

“Happy Hour”

By

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“The most unusual thing happens on Tuesday evenings, me and the other nurses at the convalescent home watch the old men rot in their beds and beg for death” She said through a thick veil of smoke, in the restaurant on 5th and main. Her drunken state apparent even in the dim light that leaked from the restaurant into the bar.

I knew I was in the ritzy part of town. From the look of it, Some bizarre Chinese themed French bistro that served Italian food and cheap wine with waiters in pants too tight, paid wages too low.

We sat at the bar a sturdy piece of stained oak, the two of us in a one sided conversation. My head reeling from last nights endeavors into alcohol, sex and cannabis, I heard only two thirds of what she was saying. I was concentrating on memorizing a lesson, the hair of the dog is ineffective if you lick the lint roller clean the night before.

“Men beg for death. Women take it. When a man is unhappy he just takes the slow route, dying in what he does and what he says, as he searches for some meaning, or redemption. Women just commit suicide, skip all that unneeded pain. It is because they are smarter, really. Simple fact of existence” she said.

The smoke framed her face, where her hair, if she had any should have been. Her wig sat upon the bar, a big pink mess that curled too tightly. Even from taking half glances at it I could tell, it was the nice kind, the kind that is made of real hair from human heads, not overly sheen synthetics or stiff brittle horse tail hair.

She wore a red dress too loose to show off her curves. Everyone noticed but no one cared. She was confused, caught between being a neo-feminist and a housewife. She didn't know if she wanted to walk over men in Prada boots, or lie under them in Victoria secret unmentionables. She didn't even know if she wanted to die.

Why was I there, an editor for a local French cooking magazine with an crotchety AA sponsor nipping at my heels like some fanatical puppy dog, I couldn't remember. I knew that Cindy, my AA sponsor, would be checking all the cheap alcohol joints. She didn't know about this place though. She also didn't know about it's happy hour. Alcohol is adventurous and safe all at the same time.

This woman was not much better than Cindy, although she had nicer boobs. Cindy's boobs reminded me too much of my ex-wife's, the sort that can turn you on, get you into bed, and make you to say I do before revealing

themselves to be realistically false. My wife Grace left four weeks ago.

Constant buzz, like a bumble bee. All alcoholics want that, to be buzzed all of the time. Stone drunk is just an unfortunate side effect of trying to be. Or at least that is the way I explained it to my coworkers, when they half heartedly pondered what smelled of stale French wines and English liquor.

They fired me on Friday. On Wednesday I was asked to clean out my desk. I knew. They told me I was being relocated. They meant to the curb.

As I boxed my work life, my only life, my safe little three walled paradise into boxes, I found my stapler. The red kind that never jams no matter what you staple with it.

I started with bob and his obsessive negativity. Then I moved to frank with his worthless self help hard-on, you know that ' I am enlightened, I am at one with the cosmos junk? Aka. I am better than you because I just wasted 2000 bucks on a retreat in the mountains with a sixty year old hippy'. Ray went next, his office trash spewing mouth fouling the air.

Then there was Ned.

Oh Ned, my backstabbing story stealing, worthless crony of an editor. I killed them all with my stapler, driving a quarter inch of hardened compressed steel into their craniums as I romped the halls with a child like glee. If only they had cheapened out on the staples, bought Chinese, they might be simply brain damaged retards instead of dead. When I reached my desk, the police cars were already below, swat teams hustling to reach me, their automatic staplers set to kill. I took my cheese appreciation degree from the College of Wineka off my desk and chucked it full force, ninja star style, at the thick paned glass.

This glass is meant to stop employees who realize they are living in corporate drudgery from killing themselves. This glass can stop a four hundred pound man running at full speed, football style, and send him flying backwards into the copier with a look of inherent hatred and confusion on his face. He has to go home and kill himself on his own time, company policy. However, It was never meant to stop four years of wasted life, effort and money, compacted, flattened and sharpened into four rather dull but still effective points.

