

# Judy Strick...Living on the Fault Line...Tales from L.A.



## Story № 4

### Buzzed: A Cautionary Tale

HOLLYWOOD

Whatever your image is of Hollywood, it's probably right, tawdry crowded tourist mecca, Walk of Fame, Hollywood and Vine, Palm Trees, klieg lots, tour buses, costumed buskers, sleazy bars, Starbucks, Ripley's Believe it or Not, Grauman's Chinese, neon, crime zone, crazy zone, crazy traffic...

That's probably what you think of. You don't think of the places where the real people live, the bungalows and apartment houses and duplexes, the auto repair shops, the strip malls and the movie studios... small studios, large studios, recording studios, sound studios; and at the Apex, on Melrose Blvd, Paramount Studios, with its iconic gates and its aura of old Hollywood.

Sara Jane Fischer went to bed one Friday night, after an evening spent in a bar across the street from Paramount Studios where she worked. When she next woke, her life was to be forever different.

This is the way it happened.

It was the start of the long Memorial Day weekend. She had gone to Albie's Cantina, as she'd been doing for the last four years. Albie's bar was a Friday night hangout for a bunch of people from the studio -- the lower level employees; the people on a time clock. As always it was noisy and crowded. Twinkling little colored lights and candles in red glass dimly lit the cantina. Pictures of bullfighters decorated the walls. The restaurant was in back, scarcely noticed by the TGIF contingent.

The bar, tended by Albie himself, was unusually busy on this particular Friday -- the holiday rush. Barstools were at a premium at the long well-worn mahogany bar. Even the little tables scattered around the room were full. She knew a lot of the people who were there that evening and got more than a few hellos as she worked her way through the crowd.

Sara Jane found a place at the bar, next to her friend Andy from Human Resources, and ordered a margarita as soon as she sat down.

There had been a weird vibe on that particular evening. Greta, a self-declared ex-friend, was a few barstools down. As soon as she saw Sara Jane she frowned, quickly got up and moved to the far end of the room. Greta had

a hate-on since four months ago, when Sara Jane advanced up from the secretarial pool and now had her own office and a title, "executive secretary." Well too bad, Sara Jane had worked her butt off, put in long extra hours. She deserved her promotion. And she wished Greta would stop giving her the stink-eye.

Andy, to her right, was ordinarily a witty drinking companion, but tonight he was depressed because his boyfriend had dumped him; so after a few caustic complaints about his ex's mean spirit and skid marks, Andy got up and left, before Sara Jane had finished her first margarita -- which she then managed to polish off quite quickly.

She was usually a careful drinker.

It had been a hard week.

Buzz Cooper from security quickly grabbed Andy's empty barstool. He had probably been lurking around, waiting. He was a goddamn lurker. Why her? He should go harass Greta, who at least would be interested

"Hey Babe... How's it goin'?" He nudged her with his shoulder.

Tonight he was wearing a Lakers jacket and a bright blue shirt. He always looked different without the badge and the gun and the uniform that he strutted around in at work, like some tinhorn dictator.

“Didn’t recognize you without your badge,” she mumbled dismissively. She knew it wouldn’t make any difference; he’d keep pestering her until she got up and moved.

Just another Friday night at Albie’s.

”Mmmmm,” Buzz murmured, nodding his head in approval, “nice sweater, you look good in green. You should wear it more often.” He glanced down at her breasts, not bothering to conceal his interest.

What a creep.

She realized that she was showing cleavage. Her sweater was getting too small. Her buttons were straining and the armpits were tight. All her clothes were tight lately. She could get fat if she weren’t careful. It was always a battle.

She reached over and grabbed a couple of tortilla chips from the communal bowl -- nerves. Buzz was making her nervous.

He was now leaning on the counter so that his arm was pressed against hers. She could feel his body heat. She was vaguely disgusted.

“When are you gonna have dinner with me Sara Jane Fischer? Is tonight gonna be the night?” The undertone was “*when are you going to fuck me.*”

She moved away so that their arms were no longer touching, and she shook her head.

He continued, oblivious, "I know that you're done now with that asshole who broke your arm."

