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FOR THE RECORD

Valley boy with uptalk
plaintive on my telephone
can't catch his name
on the answering machine
sounds like Chuck but
might be Jay who
could it be who
speaks to me?
Unknown, we leave unclear
messages on the tablets of strangers.
Homer must have said this somewhere.

12 July 2003

AN IMPERFECTION

Casting doubt on aspersions
like any good priest
the asthmatic sermon is the best
God gasping for your breath

to tell the truth
that sexiest of all promises

perhaps truth makes forgiveness
less important anyhow
since blame is fueled by doubt
isn't it, isn't everything

and the priest is wiser than the philosoph
whose pen by definition
runs out of ink before the end.

12 July 2003

A VALENTINE

If I could only know
what you're really thinking
I'd know who I am

12 VII 03

BOLZANO

the bone is in your meat today
tomorrow a museum
brave Ötzi in his air-conditioned grave
daring you to see
your future in his present past

12 July 2003

ON THE HEIGHTS OF SUMMER

Sitting where I am
in the marl pit
called glory and the lust
of life the lion

I want the lioness
at my knees the tender
aspect of the fierce ones
stars, stars

twisted round each other
in masses of unlight
powering a planet
to spin into beholding

to hold there there
here gently ur-
gently on my skin
until the separations

finish and the ordinary
light comes on
and we are two,
the hunter taken by his prey.

2.

And in the Shu Jing
the bird goes flying
there is no lion
and the fish can sleep

the world is all parts
and no whole
and water is the memory of rain
but you, what are you

and why does my throat
straiten and my fingers
tingle when you approach?
Is it something you learned from the door?

3.

Trying to be clinical
lost in the trees
a thrush will find me
we call them robins here

seduced by colors by breast
comme d'habitude
I will follow the flicker
of the bird the leader

through obscurity
to the clear dangers
of the open field
lion serpent sunlight great

Pan smiling in the weeds.

12 July 2003

IN THE GAZEBO

The thought of lost things
Omar, a quatrain
that fell out of the great Fours
discerning the answer left
when the famous empty
wineglass finally
rolls off the table and doesn't break,
rolls along the grass
dribbling the ultimate sagesse.

12 July 2003

GRACHT

Not with *consternation*
but with *cool morning* a paper
published in Amsterdam
hold your horses
the miraculous canal
arc of stone a blue canoe
explaining Rotterdam
on the web *dérive*

later take out the names of things
and leave their places

as if anything were anywhere
not just an eye mote
gospelling the truth of matter

Christ dances round the cross
where Christ seems crucified

round dance and rescue
to save them from the way they think.

2.

But I told you I was coming
gulls over landfill
high squawk and the blue
flames of methane
hard to see in daytime

walk right up to fire
bale fire burning ghat

and by the long beach
gannet's chuckle
suck of surf
between the bass rocks

inland ocean

3.

Too much liberty for me
tell it to the flag
and let the colors transmit your doctrine
to the passing cumulus
always eager for such information

(why is it that the great primaries
are the tricolors only of Chad, Andorra and Mecklenburg?)

glorious morning over the Sorbonne
when the sun on its march from Germany
gilds the local towers,
shivers some light down
along Montaigne's nose

his seated effigy accepts the splendor
and all the pens run out of ink.

13 July 2003

BASTILLE DAY

What is it looking at
sees me so small
across the venture
where the seas break

and in that ruined weather
a rock walks
and a man who looks
like Heinrich Himmler puts

his hand on my shoulder
what do I do about that
his politics his jovial
desperation we live

under the same regime
Stalin sleeps
the leeches at his
temples busy sucking,

his famous cockroach
mustache sifts
his dying breath
tyrants are born

and wither, we let them
we endure the false
touch on our poor
truth-telling skin.

14 July 2003

CORRESPONDENCES

Where can *we* be
among such numbers?
Or a cliff in Oregon
smoking in the sun
after so mist a morning,

is it all just weather
I bring you
thinking to report
everything that passes
all that comes?

the quiet rhyme
of things with things
seems poetry enough.

14 July 2003

ALL THE LEGAL LADIES

All the legal ladies
understand the moon
but so few travel there
kneading their Jerusalem
with their soft paws

and all the monkish men
who rule the government and banks
eat the sun for breakfast
and never get to see
the goods light spills

closer than coffee
more merciful than money
even only *to the happy few*
(Stendhal, out of Shakespeare,
probably by that elegant midwife

Harriet Smithson whom Berlioz
adored till they got married,
always the way, even in Serendip
or Cambaluc, love is the way
that goes away

the lost traveler under the hill.

15 July 2003

LEAVE IT AND LOVE IT

Leave it, and love it later.
The worms of God
will churn your sterile earth
and get it breathing.

Revision
is not just a human pleasure,
the sun sees
the same world different every day

we turn to some purpose
because the others want us to
but who are they?

Sometimes I get too close to saying
something when my brief is really
just to beat around the bush.

Forgive mee, Ladie, when that happens,
sometimes the Words do seeme
to take me in their Confidence

and whisper what this is all about
but my eyes don't want to stray
from the lissome bodies of the dancers

and I soon forget what they seemed to say.

15 July 2003

ONE OR MANY

One or many
the ancient problem
of philosophy,

nature of the real?
I wish I were the only
one who had to worry

but you all do
bring it all home
bring it to me

and I'll take care
smell of the linden
flowering now

sway of the hammock under
where she reads —
mentioning is music enough.

15 July 2003

PANSIES

What grows in window boxes
you can't ever begin to dream it

get a catalogue of instances
in full color, like a kid
sneaking through Gray's Anatomy

looking for what might
explain him to himself

the names of all these parts,
the history of his future.

15 July 2003

DECIDING

Earthwise blue customs
corn story old glamour
new broom in her brown hand

we come to know
her ways
decoding eat

decoding food.

After so many centuries shouldn't we know what we're supposed to eat? Should there still have to be controversies and nutritionists to decide? Do robins quarrel about the salubrity of worms? We talk as if every chemistry is the same. Is that where the difference lies? That every person is a species and no two species can decide? What you allergic to makes you you.

Every chemistry is sand and gravel
oil and water gingering inside
a sheet of flame seen close
dissolve the distances

live in this small house

cool little rain blue hair bow
faded into mother air

the silent bitter mother we call Miriam

little island where just women live
but what's the water it floats in?

16 July 2003

NAVY PIER MEDITATION

there is a friend in Michigan
across the water from
all these ladies moving
round the first big wheel

they rise they fall
in the cards
Rota Fortunæ

I read the cards
they all have faces

(But this was not the first wheel. Ferris's was south of here. And even his just fiddled out of steel wire and wood a replica of what the cards had seen long time before, the ladies and gentlemen going up and lingering a while up there and then tumbling orderly down. Nothing is permanent, not even poverty, not even suffering. Things change, and we make more noise lamenting than we do ascending.)

A man needs to meet all the court cards of the Tarot to have his life complete. These sixteen persons, personages, roles, reflections: they move around him all his days. He must be ready for them to come, appear, function, linger, disappear. They at their own times enter and take leave. It is for that reason also that they are called kings and queens, princes and princesses. They come and go at their own pleasure, or answering the court cards in their lives to which they are responsible.

So there's waiting in this game, seeking, paying attention to what shows up, thinking, responding, being responsible, letting go.

And the man must himself be ready to serve as one or more of those Sacred Identities in other people's lives. And, hardest of all, he must come to recognize himself as one of them in his own life, the card that's made of glass, the inescapable face he barely knows, the one turned inside out.

16 July 2003