

# The Curious Tale Of Tammy Flagg

By Michael Mort

Thomas Herdon was relaxing alone in the quiet library at the Morrison House, waiting for his girlfriend, Maryellen, to come down from their room for dinner, when his cell phone buzzed. He pulled it from his jacket pocket and said with a smile, “Yes dear?” He grinned even as he shook his head at what he heard Maryellen say, then he responded, “Of course, dear. Take your time. But I think I’ll go on to our table and have a drink. Oh, I’ve chosen the dinning room with the bar at the end of the hall.”

Thomas closed his phone and took an almost wistful glance around the richly appointed library. He so enjoyed the habit he and Maryellen had taken up, that of relaxing in fine local hotels one Friday night each month. It was an excellent way to decompress from their hectic lives in Washington, DC. He’d never actually been to this particular hotel before, but the furnishings in the library, indeed, the entire hotel, evoked a sense of the history and legend that Old Town Alexandria was steeped in.

He stood and purposefully flattened his suit jacket and tie, then smoothed his trousers. When he turned to walk slowly toward the dining room, the wooden floor creaked delightfully at him from under the pleasantly worn oriental rugs.

It was nearly 9:00, well past the prime dinner hour, and the intimate dining room was only sparsely filled with other patrons. One solitary man, very casually dressed, occupied the bar. The man glanced briefly at Thomas then returned to his drink. Thomas thought he looked oddly familiar, but he gave no indication that he recognized Thomas, so Thomas promptly dropped the thought.

As Thomas sat at their table—where he selected the seat facing the bar so Maryellen could view the entire dining room—he told the host, whose nametag read “Srinath,” to ask the waiter to bring him a vodka gimlet. Thomas glanced out the tall draperied window next to his table, and saw a beautiful full moon riding in the clear summer night sky above the peaked tiled roofs of the red brick buildings across the alley. It was going to be a perfectly serene evening.

Suddenly Thomas heard a female voice say amiably, “Hey, Srinath! I’ll take the bar tonight.” Thomas turned to watch the owner of that voice stride past the host and down the length of the bar. She plopped onto the stool at the corner nearest Thomas himself, next to the almost familiar solitary man, who took immediate notice of her.

Who could *fail* to notice her? She was stunning, but not in the usual sense of the word. Every aspect of her appearance and demeanor demanded attention, all at the same time. She was tall and slender, wearing a white tank top that was not exactly revealing but fitted her so tightly across the chest that nothing was left to the imagination. Between the bottom of that and the top of her extremely red and very short skirt, peeked a bare, taut midriff. And at the other end of those long and luscious legs were the strappiest and barest of four-inch heels. Sitting atop her bare shoulders and long neck was a perfectly oval face with red lips, a delicate nose and thin, dark, arching eyebrows, framed by a mop of bleached white hair that dripped off black roots.

The woman winked at him, and Thomas’s jaw dropped open. Before he could feel self-conscious about being so stunned by her, the man next to her engaged her in conversation, and the waiter delivered Thomas’s gimlet.

*Hooker*, Thomas thought, and he immediately started to consider the positive aspects of the other dining room. But before he could get the host's attention, the woman at the bar swiveled around and looked at him again. She pointed at him with an index finger which extended from a fist holding a martini glass that contained a pink liquid and a small round red fruit at the bottom. She spoke to him in a tone louder than was necessary. "Do you like your choice of cocktail? Are you content with that? Because this is *really* good. Next time, order a tomato water martini. I got them to call it the 'Tammy Flagg martini.' That's with two G's. It's the name my parents use with their fake identity."

This startling claim was so out of place that Thomas felt stunned yet again, and he briefly noticed the man sitting next to her do a double take as well. *What a captivating way to start a conversation!* he thought. But suddenly Thomas's view of the bar was obscured, and it took a moment, during which he almost tried to look around the person blocking his view, before he realized that it was Maryellen who stood before him, expectantly.

"Oh. Oh, Honey! You look...radiant," he stammered as he stood and dropped his napkin to the floor. While he dived down to pick it up, the waiter pulled Maryellen's chair out for her.

She pushed out her lower lip as she sat down. "I went to all this work to look nice for you and you didn't even see my entrance."

She did look nice, too. Nice and normal, especially compared to Tammy Flagg. Thomas couldn't help glancing over Maryellen's shoulder where he noticed a flash in Tammy Flagg's eye and a wry smile on her face before she turned back to her new companion.

"I'm sorry, dear," Thomas said. "I...I was just thinking about work."

Maryellen reached across the linen-covered tablecloth and beckoned for his hand with her upturned palm. He placed his hand in hers. She said soothingly, "Now you know the rules. We're supposed to decompress on these weekends. No work thoughts, just let yourself go."

