

KABLOOEY

Jared Botticelli

Don't do drugs. That was what they told us in seventh grade, when the DARE people came to Jefferson Intermediate and um, well, performed for us. I guess it was like their Broadway tour or whatever because everything had like a really lame song and dance number to go along with it. Ya know, instead of showing us posters of people who's brains looked like Swiss cheese cuz they'd done a wee bit too much crack, instead they were all like, "*Hey little kiddies, doncha do no drugs, oh, drugs are BAD! They will make you SAD! If you stay off drugs, you will be so GLAD!*" But, uh, after they finally shut up, they had this guy come up, and, um, he was like in a wheelchair and he talked about how he'd started using all kinds of stuff when he was like fourteen or whatever and he ended up in a car accident and now his entire body was paralyzed. He run his chair around using this tube thing with his mouth...and um, that, like totally scared the crap out of me and Seneca. Like seriously, we were like, look, this dude can't eat solid food, he can't have sex, like, um, that is so not cool. So, umm, I guess the DARE program totally worked for me.

Until summer the next year when Seneca and I were hanging out in his garage and, um, we got stoned for the first time. I guess the thing you gotta understand is that more than anything, is that it was cuz we were bored. It wasn't cuz we had some burning need to try MAR-I-JA-UANA. We didn't have anything else to do. My parents were gone to wherever for like two weeks over the summer and uh, his parents were wherever they always were and so he had gotten some pot from his older sister and it was basically one of those, "Dude, we gotta try it" and I was like, "Dude, this is so not cool" and he was like, "Dude, you are such a freakin' pussy" and I was like, "Dude, just hand me the freakin' whatever the hell it is you call it." Okay, so I like coughed up both lungs the first time. And um, then, we were both kinda like, whoa, if this is what everybody is making such a big deal about, then maybe we're like totally missing something. Because all it really did for us was make us really hungry and uh, so we ate like three boxes of Chicken N A Biscuit crackers. Those are really good.

Okay, so, um, here's another thing. I mean, it's like not my fault or whatever that I live here, in this lame-ass city, right? Like, seriously. I mean, what exactly is a high school kid supposed to do here anyway, like, uh, Bucky's roller skating rink on Friday nights? Umm, no. That's retarded. I mean, I'm not a dumb kid and I know all about the whole "give the kids something to do, and they'll stay off drugs" thing, right? So, like, in case you haven't noticed, there isn't anything at all to do here, right? And umm, I guess that's how Seneca and I kinda decided on The Plan. Ya see, The Plan has long term goals attached. He and I have been best friends since, like fourth grade, and a long time ago we decided we were gonna go to Europe as soon as we were out of high school. Travel all over, see the Eiffel Tower, play tadpole release with as many hot European chicks as possible and um, then we'd move to New York or LA or something and become millionaires. Seneca's the brains of the operation and, umm, well, I'm the stud. So, point is, every operation has to have some start-up, right, and um, that's where KnickKnack enters the whole picture.

Seneca and I first met him at one of those party things at his house. It was Seneca's whole idea and uh, it's mostly college kids who go to those things, but Seneca was like, "Shadow, dude, if you just play it cool and don't act like a total dork, everything'll be fine." But um, we were high school sophomores and even though I'm a total hottie and everything, we still kinda stuck out, ya know? So, we'd heard all about this guy, KnickKnack, well, everybody's head about him, but we'd never met him. He had like a really nice house. Like sweet. I remember being like, wow, my parents are all about college and everything, but uh, our house like blows and uh, I have this sneaky suspicion that KnickKnack didn't go to college. So, we're hangin out, pretending to like the beer we're drinking and um, we meet him. And we were kinda shocked, cuz this guy is like totally fruity, like juicy fruit, ya know? "It's so nice to meet you, boys" and uh, every word this dude says is like stretched out, like his mouth is like making out with the words he's saying or something. "It sounds like we might be able to mutually benefit each other" and I was thinking like, whoa dude, I've never even made it to second base with a chick and you're frickin' creepy. But um, it was all about The Plan, right? And Seneca puts his hand on my shoulder and in leans in and is like, "Dude, just go with it. I'm not gonna let this jester do anything, man, but, we gotta use him" and so, like always, I gotta trust my boy, right? So, umm, we go upstairs with Creepy Freaky, and uh, he shows us...The

Pharmacy.

