

Gratuity

by

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CHARACTERS

FRANCIS	A priest, male, early 30's to early 50's, wears the clerical collar
TANVEER	An imam, male, early 30's to early 50's
BILLIE	An atheist, female, early 20's to early 30's
CASEY	A bartender, male or female, early 20's to early 30's
ROBBER	A robber, male or female, early 20's to late 60's, wears a black ski mask, all black clothes, and a thickly stuffed backpack

SETTING

An empty bar on a cold night in December

TIME

Night, around 9 or 10 PM

A priest, an imam, and an atheist walk into a bar. It's deserted save for the bartender behind a minimally stocked bar. A table with 3 or 4 chairs is necessary. A front door to enter and exit through sits stage left.

BILLIE

I really feel the most exciting moment for me, was when we realize the conflict in the first part was all manufactured and, like, Amy was the antagonist the whole time!

TANVEER

Perhaps, but the character of Nick is far from blameless.

They sit at an empty table.

BILLIE

I mean, I know that, I'm just sayin' that that twist kinda floored me! To feel like Amy was the hero? But then it **was** Nick in the end!

FRANCIS

Whoa whoa whoa. Hero? Be careful how you throw that word around.

TANVEER

Yes, these people were far from "Heroes." I was morally repulsed time and again! Some of it was hard to stomach.

FRANCIS

Absolutely. I kind of hoped to see the both of them go to jail. Justice.

BILLIE

C'mon, Father! Where's your Christianly spirit? Forgiveness and cheek-turning and whatnot!

CASEY

Hello folks!

CASEY comes to the table and sets menus and drink coasters before the guests. TANVEER and FRANCIS greet Casey in a jovial manner.

CASEY

I'm Casey, and I'll be here all night! Can we get something started for you?

BILLIE

I know I could use a drink! Something stiff.

(Beat)

Vodka lemonade. Make it a double.

CASEY

Sure.

(to TANVEER) For you, sir?

TANVEER

Iced tea. Do you have that?

CASEY

Yessir!

TANVEER

Thank you.

CASEY

(to FRANCIS) And for you?

FRANCIS

I'll have whatever your house red is. Thank you.

CASEY

Fer' sure! Any food for you folks tonight?

BILLIE shakes her head.

FRANCIS and TANVEER decline

politely.

CASEY

No problem. I'll have those right over for you!

CASEY heads back behind the bar to get the drinks.

BILLIE

And you're an Imam, right, Tan...Tan...

TANVEER

"Tanveer." And yes, I am an Imam.

BILLIE

And where are you from?

TANVEER

(Beat)

Newark.

BILLIE

Er... What about... Where is your family from?

TANVEER

My parents emigrated from India.

BILLIE

Ah. Yes. I see. A lot of Muslims in India?

TANVEER

Second largest concentration in the world.

BILLIE

Oh.

(Beat)

CASEY

Okay. Here are those drinks for you folks.

CASEY places each drink on the table. BILLIE grabs her drink and sucks at the straw long and deep. TANVEER and FRANCIS

thank Casey as Casey returns
to the bar. 15 Seconds of
silence follow.

FRANCIS

So... *Gone Girl*. Where were we?

TANVEER

I believe we were discussing the morally-dubious
foundation on which our protagonists stood.

BILLIE

Oh, yeah, and the Father was saying that he'd rather
see these poor sinners hanged for their crimes than
forgiven.

FRANCIS

(irritated) You're putting words in my mouth, young
lady.

TANVEER

It's okay, Francis. I think we both understood your
meaning.

BILLIE

I don't think I did.

TANVEER

Young lady--

BILLIE

"Billie." Or "Ma'am," if you must.

TANVEER

Billie. The laws of Allah are absolute, but it is also
important to remember that the laws of man are dictated
by Allah too. Just as we humans expect punishment be
served to criminals, so does Allah above.

BILLIE

Okay. But don't both of your religions preach the
importance of forgiveness, like, somewhere?

