

ED MARSHALL'S FLIGHT

The ticket reads:

DATE 29JAN
FLIGHT US1980
BOARD 715AM
DEPART CLT 745AM
ARRIVE BOS 952AM
GATE C12
BOARD GROUP ZONE 4
SEAT 19E

The heavy plane is buoyed
at departure up by southern air
I ask Ed Marshall: will we meet in Gethsemane tonight in Boston?
Will the poet, now at hand, find thee praying in the snow, beneath the olive boughs
to take thee
with a kiss?

but upon arrival laden
sinks back to ground beneath
laden Boston clouds.
There is record snow arriving at the funeral home on Spring Street.
The family gathers
in the entranceway delaying
making small of things
and smalltalk exchanging
nervous laughs mask nervousness
betrayed by furrowed brows.

O Ed you warned me
how many times have I read your foretelling of what comes next:
Blasphemy! you called it in a funeral
home
in Gloucester
and the same I saw recumbent in a casket before the altar in Milwaukee
a thing of stiffness painted
in the likeness of Regina
grandmother of my mother
who knew the calamity of war and flight from that

as well as the positive and endless valences of family
and love for whom
too many encomia could not be sung and who held me as a child
and whom I had canonized long ago in childhood.

And you warned me that they do this.

They make lies of bodies when memory is yet alive
and it is blasphemy done with glues
perfumes and
make ups

and the same I see in this heavy curtained room
in the crumbling attic of America's memory
in Boston

in a padded box
in worn West Roxbury

where this body lies

in a casket

and my father's brother's face is painted

on the corpse's face

is painted to resemble one that is to say it is but

a semblance of one alive, but only sleeping

but it's only paint and

that face is drawn and thin and not

in wrong places.

The façade is a thin one.

O it is not him they (we the family) say.

God they say.

That isn't Charlie.

And Charlie was always nervous, my dad recalls and has never seemed so small to me.

A priest a priest in coat and collar cassocked

speaks: Christ have mercy.

And all they Hapenneys and Healys gathered for the wake

reply: Lord have mercy.

But here in cold West Roxbury I am no Christian

feel no merciful finger

in the small of my back no voice no book no paradise

in death

but black solemnity.

I am no preacher on the Common, touched by the poem given

by prophecy to bathers

shivering towel less

in the public baths of the world.

No pages

to wrap them in.

No bellowing need burnt out in a minute.

No,

I'll just keep

this quiet votive lit

some nights (tonight) small sacrament is all

I manage a line a word

lit for the poem

And this I'll keep 'til morning,

until I feel the omen telling rumble that marks the final cycle within the core of my own earth.

It is just that: the own personal bodyearth

at stake. Ed, there are they

who would tear the word from the mouth that spake it

and crumble the tongue in their expressionless fingers and say:

where is it? it could never have

existed.

I ask you: tell me

by what might I moor myself this hot breath I am

to the poem rocking

in the swell of waking day in a city of falsehoods whirling its glittering
waves of glass

and asphalt up

into the bright howling entropy

and come crashing down upon this head?

I am unable for going on two years now to hold a job

for more than one or two handfuls temporary respite from the grasping months

before I cannot stand to wake

in knowledge of the deal I've struck my time not mine brain a-boil

and

I ask you: flay me and pour water on my naked bones

and cool me

and by that method save me, Ed you who were (still are somewhere?)

lamb of an utterance

who alone can deliver the delicate

thought written on the wall of the cave

from the swelling sensectomy of them that would deny the revelation

of a word.

I am spoken in a rented car a slow drive. Go

past childhood Jamaica Street and

remembered marks and details.

These my father points out

points to remembered things the Arboretum, Holy Name

things for his fathered they who haven't seen this

place the father knows

now walked paths the father as a child trod.

Now the steps cold those snow-numbered feet

at the bottom of the hill of childhood

Jamaica Street.

The wet-shoed ungloved

quiet men the fathers sons brothers cousins uncles and one gone

assemble in the pall shadow of St. Thomas.

Years after all of this I saw my brother just seventeen years old

reduced by benzos to a manuscript pale and shuffled

and in that state I watched him walking in a dream his hands parted the tall grasses

and he marked his measured pacing with

quiet footfalls beneath the hospital blanket

gaze empty but ever forward

in the half light of a half sun that is always half part below

a horizon that will continue to recede regardless of whether there is anyone to see it

a moment infinitely distorted and

still sinking in my memory into the liminal distance that separates

the uncertain waves of two clasped hands.

He could not have foreseen his present burden when laden he climbed the steps beside me

laden also all of us

but with a different burden, shared unequally,

brass rails gripped and hoisted in sequence and in proportion to our generation

and passed below the heavy lintel stones, the Doctor's name

we passed beneath the spires

and I wish now that I had somehow seen it then.

Here, inside the church a childhood grown men's
memories in coldstone velvet green
and crucifixes.

There are readings are hymns
homily and tears a religious polychrome to paint the walls of mortal skulls
in a space like this
and same solemn priest all rise commune all kneel we pray:
let there be peace.

There are echoes.

A light snow wetfalls
qualia more than just a dusting
the cars process behind the hearse
up up
wet New England streets
up hills
up another.

In cars: eyes
eyes: in people
people: in coats and gloves
in cars.

Go they go they go they the resting place:
Gethsemane.

This place is the once was utopia nearly almost no and then
erased by auto-arsonists. George Ripley, years later
in a coffeehouse in Charlotte
as he pulled espresso shots confessed
to a small audience that his Brook Farmers
achieved their goal, their paradise
attained when the final building fell
to ash to dust again.

One last farmer said they fell, funereal apple petals in the wind.
Ed, I realize now,
transience is it, the godhead in the bones beneath the snow
here and beneath electric Bethlehem
in Lynn, emm ayy,
the same.

I once bought a typewriter
to understand you better in this century.

Now, Ed you are resolved in perfect clarity on the screen before me.
I can not write this on a typewriter or anchor a messiah
in an alien time. Even this word will pass when
there are no tongues
to shape it.

No, Ed you who are not George Ripley
you who are not John Murray Spear
you who might be Jacob Boehme
you who are a point on a line sprung from the basement of a poem
you who deposited the word in the dark of the night on my doorstep

you are not here tonight
not in Gethsemane
in Boston
in the vestibule of St. Thomas
in fetishized clacking obsolescence
or in this a dialogue seeped from me through the cracks in my keyboard.

Ed
a packet of air held behind my tongue
once freed ought to be left alone.

I leave him at the gate.

A long winding to the family plot—we wind it.

There the family
watches.
There marks time
in stone.
There under snow
is ceremony
and in the ground
is put.

Here I hear a priest rosaried and cassocked speak:

All go they Gethsemane
from Gethsemane they go
in silence.

So:

Receive them in the basement in West Roxbury.
Give them food give drinks drink toasts.
Received they will receive each other.

Release them from the heavy coats the grim.
The ties the shoes and eyes all loosened.
Released they will lease life anew.

Relieve them from the cold cold bones.
Find warmth warm flesh that laughs.
Relieved they go hotel flights home.

Though they will return, they go.