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Beer and Pool and the Gravel Voice

by Michael Catherwood

Pink and I sat in Walt's New Frontier Tavern drinking pitchers of beer after the Florence Days Parade wound down. The bikers were doing burnouts on the floor of the bar, and the fumes from the tire smoke stung our eyes. The matchstick bartender threatened to call the police, so the bikers roared and backfired out the open front door. Fezzes lined the bar as Shriners drank martinis from the their stools while a one-armed guy in a Vietnam Vet cap ran the pool table.

Pink thought he'd challenge him and put his quarters up. "Are you next?" the one-armed man asked, coming back from the bar; his voice scratched with gravel and cigarettes. "Yeah," Pink said. "For beers?" "Sure," the pool player said. Pink racked the balls while I drank the beer. Then I noticed bugs swimming in our pitcher. I motioned for Pink to come over. "Jesus, what are those?" "Ticks, I think." Then the one-armed pool player walked over. "Ticks alright. Look up. They drop down from the ceiling. He keeps the dog in here at night." He laughed, "No charge for meat." The tire smoke hovered behind the fezzes.