

There Was a Chord

A Harry's Bar Story

By

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'Wolfie will kill us he ever finds out we're doing this,' said Struts, clutching his guitar to his body for comfort.

'Wolfie won't even know we're doing it,' answered Toy Town.

'What would he do?' asked Bubbles, almost hidden behind his double bass. He pursed his lips causing his little face and long nose to look even more like a rats' muzzle.

'I dunno,' muttered Struts, 'maybe break our knee caps.'

'No, there's worse,' rumbled Sinko.

The band looked to him. Sinko may always have spoken in a slow and clumsy rumble, but what he said was always interesting.

'He could break our fingers,' continued the hulking drummer.

The band all instinctively hid their hands. He was right – there was something worse than broken knee caps.

'Look,' said Toy Town, 'all we have to do is play a few chords. What could Wolfie ever think was wrong with that?'

'Because of why we're playing them,' said Bubbles. 'Wolfie doesn't like anyone who gets in his way.'

'Where did you get this stuff from, anyway?' asked Struts, staring at the sheet music.

'The Rabbi,' answered Toy Town.

'What? That old piss pot?' said Struts.

‘He knows a lot,’ boomed Sinko. ‘He was a scholar before he became a drunk. I talk to him all the time about Judaism.’

‘So he obviously found something in some ancient text,’ said Toy Town.

The band nodded collectively in acknowledgement. If Sinko said that the Rabbi knew something, then the Rabbi was worth listening to.

‘And playing these chords will really change the world around us?’ demanded Struts.

‘Don’t you see?’ said Toy Town, ‘these aren’t any old chords. They’re the chords that David used to pacify Saul. It’s in the bible.’

Sinko nodded his head, wisely. ‘Yeah. David played his harp for Saul and it pacified Saul’s madness. But we don’t have a harp, do we?’

‘Yeah, but we’ve got a guitar and that’s nearly the same,’ snapped Toy Town.

Sinko frowned.

‘Look the instrument isn’t what’s important,’ said Toy Town. ‘What’s important is we’ve got to learn them before Wolfie does or he’ll use them for evil.’

Sinko shrugged.

‘And we’re going to use them for good, right?’ added Struts. ‘It won’t work, you know. It’ll all go wrong.’

Once more Toy Town wondered why Struts wasn’t called Eeyore.

‘Anyway, how do you know that Wolfie was trying to learn this stuff?’ muttered Struts.

‘I overheard him talking during a bass solo,’ said Toy Town.

To Bubbles’ obvious annoyance they all nodded in unison. What was a bass solo for if not for talking over?

‘Come on guys, let’s just do it now,’ goaded Toy Town. ‘Morse’ll be here soon and then we won’t be able to do anything other than what he wants.’

They all frowned at the thought of the band leader and sax player stopping them from having fun yet again.

'I still don't know,' said Bubbles.

'Think of the money we could make,' said Toy Town, using his ultimate weapon against the little bassist.

'What do you mean?' asked Bubbles, his long nose twitching.

'Well, guys, think of it,' said Toy Town. 'If we know these magic chords we could pacify every crowd and make them listen all the time. We'd be famous.'

'And rich,' muttered Bubbles.

'And what do you think Wolfie would do with this stuff?' added Toy Town. 'He'd mess with our minds. He might even make us like Country music instead of jazz.'

The band shivered together. Incredibly, there was a fate worse than having your fingers broken.

'Okay, let's do it,' said Bubbles, eager to get more money right now.

They stared at the chord charts and melody. It was a peculiar chord sequence, but they could play it easily. Compared to some bee-bop changes, this was straight forward enough.

'What I want to know, is,' said Struts, 'if this is David's secret chord changes, how come no one else has accidentally played it in some school band?'

'Or, worse a heavy metal band,' added Bubbles.

'Maybe it's just the whole combination,' said Sinko.

They all nodded in agreement. That sounded right.

Sinko picked up his drum sticks holding them delicately in his finger tips as he always did. Bubbles hugged the double bass to his neck and held his hand ready to pluck. Struts adjusted the guitar and then fiddled with the tuning. Like all guitarists he couldn't leave it alone. He just didn't seem able to stand silent and waiting. Toy Town lifted the upright piano's lid, sat down and waited. Eventually Struts realised they were waiting for him and stopped plinking away.

Toy Town counted, 'one, two, one, two, three, four.'

They all instinctively came in on the upbeat and launched straight into it. It sounded a bit like Klezmer music with a folk edge and some interesting patterns weaving through the melody line. They were a damn, fine backing band so they played it right through the first time without any problems.

They looked at each other.

Nothing had happened.

‘Are sure these are the right dots?’ asked Struts, pointing at the sheet music. ‘Only I thought the world would change or something.’

‘Dunno,’ said Toy Town staring at the script.

The door to the bar opened and a man stepped in.

