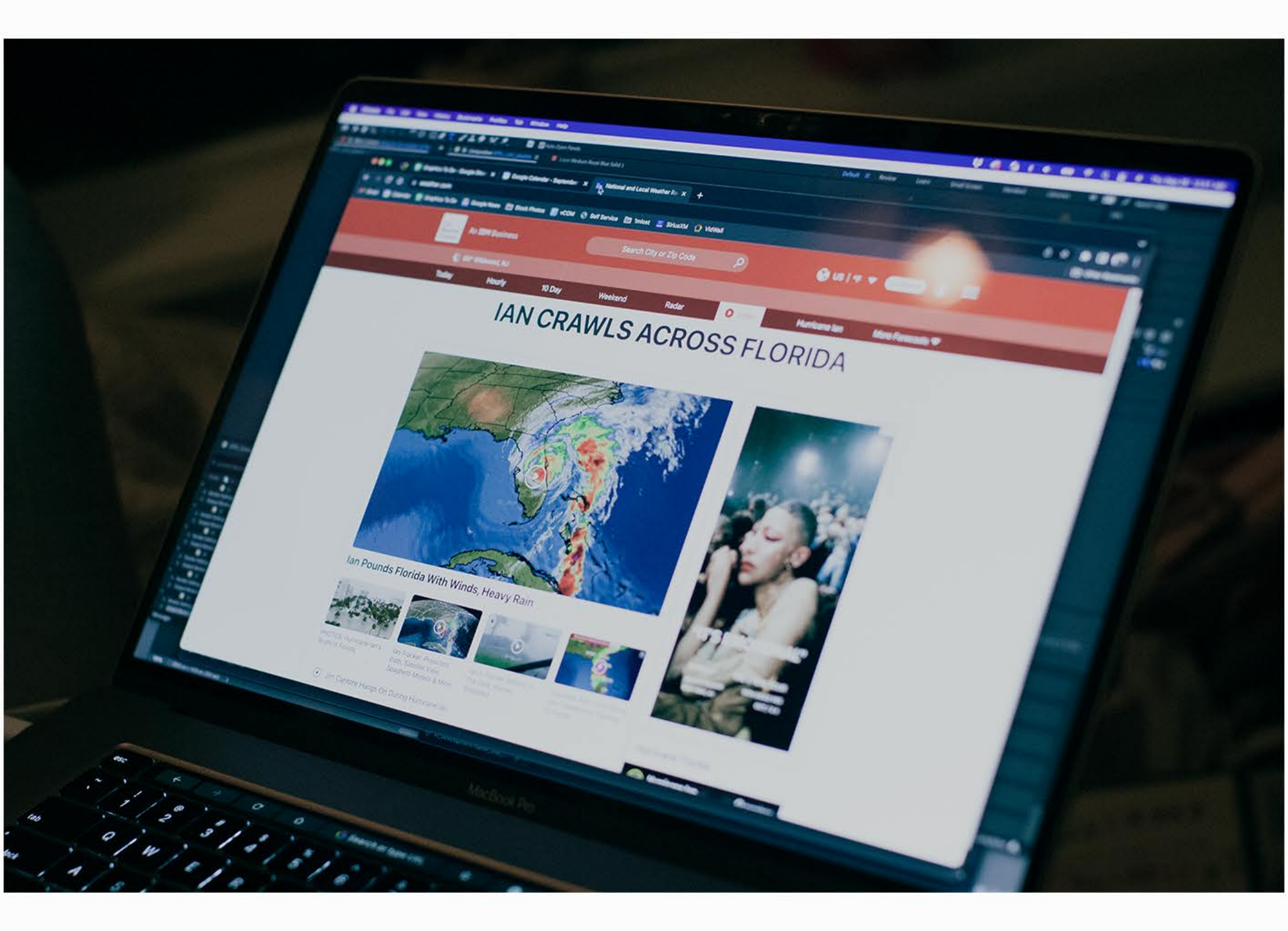
1mlost: in The Wildwoods

NEW JERSEY
WILDWOODS
welcome to the

Smoking cigarettes is a filthy, terrible activity. But few others lure me out to the porch at 10:45 on a rainy, chilly night. That's how I meet Jerry. Jerry just pulled up in his small white unmarked delivery truck. I'm surprised by the hour. Jerry has been driving for 13 hours and is due to start a new shift in 7 hours. Jerry notices my motorbike and asks if I ride bikes. We complain about each other's jobs like an old married couple and he ends by asking if I've ever gone to The Race of Gentlemen. I immediately remove my top hat and ask, "Sir, what is this Race of Gentlemen you speak of?" "It's in Wildwood. Motorcycles and cars racing on the beach. People dress all crazy, like vintage." I wish Jerry safe travels, snub out my cigarette and take my package.

