

Second Chance Bar and Grill

by

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Brumbelt looked up groggily from the bar. He was a good sized Brown Bear, and no one ever messed with him... not ever. And yet his posterior hurt terribly, and he felt as if he'd been worked over by a seasoned heavy weight Grizzly.

"What happened?" he asked. Though he'd spoken forcefully, all that came out was a whisper.

The bartender, an old Badger less than a third the size of the Bear, stopped wiping the beer mug he was working on and raised an eyebrow. "You was hit by a bus... and thank your Bear Gods you was drink'n in this particular establishment."

Brumbelt groaned, and managed to sit upright on the barstool. The room whirled around him and he gripped the counter's rounded lip of polished wood trying to keep himself from puking.

"Use the spittoon," the Badger warned, and was then rewarded with a retching sound as the Bear fell off the stool and clutched the polished brass foot rest, his nose stuffed into the foul recesses of the equally polished spittoon.

When he was done, the bar's mop boy was there with a fresh spittoon, taking the used instrument and disappearing into the back. There was a door there to the alley, where he would empty it down the storm drain, rinse it out, and then place it back on his ready shelf.

When he could, Brumbelt sat up on the floor. He felt a little better for all of the puking. Slowly... painfully... he made his way back to the barstool where he found a tall glass of water waiting for him. Sitting next to the glass was a white poker chip.

Gargling half of the water, he bent and spat into the fresh spittoon and then drank the rest.

"Better now?" asked the barkeep in his gravelly voice.

"A little. What happened? I don't remember drinking all that much."

"You didn't, and I told ya what happened. You was run over by a bus... the six fifteen to be exact. Happened just a minute ago and you was kilt deader than a mackerel on ice down on Market Street."

“Killed?”

The bar keeper raised his voice and spoke as if to a deaf person. “YOU WAS HIT BY A BUS AND KILLED.”

The Bear looked at the cantankerous old Badger. One ear had been chewed on somewhere in his past and his nose was large and split. Obviously he was not the sort to be trifled with during an argument.

“I’m dead?” he asked; the words he’d heard beginning to sink in. His head had at least stopped spinning, but his body still felt like crap.

“Drink some more water,” the Badger instructed, pouring a tumbler. “You’ll feel better in a minute or two.” He expertly slid it to Brumbelt’s end of the bar without spilling a drop.

“As I recall,” the Bear told him, picking the glass up and looking at the Badger through its concave surface, “I only stopped here just for a single beer. I’m thinking you tried to poison me.”

“If’n I did we wouldn’t be talking cuz that wouldn’t be covered by the second chance rule. You came in... I poured you a frosty one... and then you met Bell-z-bub.”

“Who the heck is Bell-z-bub?” the Bear asked, taking a swallow from the glass.

The Badger jerked a thumb to a darker corner of the bar. “He’s our mechanical Bull and dang good at gett’n the customers all excited. He took you for quite a ride.”

Brumbelt stood, finished his water, and then sat the glass on the bar with a thump. Moving toward the back of the bar, he saw a large Minotaur standing like a cigar store wooden statue. One hand was extended as if pointing at him and the other was held close to his chest in a fist. His face had a rosy glow to it and he wore a huge clownish smile; like it was all meant in fun.

“I do remember you,” the Bear said slowly, “And you did piss me off.”

“Careful there fella,” the bartender warned. “He busted ya once, he’ll do it again. Use the chip I gave ya it’s your second chance at living again. Forget about the Bull... he’s just a dummy... forget it and cash in the chip.”

Brumbelt turned and looked at the bartender. He’d forgotten all about the white chip. He glanced down to the end of the bar. It was still sitting where he’d left it. “What’s that?” he asked. “Let me guess... you give me water and a white chip; you want me to stop drinking.” He snorted. “I only had one beer!”

The bartender placed the mug he’d been polishing under the counter and sighed. “You’re thicker than that stupid mechanical Bull,” he grumbled. “That chip is your deliverance

you moron. I told ya; you was killed. Take it... it's a second chance, free and clear. Cash it in and go home. Get a good night's sleep and... WATCH OUT!"

The warning was a second too late. Brumbelt's ass was kicked by something solid. He actually flew into the air, crashing back down in front of the bar. He caught himself on the polished lip of wood. Turning he roared, his teeth bared and arms outstretched ready to wrestle. His anger was solely met by the mechanical Minotaur's clownish smile.

"He's a sneaky bastard," the Badger warned. "Let me buy you another water and you can calm yourself. I'll explain about the chip. It's good for a second chance... why die all over again if'n ya ain't got to?"

Brumbelt ignored him. Picking up a barstool, he threw it at the dummy. It careened off of the smiling head with no apparent damage.

"CRIPE'S SAKE!" the Badger yelled, moving to the other end of the bar. "USE THE CHIP AND FORGET ABOUT HIM... LEAVE AND NEVER COME BACK! IT AIN'T WORTH IT!"

The bear turned to him, about to shout out where he could stick his stupid second chance chip when the barstool struck him from behind and bounced over top of the bar. Now raging, Brumbelt spun around and glared at the happy face of the Bull. It was as if a retired boxer had once again heard the bell ring; though it might have only been the doorbell. The Bear waded into the fight fists raised and fingers extended, shoving chairs and tables aside... and then he remembered. Looking below the mechanical Bull's waste, he saw the huge erection poking up under his loin cloth. Suddenly the pain in his backside came to the forefront of his thoughts. Turning, he looked for the Badger, but all he found was an untended bar.

A huge hand landed on his shoulder. With a shriek he ripped away from the grip, and ran out the door and across the sidewalk... straight out into traffic where he was met by the six fifteen... again.

Inside the 'Second Chance Bar and Grill', three figures watched the bloody mayhem going on outside their window.

Without taking his eyes from the scene, the barkeep reached into his pocket and took out a white chip. This he handed to the Minotaur standing next to him.

"You win Master. I didn't think you could get him to do it twice in a row like that." He sighed. "Reminded me a bit of the good old days."

The Bull passed the chip off to the mop boy with a chuckle. "Nice to know I still got it. Here ya go kid... buy yourself a jug of that ice water and take it downstairs. I got a bunch of folks stoking coal there and they're real thirsty. Drink it in front of them... it'll make it taste better."

“What about the Bear?” the Badger asked.

“You know the rules,” the Bull told him.

Together they intoned, “If they don’t give a chip, then neither do we; only one second chance per customer – no exceptions.”