

Losers Lounge

Don Boner

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Edited by
Carol Stevens Yürür



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Don Boner was raised in Nashville Tennessee and moved to Indiana in 1969. He has worked as a DJ and radio time salesman and in the poverty program in neighborhood organizing, as a Civil Deputy in the Marion County Sheriff's Department. He worked in Information Technology management for 19 years with Adman, an accounting and billing system for the creative service Industry. He has been a part-time instructor at a private Technical school, and currently works in an IT call center.

In 2002 Don studied Film Production at the New York Film Academy and started writing movie scripts in 2002. Don's first feature, *Losers Lounge*, which this novelette is based on best Film Noir award at the 2004 Bare Bones International Independent Film Festival. His second feature, *Somewhere In Indiana* is distributed nationally by Echelon Entertainment.

Thomas Alan Orr is a native New Englander who came to Indiana to serve as a conscientious objector during the Vietnam War. He has worked in human services for over 30 years and has drawn from these experiences in his poetry. His first book of poems, *Hammers in the Fog*, was published in 1995 by Restoration Press. His poetry has been featured on the syndicated radio program, *The Writer's Almanac*, hosted by Garrison Keillor and has also been included in two recent anthologies, *Good Poems*, edited by Garrison Keillor, and *In Praise of Fertile Land*, from the PCC Farmland Trust. Tom's poetry appeared recently in cyberspace on *RootsWe*, and he reads his poems in the feature film, *Somewhere in Indiana*, produced by the DL Sites Inc.

Carol Stevens Yurur is a journalist and editor of newspapers, magazines and books in the United States and Turkey, and has been a writer and project director in advertising, marketing communications, public relations. She is a translator from Turkish to English language. She has translated a series of short stories and children's stories for two Turkish authors, and a cookbook. She has lived in Turkey since 1987.

Preface

Losers Lounge is a murder mystery set in 1948 that follows the perplexing and often seedy life of a private detective who is accused of murdering a troubled young lady with a dark history. *Losers Lounge* is a dark and mysterious story that lives on the edge and tells the tell of shady characters, crooked cops, switched love and bad luck, a darker side of human nature, a *noire*'-style murder mystery at its best.

On one level *Losers Lounge* is a simple murder mystery set in 1948 in the fictitious town of Passionville, Illinois, just southeast of Chicago. The action takes place in Lisa Losers' Lounge, where seedy characters hang out.

On another level *Losers Lounge* is much like a modern day Greek tragedy. The protagonist is banished from town, the antagonist attempts by false pretences to gain control, and innocent lives are upset until eventually in the end all the characters are guided by their fates to leave Passionville. Allegorically Passionville is a not a place but a state of mind.

All the characters in *Losers Lounge* appear to be shades of gray, instead of the good and evil that are normally associated with a narrative. Perhaps the fact that all the characters are not black nor white illustrates that all people in fact have some amount of evil inside of them; evil that from time to time emerges to cause pain and anguish in others.

So walk with me as I utilize a style I call impressionistic writing, and remember to let your mind step back a little so you can feel the story unfold.

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Prologue

Welcome to Passionville:



Thick, dark clouds roll across the chilly October sky. The wind occasionally causes the “Welcome to Passionville” sign to sway to and fro. Passionville, Illinois. Located 35 miles southeast of Chicago, population thirteen thousand, established 1811 - rumor has it, by some escaped German convicts from Pennsylvania.

In the late nineteenth century, Passionville was home to the largest carriage manufacturer in the world. The Illinois Carriage Company employed, in its peak, over one thousand hardworking craftsmen, producing carriages for mass consumption and for affluent elite and aristocrats from around the globe. A casualty of the automobile, the company closed its door in 1929, almost creating a ghost town.

In the late twenties during Prohibition, Passionville once again prospered with its speakeasies, gambling halls and

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brothels. Those seeking pleasure and escape came from Gary and Hammond, Indiana, as well as Chicago Heights and Crete, Illinois, to satisfy their desires. Passionville was a wide-open town where the booze flowed freely and the whores turned tricks for five dollars a pop. The bluesman from Chicago found plenty of work in Passionville. Fences specialized in hot ice, selling gold, pearls and diamonds for nickels on the dollar. However, the money from sin was short lived. The repeal of Prohibition and overly zealous Federal agents moved Passionville toward extinction once again.

Two pivotal events saved Passionville, quite by accident and both of them in 1941. Hermann Paxton and Roger Van Burg started a small trucking firm and secured a contract with the U.S. Government. After the onset of World War II, the trucking business grew rapidly with the armed forces' contracts for delivery of supplies needed for the effort in Europe. In 1943, Paxton's partner, Roger Van Burg, was killed in an automobile accident. After the funeral, Paxton sold the company for a handsome profit and announced he was running for mayor with the pledge to clean up the town and rid it of the few remaining vice operations. Paxton easily won the race for mayor and closed down all the dives except for Lisa Losers' Lounge.

In the same year, Tom Johnson started a lumber mill. The business struggled during the war but it was hugely successful after the war ended. The mill employed over 400 people and operated 24 hours a day to keep up with the postwar building boom.

