

BLACK COFFEE:
SHOTGUNS AND LOAN SHARKS

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Black Coffee Ep. #1 Shotguns and Loan Sharks

EXT. MILDRED'S FRONT STOOP - NIGHT

JOSHUA (24) leans to one side. He clutches his left side as he pushes the DOORBELL button of a neat bungalow home.

He shivers as rain drenches his torn, short sleeve shirt. A sleeve dangles by several threads, while the rest of the shirt is misshapen.

JOSHUA

C'mon No-Nee. Please, open the door.

He pats his pockets, then turns them inside out. Coins sprout wings and fly away.

Joshua shakes his head, then lifts his face to the rain. Water hits his beaten and swollen face. Bright red drops plop in small water puddles, turn pink then drift away.

JOSHUA (CONT'D)

Owwie!

The front door SQUEAKS open. Joshua steps back, hands high as the barrel of a shotgun pushes open the screen.

JOSHUA (CONT'D)

No-Nee, it's me!

MILDRED

Ah hell, boy! Who whooped yo' ass?

MILDRED (76) steps onto the porch.

She wears jeans, a sweatshirt, and a ratty housecoat. She also has a pink print scarf wrapped on her black and silver pin curls. The silver in the curls looks like coins.

JOSHUA

I need your help, No-Nee.

MILDRED

Hmph!

Mildred looks around, then lowers the shotgun. She pushes Joshua inside and SLAMS the door.

INT. MILDRED'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

A round, copper umbrella stand, with Abraham Lincoln faces stamped around the rim, rests in one corner of the kitchen.

Mildred places the shotgun, barrel down, inside it. Water DRIPS on the shiny linoleum.

A scarred wooden table sits in the center of the spacious, airy kitchen. A lazy Susan sits in the exact middle of the table.

On it sits a salt and pepper shaker, a bottle of hot sauce and a sugar bowl. There is no other clutter. Mildred starts coffee, then leaves.

JOSHUA

No-Nee . . .

MILDRED (O.S.)

Don't say anything until I've had my coffee.

Mildred returns with a first aid kit and towels. She shoves the towels at Joshua.

MILDRED (CONT'D)

Stop dripping all over my floor.

Mildred places the small box on the table. She goes to a cabinet near the refrigerator, removes a bottle of Irish whiskey.

She drinks a shot, then pours more whiskey than coffee into two mugs.

She sets them on the table as Joshua drapes a towel over his shoulders.

Joshua slumps in his chair. He drops his head in his hands. The cat clock on the wall gives the time, 2:18 a.m.

Mildred pushes one of the mugs toward Joshua.

JOSHUA

I'm in trouble, No-Nee.

Joshua cups his mug.

MILDRED

Hmph!

Mildred opens the first aid kit and none-too-gently cleans the wounds on his face.

MILDRED (CONT'D)
What kinda trouble, boy? And will
it visit my front door?

Joshua pulls away from her.

JOSHUA
Uhhh.

Joshua slurps his coffee.

Mildred sits down and stares at him until he meets her gaze.

MILDRED
Answer me!

JOSHUA
It's well . . . A loan shark. I
kinda borrowed money from him.

MILDRED
How much is kinda?

JOSHUA
Twenty-five large.

Mildred leans over and smacks him on the back of the head.

JOSHUA (CONT'D)
Ow! What was that for?

MILDRED
For gambling with other people's
money.

Mildred stands, lights a cigarette, then swigs her coffee.

JOSHUA
I know. I know. I don't have much
time. Tonight was just a warning.
Next time it's a limb.

MILDRED
Yeah. I know how their kind works.

JOSHUA
I - I just got into a slump and .
. . I have a gambling problem and I
need help.

MILDRED
Is that all you have to say to me?
You have a problem and you need
help?

JOSHUA

What do you want me to say?

Mildred takes a deep inhale on the cigarette, then blows dollar signs into the air.

