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Right Here in Clover City

by Carl Stanislaus

Pool here is not a place where one swims,
nor mutual transportation for commuting workers.
Here, it is a rack of colorful, numbered balls
on a cushioned rimmed table, with six leather pockets,
played with varnished cue sticks, chalk
and careful calculation.

Sitting on a glass display above the cigars,
a monkey figurine mimics "See no evil, hear no evil,
Do no evil." Signs admonishing patrons not to
swear, gamble or loiter are summarily ignored
by those doing their monkey business under the table,
hoping the management will turn a blind eye.

Young men, warned away from this "den of iniquity,"
have long since grown into wrinkled old men
who gather daily for dominoes, snooker or cards.
They commune in this smoky haze,
while concentrating spit toward brass spittoons,
or some greenhorn's shoes.

Nowadays girls in male attire wander in,
their feeble masquerade fooling no one.
Sometimes they try their hand at billiards;
more often they get change at the register
for the dispenser in the men's room
offering handkerchiefs, combs and condoms.

