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THE PARIS DREAM

Show me your face

I belong to your seeming

I was dreaming

when December
begins on Wednesday
on the last Day of the Knife

the image can be pried
away from the skin of the sky

and you can see
not you.

You can see what is not you

Show me your face
so I can understand
what I stand under
all the thirteen days of my life.

champagne, a dress

She told me if I lifted the cloth

–silk, color of almonds,

patterned

but what was the pattern,

did I even know it then,

dark castles, dark flowers–

then I would see

big items, houses, worldly

patterns, big things, chariots,

see the original images of the world

laid out on her skin,

the images the Tarot cards were modeled on,

we were lying together

young to each other,

an hour new, she told me to see

I slipped the cloth up her legs and saw

bruises, red and blue and darker,

I drew back a little, shocked

her hips so badly bruised,

ecchymoses, lurid, livid,

amber-edged, wine-dark

here and there

look close to them and see them,
I lay my head along the skin and saw
the deep colored granulations of desire
that made the world,

everything comes from these images

she said, they are the original,
I can still smell him, she said,
the one who drew me.

a person from North Africa

smelling of sweat, of spices

It took me all day to understand
what I was seeing or what I had seen,
the colors, every image
comes from the colors
and the colors are the colors of a wound,

**beneath any image there must be skin,
some life that bears them, some life
that writes them in.**

Later, she explained in me
as I sat thinking, after waking,
thinking: our age is greedy for, needy for
the imposition of new images,
to break the image given to us
and to choose, tattoos, the pierced
continuity, the map remade,
to be in control of what your body shows,

to be the one who speaks your skin.

And all this scribbling on back and shoulder
a desperate measure to reject
the phantom images society imposes—

lie beside me now she said

lift the cloth and see the real.

Then on the day of the Knife
the day of Mercury, of heavy rain,
of glistening from the sky
that wets this patient skin,

peel off the real,

see

see the want beneath the wound,
the scars of free will—

peel off the freedom and be free.

1 December 2004

ENCOMIUM CÆCITATIS

Gazing, the eyes
as gauze of seeing, as:
seeing is itself
the obscuration of what is there,

seeing is the veil
the senses lay across the world
to shield from light
by image

images, apples and breasts
oak trees and marmosets,
the specious evidence
neurology projects

on unexampled brightness.

1 December 2004

ROMPE LA TELA

Rompe la tela d'este dulce encuentro

Break the cloth. That's all he asked.

Her fear was just this: what kept them apart a little bit was what kept them together. If that small apartness tore or gave way, the sudden actual of them would repel.

But break the cloth, he said, as simply as an abbot might once have commanded: Build this church here for me to worship in, knowing every shadow, every arch. For how can one love if one does not know? So break the cloth.

But what is love, she said, except the will to know. And if all is known, what magnet (*aimant*) is here then to draw love into operation? Love would stagnate.

But break the cloth, he said. And his mind filled with the image of the cloth pulled taut around her body, and she twisting fiercely to be free of it at last, till she broke through, cloth ripped, her hips

whirled through, free of what had controlled them. He saw. His mouth dried at what his mind saw, he forgot to speak.

Who can break a cloth, she thought. She knew or did not know what he thought or saw. Or thought he saw. We do not know how to give ourselves, she thought.

1 December 2004

=====
Morning, such that the sun
over the hill is in my mouth
and the fingers of cold knowing
test my arms and chest around
the collar and up the sleeve
and I am barely ready to think
the doorbell rings it is the sun
I guess no one else around
a morning is all insinuations
hurts and splendors mixed
my hand freezes tries to understand.

2 December 2004

=====
Maybe I need a longer pen
one that could write across the lawn
sodden from a day of hard rain
or up the road turn left to town

and still keep saying something,
why stop there, cities and mountains,
priests and acrobats attend me,
stretch, they need me, stretch

over the atrocities of distances,
say it clearly and be everywhere home.

2 December 2004

HELL

I want you there with me
since you're the one who made me be here
the least you can do is wait and see

the bloody anguish that lovers fear
when lust turns to pleasure then
accomplishment, accusation, drear—

lead me out of this clockwork den
of yearning for body after body, every one
betrays me when I grasp it, even when

you look at me and try to lead me on
with a flirt of your hip or a word
that galls me more than devils can,

take me to the ash heap where a bird
once every century comes down to take
one burning sinner out of the absurd

and drops him for a season in the milky lake.

