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THE ASSASSINATION OF THE DUC DE GUISE

In the shady yard sale back of our home town
didn't buy a five-foot glass-enclosed ornately framed
oleograph of the Assassination of the Duc de Guise.

Have done with artifact. One sprawls before the Queen
I guess she is. The thrown the crown the courtiers
standing around. It is an assassination,
like Sadi-Carnot, and Chirac yesterday
failed his appointment with
such dignity as death endows us with

coram publico, in the face of all humankind
dying, not secretly the way we do,

murder as an expletive
in the language of politics.
It is the assassinated we remember first ---
it takes longer to remember the assassin,
who he was, why he was,
why anyone raises his hand in anger.

I am the reason.

I was wrong
from the beginning,
I insisted on belonging
to the core of the world
and if they wouldn't let me

I would claim it for my own
murdering the one I thought
stood closest to the center

but how little anyone can tell
where that furtive center is,

the center is the center of your feeling
now ---- that is the heart of the world
if it had one, and there the assassin
scrupulously annotates the place each day
his shadow falls ---- God always looks
over his shoulder ---- my shoulder hurts
---- it's time for everything to get better

Society for the Abolition of Horizons.

I think we cannot hold the Things together
without a picture to instruct us

horizons are always *there* and we need
the science to be here

the view from your upstairs window
where the harlot takes the air at morning
smell of rank ailanthus, a wheel of pigeons over
and the road is bare

but in an hour, in the twinkling of an eye
down the street will come the Apostles
with the Ghost beside them

in the guise of one like themselves
as if traveling to the same city

and she will watch until they come,
sitting there now as she is on the windowsill
frankly that is the beauty of the world
the customer is always right
salesmen are no more than angels
we get paid, all of us, for moving things around,
right now I'm with the camel co-op
selling salt in Mali, I am a banker shifting
your mortgage application on my desk
while staring blankly at your knees,
it's all velocity, we're all transporters
till we are transformers, great rhapsodes
hauling words screaming from the lexicon,
work equals move. A verb so important
it is transitive and intransitive at once.
No more questions to this answer.

She watches the road, she is the exception,
the sole attractor. She makes men move
while she reposes, she lets them also
stop a while in her, torque wildly in her seashell
and fall still, the glorious alchemy of prostitution,
of standing there before the other, stasis,
letting the world come to hide in her,
no wonder she's so often sad, against nature
her work is, thus on the side of god.
Against nature to let a poor man rest
to let a rich man come and go again
as if he really had something to deliver,

that's what she sees from her upstairs eye,
morning in the head, who cares
what room she's in, she looks out from
all she's been and everyone she's been with
and studies the doctrine of the street,
pigeons scattering again and again
from their merciless invisible enemy
the fear that makes us fly.

If I were this man I would go to the brothel
early in the morning to reverse the flow,
screw the norm, add sacrilege to sex,
to wake my fellow workers from all
the illusion of the useful day.

What man?

This one she sees coming down the street,
the scandal of actually being there, money
maybe in hand, thinking out loud, hurrying
his steps to come inside her house, there
at the end of the lesson. No horizon
when you look down into the street.

She sees me now looking up at her,
I wave, she whispers, I know, she knows,
I hurry up the stairs to hear what she says,
to understand and be understood,
it has happened so many times before,
her cat leaps up onto the windowsill.

When I leave I turn and look upstairs,
blow her a kiss while I still have one,

go on my way but ways are rare,
kisses plenty, she blow one back,
I admire the curve of her seated
again on the lap of the window,
I must keep moving, I'm still an angel,
the poor girl, how hard it must be
to be with me, all Ahab and no Ishmael,
on my way to the newspaper
you publish to fill it with my ads.

2.

