

**AVIA**

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# AVIA

**Nathaniel Tarn**

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To my boyhood and its hopes



“When I’m ready to leave Europe, I can step into the cockpit again and fly on round the world, through Egypt, and India, and China, until I reach the West by flying East. There’s no place on earth I can’t go.”

“As a matter of fact, how *will* I return home? *Why not* fly on around the world?”

.....

“Flying on around the world would show again what modern airplanes can accomplish. Besides, it’s beneath the dignity of the *Spirit of St. Louis* to return to the United States on board a boat. Rather than that, I’ll make the westward flight back over the route I’ve just followed.”

Charles Lindbergh “The 32nd hour.”  
*The Spirit of St. Louis*, pp.482–3

“I had hoped to visit Sweden and Germany, to spend several weeks in Europe and then to return to the United States either by crossing the Atlantic Ocean westward or by flying on around the world. But while I was in London, the American Ambassador informed me that President Coolidge had ordered a warship to carry me back home.”

Charles Lindbergh:  
*Autobiography of Values*, p.13



# **1: CAL'S DREAM**

*With intrusions by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry*

## I: THE PURPOSE

*Set keel to breakers, forth on the godly sea*  
*Y bajamos a la nave, enfilamos quilla a los cachones*  
*Mais quand nous étions descendus—la nef, la mer:*

Before it is too late:

before:

will fails, as it nearly did,  
day I set out, came here to another side,  
the other side, as I suppose, of all temptation,  
bank of the greatest river,  
river so big it had devoured the sea,  
become entirely the sea—

before it is too early:

before:

my life emerges from its sheath,  
its odoriferous existence full of anxious  
color, avid to give itself  
into all essence—and before  
it crowns the cradle of its leaves  
to rise into its splendor as a king—  
then close its face in death, rust, burn away

before I've lost the will:

fully to know the journey I have done,  
this astonishment . . . then going back!

Because I will not sail now, on that ship  
those idiots sent for me,  
will not have skin cut down, sinews  
dismantled, bones carried me above the sea  
taken apart and boxed: a skull,  
trophy of tribal war,  
caught, shrunk and bundled into memory.

but will have to fly

back the way I came,  
the exact way I came,  
retrace each step,  
each thought, each action,  
action quicker than thought  
brought me to this success  
so near disaster I almost married loss  
and gain of all the world in one downing to land.

Before it is too late:

before the will is paralyzed again,  
before all seems as futile as it did to me  
in that excruciation of my life  
kept me from final sleep below deep water,  
hour after hour fighting the iron sloth,  
no harder fight there is in all the world:  
this stupid human *maquina* required to stay awake  
all through the bleeding dawn, the hardest time,  
to hold the wings above that lethal surface.

Before too late:

to launch this song of my ambition,  
born long ago, when I knew no desire  
except to be the first in some adventure  
and when it seemed impossible  
to fail as now it seems only too probable  
to do nothing but fail—at this late age  
when I go back over the traces  
to try to take all starts, all finishes  
up into air with me,  
make a last dash for that great sky  
above all weathers men will reach one day,  
lose themselves in  
long after I have breathed . . .

Before too late:

to catch those ghosts behind my back,  
to hear their words again,  
study their talk this time,  
know what they say in breadth and depth,  
exhaust the tactics they describe, the falls  
of wing out of the sun onto an enemy,  
as well as endless journeys into night  
to link all parts of earth together  
into one kindness

and above all, perhaps,  
how dream could turn to nightmare,  
so that we lose the very thing we strive to enter,  
destroy the breath we breathe just as we breathe it:  
trees fall; birds fall; fish; beasts; men drown;  
all species faint into the earth and color it no longer—  
because we spread the veil too thin  
over earth's eyes and rend it.