Both FRANCIS and TANVEER begin

to speak, but stop. FRANCIS
gestures for TANVEER to
continue.

TANVEER

It's true, the Quran reads, "requiting evil may, too,
become an evil: hence, whoever pardons and makes peace,
his reward rests with Allah - for, He does not love
evildoers."

(Beat)

BILLIE

Buuut...

FRANCIS

But **God** knows that a society must have laws and laws
must be obeyed to maintain order. For without
punishment for crimes there would be no deterrent for
criminality and we would have anarchy.

BILLIE

I think we need an objective viewpoint--Casey!

BILLIE waves her arms and
gestures for CASEY to approach
them. FRANCIS and TANVEER make
small sounds and/or motions of
annoyance. CASEY comes to the
table.

BILLIE

You seem like a reasonable individual. Who's right:
Jesus or Muhammad?

TANVEER begins to protest, but
BILLIE silences him with a
finger.

CASEY

Oh, I'm not really supposed to discuss religion or
politics with customers. "Hot button" stuff, ya know?
Sorry.

BILLIE

No no no, this is important. You get a pass on this one. We insist.

FRANCIS begins to protest, but
BILLIE silences him with a
finger.

CASEY

Are you sure? It's that important to you?

BILLIE

We are sure! Now, Jesus or Muhammad?

CASEY

I don't really know what to say. I was raised Jewish. I guess my upbringing would say "neither, they're both wrong"...?

(Beat)

But I'm non-practicing!

FRANCIS and TANVEER's faces
contort in disapproval.

BILLIE

Perfect!

BILLIE mimes making a check
mark on an imaginary
checklist.

BILLIE

Okay, Casey. Punishment or forgiveness?

CASEY

Uh...Forgiveness?

BILLIE mimes another check
mark.

BILLIE

Final question. God: Man or woman?

CASEY

Oh, man, definitely.

(Beat)

The God of the Torah? Definitely a man, all full of disappointment and retribution? That's my father up and down. Final answer.

BILLIE thinks a moment, then nods and turns back to her companions.

BILLIE

Fair enough.

(Beat)

Two for three ain't bad.

TANVEER and FRANCIS smile uncomfortably at CASEY. CASEY bows awkwardly and returns to the bar.

BILLIE

Do you guys see what I'm trying to say?

ROBBER enters stage left, a stuffed backpack on his/her back, slamming the door behind him/her. EVERYONE startles and looks to the door. The bar's dim lighting hides ROBBER's appearances. ROBBER, breathless and panting, locks the bar door and leans against it, catching his/her breath.

CASEY

Um. Good evening. Are you alright?

ROBBER jumps at Casey's voice and spins around, wielding a pistol back and forth among the room's occupants. EVERYONE puts their hands in the air.

BILLIE

Whoa, buddy. Calm down!

ROBBER

Shut up! Who are you people?

BILLIE

We're just trying to get a drink. We don't want any trouble.

ROBBER

Yeah, well, I guess it's found you.

(Beat)

Like that like about greatness: "Some are born in trouble, some achieve trouble, and some have trouble thrust upon 'em. Thy Fates open their hands. Let thy blood and spirit embrace them."

TANVEER

Twelfth Night.

FRANCIS

Ominous.

ROBBER gives Tanveer an exhausted thumbs-up.

BILLIE

Sure, buddy. It's exactly like that.

ROBBER points the gun at Billie.

ROBBER

Don't patronize me.

BILLIE raises her hands higher.

BILLIE

Wouldn't dream of it!

ROBBER

Now, all of you, out here where I can see you. On your

knees.

EVERYONE files to center stage
and kneels side-by-side with
hands on the back of their
heads, Tanveer beside Francis
beside Billie beside Casey.

ROBBER

Is this everyone?

CASEY nods vigorously.

ROBBER points the gun at
Casey.

ROBBER

Use your words! (under breath) We're all adults here,
aren't we?

CASEY

Y-yes! I-It's just me and t-these folks.