The assassin has struck down the duke
who sprawls at the sovereign's feet.
Everyone is picturesquely dressed.
The assassin seems cowed by what he's done,
when he got up this morning he had just a mouth
for breakfast and two armpits to wash,
now he's history itself, cog in the blood wheel,
I'll ask you one more time how much you love me,

I was praying on the lawn, eyes closed,
intent on the light inside my spine
when someone called me
I heard my name, and for a space
of time had no idea,
was it the scandal of an inside light
suddenly speaking, inside outside
different? Undecided, I heard again
and let my eyes go up and it was you
still in the posture of one calling
arm raised to guide me towards
where you were going and you went,

but it wasn't your voice you used
to rouse me. Some other.
Tempests and looking glass, two fires
had been started by the lip of the wood
and men were carrying offerings
to pass through it, burnt sacrifices,
on their way to being,

I know it was you who called
but whose voice did you use?
The voice of the schoolmistress
recites facts about the Duc de Guise
I have always been a protestant
in catholic silk, I thought they all were
just one same thing
as if spirit had a boring taste in matter.
But the young man with the sword,
staggers back, a little shocké
by what he's *brought to pass* (he thinks that way,
highfalutin rhetoric is a mark of all assassins),
his sword is losing its erection as he withdraws.
The queen appears to look with satisfaction
on this *turn of events*, , the courtiers stand around
waiting for the opera to begin, waiting to decide
what text to let their body language speak.

Do you call this music, this repro
in its deco frame, the old time shocker,
political miasma, melodrama?
But a man is dead.
O universe of French assassins,

“o world full of madmen in love.”

The garbage truck grunts by
because we live in synchronicity
an attractive busy suburb of the real.

3.

The question of love insists on coming back ----
you're in love and a lover
as long as you think
love is a meaningful word

but God only knows who you're in love with,
you never do. One stone falls as fast as another.
Humiliation is a kind of comfort
as when a cup falls off the table or you let it fall
and happens not to break
it lies on the ground utterly safe
because it can fall no further.
Only sunlight can hurt it now.
'Hurt me' you can hear it saying
in a tiny china voice, 'Fais moi mal,
Johnny,' but the dew is diamond on it now
because a cup that falls at morning on the grass
is busy all day long. No crow will pluck it
loose from its natural form. But who knows the night.

It's not so bad to be humiliated,
it's like traffic, road, rush hour, cigarettes,
Monday morning, Christ it's now again,
I must bottle the dishwater and begin.

O these joyful elegies of mine, these emeralds
I borrow from your eyes,
sapphires, topazes, indexes
of constancy. The sky is always there
hence the arrogance of horizons, an act
without horizon is an insoluble mystery.
"Thank God for little languages no one knows"

All limits are consoling. Horizons soothe
as if we knew how far we could go
and no need to go more. But we do,
aniline blue, natural crimson we do
and virgin white, all the stories we presume
to tell the sky, mumble in Polish,
smear ocher on the wall inside, we live
by acts of refusal, we recuse, we step down
and bellow a word, defile a canvas
or hurt a rock until it looks like you
shivering on your posing stand, paid by the hour
for this silent lecture you perform, inform,
beauty means just being there, completely.

So love is not the issue, color isn't, art,
form, violence, the smashed terra cotta of identity,
death. Madness is not the issue either,
stone and sword and a smile from the upstairs window,
not these either. Which I pronounce with the vowel of *die*
not the vowel of *thee*.

Of course some days
are hotter than you others, in the city, clearly,
or a little shiver, lust in woods,

here is the middle of the mouth, a tongue sleeping.

What does she see at last? A man
running in the dawn
looking back over my shoulder

and no other man can see
the dog from which this man flees

but you can see.

Because you have picked up every stone
and set them down
in proper order
according to the teachings of the Hidden Spectrum
and the oldish man with the white face
you know the satisfactions from which I run.

Once in a Thai restaurant in Philadelphia.
Once in the U-Bahn in Berlin
while the train was between the Zoo and the Middle
(a philosophic province where I still live)
once in a crowded bakery near the Luxembourg,
that's all. Or maybe more,
no man can remember, it's like going bald.
Memory makes the hair fall out ---- a fact,
I heard it in the temple, when Brother Anatole
tried to improvise and we all sang.