Her heart contracted..."My wrist," she quickly corrected him.  
"And how the hell do you know about that?"

Nobody at work knew a thing about the way she and Billy Poole had parted company. She had explained her cast by telling everyone she had fallen off her bike. She didn't even own a bike.

He just smiled enigmatically; "It's my job."

She turned away from him and looked for another empty seat.

Greta walked by and stopped behind Buzz, putting her hands on his shoulders. "How're you doing, Buzzer," she said, ignoring her former friend.

Buzz grunted. He wasn't interested in Greta.

Albie brought Sara Jane a fresh margarita, her second of the evening. She needed to loosen up and leave work behind her. Things back at the office were getting tense. Elliot Kushner, her boss, was on the brink of being fired; and if they canned him, her agenda -- her upward career path, was back to ground zero, her plans to become a full producer in the toilet. Without Elliot, she'd go back to the secretarial pool- the seventh ring of Hell.

She drank her margarita greedily, bypassing the straw, going for the glass.

“So how’s life on the fourth floor? You like your new boss?” Buzz asked in an insinuating way that implied orgies and nasty goings-on. He did everything but wink.

“It’s okay,” she nodded.

“I heard Kushner’s in trouble.”

“Naw. Stupid gossip, everything’s fine.” She pulled out her cell phone and started checking her messages. He just never took the hint. Buzz Cooper made her uncomfortable. There was something mean behind his eyes. Furthermore he always seemed to be popping up -- in the commissary, on the lot, in her building, Zelig-like. Maybe it was part of his job to be all over the place, but it still made her nervous.

“Yeah, I was up there a few days ago,” he continued, ignoring the obvious fact that she was ignoring him. “I stopped by to say hello but you weren’t in. I left a little something on your desk,” he said slyly.

She hesitated for a moment... “Oh yeah, the rose. That was you? I was wondering.” It had made her a little nervous, a long stemmed white rose, that looked like it had been pulled from the floral extravaganza at reception downstairs, just lying across her desk gasping for water.

“Yeah, thanks,” she said, looking away from him. “Excuse me; gotta go powder my nose.”

“You girls and your noses,” he said.

“I’m not a *girl*,” she muttered. “I’m a woman.”

“You sure are babe.”

She had stepped right into that one...

So Sara Jane got up and went to the bathroom, hoping to lose Buzz Cooper. Canned mariachi music hung over the room. She pushed her way through the throbbing, jostling, heat of the crowd.

Moon Dog was lounging at the far end of the bar, near the door to the ladies room, his usual lair. He was wearing a Grateful Dead t-shirt. He always wore rock and roll t-shirts, and he sported one of those closed shaved beards that didn’t cover up his double chins. His hair was tied back in a ponytail. He was fifty if he was a day. He was always sending drinks over to select young ladies at the bar. She had been on the receiving end of several of his margaritas in the past. She always sent them back. He was not the type to take hints, although the margaritas had stopped coming.

“Hey, sweet baby, what’cha say maybe... when’re you going to let me take you to the moon?”

That’s why everybody called him Moon Dog -- he always used that line.

Albie told her that Moon Dog’s real name was Seth Rubenstein. He told her that Moon Dog was rich and crazy. His father owned coal mines in Bolivia.

Sara Jane ignored Moon Dog.

She heard him as she walked off.

”Mmmm, mmm; I just love me a big assed woman...”

“Harmless,” Albie had once told her. ”He hits on all the pretty girls; don’t take it personally. He’s lonely. He eats here every night at five and he has the same thing every time: the ‘Monterey Combo plate’ and a flan. He always leaves huge tips. And then he hangs out at the bar and looks at the ladies. Sometimes they look back, mostly not. Like I said, odd but harmless.”

Harmless? Perhaps. He sure was a pain in the ass.

She was sick of to death of this kind of crap, hanging out in bars, hoping for the miracle to come. She was over Billy Poole now. She needed somebody new, somebody who wasn’t a bad-boy. She needed to start going out to other places -- not bars. Maybe she’d meet somebody who wasn’t an idiot or a creep at a lecture, a film festival, museums, concerts... yeah, yeah, yeah; she’d been down this path before, and she always ended up at Albie’s on Friday nights.

