

2016

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Recommended Citation

Erickson, Ryan (2016) "Pretty Girl from Pleasant Ridge," *Exile*: Vol. 62 : No. 1 , Article 26.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.denison.edu/exile/vol62/iss1/26>

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Pretty Girl from Pleasant Ridge

by Ryan Erickson

Of all the popcorn shops,
in all the towns,
in all the world,
I walked into hers.

I could never mistake the sound
of her voice behind the counter –
but it wasn't really her voice,
not the one I heard
whispering sublime assurances of eternity into my ear,
as I lost myself in the infinities of her eyes
while we lay beneath the infinities of the sky

No, this voice was different,
void of the refreshing, dynamic musicality
it had previously carried amidst sunsets
or while butchering the lyrics to our favorite songs
barreling down the highway and into each other
with reckless abandon.

Paired with the clinking of the cash register,
her voice now sounded like a music box,
wound up with intentionality and only released to be heard
by children and mothers and elderly patrons,
a voice feigning innocence with the same melody every time.

When I checked out,
she used her music box voice on me, too –
probably because she assumed I had come there on purpose
in some delusional attempt to reconnect with her.

Had she watched my eyes as responsively as she used to,
back when a double wink meant disbelief
and aimless staring meant disillusion,
she'd have noticed me pass over the basket of Grape Tootsie Pops
despite my desire to hand her one at the register
the same way I had bequeathed those miniature confections
to her dozens of times before, in acts of gratitude, contrition, & meaninglessness

She'd have noticed me refrain from buying that glass bottle of Mexican Coca Cola,
even though I wanted one,
because I knew to her it would mean I remembered
she had always indulged in one at a little corner store
with her friends after school.

She probably thought I wanted to get close to her again,
that I believed our presence across a counter from each other
surrounded by artificial sweetness
would somehow replicate the genuine bliss of our presence within each other
surrounded by blankets.

But the truth is
I couldn't have felt more distant from her,
not even if we were separated
by the same distance that we had once placed ourselves
in relation to the stars.