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The trouble with dogs
is that they tell the truth.
I like people around me
to keep telling me lies.

23 November 1995

Obsidian, amber. Obsidian
as if a siege

or be besieged.

Dark-eyed, a man with his back to the wall.
What does he see with his shoulder blades?

Ghosts of brick, autumn sunlight,
the amber light between living and dying,
an army of jobless men walking away.

The disarray of named things,
that his terror has a stone of its own,
he wants to feel her beside him
but he has no side.

24 November 1995

The north coast they call the Coast of Opal
from the Calais fogs shot
through with the flat sun of Picardy.
In the terrible heat wave of 1992
it was cooler than anywhere in France.
Yet the opals I know, Laura
gave me one, ancestral, Austral,
was like a bonfire inside a glass of milk.
Names are all that matter in the world of stone—
call a rock ambivalite and pray to it.

24 November 1995

Then there are the Calvaries,
stone shrines to Jesus dying and Jesus dead

and the women stand around Him
like the Pleiades in a cold black sky

already His body is full of absence.
But the stone's still there. Here.

24 November 1995

THE DARK MIRROR ...

[continued:]

3. *Nembutal*

So many old names for it. Diminish
the intensity. That's what it means.
Sen-sen. Alcohol. Sunglasses.
And I'm another. Once upon a time
there were kings amongst us
travelling incognito among the martinis
and girls in loden coats. Gentle
castile soaps hard-milled, language
does its best. To rescue sinners
from their dirty hands. Spillway
once near Florence, among pines
almost black with winter they walked
"hands" she said "inside one another."

24 November 1995

LA QUESTION

Of course dream is mostly interrogation
— the Gestapo came from somewhere,
after all, things like that don't just get invented.
I remember the hardest question: my favorite
composer. What does that mean?
Somehow I said Bellini, but only after a long
pause, so that neither they nor I
really believed me. They passed on
to other certainties and pains, and left me
treasonous in mind. Gunshots
at waking, hunting season, the strange
pleasures of humans, the chase
never stops, not for a minute. All we see
is sometimes a flurry in deep bushes,
a cry heard, swift passage of a frightened bird.
Where was Beethoven? Bruckner, I thought,
but that was love speaking, and Wagner,
but I wouldn't give them the satisfaction.
And Beethoven I think I was keeping for me.
What giddy company does my sleep keep,
the exhilarating grieving of Palermo, high
sun and strange girls in trouble. Bellini.
O girl in the heart, déesse de seize ans,
deux bras, trois yeux, color of the first
shoots of young rye on the other side of winter,
you who are served by such music,
guide the rowdy silence of my heart.

25 November 1995

These are the nth times we've had to learn
the wetness of H₂O

and trailing that
through used to be water

like the horn of an animal through the German air
an afternoon on a sunny terrace

and then there's the devil to pay.
Mephistopheles to wit

in gaudy rose-bespattered hose.
The simple things I forget

when I'm listening to music!
Like a man walking to Hilversum

through the rain forgets the rain.
Someone is always waiting.

25 November 1995

At the last station, a Citgo,
I got a free cup of coffee
with a fill-up (8 gallons minimum).
And at this one they offer
two cents off each gallon
if I buy a cup of coffee inside.
O powerful reciprocals, o
precious fluids on which we run.

26 November 1995
Red Hook

It is a matter of what we know,
and how much we told those others
who only know what we tell them
or through us, reaching out
through the words of our skin to
touch the unlovely distances of
all those people. The dream ones.
There is nothing later than this.

This is the hour when the clocks open
and the stuff they have been making
with all their turning and the whirling
tumbles out across the floor. Pink sand
just like Jonathan Edwards' pulpit
hourglass, measuring the ineluctable
passage from grace to perdition.

Dream tracks. Walk towards me
over the sand of the floor, shuffle
so your dry feet make that slurring sound
and drop a garment at each step
until you are naked and close, so close
I can't see you, your belly pressed on my eyes
and I have lost the world again in you.

Even dreams break. The contrition
of the meekest sinner is a mighty music,
sounds like lovers making love
all night in the room next door. Or wind
batting at the window ivy. Or owls
in the next woodlot complaining of the moon.

26 November 1995

As if the angels were exhausted
ideas quiet. Crabapple tree.
Old friends from the Black Sea.

28 November 1995

There is a swagger to the morning
an éclat of crows.

