

Barcode, Sloe Gin Fizz is Pink

by Martha Rand

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Sloe Gin Fizz is pink
Bombay Gin comes in blue
I'm sitting here at Emerald's
And all I can think of is —
you.

The little pause after “is” made it almost rhythmical. It was morning and the Emerald Bar would be closing soon. She'd been up all night in the news room. Ohhh, the sacrifice of a nighttime job. It was the best job she could get in the best market in the country and so she'd taken it.

“Good night and good luck.”

“Good night, good luck and be well.”

“And so it goes.”

These were the words said at the end of the show by some of her favorite news anchors. She knew she was sitting at a bar where some of the biggest newsmen had sat before. Probably before the show, after the show, in between the shows, they'd been at the very same place on Columbus Avenue. She knew the guys with the liver spots they couldn't hide even under the thick pancake make-up. She didn't wear that, she wasn't the talent.

She remembered that she was used to sacrifice. The only time she threw up in the morning, now, was when she'd had too much to drink. No more sticking her fingers down her throat as part of her morning ritual. The calluses on her knuckles were gone, but she'd probably never have nice nails. Many possibilities were gone.

Although, she dared to believe that many possibilities were still ahead.

There was the sound of sirens. She looked out the front and saw the fire engines racing downtown. The door opened with a rush of wind and a beautiful slice of sunlight spliced the darkness at the doorway. The sirens were louder now.

“Do you know what's happening?” the man who entered shouted as he ran up to the bar. “Turn on the news.”

Cartoons had been playing, because the newsies in the bar were off the clock.

The bartender pointed the remote toward the TV and clicked.

At first she can't tell what's happening. There's smoke. There's a tower. It's hard to see, but there's a plane sticking out of the building. It's a transfixing moment in which lifetimes are changing.

Her cell phone vibrates on the bar. She wasn't going to pick up, but then she thinks better.

The call's gone to voicemail before she can catch it.

Everything in her is shaking. “You think you've seen everything.” She hears herself say pulling a twenty out of her jacket pocket. The news studio is two blocks down.

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The word is they should stay at their desks. He makes a phone call, but there's no answer. For some unknown reason, he believes he can't, can't stay at his desk. He picks up his paper cup of coffee and he starts to walk. A man stands in front of him purposely blocking his way. He walks around the man and continues on to the hallway and begins the descent through the stairwell. At each landing more people join. First, in the marching down. Then in the trek uptown.

