

The Night the Lights Went Out at the Tattersall Tavern

by
D.C. Brod

It was the end of an era. It was the beginning of a new one. Every columnist who had anything remotely to do with sports, and many who didn't, had written about it. And almost everyone I talked to those days had an opinion to voice. So there was really very little new to say about the first time the Cubs would play under lights in Wrigley Field. I just knew that taking an afternoon off work to catch a three o'clock game wasn't going to be the same knowing I could go to one in the evening. Progress had robbed me of my favorite guilty pleasure.

I was going to watch the game on the wide screen TV in the Tattersall Tavern. I couldn't imagine any other place to be. Sammy MacTavish, the guy who owned the place, was the self proclaimed "world's greatest Cubs fan." And although a lot of people could have contended for that title, Sammy would definitely have been a finalist.

I got there around six that night. They had predicted rain, but you couldn't tell by looking at the sky. It was blue and muggy, the way it had been all summer, trapping in the heat and keeping out the rain. A drop of sweat slid down my back as I stepped into the manufactured coolness of the bar. It felt wonderful.

There weren't any tables for two left, so I took up one for four. Ginny quickly found me and placed a fresh basket of popcorn on the table. "Well, McCauley, is this a scotch or a Guinness night?"

"Guinness. I've gotta go the distance." I looked around the tavern, which was rapidly reaching capacity. "See a lot of new faces tonight."

"Yeah," she said and continued in her mild drawl, "let's hear it for media hype."

"Media hype?" I feigned astonishment. "Media hype? Ginny, this is Americana, pure and simple. Apple pies, hot dogs, Chevrolets. Whatever."

She rolled her eyes. "I just hope we get through this night without someone puking on the floor."

I shook my head. "So young to be so bitter."

"I'm not kiddin'. I hate nights like this. You know, even when it's crowded, I usually know or I've seen most of the people before. And I'm here to tell you, this isn't the usual crowd."

I shrugged. "Just because it's packed?"

When she spoke again it was as though, preoccupied with the birth of her own theory, she hadn't heard me. "I'm not sure what it is. For example—" someone at a table nearby was hollering at Ginny to fill his drink order, and she gestured toward him "—that's rude. I'll get to the son of a bitch when I'm good and ready. And you see that older guy with all the gold chains and the floozy?" I glanced in that direction and noticed that the man she was referring to was apparently infatuated with Ginny's rear end. "That guy keeps putting his hands all over me when he's placin' his order. I'm a waitress, not some billy goat in a petting zoo."

I nodded solemnly, "I'd never confuse you with a goat, Ginny."

Requests for her service were getting louder now. "Well, Quint, I'd love to stay and chat, but I'm in real demand here. Guinness, right?"

I nodded. "You keep 'em coming. I'll keep 'em down."

She left to fill the order. Sammy was hustling behind the bar, working just as hard as his full time bartender, Mark. He had the ability to talk and joke with customers while mixing drinks

and drawing beers—the bartending part was just second nature. He'd owned the Tattersall for almost forty years, longer than a lot of his customers had been alive. He was mixing a concoction in a blender now—a sure sign that this wasn't the usual crowd—and arguing with Marty Shaw. I caught only snatches of the conversation but apparently Shaw was claiming that during the playoffs in '84 they'd made a bet on how long it would be before they installed lights at Wrigley Field. Sammy flatly denied it. Shaw told him he was just sore because they finally went and did it. He said the least Sammy could do was let him drink for free. Shaw wasn't a regular, but he came in occasionally and he really knew how to drive a person crazy. He was probably going to sit at the bar all night, reminding Sammy that he'd reneged on their bet. Sammy would've been better off giving him a few drinks than listening to him whine all night.

