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The Old and the Young

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The Old and the Young

Some people, young ones, are passing. There they go, one after another,
alien to the glorious afternoon anointing them.

As those old

slower ones go yoked

to that last ray of the setting sun.

The old ones are aware of the warmth of the fine afternoon.

Thinly the sun touches them and they drink in
its mildness: it's a gift—so few are left!—

and they pass slowly down that clear path.

It's the first green of the early season.

A young river, more like the childhood of a nearby spring,
and the first hints of green: the tender oaks,

woods ascending lightly toward the mountain pass.

So lightly. But the old ones don't move at that pace anymore.

And there the young, taking the lead, go past them
without seeing, and go on, not looking back.

The old folks watch them. They're steady,

these people, who at life's far side,

at the edge of the end, remain suspended,

without falling, as if for ever.

While the young shadows pass, extinguishable, unsteady,

urged on by a thirst which a gust of air will quench.

(From *Poemas de la consumación*, 1966)