Downtown Passionville is nothing special. The old courthouse is set in the middle of the town square. The Passionville Five-and-Dime is on one side of Main Street and John's Drug & Sundries is on the other side. Lounge is near the courthouse at the corner of Main and 1st

Avenue, and The Gerst House is five blocks down the street. The old Rivoli Theatre is on Main Street near the Old Main Street Hotel, where two dollars a night or eight dollars a week gets you a small room with a bath down the hall. Dan & Whit's General Store and Benny's Garage are on 2nd Avenue, and the small train station where trains to Chicago run every 30 minutes is on Main near 4th Avenue. Barette's Hardware and Feed Store on 5th Avenue serves the needs of the county's rural areas. Across the street from Barette's is the Illinois Press that specializes in printing catalogues and directories. Eastern Illinois Trucking Company and Johnson's Lumber Mill stand on 15th Street just past the edge of downtown. Three small churches serve the spiritual needs of Passionville.

For some of the inhabitants, Passionville is their last stop on the rocky road called life. They are trying to forget who they are and what they are. They go about their day-to-day activities always pushing their hidden dark secrets away.

Chapter

1

Joey Ferdinando PD



Slowly she turned the knob to the wooden door, walked into the small entryway and climbed the stairs. The bare light hanging from the ceiling flickered, as if it were about to go out, annoying her as she continued up the stairs. The hallway at the top of the stairs had one door on the right and two doors on the left. She looked to the door on the right that read in large black lettering on the frosted glass: Joey Ferdinando Private Detective. As soon as she knocked on the door, a loud voice yelled back, “It’s open.” Taking a deep breath, she turned the knob.

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Joey Ferdinando stood up to greet her. “Regina Cornelius?” he said, offering his hand before motioning for her to sit in an old scratched wooden chair beside his mahogany desk.

Though Joey was only thirty-two he appeared older to the woman, who noticed a troubled look in his dark brown eyes, however, his rugged face was clean-shaven, his hair neatly combed, and he seemed to carry his 5 foot 8 inch body well.

She cast her eyes slowly around the room and noted the sparse décor, half serving as his office and the other half obviously his living quarters. The office consisted of the old desk, two chairs and a filing cabinet. The other side of the room had a couch that appeared to double as his bed, and next to it, a small end table with a light and a radio. A faded poster of FDR partly covered a stain on the wall. A few books and old magazines were scattered about, some opened on his desk. The “kitchen” consisted of a table and chair, an old refrigerator, and a small stove.

Regina looked straight at him and crossed her legs. “Thank you for seeing me, Mr. Ferdinando,” she said in a voice that seemed to match her sexy look. She wore a waltz-length print skirt with a white blouse and a small black hat perched on her shoulder-length dark brown wavy hair.

Joey smiled as he looked her over. “Just call me Joey ... Now, what can I do for you?”

Regina arched her head back ever so slightly. “Look, I believe my husband, you know, Erwin the lawyer down at City Hall, is cheating on me. I didn't want to believe he would do such a thing. I questioned him about it the other night and he denies he is doing anything wrong. Please, Joey, you have to help me,” she pleaded.

Joey noted something on his pad of paper and looked her in the eye. “Look lady, how do you know he is cheating? He is a big lawyer down at City Hall and I am sure that, from time to time, he must work late or maybe he goes out to have some drinks with the boys. You know those judges expect the lawyers to pick up the tab when they’re out drinking with them. I’ve never seen a judge pay for a drink,” he said half joking.

Regina fidgeted in her chair, trying not to show irritation at Joey’s question. “I just know. I mean, if you were a woman, you would understand what I am talking about. Please won't you help me?”

Joey put down his pen and paper, looked up at the ceiling, and shook his head before looking back at Regina. “OK I'll take your case. I charge twenty dollars a day plus expenses. I need a one hundred dollar retainer.”

“Look Joey I don't have any money,” she said, looking a bit shocked. “I mean if I did, I would give it to you,” she declared, pausing to take catch her breath. “My husband cut off my allowance. I have nothing!” Regina reached down, picked up her purse and showed Joey an empty purse.

Joey sighed and shook his head. “Why did he stop your allowance?” Pausing for a moment he leaned back putting both of his hands behind his head and shot her the blunt question: “What did you do?”

“Nothing! I swear. I don't know why the old bast- I mean, I don't know.” She tried to regain her self-control. “Maybe it was because I asked him if he were having an affair.”

Joey put his hands back on his desk and said, “Look lady, a guy like your husband doesn't just cut off allowances to a dame like you,” pausing while looking

her over again. “If you don't tell me what really happened then there is no way I can take your case. Understand?”

Regina looked down at the floor and squirmed in her chair. “He caught me,” she said softly.

Joey pushed back his chair and propped both his feet on the desk. “Caught you doing what?”

She hesitated before blurting out her confession. “Well, I was in my nightgown when the milkman came to collect. It was cold outside so I asked him to come into the house. He told me how attractive I looked and that he thought I looked like a movie star. ... Well, one thing led to another and then, well the next thing I knew we were naked on the sofa. That's when my husband walked in.” Regina then added in a high-pitched voice, “But I know he was cheating on me first!”

She shrugged her shoulders and tilted her head. “You know it's not my fault that men are attracted to me. I know what they want; I can tell from the way they look at me. But I swear that's the first time anything like that happened, I mean, I am a married woman. I don't know why I let the milkman seduce me. Maybe he hypnotized me...”

“Joey, you've got to believe me”, she said looking Joey straight in the eye. “Please you must help. I'll do anything. And I mean ... anything.”

She stood up and stepped toward Joey. He watched her slowly remove her blouse and drop it to the floor. He let her grab his hand and place it on her breast as she kissed him and gently bit his ear. Joey returned the kisses, stood up and let her lead him to the couch.