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THE COAST OF FLORIDA

Are you mine yet
can you sleep in me
and wake tomorrow
or be a sparrow
when no one's coming for dinner
and I can be alone with a bird
and can be small

between jagged circumstances
like a blue dolphin humping the night wave
I saw you, why do I think
always of animals,
was there a fox in the woodshed
had a message for me, an owl
lost inside the autumn chimney
giving my parents instructions
on how to make me
and not somebody else,
thus a beast in me
conceived at Christmas
am I the opposite of Christ,
Bethlehem a long way down my spine?

6 January 2003

REPAIR

I think this pen is working again
because I see the words it leaves
behind as it works its way across the paper,
the acrobat leaving traces in the air.

6 January 2003

ICICLES

Stalagmites are they, or stalactites, anyhow ice,
all the oldest problems in the world,
Géricault or Delacroix, God
or Manon Lescaut, the choices
come like grapes on a sagging vine,
you can hardly tell where one
cluster ends and the next is ready for the olive
fingers of the contadina, south flowing
rivers, mountains of the moon.

Morning seems to me a thirsty town
with all those migrators huddled on the shore
wondering when all this water becomes the Ocean
the desired thing, then Bill started dying,
Etna threw up, Albanian refugees gasp on rafts,
there is a pattern somewhere but the Pope
keeps it hidden in the archives, or as Fred
without actually saying so gave me to believe
the plan is hidden in opera.

Not just *Tristan*

or *The Decabrists* or *Lulu*, but all of them,
you need to think about them all at once
and then you'll hear the pattern queer as clay —
that is the loom on which you're woven.

But what Lacan actually said was
You don't just feel fucked, you *are* fucked,
face it. They way sunrise faces us

with the bold innocent face of a retarded child,
you take one look at that and it's clear
what kind of galaxy we live in, heaven
looking down at purgatory, with some hope
beyond the temporal inconveniences of life
to say the least. Yet some of the noblest
spirits called it home a while, then left
behind instructions as they swanned aloft
to opera houses in the sky. Their
exclamation points are hanging from my roof.

7 January 2003

DYSLEXIA

Isn't poetry at heart dyslexia, a hopeless misreading of words as things, and things as words, compulsive metaphors, obsessive likenesses mapping themselves on plain words?

Poetry is asking. Poetry is coming into the room.
Poetry is finding the child. Poetry is seeing the child
sitting at the table quietly in front of an empty plate.
Poetry is saying More food More food
never sure whether it's begging or commanding.

The child. The child who will not eat
meets the child who will not stop eating.
They merge. They become poetry.

Or: poetry is a bank robbery
where the getaway car is always waiting
and runs smoothly to an undetectable hideout
time after time and the years go by

and just when you think you're in the clear
the police are waiting for you at the end of your life.
You wake up one morning and there they are,
all blue, fingering your measly haul,
shaking their heads at all this fuss about nothing.
Crow call. You know it's obituary time.

You can't help it, you did what you could.
You think about all the times, fully armed,
you slipped the teller a love letter by mistake.

7 January 2003

ABSOLUTION

How can we forgive ourselves
for not doing all the things

we wanted to
and we were meant to do

you know that as well as I do
you read the script you unrolled with me

time after time the old portolan chart
that showed our whole sea

with intolerable accuracy
and we knew full well where we were

and where we were supposed to touch
land and set up our city but we did not.

We lived on the perimeter of one another
and never took the subway to the core

even of this easy city we assumed, we took cabs
and thought we had private agendas

but the only deed we did was turn away.
A cab is all selfishness,

one person or a small set of persons
set on getting somewhere else

fast, no time for fucking around
with all the beauty ordinary there

around us. Even the can
you wear on your finger

from whose slope the light falls away
— dome of opacity, church with no door —

oh I am frightened of such stones,
cabochons, because my heart is like them,

that Portuguese migrant worker squatting in my life
always trying to tell you something

but my hands keep getting in the way.

8 January 2003

I am such a simple man
no one will ever know.

8 January 2003

GENESIS

Any movie is the story of my life.
That's why I like abstract films best
where I can get a breath of air
that isn't me. No narrative.
Show me a painting that wriggles
on the wall, that'll keep me busy
and this long Nietzschean comedy
of my years forgets me a few minutes
while I watch the blue turn red
and round things grow little horns and run away
and dark and light come dance with one another
like Night unpacking its tools on the first day.

8 January 2003

THINGS HURT ONE ANOTHER INTO SONG

You stand on the street corner
and tell what you think
against the government against the bank against the book

you tell it with clarity and outspokenness
we call what you are saying 'song'
or 'poetry,' later we collect it or put it in libraries on steel shelves

but now we think: how things
must have hurt this man so much
so that he cries out loud on Market Street

and annoys us with his views,
are we never to be safe from song,
never to be rescued from what people let themselves think?