‘We’re closed,’ called Toy Town automatically without even looking up. ‘We’re just practising.’

‘I just want to hear the music again,’ said the most beautiful, melodious voice the band had ever heard.

They stared in unison, dumb struck by this beautiful, slim man, with a huge head of blonde hair forming a halo around his head and the sweetest heart shaped face in the world.

‘David’s angel and muse,’ muttered Sinko.

Blondie smiled gently and their hearts skylarked. ‘I think I can see what you’re trying to do, here,’ he said. ‘I can teach you do to it right.’

‘All take over from here,’ said a grizzled voice from the door to the toilet.

The band went white. It was Wolfie, and squeezing out from behind him were two goons in suits, almost as big as Sinko. It must have been very crowded in that little room. The vicious, little man was holding a ukulele.

‘He’s worse than I thought,’ spat Toy Town. ‘He plays Trad.’

Every band member’s face darkened at the reference to that inferior jazz style. What a twisted, evil man, Wolfie was. No wonder he had such a nasty reputation.

'You can teach me to play it right,' declared Wolfie. He walked over to the piano and snatched the sheet music from Toy Town.

'No, you mustn't,' shouted Toy Town to the angel. 'He'll use it for evil.'

Wolfie smiled nastily at his goons and then at Toy Town. The pianist's face went white when he realised just how much trouble he was in. Toy Town appealed to Sinko, but the drummer only shook his head. Toy Town should have known better than to ask a pacifist for help against the violent.

'I'll sort you out later on,' said Wolfie, menacingly.

The rest of the band mentally reviewed every pianist they had played with to see if any could replace Toy Town while his fingers healed.

'And now, my friend,' said Wolfie returning his attention to the angel, 'if you could just come over here and teach me to play your little song on my ukulele, I'd be very much appreciative.'

Toy Town's whole body appealed to the blonde man. 'Please,' he pleaded, desperately.

The angel smiled at each of them in turn and even Toy Town was cheered for a moment.

'This man would use power for his own purposes,' said Sinko to the angel, whilst nodding towards Wolfie.

They paused and waited. What would the angel do?

Eventually, the beautiful blonde man smiled at Wolfie. 'Let me show you the right way to do it,' he said. The angel led Wolfie to the corner of the room, while the goons locked the door and stood guard.

The band glanced at each other. Surely it couldn't be that bad. Some country music was quite nice, wasn't it? There must be *some* good country music, surely? They shook their heads. They looked at the ground. It was going to be all about the words. The melody wouldn't matter and they would have to listen to the same few chords again and again and again. Life wouldn't be worth living.

Toy Town stared at his beloved fingers.

Wolfie started plinking away at his devil's instrument trying to learn to play the melody. He was an appalling player, with no sense of rhythm and almost always hitting bum notes. The angel seemed to be incredibly patient.

After a while someone tried the locked door to the bar, but the goons stood by it to ensure that no rescuer could enter.

Outside they heard Morse, the sax player calling. 'Are you slackers in there?'

The goons shook their heads to make sure that the band knew to keep quiet. Morse kicked the door a few times and then went away.

'Why don't we call the police on our mobiles,' whispered Bubbles.

'What would we say?' answered Struts. 'That we've been captured by a madman who's making us listen to him practice? They wouldn't even realise what hell this is.'

'Yeah,' agreed Bubbles. 'Have you ever listened to a Police Marching Band? They're sick, guys. They wouldn't even understand what was wrong with a ukulele.'

The band nodded again. This really was what Hell must be like – a man with thick, stubby fingers playing the ukulele badly. Add a few broken fingers for the pain and get him to play country music and they may as well be practicing with Old Nick himself.

Eventually, Wolfie managed to get the tune right. He was playing it straight, no swing, no syncopation, just boring even notes.

'Now wonder we couldn't do it,' said Bubbles. 'It's played straight. It's a song that you don't swing, even though it's not a ballad.'

'I guess Jazz wasn't around in 4000 BC,' answered Sinko.

'Those poor bastards,' said Bubbles, appalled.

'It just shows how far our culture has developed,' agreed Toy Town.

'And now gentlemen,' announced Wolfie, 'you will play the backing for me, so that I can start to control your minds.'

They stared at the angel to see if he finally realised what he had done, but the angel only smiled gently.

‘We won’t play it,’ said Toy Town, defiantly. After all he would get his fingers broken and be forced to like country music anyway. What could be worse?

‘You don’t matter,’ announced Wolfie. ‘I’ve got the rest of the band.’

Silently, Toy Town appealed to the rest of the band, but they stared at the floor and flexed their fingers self consciously.

‘So gentlemen, I shall count you in,’ said Wolfie.

The three remaining band members picked up their instruments and prepared to play. Struts twanged once, but somehow knew to look at Wolfie in time and stopped playing when he saw the vicious man’s expression.

