

Alls Ya Gotta Do

Zach Brown

The creak of rickety wood sounds as a shabby looking fellow takes a seat at the bar. Someone clicks on the jukebox perched against the wall behind him. The modest barfolk take up a country ballad's lull. The newcomer fidgets a bit. Darnell Tennessee, a respectable barman, draws "What'll it be fellas?" The shabby fellow responds:

"Wayl I reckon myself, a tenacious handyman going by the name of Jeremiah Castle, will have whatever's the cheapest beer ya got. My compatriot there, a gentleman of current unemployment called Larry - and that'll be just Larry mind you - will have a shot of whiskey. And leave the glass, if ya could."

Lickety split, Darnell lays the drinks on the table in front of them, slamming the bottle of Jack Daniel's with a hearty, innocent violence. "There ya are, Mr. Castle, 'n' 'just Larry'."

"Thank ya kindly, 'keep." Mr. Castle begins to guzzle his beer.

Darnell waves his hand as if the work wasn't a big deal and heads off to serve the only other patron in the bar, a layabout wino endowed with a long, wispy, twisting beard probably a few too many drinks in. The patron is shouting "LIZARDS!" Larry dreams up a horrific nightmare as he imagines what trauma led to this man's shouting. He sees a cockroach get stuck in a spider web against the back of the bar.

"Friends in low places..." Larry mutters incoherently.

“Drank the drank pal. C’mon Larry ya know you could use it, I’m trying to help ya out here.”

“What’s the point, J? What’s the point.” Nonetheless, Larry relents, downing the shot and opting for the bottle in its place. The din of the music fades and Larry and Mr. Castle are talking the same conversation they always do when they get to drinking.

“I just hate it, J. Why do those billionaires flying this way and that out there have so much, and you’re ordering the cheapest beer you can every time we go to the bar? And I mean, look at this place. It’s got bugs! The chairs are as loud as the jukebox! Why’s it we gotta have so little?”

“Why’s it we gotta have so little, Larry!? I’ve done told ya before ain’t I? Way back when Mr. Karl told us ‘bout a period of primitive accumulation in which a small class of people assumed control over them there means of production by seizin’ on the needs of rural migrants for a way of livin’ as they was comin’ in to the cities on account of how their subsistent farming practices was made obsolete by the mechanical developments of the industrial revolution. Wasn’t long ‘fore the endless drive for what some fellas call the accumulation of capital took hold of the global economy, draining the good mother Mary of earth of her resources and otherwise perpetuatin’ class structures that put the need there in the first place, normalizin’ their existence to the point of replacin’ the natural order. And I told ya, I told ya Larry that the workin’ man’s solidarity as a class, reachin’ an understandin’ of the conditions of their exploitation and organizin’ a revolution ‘round their shared class interest: that’s the only way out of this here cockamamie scheme we call human civilization.”

The barkeep’s eyes twinkle with fascination with Mr. Castle’s story: “Is that all true?”

“Couldn’t be any other way, m’friend. And you and I – and e’rybody else ‘round these parts we’s gonna redefine our social relations through our collective action. We’s the bedrock upon which this country – ah hell, this whole world, rests upon. And when we put together our movement ferm the ground up– “

“THAT AIN’T NEVER DONE NOBODY NO GOOD NOHOW.” The bearded drunkard at the end of the bar shouts out at Larry and Mr. Castle. It was a small bar: tough not to overhear conversation. “Lemme tell ya somethin’, son. Larry was it? My name is Jebediah King, and tonight I turned one hundred years old. In that time lemme tell ya somethin’, kiddo, let me tell ya. And listen good ‘cuz Ima gonna tell ya. Y’know how much money a revolution of the workin’ class taken from the rich man and woman? They got nothin’: government squashes ‘em ‘fore they even get started. Y’know how much money them scientologists taken from ‘em?” He pauses for dramatic effect – it doesn’t play very well. Mr. Castle and Darnell are unimpressed, but Larry is transfixed. “Son, if you wanna even this here proverbial playin’ field you don’t go ‘round buildin’ one of them class consciousnesses- I tell ya, I tell ya alls ya gotta do... is start yourself a cult.”

