

# FORGOTTEN CITY

By Shawn Willick

Sitting here looking at the screen I am at a loss as to where to begin. As I am typing the last hints of autumn sun are glinting off the half full bottle of vodka. Visions of the summer are running through my head faster than I can follow. The Beach Boys are singing about a 409 as I reflect on the night before. "Drunk in Detroit is no way to go through life son." My father's words have been haunting me all afternoon. His advice and the throbbing pain of a hangover have been my only companions today. Looking back there has to be some meaning to it all.

As the needle of the tach hovers next to the 6 in the red he shifts the Dodge in to fifth. At 120 he eases past last the car in his way. There is nothing left on the expressway other than the lights of the city, an invitation to adventure. A glance in the mirror show headlight quickly fading, tonight they are nothing. If there was anyone else in the car they would see a small grin highlighted in the glow from the dash. They would also see a light dancing in his eyes. He is one step from madness.

He is getting closer to the city. Closer to the seedy dive he calls a bar. The tires squeal in protest as he exits the expressway a little faster than he should. A few more turns and he will be there. He can tell he is getting closer. The number of hookers has increased in the last mile, so has their size. He wonders, not for the first time, if this will be his fate for the evening. He shudders as his memories of a worse time play for him a porno of desperation, booze, and a working woman. The Dodge scrapes as he pulls in to the parking lot of heaven.

She looks up at the wail of screeching tires and the sound of a chassis protesting the abrupt kiss with concrete. What the hell is this maniac doing driving so fast in a parking lot? She forgets the entire incident as she notices her beer is far too light. "Give me another PBR!" The silver plastic tech sitting next to the empty bottle flashes 9:00. The little voice laughs as it informs her she is alone again. She shuts it up with a quick chug from her new beer.

He scans the parking lot as he exits the Dodge. The crisp white of the shiny new ride is a stark contrast with the dark and faded paints of the other cars. These land leviathans are still living, dinosaurs desperately clinging to a dying city and time. Looking around he is slammed with a vision of what this place looked like in the past. He can see the cars and bar as new. He can see the happy men and women coming and going without a care in the world. Tiger Stadium is lit up behind him. He can hear the fans cheering. He looks over his shoulder at what is left. The stadium

is dark. The only fans now are looking for a quick blowjob or some cheap drugs. What a waste. His body is aching for a drink.

He opens the door of the bar and is enveloped in sounds and smells both revolting and comforting. He asks Frank for forgiveness as he walks in. The crowd is light this early in the evening. He looks to see his spot near the pool table open and proceeds to the bar. The gentleman slinging drinks tonight is new. He wonders how the service will be as he orders a beer with a vodka chaser. His drinks arrive quicker than he thought and soon the amber goodness of cheap American beer replaces his fears of minutes before.

She sees him as the door opens. This must be the asshole who thinks the parking lot is a racetrack. She lets out a little giggle as he passes her to talk with the bartender. He looks like he stepped right out of the past. Black and white checkered shirt, black slacks and shoes. Complete with a black fedora. She checks her wallet as he looks her way. Making sure she has enough money to cover this evening's tab. She does not. The voice politely informs her she is quite screwed.

He looks over the bar after downing half his beer. There is a woman sitting near him and a few others scattered throughout the dive. The woman seems very interested in her handbag. With no more thought he retires to his table in the corner. Outside two cracks from a gun sound and a car speeds off. Everyone looks to the door. The only sound now is some poor girl singing about failed romances leaking from the few speakers placed haphazardly about the room. After a minute the patrons return to their drinks and continue with their lives.

Time passes and the bar starts to fill. More and more people are filtering through the door. Laughing and drinking he watches each one pass. The pretty little waitress comes by to see if he needs a refill. He thinks she is an art student. He has asked her out before only to crash and burn. Secretly he resents her. She has her whole life ahead. She will move on from here, maybe become famous, maybe get married and have a family. He makes small talk with her about work, school, music, and movies. She takes his order and moves on to flirt with a couple of frat boys playing Golden Tee. His vision returns to the woman at the bar.