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**From the Selected Works of James Plath**

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# The Boy Who Would Be God

James Plath



Available at: [https://works.bepress.com/james\\_plath/10/](https://works.bepress.com/james_plath/10/)

James Plath

## THE BOY WHO WOULD BE GOD

It all began when his grandfather died  
and he sat erect, craning to see, waiting  
at the “wake” for the old man to push  
through the heavy scent of gladiolas  
and satin pillows—to rise again and join  
them in singing “Heaven is my Home.”

Back then, too much seemed staged  
for his benefit, to teach him some lesson  
about kindness to animals, or not putting  
pennies on railroad tracks. But the voices  
soon died and the organ rolled on like a diesel  
locomotive, so full of bass that he felt the rattle.

In the picture he has, his grandfather looks  
like Dwight D. Eisenhower, who in every book  
gives fatherly advice to soldiers wearing boot  
black under their eyes. Like big-league ballplayers,  
they huddle around the secrets of winning: be  
frugal, show respect, tell the truth, do your best.

In his dreams, the boy walks single-file again  
across planks in the cemetery rain. Clay melts  
into mud, sludge pools beside a bottomless hole.  
But the boards extend like straws stuck end to end,  
long as the tunnel they’re building now under the English  
Channel, sealed off from the sea and the smell of flowers.

Years later, in stiff November, hunting with a high school  
friend and his father—one shot turning cottontails  
to quiver—he’s shown how to slice from anus  
to breastbone to remove the entrails. In the cold  
old shed beside thin ice, current sluggish under skim,  
he tears the skin and watches the animal’s spirit

rise: just one quick puff of steam.