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I kept wondering that day about the knee
the way we bend, a mystery
there, my Greeks, to politic
your way along the ground—
we grew in grassland
we stood to see

and still we call an honest man upright
whereas we are dignified also
in sitting down, Abu Simbel,
the king's majesty is enthroned,

a man stands, a monarch sits.
The lady invites you to sit down.
These honors conspire in our bones.

11 February 2004

=====

On the garage
a window
box waiting
for the colored
mail of springtime

it snowed
last night
just a trace
icing on the wait
news from the earth

11 February 2004

[earliest flower memory: pansies in the window box on the window of the garage at the end of the garden, 1938, and pussy willow by the alley, and hydrangea sky blue in the middle of the little lawn, always wet with dew]

THE SEPARATE

There are places where things are still allowed.

Diagram of desire, who said that,

reading from his student notes scribbled on a cuff

we wear no cuffs more we are animaux du soleil

and need no other restraint than our lewd bones

tu sais? *Mixing*. When touch and tone and

vocabulary blend in feeling, we say it is mixed

if some of the feeling goes to one person and

some to another. Who has a right to stand

where feeling goes? We must prescind.

See to it that every person elicits a distinct

and different response. So that what is theirs

is no one else's. You do not share. Precisely.

Is that what you mean, theologian of the hour,

whose cosmoses arise and fall inside one

luminous conversation? The world around us

is a mixed place, he argues, the seeds in it

all jumbled together like in Psyche's story.

But she: I have come to earth this time

to set things free. For I am Psyche, I am the Swords

in the old cards you read, I purify by dividing.

My alchemy is *Scheidekunst*, the art of separation.

11 February 2004

Two sentences into which I woke:

1.

You launch your mighty vessel on the ocean of the world, then look up and see all round you the legs of grown-ups indulgently watching it set sail among the imperturbable ducks.

2.

You imitate the world until it's real and then you can't get rid of it.

12 February 2004

WHEN NOTHING HAD BEEN SAID

The irises stand tall in the cool chests of the florists
and roses are suddenly in fashion

you see these things and think: calendar,
one day explains many, a word is a sentence,

money, or you remember someone who wants
testimony you thought your whole life gives.

But what are deeds? Actions
are weaker than butterfly wings, only words last.

12 February 2004

ARGUMENTUM NUMISMATICUM

Pennies are still interesting. Probably if you wanted to counterfeit pennies, each one would cost much more than \$0.01 to manufacture. Here is a piece of copper, or I guess by now it's bronze or some special alloy my tongue tip cannot analyze, a piece of metal neatly shaped and stamped: a paradox, a coin worth less than it's worth. It's like people, who are always worth more than the use we put them to. But it all adds up, doesn't it? If one penny takes part over its lifetime in a thousand transactions, say, then it has done ten dollars worth of work, considerably more than it cost to manufacture it, more than it's worth. And so we imagine someone who keeps track of all the transactions in which each one of us takes part and says, there, that's what this person is really worth. In imagining said Someone, we also take part in a transaction (increasing our worth), as we also do in writing down what we imagine, talking or hearing about it, believing it, refuting it, dismissing it as nonsense, a theory not worth two cents.

12 February 2004

AFTERLIFE

Some fetuses were talking in their wombs. What is the afterlife like, after we natch? That was the question they discussed. (*Natch* is their verb meaning to get born. It is an active verb, unlike our passive equivalent, 'to be born.')

Just as they have their own language, so also they can communicate with fetuses in nearby wombs, within the same neighborhood or even city.

The oldest fetus, yes, he was almost eight and a half months old, answered first. They all respected him, and trusted the wisdom age brings with it, and were anxious for his opinion. After we natch, he said, there is a wonderful golden place, all soft and friendly, and many of our friends who have gone on before us will be there to welcome us, at the end of a long tunnel, full of light at the far end where they wait. People will take care of us for a long time, aware of the ordeal we've gone through. Little by little they will teach us and help us prepare for our endless life out there. There is so much to learn! It is wonderful! We will live in small cozy rooms and study and play and when we grow old we will take our turn in welcoming new arrivals from our world.

Another fetus shyly offered a different vision. No, I think it's not really like that, I wish it were. It's more like this: after we natch, we grow bigger and bigger and stronger, until we are not only able to move around by ourselves on our own soft feet, but are expected to. And every day, or almost every day, we are expected to go to a place called sleep and stay there for a few hours, and when we wake up, we go to another place called work. It is very hard there, and we have to use our lovely soft bodies in strange hard ways, and most of us don't like it at all.

All round the town, fetuses were shuddering at the thought of using their bodies, using them for lifting, carrying, digging... as he described all the various employments they would be required to perform.

But who makes us do that, one of the fetuses asked, and why?

That started a side discussion, some saying it was because we have done evil in the womb and must be punished, others saying that it's just the nature of things, and still others puzzled as to what 'things' might mean.

When that side issue died down, they went on with their main discussion.

The next fetus to speak had a lovely calm manner about her, and explained that what they had just heard and discussed was a terrible mistake, there was nothing so horrible waiting after birth. She was confident, and explained it so well and so appealingly that most of the fetuses were comforted.