Ginny brought my Guinness in my own mug. If you hung around the Tattersall enough and Sammy liked you, after a while he gave you your own mug. You couldn't buy one, one day Sammy would just deliver your drink in it. He kept all these mugs on a shelf above the liquor bottles, separate, of course, from *the* mug. That mug even looked different from the rest, being heavier and larger and at least twenty-five years old. It was the mug used by Ernie Banks and it was Sammy's prized possession. Banks had come through town in the early sixties, probably to do some fishing in the Fox River, and he stopped with a couple friends at Sammy's place for a beer. Sammy still got flustered telling that story, and no one who met him lasted more than five minutes without hearing it. "Finest man I ever met. Why, just talking to him, you could tell that guy had something magic going for him." Sammy said he could tell you what kind of beer Ernie drank, but he wouldn't. Said he didn't think he owed anyone free advertising. I think maybe he just wanted to keep one little nugget of that encounter to himself. So there that beer mug sat, in its case next to the bar like some kind of religious icon. And, maybe for Sammy, that's what it was. To him, baseball represented everything that was true and pure about the world. The Cubs were the best part of it and Ernie Banks was the Cubs. And the mug. Well, the mug said it all for him.

I noticed Sammy talking to a group of four standing at the bar. One in particular stood out. She wore a white sleeveless dress that just sort of hung on her without giving her body much definition. Her hair was very blond and seemed all the more so against her tanned skin, I silently placed a bet on the odds that Ginny would card her. I wasn't figuring on my own odds with this young lady, however. I was just admiring. Almost twenty years separated us and she probably wasn't in the market for a used private detective. But she looked so young and healthy and crisp in that dress with her hair falling loose against her back. I figured that this was the reason young men tried to hit balls out of a park. She was with two men and one other woman, who was attractive but wore slacks and a tube top and, for some reason, was nowhere near as captivating. The two guys both wore cool cotton numbers and probably would have had cardigans tied around their necks had the weather allowed. They wore their hair short and slicked back with some kind of gel so it looked wet.

The blond woman was listening to something Sammy was saying, nodding and smiling as he spoke. He pointed to the case with Ernie's mug in it, and her mouth dropped open in either frank or exaggerated admiration. The entire group was listening to Sammy's story, but he might have been talking only to her. I couldn't blame him. That's exactly how I would have done it.

The bar quieted down while we all watched the screen as an old guy pushed the light switch at Wrigley Field. Actually, I guess it was all symbolic. Some Cubs' employee was probably in the bowels of the park madly yanking switches, cackling, and muttering "take that you Citizens United for Baseball in the Sunshine" as he performed the godlike act. If we were

expecting a sudden blaze of electricity, we were all disappointed. The lights came on slowly and I don't know about anyone else, but I'm not sure I noticed when it finally happened.

"Hey, Quint. Knew I'd find you here." Mike Richardson, computer magician and weightlifter, sat down in an empty chair across from me. "Glad you got here early for a good table." He looked around the room, craning his neck for a glimpse of Ginny. "Is it a zoo here tonight, or what?"

I pointed to the TV screen. "History, Mike. Pay careful attention. Your grandchildren are going to quiz you on this."

"They'll be lucky if they make it through five innings," he said. "The sky's ready to bust open." He helped himself to a bunch of popcorn. Outside, there was a flash of light. The responding thunder was lost in the noise of the bar. Ginny placed Mike's beer mug in front of him. "Thanks, Gin," he said looking up at her. "Havin' a good time tonight?"

She scowled and said, "If that guy with the flooze gets any more personal, we're gonna have to start charging him extra."

"What guy?" Mike said. "What flooze?"

"You know," she said, "I didn't give a damn when they decided to put up lights, but if I'd known it was gonna bring the weirdos of the world out, well, I might I have joined the protestors." She looked at my mug. "You doin' okay?" I nodded and she said, "See ya. later."

I was aware of movement at the table to my left against the wall and when I turned, I saw that it was now occupied by the handsome foursome. The blond woman was checking out the room, and her date pulled closer to her and placed his arm on the back of her chair. He whispered something in her ear that caused her to pause in her surveillance, but only for a moment. She laughed a distracted, forced laugh and continued her appraisal of each person in the bar. When she got to me, seeing that she had my attention, she smiled and raised her eyebrows a fraction. Then I realized I had her date's attention, too.

I turned away and caught Mike watching me. "I don't mean to state the obvious, buddy, but that's not healthy."

Shrugging, I said, "It's my way of staring into the jaws of death."

