To Father, in His Last Summer

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Abstract

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by
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English 3

you do not know,
even as you sit here choking down
the soupy eggs and toast
which your thickened lazy throat
will soon reject,
leaving, at the end of the counter
a plateful of used breakfast;
you do not know
that while humming about the kitchen
I compose a sad song
of your death.

this summer,
in the seventh year
of forgotten muscles and
a blood-soaked brain,
your once ominously thundering
goddamnitgoddamnit
is but a whisper,
and the smile that responds
to a grandchild's innocent concern
easily falls
to a trembling chin.
a clattering cumbersome
burro of steel carries you now,
and you hold your fork
in your fist.
and a smooth plastic sheet
fits snugly, securely
beneath marshall fields florals.
old friends seem nervous
as the guilt-ridden survivors
of catastrophe.
they pay their respects over whiskies
and with gay desperation
recall your illustrious career.
but the whisky makes you drowsy
and they shuffle smiling out the door
stringing pretty lies in their wake.

when the crash came
and the feds snapped the lock
on your modest feedlot bank,
when a hundred starving farmers
wept to you of their dreams
sitting now
with rats and mold in the silos,
when the strong brown bodies
that knew all fears
but halted for none
finally let escape a reluctant quiver
of despair,
when a hundred forsaken men
rushed, pounding on your windows,
did you really
build a castle of green bills
on the muddy linoleum
for the hungry stricken eyes to see
and devour in relief,
or have I invented
this white knight drama
for you
for me...

when I was so small and unknowing
and would trail you like
a streamer,
the man at the post office
would grin and goodmorning at us
and crinkle his eyes and ask
if I wasn’t one of the granddaughters,
and you would dutifully bristle
and proudly respond that, no,
I was an after-thought.
and the man would feign astonishment
and you would both finish
laughing at the good joke
that I didn’t get.

a silly vignette
is all I’ve saved of you
somehow
from those memories warped
of time and space;
they are mysteriously irretrievable.
but
like the greenblue smells of spring
I recall too
your brushing noon-time affection
that mother misses now.

like a confused pigeon
that remembers only routes
but forgets the reasons why
I return
to retrieve something lost
or revive something dead
but watching you
neglect this too.
sadness saturates me here
to see your heavy milky eyes
look at me
through me
past me
vacating even your face,
knowing now
I cannot regret
only the suggestion of emptiness,
or the absence of the clinking
where broken links disrupt
the chain.

old man,
your death thuds through my ears
the words I’ve never heard
or shall ever hear
all the visions you too
have forgotten.