I have never been to Wildwood, NJ. My family always went to the tamer, Long Beach Island., about 35 miles north. All I know is it has a boardwalk, amusement rides, and one hell of a good name. I'vte never been to a gathering of motorcycle people and was curious why they never struggle with waning attendance. The week before I'm set to leave a massive hurricane Ian forms in the Gulf of Mexico. Ian is threatening to bring lousy amounts of rain to the East Coast for race weekend. I check the info on the official website and it emphatically reassures me the race will happen rain or shine.


IAN CRAWLS ACROSS FLORIDA
Ian Pounds Florida With Winds, Heavy Rain

Up at 3:45am on Friday morning. I have to sign in to my day job in about 6 hours, but also need to ride a little over 200 miles to the southern tip of the Jersey Shore by 9 to pick up my press pass for the event. The township where I live is called Deerpark for a good reason and riding the roads around here just before the break of dawn feels a little like Russian roulette. On these empty roads I startle a few deer as I ride by at 65 mph. At first light, I'm skating around the outside of NYC, picking up the Garden State Parkway. These highway jaunts feel fruitless, and the only amusement I get is from the names of the rest areas: First Jon Bon Jovi Rest Area, next Judy Blume Rest Area and finally, obviously, Frank Sinatra Rest Area. After about 3 hours of this dead straight, dead flat 3 laner, I'm greeted with a sign for "The Wildwoods." I'm not a beach person, and this is the first time I've ridden my bike to the beach. I much prefer the actual wild woods, but 2 miles from my destination, the smells of the beach are bringing back happy memories of childhood summers.

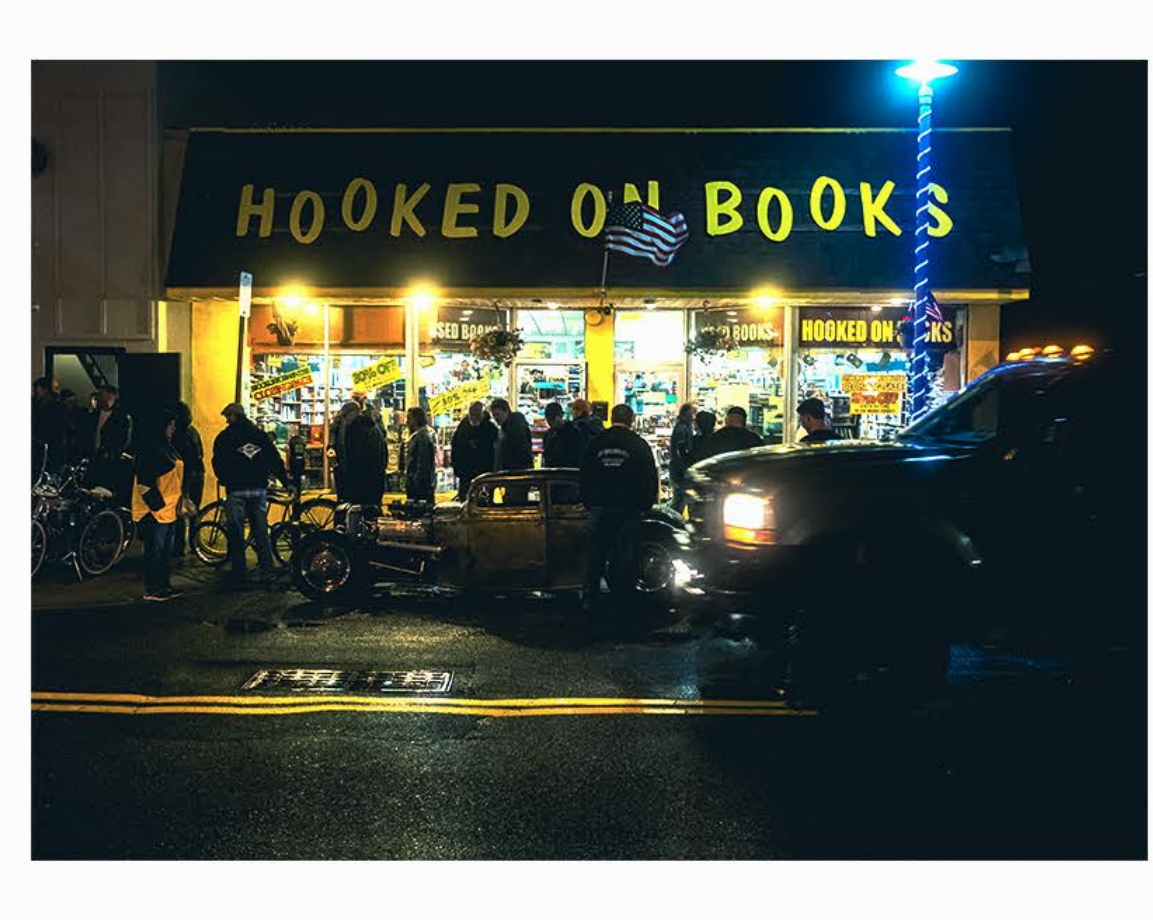
DUNKIN' DONUTS
DRIVE THRU
Regular Cash 3.55
Regular Credit 3.65
Diesel 4.79

