

# Cantina

by Brian Michael Barbeito

It's good enough. Spacious. Then the cards but I am not for cards. Sasha directs the people, helping them, at ease and happy even. Strangers that have found a common denominator in games. A brotherhood and sisterhood I can't understand. I watch. I see green limes somewhere. I wonder for a second if I am a lime green alien in disguise since I never join in on the games. At certain intervals they pause to ask how come I don't participate in anything. I have to think up a polite answer. It's like there is a larger game that just never quits and everyone, like it or not, is on the roster.

The woman at the bar is drowning herself in Coronas. Too fast. She is self absorbed in a peculiar way. She has done this before but doesn't care, can't care, or won't care. Not thirty minutes later she has drunken four bottles or more. Then she wavers. She gets up and loses balance, a balance she never really had. She hits the bar chair with her head but instead of succumbing bounces back like a jack in the box or resourceful pugilist. Nobody sees it but me. I judge her or observe her and she seems not well.

I walk out for air. I break my own rules and walk alone to the far edge of the parking lot. A car pulls up with five people, all male. They get out. Souls with a look and aura you would immediately avoid. I watch them in a middle way, meaning not in a confrontational manner but not so as to appear meek either. Besides, I want to know their whereabouts foot by foot and inch by inch. One walks too fast in my direction. I watch his hands and it is the second rule I have broken in minutes.

Sometimes habits learned in sports can be useful in other arenas besides, such as how in hockey one learns to watch always the chest of the opponent, the middle of the chest, because the stick, the hands, even the arms and legs and shoulders can fake you out, but the centre of the chest cannot and has to go where it goes. But here I want to see what is in his hands. There is something cupped in his left hand and the fingers of his right hand are open and normal. He

is perhaps a lefty. As he gets closer there is a climatic point of sorts but it recedes. I realize he is just a fast walker and it is only his wallet or something pedestrian in his hand. They pass.

I swing around the other way and look to the lights of a gas station. Then I glance back nonchalantly just to see if they keep going, to make sure nobody is doubling-back, because I am still alone with only the quiet one note song electric lights sometimes make. They disappear behind the door and there will be no trouble. It's good enough that drama has let the night alone. Let things be what they are, says the night. But the goals are dull, the aspirations too low, and the evening whiles, well they wile watch wait and wonder without a real promise. I am an itinerant palm reader searching for clues and kismet but the hours have no fate line one way or the other.

It will have to be good enough. Constricted now is the night and somehow devoid of the original spaciousness. It will have to do, this empty adyton that shows nothing and tells little. It's good enough.