Lining the glass shelves of a glass case are lavish, glass bottles of radiant colors: verdant, gleaming, translucent green and turquoise, translucent blues that also gleamed and all sorts of other fun shades of alcohol that strike in contrast to the brown bottles against the brown wood of the other bar. Evidently exclusive, this place holds a similar number of patrons to the last. A pair of elegant gentlemen are smooching one another in a private booth some distance away from the main bar. At the bar is a woman wearing a baggy t-shirt and shorts, recognizable to the trained

eye as one-of-a-kind custom makes, the only of their kind in the world. Her shoes are an experimental prototype, completely transparent glass that is strong enough to endure the roughest terrain around the globe. Atop her neatly cropped hair rests a tiara made of the same material. She wears the tiara because she can. She wears the tiara because she earned it. That's how it went.

“Jennifer Beza, I’ve come a long way to meet you.” Jenny turns to face the man addressing her. Larry is wearing a shabby robe that looks about a thousand years old, visibly shedding dust into the air and ruining the immaculate glass countertop. A thick rope ties together his crusty garb at the waist.

“Who are you?”

“I am the son of God.” Jennifer eyes him up and down. Noting the dirt under his fingernails and his smell, like sweat and the outdoors: disgusting.

“You’re not the son of God.”

“I am the son of God.”

“Oh yeah, and why would the son of God come to see me?” She smirks, taunting the faux messiah.

“Jennifer Beza, God hath sent me to speak to you because you have amassed a great fortune with your company, and now control the majority of the world’s wealth. You wield great power, and God told me they respect you greatly.”

“Hm.” Jennifer Beza thinks about this dirty fellow across from her claiming to be the son of God. Normally when she is forced to interact with these preacher types they lecture her about her lack of charity, her greed, her infidelity, or some such nonsense. They always want to tell her what to do with her money, with her life. This one spoke true; she has amassed more than half the world’s wealth. She did wield great power. And she earned it. Why shouldn’t God respect her? “Prove it.”

“Pardon, ma’am?”

“Prove to me you’re the son of God.”

“Well that’d be no trouble at all Madame Beza.” Jennifer fails to notice through the billowy, carpet-like robes that Larry has a pool of sweat congealing as his nerves turn to trembles in the cold of the enchanting glass bar. Why did the rich love the cold so much? Larry recalls once when Mr. Castle called them vampires. He starts squinting at Jennifer’s teeth. “What if I told you something about yourself that you’ve never told a soul?”

“Please.”

“You earned it.”

“Excuse me?”

“You earned it, Jennifer. Everyone who tells you otherwise, who says no person should hold a place of your caliber, or that you were lucky and merely coasted off an appreciating inheritance and a gamified socio-economic system which rewards players who play by different rules due to how they start the game- They’re all wrong Jennifer. You earned it.” Tears streak

down Jennifer's face. She smiles and sniffles. Her whimpering makes it clear every anxiety, every self-doubt, every scratch and claw into her identity all fade away. She is miraculously healed, or she feels that way anyhow: doesn't really matter which.

"How – how do you know?" She stammers in desperation.

"I know because God knows, and I am the son of God." The most powerful woman in the world stares up into Larry's eyes in pure suspense, anticipating further elaboration. "Erm – listen to me Jennifer. God has a plan for you. He has shown me the way, and I will erm – show it to you."

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The wailing creaks of the wood and melancholy moan of the jukebox are negligible against the riotous noise of an enormous crowd. They fill every nook and cranny of the bar, and spill out through saloon-style swinging double doors. They all look up at Mr. Castle standing atop the bar, taking a cheapest beer from Darnell.

"Listen up y'all. Now it is downright remarkable how quick you can get o'er a hundred thousand folks to go 'n' unionize and go out on strike when you're trying to prove a point to your pal Larry, amirite y'all?" The hoard erupts into an uproarious applause, sounding off as tribal warriors for this noble cause. As only around two hundred people could physically fit themselves into the bar, undoubtedly most of the crowd could not hear Mr. Castle, and therefore knew nothing of what they were cheering about.