4.

Board over trestles. A child
prances on it with a parasol and sings.

Entertainment. A thing *held*
between a person and a person.

An audience *listens* but they watch.

The root meaning of this:

I display myself and you behold me.

It has nothing to do with revealing,

it is just affirmation, I exist

outside my own sense of myself

as long as you see me. As long

as I see you seeing me.

Here is my trapeze, my feather boa,

magician's top hat, my song my text

my dance my smile my paradigms of look at me

look at me without remembering another

that is the order my desperate eyes

issue to your receiving, swallow me whole

and live in the seeing. As I do. Being

is being seen.

And so the failed assassin

lifts his rifle and lets loose a shot or two

vaguely towards the President of the Republic.

No one is hurt but himself.

But it's the thought that counts,

he counts as an assassin, his bullets

are still flying over Paris, vague and quick

as hummingbirds, looking in every window,

looking for someone to kiss, to suck

the sugar of light before they fall.

It's not so easy to kill. So they fly on forever
signs in the sky among the billions of signs
not one ever read to the end, like a boring
preacher and a sleepy congregation
listening to the milk drip slowly down
from the distended udder of the text. Sorry
to be so ineloquent. But death is like that.

15 July 2002

THE EXPLANATION

My legs are stone legs now and my belly
is a basin made of copper. Alexander
the wicked coppersmith made it
when he was still a part of the sangha.
And my ears are laurel leaves pinned on
my thoughtful little girls in search of life,
you know how serious they are.
And my fingers, you should see them,
they have amber fingernails but tips
delicate as the pistils of yellow flowers
you can barely feel them trail along your back.
But they feel you. Anyhow, that's
what's kept me busy these few weeks,
and you can see why I couldn't travel
to meet you. My feet were quietly of milk
for most of these days, and I had put my eyes
for safe keeping in a little jar of jade
brought back from Nepal. My lungs were wings
and went away for Christmas with some birds.
Actually it's months now, isn't it, and summer
and even now I'm just learning how to breathe.
They call this convalescence, but I had no disease.
But all the differences climbed into my body.

15 July 2002

ANOTHER BORING AFTERNOON AT THE ANALYST'S

with a murky cast of characters all played by me
every line must move the mind I guess does this?
I think I'm going to be sick, it's so hard,
I have tried to do it all myself

desert island archivist of whale songs
in the society of diesel
wordless grid of traffic to get born
I need pictures

it's all so alone to say a thing or two
finally unpacking the kit
to stay, here, with *you*
in the virtuous family of the pronouns still
full of aspirin and unbelief

gather the notebooks when I say
it means *Submission* mean me
nothing to do with nothing to believe
you don't need much excuse to kill the world

What was the dream thinking? Strange salt
on your table and the waitress kept bringing
slim strips of red pepper. Nobody touched a thing
so the prayerbook was neat at the end of Mass
and you left the communion rail hungry as you came,
what a girl. Turn the sound system on,
Marnie, there's explaining to be done. The freudian
asleep in the teapot, suppress the repression,
return to what *it* means, could it?

So it wasn't a dream. And it wasn't thinking.
The whole night thought was stopped.

And still she is the famous farmer's daughter,
she lives with Moses where the light goes out
she surfs in twilight, reads Proust, lights candles
locks the door, smiles at mirrors, sews
naughty mottoes on her children's hats.
Now it's time for the movie. One of these
portuguese man of war Rockaway beach encounter
traumas where they first see gay people
I had never seen before a living company
that admitted they liked to love *each other*
not just one coming on and one demurring

how great to be like that but where would I
ever find the homo to my strange sexual?

Relax,

don't tell it all at once. Blue haikus
interrupt the mind. A little beetle explains a tile.

That's better, Central Asia. Lie down and seep
the story slowly into speech. You were saying?
Everything is hetero to me. O that again, a stereo
conversation with one channel shorted out,
you shake the Times and all the words fall off,
I understand, black men have white hands.

