1984

Loretta

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The first any of the local men laid eyes on her was one drizzling Saturday in early fall when everybody 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.