"Yeah, right," he said, turning toward the table and trying to get her attention.

It was almost game time and the place was packed. The Chicago Symphony Orchestra, in shirtsleeves with their collars open, played the national anthem. Then Sammy made everyone shut up when Ernie Banks and Billy Williams each made the ceremonial first pitch.

A tanned, burly guy wearing a sleeveless T-shirt and shorts approached our table. His hair was something between blond and brown and on the sparse side. He had a mustache that ended in two points directed at the floor or whatever was south of him at the time. Like I said, he was burly but without any apparent fat. I figured him to be a construction worker who moonlighted as a bouncer. Or something like that. He carried a stein of beer, and from the way he was walking I guessed it wasn't his first. He stopped at the table and said, "The old guy at the bar said you probably wouldn't mind if I sat with you guys."

I wasn't anxious to spend the game with a drunk. I could have done that at the ball park, but I figured that was prejudging. "Sure," I said. He introduced himself as Carl and looked around the pub, nodding his approval. "Not a bad place," was all he said, like he felt obligated to compliment us, his hosts, on our surroundings. When he found the blonde at the next table he returned her smile, not at all self-conscious to have been caught looking. "Who's that wimp she's with?" he asked the table without taking his eyes off her. Now she was starting to get a little

uneasy and she looked away. Carl's smile widened, and he looked at Mike and me. "I love playing chicken."

Mike drank off his beer and looked around for Ginny, lifted his glass when he got her attention, and turned back to us. "We're not sure, but we think her date's a Phillies' instigator. Sent here to laugh at us when the Cubs lose."

"Naw," Carl said, finishing half his beer in one large swallow, "won't happen. Not tonight." When Ginny brought Mike's beer, Carl ordered another.

The noise in the tavern was reduced to a murmur when Sutcliffe threw his first pitch. It was a ball and the umpire deftly handed it to someone in the Cubs dugout—no doubt it was destined for retirement as the first ball thrown at a night game in Wrigley Field. Two pitches later was the first pitch that resulted in a home run in Wrigley Field. We all groaned and shared Sutcliffe's misery. Someone suggested turning the lights out.

The mood of the crowd picked up in the bottom of the first when the spectacularly endowed Morganna ran, as best she could, onto the field to plant a kiss on her favorite second baseman. She was stopped short of her goal. Then Sandberg, either out of elation or relief, knocked one into the bleachers. With one on base we were ahead two to one, but doom was rumbling outside the window. The storm had hit Foxport and it was just a matter of time, probably minutes, before it moved past the burbs and hit Chicago.

The dust on the diamond was starting to swirl by the third inning and those not under cover in Wrigley Field who were still capable of rational thought were probably considering the best spot to wait out a rain delay. The rains came during a commercial so, like the turning on of the lights, I wasn't aware it had happened until it was supremely obvious.

Everyone got their moaning out of the way and there was a flurry of orders for refills as we prepared to wait out the delay. Then the lights flickered and went out. The reaction was stronger than when Bradley hit a home run in the first inning. Stone silence, then hoots and yells. Finally a voice, Sammy's, rose above the rest, instructing us, "Don't anybody panic. We got flashlights. We'll wait this out with the folks at the park."

I didn't want to be the one to tell him that the folks at the park were one up on us in the light department.

Carl's chair made an ugly sound as he pushed back from the table. He said under his breath, "No offense, guys, but this table ain't the one where I want to spend a power outage." He moved away, toward the table with the blonde.

Mike leaned toward me. "This is great. He figures he's got a chance now that she can't see him."

It was pitch dark. The street lights had gone out as well as the interior lights. A few people struck matches and ignited their lighters, but Sammy, fearing a lit match on the floor, begged everyone to wait until the flashlights arrived. "I'll bet poor Ginny's in the back room digging through cabinets in the dark," I said to Mike.

It was strange. A crowd that had been healthy and rowdy a few minutes ago was reduced to whispers with the absence of light. If the conversation level had been normal we might not have heard the high pitched squeal, "Peter!"

Mike laughed softly. "Sounds like Carl found his mark."

Then another voice. "Gwen? Gwen, where are you?"

