

# Golems

by Michael Phillips

The place is awash in dull-red and sickly-yellow light. A confederate flag is tacked to the ceiling, unimaginative lingerie hangs on a wire above the bar, bras of black and white. It's loud, music you hate, so loud you can hardly hear the little voice in your head telling you you'd be happier leaving. The woman behind the bar has long hair, dirty-blonde, dressed in faded jeans and a white half-shirt. She'd almost be pretty, if she were really there, if her pale-blue eyes really saw you. You order a drink, a Cape Cod. It's a classy drink for such a classless place. The woman, in fact, has to ask you what it is before sliding it to you in a cheap plastic cup. It's mostly ice and cranberry juice, the vodka merely an after-thought.

You sip your shiny red attempted alcohol, hoping to feel something rather than nothing. Johnny Cash begins to sing about one tragedy or another, you've heard them all and you don't care. However, as the man in black tells you his troubles, the woman in white takes to dancing on the scuffed wood bar. You look up, she's all motion and no life. She's an illusion of sex, no heat, no kisses that feel like bites, or bites that feel like kisses. She's a golem, a machine set to task. Her black leather boots slam and skitter, scratch and further scuff the pitiful bar, home to so many weak drinks.

You leave your still-born Cape Cod, barely touched, but it barely touched you, which seems fitting. The surrounding emptiness is too much, the golem too sad to watch. Lifeless life, stopping when the music stops. You leave your cash on the bar, probably too much, but enough to get you somewhere else. You don't know where you belong these days, but you know it's not here. You leave and don't look back.

The night air is cold on your face, cold like you, through and through.