

For My Father, 1934-1990

Marni Asplund Campbell

Have you noticed, then, that sound moves
differently in fall—such falling
of leaves, a fall
from warmth and
 pleasure
into slower life, and old patterns—
and the sound, too, falls
in clear waves, so much clarity in the sound of bells
from a school and the brush of dry leaves so
powerful that I step reverent,
through these battering bells
these dead leaves and
the distant pulse of the sun
falling, shrinking.

I walk through the square late and anxious
and you step beside me taking my arm
as you sometimes did
to tell me something;
that this fall is yours
with the pleasures of clear sound,
bells that call to old books and dialogue, small windows
circumspect with ivy.
But you chose this time of urgent sound
to leave,
hands upturned
in a final gesture of amusement
at the presence of geese and corn,
and the leaves that scream
hectic color into the non-light
of dead suns.
And when you come to me now, it is in
a clear plastic bag—soft leather shoes,
faded oatmeal sweater, cut up the back, your wallet—
this is just loose change

from a scattered life
engraved with a message but not speaking.

And if you came again, there is not much I could tell you,
except for this:

peace is not a soft cloud
that makes solitude from isolation or
reverence from fear
peace is a hot knife that
easily slides through skin and bones.
Peace is not in your white, still face
or in the cold hands that now lie folded
on your chest, hiding the long thin scar,
your embarrassment
but it is in the moan of the widow
who must now leave you there,
alone in your room
and find life in the autumn that is sweet,
find that there is sound from where you are.
It rolls through fall air,
maybe like a slow chant,
but more like soft, dead leaves.