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ROOTS OF POETRY

(Take a poet
And find out everything that ever happened to her

Start with that,
The roots of poetry:

Action and reaction and things seen and musics heard and books red and books neglected

These are the *roots* of poetry
(not the water, not the seed, not the nutrients —

these are the ones must be kept secret
while the poet's alive)

[16 Sept 2000]

1.
Take a poet
and find

find out
everything

find out everything
that ever happened

ever happened
to her.

Start with that,
those stammers,

poetry is the black
mirror, what is written

is all there is,

all there ever was,

it is the world
where everything happens

happens twice
once as world

and twice as word
and never done

and all the ands
she'll ever have

stitched her world
together with

unraveled
later to know

it new,
all those ands

are your hands too
adding and subtracting

the beautiful mindless
weaving of the mind

a body walking
through the world

2.

The roots of poetry are action and reaction and things seen and
musics heard and books read, and books neglected, school
assignments never completed, promises never kept

Because all a poem is
Is all your ever
Promises
Suddenly kept.

3.

These are the roots of poetry
(not the water of it , not the seed. The seed is so long back, far
back, soft back, no one could ever find it, we must keep
looking, o lady deep inside to find the seed

o god I want to be your root)

1 December 2000

Earth and quake
So the earth moves
Manages if it were not
Solid could not move
No *Solve* sans *Coagula*.

1 December 2000

1 T

A knife can open many
things but can a knife open itself?

There are sparrows in the sky some days
so some days birds have skies in them

deep deep because
no Emerald Tablet ever lies but is no simple rune

for everything is, and everything has,
a reciprocal.

Guess who I am
against whom you lean back

so softly, all history
insisting that we come together.

2 December 2000

PORTRAIT OF A MAN AT NIGHT

Now it is too late to be anything at all. I waited for you to call until the telephone turned into a little ash forest in the uplands of Gloucestershire chopped down a hundred years ago by speculators. I wanted to tell you how much I wanted you to be the person who brushed by me with a smile in the crowded market. But you weren't there and the market was empty. The cheese sellers, conscious of your indifference, had rolled their wares back into rhubarb leaves and gone home, men with corkscrews in their hand could not find the men with dusty bottles of wine, it is terrible, I wait at the marble table of a tea house and a Tunisian waiter leans on the green chair beside me and tells me an interminable story about a Bedouin and a well. Marble sounds just like interminable. Where are you? I want you. I want to stand in the street in full sun looking up at the interesting façade of the glove shop and have you walk up to me and press against me without in any way compromising your smile. I want the newspaper to be full of rumors of what you're thinking, right now, what are you thinking about wherever you are, where are you, I waited for you to call until language dried up and all the words blew away and the moon rolled down the sky like an interminable marble rolling nowhere, nowhere, where are you, and now it's one in the morning and the moon is gone and I am left standing here like a wrought iron streetlamp lit months ago and still burning.

2 December 2000

Vibration
they tell me
is just an echo
of liberty

liberty
the afterbirth
of symmetry
so I don't know

I don't know
who you are
really you
don't know me

or else you do
and only I
am alone
in this mystery

night science
the things we know
the knowing of them
hard as starlight

spearing down December
how dare you look
up here they tell me
how dare you see?

2 December 2000

NOSTALGIA FOR NOW

The breath gets shorter in December

Bereshith because

it is the beginning of something else, the start ups,

the asthma that answers all the inspired avowals of November

that lead to doubt and loss

maybe but teach a kind of love there's no denying us,

the patience of being, knowing the intricate together

that comes from *waiting for this*

and never looking past the delicate distance so brief between us.

3 December 2000

CANZON CORNETTI OF SAMUEL SCHEIDT 3:34

but it's not clear it's not here
it may be what we're looking
for it may be what we're
looking with, we'll never find it
unless we look at our hands
looking, the fingers are eyes
the arm is an animal the bird
lives far away in a tiny sky
with ribs of storm clouds all
around and everything lives
forever if it was ever alive

2.

brass has a sound a taste
tells the noise to muse on this
and mean something at us
the way a hand does when
it points to a door or a fire
or a bird on the tree
and the tree too is on fire
and the brass answers
every question just the same

3 December 2000

how could I tell you the one thing I need to say
when everything keeps remembering me

far away, like a trout skipping under whitewater
then gone and nothing left in water but water

movement writes itself away too I leave the room
gasping for another set of values something

that could make the touch eternal make the skin
more like a desert wind make the hands

more like the wheatfields I will feed you forever
I will live longer than any river takes you to be sea

4 December 2000

sedjem

Knowledge is a reed

reed marsh bundled mast of Egypt
today René Marie Rilke was born

to dig a deep broad well
with rough stonework coping

intricately round
the simplest thing

the water of that well

for me to sprawl athwart and gaze
deep into star-craft star-cunning the being

the nature of the stars
you see only down there

word abyss

truest well.