2 December 2004

[ten minute exercise in class, renew a classic, text assigned by
Elliot Dutcher]

WINTER HERALDRY

Move carefully, trying to begin.

The pin, as if on a grenade,
pull out then toss, the other,
the thing in the other hand.

Let the pin fall.

Or as in the other areas of war
jab the point into a map to mark
where dead things are, or are
to be. Dürer engraved
Death's coat of arms – look up.

2.

You can tell which one is Lancelot
because of the three red stripes on his shield

OBJECT: A shield argent, three bends gules

bearing the blood of three
persons of high degree

his king, his queen,
the third can only be himself
waiting for him at the end of his life
old priest with poisoned cup
he says his mass in the ruined chapel,
his poems make a fatal book,
his old sword stuck in the wall
piercing a map or chart the rain has
washed all the words or streets of it away

he follows the blank sign
advances towards his next calamity,
love is atrocity.

From this field
nothing rises. No survivors.

3.

Who is the haggard man
to whose pixel-neutered private parts
our Army's lady soldier points and grins?

What becomes of him and his mocked genitals,
his stubble, his angry scared eyes?

We care about the picture
only the picture,
the grinning girl
smirking like her President,

it is his face we see in her face,
the smirk of office,

that's why the picture haunts us

fascinatio of the image, this phantom walks.

Beside it, Death's bonehead charm
seems benign, and certainly a democrat,
this skull fits all colors and all creeds,

death wipes the blood stripes off the knight's shield

and still the little man is terrified
and where is he,

why don't we care where he is,
this nameless famous Iraqi?

Forget him, like the rest.

Go let him read

Death's favorite book

and meditate, scheme revenge,

we're worth it,

we can't picture him or it,

he has to blow himself up in our faces

before we notice him,

his luminous desire just to be

and not just seem,

not be just a picture but a man.

Not just a pinhole left in the chart.

3 December 2004

SCIENZA NUOVA

Finding found it. Losing left it
undisturbed, right here,
you could wrap it round your wrist,
it belongs there, skin to skin,

amazement seething through the heart
because of this one touch.

It is December. Strike ~~heart~~.
Strike ~~touch~~. Even chemistry
is old-fashioned nowadays,

plastic crocodile above the alchemist
poking round his nuclear reactor,
old old old.

We need another science,
one for the Wolf
whose eyes I use
to see who is walking,
to see who has half
turned into stone
or find the woman who already

is a ruined abbey,
arches full of sky, Romanesque,
crows call through her,
I look up her skirt and I see clouds.

We need a science because birds are men,
because soldiers die in the desert without a clue,
death's crash course teaches them to die without knowing
to die without remembering

we need a science
that makes words dangerous
makes them lethal
used to lie

makes them explored in the liar's mouth
in the mouth that wants to own us or kill us,

we need a science that doesn't own us.

3 December 2004

BLOCKS

When we were children
we wrote with building blocks
alphabets that came with animals
buildings flowers on them

so who know what the words
really meant that we built up

and how common elephants are in English,
then tigers next,

I looked out through the mulberry tree
into the mild Marine Park light
and saw no tigers

but the words kept me in the forest,
the alphabet is jungle.

Who knows what the words really mean,
the Jews with their camels and tent pegs and windows,
the Jews with their oxen and doors

and me in Brooklyn with my elephants
trying to spell my name
with a king on an elephant and lilies scattering everywhere
and at the end of the little parade
a dusty shaggy plodding yak,

we wrote with blocks
the little hands shove them, pile them up,
hide one inside the others,
from their machinery a language comes
no dictionary knows,

nobody knows but the kid on the floor in the dining room
way back then and nobody knows now.
Nothing isolates us more than language.

4 December 2004

UPADESA

Cautious as a dream

we meet the water.

The water says: a leper

drank from me and was not healed

but his thirst was gone.

Then a cat lapped from me

and still could speak only the language of cats.

Yet am I not a marvel, a miracle,

that things meet me and meet me

and I do not change them,

I deign to whatever is.

Can you say that, wise guy?

I am abashed before its cosmic inoffensiveness—

first rule of medicine: do no harm.

Until that moment I had not realized I was a physician

but now the roses blossom on every skin

and I kiss them off one by one

and I swallow the sickness of the world.

But the water said (in that strange humble insolent way water has)
are you sure you can do that?
When you pass along the way
all the cats get leprosy
and the lepers mew, you mix things up
because you have too many words—
be like me. Have only one.

4 December 2004