

## Shut-It Out

By Cara Schaaff

The room floods with a wild applause after Annie finishes her last song on her set list. She smiles and scans her green eyes over the crowd. The intense sensation that she felt loved at that very moment made her heart flutter.

As the crowd dies down, their voices scatter and the jukebox fills the dimly lit room. That's Annie's cue to unplug her guitar. The moment passes as she runs her hand through her short bleach-blond hair; it was a little damp with sweat. She exhales and wipes her hand on the back of her jeans.

She begins to pack her things. She puts her guitar in the hard-covered case off the side of the stage.

"Great gig tonight. You sounded awesome. As always."

Annie turns around and sees her friend Dee.

"That was sick, wasn't it?" Annie replies, as she wraps up the electric cord while flashing a grin at Dee.

"I'm almost done. Any plans right now?" she puts the cord in a black bag.

Dee chugs the last of her Bud Light bottle.

"I could use another." Dee leaves the bottle on a random table nearby and picks up Annie's guitar case. "Let's go to another bar though. It's too crowded here, and you might have some crazy stalker fans that probably want you to sign their boob or something."

Annie laughs at her comment and grabs the rest of her belongings. She jumps off the stage and heads towards the exit.

"Wouldn't be any worse than me signing somewhere else. I mean, I'd rather sign an ass than a boob any day."

Dee chuckles at Annie's retort and follows her out of the bar. "I am not even going to go there. Change in subject; I love that last song you played. What's the name of it again?" Annie grabs her keys from her back pocket and unlocks the trunk

of her black Jeep Wrangler and opens it. She didn't want to have to explain whom that song is really about.

"*Shut-It Out*" is the name of the song," she says reluctantly as she continues to put the rest of her equipment in her trunk. She shuts the trunk with a quick slam.

"I'm glad you like it; it's one of my favorite pieces. It's about a girl."

Dee looks at her friend with confusion as she leans on her car.

"Who's this chick? Do I know her? Do I have to hurt her?"

Annie shakes her head while laughing and facing Dee.

"No, no... relax. With my busy schedule I don't have time for love nor stopping fights between my friend and some girl that I have a thing for. Although, that would be an interesting fight."

"I have work in the morning so I guess no fight tonight. But, you promised me a drink and I promised you another bar, let's go to Tap and Barrel. I think Tom and Jenn will be working tonight. I'll drive?"

"Nah, I don't want to leave my car. I'll race ya though." Annie replies, as she walks around to her driver's side door with a smirk.

"Your grandma would beat me before you do. See you there!" Dee shouts, as she races to her own vehicle.

Annie jumps in her seat. She buckles up and turns her engine over with a roar.

"I highly doubt that," Annie says to herself, as she puts her car into gear. She rips out of the parking lot.

Annie rolls down the windows of her car during the quick, five-minute drive, as *Everlong* by Foo Fighters fills her car. When she stops at the light, she looks in her rear-view mirror to re-apply her eyeliner. Even though it is the only make up she wears, it brings out the emerald in her eyes vividly.

The light turns green, she then pulls into the parking lot of the bar. She halts her car right in front of the entrance; Dee pulls up to the spot on Annie's right side. She sprays some Axe randomly on her body and checks her hair one last time before she hops out.

“Sometime today, Dee?” she says sarcastically. She leans on the hood of her own car waiting for Dee as she puts some chap stick on her lips. Dee finishes fixing her own make-up in her car before she gets out.

She walks over to Annie who is now standing by the front entrance of the bar. “Sorry. Never know whom we might run into. Gotta look good. ”

“You really are trying to look good for no one right now but Tom, Jenn, maybe Tony and me. This place is a ghost town right now.” Annie starts to laugh a little bit at her friend and holds open the door for her.

“Well, it won’t go to waste. Thank you.” Dee says, as she walks inside.

“No, it won’t. I now have something to....” Annie’s comment is cut off.

“Look at what the cat dragged in. We don’t serve your kind!” yells Tom from behind the bar.

Annie smiles at his comment as she goes over to him for a bear hug.

“‘Rappers only’ I suppose?” Tom laughs at Annie’s comment. They used to work together at a restaurant chain. Even after years of not working together they still remain great friends. There are two other people in the bar besides Tom. Jenn sits in the last chair; she worked the shift before Tom’s. Sitting next to her is Tony; he runs the bar. He’s in his late 20s. He is half asleep on the bar.

Annie sits next to Tony and Dee sits next to Annie. Tom put a coaster in front of Dee then Annie. “What will you ladies have?”

“Two shots of Jameson, a bottle of Bud Light for her, and a double vodka and cranberry with a lime, for me,” Annie says quickly. Dee didn’t even have a chance to respond.

Tom pours out the shots for the two women and proceeds to make the rest of Annie’s order. Annie holds up the shot to Dee, who reciprocates.

