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IN MEMORY OF WINE

1.

This knows so long
the street runs faster than the man
snow soft in sun
not yet burnished by the light
knowing colored things
falling over fast
bleak speed a brasserie
they forgot to close
people forget to go home
time stopped happening and

2.

celebrate with telephones
in large public buildings pigeons fly
they are rock doves
remnants of an earlier religion
they are heard wooing in the cupolas
or striking fluttery diagonals
across the serene rotundity of dome
busy with their own
stuff of the air
God answers all cell phone always
this is the deep structure of the word 'you'

3.

no reason to not
nautical twine tangled by a seagull's feet
speaking German to the clouds
a slim bass skeleton still meat on the skull
washes under the jetty
as the tide lifts
everything people ever know
is lifted up to language
offer or assay
no reason to doubt or not to
does it name something she knows in herself

4.

they learned to rescue newspapers
and layer them inside their shirts
against the cold
they learned the sunlight on Madison
is colder than the light on Third
no one knows the reason for someone else
the self-given
scientia amoris will someday someone
teach or teach me how love grows
from nothing or a glance or whim

the whole megilla
writes itself until the gentle heart is slain
as the beard grows by itself
the man in the red vest lies in the doorway
death that long-winded drunkenness
keeps him out of the conversation

5.

and go further where the landskip
folds old posters into paper flowers
yellow like old ranunculus to fade
in the mild Netherlands of passing time
until the man wakes up again
never or often or reclaim the land
Cozine Street the limit of the true
before that ocean was and outwash
plain they soon filled in
to make a place where goats could graze
the liminal is littoral is the holy edge all-nighted
a wise one needs a skull
brown dome beneath the palm
to rest in anticipated emptiness
all of this eventually just that.

19 March 2004

MIRRORS

mirrors are miracles

mirrors are the only things that tell the truth
and they tell lies

mirrors show who the face isn't

mirrors measure

mirrors murmur predicate or preach

mirrors analyze the skull beneath the smile

mirrors suck in the cheeks and pout the lips

mirrors fall in love with mirrors

mirrors clatter love songs as they shatter

mirrors crack at midnight at the center of the world

mirrors are suicide notes endless revised

mirrors never answer.

19 March 2004

MEDITATION ON A SPANISH WORD AND A FRENCH WORD THAT LOOKS LIKE IT

cadena, a chain

cadenas, a lock

each to each

a chain or series

a chaingang or humans linking hands

across the landscape to express

whatever human beings express

when they touch

unusual specimens of connection

cadenas, a padlock

on your door

o you maiden who

in the Bible is

so much visited

and the old heretics declare

secretly and usually

at the cost of fire

the heart is a padlock

on a door that is God

open the lock
then open God

join hands and go in.

20 March 2004

AMERIQUE

How did we get here
is easy to mishear,
who did we get here
or who got us here

were we sent or were we summoned

I have stared at the Hudson all my life
and never been sure
though sometimes in late winter
I watch ice floes drifting south
and the tidal current swelling north

two directions and one meaning
(deux sens et un seul sens)

I feel close to the breath that spoke me.

20 March 2004

CROWS

Crows know

Cracow under snow

a little street

I can never find

again the first time

have to come back to

short of breath

and finger the padlock

on the iron door

somewhere in there

I hear a noise

I press my ear

against the metal

and hear crows calling

a dozen at least

shouting in a bleak

winter field

inside that house

why won't you let me in

I need my weather

I need the theologians of matter

to build me new bones

rub a name on my lips

I need the alchemists of ordinary noise

to build me a spoken language

and drop it in my mouth all made and sweet

like the man in the Bible the birds came down to feed

feed me the inside

of your house

whoever you are in there

walking barefoot in the snow

with all your beautiful ideas

with all those doors between us

with all your crows.