The glass wobbled and shook then shattered and cascaded thirty floors to the street showering the ground in deadly beautiful rain. The police huddled and drew back below screaming for the swat team to get out of there over the radio, but it was too late.

As they burst through the stair-well door and found me standing before the open window their faces filled with terror. They turned to run. But the pressure started to stabilize and the rush rockets me and them into the void of the city. Me and ten innocent swat members floated turning to TV dinners as the frigid cold and lack of air pressure freeze dried us into mummies that Egyptian burial priests could only have wet dreams about.

I really hoped this was the liquor getting to me.

This didn't happen. I could never break the thirtieth floor windows. The place worked at didn't have a thirtieth floor, I worked in a two story concrete block surrounded by car dealerships. And I am alive. Alive as you can call a man with a death sentence of two failing kidneys and a shot liver can be.

The woman next to me hadn't halted her gaunt flapping jaw the whole time we have been sitting at this bar.

She was the font of hypocrisy, one moment spewing the flaunts of man, the next dribbling of her incessantly need of one. Not only is she a font, but a broken one, too.

As much I was not listening, I couldn't help but wonder if I am the only person who will. I wonder if I was just her waiting to happen. Lucky for me all I have is a jaundicing liver, the poor bitch has cancer, either that, or is just an class A weirdo, both of which will get you killed pretty quick.

I see her dead. Strangled by a jealous lover. I see it all happen.

From my balcony as I take my tea and sip, her life slips away under a pair of corporate suited gym toned arms. The man she was cheating with is dead ten stories below her balcony, naked, his brains splayed all over the pool concrete. He just missed the water.

When the police come asking for witnesses I sit back and sip my tea. I let the guilt come, and then I let it stay, and sit with me for tea. The guilt is incessant and annoying and poignant, so me and it get along well. It punishes me as I grow young, and then leaves when I die saddened because its lost best friend.

I really hoped this was the liquor.

"and John Malcovitch is overrated..." She mumbles through a sip of wine, a bit of its redness sliding down her plump, chin.

I catch all this as I lift my head from the salad that has for the last hour been my pillow. No one seems to notice when a drunk guy face plants his salad. Instead they just keep filling his cup up and if your bald woman with a red dress you start talking to him. The cherry oregano vinaigrette stings as it rushes down all too eagerly into my

eyes. Next time I am getting the dressing on the side.

I'd like to say that the conversation has been a waste, but annoying as it has been, I am grateful at the bald matron to left isn't trying to convince me that drinking myself to death is a bad life choice, when clearly it is the only logical choice. I've almost completed the writer cliché, divorced, friendless, unappreciated, and really close to dying of alcoholism. The greats knew the value, but my AA sponsor reminds me that I haven't ever published anything worthy of note. Technicalities.

The bartender was off flirting with two women he will never see again, in the hopes one of their diamond facades would crack over his heart of gold. It was a good distraction. He didn't see me pull a string of twenties out of his tip jar.

She did.

"Hey...What are you up to?" she said, wiping the bit of red from her chin. She didn't notice it'd dripped right into the canyon between her hills.

I got up..

"Hey come back here and put that back." she said. She stood a bit, but couldn't quite manage. The din didn't quiet. Everywhere people just kept talking

"Thief!" she said. Not a chair squeaked. She must of been a usual.

Looking back would have been a mistake. Criminals usually on get caught because the brag about what they did. A lot of times cops and criminals share the same bar, and cops will get busts out of this. The criminals are too hung over in the morning to remember to tell their friends not to go to that bar, and the cycle continues.

"Stop him!" she said. No one stopped crunching on their 30 dollars arugula salads with cherry truffle dressing and imported pistachios.

Outside was as bright as noon, probably because it was. I began to step out through the back entrance, the hand of a man, with an Armani suit ,put itself on my arm.

"Your bill sir?" he smiled through fake teeth. A fake smile and a fake teeth. How perfect.

I reached in my pocket and handed him a few twenties as the woman screamed in the background. He took them. As I turned again to leave, he asked "change sir?"

"Don't know at thing about it?" I said and walked out into the summer heat.

