

Poem

**Mental<sub>[M1]</sub> Illness: A Cosmonaut's Account**

We live for dreams.  
And so it was that I,  
One day,  
A time ago,  
Stepped out for my craft.  
Believing that I might blast out,  
With my ideas to propel me,  
Into limitless space,  
And there behold what might be seen.

What we, with our earthbound, finite minds,  
Do not grasp,  
Is that space is God's, and is infinite,  
And also that we are made for more finite pleasures –  
The sun on our shoulders,  
The light breaking through glass,  
The warmth of fire –  
And our minds cannot grasp this limitless space  
And so  
In short,  
Things go awry.

So it was,  
That after firing the engines of my mind  
In the fire of my blood  
And the hope of my heart,  
The engines reached, and could not reach,  
And gasped, and died.

For many there is, in such straits,  
Only a fiery death,  
As ship is engulfed by flame,  
And all toils end.

I, though, was spared such death,  
But darkness grabbed me.  
For a time there was just that,  
A spiraling darkness,  
The crippling knowledge that I was falling  
And an unmitigated heat  
That seared my mind  
And left it changed.

Many also are spared that fiery death,  
But cannot see out of the cruel womb of collapse,  
And so they fall, and fall,  
And turn inward  
And die death before its time.

I was spared that, too.

I have learnt that there are three kinds of falling.  
The first is the fall that all dread –  
Falling down the chasm of life  
And ending with the crumpling of bone against bone  
Against the rocky earth.

We all dread this fall,  
And many lives are spent  
In the habit of control, of invincibility,  
To stave off the thought of this fall.

The second form of fall is kinder.  
It is the eagle's fall,  
Unerring, majestic,  
Borne upwards at last,  
By the grace of wings.  
Great athletes know this fall,  
All consummate grace and skill,  
And in the end, the prize held in bloodied claws.

There is a third kind of fall,  
As I have learnt,  
Akin to this,  
But unlike and like the eagle's:  
Eternal,  
Knowing no end.

Such is my fate.

You will, no doubt, know of it.  
The satellite falls in this way.  
For it falls, forever,  
Falling always towards the earth's heart  
Which was its home.

And so, after a time of spiraling darkness,  
My eyes were opened to the dawn.  
Not a dawn such as I knew on earth,  
But a haloed, ethereal dawn,  
Of sun, and stars, and moon,  
With the earth a blue-green jewel,  
Now below me,  
Now, when my craft turned, above.  
That is the miracle.  
That I fall, like many dying,  
Or consumed by death.  
But am always held by grace,  
By the wings of angels,  
From the magnet of the earth's form.

So there is this kind of dance,  
A slow, hypnotic, measured dance,  
Such as you will have seen in films of spacemen,  
At once bound by gravity  
And yet free of its hold to earth.  
My thoughts know sometimes great heights,  
Sometimes the pang of loneliness and separation,  
I see the earth spread beneath me, distant,  
Forever aloof –  
The world I used to know.  
Its seasons and its loveliness are still there  
But I am held in a spell of falling,  
And removed from it all.

Gone are the days of worrying,  
The life lived always within bounds of earth –  
My job, my kin, the hopes and fears that I knew before the ascent.  
Gone most of all is the need to divide,  
To say that this is mine and no others,  
That that is yours and I would have it mine.  
All these distinctions are loosed from my head.

I have heard whispers of some that goes on below.  
People say “He’s gone now”,  
“He will never hold that job now”  
And such like.  
And I know it also to be true, in part.

But they cannot know this forever freely falling,  
The sun my friend,  
The earth quite near,  
The eternity of space and stars forever beckoning,  
And God’s face there,  
Somewhere beyond my mind’s reach,  
Smiling on his forlorn, falling, cosmonaut.