20 March 2004

=====

When boys were named Lester and girls were called Kate
I set out walking on my big fat feet
in too-tight old brown shoes and wanderlust

and all I thought I was on my way to find
was a nice red leather armchair
by a fireplace and a cat asleep in my lap

that sometimes became a girl named Kate
who'd look away from the interesting flames and kiss me
saying Lester, honey, read me from that book

and lo and behold the book was open on my lap
and words appeared that I could read out loud
and as long as I read new words kept appearing

and Kate would love me and listen and fall asleep
all book and cat and woman so I'd sleep too
and leave behind for a while my famous aching feet.

20 March 2004

GROSGRAIN

1.

A grosgrain ribbon
red to mark
the pages of a book
I'll lend you
for your hair
for when you want to make
that lion mane
safe from the interpretations
of the air,
impertinent spring
with all its breezes always
forgiving everything.

2.

A good book always has a ribbon in it
or maple leaf or dried up daisy
or a picture of some saint
whose feast day you forgot again
or a funeral you went to once
where they passed out a card
with a picture of a nice old priest
with a mean old face
looks up at you from a book
about something altogether else
and you try and try to remember.

20 March 2004

LINES

getting the balance right

ought to be easy

I'm Libra

getting them interestingly

wrong's the trick

to make the silence answer when you speak

20 March 2004

AT THE CAFÉ NOUBA

Another magic had taken over.

Not the ordinary magic of desire and dessert
where we do all the work of wanting

but another order of fulfillment
where what we didn't even know we wanted
came around us with sugar and voices and arms

as if we were another
and had come to that old Poland, old Brittany,
old everlasting Africa at last.

20 March 2004

BELATED VOCATION

You're close enough to something else
to start beginning. To be fashionable
like a screwdriver in an elevator,
free fall. This word 'like'
that poets like so much
is really candy in their childhood
where any of us anyhow most live,
wouldn't you? Banana stripes,
chocolate theologies? Because it's Lent
I have turned the world to the wall
and studied the backside of the mirror
where on old brown framer's paper
I found a road map to eternity, a few
serene old numbers, too few for a phone,
too many for the dimensions I beheld,
a name in old German script. Imageless
I woke – let the rest of my planet
bask in resemblances! I would be
and just be and be a priest of emptiness.
My hands full of it I smear on you.

21 March 2004

OBLATION

A small animal trots behind the barn
Not barn, garage. Not trot, pads.
Not pads, disappears. A memory trace
my eye betrayed me with. Treachery
of cats and foxes, unlikely weasels,
all gone. Rubbing my eyes
to validate epistemologies.

I sent you the wrong version of the poem,
the one that had me in it.
I was supposed to hide behind the rose.
Behind the stone, the barn, the new garage.
Since I move with an animal's desire
I should disappear like one,
Damascus road and no one knows,

I thought I saw myself approaching me,
a big man with a book in his hand,
and looking at me the way I look at you,
and was afraid. Did he mean
to join with me and leave no room
for me to vary from the pattern,
terrible monogamy of being oneself?
Would all my words just turn into
prayers and no one listen

except that last resort beyond the sky?
I don't want to be such self, I want to run
and hide my glad incompleteness behind the barn.

21 March 2004

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Getting near it
the thing I mean
coffee and cigarette
without the cigarette
boy and girl
without the boy—
first morning spring
wind pouring
down the hill
personless pastoral
I turned a switch
and there was no me
no clamor of no
argument
a pail of water
not even freezing
playing the harp
and listening
the clarinets too long
it gets vaguer
the way wind stops
a chipmunk
chases a squirrel
there is a wind
inside the wind

a kind of dark
inside the light
almost there
a semaphore
beside the tracks
sixty years ago
and not there yet
the light is an animal
that knows how to read
and time is railroad
I interpret the signals
with my arms
water sloshes
from a basin
personless personless
silence me.

21 March 2004

ASTRONOMY

The first book I took out of the library:

The Sky for Sam.

The constellations

I still try to grasp.

How many discrete points of light

does it take to make

a woman in the sky

seated on her chair

and how many more

till I can come to her there

and lift her to her feet

and celebrate an immense unity

so when we touch we will be everywhere?

21 March 2004