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Open or closed
a door invites.

It is like the moon –
we can't see anything
else up there
in any detail
but what we see
we cannot hold.

We see her
but can't touch her.

Especially tonight,
dark of her,
and clouds on our side.
O moon even
at full such a faint
transaction!

I touch the door now
fondle the handle
whisper to the wood.

In the grain of it
it's easy to read
three old wolves
looking out of the wood,
their pointy ears
their jaws.

The wood is looking at me.
But I am as
far away as the moon
from their quiet mouths.

9 January 2005

JANUARY ELEGY

And then it was time for the light
which I had bought in Vienna
to be delivered of a baby girl
who grew to be maturity one afternoon
four crimson amaryllis blossoms big
always in the back of my mind installed
like a new machine on floorboards dingy from the old
everything she brought with her we would need
the sunlight prisms in her eyelashes
am I seeing this mild world through her eyes
strange that I waited this long to unload
a caravel from Cipangu or the Mosquito Coast
full of imagined terrors this poisoned tea
it is humiliating to keep asking for help
all I want is an altar to kiss
hold the knees and sob against the furrow
the enemy is invisible only we have an army
the tanks rumble everywhere looking for war
I am intimidated most by silence R.I.P.
blue shadow veins in tree bark January

the snow makes visible everything it hides
still looking in the hold for that careful treasure
girl pirates dug out of my mind and shipped
they sailed so far to bring me what I was
humiliating to wait so long to be
humiliating to be asked for so little
sorrow-faced customers at the wrecked market
oranges and breadfruit smashed on the pavement
it is time to stop eating animals stop stop
your greedy little face I loved so much
because silence is voracious silence eats away
silence turns inches into miles turns smiles to skulls
silence is footprints in the snow leading away away
into a forest on the very edge of existence
I can't see as far as you have gone
sick of the humiliation to bear the weight
unanswered desire is to bow the shoulders
humiliate to bear the weight of what I need to say
along with the terrible weight of what I want to hear
the other person say and the other doesn't say it
the other never does the other is all about negations
so many boundaries terrains an other person has
and I have only one so everything I do is a mixing

of me and them me and the other and all others
transgression of their vital presences interfused
like all the hundred grapes in one cluster
losing their names in the ecstasy of the single Wine
one's life should be a single glass of wine
is it dark now because the earth turned from the sun
or is it something I did I'm never sure
so much wretchedness on earth so few to blame
it must be my fault the mother darkness frowns
the callous father shrugs and turns away
the sea is such an angry father always moving
never talking I am sick of the silence
is this a spirit I would seek to entertain
safe among the horny studs of Sodom
a Gomorrah girl to call my own be sweet
music is a most delicate insertion
but not the only one – how my head aches
thinking of you – tooth of a great sperm whale
left on a blank beach an ivory comma
between no words all the words are done
why did I bring such sinister punctuation home
not one stone left standing of the cathedral
a religion of demons trying to be good

I miss you the way a ribbon misses a head of hair
Niagara has never stopped its syntax
from level to level the world is water
seven-eighths is ocean they say and I believe
anything I'm told I have cherished all the Love Yous
until the silence I mistake for peace
I am humiliated by silence
like everybody else I am humiliated
by being the same as everybody else
there is no cure for an unspoken word.

10 January 2005

=====
All of the stuff that happens
is livelier than me,

a world trembling in my eyelashes
and I'm only useful for the glance
I give it, it's there,
it's there, don't look at me,

there, the sparrows on the snow,
the crow on the branch
talking to me,
only what's there talks,

only what's obvious can tell the truth,
But it's so hard to listen
to what is actually there
with all the sunshine
of what I want
dazzling my eyes.

11 January 2005

=====

The only game
is moth and flame.

11.I.05

[Answering the question not yet embedded in yesterday's "January Elegy," Why am I so afraid of what I want?]

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WAITING FOR THE MUSEUM

Aspiring towards something blue
the people on the purple line know all about it
Sunday noon used to be dim-sum time
one day when America itself was art
birth trees scant wear knees kneel
I have come back now from any human weather
by the lake one's mother reads, one rows
interruptions are so important
go always for the clinical description
pathology will always be with us
no fear of strangers this is a street
when you think about the space
between the painting and its seer
it gets exciting down in there
between the reader and her word
something is always coming toward
the thing we look at hurries towards us
it makes words chatter in our heads
be close to me for once and I'll recite
the genealogy of all the angels

from Tubal Cain down to Gerhard Richter
they make us crowd into the silent space
language builds so fast around what happens
because it all is friction
between what you are thinking
and what these words make you think I'm thinking
surrounded by the strange personless space
where the words seem to mean only themselves
like the dusty white ceilings of Venetian churches
you know the one where Saint Lucy's actual body
lately masked with silver lies in state
stretched out for fifteen hundred years
or the sea-green amazements of rococo
in Sankt-Gallen soft hip of Switzerland
where the police never quite caught on
we were smuggling daylight all night long
we are pedestrians on a simple earth
at last the pale midriff of your thought
exposed I swoon with understanding
the body's most sagacious strategy
this is the history of criticism
clothing only means what we can take off
we learn to lick what hit us

every wound a miraculous analysis
we learn to look back over our shoulders
to love the dense event from which we run
every part of the body is critical method
and all of this without the slightest touch.

