

To the bartender who tends to more than just the bar

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Nonfiction

For Jenn

You think no one notices the way you remember everyone's orders, the Corona (no lime) for the guy with the Zeppelin shirt, the sweet tea vodka iced tea blend with extra fruit for the girl with the blue earrings, the cheap wine in the plastic bottles for the woman in the corner. You think we don't see the way your silhouette dips behind the bar, that your voice is drowned out by the clinking of the bottles and the creaks of the barstools sliding on old hardwood slats, and the locals trilling along to *Up on Cripple Creek*.

You think we don't notice the way you tend to our secrets, when I told you I was pregnant before I told my friends, the way you winked and concocted a drink that looked exactly like my regular drink but wasn't, for all those weeks. The way you hugged me when no one was looking, the way you whispered to me that I would be a great mom, as if you had sensed my uncertainty.

The way you tend to the band, too, clearing empty glasses from the ledge near their mic stands, refilling their water glasses, reminding the patrons between sets to tip the musicians.

The way you tend to your fellow bartenders, a gentle hand on the lower back as you scoot behind to clean up a spill, the way you restock the cooler before it's empty, the way you smile.

The way it doesn't even feel like we're in a bar, more like someone's living room, like there should be a recliner in the corner and a colorful macrame rug at our feet. The way you make us forget what we're escaping from.