

HAIRTRIGGERS

A Play in One Act

by

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

STOKE: Leader of the gangsters. The coffee purist.

DIXIE: A gangster, Stoke's fiancée.

JAGG: A gangster, young hooligan.

WANDA: A gangster, Jagg's indifferent girlfriend.

Scene

An abandoned coffee shop in any small town U.S.A.

Time

Present day.

(LIGHTS UP on a table, four chairs, and a coffee maker. A stagehand activates the coffee maker so that it begins percolating. We hear THE LETTERMAN's "SHANGRI-LA" sound off. Then we hear a GUN BATTLE and POLICE SIRENS sound offstage over the song. FADE SFX)

(Moments later, STOKE enters in a black suit, his white dress shirt bloodied from the gunfight. He goes to the table, pays his wounds no real bother. He lays his gun down on the table, takes a seat, gazes at the coffee maker percolating coffee)

STOKE

In the beginning, God made California, and then he made things like man and woman. But, it wasn't enough. Seems that man and woman had to go to work, and so he made cigarettes and yep you guessed it... coffee. Time passed, and more and more experts began to complain that things like nicotine and caffeine were the very thing that was sendin' us to our grave. I remember the time I went to the doctor and he told me I'd better quit. I just turned to the old man, looked him square in the eye and said... we don't wanna do that mejo.

(DIXIE enters, her blouse bloodied from gunshots. She holds STOKE at gunpoint)

DIXIE

Where's the money, Stoke?

STOKE

I love you too, Dixie.

(DIXIE cocks her gun)

STOKE

(Continued)

I don't have it, baby. All I brought was me.

DIXIE

We're you followed?

STOKE

I don't think so. I thought I was the only one who made it out alive. I hid in the rocks until the sun went down, and then I just walked across the desert. How is it we arrive at the same place?

DIXIE

I followed your footprints as the sun was going down.

STOKE

Pretty smart, baby. Pretty smart.

DIXIE

What is this place?

STOKE

Some shithole coffee shop in a ghost town. Found this coffee maker. Found some coffee grinds. Found a filter. Now, I've found you.

DIXIE

What time is it?

STOKE

Goin' on three in the morning. Still wanna get married in Vegas?

(Long silence. DIXIE lays her gun down on the table, sits across from STOKE)

DIXIE

I haven't taken a shit in four days.

STOKE

Don't worry, Dixie. The coffee will make you regular. Any moment now.

(Moments later, JAGG enters in a suit with his gun, his dress shirt bloodied from gunshots. He paces the floor)

JAGG

Cigarette! I need a goddamn Cigarette!

(DIXIE removes a pack of cigarettes from her purse, examines the contents)

DIXIE

We're down to a goddamn half a pack, between the three of us. Shhhhit! We've gotta find a Seven Eleven, before we cross the border, or we'll all get on each other's nerves and beat the shit out of each other.

JAGG

Gimme one.

(JAGG takes a cigarette, puts it in his mouth, fumbles for a lighter, DIXIE puts a cigarette in her mouth, digs through her purse for a lighter)

STOKE

Where's the money, Jagg?

JAGG

(To DIXIE)

Got a light?

DIXIE

(Fumbling through her purse)

Yeah... No... I could have sworn I had a lighter.

JAGG

Wanda's got my lighter, and she's got yours, and yours. How is it that one person ends up with everyone else's lighters? We shoulda got more cigarettes.

DIXIE

Shoulda got more lighters.

STOKE

(Pressing)

Where's the money Jagg?

JAGG

You should be so lucky. The two of you engaged, and I get stuck with a girl who runs off with the money and the lighter. I told you we'd lose our lighters. Everyone loses their lighters.

(Looks around)

What is this place?

STOKE/DIXIE

Some shithole coffee shop in a ghost town.

JAGG

What are you two? A fuckin' stereo?

STOKE

(Gently takes Dixie's hand)

You could say that. Come hell or high water, we're getting married in Vegas at the Luxor.

DIXIE

And then it's on to the Madonna Inn for our honeymoon.

