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61.

This time paradise you say well maybe
doubt is a dollar in your pocket

use doubt wisely spend it on true things
so only the truest of them all comes through

so make love to all the other truths
then let them go one brick at a time

you said it led this way I said
the morning is all going and the evening being gone

and lo! it was morning of the ninth day
the tone above the octave sang again

so all the inward children leapt up crying

here she is again daughter girl friend mother

she comes to read us all the books

and play us wordless music hum by hum

there should be a science of relationships

for a good child everything is mother.

6 March 2010

62.

I have to talk for hours to find out what I said

let alone what I thought I was thinking

meaning is the man around the corner

the girl hiding in the closet under mother's furs

meaning is the backside of the moon and everything

meaning is the hat blew off your head where is it now

meaning is a white ball rolling on grass no answer

meaning is mosquito bite a lodging for the night

I don't want to know what meaning is

I just want to know the road to heaven

knowing the way is heaven itself

limestone dust on river mallow flowers

sometimes we stumble and the wind talks

lozenges half-sucked drop from laughing mouths

things to worry about rub against my arm

for I am Solomon with a thousand wives.

6 March 2010

63.

Whether it exists or not is hardly the question

the reverence of our mind set towards it is

passionate reverence is the heart of our bliss

it makes us happy caring for the world no matter

even grasping then becomes a kind of blessing

and letting go a kind of sin

he said and I was prone to listen

then I rolled over and saw the stars

the light came down test every word

not everything that everybody thinks is wrong

not every word a masked assassin

sometimes you have to kiss them to taste their minds

every girl learns that soon enough

and the knowledge makes blood break out of her body

gaunt moon the upshot of her cry

so every sentence has its puberty in you

test it taste it love with it

in the infinite lifetime of a second or two

then read on and let the scarlet carpet

float you through the middle-night bazaar

wording one by one the things you need

until your philosophy is complete

that system of thought you call your body

new work the reverence from which I speak.

7 March 2010

64.

Cauldron calls we Irish stabbed

into the stew a fork just once

made do with what we plucked

though we were free to envy those with fatter gobbets

slay them later if and when we would

still have naught but our own sad piece of meat

destiny thinks like that

resentment does no good at all

chill vendetta nauseates the diner

greasy with revenge

so take the nice food on your plate and shut up about it
it all comes out the same hole in the end

we Irish talk like that never serious two words in a row
lest we sink into the ancestral gloom of being right

accuracy is a hole in the heart
approximate kisses warm about your ear.

7 March 2010

65.

From so far away I feel your body
moving or your body still

is there anyway you can understand
how powerful long-distance knowing is

as if I touched you and the touch
sank into us both like a stone in a river

that stayed there forever and the water
touched every part of it and it

changed the way the water flows
neither ever separate from the other

I'm not lost if I'm not where you are

I'm only lost if I'm not where I am

the lover consoled himself with thought

then looked out the no-glass window

out over the whole city he imagined

far away from where he was trying to be.

7 March 2010

66.

Yearning that for some be cages

be me the muscled hillsides

plain in new sun a weather a weather

wait for you in a far painting

crude lovers in a simple country maybe

I can't sleep away from the sight of it

wake into the touch water slips through your fingers

portolans torn up in dream but the ocean lasts

all those rosaries all those prayerwheels

what would happen if they stopped

nothing at first then everything

the fox would flee the forest and the sky go home.

8 March 2010

67.

The world's a lot of money for just a family quarrel

I think we're the garage where someone's auto's stored

we are mice in the shadows of a machine

we have our sciences to ease our anxieties

our poesies to send us to sleep

sometimes big doors open by themselves it seems

light floods in the dirty little windows only hinted at

we stand astonished as the Thing rolls in

all history is scarred of such arrivals

prizes for meekness and desuetude

the earth shall inherit the earth

so Isis woke and looked about her

she still is looking we call it our thinking

but it is she haunting our neurology

hunting for the absent gesture

father-power lost somewhere in our mess of meat

she plucks the strings of me you too muchacha

till the girl in us stands like the man she lost

then Osiris wakes O sir is us

we are children we pretend don't understand

look you don't need any other book but this

it's all in here only the stories are left out.

8 March 2010

68.

I give you flowers you give me the ground
now rub your hands and make sun rise

I'll go milk that cloud of one more morning
language is breakfast now what's for lunch

every answer is an epic
the word is spoken the hero dies

we guess we understand something happened
all walk and no traction

this road goes nowhere thanks be to God
a candle in the desert lighting nothing but itself

here the fruits are sorted out by size

roll down a plane with cunning holes in it

a flame inside the water rushing down the flume

Eve's apple is the only creature left

I pick up a piece of water and bring it to her lap

she might coax it to be him again

out of pure holy merriment out of no need

she can do it all herself and did and does

no banker's diamond gleams so indigo

we are always at the bottom of the hill

a stupid endless pathway to a cloud-shroud top

her apple gives us just strength enough to climb.

8 March 2010

69.

Heaven and hell the same city differently dwelled
it is dwelling on things that make them what they are

in that city of course more trees than men
more avenues than women and the houses talk

the houses prowl around the woods at night
every morning wakes up a different animal

astonishing vistas of the ordinary
we live in the quiet of these crowded woods

so busy with desires and arrivals
you can hardly hear the workmen hammering.

9 March 2010

70.

Sylphs are selfs that saunter through the air
every land is Palestine for them a yard below

sylphs can do anything that air can do
change everything that air can change

videlicet messages of every kind musics weather
moods remembrances words as they speak or as they're
heard

colors of the spectrum all that air can do to daylight
the sufferings of light in air you witness in the Louvre

all this is sylph-work pray hard they love you too
Paracelsus spoke this way by the mantelpiece

he closed his eyes then and we saw
a dreamy smile spread about his somewhat chubby face

as if he slept right there in his fauteuil
in broad afternoon sunshine but it was not sleeping.

9 March 2010

71.

No word in mind he woke with mind in word

old superstition that every word must have a referent

each day has to be new

but it is the same old day with the same old you

until you unroll the moon out like a scroll

and read what has been written about you

it has been staring at you all your life

drink the sea that's always offering its cup

then you be new and drag the world with you

if one wakes up all others will wake too

he sang and round his ears the choir he imagined
swooped like hungry cormorants and soared

grateful for a world at least to say
even if they never manage to believe

the hymn tune sounds good and the priest
sleeping in the pulpit slept with a smile.

10 March 2010

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Clean fingers of doctors and priests
I always hated those emblems of authority
serene authorities living somewhere up there
where the money flowed to and naught came back
but rules and judgments, I watched their fingernails
pale and burnished, mine were always dirty.

I lived in the world, dirt and sin and work and needing
eating anything I could get my hands on
o god the craven canine hunger of children
born starving and needing everything
and living in a world of people who incredibly
have forgotten that they were ever new.

10 March 2010

THE PENGUINS OF PETROGRAD

Imagine a young poet. Imagine he was born in 1919 (the same year as Robert Duncan) or near to it. Imagine that by the time the siege of Leningrad begins he's in his early twenties. All young poets are in their early twenties. Imagine him remembering cold days in the library in his early teens when the unheated stacks helped him get into the mood. Imagine him back then reading the great Faddei Faddeivich Bellinsgauzen's account of his first sighting of the Antarctic continent. The city was called Petrograd when our young poet was just a boy, he had no sobriquet like 'poet,' just a boy reading old but thrilling books of exploration. A boy could become anything. Now imagine it is February 1943 and it is very cold. The siege of the city now called Leningrad has been going on for many months. The siege will last nine hundred days and we, still imagining, are halfway through it. The city stinks of dead people heaped in vacant lots, the

ground is too hard to bury them. Most of these corpses have not been eaten by the starving citizens. Some of them have been, it is a sad fact; for some reason cannibalism remains rare. Certainly almost all other living things are being eaten. The dogs are long gone, and people fight in the street for the adventurous cat that foolishly escapes from some doting owner's possessiveness. Imagine the taste of cat, rat, dog, sparrow. Imagine the young poet has become like everybody else an expert in those tastes, but he has also read about arctic explorers making nutritious blood-soup from mosquitoes boiled in thawed ice. There is still ice a-plenty even when the mosquitoes swarm. He thinks about the myriads of insects needed to make soup for a single man. It works because the insects suck our blood before we eat them. We get our own back. Could we live forever on what is already in us, he wonders. Could we learn to feed ourselves and nourish ourselves at once? Imagine the young poet thrilled with this thought: life is as a closed system, a balanced aquarium!