Things are only outrageous when they're new,

things come later, a morning
has no use for mechanism,
it is all time, pure time, succulent

wispy clouds on a vague horizon
like a man with seven wives
and each wife has seven clouds

and every cloud has seven storms
and every kiss the night let you have
still on your anxious lips

you have to pay for now. The crows
call again. You are not
alone and not together, you are alive.

Only a thing can ever hope to be alone.

28 November 1995

THREE DEEP RED ROSES AFLOAT IN A
DEEP BLUE CHINESE BOWL WITH A BIRD
IN IT

1.

No well, but geology the old sacred landshape
and ruddy chickens cross ley lines on grim
grain errands. Who can bear the quiet of sheep
standing shorn in October rain? I asked the master
why have you come here, for the sake of the sheep?
And he to me: Would I have come for the shearer?
When wool is its own reward and a glistening hand?

2.

The faint absurdity of great men is something to think about,
and the glitter of old fashioned louvered oval microphones.
Everything becomes a skeleton of something else, this bone
your sound this song your skin this touch your tantrum
me and you twist together like wire in a coathanger.

3.

The reason is they are a little larger than themselves they smudge
Kennedy was like that, a smudge of brown fire in the rain
and children make noises like airplanes, somebody has to
and the police ride by in smoke-filled gondolas, at last
they have caught up with the dead, those arrant floating voices
that run around in the back of my mouth, moths in a garden
and you are the only light, I suppose I mean you make me talk,
what else can I do burdened with such intimate forgettings?

28 November 1995

POETRY IS THE SICKNESS OF LOVE

...and each caress relapse into a villanelle.

1.

When love is sick it speaks
and what it says is poetry.

2.

Does poetry come from love,
morbid efflux of that passion?

3.

Or does love arise and fall
from grasped (too firmly!) languages?

4.

Does love fall out of poetry
the way a day falls out of a vivid dream

a background music we cannot escape
until we sleep and dream again?

5.

Why does love impeach the actual
and say it is unreal, and have the same
said back to it in turn?

6.

Is love a malaise of grammatical relations
mapped into poetry, as poetry?

7.

There is no despot like any old transitive verb.

29 November 1995

I hear your voice talking inside me
a part of the body breaks off
and becomes a boat, the boat
smashes on the rocks, the old wood
rots in the restless sea, barnacles
grow on splintery timber, burst
and turn into birds. It all comes from you.
The gap a boat breaks between two lands.
Hands. Sometimes you are not eager.
Sometimes I think I have to coax
your eyes to follow me as I bob in my
turn on the sea, sometimes I think
I have to make you touch me, you say
nothing but I hear your voice in my head.
Stuff turning into stuff. Mouths telling
too much. Let the mind stay in the mind.
Let the voice I listen to be enough for me.
People love each other in the deepest
secrecy. The words are secret too
and mean another thing. A thing
not you and not me and not between.
The fourth apex of the triangle.

... 29 November 1995

S N O W

Each time it snows it's the first time
and everything is fresh knowing.
Barefoot and clueless I stumble to the door.
What miracle of incapacity is this?

29 November 1995

I have taken with me the broken measure.
It still works for cloud shadows,
the places that are mostly passing,
Wyoming. It is built of wood,
a lath like a ruler but marked
off like logarithmic series, emblems
of one more inadequate religion.
With such a measure, masters
beat refractory or dream-soaked students,
as if the pain were a way of taking
account of things. Making a count
of the world. I have a broken rod,
a shattered cup, a tattered book
in an unknown language, all
the usual predicaments of poetry.
Red man solo in a blue world.

29 November 1995

Proximate needles male roving. Do stand
stoply by the head of the stairs fingering your Pouilly,
talk to the nice lady whose house in under your feet,
her sick husband in the far room, every now and then
one of the ditzy students she finds to help out
wanders off with a tray of canapes for him.
They pass by you too, with a smile and a shrimp.
You snag. Downstairs people discuss cigarettes
like old roues reminiscing about dead mistresses.
Children breathe quietly in somber recreation rooms.
Welcome. Everything accords with the architect's plan.

30 November 1995

A DARK MIRROR SCRATCHED DESPITE LOVE'S CARE

1. Among the Vessels

What I did and what I thought
I was doing. Where the Plymouth
thought it was going. The hill
up the road, the old Palermo recording
of Scotto singing *La Straniera*,
how the world is mostly weeping,
the hill, the hard, the silent
father, the landscape below
untouchable in simple distance
blue as a pearl in no one's hand.

