

January 1980: Avenue A and St. Mark's Place, East Village

by Nonnie Augustine

In the St. Mark's Bar and Grill romance is a speedy thing, a blurred whirl of grope, kiss, connect. The tricky thing is timing: to leave in time for the boozy love of the hour to carry through to full, naked contact. Some succeed of course. Others overstay, hang past the crucial decision making passion swept minute and, too drunk to catch the wave, the wind, the fast train, stagger, blink, moan in the shock of lights-up and rough demands to leave now; no chance of last call one more time. Clive, sick of the assholes, sick of being a bouncer and aching to get home to his bed and later his photography, looms, an insensate bulk, deaf to protests. Who'd want to stay anyway? Once the overheads are flicked on, and the mean scale of the place, the cigarette butts, flakes of bar napkin, dirty glasses, revolting stretch of floor trash, and the haze of smoke and Co2 are exposed, even the 4am streets are more appealing so the leftovers caught in the glare give up and leave. Chrissy, who has expertly paced her own shots through the night as she pours drinks for regulars, (if any of them could be called "regular") tourists—from the boroughs, uptown Manhattan, New Jersey and beyond, (maybe there to drink because the Stones had boozed in the place and sung about it) unplugs the jukebox and the sudden quiet deafens. She counts the cash. Clive mixes a Tanqueray and tonic, keeps his eye on the barmaid and the money. Young Gomez runs his mop and pushes chairs back around the half dozen tables, hoping Chrissy will let him walk her home again, but he's doubtful. By the time she's finished with the register, they've each recovered some peace, some reprieve from the drunken din and all that they've seen

and heard during the long hours of keeping a lid on the night's frenzy, violence or near to, loneliness, fast lust, and punk rock.