“What are we toasting to or what should we toast to?” Dee says quizzically to Annie. Annie thinks for a second and then responds.

“To those boobs I didn’t have to sign today. May they wait another day for me to sign them,” Annie says, to Dee. They exchange smiles briefly as they clink their glasses together, then they suck down their liquor. They put the glasses on the bar by the time Tom returns with their drinks.

“Whose boobs are you autographing? Which reminds me, how was the show?” Tom asks Annie, as she takes a swig of her cocktail.

“It was good; same old stuff, different day.” Annie shrugs off her answer to him as she checks the time on her phone.

“How long has it been since anyone else came in here tonight, Tom? It’s kinda- dead for eleven-thirty,” Annie asks.

“Besides his girlfriend and mom? No one has been in here since about ten, maybe,” Jenn states, as Tom throws the towel he was using at her face. Everyone erupts with laughter.

“Gross!” She throws the towel back at him with force.

“At least my mother can down more drinks than you can lady,” Tom says to Jenn, and then continues to clean the remaining two dirty glasses that were left on the bar.

“I never denied that; she asked who was here and I told her,” Jenn snaps, while she takes the towel Tom threw at her. She chucks it back to him, at his head.

Annie is in her own world with thoughts as this whole conversation is going on between her closest friends. Dee is watching Annie intently for a few seconds before she nudges her.

“You okay Annie? Wanna go outside for a few?” Dee asks, as she gets up from her seat.

“Yeah I’m alright, but I can always use some fresh air.”

The ladies walk out of the bar without saying anything to anyone else. Annie leans on the front of her car. Dee joins her while lighting up a cigarette. She didn’t want to leave Dee just yet, but she isn’t in the mood to hang out anymore. Her feelings for Dee are starting to hurt her heart. Any time Annie gets to spend with Dee, she takes it; she doesn’t care if it makes her get home at eight o’clock in the morning. Annie walks aimlessly in no consistent pattern.

“What’s up with you? You play a show; ask me out for a drink, now you won’t talk? Certainly not yourself right now.” Dee stares at Annie as she exhales her cigarette.

"I'm just tired I guess. I don't know; it is late." Annie plays with the hemp bracelet on her own wrist.

"You get so gloomy sometimes after you play, I don't get you. If it was me, I'd be on a high from it." Dee hops up onto the hood of Annie's car to sit.

"Maybe I just need to get high. Playing a show takes a lot out of me. I am on a high in a sense; it just feels like I'm crashing after being on that high." Annie looks up at her friend and joins her on the hood of her car.

Tom comes out of the bar and spots the two on Annie's Wrangler. "I have to lock up, so if you wanna come back, either come back now or knock when you're ready."

"We will be right back in, just give us a few," Annie says, to Tom. He nods and retreats back into the bar.

Annie jumps down from her seat and stands in front of Dee with her hands in her pockets.

"Almost done with your cig babe?" Annie says, while looking at the pavement as if it was the most interesting thing she has ever seen.

"Uh huh. I can't stop thinking about that last song you played at the bar; I want it on my iPod for when I work out. I love working out to good songs like that." Dee inhales the last of her cigarette and flicks it into the street. If there is one subject that Annie doesn't want to discuss right now, the song is it.

"Thanks, good to know you wanna listen to me while you sweat."

Dee laughs, at Annie's comment. "You know what I mean!" She nudges Annie.

"Yeah, yeah... I had some inspiration a few months ago," Annie replies, as she leans on a pillar in front of the bar waiting for her friend to move, but she doesn't.

"Is it about someone?" Dee inquires.

"Nah, you know me, I can't settle down. I don't want to settle down. No time for love right now anyway," Annie says, laughing nervously. She really didn't want Dee to know; she knows nothing will come of it. Why should she bother opening up a can of worms if it isn't necessary and know the risk of losing a friend? It wasn't worth it to Annie; she has to forget her feelings. Annie wants to say something but can't get it out. Dee takes notice.

“Maybe one day you will see things differently. Do you want to finish your drink?” Annie checks the time on her phone for the last time.

“I think I am going home.” Annie declares as she takes the keys out of her pocket. She looks back at the bar for a second.

“I wanna say ‘bye’ but I think I am going to just go. I’ll pay Tom the next time I see him. Love you girl.” Annie hugs Dee.

Dee reciprocates the hug. “Alright chick, love you too. Get home safe, text me when you’re home, and get me a copy of your song.” Dee let’s go and watches Annie walk to her car.

“All right, I will, night!” replies Annie, as she unlocks her car and hops in. She rests her head on the steering wheel for a second to recall the night’s events. Every time she hangs out with Dee, it gets a little harder than the last time. She shakes it off and heads home.

Annie pulls up at her apartment a few minutes later. She thinks for a minute with her car still running. She puts her car into reverse and heads back to the bar.