He did not answer. Things
don't answer. Not till we make
them speak. I had a little red book
with empty pages, I was sworn
to fill them using what was called
writing. I was a chemist, a composer
of sonatas, a classical scholar,
a detective, a beachcomber, a pianist
mostly, great tenor, conquistador,
a boy in the front seat alongside

his silent father. Vinyl weaving
seat covers old car the War was over,
there are few professions closed to desire,
I was Heidegger, I was Mahler grieving,
I was the faithless wife of every Cæsar,
I was the Pope and brought Stalin to his knees.
Silence breeds talk, music breeds
interminable conversation. The father's
silence is a fire in his son, and now
the chorus out there disguised as dawn.

2. Arugula

God this is boring, all this remembering,
call it *A Silence Remembered* and make it
vaguely Irish, full of potted plants,
liverwurst sandwiches I detest, show tunes
whose lyrics don't stick in the mind. Fake it.
Rooms and rooms of relatives quietly
making each other uneasy. Don't you hate it
when it gets boring, and nothing happens
in a line of poetry but words, words, words?
I want every instant to be eventful, ripe

luminous confusion, a rush hour crowd
crossing Sixth Avenue and Forty-second Street
like limitless shoals of mackerel
and nobody touching. I want every word
to break out in a sweat and start
babbling about its original meanings,
tell everything, break into images
and images stand up against the setting sun
talking their heads off like aunts at a funeral,
telling rosary beads and fathomless histories.

But it would be better if I were even more boring,
a bored audience is the sign of successful Art—
bored out of their skulls and plenty of silence,
plenty of time to think and think well of themselves
for putting up with such tedium in the name
of Art, and by extension feel good about the artist
who puts them through such a moral misery,
uplifted by inattention, the sheen of sleep
glimmering between the rare events. And later
the sheer release of going out into the street.

Art. Dingy classroom that sets you free at last.

3. *The Coast of Opal*

The trouble with dogs
is that they appear to tell the truth.
I like people around me
who seem to tell me lies.
We'll find out later which is which.

Truth anyhow's a kind of stone I guess.
Obsidian, amber. Obsidian
as if a siege
or be besieged. Dark-eyed

When a man has his back to the wall
what does he see with his shoulder blades?

Ghosts of brick, autumn sunlight,
the amber light between living and dying,
an army of jobless men walking away.

The disarray of named things
Every terror has a stone of its own—
he wants to feel her beside him
but he has no side.

So this north coast they call the Coast of Opal
from the Calais fogs shot

through with the flat sun of Picardy
where they tell me I come from.

In the terrible heat wave of 1992
it was cooler than anywhere in France.

Yet all the opals I know some Laura
gave me, ancestral, Austral Laura,

a southborn air amid the mind
like a bonfire inside a glass of milk.

Names are all that matter in the world of stone—
call a rock some word and pray to it.

Here there stand the roadside Calvaries,
stone shrines to Jesus dying and Jesus dead

and the women stand around Him
like the Pleiades in a cold black sky.

Already His body is full of absence.
But the stone's still there. Here.

4. Nembutal

So many old names for it. Diminish
the intensity. That's what it means.
Sen-sen. Alcohol. Sunglasses.
And I'm another. Once upon a time
there were kings amongst us
travelling incognito among the martinis
and girls in loden coats. Gentle
castile soaps hard-milled, language
does its best. To rescue sinners
from their dirty hands. Spillway
once near Florence, among pines
almost black with winter they walked
“hands” she said “inside one another.”

5. La Question

Of course dream is mostly interrogation
— the Gestapo came from somewhere,
after all, things like that don't just get invented.
Question is torture. The rack of knowing.

I remember the hardest question in the dream
last night: Who is your favorite
composer. What does that mean?
Somehow I said Bellini, but only after a long
pause, so they did not believe me, I
didn't believe myself either. They passed
on to other certainties and pains, and left me
treasonous in sleep. Then gunshots
at waking, hunting season, strange
pleasures of humans, the chase
never stops, not for a minute. All we see
is sometimes a flurry in deep bushes,
a cry heard, swift passage of a frightened bird.
What giddy company does my sleep keep,
the exhilarating grieving of Palermo, high
sun and strange girls in trouble. Bellini.
O there is a girl in such a heart
deux bras, trois yeux, color of the first
shoots of young rye on the other side of winter
You who are served by such music,
guide the rowdy silence of my heart.

November 1995