Adolescence at a A&W Near the Base of Highway 20

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Abstract

God when I think about it: we were kind of mindless, really like someone gave you a veiled invitation to sit out a sallow hot Sunday and could you say no to your buddies, or they to me?
“Southwest Iowa,” she said in amusement. “But it has little to do with my ideas.”

Greg was insistent. “What’s its name?”

It didn’t seem important, but “Oak River, near Council Bluffs.”

He stretched back at the wheel, never looking from the road. “Doesn’t mean a thing to me.”

Nancy couldn’t help adding, “I’m sure it doesn’t.”

As he stopped the shiny convertible in front of her dorm, “Do you need an escort to the door or. . . .”

“No, thank you,” she replied just as flatly. “I can make it. Sorry to have botched up your study break.”

“Oh, it’s been interesting. Good night.”

Nancy walked jauntily to the door. What a damn waste of time. . . . typical jock. She knew what he was. But a “maybe” nagged at the back of her mind.

Adolescence at an A & W
Near the Base of Highway 20

by Michael Leonard
English, Grad.

God when I think about it:
we were kind of mindless, really—
like someone gave you a veiled invitation to
sit out a sallow hot Sunday
and could you say no to your buddies,
or they to me?

From here though: I was special.
The dead of day leaned on me heavy.
I knew it even then, didn’t you?
If you sniggered when my driver asked
the carhop to bring him a fuckin’ hotdog,
well I also got a hard-on when a long
silver Ruan split the quiet asphalt sun—
on down the hill, on down the hill.

If what followed was not so phallic
(two sardonic pig trucks; I could smell
them through all that was humid),
then it must have been the noseless patron
in the next car saying two malts,
a baby root beer, and God is dead—
that made me think of Karen’s spicy
thighs on a pitchfork frame
snug against this morning’s communion rail.

That’s when I felt the fool
with your shirt open to the navel
and to myself whispered: Don’t ever say that
about the hotdog to her, you son-of-a-bitch.
Frightened, you laughed and oooed as her black
hips blinked the turnstile toward us;
but adamantly, nearly aloud, I said:
There is something more—knowing that
after fried chicken and TV with the folks
I’d reach for Karen and dimple her clever
belly and we’d go, we’d go, we’d go.

What mattered I didn’t know the dead of Sunday
enough to lie that it bothered me not?
You would never know
as you never knew the Ruan,
the leather yield of kneelers,
the other Karen,
or Mother’s chicken.
What mattered I couldn’t draw myself
to say Let’s go home guys.