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I think there could be marble
basalt syenite
or papyrus

everything needs its skill and I have none,

not even the reconciling wand, Mercury's
snakeless, winged though, healing.

To be reconciled with a part of my own mind
is not a poem. Hesiod laughs at lazy men
when winter comes. But what when summer
answers my fetishistic prayer. Be bleu,
sea, be calme, ciel, be bright, bronze,

the wind still blows, a boy goes
up to the dry rough places to bring home his goats.

20 January 2001

Call things easy, or lazy?
Masons at their
Liturgy, the mayor
Sends me a message:
Stop Smoking! (I don't smoke)
Bridge tolls are rising!
(I walk on water)
Cover your fire!
But I am a kite
Tied to your tip
I have the whole
Sky to roam in
But I know my home.

20 January 2001

Don't want to be faithless don't
want the green book to flop open again
to one more lie

grievous Parisians
hurrying through sleet

on the street of the sellers of musk
and a stuffed yak hangs over the doorway

in another city. No, not a city
though you can live there

if you forget *les Droits de l'homme et du citoyen*
and think a lot about the sun and the moon.

21 January 2001

LETTER TO HEINE

Heinrich Heine I have been mad at you for fifty years
Because the way my German teachers obsessed about your work
When I wanted Rilke and Hölderlin and Benn.
It's true I liked your *mattress grave* pieces, they were strange and moving,
And what I read of "The Rabbi of Bachrach."

But mostly I thought your poems were that worst of combinations,
Cheesy sentimental secretly cynical —
Bad as Byron but without his likable bluster and heroics,
Missolonghi and all that.

Then a few days back I read a poem by you that seemed pure and magical, in the same
rare company as Kubla Khan if maybe not as rich:

"The Asra"

Every day the beautiful
Daughter of the Sultan strolled
At evening by the fountain
Where the white water splashes,

Every day the young slave
Stood evenings by the fountain
Where the white water splashes,
Every day he's paler, paler.

One evening the princess stepped
Up to him with sudden words
"I want to know your name,
your homeland and your people."

And the slave said: "My name is
Mohammed, I come from Yemen,
My tribesmen are the Asra,
The ones who die when they love."

That's it. That's all. Gorgeous. Utterly surprising. The slow repetitions and familiar décor of the two opening stanzas prepare us for a long, sluggish *romanza* between slave and princess — we've read them by the dozen. Then come the sudden words of the sultan's girl, direct, bossy — you can hear the sexy petulance, the stamped foot — all the signs of her own inner attraction suddenly let loose, her own anxiety speaking in her spoiled-brat way of asking. And the triune simplicity of the slave's answer, his

unanswerable answer. The poem ends, suddenly, breathless, all told, all known, and nowhere to go. This is close to magical tragedy, if there were such a thing.

So I'm sorry, Heinrich Heine, I got you wrong. Maybe someday in the future some hater of my work will find, somewhere in my thousand scrolls, a poem as honest, skilful, true and powerful as "Der Asra." And the hater will forgive me, and blush, and feel stupid about neglecting me so long. As I feel now about you, who gave us this supreme example.

21 January 2001

what a man takes then a woman
takes then a doorway a hallway
going away or coming towards

who can tell which one it is
and where it leads
and where it leaves you

if it's you, is it you
walking now away towards me
and what must I become

to meet your last dark step?

21 January 2001

squeeze sun over snowday
wax wax what is permanent
connection down up a road
over the stony desert who
will follow me to January
will always be everywhere at home

one week a year the gold
flowers speak the Luvian
lovesongs the rain teaches
color is wonderful

then it's desert again
I fail the test again
since every color is tumultuous
with felt meanings
and the moonlight on the rock
is like a swimming pool
and I don't swim

though once five
thousand miles away
I walked out on the ice
towards Denmark
hidden over the sly hills of the sea.

22 January 2001

How can I be that nervous about sunshine
not wanting to talk
not wanting to be an old man with a plastic comb in his hip pocket

color always believes in itself

what a nice god that would be to be
like the lilac-sized clumps of snow on the pine bush outside the diner

motherless child.

22 January 2001

MAZE

Besiege it. Lie down
where you can see
Shameful amorists
Try to coax their beige malaise
Into more strenuous hues.

They fumble through the turnings.
You watch them, their ankles
Twitching can be seen
Below the rootstocks of the hedges
Because you're hiding
In deep grass, watching,
Low, to be luminous, to see.

See the mileage so far to heaven
but you hold it all in your eyes.

22 January 2001

And these things can still run across the page, hurrying, being home.

Samuel Henry MARLES

Christened 27 May 1832 East Teignmouth, Devon, —- this from the Mormon record —
is this he?

Jane McGarry says: Married in Manchester at 21. Need copy of her papers. What does our SJM mean then (this is a puzzle, since we have poems of his dated in Somerset, 1855) ‘having lived in peace in the country (US) thirteen years’ — this in 1861 when he renounces his English nationality and enlists in the Union Army... Did he come to the US at 16 (1848), then go back home for a while, write poems, meet Jane Brass, get married, come back to NY???

Would he have taken his grandmother’s family name to replace Henry? That ‘Jason’ has always been the puzzle.

