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This time I have a picture of it happening—
the ship made of clamshells in full sail,
the grey hair in the wind, the cliffs of home
and then by chance herself—by sheer
eventfulness the world reveals her
standing in that doorway
with the dark house full of books behind her,
all the light and reason in her face.

This time I have a picture of it happening,
the hurricane bothering Bermuda, and the American coast
unguarded save by media, whose cameras
glint in my mind documenting one more passage.
Waves coming in and going out, the crash and wind
and all that opera. And no one listening
and only the house walls groan, sea miles and
gull cries, and broken windows on an empty sea.

They say. They say and I listen,
I listen and write down
a picture of me listening

and from what I see I try
to guess what they were saying
shape of their lips,

fall of their eyelids
or the beaches faltering
under the wind's mass

or whatever is talking
using language
we have to guess at

stutter of a script
her tracks or
she smiles. They say

a picture
of me understanding

then I think I do,

it is a weather
understood as city
wind street, hail house.

It is what happens
is our only town.
I guess to breathe.

The great work is beginning
it is hard, it is a door

to keep ghosts out
and let their language in,

just like the little copper slot
that lets the mail.

The great work is a brazen basin and is ash,
as water is the ash of air it is light,
or put it that way, Tom,

water : air :: light : x,
whose ash is light? Whose shadow
is this brightness?

Guess guess the crows call
and tomorrows linger
left as today,

we belong
to the future
that's why

this glorious ordinary moment is so poignant,
it is what we were being before we are.
That's why I always tell the weather.

Because the weather is the spirit in us talking
out there where we can't refuse to see.
And that is *renga* too,

bad music
of the other
you must hear

to know yourself yourself
and answer
with appropriate contralto.

This moment
is museum
and holds all we need.

After lunch in the hall of living sculptures
we'll seek the exit
tile-gated, marble-paved, conceivable

but very far.
For now
this illiterate bookbinder's happy at his skill.

This time I have a photo of it happening,
the great work is beginning,
Bernini-transforms
changing geology to anatomy and both to buildings,
you can live in them
or walk around saying mantras
in the astonishment of breathing,
stereotactical hyperzoic amazements
you can rub your haunches on and rest
thumbing the guidebook you find
between the left half and the right half of what you mean.
Maybe brain, I'm not dogmatic
on that point. You find the meaning of the world
when you split open what you think,
and find the lucid core. The empty hollow light-filled core.

You find it in your thighs,
or in the traits-of-union
that hyphenate our ragged liturgy,
this meager me, this ample you.

There the breakers, here the roadwork
all summer long, pavements and beetlers,
jackhammers and the dust we call MacAdam's,
sons are we all of Adam
by that muddy theory
the Jews call holy.

Waves wild from hurricane,
thrust of rage against a road
by local graft or contract
spawned, no difference.

My dialect is to be suspicious,
I sing to allay yours,
lovely listeners, mortgage holders of my grief.
This agitation in which we take our pleasure,
dead music and the sound of rain.

Even this obsequious palaver
to make you love me (listen!),
what people are we who begin
our commands with "Listen...!"
the imperative, the empty
glass turned down, a crust of bread,
no single thing but what it means and more.

The great work is beginning, the part of Spain
they lost in the jungle, the part of Logres
buried in this stray coast, our Merovingian cabal
to rehearse some simple government that will be good to us,
a mother senate not some mean old men.

Find. Find what was never lost.
Look at everything you say
and listen to everything you don't.
That's one way. All the people
of the Açores, black and white and indio
worshipping in one church.

Now take the church away
and leave the people.
Is the sky enough for them?

I think of Barbara who trained dogs
that bit her, and Manus's fat Icelandic ponies,
Gunnar fallen and Hector
dragged around the Trojan suburbs,
he who had been so good with horses.
They touch animals and then touch us.

Sometimes only the subway's listening—
are we there yet? Can't hear the station,
I hear the sound too well but not the word,
what words is she saying beneath the earth,
the only way to travel, stone by stem
by root of power, flower, santeria,
be my breakfast, cornmeal on the platform
strewed in the shape of a heart, human,
some little mice the color of lost money.
Express or local, the noise itself
is what seems to carry, why think?
Why think of subways in the crow-loud forest,
all that going is a standing still
and saying something from a hidden branch
I hear right here? Is hearing understanding?
And all that stalwart standing is just perishing.

