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BIRDS OF A FEATHER

A man in a coat
sinks the boat

*

Well said
soonest dead

*

Bare skin
must win

*

Luff means flap in the breeze
Tough means back to the trees

*

Star bright
spoils night

*

Everything done
leaves none

9 April 2004

[Prolegomena to the Bergen Street Magic Spells]

BERGEN STREET ZAUBERSPRÜCHE

familiar house fronts
unchanged in all my life
conceal strange arts

the way who knows
what could happen with a pen

whose hand holds?
we keep walking up the sidewalk
to the very large plane tree

there is discussion: is it
elephantine or Herculean?
Elephanta or Herculaneum?
Ruins, India or Italy?

why is the tree
looking at me?

and then the *seiðr* starts,
witch work,

north of magic
a road spills
white sand

under spruce trees

sand in snow

you write with a fingertip

the one you want

when wind blows

the name away

the one you want

comes to your house

if you don't have a house

use a bird

if you don't want anyone

proceed to the end of the night

where someone is waiting

no road can resist

a tower hurries towards you

always blame it on the wind

2.

iron gate

keeps the street straight

then drink the contents of the cup
in one draught
keeping your eyes open
and focused on what's in the cup
until the last drop
is in your mouth
then close your eyes
and toss the cup as far as you can
without letting your arm come
north of your shoulder

when you wake up
your clothes will seem to be on fire
but it is only a shadow
of someone very rich
who's thinking of you at this moment,
mouth begins to water

get up quickly and paint out the sun.

There. Moonman is on the stairs
with his big white leper face,

now rub him out with spit,
now paint a star instead
where the sun and moonman's shadow cross
and stargirl whistles in the street

how come so few people whistle any more
the subways and the sidewalks
were full of people whistling

not just men of a certain age with red faces
but they did whistle best

some girls whistle
this one does

a star is a whistle in the sky.

3.

It isn't a matter of remembering
it is a matter of holding it on your lap
squirming like a flower
you want to call tuberculosis
but is really only one more rose.

4.

The furnace is running in the cellar
because the lawn is cold
a bird bounces off the window

I find him later
under the bush, cock bluejay
with a broken neck
the intelligent gravitas of his eyes
hardly dimmed by dying

the connection is everywhere
time is a clumsy pet

a business card on my table
the perennial mystery of anybody else

5.
how a bruise
finds the skin—
that's the way
to begin

talk to your mother
the way ice melts

talk to your father
the way trees walk

Everything is something else.

Everything is something else also.

Why does that mean so much less.

O word

you golden bird

at the feeder

of my heart

listen to my chest, love,

these are finches

zooming around in there

squalling and tweetering

a gold bird variation

take you out for finch

not today and not to borrow

always elver and never eel

the world was meant to feel

cold coffee

cold coffee

for Dizzie Gillespie

my heart in my hands

I approach my hour

still growing up

I am the garden where I began

all concrete over now

a limestone lawn

a man with an animal head

a bridegroom with no door

a bridge without a waltz

a floorboard without a mask

a stone without a cathedral

chalk all over our hands

now swallow what you've drunk.

Good Friday
9 April 2004

At the intersection of the mouth and the street

a word falls out of the sky
but sprouts wings before it strikes the pavement
and flutters around us ordinary people
saying stuff, things interesting as money,

things you think you remember your father
telling you years ago when you were both alive,
a word like the English ivy on your red brick house,
little pig, like everything before it became everything else

and you call this music? I tell you not even
showgirls in Las Vegas in all their glory
heard chromatic intervals like these

they keep me panting, keep me on your trail,
think of all the things you find in the river,
so many people telling you what to do
and very blue the dome we live inside,
rain forms on the curve of the roof and falls

and so it all comes together like a train crash
and every word wants to remember when you first spoke it
or else be silence and forgive your mother.
I think I am a telephone.

9 April 2004 <late>

ANUBIS

stand still and howl
at the interface
of man and street
a thing like a dog

he waves his hands
before his eyes
as if to see them
or as if to brush away
some to us unseen
obstacles that hide
his seeing from itself

truly the moon
rolls along the ground
towards him
cars come and go around it
headlights taillights
mist in the trees
but no one is looking at the trees.

9 April 2004 <late>

ADAM WOKE ME

Adam

Seth

Melchizedek

all have something to say.

The Jews before the Jews.

The other priest.

*

On this day

while Christ lay in death's hands

his spirit body walked among the dead

telling the secret that wakes them up,

a secret I can share with you:

Wake up, come back, we need you.

