

THE SHOCK

The water still spouts out
of my face without warning
displaced by my love of you.

Turncoat! My brother!

I see you time and again
through windows, across streets,
even in newspapers
only to evaporate
into yet another stranger-
you, gone into a box
and for what?

The world's not turning.

I stare again and aghast
at what death has done to you
laid out before us
like a set of clothes frozen
overnight on the washing-line.
Your face made up with cheap rouge
like a washed-up actor
(Is this what they do?).
And your lips down-turned.
Down-turned!

You were always there
and not there,
sweet Judas.
Now, never, just like that-
gone in the twinkling
of a savage eye,
gone beyond,
gone beneath, gone silent
as your bones
and the stone bearing your name
the pigeons shit on.

*"NICHOLAS HALLILEY
ARCHITECT...."*

I howl over your grave
like a starved dog
whose master is taken,
like a crazed wolf
roaring at the winter moon.

People going by must think
it was only yesterday
and it always is.
Always!

I am the kid you threw downstairs-
Remember?

How you were cruel, kind,
unrepeatably difficult, kissed me on the lips
in your bathroom
to show me you loved me?

"Brother."

And I forgot!

Your books on my shelves
and in the boxes underneath
speak to each other at night
softly, so they don't offend me.
But I can hear them
whispering, whispering
they want your fingers touching
their soft leather covers, not mine.
They want to be with **you**.

I'm like them, my brother!

But I find misshapen splinters
and hard shards of you only
in our mother's faraway looks
and half-sentences
no one can finish.
No one!

Feckless me, become a hoarder
of the infinite scraps of your living.

My friend asks me
if it gets easier with time.

Christ, I just want you alive.

I just want you alive!

THE GRAVE

Again the yellow fog like gun-smoke
again the glowering low midwinter sun
again the feeling of again
four years on.

This time I have brought you roses-
carmine, white and scarlet.
The woman at the florists said,
“They’ll survive anything.
You can take them out their pots
And plant them on the grave
If it’s not plaqued over.”

Our father can’t bear to come near you.
I say, “We’re just going to the graveyard.”
He nods approvingly in the low light.
I have come to you with our mother
through the cold air
down the quiet avenue of graves.

Mum and I have left the flowers growing
in their plastic pots by your headstone
for now, the cellophane from the shop
sheltering the petals from then January wind.
One day we will plant them above you.

I scraped the birdshit off the headstone top
with the secateurs we always bring.
We’ve cut the wet grass as usual
and scabbled the oak-leaves out
out of your soil, thrown them off
with cold fingers so the grass can grow.

We were pleased how the flower-box looked
and discussed (not for the first time)
how to stop the stone getting so green
your name’s hardly visible.

We talked softly about you
in the thin grey air.
She said, “What a waste.”
I said, “No, he made beautiful things.”

As always, Mum put her arm in mine
and we walked off
in that rigid way we have.
And still we can’t believe it.
Still, still!

THE DECODING

*Few words, and you will leave in peace
(inscription at the Alhambra Palace)*

People come and go
in the cool of the morning
their voices veiled
by the fifty-six fountains.
You speak to me by proxy
through the soft barrage
of scarlet flowers and sunlit water.

The green-eyed cat turns towards me
on the stone steps you walked on,
its paw hanging in the air like a question-mark.
I gasp, clutching your camera
in the Architect's Garden.

Concealed in drawers back home
photos of kittens.
Glowing in your kitchen,
pots of geraniums.
All suddenly decoded.
The other side of Samsonite
dizzying coloured mosaics
from the palace of palaces
drawn by the Architect of God,
Wahdat Al-Wujud-
the architect's tracing-paper
like a soft veil over the rage
of structured colour underneath.
And on the blazing gold border
you the great infidel have written in Arabic,
"The glory is all God's."

+Wahdat Al-Wujud: the unity of the real

THE VIDEOTAPE

Here you are at the press of a keypad
staring through the howl-round
at your own image emerging
through the snow.
Transfixed as if you'd seen a ghost
or feared the camcorder would steal your soul.

My lord, your face is as a book
whereon men may read
strange matters:
That cold fire in the eyes
-no good can come of it!

Then the charming smile
death had rubbed from memory.

*(It's not what you can't forget,
it's what you can't remember.)*

The psychiatrist:
"This tape is a training instrument.
It will not form part of your clinical records.
Do you have any questions?"

"No. That seems fine to me--"

How uncertain you are,
how soft-spoken!
how slight you seem,
how thin the strong Taurean neck
I remember, the skin on it
just starting to hang off.
And how you stammer!

**"I'm, I'm a bipolar erm,
S.A.D. sufferer.
I have a low in winter
but a crest in summer,
running on four hours a night,
loving it.
Winter, I need ten hours.
Twenty-four
After some supreme effort!"**

*(To be near is to have the taste
of fear of being far.
Thus fear need not be suffering*

and is likened to snow-blindness.)

“I’m afraid you’ve gone out of focus”

Boyish laughter
then the lower lip turns in
and the stare is back,
the gaps between your teeth
bigger than I recall.
How distinguished your thinning hair
still auburn except at the temples
combed neat for the doctor
above your ochre suit.
The control on auto,
six lines on your forehead
slide in and out of definition.

**“One can’t sit still somehow
yet the energy isn’t there
for concentration at work.
I like working as an architect.
The greatest fun I can have
apart from, you know, sort of
being out and about, is to sit
at the drawing board and design something”**

How you tend to lean left or right,
seldom head-on,
how sunken your cheeks.

“Could you move to your left a bit?”

**“I just don’t have the energy,
physical or mental,
to cope,
you know.”**

You are going, going,
the hospital gardener behind you
suddenly sharper than you are-

**“I’m, I’m, I’m now
a self-employed architect-“**

A self-deprecating giggle-

**“-and I can’t do simple things.
I can’t make decisions.
I can’t add up!”**

Years in a syllable-

**“I can’t make plans.
I can’t even design.
What the hell’s happened to me?
You know.”**

How sallow your skin.

The background soft again, you clear-

**“Something’s going on
which is erm, cyclic.
Am I a manic depressive, or not?”**

The eyes unblinking-

In the garden behind you
a leaf falls vertically-

**“Last summer, erm, I didn’t
have an emergence from my winter S.A.D.”**

*(Time is short, you wrote.
Nothing wrong with being exhausted
as long as I can then stop
and do nothing).*

**It tended to sort of carry on.
By June I was getting, erm,
Fairly worried about this.**

Your face softens and darkens,
sharpens and brightens again,
you laugh,
then a glitch
and you’re gone.

*(To be far is to have the hope
of being near.
This hope is pain
and is like having no eyes.)*

THE INFIDEL'S PRAYER

*The face of truth remains hidden behind a circle of gold
(Upanishads)*

Lord, I can't see you.
In the dark I see nothing
but the dead this side
of the circle of gold.

But let my cry come unto you.

They say you are kind and caring.
They say you are a fount of love.
I know you're not there.

But let my cry reach your heart.

Leave your saints be.
They dwell in the light
they died in.

Cast your light on the lost,
the damned and the crazy.
Pour it over those who die
screaming in terror.
Throw it at those who crawl
on all fours through
the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

Let light shine on them forever.
Grant them eternal peace,
even on the day of great bitterness
when the universe burns to ash.

And Mary, God's Mother,
Jesus, God's Lamb,
Goddess Lord Goddess,
Wrathful Fount of Love,
May light bathe my brother's lost face.

May he for all eternity
rest in peace--
bright light shining
on his green and troubled eyes.

Let me let him depart in peace
with a smile on his sacred godless lips.