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ELEGY: STRAW

**On the road by the brickyard
the sweet fragrance of straw-dust
and the hot of an oven
cooling down already for the weekend**

**and who am I
 bothers me again,
when I should be content
with the shadow of that woman at the corner
where Liberty Avenue breaks into Queens
and the fish are frying every Friday,
but I'm not,**

**that woman
is gone long ago on her own occasions,
mother of nine, mother of some new
redeemer hurries to our side
 to wake me
from my questions
into the cool water of reasonable doubt.**

**The lawyers call it that,
they have a name for every unimportant thing,
my life, your soul,
the shadow of your shoulders
soft on sidewalk left in the mind**

no matter, no matter how many years,
the manumission of memory

I appeal to the court,

forget me

in the forgiveness that is like fire,

what did they use to fire their ovens
to bake the bricks, the ruddy mud
strengthened with straw,

for the least thing holds the mass together,
straw from upstate, from where I am now,
and the sumptuous meadows crowd with grass,
and the cornstalks of November,
and the smell of straw

on which the ram

and his kindred bed down, the sheep
of Wurtemberg idle on the hill
virtuously grazing on the actual,

and I smell the straw of Brooklyn, straw
an immigrant like all the rest of us,
Samuel and Owen and Thomas,
straw, straw.

And in the earth

even, the memories do not abandon,
we taste the dead inside the roots

of what we eat, the dead
inside us take flight in our music,
give their sermons in our dim poetries,
and to them we speak and write and carve
something into something else
and call it ours.

We are theirs,
straws left over from their grassy days,
from their wheat and barley,
the sloppy music we remember
from all their decent intervals,
tonus Peregrinus, neums of a
song half sung through crying,

so who am I

I said
meaning
what do I remember?

all that happened in and around me
is another animal,

one more
running away
over a hill I can't follow,

they throw straw

on the fire
to make smoke, the smoke
tells them things, smoke signals from the Vatican?
no, the broken-down old Irishmen
who landed in Vinland
carrying their silence and their crucifixes,
who lived among the Indians and said no word,
monks all of them,
womanless, childless,
wordless in God's silence,

what was there to say?
They huddled over little fires,
tossed dry grass in
for some sweet smoke,
or in autumn, cold like now,
roared their fires with husks and cobs and straw,
cob for the slow and straw for the blaze,
and were content.

We live in their smoke,
all the beautiful old confusions of Europe,
odic force and Christian values,
chivalry and blue flower,
swirl in their campfires,
monks, madmen,
what did they leave behind them

to infect us when we
in our turn got
washed up on the shore.

Venus mercenaria, the common clam,
by the millions even in these
scant salt waters up the Hudson,
their names, their names on everything,

and what would be the Latin for this hour,
cold knees. remembering Brooklyn,
what a brick feels like
plucked out of cold mud
with the grass blades still clinging,

what is the cure for memory,
for looking at this world and seeing another?
America. Sure, the whole place is a church
but who knows to what god?

THE DOG

(for the new Tarot)

It doesn't love anybody
and nobody loves it.

It is ugly
the way a man is.

Always ready
for the next thing.

The next thing makes
us ugly, he is ugly,
stupid and fierce.

Like a man.

He stands
on four legs, stolid,
ready for the next thing,
he faces us directly
like a man,
straight ahead,
not looking up.

His name is Ready,
Ready Dog.

Behind him we see
if we can break the almost
hypnotic ill-will of his glance
two whaleback hills
left from a recent
glaciation. A dog

**in a landscape
tell us all we need
to know.**

**The earth
is not malevolent,
not stupid, not fierce.
And everything has happened
already,
so there's nothing
to be ready for.**

**The Dog means
don't do it
whatever it is,**

**The Dog
means a broken record
of a song you never liked
they played all through
your childhood.**

**Don't do it. The Dog
means your husband
will beat you, your wife
cheat, your children
convert to ugly religions.**

The Dog means the wrong god.

4 November 2013

THE CELLAR DOOR

The cellar door
stands open.

It leads down
to a little Galilee
between the earth and
how much of heaven
fits in a house,

a between place
like between your eyes.

Such words
we rest on things,
hoping they don't
slip off by night.

It is day now,
you can see this
innocent aperture
leads gently down—
would you go down there
with me
if I call you
by the name of another?

2.

Why should we lie.

There are so many ways
into a single house.

I offer the low path,
humid, cool down there,
whitewashed stone walls
gentle menace of furnace,
sump pump, dust.

Cool dust,
not so different
from remembering.

3.

The picture
is out of breath.

It just wants you
to go in.

Humble yourself
to the low
ceiling of the actual.

Talk to whoever
you meet down there.

Later you can
help him up the stairs.