MILDRED

Why come to me?

JOSHUA

My parents. They bailed me out when I ran up my credit card in college. They won't help again.

Mildred blows more cigarette smoke dollars signs, then adds more whiskey to Joshua's cup.

JOSHUA (CONT'D)

No-Nee, I can't let gambling ruin my life. My job is going really well, and I could lose everything. Everything.

Mildred dangles the cigarette from the corner of her mouth and reaches for a coffee can on top of the refrigerator. She pulls out a roll of hundreds.

She drops it on the table in front of Joshua. His eyes buck at the money. Joshua reaches for the money. Mildred smacks his hand.

JOSHUA (CONT'D)

No-Nee?

MILDRED

This is your get outta jail free card. I will help you on two conditions.

JOSHUA

I'm listening.

Mildred takes another puff.

MILDRED

You attend Gamblers Anonymous and I will be there with you.

JOSHUA

OK.

MILDRED

You take me to the meeting with your loan shark.

JOSHUA
I can't. They're dangerous men.

MILDRED
This is non-negotiable, Joshua.

JOSHUA
SIGH. All right.

MILDRED
The guest room is made up. Get some sleep. In the meantime, I'll put this away for safekeeping.

Mildred snubs out her cigarette, then pockets the money.

MILDRED (CONT'D)
And Joshua, if you go back on your word, you'll wish I'd left you to the loan shark.

INT. LOAN SHARK'S OFFICE - DAY

Joshua and Mildred stand in the office of JIMMY FAUST (50s). Time and fashion have not been kind to him.

Jimmy and his clothes are faded, wrinkled and tattered around the edges; just like old currency that needs to be put out of circulation.

Jimmy sits behind a desk made from an aquarium. The top resembles gold, while small sharks swim in the tank below. Every now and then a shark will gobble up a "gold" fish.

JIMMY
Must be my lucky day for a bee-uteful lady such as yourself to grace my humble office.

MILDRED
I'm really not interested, Mr. Faust.

JIMMY
I love a woman who plays hard to get. The thrill is in the chase.

He pulls out a hanky and wipes the sweat, coins and dollar bills, rolling off his brow.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

A looker such as yourself must
keeps a suitor or two. I wanna move
to the front of the line.

Mildred looks at Joshua who rolls his eyes. Nonetheless,
Joshua steps forward and lays a thick manila envelope on
Jimmy's desk.

JOSHUA

Here. What's in that envelope
clears my debt with you.

Jimmy taps the envelope, glances at Joshua, and then places
the money in his desk. Jimmy stands and walks around the desk
towards Mildred.

JIMMY

I apologize for getting rough with
your boy. Youse understand. I don't
play about my money.
(to Joshua)
No hard feelings, Joshua.

JOSHUA

We're done.

JIMMY

Not quite. How bout youse and I go
to dinner, Miss Mildred?

Mildred steps close with a saccharine sweet smile. She holds
a stiletto to Jimmy's groin. More change and dollar bills
sweat from the man's face.

MILDRED

If you or any of your kind even
think of loaning money to my
grandson again, you won't be
loaning money, you'll loan your
soul to the reaper and he always
collects his debts.

Mildred steps away.

MILDRED (CONT'D)

Let's go, Joshua.

EXT. SIDEWALK OUTSIDE LOAN SHARK'S OFFICE - DAY

JOSHUA

C'mon, No-Nee, I'll take you to lunch as a way of thanking you for saving my life.

MILDRED

Bullying loan sharks does work up an appetite.

JOSHUA

HA, HA, HA!

The two walk up the street. A block from CHEZ CHANTAL, TAD ARMSTRONG (42) stops them.

Tall and well dressed, the three piece suit Tad wears appears stiff and crisp, like brand new bills.

The watch on his wrist looks like a money bag and his shiny dress shoes squeak "dollar" when he walks.

TAD

Mildred. What a nice surprise.

