

The Best Key Lime Pie Ever

By

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INT. DINER - DAY

An old-fashioned American diner. Booths with wooden tables and naugahyde upholstered benches, each one with a mini coin-operated jukebox.

Bottles of ketchup and mustard on the table. A glass ashtray.

The diner is empty, except for two people.

JACK MARLING, early 40s, sporting a utilitarian haircut and what might pass for a suit in the rural Midwest, is also sipping coffee, black. Across from him is ANTHONY DANOWITZ, Late 40s, slick hair, over dressed.

They sit in front of a large window which overlooks the parking lot and lets in the afternoon sun. A maroon Crown Victoria auto is sitting in the nearest parking space.

Jack slaps a BRIEFCASE onto the table.

JACK

This is it. Your new life.
Everything. Birth certificate. High school diploma. A driver's license with your new name...

ANTHONY

My name?

JACK

Cecil Smalls.

ANTHONY

Cecil Smalls? That sounds like a jerk. Why can't I pick the name?

JACK

The department picks the name. You've got a part-time job in a lumber yard.

ANTHONY

And what? I'm Cecil Smalls now and I'm a fucking lumber jockey?

JACK

Part-time lumber jockey. In Templeton, Idaho. In this house.

Jack passes a photo across the table.

(CONTINUED)

ANTHONY

That house is a piece of shit.

JACK

Then go back home to Manhattan after you testify. It would save the tax payers a lot of money and grief. It's going to cost nearly sixty grand a year just to keep you breathing.

ANTHONY

That's more than your salary isn't it? Even your bosses think I'm worth more than you, and they think I'm a scumbag.

JACK

Look at that nice girl over there. Hard worker. Pretty.

Jack motions with his cup of coffee towards STARLA, late 20s with a mop of red hair falling across her forehead. She wears a faded yellow uniform with a white apron. She wipes down the counter, and as a phone on the wall RINGS, she moves to answer it.

JACK (CONT'D)

How do you think she'd like to know that when you die the roses on your casket will be paid for with her tax money?

ANTHONY

I bet you twenty bucks that she'd be happy about it.

JACK

Twenty bucks? That she'll be happy to pay for flowers at your funeral? Make it forty.

Anthony nods and drops a quarter into the jukebox.

Procul Harem's "A WHITER SHADE OF PALE" swells.

ANTHONY (SINGING)

We skipped the light fandango...

He closes his eyes and takes it in.

(CONTINUED)

ANTHONY

Ah, this one takes me back. 1979.

He taps a pack of cigarettes on the table and one falls out. He lights it and inhales.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

I was down on the Coney Island boardwalk with Shelly Winkleman. And we were walking past the shills and the eggmen and the cons, and I never stop, right, because I know that they've got it all figured out. There's no way to beat them.

JACK

I'll bet you I can tell you where you got your shoes...

ANTHONY

...You got them on your feet. Right. You know the drill. But for some reason, with this one guy, I stopped. He was just standing there holding a shoebox. And maybe because I never seen this gag before, or maybe because it was fate, I don't know, but I stopped. And he said "I bet you..."

STARLA walks up to the table. She looks nervous, jittery.

STARLA

What can I get y'all?

JACK

Good morning. I'll have the tomato soup. And an egg cream.

STARLA

And for you?

Anthony squints at her name badge.

ANTHONY

I don't know... Starla. What won't make me sick?

STARLA

Anything but the egg cream. But if you want to know what the best thing is, I reckon it's... it's the Key Lime Pie.

(CONTINUED)

ANTHONY

You hear that? Starla reckons it's the Key Lime Pie. What do you reckon Jack?

JACK

I reckon you're an asshole.

ANTHONY

I'll have the tomato soup as well.

STARLA

I think really you oughta try the Key Lime Pie. If you're just passing through you might never have the chance again.

ANTHONY

What's with the fucking Key Lime Pie? I'll have the soup.

STARLA

It's just that I'll bet you...

