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THE BUILDERS

for Steven and Sara

Stray intimates

in long deciding

how will walk who

in which remember—

o the architect

that wildflower

is all the welcomer

who bids me in?

Did you scale shadows

to shame my meagerness,

make darkness my messenger,

your balconies make

angels of us, when?

To enclose space

is it rape or rapture,

a beautiful hand

grasping emptiness

caresses us

we are enclosed

luminiferous interior

safe as daylight

summons us to stay—

to inhabit beauty!

Buildings marry us

invade our space with their own—

and we call such spaces ‘buildings’

because the main thing

about them is that someone’s there

someone, you, built this
whatever it is, a shape
of spaces in the hope of home,
the building of it comes first

that is what counts
the artifex has had his say
his do-like-this, his
open-this-door-only
and be most strange
at home in this
space where you have never been.

This hard language
speaks to your skin
width weight
and you answer
with your limbs,
even your breath

is shaped by this

air you enter,

well-wrought freshness

of a made place

the whole world outside is a beautiful accident.

2.

Have to get closer than that.

Less lyric, more absolute.

Geometry needs no rough edges—

leave them to CERN, physics

and other poetics—

a building can't stop answering

that question you're afraid to ask.

3.

Over the lintel at Delphi

the letter **E**

epsilon, which in Attic Greek meant

‘you are.’

Remember you exist,

remember it’s no god no principle no authority—

just you.

Architecture, like oracles, remind us to be.

Every step you take relates

to this deliberate structure—

existence is the only absolute,

our contingency a weird kind of certitude.

If you can walk through the door

you are a human on earth

and the whole earth belongs to you

as much as anyone—

democracy is a door.

A cathedral is a gift to the people not to God.

The best religion is a vacant house.

4.

Architect—one who makes arches.

Hummingbird—one who makes flowers.

Is a building a shimmer in the mind first,

a mirage for Aladdin, smoke dream,

a building is the shadow of desire—

and when Holl lays the skyscraper

horizontal on the Chinese earth

he heals more than the sky—

he heals us of the fierce *ascent*

we have been cursed with since the ziggurat,

now from room to room we glide,
rolling easy, drawn by eyes alone—
the soft horizon bids us always in

he built the distances indoors
the high far hallows
the end of the hall

rooms are the letters of an alphabet—
each building is its own language

wrap the room around me and goodnight.

7 August 2012

= = = = =

All times a mash of who
permanent identities in shriveling bodies
the ones I knew
are with the Guermantes now
faces barely match what felt in me
still fresh—flower in Lucite?—after?
After what? I thought I was remembering
a person but I was remembering a moment
she belonged to, and I did too, now neither
of us can do more than gaze stupidly
into this puzzling memento, a trinket
of Venetian glass, a seashell from Point Lobos.

7 August 2012

= = = = =

No one must touch me

no one must know

the alphabet is full of lies

but only we can tell

left to themselves the letters

are pure as the sky

or the birds that flock across it

wild geese over the river.

7 August 2012

= = = = =

No drought the day—
memories are best when you don't remember them,
leave them as input, impulse, inertial
thrust to a meeting
with the apparent new, the seemingly
unremembered. But you'll never know.
You never know.
Sit outside and wait for me.

7 August 2012

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Aubergine evening.

Dormice chittering

under the eaves

the sky full of listening.

7 August 2012

= = = = =

People live there while they can—
strange that I don't know
whether people I'm thinking about
are still there or have died—don't know
by outer information surely,
but strange that the imagining inside
can't tell (like Rilke's
angels) whether it's dealing
with the living or the dead.

7 August 2012

= = = = =

Rage in range

the angry

round us—

a child

tore the gift book

enraged not at it but

angry at the love

means giving

he deemed inadequate

terribly fierce is

the judgment of a child

my hand trembles

to remember it

the loving inscription

torn out—

a tantrum he will live with

all his life

the angular explosion

out of the too nourished body

revenge,

revenge for what—

8.viii.12

= = = = =

The meek control the earth
with their lassitude—
lulled by the spectacle of such ignoring
the alpha males are tricked
into their endless supremacies,
become kings, commissars, executives,
bankers, generalissimos, popes.
They strut and war and tax and punish
they display and conquer and are vanquished
they merge and all the while
the meek smile their little lazy smiles
and sleep sound in hovels, barracks, jails.
The meek have inherited the earth
and have given their heritage away.
History is the consent of the government.
No other story but techniques of being ruined.

8 August 2012

= = = = =

Something tired in the tepid air

a mournful hush— aucun oiseau—

the fox is still asleep—those deer

and their fawn are nestled back there

so many resting places on this earth.

They tell me rest. You have been

a ferryboat too long, groaning your way

through the oily harbor

from ocean feeling to the coast of word

and back again to dream.

For the sea is nothing but my sleep

and you are sometimes open there—

but on such a morning as this

all the seas are trees

and rise to whelm with green waves

your enstatic calm—say something, anything,

to break the spell

I cast on you but can't undo—

only you

can speak the silver word.

8 August 2012

= = = = =

Can't get there

and isn't anyhow

a where or how

just this

like breathing

has no natural

end—death

is a bad idea

men bought into

like war and money—

learned it

from animals—

pets teach death—

and now it's hardly

here before it's gone.

Go on with this

instead, a rap

on no one's door.

8 August 2012

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That they run

that agency that runs the lake

runs the mountain too—

—how can we understand

such weather — give me a cloud

and I'll stop asking —

latterly frequently troubling you—

all we are is intermissions

of a silent rapture—

Odic force and naked lightning

and the train lurches by

like the whole nineteenth century

or swim too close to the waterfall

and you belong.

2.

Iguaçu for instance

or the electronics mall in Paraguay.

Sovereign Pontiff

puzzled by all the bridges that God made

and left him he thinks in charge of—

we are a race of smugglers,

girls smoke and boys get tattoos

the gospel withers.

Sweat the least of things

because the inland sailors come

smiling like gibbons in the barren trees—

3.

but I saw this sacred couple

stand unsmiling in the bamboo grove—

the crow tells me far more than I can understand,

I write down the fraction and pray for the whole

they stared out at me as if I were a camera

the trees grow taller every day

they are giants now, they surround my house

they hide the road, I hear cars they don't let me see

every day closer, just great green leafy trees and far away sky—

where the crows are. That they understand.

4.

The important people in my life

are sleeping now. The arrow

points to some o'clock

that has no easy number—

church steeple, pigeon coop, beer saloon

were old names for that hour

or hot air from the subway grating

forced up out of the secret tubes

the underseen. Time to go home
it keeps telling
but the woman still is in her clothes
the moon is captured by the trees
and nothing works the way you suppose

but everything works.

That's the sad of it,
elderberry juice in the Prater,
old man crying in the rain

the Emperor will never come home
he never left
he's hiding in the attic now
fighting Chickamauga all over again
a little silver plate gleaming in his skull.

8 August 2012