The daymare I ride you
to bring the news—
the great work is beginning—

the news is good today,
an arduous ocean
interferes with us

and on a cold night
the traffic passing
sounds like ocean,

a coast is lost
a boundary blurs—
what could be better than tomorrow,

left hand, new art?
All conservatives
are frightened of their sons.

16 August 1995

Once there was a table
now there is a chair

only now
when the seat comes up to the table

and the eucharistic revelers can sit down
in quiet and close their choices

around the enlightening energy
they have taken in

and speak out to us
in the most ordinary words,

only then when the glacial rock sits in the meadow
can the great work be beginning,

I had a table and got a chair,
marked the seat with chalk
and sat down where I said
and made an end to it.

Sit there till you make sense,
the mothers who are language
told me, sit there and make
the kind of sense a table does,

having nowhere to go and no
way to get there, just these excellent

virtues of Stability, Extension,
Emptiness (“barely

and widely”) or Vacancy, and Scale
(it must fit your elbows).
And a table must be quiet
so the dinner can be heard.

The great work is beginning
and the chair must creak too merry
nor must the cushion be too soft,
too many people fall asleep while eating,

reading, writing, staring
at the landscape of their lover’s face,
or the brick wall out the window
or the leaves of maple, something to

count and use the busy-busy
aspects of the mind
while you go thinking.
A table is for thinking.

The great work is beginning
and in Zurich the puppeteers in sunlight
finger their marmots and their hedgehogs
and children are pleased to have
their worst fears confirmed,
we turn into animals easily,

even animals can talk.
Over the hill in hell the beasts are busy—
it is inconceivable that knowing
as much as we do war is still feasible,

say no more, something’s wrong,
wrong with what we know, for some idea
my hand turned into an animal and slew a man.
Men die and kill because they do not fit their names,

the great work is beginning, clear off the table,
only the chairs are needed now
in all this wind, on the cliff called Three-Graces
we migrated into the wind

and let the wind do our knowing for us
and what can a wind know?
An animal is letting go.

Two acres of dead forest
and all through the grey dead leafless trees
purple loosestrife flourishes,
two acres of purple flowers
in the dead woodland, wide
open to the leafless sky two
measures of flowers, purple,
flourishing where moisture lets them,
the swamp that drowned the forest.

Too many people fall asleep in the sky—
put purple flowers on your cushion
and they'll keep you on earth,
purple is chock full of staying,
be here with me, heart,
dawn-wind, light a little purple
before the sun blasts through,
that bronziest swimmer.

Endure language. It endures by changing.
A game of miracles constantly beginning,

a breeze! Some dreamer cries A sail!
Suddenly in endlessness.

And wakes up to instruct us:
Let the wind do it!

But there is no wind, there was
and went away. The sparrows took it,

and the finches, the crows
still have it, toss it in their voices,

the trees by moving made the wind to blow
the boy believed and who will fault him,

ghost of a wind is a word.
Now hum the sentence you don't dare to say.

To live
by not talking
is not the same

not the same
as silence,
silence

has a lot to say,
the Holy Rule
that talks in me,

the eyes unfocussed see silence,
see plenty, the empty
hands hold plenty silence.

Old cartoons wear tight skirts still.
One by one pluck
the fronds off hula skirts until

that rustly raffia is through
and a naked ordinary stands
clear communicating tribal information,

our bodies do not belong to themselves.

17 August 1995

What swords we keep to share,

to wound us with particulars,
the bronze and satin bruises we can show
each other, wounds
carved into wounds, every cut
a pair of lips that tries to tell,

but those are just faces. Real losses
live in shadow, the tears in our eyes
ward them from sight, can't name them
any more, the losses, the voices
we neglected to listened to too well,
the inmost surgeries time works on me.

We lose each other
and with each loss
a chance in me
new space yields.
And if that is lost
—the bare ardent
opportunity—
that is true loss
and an anguish and no name.

No flowers in the graveyard for that one,
no plaque of bronze or six-months'-mind.