“Tom! Let me in!” Annie bangs on the door. Tom comes over to let her in.

“I thought you left. Where’s Dee?” he locks the door behind her once she is inside. She looks around.

“She went home. Technically, so did I but I can’t go to sleep just yet, so I came back. Tony left?” she sits down next to Jenn. Tom pours Annie a drink.

“He’s in his office, sleeping.” Jenn says as she is playing a game on her phone. Tom gives Annie her drink.

“No wonder his car is still here. Thanks.” she takes a sip.

“I came back for advice.” Annie says, to no one in particular.

“Is it about Dee?” Tom says, as he is cleaning glasses. Annie drinks her drink.

“I hate you.” Annie sits back in her chair.

“Why?”

“Cause you probably hit the nail right on the head, Tom,” Jenn says. She never looks up from her game on her phone.

“Tom, how many times have I come in here and told you about this girl I slept with or this one. I haven’t had feelings like this in a while, especially for a friend. It’s scary. And how in the hell did you know?” Annie sits back in her chair.

“Because I can read you better than just about anyone.”

“I am not sure what to do anymore.”

Tom puts down the glass. “Tell her. Stop being a wimp,”

“Is it just your fear of being rejected, or the fear of ruining the friendship?”

Jenn asks. She is still into her game.

“A little bit of both; and Tom, I’m not a wimp.” Tom looks at her sternly.

Annie starts to laugh. “Alright, behind my tough-asshole exterior I am a wimp, but how do I tell her without telling her?”

“You can get a plane and write it in the sky. That should only cost a thousand bucks, but it will get the job done.” Tom takes out three shot glasses and fills them with whisky.

“Do you plan on lending me that money? Interest free?” Annie takes the glass and places it in front of her. Tom laughs slightly.

“Interest free? You are out of your mind. You couldn’t afford me.” He smiles wide and holds up his glass. Jenn and Annie follow suit.

“You are such an ass. Cheers,” Jenn says.

“Cheers,” Annie and Tom both say. Jenn is the only one with a contorted look on her face.

“Well, that can definitely put hair on anyone’s chest; even mine. You should definitely try and tell her, Annie. Honesty is the best policy.” Jenn places the shot glass in Tom’s reach as her phone dies.

“On that note, it is time for me to head home. You’ll figure it out Annie, I’ll see you soon.” Jenn hugs Annie then walks to the exit.

“See you tomorrow Tom.” She let’s herself out as Annie locks them both inside. Annie takes her seat back at the bar and finishes her drink.

“Tom, what do I do?” Tom refills her glass again.

“Annie, what are your strengths? Besides curling into a ball when you don’t know what to do in tough situations?”

"I'm not curling into a ball."

"But you are though; not physically, but definitely mentally. What are your strengths?" Annie thinks about the question. She takes another sip of her drink.

"Well?"

"I write, I write all of my emotions down on paper. "

"Then what do you do."

"Well sometimes I turn them into my... songs." It hits Annie like a ton of bricks. "Tom, you are so smart! I could kiss you." Her eyes light up as Tom laughs and shakes his head at her reaction.

"I was waiting for you to say that. Just write her a song. Or give her your songs that are about her. I'm sure you have a few."

"I hate that you know me so well."

"If I didn't know you so well, I wouldn't be thinking about doing another shot right now before you have to sober up. Then I can close up." Tom pours them another shot.

"I'm glad I have you. Thanks. Cheers." They both clink their glasses together.

The next day Annie decides to put her songs onto a CD for Dee. What does she have to lose? Her sanity? That is already gone. Annie is a 29 year-old girl who doesn't know what she wants or what she needs. Maybe she does need to get this off her chest.

Annie drives to Dee's house not knowing what is going to happen with her visit. She pulls up and walks to the front door. She knocks. A few seconds later, Dee opens the door wearing a nightshirt and pajama pants, while wearing an apron and a bandana on her head. It looks as if she was cleaning.

She smiles at Annie. "And to what do I owe to this?"

Annie takes out the CD from her jacket. "Well you wanted my music, so here is my music."

"Thank you." Dee takes the CD from Annie.

"This needs to be said. Are you being Consuela right now? The Spanish maid? Hola?" Annie says, while laughing and making the most of this moment.



“Very funny.” says Dee, as Annie walks past her into the house.

“Sure! You can absolutely come in, just watch out for the...” She is too late; Annie slips and falls right on her butt.

“...wet floors.” Dee starts to laugh as Annie starts to groan.

“Ugh!!! Really?! Now my ass is wet.” Dee laughs uncontrollably and helps her friend to the couch. Annie is holding her butt as Dee hands her a folded towel that is in the pile of laundry on the other couch.

“That sucked!”

