



THE DRIFTER (BB'S JAZZ, BLUES, & SOUPS)

A young couple sat at the bar, speculating about a guy about their age who was sitting alone at a table near the stage, his worn military bag propped next to him.

A waitress had informed them that the drifter's girlfriend had dumped him in New York a few weeks earlier. Now he was *walking* to Phoenix.

"Apparently he only has seven dollars," the girl at the bar told her boyfriend, "and he's spending that on beer."

Her boyfriend looked at her sweetly. They were back together after a rough hiatus. Being reunited had brought with it a tipsy, exciting delirium, tainted slightly by the sour circumstances that had broken them apart.

Was the scruffy guy crazy? Of course: Who else would walk cross-country in the middle of winter?

"I want to talk to him," the boyfriend said.

"Don't," the woman said. "Leave him alone." But her boyfriend had already pushed away from the bar.

A moment later, standing before the drifter: "On your way West?"

"Yeah."

"Walking?"

"Uh-huh."

The drifter said something else, but the boyfriend couldn't make it out over the din. He nodded in feigned acknowledgement and wandered back to the bar.

Yeah, he was a little crazy all right. You could see it in his eyes. But the boyfriend's compassion had awakened. What would the drifter do? There was a homeless shelter nearby, but it closed hours ago. It was cold out. The couple went back and forth about the drifter's options, and about the virtue and danger of helping strangers.

"We should leave some money for him, so he can get a room somewhere," the boyfriend suggested.

"Won't he drink it?"

"Maybe. What if we leave it with the doorman? He won't get it until he leaves."

The two shared a moment. Their feelings for each other had now spilled outward; the world was the beneficiary.