The National Gallery

David Thomas
College of DuPage

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The kissing queens of the county fair

David Thomas

They were the front porch, the Great Plains, the kissing queens of the county fair. I lay down in fields with them, just beyond fairgrounds the whole county knows. I held them in my sun brown arms and kissed the sweat from their foreheads as I pulsed between their thighs. The notion that someone in someway failed me is shameful; there is no failure laying down in the straight rows of yellow wheat, a new moon overhead.

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Sliced back my hair and took this babe to Bourbon Street. At all hours. We explored the old French and Spanish streets, and drank Hurricanes until we were wearing them. We told the streetshoe who danced on a living room rug set down under a streetlight, we told this streetshoe, who asked us if we liked his pictures and then said they weren’t for sale, “no.” On a third floor balcony we watched the crowd exchange places, back and forth. Bootblacks tap danced in front of a blues bar as I smothered my face in the girl’s naked tits. Later: 3 A.M. The Napoleon House. Absinthe? The girl said, “I don’t want to go. I can’t benefit by going. I can’t benefit from sitting. Nobody else is going. I’ve seen so many pictures.” I drove her across the Mississippi in a rented T-Bird to her Navy bungalow in Algiers. Her seashell taste was still in my mouth when I returned to the hotel. At 30 I’m able to speak without images or innuendo. At 30 I’m able to spend the night reading books no one reads anymore.