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for Susan's birthday 2001

The fact that time passes
Is not even a fact

It is time that stands still

Time is a stone

And we roll past it or slither past it
Rush down the hill crash through the rail
Swim beyond the reach of the slacker eyes of the lifeguard
Walk down the wrong street with a lily in the hand

We are the ones who hurry
Away from the 'sweet encounter' *(Juan de la Cruz)*
However we do it,

How do you do?

So I suppose the main reason to put up with George
Is that he knows how to balance one stone atop another atop another
Big on top of little thus
Making time move and us stand still

To make the stone stand
Makes time fly

Leaving us intact and still, staring it may be out at the snow field
Wondering that there are so many lovers in the world
So many cups left
To spill emptiness from
Into the meek awareness
That is all you need

So that you live forever.

That is the plan.

7 January 2001

What trees tell
Is everything
About which nothing
Can be said

He looked over
The border into Croatia
He thought canals
Have eels there too

Looked back
At this larch
Everything becomes amber
Or number
It melts all over his hands

8 January 2001

Just as I woke to a sudden
desire walking up the stairs
entering the Heaven Realm
of this starlight beast boat
nightly moved to the harp I hold

there was a sleep attack
north of my alertness — green sky
shot full of comets

I glimpsed a king riding on a dog
trotting out of the dawn, dry skin
furled over the known universe
along half a mile of dirt road
ending in a grove where we played a game
none of us had ever played before.
Roses were in it, and fingertips, and spit.

8 January 2001

cast for a cracked canteen
webstrapped to a kid's leg
and both wet, trouser and strap,
with the spill of an ill-screwed
chain-linked cap a summer
must have happened to sleep
a whaleport in sloppy snow

8 January 2001

INTERVIEW WITH THE NIGHT MERCHANT

But where is it going, the sandman asked, all this sleep
I give you between your Austrian novel and the wake-up phone?
What will do when the Night Angels demand a reckoning,
All the hours you've piled up in their dingy café
While you fantasize compulsively about this and that
And don't even know it. You are far away from yourself.

He said. Every day a new word to look up — is that an answer?
He didn't think so. So daytime is writing the letter, going
To sleep is the envelope, dream licks a stamp and sticks it on,
Is that it? He didn't think that was it either. How about snow?
No. I had to come up with something better, Danish, arduous,
Like those frowning nudists we call philosophers. Wrong.

He rephrased his question: what have you done with all
The precious sleep I sifted in your eyes, the radiant dreams
That stood before you or whirled you around the dance-floor
Even kissed you sometimes and made you wake up
Gasping for more. What have you done with all that?
Is your sorry waking life a destination worthy of that amazing
journey?

9 January 2001

VARIATION, AFTER D.G.

Each recitation melodrama gave a sermon
no one wanted to hear - the banana in snow,
the dull Le Monde soaked through with
politics in which two cormorants
fought for dead fish - all this
varicose imagination not for the life of me.

9 January 2001

Birthdays manage. The horn goat
Honks beyond the snow.
Honk hoom hon hoon the breathing
Is bereshith, another world created

Out of sound. Nada. Ultimately
You are a candle. Something about lasting
A long time makes me want to dance
The long slow sexy contours of eternity

And what people give is finally geography
Not just geology to each other, uses
Of their land, the economic consequences
Of skin. The way you use me.

9 January 2001

I'm dying now and this picture is still in front of my eyes

Reverence in it old hotel on the coast
Rupestral carvings rugosa everywhere
Flowers grow themselves. Against causality
I have marched up endless dark corridors
Leading to a single window glaring at the end
And a girl taking a blind woman by the hand

No one is ready for the house they live in
A house is made of habit a habit
Has to be made insouciant Rabbi
Charming legs off the table by sheer
Tradition is there any point in all this love
The mortal doctrine of do it do it to me.

10 January 2001

what comes of this?
what goes?