If so: he is the son of Samuel Marles son of William Marles (married to Mary Jason) son of Abraham Morris...

So I had something to say to the middle of the night
And waited up to tell it, now I forget. I'll go to bed
And dawn will remind me.

And so it will go
As long as time knows how to creep alongside us
A dog that's known to nip its master's heel.
Now I wonder what I have to say to the stairs.
And well we know that wood is always listening.

22 January 2001

HOUSEWORK

Keep the sky dry.
Sweep the mind.
Change things into themselves.

Pick up some new pronouns.
Wake the books.
Forgive the lawn.

23 January 2001

ORISON

If the Scatterer of Intellectual Property (used to be called Muses)
Is listening tonight, I want a new art form
All done with words but not like literature

Words on paper or surfaces but not like books or bricks,
Something new, o please, Mlle. Scatterer.
You who, la Rousse, strews to all the winds

The sense of words and what they do inside us,
Give me the Polterabend of the heart, where the old forms get broken
The kettles are shivered, the old glass smashed

And no more reflections, no more shadows,
Smashed under the heart's tread,
Newer than Jewish, bluer than laudanum,

An art form beyond form beyond art
A word on the other side of speaking.

23 January 2001

Trying to tell the truth.

I'm trying
To tell the truth
But truth won't listen.

Listen, so many people
Try to tell her things
She's cautious,
Maybe a little indifferent —
What are you trying to tell her?

Some lies.
I wanted to tell her what I could not know
And could not do,
Make promises I could never keep,
I wanted to tell her all my lies
So she would make them come true,

True by just hearing them,
Letting them settle
And all the falsehood blows away
Or burns away and what's left
Is the truth. The bottom
Of the mind. The 'you'
In I love you.

24 January 2001

Moondark. Waterloo.
Underground. Down every
Corridor you hear music
Coming from the tiles.

I know there are people
Behind these sounds
I try to ignore, my own
Agitated arias

Need my attention
But I can't turn them off
I try to follow the stories
Of their agonies I hear

Their kindness their distance
From their kind
But I'm halfhearted
Like the occasional

Trombonist now and then
Paying attention to
The remote guest conductor
Waving his arms against the dark.

25 January 2001

Entrances are rare

the old subways
knew a thing or two
stopped at 14th, 18th, 23rd, 28th as if
a train were like a trolley
and waited on people
where they lived

where do you live
and how can I get in?

my irony
is broken, my attitude
is gone

you are my angel and my darling
embarrassingly just
the way you are the way you are

25 January 2001
[3 February 2001]

But consider this agitation
donkey tails sweep across the north sky
because somebody knows my name
I'm getting tired of driving there
unfurled woodland broken promises

comes with a gladiolus scarlet
where did you get that in winter

in what deep karma did you find me
or does everything find us
a quiet inevitability

when we thought we had to hurry
to the ends of the earth to meet
the earth that actually always ends here.

25 January 2001

TRUTH

to the memory of W.V. Quine

Bring it to the end of what else the heart desires
so subways will get there amidst amazements of the local
laity drowsing onto the express at 96th
where doors open and close on discrete magics
waking you sometimes from the torpor of being everybody
in this quickest of all cathedrals underground.

If it's not true on the subway it's not true anywhere.

26 January 2001

ALL THROUGH THE NIGHT

Dream of and touching to instruct her
gleam on car hood (the punishment)

stripped of string music no back-up alone alone
instruct her — hollow tree trunk message —
every name a melody — safe journey, honey —

outside the Temple in the Bible of course I want
do it by touch not commentary hallelujah
teach the fusillade from interrogating Eros tell ask tell
tell ask a hill in the hills a stone in the stream

she's driving her black car and I want green
a Luftwaffe scarf around her silken neck
the old supremacist tra-la-la

(the sun is out) (I want more money)

Second chorus

Rapt into splendor señor a restoring
calm falls on the city Cooper Union Cooper Union

honey salted cashews did you know the shells are poison
roll over on the downtown local enduerme

like a pineapple biches means gazelles

not gorillas name your values
chrome entitlements you blue blue blur car
now hurrying home Cooper Union cooper is a
kind of barrel maker and his yard is flush
with warp wood he has the knack of curving

just like the backside of your cello
to blend with others of its kind end here
the gospel preachers are shouting in the vestibule

Third chorus

Landsmen meet and boil some barley
so here's my story my mommy took me from my daddy
and did whatever they do they do inside you know
it's like a butchershop a school an animal
it's like a church a shoestore a snowstorm a bingo game
and you're drunk for three or four years
then you can talk, talk enough to keep them off

distract them from your actual intentions
your center your attentions the one you mean
the one you're always getting ready for señor,
the bagpipe player who fainted on your lawn
the harpist who was still there at breakfast.

26 January 2001
Red Hook

[Rubaiyat]



It takes so many people to be me.
And what do I do with them
When they have turned into this character
Who wanders through the world kissing and complaining?



Sometimes a relationship feels like your mouth after the dentist,
Not too much hurt, some numb, and a taste you never had before
And you know it's really supposed to be good for you
But it's not your mouth any more. Only the pain is yours.



26 January 2001

