

*Sam Hall*

## SHOTGUN NOT

Drew and I weren't at uni. We had both quit and were back home working. Most of our mates were at uni slaving away — 'they're mugs' we thought. We spent our days playing golf, drinking or working; sometimes a combination of the three, inseparable. We did everything together. It had been like this since about grade nine. We had been best mates for nearly ten years now.

One particular day that we both had off from work, we went out for a game of golf. I had never lost to Drew up to this point, but on this day he was playing like a man possessed. Every ball was hit out of the middle, landing with a crisp thud on the greens wherever he was aiming. We spent the whole round drinking, smoking and laughing like always. After we finished we knocked the top of a few more in the clubhouse before heading home. Usually neither of us would drink and drive, but it was early, around 1 in the afternoon, and we knew even in our small town there was next to no chance of being pulled over. So off we went, back to my place via the drive-through.

With a carton under one arm and the score card held aloft over his head, Drew paraded around the driveway like he had just won the Masters. For those who don't know, the Masters is the biggest tournament in professional golf. People would kill to win the Masters. Anyway, Drew and I proceeded to put a few six-packs in the fridge, and the rest in the esky, and then his trash talk began.

"This is a turning point mate! Now that I've done ya once, you've got no chance of beating me again!" Drew crowed.

"Got lucky ya little fucker," I replied, happy for Drew but inside a little disappointed that my unbeaten run had come to an end. "Grab us another cold one hey mate? Get it from deep down in that esky where they're cold."

"No chance mate," Drew offered, "losers get the beers tonight."

"Righto mate, if that's the way you wanna play it."

"Gotta do it while I can man, gotta abuse this power while I've got it."

The next few hours were full of this back and forth trash talk, both of us trying to gain the ever blurring upper hand. We moved from in front of the TV to the pool room without even needing to suggest it to each other. Drew and I were so

in tune with each other's thoughts it was scary. We always knew what the other was thinking, we were connected on such a deep, subconscious level that when we met some people for the first time they thought we were brothers. For the record, I won the pool match that night, 8-7. It was the first time I had beaten Drew in about a year; it was a happy moment for me. Again, we were reduced to banter, this time with Drew getting me beers.

After the pool, we migrated out the back and lit a fire in the pit. This was a sign when Drew and I were on the piss. It meant three things — that the conversation was about to get deep, meaningful, and exaggerated; we would regurgitate the same stories we had been telling for a few years now (different hockey games when one of us did something flukey, recounting particular shots in that day's golf round, how we know the other one is gay... always the same); and it meant that we were getting well and truly skinful.

"You know how I know you're gay, mate?"

'Here it is,' I thought, 'what's it gonna be this time?' "How's that Drew?"

"You have two Spice Girls CDs."

"Noose yourself Drew. I bought them when I was about ten, that's not a reason!" We both laughed and had a swig. The fire was roaring now, six feet high and just as wide. The dog had taken himself off to bed, content that we wouldn't burn down his kennel. Drew and I moved our seats a few steps back and settled in for the long haul.

"Got any durries Drew?" I asked quietly.

"Yeah lad got a new pack today, are your olds in bed?"

"Sure are mate, arc one up and swing us one hey?"

"Fucker, you still owe me from last weekend," Drew fired back.

"I'm good for it man. Next time I'm on in the drive-through I'll pick up a couple of packs."

"Righto mate, but you better come up with the goods."

I reassured Drew, "You know I've got you covered mate, just swing us one will ya?"

We fired up durry after durry, and chain smoked our way through the next hour or so, drinking our beers and talking our shit. Then the night changed direction sharply.

"I'm hungry man, you got anything to eat?" Drew asked in an ever more slurring tone.

"Dunno hey Drew, go have a look in the fridge, I'm slack to get up."

"Yeah me too hey. I'd murder an S B & C right about now hey."

"The fuck's an S B & C?"

"Steak bacon and cheese pie man, get your head in the game dickhead," Drew said with an enthusiasm for abbreviations which only reared its head after half a carton.

"Shut the fuck up. Since when is it called that?" I slurred in his general direction.

"Since now. Only women and gays don't call it S B & C. You know how I know you're gay mate?"

"Don't say it Drew."

"Because you're not a female, and you still call it a steak, bacon and cheese... Ya fag."

That was Drew and me to a T — talking shit around a fire, beer and smoke in hand, never happier. Our life was unreal.

"Fuck it, let's go for a burn, shotgun not driving." Drew said as he leaned so far over he nearly fell off his chair.

"No chance mate, no fuckin chance." I replied, confident I'd put to rest any chance of a late night drive to BP.

"I'm goin mate, you comin or not?"

"Ahhhhhhh righto then, better make sure you get back in one piece," I had decided that it was best to go along, just incase he got pulled over, "but you're driving, I'm way too fingered."

"Let's do it. Where's my keys?"

"Fucked if I know, where'd you last have them?"

"Not a clue, I'll check the car, you check the house."

I stumbled around the TV room and the pool room, without success. Then I heard the car fire up, and knew Drew had, to my disappointment, found his keys.

“Gimme some Meatloaf,” Drew said as we left the driveway.

“Fuck Meatloaf gaybo, Johnny Mayer all the way,” I replied with such gusto that Drew conceded without putting up a fight.

We went out the driveway and down the road, turning right to take a back road that was just across the main road. As we got to the end of our street I could feel my right foot pushing on the footwell as if pushing the brake pedal. The car wasn't slowing down.

Drew had a glazed look in his eye that instantly made my heart start to race. He wasn't going to stop, instead just hitting the intersection head-on, throwing caution to the wind. Drew was a reckless driver at the best of times, I guess this time he just wanted to show me how crazy he really could be.

“SHIT!”

