Alzheimer's; Communist

Harry Gerfen
Alzheimer's

He'd like to say he didn't slam the door and walk the streets in anger, that the dead leaves sounded like something other than dead leaves scuttling over the asphalt, that he stared at the first snow on the distant mountains and pulled his collar around his throat and leaned into the wind and forgot why his fists were clenched.

But when he came home she was still on the couch with her knees pressed together and her hands folded in her lap. She turned her eyes toward him, and he hung his coat and bent down and began to collect the stacks of photographs he had thrown to the floor. Again, he sat beside her and tried to put back pieces of her memory one by one, but this time, when she began to cry, he took her small hands in his own and knew the idea had been impossible and heard the sound of the leaves scraping against the porch and a window shuddering
with the first breath
of winter, and he placed his lips
on her forehead and closed
his burning eyes.

Henry Gerfen

Communist

The locals said after the war he spent
twenty-five years in Franco’s jails,
emittered, half-insane, dying
of hunger and contemplating revenge.
All of which made him a hero to me, an object
of my unwavering fascination as I watched him
sit, day after day, in the half-shade
of the same flickering leaves, studying
the monotonous rows of twisted olive trees
on the brown, dust choked Andalusian hills.
When he finally spoke to me, one night,
he was drunk in the local bodega. Leaning forward
on a three-legged stool, he pushed his breath
into my face. His voice had the texture
of gravel. Do you know what I wanted,
what I really wanted? he asked
with the single-mindedness of a man
discharging a burden he had carried
too many times up the same hill.
I wanted a woman. I wanted
to get laid, he said and laughed.
What did I expect? A fist
in the air? A band playing the International?
The word liberty on his lips?

Henry Gerfen