STOKE

And after that, we're gonna buy a ranch out in the middle of nowhere, and I'm gonna start my own goat jerky business, and when the evening sun sets, I'm gonna fall asleep in my rocking chair to a big bowl of chilimac and a buzz bomb.

JAGG

How. We lost the money. Besides, you don't need to be married to do that.

DIXIE

But, you do need to be married to enjoy my goddamn home cooking.

JAGG

Hey, lady, I got nothin' against your home cooking.

STOKE

Think about it, Jagg. It takes a man to kill meat, but it takes a woman to serve it up.

JAGG

What the fuck are you talking about? You hardly know each other. Now, take me for example. I need a fuckin' cigarette. I don't take more than I can carry out the door. In college that's what they call economy. Just wish I had a fuckin' lighter.

(WANDA enters with a gun, holds a briefcase with money sticking out, her blouse bloodied from the gunfight)

JAGG

(To WANDA)

Give it here.

(WANDA smacks JAGG across the face)

JAGG

(Continued)

Ooooh... That was clean, baby. Real clean. Come on, let's go around back, I'm in a smoochin' mood.

(WANDA points her gun in JAGG's face, cocks it)

JAGG

(Continued)

You kissed me when we blasted open the safe?

WANDA

It didn't mean shit. I was in a zone... and I didn't walk ten miles across the desert at three in the morning to be pawed by some hormone happy chain smoker.

JAGG

I don't care about the money. Just gimme the goddamn lighter.

(WANDA tosses the lighter to JAGG, sits at the table with STOKE and DIXIE. JAGG paces around the room with the lighter, tries to ignite it several times, to no avail)

JAGG

(Continued; Lighter won't ignite)

Fuck... Fuck... Fuck... Fuck... Fuck... It's no use. I gave it everything I got.

(JAGG gives up, tosses the lighter to STOKE)

DIXIE

It was a good lighter.

STOKE

Yeah. The little guy hung in there as long as he could.

JAGG

Long enough, except to light my goddamn cigarette, and yours, and yours, and yours!

DIXIE

(To WANDA)

Thought we lost you Wanda.

WANDA

You think I robbed that bank for the money? Fuck that shit. We all know why we're here.

(Sudden silence. JAGG takes a seat, the cigarette still in his mouth. WANDA puts down the briefcase, sits across from JAGG. ALL piously gaze in silence at the coffee maker)

JAGG

Gotta have a cigarette with my cuppa Joe. It's just not the same.

WANDA

(Looks at Jagg)

We'd all be smoking right now, if we'd all kept our own lighters.

JAGG

Why do you look at me when you say that?

WANDA

I just happen to look at you when I say that.

JAGG

You just want to start an argument.

WANDA

Fuck you.

JAGG

(To DIXIE and STOKE)

You see? You see? You see that? You see that? That. That! That she he insinuates, and refuses to admit. You see that?!

STOKE

All right, all right, all right, all right! The two of you shut yer asses! If I listen to you two go back and forth any longer, I'm gonna take up smoking.

WANDA

(To STOKE)

You don't smoke?

STOKE

(Pointing to the coffee maker)

You see this? You see this? This? This is what we crossed the desert for, all shot up and bleary-eyed. This, this, machine... I'm a purist.

DIXIE

(To WANDA and JAGG)

Now, are you two gonna be fuckin' assholes all night?

JAGG/WANDA

(Under their breath)

Mmmmmm... yeah... we'll see.

DIXIE

You're quite a matchmaker, Stoke.

STOKE

All couples dream of being gangsters. Who could blame me?

DIXIE

The ultimate double date meets the ultimate fantasy-wish fulfillment. Calamity from a distance. Now, let's get down to business. The business of getting speedy. The business of drinking coffee.

STOKE

Yes. The business of coffee. Fuck the money and gore while we all join hands.

(ALL join hands, close their eyes
as STOKE gives grace)

STOKE

(Continued)

In the name of the I'll-take-it-black, the half-a-pack a day, and the holy filter, I now pronounce us deranged and escapist. I will now fill your cup.

