



## **Tears of the Copper Queen** *You could hear her heart break*

Off the beaten Arizona track, down along the Mexican border and just south of Tombstone lies the nearly hidden gem of Bisbee Arizona. It was founded in 1880 as a mining town. It rests on a sharp slope nestled in the Mule Mountains, once rich in copper, silver and gold. It's home to just over 5,000 souls, about half of what it was in its heyday. The gold and silver are gone, but there is still copper there. The tunneled mines have given way to open pit strip mining south of Bisbee on flatter land.



The Copper Queen Mine, the most successful tunneled mine ran from 1885 until 1975 and has since been converted to a tourist venue. You can ride the miner's railroad down into the mine and get yourself a genuine case of miner's claustrophobia for just a few dollars. I did it and it's actually pretty cool.

The town has reinvented itself with only modest success. A curious influx of flower children, Haight-Ashbury expatriates and their offspring, have opened small shops for flowers and gifts to play to the tourist trade. I stayed in the 100-year-old Copper Queen Hotel, a delightful historic landmark, and of course the Copper Queen label sticks to everything.

The hotel staff recommended nearby St Elmo's Bar for live music for a Saturday night. The bar itself was a museum of local culture, but there was a cover band and a dance floor surrounded by tables and booths. The music was for the most part loud and upbeat with an occasional slow-dance piece thrown in for the old folks. The lighting was dim, using small spot lights on ceiling tracks pointed straight down.

A woman, probably in her 30s, sat alone at a table near the middle of the room, directly under one of the spotlights. She was an attractive woman dressed in her Saturday night finery, but what made her stand out was a striking red dress that sparkled under the lighting. The color was so compelling that the rest of the room seemed faded almost to black and white. She had a drink in front of her but paid it little attention. She seemed anxious self-absorbed given her surroundings.

A man came in and sat at her table. They engaged in an intense but quiet conversation that lasted only minutes, when he stood up and left. She sat there, at first frozen in quiet contemplation. People at the surrounding tables sat tensely, ignoring their drinks, ignoring the band, waiting. When the tears came, they were a flood running down her face spilling onto her dress. There were no sobs, no sounds, but you could hear her heart break. And with it, you could hear the whisper of hearts breaking among all who witnessed, remembering, and feeling her pain.

*Gene Ziegler, Chandler Arizona March 2019*