



PAUL MONETTE AND ROGER HORWITZ
Monte Oliveto
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LOVE ALONE

18 ELEGIES FOR ROG

by Paul Monette

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BROTHER OF THE MOUNT OF OLIVES

Mine, O thou lord of life, send my roots rain.

—GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

combing the attic for anything extra
missed or missing evidence of us I sift
your oldest letters on onionskin soft-
cover Gallimard novels from graduate school
brown at the edges like pound cake and turn up
an undeveloped film race it to SUNSET
PLAZA ONE-HOUR wait out the hour wacko
as a spy smuggling a chip that might decode
World War III then sit on the curb poring over
prints of Christmas '83 till I hit paydirt
three shots of the hermit abbey on the moors
southeast of Siena our final crisscross
of the Tuscan hills before the sack of Rome
unplanned it was just that we couldn't bear
to leave the region quite the Green Guide barely
gave it a nod *minor Renaissance pile*
but the real thing monks in Benedictine white
pressing olives and gliding about in hooded
silence Benedict having commanded *shh*
along with his gaunt motto *ora et labora*
pray work but our particular brother John
couldn't stop chattering not from the moment
he met us grinning at the cloister door
seventy years olive-cheeked bald and guileless
no matter we spoke no Italian he led us
gesturing left and right at peeling frescoes
porcelain Marys a limpid row of arches
across the court like a trill on a harpsichord
little did he know how up to our eyeballs
we were on the glories of Florence the Bach

geometry of the hill towns their heart-
stopping squares with the well in the middle
and a rampant lion on the governor's roof
we'd already scrutinized every *thing* and now
before we left wished to see it peopled
going about their business out of time
keeping bees holy offices raisin bread
as if nothing had happened since Galileo
instead this voluble little monk pulling us
into the abbey church its lofty Gothic vault
overlaid in sugared Baroque plaster like a bad
cake then Brother John grips us by the biceps
and sweeps us down the cypress-paneled choir
to the reading desk where the Gutenberg
is propped on feast-days he crouches and points
to the inlay on the base and there is a cat
tail curled seeming to sit in a window
every tiger stripe of him laid in jigsaw
as we laughed our rapturous guide went *mew mew*
like a five-year-old *How long have you been here*
we ask a question requiring all our hands
fifty years he tosses off as if time had
nothing to do with it one hand lingering
on my shoulder is it books we like then come
and we patter round the cloister in his wake
duck through a door up a stone stairs and peer
through a grill wrought like a curtain of ivy
into the library its great vellum folios
solid as tombstones nobody copying out
or illuminating today unless perhaps
all of that has died and there's a Xerox
glowing green in the abbot's study John
pokes you to look at the door carvings it seems
he is not a bookish man but who has time
to read any more we must descend and see
the frescoes fifty years without the world

pray work pray work and yet such drunken gaiety
gasping anew at the cloister's painted wall
clutching my hand before the bare-clad Jesus
bound at the pillar by the painter so-called
Sodoma the parted lips the love-glazed eyes
JUST WHAT KIND OF MEN ARE WE TALKING ABOUT
are we the heirs of them or they our secret
fathers and how many of our kind lie beneath
the cypress alley crowning the hill beyond
the bell tower how does one ask such things
with just one's hands then we took three pictures
me and John John and you you and me *click*
as the old monk takes my arm I'm certain now
that he likes touching us that we are a world
inside him whether he knows or not not that
I felt molested I can take care of myself
but a blind and ancient hunger not unspeakable
unsayable you think he knew about us Rog
how could he not pick up the intersect
the way we laughed the glint in our eyes as we
played our Italian for four hands but my sole
evidence is this sudden noon photograph
the two of us arm in arm in the cloister
delirious gold November light of Tuscany
washing our *cinquecento* faces splashing
the wall behind us a fresco of the monks
at dinner high above them in a pulpit
a reader trilling in Latin you can't even
eat without *ora et labora* and we look
squinting at John as if to wonder how
he will ever click the shutter right it's like
giving a watch to a savage but we look
quite wonderful you with the Green Guide me
clutching the pouch with the passports we look
unbelievably young our half smiles precisely
the same for that is the pierce of beauty

that first day of a rose barely started
and yet all there and Brother John so geeky
with the Canon A-1 did he even see what
he caught we look like choirboys or postulants
or a vagabond pair of scholars here to
pore over an undecoded text not religious
but brotherly enough it's a courtly age
where men are what they do and where they go
comrades all we look like no one else Rog
here's the proof in color now the tour is over
we are glided into a vestibule where cards
slides rosaries prayers that tick are gauntly
presided over by a monk senior to John
if not in years then officialdom the air
is strict in here we cut our laughter short
this one's got us pegged right off this keeper
of the canonical cash drawer withering John
with a look that can hardly wait to assign vast
and pointless rosaries of contrition we buy
the stark official guide to Monte Oliveto
leave a puddle of lire *per restauro*
for restorations and then we're free of His
Priestliness and John bundles us off still
merry and irrepressible too old perhaps
to fear the scorn and penitence of those
racked by sins of the flesh who never touch
a thing and ushers us out to the Fiat
bidding us safe journey who's never been
airborne or out to sea or where Shiva
dances or Pele the fire-god gargles
the bowels of the earth we wave him off
and leap in the car we're late for Rome flap
open the map but we're laughing too *Did that
just happen or what* and we drive away
winding up past the tower towards the grove
of graves where the tips of the cypress lean

in the breeze and a hooded monk is walking
head bent over his book of hours in passing
I see that it's John wave and grin *rividerci*
startled at his gauntness fixed on his text dark
his reverie no acknowledgement goodbye
that is the whole story you know about Rome
and flying tourist opening weeks of mail
putting a journey to bed and on and on
but I've thought of John ever since whenever
the smiling Pope makes another of his sub-
human attitudes the law he drives our people
from the temples and spits on the graves of his
brother priests who are coughing to death in cells
without unction and boots the Jesuit shrink
who calls all love holy he wants his fags
quiet *shh* and I try to think of John
and the picture he saved three years for me
till the lost roll of Tuscany came to light
and turned out to hold our wedding portrait
the innocent are so brief and the rigid world
doesn't marry its pagans any more but John
didn't care what nothing we professed he joined
us to join him a ritual not in the book
but his secret heart it doesn't get easier Rog
even now the night jasmine is pouring
its white delirium in the dark and I
will not have it if you can't I shut all
windows still it seeps in with the gaudy
oath of spring oh help be somewhere near
so I can endure this drunk intrusion
of promise where is the walled place where we
can walk untouched or must I be content
with a wedding I almost didn't witness
the evidence all but lost no oath no ring
but the truth sealed to hold against the hate
of the first straight Pope since the Syllabus of

Errors this Polack joke who fears his women
and men too full of laughter far brother
if you should pass beneath our cypresses
you who are a praying man your god can
go to hell but since you are so inclined
pray that my friend and I be still together
just like this at the Mount of Olives blessed
by the last of an ancient race who loved
youth and laughter and beautiful things so much
they couldn't stop singing and we were the song