(ALL open their eyes. STOKE pours the
OTHERS a cup of coffee)

STOKE

(Continued; pouring coffee)

Well, god dammit. It's a nice day to be alive in the sun. A great day for kickin' ass. Fuck up the fence. Dent a fender. Make a flag with a golden pole. Stand on the edge of the cliff, spread your arms and shoot rock and roll into the side of the mountain. Watch it crumble. Make way for the cities. Sit down in a chair. Feel good. Have yourself a cuppa coffee.

(STOKE moves his cup of coffee into the center of the table)

DIXIE

Well, there it is. Blue. Round. Streamlined. It's gotta handle. It's gotta function. Makes you glad. Makes you mad. But, it's contained. It's a cuppa coffee. A real cuppa coffee. Alone on the table. Quiet. Serene. Calm. Eloquent. All alone. All to itself. Feels good just to look at it.

(ALL slurp their first sip of coffee for several moments)

WANDA

Ahhh! That first sip. That's the sip that creates that thunder. That urgency. That what can I say. That hello dolly feelin'. And it's all brown. All the way to the bottom. And it's all mine. My own private thing. My own private moment. That first good morning sip of coffee. That's the ticket. That's the kicker. That's where it all begins. And there's no goin' back... I'm goin' back.

(ALL slurp their second sip of coffee for several moments)

JAGG

Second sip. Don't fuck with the man after the second sip. No siree. Don't fuck with the man and don't kick the can. Cuz now he's awake. He's gonna nail it down and he's gonna nail it down hard. When the sun rises, so does the cup. And when the cup rises, so does the man. His brain begins to tingle. Then begins to shine. The charge of the universe. The charge of a lifetime.

STOKE

The electricity. The current. The tides goin' in or out, with no regrets. No nothin' but a craving. Look at that cup. Sturdy. Round. All coffee cups aspire to somethin.'

DIXIE

It's survival of the fittest. The ones that don't make it have all those flashy half-ass designs that you don't pay attention to after six weeks. That's why if your gonna own a coffee cup. You gotta own one like this. I mean, just look at it!

(STOKE holds his cup out like a grail
for DIXIE to gaze at)

JAGG

Everywhere you look. It's blue. Just like the sea, where we all came from... A cup like that aspires to somethin'. Simplicity. Serenity. Identity without complexity.

WANDA

And if that cup aspires to somethin', then so does the coffee inside of it. The coffee and that cup aspire to a symbiosis.

STOKE

And the man who drinks that symbiosis aspires to share in that simplicity and serenity.

DIXIE

Shit. That does make a gal feel complete.

JAGG

There's only one thing better than the first cuppa coffee.

WANDA

It's the goddamn refill.

(STOKE pours a second cup of coffee
for the OTHERS)

JAGG

When a man gets up in the mornin', pours himself a cuppa coffee and stands proud and poised in front of the sun, and lets that cigarette dangle out of his mouth, he's got one last detail to take into account.

WANDA

A goddamn ashtray.

(WANDA removes an ashtray from her purse, sets it down on the table)

STOKE

That ashtray and that coffee cup are the same color.

DIXIE

They like each other. They belong together.

JAGG

Yeah, but there comes a time in a man's life when he's got to gauge how much caffeine gets into his bloodstream.

WANDA

A rocky mountain high, as clear and pure as the rolling waters of Colorado. But, he spins out of control.

He doesn't know how high he is any longer, because he's been so speedy for so long.

STOKE

But, the man's gotta push, and push, and push to see where he's gonna get to. A man's gotta drink alotta coffee in order to aspire to somethin'. He's gotta ride out those moods of black doom in order to know what needs fixin'. He's gotta know the flavors, the aromas, the sweetness, the bitterness. It all boils down to a fundamental reconciliation... Do I run the coffee through the machine once, or twice? Who is this other self? This hostile self? This venomous self? This caffeine self?

(STOKE pours more coffee for the others. DIXIE goes to sip)

STOKE

Don't touch it!

