

Hayden Carruth

VALENTINE

Today, all day was Valentine's Day.
I watched the Olympic Games, especially
The Russian and Japanese skaters who were
Lovely beyond words, so young and strong.
The pain I've felt this whole day has
Thickened in my brain like an old baseball
Left out too long in the rain. How many
Valentine's verses have I written
In my seventy itinerant years of cobbling
Syntax and measure by the wayside with
My pack and my little trundle kit?
Hundreds no doubt and maybe more.
Then why am I so laggard now?
It's hard to say. Fatigue and old age
Might be the answer, yet I think not.
I was old when I was born,
And I've been tired all my life.
Even so, I think I've been
Reasonably productive. No,
The truth more likely is that I'm
Sunk in old anxiety and depression.
The verse will fail. The verse IS failing!
What could be clearer? Oh, my dearest,
You must help me again. Fetch me
My medicine and my imagination,
And then listen while I say in prose
you are more beautiful than any, more
talented and wise. You are my lifelong
love, my old companion, the one on
whom I rely to see me to my grave. You
are my beloved always and always. Please
be with me, talk to me, hold me, and stand
beside me, dearest, when I gaze out the
window.

Here you are, sweetheart, a most un-
conventional valentine, but only one day late.

MARK

You were the stalwart of our neighborhood,
Ready with a smile when we broke down
On the road. You gave us a jump-start on
Freezing mornings. And when an old thorn-tree
Needed to be taken out, you put on your old
Leather coat and climbed right in and cut. Then you
Trimmed the thorns with your axe in one hand
And you put the sticks in the supply of stovewood
In the garage, and all you asked for was a beer or
A cup of coffee. When you were laid off in the
Downsizing of Oneida Ltd, we could read the hardship
In your eyes, hardship for you and Laurie, but you
Didn't complain. "Everyone's in the same boat," you
Said, and you smiled and waved when you went by.
Your motorcycle was your best pal, and you knew
Every nut and bolt. You kept it in prime condition,
And often we saw you buffing the chrome, the fenders,
The tank when we drove by on summer evenings.
Mark, we miss you terribly. We always will. You
Held the door for your mother at the post office
And helped with yard chores or in the garden. Now
Nora must learn to live without you, which is
The hardest task any parent can ever face.
May God bless you, Mark, and may He someday
Tell us why He let this happen. Meanwhile we
Will keep your memory alive and clear
Until our own time comes. But now, so long,
Mark. It was truly great to know you, and
We shall never forget.