Before all this:

before the will is paralyzed again,  
before I've sunk into depression  
for an achievement never to be matched,  
this I must do again:  
to up again,  
dispose the plane into her attitude,  
steady her attitude into extended flight  
as I would help some woman through her sleep  
back to the light she knew falling asleep,  
arrange her skirts about her—long ago skirts  
she could not quite escape to rise  
(freedom of legs and arms!)  
into this empyrean—  
then ride her through the sky,  
her final ride  
before dismemberment.

the last year ironed out,

thin smoke of people,

into extinction,  
this smoke thinner than cirrus to the eye  
thicker than thunder to the heart  
we all shall fly through  
for generations  
before it is too late to know,  
to recognize, to understand.



## II. A DISTILLATION, FROM SAINT-EXUPERY, FOR FRANCE

*Grass seems to flow like water in your wake,  
then ground to tighten, to run like straps  
under your wheels. You pull the fields  
toward you, throw them behind, reject them  
utterly. The air untouchable, then fluid,  
now solid. A transform out of noise made  
into matter.*

*To tell of the real weather of the earth:  
white ruin of waves, border of land & ocean;  
at sea an opening, foretold because of spying  
along the water a prairie-colored lead. The  
clouds sit very low but light shines through  
like a great smile. The sky an atmospheric sea,  
planet at bottom lying on the sand. Earth  
naked, dead at height—you drop, she dresses  
up. Draw to yourself the distance like a cloth.  
Slow earth bringing you towns as surely as a tide.  
Towns seated in their plains, midst of their roads,  
like stars open to nourish them, full of field-sap.  
Then the undressing—from plains, from towns,  
from lights. The night comes on, enclosing you,  
a temple. Slow death of world as the night falls,  
you count stars washed by rain. You count one  
star too many: its search for bed & board among  
the constellations. You dream. Little by little, the  
plane may slope, lean to the left. You then dis-  
cover human lights under right wing. But this is  
sea, or ice, or desert: human lights? You level  
out and smile: yes, village—but of stars. Dream  
on. Sometimes a storm: a shadow from the origin  
of worlds. You see three stars within a hole, you  
climb toward them, knowing you cannot down,  
no matter, up you are, biting the stars, hunger  
for light so great you climb regardless. Under*

*the sea of clouds, they told you once: remember  
lord eternity. Not enough height for you to shut  
the maw of mountains.*

*Then, land again, laughing to  
join again your shadow, pulls a man up as you  
down to your very own, your height, your scale.*

### III: AFTER THE FLIGHT: TO SLEEP, PERCHANCE TO DREAM

How is it possible  
I say to myself over and over  
that your life might be divided so  
by a single action  
into a solitude so vast on the one hand—  
that it is hard to credit such salvation  
(no, I am not mistaken, this *saves* me *now*,  
this has built up whatever trove of strength  
I can shore up against my ruin) . . .  
and, then, on the other hand,  
into a company so large  
it batters at my gate very like an ocean  
several times the size of the one I crossed  
into this madhouse. How do I hold  
such axial solitude against this tide?  
And is it the perception of that inner cloister  
thrills them the most and draws them to me  
much as a saint draws men by modesty?  
The more she claims she does not merit worship,  
the more they bring her food and treasure  
and their knees. Sleep, jeeze, how I need sleep!  
Since I missed that night  
out on the field, New York, May twenty-sixth,  
and nearly died of it at sea—not *all* the sleep  
I've had in Paris, Brussels, London slakes my thirst  
for sleep. Breakfasts, lunches, dinners,  
the speeches above all  
where they expect a rhetoric from me they know  
the codes of like the contours of their hearts—  
but we Americans can never manage that fine noise  
since we are used to things not to ideas:  
*No ideas but in things.*

If I could tell them  
who fantasize on flight as if it were  
imagination: winged men, head up toward the sun,  
legs trailing far below—always that upward thrust—  
(look at the trophies they have made for us:  
birds, horses, women—not a single bolt,  
spar, elevator, rudder, wing—not one red cent’s  
worth of any true *machine* gets us into the air  
and down again.) “My Lord,” I said once to a colleague  
“what are these things but lawnmowers with wings!”  
and he “oh sure, but kill in overdrive!”  
I never meant it, you know that, being too much,  
far, far too much, in love  
with the most beautiful *machines*  
our engineers like Ryan can provide  
to carry Icarus up to the sun.