Throughout the meal, Maryellen jabbered and Thomas pretended to listen, but he found himself hearing Tammy Flagg more clearly than his girlfriend. She obviously had just met this man next to her, but she engaged him with such energy and enthusiasm that Thomas felt a burning desire to be a part of their conversation, to learn more about this dramatic woman.

*Who is she?* Thomas was asking himself, when he heard Maryellen say, "You aren't listening to me at all, are you?"

Gathering himself, Thomas decided he had better force himself back to reality, away from Tammy Flagg. She was too flamboyant anyway. He looked intently at Maryellen, persuading the thought of everything—and everyone—else in the dining room out of his mind, and he said as tenderly as he could, "Let's leave and have dessert in our room."

As the two of them retired from the dining room, he cast a quick last glance at Tammy Flagg, who acknowledged him with a knowing smile and a tilt of her head. Thomas was completely unsuccessful in his attempt to focus on his girlfriend alone the rest of that night.

Those errant thoughts actually followed him for days. He decided that he wasn't so much obsessed as he was...*intrigued*. That Tammy Flagg person, or whatever her name was, bedeviled him so thoroughly that he committed himself, exactly one week later, to show up solo at the bar in the Morrison House around 8:30, in hopes of encountering her again.

She did not appear.

When Thomas asked the bartender about her, the man could not remember her in particular. Furthermore, he flatly denied having ever made a martini called the "Tammy Flagg special," although a martini with tomato water and a cherry tomato had been a special at the hotel for a long time. Thomas concluded that this made up drink name was part of the woman's eccentric

persona. He ordered the drink and liked it. By the time he had consumed a second one, Thomas decided he was being silly, approaching obsession even, over Tammy Flagg. He resolved he would not repeat this folly and went home.

Almost three weeks later, on a coolish late summer Thursday evening, Thomas realized his taste buds were demanding a Tammy Flagg martini at the Morrison House. He pulled on some blue jeans, threw on a faded polo shirt, and laced up some old jogging shoes over bare feet. He looked at his unusually casual appearance in the mirror and flatly denied the encroaching thought that he had dressed in hope of encountering the singular Tammy Flagg again.

Thomas pulled up to the Morrison House and casually tossed his car keys to the valet. The weather was a bit chillier tonight, somewhat windier, and the sky was partly obscured with clouds that passed faintly over the full moon. He slowly marched up the curved brick stairway. At the columned portico before the front door, he turned and let his eyes rest for a moment on the neat and romantically lit courtyard. He took a breath and tried to empty any thought of romance from his mind. Then he turned and pushed open the tall white wooden door. He stood in the entry hall as if unsure what to do.

It occurred to him that he hadn't enjoyed the library on his previous visit here in search of Tammy Flagg. Since this time his visit was supposedly for an entirely different purpose—one which he barely understood now himself—he turned right into the drawing room. He passed through that room and turned left through the colonial style mantled doorway into the library, the floor creaking pleasantly under his feet once again.

There, alone on the couch in the paneled room, he was startled to see a woman sipping a martini. Thomas *wanted* it to be Tammy Flagg, and with his first glance at the martini glass, he thought it might be. The glass held a pink colored fluid with a small round red fruit at the bottom. But upon inspection of the woman herself he realized that this could not be Tammy Flagg. She looked coolly elegant in a flowing white and green summer halter dress that came down over her knees. On her head she wore a broad white hat which had a long green ribbon trailing down the back, mingling with her golden hair, which flowed down to her elbows. Her skin was very white, but her fingernails and toenails were painted a dark purple, lending an eerie edginess to her otherwise dainty appearance. Her head was slightly bowed and the brim of her hat obscured her face. Still, that martini glass.... Thomas needed to see her face.

He cleared his throat. "Excuse me. Are you drinking a Tammy Flagg martini?"

The woman looked at him briefly. "No," she said simply, then she immediately lowered her head again, looking back into her lap. That's when Thomas noticed she was reading a book, which, by the looks of it's yellowed pages and worn edges, had been taken from an old collection somewhere.

In the instant that Thomas could make out the flash of this woman's face, he was certain she could not be Tammy Flagg. Although this woman's face had the same oval shape and slender nose as Tammy Flagg's, this woman's eyebrows were light colored. She was a true blonde.

"Sorry to disturb you," he said politely, and turned to leave the room; he needed to be alone.

Before he took two steps, he heard the woman say, "It's a Tammy Mudd special. That's with two D's."

Thomas spun instantly on his heels to face the woman again, his head jutting away from his body, his mouth agape, staring at her in disbelief. "Did I...were you..." he sputtered. She continued to look at her book, without a hint of flinching to acknowledge him.

"Good evening, sir." Thomas was startled by an approaching man who had entered the room noiselessly. He was smartly dressed in a finely tailored suit, and he had a broad smile on his face.