18 August 1995

The great work is beginning
(a gap for breathing) (a boat
remembered holds
how many passengers?)

really, Robert, a boat
is just for thinking,
aren't you tired of holding
taut to the devious wind

leaves of rough canvas,
scratches, weary, where are

the winds when you come home,
the leper graves of Penikese

steeping deep
some potent medicine,
old nosodes of homeopathy,
out of deep sickness a cure for all?

Stretch the canvas,
isn't that what Dutchmen
made the painted ground
for all our seeing?

An image is colored
into brief apparency,
embedded on sailcloth
so we are held

by what makes us go?
A meager moment
but the image stays:
Pieter Saenredam: *Interior of the Old Church in Haarlem*,
snapshot of the luminously empty mind.

Under yew trees
round old churches
we plant our dead,
a seed

like everything below the ground
they have on
their own life, a seed
for order, new politics, the Empire

of the world to come, *ha-ba*,
said the Jews, the one waiting
radical in our epistemology
like a corpse in shallow island grave

that rises up on the Third

Morning after the end of the world
imposing its new music
(otter-mewling, gull-keening)

on our glum minimalists.
And we somehow sing again.
A bird will lead us
flying up from under the ground,

the bird of before,
a pillar of song birds
and by night a cloud of fire.
Legible.

It must be legible.
I heard your heart
the way it is with any lovers,
my head on your chest,

loving you, admiring the view,
Vineyard Sound, your breast
with Gayhead light beyond it,
red then pause then white,

time on an island
is most delicate,
the discrete intervals
between the stars

undistributed by streetlights,
we must be legible
to each other, our mathematics
must be quiet and make sense.

Not meaning to
the husband yelled at his wife,
his illegible script tore
in the sea wind, he whined,

nothing to say

but hurt,
heard himself, for days
said he was sorry

and I'm sorry,
what kind of feast
was that to spread you,
meaning well and saying ill,

all our ruined pharmacy
forgive me. The great work
begins with ordinary bread,
the kindness of eating.

He is sorry, he is story,
like any man who happened
to himself
and then to you.

The great work after all
was beginning. Brass image
of its beginner, many arms
for our interminable loneliness.

Mosaic image of a ship
lively and serene, soft in a legal sea.
Try to forgive me, the birds
give lessons on the brevity of thinking,

these squalling finches my Anaximenes.
It never happened. The mind
must be legible. Without
all this translation that sometimes,

even here, sometimes is so beautiful.
Staggered by the arts and measures
of our cunning our lives reel
from word to word. Meantime

two goldfinches

on one branch.
Then two more.
It's just now again
after all.
And not too bad,
the sun.

Sparrow forth, voyagers,
your streaky bosoms puffed
in the wind of politics.
No one listens!
And that is your freedom,

goers, that you can say
everything little by little
and eventually listen,
even you, to what you say
and one day learn,

learn from overhearing
your own chatter,
chitter, clatter
of windy meanings, seedy
hopings, hurry and fluster,

then fall silent around
some seed of silence
suddenly known!

Be corundum! A call
of stone, to impound
a meaning with
sudden carving.

Chisel, mallet,
meaning. The patience
of things to endure
our palaver!

The Ten Thousand
Limestone Stelas
in the Hall of the Classics
in Anyang

from which the wise
take ink rubbings
and so propagate
Established Views

like bumblebees
spreading weeds.
All we think
is pollen. Is money.

Let there be
a stone so hard
no word ever
can be cut in it.

Then see what it says.

19 August 1995

The great work is beginning I thought of leaving
but it is water, isn't,
would the weaving woman leave it
or the man who sets his hands on rock

and ever after the cliffs show clearly pictured
whatever was on its mind when he touched them
with flint or ocher, and whatever she was thinking
is the same as weaving, the same as the skin we wear,

listen to her cloth, that's what my mother said.
Or all my mothers, listen to what you see, and remember.
The weaving woman would not leave it.
The man who taught the rocks to talk still teaches.

And the smart woman

who is not yet my mother
asks: Just what was it
you thought of leaving?

Not the body, it has no exit,
not the mind, it has no edge.
The work you finish
is not the work proposed.

