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senza gatto

Without the red cat slinking through the fence
(the red cat peering in the window
his face huge, demanding)
we would not have evidence to prove
the face of someone is an absolute demand

just as without the telephone
we would not so clearly understand
that a voice is given to us
to say something different from
what the face says, the voice
comes from the body,
passes through the face and finds us
out here with its words,
and with its words it says a different thing

words are in between the body and the face
and come outside to play with us and change
the terrible demand the face is always making,
a face says pay attention, the words
say listen but do not hear,

the face is all looking and feeding and demanding
but the words are all forgiving, all releasing—
the red cat has no words so has to walk away.

15 February 2004

PEN

What is waiting for me here?
Oracle of ink, spill the next word
like a card falling from the deck
when your daughter fumbles with the pack
and one falls out. Ace of Hearts
you hope but what you see
is Nine Clubs waiting hard
for all the Mondays of the world.

But you have no daughter
(how old is she, this child
or woman you do not avow?)
no daughter and no cards,
and you, you are no Gypsy.
Just ink. That's what you have,
black, fluent, gleaming in the sun,
the fifth river of Eden,
dark milk of Paradise.

15 February 2004

(& commentary – Ink:)

But ink is substantial for me, not metaphor. I do write and write with it, with pen and ink, ink and pen I join together by acts of suction, injection, osmosis, absorption or mere contact, depending on the instrument. Everything depends on the instrument always. Ink makes me write with my hand not just my voice or mind. The hand gets dirty. Inky fingertips, and ink touches other things, makes other meanings that are not words. Marks. Ink keeps me honest. It makes every act of writing an agon, Jacob and the Angel, which is which, will the pen run out of ink before the poem runs out of words? I watch and listen, I pray sometimes to the dark god that glistens in the ink, who is not different from the god that is a word or the word, not very different from Jacob's god or whoever it was who sent the Angel to contend – but in the bible the Angel is called just *ish*, a man. Ink is the river of contention. In the morning we cross over it with our sheep and goats and wives and all the properties we think are real. Each footstep leaves inky traces on the pale desert floor, words on the page. We have battled with ourselves and won, and what we won is a wound, the wound is the word, *blesure*, blessing, no Jacob, no angel, but still, the morning has been spoken.

15 February 2004

[LETTER 4]

[reading in Joseph Roth's *Hiob* I found on page 28: Jonas, der ältere, war stark wie ein Bär, Schemarjah, der jüngere, war schlau wie ein Fuchs.]

So what did the fox
make the bear do
and what came of that?

As I read Roth's words
in morning sunlight
I found myself hearing
your voice singing

strange how you sang
looking up and singing
in the middle of the talking
a woman with two voices
one said and one sang
in a high far-away voice

couldn't hear the words
about a fox about a bear
just heard the old light
that fell through your song

strange how I heard you
and hear you still
without having a clue
to what the song said
or what you meant
or what it means

how could I listen without listening?
the song snaked its way
through what we said,
but the song I still can hear
and the other words are silent

some song
saying from your mouth
as if it has always lived there
and you could breathe it out
at will, no that's not right
either, though it is,

the song was always there
and we happened by
and I almost heard it

not sure in the woods
if the wood is creaking or
a bird is crying, squirrel
scolding, all those strange
people that are not us
shivaree in ordinariness

you let some words free
in the world (what were they)
as if you didn't mean it
but they did,
the song meant you

but does it mean me?
Am I the bear
in this cautionary tale,
it this about
watch out for foxes?

big and clumsy
wants to marry
with sleek sly quick
I wonder

what punishment
does his aspiration bring

you seemed reluctant to explain
as if time would tell
even Hell
must come as a surprise

what happened
to the song's animals
what will happen
to us who listen or who sing

what do I want
to do with you?
somehow I touched you
and the feel of that accident
stays in my body
as a meaning
like dry water

poured upon me
the truth of what one
body spills
willy-nilly on another

your truth suddenly
in my veins
ascending home

to give me something
to understand
because this is a letter
it must mean you,

a letter is a set
of variations on forgetting
as if the only thing
we really need is letting go

I suppose I heard
a pale girl from elsewhere
schoolchild watching a dead fox
and at the back of her mind
maybe singing
some old song that brings
everything back to life

the fox will never move again
till she makes it talk,
not a bad life
to spend

bringing things back to life by music
the touch of song
in some old half
comprehended ballad
some old thing
I hear delicate as rain
the words lost in the touch of it

some beautiful warning.

