

A Magical Night in Sweet Home

By Kenn Hartmann



Flipping through channels of socio-economic doom & gloom, I pause to watch the unwatchable Sons of Anarchy psychodrama – of course I’ve never been able to watch that celebrity dance show either. Instead, I shut the bumper box off & go for The Apocalyptic Ride down the Ike, an urban stretch of highway that cuts the western heart of Sweet Home. Ah, the adrenaline joy on this rare occasion when there’s not enough traffic to be a hindrance to a bat out of hell. I stop at the Born Losers, MC clubhouse on Madison just east of Cicero. James, the VP of the BLMC steps from the shadows, greets me heartily & buzzes us inside. He calls me ‘Daddio’ but introduces me as ‘Mister Whack Fo’ Daddio.’ James was

a founding member of the club back in 1974, now an elder statesman of spirited enthusiasm for the entrepreneurial endeavor. He gives me the VIP tour, past the card table & dance floor, past the kitchen & motorcycle garage, into the Car Wash & out onto a side alley glowing beneath the rarefied electric city light. There’s even a party going on next door. A couple of beat rice-burners lean against the brick wall like discarded bicycles. This isn’t ambiance; it’s the real deal.

Tending bar inside is Mz. Delicious. You know how bikers are with road names, code names & aliases. Personally, I haven’t found one that’d stick. I can’t help what gets said behind my back. Mz. D is the club treasurer so despite her friendly, carefree attitude as a server, she does have the no-nonsense confidence of someone who knows how to take care of business. She says, ‘I just love the camaraderie & excitement that happens in great facility like this.’ The place fills with revelers; someone is throwing a birthday bash & the party-ers mingle. DJ Phil takes over the music booth & cranks up the jams. He gets bodies onto the dance floor. I wish I could writhe around like that but my appendages just don’t cooperate. Maybe some old school steppin’ would be easier on my bones.

Then there’s CW. The ancient one. He’s probably the only dude on planet earth to have enjoyed his tour of Viet Nam. How could that be? ‘With my thigh pockets brimming with South East Asian weed & 45’s strapped to my waist, how could it not be? I was stoned, armed & doing whatever the hell I liked,’ CW boasted. One day to avoid a long hike back to base, he commandeered a 350 Honda from a local. An American MP demanded he return the motorcycle. CW casually mounted the bike, flipped off the MP & rode back to base. Nowadays, the young guys call CW because they know he’s always available to ride the far range to anywhere, anytime. He keeps his Harley ready to roll. ‘I still do whatever the hell I please & riding pleases me most.’

Heading out west, the Chicago Cops conduct a routine roadblock across the eastbound lanes of Madison beneath the Viaduct. Cars at the back of the pack pull U-ies or bale down side streets. I kick it up a notch beneath the cold autumn moon, Halloween sky. I gun it down the ramp onto the Eisenhower, the Ike, 290 westbound hellacious heart. The wind is as heavy as the breath of God as I twist the throttle, confident with my new tires, new brakes, new chain. My shifter shaft is still broken from an accident last spring. But so? The shifter’s tied on with a shoestring. On the six-lane wooded industrial tributary Kingery Highway, a ghostlike deer darts through my head lit beam. I brake hard & holler, ‘get out the f’n road!’ The animal disappears. I feel lucky. What a night to be alive. I kick it down a notch & keep my eyes peeled. Damn lucky. Whew.

Kenn Hartmann

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