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A man without a life

A man without a life
has just been slain. It is the news
that tells us all things old.
We never heard of what we always knew.

And so the victim's footsteps
always stop at our door, his blood type
is the same as ours, his long blond hair
or grey hair or curly black hair

his long sleek slack ebony Chinese hair
spreads out over the snow in our own yard
like a flock of witless birds come down to seed
and his dying finger wrote a final clue:

a character that looks like a tree with little leaves
as if he wanted to tell us he died of Spring
itself, and we are witness and co-conspirators
in the slow savage whirling cabal that struck him down.

16 December 1995

Dolce color

Sweet by seaboard
and a band of turquoise

lend me your sky
the kerosene
has already taken
the chill off the sun-porch

it is strange to be alive again
after the reprisals of dream

17 December 1995

faXmas

whee don't need letters any more
we can spell with our thumbs

& sail in our woks
across the secret phone lines,

the skinniest ocean
brings us to you
fat as your pregnant mother
all giggles & anxiety & someone on the move

how quietly it slips out of the machine
Egypt sands
& everything has been said

down to the signature the thumb print the Sumerian
cylinder seal the dumb cartoon of a dog

the kiss kiss of lips parted on the h
of happy Christmas & our
sudden breath looks like this

17 December 1995

Souvenir d'Osnabrück

sitting here listening to Heinrich Biber's third partita
I wonder why the little black river Hase
that runs through Lower Saxony keeps bothering
all these years, you can hardly see it from the little bridge,
black water black ducks and night coming,
it's not the Seine and no famous bridges to slip under

the violin and the continuo understand the passage
of time as something intrinsically meaningful
as if a century were a sentence full of relative
clauses headed towards an overwhelming predicate
but it isn't and it won't and we're just in a dinky cab
hurrying to the station and it's not even a consolation

just a violin and a river and a town we're leaving
and music shapes a fine understanding untroubled by meaning.

17 December 1995

You call this working,
this gazing at blue sky?

Yet everything comes this way.

The very air we breathe
comes from there.

And deep
inside our body is a seed
that blue world planted,

that's what we *are* inside,
a garden to grow them,

many seeds,
all the seeds of light.

18 December 1995

Everybody is the same age as me.
Oblique confession of grammatical eternity,
I am as long as I say I am

or am and so forth. Everybody
was born when I was born, lives now,
will pass through an exposition of dying

and then. And then. And then.

18 December 1995

Meantime any people who can talk
to each other are the same people.
Lost members of a lost tribe
suddenly and momentarily found.

Anyone who can hear me
belongs to what says us both,
together, joined anew, for a fraction
of a second by the common sound.

18 December 1995

A TREE IN WINTER

If a woman were climbing a tree
would it be to prune or glean?

Do I have to decide? The oaks
stay brown. Terrible answers
everywhere.

Does it look at least like

there are spurs

spurs sparrows spoons

When I got this far
I knew I was in space
and space in me
an oracle thrashed by winds

the stormy life of meek people
stone tries to console
churches and statues and such

we will not be content
till the hand we paint on the wall
reaches out and touches us

Then this comely farce is finis

everything can be put inside
everything else
except one thing

one thing that does not fit even in itself.

More lies.
Will you be my
blue battery?

The energy
recurring
to the alternate pole.

Asked questions
get answers.
Tacete!

How everything shrinks down around
something wanted. How desire
makes the world minute, presumably
to match its feeble grasp.
The walls close in. Everything stinks of one thing.

3.

There never is an end to silt under rivers
and it doesn't take much to stir it up.
Under the foothills of the Rockies I walked
in the high 90s in lucid glare behind
someone walking the way I walk, a poet
I guessed from the looking side to side.

No end to recognitions. We count only
the desires that lead to conspicuous tragedy,
I mean a pain so great not even we can
swoon into denial. And then we stand there
with bloody faces wondering where the daylight went.

4.

“the dark is rising”
analyzing

heart-handed
books for children

you can look out on a December morning
snow coming, road empty,
and see no evidence whatsoever
that literature was ever practiced on this earth.
And music might be an inference only
from the slish of tires on the highway past the hill.

How frail the earth looks this morning.
Morning opera, icy little road
and little duck stream quick
between the slushy frozen banks
and all that snow. And the sky
presses down and the trees
those quislings reaching up
and everything looks fragile and too small.

I will protect
my mother,
I will pray
by seeing.

And one day maybe we can pray by being.

19 December 1995

Contributions to the study of it

It is gloomy with her teeth, it tends to view
the upright sleeping victim as a toe
to sip from.

Then it is gone, or a cone
from which meltingly
love's pollen's nectar's moisture
slips
drop by drop, like a duck swimming
with unseen paddles fast and seemingly
serene.

It is serene, then it is full
and no one's the worse for this kind of love
since death, he would come anyhow,
he is always waiting

like a broom behind the door with a blue handle and old straw.

19 December 1995

The Authorities

There might have been a fireman
which is a kind of impresario
of sorrow and ash,
 wet ash, the merchandise of despair
is scattered around the acreage
and cars are going home.

There might have been an admiral
sailing his flagship up the arteries
in search of primitive cells he could shout at and control
or bombard with shiny bombs neat with blued steel

Or there might have been a cardinal
whispering to another of his collegium
about the dying Pope and the pope to follow,

voting for shadows. Someone has to fill every job we can imagine. I think of Christine walking down the Albrechtsgaße in Vienna and it is snowing there too and how hard it is to keep talking but not as hard as to learn how to stop and let the snow-silent emptiness of language carve nothing into something and make it beautiful. Somebody has to do it. She is walking and her breath stands in front of her mouth

from the word she says, how hard it is
to read the breath, what is she saying,
I will walk behind her and find out, I will pause
when she pauses and I'll take a deep breath
and she won't mean anything but air.

