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Haunted Past

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Haunted Past

Donnie Drobny

The Midnight Hotel was a dimly lit bar well off the beaten track of the city. Unlike many hip dive bars, the Midnight Hotel smelled of cheap alcohol mixed with the bitter scent of cigarettes. Jack sat alone at the bar nursing a long necked bottle and staring at the playing card coaster. Absent-mindedly, his left hand reached down and touched the wedding ring he always carried in his pocket, feeling the weight of it through the course denim. He still carried it even though his wife, Susan, had died nearly 5 years ago. The weight in his pocket reminded him of what the weight in his heart would never let him forget.

He found himself thinking about the way that she laughed at all his dumb jokes, the way she softly snored in bed beside him and how she tugged at her earlobe when she was angry. That was the Susan he missed.

"Hey buddy, you in there?" The bartender's voice ripped through the haze of memories and Jack started, looking into the smiling face of the aging man behind the bar.

"Yeah, sorry, I was just- well, somewhere else I guess."

"I know the feeling. Need another?" He gestured at the empty bottle still in Jack's hand.

"Sure, I'll be here awhile."

The bartender took the bottle, revealing the queen of hearts, a halo of water encircling her head, and walked away. The bar had filled up and a flash of raven black hair, exactly the same shade Susan's had been, at the other end of the bar caught his eye. Jack was sure that she would turn around and he would see that same smile with the lone dimple on one side. Then she turned to face him and that same smile flickered and faded. That same dimple shrunk then disappeared. Her green eyes locked with his and flashed quickly to the exit.

He was up pushing through people before she had begun to move away from the bar, cutting her off before she could reach the door.

"Excuse me." She looked at the floor avoiding his eyes.

"Susan?"

"Jack, I-This can't happen."

"Susan? How- I saw them bury you. I was there Susan.

What the hell is going on?" He reached out, taking her arm and she turned to face him.

"Jack. Look at me, right in the eyes. You did not see me here. I am gone and I'm never coming back." She pressed her will against his, feeling his crack and break as a dull haze floated over his eyes. He blinked twice as she disappeared out the door. Jack walked back to his seat and picked up the new bottle the bartender had set before him.

"Who was the lady?"

"What lady?" The two men looked at each other, faces mirrors of confusion.

"Whatever, man." The bartender walked away shaking his head as Jack removed the small gold ring from his pocket, stared at it thoughtfully and returned to his beer.