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To Radcliffe Squires

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TO RADCLIFFE SQUIRES

In Memoriam

“The dangerous magic of human memory.” You envied that phrase by Frederic Prokosch and his pretty-boy looks, and his year of fame. Shyly, you showed me a studio photo once, yourself as his double, girl-glamorous, prewar faun’s flesh unwrinkled as Narcissus. The Asiatics whispered to your generation: journey among the wicked vanities and turn what is “tarnished, perverse, epicene” into vignettes the world will savor secondhand, keepsakes for an afterlife of vanished esteem. You hero-worshiped this vagrant who “had no master—and hardly a peer,” who never answered your letters as you charted his intensities in an admiring book.

Prokosch abandoned verse; you took it up, six postwar volumes of crystalline speech, stanzas wind-carved as the Utah buttes. Tracing these fey solitaries to their source I found a mercurial tree-keeper, a connoisseur gracing the house and garden with rare slips from Olympus, cuttings from Andros and Carmel. “Life is the only pragma; it is the only fact,” you wrote in summarizing The Skies of Europe, and neglect of your art did not entirely sour, even in your seventies, the praise of life you offered a few hundred readers, till life stopped one Valentine’s Day, and you put by your spoiled body on that unnatural shore.
I wonder what made you love, so much and so long, the maker of *The Carnival*, wayward, haunted, the Shelley this century keeps from its schools. The only unforgivable sin, you often said, is to impersonate oneself. Of course, but how many others are worth mimicking? One model, at least, must drive the hungry spirit among otherworldly gardens, the Asia of poets. Love will crown the voice of a generation. You never knew celebrity, not even a year, but your obscure life grows elsewhere still, in human memory like mine, in the exotic herbs you divided among friends, in the language you made a dangerous magic of. *Requiescas*