After I natch, I will be taken care of, yes, that part is true, and people will be very nice to me, and give me everything I want. I will live in a beautiful light and airy house on top of a hill, and from the veranda that runs all round I shall see all day long the pretty sailboats moving up and down the sea, and nice older ladies and men will bring me food to eat and things to drink. They'll tell me stories until I learn to make them up by myself from things they call books, and they'll cover me up snugly when I go to that place called sleep, which is really a very nice place. And when hours and hours later I wake up there will be stars in the skies and soft music and more food and games and stories and friends. And that place he called work is just a make-believe nightmare they use to frighten fetuses with. O we will watch the sailboats sailing up the sea, and white sea gulls and white clouds forever. That's how it will be, I'm certain.

But then another fetus broke in, almost angry, though you could tell it was mostly sadness that made her angry. No, no, it's not like that at all. When you natch, you're going to wind up in a tiny apartment with dirt and smelly old things all over the floor and there will be rats and insects crawling everywhere, and the woman I am inside now will not pay much attention to me, she can't, she'll be poor and unhappy, and the man who made me begin putting together inside the woman, well, he'll never be there, but other people will, and I won't have anything to eat, and some day I'll be hiding under the table

and some bad man will kill my mother and I'll huddle there watching her dying in her blood and I don't know what I'll do then.

The fetuses were quiet for a while. Then one said, well, they can't all be right, can they? So I guess we have to assume we just don't know what's coming.

Another spoke up and wondered on the contrary if maybe they were all true, and that entirely different lives waited for them, and each fetus would have a completely different life. But the others said no, that seems improbable, illogical. That's just wishful thinking. Whatever is coming is the same for all of us. Birth is the great leveler. All the differences we perceive in one another now, they'll all be gone after we hatch.

The fetuses seemed to find that the most reasonable conclusion, and went on talking about other things.

12-14 February 2004

SANS-ABRI

Passing through and not remembering
and then going home
as if the opening in a cardboard box
led to your palace

And after a warm dinner
the dream could begin again
and you became someone
not defined by your lack of location

lord of absence, a problem in the street.

13 February 2004

SOUTH SUDAN, ON THE BORDER OF CHAD

Old man wiping away a tear from under the inner
corner of each eye. And he said: These tears
you see me shedding now as I remember
the happiness and comfort of my life before
are not my tears, they belong to the situation,
not to me, I am the same man I was before,
these tears are just something I found
on the road, it is the desert weeping
using my eyes to tell the world about the grief
all men must experience, in one way
or some other, and here I am, with nothing
but my pain, but I can carry that
as once I carried water from a well I had.

13 February 2004

THREAD AND NEEDLE

Thread and needle
needed.

Nadel
the furrier said
I also need.

For skin
will not stick to skin
and all my work
is like a priest or marriage broker
bringing skins together
in hopes they last.

In people, this needle
is desire, for furs
a steel insertion
carrying a future with it
shaped like fine thread.

I am a religious man.
Through me, so many
animals come together
and stay.

O moth my
enemy, what can you boast
when the Angel of the
Occupations networks
at the end of time with
the Angel of Death?

Do you think your lust
for flame redeems you.
Maybe. You devour,
I conspire to unite.
Who can say if G-d
is on the side or more or less?

13 February 2004

BEFORE THE WORLD

The grossness of the man
made the middle.

Before that,

there were just extremes:

a star, a woman

walking on a tightrope,

a diamond cast

on purple velvet.

The sky is always cold—

that's how you know.

13 February 2004

SAXIFRAGE

I am who you think I am
but who I think I am
is no one yet. Not the oak
and not the briar, not salt
and not a broken mandolin
but only who you think I am
will I turn out to have been.
The stone knows more than
the flower cracks through it
and both of them know who I am.

13 February 2004

=====
Ordinarily I would not think of
heavy traffic in front of Victoria
Station or the quieter street
that runs beside it leading
down to the Catholic cathedral
with Eric Gill's sumptuous
Stations of the Cross and
beggars begging on the steps
just like the Middle Ages
but somehow tonight I do.

13 February 2004

=====

A Valentine for Charlotte

It is where you lead us
you lead us
in the open place that knows us best

a place like a quiet round dance
where there is nothing in the air
but air, and that is all
but that is time
dancing us to our places

following the intricate
diagrams of meaning
the gentiles know as 'love'
but we call mind
because to move this way
is knowing everything

and knowing
is the strangest air
breathing so quietly
along each other
our faces close

remembering the future
always now.

14 February 2004

=====

And finally be far away
from measure and smile
at the empty yard and know

just knows. Saturday
meant harvest. Then
your trouble just began.

Wind in some leaves.

14 February 2004

=====

Amazing that the rhododendron
is ever green. The leaves
curl the colder the tighter
into green quills. Get no tighter
below ten degrees. The measure.
Rattle soundless in the wind.

14 February 2004

=====

With respect to the arrivers
the sink overflows.
Because they bring flowers
young lionesses patrol
the living room. "We
could live without florists,"
who was it who said,
"but not without flowers."
The young lionesses
stretch along the sofas
leapt onto the buffet, slept
anywhere the sun lay.
Why is there so much
living in your life
the visitors demanded.
She answered trimming
the stems to fit the blue
glass vase or vase,
it all just overflows
and the fridge is crowded too,
you should see the breadbox
and the poor telephone
has forgotten how to sleep.

14 February 2004