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LET US BREAK ALL THE OLD ENTRANCES

We are so old
I don't know why we
Get so old. So old
To be, because

Pianos. Chopin.
Life itself is old
On this young planet,
We were we

Before geysers spoke
We saw sagas
And we scythed wheat

Before wheat was,
We were old
Before a tree
A cycad was a pale

Idea of all the fronds
Of us, diseases
Were bad ideas we
Had and some spat

Flowers toys hazelnuts
All these came here
Before none of us
And even the oldest of us

Is an immigrant from now.

2.

Because this is always.
It happens we are in an old drawing room
In a nineteenth century salon
Listening to Chopin's sonata.

But in fact this is always.
This particular this
Is eternity
And all there is of it.

History this hand.

15 December 2000
Rokeby

When you're slumped down in the sofa
you see things the way children do

those marvelous low eyes
as if you were a yellow flower looking

up at the treading populace
of strange large old animals

all hearing the same music
you vibrate also too, but you have color.

15 December 2000
Rokeby

CHEMIN DE FER DE LA PENSÉE

On its way
To your house
An incredible
Number of sleeps
Away. Count
Yourself by
How many times
You answer me.

Ocean of air.
Only that mistake
Knows the way
We call the heart.

15 December 2000
Rokeby

SCHUMANN'S PHANTASIE Opus 17 in C

for Franz Kamin

I have this candelabrum
because the beautiful old house is old

I have this candelabrum
of ten lights

ten
candles all pretty

much the same height
each one was kindled
and is bright

burning
with more or less the same
size of flame

and this
I carry with me
down the long windy dusty hallway

I find a big old door
that lets me kick it open
it gets colder and I know

the outside is coming in

I come to join it
out there the dark veranda
down the steps
into the interminable sameness of the night

my only mother

now, and as it is
I am orphaned every dawn

To go carrying my candlestick

over the crust of ice of snow melted and frozen and
melted again, down
through meadow and trees
to the pond between this life and the river

the river always means something

this is the river
Schumann drowned in
though they call it here
by a different name

something old and Indian
nothing to do with the night I am

but it is the same river
it is always the same river

but a pond now, a pond is something
I can handle, I can walk into it holding my light
full of life and freezing cold
and that's my trouble
I am too alive, why am I always alive
old and cold and alive
alive in a dead world,

this dead world

with a live pond in it,
still not frozen

I stumble down the muddy shelf
then I throw my candlestick
my ten light candelabrum
out in front of me
high it arches up and falls
of course in slow motion down
into the bizarre smugness of dark water

but keeps burning!
Here's a trick Robert Schumann taught me,
it goes on burning, every
single flame still prospers
burning deep down in the water
it lights up inside

and the bronze candelabrum
comes to rest
flaring light, evidently eternal or lasting
long enough for me to leave it there and go home,

leave it burning down there
lighting up the hidden underneath of everything.

15 December 2000
Rokeby

WHAT JESUS SAID TO MARY

Whoever is listening
if you want to be
saved from the music

just remember me.

Said the mother to her Son,
You are the music
and what then?

I am no more music
than a law court or a rubber ball
a dance floor or a bowl of corn

And that is what I said you are,

for everyone who names you
is your mother,

and all you are ever
is what men say you are.

So you are Christmas and an empty room,
dead mouse behind the bookcase
full of books nobody will ever read again

yet they too love you, love you
like a loaf of bread.

We are
and are in heaven when we taste your hand.

15 December 2000
Rokeby

Clock ticking in the morning kitchen
My only anthem
Woman sleeping
My only work to wake

My only work's to wake the woman
This is the sound that has opened all my life
The quiet never precisely regular clock beat
Between the birds and the refrigerator, clear
Sometimes, veiled others under chances, other dances,

This is the sound that makes the silence seem.

And this is the sound I try to bring
Blatantly as poetry

A broken cup in the kitchen sink
Still has room for everything.

16 December 2000

TURN

Turn things around
Be difficult

Be a letter
Somebody wants to read
Intensely.

And be the light she reads it by
A secret yellow silk wallpapered boudoir
Old now and tattered
She reads the letter in,

Be the alphabet
That can spell such things

My hand reaches out to you.

16 December 2000

Eating is such a strange solution
to a problem we haven't yet
looked in the teeth

it goes with old houses with plaster
ceilings scabbed with mold
with long empty corridors I love you

only we are ever supposed
to be new in this old world
everything else is lichen and oak

mushroom and philosophy
so these functional lips are meant
to say *My love goes to another country*

even if the other country
is just tonight
and her hand lies in my hand sleeping

or seeming, and this
muscular interdigitation
is the same as peace

long enough for you or me to wake
and look at the far ceiling
and smile and think maybe I'm hungry.

17 December 2000

VARIATIONS

My love goes to another country
Even if it is just this one we dream
Together in night by night

Magdeburg or Berlin
A place I need
To know you in,
Gebetbuch
My little prayerbook

All I ask you
Is you open your
Pages to me
And let me chant
At the top of my voice

All the gods you have
Stored inside you
Story on story wrapped
Until they give me
Everything I need

And this also is you.