The dimly lit bathroom was empty; Sara Jane checked herself out in the mirror. She definitely needed to watch it. She didn’t want to wind up like her mother, who was fAAAt. She needed a haircut too. She liked her hair looking neat and efficient, and now her bangs were flopping in her eyes.

She wasted time fooling with her hair, lip-gloss, checking her cuticles, and hoping Moon Dog would be too drunk to hit on her again, and Buzz



Cooper would evaporate. She figured that by the time she got out of here somebody else would've taken her empty seat at the bar; for instance Greta.

She tried calling her mother, to kill a little more time before she went back out for one more margarita, and one more look around the room. Three was her limit. Albie knew that. Albie kept track for his regulars – “A service of the house,” he once said. The line was busy, her mother being one of the only people left on the planet without call-waiting. Sara Jane had to laugh at herself, still looking for her mother to bail her out. “Grow up girl!” she told herself.

She looked at the mirror again and pinched at the little bit of chubbiness that had started accumulating at her waist.

When she finally left the bathroom, Moon Dog was still hanging around with a drink in his hand. He gave her the eye and winked at her. She ignored him and kept walking, but she knew he was staring at her “big ass.”

It was like running a gauntlet. Greta, who had not grabbed Sara Jane's vacated barstool, was shooting her hate looks; She could feel Moon Dog's eyes on her back. She glimpsed quickly over her shoulder -- sure enough. He usually gave up right away and started hitting on some new possibility for rejection.

In retrospect, it struck her as odd.

The bar was jammed; three deep in customers, chatting waiting for drinks. It was that time of night, when everyone was on their second or third

rounds. There were no empty seats to be had. Except for the one next to Buzz Cooper with his sly, pink, arrogant ways. He was still sitting there in the exact same spot, his jacket draped across her still empty chair, his shaved, bald, head glistening.

“Saved your seat sweetheart,” he said patting the empty seat cushion. “I fought for it with my life -- the only empty seat left in the place.”

She looked around. He was right. It was standing room only, and even that was getting a little bit crowded.

So she reluctantly sat down, turned to wave to someone she knew from reception, and when she turned back, there waiting on the counter in front of her was a frosty new margarita-grande.

“Mine?” she said to no one in particular.

“Looks that way.” Buzz smiled like a cat.

“Where did this huge thing come from,” she said.

“Must’ve been sent by an angel,” Buzz smiled and shrugged.

She frowned, took a ten-dollar bill from her wallet and put it on the counter in front of him. “Thanks, but I’ll pay for my own drink.”

“Take back your money, Babe. It’s not me. You must have a secret admirer. Or maybe you’re the two thousandth customer this week.”

She looked around the room, checking to see if anyone was watching her; anyone she knew.

“Wish I had thought of it,” said Buzz with a sly smile. “If you want to find out, check with Albie.”

It was a busy night and bartender had his hands full. It was not a good time to try and get his attention.

Sara Jane decided to ignore Buzz. Maybe the drink came from Moon Dog? But she didn't see Moon Dog. There was that bad vibe in the room; she felt it again. So she slugged down a few mouthfuls of icy margarita and looked around the room. There was not a single soul she wanted to talk to here. And she suddenly missed Billy Poole which was idiotic because he was nothing but bad news.

“So Babe, how about grabbing a little dinner,” Buzz jostled her shoulder with his shoulder.

“No. I gotta get going.”

She quickly finished off her margarita and got up to leave.

“One of these days Sara Jane...” Buzz muttered with a lascivious smile as she left. He always said that to her as she was leaving, even if they were just passing in the hall.

The seat she vacated was immediately grabbed.

Buzz... bzzzzzz... her head was buzzing, it was so hot in there, all those people, pushing, shoving, sweating. Sweat was streaming down her forehead like tears. Gotta get out... get some fresh air.

She walked out to the parking lot to get her car. She could still hear the clatter of voices mixed with music coming from the bar. She was weaving ever so slightly.

