

Old Man

JOSHUA KULSETH

I'm wondering for the first time in who-knows-how-long
at my father's barrel-chested posture, his widow's peak,

his strong jaw pitched forward into frame—
dead now only a few-years-shy of two decades,

and on the occasion of what would have been
his sixty-ninth birthday, he still baffles me.

How are there no pictures online, when everything's
up for grabs, to be searched and looked over?

Not a single one, from his obituary even;
only a tombstone and picture

of his nearly-equally-long dead mother.
And why do I call him old man

when I only ever called him dad,
and he stopped aging at least ten years

before anyone could call him old?
Why (I could probably guess this one)

after so long does his friend, my godfather,
still message me every January 28th—

“Happy Birthday Bill Kulseth”—a man
I wouldn't wish alive again even if I could.

More questions: why is it a memory seems to age
when the one we're remembering hasn't
been around for years? Is it as we grow
we remember differently, maybe nurturing
some new sympathy or hatred, aging
past the lived memory into something else,
some vision we make for ourselves?
Maybe that's it. Don't get me wrong,
I don't hate the old man anymore, only,
I know if he were alive to meet his sixty-ninth birthday,
I wouldn't have remembered still,
and there'd be nothing
prompting these questions leading nowhere,
that don't matter anyway,
but which offer a break from maybe what's saddest:
how like a *thing* he's become for me,
like a numbered square on the calendar.
Battle of Waterloo, June 18th;
first public radio broadcast, December 24th;
invention of the fountain pen, May 25th;
the Old Man's birthday, January 28th,
followed hard by the anniversary of his death, February 20th—
facts of history, casually recalled, agreed upon,
and forgotten once again.