

THE BEST OF FRIENDS

Written by

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Based on the book
After Dark: Birth of the Disco Dance Party
(A true story)

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EPISODE 1

TEASER

INT. ORPHEUS DISCOTHEQUE - NIGHT

Title: 1975

The large room is empty except for three BARTENDERS (Two Black M 30s, one white M 30s). They're all wearing white shirts and black pants and scurrying to prepare for the night. Two WAITRESSES are straightening out the cafe tables and chairs. TOSHIO, an older man (60s), is vacuuming the red and black commercial carpeting around the bar.

JOHN and JEFF are sitting at the bar going over the door schedule while MEL stands next to them looking on. They are dressed in suits and ties. CHARLES is in the DJ booth organizing the records that he'll be playing that night.

JOHN

(Shouting) Hey Charles - play that record I like. You know, the one with the saxophone player.

CHARLES

Soul Makossa.

JOHN

Yeah, that's it.

MEL

Manu Dibango. Everyone likes that record. You shoulda seen the action around the DJ booth last night when they realized Charles was selling extra copies.

CHARLES

I had a whole case and sold most of it.

The sounds of Soul Makossa fill the room. John smiles and starts dancing. A nearby waitress dances with John for a few moments.

JEFF

Oh shit! Today is Ruby's birthday. I need to pick up something for her - even if it's just a card.

(MORE)

JEFF (CONT'D)

John - do you mind if I run a quick errand?

JOHN

No problem Jeff. It's still early. You have time. But make it quick.

Jeff hustles out the door and returns a few moments later.

JEFF

Hey John, your car is blocking me. I'll move it for you if you want.

JOHN

No, just take my car.

John tosses his keys to Jeff.

JEFF

Okay - thanks John.

Jeff rushes out the front door.

MEL

Charles is good at finding new sounds. He knows how to excite the crowd.

JOHN

That's why record company execs hang out here. They see records flying off the shelf without ever being played on radio.

CUT TO:

NIGHT, PARKING LOT NEXT TO ORPHEUS

Jeff approaches John's car. As he puts the key in the car door, a man appears out of the shadows. He has a gun. He says something, but it's inaudible.

The man shoots Jeff five times at close range. Jeff staggers to the front door of Orpheus, opens the door and collapses. The music stops. John and Mel rush over to Jeff whose white shirt is now red.

TOSHIO runs into the club and shouts with his Asian accent.

MAN

I saw what happened! I saw what happened!

(MORE)

MAN (CONT'D)

Just as he was about to get into
John's car, a man came up to him,
said something, then shot him -
many times.

JOHN

Somebody call an ambulance - NOW!
Is he breathing?

BARTENDER

Will do.

One of the BARTENDERS rushes to the phone booth in the rear.

MEL

No, I don't think so.

JOHN

Toshio, what did the man say before
he shot him?

FADE OUT.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

INT. MANHATTAN CENTER BALLROOM - NIGHT

Title: Five Years Earlier

Four hundred guests wearing jackets and ties are in a modest, well-worn ballroom. Most guests are African American, some are Latino. All are in their early 20s. The dance floor is full as Jr. Walker & the All-Stars play "Shotgun".

Excited dancers are making audible sounds of enjoyment while dancing the Jerk, Mashed Potatoes, and the Bop.

MEL and CHARLES are watching the action from the edge of the dance floor. They're dressed in business suits.

CHARLES(V.O.)

These folks are mostly from Queens.

MEL

Yeah, I noticed that.

Mel and Charles walk over to the ballroom entrance where TWO MEN are seated at a welcome table. They're both well-dressed African Americans in their late-20s and look street-wise.

Mel leans down between the two SEATED MEN and says something. His voice is inaudible. One of the men responds prompting outrage from Mel.

MEL (CONT'D)

Wait, what? Are you shittin' me?

SEATED MAN

I'm telling you straight up. No money is left over.

CHARLES

Hey man, we should have at least \$3-400.

SECOND SEATED MAN

We didn't take any money, okay?

First seated man stands up to confront Mel.

Dual dialogue format. Voices are raised.

MEL
So it's going to be like
that, huh? I don't buy it.
How can that be?

SEATED MAN
I'm not gonna continue to
repeat myself. I already told
you, we had just enough to
pay the bills. We're not
holding out on you.

Mel stares at the man who stares back. Mel takes a step
toward the man. Both tense up. Charles grabs Mel by the arm
and pulls him away from the table.

MEL (CONT'D)
Don't pull on me Charles!

Mel jerks his arm away from Charles, but Charles still
succeeds in pulling Mel away from the confrontation.

CHARLES
Those Manhattan guys fucked us, but
no sense gettin' into a fight.

MEL
We never should've partnered with
those fuckers.

CHARLES
Or let them control the door.

Mel looks at Charles, lips tightening.

CUT TO:

INT. 3RD GRADE CLASSROOM - DAY

A film of a beaver building a dam is playing.

VOICE OF FILM NARRATOR
Beavers are industrious. They never
give up.

The film ends as a class of third graders watch. The teacher,
JOHN LATTIMORE, the teacher, has an extra-large Afro hair
style. Dressed in shirt and tie, he's OVERLY CAUTIOUS and
DELIBERATE.

JOHN
If a beaver's dam is destroyed by a
storm or man, what will beavers do?

