

## **Thank You for the Drink**

One particularly hot August morning, the sun positively blazing, Oswald stood comfortable under the shade of his sturdy timber roof, polishing glasses behind his bar. Nestled in the heart of an older and crueller Idaho was his quiet tavern, seemingly endless miles from the next sip of water. As Oswald was caught up in his chores, it was without warning that a shaggy scrawny man stumbled in through his door. The man had not one article of clothing covering him, but rather the deep red pain of sunburnt skin and peeling blisters. As the stranger slowly stepped towards his bar, Oswald placed the glass onto the countertop and slowly reached for his gun. The stranger showed little life left in him and Oswald weighed if this dishevelled thing could be a threat. But confident that he could take him down if he tried to strike, Oswald took his hand away from his gun as the stranger stood unbalanced at the counter. The stranger, with a voice dry and hoarse from the summer heat, uttered quietly “water”. Oswald felt pity for the man. But firm on his principles, he informed the seared soul, “Sure stranger. You can have a glass of water. For \$2”. The stranger, barely hanging on with what strength he had left, begged Oswald, “Please sir. I have no money. I was robbed on my way to Oregon. They took everything I had. Spare me just a little bit of water”. But Oswald remained undeterred. “Listen scrawny, it’s sorry seeing a grown man in your state. But I’m running a business and so unless you have \$2, my advice is that you turn around and keep walking”. “Please” whimpered the stranger as he grasped Oswald’s arm, “I can’t give it to you now, but I promise to return here with the money. Where is your compassion?”. Aggravated by his insistence, Oswald tore his arm away from the stranger’s grip and yelled, “Listen no money, no goddamn water! Now I’m not going to tell you again. You have ten seconds to wander your ass out of here before I drag you out myself!”. The stranger, dejected, slowly pulled himself away from the counter, turning himself towards the door before pausing firmly in his place. “You ever hear of the game five finger fillet?” the stranger spoke calmly. Oswald let out a snort in disbelief from what he was hearing. “That head of yours must’ve been cooking out in the sun too long if you think there’s an American who doesn’t know the knife game.” “Well...” said the stranger, turning back to face Oswald. “How about a little wager? One minute each. Winner is the one with the least amount of cuts in the end.”. Oswald studied his challenger, doubting the sincerity of his dare. A man who could barely hold himself up and was incapable of keeping his hands still was daring to avoid the strike of a knife by his

own hand. Oswald quipped to the stranger, assuming this had to be a desperate joke, “If you can beat me at five finger fillet, I’ll personally carry you to Oregon”. “No,” the stranger said firmly. “If I win, all I want is a glass of water. If you win, I will walk out that door and you will never see me again”. Oswald, still unsure of his angle but willing to play along, supported the stranger. “Okay slick. You got yourself a deal. Take a seat at that table and I’ll bring over my best knife. Just for you”. The stranger stumbled his way to an empty table sat in the corner of the bar and placed himself into one of the chairs as Oswald reached into a drawer for a sharpened pairing knife. Oswald made his way over with a confident strut from his assured victory, placing the knife in front of the stranger before settling himself in a chair opposite him. “Your challenge. You start”. The stranger picked up the knife, staring into the shimmer of the silver blade and then up to Oswald. “One minute. You keeping watch of the time?”. Oswald, still sure of himself, peered away from the stranger to put his focus on a dusty clock hung high on a far wall, taking a moment to take in the seconds passing. Suddenly, Oswald froze stunned as a very sudden pain began to emanate from his neck. His hand slowly trembled to where the source of the pain was as he felt the length of a narrow blade extending from his throat, pulling his hand back to reveal a deep red liquid spread across his palm. Oswald peered his eyes back at the stranger to see him extended over the table with the knife in hand and blade piercing into Oswald’s throat. The stranger slowly pulled the knife from Oswald’s neck, bearing an emotionally charged yet serious look on his face, and Oswald collapsed onto the ground as he held on firm to his wound. The stranger placed the knife back onto the table, standing himself back up and gradually making his way to the bar, having to maintain his strength from his trek and now from his nerves. Once behind, the stranger reached for one of the newly polished glasses as Oswald could only lay speechless, peering wide-eyed at his killer. As Oswald’s vision began to fade with every second of life leaving him, the stranger remained focused as he opened a jug labelled simply “water” and poured its clear contents into the glass. With Oswald only finding himself further from the familiar setting of his shop, the stranger placed the now almost empty jug onto the counter and brought the now-filled glass to his chapped lips. Soon, nothing but blackness sealed Oswald’s vision. Whatever was left of his world was now gone. But in those final moments, the last grasp of his mortal life was heard in the faint sound of footsteps approaching him followed by a mumbled voice.

“Thank you for the drink”.