



Closing Time

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A bartender and a photojournalist talk

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“Excuse me. Is the bar still open?”

I look up from cleaning to see an older male with an overly patched burlap messenger bag that has seen better days. I motion for the man to sit down at a table that doesn't have its chairs upturned.

“The bar is closed for the night, but I can get you something. What would you like?” I asked.

“A dirty martini,” he replied.

“Extra gritty, double olives?”

“It's the only way I roll.”

As I made his martini, I took in this mystery man. Lanky with dark shaggy hair, salt and pepper beard, cigarette burns on his denim jacket, dark blue jeans, well-worn sneakers and eyes that have seen a lot in his travels. He opens his bag, pulling out a notebook, laptop, and two cameras.

“Are you a photographer?” I ask him, sitting his drink down in front of his laptop.

“Yes I am,” he answered. “I'm Alan Jankowski, world-renowned rock and roll photojournalist. I just came back into town from a world tour with a band I began photographing back in the early eighties. I took pictures and videos that I can email. I'm getting my final book published at the end of this year.”

“Cool. Did you get any shots on your Exakta66 camera?”

“I'm guessing you're a photographer as well.”

“Yes. What's your favorite medium to shoot?”

“I like to shoot in color. Sometimes, I get some black and white on my digital camera. The Exakta is strictly for black and white shots. Would you like to see what I got on my laptop?”

I sat next to Alan as he turned on his laptop. For some reason, he had a picture of a penguin as his wallpaper. I turned my attention to a folder he opened and saw a black and white image of a vintage 1960 Gibson Les Paul guitar, cover of an early Albert King blues album, and a variety of pictures that included a matured potato plant and a dead bee.

We talked for several hours about life, including his decision to retire from being on the road as a photojournalist.

“Sharon, is it okay if I use your studio to develop the final rolls of film next week?”

“Of course. I’ll give you my address.”

Several months later, a package and a letter arrived at my bar. In the package were four hundred twenty rolls of film, his obituary, a picture of the neon sign from my bar and the final book he published.