

All The Kings Are Gone

“Seeing you here is déjà vu all over again, isn’t it? It was just one year ago that the more lovely half of this loving couple departed. And now my dear friend Max has followed her.

“Ladies and gentlemen, friends. Before we get started, I have a few personal remarks I’d like to make. I suppose there may be a life lesson lurking somewhere in my thoughts, but that’s not my intent. It’s more the unburdening of this old heart. But if it also happens to ease your pain, I’m glad for that.

“My friend Max. Where do I start? He was wise and patient. Let’s not forget kind and generous. I’m sure we all remember his infectious enthusiasm, how it emblazoned his face like a neon sign and made him outshine men half his age. But I suppose I will remember him most for the way he taught us about the meaning of life without ever demeaning another person.

“As attorney to the family for the past fifty years, I saw Max and Marian regularly, about once a month. It’s barely possible to talk about one without the other. It would have been their diamond anniversary this year if Marian had lived, and how fitting a jewel of enduring value was their marriage. Max died exactly one year to the day after Marian’s death. This was not surprising. They had always worked closely together and were so connected in life, that it seems only natural they would also be connected in their deaths. Whether they were designing their now classic toys or an exhibit of art history to be enjoyed by children and adults alike, they brought a special talent and intelligence to bear *laserlike* on the subject. And in the end it was the pure joy of toys in their lives that so gracefully linked them not only to the beauty of the world and how it feels to understand the universe, but also to every person they met.

“Max credited his enduring fascination with the concept of inner lightness or ‘ballon’ for lighting his path in life. But we all know it was the luminous way he and Marian lived their own lives that showed the rest of us the way to live our own.

The Best Show In Town

“Since word came of his passing, I have been recalling his wonderful expressions and thinking about what I will miss most. Like his passionate talk about art leading the way to a better future. His need to repay society and his courageous philanthropy. The potential in each of us—his celebrated ‘magic fire.’ His brilliant blues twinkling with electric mischief every time he played a joke. And of course his devotion to family.

“Max told me several stories recently, and I was surprised to say the least. For here was a man in his late nineties telling me what took place some 85 years earlier when he turned thirteen. And on the spot he became a thirteen year old again, suddenly springing from his chair to demonstrate the dance he learned from the town elders. Another story, an emotional retelling of the first time he disobeyed his father to follow his instincts, left me feeling drained and exhilarated. No, I don’t think many of us noticed that his walking stick turned into a cane quite some time ago.

“There’s an old saying that behind every great fortune is some horrible act. But it couldn’t be further from the truth with Max. He amassed his fortune based on the simple belief that imparting hope and joy to just one person benefits us all. And that a man of such prominence could achieve this without being touched by scandal or slander is, I think, amazing.

“But it didn’t stop there. For as long as I knew him, he supported a host of causes, and I saw him extend a helping hand to the less fortunate time and time again. People the world over came to know the liveliness and the emotional intensity with which he met life, his love of ideas, and his concern for social justice. The smallest thing, be it a word or a scent on the wind could start a flight of imagination. And to say that that man loved food surely must rank as one of the great understatements of all time. Because seeing the joy he derived from sharing a good meal with friends, and especially his passion for chocolate, was a feast in itself for my eyes.

All The Kings Are Gone

“But what truly set him apart was his boundless capacity for original thought coupled with a character born of an inner dignity. For Max presided over even life’s difficult moments with a combination of industry and joy and humor that made him beloved by all who knew him.

“And as for me, his death comes as a painful reminder that it is all too easy to take for granted this stage on which we act out our lives. I know more than a little about the subject. You see, I didn’t take the time to imagine what my life would be like without my good friend in it. And now I feel the pitiful pinch of guilt that comes from knowing that while he was still alive to hear it, I never told him how much he meant to me...

“It’s at times like these that I have to remind myself that life is a great teacher. And now I *cannot* and I *will not* hide my love any longer.” He lowers his eyes. “Max my friend, we shared the privilege of watching each other grow old together, and I thank you for that. You were the most remarkable man I have ever known, and I thank you for that, too. Damn it, you even cried when you were happy...

“Just so there’s no misunderstanding—no, I’m not crying because I’m happy. A part of me is terribly empty right now because I miss him so much. *God, I only hope he knows how much...*”