And *Adam* woke.

Who are you

who breathe like me?

Jesus answered:

Everyone who wakes

breathes the same breath.

You were a shape of clay
who learned to breathe
learned to count your breaths
and little by little came to know
the mind that made you.

Then *Seth* woke and rubbed his eyes and asked
Then who made me,
shall a man of blood
be born from pure breathing?

Sure, said *Jesus*,
after the rigidity that was Cain
and the looseness that was Abel
(Cain means stiff, Abel means empty)
worked each other out
(the loose fixed,
the fixed flown)
(dead, fled)

you were what is left.
From Adam's meditation you were born.

But what about my mother, *Seth* was asking,
didn't I crawl out of her living body?
How does she figure in this story?

I am a man and do not know so clearly
but I think she knows
how to breathe
from the beginning,
what Adam needed to learn
to take inside his ribs
she knew already,

Adam studied her while she was sleeping
and watched her rib cage soft expanding
as she breathed, studied her breath
and learned to breathe,
counting the measure of her breathing,

ah, strange is the sleep of women,

through them everything can be known
but they claim to know nothing
but they smile when they say so,
they claim to be sleeping.

In a corner of the room
strangely pale
compared to the dark parlor of the rest
a quiet man said Welcome,
I am *Melchizedek*, I have been lonely

in this charnel paradise
all built of after,
they never manage to get to sleep
enough to wake from it,
some drowsy centuries they have waited
and I have watched over them
pondering the breath they can't quite draw in,

for the dead, Sir, are those who do not breathe.

Who are you? *Jesus* asked.

We are the Jews before the Jews
from whom you come,

a lineage
that came before the Covenant was made
and runs beside it, and deep inside it,
always there, always pure,
a clinamen in the disaster.

This lineage is what you call the Breath of God
and is the breath of the beginning,
Noah's breath in Moses' lungs—
for I was *Shem*, your second father.

Each person has to find

the religion that came before his own
and still runs through it,
the lineage of which his lineage
is a shadow or a dream
or priestly artifice or monk confection,

and when it is said
Find your face before you were born
what is meant is
Find your breath before you breathed

it runs outside you, beside you,
inside you, the first current,
all girl and olive tree and goat and hill

we are where the breath comes from
that woke you
over Jordan

and now you bring it back to us
alive,
and wake us

because sleep too is a mother
one more mother you don't understand
Eva, Maria, who are these women
who gave birth to you and still endure you,

endure your teaching and your ideas,
endure your death and resurrection,
all the Miriams,

why don't they wake now,
where are they sleeping?

There's always something someone doesn't know –
Adam spoke so slowly,
painful, old,
but he knew something the rest forgot:

what Eve told him when it all began,
the thing she whispered in his ears:

Take in
this forbidden breath
and set it free
inside you

for when you breathe
you will be like the gods
and when some day
you come to die,
breathe not all of it out,

a little of it keep
and call it me

and I will sleep inside you
until the whole forest wakes
and we stop hurting.

Then the light came on strong
and I could see that Adam was my father,
his tongue was wounded, a silver
stud ill-fitting
stabbed through it
just like a young rebel with his piercing,
the pain he bore
a pain we did not understand,
it darkened his speaking

where did that come from,
who did it, why did he endure,
could nothing be done,
did he want it so?

Speak for me, *Adam* said,
it is the morning when the holy dead
whisper through the veils of sleep
and tell you Speak,
speak for me, tell them of me, Adam,

you knew me as your own father
as you see me now, always old, always before you,
tell them of the ones before the Jews
who are the Jews,
tell them how I found the breath
your mother gave me

and how I kept track of it
and knew the mind who made me.

Adam stood up
capable again
to do breath's business
in such a silent world

Die in your religion
and wake in mine,
he said,

and I could not tell
which one was speaking,

my father's tongue pierced.

And when I woke from this Book of Adam
my *wife* told me: so Adam was himself the serpent,

the forked tongue one, who tricked his wife
into that act of mutual breath, the inspiration,
the sacred transgression,

yes, said *Adam*,

she is right, that is the secret no one ever told,
I was the Serpent and to her I came
in that alternate guise so she would not know me
and would listen to me the way
women always listen to the stranger,
I put her up to what she did to me,

breathless, I taught her breathing,
and with her kiss she breathed life into me

and when we both were breathing
we had to leave that dreamy garden
of chalk and leaves and chemistry

and so fell into living
and this living pierced me ever after.

10 April 2004
Holy Saturday