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AGITPROP ALL OVER AGAIN

Sign up graduates
and coat their tongues
with money. Tell them:
“Get me what I want –
it’s up to you to find out
what that is.” Then
give them more money.
Listen to what they say,
bug their saunas, listen
in their cafés, bedrooms,
cabanas, bug the sand.
Listen, listen, listen
then bring it to me.
A time will come when
they will finally say it,
without noticing
what it was, but you must,
the word will have slipped
out and there it will be,
smug as Socrates, the actual
desire, the winning horse,
tomorrow’s middle name.
Now you can come home.

28 March 2004

=====

From the pierced body of the snake

a stick somebody
shoved in the earth
without meaning to yet driven
beyond meaning
by a power in his arms to act

stands up, at its tip
some fire
fed by the blood of the being inside,
and by this flame the land around
is changed

it burns all night
blue as methane
sometimes, sometimes red as the animal
of earth meditates
its long sacrifice.

Every life lives for another,
the more the better,
and in the sacrificial light we find our way.

28 March 2004

=====

Because this broad swath
left by conscience in the lush
grass of lust has grown
in again and nobody remembers

the heart is ready for its sonogram,
its Viennese, its industrious
theologians to apply calipers
of angelic hermeneutics to

this simple anxiety to be you.

29 March 2004

A STICK

A stick

holds hit

holds scratch

scratch

signs

in dirt

a stick holds

words

a stick holds hurt

a stick holds break

a stick points

both ways at once

a stick a stick.

29 March 2004

=====

But all my waves

overwhelm

only the smallest

grain of sand your beach has

finches feed

one seed at a time

now looking close

I see another possibility,

people coming in at night

speaking different languages

but their bodies speak

the only one I know

how strange they move

at variance with what they are

or say they mean,

sometimes we're even more

like shadows than usual,

and nobody understands the word he speaks.

29 March 2004

=====

So many left to see
space coming home
to no space

the closed eyes
from which the child wakes

scratches the wall open
and makes light.

That's how it was,
don't you remember,
there was sleep
and then there wasn't

and you had to do the day,
no one helped you,
you figured out the ivy
you yanked aside

to shape a window's
worth of garden
out there,
out there

where only guesses live
and you put things into place
as if you remembered them
from some other existence

but you don't remember,
you put them there
the only place they seem to fit
and yet you know

there could be another way,
there always could,
the dog limping up the alley,
the blue flowers on the hydrangea.

29 March 2004

=====

whose brain did I wake with?
metal folding chairs
Paris in the old days
Brassai shooting the Luxembourg at night
catching the marble shoulders of the gods
glinting in gaslight
it felt like lengths of gel or toweling
I handled to think
(think is head hands with slippery viscosities)
and this pen I write with
was another one
silver and wide
like a road up the hill
following an orange truck too far.

29 March 2004

dreamwork

NOSTALGIA

As if a permanent risk of blue glass
America is always coming home
snow glare on summer streets
we keep away from air conditioned bars
only so long, and then the mid-1950s come
again with moon river and tom collins
and it really is nice to be dark and cool
and nobody can tell what you're thinking
cause your eyes are their own mirrors now
and they see themselves and think it's you
and they don't know what they're
thinking themselves let alone you
so everybody loves you and the leatherette
booth is soft as a luncheonette.
Listen to the mind, traveler,
home is where your thinking leads,
nowhere else, *that* house, that white
pergola new painted over the small sea,
on a little island where you have never been,
dahin. There. It all is waiting for you there.

30 March 2004

=====

Sunrise headache wind chimes

Sparrows futile seeming

But always here

30 March 2004

=====

Remember to feed the birds
before you go into the sky

30 III 04

=====

To dig
so much out of
the self's dumb
selfsame quarry
yet get it to be
when extracted
and exposed
to light
scarlet as new
blood never shed

30 March 2004

=====

for Jane Madill

On Victoria Island the rain
sometimes seemed to come
sideways out of the ground,
it walks to meet you
as you happen along
thinking about tea, a book
you haven't finished reading,
some steak and kidney pie
still left in the fridge.

