

Rome · *Casey Finch*

He was civilized and grievous. On the thin, uncelebrated day he died, the sparrows flew out like an opened fist, dragging the invisible sky behind them. The sparrows flew out in idiotic formation, as in cartoons, and together sang an old and awkward song; though out of it came nothing. For in the provinces the chained and frozen rivers did nothing when the news of it arrived. The aqueducts stood, as always, immovable in the televised wind. No fire dismantled the olive groves. No roads began to break apart

or disappear. He was civilized and grievous. He used to intercept the orders the wind gave to the trees, to string the stars themselves into a corrupt astrology that placed at the center of the tiniest, most distant things his sword and shining brow. But on the unrecorded day he died, nothing was stolen or noticed. No one wrote a single elegy or tugged madly at his tiny hair. No satellites swerved from their marvelous orbits across the Roman sky.

He was gifted and good to look at. He was civilized and grievous and lean. He used to stand at the control board of battles, to stare, magnificent and horny, at the borders of countries whose names he could not pronounce, and there decide what of the earth he would push aside and what he would build into another, lousy road. But on the day he died, the poems and the lies he commissioned returned to nothing, hollow now and useless. Nothing was harmed or misplaced. No quarrels were interrupted. And

in the afternoon no provinces gathered to form a geography of mourning. It was impossible to dislike or ignore him, for he drank too much and wept at his own happiness. It was impossible to forget the beautiful, inconsistent language he pushed down the throats of his enemies. He was civilized and cheerful. He was

beautiful and abrasive and worthy. But when he died, when the good times became too good to untangle, nothing bore his body on a shield or broadcast the news of it to the provinces. Nothing replaced the vending machines he set up at the crossroads. And, in the end, nothing came down on a wind from the Pyrenees and dropped leaves into his wide, ridiculous grave.