

Four hearts and a vase of jonquils

by Mathew Paust

I wonder if they'll be there,
Near the place where you gave up the ghost.
I wonder as I drive the road you rode
To where I know I'll find the rubber remnants
Rubbed off tires locked by brakes
Your squeezing hands applied in desperate
Change of heart?

I wonder as I pass the place
You likely entered from,
From where your widow lives,
From where she moved to
When your hearts unclasped.
I wonder how your final visit was,
If separation's storm had waned
For one of you, or gained new ire.
I guess the latter.

My wondering gains velocity along the stretch,
The final stretch from where you likely entered
To where you must have seen the STOP sign growing large
As you approached it in your deadly dash.
I scan the road for skids of black to tell me
Something more was going on,
Some failure of machine to heed
The man astride its virile engine,
But no...
Oh, wait! There's one...a small thin stretch of tire skid,
Well short of the end, no STOP sign yet in sight.

Short, but long enough to imply
Another violent death forestalled --
A child's...a dog's...

No.
More likely one last throttle goose,
Acceleration burst, no
Change of heart.

So now I near the spot where your life stopped,
And wondering's back to what I'll find
Besides the skid mark...there it is...
It starts too late, too near the octagonal sign.
No sign of of impact out there beyond,
Where it happened.
All cleaned up, everything.
I stop and crane my neck,
Strain eyes to find the yellow clump,
The jonquils I'd seen yesterday,
A luscious bunch ensconced in vase
With a single forsythia sprig and one of white hemlock.
I'd seen the mourner gather and arrange
And leave with them for destination
Undisclosed.

Ambivalence now resides within,
You deserved the flowers, those flowers,
I can't deny, hard as I try,
Hard as it is to reconcile the betrayal,
The terrible poignance of so intimate a gesture
To another.
That the widow received them in your stead
Is a softer pain for me to bear
On the surface.

