

V.B. Price

THE OWL, THE SEAL, AND THE COYOTES  
–October 1993

Watching you go through the last days,  
I tell you once that “you’re my hero,” and you,  
barely able to breathe,  
instantly reply,  
like a Don cleaning his nails,  
“Watch out for the god damn accountants.”

Watching you go,  
I recognize the final photos of your life.  
What a scream!  
Flat on your back,  
in your ratty, flamingo-pink tee and horrible robe,  
oxygen tubes in your nose,  
you sensed the camera, and raised your arms over your head,  
a mock ballerina, toe dancing off the screen.

Watching you go,  
I hear on the phone that you’re gone,  
and tell my sister by phone that you’re gone,  
that you took all day,  
holding the shepherdess by the hand,  
that you left around 6 p.m.,  
wearing a long blue cloak and a tickled grin,  
two flappers by your side,  
eager for the night to begin,  
as always, wanting  
what happens next.

Watching you go,  
I see, amazed,  
the gray cottonwood limbs  
blossom into a twilight owl, huge  
like the tree,  
its black feathered bark  
disguising the promise that trees can fly,

like you can do the impossible  
and finally die.  
Watching you go,  
I turn nasty.  
I snap at idiot questions,  
made desperate  
by a mute  
suffocation  
of love  
by bile,  
of loss  
by relief,  
of privacy  
by violation,  
by undesired  
nudity  
and no place to hide.  
You can’t  
just say no  
to the rape of the press.

Watching you go,  
I feel so little yet,  
mostly a sadness  
over the absence of feeling;  
I want so much to miss you;  
I can hear the hollow roll  
of rubber tires on polished wooden floors  
move toward my life even now,  
the sound of your scooter,  
moving you on  
past disease  
to one more breakfast out of bed.

Watching you go on the wine dark sea,  
I think of Odysseus,  
brine caked, awaking on Nausicca’s shore;  
“wine dark”  
is not the color only,  
it is more  
the dark, intoxicating surface

of the speechless deep.

Watching you go  
out to sea with your pals,  
I look over at the empty chair on the boat  
to see if you're OK,  
if it's all too much,  
if you're reaching for the out of reach,  
if you're reaching for me  
to reassure me  
-but you're not.

Watching you go  
in a trail of roses on the sea,  
your ashes falling like a pure white wish  
through the muscle of the waves,  
your planter's hat riding the breakers to be,  
I wonder if Proteus,  
nudging a baby seal  
so it pops up and down  
through the sad bouquet,  
was sending a message from you.  
I conclude  
that I can't read the signs,  
but the token will do.

Watching you go,  
feeling so little of you,  
I see now  
the performance of your life,  
never having been allowed before  
behind the curtain:  
You liked to make us happy;  
it was safer when we were having fun.

Watching you go,  
the swarms of your fame  
inhaled up my nose,  
sticking like gnats to my lips and tongue,  
I wave them off with my cap,

as they blow away  
to the next famous death  
on the meaningless next page.

Watching you go  
through a perfect winter twilight in the mountains,  
just as the sun inched down  
and finally dropped  
into the dark,  
like your breath inched out  
and stopped  
as you dropped out of view,  
we heard coyotes bark and laugh,  
relieved of light  
like you, when life was lifted from you,  
then sensed them  
tense and watch,  
I swear it's true,  
your easy disappearance  
moving through the night