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## **PRELUDE TO ACT ONE OF *PALESTRINA***

1.

Listen along the line  
and the simple continuity  
will brush the fine hairs  
forward (right way)  
on your forearm gently  
length of the dream.  
This way you know  
someone is happening  
to you. This is someone.  
This is what someone  
does. You know by feel.  
The only way you can  
anyone at all. Heartbeat,  
breath, taste in your mouth.  
My mouth also. Talking  
as if talking to you.

2.

Prelude to a long complexity  
simple enough for a bird  
to be scared off the roof  
though you only meant to  
say hello bird hello. So  
often welcome is banishment.  
What can we do about that?  
List all the loves you lost  
and pretend you never had  
even one of them. You never  
had them. They were  
sunshine at night, fountains  
in the desert, more dreams, dreams.

3.

That's why this particular  
music is so important. After  
a fitting number of violins  
a human voice comes along,  
child or woman, hard to tell  
Words in some other language.  
Light around the edge of curtains,  
possible daytime. Shake  
the cloth gently. Then shake  
the light even gentler to see  
what kind of body that shimmer  
clothes. I thought one day  
I saw that person, the actual  
body behind the light and then  
the veil fell back and all  
was wall and window once again  
the way we like to keep the world.

4.

But if this little voice (it is  
a child I think, I read its shadow  
on my ears) is saying something  
we need to hear we'll never  
know. Words die into music  
and here we are. And mine too,  
these, are just looking for  
some lucid death to pass into  
on their way to some better  
kind of saying.

5.

But who knows.

What is said here is spoken  
everywhere, and what you hear  
turns back into irritable grammar  
inside you, telling you all the things  
music wants you to do, all the Asias  
you're supposed to go get wisdom

from, all the awkward propositions  
you must cajole all your hoped-for  
friends into pretending to believe.

Love, religion, justice, policy.

What if there are no angels really?

Where would our conversation be?

Isn't there some agency out there  
that parses even this and tells you  
in cleaner words the things I mean?

7 December 2013

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1.

Upgrade the ears'  
 expectations— wake more sense  
 when I take longer  
 at the wheel at the clasy pot  
 intricate with revolutions  
 rests in the kiln —  
 let the line know you've played it out  
 through your anxious fingers—  
 the way the word  
 masters such as me i  
 nto speaking —  
 o hear me better than I am.

2.

Someone was coming. The snow  
 was melting. Inference, inferences.  
 Hearing *Tristan* in the morning,  
 every modulation means.

And sometimes the words mean too.

3.

Hard to be anybody these days  
when not even the ink is black  
and the sky's a higher octave of the snow –

the human voice is frantic now  
something needs to spe  
reaches out through so many mouths,

all we really know is how to fall in love.  
Meantime the sheep wander loose in the ravine,  
looking vaguely for grass, looking for wolves.

4.

O mute pastoral of modern meaning,  
one by one the buildings instruct the sky.  
Nothing to learn – chemistry textbook  
from childhood, of dubious relevance —  
all that precision, everything changes,



every breath a new cosmology.

We don't know how everything works  
though we can handle anything at all.

5.

Have I said it yet? Of course not.

Those who know don't say. The brass band  
silences the parade.

Try to mean me.

Try to remember for me.

Tell me what you want,  
for sky's sake tell me what you mean.

6.

So it turned into a love song after all  
just like Tristan.

The ship always comes too late —  
that is the meaning of philosophy,

a lover

loses his sheep, the sail is tattered,

holds no wind.

No one

is coming, the snow will never melt.

Everything speaks German.

Do you understand?

There is a sign in the sky, a shape

like the face of someone you never knew.

Time gets longer and longer but never gets here.

8 December 2013.

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Flag maybe.

Alternate loyalties

cloud flutter,

scud

across the heart.

I am no more than

what it lets me hear.

8 December 2013

## **BRAHMS**

1.

Melody in reserve  
hidden behind the striding  
orchestra the fierce  
piano rolling out its  
nets is waiting.

Back there

an energy,

a song

not meant for singing.

2.

Always waiting  
by the bronze doors  
open a new year  
right in the flesh of the  
old year never ended,  
time turned inside out.

3.

We're used to  
his agonies by now,  
call them romantic,  
Late Romantic,

but time hurts him,  
hurts us in him  
if we really hear,  
tone makes him do

and all this happens,  
love has something to  
do with it but what kind,  
what hand reaches towards us?

4.

As love once wove  
and spread the meshes  
caught Agamemnon  
in his bath so unarmed

he could be struck down  
the music strips us bare,  
controls the nerves, meshes  
in us, what does he mean,  
why does he say what this ‘  
music make me hear?

5.

Are the lines long enough, sister,  
lover, for you to find him, touch  
the fiber of his pain and set him free?  
Can you save the man trapped in music?

8 December 2013

(Bard Conservatory, Brahms No.1, conducted by Jeffrey Kahane)

## CADASTRAL

1.

Listening as over words  
sun's first glistenings  
illumine hours—  
the forest you never entered  
thousand acres of my father's house  
and we a hectare bare.

2.

No grass for goat.  
No girl to milk it.  
No road to go it.  
Poor goat. Identity  
is something like that.

3.

So try to keep your  
equilibrium in your  
hip pocket with the little  
scrap of cardboard some-  
body wrote the address  
on you're headed to  
in case you forget. Left  
foot right foot and the ice  
melts by noon. Finger it  
at afternoons of doubt  
but never take it out.

4.

Or eat the rice and beans.  
Nothing must pass your lips  
till each day has its Easter  
  
and he rises up in you  
new-named and glorious,  
you walk him in the garden.



5.

Bilateral symmetry was the answer  
our flesh offered for the riddle  
of how to be, and also be someone somewhere.  
But wouldn't it have been better just to be?

9 December 2013

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A plea  
for left-sided motormen:  
  
don't always leave my mail  
on the dining room table,  
the morning sun has to spread  
out there unimpeded,  
splendor on oak, just a wish  
away from being everywhere.  
I am the motorman and I tilt  
always to the left. Where  
does my mail come from now?  
I can use the table but the wood  
is not mine. But the sun is.

9 December 2013

## PREX

Guide me through  
the green gospel  
on the scarlet  
pilgrimage.

It grows dark now.  
this strangest  
winter fruit.

9 December 2013

## FEATHER

1.

What wasn't said  
is still speaking.

Feather on the wind  
deserts its bird,  
carries its tiny parasites  
gently into the deep-  
peopled forest  
where everyone  
lives and everything  
is alive.

No dead  
matter—only persons  
come and go, die  
from one into the next,  
shapes elapse  
but the rest persists.

2.

So the feather  
might be blue jay's  
tufting along  
through the light  
snow sifting down  
until it loses  
my attention  
and is free again  
from commentary  
and inferences,

a thing out there  
at peace  
among the all of it.

10 December 2013

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Asphalt almost  
wet enough to reflect  
fence posts, fence rails—  
and slick cars pass.  
Everything in my world  
must be a mirror.

10 December 2013