

The Shiga Hero (Dearest Uncle)

—for Bill Sibley

As usual I'm not supposed to talk about this, but it is an elegy

and, lucky you, you followed the sing-along ball

over the waves, sailor boys rigging the mast,

arms half folded and a Chablis, tipping back

in a world born to its station, a world across the street

in sunny Maine, where the neighbors, the Trumps,

said it was a pity the way the pecking order gets televised nowadays.

I, proud anyman and mannered servant

floated into middle-class complacency,

never got quite comfortable being comfortable.

I'm sure there's a name for it (but it's too late to ask, now, isn't it?).

Anyways, the clutter of the world leaves a core freshness

to return to when notes seem only a turn of chords in memory.

Though never your nephew, you were more than a father,

knowing man cannot live in literary limbo for long.

When I said *how can I ever repay you?*

you waited at the door, eyebrows raised

while I simply slipped out with the others

though I like Johannesburg Dry Riesling from the lower highlands.

Did you teach me how to tease too?

I hope you aren't mad, heavens,

the way ghosts in our stories came unbuckled

at the slightest rebuff, following lavish corridors of friendliness,

long and echoey. Rough days wear us down.

The body wanders,

holding the lighter,

waiting, dearest uncle.

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