And still I thought of leaving,
of loafing by the beaches of Long Island
watching gay boys and grim girls take pleasure
in the incidental marriage of their bodies with the weather,

I thought of sleeping
but sleep won't have me,
I fall awake during its endless sermon,
I leave his church before the dream.

So maybe I can leave
the image of a ship,
cobbled together out of bits of clam and mussel
and go ashore

into the unimage, the unspecified, the shore
(Apollinaire's *océan de terre*)
but that's just more heaving
slow waves and nights with tail-light rubies running,

one more work to catch them
or follow with all the reverence of desire
their scarlet traces into the appalling dark
to find one more image,

one more thing the Nashawena shepherd made
in the long nights of his other island
when the sheep were sage and his hands
found their way again and again to what I see.

Always one more image one more island.

20 August 1995

The great work is beginning
I know
because the gold is back:
finches, shadows,
shunted golds of afternoon,
a leaf or twig or two
vexed in greenness: back
because never far, the great
work is no distance,
too easy, easy but it's different.

Can you see your own face,
can you spit into your own mouth,
man in a world of mirrors,
everything is glass, everything breaks,
broken mirrors making more mirrors,

everything shows
the way to your face.

Can I whisper in my own ears
the way the flimsiest breezes can?
And so on, the questions
need their dinner now,
what is meat?

The gold. Midas
showed it. Turn food
to gold and anyhow
eat. The story's crooked
as usual, you have
to unwind any story
to make its sense.

Ariadne showed me
a knotted rope
is a way out,

some software for deliverance.

The breath grows larger on a cooler night,
the heavens with a hawk of darkness
isolating islands of stardom,

imagine a Freemason on a Kansas road.
It is almost midnight. The mist
has not risen from the Wakarusa,
it is dry and ever will be, and still, and clear,
not so much hot. Pas si méchant,
ce feu soleil. He is late
getting started, this illuminatus,
he is on his way to the edge of Oklahoma
where solemn initiation doth perpend
and summons him and all his bag of tricks
to that high mysterious liturgy
in his old car. The Old Conditions
of our renaissance endure, made young again
in the slow twang of real estate men,
the acolytes of money, ourselves.
He'll program them. They'll meet
in whatever they can keep of silence
by the bleeding fountains and stone-carved trees
of renaissance engravings, the orders
of architecture will be their meager cloth,
naked they'll stand shivering under cottonwoods
while his unquavering voice admits
the eighteenth century rhetoric of the rituals
into the estranged American air,
almost dawn by now, he looks back
over his shoulder at the grey light
coming from the stone, the intricate worldview
that once unfolded in Italian towns
he gets the drift of now, a stir of dry wind.

22 August 1995

Listen to the words of the abba,
the great work

is fleeing conversation,

ours
is in heaven,
heaven

by the weight of hearing,
the great work
is beginning

and it is finished
as soon as ever it begins
for it is simple

and no strings
or no lute playing no music
in a feast of negatives

and you hear it
and you have swallowed all the possibles
and become the actual

and how light the actual is,
breathy and like a river
with no banks, a sky
with no horizon—

the appearing
is all

eye, eye all
nature one
far seeing

and so on,
and time is not different from weather,
and so on,

it answers
to be simple.

This is the commentary the pen makes
on which the rockledge said
left under the house
by the builder and the glacier,

amazing things one will not see again,

the preposterous arrivals
of what is always here,

downbeat and evening star
and a table that follows you
from island to island

stretched out beyond your fingers' reach,
broad-brimmed, cluttered with stars.

22 August 1995

The great work is beginning
you find it feeling

it said at dawn
find it by feeling

if the light is
then trees are there

you see the alternatives
bleakly, it is waiting

beneath you, behind
you also like a stone

in a forest
who can explain

the history of things,
who can explain

the work of feeling?
At my doorstep

some old cement
extruded from the form,

we amateurs,
has picked up from the wind

one white
duck feather

and is a something
that never was,

an art a fetish
a sacrament

that flies away
inside us

in the one way corridor
to that cabin

by the river
inmost outpost

dry summer
shows the river's bones

the bones
are talking.

26 August 1995