



Whiskey Sour

Skyla Dawn Cameron

I THINK I PICKED UP HIS SCENT EVEN BEFORE HE ENTERED the bar.

As I ran a damp cloth over the counter in front of me, it was as if something tickled my nose. I breathed in sharply, my rational brain telling me my instincts were wrong. My instincts and brain are usually at war like that.

In this instance, I ignored my instincts.

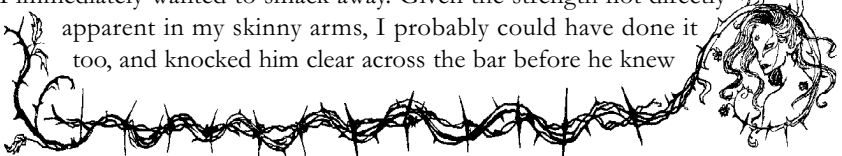
I'd never caught his scent fresh like that before, and I guess that's why my brain didn't trust my nose. Weeks after the morning he left, when I had just begun to realize something was wrong with me and hundreds of different scents had assaulted my nose, his was among them. Old, watered down, lingering in the corners of my apartment where I hadn't cleaned. And it was that uncertainty, that lack of trust in my abilities and my instincts that came back to me as I cleaned my area of the bar, sensing someone I knew shouldn't be there.

Maybe it was just wishful thinking on my part, rather than full-blown doubt. If he showed up at my place of work again, I'd have to kill him, and then I'd probably be made to leave work for a few days without pay. And I do like to get paid.

I dropped the cloth in the sink under the counter and went about refilling the peanuts, immersing myself in the noise and smells around me, ignoring the niggling in the back of my brain....

In my peripheral vision, I saw a patron slide onto a barstool near me. "Whiskey sour," came a voice I wished I didn't recognize.

My grey eyes slid toward him. A cocky grin met my gaze—one that I immediately wanted to smack away. Given the strength not directly apparent in my skinny arms, I probably could have done it too, and knocked him clear across the bar before he knew



what hit him. Bit of glamour to disguise it, make up something about him trying to assault me, and no one would be the wiser.

Instead, I reached under the bar for a heavy glass. I set it on the counter with a noticeable *thud*. My movements methodical, I filled it with ice, lime juice, and finished with a shot of whiskey. I held onto the drink, however, and stared at him expectantly.

“Cash up front.”

His eyes, which were a dark brown with amber ringing the inner iris, lit up with amusement. “Think I’ll take off without paying?”

“Just looking for an excuse to throw you out.”

He pulled a ten from his jacket pocket, set it on the bar, and slid it my way. “There you go,” he said, meeting my gaze in a challenge.

Within me, I had the same fight to establish dominance as he did, but luckily I had a strong enough will to not give in to those urges. I passed him the damn drink, took his money, and promptly put him out of my mind. Easier said than done, but I was willing to work at it.

“Juliette,” he said.

“Oh, so you remember my name?”

“Can we talk?”

“We are talking.”

“I mean in private.”

I gestured around the bar. “Quiet night. This is about as private as you’re getting, so say your piece, then get out, Toby.”

Thankfully, a new customer took a seat a few stools away from him. I went to take her order and clear my head for a minute or two.

“That guy bothering you, Jules?” whispered Luc as he approached me. Luc worked the other end of the bar. He had an annoying sense of what he’d call chivalry, but which I found chauvinistic. At least Toby had that going for him; he didn’t treat me like an infant just because I lacked a dick.

“Just an old acquaintance,” I said, with what I hoped was a believable smile. “Owes me money is all.” Luc must have accepted the explanation, because he returned to his spot to refill the glasses of a couple of regulars.

I decided to look for something else to do rather than leave myself open for conversation with Toby. My hair required some fixing, of course. And I had a new pair of long silver earrings that grazed my shoulders, so I decided to play with those for awhile. All very important work, I might add.

“I really need to talk to you,” Toby said as I began obsessively wiping the bar down again. Though genuine seriousness touched his tone, I didn’t believe it for a second. It did seem, however, that he wouldn’t be leaving until he’d told me whatever it was he’d come there to say. Just in case it was an apology, I decided to hear him out.

“I’m taking a break in a half hour, depending on how busy we are,” I said, and then gestured to an empty booth at the back of the room. “Wait over there, but remember we kick people out for not spending money.”