

Wilderness House Literary Review 6/4

Darryl Price
That Kind of Body

I was thin young. There's a kind of freedom to be found when walking around inside that kind of body that allows you to have in this world what's known as a presence. People see you eating but they can't make out what for. You're not going to gain an ounce. It's not that they feel sorry for you. You just seem to come with a certain kind of strange unknown magic about you. It can be felt but not really traced. It's like you have a little secret but everybody knows you do. Some of them wanted it for themselves, you could see it in their eyes. Yes. They want it badly. But I would say most of them simply don't trust it. So what you get is looks all day long. So it's radiating vibes all day long, either of the don't come near me type or the come here boy I want to buy some of that type. I also had fairly long hair then I suppose but only because I couldn't be bothered with going somewhere to get it cut. It seemed like an awful waste of what little money I ever had on me. Money was for fun, as much fun as it could be stretched out to buy, so I went to the state fair with my dinky camera and my money to see what I could see.

The first thing I saw was a woman in a polka-dotted dress sitting on a park bench eating an ice-cream. She was making little slurping sounds around and around the cone in her hand because the ice cream was dripping like a fountain like a volcano that had just erupted like a candle in fast motion, and believe me she was having trouble keeping up with it all, but that wasn't what was the interesting part for me. She literally took up the whole bench by herself from one end to the other. I asked her if I could take her picture and she said, "Why sure, honey." She gave me a very practiced pretty smile and held her ice cream cone out to the camera as if to say, "Would you like to share some of this with me?" I thanked her and quickly moved on in the direction of the barker's row.

In those days if you wanted to get from one side of the state fair to the other rather quickly you went behind and in back of the stadium and walked through the rows upon rows of barkers calling out: "See the only still living mermaid around," or "meet the girl of your wildest nightmares—half human and half-gorilla." Stuff like that. I was walking as fast as I could go without making eye contact with anyone, young or old, fairgoer or fair employee. And I'd almost made it—I could see where the real fair stuff started again—the wafting food smells, the rising and falling noises coming from the rides the throngs of endless walking people—when a voice called out to me, "I can see you there boy, don't run away from me, this is something you've just got to see for yourself if only to tell your grandchildren about it one day, only fifty cents, the head of a beautiful woman and the body of a hideous snake, don't pass up this opportunity of a lifetime, take a chance, only fifty cents!" What could I do?

I gave the man in the striped shirt and the funny looking bowler type hat my fifty cents and I went inside a small tented room. What I saw there was a large beat-up looking army colored low mesh cage sitting in the center of the floor and inside it was the most beautiful face of the most beautiful looking woman I had ever seen before sitting atop the stacked and coiled body of what looked like a giant snake. We looked at each other in

Wilderness House Literary Review 6/4

utter silence. I couldn't take my eyes off of her. I wanted to kiss her.

Finally I mustered just enough breath to hoarsely mutter "Hello." She smiled at me through those perfectly beautiful teeth and her really red red lipstick and said, "Hi. What's your name then?" I told her my name and she told me hers, although I immediately forgot it because I couldn't really pronounce it anyway, but it sounded sort of Asian. "What do you do?" she asked. I told her I worked in a bookstore, and she said, "Oh I love books!" After that we had a full on conversation about books and movies and she told me she was getting a degree through the mail and, and she was just the nicest sweetest person I had ever met in my entire life up to that point. She dazzled me in every way. It turns out she was in an automobile accident that had left her paralyzed from the neck down and she and her husband, the barker outside the tent, were just doing this to make a little money, and to have a little fun. To say I liked her would be an understatement. I adored her. Nothing about her made you feel the least bit sorry for her. She just simply wouldn't allow that feeling to come out of you. She required no sympathy. I felt like I had met an angel. I still wanted to kiss her.

Just then the tent flap flew open and in walked a boy of about ten years old and his two doting parents. All three of them were wearing blue duck-billed caps that looked like they'd also served as maybe rain bonnets somewhere in the last few years or so. The dad was round, the mom was round, the kid was round. They looked like a family of balloons or lost together balls. The kid runs right up to the cage then and puts his chubby fingers through the mesh and shakes the whole thing and starts screaming, "Oh, God!" I turned and walked out of there and gave the barker husband a kind of backward wave goodbye. Later on at home I realized I hadn't taken a single photograph of her.