It was festive outside, lights strung in trees, the distant sound of laughter- all vaguely surreal. She walked past a shiny silver Bentley with black windows. She had seen the Bentley there before -- even in L.A. a Bentley stands out; especially in the parking lot of Albie's.

The motor switched on, the car purred and idled, waiting for her to pass. She glanced over at the open window on the driver's side. There was Moon Dog, waving his hand, flashing his intrusive grin at her. She stumbled over a crack in the pavement as she hurried past him to her car, alarm button in hand.

"Hey sweet baby," he said. "You look a little buzzed. You okay to drive home?"

She kept walking and gave him her best drop-dead-loser look. She stumbled again.

He winked at her, then closed his window and waited for her to pass.

Moon Dog in a Bentley, like the Queen of England? That creepy old asshole?

As soon as she got behind the wheel of her seafoam-green Prius, she was gob-smacked by the after-effects of that last margarita. She should not have gulped it down so quickly. Her head was like a helium balloon, barely attached to her shoulders.

Bzzzzzz...

She drove a few blocks, took a left at the first green light and pulled over onto Larchmont. If there was anything Sara Jane was, she was not a fool. She was too drunk to drive and she knew it; so she fished around in her purse, until she found her cellphone, and called a cab.

She checked her watch, having no idea of what time it was, or how long she had been at the bar. The digital numbers looked fuzzy at first. She had to focus her eyes... 9:45. How the hell did she get so herself so drunk on three margaritas?

The cab was there in less than five minutes. She was not too drunk to notice that it was one of those gypsy cabs. She was not choosy.

She needed help getting out of her car.

The driver, who seemed used to dealing with wasted people, was a squat, darkish, middle-aged man with short black curls, and deep black eyes. He was very solicitous.

“You okay M’am?” He had a slight accent; Indian perhaps, or Persian.

“One too many margaritas,” Sara Jane mumbled.

“You are very smart, M’am, to call a cab.” He was short and husky, and he was wearing a Hawaiian shirt; maybe he was Hawaiian. She was not too drunk to notice that his nails were dirty and his features rough.

He held his arm out for her; she was very unsteady on her feet.

She was not too drunk to forget to lock her car up tightly. But she was drunk enough to press the wrong button and set off the alarm. The horn started beeping... beeping... beeping... as the cab, with Sara Jane inside, pulled away from the curb.

She gave him her address, and tried to keep her eyes open as the blaring of the car alarm receded in the distance.

It was a ten-minute ride to Sara Jane’s rented condo on Kings Road in West Hollywood. The cab was noisy and old, the seats were sprung and the brakes squeaked. “Kidnapped by gypsies,” she thought to herself, and looked around for a license but she quickly gave up. There was a blue and white glass disc -- some iconic kind of evil eye, dangling from his rear view mirror.

She tried staring at the eye to stay awake, but it only made her dizzier.

She started talking to the driver, to keep herself conscious. "Where are you from?" she asked the cabbie.

"Ah I am Turkish," he answered proudly. "From Arvana, a little town near the border of Iran. There was a donkey in our backyard. My father had three wives... "

"Not Hawaiian," she mumbled.

He snorted then made an abrupt left turn off Melrose and before she knew it, the cab was driving down some dark, deserted, potholed, graffiti smeared alley. The bumping of the cab made her sick to her stomach. And she was slightly afraid.

"Where you goin'?" she summoned up the strength to ask him. Her head was swimming and she knew if she passed out now she'd wind up in an emergency room instead of her bed -- or maybe dead in a dark alley.

"Short cut, bad traffic ahead." The cab bumped and lurched again over another pothole.

"Who-o-o-a, Stop the car!" She shouted.

Which he did immediately.

She opened the door and puked into a pothole.

He hopped out of the cab and closed the door for her.

"Thank you Ma'm, for not vomiting in my back seat."

He turned back onto Melrose, and the street was brightly lit and crowded again. He started talking to her, and her head nodded.

“People vomit in my car; they do such things in my car, you wouldn’t believe it. Like I am not a human; but I am!” And he pounded his fist on the steering wheel angrily. “And you, you probably think I am just a cab driver, but back home I was a teacher of mathematics, in the university. So I’m not just a Hawaiian cabbie.” And his voice started getting angrier and louder. “And not only that, imagine being a Muslim these days.

