

Lela In the Summertime

I

Summer in the interlude of
murmured dreams and nascent lust
we sat on benches in the green
reading to each other
lies of war and deadly riots
all far from us, this grass, our quiet.
When Thich Quang Duc burned and died
you touched my hands and wept
grieving for a monk we never knew -
no tears could drive away
the guilt and anger of simply living then.

Eighteen -
no better age
for blank verse and complex rhymes.
An awkward artlessness
between two hearts beguiled
by music and unrhythmic lines
Do not go gentle into that good night
this song of rage became our rage too
against the war, Diem and Madam Nhu.
We read and talked and reviled
the words of old men who no longer mattered
your brown hair tangled through my lips
I still smell summer's scent
of lemon soap and hyacinths
embracing all that would follow
whatever love, whatever fate
wove through whispered words of
Olsen, Plath and Alan Tate.

II

We are old.
Our lives lived quickly and far apart
I traveled across the world
and remained just as poor as before.
Three women gave me joy
which I in measured parts returned.
Sex, turned out, was awfully good
but also dear:
ceaseless work and lurking kids
remain its only history.

From time to time I catch myself
return to days with you and poetry
your face reflected in ethereal mirrors
slung by years in hidden places.
Fifty years.
What woman had you became?

I wrote a friend from then we both knew well
who still lived where we grew
and asked for any news he might have heard.
"Oh she's a weird old lady who lives 10 miles from here
in a rundown house, all by herself
and some dogs I think.
She owned a business that went broke
she takes anyone who makes her cross
to civil court for some trumped-up cause
even sued her brother once
she never wins. I don't know where her money's from
a bitter lady is all I hear."

I have your address
but should I write?
The woman from afar I loved
transformed by time into what -
a corker, screwball, a little nuts?
And me too
bloated codger naught to show
for years and years of
fumbling words,
faulty rhymes
and meter lost in sinking verse.

Philip Larkin Holy Cow

Philip Larkin holy cow
bugle eyes and brushy brow
his bleakness never wavered
but read too young on sleepless nights
refrains of dread that sighed and doddered
they lost to verse and raging art
of Auden, Thomas and Richard Wright.

His cough, his callow voice
still murmur in the lapping shallows
where River Hull meets rock and sorrows;
'Tis for Art and only that,'
damn the rest
whining wives and little brats - even dogs
(a bachelor Englishman no less!!)
for strait evenings with paper, pens
and a flask of whisky as his friends.

Of Dust the Starlight Draws

Of Dust the Starlight Draws

Last night in dreams a man forgotten
rests beneath a lily spray
as sunlight whittled night to grey
a resurrection or rude reminder
of time untangled and death undone.

We worked together in a different age
in suits, blue ties and Florsheim shoes
each day lifting money from some baffled rube
till evening came then across the street
for Winstons, beer and vodka pours
we'd sit for hours and smoke and chatter
over office nonsense, baseball scores
and how we'd fuck that skinny girl
who stumbled out the restroom door –
but in his bones a secret stilled.

He never said a word
in rage or of the unfairness of it all
just malignancy and dread
a dead man walking down the aisle
to sit each day at an empty desk until he couldn't anymore.

Done, covered with dirt,
indifferent now to memories
bar room lust and crumpled cups
then soon to each who knew him.

Until today when night unraveled
illusion or joke -
he sits across a barroom table
afraid of nothing but an empty glass
alive until all his dreamers
join the dark and sudden earth.