

Epreuve de la jeunesse

Edward Hamlin

If you ask me why I grieve,
here is the reason:

I found you late in your life
and early in mine.
Nothing more.

It will be a death by inanition.
One day I will begin hungering
for you,
for your fine language,
your offhand humor,
your casual truth,
but you will be gone
forever. Perhaps
I'll have buried you,
or cried with your widow,
or brought peonies and cigarettes
to lay at your headstone,
the hunger fizzing like an acid
at the body's soft fulcrum.
At night, sitting alone as the city dozes,
I will hear the gingkos switching in the yard
and starve for your lost, nourishing love
of life,
a ghost-frost
grazing the very bottom of my heart.

Today, though, amid sunlight and the lake's silver,
I worry about depleting you,
weighing the rigors of loss.
Who am I, begging for a handout
of your finesse,
to steal the eyesight you keep alive
with ointments and lasers?
Who am I to occlude your world,
already dimmer,
with a portrait of regret?
I have no right to rob you of these springs
and winters of seeing,
of faces you love more dearly than mine.

Your gaze, filmy and grey,
perforated with blackness,
has worlds to caress
while it is able.

So close your eyes when you speak to me:
spare them for what only you can see.

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