

V.B. Price

INTOXICATION

Watching you go, old hero,
Laertes in his Sunday suit
planting in the mud,
numb to the lies of his son,
the Odyssey half begun,
his adventuring child admiring
the casual folly of his fun;

watching you go, old hero,
sharks all around me
on the bow of the trawler, snapping for breath,
trapped like me;
what were you thinking?—your face turned to the sea,
so far away,
sideburns feathering out like Hermes's wings
from your old Greek captain's hat;

watching you go,
I remember Tijuana
when you hid
a lit Delicado
behind your back for me to puff
and I dragged deep,
tempting fate: no longer just
your prisoner kid, but now
your accomplice, too,
in marital misdemeanors:
what joy to foil
the sweet keeper
as we teamed against her
in happy vice;

watching you go,
your long ago scorn
for my sloppy letters, Christmas wrappings,
like squalls in dish pans,

live wires in the tub,
your lightning eyes
drilling me to the floor
teaching me the fact of work:
work true
or be washed away
in shame;

watching you go,
begging me,
like bargaining for a pot or painting,
to show you mercy
and put you to sleep,
and then,
like chewing the next bite,
as if you'd said nothing at all, you say,
"How marvelous the Titian show...
if I could only go";

watching you go,
my feet still sore
from standing behind you
years ago for years,
a porter for the great collector,
bored numb by your endless fun,
relieved to be around
as your flycatcher's eye spots prey
in the Roman junk store a mile away;

watching you go,
our pride in each other
the same as it was
when we peed on Trajan's column
32 years ago
when you were as old as I am now,
and I was 21,
drunk on chocolate and dusk in the Piazza Navonna,
drunk on being your son,
on being alone with you
drunk on being a father;

watching you go, old hero,
cleaning your closets of the choicest ties,
eyeing the rows of Brooks Brothers blue;
all that's left of you
I want, you wore,
and it's still too big for me;

watching you go,
I savor my bacon and eggs each morning with you
at the blue plate diner
by the pier when I was ten:
the salty grease, the yokes, the toast and jam,
this new discovery
of how to eat and how to be—savoring
every sense in every moment, even though
we could never do more than exclaim
the passing surface of our pleasures.