

The Town, Part 1

by Mark Stratton

Crossing the old bridge he drove into the town. Sunlight flashed through the gaps in the old truss bridge. Unless the bridge itself was hiding the clouds, there weren't any to be seen. The river below was calm, almost turgid in the summer heat.

The tires sought the ruts in the grating that served as a road bed. He tried fighting it, but backed off a bit, ready to yank on the wheel if need be. Semi's rumbling along rattled the decking, giving him the sensation the bridge was shaking. He tried to ignore it.

"I'd hate to drive across that drunk," he thought to himself as the car returned to solid ground, finding himself on the main street of the town. A block and a half from the bridge, he slowed as the traffic light turned yellow, coming to a full stop at the intersection, nobody else in sight.

Waiting for the light to turn, his mind wandered wondering how it was that bridges of this sort collected stories. Old thru truss bridges with grated deckings, or any older bridge for that matter. The stories seemed to have died out since the concrete overpass type of bridge replaced them. Not nearly as romantic, he mused. Nor as interesting as stories of men falling and being caught in the concrete piers supporting the bridge, entombed as long as the regulars were willing to peddle the legends at the corner bar on Friday nights to new customers as closing time approached. Or that the decking, ruts worn in with age, was actually installed upside down which is the real reason the ride is so awful and scary. Were there suicide stories, complete with heartbreak and gun-toting daddies whose daughter had been disgraced?

He looked up and down the street, noting that every other shop on the street was either an antique shop, flea market or craft store. He

wondered how many would be closed in a year, joining the other empty storefronts that would never regain their former glory. The bid to paint the fading town as 'historic' with brick corners at the intersections and newish old fashioned lamps that were meant to conjure up that nostalgic feeling for an era that never was, when life was simpler, and...

He was jarred out of his thoughts by the honking horn of a car behind him alerting him to the change in the traffic light. It was now green. He jammed his foot into the gas pedal in response, barking the front wheels a bit as he lurched through the intersection a bit too fast for comfort.

His mind a whirl with thoughts of how this town was like any other smallish town, he made his way down the main street, passing the old high school that now served as the middle school. As he crested a small hill he thought to himself, "It's just a town, that's all it is."

It was about that time he noticed the flashing lights of a police cruiser behind him. He cursed quietly as he pulled over, the squad car falling in behind him. They both came to a stop and he put the car in park, shutting off the engine. Rolling down the window, he rested his hands on the steering wheel and waited. He didn't have long.

"I never expected to see you here again, Donovan." said the officer after he had made his way to the drivers window, ticket book in hand. "What's it been, four-mebbe-five years?" Cole Donovan could see the disdain through the sunglasses the cop wore.

"Yeah, something like that," he replied. His hands hadn't moved from the ten and two position he'd assumed after he'd opened the window. Cole turned and looked up saying, "You haven't changed at all, Dub. Not a bit."

"Yeah, we'll just see about that." said Dub Hartman. "Get on out of that car, Donovan. You know the drill." Hartman stepped back from the car, his hand going towards his holstered sidearm.

Cole Donovan sighed and made to get out of the car. "Just a town, right? Who the hell was I trying to kid?" he thought to himself as he was doing so. He did indeed "know the drill" and knew the next few hours weren't going to be any fun at all. Except for Dub Hartman, that is.