I have to hide who I am. Damn the American dream! I AM A MAN! AND NO ONE CAN TAKE THAT AWAY FROM ME!” and he pounded the steering wheel again, and slammed on the brakes which squealed loudly.

Then he turned on music, loud Turkish rock, and stopped talking completely.

Sara Jane started slipping off again, so she focused on the eye and tried to stay awake.

The evil-eye swung back and forth as the driver changed lanes. Sara Jane, who was just about to go under, desperately focused on the blue and white glass disc, and fought waves of nausea.

The cab pulled up to the curb in front of the tiny lobby of the Kings Road Arms.



The small reception area seemed to be deserted.

“M’am, here we are,” the driver, said, no longer angry, once again solicitous.

He helped her out of the car and she held onto his forearm so that she wouldn’t fall flat on her face. Her legs were gelatinous -- or perhaps it was the ground.

Sara Jane was weaving back and forth as she stood there fishing around in her purse for the cab fare. She took a fistful of bills out of her wallet and shoved it at him.

“Take yourself a good tip,” she muttered. He counted back her change, carefully.

“M’am please, I will walk in with you? There is a concierge?”

“No, no concierge,” Sara Jane muttered, shaking her head, which produced a spell of dizziness that had her grasping the cabbie’s arm.

“I will help you, please,” he said. “I will get you in safely.”

“Thank you,” she said holding on to him for dear life.

She almost passed out in the elevator. She willed herself back from the edge of a void.

“Threeee... ” she slurred. “issa 3<sup>rd</sup> floor.”

“Your room number, M’am?” he asked her when they had arrived at her floor.

She ignored him. So he walked with her down the long, Tuscan-white carpeted hallway, through a tunnel of Navaho White walls and recessed overhead lighting. There were no shadows.

“Mine is the red door,” she mumbled.

The doors up and down the hall were all red.

“Ma’m, your room number?”

She pointed to her purse as she slumped against the wall, and fished around inside her handbag, found her keys. She suddenly remembered... “332C.”

He found 332C, another anonymous red door.

The cabdriver, who was not Hawaiian, took the keys from her unsteady hand, walked in with her, turned on the lights and sat her down.

“You okay, M’am? Anyone you want me to call?”

She pulled herself together and sat up straight. “No, No. I’m fi-i-i-n-n-ne.” She said, her slurry voice echoing in her ears. “If you don’ min’ lettin’ yourself out... thank you, than-k you, just push the button on the knob... locks issself... than-k you... ”

Somehow Sara Jane managed to get herself to her bed. She kicked off her shoes, crawled under the covers, fully dressed, closed her eyes and wished herself dead. She would never again drink another margarita.

She laid gingerly on the pillow, afraid her head would float away.

And when she closed her eyes she fell into sleep as if falling off a cliff. As she slept she was assaulted by dreams, vivid slashes of clotted angry colors -- red, blue, hurling against the back of her eyeballs; dreams of gagging, of being pummeled by an unseen force, clots of purple color, clots of green exploding behind her eyeballs, flashes: trampled by horses, pulled about in a staved oak barrel, tied to a stake with flames beating at her feet, globs of puke-colored ochre splashing across the back of her brain; She dreamed she was walking through a freezing mist that was death... black, grey, brown...

She would not remember these dreams when she woke, but they would affect her mood, perhaps forever.

When she next opened her eyes it was three PM -- Sunday, according to her clock, which did everything but make her breakfast.

No way!

Sunday?! At first she thought the clock was broken.

Then she tried to raise her head. She felt like her skull was encased in cement and would surely break her neck if she moved.

Sara Jane closed her eyes and let herself be washed by waves of consciousness. She was aware of an intense ache whenever she moved any part of her body. She hurt now like she had hurt when she had taken a hard fall skiing in Mammoth.

So what the fuck had happened to her last night? No -- not last night; according to the clock it was two nights ago. What happened to Saturday?

She had no idea.

