

# Tit for Tat: A Bronx Folk Tale

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Region: [USA](#)

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*He was fat and fourteen and we called him "Tits." He wasn't terribly fat but his breasts were bigger than any girl's we knew, so though he didn't like it we dubbed him Tits. It was once upon a time long ago, before women's liberation, when Elvis was king.*

He thought he was another Elvis; played the guitar and sang. Once he had a party in his grandparents' dark basement. The whole gang was there. We were excited. There was mystery in the air. We didn't know at the time that Elvis wore diapers and was a dope fiend. God no. Elvis was the King and David thought he was another Elvis and would get all the girls with his guitar. Ike was liked by everyone, or so it seemed. What did we know?

His grandparents were Jewish and he had a Jewish name. That made him exotic to us Catholic kids. Somewhere down the line we knew his ancestors had killed Christ. But it didn't bother us. His mother had converted and that made him half-and-half. We knew no one like him.

"In the Still of the Night" was one of his favorites. He liked accompaniment. Shutupshoobeedo ....something like that. We'd do it in the round to his direction, each coming in when he nodded. He was the maestro. Tits. Oh how we laughed. Shutupshoobeedo .... We sang in the streets at night, in courtyards, imagining an audience in the old Bronx apartments. We never got applause, but sometimes they screamed for us to shut up. Shoobeedo.

So David had this party down in his grandparents' dark basement. He stole my girlfriend that night, but I didn't care. I guess the girl didn't either. I laughed. He was Elvis. He shook and rocked and didn't wear diapers, at least as far as I knew. He stood up on the couch and crooned "Love Me Tender." That was it. My girlfriend was his. When I saw the look in her eyes watching him, I was relieved.

"Hey, David, give us another one," yelled Willy, "I mean Tits."

We played spin the bottle. I kissed a few girls. Tits sang some more, old songs. He played the guitar. We all screamed for more, give us more, Tits, we yelled. The girls were pretty quiet, but they liked his singing. He waved his hair, knew how to curl his lip in a grinning bad boy snarl. The kisses were dry and mild. He shook and rocked as he stood on the couch, Tits shaking and shocking the girls. Later he told us that Jewish girls were easy, but we'd have to go down to the Grand Concourse for that. He was the King, Elvis with tits, and he had all the moves.

"Come to my house," he told Willy and me a few weeks later. "I know this girl who's going to come over and she's gonna strip for me."

We knew she couldn't be Irish Catholic; no Irish Catholic girl would ever strip. It was hard enough getting them to give you a hard dry brittle little kiss. She might be Italian, but Italians were sex nuts like the Jews, and they weren't really Catholic even if they went to church.

"What are we going to do?" I asked excitedly.

"Hide in the closet and watch what I do. You know that Jap sword I have? Well, when she strips, I'm going to take it out ..."

"Cut it out," said Willy, "if you show her your tits she'll go nuts." He fell on the floor laughing.

It was pretty funny, calling him Tits, but I had never seen any. The year before I almost got a glimpse when I was away in the country and peeked through a hole in the wall at a girl getting undressed. But she turned at the wrong moment and I saw nothing but her ass and for a kid like me that was nothing. I had been seeing asses all my life, they were there from the beginning, but girls' breasts, my God, they grew until you had to hold them down with a bra so they wouldn't ...well, I didn't know what they were capable of. All I knew was that babies came out of women's belly buttons.

"Come on up about one o'clock," David told us. "My mother will be at work and the girl will be coming at one-thirty. You gotta get there early and hide in the closet."

We understood that only Jewish mothers worked. They sinned and had sex and never had more than one or two kids. David was half-Jewish, but we knew that meant nothing. If he was half-Jewish, he was Jewish, even though he went to Catholic school with us. He could never be Catholic like us. Somehow Tits was perverted, but we loved it.

