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The Tavern

The tavern was rife with discussion, talk of the gold found in California filled the room. Before the gold was found, I'd get 12 customers in a day, now I'm struggling to find more areas to seat newcomers; It'd only been a week since the treasure trove was discovered.

"Hey bartender, one more round!" yelled a customer. It was Jacob, one of my only regular customers. He didn't care about gold.

"Coming!" I called back.

Jacob also doubled as security. I helped him get home when one beer turned to seven and his way home turned into a labyrinth in his inebriated mind. Since that night, he swore to protect me and my bar, an offer I graciously accepted. He knew that despite my originally low customer count before the gold rush, fights weren't uncommon. He was ready at any time to protect me from someone's drunkenness and their slow, wobbly shift to anger and bloodlust.

"Here you go fellas, drink up!" I said as I placed six beers on Jacob's table for he and his newfound alcoholic pals.

"You're the bestest, man" he said while the table roared in agreement, clinking their mugs and toasting to a golden future.



I walked back behind the bar and looked at everyone as I passed. They wore smiles, laughed, talked, and enjoyed their temporary liberation from the work that awaited them in the morning. This is what I want my bar to look like. This is my dream.

The tavern door opened and the rusty bell hanging above the door rang. The bar got very quiet. Dead silence. Unwavering, and with my eyes still focused on the mug I was cleaning, I gave the standard welcome.

“Welcome to Shady Oaks Tavern, grab a seat anywhere and I’ll serve you shortly!”

There was a response, but it was from Jacob. The beer had made him friendly. Red in the face, he called out to the stranger.

“Over here buddy, there’s a seat right here” he said, patting the stool next to him with his large battered hands.

I glanced up, and the stranger moved to him with inhuman speed. Like a strong gust of wind, he suddenly appeared before Jacob. He began to cry. Screaming. His face was now scarlet as he yelled “I...I can’t remember!”. I’d seen my fair share of drunk men, but I’ve never seen anyone do anything like this. He grabbed as much of his hair as he could with his calloused hands and slammed his head against the table while screaming. I felt sick.

“Please! Please I can't remember!”

The bar was no longer quiet. The man began to walk towards the bar. One by one, everyone began to scream “I can’t remember!”. The screams were comparable to that of an animal in its final moments. Full of pain and desperation. The men in the bar began to



claw at their face, their sweaty, dust covered skin began to curl under their fingernails as it came off. He was closer. I hadn't realized that I dropped the mug I was cleaning. It shattered. I bent down to pick up the larger glass pieces to defend myself. When I stood up, the man was standing at the bar. My stomach tied itself into a knot and my mouth tasted of iron and copper. Blood. I saw the entire tavern in an uproar. Screaming, and harming themselves in whatever way possible. The man stared at me. I sensed a great evil. He reached his long, slender arm out to me and I...I can't remember.

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