17 December 2000

επισοδε ρεμεμβερινγ φαλχαρραγ

=====

Ωηεν Ι χαμε το της ωορλδ
αλρεαδψ Ι ωασ ωονδερινγ
ανδ ωηεν Ι λεφτ ιτ Ι ωασ ωορριεδ, λορδ,
ηαδ ι τακεν μορε τηαν ι ηαδ γιπεν?

τηεν της ποιχε βεγαν το σπεακ το με ιν με

Kind, was machst du? The
world
Is larger than your hand,
smaller
Than your mind. Nothing goes
And everything comes — what
worries you?

17 December

2000

(Waz wirret dir is what it said in Middle High German?)

a rock smashed by a glass

— Hafiz

the fragment I call by my name
I pick up sliver by sliver
From where you smashed me
Beautiful in moonlight each by each

17 December 2000

Till then we keep forgetting things
what are they and why do we care —

he was afraid of flying so she held him
high in the air, she could do that,
ten thousand feet in the air over the roof of their house
she held him and whisked him back and forth
like a revolutionary waving a flag on the barricades

and gradually he calmed down, recognizing
this as his own sky, his own clouds,

the same ones that fooled him when he was four
into thinking his house was falling down
because they were moving so fast away from him.

17 December 2000

At last this little piece of string this loop
möbius'd around a girl's wrist saying
remember to love this man
more than the other, because a string
makes a knot only when you stress it
that otherwise is so loosely slung
lovers lying together easy in the sand of the bed

is a piece of string. A mystery
like a church on fire I saw from the window
reaching past the blue and white porcelain
Chinese urn full of blue hydrangeas

to see actual flames. A string is like a fire.
Like water. "When the fire comes
I will be water," the martyred Imam said,

Noble Drew Ali, ca.1926

because things blossom in the bosom of each other.
I heard that in French once

and a bus full of women in snug wool skirts sailed over the hill.

17 December 2000

flooded little park,
 one more of those they said was dead

come show us
the flooded little road beside it

beside us. Big plumes of water
splayed up when cars go through fast,

the heraldry of water
 on the high hill of light
 displayed.

Pitch your pavilion here, lady,
 Where I can shelter in the rain itself.

17 December 2000

A dagger from the sky
is what it is
a bullet in the chest
on the wide steps of the Bourse

both weapons strike the same spot
ribcage left side below the heart

we are wonderful
to be so wounded

to be killed so often
and live, to die
so often and be alive

neverending overtone of what note held?

18 December 2000

(poem

for Ungaretti)

I understand everything.
It is far away.

18 December 2000

When did I not touch you.
Neither shrinking nor welcoming, you
became simply, briefly, the place
to which touch referred.
You didn't repel my hand,
didn't seem even to endure it.
We coalesced, the way the shadow
of one object mingles seamlessly
with the shadow of another.
We are shadows, we should mingle,
people watching would see nothing,

a pale cloud shaped like an A
disappears in the uninterrupted blue
of bright winter sky. And light too
in light is unified.

18 December 2000

pieces of reaction, a smarmy colonel
in a private's war, be blue
around the gills and gasp
anthems of retired tyrannies

hoping the brittle diamond
will tip your scepter and bring her
whom you never altogether remember
to worship at your hasty throne

stranger things have hoping.
A barcarolle or swell of grease
lofting your little rowboat home
with a hammer rusty in the bilge

because nothing ever has to be done.
It is too easy to be cynical finical
frivolous or mean. I just want to know
what the woman means when she

looks at me and says nothing at all
but doesn't look away. Silence
also needs a deft translation.
I hold my breath and try to hear.

18 December 2000

so long they were away from people on their island their fogs our
fingers trying to understand one another's faces no moon in that sky
no stars beneath such clouds or maybe this really is the surface of stars
what they're actually like this gloom is Sirius and I cannot find you close
as we have grown there is always a little in each of me that shrinks back
from the holy hand from the bible of skin

and fog like this makes every priest an atheist to find by touch what he
had lost in thinking

and maybe this is what the stars really are and all their famous light
comes only from the friction of hot distances alone

and each star by itself is mute and netherlandish with grisaille a street
of hopes and houses left abandoned in an endless early winter where in
the howl of wind we make believe we hear geese and wolves and gulls
yammering at the relentless sea

we are stars and have found each other in the dark so now no one can
answer us and we have to keep falling always inward into each other
there is no other escape we keep each other's freedoms deep inside and
hasten to each merciful abyss.

18 December 2000

Catch a deciding
Revision of a star —

Unfortunate artists
(Montesquiou, Higgins maybe)
who had enough money to
put a lot of art in their lives,

lifestyles, instead of conversely.
Conspicuous displays

and yet I love them, the bats, the barricades
against the ordinary

in which we poor painters
have to put
all our art
such as it is

onto rough canvas imported from somewhere
and scratch our hairy
balls in secrecy.

19 December 2000

