

This Girl in That Shirt

by Lori Lou Freshwater

This girl, who I had never seen before, she was coming into the 7-11 where I worked the midnight shift. She just walks in out of the darkness, no car, no nothing. Never seen someone just walk up like that, and I've been wasting three nights a week in this joint for over a year.

At first when she walked in, I thought she looked like a wet dog. Then after a minute, I'm trying to wrap my mind around how perfect she is. Her hair somehow managed to look soaked and dry at the same time. The brown checkered shirt she was wearing was thin and had tiny gold threads in it. I couldn't take my eyes off it. And I couldn't take my eyes off her nose, this nose, it was pink like she had a cold or maybe she'd been crying.

It had been over an hour since anyone else had come into the store. So I was just staring at the Slurpee machine. The way it swooshed and made that noise could hypnotize me. Off and on I would try and watch the black and white TV. It's about the size of a cantaloupe. Frank my manager puts a new aluminum foil shaped animal on top of it every few days. But it never helps the picture come in any better.

This girl walked around the store like she was looking for something. She's got her hand on her throat like she's trying to keep something down. Anyway, the whole time I'm staring and I don't even know how to stop. After she picked up a pack of crackers and started walking toward the counter, I finally got a hold of myself. So what if I was a little shaken up? It happens to everybody once or twice in their life.

So she comes up to the counter and puts the crackers down. And she says with this Tinkerbell voice, "I would like to buy these."

"Well I would like to sell them to you," I said, realizing not only how stupid that sounded but also that I was standing there with my arms down at my side and my mouth dropped open enough that all I was missing was the drool. "That'll be a dollar seventy-nine," I

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manage to say without sounding too much like an idiot, at least I think so anyway.

Right then some sort of switch flipped and she looked scared. What the hell I am supposed to do about this was all I could think. She stood there and she kept looking like she wanted to run, and I stood there and kept watching. She put both hands on the counter, like she was holding on to the side of a boat that was in the middle of some god-awful hurricane. She put her head down, like she was trying to bury her chin into her neck. Then, all at once, in one startling goddamn motion, she flings her head back and looks right at me and says, "I do not have any money."

I'm looking at her dangly silver feather earrings. I'm looking at the dark roots of her hair showing where it's parted in the middle. I'm a nervous wreck.

So anyway, out of any other ideas — quick thinking has never been one of my strong suits — I reach over the counter and give her the crackers.

"Go ahead, take em'," I say to her.

She looks over at the front door and she says, "Thank you."

The neon in the window blinks, and I say, "You're welcome."