She couldn't remember a thing that had transpired after she had gotten into that cab; her last memory was the swaying glass evil-eye. Maybe the goddamn thing had hypnotized her. Maybe that's why the cabbie had hung it there. Maybe he hypnotized his fares and robbed them. Beat them up if they resisted. Maybe she resisted?

She closed her eyes and reminded herself not to be paranoid.

She fished back in her memory and caught bright splashes: Albie's bar, the margaritas, the crowds, the noise, the silver Bentley, the white rose Buzz had left on her desk... that blue and white glass eye...

She was jerked to full awareness by the insistent ringing of the phone. She reached out an aching arm, and picked it up.

"Hello?" she managed to grunt. Her mouth was parched.

“ARE YOU OKAY?!” It was her mother, frantic. “I’ve been calling all weekend. I was ready to call the police, the hospitals, I didn’t know what the hell had happened, or if you had even gotten home...”

“I’mmmm... fine,” Sara Jane mumbled. “Talk later. Okay?”

“Well, I hope you had a good time wherever you were.” Her mother said angrily and hung up.

It hurt Sara Jane to breathe; her throat ached, her ribs were sore. Her mouth tasted like vomit. This time she managed to lift her head. There was a loud pounding in her brainpan, or maybe it was her heart beating. She had never felt so horrible. That was some fucking margarita!

She tried to sit up, and her entire body burned with pain. Sara Jane wasn’t a big drinker, but she’d certainly been hung-over before -- bed spins, puking, the whole thing; but nothing like this; two nights and almost two days - gone. Maybe she’d never had three margaritas in such a short time before; three? Maybe four -- the grande really counted as two drinks.

What an idiot!

She finally dragged herself to a sitting position, at the edge of the bed, legs hanging off the side, head full of helium and hurt.

And was surprised to find herself naked. She must’ve pulled off her clothes the other night, in her stupor.

She shook her head like a wet dog, to clear her mind.

“Ouch!”

She touched her face. Her cheek was tender and bruised. She had trouble seeing out of her left eye, which was swollen and painful to the touch.

“What the hell?!” she said it out loud, her voice a croak.

Sara Jane hauled herself up and hobbled over to the full-length mirror on the closet door, holding onto the wall for support. On the way, she tripped over something and stubbed her bare toe. Her beloved Ikea floor lamp was lying across the floor. Her eyes were still not tracking, but she could see that the room around her was a mess.

But not nearly as much as she.

When Sara Jane Fisher saw her reflection in the mirror, she almost passed out again. The left side of her face was swollen from eye to lower lip; Her eye was purple and she looked like she'd been punched in the face.

She was aghast! What the hell could have happened here?

She gathered her wits -- Think! Were you in an auto accident? We're you mugged, did you fall down stairs somewhere... or were you so drunk that you lost your mind?! She tried to remember something... anything. The last thing she could recall was that blue glass amulet eye, and the back of the cabbie's curly black hair, and the bumpy road beneath them, making the eye swing back and forth.

Good lord, what had happened to her between now and then?

There was an angry scrape on her right shoulder, scratches on her right arm and the palms of both hands, a large black and blue bruise on her left hip and upper thigh. She looked like a battering victim on one of those police procedural TV shows. She looked at her palms and her first thought -- defensive wounds.

My God! No!

Her mind went blank for a moment -- opened into a black void. Then she thought of the old joke -- "Denial is not a river in Egypt," and she almost laughed out loud.

She turned and looked around again at her usually immaculate white bedroom. Her bentwood rocker was turned over on its side, and the green glass vase she had filled with yellow daisies, that had been sitting on the dresser, was now lying on the floor, broken into treacherous shards. The carpet was damp, the flowers dead.

How ghastly, to let herself get that drunk. She felt an ashy nausea growing in the pit of her stomach.

The soothing grey bathroom was another disaster zone. It stank of vomit. The wastebasket had been overturned and wads of make-up stained tissues, tufts of hair drifted about the room. The smell hung heavily in the air. There were damp towels all over the floor and the toilet seat was raised. Damp towels? Had she taken a shower? In the apparent condition she had been in?

