

But Beautiful

Author(s): GEORGE KALAMARAS

Source: *The North American Review*, SUMMER 2021, Vol. 306, No. 2 (SUMMER 2021), p. 91

Published by: University of Northern Iowa

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/27152960>

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GEORGE KALAMARAS

But Beautiful

for Freddie Hubbard

Finally, the day comes to an end.
 Our work comes to an end.
 Wind in the pines. Winter wind.
 Nine or ten deer bedded down
 in the snowy cheatgrass outside
 my mountain door. Cold, blowy snow
 in their matted fur. Tu Fu's "Night Traveling"
 on my mind: *Thin grass bends on the breezy shore
 and the tall mast seems lonely in the boat.*
 I open the night, my own long hours of night traveling,
 with Freddie's first LP, *Open Sesame*. June 19, 1960.
 Freddie, only twenty-two. That photo of him on the back
 cover hunching all of his youth over the keys with McCoy,
 going over a score. The sad of his "But Beautiful"
 blowing my mind—not in the clichéd way, but sailing
 me further than the day and my aching brain, taking me
 to Tu Fu, his exile and loneliness, to my youth,
 a wooded cottage several states away. Moon-drenched
 swamps. Hickory trees. Hound dogs. Even hours
 south of there to Indianapolis where Freddie first hit
 those notes, finding a way to stay in the world.
 I think of Tina Brooks, Sam Jones, and Clifford Jarvis.
 McCoy, of course. All coming together
 for this. How can so many early years express the ancient
 depth of what is to come, as if—yes—we all return
 into a body, a knowing past pressing us forward? When I walk
 to the door, the deer outside just a few yards away huff a little
 and shift, their breath steaming the already-smoky
 night. A fawn lifting its delicate face
 to its mother, nudging her, pleading for something
 I'm not even sure it understands it needs. Now a young buck sniffs
 the hindquarters of a doe. Instinctively. The urge for us all
 to move forward. Enter the unknown. Explore

the glorious darkness. Merge with another
 body and create a world. Freddie's "Gypsy Blue"
 now comes on, reminding me that my home in the woods
 is 1183 miles away. In years. In decades of aches
 and rain. In boggy memories and all the relative dead.
 In my mother's voice, which—even now—I still struggle
 to recall. Tu Fu's years of wandering and exile
 were the only thing that brought him
 home. How does one decide to explore the heavens
 and hold the Milky Way, like medicine,
 below the tongue? To float
 the river, its wind-bent reeds, and hold
 these melancholy notes inside
 as a way to thrive? Oh, Freddie. Whether
 in Gongyi, Henan Province, or Indianapolis,
 like you, we are all born, and we all
 must one day leave the body and set sail
 with Tu Fu down the Milo into a glorious river silk.
 Your *Open Sesame* reminds me to open
 even to *that*. Even if the notes know a world
 my knowing does not. You are blowing
 your trumpet and blowing a boat into what
 we spend our lives wondering about most. Even as we try
 to forget. Each breath of yours huffing us forward,
 back, through the rocking moon-bit waves. Time
 and again. You are gone now, Freddie.
 Blown away in the blowing
 of your horn. In tonight's blowing
 snow. Out there yet still
 here. Yes, you are gone, Freddie. Gone.
 And it is sad. All of it
 sad. But beautiful. But beautiful.