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Boots

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Boots // Rachel Bevels

Ten o'clock. The depot's lights go out. He descends the stairs, trudging toward the business district. The air is thick - another heartless winter night. Tibbs pulls his coat collar tighter and lights a cigarette. The smoke hovers in the air, emitting an odorous fog. At the corner, the blonde notices him and adjusts a tight leather skirt. He slips a dollar in her bra and mumbles something about a rain check.

The train station comes into view just over his right shoulder. Throngs of people shuffle in and out, waiting for a cab back to significance. A whistle sounds, and Tibbs nonchalantly turns his head. Bright lights. The shadow of a young woman. Clickety-clack, clickety-clack. A scream. Brakes screeching. A clunk, and finally, a slow, rumbling stop. Tibbs lets out a puff of smoke, unnerved. As if he'd seen a bag blown away in the wind. He leans forward for a spit as the insignificants spill from the station front in every direction.

A bicycle speeds by, trailing Tibbs spit down the sidewalk. Tibbs turns sharply on his heels, leaving the station far behind him. The laces of his size twelve boots flap loosely against his size ten feet. Compensation. "Bigger shoes give the illusion of added height," he'd once been told. A few blocks down, his foot slips off the curb and into the sewage-ridden street. Tibbs eyes the sole of his shoe, and, with a profane grunt, continues his saunter toward the back-side of town, a mush announcing every step. Tibbs pulls his hat brim lower. No cars in the streets tonight. The neon lights of the clubs pierce the empty neutrality of the store fronts. Tattered 10-percent-off signs beckon from the windows to an audience of street lamps and rubble.

Coming upon Grendale, he stumbles into the empty pub and orders a whiskey. The bartender shoots him a puzzled look. "We don't sell drinks here," he rasps. Tibbs glances back at the door. "Is this not the pub?" "Nah, yer in the right place, but we don't sell no drinks." He stares at the bartender for a moment, flicks a butt to the floor, and strolls out into the night air. In the distance he hears a train chugging north.