The Patriarchs – An Elegy

The weather in the window this morning is snow, unseasonal singular flakes, a slow winter’s final shiver. On such an occasion to presume to eulogise one man is to pipe up for a whole generation - that crew whose survival was always the stuff of minor miracle, who came ashore in orange-crate coracles, fought ingenious wars, finagled triumphs at sea with flaming decoy boats, and side-stepped torpedoes.

Husbands to duty, they unrolled their plans across billiard tables and vehicle bonnets, regrouped at breakfast. What their secrets were was everyone’s guess and nobody’s business. Great-grandfathers from birth, in time they became both inner core and outer case in a family heirloom of nesting dolls. Like evidence of early man their boot-prints stand in the hardened earth of rose-beds and borders.

They were sons of a zodiac out of sync with the solar year, but turned their minds to the day’s big science and heavy questions. To study their hands at rest was to picture maps showing hachured valleys and indigo streams, schemes of old campaigns and reconnaissance missions. Last of the great avuncular magicians they kept their best tricks for the grand finale: Disproving Immortality and Disappearing Entirely.

The major oaks in the wood start tuning up and skies to come will deliver their tributes. But for now, a cold April’s closing moments parachute slowly home, so by mid-afternoon snow is recast as seed heads and thistledown.

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