The apartment overlooked Woodlawn Cemetery in the north Bronx. A lot of famous people are buried there. Babe Ruth, I think. Fr. Flynn, our pastor, loved him, but he never told us about Babe's sexual exploits, only about his athletic prowess and how he came from a Catholic orphanage and loved God. Boy, he could hit the ball out of the park. Pitch, too. There's never been anyone like him, Flynn would say. He could run in spite of that big belly. Quite a man, he once ate twenty-five hot dogs and then hit three home runs, drove in six. Shacked up the night before, but the good father didn't tell us that, only hinted at it for some strange reason. That's what Tits told us. He said Fr. Flynn didn't know the difference between knocking up or knocking in. Tits knew all about the Babe. He said he was a big lady's man, sort of an early version of Elvis but with a bat instead of a guitar and that girls and women loved guys who held things in their hands like that.

"Stay in there until she strips," said Tits, "then just peak out. Make sure she doesn't see you, especially when I take it out."

Willy fell down in hysteria. I couldn't help laughing. Take it out - where did this girl come from?

So we hid in the closet.

We heard her come in and say something. David talked extra loud so we could hear him. The girl went to Evander Childs High school, was a freshman, and we figured she was either Jewish or Italian or else she wouldn't be ready to take her clothes off. Yeh, she was a slut, we knew that. She probably lived in one of those connected brick houses further east on the other side of the el train where you could get illegal fireworks for the Fourth of July. Strange things happened over there. We had heard that girls from that neighborhood liked to put out and make a lot of noise about it too. The girl sounded dirty.

"You want a soda?" David never offered us one.

"Okay, want a cigarette?"

"Sure. I've run out." We knew he didn't smoke.

We heard them lighting up and opening the soda. The girl coughed. Well, maybe it was David, I wasn't sure. Willy started to laugh. He got me going. For a moment I thought she heard us. We had to hold our sides we were laughing so hard.

I carefully peeked out. They were sitting on the couch and Tits was strumming his guitar. He sang a few lines of "Love Me Tender" and the girl told him how good he was. He was so proud; his plump cheeks seemed to glow. They puffed up. I couldn't see the girl too well since she was hidden behind him. Willy looked, but he couldn't see her either.

Then, by God, Tits was on her. We knew because we heard the guitar drop and him panting. The girl was squealing under his pants. Ah! Ah! Ah! He was breathless.

"You're hurting me. Get off, will ya?"

Was he crushing her to death?

"Take off your clothes." He was standing now. "I said take off your clothes. I'm going to show you something, Baby." He was swaggering.

"Let me finish my soda first," she said.

Willy and I were both looking out now. The girl got up and put her soda bottle on the table. She was short and skinny and had stringy dark hair. I could hear her gum snapping madly. Juicy Fruit I think it was. The smell was so strong, the snaps so fast and loud.

"Look, Baby, I said take it off," Tits boomed in the deepest voice I've ever heard. He was strumming his guitar.

We shifted around in the closet to get a better view and when we looked next – I swear it must have been five seconds later – the girl was standing there in her pink underpants, not the silky kind that you could see through but solid pink, and no bra. Oh my God, we couldn't believe it – she had on an undershirt like my father wore. Flat as a board. Tits seemed agitated.

He went to the corner and got his six foot long Japanese sword. He took it out of its long metal sheath.

“Whaddya doing?” the girl squealed.

“Dance for me, Baby. And take off that undershirt. Strip.”

“Put that thing away. Are you crazy?”

“I’m just fooling around.” His voice was rising. “Don’t worry.”

The girl was quickly putting on her clothes.

“Come on, what are ya doing?” He lay down his sword.

“I gotta meet my girlfriend.”

“It’s early.” His voice sounded like one of those boys who gets cut up and sings like a girl. Like a really high whistle.

“I gotta go.”

She walked toward the door and we had to close the closet quickly. For a split second I thought she saw us and was going to yank the door open. But she opened the other door and went out into the hall.

“How about tomorrow?” Tits squeaked.

The girl laughed a really low horse laugh like an old aunt of mine who’d been smoking since she was twelve. I remember wondering how such a deep sound could come out of that small skinny body. We were peeking again.

“Are ya kiddin? There’s something wrong with you. I should’ve listened to my girlfriend. Just yesterday she goes to me, ‘Candy,’ she goes, ‘watch out for that guy David. He needs a bra.’ “

We cracked up.

Poor Tits, he never sang again. The king had been slain. The world changed.

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