

Wilderness House Literary Review 5/1

Nathan Graziano

A Long Way from New Hampshire

A couple of creeps come out of the gas station carrying six packs and staring at my boobs. I'm standing beside the propane tanks, waiting for Aaron and his cousin to get back from wherever they went to score weed. Aaron said it was a sure thing, but we're in Brownsville, Tennessee, a long way from New Hampshire.

I shiver thinking about these creeps. They look like the types of dangerous rednecks who would rape a girl, cut her throat then dump her body like a sack of broken heels somewhere in the hills. Before Mom got sick, she used to say, "Jenny, if you're going to dress like a whore, don't you be surprised if you're treated like one."

Maybe she was right: the looks in these creeps eyes leave nothing to the imagination. I know what they're thinking. But she's a thousand miles away, dying, and I'm here to fend for myself.

I'm hoping the creeps will get a good look and keep going, walk right by me. But no. They stop in front of me, rubbing the stubble on their cheeks. The taller of the two creeps, a guy with a lazy left eye that makes him even creepier, holds out a beer. "Want one?"

"No thanks."

"Do you need a ride somewhere, sweetie, or are you just prettying up these propane tanks?" says the tall creep. He winks. "I'm Jake, and this here is Keith, but people call him Corn. We got some bud in the truck, if you're interested."

"My boyfriend will be back any minute."

"Here's not here now," Jake says then rubs his you-know-what. "We can drive around a little, get a buzz on, and have you back in five, ten minutes. However long it takes."

"No thanks." My skin is prickling. Not again, I think. I want to scream, but I can't get enough air in my lungs. I should knee this creep in the balls and run, but my legs are shaking. Not again.

"I'm not sure where you're from, baby, but around here if you hang out in front of stores, guys are going to get the wrong idea."

The other guy, Corn, spits in the dirt. "Tease."

Then they turn and walk slowly back to their pick-up truck as my heart stammers like rain on a roof. Then, while driving past me, Corn sticks his head out the passenger window. "Fucking whore!"

The back tires spin and the truck peels out of the parking lot.

Dark clouds scurry across the sky and a breeze whips through my hair, which I recently dyed jet black. A raindrop falls on my cheek, and another on my forearm, and then one on my nose. I wonder if I should go inside the store and report this. I wonder when Aaron is coming back. I wonder what my mom would say if I just showed up at the house, dressed like this, and said, "Mom, I messed up. Can I come home?"

Wilderness House Literary Review 5/1

Nathan Graziano lives in Manchester, New Hampshire with his wife and two children. A high school English teacher, he recently completed his MFA at The University of New Hampshire. He is the author of *Teaching Metaphors* (sunnyoutside, 2007), *Not So Profound* (Green Bean Press, 2004), *Frostbite* (GBP, 2002) and seven chapbooks of poetry and fiction. His work has appeared in *Rattle*, *Night Train*, *Freight Stories*, *The Coe Review*, *The Owen Wister Review*, and others. Graziano's third book of poetry, *After the Honeymoon*, was published in Fall 2009 by sunnyoutside press. For more information, visit his website: www.nathangraziano.com.