DIXIE

Why not?

STOKE

The man always lets his cuppa coffee settle before he takes that first sip.

WANDA

Cuz if that coffee has too many ripples in the first sip, it starts a chain reaction.

JAGG

That ripple goes from the cup, to your lips, down your throat, and into your stomach.

WANDA

And when it hits the bottom of the man's stomach, you may think it don't have any ripples. But, believe me, it does. You can't feel it. You can't sense it.

STOKE

And if there's one thing the man doesn't need, it's a ripple in that first sip of coffee. Cuz that where it all goes wrong.

DIXIE

Jesus!

STOKE

And once that happens, the man is no longer the man. Cuz the man and the coffee are at one in a peaceful conglomerate of order. A universal order. An order that was destined to be.

(TOM JONES' "IT'S NOT UNUSUAL" sounds off)

DIXIE

Like... music. Like the silence between the sounding of a note in a symphony that no body hears, unless they take the time to listen.

STOKE

And when the man gets to that first sip of coffee, and he watches the sun rise, he's already got a plan.

DIXIE

And the plan is already in the man.

JAGG

And that's what makes that yonder so goddamn blue, unrestrained, wild.

WANDA

And when the caffeine is in the system, we can be damn sure of one thing.

STOKE

We're getting a rush on.

DIXIE

You mean the man is wakin' up.

JAGG

The man goes into a trance while he's gazin' at the rolling hills, the blowin' trees, and the sun comin' up along the horizon.

WANDA

Things he's gotta get done. Things he's gotta conquer. Things he's gotta turn from a losin' streak into a winnin' one. And all along, the caffeine is doin' it's job, goin' to work for you.

STOKE

(Takes a long sip)

Goin' to work for the man.

DIXIE

Man, whatta plan.

(TOM JONES' number suddenly shuts off)

JAGG

So, what's on the man's agenda for today?

STOKE

Well, shit. Another cuppa coffee... The man has to drink at least four or five before he can aspire to somethin'.

DIXIE

And you just let 'em go.

JAGG

Let 'em go tell the man he's the man when he wakes up in the morning.

WANDA

Cuz if there's no one there to tell the man he's the man, how's he gonna know who's the man?

STOKE

We are all a conglomerate of the man.

DIXIE

And the one vital part the man cannot be without, is a cuppa coffee.

JAGG

That is why the universe is not complete...

STOKE

Without...

STOKE/JAGG/DIXIE/WANDA

The man.

JAGG

It needs some sort of resolution. Like an arc. How do you resolve a cuppa coffee?

STOKE

Not much to resolve, except where there's a stoke, there's jagg.

DIXIE

And the fall is hostile, ruthless, insane, devoid of grace.

JAGG

No smooth transition. Just a cryptic concierto of things that go bump in the coffee shop.

WANDA

I wonder how many people will quit smokin' and drinkin' coffee tomorrow?

STOKE

Forget about it. If not coffee and cigarettes, then something else. A new pill. A new serum. A new soft drink. We'll be there.

DIXIE

God dammit. I suppose we will.

(STOKE looks up at the ceiling for a long while. JAGG and WANDA follow suit, look up at the ceiling. DIXIE removes a compact mascara kit, looks at her reflection in the small vanity mirror, removes a tube of lipstick, begins to gently apply it to her lips)

JAGG

(Looking up at ceiling)

What are you lookin' at?

STOKE

(Looking up at the ceiling)

Nothing, really. I got the crawlies. It was no mean feat, but I finally got the crawlies.

WANDA

(Looking up at ceiling)

Thought you were lookin' at somethin'.

JAGG

(Looking up at ceiling)

Thought there was something wrong with the ceiling.

(DIXIE drops her lipstick. The clatter startles the others. **ALL grab their guns and face each other off at point blank range** across the coffee table)

DIXIE

Lipstick. I dropped my lipstick.

STOKE

Lipstick?

WANDA

Lipstick.

JAGG

Lipstick. Fuckin' Dixie, fuckin' lipstick.

STOKE

Fuckin' lipstick.