And um, this ain't Tylenol in the medicine cabinet we're talking about. Like most of the stuff, at the time, I had no friggin' idea even what it was. So, umm, I just keep my mouth shut and Seneca and KnickKnack, they're talking to each other in soft voices, but super fast and I'm not even following most of what they're saying, right? And every couple of minutes, Seneca, he's squeezing my shoulder and he looks right at me and I look right back at him, and I know, okay, I just gotta follow along. Cuz um, Seneca and I, we're thicker than blood, ya know? We are. And then, well, Seneca is holding this bright blue paper bag and uh, KnickKnack says, "It's been lovely, gentlemen, I'll see you next weekend." And uh, we leave. And that was the first night Seneca and I dropped acid. Umm, okay, terrifying. Yeah. We're walking back to my house and there's like rainbow starbursts falling out the sky and dropping on my head and I think I smell my hair burning and there's like neon green surfs darting around in front of us, and when I talk it's like my lungs are filled up with helium, and then, there's Seneca, saying, "Shadow, my boy, Step One of The Great Plan has been achieved." And it felt so good. We laid down in my front yard and watched the fireworks in the sky and the daisies my Mom planted are all singing to me, soft and sweet, and I guess I was thinking, this is something to do.

The Great Plan was simple, as Seneca explained it to me. KnickKnack was the Pharmacist and we were just the dishwashers, clerks, busboys, whatever you want to call it. But for every goodie we bagged our cash register went cha-ching. So the more party favors we distributed, the bigger the cha-chings. I know that look. You think you know, right? Well, I know exactly what you think. You think, that's the kinda kid who's gonna get my kid hooked. My kid would never touch that kind of crap if it wasn't for scum like you. Well, you know what? That's a bunch of fucking bullshit, seriously. Your kid and your kid and your kid and all your kids are gonna find it anyway. Maybe if you could remember what it was like being a teenager, you'd remember how freakin' much it sucks. So don't even try the whole all high and mighty routine because, like Seneca told me, people have been altering their states of consciousness for centuries and they do it, because it's freakin' fun. I think you'd be surprised, seriously. Cheryl Rogers, you know, Varsity Cheerleader, Seneca made out with her in the back of the Explorer while she ate right out of my hand. No joke. Check. Andy Trueblood, that's right, upperclassman, swimmer, regular customer every Thursday afternoon. Check. Our customer base got bigger and so did our supply. Any good retailer has to vary their product selection in order to meet their customer's needs. We had the popular kids and the nerds and the jocks and the hot girls and the girls who weren't hot who needed to feel better and the straight A kids who needed to stay up all night. Check. And even Mrs. Peterson, who got a special delivery every Sunday afternoon. After she was all hopped-up the three of us would lie naked in her big white bed smoking clove cigarettes that hurt my chest and reminded me of the first time we'd smoked the evil weed. She run her smooth, cool hands over our chests and tell us how special we were. And we were. We are. Seneca and I.

The blue Explorer basically became a delivery truck and our restocking trips to KnickKnack's house went to a couple of times a week to every other day to every day...school was our sales floor and we did whatever we had to do to avoid sleep. Every good retailer knows enough about their product to like, educate their customers, right? And when I was freaked out, Seneca would say it was just gonna be once. Uppers. Check. Downers. Check. K, G, MDMA, check, check, check. When we did ecstasy, the whole world would turn rosy pink and we would just rub each others shoulders for hours. Seneca always said, "Time spent sleeping could be better spent selling." And so we sold. And we had money. Lots of it. Enough to go to Europe thirty times. We always knew that as soon as high school was done, it would be over, and the whole next phase of The Great Plan would begin. So, we had enough to spend. You can't buy these Nike's at a store, ya know. Like duh. Internet only. Mom and Dad just got busier at work and, well, I got busier with my work, ya know? Supply and demand. I mean, I knew they knew though, ya know? I mean, twenty bucks allowance a week doesn't buy three Ipods, right? Ha. Uh, so it was a Friday afternoon and I guess I'd left some stuff out and my Mom got home before she was supposed to, and I'd been locked in the bathroom for like, an hour or whatever, and then all of a sudden, my Mom, she's like calling out to me through the bathroom door, "Sweetie, Shadow honey, I'm concerned about you." Right. Sure you are. "Baby, are you okay, sweetie?" I'm awesome, Mom. "Shadow? We'll just talk, we haven't talked in a long time. We'll work all this out." Work what out? There's nothing to work out, everything's peachy-pie, Mommy. And then, she's like pounding on the door and her voice is going up and she's just saying the same crap over and over and I'm getting pissy, you know, "Just leave me alone, seriously, Mom. You are so stupid. I hate you. I just fuckin' hate you. Just leave me alone. forever." And uh, she went away. and, she left me alone.

