

V.B. Price

THE OWL, THE SEAL, AND THE COYOTES
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Watching you go through the last days,
I tell you once that “you’re my hero,” and you,
barely able to breathe,
instantly reply,
like a Don cleaning his nails,
“Watch out for the god damn accountants.”

Watching you go,
I recognize the final photos of your life.
What a scream!
Flat on your back,
in your ratty, flamingo-pink tee and horrible robe,
oxygen tubes in your nose,
you sensed the camera, and raised your arms over your head,
a mock ballerina, toe dancing off the screen.

Watching you go,
I hear on the phone that you’re gone,
and tell my sister by phone that you’re gone,
that you took all day,
holding the shepherdess by the hand,
that you left around 6 p.m.,
wearing a long blue cloak and a tickled grin,
two flappers by your side,
eager for the night to begin,
as always, wanting
what happens next.

Watching you go,
I see, amazed,
the gray cottonwood limbs
blossom into a twilight owl, huge
like the tree,
its black feathered bark
disguising the promise that trees can fly,

like you can do the impossible
and finally die.
Watching you go,
I turn nasty.
I snap at idiot questions,
made desperate
by a mute
suffocation
of love
by bile,
of loss
by relief,
of privacy
by violation,
by undesired
nudity
and no place to hide.
You can’t
just say no
to the rape of the press.

Watching you go,
I feel so little yet,
mostly a sadness
over the absence of feeling;
I want so much to miss you;
I can hear the hollow roll
of rubber tires on polished wooden floors
move toward my life even now,
the sound of your scooter,
moving you on
past disease
to one more breakfast out of bed.

Watching you go on the wine dark sea,
I think of Odysseus,
brine caked, awaking on Nausicca’s shore;
“wine dark”
is not the color only,
it is more
the dark, intoxicating surface

of the speechless deep.

Watching you go
out to sea with your pals,
I look over at the empty chair on the boat
to see if you're OK,
if it's all too much,
if you're reaching for the out of reach,
if you're reaching for me
to reassure me
-but you're not.

Watching you go
in a trail of roses on the sea,
your ashes falling like a pure white wish
through the muscle of the waves,
your planter's hat riding the breakers to be,
I wonder if Proteus,
nudging a baby seal
so it pops up and down
through the sad bouquet,
was sending a message from you.
I conclude
that I can't read the signs,
but the token will do.

Watching you go,
feeling so little of you,
I see now
the performance of your life,
never having been allowed before
behind the curtain:
You liked to make us happy;
it was safer when we were having fun.

Watching you go,
the swarms of your fame
inhaled up my nose,
sticking like gnats to my lips and tongue,
I wave them off with my cap,

as they blow away
to the next famous death
on the meaningless next page.

Watching you go
through a perfect winter twilight in the mountains,
just as the sun inched down
and finally dropped
into the dark,
like your breath inched out
and stopped
as you dropped out of view,
we heard coyotes bark and laugh,
relieved of light
like you, when life was lifted from you,
then sensed them
tense and watch,
I swear it's true,
your easy disappearance
moving through the night