

Lie Still, Little Bottle

By Mary Jones

Characters:

Melissa: late 20s

Debbie: late 20s

Bartender: the bartender only reacts to requests from Debbie and Melissa, and has one spoken line. The sex and age is irrelevant. However, Debbie and Melissa are regulars, and so it is assumed that the Bartender knows them fairly well.

Setting: a bar.

DEBBIE enters the bar. She is “dressed to kill”—or at least pick up stray men. DEBBIE reaches into her purse for a cigarette. DEBBIE then turns to the BARTENDER and orders.

DEBBIE

Can I get a gin and tonic? Great. *(to audience)* Anybody have a light?

Presumably, some one will give her a light or some matches.

DEBBIE

Thanks. Hmm. I don't think I know you, and I know just about everyone who comes here. Are you new? What's your name? {x}? You here by yourself? I'm just waiting for a friend.

DEBBIE continues to chat until MELISSA enters and sits next to DEBBIE.

DEBBIE

Sorry, {x}, just a minute—she just showed up. But, uh, don't go anywhere.

MELISSA is quiet a moment, not looking at DEBBIE but at her hands, which are folded over her purse, which sits in her lap. She is equally dressed.

MELISSA

(to the bartender) Can I get a... a club soda.

DEBBIE

What?

MELISSA

I just want a club soda.

DEBBIE

Get her a gin and tonic.

MELISSA

I don't *want* a gin and tonic.

DEBBIE

Fine—then get her a Manhattan.

MELISSA

Just a club soda would be fine.

The BARTENDER gets her a club soda. DEBBIE attempts to protest, but MELISSA shuts her up, shooting her a dirty look. DEBBIE reacts, mildly offended, but shrugs it off.

DEBBIE

You're late. *(no answer)* Melissa—you're late.

MELISSA

(irritated) Late for what?

DEBBIE

Well, normally you're here by ten. What gives?

MELISSA

As if all the men leave before eleven.

DEBBIE

That's not my point.

MELISSA

Wasn't aware you had a point, Debbie. I thought this was just one of your random interrogations. What time did you get here?

DEBBIE

(pause) An hour ago.

MELISSA

(to the BARTENDER) When did she come in?

BARTENDER

Just before you did.

DEBBIE

Damn it! Why couldn't you-- Yeah, fine, just before you. I was busy. I was getting dressed. I just thought you'd be here already.

MELISSA

Then why are you yelling at me?

DEBBIE

I'm not yelling. I'm just surprised. You've been acting weird lately. What the hell's gotten into you tonight?

MELISSA

What do you mean?

DEBBIE

You haven't been here five minutes, and you're biting my head off for asking a simple question.

MELISSA

You only got here a minute or two before me, and now you're yelling at me, and I don't know why you're so upset—and if you're going to be like this all night then I'm going home.

DEBBIE

Jesus—and I thought you were snippy at work.

MELISSA

Work? Heh. That was nothing. Telling a customer he's a moron because he won't get in line like everyone else isn't snippy, it's honest.

DEBBIE

You're lucky you weren't fired. Well, anyway, then what happened? What's going on?

MELISSA

It's a long story, and I'm not going to get into it, OK?

DEBBIE

Up to you. (*pause*) Look, hon, you know I'm here for you. You know you can talk to me.

MELISSA

Yeah. I know. It's fine. I'm fine.

DEBBIE

Sure. Sure. Hey, um, bartender—can I get another gin & tonic?

MELISSA

Already?

DEBBIE

It's hot in here, and I'm thirsty.

MELISSA

That's not going to help.

DEBBIE

Jesus, we're in a bar, not a McDonalds. What do you want me to order?

MELISSA

That's not what I meant. I mean, look, um, you drink kind of fast.

DEBBIE

I took a cab, dear.

MELISSA

I just mean—

DEBBIE

What?

MELISSA

I don't know. I don't think when I drink.

DEBBIE

That's the point.

MELISSA

I do things—things I wouldn't normally.

DEBBIE

Yeah—it's great. Peel away the layers of fear and conformity, like turpentine.

MELISSA

I... Never mind.

*DEBBIE slowly looks around the bar.
She spots a man, and motions to MELISSA.*

DEBBIE

Hmm. He looks worthy.

MELISSA

(noncommittal) He's cute.

DEBBIE

I say we take him back to your place. Mine is a mess.

MELISSA

I don't know—

DEBBIE

Come on! Hey—how big?

MELISSA
Um. Average.

DEBBIE
Huh. Yeah. Oh well—that’s not the most important part anyway. How ‘bout that one?

MELISSA
Too short

DEBBIE
Yeah, that could be a problem. (*points to another*) What about him?

MELISSA
Too hairy.

DEBBIE
OK, well, what about... (*settles on another random male*) Him?

MELISSA
Dresses weird.

DEBBIE
God, you’re picky tonight.

MELISSA
You know, this IS something we should be pickier about.

DEBBIE
(*ignoring her and picking another man*) What about him?

MELISSA
Smells.

DEBBIE
You can’t smell him from here!

MELISSA
He looks like he smells.

DEBBIE
Come on.

THEY approach a man in the audience.

DEBBIE
Hi. God, you look awfully familiar. Do we know each other?

DEBBIE will attempt to make conversation with the man, but MELISSA is obviously unresponsive. Eventually, as MELISSA has been practically silent during this attempt, DEBBIE gives up, attempting to leave the man while retaining her sense of “charm.” They slink off back to their barstools.

DEBBIE

Is it going to be like this all night?

MELISSA

Like what? Look, I don't know if I want to do this tonight.

DEBBIE

Whoa—wait a minute—

MELISSA

I've got a headache

DEBBIE

And I've got aspirin! *(pause; now in a kinder voice)* I know something's bothering you—what is it?

