

Unashamed Love

By Jackie Reuther

Mid-afternoon. The camera unhurriedly pans a cobblestone street lined with tall, bushy trees. Anonymous yet relatable clusters of people walk the sidewalks; some carry packages in their hands, others simply stroll along with amused smiles on their faces. The presence of a bright yellow sun is evidenced by the warm glow reflecting off of the pink and orange azaleas and intensely purple tulips surrounding the bases of trees. The camera focuses on an unconcerned cop as he rides along atop his shiny brown horse; the rhythmic sound of horse hooves is audible even after the cop has been removed from the shot. A strong burst of barbecue-flavored scent suddenly fills the air; the nearby pub has evidently opened its doors for lunch. A cheery storeowner waves to the unknown driver of a passing minivan as she sweeps off the white wooden porch of her restored Victorian candy shop. An older gentleman and a young boy unhurriedly walk in step with one another as the boy excitedly relates a story, using his tiny hands to indicate the size of something in his narrative; this arouses a hearty laugh from the man. Two curly topped girls on bicycles stop next to one another to allow a mother duck to lead her chicks across the otherwise inactive street. The camera progresses slowly forward to the clapboard building on the nearest corner; the front door is propped open with a rusty coffee can and soft music floods the streets. This picturesque scene is removed as the camera pans upward to a cheerful blue sky, suggesting the paralleling happiness bearing down on the streets below it. The audience is left captivated by the site they have just witnessed, though they aren't exactly sure why. End scene.

Long Grove, Illinois has the capability to capture the magic of small town life in a demographic wherein the hustle and bustle of city influence lingers close by. Anyone who enters the town is greeted with an instinctive feeling that they have found something intimately special; the charm and innate warmth of the town is not lost on many. To discover this location is to experience the relief of being let in on a secret you've been mysteriously dying to know. You didn't see it coming, but the town has seduced you into falling in love with it and you find yourself feeling charmed, happy.

To encourage the welcoming of summer, the downtown settlement of Long Grove hosts the Strawberry Fest, an annual festival dedicated entirely to the small red fruit. All shops and vendors along the main road in town open their doors to the public, catering to the strawberry-inspired entertainment. Smiling men crowd the street corners with a guitar in their arms and a song on their lips; somehow their twangy, bluegrass sound attracts a crowd as they sing their praises for having "seen the Light". Clusters of families lazily meander through the town, sipping on strawberry smoothies and exchanging warm greetings with passing strangers. Intrigued after hearing about this event, my mom, sister, and I ventured to Long Grove to attend the Strawberry Fest. We shopped a little, danced (literally) in the streets to a live country music band, and indulged in treats being sold on every corner. It was an enjoyable afternoon, and I couldn't help but feel momentarily silly by being so stimulated by a daytime festival, but I, too, had been seduced by the town. At the suggestion of my mom, we decided to briefly sit in the sunshine and she

bought us chocolate-covered strawberries from a nearby vendor. We shared a wooden bench with friendly strangers and laughed as my mom would inevitably drip bright red strawberry juice onto her white capri pants. My sister helped her dab at the now permanently-stained pants with a napkin as my mom lightheartedly prompted us, “Next time I wear white, will you girls please remind me I am a chronic spiller?” I giggled and responded, “Aw, but it’s more fun this way”, and my sister agreed, “This one actually kind of makes the shape of a strawberry”, encouraging a laugh between the three of us. I happened to look up at that one particular moment; as I did, I locked eyes with a girl walking past the long bench on which I was seated. We smiled at each other, both committed to our own respective conversations, and the exchange was over. I briefly studied the girl; she was perhaps a year or two older than me, and she walked with her right hand resting easily on the bag handles hanging off of her shoulder, while the other hand was pressed lovingly against the back of the guy at her side. Instinctively, my eyes darted to her ring finger; there a diamond sat, promising she had sometime ago declared her wedding vows. At that moment, she laughed at something her husband said and he bent down and gently kissed her atop her head as they walked along. They walked in step with one another and giggled as though they were in a world of their very own. They were happy and safe in each others’ arms, and as they walked through the busy town that afternoon, they unexpectedly treated all those they passed to a small glimpse into the lives of two people truly in love.

Dawn. The once-blue sky has humbly retired and is replaced by an orange palette infiltrated by opaque billows of gray and purple. The premature presence of a bright white moon provides an attractive illumination among the quiet sidewalks and lessens the intensity once bursting from the flowers aligning the streets. Though presently vacant, the camera conveys the unspoken indication of people having spent the day here. A light in a nearby shop turns off and the camera turns in its direction, catching sight of a whistling man step out from within the store. He retrieves a key from his pocket and expertly locks the door before stepping off into the evening. We see him wave to someone outside of the shot and we hear a voice call out to him, “It was another good one, eh?” The storeowner nods brightly and calls back, “It’s always a good one, Mac. G’night.” We hear him continue to whistle an indiscernible tune to himself as he strolls out of view. The sound of a sprinkler clicks on in the background and the subsequent ticking noise ensues, determined streams of water hydrating the grass and sidewalk in its path. The echoes of crickets chirping fall into a rhythmic pattern, officially declaring nighttime has fallen on this town. With no use for speed, a small red car appears in the shot, its headlights leading the way along the increasingly darkening streets. Abandoning the rest of the scenery, the camera focuses intently on the unassuming car as it passes through the scene. Although it is too dark to distinguish the people inside the car, it is evidenced by the slow pace at which the driver advances that there is a slight reluctance to keep moving forward; the car takes its time proceeding, soaking up every possible moment to spend under the charm of this town. The camera aligns itself directly behind the car as it progresses slowly down the street and finally through a covered bridge, making its way out of the scene. The camera is finally at rest, but continues to focus on the car’s departure; the shot is completely consumed by the car’s taillights as they progress further, until they are eventually small and faded in the distance. End scene.