

AMAZON ORIGINAL STORIES

# EERIE BASIN

IVY

POCHODA

AUTHOR OF ECSTASY

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*a  
Short  
Story*

IVY  
POCHODA

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*For Erin Norris, the one and the only, and the final word*

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# Erin

There's a bar at the end of the world. Or at least what people used to consider the end of the world until you all showed up. It's on a street that used to be cobbled, where you used to be able to see the old docks, and later watch the old docks sinking into the bay.

You all think I'm the owner. That I'm the Lily whose name is on the window, even though you know that's not my name. But it might as well be. I might as well be Lily.

The bar isn't mine. I'm just the caretaker.

The old-timers—what's left of them—can tell stories about Lily's before it was *discovered*. Before the new coffee bars, bistros, and the fancy grocery store. Before the damn IKEA.

Before me, even.

Before the SUVs and electric cars.

Before the Pilates studio.

Before the last dive bars were turned into cocktail bars.

Except for this one—Lily's. We're still standing, still grimy and rickety. *Authentic* is the word they use when we get a write-up in one of the New York magazines.

I started working here two decades ago when this place was still unlicensed. Back when we jacked into the streetlamps outside for extra power and sometimes did without. Back when you paid on a chit system we kept behind the bar.

We've had a license for a few years now. And we started taking cash. But credit cards—hell no.

We only pour well and serve beer from cans or bottles. No wine. No martinis. The other bartender, Chris, well, he's been known to throw a glass

at folks asking for a French 75 or whatever else people think is cool these days.

Anyway, all of this is to say that we are a relic of the last days of the real Red Hook, a place where the old stories live on, turned into legends. A place where rules are broken, where we stay open all night, a lighthouse at the end of the borough. A place where you might be drinking next to the granddaughter of a mob boss, like Gina over there, and not know it.

Tonight, the bar is filled—newcomers and old-timers alike who've come to say goodbye to Jimmy Dikeman. He's not exactly an old-timer like the rest of them. Didn't grow up here. In fact, he only beat me to the hood by fifteen years. But still, he's not just part of the furniture. He is the furniture.

Maybe you've read about him—*The Cop Who Invented Red Hook*, even though he knows he didn't. If you've never heard of him, chances are you're here because of Jimmy. Chances are you live in one of the lofts he renovated. Chances are you've patronized one of the establishments of which he is the landlord. Or maybe you rent a place that exists only because Dikeman Developments' investment in this waterfront community made your own landlord take a risk on Red Hook.

He's the reason the streets are filled with Teslas. And babies. And runners.

He's the reason the bodegas are closing, and the dive bars too.

He's also the reason this place didn't fall further into ruin.

He may not have invented Red Hook, but he saved it, depending on your outlook.

Anyway, Jimmy's moving on. He says nearly four decades out here is enough. It's hard to imagine him elsewhere besides his seat at the end of Lily's oak bar on the Beard Street side.

He blames his health. And I can't argue. Last few years, he's been wasting away. Dude got so thin and pale, it was like he was fixing to disappear. But ask him about it, and he'll snap at you like a mousetrap.

Maybe he went to the doctor and maybe he didn't. But one day, he up and tells us he's quitting Red Hook, moving to the Keys.

My mouth literally hit the bar when he said it. Made him repeat it twice. As far as I can tell, there's no Red Hook without Jimmy, and there's no Jimmy without Red Hook. But if Florida can put some more meat on his bones and blood in his cheeks, well, bon voyage, old-timer.

Jimmy's pinking up a bit tonight, which has to do with the shots of Jameson I've poured him.

Everyone's buying him rounds. And if he keeps up this pace, it's going to be a short send-off. We promised him a big toast at midnight. A real farewell. The works.

And before that, I'm going to make my play. Jimmy's not just a customer. He's the owner. Bought the building, bar, and all nearly thirty-five years ago—the start of his Red Hook empire, he tells anyone after three drinks. With him leaving, I have plans for the place. Twenty years of keeping Lily's afloat, she's basically mine. The rest is paperwork.

