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Lying Lights

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Lying Lights

By Samuel Cooley

The bartender is staring again. Every now and then, she'll glance at the door behind the bar. It's the last stop she has to make before closing the bar, but she can't do it until I leave. I bring the whiskey to my lips and take my time drinking it.

"Getting pretty late, don't you think?" she says.

"Don't know what you mean. Night's barely started," I try to say, but the words slur. Her stare turns into a scowl, and she stomps towards my section of the bar.

"Not anymore," she says, grabbing the glass from my hand, "it's officially closing time."

"I was drinking that," I say, staring at my suddenly empty hand.

"Not anymore. Find someone to pick you up. If you're still here when I get back, I'm calling the cops," she says before heading into the back of the bar to finish closing. I'm too busy wondering what she means by find someone to respond. It's 3 am, who am I going to call?

I leave a dollar tip and stumble outside to figure it out. My truck is the only one in the gravel lot, the beautiful blue paint and old dents shining in the bar's outside light. Doesn't look like there's anyone to find. I hop into the driver's seat and get on the road, heading towards Greenwood.

Going through Greenwood to get to my house is safer than going through downtown, less cops waiting for a mistake. The only problem is that it's a long drive. I always need something to hold me over or else I'd fall asleep halfway. Luckily, I keep some whiskey in the back just in case. I imagine the burn on my tongue when I reach back to grab it.

Suddenly, my car leaps into the air like one of those gymnasts, barely sticking the landing as the tires swerve. I don't remember there being speed bumps on the street. Somewhere behind

me, there's a sound, sharp and keening. More importantly, there's nothing else in the road in front of me. Only streetlights breaking up the darkness.

I wince as one of them passes over me, reflecting off my red hood. They should really make those things less bright. Someone could—

I slam my foot on the brake so hard my tires squeal. My hood's red, why is it red? My next swig of whiskey tastes like dirt, but I force more and more down until I'm warm enough to open the door. The color is heavier out there, like a fresh coat of paint. The dent is worse. I must have hit a deer or... the cry from earlier marches up the road, echoing in my memory.

A deer. That's it. It sounded a bit odd but there's nothing else I could have hit. Nothing. I get back in my truck and keep driving. It isn't long before the streetlight fades in the mirror, replaced by another and another as I continue down the street. I take a swig of whiskey, but my body just gets colder.

"It was a deer," I whisper to the lights, practicing my lies until one of us believes them.