

2-2010

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## A WORD

1.

Not a word.

A word.

A word about it is not a word.

Waiting for it is another word.

This one also is another.

A word is wanted

and someone wants it.

Wanting a word

is not a word

not even close.

A word is somewhere else

also, as far

as far from wanting

as it can be.

A word is

away from wanting.

2.

You will ask.

You will ask me

if a special word is meant

or any word

will do.

You will want to know

how much I know

about how a word gets

to be wanted

and what word it is

and I will answer truthfully

if I knew I could tell you

but I don't know

what word is wanted

or wanting or for what.

I don't even know what a word wants.

3.

So let's decide what a word wants.

Or decipher it, using the tracks in the snow

left by those who have been looking for it

using the smell of the word's absence,

the sound of thinking about it.

If we knew what a word wants

we could speak it scrupulously

so that those who heard us heard the word too,

a word is something to eat, people

who heard us would not be afraid

their palms would be dry whereas I

myself fear a word when it's ready to speak.

4.

Find a place to lie down  
and look at the sky.  
The word will be there  
waiting at the top of your eye.

It reaches you,  
a word reaches.  
A word stands in the sky  
the way words often stand for things.

The word that's wanted  
doesn't do that though.  
It does not stand you think  
for anything else.

So the word is just like you,  
it stands only for itself  
just as you mean only you  
and not another one or another thing

not even the sky. A word.  
A word stands.  
That at least is  
something you can know.

1 February 2010

## **BOOK**

Move the dried lily petal  
from the pages you dried it between  
to some earlier page, close  
to the pages that were open  
when the lily, still soft, fragrant,  
but failing, fell, let it fall  
onto the table  
onto the book  
and you left it.

Things find their places  
among us.

Sometimes  
invisible, invisible things are.  
Like the leaf suddenly gone.

1 February 2010

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I wanted to be close to it  
as a thing would be  
to another thing,

a rose-red interval  
between being and non-being,  
nothing like a river.

1 February 2010

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History belongs to me.

I make it.

History is what I think happened,

who gave me this fountain pen

and when, who kissed

whom behind the synagogue,

how many caissons

bogged down in mud at Waterloo.

An old man I knew

knew an old man who

knew Lincoln.

Nothing older than that,

no history before someone you knew.

1 February 2010



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While listening to something  
something else says what it says:  
the names of some people who  
live by the northern sea.  
Coast names, sand names, rock  
names, wild rose names.  
Horses are running on the shore.

The wind plays the flute, low,  
low, the pebbles on the beach are  
all tattooed. I'm trying to listen  
to the distance all by itself  
but the natural circumstances  
keep interrupting: the wind  
you call a flute is just the sun,

the horses are waves, the rocks  
are shadows, the salt itself  
is in your eyes, you're crying,  
you will never come home.

1 February 2010

## SOME BIRDS

To have been here at last  
among all the sparrows who  
somehow seem to mean springtime  
early in the world as it is  
though no scientist will agree—

are they like prayers  
someone said with such abundance  
that most winged their way  
to wherever deity may hide  
but these stayed?

Or are we  
the ones to whom prayers come,  
to remind us of the *good mind* in the world  
when people will well upon  
each other and all things?

Christ,  
they're just sparrows.

Yes, but they're our

sparrows, and they come to us  
to see what we have done  
and what we have left  
for one another and for them  
in the way of seed.

1 February 2010

## RESCRIPT

Sometimes time  
and sometimes nine.  
The empress rules  
her Byzantines.

Men wonder where  
she came from to begin,  
others who she is  
and how her soft voice

pervades the city  
and the fields of wheat  
outside, even the pale  
mallows that grow

by every stream, they  
tremble pinkly  
at her spoken word.  
What words?

The one that women  
always say:  
*I am the undecided,*  
come help me choose,

all art and skill and craft  
come put to use  
till every wall  
is thick with images

and the bars are loud  
with questionable song—  
then I can fold  
my hands and sleep

and in my dreams  
my dark and quiet  
sisters will come to me  
and we will play

all night alongside  
the pale river of waking  
with each other  
and never get wet.

2 February 2010

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Trying to figure  
her out is  
a way in.

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Boy hope  
look look  
a star is dancing  
to watch her  
is worth it all.

So I promise  
to build you a city  
and all I ask  
is everything.

2 February 2010

## **SLEEPING ALONE**

Sleeping alone is a prayerful art,  
it somehow helps the world a lot  
in ways you cannot reckon  
but you know it does and even  
the summer pillow is cool on your cheek.

2 February 2010



## HOUSE

Ready to be a barn for beavers  
or a hospice for the dead.  
a house stands. *Anything, anything*  
is what a house says.

Loki built me, sparrows  
lord it over me,  
I am a thing of comfort, I am  
the best thing most men ever do.

From my windows you can see God,  
I am the most mysterious thing in the world,  
the more I am, the more the mystery,  
I am here even when you turn away,  
  
my door thrills to your amazing key.

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My mind exists to explore you,  
my body only to know yours.  
I am an afterthought only,  
a palpable machine.

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The sun rose bright then disappeared  
in the sky, winter's flag  
waved in my face, the trees  
themselves look cold today,  
elongate missionaries from the underworld.

2 February 2010

## VOCABULARY

1.

You get to read everything again—

I am Sumer. You knew me  
when we each had different names.

I have ice but no word for snow—  
eagle-dust my poets call it, or crumbs of sky.

Don't listen to them—  
anything we don't have words for

doesn't really exist—  
it's merely personal.

We just have to find the person  
to whom it belongs.

2.

I asked God for a mountain  
he gave me a river too

asked for a well in the desert  
gave me a big flock

black-faces sheep drinking from it  
at ease, drinking their fill.

3.

Why do I wake up  
at midnight wanting

and what I want  
is something else?

And whose is it,  
nameless thing I want?

Someone somewhere  
has a name for everything.

2 February 2010