11 January 2005

ACTS OF CONTRITION

I did the wrong thing
the not-write thing
I fell into the paper
on-line the weather
the government the new
players in town the girls

and I did not attend
to what the dream
was telling, all a dream
is is telling, all
I have to do is listen
and I didn't listen

but I'm not an evil man
yet, I let the silence
listen for me
inside, while I was
busy reading "what
passes for the news"
it's above freezing
at last, snow

melting off the roof
I see the evidence
it meets the silence
the two worlds
are only one
if even that,
delicious fragments
ready to assemble
into a phony history

a feast of maybes
to attend to
if I could get my attention
back from the paper
back from the anxiety
that drove me to read
instead of writing
knowing into place
all morning
like a good child
trying to remember.

12 January 2005

=====
But it was something like a window
it laid its glass along your side
so you felt rather than saw
the things outside, the things waiting for us
on the other side of what we simply,

merely, see. Can I talk like this to you.
Can we pretend we have known each other
for years of talk but are still new enough
to care? Then feel the cool glass
on your skin, beside you, beneath you,

we walk on miracles and make sense
of nothing. But we make sense.
Senses make us. One or the other
turn by turn, and we call it history
when we stop to catch our breath.

Our. What a big word that is,
even bigger than We. It claims
joint ownership of something,
a house, a dream, an experience,
a little afternoon between the words

when maybe only the words are real.

12 January 2005

THE SECRET IDENTITY

Mist. And let it be mine,
out there, a shady daylight
for all the transactions of the heart,
January thaw.

Never tell the sea
what you're proposing, never tell
anybody anything.

So much silence,
mist in my trees. *Who cares?*
the Lama said when I told him my dream.
Who is there to care about such things?
Who is there to do anything,
parley with the waves,
have emotional reactions to some trees?
Who. The anybody
who may be at home.

The sock
tied to the doorknob, the smutty story
I use for a heart.

Four chambers. Who. The place,
the masters of psychogeography
tell us what we always knew:
the place thinks for me.
My feelings are what the place feels into me.
Caveman, we called him,
the man born from a cave, thought and felt
what caves taught him, and vanished
like a cave into the earth.

Find him.

Find the one who thinks like this.
Find the one who writes this down.
Who. The one who cares.

13 January 2005

LES NUITS D'HIVER

1.

What is waiting for me
when the mist walks
through those maples
I can hardly remember
that I belong to a city
not so far away
that I will never visit
its streets are all gone now
the language is changed
the churches worship
a different god
and only my shadow
on the sidewalk
still looks like me.

2.

You are the ghost
of the snow that melted
early this evening
when the weather
settled down and was
suddenly warm,
ice slid off the roof
and crashed on terrace
with the sound of steps
coming to visit
but no one was coming
and the darkness
relaxed all around me
content in its strange

mildness and you
were gone, up
perhaps into the white
mist through the trees
where no one waits.

3.

The pond was never frozen
all the way. We stood
by the waterfall
admiring the beaver
carrying reeds across
to his lodge, proud
we were of him as if
we were his parents,
proud that we were
ourselves together
on a quiet earth to bear
our delicate illusions
hand in hand
over the quick
disappearing stream.

4.

So far away.
So long between
one word and the next.
Like farewell kisses
so rare they are
and so well remembered,
cherished even
when nothing else

is there to hold,
shadow of a sound
is what they called it,
a word, in the world
I come from, even then
looking for you.

5.
a little concert
the bird makes in the bush
a chickadee
no, a white
throated sparrow
with that call
that makes me cry
I don't know why
so full it is of
hope and tenderness
and joy of all
that might be coming.
a bird in this little
tree at my door
the dark boughs of it
the yew tree by my door

6.
You're going away
so you must be mine,
you must be water
everything that passes
belongs to me

it is like the sun
bursting through clouds
the sudden absence
where are you going
beloved, water,
where are you going
time, space, identity,
measure, matter,
homeland, ivy
on my house wall,
color of the morning
the frantic torch songs,
where have you gone?

13 January 2005

(listening to David Daniels' performance of Berlioz's *Les nuits d'été*)