She opened the small window to air the room out, trying to put two-and-two together: It had been dark, and she'd had to pee or puke -- she had knocked over the lamp and tripped, grabbed at the dresser, knocked over the vase and fell against the corner. She had gotten herself all scratched up from the broken vase, bumped the side of her face on the corner of the dresser as she was falling, which is how she got the shiner. It wasn't from being beaten senseless.

That made sense. Yes that must've been it.

She winced at the thought of herself stumbling around like a fat, drunk, naked, crazy person, wrecking her bedroom in a frenzy.

At least she had made it to the bathroom when she'd puked. After she puked she must have taken a shower. Ergo the damp towels; ergo she was naked.

But why weren't her clothes discarded on the bathroom floor, along with the other discards.

Sara Jane returned to the wreckage of her bedroom: the tangled pile of clothing tossed in a heap on the floor near the bed, the overturned night table next to the bed.

And then a nasty thought tiptoed around in her head. What if...

What if the cab driver -- who had looked like a bit of a ruffian after all, followed her in, knowing she was drunk, and robbed her while she was asleep.



But when she checked, her jewelry box was untouched, not that she had all that much in it -- except for her grandmother's diamond ring, and the pearl earrings that Billy Poole had given her. Nothing had been taken. Nothing seemed to be missing from her drawers.

And she remembered that she was naked, still. So she got her soft loose pajamas from the drawer and put them on. She was not comfortable being naked -- especially in the state she was in.

How odd though, that her clothes were not on the bathroom floor. If she had been so drunk, why didn't she just get under the covers, with her clothes on?

Sara Jane picked her sweater up from the discards on the floor. The damn thing drooped like a dead thing from her fingers, a few buttons missing, a few dangling by a thread, as if it had been torn off. She picked up her bikini panties; the elastic at one side had been ripped apart, her bra looked tangled and tormented. The clasp was broken. Her clothes looked savaged. There was a streak of blood on the white Egyptian cotton pillow case, blood on the white-on-white jacquard bed-sheet. Snow White -- the drop of red blood on white snow... the poisoned apple...

For a moment she was sick -- dizzy, and she once again considered a fall into unconsciousness. The bright splotches in her dreams flashed behind her closed eyelids.

My god!

What had happened in this room?

And then something clicked in her brain. And her face grew hot, and her stomach turned to lead and her head filled with fear and rage. She'd been drugged; somebody had messed with her margarita, that last margarita, "sent by an angel."

And then a dread lead fear hit her.

Rape! Had she been raped?

She reached into her PJs and felt between her legs. There was no telltale slimy residue dribbling out from her insides, no throbbing discomfort; nor were her inner thighs bruised or scratched or more sore than any other part of her body.

But if a condom had been used...

NO! She hadn't been raped. Or drugged! What was she thinking? Alcohol poisoning -- that must be it. She had gone crazy from too much booze, and passed out. Surely she had not been drugged and violated. She would remember if such a horror had happened, and she couldn't remember a thing

*Denial is not a river in Egypt.*

Sara Jane Fischer laid herself down and closed her eyes, and waited for the tornado that was spinning around in her head to subside.

Raped. What if she had been raped?

She would know it wouldn't she? You knew that kind of thing, didn't you... even if you had been unconscious?

She lay down again and tried to clear her head of all the sharp-fanged thoughts that were assaulting her. Then she tried to get a grip, tried to remember. She thought back to the bar at Albie's, the margarita, waiting for her when she got back from the bathroom; Buzz Cooper perched there on her left, like a vulture. Creepy Buzz, who knew too much about her... But the bar was so crowded that any one of the barflies around her could've... while she was distracted... and Moon Dog, with his leers and his Bentley, watching her stagger drunkenly to her car, lurking there in the parking lot until she left -- did he follow her? What about the gypsy cab with the gypsy driver and the hypnotic evil-eye.

Or maybe Billie Poole who had a tendency toward violence and a key to the condo that he'd never gotten around to returning -- no that was ridiculous. He wasn't even in the bar that night to drug her.

Unless she didn't see him.

A stranger, a predator, standing behind her in the dense hot crowd, slipping something in her drink when she was distracted, following her home.

