Tricks, Lies and Backhanders

By

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INT. BENNY’S - BAR - POOL TABLE - NIGHT

A pair of HANDS arranges THREE POOL BALLS against the END CUSHION.

A cacophony of ROCK MUSIC and CHATTER fills the air.

A RED striped and BLUE striped ball sit side by side on the table with the BLACK ball placed on top. It balances between the two balls and the cushion below.

The individual takes time to stabilize the black ball from falling off. After a couple of attempts to finely tune the arrangement the hands move away slowly...The balls remain in place.

RICHIE (early 50s), scruffy, weasel-ish, a man who enjoyed his youth a little too much, looks up from the table.

BOB (mid 20s), tight haircut, tracksuit, stands at the other side of the table. He looks on intently.

“Working class” would generously sum up this place and its clientele.

RICHIE
Right chief, we’re good to go.

BENNY’S - LOUNGE - SAME

Less crowded then the boisterous bar area. Couples engage in conversation. Relaxed, down tempo music plays overhead.

DEREK (30s), bad boy handsomeness to him, BLACK t-shirt, sits at a table before a pint of lager. He takes a sip, eyes up a BARMAID (late teens) collecting glasses nearby.

BAR - POOL TABLE - SAME

Richie stands beside Bob, holds the white ball.

BOB
So what is it you’re saying you can do here?

RICHIE
Ok, it’s like this...I bet you twenty notes I can hit that black ball with this white ball, without the white leaving the table or touching the red or blue.
BOB
By just hitting it like this?

Bob does the standard cueing motion towards the table.

RICHIE
Just like that, no jumps or trick shots.

BOB
Well, there’s gotta’ be a trick, right?

An attractive barmaid, STEPHANIE (mid 20s) approaches with a pint of stout, she hands it to Richie.

RICHIE
Thanks, dear. Put it on my tab.

Stephanie replies with a smile and a wink, heads back to the bar counter.

Richie turns to a group sitting down nearby.

MALCOLM sits beside JILL -- FRED sits beside SAM (all mid 20s)

RICHIE
Gentlemen...and lady.
(nods to Jill)
I have challenged your comrade Robert here.

Bob stares at the table, sizes up the situation. Richie takes a sip of his pint, leaves it down.

RICHIE (CONT’D)
I think he needs your opinion on the matter.

LOUNGE – SAME

Derek downs a mouthful, his face drops, MEG (30s), average looks, makes her way towards him.

A sly grin curls her lips -- She wears RED.

DEREK
Meg...?
(MORE)
DEREK (CONT'D)
(looks around, whispers)
What are you doin’ here?

MEG
(all smiles)
I came to see you, sweetie.

She takes a seat across from Derek before he can respond.

DEREK
I told you never to come here.
This is my...fuckin’ local. I’m supposed to be meetin’ Kathy after she finishes work...in like five minutes.

MEG
I know.

BAR - POOL TABLE - SAME

Richie, Bob, Malcolm, Jill, Fred and Sam all congregate by the table. Bob gestures towards the balls set up against the cushion.

BOB
And the white won’t leave the table, no trick shots.

RICHIE
Or jumps.

MALCOLM
Well there’s has to be a trick, yeah?

RICHIE
Fuckin’ Lyrebird we’ve got in here, have we? Look, I’ll make it more interesting. If all of you go in for twenty and I don’t do it, I cough up fifty to each of you.

The five punters look at each other, consider.

RICHIE (CONT’D)
Ye can all have a go first. If by chance one of you pulls it off, I pay up. How does that sound?
LOUNGE - SAME

Derek leans in towards Meg, conscious of the people sitting nearby.

DEREK
I thought we agreed to meet tomorrow night...at our usual spot...? She’s gonna walk through that door any minute.

Meg replies with an indifferent smile and nod.

MEG
Yeah, in five you said.

Derek frowns, his exasperation turning to anger. He leans in closer.

DEREK (CONT’D)
What the ff-- is wrong with you? You’ll blow the whole thing.

MEG
For whom exactly? Me...or Shelley?

Derek freezes, stumped. He tries to play the innocent card.

DEREK
Wha-- who’s Shelley? What are you on about?

Meg looks at him, half leering.

Derek gives up the act as soon as he started it. His eyebrows furrow in genuine curiosity.

DEREK (CONT’D)
How did you find out about her?

BAR - POOL TABLE - SAME

The group still contemplate the bet.

MALCOLM
Nah, I’ll pass.

RICHIE
Chicken shit.
MALCOLM
Look, there’s obviously a sure way for him to do this. Does he look like the kinda’ guy that has money to blow on something that might not come off...? I’ll answer that, no he doesn’t, ok. No offense. And I’m not givin’ him the satisfaction of getting one over on me.

JILL
I’m with Mal on this one, no thanks.

Richie shakes his head contemptuously.

RICHIE
See, you’ve poisoned her mind now with your lack of endeavour.

MALCOLM
She’s old enough to make her own decisions.

Richie quickly turns to Bob, Fred and Sam.