ROBBER

Good. You're all going to stay right there until my
ride gets here.

(Beat)

So. Get comfortable or whatever.

BILLIE moves to sit. ROBBER
waves the gun towards her
face.

ROBBER

What are you doing? I said "on your knees!"

BILLIE scurries back to her
knees.

BILLIE

Yeah, but then you said "get comfortable!"

ROBBER

I meant on your knees!

BILLIE

Okay! I'm sorry!

ROBBER

Damn straight! Now stay there!

BILLIE

Okay!

ROBBER

Okay!

ROBBER paces for a silent and uncomfortable minute.

ROBBER

Ya know, while I'm here, I might as well get something for it. Mind if I help myself to your register?

CASEY shakes his head emphatically "no."

ROBBER

(encouraging) Words...

CASEY

N-no! Help yourself!

ROBBER

Thank you. I believe I will.

ROBBER moves behind th bar and places the backpack on the counter. He/she keeps the gun trained on the hostages a opens the till.

Is this all you got? Really?

(Beat)

Sheesh. Slow night.

ROBBER stuffs fistfuls of cash into the backpack.

FRANCIS

(whispers to Billie) Any new insights on your feelings on criminality, young lady?

BILLIE scowls in return.

ROBBER

Hey! No talking over there! If I hear talking again, someone dies!

ROBBER finishes emptying the till, closes the backpack, puts it back on, and moves back out from behind the bar. He/she begins pacing before the hostages again, bouncing the barrel of the gun from one to the next. 30 seconds pass. ROBBER sighs and grabs a chair, setting it slightly stage left, in front of the hostages but between them and the door. He/she sits backwards in it, facing the hostages.

ROBBER

This is actually pretty boring. Waiting. What were you all talking about before I came in?

HOSTAGES trade glances.

ROBBER

Someone say something!

CASEY

(quietly) You said if someone-

ROBBER

Speak up!

CASEY

(speaking quickly) You said if you heard more talking somebody would die.

CASEY presses his/her eyes shut tightly, as if preparing to be struck. ROBBER scratches his/her head with the barrel of the gun.

ROBBER

(realizing) I did!

ROBBER pulls his/her sleeve back and checks his/her watch.

ROBBER

Well, congratulations, it's a cruel world, someone just died. Now, talk! It'll make our time together fly by. Promise.

HOSTAGES continue casting cautious glances at each other while ROBBER gestures in a way encouraging them to speak.

FRANCIS

So... *Gone Girl*, huh?

ROBBER

Oh, love that book. Amy is **such** a badass.

HOSTAGES stare curiously at ROBBER for a beat.

(indignant) What? I read.

BILLIE

(in a low voice) Figures.

ROBBER waves the gun at Billie. They all cower.

ROBBER

Hey! Nick was asking for it. Cheating scum. Don't fault me for thinking Amy the hero.

(Beat)

BILLIE

(indignant) You're a **masked gunman!**

ROBBER

(likewise) So?

BILLIE

Can we admit your moral compass is a little skewed?

CASEY

I agree with the bandit.

All eyes move to Casey.

TANVEER, FRANCIS, BILLIE, &
ROBBER

What?

BILLIE

Oh, so **everyone** here has read the book?

CASEY

Actually, I saw the movie.

ROBBER

Oh, yeah, good stuff. Ben Affleck didn't even ruin it,
like he usually does.

CASEY nods in agreement.

TANVEER

Okay, so, the bartender and the bandit see Amy as the
hero, Francis and I see Nick as the Her-

FRANCIS

(Interrupting) Whoa, I do not condone the kind of man
Nick is. He is no hero as I see it.

TANVEER

Forgive me, I misspoke. Not so much the "hero" as "less
the villain" perhaps?

FRANCIS bobbles his head on
his shoulders before nodding

in acquiescence.

ROBBER

It would seem we have a hung jury! (gesturing to Billie) What's the verdict, Mr. Vice President?

BILLIE

I think you're mixing your metaphors there, captain.