ANTHONY

You'll bet me? She'll bet me.

STARLA

I'll bet you it's the best pie that you've ever tasted.

ANTHONY

Yeah?

JACK

This is what he does. He bets.

ANTHONY

OK. If this is the best pie I've ever tasted then I'll leave this shitbox house to you when I die.

He slides the photo of the house across the table.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

It's in Idaho. Probably some great bingo halls out there.

STARLA

You'll give me that house?

(CONTINUED)

ANTHONY

Well, not for a while, not until I die. And not the house itself. Jack here...

Jack waves at Starla.

JACK

Hello again.

ANTHONY

Will liquidate the house and you'll receive the money. But then... what's the house valued at Jack?

JACK

\$178,000.

ANTHONY

Like I said, it's a shitbox. That \$178,000 will be taken to the Golden Nugget in Las Vegas. They have no limit roulette there. And you'll put it on red. Ever been to Vegas?

STARLA

Pardon me?

ANTHONY

No, fuck it. You can choose, red or black. Control your own destiny, it's better that way. And IF you win, the \$356,000 is yours to keep. But only IF this is the BEST pie I've ever had.

STARLA

I don't know what...

ANTHONY

And it must be, because you told me it was, and you wouldn't lie.

STARLA

And suppose you don't agree that it's the best pie you've ever had?

ANTHONY

Then you dance with me, right here, to "A Whiter Shade of Pale", because, goddamnit, I never got to dance with Shelly Winkleman to it,

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ANTHONY (cont'd)
and that's what should have
happened that night.

Jack just sits, drinking his coffee. He has no dog in this
fight. He lights a cigarette.

STARLA
Right then. I guess I better go and
put a cherry on top. For luck.

Starla turns to walk away. Even more nervous than before.

JACK
And don't forget my tomato soup.
Cancel the egg cream.

Anthony turns back to Jack.

ANTHONY
So anyway. '79. Coney Island
Boardwalk. The shoebox. And this
shill says to me, he says "I'll bet
you that I can show you and your
lady the freakiest thing you've
ever seen in your life. And so I
says, what's the bet? And he tells
me it's \$20 for him to show us, but
if it's not the freakiest thing
we've ever seen, he'll give us 50
back.

JACK
50 back? That's a good deal.

ANTHONY
It IS a good deal, because I figure
I'll just tell him some bullshit
about some freakier thing I saw and
he'll give us 50 and we'll walk
away and we'll have some cotton
candy and get drunk at Cusomano's
bar where they served underage kids
and it would be a great night...
but if that's what had happened, I
wouldn't remember it.

JACK
You never get a good deal on the
boardwalk.

(CONTINUED)

ANTHONY

No. What happened is that he opened the box. We looked. And then we didn't ask for the 50. We walked away, and then this song here, "A Whiter Shade of Pale", started playing, and we went separate ways and never saw each other again. But because of that night, I am who I am today. Because of that night I'm being forced to become Cecil Smalls and become a part-time lumber jockey and live in what was probably a confiscated meth lab. You know that shit is toxic. It sticks to the walls, right?

JACK

It isn't a confiscated methlab. What was in the box?

ANTHONY

You don't wanna know, Jack.

JACK

I do. What was in the box?

Anthony takes a long drag from his cigarette and smashes it in the glass ashtray.

ANTHONY

A tiny man.

JACK

Get the fuck outta here.

ANTHONY

No, I'm being serious. Look me in the eyes and tell me I'm lying.

Jack stares at him for a few seconds and then smashes his cigarette out too.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

And not a baby neither. I mean, a tiny black MAN. In a shoebox. And he looked like he was trying to talk but he couldn't form the words. He just turned his head and looked at me and Shelly and opened his mouth. And it looked like he was gonna cry. And then the man closed the box.

(CONTINUED)

JACK

And now you're giving away houses
in diners.