What will happen to the bear
and will the fox be glad?

Is there anything to be done
if the world is only marriage?

16 February 2004

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I would like to make a glass out of wool
and drink from it cautiously
except I fear it would be blasphemy
against things, things
have a sacred presence of their own
a *numen* it does one no good to violate
with strange oily wine dripping down my arms.

15 February 2004

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being near enough
being again enough
is there a wedding?
what I love is departure

there are too many in the valley
already the path through
pine woods lure me
for you to wander up

out over the dark crest
leave me I am all
about leaving and a touch
remembered always

renewed beyond all
relationship a star
clear of those same trees
hermit of the absolute

16 February 2004

(VALENTINES)

My freedom is letting you go

my power is giving you everything

I abbreviate the hour
know you from the bottom up

asking more is not always

even my claws know to let go

consent to be your whole
self with me
a little hour free of consequence

16 February 2004

[MALLARMÉ]

What I found interesting was how
quickly I accepted the other.
It was a paradise then it wasn't,
a restaurant with flies in it
a marble table but it hurts my bones.
Massage me, I am somebody else.

Take me into your chancel
then hide me in your crypt
I am a priest of the wrong religion
but I still need inside you
this lonely aching temple

or how can I star in your movie
m'introduire dans ton histoire
is the strongest animal, weasel
fierce and quick but only in
the night around you, do I mean
you, do I mean anyone but
this soft architecture
keeps saying something I almost hear

you, you, Cuba, contradiction, salt

what does it tell me of how few I was?

And it's all right to do it in the closet

you'll never wear those clothes again.

17 February 2004

THE CONSTRUCTION

of hell is also
a piece of water

because we left
ourselves in that magazine
or gun emplacement viewed
by the low rocks
and the rabbis were silent
but the priests were howling
do you understand me
this is German I am speaking
this is an angry early

you are wise and you are white
you are red and you are ready
you are black and you are breakfast

where are the diagrams
the meek qabbalah of your guesses

where is your house
that thing that looks like a number
and your shoes fit barely
under the sofa by the window

and there is no cat anywhere?

It is so far from me,
so much away
in the lingering confusion
after the problem is solved
and the numbers are all put away
in the back of the mind
where they come from

and are safe there again
like ivory chessmen in their leather box

the sponge of feeling
mopping up the little sense that's left.

Numbers red and numbers white
the rock splits open and words
begin to appear on the stricken planet

and after some eons of listening to each other
the words turn into people
speaking words clumsily to each other
in their caves and grasslands

and we grew
obedient to the words
that made us

are you listening to me Lady
or are you gone forever in the bleak
imagination there is somewhere else to go.

I am not good for you.
I have brought you to Hell
a place we have constructed
together, leave me,
leave with your accurate
goatish companions your learned men
your Christian rabbi your children
who take the form of old old men

the words made us
and unmake us

listen my love
is laceration

sea without number.

17 February 2004

Humanity must mean something else

a blockade in the throat of spirit

that wants to say larger than just us

but we define all virtues as such

for we at best are consciousness

18 February 2004

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Had sleep

must leave

hard

to get

things started

when everything is true

18 February 2004

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Vast buildings lost

in my mind

gone now

where were they

Brooklyn on an avenue

runs west downtown

and on the north side of

the hugeness of those temples

(like the library and museum on Eastern Parkway

but far larger, north of there)

and these are actual *memories* of mine

we went there

time and again

I showed them to you

as I showed you the Palace of Arts in San Francisco

whose columns began to approach the scale

of these pale temples,

actual memories they are

of what must have been dream

buildings but no differently remembered.

19 February 2004