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Imagine an alphabet that fits this skin
and yours too, so that to write a shopping list
becomes a Bible. Knows everything you are.
To write. Not the poem novel essay biography
but to write. Letters of a word, word
of a dread, bread of a body, skin of time
and lymph of the lost, this bright blood,
bone and no one home. Imagine I can tell you in the dark.

12 January 1995

A MAN AFRAID OF HEIGHTS IS FALLING
FROM A JET AT 35000 FEET WHILE TRYING
TO WRITE A BEAUTIFUL POEM

(for Tai Situ Rinpoche)

Why is the earth so eager to meet me?
We're both one turning
around the same sun,
won't she let us go our separate ways

around? Why must she take me?
Already I see the thatch of her house,
green grass and winter dry,
a dog barks, a chimney smokes—

whoever I was, I almost flew.

13 January 1995
New York

GRAMERCY PARK, LOOKING NORTH

That a crack runs down the brick
(if I can't write here
where I was born
and where it began
in me to speak
where should I write)
but the wall won't fall.

2.
Open all the doors, the manners
and all night long the emergency
vehicles hoot up and down
loudly rescuing the invisible.

3.
That sly-eyed charmer on the train
how to cure him of seducing,
of deceiving, of his baseball cap,
and will the sun come out?

Are we that bad? The vague rush of words
in a sudden orator's excitement,
espontaneo, floods the wit
like Russian music,

Russian Aprils when the rivers crack
and everything is noise with hidden meaning,
Russian music, the spring is coming,
houses piled on houses,

copper rooftops of my masterpiece,
birthplace, my cause, city ever, as ever
waiting till the body answers
everything it has in mind.

14 January 1995 New York

THE WORLD A WINDOW OWNS

These are your people, sheep, tents, Judæa, all —
just these windows you see from your window,

the eighty or so apartments you can glimpse
in these slices of a dozen buildings, o secret
geometry of all their private lives, morning mist,
shades down, curtains sweeping, copper
penthouse roof and tile all verdigris and soot,
condos, old row houses, backs and shafts and courtyards
and one soft flag. All the people here
are who you need. A window's worth of world,

and they need you. Figure out the ways
to know them and make them happy,
let them change you into what makes sense,
delicate sciences of all these gulfs and bricks and distances.
Pray to the old wooden water tower on that roof in fog.

15 January 1995
New York

NEEDS

Waiting for needs (nieces' knees,
uncles' ankles) (there are relations)
(deep in the etymons)
a face like a failed monster
(education needs a lobby)
(a fated tryst) (a Galilee) (by the Royal
Palace then up the Damrak then
across the narrow harbor then to bed)
(grieving all the things I've learned

that Idyll of Theocritus made me grey
that sloppy Ajax kept me motionless,
or ornaments from Frescobaldi's toccata
kept me mute, hide my face) (beasts
of the Great Barrier) (what is known?
Whatever do we really know?) (if one
then everyone) (to know a thing
is to inherit its location in the world)
(intuit) (her knees) (the shimmer
of her far harbors) (Brooklyn gantries)
(Federal, neo-Dutch?) (the oily islands
all have changed their names)

(my body is waiting also) (deep
rooted in the blooming market) (by the water
wondering west) (needs) (needs need you
did you know) (a peel of soubrette, a pangsied
damsel) (la pensive? Penseuse?) (wise riff
amid the stasis) (old cheese by the canal)
(the simple spouts of friendliness) quick
red silky music (acronym)
(keep coming) (everything has legitimate
activity, liberal roots, you leave your heart
inside them, transplutonian elements)
(said Rilke) (ruffs the old ones wore,
merchant venturer or Calvin's daughter)

(what kind of disclosure?) (knows her?)

