

THE COP BAR

A police officer's life, losses, and memories



I know why I get wasted. I know why I leave the house half in the bag and come home solo: the fucking cop bar. That place is my old precinct and my personal crime scene all in one—walls like a memorial board that never stops adding names. It's the unofficial squad-room where the ghosts still have lockers. It's the park where we met, the class we took, the beat we walked. It's the scene I keep revisiting even though evidence says it'll never be cleared.

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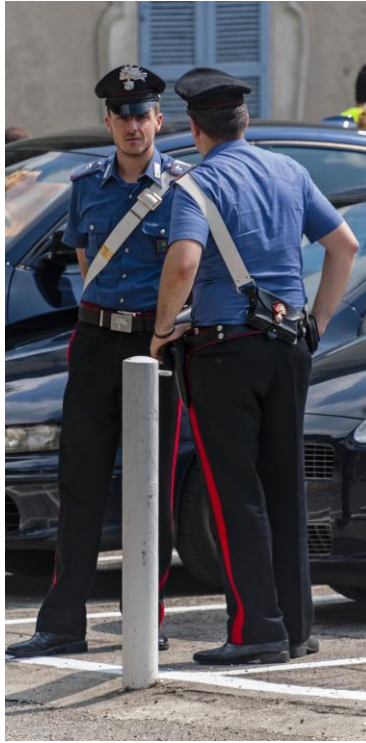


I belly up because that's the last location I remember my people alive. Jukebox screaming, lights strobing like a bad traffic stop, drinks lined up like perp photos. Some broken part of me thinks if I put enough whiskey on the report, they'll round the corner and cuff my shoulder—"Hey, kid, you still vertical?"

But they won't, Keller. They're 10-42. End of watch.



I tell myself if I blast the throttle—enough lines, enough shots—I can roll back to when they were breathing. Like the old days between calls, when the world was stupid and ours and we laughed too loud in a booth that stuck to our elbows. I keep trying to Mirandize the bottle, like if I read it its rights it'll finally talk. It never does.



It hurts like catching a domestic call with no backup. I miss their breath, their dumb jokes, their swagger. I miss not calling them back. I miss the way they'd correct my report grammar and then drink like poets. I miss the messages on the answering machine, the hugs that cracked ribs, the cocky grins that got us into and out of trouble. I keep trying to drink them back into service. I keep walking the same beat, hoping they pop out of an alley and say, "Relax, partner. False alarm."

They won't. They're gone. Everyone but me, and I'm stuck with evidence: trace prints of their love on everything.



Here's the roll call none of us wanted:

They're not going to call.

They're not going to write.

They're not going to swing by.

They're gone, Keller.

I'm sorry, but this is the part of the briefing no one listens to. They died—AIDS—back when the manual was fear and the training was rumor. I don't drink to forget; I drink to remember the whole ugly beautiful scene—the volume, the confusion, the disorientation, and the hangover that shows up like IA on a Monday: a nasty little “don't forget me” pinned to your locker.

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And it hurts more after. Because every time I reload, I realize again they're not in the bathroom, not stepping outside for a smoke, not "be right back." From here on out, my shift runs without them.

I don't know where to store their memories. I keep trying to book them into a bottle, a glass, a cigarette—bad chain of custody, all of it. Magical thinking with no probable cause. If I can re-create the scene just right, maybe they'll reappear—call, visit, slap the back of my head and steal my fries. None of it works. Warrant denied by reality.

I am alone. Not weak—just one officer on a long perimeter. The memories can look happy from a distance, but up close they're like dress blues at a graveside in the rain—heavy, cold, and mine to wear. So here it is, written up clean on this sub-zero morning:

They are dead, Keller. Your friends died, and you miss them like hell. “Forever” isn’t poetry; it’s your whole sentence. No barstool, no shot, no straw opens a door in time. You can drink until the jukebox learns your badge number, and it still won’t call them in.

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And then my five-year-old nephew storms the room—Zach, all crazy hair and fun seeking missile—waving a lightsaber like he’s clearing a hallway. He is alive, loud, growing. Just like we were once, before bagpipes and folded flags taught us the other half of the job.

He wants to play Star Wars. Copy that. I’ll holster the ghosts, log off the keyboard, and pick up the toy blade. Use the Force for good, not for evil. Consider it community policing for one small planet.