Wildwood is empty for the most part since the off-season has gotten underway. I see a couple of people driving around on rusty choppers and pass many antique cars parked along the streets. It's 9:00am and the press registration has opened up, so I head to the beach. The club that organizes the even are hard at work on the sand, setting up circus tents, seating, and a makeshift bar. A line of antique hot rods is forming next to a swap meet for various car parts on memorabilia. The combination of rusty cars, sandy beach, hand painted signs is a photographers paradise. The entire scene is reminiscent of another time and framed beautifully by a large wooden roller coaster that juts out into the ocean on a long pier. The wind is kicking so hard that it's blowing sand into my eyes. I wander around snapping a few shots, looking for the table where my press pass is waiting. After 15 minutes of finding only empty tables and chairs, I ask a lady wearing a badge where I can get my press pass. She says they're not setup yet and that I should come back later. I still need to find my hotel, setup a workstation and prep for the start of my shift in 45 minutes, so I quickly abandon my effort and get out of the whipping wind.

Heading down Atlantic Avenue, I quickly realize I've booked a one-star motel, nowhere near the event. After passing roughly 75 decent looking places with VACANCY signs ablaze, I pull into the Jolly Roger. They let me check in at 9:30, and they serve coffee all day, so I can't begrudge the distance from the event. I quickly setup a makeshift desk for work and give my phone a look to see what I've missed in the last 5 hours. An instagram alert informs me that the race has been cancelled. I'm writing this a week later and still don't have a straight answer as to why the event was cancelled or if I will receive a refund for cost of the tickets. I'm not going to candy-coat it, I can't stand being at the Jersey Shore. This burn needs some kind of salve. I quickly order room service from the beachside hotel next door and promptly devour a very excellent breakfast. I finish up work and my spirits rise. Outside , the remnants of Hurricane Ian are misting the streets and whipping up sand. I could use a beer but I'm approximately 1.2 miles from the nearest bottle and have a flask full of whisky. It's 5:45, the night won't end well.

