5-4-2005

So Young and Beautiful

Michael R. Ashley
Concordia University - Portland

Follow this and additional works at: http://commons.cu-portland.edu/promethean

Part of the Creative Writing Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://commons.cu-portland.edu/promethean/vol13/iss2/4

This Story is brought to you for free and open access by CU Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Promethean by an authorized administrator of CU Commons. For more information, please contact libraryadmin@cu-portland.edu.
SO YOUNG AND BEAUTIFUL

Michael R. Ashley

He has been nursing his drink for some time now and he is wondering if she means to stand him up. The thing of it is he knows she can't be faulted for being so young and beautiful. Beautiful people have always made their own rules.

He signals the barman for another. As he pays, her photograph falls out of his wallet. They had been at the beach that day. In the picture, she has just shaken out her wild Raggedy Ann hair. She is looking boldly into the camera, her ever-changing green eyes flashing. She is, he thinks, a blind fury of creation. He considers himself in the mirror behind the bar.

And she is ten years your junior. Until now, you have been careful about not making a bloody fool of yourself. Maybe it is time to let her go. Do it now before there is any of the arguing and the crying. She is already feeling an obligation. He stares blankly at the bald face on the clock above the door. Who knows? If you have any luck at all, she has already gone off with that boy. Just as well. It will make things easier this way. The boy is more her age anyway. Haven't you become quite the philosopher?

A young couple comes in for a nightcap, gay and glowing from dancing. They take a booth in the back, holding hands and cuddling, whispering and laughing. The barman goes over and takes their order. He brings it to them on a tray and leaves them alone.

He will have one more. He tells himself he knows how hard it is to get a cab at this hour.

A noisy crowd of regulars burst through the door, joining him along the bar, leaving him to his anonymity. They are the late shift from the hospital at the corner, some in whites, and others in scrubs, wound up tight from ten hours on their feet in the emergency room. A tall EMT begins recounting the evening for the barman, with everyone chiming in details as he goes along.

"I'm telling you, James, she was dead when we got there."
"Oh, here we go again," scoffs the barman. "C'mon, you always say that."
"No really," insists the EMT. He thumps his partner. "Ask Trent here."
"Well, she didn't have a pulse," the one called Trent begins.
"She didn't have any vital signs!" crows the EMT.
"Lemme guess," the barman deadpans. "You brought her back from the brink of death."

The EMT pauses for effect, then seems to think better of it and shakes his head. "We don't know yet. She's in Intensive."
"I'll say this for her," a male nurse in scrubs allows, "that's one hell of a pair of legs."

Ashley: So Young and Beautiful

About this, there is unanimous agreement, the men among them nodding distractedly and staring into their drinks as if they might see her there.

"How about that poor boy she was riding with?" someone asks.
"Brains across the highway—that's what you get for not wearing a helmet," says another.

An RN with sad brown eyes and a delicate, heart-shaped face produces a cigarette and leans in as someone lights it for her. "Hang on, you guys," she says. "He gave her his helmet to wear. He saved her life," she says plaintively exhaling. "But my god, what a head of red hair. That's the reddest hair I've ever seen in my life," she finishes.

"She was a genuine redhead all right," smirks the male nurse.
"That'll do, sir," deems the barman. "This one's on the house kids."
"Thank you James," says the RN. "You, at least, are still a gentleman."

This brings a loud chorus of protests and much laughter all around.

He is sitting at his end of the bar, holding her photograph in fingers that begin trembling as he hears them describing the girl. Panicky realization hits him in the pit of his stomach, sucking the wind from him. He is going to be sick. His chest is tightening, he's not breathing, the collar at his throat is strangling him. He is gasping, frantic. He whirls, knocking his drink off the bar; it falls in slow motion, shattering at his feet. A few of the other patrons look up, mildly curious. He rounds on the crowd. One of them must know. One of them has to know the name of the girl--

A flash of red at the door. Can it be? Feeling his heart lurching in his chest, he reaches for the bar. She's here, swinging through the door, smiling and oblivious, her eyes now dancing around the room, now falling upon him. She waves, laughing as if she doesn't have a care in the wicked world. He feels his brow is damp, his pulse pounding in his temples. He is only dimly aware that everyone in the place is turning to look at her as she cuts and wind her way around the tables towards him.

My god, he thinks, she is so young and beautiful. He catches his ragged breath and pulls himself together. He rises on unsteady legs and puts away his trembling hands. Then as she draws near to him, he smiles for her.