vibe has shifted. The bartender has retreated to the back after selling the boys a bucket of beers and a shot each.

"I Found The Girl" by Toney Fountaine sounds like it's playing in slow-motion.

Jackson pushes.

Jason pulls out his phone. He looks up at Aubrey.

Search: Kit Kat Lounge. Photos load. Stripper poles. A dancer mid-spin. He finds a post tagging a 'Jane' from three hours ago.

Looks at his phone.

Jason zooms in on the photo.

A dancer spinning under neon.

He squints. Zooms again.

The glitter on her cheekbone.

Then, slowly looks up at his friend with a scowl.

Jason taps Jackson with the edge of his phone, who studies the screen.

JACKSON

Who's Jane?

Aubrey freezes, just barely. They scoff.

AUBREY

I don't know.

A screenshot illustrating glittering lights, a dancer mid-turn. The face isn't clear but the resemblance is undeniable.

JASON

Wanna try that again?

Johnny looks sick about this. Jerome finally speaks, first finishing his mouthful, interrupting with a stern "Mmm".

JEROME

(choking; heated)

Let's not do this tonight!

Jason ignores him.

JASON

I found this online.

Jason slides his cracked phone across the counter. The face isn't clear but the resemblance is undeniable.

JASON (CONT'D)

Are you... stripping?

Silence. The word lands heavy. Aubrey laughs hard, sharp, and a little attitude.

AUBREY

That...

(sighs)

...is my girlfriend.

That shuts Jason up for half a second. Jackson smells blood.

JACKSON

You're dating a stripper? That's rancid, man.

They flip him off while sipping on their shot.

JASON

Is she your sister? You look like twins.

Johnny jumps in to keep the peace.

JOHNNY

It doesn't matter if-

JASON

(over)
If he lied?

Not morality or concern. Control. Aubrey stands ready to leave.

AUBREY

You're not my keeper. Acting like we're married or something. I can be with anyone I want.

JASON

So you're dating this Jane girl, what is she like a tranny or something?

AUBREY

(stumbling)
Why- why would you- what makes you think that?

JASON

'Cause she looks like you.

JACKSON

(chiming in; giggling)
Yea, maybe get a chromosome test.

AUBREY

Both of you can kiss-

JASON

(cutting off)
I'm just saying, you wouldn't be keeping any secrets from your tribe.

AUBREY
Tribe?!

JASON
I thought we were all friends?

AUBREY
Are we?

That hits harder than the rumors.

Seeing an opportunity during the silence, Jerome enters between them slowly, steady.

JEROME
You're acting like she owes you all her secrets just because you grew up in the same cul-de-sac.

The pronoun shift hangs in the air.

Silence.

Jason turns to him.

JASON
...she?

Confused looks. Jackson leans in.

JACKSON
She?

Jerome doesn't back down. Aubrey doesn't correct him, instead:

AUBREY
I think I'm just gonna go and see my-
(looking at Jackson)
'Rancid' stripper girlfriend.

With a militant pirouette, they head out with no goodbye.

HARD CUT TO:

2 EXT. O'NEIL'S TAVERN - PARKING LOT - DAWN

The sky is indigo fading into steel. The marsh bugs humming behind them. The marquee flickering.

Above their heads, "Girl You Need A Change Of Mind" by Eddie Kendricks, softly plays.

JEROME

Told you.

No calls or texts.

(to Jason)

You've cost us a good friend there,
prick.

He moves himself seated behind all the other guys.

JASON

Would you date a stripper?

JEROME

If I only had shit friends like
you, yeah, I'd marry one.

JACKSON

In fact, he's gonna call your mom
up tonight.

JASON

It's morning, moron. The sun's
already out. Open your eyes!

Aubrey accidentally lets them have it. In full glitter make-
up, pin- straight hair in long sleeked ponytails, and a
strapless dress in the passenger seat of her boyfriend's
convertible.

After getting off a shift, she completely missed out on her
'boy's night', hoping they'd be gone.

She scouts out the lot, making direct eye contact with
Jason.

JASON (CONT'D)

Hey! Guys!

(he points them out)

Look!

All their heads turn to take a glance.

JACKSON

What, you know them? She's kinda
cute.

JOHNNY

She's alright.

JACKSON

What would you know about women,
you live in a men's only dorm?

JOHNNY

It's not men's only! It's co-ed!

They go back to bickering.

Jason keeps looking, in disbelief.

JASON

(trailing off)

But- wasn't that?

They ignore him.

Jerome takes advantage of all their turned heads to sneak a wave in to Aubrey who waves back.

Aubrey tells her man to hit it, and he speeds off without a question.

Their car disappears down the empty road as the sky turns fully blue.

Jason - the only one who got a good look at Aubrey's face - isn't sure whether he actually saw his friend or if it was all in his head.

CUT TO BLACK.

THE END