Jolly Roger

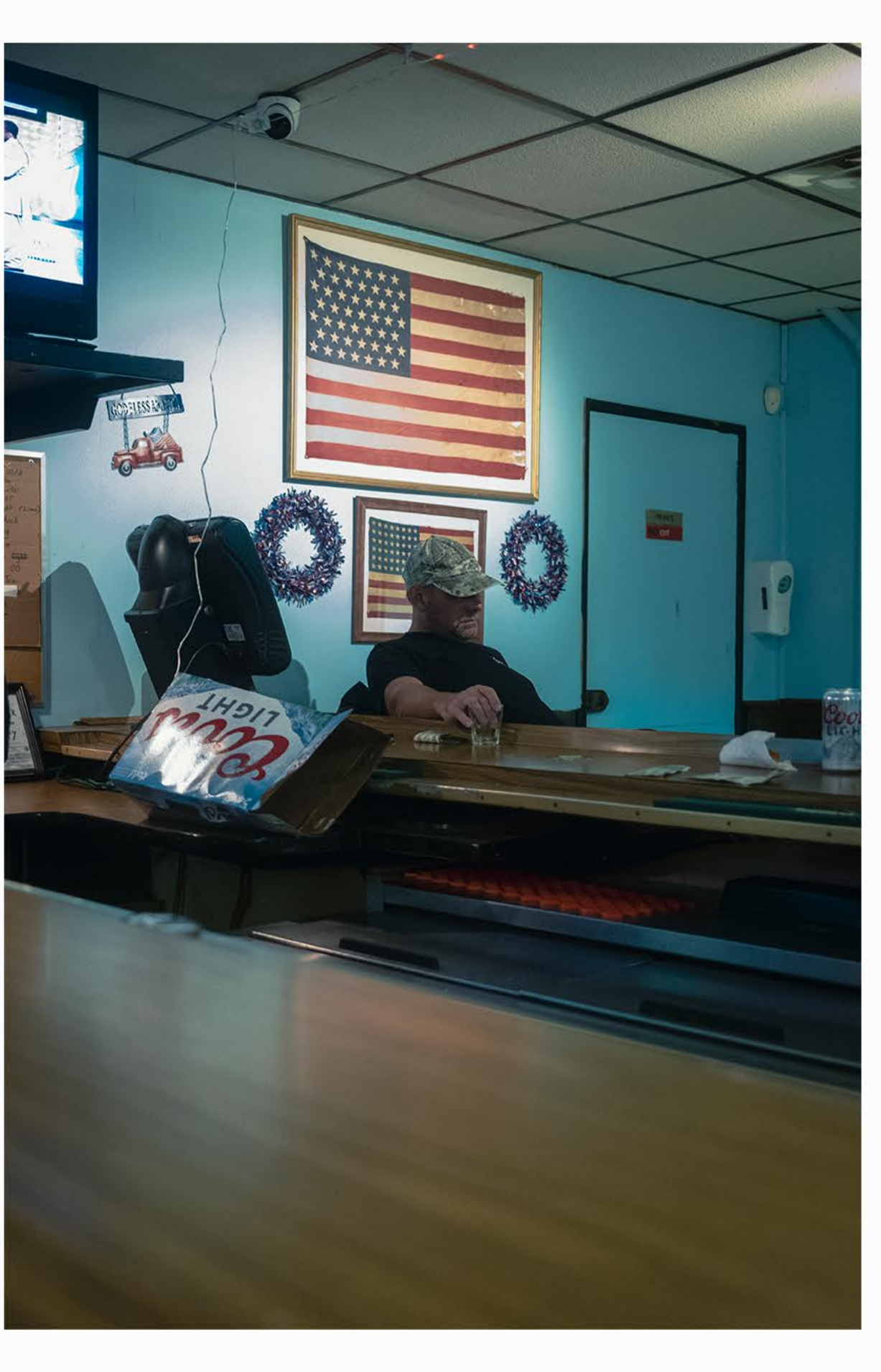
Time to make lemonade. I put on a semi storm-worthy jacket and head out to explore The Wildwoods. The organizers of TROG have moved the evening's concert to a local bar and grill called The Cove. I take the 1.2 mile walk down the boardwalk to check it out. The parking lots are littered with tarp covered hot rods. I eat 2 slices of pizza under a sheltered counter on an empty boardwalk. Outside of The Cove I find a line forming in front of a used book store. Hooked on Books is completely empty at 9pm. The shopkeep is looking dutifully bored of his station and the only other occupant is :lounging: on the floor by the back shelf.



It is a treasure trove, but requires significant curiosity. The modern literature is divided by "men" authors and "woman" authors. I skip the battle of the sexes and browse the "classics." Used book stores can be an oracle and I like to grab books that call to me. The poems of Herman Hesse is a book I can't leave behind. I open it to a random page and get this;

How heavy the days are.
There's not a fire that can warm me,
Not a sun to laugh with me,
Everything bare,
Everything cold and merciless,
And even the beloved, clear
Stars look desolately down,
Since I learned in my heart that
Love can die.