Wish I could tell them though  
what it is like to hold the two in mind:  
both the heroic climb,  
and lyric lunge toward the sky,  
the sovereign liberty in the air’s empire,  
as well as elegy sometimes, crash back to ground,  
hard gaze at all the errors made in flight.  
Tell them compassion for the land below,  
sacred detachment as you see  
all hills made into valleys with the valleys,  
all earth a valley, borderless, no war, no conquest—  
as it will be still more one day when fiercer thrusts  
may let us see the planet in the round and grasp  
at last the sum of maps as one blue orb,  
perfected as a bluebird in the morning light,  
angelic to the sun with sister planets,  
we may yet visit, finding right there the dead  
we have lost so for such a lasting time  
they far outnumber us by untold quantities.

Wish I could tell them *also*  
not just the vision but the joy as well  
of all the scholarship involved:  
yes, not to laugh,  
*learnthing* I mean—from humble  
lift/thrust/drag/weight,  
gravity center,  
in the machine you use—and on to motors,  
fuels, oils, instruments, and on out to the  
very curves the earth has in her distances,  
her winds, weathers high/low,  
mists, fogs, clouds, rains,  
and every golden warmth from balm to fire,  
down to the touch of these over the distant valleys  
the rifts, lakes, falls,  
you hope to fly some day.  
Not to forget sea-valleys:  
how you assess a wind the way it  
plays with spume at the discretion of the waves.

But usually I thank them all,  
harp on the theme of future hopes and fears  
(if not the downright future of the industry)  
mainly the thought we may all travel soon  
as safe and sound as bugs in rugs  
relaxing back in padded seats and comforts  
where he or she we feast today as hero  
will not be more than wholesome busdriver . . .

Brussels, princes and king; London a prince, a king,  
("Tell me dear Captain Lindbergh how do you pee?")  
I seem to dream awake as if I flew  
at wavetop with a heavy sky hemming me in  
close to the waves. I guess it is those meals  
with food so rich and varied I could croak  
without some discipline. Damned if the other night  
they didn't mock me with a jar of water

and pile of sandwiches on the fine ware before me!  
A heavy belly is the mother of all dreams  
                    they used to say in the old airmail days.

What a surprise!  
Why, she is standing there, my silver dream, as if  
                    I'd never left her. Up, up and out,  
                    before they get me and discipline again  
catches my scruff and heaves me onto *Memphis*!  
(It would hardly surprise me if our dear President  
disliked some of my close intentions as to Europe—  
that wire I sent to Rome, e.g., "Thanks for your call,  
Long live *Il Duce* and Italian youth." And wished  
to ship me back to Washington allegedly because  
my country could not wait to honor its great hero:  
in fact to keep my nose out of his politics. And  
all those dumb *ententes*, treaties and paper scraps!)

                    Now, *hold it!* . . . Paris or not Paris? I could  
follow a *Handley Page*, Croydon to Abbeville, Beauvais,  
into Le Bourget without a scrap of trouble. It suits me  
better, this June third, to leap to Paris, then fly to Cherbourg—  
from there without a landing jump to Guernsey, drop the S. and  
                    sail off to an island I was told about  
at one of those receptions. Don't remember which.  
Rest. Rest is what I need—just for a day or two  
                    before the next adventure. "Herm" names  
                    that island? "Herm" is for Hermitage,  
they say. Is there no poem, part of which (or  
am I . . . dreaming?) goes, if remembered rightly:

"There is an island set in a circling sea  
of which it has been said  
                    (as of the paradise gardens)  
'if there be any heaven on this earth  
it is here, it is here, it is here!'"

Let me lie there couple of days. No *do!*  
no one to talk with: not a single order.  
Watching the gulls fly overhead, neck  
pillowed on fine sand at the little beach  
no day-trips have ever picked out yet.  
Perhaps, at some much later settlement,  
it would be good to own an island here.  
May fly the coast a little before leaving  
to see what I can raise out of the ocean.