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## Longing Eyebrows

Eamon Loingsigh

I, for one, can't wait. When the time longs into my soul and the creak in my knees cause gentle steps, I'll grow long my eyebrows. I'll let them loose on my face as I chase away the last days of my living.

Now I stand though. I have son and daughters rearing up on me. Smiling as they gain to overtake me.

Today is the day a great poet died. And nothing's warmer in the throat than the poet that you have long smiled with in word. From the long life he gently stepped and with such great care. So thoughtful that it was oft he was for granted taken.

'til now.

The sound of the subway sizzling in a whoosh through the long tunnels brings me back to my grandfather too. Another man of the gentle hand who so gives me the light of hope for my long eyebrowed salute to this life. He held my hand in the traincar for he knew the surroundings were new on me. Dark colors around, spray paint clicking sounds splayed upon each wall and passing train, *ca-click-ca-click-ca-click* went swooshing through my cotton-wool brain.

My grandfather rarely talked. By trade, he was a listener. And there had been in this life nothing that once he had not heard sung by the throats of men whetted with liquor in the old west of Manhattan saloon in our family.

"Who are the Mets playing today?" asked I.

"The Astros."

"Houston Astros?"

He nodded in smile at me, tapped the top of my hand on my knee.

"Jose Cruz is on the Astros. I like his stance."

"Really? How so?"

"Uh, he just has a, uh, it looks cool."

“Cool?”

“Yeah, like it’s a fluid motion.”

“A fluid motion? That’s a wonderful way of explaining it.”

“Yeah, it’s just a fluid way of swinging. Like he has an artistic way of swinging and I can imagine him hitting the ball square while, um, before he has even swung yet. Do you know what I mean?”

“I do, I do. Much better now, I understand.”

The lights flick on and off and we speed through the click of the black tunnels as he smiles from above. His dear hands and the touch which became so familiar to me, I couldn’t see then, but was the touch of a poet who’d never once been named so. He’d not written much words in his long years and his work was that of hearing the spirits sway in his mind like the Latin prayers of his own youth, sweeping in Mass along the echo of another era long since left.

I have a picture of him when he was yet a young soul. It’s dated 1919.



My grandfather on the right with his eldest sister’s hands on his shoulder.

I look upon it now and remember that train ride in 1979, when I was that age.

“Haven’t you ever seen Jose Cruz play before?” I asked.

“I suppose I have, but never quite saw him as I do now.”

It was an afternoon game, warm on the skin. We sat in the sun and I looked over the expanse of the place and with the smell of the wind and the green of the grass on my nose, my mind was set on a pace. The grass now so welcome a smell with the clickety-clack of rust out of the way, yet the Met fans did not see it in such a way.

“Ya bum!”

“Ya’re a friggin’ louse! Go back to da minors!”

And when Jose Cruz hit a long shot that swooped across my eyes in the sky, headed down with a reaching carry, I stood up with the rest of the crowd but for another reason. I was taken by the swing of him while the color of the blue and white uniforms, the yellow and orange uniforms, the green of the grass, the colorado of the infield left the place, overcome with a whooshing, resounding “BOOOOO!”

Darkening my thoughts, he stood by me and looked down, seeing too the color of my face leaving it. The sadness of the whole world rising in the chant of disgust and blasting down into me like a wave smacking my eyes and face.

“What a beautiful swing!” he yelled in my ears above the mad crowd.

I kept my mouth closed and looked up at him with the smile of a child once understood. He who was a lifelong Brooklyn Dodgers fan turned New York Mets fan found my little thoughts truer than any loyalty to his team.

I had never heard him raise his voice before. And I never heard him raise his voice again. The only time worth doing so, was then, I suppose.

“In the gloom you cannot trace a wrinkle on their beeswax brow,” he said, after the crowd laid down their insults and we all sat back in our stadium pews.

I listened, then looked away. A few pitches later when the urgency of the words left us, I asked what he meant by them.

He smiled, “Could mean anything. That’s the beauty of poetry and of religion. It means what you make of it.”

“Can you say it again, I don’t remember it perfectly.”

“In the gloom you cannot trace a wrinkle on their beeswax brow.”

“Who is ‘they’?”

“Poor women in a city church.”

“Oh.”

“You can think about it long, but it only means what you make of it.”

The distant thud of ball in catcher’s mitt fell far away. The anger of the crowd too, many years away. Here I sit writing as I may of the death of a great poet that in my childhood found a way to open my thoughts to the many, many things they can possibly convey.

“What is the name of that person who wrote that?” I asked my grandfather.

He smiled and looked down at me again, tapping his familiar hand on the top of my own, “Seamus Heaney.”