5 November 2013

THE TREE

The tree is named Marie.
She stands slim and tall
out of uncertain shrubbery.
Slim but not so
young is all that —
even the slightest tree
can be old, smart
and cool and free,
can say what she
likes and what she means.

She is unusual
in answering to a name —
usually things and silent
processes leave
such absurdities to us.
But she consents.
She raises her head
to heaven and
consents and consents.

Everything happens to her
but nothing happens to the tree.
How slim she moves
slow in the whirl around her,

**if we didn't have to
believe so thick in time
we could see her dance.
Accomplish for yourself
her assent
and time will stop.
Any tree can tell you that.**

5 November 2013

THE PROPHET

His prophecies all come true
in and as the children
round him.

People call them
his daughters
but we know better —
these little girls
are all of his fathers,
a man needs many
fathers,

 especially a man like him
with long beard, baldheaded,
words in his mouth,
speaking for the gods.

He is a prophet,
he sleeps all the time.
All around him
his fathers are playing
sprightly, tender,
doing deep intelligence
in the sunshine
of his brow.

What can this mean?

It means that prophecy

is truth

and truth

a kind of dream

that has us

and we wake.

5 November 2013

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**I thought it would never come to this
but the tree is standing,
the sky supported by it,
the earth patient as never before.
Truly it is now.
I hear a him and a her
love-palavering
beneath the falling leaves.
The elements align
as if this solid world
is just their sleep,
and whatever happens in the wind,
our minds, is just
their pillow talk.
Some birds fly by,
it must be morning —
could the world be
in love with me?
Sunlight shouting in the trees.**

5 November 2013

THE SHOE

Gurdjieff said you could
cover the world with leather
or just put on a pair of shoes.
Same effect for you,
different for the planet.

This is not that kind of shoe.
Dainty, tall, needle-heeled,
dainty, faintly silly, the kind
that goes with New Year's Eve
and empty champagne glasses
littering the lawn
of Schuyler House years ago
no, wait — that's
just a memory,
just an ordinary
mental thing
no leather.

A shoe has very little memory
though a lot it could remember,
a shoe gradually takes on
the deformation of the foot
and does a little damage
of its own,
 slowly though,

slow.

**This shoe
(any shoe)
is waiting for you.
If the shoe fits,
we say, little reckoning
how rare that is
and what terribilità
when that happens,
a good fit,
the primal wound,
the promised land
invaded, a well
in the desert, hold me,
love scalds me,
they scold me, old men
with beards,
jabbering prophecies.**

**A shoe
is always listening.**

**In the picture
the shoe is patent leather
and gleams like coal
gleams like calm sea at night,
all the comparisons**

fit neatly in its last,
snug in its pointy toe.
There is no living
being in this image —
an absence speaks,
the implied woman —
all dressed up, or off
in bed now or
dancing barefoot
on the lawn at Schuyler
House years ago,
no, no,
no memory, no
more than me and you,
remember, on the lawn,
when you said I felt
like the wind, no, stop,
the shoe is empty.

That's what it means.
Think about everything
that is missing
while all the rest
is still here.
Shoes are about going,
an empty shoe
is about being gone.

**Think deeply
about absence,
permanence,
the sea at midnight,
the empty rowboat,
the champagne, grass
stretching over the prairies,
wind styling the grass
vanishing in it,
the wind. The wind.**

5 November 2013

THE HUSBAND

(Tarots)

He holds a hammer in his hand.

He holds a wounded sparrow in his hand.

He holds a yardstick in his hand.

He holds a letter in his hand he hasn't finished reading.

And never will.

He holds a key in his hand.

He holds an antique ormolu clock on his hand.

He tells old time.

He holds a book in his hand, it's open, pages riffled by wind.

He holds a kitten curled up on his palm.

He holds a photo of a lost love in his hand.

He has forgotten her name.

He holds a mirror in his hand but does not look at it.

Who knows what he would see?

He holds an ear of corn half-eaten in his hand.

He holds a bottle perhaps of water in his hand.

He is sustained by the simplest things.

He holds a rifle in his hand.

Does he know how to use it? Not sure.

He holds a butterfly net in his hand.

He feels ridiculous but he loves things.

He holds his hand out and a dragon-fly lands on it.

He holds his father's cane in his hand.

He holds a big map of China all open and dangling.

He holds a silk stocking draped across his wrist.

He holds a branch of holly in his hand.

He holds a wad of paper money in his hand.

He holds a pair of scissors in his hand.

He holds a bell in his hand.

He holds a dogleash in his hand but no dog is there.

He holds a wooden flute in his hand.

He holds a red ball in his hand.

He holds a kitchen strainer in his hand.

He holds a stone in his hand.

He holds nothing in his hand.

5 November 2013