THE FALL OF JAKE HENNESSEY
by P.J. MacLayne
EXCERPT

The flash of metal reflecting a blinking neon beer sign in the front window had Jake on his feet and halfway across the bar in a second.

“Settle down, Duane,” the bartender said, backing up a few feet.

Jake recognized Duane's type. Too skinny, pockmarks in his face, scabs on his arms, shaking so hard Jake didn't know how he remained standing. If Duane was crashing, he became doubly dangerous.

Chairs scraped as other customers moved out of reach of the steak knife Duane waved, aiming at everyone and no one. There'd be no happy ending to the situation, at least as far as Jake foresaw. He circled to get in behind Duane.

“Put down the knife,” said one of his friends from several feet away.

“Take it easy,” said the other.

Duane didn't pay attention. The weapon traced aimless circles in the air. He advanced two steps closer towards the bartender. “Don,” he slurred. “Don cheat me.”

“Nobody's cheating anybody,” the bartender said. “Put down your knife and go home and sleep it off.”

It was easy to predict Duane's next move. Jake had seen it repeated too many times. The druggie lunged at the bartender, but Jake reacted first and grabbed his arm. A dangerous maneuver, because tweakers often found bonus strength out of nowhere. He'd been in fights where it took three bouncers to subdue one meth head. Fate was on his side this time. The knife clattered to the floor, and a kick to the back of his knee ensured Duane did, too.

While all hell broke loose, with everyone yelling at Duane and Duane's friends yelling at everyone else, Jake slipped out the front.