As I heard him yell, I turned towards him, and in that split second I saw the headlights a foot away from the driver door.

BANG!!! The loudest, most horrible crunching noise I have ever heard in my life. The car spun, tyres screaming, I could feel myself being pushed against the passenger door as the car went round and round. Then the most peaceful quiet as the night returned to normal. That didn't last long. The driver of the car that just hit us was sitting in her car screaming. Drew wasn't in his seat. I could feel blood dripping off my chin. It was warm, almost surreal. I looked out the window and could see in the light from the other car's headlights an awkward looking shape down the road. Slowly I got out of the car, and started limping down the road. My knee was busted, I could see a big cut down its side. I got to the shape and saw it was Drew. He wasn't moving, he was just staring at me. Pale and cold to the touch, I knelt next to him. I could feel the rough road surface biting into my knee caps.

“It's OK mate,” I whispered, terrified but remaining calm on the outside, “everything's gunna be ok.”

I didn't for a second believe what I was saying, but I felt Drew's hand rest on mine. I could see his lips moving, he was trying to talk. I bent over and put my ear next to his mouth.

“Fucked it this time, didn’t I?” he murmured.

“Nah mate, we’ve had worse. Don’t move OK? I’m not goin’ anywhere, just lie still Drew.”

I could still hear the woman screaming. Now she was out of the car, walking in circles. I could also hear the ambulances in the distance, someone must have called them, I still don’t know who it was though.

It was starting to rain, I took off my shirt and held it over Drew’s face to keep it dry. His lips were moving again, I leant over.

“Mate I wanna tell you something. Just shut up and listen to me. All this time, I just wanted to say...”

“I know mate, I know. Just chill out a bit longer, ambos are nearly here.”

“Mate,” he cut me off, “I love you. Not just as friends, I fuckin’ love you man.”

“What?” I couldn’t believe what I just heard, I had been glancing down the road, I could see the lights of the ambulance. Now I was looking him dead in the eye, I thought he was delirious, but he was returning a steely cold glare that I knew meant he was fully aware of what he was saying.

I stared him down, unsure what to do. I felt his hand slide up the back of my neck, onto the back of my head. He pulled me close, and kissed me. I pulled away, I fell back on my haunches. ‘No,’ I thought, bewildered, unable to accept what had just happened, ‘no.’

Drew was looking at me, content. The rain felt so cool on my face I just lay back and let it hit me. Then I drifted off, everything was quiet, I was comfortable, at peace. I fell asleep.

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Slowly I opened my eyes, my head throbbed, my leg ached. I looked around. Everything was bright white, it took a while for my vision to fully recover.

“You’re a lucky man, Jason.”

I turned to where the noise came from. I saw a doctor in a big white coat, just like in the movies.

“Drew” I said, instinctively.

“He’s in ICU, you can see him shortly.”

“What happened?” I couldn’t remember anything from the day before. Then it started, flashbacks popping into my head like machinegun fire. BANG, I remembered the golf. BANG, the beers. BANG, getting in the car. BANG, Drew kissing me.

“Car crash, Jase. It’s a miracle you and Drew are alive. You have a laceration to your forehead, and a broken knee. Drew is a little worse off. He cracked his skull and broke his neck, not to mention a hundred cuts and scrapes. He will be lucky to walk again,” the doctor said, with a look as if to say ‘not another one of these, when are kids going to learn?’

I felt myself drifting off to sleep again.

I woke up again, this time I had a splitting headache. I rolled over and tried to throw up, but all I managed was bile. I could see mum asleep in a chair across the room. Slowly, I slid out of bed and into a wheel chair I saw next to my bed. Everything was stiff and ached. It hurt to roll the chair just an inch forward, but eventually I got to the elevator, and then up to ICU.

“Drew,” I said as I rolled up to his bed. “You awake mate?”

“Fucked it this time,” Drew whispered, flashing his wicked grin and winking at me. “I always said, if you’re gunna do a number on yourself, make it a big one.”

I could see it hurt him just to talk, but it was characteristic of Drew to pretend all was well. I felt like crying just looking at him. I didn’t know what to say.

“You angry at me mate?” Drew asked, he always knew how to cut the silence.

“Nah mate, there’s no hate. You remember what happened?”

“I got nothing, I can’t even remember what I had for breakfast. The doctors say that my memory will get better, but the last thing I remember at the moment is goin to work three days ago.”

“Want me to fill you in?” I said hesitantly.

“I know we crashed the car, I know I have a busted neck, what else is there?”

“Righto mate, relax and I’ll tell you what happened.”

“Fire away.”

“We played golf, I won.”

“Don’t lie,” Drew always knew when I was lying.

“Righto fucker, you won.” I decided there was no point lying. “You smashed me actually mate, you played like Tiger.” I could see Drew’s eyes flicker, he was remembering. “Then we went back to my place and kept drinking. We decided to go for a drive to BP at about 1.” Drew was crying now. “We got t-boned at the end of the street.”

“That’s it?” Drew said. “Nothing else?”

Tears were running down his face.

“That’s it mate. The ambos rocked up, and we woke up here I guess.”

“Nah that’s not all Jase, something else happened. Don’t you remember?”

He looked at me, I could see he was waiting for my reaction. I could feel myself welling up.

“That’s all I remember, Drew.” I was crying too. I couldn’t help it. It was the first time I’d seen Drew cry, and I’m sure it was the first time he had seen me like this. “That’s all I’ve got mate.”

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My buddy Drew, that was the last I saw of him. Slipped into a coma, and was gone — like that.

Someone once told me that you remember what you want to forget, and you forget what you want to remember.

Every week, after a game of golf, I think the good things about Drew and me when I get my S, B & C pie. Before I swallow and it’s gone.

