

A Good Night In Memphis

Bluff City nights in May 1985 are alive with music and madness. Through the smoke and noise, stories without endings follow revelers that only those with pockets full of regrets can sometimes understand.

Crowds have gathered at a small East Memphis bar to escape exhausting downtown events. Tim works the door of Ziggy's inside the Holiday Inn, checking IDs and maintaining order. It's easy part-time work that helps him forget his troubles.

A lone disc jockey with headphones on sits, head down, at the end of a long stage partially hidden by thick gray curtains. A wooden dance floor is between the disc jockey and thirty small tables in front of a busy yet spotless marble-topped walnut bar. Two bartenders are behind it, reaching for glasses and mugs and bending for bottles and cans.

One of the bartenders leaves his duties and passes through a growing crowd of patrons toward Tim's wooden backless stool by the door. He watches the young bartender approach, drying his hands with a hotel bar towel.

He whispers in Tim's ear, "See the man with the brown sports coat standing with his back to us in front of the bar? He has a gun."

"Where is the gun?"

"Under his coat."

"Which side?"

"His right."

"Is anyone with him?"

"Those three ladies have been talking to him."

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“OK. I want this couple at table 12 cut off. I’ll get em’ out of here after this guy.”

The lady sitting at table 12 has been here before. Tim has seen her. She’s an escort. The manager threw her out a few weeks ago and told her not to return, yet she’s returned and is conducting business with a scruffy-looking guy in a black suit. She’s never given Tim trouble, so he lets her slide tonight. All Tim can think of is that she could do better than the guy she is with.

Passing the small round table, Tim looks at her and him. The man seems angry, so getting them out might be difficult, but they can’t stay there.

Approaching the man in the brown coat standing at the bar, Tim leans over and waves his index finger, signaling for him to listen. “It’s illegal to have a weapon in a Memphis bar. I’m asking you to walk to the door with me.”

The man in the brown coat moves his hands from the top of the bar toward his waist. Tim leans against him while gently restraining the surprised man’s arms. The man whispers loud enough for only Tim to hear: “I’m the po-lease.” He nods his head toward table 12.

Tim looks into the oversized mirror behind the bar and sees the man at the table watching while the escort sits with her back to them. “I’m going to let your arms go. Show me an ID.”

Tim does, and the man in the brown coat slowly and discretely does, exposing the butt of a revolver in a brown shoulder holster. His Identification accompanies a silver police shield. Tim moved a step away from him. The man in the brown coat’s hand is shaking.

Without another word, Tim backs farther away, nods to the bartender, and indicates he is leaving the bar area.

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Walking down a short hallway within the view of table 12 to the manager's office, her door is open. She is writing and does not look up when Tim walks in.

After a short, interrupted explanation of Tim's visit, she asks, "How many?"

"Two. One is a lieutenant in a brown jacket at the bar, and the other sits at table 12 with our escort friend."

She slams her fists on the top of her large wooden desk and brushes paperwork onto the floor. Rolling the office chair back, it strikes a wooden end table and knocks a picture over. She storms past Tim through the office door and down the hallway to the bar area.

Stopping, she places her left hand on her hip and signals to the officer at the bar with her other hand. He places a glass on the top of the bar. Tim stands behind her and sees the escort spring from table 12, knocking first the tiny chair she was sitting on and then the table with their drinks on top of it onto the floor. Glass breaks with a crash onto the polished tile floor. She moves through the door leading outside and into the parking lot.

The man with her has been splashed from the spillage and moves away from the table. The man with the brown coat approaches him, taps him on the shoulder, and together, they move toward the manager—a third man rises from another table and follows them.

Three embarrassed undercover police officers follow the manager past Tim and into her office. The door slams behind them.

Returning to the doorway, Tim knows customers are watching as he moves past them. Nothing is said, and the disc jockey's music continues.

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A man wearing a shirt with the word Seagrams across the front enters the bar and stands behind Tim's stool. "Do you mind if I stand here for a minute? I'm looking for someone."

Two customers stop and look into the man's face. "You're on *Moonlighting*."

"I'm in the Navy."

"You're David."

"I'm in the Navy." The man says again.

"Ma'am. He says he's in the Navy. I need you to move. People need to get by."

The three police officers pass Tim without looking and move toward the parking lot.

Since the sailor is a doppelganger of the actor who plays David in the television series *Moonlighting*, he has the attention of everyone in Ziggy's.

Having decided that the person he is looking for is not there, he shakes Tim's hand and looks at his Holiday Inn nametag. "Smile, Tim."

"I am smiling."

The man turns and leaves as others follow his movements to the hotel elevator.

Remembering the sailors' parting words, Tim tries to smile but has forgotten how, so he discards the sailor's advice. With nothing much happening, the rest of the night is slow, like sad music.

When the disc jockey's night is about to end, the manager approaches Tim with two shot glasses filled with tequila before hiding them behind a curtain beside the elevated stage near the

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disc jockey. She asks to hear “Lady Blue” as she always does. The song begins. She kicks her shiny red high-heeled shoes off and offers Tim her hand. He follows her onto the dance floor.

Their movements begin with a promising embrace. He smells her soft hair and feels her smooth skin, wondering why she sometimes likes him because he often regrets the dance.

After three minutes and thirty-five seconds, the music ends. She takes his hand, and they walk back to the end of the stage as the last customer leaves.

She pushes away, still barefoot, and walks in the way some women walk when they know a man is watching them to the office door, closing and locking it before returning to the stage and sitting beside him. She moves closer as they discuss loneliness and why prostitution is even a crime. The disc jockey and other workers say their “good nights” and depart slowly.

Locating the two glasses of tequila, she offers a toast. “To a good night in Memphis.”

The empty glasses are placed on a nearby table. She takes his hand and walks to the door, still barefoot and carrying her shiny red shoes in one hand and now a brown satchel in the other. She embraces him again without saying why before closing the door behind them and locking it.

Waiting for her to turn around, Tim notices that his shirt smells like hers and wonders if hers smells like his. She turns around and balances herself by reaching up and placing a hand on his shoulder while putting one shoe on and then the other.

Without knowing if everything that needs to be said has been said. They turn and quietly go their separate ways, as they always do.

Tim looked back to see her watching him, her head tilted to one side. The brown satchel was draped over her left shoulder. Her long brown hair seemed to float behind her and swing from

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side to side in rhythm with her hips. She looked away as she stopped at the side of her small car and fumbled with her key. The driver's door swung open, and her satchel was placed inside.

Turning to look at Tim, she curtsies, raises her right arm, and waves her hand with two fingers extended. Tim rests his arms on the roof of his car. She tilts her head upward and raises her arm higher, ensuring Tim notices the two essential fingers standing straight and tall.

Seeing her do this makes Tim smile for the first time in months, feeling the one word she is showing with two fingers. Peace.