

# Remembering the Chevrolet

by Clifton H. Jolley

A lament by one of England's best friends and former neighbor and colleague. It was published in the tribute issue *Dialogue* published following England's passing.

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## 1. The Miracle

*"The tumor.. .apparently responsible for his recent emotional decline."*

Gene's criticism is a stone upon my mouth. He accused:  
"You resurrect words I like, like bodies brought too often  
from the tomb to be surprising, interesting, new." Like Clint, who  
loved saying "portico," and Gene himself: speaking all that religion

as though he knew. My words are adjectivals: qualifying  
what someone else more cleverly construed. Which may be  
right, since I really, really never had a clue. Gene would nod  
and tell me how little harm there is not having read much,

not speaking Latin or French, having cheated  
my way through graduate Greek, and other things  
I do. I believed him. Not because of anyone's pretension:  
if what one intends is not interesting, why trouble its being true?

Which is why when I learned about the operation,  
I intended to telephone Gene, and tell him how  
my touch typing has suffered from the palsy in my hands,  
and wonder with him whether not spelling well precedes

the objective correlative in one's fingers, and is,  
after all, not a lack of skill at all, but all the same  
and well? Which was about the time I learned of his collapse,  
and of the tumor removed with the right frontal orb of his brain,

and of the explanation emailed me that perhaps the tumor could explain  
"his recent emotional decline." As though anything can explain.  
As though disappointment were a disease to be excised, a kind of  
redundancy of flesh, the resolution of which is surgery.

As though everyone knew: “We’ll find and remove his sadness.  
And when we’re through: A new heaven and a new earth.  
The New Jerusalem he thought he knew; but *we* have better known the truth.”  
No more words. No more disappointment or decline. No more wounds.

Except, of course, this necessary removal of his brain.  
Which I would have liked discussing with him, to be sure  
the thoughts discarded with that repetition of tissue did not remove  
his forgiveness of my sins; that in the morning when he wakes in his tomb,

Gene England does not expect me to retake the French  
I pretended learning, does not think I’m a fool  
for disbelieving and for not reading all the books I should.  
I would not want Eugene’s cure to be: stop loving me.

Others will, of course, want Eugene alive.  
Others will, of course, know precisely why  
he was sad, and the reason for his declining health,  
and all the wonderful religion he had in that amputated brain.

All I really, really know is this: fly fishing for native trout  
on the upper Weber River. Gene taught me  
to dry the feather in the air and told me: “That’s all  
you really, really need to know.” Which I remember. So,

if he remembers (with such a loss of flesh),  
perhaps he still will know to love me  
and to forgive what I less know than when he first forgave  
my ignorance and suffered me his love.

2. Muerte.  
“... *He is Dead.*”

On the evening Gene England died I was thinking something.  
I was sitting somewhere eating carrots and thinking something  
I can’t remember. I can’t remember what I was imagining on the evening  
Eugene England died. Which is what I had to say when Rudy Silva told me:

Nothing. I said: “Thanks for calling,” and something about  
would he call to tell me when the funeral was to be.  
I admit: Gene’s dying took me by surprise, because I believed him  
when he told me he had the miracle, and I assumed he meant:

“To save my life.” When I saw him in the hospital  
we kissed (the ancient, peculiar Mormon ritual)  
and he said: “I’ve had a miracle,” and I thought he meant  
to stay alive. His eyebrows were the size of burning bushes

against the desert of his shaved head,  
the distance of his anxious eyes.  
I said, “You look just fine.” But the comedy  
had gone from him. He was serious in the way

I now suspect the least of us become  
when the miracle is not to be alive.  
I had not anticipated he would die. Which is why  
I was eating somewhere, something when he died.

Eugene: Tonight I’m watching through the house  
for draperies. I’m covering the mirrors. I’m  
tearing clothing. I’m putting ash upon my face.  
I’m remembering each less deserving living thing

that is still alive. I’m thinking of myself  
and wondering: did you ever really, really  
know what you have done? Did you ever feel so guilty  
as you have become for so inconveniently having died?