RICHIE
Ok, ok, you three, twenty each if I do it, but! If I fuck it up, I give you...three hundred quid, between you...huh?

The three exchange glances, tempted.

FRED
I’d like to see that cash up front if you don’t mind.

Riches fishes around in his back pocket, produces an adequate bundle of notes. He fans them momentarily, proving his worth.

Malcolm scoffs, a wry smile, humbled. Jill laughs.

BOB
Jesus! Did ya flog a lung?

SAM
No way, he wouldn’t get half that for one of his!
RICHIE
Yeah, yeah, funny men. So what’s it gonna be?

Pause. The three reflect on the proposal.

LOUNGE - SAME

Meg picks up a beer mat, picks off pieces, all very casual. Derek looks around him warily.

MEG
Oh, the usual way...I looked through your phone. You know, your messages, call registers--

DEREK
You’ve no right--

Meg just about contains a laugh.

MEG
(waves her hand)
Shut the fuck up...Don’t even try to preach that whole privacy act bullshit on me.

Derek shrinks in his seat, glances furtively around.

MEG (CONT’D)
I’ve had my suspicions for months.
(taps her chin in mock wonder)
Mmmm, reams of calls, missed, dialled and received from a number not registered in your phone book...That’s not mine...and presumably not your wife’s. At least you deleted whatever messages you got from her, but wait! You forgot about that little sent items folder, didn’t you? (shakes her head, laughs)
Fuckin’ idiot...Made for some interesting reading though, I must say.

DEREK
Look, I--
Meg ignores Derek, looks past him. Her expression brightens.

MEG
   Ah, here she is.

Derek freezes for the second time, cringes. He turns around.

SHELLEY (late 30s) a little lower down the pecking order in terms of looks than Meg, marches towards their table. A similarly ambiguous smirk on her face -- She wears BLUE.

She and Meg exchange courteous smiles.

SHELLEY
   (friendly)
   Derek, how are you keeping?

Derek’s expression is gone from “Oh shit” to just plain “Rabbit caught in the headlights”. Shelley sits beside Meg.

MEG
   I’ve never seen him caught for words like this before.
   (to Shelley)
   Or does he put on a different face for you? The brooding, silent type maybe?

SHELLEY
   No, just the charming, phoney, loud mouth we talked about.
   (to Derek)
   So here we are, huh? Your two bits on the side all under one roof.

BAR - POOL TABLE - SAME

Bob weighs up the possibilities.

BOB
   ...I dunno. I’m having my doubts.

SAM
   Me too, it’s got to be a certainty for him to be so confident.

RICHIE
   Ok, if that’s how you feel.
Richie goes to take the balls from their positions.

FRED
Whoa, whoa. What are you doin’?

RICHIE
No money no demonstration. You gotta pay to see.

SAM
What! Show us the fucking trick, man.

RICHIE
No way.

The three trade glances again. Sam turns to Fred.

SAM
Come on, it’s only a score. You’re pulling in decent wages every week, you shouldn’t even be thinking about it. To me (points at Bob) and him, it’s a significant portion of that money we queue for every Thursday.

RICHIE
If it’s only that chump whose putting his money down, we go back to the original twenty each way bet...But, if you two jump on, you could get this.

Richie waves the wad of notes in front of them.

Bob’s attention is caught by KATHY (30s), a “healthy” built woman, pushing her way through the crowd. A rung down from Shelley on the looks ladder -- She wears WHITE.

SAM (O.S.)
Alright, I’m in.

Bob and Kathy make eye contact briefly, her cold, rigid expression unflinching. Bob turns away, eyes bulging.

FRED (O.S.)
Ok, me too...Come on, Bob, fuck it. I wanna see this.
Kathy makes her way towards a DOORWAY.

"LOUNGE" is written above it.

RICHIE (O.S.)
So Bobby, yay or nay?

Bob looks back towards them, thinks.

BOB
...Yeah, go on.

RICHIE
Excellent, we got a deal.

LOUNGE - SAME

Meg and Shelley remain seated at one side of the table. A meek, uncomfortable Derek sits at the other.

MEG
(to Shelley)
I told him about how I found out about you.

Both sneer.

SHELLEY
Yeah, that was rather dumb, wasn’t it, Der?

MEG
Nope, not too bright, and it ain’t the first time you’ve played away from home either...and got caught.

Derek lowers his head in defeat. Time to bail.

DEREK
Ok, you’ve got me. I’m a creep, snake, rat...fuckin’ piece of shit, whatever...But I gotta go.

He motions to stand up -- The two women act quickly, rise to their feet also. They put their hands on both his shoulders.

MEG
No, no, no, whoa there, Joe Buck.
Not so fast.
Between the two of them, they force Derek back down on the seat.

SHELLEY
You’re here to meet Kathy, remember?

MEG
You don’t want to stand her up now, do you?

BAR - POOL TABLE - CONTINUOUS

Richie shakes their hands -- The money is put on the table. A small crowd of curious people have gathered around. Richie shapes up to take the shot.