DIXIE

Lipstick. It's my fuckin' lipstick.

JAGG

Fuckin' Dixie.

DIXIE

I was reachin' for my fuckin' lipstick. What's with you fuckin' people?

JAGG

What's with your fuckin' lipstick?

WANDA

I knew it was lipstick.

STOKE

Yeah, me too.

DIXIE

That's what you get for lookin' at the fuckin' ceiling.

(Long silence)

WANDA

I knew it was lipstick.

JAGG

Fuck do you know about lipstick?

WANDA

Fuck do you know about smoking?

JAGG

(To DIXIE and STOKE)

You see? You see? You see that? You see that? That. That! That she he insinuates, and refuses to admit. You see that?!

STOKE

All right, all right, all right, all right! Shut yer asses!

(Takes a moment)

Guess we're all just a little hairtrigger. Little Sunday bank job goes wrong. The nerves begin to fray from eluding the law on foot across the desert. We jump to conclusions. So, why don't we all just lay down our guns and have ourselves a nice cuppa coffee.

(ALL sit)

POLICE (O.S.)

This is the police! Come out with your hands up. The coffee shop is surrounded!

(ALL jump to their feet again, grab their guns and face the door)

STOKE

(To the OTHERS)

I'm not one for makin' speeches. But, it was nice workin' with you. I just want you all to know, if any of you survive, and I don't, promise me you'll go to The Luxor in Vegas... and when that... that... What is that fuckin' laser thing?

DIXIE

The light at the top of the black pyramid?

STOKE

Yeah, that... Promise me...

JAGG

(Cutting off STOKE)

I went to Vegas once to gamble. Left my Discover card in the ATM. Some guy stole five hundred dollars from my bank account.. I got so depressed, I got drunk and accidentally gave the cabbie a fifty instead of a twenty...

WANDA

(Cutting off JAGG)

How unfortunate...

DIXIE

(To STOKE)

You were saying?

STOKE

Uh... I was saying?

JAGG

Yeah, something about 'think of me'.

STOKE

Yeah, oh yeah, and I was tying it all into the Luxor in Vegas...

JAGG

(Cutting off STOKE)

Sorry, didn't mean to cut you off. Guess I was just embellishing for embellishment's sake, sometimes I ramble...

WANDA

(To JAGG)

Will you shut the fuck up?

DIXIE

(To STOKE)

You wanted us to think of you...

(STOKE takes DIXIE aside, away from
JAGG and WANDA)

STOKE

Dixie, we had ourselves a ball. Drove around in some fast cars, ate some great steak, robbed a bank, got shot up pretty bad, didn't give a shit... Aw, I can't say it.

DIXIE

You don't have to.

STOKE

(Turns to JAGG and WANDA)

Jagg, Wanda. Guess I owe you an apology. If I hadn't introduced the two of you, you never would have been caught up in this mess, now with the place surrounded by the cops and all.

JAGG

(To WANDA)

Fuck it, darlin'. Maybe I'm just a dumb kid who doesn't know the first thing about dames, and I smoke just to look cool and all...

WANDA

Save it, Jagg. You're a great kisser.

(Turns to STOKE and DIXIE)

But, I'm in a shootin' mood.

(ALL exit. We hear a brutal GUNFIGHT outside the building. Moments later, the four gangsters re-enter, still bloody, but looking refreshed, chuckling as they take a seat at the coffee table once again. STOKE pours everyone a cup)

STOKE

That was a bitchen gunfight.

DIXIE

It had a pleasantly intense taste, medium body and high acidity.

JAGG

The perfect balance of deep flavor with a subtle spicy
aroma.

WANDA

A smoky essence and a rich finish.

STOKE

We can't imagine the police will be satisfied with
anything less.

(SLIM WHITMAN'S "RAINBOWS ARE COMING
BACK IN STYLE" sounds off. STOKE begins
to chuckle, then gradually, the OTHERS
begin to chuckle over the song, louder
and louder, until they are roaring with
laughter... BLACKOUT)

END OF PLAY