

1977

Getty

Richard Hugo

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His grave is modern. His anguish goes back—
the first tone from struck rock. You and I,
we're civilized. We can't weep when it's needed or counts.
If you die first, I'll die slow as Big Bear,
my pale days thin with age,
night after night, the stars callow as children.

Getty / Richard Hugo

Today, I remembered Getty, the old man
at Price's lake who rented boats and coughed
and told me he was gone. Moss caked his lungs
and a sky I'd forgotten drifted in his eyes.
The brooks I caught were dazzling and wild.
I shouted 'Lord love Getty' at the trees.
Nothing came back. The young sheen of willows
hung over cedars dark and grumpy with age.

I came back early next spring but Getty
prophetically blue, had gone, that winter
I stayed home in Seattle and wrote hard
to make 'alive' and 'violent' do for the sky.

Some days the fish don't bite. You know that.
And we die at wrong times, like Friday.
Whatever day Getty died, it could not be special
or wrong, an old man like him, alone
with a lake, no urge to go after trout
and no particular feeling when nylon
arcs out over the water, hangs that one moment
all moments pulse, first kiss, first soft light
in the eyes of the girl who seemed nothing last week,
and settles soft as a far teal
and waits.

Let's see. What happened today: a mild fight
in the tenure meeting. We voted nine to one 'no.'

A disturbed student raged in my office
about elk roaming some desert for water.
A swim—I felt my arms harden
and knew I was building more wind.
On the way home, night ignited the town
and I thought of a speech: In conclusion,
let me say Getty let me say—
I remembered his eyes and the sky in them,
his easy prediction coughed out
like we had plenty in common.

Alma / Kathryn Stripling

Two dead leaves
on the table and ice

floats on milk like the ashes
of leaves. Oak
twigs kindle
and fire leaps like a prayer, "Give us

breath." When I open
the door and breathe deeply
the cold air inflames me.
The fire seizes log after log.

In the garden my husband burns
dead stalks of squash and potatoes.
I sweep my dust into the coals
and our smoke mingles over the orchard.

In winter I sweep the floor gladly.
I gather the crumbs from the cupboard,
and the rinds of the apples.
When the dust bin grows heavy,
I give what it holds to the fire
and the fire sings its song: