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THE COLD HILL CALLS

paper rules rock *covers*

fire *changes* paper

I forgot the mirror

how can we have lunch?

the grass, the circumstance.

We found a little tomb of someone by.

So small it could have been a fairy's house—

in stories things change into other things.

Then rock bleeds and when paper burns *changes*

the writing that was on it gets released

smoke writers letters in the sky

you have to be quick to read

We are quick. We hear the hill.

Sometimes I do want other people's music,

that's not bad, is it? Sometimes

I want to listen to what someone else

did to the air. Not just me

with all my listening. Not just me

and the world all alone with each other
always on this hill. But on the old
stone carvings on the tomb it said

listening is the loftiest flute.

You have to understand around the base
or lichen-plinths where grass grew.

You have to understand the stone was cracked
and from the gap a rivulet slipped out
trickling through the grass. What water is this?

You have to understand I heard the water speak
some other language but language
always is some other one,
not the cold stone against my legs
as I tried to read what the water says –

but it was comforting to hear it speaking
even if I'll never know what it said.

The way you come in late and find
your mother lying still so quietly you watch
until you see her chest expand beneath the quilt
just a little and know she's just asleep.

6 April 2006

ALL THE MODES OF TRAVEL

The wind grows little hairs
that shiver sideways when the wind
hurries forward pulling things along
into the traveler.

Tendrils,

the traveler thinks, wisps
of difference between words,
after all all words are breath
all breath is wind, right?
A forest is utterly vernacular,
violence but no lies in it.
Things tell us to be true.
De vulgari eloquentia.
Now imagine writing down the wind.

The young nun bends forward
she is not mean or hasty like the others,
he feels her cool breath
on his lips, on his upper lip
as she instructs him, *my mouth,*
another's breath he feels
but doesn't think. Thinking
comes later. She bends close
to him, he sees she has eyes,

he dares himself to see them
for a moment: calm, amused,
assured, words come later,
now they are only a color
and are close, the color is like
green with no green in it,
or amber with no brown
and so much light. She bends
closer to him, she knows
what she knows, she knows
he doesn't see well, she speaks
clearly, the way we speak
to the blind, she speaks the wind
onto him calmly, no haste,
I already forgive what you will do
she tells him, the wind
blows so we can see the little hairs
on her arm, fine hairs
on the nape of his neck
moving from the same wind,
the wind is a wedding, she bends
close to him, there are distinctions,
she explains, words and meanings
are all we have, and touches him
like this, such as these.

Then she is gone
from his close face,
moved back
against the blackboard
to which she turns to write:

exile nomad pilgrim wanderer

Now what are these? Explain the difference
she says and smiles at him,
alone in the immense classroom.

An **exile** is one who has gone out
from his country, sent out by the king
or hearkening to some inner voice
like Abraham our father.

He is not
your father, little boy. You have no father,
You are an exile: what are you?
I am what they used to call a wretch,
Old English *wræcca*, outcast, exile,
I am a privative, defined
by what I'm not, I have no home,
I come from somewhere that doesn't want me
and go where I am not known,

a blind man married to a pretty girl
and every hand is turned against me.

That is right, little boy. But if you were a nomad
what would you be then?

A nomad

is a kind of businessman who sells the distances
alone, he travels and he has no home
but the road he knows. But here's the thing:
he knows the road, the road takes him
from grass to grass, and all his sheep
walk along the weary way but the way
is like the hallway from the bedroom to the kitchen,
a nomad is the opposite of an exile,
a nomad is at home all along the way
because every place is full of his advantage,
the economies of wind and water
make his sheep fat, the sunshine
shows him where to go, and night
is a wolf that knows to keep his distance,
a nomad is a bourgeois on the road.

Very good, industrious little boy,
I have seen you going from desk to desk
like a scholar from book to book
looking for the place that has a place in it

for you, you are a nomad, that is so,
unprofitable so far, singular, sheepless
but your day will come. Till then
suppose you were a pilgrim?

O a **pilgrim**

is a sudden thing, a going towards
and always onward, no thought
of where to come from or of where
I am right now, o I am a pilgrim,
it's in my mind to travel
all the way to where you are
because I have seen your eyes
and smelled the sweet chalk of your clothes
I know you are holy, holy,
and a pilgrim always goes
to what is holy, a pilgrim knows
nothing but *the quality*
of his destination, nothing of what she
to whom he travels really is,
just that divinity of sheer seeming,
and so he goes and so I rise
from this shabby personage I am
and travel towards you
my goal, my dusty flower, my lost Eden,
the only good I really know.

O forward little boy, bold and ignorant,
all your knowing will take you
only as far as my knees, and what then,
what will you do then, my princeling,
my impossible scholar
who has lost his little book
and has to make the words up
as he goes along, is that you,
will you try to travel in me,
will you be my wanderer?

A **wanderer** I am

I was trying to be understand it
it sounds so glamorous, like water
running over grass and rock,
like the moon in barren apple trees,
like a dog asleep by a ruined house
but now you've said my name
for all I know is what comes to mind
and apple blossoms happen of pure chance
and what am I, I am nothing
and all I say becomes my road
and I have nothing anywhere but road.

