

1990

1

Although it was Friday night, somehow it felt different.

The house where I lived with my mother had a huge living room, three bathrooms, and a two-car garage—a perfect home for a small family of two. It was a couple of minutes' walk away from Wilson High my new school and the Strip down on 5th Street in Downtown Los Angeles, which I call City of Angels.

Behind the property of my house, there were businesses, along Anaheim Street, and one of the buildings had been for lease for the longest time, I don't know why. One day, what I did noticed was the beauty of motorcycles. There were three Harley Davidsons in front of

the place. I caught eyes on the chromed front blade wheels of those fancy bikes—I called them bikes for short. Since I had never seen these types of high caliber quality bikes around this neighborhood at least, it raised a flag.

Who were they? I thought.

Let me go scope things out, I thought as I turned into the alley.

A soft wind blew a few dry leaves into the night on the parking lot asphalt pavement of that vacant place. I walked slower as curiosity got the better of me, realizing I was in front of a billiard bar. Just yesterday, there was a sign that read FOR LEASE, and now it read NIGHTFALL.

So, I went in.

I noticed it was dark, extremely dark, in there. The smell of mildew and cigarettes was overwhelming, and it was the first thing that struck me—added to the polluted environment I thought. A tune, “Hotel California” by the Eagles, began to play softly in the background

from a jukebox nearby. Its tempo and rhythm made my head nod to the beat of the music.

The artificial fog began to roll. Fog can be part of the ominous mood or inseparably tied to a dangerous and creepy supernatural place. In the main bar, no rays of light seeped into any windows or doors. Gloominess was the second thing I noticed.

As I looked up above the bar at a large chalkboard sign with expensive drinks written on it, I overlooked the price of beer. But still, I left a ten-dollar bill at the bar. I didn't mind a beer. Underage drinking wasn't a concern now that I had moved from the country to the city, where my new friends were getting me into new things. I only drank on the weekends, and it was okay with me to start early.

I sat on the stool closest to the bar and smiled—an eloquent smile that drove girls wild, or so they tell me. I'm six-foot-one with short jet-black hair, just turned eighteen, and I act as if I was twenty-one years old—or older even, or so

they tell me. They also say that when the sunlight hits my eyes, they changed color—from hazel to a bright green.

“Can I have an MGD please,” I said, hoping someone had listened, or seen that ten-dollar bill at the bar.

Desolation was the third thing I noticed. I stopped thinking about myself and began wondering where I was at: When is the bartender going to be here?

Looking around for too long, I started getting nervous. And I hoped like crazy they wouldn't card me. If the bartender did, I had a fake ID neatly tucked inside my wallet and ready to prove I was legal to drink. Since lately I had wanted to slide into the 21 & over nightclubs scene along the Strip, I had gotten one down by Macarthur Park, on 7th and Alvarado, where I had to use some of my high school Spanish to communicate with some of the thugs around there.

There at the bar, the music wasn't as ear-splitting as it was in the Strip nightclubs. For the first time in my young life, I liked the music to be only loud enough to know what was playing and who was talking. I cracked a restless knuckle, and then I startled when someone tapped a bottle of Miller Genuine Draft beside me.

I took the beer with one long sip that left my palate cold but with a warm finish. As my eyes began to adjust to the poor lighting, I could have sworn I saw a man sitting hunched over. Perhaps, he could be the bartender who had given me the beer. Although I wasn't too sure, I gave him a full-smile and raised my hand in a wave. But he didn't wave back at me because there was no one there. Perhaps it was only a silly pipe dream.

The beer had hit me quickly, given the fact that I hadn't eaten anything. So I gave a few steps away from the bar, looking around, feeling comfortable enough to nod my head in good cheer to the right music playing in my ears.

Delusion was the fourth thing I noticed. I had never been delusional but for the first time in my life, I felt being followed, or that someone had put poisoned in my beer for that matter. A little worried, I sipped more of my beer and came to a halt at a distance safe to a creepy doorway, where I had heard footsteps and voices that might belong to a few young men.