I’m putting towels on the long mirror in the hall.  
I’m draping each bathroom with newspaper, taped.  
I’m thinking nothing anymore. I’m remembering nothing.  
I’m only feeling this wound in me, this ulcer I’ve discovered

in the belly I’ve become. And I know what you are saying:  
that there still are huge omissions in my reading, that I am  
irreverent of the miracles you have seen. I always knew I was,  
as I know you have forgiven me. Forgive me still, Eugene,

that I did not anticipate your dying, that I did not believe  
this ultimate miracle of your life. That I still am blind  
to what you now can see. I think Karl Keller may have been in  
love with you, which was a blessing I can now believe. I love you

for the inevitability of your larger life in this smaller life in me.  
And I imagine death as changed because you have gone  
to where I cannot yet proceed to go, but now believe, now feel  
in the wound that has so deeply and so permanently wounded me.

I will never again eat meat. I will never again believe  
it possible to apprehend the distance from this retreat,  
to Kolob, except as calculated by the twine required to bail  
a bail of hay, the distance from the hand of a boy to pitch it

on the truck. And if I remember anything again  
it will be the trick to dry a fly in the air before  
allowing it—at the end of a filament stretched straight  
against the ether of the Utah sky—to touch the water

and float upon the surface of the stream. I  
do not forgive you having died. I do not forgive  
not having understood nor understanding nor believing  
I will remember what I was thinking when you died.

This is what I've learned about fly fishing:  
Since Eugene gave me the nine-foot graphite rod  
(for having helped him build his home), I've stopped  
catching fish, or caring for the catching or the catch.

Instead, I'm learning this higher education:  
the naming of the fly, the silicon wash  
to help it float, the arc of line, the brilliant water,  
the clear and empty sky, the hook that is to die.

And finding holes, the "Glory Holes"  
where Gene and Doug Thayer caught fish,  
and I watched the fly tempt the rise of imaginary trout  
I hoped to catch the fly and be caught. You may

say I am no longer a fisherman, since fish  
are no longer the resolution of my fishing.  
And you might be right. Eugene resolved  
in me what otherwise was inevitability:

anyone would agree to not catch fish  
is like not doing anything, except to die.  
Which is why I asked Mary Bradford: "Will you  
cover my face with kisses the way you did Eugene

when it was inevitable he would not survive?"  
And she replied: "Will you cover mine?"  
When I close my eyes, I can see Mary's kisses  
On Eugene's face, taste Gene's kiss on mine.

I can see the arc of line, the trust of fly.  
I've not caught fish since bait. No longer try,  
nor more than learn this trick that turns graphite into  
a tool. I have never turned a hole to glory,

nor shall since Gene has gone down to death.  
When I close my eyes, I see him saying:  
"You have not read enough. There is an emptiness  
in your education as still as water, as deep as sky."

My mourning is complete, Eugene.  
I despair in rod and line and fly.  
I catch nothing anymore, but watch death catch you  
as it would a lesser academic who has not studied

what it is to die. Rainbow. Brown. Golden.  
The albino trout the Fish & Game bred to be seen  
against the green water, the green rocks, the green stream.  
You caught every one, the magic in you like a dream

of water, of sky, of stream. And the Green Man  
marching in you as though decapitation were  
no more than inconvenience, which inconvenience  
we now perceive as death: your final trick, Eugene.

What I hope to dream is God catching us,  
not as in a snare, but on a fly. What I hope to see  
is you, Eugene, caught up to glory, whole, as every Mormon  
believes he'll be: a fish caught by God and carried to the sky.