"Peter? Where are you? Wasn't that you? What the hell's going on?" The voice wasn't raised any more, but even at a normal level, it projected well.

A few people, including Mike, were starting to chuckle now.

"I'm right here honey." The man's voice was a loud whisper. "Don't get upset."

"Don't get upset? Some ape tried to cop a feel and you're telling me not to get upset."

"Gwen," it was another woman's voice and by now I could tell the entire conversation was coming from the table with the blonde. "Gwen, someone might have just brushed up against you. I mean it's dark in here and all."

"You think I don't know when I'm being felt up?"

"Gwen!" This came from Peter as the laughter surrounding the table rose above a chuckle.

"Okay, everybody." It was Sammy, an expert at defusing situations like this. He was at the table with the two couples. "Everybody stay sitting down and nobody's gonna be where they aren't supposed to be." From the sound of it, there were a lot of people table hopping and falling over chairs.

"Don't tell me that." It was Gwen. "Tell that ape."

Sammy hollered, "Ginny, what's keeping you?"

"You've got a mess back here, Sammy," came Ginny's muffled reply.

Moments later the lights came back on and a cheer went up. Visibly relieved, Sammy returned to the bar. "Keep lookin', Ginny."

"I could use some help, you know. After all, this is your mess back here." Sammy joined her in the back and Mark was besieged with orders at the bar. If the lights were to go out again, everyone wanted to have a good supply of booze to get them through the ordeal. Marty Shaw helped himself to a large glass of liquor someone had left on the bar. The guy with the chains was looking around, probably for Ginny. Carl was back at our table finishing the basket of popcorn. His smile said it all and, from the icy looks the blonde, since identified as Gwen, was giving him, he'd been made. I was having serious doubts about this guy who'd joined us, and was trying to think of a subtle way to get him ejected.

Before I could think of a good way to do it, the lights sputtered and died again. Everyone groaned. I leaned toward Carl. "Try staying in your seat this time, okay?"

His grunt was noncommittal.

I went up to the bar to see if I could help Mark, who was having a lot of trouble explaining to many of the patrons that he was powerless to tap a beer without electricity. "What are you talking about?" a disembodied voice cried. "I can't drink bottled beer."

"Well right now, that's all I've got," Mark said.

The voice hesitated, then said, "Okay. I'll take a Bud."

"You'll have to take whatever he grabs first," I said. "The labels don't glow in the dark." I tried to help Mark with orders, but we soon realized the futility of it. "Look," I said, "there's no way we can do this until we at least get the flashlights."

That was met with mutters and groans and I heard Mike Richardson, who had moved up to the bar, say, "Everybody sit down, okay. Sit down or go to another bar that has lights." Apparently a few people decided that was an excellent idea because I could hear chairs scraping the floor and people moving toward the door.

"We could sure use those flashlights," Mark said loud enough for Sammy and Ginny to hear.

As if in response, what sounded like a truckload of boxes crashed to the floor in the back room. There were a few seconds of silence, followed by a moan. Mike and I felt our way down the bar and into the back room. "Jeez, Ginny, you okay?" Sammy was saying, shoving boxes this way and that.

I'd worked a few nights for Sammy when Mark couldn't make it in, and I knew what Ginny was up against. Sammy's storage room was a disaster area and something to be feared if you couldn't see where you were going. Sammy called out to Ginny again.

"I'm under seven boxes, and I'm okay. But it'd serve you right if I'd busted my head. I'd sue you, you know."

"Oh, Ginny." Sammy spoke like he was scolding a child and began to move the boxes, mostly empty, that surrounded her. "Did you find the flashlights?"

"I'll give you a flashlight," Ginny started to say but never finished because the lights flashed back on. Another cheer went up. "Is it still raining at the park?" Sammy yelled into the bar.

A chorus of "yeses" responded.

Ginny brushed herself off and straightened her apron. Then she looked at Sammy and said as she walked back into the bar, "You'd better find the flashlights in case we lose the lights again."

Sammy looked to us and I said, "One per table ought to be enough." We found seven flashlights in a half-disintegrated paper bag jammed into the back of a cupboard. "If these work," I said, "it'll be a miracle."

