

The New Criterion

Poems

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Ralph: a love story

by [Donald Justice](#)

In what had been a failing music store
A man named Flowers opened the first cinema
In Moultrie. Ralph was the projectionist,
At seventeen the first projectionist.
And there was a piano from the store
On which the wife accompanied the action
With little bursts of von Suppé and Wagner.
Ralph liked the dark of the projection booth;
He liked the flickering images of the screen.
And yet because he liked it all so well,
He feared expulsion from this Eden,
Not so much feared as knew the day must come,
Given his luck, when it would all run out,
Which made the days more paradisaic still.
Margot, the daughter, twenty and unmarried—
To tell it all quickly—seduced Ralph.
She let him think he was seducing her.
They used to meet in the projection booth,
Embracing wordlessly but laughing too,
Unable to suppress their self-delight.
Time after time ...

Donald Justice

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