Later in some random church that happens to be open
you will sit holding your head in your hands
thinking: I know nothing about Marx nothing about God

or government or truth, I only hear the words
and whatever I hear, I say. So hearing is my only genius
and my downfall, knowing nothing, saying everything,

words are the whips things hurt us with.

8 January 2003

Wondering always
how many are left
of the first inhabitants

you come to the island.
You spend the winter
you die.

It is always like that
but something comes of it
something you can't guess

because guesses are pastnesses
projected, and this
instead is on its way

for the first time, first time,
island my island
bringing what you have made of your life.

8 January 2003

20TH DAY OF NIVOSE, DAY OF THE WINNOWING FAN

and what to do, what sifting
of Latin impulses from Saxon words
will we ever build the city together
the one that stretches from Glastonbury Tor
to my Canarsie marshes
the streets of glory debouching in our neighborhood

it is not certain. An erection
is by its nature
both contingent and temporary.
My head aches, isn't that politics enough?

9 January 2003

SOMETHING ISN'T TALKING

I heard my hunger waiting by the barn
for rain to fall, and princesses
saunter by in wet calico
disdaining convenience and propriety
to tread the measures of the oldest dance
all around me, hard to see
but I could see them, I was born
in this world and am a freeman of it,
the world they have no words for yet,
only men and women dancing behind the barn,
the sumptuous presence, the amplitude of now.

They are with me even as I speak —
and now it sounds as if
this is the first time ever I am really speaking
after all my listening,
clumsiest of all the dancers,
the boy by the barn
and yet around me it is they dance,
slow and close and quick and closer,
eternal alphabet of their bodies
inscribing in the air
a word I am still supposed to speak.

9 January 2003

Having turned every else
I turn to you, word,
like a drunk coming home late to his wife

endure me one more time
nur einen Sommer gönnt
do not begrudge me one more fling

among your sempiternal roses
cattleyas forget-me-nots the blue
wind from over the mountains

stirring skirts and blouses of the town
let me say it all
at last and let the silence

from which I come be patient.
All my life I have waited
above all things to live with you.

10 January 2003

CAT SPIT

a kind of walking
waking
around the rim

small words talk sex

or outboard motor
the dory flips and all those flukes
your uncles caught
head back to the bottom
sidewalkers of the abyss my flatfish
my deep star
gravity is what keeps your sox on
speaking of smut
the Boston paper full of naughty priests

now it is glad now it's novena
the mustard jar almost empty
name with your eyes closed
the ones who stood so close to you

and without stirring from your recliner
recite the detailed contents of your fridge

the gender of food

needs study
do girls eat cornichons
gherkins my lady, Elemer

wants to woo the penniless heiress
why not, a word's worth two of me

porridge and alarm, the Scots wha' hae
come tumbling in the living room
bleed real on your ma's rocker,

this is all finally about furniture.

10 January 2003

THE SWORD

When I woke I had come from my first battle
hardly remembering it, knowing only
I had never been in battle before, detail
lost in shock, the saber
in my hand, the wound on my leg and foot
bloody, but pain not yet.

Even in the dream I know
this was a different thing
from anything I had done before,
the first battle,
terror and exaltation of the thing
lost in the quiet breathing
of a man sitting among women,
there were women, with a sword in his hand

I see a picture from a peephole
in the middle of my head,
view down the arm, the steel blade,
the bleeding flesh, the myopic
young women in their white gowns,

nurses, muses, ballerinas, gods.

Static, and no pain,
a moment built inside the dance
by the dance but not the dance

not part of the dance
as the sword is no part of the wound

though it carries someone's blood home with me
among so many colors and shadows
in the terrible quiet that comes after.

11 January 2003

RED SKY AT MORNING

red sky very
sailor be shy
red across a wide
curve of rising
red wife
you wake to
take warning
from all the dark
the crows know
they come
from the earth
directly into

the morning
they hunt by red
a glory web
succumbing now
to ordinary light
now all the snow
is only white

and the flush of east
sailor south sailor
west sailor comes
back inside me
the red anxiety

my stupid decisions
my glorious life.

12 January 2003

Fiona Wilson

IF THAT'S HOW IT GOES

then the comeback is the theme.

the wading ashore the salty ankles

**She can no more hold him
than the ring can hold water,**

how could she want to, years, years,
hold him in her ring

**water, the ring, or vice versa.
Who is this "person through whom**

he is so old, or vice versa, too many
persons in this person

**the poem was written" (the poem
itself a wanting or random guessing)?**

it has to be no one, no one
or is 'noon' the word she read

You look at me: "If that's how it goes...." trying to understand who
was coming who was going

-- Robert Kelly

12 January 2003