19 December 1995

[Reading about the Revolution]

And as to meaning, let the air repent
that woke such songs in us as liberty.

It meant an hour, we meant a life
and we have been fighting ever since.

It was a day to mock the king, not kill him.
And now we sit on our million-cushioned throne

and rule no one, least of all ourselves,
and all things ill. And wonder how much snow will fall.

20 December 1995

IN THE BLUE QUEEN'S BOWER

Her embarkations in him.
So quiet this shepherd
can hear the slow words
form at the back of his throat.
Taste of sugar, taste of salt.
But something of all of it
has to get said.

That's what she told him
by being. He stands alone
in flocks of snow, the hummocks
remind him of sheep
of course. Every image anyhow
leads to every other. That
is the nature of to see.

20 December 1995

Winter Solstice

Certainly all kinds of
things to be said

the Calendar
for instance: Winter

begins today by number
though we cannot count

the snows of this season so far
the ache of muscle

this strange body that we are.
But I'm of no mind

to say them. Newbury Street
with all the pretty

art the wafture of money
sweet breath of shoppers

young to the business
grinning and smiling

but I don't want to tell
about them or tell them a thing

they are busy
with cold sunlight and desire.

Beast and bestir.
Malcontent acres,

miscreant wives.

Thermos victims late to train.

There is a tempest
in the fingernail, a stain

of awful victory in every sink.
The porcelain forgives.

Law does not relent,
at most it lets the issue fall

undead into the calendar.
We forget what we proposed.

Winter starts. Last night the stars
for the first time in a week

were visible, sparkling,
full of that ancient personality

from which our narratives
fall down. The Big White Man

whose belt is full of galaxies,
a penis sheath of eternal ice

to keep the thoughtful world below
incessantly pregnant. The Goose

who flies away with the Moon.
The Maiden Chained to Emptiness

and towards her everlastingly
her would-be freer, suitor, Pterseys

hurries always just too late.
The dark wave laps her thighs.

And all because a rare man
tilted up his shaggy chin and spotted
lynx-eyed as he was a chain
of dubious circumstances
vague as smoke but bright,
bright, above him,

you see them better from the corner of the eye.
And Homer saw them not at all,
busy as he was with listening.
And the rubble of his house, the ice
pressing down the corner of the roof,
a blind man's house is always neat,
everything finds him where he reaches,
where he walks, listening always to the marches
weird armies forage through him,

trying to dissolve the sky.
Stars are mostly memory anyhow.

21 December 1995

Weather

I don't know what it means.
There are certainties
like birds in snow,

the ring of life,
everything trying to survive.
It is not a time for asking questions,

winter, it is a foundering
ship and a falling stone,
your father's old car careening

out of control.

21 December 1995

A MARROW BONE

for Charlotte

Can the remarkable submarines
find the Topaze Kingdom hidden
under all that blue? I wander
on the surface of it, guessing
amber shadows as I go, names
of stones or resins, but not one
says the color of the thing I mean—

Juliana's medulla oblongata
from which I feel her whole
lucid theory seems to rise.
How people time
the things they do. The hushed
laughter of Ingrid Belete
stilled just as it rises. The rhythms
of it. Of it all. The marrow
of how things happen.

Blue capacity

I said, and you said A blue
Chinese bowl confused with hydrangeas,
the Baron set them out himself
on the spine of the piano and left them.
But I said No, that's remembering.
What does it mean to think,
to think a blue capacity, a topaze thought?
But my question also was just remembering.

Wait, get into the swing of it,
this is the only now there is.

When a room's been very cold
how long does it take to get the chill out of it?

Cold lasts so long inside a chair,
a bed. Sometimes a year goes by

and it's still snowing inside the furniture.

How do we think with such brittle spoons?
We went down yesterday through the hip-high snow
to feed the ducks. Each gingersnap
we broke in two or three (I did two and you did three)
and tossed to where they snapped and dunked and swallowed.
How good they are at catching and retrieving
from the hard rush of the icy water past them,
hardly a crumb gets lost until they're full
then sail away. And we're getting good too,
aiming cookies through the reeds and past the slush
to land them suddenly before his beak.
Is all this what is called thinking?

Because there is a reverberating chamber
like a theater for anatomical demonstration
in an old medical school, all sounding wood
and smell of cold meat, steam radiators
hissing, formaldehyde, instruction,

resonance upon resonance piled, and the dead

body of a young man spread-eagled on the table
like a Viking victim and everyone is hearing
the words appropriate to the young man's contents
rolling out of an old man's mouth,

ribcage of the lover ripped wide open, the words
of the professor are adequate, so meanly adequate,
stream of Latin and of German, the students
in their shabby decent clothes look on
with their mind catching the words, only the words,

all we are given are words, words they have to repeat
all their lives till they too stand up to their elbows
in the meat of some dead lover explaining
where life comes from and where it goes
and what this gizmo is a handbreadth below the heart—

is all that what is called thinking?

I think we do not think. I think we learn languages
and meantime guard our marrow. There is a thing in there
Tibetans call *srog* (say 'soak'), a life-force
no one knows anything about. But it keeps us going.
This going is called thinking.

22 December 1995

It's just as well nothing answered when we called.
We have nothing to say, and never will. Only a hum
pleasant to hear if you like the way we look,
otherwise if otherwise. Only a hissing whistling
rush of air between our lips, we do have lips,
and if you're good you can tell we love you, sort of,
and all this fluster is a way we have to say so.

But nothing's clear. No other way to tell.
If we had language when we needed it
(not just when it needed us for its conspiracies)
then we could say:

“Everything I have is yours.
Everything I ever thought
was trying to imagine
a system in which we two
could exist together.
I failed, but here you are.”

23 December 1995