

Wilderness House Literary Review 9/3

Matt Peluso

Diamond In-The-Rough

I had no idea I'd love Appleton

But first there was the platinum blond, NYC model on the puddle-jumper
from O'Hare

Then, the tall, copper-haired beauty with the warm smile at a US Airways
counter

When I asked her where I could get a cab, she said: "You must be the new
player"

(Small town minor league celebrity has its benefits)

I asked her out on the spot

She turned out to be a sweet Mid-West girl with a natural calmness
that evaporated all my East-Coast anxiety and anger whenever I was with
her

Whether kissing, stalled on the Ferris wheel at the local summer carnival

As we gently swayed high above the fair-grounds in a warm breeze

Or hand-holding down the empty Main Street late at night

The hours laughing and loving in my motel room during rain-outs

When I need to, I can still conjure up the feel of her long body draped
across mine

70s soft-rock on the bed-stand clock-radio

Naked, sheets off, post-coital stillness

The residue of smells and tastes on our bodies

While she kisses my ear as I slip off to sleep

The deep, untroubled sleep of the young and loved

With nothing to do except play baseball the next day

I flew out on Labor Day after our last home game

Final kisses at the same airport where we first met

Mutual promises to keep in touch, which we did (for a while)

A few letters, some drunken, late-night phone calls (by me)

Eventual distractions overcame our closeness

The relentless immediacy of daily, separated lives

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I moved around a lot, her phone number changed
Others entered my life and (I assumed) hers
Distance was real in that pre-cell phone, pre-internet world

Maudlin, I tried to find her a few years ago
Her mother still lived in the same small house I had been to once,
when she (the mother) wasn't there
She showed me photographs of the sweet girl just as I'd known her
A dress she'd worn on one of our dates, a hair-style that won't come back
A life frozen in time

Her beautiful daughter had died just three years after we'd lost touch
A car accident coming back from night classes in Green Bay
No alcohol involved, probably just fell asleep
Tired from her day job and the commute
It only takes a second in that frozen tundra
Lord, what I wouldn't give to turn back time
and warn my youthful self about the dangers of casualness
About the reality of regret
I'd tell myself to take that tall, sweet girl with me wherever I went
I'd tell me to give her soft kisses just below her ear
While whispering "I love you" as she slipped off to sleep