These things are decent things,
rain and food and islands,
and they help us not to think
of all the luminous departures
in whose strange sad light
we go on seeing every day,
walking towards everything
as we have always walked,
the moist ferns at your feet
a last letter from your father.

30 March 2004

=====

And I can want this delicate
person that I was, o Me!
I will see him again
after fifty years
because he is his streets
alleys vacant lots
because he is nothing but where there is.

30 March 2004

New York

THIRTY-FIRST STREET

Having some, halving more –
a man from Worcester
come about the light –

but in the dream in Tuscany
the car lights were the ones that failed
in my head I composed a description
in operatic Italian for use
at the garage if I could find one
corriente elettrica I thought,

and then inside the little house a girl
was taking the fridge apart
repairing it bare-waisted, her blonde
thick hair getting in her way

but I had already come there later
via an elevator
shaped like a little tap room
and to run it my hose
yanked on a beer pull
that made the cage rise up
and beer fill up two glasses

he gave me one and I sipped

politely and happy
that it was not beer at all
but a pale pleasant insipid liquid

temperance beverage
but time was passing

and you had the key
and we were apart again
just as I had been dreading
the stupid separations in b movies
just before the monster comes

but there you were
when I finally got out of the shuddering
elevator, you were inspecting
fabrics printed with maps

and we were together

whereas earlier we had been with the girls
who ran the bakery

and we sat around all of us smoking cigarettes
one of them had made from something like cabbage
and another small one she
held to my lips and I inhaled

until there was nothing left

not even fire

and she looked surprised at her cool fingers.

31 March 2004

New York

dreamt

=====

Changeliness and things
home fries with onions and
peppers red and green

the small world
of in between
seems infinitely big.

31 March 2004

New York

=====
All the places
sing in me
where we've been

today like a neat
poem by Larkin
where everything

knows how to get said
and held together
as if human names
meant something big

big as memory
or as a schooner
nosing into Sheepshead Bay
heavy with fluke.

31 March 2004

NY/Amtrak

1878 BROWN STREET

The garden in the mind is extension. The mysterious absence of definition in the distance between the blue hydrangea and the pussy willow by the alley picket fence is explained today: the yard was very small. It was not the forty or so vague pretty green feet to the fence, but maybe fifteen. The corner of the garage almost reached the hydrangea, just a narrow cement path I now remember. The garage is designed for the stubby cars of 1928. Everything is small. So the remembered vista is enlarged by absence alone – nothing added (memory was at least that honest) except distance. The actual remembered particulars are stretched out to cover an imagined extent.

Or: not imagined. Remembered with a child's distance. Walking the few steps from the alleyway to the stores on the other side of Avenue S, past Haring Street, I recall what a significant walk that seemed to me when I lived there. So the garden too had a child's legs to measure it, far, far, from the little patch of grass around the hydrangea, I can feel it in my fingers, to the gaunt picket fence.

In fact there is nothing there. Some later owner tore all the ivy down and replaced the old burgundy brick with a parti-colored imitation fieldstone. Rooted up the deep red roses by the Mulhare's wall and the pussy willow and the blue hydrangea that all summer was the center of my world. Paved the whole thing over with cement. Patio. Empty now, dirty cement, late winter on earth. Desolate. So it's a bare thirty feet now from the shabby iron fence at the alleyway and the shabby back wall of the house, where a porch or platform hangs off the second story, and a narrow staircase leads up to it. My parents' bedroom. And the window of my little room is a door now, the way onto the porch. But the downstairs window of the

bathroom is still a window, and it looks as if it is the same old pebbled glass! The light is on in the bathroom though it's early afternoon, the light is yellowish in the rainy light of the day.

No one answers the door when I knock, but an expensive little dog barks steadily, and noses apart the vertical blind that shield the window of what was once my living room, where I am sitting in a green armchair with a green ottoman, I am reading Stevenson and eating Christmas mints sixty years ago. The dog barks, it knows a ghost is in the room, a ghost at the window, a ghost at the door. The dog barks and no one comes, and we go away. What could I have said? No hydrangea flowers in the no blue Chinese vase on the no black lacquered table in the window. No explanation. Memory too is a country where there is no why.

31 March 2004