

## Two Trains and a Dream

*Et in Arcadia Ego.*

Virgil

The ways of God are unknowable to man.

Saint Augustine

The bow of God's wrath is bent, and justice bends the arrow at your heart.

Jonathan Edwards

All the minds and spirits God ever sent into the world are susceptible of enlargement and improvement.

Joseph Smith

### I. OCTOBER 8, 1908: A TRAIN

Pulled out of Green River, Wyoming, heading  
West toward Salt Lake City. The Mormon prophet,  
Joseph F. Smith, was going home from a visit  
to Boston, with his traveling companion.  
He saw the flash of white butts as a herd  
Of antelope, coming in from the north, turned  
Away from the train and bounced through the sage,  
And he thought how sixty years before, aged twelve, he had  
Watched such plenitude of beasts on this same route,  
Then on a wagon seat next to his mother  
As she managed their team on the pioneer trek  
After his father, Hyrum, was shot  
With Joseph at Carthage. The car was hot,  
So he walked to the back, out onto  
A polished wood platform with a wrought iron rail—  
And heard a voice say, “Go in and sit down.”  
He turned back but then stopped, wondering if he had  
Imagined the voice, when it came again: “Sit down.”  
Just as he reached his seat, the train hit  
A broken rail and the engine and most  
Of the cars (not his) went off the tracks.  
The companion later wrote that the prophet  
Would have been badly hurt if he hadn't sat down,  
Because all of the cars were “jammed up bad.”

## II. MAY 25, 1999: A TRAIN OUT OF

Boston, leaving Providence, Rhode Island,  
Struck Julia Toledo, from a  
Mormon family in Ecuador  
And her four sons, walking on the tracks.

All were killed instantly, except Jose, ten,  
Who died in two days. They had just left a  
Transition shelter where they stuffed their packs  
With clothes, coloring books, tiny dolls—all found  
Along the tracks, with shoes, torn packs, a bloody  
Bible. Julia had led them through a break  
In the fence for a shortcut to someplace,  
Fleeing, some said, an abusive husband  
Who had tried to steal his sons. But he,  
Located in Ecuador, heart-broken, said no,  
There was trouble with his in-laws because he was  
Still Catholic. Others said it was  
Julia's sister, tired of baby-sitting,  
Had driven them out to homelessness.  
They had climbed a short trail up the traprock  
Of the railbed, walked two miles before Jose  
Got separated, to the north side.  
Julia, carrying Pedro, pulling Angel  
And Carlos, was just lunging across  
To reach him when the train struck them all.

## III. IN MY DREAM GOD IS LISTENING, CAREFULLY,

As I tell him these stories and ask him,  
“Which of these trains, children, was in your hands?”  
We are both seated, quite comfortably,  
On a green satin French provincial  
Couch, in a room painted by Watteau—  
The transition room in Kubrick's *2001*.  
God asks me if I am proud or rebellious.  
I notice that he is luminous under his robe,  
And his face is serene beyond all description,  
His skin young, downy, but full of pores.

I can see small white scars across his forehead.  
Then tears gather in his eyes, and slowly  
Tears begin to drop like blood from every pore.  
I ask again, “Which train is on your hands?”  
And he sets his face toward me like flint: “Both. All.”

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