JEROME and a few other students raise their hands.

JEROME
I know Mr. Lattimore! I know!

JOHN

Jerome?

JEROME

They build a new dam.

JOHN

That's right Jerome. If their dam gets destroyed 30 times, they rebuild it 30 times. That's how they control their environment. They're ambitious and they never give up.

Students on one side of the room begin screaming and run to the other side of the classroom as a mouse runs along the wall. John sees the mouse and is so frightened, he climbs on top of his desk.

STUDENT 1

Mr. Lattimore, aren't you supposed to protect us?

STUDENT 2

You can't protect us from on top of your desk!

The class erupts in laughter and an array of oohs and aahs.

JOHN

I got up here so I can see where the mouse is.

STUDENT 1

Mr. Lattimore is scared of a mouse!

The mouse runs out the classroom door. John climbs off his desk.

JOHN

Settle down everybody. The mouse is gone. Maintenance will catch it.

School bell rings.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Okay class, read chapter 8 for homework. You'll learn more about how beavers control their environment. Class dismissed.

John packs up his papers and leaves the classroom after the last child is gone.

As he passes the PRINCIPAL'S (white F45) office, she waves for him to come in. STUDENT 1 and STUDENT 2 stare at John as they leave the PRINCIPAL'S office.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

John, your students told me you displayed great courage when a mouse was in your classroom by climbing up onto your desk. I'm surprised you're that afraid of a little mouse.

JOHN

I wasn't afraid of the mouse. I just wanted to keep an eye on it.

She smiles and shakes her head in disbelief.

SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Okay John Wayne. Hey, I know you're our best teacher - and the kids love you. That's why I was so surprised to hear you ran away from a mouse. Anyway, I didn't call you in here to praise your bravery.

She hands a folded piece of paper to John who opens it.
Title: John - meeting tonight at Maloney's 5pm. Charles.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY AND LOBBY - DAY

John walks over to a phone booth in the lobby, closes the door, and dials a number.

JOHN

Hey Cheryl...Yeah, me too. I gotta meeting so I'll be a little late...instead of 6, I'll pick you up around 7, okay? See you then.

FADE OUT

EXT./INT. STREET IN FRONT OF MALONEY'S BAR IN QUEENS - DAY

John parks his car and walks into Maloney's. It's empty except for four guys seated in a booth in the rear. MEL, CHARLES, LARRY, and PERRY (all M22) are dressed casually.

CHARLES

You know these cats?

Larry slides over to make room for John. Bartender brings a pitcher of beer and glasses. Mel pours.

JOHN

Never seen them before.

John slaps five with LARRY, MEL, and WESLEY, then greets CHARLES with a special handshake that ends with them both wiggling fingers at each other. John chuckles.

CHARLES

John is a third grade teacher. He's also head of the Kingsmen.

MEL

Yeah, I hear people talking about Kingsmen parties, but I never had the pleasure.

LARRY

Me neither. Being in Nam I missed all the parties. But not any more!

CHARLES

You didn't miss much.

LARRY

Hey, I heard you guys lost money at the Manhattan Center last month.

CHARLES

No, but we didn't make any either. We were ripped off by two city guys.

LARRY

Really?! Ever work with them before?

CHARLES

No.

LARRY

That's the problem. Those Manhattan guys think they're slick....You and John teach at the same school?

JOHN

No. I teach third grade at PS 45 and Charles is at PS 160. Charles works with special needs kids.

LARRY

You can have those jobs. I don't like working with a bunch of wild kids. That would drive me crazy.

CHARLES

You mean crazier. No, but really, it's difficult working with my kids. It takes a lot out of you.

JOHN

I'm sure.... So it'll be just us, right?

MEL

SPENCER couldn't get off early enough to be here but he wants to be a part of this.

LARRY

Great, SPENCER knows a lot of people.

MEL

It'll be fun giving dances. I figure we can do 3 or 4 a year.

LARRY

I'm in. What should we call ourselves?

MEL

How about "The Best of Friends"?

JOHN

Hunh?! Okay, yeah, I like it.

The others express agreement with nods or mmmh hmm.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Charles, you were a math major, you should be our treasurer.

MEL

Absolutely! Good fit.

LARRY

Here's a toast to our new club.

All raise their beer glasses.

ALL

To The Best of Friends!

LARRY

TBOF. The initials sound good too.

CHARLES

I need everyone's contacts to start building a master mailing list. I'll keep it confidential.

LARRY

You want ALL my girlfriends' info?

CHARLES

No Larry, just the good lookin' ones.

Larry smiles as they all get up to leave. They pause to watch a breaking news bulletin on the TV behind the bar.

TV NEWSCASTER

Breaking News. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. has been shot. The civil rights leader was in Memphis, Tennessee and was shot while standing on a second floor balcony at the Lorraine Motel. Dr. King was in Memphis to support the sanitation workers' strike....
(announcer's voice trails off)

CUT TO:

EXT. OUTSIDE MALONEY'S, NIGHT

All exchange worrisome glances as they continue walking and exit Maloney's. The conversation resumes on the sidewalk.

JOHN

I'm not surprised. It was just a matter of time.

LARRY

Yeah, but it's still fucked up.

MEL

If he dies, there's going to be trouble in the streets, but not so much around here.

LARRY

Agreed, but I wouldn't want to be uptown tonight.