I decide to skip the party and head to a local's bar. 'Irene's Good Night' is another half mile north and it's really starting to rain and blow. On the way, I stumble upon Binn's Motor Inn. The outdoor chopper party was supposed to take place here tonight and the balconies are full of open doors, the parking lot chopped up motorcycles. They are having a good time, maybe a better time in spite of the weather. This group of friends rents out the entire motel every year for the races. They invite me for a drink but Good Night is calling. Irene's is fairly full but I manage a corner spot at the bar. All sorts of characters stream in and out: the man from Glasgow who flew to Boston and rode 4 hours down on his electro-glide, the 30 year old truck driver with 5 kids, whose mom died young and just wants to give his kids a real family, the married couple that know the bartender and order a flight of beers. The beer is really good and cheap. I step outside with the trucker and we smoke a joint. He tells me about the time his driving partner convinced him to take the bus into Los Angeles. The only time he ventured from his truck during his travels. The youth start arriving so I quickly head out.



It's a long walk home and it's been a day that started at 3:45am. I'm heading back to sleep and walk by what looks like a large shed or outbuilding with a sign that just says "bar." I step into the American Legion 184, and get many odd glances, so I ask the nearest person if I need a membership to drink there. He replies, "I don't know. I don't work here." It's a good enough answer so I sit down at the bar. My counterpart across the way, sits with his hat covering his eyes. He never moves, he never speaks. Just sits with his fingers in an empty double rocks glass.
I ask the bartender why there is an English dictionary behind the bar. She smiles , "I hide stuff there. The last place anyone would look."

It's after 1 and I really must find my bed. The rain is coming in waves and I'm in a particularly bad one. I decide to have a last drink to wait out the heavier waves of Hurricane Ian. I glance around and see a sign in the distance spelling HURRICANE. Only the HUANE are lit. As I get closer, I see the bar's full Christian name is Hurricane Bikini Bar. It's a "gentlemen's club." I drag my soaking self inside. The club is laid out with a horseshoe bar to one side of a small stage with 2 poles. I find an empty seat at the bar with my back to the stage. The bartender ignores me like a true pro for 15 minutes. A woman in a red lace neglige sits down beside me and asks if I'll buy her a drink. I take notice of the matching red bandaids covering her nipples and plainly ask, "so do you work here?" Suddenly I have the attention of the bartender and the drinks are flowing. I watch the show for a time, but it's not really my scene. The entranced men throwing money on stage for attention are at least as interesting as the acrobatic, semi-nude performers.

Hurricane Bikini Club

After some pushiness, I agree to pay for a private dance. $20 for 4 minutes. The employee takes me to a room behind the DJ with dingy tan couches. I recognize another man in the room as the guy who throws twenty dollar bills on stage. He is in some kind of zoned out state with a woman upside down on his lap. I'm not really into the experience of the private dance and after 4 minutes, the dancer gets frustrated by my lack of enthusiasm, says my time is up and leads me back to the bar. The woman in the neglige and bandaids appears again and asks if I will buy her a drink. I play the game and get myself and her a drink. It's 3 o clock so I stumble out of the Hurricane and into the real Hurricane. It's a one mile walk back to the Jolly Roger. My boots are taking water and they slosh and squish with each step. The rain is horizontal and I can't see but somehow find my way to my room. I strip out of my soaked clothing and flop down on the bed. My books! The poetry of Herman Hesse, abandoned in the back room of the Hurricane Bikini Bar!

I wake up at 11:30 to surprisingly nice weather, a cancelled race, a headache, and two missed FaceTime calls from my family. The balcony doors are leaking and there is a puddle of water collecting in the middle of the room. Although I have the room booked another night, I decide to make a break for it. I quickly throw my wet clothes in a side case, and check out of the Jolly Roger. I pick up Rt. 206 deep in South Jersey and ride that road all the way home. I get back as the sun is setting.

The race of gentlemen was a bitter pill. The organizers provide scant reasoning as to why the races were cancelled. I infer that the city shut down the event due to the threat of lightning and coastal flooding. The previous weekend, an unsanctioned car enthusiast meet-up ended with 2 people dead due to reckless driving down Atlantic Avenue. In the end, no one raced on the beach that weekend. On Sunday I took my daughter to the zoo. Come Monday, the floodwaters engulfed most of the beach in The Wildwoods.

TROG
CLASSIC & VINTAGE CARS
PAID PARKING

photo stolen from instagram (@OilersCarClub)