On the other hand... maybe... maybe... maybe she had just been incredibly drunk... maybe she should have eaten something other than chips if she was planning to drink like that...

Of course she should go right now, down to the emergency room of Cedars, which was not that far away -- but the idea of sitting in a crowded waiting room on a holiday weekend, and waiting for a pelvic exam; and pictures would be taken, unsettling pictures for strangers to look at, and statements taken, and inevitably having to explain all those margaritas, to have to be examined in the presence of more than one person -- she who was very shy for a modern woman.

No! No -- no emergency room.

She would call her doctor tomorrow, who was a woman, and non-judgmental. She would have herself tested for drugs; for rape too -- and what if she had gotten pregnant, no; that was impossible; she was on birth control pills.

And then she reminded herself that tomorrow was a holiday and her doctor's office would be closed. And she had another searing implosion of rage as she thought of some son-of-bitch violating her, and getting away with it.

Her mind would not allow her to go there. And before she knew what had happened to her she fell asleep.

When she woke up again it was dark outside. She checked her clock. It had been forty-nine hours now since she had left Albie's Cantina.

She went to her computer and googled date rape drugs. Her symptoms definitely resembled Rohypnol intoxication -- the dread roofies; or extreme alcohol intoxication -- the loss of memory, the long period of unconsciousness, the horrendous hangover. Same damn symptoms both of them. She learned that the drugs could linger in her system for seventy two-hours. That left her twenty-three hours to get herself tested. No rush.

She thought of that last margarita-grande, sitting on the counter, glass sweating, laced with tequila and Rohypnol, waiting for her like Snow White's poisoned apple.

So Sara Jane was thrown into a storm of indecision about what to do next, which was not normal for her. She was usually a very decisive person, very sure of herself.

So she went to bed again.

Were you to have watched her sleeping that night, you would have seen a creature thrashing about like a dolphin trapped in a net.

Monday morning, when her alarm went off, she pulled the covers over her head and sunk back into oblivion. She didn't wake again until eleven.

She called the office to tell them she was sick, but she had forgotten that the office was closed for the holiday.

She was so tired. She had never been tired like this -- as if she were up to her neck in mud, slogging through, trying to reach the other side of the swamp. So again she slept. And again she dreamed and again she thrashed about so much that it was no wonder she was so exhausted.

Tuesday morning she woke at nine and called the office again. There was no way she was going in to work today.

Greta answered the phone. She was filling in for Sara Jane.

When told that Sara Jane was ill, Greta hesitated then said smugly, "I'll bet; you were pretty damn buzzed Friday night. You'll be hung over for a week."

"No!" Sara Jane said emphatically, "I've got the flu."

She had fourteen hours left to get tested.

What to do... what to do?

So she fell asleep.

And when she woke she had decided to do nothing.

She knew that this decision would cost her in the long run. She knew it would lodge in her like a sliver of glass under the skin, causing a callus to build. One day she might even be crippled from the damn thing buried inside her.

But, she reassured herself, there were some things in life you were never going to know for sure, and this would be one of them. So those are the things you might as well get over and forget.

And Sara Jane Fischer went back to sleep until the next morning. When she opened her eyes and saw the morning sun, and checked the clock, she decided to go back in to work before Greta became too comfortable.

She wore sunglasses, long sleeves, and pants to the office, and told people she had fallen downstairs at her mother's house.

"Thank goodness mother was around to drive me to the emergency room," Sara Jane said, often enough that she half-believed it.

Sara Jane had dreams for years after of that terrible lost night: color splashed dreams, noisy dreams of blue-glass evil-eyes and speeding silver Bentleys, and the sound of chainsaws buzzing... BUZZZZZZZZ. But her memory of the rest of that evening never returned.

At the end of the following year, she was appointed assistant producer to Elliot Kushner, who had not been fired after all. She never went back to Albie's and she never had another margarita in her life.

She got quite stout. Maybe it was that sliver of glass lodged somewhere in her soul. It was probably just as well. Maybe if she was fat enough no one would want to rape her again.

Sometimes she wondered why her mother had gotten fat...

## THE END

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