‘One, two, three, four,’ counted Wolfie, arhythmically.

The band tried to catch the beat and quickly aligned themselves into a steady backing rhythm while Wolfie’s tortured ukulele plinked around it without ever actually getting into time. Somehow the evil plonker managed to reduce the number of bum notes to less than one every bar.

Still playing, the band smiled in relief to one another.

‘No wonder the angel was ready to help,’ said Toy Town, shouting over the din. ‘This little shit couldn’t play to save his own life, let alone get evil control of the world.’

Wolfie’s look could have killed Toy Town. And probably would later on.

Toy Town lifted his chin in proud defiance.

The piece eventually ended with a final plink from the ukulele and the band sighed in relief.

‘That was appalling,’ muttered Struts

‘You didn’t play it properly,’ shouted Wolfie when he realised that nothing had changed and he didn’t have any new evil powers.

‘Perhaps I can help a bit more,’ said the angel.

‘No,’ shouted Toy Town almost crying. ‘What are you doing?’

‘Perhaps he’s one of the Watchers,’ said Sinko.

The angel frowned in sad despair at this accusation.

‘What are they?’ demanded Wolfie.

‘The Fallen Ones, The Nephilim,’ answered Sinko. ‘They’re in the Book of Enoch. They used to be angels, and now they’re demons, so they look like angels.’

‘No,’ said the angel. ‘I know what I’m doing. Trust me.’

Sinko shook his head in denial.

‘Play it one more time,’ said Wolfie. ‘And you help us to get it right or you’ll regret it,’ he threatened to the angel.

The angel nodded once and counted gently, ‘one, two, one, two, three, four,’ in perfect time.

The band and Wolfie started together, right on the first beat. Somehow a soft light had formed around them. Sinko’s drumming, always delicate and right in time became smoother, almost lyrical. Bubbles’ bass notes laid down the tonic at the base of every chord and right on the beat forming a wonderful foundation for the pyramid of music above it. The chords from Struts’ guitar were gentle and soft, high and slow. Despite himself, even Toy Town’s fingers settled onto the piano and gently stroked an harmonic blanket of comforting sound.

The most amazing part of it was Wolfie. Suddenly, every note was perfect in time and harmony, with achingly exquisite runs and passing notes that weren’t on the sheet music.

The angel smiled. He had to be making all this happen. No wonder no one was able to play this by accident. It was far more complex than the sheet music showed.

The goons at the door started smiling in an even more vacant way. It was working. Every player could feel it. This music really could pacify and control. No one could listen to this and not feel the deep, sweetly sad parts within themselves. This music was incredibly powerful and amazingly it sounded almost as good as jazz!

They finally came to the end of the piece. Everyone stopped and stared at the ground, in wistful contemplation.

‘Maybe money isn’t so important,’ muttered Bubbles.

‘Things are going to get better,’ announced Struts.

‘Yeah,’ agreed Toy Town. ‘That was beautiful.’

‘The perfect infinite has revealed itself,’ said Sinko.

‘What have we done?’ wailed Toy Town, waking from his reverie. ‘What’s he going to do with this?’

Wolfie was staring at his fingers. His face was dark with rage. ‘That wasn’t right,’ he shouted. ‘That didn’t sound like any George Formby song I’ve ever heard.’ He pointed at the angel. ‘Get him boys. He’s failed me. We’ll catch up with the pianist and his mates after he’s been sorted.’

Toy Town held his fingers under his armpits and thought of Dolly Parton. And that was only the start!

The musicians stared in despair, helpless after the music and waiting for their dreadful fate.

But the goons didn’t move. There were tears on their cheeks. ‘That was so beautiful,’ mumbled one while the other trumpeted into a handkerchief.

‘What?’ shouted Wolfie, purple with rage.

‘No boss,’ said the talkative goon. ‘We should let these people go. You come with us.’

Wolfie’s whole body was shaking as the goons walked over to him and picked him up by an elbow on each side.

‘Put me down you stupid bastards,’ screamed Wolfie as he was carried out the door. ‘Let me go.’

The angel followed the noisy trio.

Wolfie’s rage could be heard on the wind as he disappeared down the street.

The angel turned to the dumbfounded band and bowed. ‘I told you I knew what I was doing,’ he said as he winked. He left.

‘We are never playing that music again,’ said Toy Town as he discreetly tucked the sheet music into a safe corner of his music store. ‘It’s too powerful.’

The band nodded in unison, each carefully squirreling away his copy of the music. They were all desperately trying to remember all those extra runs and trills so they could add them later.

‘Bubbles do you want to ring our glorious sax player and leader and call him back for a practice?’ said Toy Town. ‘I want to try a new song, “Hallelujah” by Cohen.’

That day they played better than they ever had before, but it didn’t last, of course.

THE END