LOUNGE - CONTINUOUS

Derek struggles tamely to wrangle free from the women’s grip, still desperately trying to avoid a scene. Kathy approaches in the background. Derek’s panic rises.

DEREK
Look, just let me go, alright. You won’t hear from me again, I promise. I’m history.

The girls look at each other. They grin menacingly in response, shake their heads.

INTERCUT - BAR - POOL TABLE/LOUNGE - CONTINUOUS

Richie is bent over the table, the cue directed at the white ball.

RICHIE
Are you ready?

He peers back at the three guys standing behind him. Without looking forward, Richie hits the white ball gently down the table towards the three balls.

CUT TO:

Kathy appears behind Derek as Meg and Shelley let him go.
CUT TO:

The white is half way down when Richie slams his fist on the table. The resulting tremor displaces the balls.

CUT TO:

Derek turns around. Meg and Shelley step aside. Kathy brandishes a balled fist, a large wedding ring bound around her middle finger.

CUT TO:

The red and blue balls separate, allowing the black to drop down into the path of the incoming white ball.

CUT TO:

Kathy punches Derek square in the nose. The jagged diamond ring penetrates the flesh.

CUT TO:

The white and black balls collide to the CHEER of the people watching. Malcolm and Jill join in, loudly.

LOUNGE - SAME

The whole place looks on as Derek is doubled over on the seat, SCREAMING in pain. Blood leaks from his nose.

CHEERING sounds from the bar area.

BENNY (50s) the owner, his grossly disproportioned belly spilling over his belt buckle, stands behind the counter pulling a pint.

He watches Derek’s theatrics, rolls his eyes in weary familiarity.

BAR - POOL TABLE - CONTINUOUS

Richie saunters over to the money, picks it up.

He walks past the three suckers, smiles broadly. They shake their heads, gutted.
LOUNGE - CONTINUOUS

Kathy stands over Derek, an expression of fury tempered by satisfaction.

Meg and Shelley exit the establishment, mission accomplished.

BAR - COUNTER – MOMENTS LATER

Bob leans against the counter, stung.

BOB
That decrepit motherfucker.

Stephanie appears behind the bar, smiles.

STEPHANIE
You’re like the eighth person he’s caught with that this week. That’s why he has that sort of cash on him...If it’s any consolation.

BOB
Not really...And I see you were bustin’ your ass to try and warn us an all, thanks.

STEPHANIE
What am I gonna do, he gives me a cut to keep my mouth shut.

Bob looks back at the pool table.

BOB
Wankers...Pint of Miller.

Stephanie fetches his drink. Derek appears beside Bob, a bloodstained tissue held to his nose.

BOB
What happened you!?

DEREK
I was kinda...found out.

BOB
Again! Fucks sake...You’re just being complacent now.
Derek is wounded by Bob’s lack of sympathy. He looks around to anybody within earshot.

DEREK
My brother, ladies and gentlemen!
What a guy, huh? An epitome of compassion...Fuck you!

BOB
Don’t worry, she’ll forgive you.
Like the last time...and the time before that.

Derek puts his elbows on the bar, rubs his temples. Stephanie comes back with Bob’s pint.

DEREK
Double JD and coke, Steph.

Kathy appears between the two. Bob looks at her uneasily, as she puts a hand on his shoulder.

KATHY
I’m sorry, Bob, but I’ve had second thoughts concerning our...little arrangement. You’re nearly worse than him.

Kathy thrusts a twenty quid note into Bob’s hand. Now it’s his turn to look like a blinded rabbit. Kathy turns to a confused Derek.

KATHY (CONT’D)
Your darling sibling overheard me on the phone the other day planning this with Shelley...or was it Meg? I’ve stopped keeping track. You know I never liked the idea of him having his own key, always in and out, “borrowing” stuff he never returns...So anyway, in order for things to run as smoothly as it did out there, he bribed me for his silence, imagine that! And for very reasonable twenty quid. That’s all you’re worth to him. Which is something we actually agree on...But what a scumbag to do that to you, his own flesh and blood.
Kathy shakes her head, TUTS loudly in mock solemnity.

Stephanie comes back with the whiskey and coke. Derek’s eyes are fixed like lasers on an increasingly unsettled Bob.

KATHY (CONT’D)
We were supposed to do this transaction in secret, that’s what I had second thoughts about...I felt you should know.

Bob’s eyes dart nervously from Kathy to his glowering brother.

BOB
Uh, if it’s any consolation I just lost it on the table to Richie. He’d be more than happy to show you how he done it.  
(smiles meekly)
So no one’s really a winner here, bro...you know?

Kathy steps out of the way.

KATHY
I’ll leave you to it then.

Bob and Derek stand face to face, poised

Kathy walks past Richie by the pool table. She spots the fat wad of notes still in his hand.

KATHY (CONT’D)
Good, you can put that towards getting us a nicer motel next time.

RICHIE
(grins)
My thoughts exactly. Three star it is.

Richie’s lustful eyes follow her out as Derek throws the first punch in the background, landing Bob on his back.

CUT TO BLACK:

THE END