

Modicum Consideration for Consolation

A short story by

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From the second I entered the bar I knew that it was not the most beneficial decision to have gone there. The memories were thicker than the humid, rank air inside, and they kicked in instantly. A bilocation sensation swept me away as I felt I could see what the place used to be and what it had become simultaneously. This bar was once a beehive of activity from Doors Open to Last Call. It was a place to drink, a place to dance, a place to hookup, a place to fight. All variety of people came here, like a neutral territory in the world where it did not matter what race and gender you were, so long as you were looking for a wild night. The mental images of the former regulars, sitting in their usual spots and up to their usual tricks, gradually burned into my vision as I observed those now empty chairs and tables. It felt like the place was haunted; there were no bodies, except for the bartender and me, but the atmosphere of all those wild nights clung to the drab ambiance and magically hid behind it.

The dance floor – more precisely, the space repeatedly cleared of tables and chairs by the habitués that moved them to the corners time and time again – was cold and dusty now, riddled with scuff marks from overuse and under-maintenance. There was no music playing to groove to

anymore anyway, the bar was as silent as a discarded tomb. The same tables and chairs everyone used to push aside now stayed put, stationary as if they had won a battle for their right to be left alone. I walked past the area slowly, trying to remember and replay every experience that occurred on that floor in my mind. For better or for worse, the memories collectively brought a tiny smirk to my lips. I was stuck somewhere in between the positions of *willing to give anything to have those days back* and *simply happy to have had those times but have moved on*. As I ambled passed and over to a bar stool, the apparently lone employee left as caretaker to this mausoleum of fond memories eyeballed me with a stinging glare.

The strung out looking bartender did not seem pleased to see a customer sit down. They were absolutely content, one might conclude, to wait out the night alone and soundless. They neglected to ask what I wanted to drink, or even to say hello; they waited for me to address them. I ordered some rum on the rocks, assuming they were either unprepared or unwilling to mix a cocktail, and pulled some cash out of my wallet. The bartender moved slowly to grab the glass, ice and alcohol, probably finding no reason to rush. If pressed, I would not have been able to give him a reason to either. The drink measured out more than a double shot and was cheap enough, and it lead me to think this solo servant was not as insensitive and detached as I thought. They were not ungrateful, but they knew what was ahead of them in the long run: unemployment. This single patron passing thru for a single drink was not going to solve any financial hardship, and it might have felt almost like a laugh in the face to them. They pretended to clean something at the other end of the bar to circumvent conversation. I resumed observing the space, reminiscing with the voiceless walls that saw everything back then. The whole place was unkempt and could easily be mistaken as a condemned building. The ceiling was falling apart. It probably was not even safe to being sitting in there. Regardless, I continued glancing around.

Not too far away from my bar stool, just outside the last stool on the end, I could see what I came in for. There was a poorly lit corner of the place, which had never been properly illuminated at any point in time. There was some sort of shelving unit there now, but it used to be a vacant corner that no one bothered to notice or occupy. It was a safe spot I discovered was perfect to catch my breath or to avoid someone. I looked into the shadow of it, as if it were a bottomless pit that inspired wondrous notions about what lied beyond the darkness.

I gulped down my drink.

“Can I get you another one?” the bartender snapped to service immediately.

I waited for a few seconds, debating whether this was what I really wanted or not.

“Sure...one more can't hurt anything now.” I replied without taking my eyes off the corner.

They poured the next drink at the same pace as before. I had to stop myself from downing that one in a single shot also. Clearly something had to have changed in my composure, because the bartender asked if everything was alright.

I did not answer at first. I did not want to have everything on my mind at the time spilling out like a waterfall of meandering grief. I turned away from the corner but kept my head down. “I met one of my best friends right over there. Years ago, it was around two in the morning.”

It was around two in the morning, and I had way too much to drink. I was leaning up against the wall in my secret corner, hoping it would stop the room from spinning so fast. My head slumped for a minute or so as I fought to stay conscious. When it popped back up someone else had found their way over to the wall and was now propped up next to me, appearing to be in the same condition. We chatted to keep each other awake. The rest, as they often say, is history. We became famous friends. Some would even come to say we were almost symbiotic. We went through heaven and hell together, never letting the other one lose their determination and strength.

As close as family, we even fought like siblings here and there. And, for as long as we frequented this place, that corner was our all-purpose hideaway.

“Are you waiting for them here now?” the bartender inquired.

I wanted to say something slick, like *‘You might say that,’* but I had to face the truth. “No, they’re dead now.” I reached into my jacket pocket to clutch the pocket watch left to me in their will, desperately trying to literally hold onto time, I guess. Some childish part of me hoped that I could squeeze the watch hard enough to make it burst open, filling me with the power to control and move through the past and present.

The bartender, uncompromising in their affectionless demeanor, simply said “Sorry.”

As if their sentiment could reverse the flow of time and restart it all to be relived. I took down the drink in one swig, and then pulled some more money out of my wallet. I left a generous tip. Thanking the bartender for the drink, I quickly got up and made way for the door. Every inch of memory left in that place was coming with to haunt me, I could feel them. I would never be alone. Part of me wanted that, part of me wanted to be left in peace. Ironically, it did not seem to be my choice anyway.

Just as I always used to do on my way out, I looked up to the security camera over the door – which I assumed no longer operated – pointed my finger like the barrel of a gun and shot an imaginary bullet at the lens, and said softly “You’ll never take me alive.”