"That's okay," Sammy said, "I got batteries around here somewhere." That was when Mike and I returned to our table.

We settled down to our drinks. Carl had cleaned up most of the popcorn, but I picked at the last few kernels while we watched Governor Jim Thompson being asked insightful questions in the press box. Carl shook his head. "What an operation."

Ginny seemed to have recovered from her mishap and was dodging the guy with the hands and Sammy was rumaging behind the bar. Gwen, who now had a light blue sweater draped over her shoulders, and the rest of her table were laughing about something.

I had turned my attention back to the TV when I heard it. At first I thought it was a crack of thunder, and an instant later, I knew better. Sammy was standing in front of the bar with a .45 automatic in his right hand. I looked around for a body and, seeing none, I stood. "What's going on, Sammy?"

Something hard and foreign had taken over Sammy's expression. His jaw tightened and his eyes narrowed. He looked at Mike and me, then slowly swept his gaze across the room. When he finally spoke, he spat out each word. "Some worthless piece of crap took the mug."

The response was stunned silence. Half the room knew the gravity of that act, and the other half didn't know what in the hell he was talking about and thought he was probably crazy.

I walked over to the mug's display case. It was, indeed, empty. And it wasn't among the mugs on the rack above the bottles.

When Sammy spoke again, he said, "Nobody leaves here until that mug is back in its case, unscratched." His voice had a dangerous quality to it, as though he were daring someone to make a break for the door. That got a reaction. Several people muttered something about what in the hell he was doing and started to get up. Sammy put another hole in the floor. I called the police.

Sammy was still standing in front of the bar. I walked up to him and said, "I've called the cops. They're on their way. No one's going to leave." He was studying groups at each table, looking for signs of guilt. I didn't know whether he'd heard me. "Nobody's going to leave." I looked at the crowd in the room. "Nobody's going to leave, right?" Everyone nodded.

Sammy glanced over his shoulder. "Where's Shaw?"

I looked around. Shaw was gone. Did he consider the mug fair payment on the alleged wager? Maybe, but if I were to agree with Sammy, he was liable to march over to Shaw's house and blast him out of his socks.

"Look," I said, "I've got an idea. Sammy, why don't you turn around, back to these people, and we'll give whoever took the mug the opportunity to return it with no questions asked. Okay?"

Sammy finally looked at me. "No way. I want his ass."

All eyes were on him and even the regulars were looking nervous. We needed a diversion, but I didn't think there was a soul in the place ready to challenge the little man with the gun. As it turned out, I had underestimated the powers of alcohol. Or maybe it was simply a matter of innate stupidity that made Carl look around the room and, gesturing with a bottle of beer, say, "I don't know about the rest of you, but I'm not gonna let some whacked out old jerk tell me what I can and can't do." He stood and Mike positioned himself between Carl and the door. Size-wise they were a pretty even match.

"Man," Carl said to Mike, setting the bottle down, "don't make me do this."

"Do what?" Mike smiled.

The bottle shattered and Carl looked with disbelief at Sammy. "You're nuts, old man. You're completely nuts." Nuts or not, he must have made his point because Carl sat down again.

Fortunately, Sergeant Julius Crowley chose that moment to arrive, and we were happy to hand the show over to him. Foxport isn't what you'd call a big town. The police force is small and they know all the businesses and the people who run them. I was glad Julius had answered the call. He'd been on the force on that day Ernie Banks walked into the Tattersall Tavern.

Sammy looked at him and said in a low, even tone, "I want you to arrest that sonofabitch and I want him to get the maximum sentence. And if anything's happened to that mug, I want him to get the chair."

"Who you talking about, Sammy?" Julius asked.

"Marty Shaw."

"Who's looking for me?" Shaw entered the bar with his hand against the wall as if he were still groping his way in the dark. He'd apparently come from the john and he was holding his stomach with his other hand. "God, what was in that funny-colored drink?"

Behind the bar Mark laughed and shook his head but didn't answer him.

"You got my mug!" Sammy said.

Shaw lowered himself into a chair, groaning, "What mug?"