I wait for the turn of the music
when its colors change

10 January 2001

so many circumstances guilt me of a city
barracked with philosophers blue by book

and the river culls the shore of our poor things

and there so many of them, the little bees
who cluster round the garbage cans

but know what to call them, listen to my chest
and find a sound there they'll understand
if I whisper it in their direction

pizza scraps and cans of Coke, they buzz
for the meager beauty of being, got to eat,

the Freemasons have their temple, these
guys have the light. The sugar of neglect

10 January 2001

Sometimes salt is all we need
those bitter nights
when I think that I alone am mercury

11 January 2001

Imagine a teacher at the front of the room

slowly undressing
— common fantasy among schoolchildren —

but when the cloth is gone
the body's missing too

so when the last garment's thrown joyously away
that end of the room is empty

just sunlight, chalk dust, a new
vocabulary item on the blackboard.

11 January 2001

Let this love that's always flowing out of me
Find its river channel lake millrace sea

Let it do something let it make noise
You learn with love to hear as words

Telling you the truth for a change
No matter how many lies I love you with.

11 January 2001

Let my breath unveil the world
And everybody feel me
Close, close
As if I were the color in their skin.

11 January 2001

all the facts
waiting for me
to forget them

like a daffodil
(what is?)
coming out of the snow

11 January 2001

So suppose it was a dream, and some years passed,
and then the dream began again, and it was never.

Caught between one dream and itself all over again
what was left of what I had thought had been my life

between the dream and the dream? The rock
beneath my feet keeps trying to tell me something:

*you have no right to dream, you have no right to wake,
all you have a right to is in between.*

11 January 2001

CHANSON

so much to tell you
so much to ask
so much to remember
so much to forget

there are a hundred questions
stored below your chair
would we be happier
if you left them there

so much to confess
so much to demand
so much to hold
so much to let go

there are a thousand sparrows
waiting on your lawn
I sent them to shout at midnight
So you would think it's dawn

would get up and come to me
where I am not waiting
and we would lie down together
where the sea is dry

so much to dream about
so much to explain
so much to do with you
so much to forgive

11 January 2001

THE INSCRIPTION OVER THE GATE

I am what is.
No one has ever penetrated
Me, no one ever will.

I am pure being
Beyond action
Beyond perceiving

You hear me stirring
Deep inside
Impenetrable dark

This sense of something moving
Is all that makes you sad
Or makes you glad

It is all me
I am the other
Side of everything.

12 January 2001

where do I go
when I go to sleep

and who is there
I am so eager to see

that every night
I hurry towards

and who is there
scares me so much

I put off sleeping
till my eyes won't

look at anything
that is not she?

12 January 2001

some dried ferns

must have been green
when someone picked them

then faded
on a drumhead table
under the candle and the clock

or were they green still
sifted through
cool fingers in a cool
winter fern brake

and green still
carried home
warm in some pocket

and green they slipped
into an envelope
and only there

did they turn brown
dried out by some angry
letter they were next to

from a lawyer or a liar
and the ferns quietly
fading

into all the mingled letters
at the bottom of my file cabinet

little brown leaves leaflets
among the dark words
still delicate with kindness and hope?

12 January 2001

every day
is the hell or
heaven we
earn

afterlife of
last night's dream
we woke from
like dying

12 January 2001

BLACK MIRROR

So many places where a boy can get lost
on his way to the city.

The worst
is the glossy wet blackness of the asphalt
you could stare at that all night
and never come home.

That is home,
the soft of it, the way it takes your eyes,
the way it takes the red tail lights
of cheap cars and makes them rubies
streaking north from Washington Square

I have stared into that mirror fifty years
do you understand

I was asleep then I was married

later the blue streets of afternoon
turned wax at nightfall then the wet black happened

down where the Only People live and will not come out dancing

they make me go down among them
and maybe not even then.

12 January 2001

Something bitter in the taste
remembering is a hard word
for what is lost

the stone breaks
and slithers out of it
a lizard or a toad
amazed to see the world still here
after long thinking

Time takes too long

13 January 2001

not back from the sailor
fingertips bent up to play
battered virginal
somehow hitting hard
though the note in fact
is something to plucked
or pulled held
till it's tired of itself
so music goes

this was the train
dragged them east
to a land where people talked
like angry old men with no teeth

forest to forest
one day passed

13 January 2001
after *Shoah*

rock heard spud fall
could lick a catheter
so gale with losing

hard man old soil
hating the names of things

13 January 2001

is it there yet the falconer
or is it just sunshine
that shyster
outside the movie theater
waiting for children

making them sign
what isn't even their
names yet to this contract

don't do it
wait for the imaginary bird

kestrel on a penny stamp.

13 January 2001