



1984

## Loretta

J. V. Brummels

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Loretta · *J.V. Brummels*

“... she’s a roadhouse queen, makes Texas Ruby  
look like Sandra Dee.”

—Rodney Crowell

The first any of the local men laid eyes on her  
was one drizzling Saturday in early fall when every-  
body has business in town. Lightfoot and I’d  
just sat down in Del’s to a pitch game with LeeRoy  
who was just telling us just what everybody’s business  
was when she strides through the door and says, *tequila*.

Think of a sawdust bar  
in a sawed-off burg.  
Think of a thunderhead  
of hair and flashing eyes  
in jeans and boots.  
Think of a bunch of men  
at their nose-picking worst.

Del, facing the cash register, backs up two steps  
towards the bar, turns unprepared, catches the full  
force of her and takes two steps back. Spread out  
on the keys of the register like he’s guarding it,  
he reaches behind him, brings a bottle off the shelves  
by feel and hands the neck to her at arm’s length.

Think of Neal Scrim’s eight-ball  
losing its English halfway across  
the tattered green felt.  
Think of LeeRoy pushing his chair  
back on two legs for a better view.  
Think of LeeRoy falling backwards,  
smashing the chair to kindling.

She lays some money down, says, *keep the change*,  
and turns on one heel. She’s out the door before  
I realize my mouth’s open, before LeeRoy thinks  
to get up, before Scrim scratches, before Del  
can turn around and hit the cash register twice  
to make it stop going off like a pinball machine.

Think of men in a bar  
pushing up the backs of their hats,  
shrugging down in their jackets.  
Think of beer going sour  
as milk in their glasses.  
Think of Lightfoot all the time  
carefully counting the deal to himself.

*Who*, says LeeRoy after time has perceptibly passed,  
*was dat?* Neal Scrim, sitting on the edge of the pool  
table, has got his cue sticking out of his lap.  
*That*, he says, *is the new English teacher*. Hand care-  
fully organized, Lightfoot looks at LeeRoy standing  
there. *It's your bid, LeeRoy, and who's who?*

. . .

Think of it, a man who cared for cards that much!  
A week later, on a hot, sticky afternoon, I laid  
eyes on her for the second time. She was doing  
the backstroke in Krueger's Pond, horn-naked.  
I came up over a rise looking for Lightfoot,  
and I found him, treading water there beside her.