(ROBBER shrugs, unconcerned)

And anyway, isn't this crazy? I mean, we all know they're shitty people--they're all shitty people. We're all shitty people. Look at this shitty person right now. (gestures to robber) Right now he/she's just the shitty person with the gun so he/she wins the shittiest person present award!

CASEY

(interrupting) But isn't **that** the point? That there are no heroes or villains--or angels and demons. Just... shitty people?

ROBBER

Good point!

TANVEER

I don't know about the rest you--except maybe you (gestures to robber)--but I am an honest person. I wear my faith on my sleeve and my faith is my life.

ROBBER feigns hurt.

BILLIE

Maybe you're the exception--Though I doubt it. People lie and cheat all the time. **All** of them. Even themselves!

TANVEER

The words of cynic.

FRANCIS

Is it cynicism, or simply truth? I see hypocrisies abound within circles of faith. And it is unfortunate,

but it is truth.

ROBBER

Do tell, father!

FRANCIS

You would not believe how many I hear preaching of heavenly virtues from the pulpit, but living lavish and lascivious live.

BILLIE

I believe that.

FRANCIS scowls at Billie.

TANVEER

My brothers and sisters in Islam are certainly not the same. The scrutiny upon our heads is far greater than anything Christians have seen in recent years. In word and deed, Muslims work twice as hard than a Christian to truly show Allah to the world.

FRANCIS

In an age of failing faith it is more a challenge to show **God**--to show His light to the world than it ever has been. And some people who say they are doing it are actually doing the opposite.

TANVEER

God. Allah. They are the same God. And the world needs His guidance more than ever.

FRANCIS

Maybe in your religion, but you do follow a fals--

ROBBER

(interrupting) Okay children. That's enough slap fighting.

TANVEER frowns at FRANCIS
implication.

BILLIE

Why do you preachy types always want to depict God as a

man?

FRANCIS

God is neither man or woman: he is God. It's an effect of common usage.

BILLIE

Well, you say God has no gender, but your religion does show a pretty strong preference to the penis.

FRANCIS

(growing irritated) I'm sure-

ROBBER interrupts Francis by noisily sliding his chair across the floor and places it closer to Casey. He/she sits backwards in the chair again.

FRANCIS

I'm sure you are thinking too literally.

BILLIE

I mean, you do hold that Eve was the first sinner, and she carries the blame, right? Pains of child birth and whatnot?

FRANCIS

All of mankind bears the weight of the original sin, Adam was not excluded. And if we want to talk about the "preference to the penis" as you so brazenly put it, what about Islam? What about the verse that allow a husband to Beat his wife?

BILLIE

(mocking) I'm sure you are thinking too literally.

TANVEER

(visibly irritated) Pardon yourself, Father. Without getting too far into the specifics of Arabic diction, I can assure you that such a belief about the place of women is contrary to the teachings of Allah, and that the specific verse to which you refer can be more

thoughtfully translated into gentler terms. The same word that means "to hit" or "to strike" can also mean "to travel," "to ignore," "to explain," or "to condemn"-any of which would be more in-line with what Muhammad-peace and blessings of Allah be upon him-instructs.

FRANCIS rolls his eyes.

ROBBER

(quietly to Casey) You guys don't have any popcorn here do you?

CASEY shakes his head "no."

BILLIE

Really though, I don't think **either** of your religions have too great of a place for women. I mean, for, like, hundreds of years women weren't allowed to speak in church right? And had to ask their husbands at home when they had questions?

TANVEER

(proudly) Muhammad-peace and blessings of Allah be upon him-teaches us that is the obligation of every Muslim man and woman to seek knowledge.

FRANCIS

(to Billie) Are you **trying** to be antagonistic? You are drudging up mistakes of the past. Admitted ones. You don't see that now, do you? You don't see us selling Indulgences anymore either!

(Beat)

And you. Where do you find your moral compass without God at true north? Even Islam draws it's moral code from Christianity. (under his breath) Albeit waywardly.