"Now settle down y'all, Mr. Castle got somethin' to say." Darnell quiets the crowd.

“Now this town’s only got a population of two hundred people, so I’m am a guessin’ that some of you folk ain’t from around these parts.” A great number of the crowd knock their heads into each other’s as they buckle over from laughing. “You there, what’s your name where you from?”

“My name’s Peter! I’m from Mobile, Alabama and I work at a gas station, also goin’ by the name of Mobile. And them Mobile folks from Mobile down in Mobile been a underpayin’ my wages for services rendered for ‘bout ten years now! I know hwat a man is worth, and I know them Mobile folks outta Mobile only make their profit offa the surplus value derived from the product of my labor hwich is not fully bestowed unto me, the laborer: the same as any means ownin’ makes they profit. Offa yours and mines back!” The crowd is beside itself, each member shouting their own lamentations at the hands of their corporate owners.

“Wally’s Magical Fun World of Groceries told me to go on welfare and Medicaid so as to afford my bills and medical care!” This man squeaks in the manner of a dweeb.

“Over at the Barbarian Factory our managers tell us using the bathroom is breaktime Ms. Jenny can’t afford, so alls we can do is piss in any available receptacle. Issue is, sometimes there’s no receptacle around, so we gotta let loose in our trousers and we ain’t paid enough to afford new ones. See?” The woman speaking gestures to her pants, clearly marked by a voluminous history of urine stains.

“The big man told me I should call him by his first name instead of ‘Mister’. He says ‘we’s a family’ and he says ‘think of me as your brother’: so I says his shorts make him look like a queer and call him a pussy the way me and my brother do. And he gives me the boot! Now I’m

out on my ass with my actual family to feed and I gotta tell ‘em they’re gonna starve ‘cause I was stupid enough to think my boss was my brother.”

Mr. Castle responds: “Brothers and sisters and everyone all about and in between, workin’ people of the hundred miles surrounding this small town who have now gathered here to see me, listen close! Each ‘n’ e’ry one of you has a story just like the testimonies we just heard. We, as the workin’ class, have been deprived of our liberties, our agency, and our right to a free and fulfillin’ livelihood. We will not be denied, we will not be silenced, we will take action today. Follow me into the city, for I got a plan for us all.”

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“Why did you open a bar made of solid gold Mike?” Jennifer adored the exquisite, priceless glass of her own bar (The glass of course, had a price; it was an exorbitant one.), but as she gazed into the solid gold bar top and a twisted version of her reflection gazed back, she was disturbed.

“Because I’m Michelangelo Giovanni Tortellino and I do what I want.” His defensive retort breaks to a sigh and a soft continuation. “I guess I just wanted to see if I could. And just like always, I could.” Mike looks around and sees nothing but twenty-four karat gold. Flawless, every surface is polished daily. He sees seating arrangements, booths entirely made of gold: ridiculous and impractically uncomfortable. He looks at the golden bottles he makes his employees pour all the drinks into, and the golden glasses he makes them pour the drinks from the golden bottles into. He looks at the perfect sheen of the gold bar, which he doesn’t allow his employees to slide drinks across because a scratch could diminish its value by millions. He



wonders why, at this point, he spends a second thinking about millions. Maybe it's a habit he cannot shake. He wonders why, at this point he cares about anything.

"So, what do you think, Mike? I'm telling you he's the real thing."

"Jenny, I have much respect for you. But it sounds like a bunch of gobbledygook and balderdash to me. How'd this guy even know about your hideaway? I thought I was special." He gives Jennifer an Italian wink. She's not looking.

"God told him how to find it Mike, and that's God's honest truth."

"Jenny, you have never been a religious woman. I once watched you torture a man just because it was something you could buy. You didn't even enjoy it. Why would God want to talk to you?" He fidgets with the pyrite cross necklace his father left him that he has concealed under his twenty-four-karat shirt.

