

Springtime and Hopkins and You

I swatted at carpenter bees with a copy of *New Yorker*,
one of the double issues that give you some leverage each swing,
and frazzled by another poem I couldn't understand,
I welcomed their buzzing distraction, the hellos from neighbors who passed
on the sidewalk in front of the porch, and all the juice and joy
of a warm day in June that pulled me from those shiny pages
and tormenting words. But I felt the breeze off Half Moon Lake

and thought of you, and we sat again in that Schofield room
with Doctor Jackson telling us even Eliot did not
understand every word he put in his poems. I hear your voice
reciting a Hopkins poem to the class, tears in your eyes,
adamant we should not waste our time and make up meaning
when none exists, and showing us how each word of Hopkins
was perfect, clear. And teacher and class and I applauded.

You refused to attend any church while we were together,
worship always private, just you and that Jesuit priest,
though as we walked through woods I recognized prayers when you pointed
toward a falcon that soared through a sky you praised as dappled
or when you softly whispered *Goldengrove unleaving*
to a pillow or *ah, bright wings!* at night in dreams.
After you left, I kept neglecting to return

the book I knew you wanted. I'm sorry. In lamplight I follow
when your tiny cursive wanders the margins beside his poems,
sure no one else could decipher the winding trail of words.
When you died, your family asked if I would come to your service,
but I didn't go, certain your soul resides in the book.
Its home is on a shelf we built together that spring,
and when I hold it open, I hear you breathe in the night.

Originally published in *Barstow & Grand*, Fall 2024. Thank you, editor Eric Rasmussen.