

I Got Word

I got word this morning that he died. Five days ago. I held back tears. Why hold back, I thought. No one would even see. And if someone was here to notice I could just explain. Explain what though? The “though” is a bridge. To what end? I only met him once. We really met, I mean had a preplanned meeting in a café on the rue Lagrange. The café was probably called Café Lagrange. I chose it because it was familiar to me. I’d been living around the corner on rue des Anglais, in the 5th arrondissement, about which a friend living in the 9th said it did not exist. He was driving, and told me with the certainty of a man living in the 9th there was no such street. He—the man who had died five days ago—I think he was wearing a v-neck sweater, cerulean blue. Or maybe Bob was wearing that blue sweater when we first met at the Poetry Center, his blond hair (I remember it as being blond) pulled back in a ponytail. A tale, the long and short of it, was that I was crying for a man I’d met once. When I saw him at the café—did he see me first or did I see him first? I probably got there ahead of time and claimed the table. I do that. I like to get there first, be there, as if I am always there at that table in that café, have been there forever. He looked quite athletic, as if he were a tennis player. Maybe he was a tennis player, had just come from the courts. I can’t remember whether or not he was carrying his racquet. He looked very energetic for a writer. “Her hair, her hair,” he kept repeating, as though tossing his imaginary hair, as though berating me for not being ravishing. I had long hair at the time but I knew by his affect that he was not taken by my long hair. It was not luxuriant, bewitching. She had beautiful thick hair, it was true, just look at the one or two pictures that are around. He showed me the photos from an old yellowed page of newsprint. It was from the TV section of an old newspaper. Maybe it was just one photo. But I knew there must have been more. That photographer snapping photos of the famous writer that the man I was meeting had written a book about, and the not so famous young poet with the fabulous hair, meeting in a café somewhere in Paris or Berlin, must have developed the lot of them and given them to the publisher, who paid him handsomely. Or to the editorial desk who had chosen one image for the paper that probably had a slot for a documentary about the famous writer. Where were the others? I had tried to find out, had called the paper. That section didn’t exist any more. The person I spoke to said they didn’t keep photos around. Why hadn’t they archived them? When the famous writer that the man I was meeting had written a book about died, none of these images of him and the younger woman poet at a table in a café had come to light, so I knew they were telling the truth when they said they didn’t have those photographs. The man who met me in the café to talk about the younger woman poet with bewitching hair said that they, they older, or younger, or middle-aged, or all of the above, the men talked among themselves about her hair. Did they whisper about it while she was walking past them on the street, or in a committee room when they got together to discuss their publishing projects? Did they talk about her fierce writing?

*Pour Ludovic Janvier
Paris, 1934—20 janvier 2016*