Then I heard the room cracked with the clack of billiard balls. I loved the sound billiard balls made when they hit one another. I held my breath, listening clearly to their voices when I bumped into the light hanging above the ceiling. The shafts of light hit different angles, and I noticed the stranger's face was calm and collected although very pale. Somehow the illumination was brighter, and I could see someone's small beaklike nose, arched nostrils, and blue colored eyes. His head was moving around slowly as if he was dizzy. A ruby earring dangled from his left ear like a church bell clapper. He stuffed his mouth with a fresh

cigarette and was still able to manage a straight bright smile.

What a rebel, I thought. *But what are these fellows doing here in my neighborhood so suspiciously?* I mean this billiard place was empty last night, and all of a sudden, they're here?

The leader of the crew was Jon Blackburn, the quietest of the barflies, but he was also the toughest one when it came down to brawl. Many of the people in his small circle had learned the hard way not to read into his calm, quiet demeanor. Very strictly, Jon was secretive, and hardly anyone joined his social circle unless he was trusted. Unless it was for sex, no woman ever joined him.

“Hi there,” Jon said, still hiding in the smoke of dry-ice that had invaded the place. The scenery reminded me of a picture I had once seen of Satan appearing within the cemetery of Dracula, lifting his arms to raise him once again. Could it be possible?

Three bodies staggered briefly, and I smelled danger as the small group huddled in the shadows across a pool table. As visibility cleared out, the three good-looking men—one at the front—giggled as they came into view. It seemed as if they were going to jump me.

“Who’s he?” Someone among the group said.

“Don’t worry about him,” Jon said. “He means no harm.”

“You sure about that Jon?”

“Totally!”

They walked a little closer to me, where more light hit their faces. The aroma of mildew with bitter stench struck me forcefully, hearing more whispers among them.

As Jon paced closer to me, I couldn't make out what the individuals were saying, and then they each picked up cue chalk and began to brush the cue tips. I realized they were the only ones in the entire bar. The dark colors they wore was the fifth thing I noticed. They were maybe in

their early twenties. Each wore tight black skinny jeans and tight black tank tops that didn't stand out in the dark.

They were scrawny and stooped, each holding a cue stick, awaiting their turn. My pants didn't fit me that tight. They were a little baggy compared to their tight jeans. They also wore shoes that I'd never seen before. They seemed to me like fancy running shoes that really would make them run faster. But their face was still too hard to distinguish in the poor light.

What planet do they come from?

I took a deep breath to calm down, watching them play pool. The young men seemed to be enjoying their game as they cracked old jokes and traded high-fives with one another. After every shot, they would eye me again to see what I was doing. The toxic cigarette smells reeked the worse. I could not take the smell in my lungs and throat that I had to pinch my nose at times with my fingers.

Then, I heard the alley door blast open as if with a kick, but there was no one around to have kicked it. The air had rushed right through, so I stood alert.

One of the others cackled loudly, realizing I had shown a little bit of fear. And then footsteps came closer to me. Jon took a drag of his cigarette, closing his eyes a bit, which sort of gave him a hollow feeling of ease. He was thinking about something as if he had something vital to tell me.

“Let’s get back to shootin’ 8-ball,” Jon said, smiling.

There was something about his voice which brought fear to anyone as if he could squash me like a bug or bring me to my knees.

I could see that each of the young men looked to be drinking heavy liquor. A variety of glasses—including Bloody Marys that looked as if they were drinking blood—perched on the nearest table. The blood in the glass was the sixth thing I noticed, and probably the cue that

they might be creatures of the night, at least one of them.

They didn't seem at all surprised that I was a newcomer (I looked more horrified than surprised to see him). I took one more sip of my beer as one of the barflies stepped forward—the one with long hair which accompanied Jon. He disliked newcomers passionately, I could tell by him going around me with great curiosity, the way a dog sniffs around something new and strange.