I got to give the old guy credit for his timing. You see, one of the benefits of living out here coming on two decades is that, while you are all paying upwards of four K for your lofts, my rent has stayed in the triple digits. Which means I've been saving and saving. I figured, seeing as everyone already thinks I am Lily, I might as well become Lily.

After all, I'm the one people come out here to see—"a Red Hook soul-stirrer," *New York* magazine called me. And don't forget it.

It took me two decades, but I have the dough. What with Jimmy heading south, I can't imagine a single reason he'd want to hold on to this building. He's got an apartment upstairs—calls it his *hideaway*. He stays there from time to time. Not sure why when he's got a primo spot down at the Fairway warehouse—the crown jewel of his residential holdings. Penthouse with water views on two sides. Best view in the whole of New York City. No question.

Still, I hear him upstairs from time to time. Creaking the floorboards. Tiptoeing down the stairs as if he's afraid to disturb me when I'm cleaning up after closing.

As for the rest of his empire—its fate is anyone's guess. Maybe he'll run it from a boat while fishing for marlin. Maybe he'll pass the torch. But he's got no family to speak of—part of his whole mystique.

Rumor has it he had a wife back before he moved out here.

Rumor has it she died in a fire up in Riverdale. Faulty wiring in some crappy townhome they'd just bought before they split.

Rumor has it insurance paid out big.

Rumor has it that helped Jimmy snap up a couple more properties for his burgeoning empire.

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The whole neighborhood has turned out to say goodbye to Jimmy—tenants, local business owners, some of the hard-drinking artists and musicians who've been around as long as I have. There are the remaining old-timers, Gina and her crew, as well as some folks from the projects who don't mind that Jimmy got his start in Red Hook policing them. And, of course, there are the post-hipsters who still think they're pioneering out here.

I'm throwing it back to the old days in Jimmy's honor—a five-dollar all-you-can-eat hot-dog cookout and two-dollar drinks. The mood is lively. A real party, like in the crazy years when the cops turned their backs on our lawlessness. Back when we kept the bar open twenty-four hours. Smoking indoors. Drinks free after 2:00 a.m. Drugs in plain sight.

I'm keeping my eye on Jimmy. I've made my plan—drafted a whole proposal, spreadsheets and all.

"You think he'll sell?" It's Chris whispering in my ear.

"Why wouldn't he?" I say. "It's not like Lily's and the dump upstairs are an important part of his portfolio."

"*Portfolio*. Look at you," Chris says.

I scan the bar, then clock Jimmy again. The group around him has parted and he's alone. I drop a shot in front of him but pour light. I'm not his mother, but for the next few hours, I am his keeper.

“You always know, Erin,” he says, raising the glass. “Let me—”

But I’ve already poured myself the shot he was going to buy me. “Gonna miss you, boss.”

“Keep your nose clean, missy.”

Same old joke. But these are the patterns that keep us going.

“You know, Jimmy, I’ve been saving.” I reach back to the shelf where I’ve stashed my spreadsheets and drop the papers in front of him.

“What’s all this?”

“Business plan. To take over this place.”

Jimmy laughs. “You can’t afford it, honey.”

“Fact is, old-timer, I can.”

He flips through the papers, a narrow smile on his thinning lips. “Who knew,” he said. “More to you than meets the eye. Didn’t know you could do more than divide the tips.”

I’ve stood behind this bar for two decades, so I’ve learned to shoulder most insults. But this one is a gut punch.

“It’s a solid plan.” He slides the papers back to me. “But no.”

“Come on, Jimmy,” I say. “Lemme take over the lease at least. It’s my baby.”

“And you can be the babysitter. For a little while, anyway.”

“A little while?”

“Erin,” Jimmy says, “this place is worthless. You don’t want it. I don’t want it.”

I start polishing glasses before he can see the sting in my eyes.

“Fact is, I’m thinking of tearing it down.”

I drop the glass I’m holding.

“We both need to move on.”

“Easy for you to say.”

He lifts his shot glass. “You know how I got my start out here?”

If I’ve heard it once, I’ve heard it a thousand times.

“Maybe once or twice.”

“Let me tell you.” He pauses. “The whole story.”