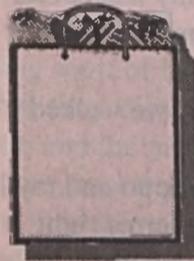


concentrate hard on her groceries instead of how nice her hair looks down around her shoulders. Groceries. Concentrate. She's buying skim milk. Of course, all rich folks drink skim milk. Don't know why but they do. What else? Rice. Bell pepper. The pepper's not in a baggie. Rich folks don't do that, either. Ketchup. Canned peas. Corn Flakes. Beer. I stop for a second with the beer in my hand. It's Pete's Wicked Strawberry Blonde. Strawberry Blonde. Just like her. I could say that. I could make that my line to let her know I noticed how pretty her hair is. And then maybe she would start liking me. Or maybe she would just think I'm weird. Or maybe she would get pissed. I'm standing there with my hand on the beer, not saying anything. I do it for a little too long. She asks if I want to see her license. I try to act natural. "Uh, yeah", I say. She hands it over while I'm kicking myself in the rear for looking dumb. Jeff is asking her does she want paper or plastic. Great. I acted like a dummy and still missed my chance. She pays. I give her the change. Our fingers touch when I hand her her receipt. That Aaron Tippin song starts running through my head: "Baby, we'll never be seen together/At night on a crowded street/ I'll never reach across your body to kill the light when you're asleep/ Baby, I'll never watch you dressing/ I won't sound too familiar on the phone/ But I can touch your hand accidentally/ And take that moment home/ That's as close as I'll get to loving you." He didn't write that song about this kind of thing, I know, but the shoe fits and I ain't got no choice but to wear it. She's walking out now.



Jeff turns around and watches. "Mmm, she's hot!" he says to me. I just give him a look. Easy for him to say. She ain't going to think he's sick 'cause he thinks she's pretty. Ain't nobody going to make fun of him. The manager ain't going to fire him for looking at her, or either pick on him 'til he has to quit.

I think for a minute that maybe I'll take my chance next time she's in here. Maybe I'll say something to her. Maybe she would like me, too. Who knows? But even if she is gay, she probably would think I'm too ignorant. Or too low class. Or maybe I really would lose my job. I need my job. Can't mess around when it comes to money. I guess this is how it will always be. I think about that song again. It's a true song, all about all the little stuff people take for granted about being in a couple. It makes me sad and angry 'cause I know the song is real for me. This really is as close as I'll get to loving her.

HONORABLE Mentions...

[Untitled]

--Anonymous

Three mangoes, pale and smashed,
died in the street as I walked by.
The fruity orange meat
lay dense and fibrous, strong against
the probing tongue, with juice enough
to saturate the hands.
Yet fragile and too succulent,
they splattered on the gutter-edge
outside the Chi Omega house.
I felt to blame, like I had watched,
or raped the fruit myself.
You waited, naked, in my bed;
I thought of death each time we kissed.
And love, you never would have noticed them.

"A Little While"

—Tobin Logan

I'm confused...don't know what I keep fighting for
I'm not amused by people's little games anymore
Empty feelings haunt my mind
Sometimes it's so hard to find
That freedom inside that makes me smile

I'm surrounded by faces that don't understand
I feel grounded...don't have the room to stretch my span
Wistful for another time
Moments when I could unwind
Peaceful, for a little while...far a little while

Well I know these cycles rend me so
Don't feel any guidance from above
I'm tired of being pulled to places I don't want to go
I'm falling back inside my shell
So please leave me alone

I'm confused...but I know what I'm fighting for
I refuse to give up what I have in store
Feeling painful memories
Looking 'tween the clouds to see
Some sunshine, for a little while
For a little while...

END