(remember all those inventive Scots) (whistle,
weep, weedy thready insidious machines)
(wear our clothes) (they breathe through our noses)
(and I'll come to you) (castle? Will you keep?)
(dungeon or Don Juan?) (weasel or wassail,
who?) (wither or weather?) (yesterday I read
silk a lesson) (teach me to touch) (let me write
with your pin) (on skin?) (can't do) (a thousand
streets lead there but it's still just one house)

(in the name of the flower) (and of the sun) (a red
one) (brick lies under a maple tree) (no lack) (o Mensch,
your contrivances! O momma our memories!)
(mooching down the Minorities Sunday morning
on our way after St. Pauls) (what were we doing
on earth?) (and of the holy host) (I will be your verger)
(sang her hymns) (anthems? Just some flowers)
(Cæsar's elegant stamina pollen golden)
(sperm at you, a dust of sunlight spattered
in a mist of maybe?) (sparrow sparrow) (name of a name)
(frog kabbalah) (parliament of hoax)
(my little owl wired to the weather, sound cool
for sommerwetter) (you're obdurate) (contumacious
you consume me with wanting) (waiting)
(who would be slower than the air?) (the art)
(make less sense than some dumb song?) (nobody
understands it either Bobby just try to sing along)

16 January 1995

SIDEWALK

(it steps along) (so high must come some song)
(needs us) (meaning needs us) (must smell of old)
(the smell of in) (peppermint or my egregious)
(I forget) (arcade in Amsterdam) (all ocean
and no rim) (no river) (lucidity
seems to trail away at the tails of words) (we begin
and no man knows the end) (the edges flare)
(the light itself a blur of sense) (what else
could ever reach us here) (a nervous churchman
my sermon's all apologies) (comes a slaty junco to
birds' establishment) (most things who says are wrong)
(eating is simple, eating is rare) (the point of time
is each enclosure) (brackets helping me to mean)
(or a shelf for every item) (each thing
is its place) (merchants of Amsterdam) (measure
the shabby rivieras of the world and bring
black butter back with you from the shale
where shabdaks sing their deep refusals)
(your daughters pause in the flush of wonder
can such extractions leave the earth unhurt?)
(so long demure) (eat off her floor) (only
the language waited) (the words write themselves
to spite me as I sleep) (every diary a planchette)
(hoojie ouija) (the page turns you and you're gone).

17 January 1995

RECOGNIZING

All small things — ravenous cloudlight — to soak the earth
into my skin my thing my sin — this utter now

scandals of daylight mirroring down — sheets
of sudden gossip hear me — I know this place —

18 January 1995

WHAT DAYS WERE THOSE

Yore? No yearner than yester. I've a yeaned lamb
waiting for you, a lamp to wick, let's hear it
for my final song. They do business in the morning,
their very cleanness is offensive, too close
they shave, what are they saying and by whom
were those words scripted that they talk?
I speak a dialect of time, I age on you, my song
inures in your account, your skin discovers
and learns to understand me first, your bones
are a whistle wakes me from my servant sleep
unprivate to do (unknown to both of us) your will.
I am stewardess of an airline long since ceased to fly.

19 January 1995
New Paltz

FIRST DAY OF PLUVIOSE

and pluviosus as can be: a heady rain
walks the porch roof. I wonder at how big the little river
whitewaters by, a man waddles uphill below umbrella.

It's an opera. Good enough for me the long
sympathy of weather, it never loses its relevance,
its deft vocabulary runs down the poor man's neck.

20 January 1995

A BIRTHDAY POEM FOR MARVIN

Live forever!

When you think about being a child
you remember the main difference
between you and adults: you
had sensations and they had opinions.

Cease to cherish opinions some old Zen man
instructed, and everything will come out right.
It is the method of immortality.
Having opinions gives the mind a place to stop

idle by the roadside. There death can find it,
death strutting along like a nun in a classroom
quick to nab any drowsy scholar
and boot him up the hall to the final dark.

21 January 1995

Boston sits on the ocean like an old lady at the opera
vaguely wondering whether the sea has something new to say
and wondering as ever about all those dusky machos
who shlep the spears around behind the tuneful fatsos,

worry worry worry, sing sing sing, it's a wonder the streets
don't crack with all our practiced anxiety. Did I wash today?
Are there poor people stirring in the shadow of my house?
Why don't we elect somebody who can solve it all at once

the way the sun does when it pops up out of Logan?
Get rid of all the dark. And as for the poor ("The poor
you will have always with you," said Jesus,
but he was angry at the time, wasn't he, annoyed,

even he was annoyed by their ceaseless petition
for food, water, shelters, health care, education...)
leave them to the churches. After all a church needs
something to do with all its money. I came here

for the fine white stars, not for your nameless whining.

