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THE BARE TABLE

1.

The bare table
loves me

the newspapers love me
only when they're a few days old
and from another country

where the herrings come from
or the music

as long as I can't read them too well

when I was no years old
fish and fruit were wrapped by retailers in newspaper
to take home

now I can never go home
now nothing is worthy of being wrapped in words
even the kinds of words we have these days

we wrap in images
and we eat in the dark
watching other people eating other things

2.

I love the bare table right back
I say: I love you wood
I love your empty grain
with the gleam of rain on your skin
and no food

and I watch the birds at their campaign
and imagine for a moment that all fish are safe in the sea

3.

The bare table loves me
for other reasons

we have sat here for hours
man and wood together
and it remembers

amity is easy
to remember
so rare

but what is amity?

The silence of a bare table
in the howling city of light.

4.

The bare table loves me

because of all I forget
and when I am trying to remember
I stare at it blankly

o love is so blank go lightly
over the surface and never come back

only the surface always the surface

what we see
is what supports the world
I think

and the table thinks this with me too
although it is ridiculous to think a table thinks

Only a chair can think —
a table is all silence and remembering and letting me see.

13 December 2001

THE OTHER STORY

There is another story
waiting for the blue lady
to get done with the newspaper
and look at the bare table

There is another story
on the other side of what we see

and another sun is busy there
with a different kind of hydrogen
a universe without the number One

This sounds like nonsense when I say it
so it's likely to be true

or true enough.

We have come to a place where only the truth will serve.

13 December 2001

Cloud architectures, chemistry of mirrors,
I wait for you on the subway steps
knowing there is an earth below our earth
and a city down there full of people

and look at you, you're beautiful and quick and good
but under you there is another you
bare as Ishtar and no man knows

but there is nothing under a table,
nothing but our own legs and feet and shadows,
the crumbs that leap free from our appetites,
poppy seeds from sleepy breakfasts
mooning about you,
nothing but the cat and the mouse and the ant

and there is nothing under the ant
the ant carries the whole world on its back.

13 December 2001

I had a corner
And I set the world in it

Threw a soft black cloth over it
Not velvet but something yielding

And the world went to sleep there
Dreaming of lines of shadows of edges of pain

Whatever you dream about in a corner
And left me alone and simple in the middle of the room

Dreaming of this of horses galloping of fountains of smoke
Whatever you dream about in the middle

Even in the middle of nothing
There is always something waiting to wake up.

13 December 2001

FINDING A PLACE IN TIME BED

a contradance, in mist, receding
Zenable landscapes of morning
afore you get to work the aft
circumstance that Jewess on the run
through all too orderly nazi trees

Beauty, in her pose of doing something,
Beauty busy with 'the production of time'

for she's what's the matter with our mind.

14 December 2001

NEWS OF THE DAY

The terrorists are being bombed to bits in their caves
Ramadan is almost over tomorrow the dark of the moon
I hear a jouncing noise a squirrel landing on seed
Black-capped chickadee temporarily leaving town.

14 December 2001

NASALIZATION AS INDEX OF INFANTILE FREQUENTATIVITY

Jounce bounce boing trounce pounce
Blue animal leaping through neighbor air

14 December 2001

CLAUDIA

Oh the poor dear her face
has been looked at too often

all the her of her
has been rubbed away

like bronze St Peter's toe in Rome
first it gets shiny and then it's gone.

14 December 2001

To believe in God is holding love in escrow
safe until its proper Landlord comes

and here you are again and again
right now we're dark in Santa Monica bistro

until my account in heaven is depleted
just dust mice and boarding passes scattered on the floor —

life laws its liens around us, doesn't it,
and after a while the novel gets tired of my love.

15 December 2001

And I could say again
in mirror speech
what the glass is always saying,
double barrel trouble

— you can never have and touch this thing you see

— you will never see this very thing again

So you can break all the mirrors or go blind

Or you can build a boat out of change and loss and breaking
and float in it till all the dying stops
then see where you are, dove shit on your collar,

a sodden mountain underneath your stern
and all your pretty daughters dancing
naked in the sudden apple trees.

15 December 2001

Taking measure is a breeze
remembers Waikiki
I went to watch the watchers
initiates beneath an interminable wave
purer than logic under sea salt
—I used to think only prepositions could be clean.

16 December 2001

THIS COUNTRY WHERE THE WHITE MAN RULED

And every little one of us a statue of himself became
Tortured into the rigid grammar of the empty street
Terrible blood-drenched goddess the girl next door.

Of course all Kali's bleeding comes from us,
the blood alone from her.
We are the ones who wound the mother.
Every goddess we worship forgives only ourselves.

16 December 2001

I hurt her
it was the sole
transaction
I could master
the blood
wrote my name
on her forehead.

16 December 2001

(An incident on Brown Street, ca. 1942, starring Joan Mulhare as the goddess.)

CONDENSARE?

Somewhere inside
The poem lies.
The rest of it
Sometimes tells the truth.

16 December 2001

guilt for little things
can blink the big ones

why did I wear this
spotted tie not

why was I born.

16 XII 01

BETHLEHEM

Asking the wrong questions
they came to the cave

how will we translate this
into crimson and gold

there's always some animal nearby
no matter what the weather

ox wolf worm crow

an animal is something like an answer
I have forgotten

which kind of animal you were
remind me

the cave is too dark
to see anything but this point of light

light blinds
we know that from the sky

what kind of answer
can a color give

does it howl
does it rest in your lap

and you hear her breathing
and think you see tears

in her eyes as she is leaving
as she is beginning to remember

I will love you forever
they whisper in the dark

it no longer matters
who hears them

they want everybody to know
especially the wolf

especially the teenage mother
shielding her infant from questions

but then I saw you crying
and the world began to change.

16 December 2001

There is a universe
close beyond your scarlet
fingernails just
scratch the air
until some music falls
lifeless from the copper
wire cage all round us
to keep your fantasies
safe from the static
of the usual and there you are
Nero of the hour
listening to time burn
moral architectures
smoking rubble
mystical debris.

17 December 2001

I'm mad at someone but the light says Who?
those Viennese embarrassments my feelings
are hard to travel with in the jungles of Indiana
where ex-nuns sleep beneath their home-made looms.

Because I was a wanderer once I wandered
naïve as sunshine in what I thought a gypsy world
but I was only Late Victorian flatfoot
collecting clues to embed in ormolu, experiences

of an actual world lost in the sensuous
semantic depravity of recurrent rhyme.
But when you're free of getting what you want
the want comes clean. The freezing rain out there
masquerades as morningshine. I love to be fooled.

17 December 2001

Not to stay, to stone.
Not to want, to wait.
Is this what they mean
When they say
God bless America?

17 XII 01

Geese barking overhead
What I remember
Reduces to a poinsettia
On the cool porch

Intensity of bract
Christmas Star a tree of them
We saw in Germany
And we have one

In opulent uneasy
Chastity alone with the light.

17 December 2001

So it gets brighter after all
Cars understand these things better than people
They know how to go, but they go,
They leave behind a picture of some boy's holy blue mother
And a statue of a Roman satirist up to his kneecaps in surf.

17 XII 01

This would be poetry
if you were in it

instead it's the wind
uneasy in dead trees

there has to be devotion
to make it work,

Lacan or backside,
anything you really mean.

One fungous blanket
covers all kinds of sleep.

17 December 2001