After calming Sammy down somewhat and asking Mike and me about the power outage and what happened afterwards, Julius gave the bar the once-over, then lowered the volume on the TV (Stone and Staats were interviewing some actor) and said to the crowd, "We're gonna have to search everyone." He held up his hands as the objections came. "Something of value has been taken here, and we'd just like to take a look in bags and anything big enough to carry it."

Carl stood up as best he could. "Well, I guess I can go. Don't have anything a mug would fit in."

"You're not going anywhere," Julius said. It wasn't his size or what he said that made Carl back off. It was the way he said it.

"Hey, man." Carl looked at the crowd, imploring, "Man, this is so stupid. I got rights. Don't I have some civil liberty or something that's being violated here?"

"Shut up and sit down," Julius said.

Carl did and Julius recruited Mike and me to help him. We went from table to table, looked through purses and bags and knapsacks and came up with nothing. I had the pleasure of rousting Gwen's table and the lady herself graced me with a smile as she handed her purse over to me.

By the time we finished, they had run out of celebrities to interview at Cubs Park and were talking to Jim Frey. Sammy, having been relieved of his gun by Julius, paced behind the bar, hands in his pockets and that look of grief mixed with rage clouding his eyes. Every couple of laps he'd stop and look out at the crowd. Maybe he was looking for some kind of sign or maybe he was just not believing that someone he welcomed into his establishment could do such a thing.

I studied everyone in the room and tried to think if anyone had left for any amount of time, and I remembered that some people had gone in search of a bar with lights. If one of those people had taken it, we were out of luck. If the person had simply stashed the mug, probably in a car, and returned, then there was still a chance. But why return? Maybe that person wasn't alone. I glanced at the TV screen. Cubs' catcher Jody Davis and three cohorts were amusing the audience by sliding across the rain-drenched tarp that covered the field. They looked like big, white, numbered seals. And the downpour continued. There was no way someone could have left this building dry and returned dry. Julius stepped next to me, watching the scene, too. "Hasn't let up there, has it?" he said.

I looked at Julius and it finally occurred to me that he hadn't worn a raincoat. "Julius, was it raining when you got here?"

"No. It let up for about twenty minutes. I just looked out the door, though. It's pouring now."

Not that I didn't believe him, but for some reason I had to see for myself. He was right. I stood and watched the rain pelt a dark-colored BMW parked directly across the street and tried to think if there was something I'd missed. Nothing came to me and I could feel the spray from the rain as it poured down on the steps. I left the door open and walked back into the room. Julius said to me, "I'm going to have to let these people go if they want to. Can't hold them without reason." He looked at Sammy, still pacing behind the bar, and shook his head. "God, what a lousy thing to do. Lousy."

Gwen was watching me and I was close enough to notice that the blue of her eyes was only slightly darker than the blue in the sweater, which now lay folded on the table. I held her gaze for a moment and noticed that Peter was ignoring the fact that someone was looking at his woman. I turned to Julius. "Give me three minutes."

He looked at me and shrugged.

I stepped up to Gwen's table and said to Peter, "You were outside, weren't you?"

He looked at me for a long time before he said, "I never left this room." He indicated the others at the table. "They can vouch for me." Confident of their backing, he said to me, "What's it to you, anyway? I don't remember anyone making you a deputy."

I looked at Gwen, then at her sweater. "You didn't come in with that sweater. Did you?"

Gwen smiled. "Were you taking pictures?"

"What are you getting at?" Peter jumped to her defense, blissfully ignorant of the fact that she was doing a lot better without him.

"I think," I looked up and was pleased to note that everyone within hearing distance, including Sammy, was listening to this, "I think that you went out to the car to put something in it and you brought back the sweater in case the lights came on before you got back."

"And I think you've got a pretty vivid imagination," Peter said.

"Will you let us look in your car?"

He was indignant now. "Why the hell should I?"

Carl stepped up to their table, smiled and nodded to Gwen, and grabbed Peter by his collar. "Because we're all sick of sittin' here. And if this jerk," he gestured toward me, "is gonna be happy once he sees the inside of your car, then I think you oughta, let him." He dropped Peter back into his chair.

