

Once They Were Young: In Memoriam

Nothing resolved for him there when he left,
When his heart departed the East,
Nothing left in the ashen remains,
Of a friendship and love that had failed—
The deadly decade of that tormented year.
He had sailed in the course of fear,
In the alcoholic river of pity and despair,
Self-hate, of not knowing where

Where would he find hope again?
Would excitement ever stir his soul,
Once more? Would there be the thrill,
Again, of wild winds at the seashore,
And thoughts of passion on the waves?
Could he capture the season of summer,
Once more? In raptures sift if all,
Through his hands? Ecstasies? Contrabands?

A decade would go out on a limb,
Before a vision would open for him,
On a path marked out for you,
But he would let it slip through his hands,
On the crystal blue shore of Ponce's sands.
So he captured the essence of you, the delicate
Balance of electric communication. Your
Terrible strength his feeble dreams would explore.

You were standing on the Condado one night,
He would never forget the stars.
The smell of the ocean was brilliant with mist,
The sky a romance of torrid desire.
Orange and red sails on the horizon,
Tore open the heart of the heavens above,
He cried for your love and you responded with power,
It was the midnight hour and you were fire.

It vanished again, that enigma unknown,
It came in and went out with the tides,
The moon shattered shells on the beach,
Ten months, and he lied to himself, a thousand lies.
A short stay of three years in the South,
Vague memories of places and things,
Late bloomers are you, early tombers, too,
And sorrow where the nightingale sings.

He longed for the anxiety of another age,
 Not the anxieties of industrial smoke,
 Nor the anxieties of entertainment and joke,
 But the strange pulsing tension of discovering anew,
 Once more, one more version of you.
 To the West was he drawn, to the California sun,
 To rumor of enchantment and dream,
 To anxiety in a meadow and mountain stream.

You were on the farm this time, driving in stakes,
 Tying up heifers, bold and desperate, rough,
 And mysterious, like the culture that raised you,
 An adjustment of tensions and dynamic anxiety,
 Beyond culture to human rewards, of
 Suntanned skin and blond beard, blue eyes,
 And a Carpenter's way with the Lord.
 Was it the anxiety he mostly adored?

His identify was always threaded with yours,
 Sewn through each fiber of body and bone,
 Stitched to his soul with the locks of your hair,
 Your backpack at ease in a lion's lair.
 You were never alike, but were so much the same.
 You were different in background and training and name.
 But the tensions dynamic together you owned,
 And you knew what it meant to be very alone.

Growth shone through those years,
 Shadowed blood were his tears, and sweat
 In his fears. His heavy heart struggled,
 Desperately to find the meaning of image,
 The presence of mind, his place in a culture,
 His peace offering to you, his joy, his need,
 Your separate milieu, your silence at noon,
 The joining of your hands, too late, and too soon.

You were in the outback and you were in Portland.
 The waves crashed and the harbor drained dry.
 The seagulls uttered a solemn cry,
 He told himself the ten thousandth lie—
 And the galaxies circled love, the tails of the comets
 Saturated with grief, for no one could understand.
 You were the desert land, the oasis, the green
 Eugene trees, the Douglas firs, the sweet scent
 Of pine, the Danube, the Seine, the Rhine.

Had he forgotten Paris when he found you there?
 Had he not realized the warmth of your face,
 In Matzleinsdorferplatz, your Austrian stance on the stair,
 Begonias in the summer air, the Glorietta soaked
 In gold, the late autumn evenings of the 60s, the piano,
 The fire, the cold winds of march in Salzburg,
 The music and the horses' hooves?
 Every statue! Every book! Every stranger's look?

In the Pacific Northwest he had forgotten Europe,
 But he had taken you with him, home to be lost
 On American soils, filling out the final years,
 Stretching his torment to its resting place,
 Sailing on the lake of internal bleeding,
 Realities stark and fierce. Here he learned
 That he would let you go, but not forever,
 For he would find you again by grace.

Two brothers sent him home, after a caring church
 Rescued his torn suffering flesh, for "it is enough,"
 The prophet said. God alone knows how much
 It was enough. Even until the Seventies were beginning to fade,
 And the Pennsylvania years returned unafraid,
 In spite of forebodings at the worst pain of all. Five years
 Of dreadful deceptions that exploded when you denied,
 How your Norse silver hair signaled his suicide.

Yet somehow he survived. And he went to school.
 So he swore he'd forget. He would radiate cool.
 But it wasn't so easy to put you to rest,
 For you surfaced again, as the last but not best,
 Academically tempting him, sparkling with thought,
 Ideas and images ethically wrought.
 You arose with the dawn, clean, wholesome and strong,
 Whispering through the Eighties, "Here's where you belong."

But the 90s held tightly both death and surprise.
 A corner was turned, and he faced your sad eyes.
 You smiled like Lohengrin laden with life,
 Blood-and tear-soaked in sorrow and strife,
 And you shared all with him, so transparent and true,
 That he cried his last cry and reached out to you.
 Your fierce fast embrace captured his soul,
 His heart and his spirit yielded control.

*We had found us at last. We had found us too late.
We met on a path bound for dear heaven's gate.
All the pain and the sorrow were canceled that year,
When our joy and forgiveness became crystal clear.
They laid us in graves separate but joined,
Tied like red ribbons and gold newly coined,
The price of redemption was stamped on our love,
And death's sweet reward far beyond, far above.*

*The StarKing
February 1986
October 2011
Copyright © 2011 Robert E. Romanelli*