8 April 2006 (11 April 2006)

THE PORRINGER

Ending soon enough the book my heart
the opera-glass the porringer Victorian
overpriced fortified wine the ginger treacle
persuade you to be a bird among peignoirs
blue trees of this curiously arrogant forest

but at Clermont they have defiled the secret grove
and cut down the tallest pine of it beware the low
karma of clipping holy things or any green
isolato of the river bluff aghast with sanctity
kid you're a little ruby glass candle for a heart

word repeated to dilute its meaning book
falls open ago soon enough my Cantonese connipter
(throws fits) parentheticals abound a boy
carries his glass heart with him most afternoons
it is no good to him in school as schools run now

peremptory basalt underwear of stricken cities
with autobuses glomming through the underclass
packed tight with me and me this dirty crew

who know their names so well and naught besides
a lot of wind today blew all the time away

so many times it says itself (don't listen)
or just leaves alive or not shuffling around the floor
don't guess at words a word is guess enough.
Now the kid recalls his paltry porringer and knows
he'll never be able to explain the pale pictures

you got to see when you finished your porridge
and spooned the bowl clean iron base with china bowl
a rose a little duck o there are fits between
the cherished and the seen sometimes a shadow
waits a whole life before it falls but not today.

8 April 2006

UTRENJA

What happens this day
happens every day.
That is why the men are singing
different songs all the same time.
Trying to be slow. Being slow
is a kind of prayer.
Pray for me. Pray I can become.

Enough about me. Pray to me.
I have become. The two songs
enrich each other, lurch.
Leaven, breath, song
complexly woven, rises,
a little hollow, like cathedral air,
what stone must be thinking.

Be slow with me, I am the road
a long time, my shoes are dust,
there is a spider bite along my time.
A man has died here before us.
This day, like every day,
turns inside out. Big surprise,
it's tomorrow, the mailman at the door,
horns blow, the mosque is on fire.

A stone of a certain size is rolled
in front of the cave mouth
to keep the earth from saying anything.
A word it knows. We must not hear.
Birds go crazy too, anything
to keep the word below ground.
The book before the world.

9 April 2006

Palm Sunday

NOISE

They send a truck around
to vacuum the streets
and make a lot of noise.

It is morning, as in Brecht's
chorale, Wake up, you Christians,
wake up, it is noise
come to you again, noise
which is enemy of sleep and waking both
and every sense and serious,
wake up!

 they send a truck
to wash the street but the streets
around here are only partly paved
just the roadbed not the edges
they vacuum the edges a huge
cloud of dust comes up
and settles back again when they pass
the way it is with everything you hear.

10 April 2006

=====

If I didn't tell the truth
the lie would give me away.
Destroy me the way the clock
destroys a city or a daffodil
menaces the sky.
Things are on edge.

On the edge things strive.
Men swink, it said,
swink and swive.
Enough to stay alive.
And on the other side
a royal protea from Honolulu
gaudy, overspecified,
her favorite flower
for its outrageousness,
she who carried diamonds in her throat.

11 April 2006

HERRING

He opened the can with hammer and chisel
pried them out – a miracle
that a fish could swim so far so small.

How far am I from the mountain?

And why? On its summit

a little shack heaped up from stones

and a dead man's poncho stretched on top

to keep the weather out –

am I a city to be telling you this?

Is this something I remember by the syllable

or the big harbor full of Norway ships

and the promenade, eating sausages?

Syllables are the only real Hegelians.

11 April 2006

=====

Examine the obvious until it ceases to be so.

Then pounce.

Statements are *meant states*. A verb in the so-called indicative is actually subjunctive, all wishy. We hope always that what we say is so. As: It is raining. True or False?

11 April 2006

ORNITHOLOGY AGAIN

The word is longer than the line.

The page is larger than the book.

The book is bigger than the world.

What kind of flower is this?

12 April 2006

BIRD MILK

Things fall down and sometimes
we leave them where they fell
or where random-seeming
number sequences of earth or wind
determine they should lie down
next to this. Next to that.

Sometimes we don't interfere.

Sometimes as the man said
there is a mountain. Things
fall slower when we let them.

There is a relation. Relation
means something we understand.

A glass with an island
engraved on it broke in the sink.

Island people shiver
in the sea wind. This is an elegy
for things that break. Logic
is the snicker of the world of things.

12 April 2006

=====

Everyone gets fatter, thinner, older.
Change walks away with us
and carries us to its house,
the House of Change
where we are honored boarders,
she even lets us smoke in the parlor
and wear the old sweater your mother threw out
and listen to the radio loud as we please.
Through our tears we understand
nothing is ever lost. But nobody else
can hear what we can hear.
They're all blind anyhow
and the street was taken away long years ago.
I was even angry at my mother for a while.

13 April 2006

[Responding to a text by Anna Gurton-Wachter]

I have read you and read you forever not nostalgic and not even being the me that is you when you say you. I am some other, like you, one who gets into the wrong car and gets out with the wrong hair, too, too, I understand. Someone I know said When we meet and it is raining I'll take off my dress and wring it out Then I said That is how the ancients made wine, squeezed out like that from what we take off, the grape came later, and she understood, I think that's what you're talking about too, the anger of being so exposed to one's own intentions, one's own meaning. That everything comes out of you?

I so much wish I were there. Can I say more? You're not selfish at all, you're in the middle of yourself, centered, as they say, and that is not an easy or a comfortable thing, since everywhere you look you see yourself between you and the rest of things. But that is how it must be, to work through the perceived self until you become invisible, hard work, art work, and when it's done you're left with the world.

But you can't say that to 'younger girls' who think I think that the world is coming towards them like the clock or the calendar, whereas in reality it's receding from them infinitely quickly, and only you are left to tell them the truth. Isn't it something like that?

13 April 2006

THE IMMIGRANTS

Day of earthquake
then and now
move to the blue path
immigrants the one
with winking lights in the floor
to make you think you walk on stars

o you are welcome in this place
immigrants, the corn waits for you
and the sawdust in the sunlight of the sawyer's yard,
the subways are built with you in mind
o and we want your mind
immigrants, your wet hands
your rubber boots, the chaste
hips of your paramours
this continent was built for you,
sleek entrances and songbirds everywhere

we are waiting for you, immigrants
we are no one until you step ashore.

14 April 2006