

Cocktail Hour

by Larry Strattner

The bullet went past his right ear and a little star appeared, twinkling in the mirror, sparkling around a small hole, before the boom of the shot filled up the bar.

He put his straight up Grey Goose martini down on the bar hard enough so the stem shattered between the v-shaped dish and pedestal of the glass. His olive bounced once.

Two more stars came out on the mirror sky as he slid off the barstool to the floor with his arms over his head as if this position would protect or preserve him.

He could hear shouting over at the door, behind him, “Warned you...you shitbag...away from my wife...” and another report. A storm of noise with lightning strikes.

At the base of the bar, in his face, a little ledge you put your feet on, or drop an occasional butt on, or maybe spit on in a bar in South Chicago touched his nose. It smelled of all of these old indiscretions and also of bleach which he doubted was making much difference. He suspected he had peed in his pants but his dark suit wouldn't show it. Certainly someone had peed in their pants. He could smell it. Or someone before him, too lazy or drunk to stand up had peed under the bar.

The ruckus behind him subsided. The shooter was still yelling, muffled as if someone was sitting on his head.

He stopped covering his head and rolled over. There was in fact a very large man sitting on the shoulders of a skinny man whose arms

and legs were thrashing but whose head was obscured by the large man's crotch. A large, black, squarish gun lay on the floor about two feet from the thrashing man's fingers.

He had come out of the bore-ass McCormick Place trade show and told the cabby to get him someplace for a martini and, no, he didn't want to go all the back to the goddamn Hyatt. As he paid the short fare he vaguely remembered the cabby saying with some mid-east accent, "...not want to be drinking down here..." Screw him. On reflection he could appreciate the advice.

The shooter had almost nailed his intended victim down at the end of the bar dressed in a Hawaiian shirt and khaki trousers. The khaki made it clear *he* had peed in *his* pants for his indiscretions but he seemed otherwise unscathed.

In future he was going to have to do some serious evaluation of how quickly he needed a drink at any given moment, bore-ass trade shows or not. His glass was a sparkling pile in a puddle of vodka with the olive sitting in the middle, as if it had been shot by Michael Jordan. An odor of cordite hung in the air. He raised his hand toward the bartender.

"Can I get another martini down here?" he said.

