

The Boxroom

Ben Donnellan

I'm up in a bog of sweat, unsure of the time or place
I've wakened — a dim sensation of your breath, cool
against the back of my neck; a half-light, half-moon
and halide glow come streaming through the breach
between two twisted louvers, a near perfect diamond

beam bisecting the room. I trace the silvery slit-shaft
with eyes still unadjusted, unaccustomed to the glare,
that, like a drop from heaven settles on your suitcase,
illuminating the blue plastic shell till it flashes back
a vision of Shannon Airport in the glint and gleam.

It stands in the corner of your boxroom, a monolith
unearthed, undiminished in its stature and cumbrous
bulk, though, hollow now, the clumsy pillar is lifted
without strain — displaced from one crook to another
to make space for my own. I think, heaven and earth,

each speck of dust in the air become a star or planet
against the indigo slate — a brilliant gem-like nebula
captured for a moment in the halcyon ray: cosmic lint
refracting a faultless rainbow of all that's been before,
and all that will be again. In its dazzle I almost forget

what it was that woke me: a dream of blood and mud,
the heady wine-dark scent clotting in a nose pressed
firm into the dirt; a skull like a bone-socked plough,
driven down into sharp-pointed scree, grit and gravel
scraping till it's polished clean. A prophecy divined

from our oncoming separation, an image of my exit
to earth: an upward slope, a pitch-dark track, and you
sinking back into memory on the platform, marooned
for a second time. Uneasy now, I shift toward the edge
of your bed, the pair of us packed in a twin-sized slip

like mackerel tinned between two paper-plaster walls.
I move to find some sheet or scrap of cloth to blind
the streak of light — your moonlit case transformed
to a sinister stele, a grave marker of our brief reunion;
a sneering cenotaph taunting in its immense emptiness.

Though, as I shield my eyes to conceal the vinyl slab,
one foot unbound from the tangle of fastened limbs,
I feel your palm come grabbing 'round my bare frame,
a hot hand on hot skin, pulling me back in. I stay dead
still — stiff as the plastic pillar, tamping down breath

after laboured breath, afraid the illusion might slip free
of my mouth and wake you. Until I feel your lips trail
a kiss along the nape of my neck, your hips shifting in
to fit the small of my back; and a whispered promise,
that I've to go on ahead, that in time, you'll find a way.