“Most likely should’ve signed those autographs, maybe you wouldn’t be so wet for me. “

“That is not even funny, Dee. I am so glad I came here to give you that.” Annie starts to stand, holding her butt from the pain.

“Before you listen to that, just know that all those songs on there,” she points at the disc, “They are about one person and one person only. One day, she will see it and she will know it is her the whole time. It is she, that I want and not anyone else.” Annie looks at Dee adoringly then proceeds towards the door. Dee is puzzled as she looks at the CD. She starts to get the hint and looks at the big wet spot on Annie’s butt.

“Do you need a towel for the ride or you going to let it air dry?”

“I am going to pretend that I didn’t hear that. I’ll hit you up this weekend. I play another gig on Friday. Enjoy the CD and your cleaning... Miss Consuela.” She smiles at Dee then closes the door behind her. Dee shakes her head at the crazy friendship she has with Annie. She puts the CD in her stereo and goes back to cleaning. She listens to the lyrics of “*Shut-It Out*” and smiles to herself.

“Shut-it out” begins to play.

“Can’t say a word, can’t speak my mind,  
Don’t wanna stay, don’t know how to find,  
Words are meaningless when it comes to this,  
I always thought ‘it is what it is’,

I should've said it now, instead of then,  
What's it matter to you, you're only a friend,  
I can't stop thinking about you, I don't know when  
I can shut-it out and start all over again  
Just shut-it out and start all over again..."

Dee plays Annie's CD on repeat for the rest of the afternoon. Around five o'clock she completes her cleaning. She sits on the couch as "*Shut-It Out*" plays again. She picks up her phone and calls Annie. On the third ring, Annie picks up.

"Hello?" Annie says.

"Hey Annie, it's Dee. You want to go out to dinner tonight?"

"Just like that?" states Annie.

"Annie, cut the crap. You like me, I like you, let's go talk somewhere over dinner," Dee says bluntly.

"I..." Annie is speechless.

"Well? Yes or no?" Dee says impatiently.

"I really can't. I... um have a date tonight," Annie says.

"Bullshit! You gave me this CD this morning. How can you not expect me to figure out that it is about me?"

"Are you really sure it is about you? Maybe I led you to believe that but maybe it isn't," Annie says.

"Wow, I guess I was wrong. I guess us being more than friends is just out of the question then?" Dee says in a hurt voice.

"Look Dee, I don't want to ruin our friendship. It is important to me --- and yes, they are about you."

"Why the hell do you have to lie?" Dee presses the end button and turns off her phone.

Two minutes go by before the doorbell rings. Dee isn't expecting anyone at that moment. She reluctantly gets up and opens the door.

Dee opens the door to see Anne. Then she tries to shut the door once she sees who it is. Annie puts her foot in between the door and the wall, wedging the door slightly open.

“Come on Dee, let me in,” Annie says, as she tries to wriggle herself into her friend’s house.

“Get the hell out,” Dee says, as she tries to prevent Annie from coming in.

“Let me talk to you! Let me explain!” Annie finally is able to get into the house as Dee walks away. Annie goes after her and grabs Dee’s arm. She pulls Dee to her and holds her from behind in a tight bear hug.

“I refuse to let go until you let me explain.” Dee is crying and can’t look at Annie; she just lets Annie hold her from behind.

“You are such an Asshole. You can’t just come in here and expect it to be okay right now. Explain, then leave.” Dee says through tears.

Annie turns Dee around to face her. She wipes the tears off of Dee’s face. She holds Dee’s face in her hands and kisses her lips softly. It is a gentle kiss and Dee reciprocates slowly and then pulls away. Annie’s eyes are still closed, well after the kiss has ended. A smile appears on her face.

“I always imagined what that would be like,” says Annie as she touches her lips, still hot from the kiss they shared. Dee also felt the spark between them and stares at Annie. Annie opens her eyes and locks them with Dee’s.

“I’m sorry I lied. I don’t want to mess up our friendship. I always envisioned what it would be like to have a relationship with you. You are quite an amazing chick, and not only that; you loved my work before you knew it was about you. That means the world to me. I am just afraid I am too much of a screw up for you to be dating.”

Dee looks at Annie. “Who says you’re a screw up?”

Annie smiles at Dee’s comment. “Thanks.”

“Let’s try it out and if it doesn’t work if we get too emotionally involved with each other and the other can’t take it, we will go back to being friends.” Dee says, to Annie.

“Yeah? Just like that?” Annie responds, feeling hopeful.

“Well, no, but we can give it a shot. I want to give a shot.”

“Me too,” Annie says, as she pulls Dee in for a kiss. Dee breaks it abruptly.

“Um, one rule though. There is to be no signing of ANYONE’S body parts but mine, got it?”

Annie laughs. “Really?”

“Yes really, only mine, you can start with my ass,” Dee says, smiling.

“Cool, my favorite part,” Annie says, a big grin across her face.