The woman said, “Oh, honey. I was just about to tell this charming gentleman that I’ve renamed my favorite drink the Tammy *Mudd* martini in honor of our coming wedding.”

Now her upturned face was visible to Thomas for long enough that he *did* recognize her as the same Tammy he had encountered four weeks ago, less one day, in the bar here. But, how...why...

The man sat next to her on the couch and said, “Next thing, you’ll be inviting him to the wedding itself.”

The new Tammy threaded her hand through her fiancé’s arm. “Well, maybe we should. He looks like a very fine and handsome man.”

Thomas was now so confused, he didn’t know what he was going to do. His mind was dizzy with the revelation that the woman he had supposedly not been obsessing over—but obviously had been—was in fact about to be married. He should just excuse himself.

“You are a such flirt, aren’t you?” the man said, with just the barest hint of jealousy in his voice.

“Oh, honey, you know there is no one for me but you,” Tammy said to her fiancé. But then she turned to Thomas with a coy smile and said, “Perhaps you would be so kind as to order us a round of these Tammy *Mudd* martinis, then join us here for a while?”

“That...that would be very interes—I mean *kind* of you,” Thomas said, letting his attraction to Tammy’s eccentric personality and unarguable beauty overcome his judgment.

Thomas fled to the bar and asked for three tomato water martinis to be delivered to the paneled library. He raced back, having been gone barely a minute, and found the couch in the paneled library empty.

“Over here,” he heard Tammy’s voice behind him. Thomas spun around. Tammy had mysteriously moved to the drawing room and was now seated alone by the fireplace. One of the hotel staff had just finished lighting the candles which occupied the firebox. This gave the room a warm, cozy glow. It was very romantic.

The young man greeted Thomas, and asked if there was anything he needed. Thomas told him that he had ordered some martinis and asked him to go tell the bar server that they were now in the drawing room. The young man raised his eyebrows, but bowed and backed out of the room.

“Where is your fiancé?” Thomas asked, glancing around the room.

“I asked him to leave us,” she answered slowly, smiling at him with sparkling eyes.

Suddenly an exciting chill filled Thomas like an electrical pulse.

“Please, sit next to me,” she said. “It seems to have gotten rather cool in here.”

He sat, and she threaded her hand through his arm. She leaned against him, and he thought she really did feel chilled. He put his arm around her and drew her closer to him.

He said, “After I saw you here a month ago, I came back hoping to run into you again.”

“Oh,” she said. “I like to come here mostly on nights of the full moon. It’s so romantic. Don’t you think?”

Thomas’s head was spinning. Her voice was so different than the first time he’d encountered her. So magical, lyrical. Her demeanor so sedate, so dainty, compared to the other time. Her appearance so transformed. *Maybe his recollection had been impaired by the full moon*, he chuckled to himself.

“I’m sorry, I have to ask you something,” Thomas said. “You are so...different from the first time I saw you here. How is that possible?”

“Well...” she started.

“There you are,” came a man’s voice from the entry way. The bartender stepped into the drawing room, carrying a silver tray with three martinis, the floor creaking under his footsteps. He was clearly happy to see Thomas. “I thought it might be you in here who ordered these, so I decided to deliver these myself. I’ve been wondering when you might come in again. I did a little research, asked a few people about that Tammy Flagg person you mentioned when you were in here some time ago.”

Thomas looked at Tammy with a smile, then returned his gaze to the bartender, who stood next to him. The bartender continued. “It turns out there *was* a Tammy Flagg who had that tomato water martini named after her. But that was over thirty years ago.”

Thomas cut him off. “That’s silly. Couldn’t have been.” He looked sideways at Tammy and said, “You’re what, maybe only thirty years old now? Just like me.” Tammy merely shrugged in response.

The bartender continued. “Oh, you’re so kind. I’m actually forty-five, but I didn’t work here then. She was probably about thirty though, and here for her wedding. But the night before the wedding—to a Mr. Mudd I think it was—she and the groom had a falling out over some man she had met in the bar here earlier. The fiancé found the two of them together in this very room, where he shot her and the man, then killed himself. Needless to say, the hotel tried to cover it all up, but it made the newspapers. She had been a rather prominent socialite, it turns out.”

The bartender stopped and looked at the three martinis he was still holding on the silver tray. “Say, do you really want to drink these all by yourself in here? Why don’t you come into the bar?”

Thomas, who had been staring at the bartender during his story, now felt another chill course through him. He gulped and slowly turned his head toward Tammy. He found himself alone now on the divan.

Thomas recalled the vaguely familiar looking man at the bar that first night. He asked, without looking back at the bartender, “Do you happen to know, what was the man’s name, the one she met at the bar, who the fiancé found here with her?”

“Oh, what was it? It was in the newspaper article they showed me. Thomas something. Yes, Thomas Herdon.”