Mildred tries to hurry Joshua along, but Tad grabs her by the sleeve.

TAD (CONT'D)

I have those papers you asked for. When would you like to stop by the office to handle everything?

JOSHUA

No-Nee?

TAD

Oh. Hi Joshua, I didn't see you there.

MILDRED

(clears throat)

Yes. Right. Tad, this is my grandson, Joshua. We were just headed to lunch.

Mildred links arms with Joshua and hurries across the street. Tad waves.

INT. CHEZ CHANTAL - DAY

A somewhat swanky restaurant with neat tables, crisp white tablecloths and crystal chandeliers, Mildred places her purse on the tabletop.

The handle acts as a vacuum, sucking up any bills or coins set aside for tips. It sucks the cash from a man's open wallet.

Mildred frowns and smacks her purse. The bills falls to the floor at the man's feet.

JOSHUA

No-Nee. Is there something you want to share?

Mildred sips her water, then dabs the corners of her mouth with the napkin.

MILDRED

We're sharing a nice lunch together, grandson.

JOSHUA

That's not what I mean!

Mildred picks up the menu and opens it.

MILDRED

Are the crab cakes any good? I love a good crab cake.

Joshua removes the menu from his grandmother's hands.

JOSHUA

No-Nee, c'mon. You pulled twenty-five -

MILDRED

Keep your voice down!

JOSHUA

-twenty-five large from a coffee can. No one keeps that type of money just lying around for a rainy day. Tad Armstrong knows you by name. By name!

Their SERVER takes their orders and menus, then leaves.

JOSHUA (CONT'D)

He only gives personal treatment to clients with six figure portfolios.

MILDRED

What'd you think I was, some poor granny living off Social Security?

JOSHUA

Well -

MILDRED

Hmph! Boy, you'll learn some manners yet. How do you think your mama was able to go to that fancy school or give you a real education?

JOSHUA

Scholarships.

MILDRED

(Laughs loudly)

I've more than enough money to be comfortable. If you tell your mama or anyone else about my finances, I'll send you straight back to Mr. Faust.

Joshua mimes zipping lips.

INT. MEETING ROOM - NIGHT

A big white banner hangs along the back wall. SUPER: Gamblers Anonymous. A dollar bill is used for the 'l', coins are used for the 'o's and a dollar sign for the 's's.

PEOPLE mill around a table with a big silver coffeepot and a few plates of assorted cookies, brownies, and pretzels.

Several greet Mildred by name and Joshua wings a brow. Mildred merely smiles, grabs a cup of coffee, then sits down. The FACILITATOR claps his hands and people find their seats.

FACILITATOR

All right. Who would like to start?

Mildred stands.

MILDRED

Hi, my name is Mildred.

ALL

Hi, Mildred.

MILDRED

It's been seventeen years, six months and thirteen hours since I last gambled.

Smattered applause goes around the room. Mildred locks gazes with Joshua.

MILDRED (CONT'D)

I knew I had a problem when my bookie threatened the life of my grandson after I spent the money I'd set aside for his college fund. That was my lowest point. I needed to change and I did.

Mildred sits.

Joshua processes what he's just heard, while two other people stand and give their stories. Joshua stands and the room grows silent again.

JOSHUA

(clears throat)

Ahem. Uh, my name is Joshua.

ALL

Hi, Joshua.

JOSHUA

I made a promise to myself and to my grandmother. So I want to thank No-Neer for keeping her promise. Now it's time to keep mine. I started counting cards in college as a way to grab some extra cash, then it was poker and slot machines. Occasionally a turn at the craps table. I thought I knew when to stop. I kept winning and winning and then I would lose. This last time, I owed money and couldn't pay it back. At least not with my life. I have a gambling problem and I need help.

MILDRED

I'm so proud of you, Joshua.

Mildred wipes a tear from her eye. She hugs Joshua.

FADE OUT.

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