### 3. Sitting Shiva

*"I've had a miracle!"*

On the morning of his funeral, I was more  
than a little drunk. I'm sorry, Charlotte. I began  
drinking on the plane from Disneyland to Salt Lake City,  
thinking of the Pope shot and Eugene alarmed as though

ordained to be alarmed. Which, of course, he was.  
And I was thinking: "Disneyland to Salt Lake City,  
then south to Provo and the Tabernacle. The trip I once  
described" when teaching technical writing for Shipley

Associates, having flown from Bountiful, Utah,  
to Pleasanton, California, and the inquisitor said,  
“Little bit of the Yellow Brick Road there, isn’t there?”  
And at the time I was amused, but on the plane that morning

I was not. I was remembering the photo  
on the cover of a German magazine: the Pope  
recoiling (shot) and Gene recoiling (as though he were shot)  
and somewhere in the crowd: the less evident assassin.

And I was pretty certain that is what had happened:  
somewhere in the crowd: a villain. And I was  
pretty sure I knew who it was. And I was about to say his name,  
when between the dwarfs and Zion, I lost the action and the name.

Because what, after all, does any of it matter now.  
Clint dead (whose poetry excused his living),  
and Arthur King, and Aunt Delilah, and now Eugene.  
And I was wondering: “What is it worth, to be alive?”

So, I was drinking Bloody Mary’s and happy  
No, I was sad, and getting sadder when I came  
into the tabernacle to cry. That’s it. Bert’s eulogy,  
the singing and the prayers. This is what it is to die.

No more fishing now, Eugene. No more flies.  
No more Bert Wilson’s beautiful, loving lie:  
“I shot the Commissioner’s Goose, but Gene broke my truck”  
before he died. And I remember how Bert told me he threw up

and told Eugene, “I shot his goose, and here he comes!”  
Is that how it is to die, Eugene? To be discovered, to be  
found out? Or is it hopeful, like a trout rising to the dry and floating fly?  
I don’t care as much as that you’ve died. And I suspect what you would say:

“Except, it isn’t a lie, a trick, a fiction, an effort to surprise.  
Death is merely knowing what it has been to be alive.”  
I’m remembering the fly. I’m remembering to be alive. I’m thinking  
of the Chevrolet, Gene; and of the question: Why?

I am no longer so afraid to die, if they sing for me these songs,  
if they make for me these reasons why I was once alive.  
Your daughter told me: “A woman said the world is not ready  
to lose Gene England, and I wondered: ‘What about my Father.’”

Eugene: I think you may have found a good day to die.  
I think you may have told me, had I listened:  
“The Miracle is not what, but why,” and I did not hear you, already  
made deaf by loneliness. Which is how I know: *this may also be a lie.*

But if it is, you are sitting in your Mormon heaven to tell me:  
“Do not believe nor hope in me; I am not the hope to die,  
but what I said: Jesus is the Christ. Believe in Him and live, live, live.”  
Which I cannot do, Eugene, although for you, I would try.

If I am Jewish, Gene, then what Messiah should I expect  
with you dead, since the savior we had hoped was you?  
*Holy Eugene, full of grace, speak to us now, sinners, in the hour of our  
need.* I am a garden full of sterile seeds that will not blossom to fruit.

I am a stream where trout go blind and cannot see the fly.  
So, what was it you were thinking when you died?  
That we were through? That we had no more use of you?  
We needed of who you had become as the day has need of sun.

But you are not The Man, nor have pretended.  
In the end, Eugene, I miss nothing more than you.  
Not your words nor the argument they proposed, but the way  
you displaced air. I want you in a room not so narrow, so removed.

*Toll the bell. Close the book. Extinguish the candle.*  
All your enemies are dead, or soon will be. And you  
so soon apologized: *in decline.* Years from now, Eugene,  
I’ll salt the lake, cover the mirrors, tear my clothes

and none of this will have mattered more than you supposed.  
I know that now that you’ve gone down to worms, up to sky,  
no more to float upon the tide of the upper Weber River. Now  
that you have died, Eugene, you make it difficult  
to be alive.

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