A Late Rose for George

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A Late Rose For George

by Isabelle Gros

George, I miss you.
I can no longer call you
when I need friendly counsel.
I still hear your voice saying:
"George Bauer." When I reached out
for tenderness, you were always a call away.

Somehow, I knew you would not come to France this summer.
I invited Sanford instead of you for the conference in Toulouse.
We were there together without you for the first time.

When Paulette called from Los Angeles,
"Bad news, be strong," she said.
I screamed, shocked into madness.
Black dress, wet hair,
crazed eyes, orphaned,
I walked, and ate with your friend
telling me unknown details of your life.
"How will we live without George?" he sighed
and I could not reply.

Memories of you perfumed my breath.
I thought of the time, in your study,
when I smoked one of your cigars,
barely moving, my eyes fixed intently on you,
you, reading a chapter of my dissertation.
I hear you tell me, again and again,
just before I left for France in May,
"I'm not dead yet, kid."
Although I was close to Grasse,
I could not get to the perfume factories
in search of scents. “French people have a peculiar
relationship to smell,” you had told me in May.
“Bring back anything you can on that subject.”
You were preparing a class on the sewers of Paris for Fall.
Instead, I read the novel *Perfume*, and remembered
how at first I did not like your smell.
Your hands marked with muddy marks, a little sweaty,
your skin yellowish, a faint smell of Cuban cigars and alcohol
made me believe you were unhealthy.
I did not come close to you.

What a mistake I made at first,
avoiding you as a teacher.
Later, you walked me gently through the completion of my Ph.D.
You introduced me to your friends:
at the MLA each year, we all drank,
laughed and gossiped in your room.
I came to love your uniform black shirt and pants.
Yourself pope of dada
writing only for us, your friends,
writing of gay flowers, snails, oysters
and scents of others.

Jean-François told me yesterday:
“With George, a part of my world disappeared,” and
holding the phone tight, I understood.
Grave flowers on the ocean where your ashes
were scattered, I did not send one rose,
for George—you’re not dead yet
in my mind.