

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Tony Magistrale: Three Poems

Tony Magistrale · Wednesday, March 7th, 2018

Photograph of My Father

*I should set up some sort of shrine for these
Bouquets of time.*

—Baron Wormser

He's naked, except for swimming trunks.
Standing in a foot of warm ocean.
Because it is a b & w image,
The water is the same blank color of the sky.
It looks like a perfect beach day.
I have no idea where he is—
Mexico on vacation?
Guam at the end of the war?
Adrift on the Pacific rim?
Anyway, he's far away from the snows of Buffalo.
But not as far as he is now.
His bald head & compact body remind me of Picasso.
He's beatific, positively beaming with energy.
I never remember him happier than he is in this photograph.
His hands are raised in supplication towards the sun.
He's reaching out to embrace the future,
Although his future is now past.
He's young. Completely on his own.
He hasn't learned how to suffer yet.
That will come later.

*

Family Man

Walking across Delaware Avenue to the Statler Hotel
for a meeting or to sign important papers
(how important are any of them now?)
pulling his coat together with one hand,
holding on to his fedora with the other,

headlong into Lake Erie white wind
 as specks of ice fling themselves between office buildings,
 another interminable winter of slush
 and burnt snow, Buffalo skies the ashen gray of death.

Each Christmas Eve I would meet him
 downtown. We would drink expensive red wine
 until December darkness drove us out into it
 and talk turned sentimental.
 Toughest trial lawyer I ever saw work a courtroom
 had to wipe away tears
 whenever he heard the song *White Christmas*.

For forty years a compliant prisoner
 in his own home. Work his addiction and escape,
 his only refuge against the daily humiliations,
 the tedious boredom, the inane dinner chatter.
 He used to tell me *someone is going*
to have to die first before anything can change.
 And I wondered where was that trial lawyer
 in the face of such protracted misery?

Back then, a man just didn't disappear,
 up and leave his family on their own.
 He tried to explain this to me every time
 I would ask, but that was before I understood
 anything about being a family man.

*

Vegas

The last year that he lived
 I told my father I wished to take him on a trip

Anywhere in the world he wanted to go,
 One last family vacation reduced

To what was left of our family.
 Of all places—he picked Vegas.

Perhaps the city reminded him of better days
 When he was young and cancer-less;

I think he longed for one more chance
 To roll the dice wantonly,

Put a stack of chips on black seven,
 Do the math necessary to hit

Twenty-one. Maybe he just wanted to glimpse again
A pretty girl dressed as a chandelier.

The lights and sounds of Vegas
Were meant to provide a distraction,

The opportunity for both of us
To laugh as we used to laugh, without deliberation.

But each night he was asleep by eight o'clock
Leaving me to wander up and down

The concrete length of The Strip
In search for something not for sale.

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