Each individual a closed system, giving out what feeds him back! We can be a perpetually self-renewing system! We can eat ourselves! Imagine the young poet abruptly realizing that his dream describes neatly enough the nature of poetry or any human art. Art feeds on itself forever, sustained by what it produces. And then imagine him realizing that he is a poet, not a poem, not poetry itself. I am a striver, an honest proletarian worker for Apollo and Socialism. I am a worker, I need to be fed. Imagine him looking around at the dirty snow of the frozen park. Antarctica at last, almost lifeless. Almost. Imagine the young poet is remembering now the first human contact with the life forms of the frozen world down there among the ice floes and calving bergs and vast ice cliffs. Skua gulls, leopard seals, penguins. Imagine he has read about them in the travels of Kerguelen and Bellinsgauzen. Imagine the young poet standing now in Leningrad, he still thinks of it as Petrograd, city of his childhood, young poets are so romantic. He is in the zoo. The zoo is still there.

Strange to say, zoos in doomed cities often last longer than people, no one knows why. Maybe people think, he imagines, that it's bad enough that we have to die without the poor animals dying too. Maybe not. We are poor too, smart or dumb, poetic or pedestrian, we all are hungry. We all have to eat. Most of the zoo's creatures have in fact already been eaten, eaten gladly; many of them -wisents, yaks, elephants, hippos, bears, camels—tasted almost like real food. Weasels and foxes and seals, not so tasty. But nourishing. Imagine him leaning on the wrought-iron fence behind which five or six middling penguins shiver. They have a pool but the pool is frozen. They have a three-sided shack. When they are very cold they can stand in there and warm one another. Imagine the young poet recalling one curious but essential fact about these luckless birds: even though the Antarctic winter temperatures are fifty below zero and the wind howls, the penguins keep warm by massing close together. The center of the penguin mass can reach 35 degrees Celsius. Heated by

metabolism, the ones in the middle of the mass grow overheated, and circulate outward, while the perishers on the periphery work their way in to warm up again – two grand spirals interweaving. He feels very alone. He is comfortable with that feeling most of the time, he imagines it is part of the vocation and destiny of poets. But imagine that today he is not so at home with solitariness. He watches the birds carefully, counts them carefully. Five and not six. Five penguins even in the little open shack provided for them could not do much circulating in spirals. Could not do much to keep one another warm. Imagine the young poet seeming to recall that at some time not long ago there were many more penguins in this pond. He remembers or seems to remember all through his life from earliest childhood being brought to the zoo or coming to it later by himself, poets always like to see and think about animals though they seldom like being very close to them or touching them, he seems to remember watching a fair number of penguins disporting themselves while

children squealed the kinds of sounds they know communicate pleasure to their distant parents right beside them. He had done his own share of squealing. But then there were many penguins, active and tumultuous and funny then. And now just five. What has happened to the others? Have they died one by one as the supplies of food they need, herring and such, got diverted to the needs of humans in the starving city? What else could a penguin eat, and where, now, in this year, winter, war, could they get whatever else might keep them alive? Imagine the poet thinking it out and not wanting to think, as he must now turn to thinking, that the penguins too, just like the kangaroos and the emus, have been eaten by the people of Petrograd. Leningrad. Someone has eaten the penguins. But not all the penguins. He remembers descriptions from the English explorers who tried, naturally enough, to eat penguins. Imagine him remembering the fearful death throes, described in Scott or Shackleton, of some poor explorer who ate the intensely poisonous liver of the penguin.

Something about Vitamin A. Convulsions, blindness, pain. Maybe all the penguins were eaten by people who died from eating them. Maybe their frozen stiff bodies filthy with death retch and flux lie in the parks among the heaps of corpses dead from less exotic causes. Imagine him remembering that the rest of the bird, the musculature, the heart, the gizzard, were safe but intensely unpleasant—oily, fishy, stinky. But in the siege of Leningrad, such adjectives do not by any means deter a hungry poet's speculation. He too could eat a penguin, carefully avoiding the liver, gall, mesentery. Does a bird have mesentery? Would a poet recognize the gall bladder, the lobes of the liver? What does a poet really know about anything? Imagine that the poet watches the five penguins shift uneasily about in their enclosure, perhaps even warily regarding him, hard though it is to read a bird's expression, those inalterable beaks, those fixed rings of color round the eyes. Imagine that he finally knows one thing, imagine that he understands one thing, that come what may

he will not kill, he will not eat a penguin. Imagine that this determination, strong as a vow it suddenly feels to him, in him, makes him happy, preposterously happy, given the circumstances. He will not kill these little birds, he will not eat them. They look at him without any sign of recognizing the beauty or compassion of what he has decided. The wind picks up, and they move closer to one another. Then one of them waddles into the little shack or shed, and the others follow.

11 March 2010