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Alzheimer's; Communist

Harry Gerfen

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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,
embittered, 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