

## JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA

*How long do you want it* the shop-keeper asked,  
but I was so lost in thought he had to ask me again.  
*Sir. How long?* I had no idea.  
Shroud-shopping was not something  
I had expected to do.

The market was teeming with people in a rush  
trying to get everything done before sunset.  
It was the worst possible time to be doing this.  
I had sent Nicodemus off for the spices.  
He came back with a wagon of aloes  
and myrrh – weighing one talent each.  
*Are you embalming an army?*  
*-Well, you said to get enough for three, just in case.*  
He could always be counted on  
to take things quite literally,  
a trait that was somehow endearing in him.

In the end I asked for ten cubits of linen.

Walking back toward the gate  
I tried to make sense of this terrible day.  
I knew that going to Pontius Pilate  
I'd be outing myself as a disciple at last  
but at this point I just wanted to help where I could.  
Wealth and education gave me clout among my peers;  
that would protect me to some degree,  
and my previous dealings with the procurator  
had earned his respect, apparently.  
He had found this whole business exasperating  
and he was all too relieved it was over at last.

When we got back with the aloes, the myrrh,  
and the linen, the women saw us and burst into tears,  
not expecting a kindness on a day so cruel.  
It's a miracle they had any tears left.  
The centurion was still hanging around,  
and young John was there too, so we had help  
to break through the rigor of death just beginning,  
and put the arms down, place the body on the linen,  
and bring the rest of the cloth over his head  
and down to his bruised and battered feet.  
There were patches of purple on his knees  
and what was left of his back, and the gash in his side

was still wet. His face was unrecognizable.  
We let the centurion place coins on his eyes  
because what did anything matter now?  
There were plenty of aloes and myrrh left over  
which the women could take to anoint him after Sabbath.  
They placed a few flowers with him in the cloth.  
There were not enough gestures to hold all our love.

I remember when the workmen  
carved out the cave in the garden.  
It was supposed to be my final resting place.  
I always found it strange to look at that cave  
and think to myself, *I'll be there someday*.  
Life is so short, and our bodies so frail.  
It's better, I think, to lay him to rest here.  
I'm leaving Jerusalem anyway.  
I am going to have to sell my house.  
Too close to Golgotha, though the view is a dream.  
I've paid some men to roll a stone across the tomb.  
Some members of the council  
have come with Roman guards to seal it.  
It's only when they've finished  
and the night is falling  
that the tears finally come  
and I grieve and I grieve.