

CATEGORY: NONFICTION

TITLE: THE DARE

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I usually didn't patronize drinking establishments on Sunday but what the heck.

I forgot the hours were shortened on Sunday so when I arrived, I managed to get there just before the lights were dimmed and the doors locked. I was surprised at the number of people who were locked in with me.

"What's going on, John?" I asked the bartender.

"Nothing much. Just have a bunch of barflies in here who aren't ready to call it a day. What are you doing here on a Sunday? Jack's not here, you know," said John with a strange smile on his lips.

"I'm not always looking for Jack. I was in the neighborhood and decided to stop in to see everyone," I said as sincerely as I could manage because it was totally untrue. I was looking for Jack in the only place that I could do it because he was a married man. I considered the Lake Erie as our private place and I hoped he would be there waiting for me, but that didn't happen.

"If you say so," he replied and again the strange smile appeared.

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Those people sitting at tables were mostly all regulars hiding in the darker corners so they couldn't be seen by any onlookers from the outside. I was sitting in my usual spot, on my regular barstool that was tucked in a corner and hard to see from the outside.

As I was looking at all of the familiar faces, John the bartender, approached the area of the bar in front of me.

"This is on the house, Ellen," he said as he poured a shot of rum into a glass followed by a small portion of a bottled Coke that he placed in front of me.

"I didn't think you could serve hard liquor on Sunday," I said as I stirred my drink.

"I'm not supposed to but the bar is closed and locked up like it is supposed to be. This is a private party," he explained with the strange smile appearing again.

Before long, I had several shots of rum lined up in front of me.

"What's going on? Why all of the shots?" I asked.

"Your friends want to buy you some drinks," he replied.

"Why?" I asked.

"Just to be friendly," he said with that same smile.

That smile was beginning to worry me. It wasn't sincere but appeared devious, deceitful, and devilish.

I was beginning to feel no pain after a couple more shots of rum being added to my Coke. I downed the drinks much faster than I normally allowed myself to do.

"Hey, Ellen," shouted a voice from one of the dark corners.

"Who said that?" I asked as I turned to pinpoint the voice.

"I bet you can't drink a shot from every bottle behind the bar," said the same unidentified voice.

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“I can drink you under the table anytime,” I shouted in return.

“Prove it!” shouted several male voices in unison.

“What do I get in return?” I asked,

“Drunk,” shouted many voices.

“I don’t think so,” I said softly.

“I dare you to do it but I know you can’t,” shouted the unidentified voice,

“Sure I can. I just don’t want to,” I said but I was fighting the need to prove the dare.

“You said you could drink any man under the table. Now, I dare you to prove it,”

shouted that same voice.

I looked at John and said, “Start on this end, John, and they are paying for the drinks.” I waved my arm toward the area where the many, male voices had emanated.

I didn’t know how far I had gotten across the top row before I lost track of the world and everyone in it.

I did remember glancing at the clock and seeing 6:30 pm.

When I returned to my world, it was 10:30 pm. I had totally lost four hours.

I was driving my car when I returned from my loss of time. I was driving along Clark Avenue heading for home but I didn’t know where I had been that caused me to drive on Clark Avenue. The bar I left was nowhere near Clark Avenue.

Under the street lights I could see that my hands had traces of blood on them and my clothes were disheveled.

I glanced into the rearview mirror and saw that my eyes were red and my cheeks were streaked by tears. My hair looked as if I had just crawled out of bed.

“What have I done?” I muttered as I continued to drive to my house.

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I pulled into my driveway and sat in my car for a few moments as I tried to piece together the missing four hours.

Nothing – I could remember absolutely nothing for the missing time.

I entered my house where my housemate was standing in the doorway waiting for me to get home.

“Where have you been?” Bertha demanded.

“I don’t know,” I said. That was the total and honest truth.

“Don’t you remember leaving here?” she demanded.

“No, I don’t remember coming home.”

“Well, you did come home because I drove you here. Then you grabbed the keys away from me and took off again,” she snapped.

“Why did you have to come to the bar to pick me up?” I asked.

“Because you were trying to kill John, the bartender. What did he ever do to you?” Bertha asked.

“I’m not sure,” I answered as my mind stopped clicking through memories and landed on what appeared to be a dream like picture.

John was standing in front of me with that strange smile that had morphed into a wicked grin. He raised his clinched fist above my glass that was filled with my rum and Coke. When he opened his fist, the image of two, white, fluffy pillows wafted down to my glass to be swallowed up by the liquid.

In a distorted voice I heard him say, “I want you to have some fun with me, Ellen.”

It never occurred to me that he had actually drugged me.

“Bertha, I think I did have a reason to kill him. What else did I do at the bar?”

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“It appears that if you didn’t like what someone did to you for any reason, you told them off in very explicit terms. One by one you let them all have it verbally and then you started throwing things at John. You picked up anything and everything that you could heave into the air and aimed it at John. But – before that, you threw up on your boss’s shoes. Boy, was he mad. That’s why he called me to come get you.”

“What else did I do?” I asked.

“Isn’t that enough?” Bertha asked.

I held my hands up and pointed out the blood that seemed to have come from broken fingernails and torn cuticles.

“Did this happen at the Lake Erie Bar? Was I this disheveled at the bar? Did anyone do anything to me that they shouldn’t have?” I asked because I just didn’t know.

“Yes, you looked that way but if you want to know if anyone raped you, the answer is no. The boss said no one could get near you. You were fighting like a tiger.”

“When I left again, did I go back to the Lake Erie?” I asked.

“No, they would have called me again. They were probably closed up by then.”

“What time did you bring me home?”

“I think it was around 9 pm.”

“I woke up from my fog at 10:30 pm. I wonder what I was doing for that missing period of time which would be around an hour and a half,” I said.

“I have no idea where you went. You didn’t tell me anything when you left here. What are you going to do about the Lake Erie? You work there running the restaurant. How are you going to show your face?” she said sarcastically.

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“Don’t worry about that. I will just tell them the truth which is that their bartender drugged me.”

Come Monday morning I went to work as if nothing happened. I did apologize to my boss for my bad behavior and vowed that it would never happen again as long as I didn’t get drugged. I asked when John would be working again and was told that he wouldn’t be because he had been hospitalized for drug abuse.

I was sorry that had happened to my friend, John; but, I was relieved that he wouldn’t be there to give me any more drugs.

I never did find out where I was or what I did from 9 pm to 10:30 pm.

If anyone can fill in the blanks for me I would appreciate it. It wasn’t a recent event. I lost that time over thirty years ago.