So, uh, I kept the customer lists and Seneca, he maintained the financial dealings of the Great Plan, ya know? All I knew was that money came in, then it went back out to the Creepy Freak and well, we kept our cut. But then, uh, the thing is, there started to be a little problem with the Plan. And, uh, Seneca told me, "It's just a little kink, dude. No worries, Shadow. We just extended our line of credit with the Pharmacist." And uh, I didn't really know what the hell he was talking about, ya know? Cuz like, at this point, some days were a little better than others, but uh, KnickKnack, he started calling our phones a lot, like, um, all the time, ya know? And I'm thinking, there's something not quite right about this whole situation, right? Cuz he's calling like once an hour, and Seneca, he's saying we can't answer, and the messages the Pharmacist is leaving are not real good and that syrupy, sweet voice of his is like creeping me out more than ever before and every message his voice is a little louder and I just want to shut him up, ya know? And suddenly, we're picking up stock from others places and, yeah, I'm worried, but I know, i just gotta trust Seneca, right? Better than blood ya know? And when he looks at me and squeezes my shoulder, I know it's okay. But then, there's this one message from KnickKnack and he says, "You boys have to pay, or we can talk about other arrangements." And um, I don't frickin' have a clue what that means, right? So, umm, it's a Monday evening and Seneca says he has to drive this time and we go to that part of town that we don't even sell in, and we stop at this Korean grocery and Seneca takes this big frickin' envelope of cash out of the glove and he goes in, and he's not in there more than a moment or two, right? But he comes back and he has a big paper bag and we drive a little more until he pulls off the road again and then he, well, he shows me what's in the bag, and, uh, it's silver-grey and metal and it's so heavy, you know? It's really heavy, and Seneca says I just got to hold it, the right way, ya know? I just have to, and I'm thinking' I didn't know anything about this part of the plan, right? But Seneca has it all under control, and so I'm holding this thing it's just feeling really cold and...umm...yeah, we drive over to KnickKnack's place and Seneca, he tells me I'm just gonna wait right inside the door and it'll only take a few minutes. And my heart is beating so fast that it's starting to hurt, ya know? And I'm sweating really friggin' bad and thinking', if I could just have a little something something, I could just calm down and get through this whole thing, right? But umm, then there's like this sound, just once, a very quick, "pop", but it like bounces off the walls of KnickKnack's house. so I just hear it over and over and over again..."pop pop pop pop" and I just want it to stop, ya know, cuz my head is just hurting really bad. But then, Seneca is back, standing in front of me, just in his diesel jeans, shirt off, his hair all messed up, black gloves on his hands, with his dark eyes drilling little holes into me. But he just holds me for a minute, his arms around my shoulders, and says, "Phase Two of the Great Plan has been completed, Shadow Boy." And I think I breathed for the first time in ten minutes.

And uh, then Seneca drives back to my house and he doesn't say anything. He just stares at the road, his hands gripping the steering wheel, and tells me, "G'night, Shadow, I'll call you tomorrow." And uh, what do you do, right? What do ya do when ya know some shit like that's gone down, right? I don't know. I didn't know that was part of the Great Plan. Umm, but then, the next morning, Seneca, he calls me, and he tells me what the next part of the Plan is. And, uh, I'm trying to listen, right? I am, but my friggin' body is just itching all over and I've been scratching and scratching and there are big red welts all over my arms but it's, like, not helping, ya know? But Seneca he's talking to me and um, I guess I'm getting like every other word or whatever, but I'm not sure if I'm like really hearing what I'm hearing but it's like, "brother, forever" and then, "sometimes we make sacrifices", and it's not making any sense at all, right? But then, "I had to tell them it was you, Shadow. You understand, right? I had to say that. It's all part of the Plan. Everything's gonna be just fine. It'll be fine. I'm gonna take care of everything." And I'm trying to make sense of this, but my body is just freaking out and I'm trying to stay focused and then, "Sometimes part of the Great Plan just goes Kablooney, and then, then there's Plan B" And then he's gone, and then, I throw the phone at throw the phone as hard as I can at the bathroom mirror and the mirror breaks and I want to believe Seneca, I do, but this part of the Plan I really do not understand, like, at all. I mean, I'm just a friggin' kid, ya know? And like, now my Mom is at the door again and she's really sobbing this time she's banging on the door really really hard and I want to open the door up and just let my Mommy hold me, ya know? I do, but I just can't do that. I can't open the door. I am so sick, right now? I am so sick. And so, I just have to think about going to Europe, that's in like a year, ya know. Just me and Seneca, we're gonna go, and all this stuff with the experimenting and the Great Plan and the business, it'll all be in the past...we're gonna take so many pictures...Seneca must be on his way over right now, we're just gonna explain that we're just kids, we got mixed up in some bad shit and we're gonna straighten out. I feel so sick. "Mom, please go away. Mom. I can't talk to you right now. Call Seneca. Just fucking call Seneca." And there's blue lights flickering right outside the window and I hear sirens and this time this