MELISSA

Do you ever picture yourself at fifty? Sixty?

DEBBIE

If you start that shit, you can just go home. I don't want to hear it.

MELISSA

Do you?

DEBBIE

Look—I'm not playing the game of "oh, won't we be pathetic when we're older, oh, we need to straighten up our lives, oh, what are we doing in a bar when we could be settled down with a couple of brats." I like my life. I like being adventurous. I have no apologies.

MELISSA

I saw Brad today.

DEBBIE

(pause) Excuse me, bartender! Two gin and tonics! *(to MELISSA)* Now I get it. Look, you can't let little shit like that shake you up. He's just another guy. We meet lots of guys.

MELISSA

After work. He was in the park—Washington Square. He had a little girl with him.

DEBBIE

Children are expensive.

MELISSA

They were eating ice cream.

DEBBIE

You have white carpets, Mel—white carpets!

MELISSA

I didn't say anything. They didn't see me.

DEBBIE

I know exactly what you're doing. Damn it—that's not a biological clock, it's a ticking time bomb, and you've got to diffuse it. Come on—you know that this'll pass if you just work your way out of it. Don't wallow, and you'll be fine.

MELISSA

He looked so happy.

DEBBIE

He has a shrew of a wife and kids who scream and a dog who shits on the floor. He's the American dream. You don't want that.

MELISSA

(bitter) Oh yeah? What do I want?

DEBBIE

Goddamn your short memory. You were suffocating—

MELISSA

You convinced me—

DEBBIE

I didn't have to convince you. You knew you didn't want to get married. Not to Brad, not to anyone. It wasn't for you.

MELISSA

It wasn't for *you*.

DEBBIE

You wanted me to step in, to wake up your Sleeping Beauty self. That's what you wanted, not a husband and kids and shit. Look, we're not like them. *(Puts her hand on MELISSA's shoulder, starts rubbing it.)* You can't tell me you would give up your life—our life—for a kid? For a husband? For being stuck in a house in the suburbs, driving your SUV to the brat's soccer practice, to the Dairy Queen, to the PTA? Long nights in front of the tv, watching idiots making fools of themselves for small prizes, only to spend the night laying next to a man whose probably got a mistress, probably resents you for tying him down? Someone you resent for tying you down? You want to give up going out with me, picking up guys, getting all the pleasure, none of the pain, for what?

MELISSA

Well, if it's love, right? It's happiness, right?

DEBBIE

Yawn! No—it's routine. People crave routine.

MELISSA

We have a routine.

DEBBIE

Yeah, but our routine ends in Hollywood-style über-climactic orgies.

MELISSA

On a good night. "Hollywood-style"?

DEBBIE

(Ignoring her) It's not like *them*—so dull. Predictable.

MELISSA

As predictable as our Saturday nights?

DEBBIE

Hon, we never know who we're gonna bring home. You call that predictable?

MELISSA

In a way.

DEBBIE

I don't understand. It's not like you don't enjoy it. I know you do. (*MELISSA doesn't answer*) I mean, all those times we brought some gorgeous guy home, all those times we ...I never once heard you complain. (*pause*) You're serious, aren't you.

MELISSA

You were always more... suited. I don't know.

DEBBIE

Suited? What's that mean?

MELISSA

I... I'm split in half. I've always been split in half. I used to be that little girl, you know. Brad's little girl. I used to be quiet and smiling and never a thought, never a dirty thought—I never even knew what one was.

DEBBIE

Melissa, you're babbling.

MELISSA

What would I tell my mother?

DEBBIE

Jesus Christ! What does it matter what your mother thinks? You don't live with her now—you're an adult, for Christ's sake!

MELISSA

Am I? Are we?

DEBBIE

That's the dumbest thing I've ever heard.

MELISSA gets up to leave; DEBBIE sees this and blocks her, sitting her back on the bar stool. DEBBIE stares at MELISSA for a moment, fixing MELISSA'S hair.

DEBBIE

You—you can't just leave like that.

MELISSA

I have to—

DEBBIE

(*grabbing MELISSA*) Now wait a minute—you don't understand. Why are you leaving? Are you mad? If you're mad, just talk.

MELISSA

(*struggling*) Have you lost your mind?

DEBBIE

You don't understand! Look, it's not like you have to leave. You haven't met someone, have you? You couldn't have. I mean, when would you? You haven't met someone, right?

MELISSA

No. Now stop it. You're making an ass of yourself.

DEBBIE

I don't care. Look at me. I... Fine. You want to stop random hook-ups. I don't care. Just don't... Oh God... Just don't leave.

MELISSA

What?

DEBBIE

Don't leave. You want kids? Fine. You can have kids. Adopt, a donor, whatever. That's OK. Hell, I'll even help you raise the kid. You don't need a husband—

MELISSA

You've no idea what you're saying.

DEBBIE

I mean, I can help you. I could move in. You have a nicer apartment. It'd be easy. We could... we could do that. Melissa—listen to me. It's—it's not just about, um. About going out, and finding different guys. It's not just that.

MELISSA

That's the problem.

DEBBIE

But it doesn't have to be. I mean it. We don't have to do that anymore. We can just. You know. Be together. If that's what you want, if you want stability, if you're tired of—

MELISSA

But I don't want you.

DEBBIE

(choking back) You... you never complained. You said... you said you...

MELISSA

I don't want that. I... I don't want you. *(breaking free)* I can't do this anymore. I didn't set out for this. I didn't think I'd ever be doing this... Or with you. I'm sorry. This isn't me.

MELISSA leaves. DEBBIE stares after her for a moment, shaken. She then turns back to the bar, climbs up on her stool. She sits in shock for a while.

DEBBIE

(to the bartender, weakly) Excuse me! Can I get a refill?

END.