With a mean look on his face, he asked: “So who are you punk?”

But Yashas and West, my best friends, weren't there with me to get my back. *Act as you're going to fight him*, I thought. *That way you could still have your dignity.*

Then came another loud “clack” as the billiard balls were struck and scrambled around the table. The break had been right—three solids had gone in the center pocket.

*Wow, three in a roll. I couldn't do that shot!
Never in a million years.*

A sly smile surfaced on Jon's face as he offered me a pool stick. "Your turn Migs, let's see what you got." *How does he know my name?* "We're not going to harm you."

Jon, who was the best 8-ball player of anyone around, watched me take a turn. Timidly I bent over with an eye on the cue ball, measuring the shot with the tip, giving it a flick with not much force or interest.

There was a pause.

"Not bad," Jon said.

And then, Jon wiped his mouth with his forearm as he finished biting a red apple from the tray at the bar, washing it down with a gulp of a new beer.

Beer with apples? Yuck! I thought.

So I wouldn't look scared, I tapped my foot on the floor to the rhythm of music, playing on the jukebox.

I could tell by now that in Jon's book he switched from friend to enemy rather quickly. It seemed as if 'the three amigos' would give everybody a chance, oh yeah, and they hoped no one didn't take it for granted.

Then, Jon bent over the pool table, nodding his head to the music, gauged his shot, and struck the ball so hard that the cue ball continued its quick roll, tipping the 8-ball, and sending them both—short and sharp—into the corner pocket.

"Awwww, Jon," one of the barflies said, sipping his bottled beer, and banging it on the table. "Let me tell you something. You're a goddamn excellent 8-ball player, but you suck when it comes to ending a game."

There was no answer at first.

"Light me up another cigarette would ya?" Jon said, smiling. "And shut your mouth, punk!"

Someone pulled a lighter close to Jon, who took a long drag and winked at me as he glanced over. On second thought, the lighter was

different than the lighters I had seen. This one was very colorful, a cyber futuristic lighter with a plasma beam lighting up the tip of the cigarette.

Are these guys from out of space or something?

“Everything okay there Migsy-boy?” He blew the smoke out from his nose with a serious face. The room was getting cloudier.

“Stop calling me like that,” I said, nodding, and not knowing what else to do or say.

Why was I doing there to begin?

They even had cell phones with a camera. I could swear Jon took a picture of me. I didn't realize until later that cell phones with cameras first appeared in Japan in the year 2000. What were they doing with such smartphones in 1990?

I wished to go, immediately. I would tell Yashas and West about this place and what I had discovered. I would feel more comfortable if all three of us came together.

Jon with his half-tooth smile snatched a new bottled beer perched on the pool table, popped

it open by flicking his thumb—the cap went flying far—and offered it to me.

“Don't get scared Migs.” Jon's smile had wiped off his face, and his wrinkles vanished.

Without hesitation, I took it. Jon received his beer too, winked, and downed it all in one long gulp.

After a couple of beers, their laughter echoed in the empty pool hall, and Jon's buddies introduced themselves by name—Ben and Felere.

They popped fists with one another engaging in a talk about Harley Davidsons and speed motorcycles.

When it was my turn to talk, I talked about loving the nightclub life down at the Strip in City of Angels and owning a Harley Davidson like the ones parked right outside, except without the blade rim wheels and all the chrome. My Harley was all stock impossible to match theirs. But their Harleys—I could quickly tell—were all

hooked up, all American made priced roughly at \$100,000 each.

End of this sample book.
Enjoyed the preview?



Buy Now with 1-Click

Please visit my Website
for upcoming books
www.gabrieljm.com



Gabriel J.M. lives in Los Angeles, California. He has a B.A. in English Literature from California State University Long Beach. He is presently working on more novels, novellas, and short-stories.

Facebook Twitter Instagram Pinterest:
@gabrieljmwrites