"This is different Mike. This guy's not talking about what the other religious guys talk about. He knows something, Mike. He knows us. He knows what we are."

"And what is it we are, Jenny?"

"We're the chosen people, Mike."

"You mean... like the Jews?"

"Think... bigger." Jennifer Beza looks up from the gold into Tortellini's prismatic baby blues.

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The room is a bar with a single large table in the center. Seated across from Mr. Castle at all ends of the unconventionally poetic round table are the leaders of the largest unions and coalitions of workers in the United States. Shouting and tumultuous uproar fills the room as the people claiming the fight for the people fight with each other. Even as the table is round, it is clear that Castle sits at the spiritual head of the table. As he stands to speak the rest of the chatter peters out.

“And you, Czechlovesolis, what was the last count on membership for yer union there?”

“Around two million.”

“And about how many of them there service workers would ya say workin’ in the U.S. of A?”

“Twenty-“

“Twenty-six million! That’s right, Czechlovesolis. That’s right twenty-six million service workers in this here country of ours. Now tell me why is it my cause rallied about ten million more service workers than yours, seein’ as you’re supposed to be the one havin’ their backs, hm?”

“I don’t know, Mr. Castle.” Czechlovesolis grits his teeth with these last words.

“Well I tell you what, it’s ‘cause ya ain’t got no charisma! Not a one of ya! And I don’t mean it in no cruel way. Hell, I’m no angel. Alls I’m sayin’ is you gotta make the people know that you’re there for ‘em, and that you ain’t gonna get nowhere without ‘em. When they get to

knowin' that it's live together er die alone, that's when ya got 'em on board, chiefs. Now will ya sign on with me?"

The table members are mesmerized at Mr. Castle's words. Czechlovesolis speaks up:
"You're right. You're no angel. You're the son of God."

Larry purchased a bar for his rapidly growing holy society for the billionaires to meet in and plan the future of the world. "Louis the XIV was the first of the chosen people." Some a hundred or so billionaires crowd into this bar, multiple floors carved out in square walkways open in the center so that the upper floors look down upon the lower ones. The ultra-wealthy patrons aren't used to a squeeze, and their squeamish fidgets suggest they might have some trouble working as a team later down the line.

"I modeled my bar off of his castle." Mike and Jennifer are sat right behind Larry who is perched on a podium elevated eight feet off the ground in the center of the ground floor.

"Louis the Great he was called! In his greatness he led the glory of France in the longest recorded reign of any sovereign in all of history. France's very own golden age, beloved by all, Louis the Great had no flaws. That is all of you, do you hear me? You will usher in your own golden age. You, as God's chosen people, also find your greatness as self-evident. You will use your awesome power of wealth in the glorious divine path, and in your greatness remake this world!" The crowd chants 'son of God!' in the most melodious chorus they can manage. Artists aren't billionaires.

“We will start this new age where Louis the Great started his own! We’re going to France.”

“Mr. Castle, that’s just about the last of the American unions signed onto our cause. We now got a centralized, organized labor force reachin’ into every business in the United States. What are we gonna do now?” Peter’s tiny mitts grip a giant mug of beer which he gestures with toast-like and takes a sip out of, carefully raising it to his lips with both hands.

“Peter, have you been watching the news?”

“I’ve been kinda busy sir, what with organizing the entire country’s working class with you and all.”

“Always make time for the news, Peter.” Peter’s eyes fall to the floor in shame.

“Yessir.”

“I’ll tell ya where we’re goin’. We’re goin’ to where our movement has been getting’ the most support. We’re goin’ to the birthplace of revolutions.”

The sun’s broad rays of midday soak the entirety of the champagne bar atop the Eiffel tower. In this well-lit place, Larry orders some champagne. It is a champagne bar. He sits across from the most popular man in the world. Their table overlooks the Paris skyline, and Larry thinks to himself how the people below look like little ants. He’d like to meet those ants. What are their

ant hopes and ant dreams? Mr. Castle thinks about the Herculean strength of ants; he wonders what an ant can do for itself to become stronger. He turns to a waitress nearby.

