

The Walls Came Tumbling Down

By Phillip Hall

“One more round of drinks for my new friends here!” Sam shouted to the waitress nearby.

He watched as she headed off towards the bar then turned back to his friends. He put on his best smile and laughed along with everyone. He wanted desperately to fit in, especially on a holiday. He listened to their drunken stories of St. Patrick's Days past. They talked about all of the crazy things they had done and how bad the hangovers had been. It was this point every time he just couldn't take anymore. He excused himself and walked towards the restrooms. When he was sure none of his companions were watching he walked to the bar.

“I'd like to go ahead and pay the tab for my friends over there,” Sam said.

While the bartender was totaling up the bill a woman approached and sat next to Sam. He smiled at her then ducked his head. He began messing with his wallet as if he was looking for something. When he could no longer keep up the ruse he looked back to the woman. She was staring directly at him.

“Hello,” Sam said.

“I couldn't help but notice you were ditching your friends over there,” the lady said.

“No I was just coming to order another beer,” Sam lied.

Right at that moment the bartender stepped over and handed him his bill.

“Your total will be two-hundred and six bucks. You paying with cash or credit?” the bartender asked.

Sam's face flushed and he took the check from the bartender. He looked at the woman who was trying not to laugh. He dug out his credit card.

“Ordering another beer huh?” she asked.

“Well, no. I suppose I was paying the bill so I could ditch my 'friends',” Sam said.

The woman laughed and Sam found himself laughing too. He handed the bartender his credit card. He couldn't remember the last time he'd actually shared a genuine laugh

with someone.

“My name is Cindy,” she said.

“I’m Sam. It’s very nice to meet you.”

“I was watching everyone but you have fun over there,” Cindy said.

Sam was a bit uncomfortable as Cindy seemed to know him entirely too well. He smiled weakly and tried to laugh it off. She was staring at him now. The bartender handed his card back and he placed it in his wallet.

“I was having lots of fun,” Sam said.

“Then why are you leaving?” Cindy asked.

“I have to work tomorrow.”

“I was here last Saint Patrick’s Day and you know what I saw? A large table gathered around having fun and one man buying all the drinks. That man slipped away to the bar to pay,” Cindy said. “Then he went out the front door unnoticed. I asked myself why? Then I went on about my life until tonight. Here I was watching you do the same thing again.”

Sam looked down at the floor, not wanting to make eye contact. Cindy reached out and lifted his chin until they were looking at one another. Sam’s face flushed even more. He had been here last year and done the same exact thing.

“I don’t really know what I’m supposed to say,” Sam said.

“Neither do I. For some reason I just had to talk to you. I admire your courage for at least trying to make friends because I am a coward that sits in the corner alone,” Cindy said.

“You’re far from a coward,” Sam said. “It took a lot of courage to walk over and call me out for ditching my so called friends.”

They sat and smiled at one another. Sam felt strange, a mixture of upset stomach and an asthma attack. After thirty-seven years of learning to dodge conversations he found all his excuses slipping away. He could think of none of the usual reasons that would allow him to walk away from this moment.

“Cindy, would you like to get out of here? Maybe head over to the square downtown and listen to some live music,” Sam asked.

“I would like that, very much. Are you okay to drive?”

“Oh I’m fine. I actually don’t drink. I’ve been sitting over there for the past three

hours with the same beer.”

Cindy laughed as she held up her own beer bottle that was completely full. Sam laughed along with her. Walls he'd built for years began to tumble down inside. The thought of love was far from his mind as he was just happy to connect with someone, to sit and talk from his heart.

“What are the odds that two socially backwards people would visit the same bar the same night, a year apart? I never thought I'd be able to sit and talk to someone openly like this,” Cindy said. “And never would I have imagined being invited to walk the square and listen to live music with another person.”

Sam started thinking about the odds of both of them visiting the same bar, on the same night a year apart. The more he thought about it, the odds were astronomical. Doubts clawed at his mind that maybe someone was setting him up for a joke. His thoughts must've shown on his face as Cindy noticed.

“Is everything alright Sam?” she asked.

“You mention the odds of this occurring and I must say, winning the lottery would have better odds. You're not some government assassin or possibly a comedian recording a prank are you?” he asked.

Cindy burst out laughing and Sam couldn't hold back as the contagious laughter infected him. She put her hand on Sam's shoulder and pulled him close.

“I'd never make it as a comedian because I tend to take life too seriously,” Cindy said.

“Well that's good news,” Sam said with a laugh.

“And I don't work for the government as an assassin,” Cindy said as she plunged a small hypodermic needle into Sam's leg, “but I was hired by your company's competitor to make sure you never completed your research.”

Sam tried to shout out but found he had no voice. Cindy gently laid his head down on the bar and walked away. Sam's mind grew fuzzy and he tried to move but couldn't. His final thoughts were of the genuine laughter he had shared with the woman who would be his executioner.