4 December 2000

ISLANDS

une cuisine cubane
here in Nueva
restaurant on Amsterdam
rabo guisado y platanos y frijoles y
cuban sandwich that means eggplant & cheese compressed on grill
y now the coffee intensely noir

and wait for flan
we once called flawn

an island ago
Devon or heaven I
still think to call

slew-foot oxen swagging their tails home.

5 December 2000
NYC at the Café con Leche
First draft on Palm3xe

If I write quickly
I might learn

to wrote clearly,
even normally

but if I write normally
who would be speaking?

What happens then
to whom?

Dreams appear
speaking their own language.

5 December 2000
NYC

There are people around here who live without air
any air.

They live in sand
they rise up suddenly and capture people like me,

they say: you have breathed too much.
Too much of the planetary vapor has
already been defiled by your meanings

your feelings, by whatever you take
it into your head to say.

And who gave you
the right to say whatever comes into your head?

5 December 2000
New York

NEW YORK SONNET

Discernibly bad Feng Shui made dreams
All night bad bed posited all too east
By west tormented jealousy wrong books
Pointlessness and loss get out of town
Proposes itself as a modest solution
Of a problem the size of the galaxy to wit
Enlarged appetites diminished capacities
It is something in the neurons something blue
Scandalizes dream priests some lewd flower
Spring up in the wrong place balladeers
Carousing through the streets in island Spanish
Wishing too in their coarse Leo-rising way
They too were somewhere else and the moon full
Of some amber light we could actually use.

6 December 2000
Hotel Excelsior, Suite 901

Can such things be
the order of night
reveals a sparrow light
first on the fluted cliffs
my palisades
spilling quietly
to the north
along someone's private river.

6 December 2000,
Amtrak

ELEGY FOR NANCY MATHEWS

Rex Stout lived in a lime green house
On the top of a little bare hill
Just up the road from yours. In those days
I didn't read such stuff, my trash
Was Anglican and old, it took me
Twenty years to get to Nero Wolfe,
That Balkan bachelor, that American.

You showed me a lime green house
And said Uncle Rex lives up there,
We go to see him all the time, his beard
Is longer than yours. Long and white
While mine was red, bronze, Babylonian,
Bad. Everything I ever did was wrong.
Too many wives, books, wants, needs,
Cups of coffee. All hidden in dank trees

My house without hill was not at all green
Except when sunlight tinged the spruce
And I remembered being half in love with you
In your dynamite blue MG you called
By a tender name I don't remember.
And my trees are all cut down too,
Who are we, who are we, loved the way
Someone I never conceivably could be
Suddenly, all round me, palpably was.

I had to talk brash about Rex Stout
To prove my poverty and my poetry were
Conditioned by dynamite experiment
And never bourgie like a house on a hill
Color of some rich lady's Easter coat
In the days when women dressed for Spring
As if it was at last their lover come
Over the green hill to choose them at last
And take them where language never comes

Into the silent snuffy tenderness of houses
Where old men entertain pretty nieces
And everything is spoken by the eyes
Which have a sense of tempo of their own.
But no tenses to this verb, or all of them
Are gone; what the Greeks called *aorist*,
Unbounded, limitless, we just call past.

6-7 December 2000

HYMN TO PERSEPHONE

I've told the truth now tell the truth
You need me because I need you
There is a flower because you say so
Because I saw you growing in that lawn

You were Persephone herself and yet
You also were the flower she bent to pluck
Can I suddenly be you and let myself
Gather you from the dark interior

Of which the only sign we see
Are all those busy dandelions loosing
Their simple scripture across our pagan
Earth will you let me bend to you

And will you bend then and pull me
Loose from the entanglements of the natural
Into the serene patience of your focused will?
For 'I' read 'you.' For 'you' read 'me.'

7 December 2000

Watching the horizon
I see humanity
disguised as smart blue apes I
suddenly know some great poet is dead,
Artmann, I guess, who could make
a goldfish speak Viennese.

And away it would swim
to sport before St Francis
no mean poet himself
though no record swims
of his ever having mastered
even ordinary German.

7 December 2000