stuff isn't in my head at all. I am so sick. I just need.. I hear them in the house, Oh god, I hear them. Mommy get Seneca. Please. Oh god. No....ya know, just like they told us, Don't Do Drugs.

ONE

Jared Botticelli

I'm just meant to be alone. No, seriously, as in "without a mate" - like, the salt shaker you keep on the kitchen counter even though you broke the pepper shaker years ago, but don't have the heart to toss out that salty little sweetie. Or the single white sock you have in your bottom drawer, that sock, it used to have a life partner, I promise, and that pair of socks used to be your absolute favorite ones to wear to bed when it got really cold and you needed a warm pair to wear to bed. But the awful washing machine devoured the other one and now you just have one. That's how alone I'm meant to be- a sock with no mate. Okay, so uproariously funny I'm not, but I try. A for effort, okay? Now, bear in mind, this inability to couple isn't for a lack of trying. It really isn't. Let's see. This whole problem began, I suppose, when Todd first left me. Let me fill you in on Todd a little. We met towards the end of college. We started dating. I liked him. He seemed to like me. He got accepted to medical school. I dropped out of school so we could survive while he was in medical school. I worked 14 hour days while he played doctor and then he finished school. And then I came home one night from work and he was packing suitcases and he proceeded to tell me that he was leaving me. And that he did. Said that after everything he had come to the realization that he didn't really know me. Well, gee whiz, do you think that might have something to do with all those 17 hour days spent at the hospital while your wife was working to pay the bills? I dunno, that's just a guess. But, I'm not bitter. At all. So, after the appropriate period of grieving my dearly departed husband had passed, I started dating again. Quite unsuccessfully, I might add. Let me just fill you in on a few of the particularly tantalizing highlights. There was the guy who was already married. His wife walked in on us having dinner. Could have been worse. She called me some very unpleasant names, and I'm thinking, good grief, am I supposed to google marriage records before the first date. Then, let's see, there was the one who neglected to mention that he had a chronic mental illness and when he stopped taking his meds he suddenly thought he was Abraham Lincoln. No, really, I'm not kidding. I wish I was. He was better looking than Lincoln, though.

And um, then there's a whole line of ill-fated first daters. I've been thinking about compiling a "best-of" collection of lines after the first date. A kind of "greatest hits of why I think you're lame and don't ever want to go on a date with you ever again but let me tell you in a stupid but nice way." "I really think we'd be better as friends." I don't want friends, I have friends, I want a boy-friend. "I'm just not ready to make a commitment right now." I'm not asking you to marry me, I was just hoping we could go eat dinner again. "You're haircut makes you look a little like a...like a...how do I say this in a nice way...like a lesbian." That's funny, because your head makes you look a little like a jack-ass. You can tell that my viewpoints on dating are really filled to the brim with sunny optimism. I mean, frankly, I run home every day just to check to see if I've received a new e-mail from those friendly folks at e-Harmony, letting me know that they've found the perfect match for me- the perfect match being of course a serial killer or perhaps another dead president, or you know, someone wonderful like that. Sometimes I wondered if I should rent out a billboard, just so I could plaster my face on it- include a snappy slogan, something like, "hey hotties, want to meet a nice, unsuspecting girl, date her a coupla times and then make her feel like the world's biggest idiot? You do? Well, just call, 718-229...yeah, well, we'll leave it at that. I mean you seem