And to think I have to pay for this. Isn't it time
for a brand name, doctor? I do endorse a lot,
God pays me to mention Things, nouns of
natural process, products, sparrows, moons,

and like everybody else I think PT Cruisers
are pretty cute, if not exactly cool, if not
quite ready yet to rule. Lie down and mortify
the flesh, the staff you lick is not legal yet,
you hit the ball it breaks the bat, the wound
you make flies over the wall, a hurt goes on
forever, that's why I love to hurt you,
I live eternal in your resentment, you make
the air worth looking at, stare at me, say
how many eyes do I have now, can you tell
how many fingertips colonize your knee?

O terrible poverty of nerves! as Dante may have said,
a party when all the jokes are told at once
and all the cards are hearts, she bounces off the jukebox
to see what music comes, o what good
do you derive from music, earthling?
It darns my socks. It lets the air in and keeps bugs out,
isn't this a pilgrimage? O God how we need miles.

Good answer, liar. But really what is feeling happening
in you when the noise noise coils up inside your ear
always trying to go further in ---- don't you know
that music means to penetrate, is always trying
to escape the air that gives it form, escape and hide
inside the density of your quiet flesh inside?

The words come marching in, that's how it's done,
it's a story, doctor, it's the only story, no characters,
it moves without moving, it happens
and nothing fucking changes, that is so great of it,
nothing. I see where the problem is, you say

Bruckner enters holding Biber by the hand,
I say the sun wakes us to responsibility, small parks,
checkbooks, lies left on the answering machine.
You say music I say meaning, you say staircase
I say snake, we're not so different, I'll make
an ordinary human of you yet. Please don't
or not soon, I have so much love to do,
I need my differences, peppermint pattie
allergy to watermelon, my darling accidents,
chérie, my social menopause, my salt.

So begin again so long ago, name all the spices.
Be the little boy on the big field with the black cow
who can't decide to touch or run away,
touch the nice animal on the head, the fatal
thinking machine that gives such weird milk,
there, between the skull's backbone and soft ears
the town called Neck in a book called Egg
where a man called Toast gave his life for his son.

Ungrateful orphan. Reach in and pull out
one thing at a time, be careful not to take two at once,
they'll copulate and breed, and out come more dreams,
gardeners squatting inside shrubbery, batting trees,
sunstroke, big blue tiled mosques inflate by night
to help you live on this dusty plain, the telephone.

16 July 2002

CHIMNEY STACK

passage home
ocarina harmonica
folkish trees fur
left on collar

after a time
you forget about wine
the Tartars come

shadow shibboleths
on bleached glacis

before we could think
they were us.

16 July 2002

THE MOTHER

yes, mother, a mouth
you gave me
to kiss all the friends
you don't believe in

and tell them all my secrets
I cherish in my skin
close close as if this little
other one was me

and I had found myself at last
safe in the clutches of this one
I begin to speak,

language

is hers, is theirs, language
is the other's

in speaking

we belong to each other.

16 July 2002

MISREADS

all my afternoons
the skill of skin

engine behind me
work going in

next door moves me
a soft day

with a noise for a neighbor
parler toucher dormir.

16 July 2002

THE MESSAGE

What is this burden
on the other side of my face

the one I keep keeping for me
but always try to give away

to you because you want it
I think but thinking is keeping

again, burden I can't set down
I want to give you not

to burden you but a gift
it would be you tell me

to know all I'm thinking
all I'm keeping from us both.

17 July 2002

industrial consistency marker
spill safety train accident deterrent
invention announcement

elite woman accent paradigm
tomato tomato argument

exhibitionist amateur rarity display
(*rare vos* significance sly fox)
garment abstraction volunteer

(Lyme disease is made of leprosy
left over degraded, down the steps climbs
up again. No disease ever disappears.
It reincarnates as another.)

From the skin on its way to the CNS

16 July 2002 late late