“I’ll have your cheapest beer.”

“Sir, this is a champagne bar. We serve champagne.”

“Well, alrighty then. I’ll have your cheapest champagne.” Larry beams a wide, jubilant smile at Mr. Castle.

“I did it, J. I brought them all here: all the billionaires. I convinced them they were God’s chosen people to bring the world and its people into a new golden age. They call me the son of God! They think that, because they were so good at making money, that makes them the holy chosen. J, they’re all here and they’re going to do it digitally. They’re going to give all their money to everybody. They’re going to split it up and send it equitably throughout the world.” Larry is ecstatic at sharing the success of his journey with Mr. Castle, whose steely countenance brings Larry back down to earth.

“Can’t be this way, Larry.”

“What do you mean, J?”

“I mean, tomorrow the whole city of Paris and everyone I done brought with me from the States is gonna round up your billionaires and force ‘em to hand over the proverbial goods, as it were. It’s gotta come from us, J. We gotta take it ourselves.” A clandestine man in a dark hood and cloak lurks at the table behind them, eavesdropping on every word. The hood and cloak are especially unreasonable for early afternoon in Parisian summer, and the sneak sweats and pants

like a dog. He continues to order more and more water, he is so conspicuous it is a miracle that Larry and Mr. Castle do not notice his listening in.

“Why do you have to take it for yourselves? It’ll never work, J! It never has. You’re going to fail and leave us right back where we were. My way will work! They don’t even know what they’re doing, they think they’re one with the divine! I can do this J!”

“I’m sorry Larry. It’s gotta be my way. Too many folks worked together to get this far for me to throw in the towel now.”

“Your way’s going to undo all the work I’ve done convincing these idiots it’s what they want to do. It can’t be your way, J.”

The pair leaps up out of their seats in unison, sending their chairs crashing backward and pull weapons on one another.

“Neither of us has to die, J. We want the same damn thing! We’re so close to getting it!”

“Put down the gun, Larry.”

“You put it down, J.” They fire their weapons in perfect synchronicity directly into one another’s hearts, and they bleed to death on the floor of the Eiffel tower.

“Merde.” The cloaked and hooded figure says to himself. Just then, Jennifer, Mike, Peter, Czechlovesolis, and the woman who pisses her pants barge into the bar. Their faces contort with shock and sorrow as they behold the devastation that stains the carpets before them.

“NO!” They lament together at once.

“YOU’VE KILLED THE SON OF GOD!” They sound like a chorus.

“You think yer hoity-toity prince of the rich and famous is the son of God? You don’t know two shits about God!” Peter tackles Mike Tortellini to the ground, while Czechlovesolis drops to his knees and weeps deeply. He had developed an image of Mr. Castle as a sort of fatherly guide. Now he is lost.

“Larry showed us the true meaning of life, when I thought there wasn’t any left. And you pond scum just shot the meaning of life to death.” Michelangelo Giovanni Tortellino knocks several teeth out of Peter’s mouth with a swift headbutt as they continue to tussle on the floor. The woman who pisses her pants punches Jenny in the face, knocking her tiara to the ground. The tiara skitters across the floor and past the railing, plummeting to a place it will surely be lost forever. Fighting back tears of rage, Jenny rips a glass spike which held her hair in place and jams it into the leg of the woman who pisses her pants. She drags the spike down her leg, ruining the pants fabric and also her leg.

“My jeans... I can’t afford another pair...” The woman who pisses her pants begins strangling Jennifer Beza, who repeatedly kicks her in the groin to no avail. The rift is irreconcilable. The fighting is eternal. The war is holy. The difference cannibalizes. Jebediah King removes his hood and cloak. He walks over to Larry’s body and picks up his weapon. He fires it at the window, spraying shards of glass across the room. He stands atop the table where the two discussed themselves to death. He looks down at a city bestrewn with disorganized riots and private military contractors flown in to quell them: same as it ever was. And he leaps off the top of the Eiffel tower.