21 January 1995

TO A POET IN OKLAHOMA

It is nice to get things from you
a hand with so many fingers

taking hold
the mail
the morrice-dancers with noses in a book
learning their feet
how to move

nothing but wonder and wonder
the hangman gets a day off

wonder in wonder
you send me your poems out of the pure
mythical unwashed body of America
sandstone and underwear
I read you red
clay your answer to the sun
that foreigner

who comes and comes

no one knows where he's been

there is no answer but everyting.

I send back the same
from eastern armpit to southly navel
this sordid semaphore of my love and difference
my doubt my stick in your mud

my eye disguised as the moon
waiting to seal your nights
(steal your nights)
with sheen or glimmer like the silver
look in an animal's eye

o even a deer or a duck

when you're too close to each other

altogether

and yet we see.

22 January 1995

When you think you hide the woods
there is a failure in my path
a death or doorway the weather knows
I guess from shadows but I go

and all the rest of it is blunt about remaining.
And the shadow is a comfort to behold
and in that country there are shadows you can touch
and I have pressed them to my skin, no different

from any person I stood beside admiring the world.
Now I have turned the light-soaked corner
and am safe in the nameless peace of place.
A street at right angles to the sun.

A tongue. Smell of turpentine in a vacant lot,
a bush, a parliament of smells. Dark-cadred,
I hurry all these years to flee my home.
But home sticks to my skin like time.

23 January 1995

THE MAN WHO UNDERSTOOD ANTIGONE

for Marvin

You have imagined her waiting in her tomb.
Waiting for what? A justice, that comes
not often in this world, this dark one. She wants
no husband but the truth — that naked

animal who makes us such discomfort
with his appallingly simple vocabulary.
With your own pain you witnessed her dismiss
every reasonable argument as quibbling,

mean-spirited. No subtlety is needed:
the distinction between the living and the dead
is the only one we have to know. A brother's
body lies on the ground, property of crows,

and a man jabbars about the law. She recognizes
everything is false but death.
And you understand her, her certainty,
how can she be so absolute, but she is, she lifts

her throat to the rope, wipes away the last
distinction. Now you see her body caught
in her dumb lover's arms, like a proposition
in geometry finally understood too late.

There is so much to understand. Did you once
stand between a mountain and a war
and learn the only point of living was
to live the one you are? To trust your heart

and know the whole law is a dead girl?

23 January 1995

Open the image. That is all I ever said.
Anything you can see is a door.

Anything you can touch. On an old vellum
some oil or butter's smeared, abstaining ink.

There the word shimmers. Things stain us
with their serene lucidity.

Only the animate blurs. We go
too fast for a quiet world, our sleazy music.

24 January 1995

MEDITATION

Snow quieting down. Baroque behavior
of squirrels, trunks and branches.
Skies and skies of snow
ready for us. Balls of suet hung in trees,
black sunflower seeds up for grabs,
we do our bit, make winter.
Yesterday you took the wreaths down.
One red squirrel among all the grey.
The Charterhouse of Parma waiting
for its reader, that insolent hero,
to swagger in. All books are me.
A reader tyrannizes. Snow sifts.
At the last breath, we don not betray our natures—
lost in the desire world but sending letters home.

24 January 1995

Something sweet and funny and happy
birthday on a fallen planet
like some French salon music around
the time of serious Debussy
all we have is each other is it enough
just barely and as for all
the institutions in the world it's
enough to make the cat laugh.

24 January 1995

So I want to move into
a house I want to build
I want to build a house in this sky
this particular sky
with the sycamore here and the mountains there
just out of reach of the out-
stretched fingers of the hemlocks down there
that hide the water and all the rest
those rich women who live by the river

I want to live in that house for two months maybe three
and I want what I see right this second
to be out every window and every door
and instead of a floor and no ceiling but what I see
right now, this sky peculiar with clouds
a density of meaningful relations
packed in grey weather with a slice of gold
cutting in from the far west under the edge of
whatever it is hides those rich women who live by the river

who would dare to call it space or time or even mind
it is what is and it is what I see and what I see
is all I am and I want to move into what I am
and live nowhere else forever and ever
maybe more than three months maybe the sky
is beyond anything I imagine and I imagine
at this very instant up into the quick breath the lovesick
hurry of cloud into wind and an uninflected clarity
beyond all our occasions beyond anything I have ever
seen deep behind the eyes of all those rich women who live by the river.

24 January 1995