Peter looked at the crowd and then at me. I smiled. "I couldn't have said it better myself."

After a long hesitation and a couple of frustrated gestures, Peter dug his keys out of his pocket. "You people are nuts," he muttered.

Julius and I walked with Peter to his car. Mike had to use physical force to keep Sammy from joining us. I wasn't surprised when it turned out to be the BMW. In the time it took to cross the street we were all soaked. Peter watched as Julius and I thoroughly searched the vehicle. We came up empty. Peter seemed pleased with himself and delighted that Julius was more than a little annoyed with me. "Can my friends and I leave now?" Julius looked at me and said under his breath, "Don't think we had any reason to keep him here in the first place." Then he said to Peter, "Sure, you can go."

"Thank you," Peter said with exaggerated graciousness.

I gave the car one more glance and turned toward the pub. As I turned, my shoe scraped against something. I crouched down to examine what I'd hit and picked up a glass handle from a beer mug. One look at Peter, and I knew this wasn't just any glass handle from just any beer mug. Julius caught Peter's expression, too. I stood in the rain and stared at the guy, the handle looped in the crook of my finger. After a few seconds, he looked away and said, "Hey, it was wet. It was slippery. I was going for my keys. I didn't break the damned thing on purpose." When neither Julius nor I responded, he said, "Look did I break the law? Am I under arrest?"

Julius shook his head and looked back at the bar.

When we walked back in, Sammy hurried up to us. "Was it in there? Did he have it?" There was such a mixture of hope and dread in his words that I was at a loss as to how to tell him. As it turned out, I didn't have to. He saw the handle attached to the jagged shard of glass. Then he looked to me for confirmation.

"I'm sorry, Sammy," was all I could say and I handed it to him.

I was prepared to have to keep Sammy from killing Peter. And I was thinking that maybe I shouldn't interfere. I was not prepared for what happened next. Sammy's rage I could have handled, but his total devastation was something else. He sank into the chair that someone had vacated for him and, at the same time, he seemed to almost cave in to himself. It was like someone had pulled the plug and everything that buoyed and sustained him was escaping.

Ginny placed a scotch in front of him and handed Julius and me bar towels. I wiped my face and rubbed some of the rain out of my hair.

Peter realized that everyone in the room was glaring at him. "Hey," he said, "it's just a mug, for Christ's sake. What's the big deal?" Peter was real lucky this was late twentieth century suburban Chicago because if it'd been Dodge City in the 1800s he'd have been swinging from a tree.

I glanced over at his table of friends to see how they were taking it. As soon as Gwen realized she was being watched, she stood up and grabbed her purse and sweater. "For God's sake, Peter, that was stupid."

Peter looked at Gwen in stunned disbelief. Then he nodded to himself, like he just got the joke and, without raising his voice, said, "For God's sake, bitch, you were the one who wanted it." Reddening, she quickly turned away from him. That said it all.

"I think you and your friends had better leave," Julius said to Peter, who tossed some bills on the table and, without a word, turned and walked out ahead of his friends. Gwen was the last of her group to leave and, holding her head high, even when Carl barked at her, walked out the door like some kind of princess going to her coach. I would not have blamed the coach for leaving without her.

After that the bar cleared out pretty fast. Mike and I sat with Sammy, and Ginny brought us a couple of beers. He stared at the wide screen TV he'd purchased especially for his patrons to enjoy the Cubs games. He talked some, mostly about Banks, always about the Cubs. It wasn't in his usual animated way, though, more like he was talking about a good friend who had just died. At one point he said, "It was more than a mug, you know."

I watched the rain pouring down over the lights that illuminated the vacant diamond and I thought about baseball in the sunshine and girls in sleeveless dresses. "Traditions," I said. "They're very fragile." Sammy looked at me and nodded.

We watched until they officially called the game around ten thirty. Sammy closed early that night.

D.C. Brod is the author of six mystery novels, including her most recent, *Heartstone* (Five Star, 2005). This story marks the first time Quint McAuley appeared in print; he went on to star in the novels *Murder In Store*, *Error in*