Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Al Ortolani: Three Poems

Al Ortolani · Sunday, March 23rd, 2025

Late Inning Reliever

This grandson, the youngest of six,
has an arm like a closer. It's a cannon
as the scouts say and keeps the batters

on their toes. Just this morning, he bounced
a baseball off my head, a cloth baseball
made for toddlers for such an occasion.

At this age he's effectively wild and leaves
a trail of broken pottery and dented wallboards.
I want to coach the art of chin music. Better

to keep the school bullies guessing, dusting back
the hot shots who crowd the plate and spit
sunflower seeds at the mound. His parents will

polish good manners and clean sportsmanship.
It's what mothers and fathers do, and should
if he is ever to learn command. As a grandfather

who has grown old with the game, I'd like
to keep him a little wild with a rising
fastball, one that's valuable in the late innings

with the meat of the lineup tapping their spikes,
if he can broadcast his disarming smile
and his let's-see-what-happens-next eyes.

*

Lighting the First Cigar

I walk across the yard

with a ladder over my shoulder.

It swings through the morning air
like the prow of ship, a slow sweep

turning towards the house, weather-beaten
and peeling with time. The rungs are wet

with last night’s rain. My shoes
squeak in climbing to the eaves.

Mrs. Brown is cooking bacon.
The smell rises two stories

through a louver in the attic
and catches like an apron on a nail.

Reluctant to begin the day, I balance myself
with the robins and the jays and wait

for someone else within me to dip
the brush into the paint.

*

Huckleberries

We purchased plastic baskets of huckleberries
from a roadside market and nibbled them
in the car as we drove west across Montana.

This was a day when we could find nothing
wrong in our lives. The old Toyota purred
under the big sky as it is called. Our children

were eating lunch in their homes back in Kansas.
We sent them photos of the snow capped
peaks near Whitefish. The dog stretched out

along the back seat with nothing in mind
except togetherness. It felt as if we could drive
for days without stopping. The berry baskets,

even though plastic and cheap, would replenish
themselves without effort like luck or fortune.
As the season wanes, we only need to wind

higher into the mountains with cinnamon bears
who eat as they gather while there is time,
while there is still purple found before sleep.

*

(Featured image from Pexels)

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