ANTHONY

Now I'm giving away houses in
diners because after that, shit
doesn't make sense. The world
doesn't make sense. There are tiny
men you never hear about kept in
boxes on the beach and there's shit
a lot crazier than that out there,
believe it. You buy your shitty
suits at Men's Warehouse and spend
your life lugging briefcases like
that one into shitty diners like
this one and putting guys like me
into falling down houses in places
like Idaho and act like you're
saving the world, and it doesn't
mean anything. We're living in
somebody's fucking dream. Morality
is relative.

JACK

I live in this world, buddy. I
don't know what the fuck place
you're living in, but I don't want
to visit.

ANTHONY

So, now the waitress is going to
think differently. Bigger. Whether
she wins the pie bet or not, and
then whether she wins on roulette
or not, is irrelevant. Because now
she's thinking about having
\$356,000, which she could never
imagine before she came to work
this morning. And when you get used
to imagining that kind of money
around, then suddenly \$2.50 an hour
plus tips just doesn't cut it
anymore.

JACK

So now she's going to be
unfulfilled in her work.

ANTHONY

Yes! Yes. But she already was. It's
just that now she's gonna start to
take risks. Now she's gonna have a
successful mindset.

(CONTINUED)

JACK

This is the most fucked up
breakfast I've ever had. Can't we
just talk about baseball?

Starla arrives back at the table, carrying a tray.

STARLA

Order up for the high rollers.

ANTHONY

Got a pen, Starla?

Starla pulls a pen from her apron and passes it to Anthony,
who's smoothing out his paper place mat in front of him.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

Alright, this here is a binding
will that recognizes Starla...

STARLA

Cranford.

ANTHONY

Starla Cranford as my beneficiary.
Upon my unfortunate death, many,
many years from now, my house is to
be liquidated and the assets left
to Starla Cranford in the form of
chips at the Golden Nugget Casino.
There's only one thing I'd like to
ask, if it's not too much trouble
darling.

STARLA

What's that?

ANTHONY

Would you be kind enough to buy
some yellow roses for my casket?

STARLA

Yeah, sure. Of course.

Anthony looks over at Jack.

Jack opens his wallet and takes out two \$20 bills. He tosses
them over towards Anthony.

JACK

Un-fucking-believable.

(CONTINUED)

ANTHONY

But of course, of course this is all conditional on whether or not Starla tells the truth. If this is not the best piece of pie I've ever tasted, then she's gonna dance with me right here. Like it's 1979. Coney Island.

STARLA

I don't know what that means.

JACK

You don't want to.

Jack takes a spoonful of his tomato soup and looks out the picture window. A truck is attaching the Crown Vic to a winch.

JACK (CONT'D)

Ah, shit.

He squeezes out of the booth and pushes through the front door.

EXT. DINER PARKING LOT - DAY

Jack runs towards the car. The parking lot is vast, almost empty.

JACK

Hey, hey. I'm right here.

TOWTRUCK OPERATOR

Yeah, you were parked in a handicap spot.

JACK

I'll move it, I'll move it. I didn't see a sign. Here, let me just move it.

TOWTRUCK OPERATOR

It's already on the winch now so I can't...

JACK

Look around, there's no one else here. There's no handicapped person who needs that spot.

(CONTINUED)

TOWTRUCK OPERATOR

Like I said, now that I've got it hooked...

JACK

Ah, this is a fucked up world. This isn't right.

Through the door, the notes of "A Whiter Shade of Pale" drift out.

Jack turns towards the music.

INT. DINER - DAY

JACK

What? He already tried it?

Anthony is sprawled on the floor by Starla's feet. He's not moving. Starla is panicky.

STARLA

We... we were dancing and he started choking. On the cherry. For luck.

Jack reaches down and feels for a pulse. Nothing.

JACK

Huh. Just now, maybe you couldn't hear him, but when I bent down just now, he said "that was the best pie I ever had."

STARLA

Really? Are you sure?

JACK

I would bet on it.

Through the window, Jack's car is towed away.

END