BILLIE

As the Christians did from the Jews before them. I don't need some dead **man's** hand-written rules to know in my heart what is right and wrong. Like you can talk anyway-all the hate and violence that is done in God's

name! The Ku Klux Klan, Westboro, Neo-Nazis!

FRANCIS

Baptists? C'mon! (gestures to TANVEER) 9/11, Bin Laden, ISIS, jihadists?!

TANVEER lowers his arms, faces Francis, and jabs his finger in Francis's face.

TANVEER

Islam is a religion of peace, sir!

FRANCIS turns and meets Tanveer eye-to-eye, noses near touching.

FRANCIS

What about Muhammad's military campaign against Mecca? All the men and women raped and killed in his name-with his permission even?! And how your Quran conveniently absolves him of guilt.

CASEY looks from Robber to the argument and back, unsure of how to react. BILLIE grins childishly.

TANVEER

The Crusades? The Inquisition?! No one's hands are clean, my friend! But Muhammad-peace and blessings of Allah be upon him-teaches-

FRANCIS

(interrupting) And quit that!

TANVEER

(Continuing) -teaches that the greatest jihad is overcoming the evil within oneself. Muhammad-peace and blessings-

FRANCIS

(interrupting) Now you're just trying to piss me off!

ROBBER rises and inserts the gun between the locked glares of Francis and Tanveer. FRANCIS and TANVEER Recoil, bumping BILLIE, who collapses and hits CASEY, who also falls over.

ROBBER

Enough bickering children! You're giving mommy a headache!

(Beat)

Jesus. Get up! Get. Up!

CASEY and BILLIE climb back to their knees.

Hands on your head. All of you!

HOSTAGES replace their hands on their heads.

Alright. I'd like to say this was fun, but, Jesus, hearing you confused pussy cats bicker makes me glad I'm Buddhist!

HOSTAGES exchange confused looks with each other. The sound of a car engine is heard drawing near, then the squeaking of brakes.

ROBBER

Right on time. That's my ride. But before I go, I **am** going to kill one of you.

HOSTAGES flinch as ROBBER scans them with the barrel of the gun, finally settling on Billie.

ROBBER

You.

BILLIE

Me?

ROBBER

You. You're the Nick to my Amy, the shittiest person here besides me. It's so romantic!

ROBBER kisses the gun and points it briefly to the sky.

ROBBER

This one is for you, Amy!

ROBBER pulls the hammer back. FRANCIS and TANVEER focus their eyes off to the side. BILLIE squeezes her eyes shut and trembles. CASEY looks horrified, but distant.

ROBBER

Good bye, Nick!

CASEY

Wait!

CASEY springs up between the gun and Billie, arms outstretched.

ROBBER

Click!

CASEY flinches.

ROBBER

(laughing) You should have seen your faces! Oh. Priceless!

(Beat)

Don't be stupid, Nick. I never wanted you to die, just to face the consequences of your shitty decisions. Kudos to you though, kid. Commendable!

ROBBER pats Casey on the cheek, as one might a dog, then turns to go.

Remember this day, kids. And be thankful!

ROBBER unlocks the door and
exits. A beat passes, then
ROBBER pops his/her head back
in.

And don't call the cops, or, ya know, I'll hunt you all
down and skin you, or frame you for murder, or
whatever. Ta-ta!

ROBBER exits stage left.
Everyone looks to one another,
flushed with anger, fear,
embarrassment. 7 seconds pass
before anyone moves or
relaxes.

FRANCIS
So... If it's okay everyone, I'll get the tab tonight.

BILLIE
Like Jesus...

FRANCIS
What?

BILLIE
Nothing.

TANVEER
If it's alright, I think I should split it with you.

BILLIE
I'd like to get the tip, if that's okay.

CASEY
Uh... Before you guys do any of that, I'm going to call
the cops.

FRANCIS
Okay... Yeah, sure.

BILLIE

Thanks.

(Blackout.)

END PLAY.