

6-1994

## junA1994

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## VERMILION

be the silk of your satin, your tent  
stitched of shadows. Listening in the wind  
is how the voice was born — a sound  
made me listen, and a candle  
sputtered loudly in the shade of dawn.  
I bring all this to the soft margin of your wells,  
oasis of the next, a glad stumble  
as if a dancer understood only half-  
way to falling some next and truest sortie of *to rise*.  
It is dangerous, the things we do,  
walking in our own bodies among strangers  
(the slopes, the juts, salients, sockets!  
The contours of us!) or carrying down the street  
a paper bag full of oil. The monotones of us.  
And for all I claim I am just instrument,  
so often mean to be the hammer's teacher.  
So by the crumbling little bridge across the Tannery  
took off all those clothes (we see the white  
and scarlet summer dress billowy and frail  
float not drenched yet in the sluggish stream—  
when we look back, her running form's  
half a block away, fleet by library, vanishes  
in town trees, appears again, a glimpse  
in sunlight, hours later, the annals of the moon).

We see and we don't see. I see with your skin.  
Guessway. Song of the sentenceless. Give way.  
There are erosions. Early morning we still need  
a candle on the porch to see the words  
even though we're writing them ourselves.  
Those who live in a dusty region inherit ancient lusts.  
Hence the hunger for wells, thirst for new-baked bread,  
the ordinary trickery we do with things.  
Hence one more bitten apple for us to share.  
Come see me think about you. Your meaning  
drives my hands. Abbreviated reveries  
subsumed in weatherwise assent. Enough.  
Language implicates me from the start—  
that's the mother, the scimitar in my hand, crescent  
moon falling over the lost city. It is built  
of curves and by curves it goes down, the dancer's  
spine curves gracious as the dancer crouches,  
balancing the final ceremony on those hips.  
I stare, and flags flimmer in the shady breeze.

1 June 1994

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Storing things in vaseline. The fruit trees  
will not rust. I think the knight intended  
no villainy to her, planned  
to spend long evenings dotting on her smile. Moods  
unpeeled. Birds chipping away at the dark.  
Soon it would be day. And no devotions. All night  
he had gazed on that silly rictus, a smile  
not even sleep could chasten. Rain  
answers doubts like that. Strong light for fugitives.  
Sweet rain god gift green! The banners  
of auspiciousness pink with fading hang limp down.  
A season since I sat here, my own life!  
Unequaled opportunity, vast store of seed.  
“On this rolling prairie, between the forks of Delaware,  
to guess at wheat! Or no, apples, tithing,  
Gospel, geese! Everything you need  
you’ll find in Virgil. Not Caesar, not cider. Not Cicero.”  
What we call fire they call ash.  
What we call water they call mime.  
Lie flat. Cherish these things. You run  
through me like a mountain stream  
but always downhill I’m afraid. How can we keep  
what we know of each other? Part  
before breakfast, give me your colors,  
I will wear them always as my eyes, I leave you  
the edge of my longing, a ruler, a thread  
spun out from pure sunshine. Never remind me,  
never forget. Be our bond like that  
of flower to branch, let loose  
and see where we fall then. Miracle of release.

1 June 1994

**Note to Brian Kim Stefans, Number 9.  
(Or actual answers)**

Paul was Blackburn.  
Bernstein means amber.  
Howe is Irish her sister  
is a Catholic  
very now she  
used to be a friend  
of the Earl of Gowrie  
then a poet friend in  
Cambridge later  
in the House of Lords  
Thatcher's Minister of the Arts  
that's how I met her  
Boston Boston Boston  
I lived there too  
the loveliness  
of its lean angers

and their name  
might mean hill  
or is that English  
for it, a howe. *Howl*  
took a while to catch on  
from its first Spirit Duplicated  
—blue ink that fuzzed  
or bent the word  
to speak  
I loved the process  
of its sleek pages,  
you read  
in a fade of grace  
the words like sky  
fading towards dawn,  
my own Deep  
Image notes  
came out that way  
too first,

It is not clear anybody  
has anything to howl about again:  
unless (except)  
some maybe American  
finds the magic way of making Americans  
realize the two tremendous things:  
the bleak horror that America has  
done and is still doing to the world at large  
and all the brave maybes we still have to work with.  
We will not listen  
unless someone tells us what we did  
and says she did it too. That was Ginsberg's  
genius, being with the thing he put down,  
his "queer shoulder"  
put to our bad "wheel."  
Maybe it will happen, a howl  
we'll learn to hear  
when someone gets it out,  
surely not the drivel  
of our usual aesthetic complaints  
all based without exception  
on envy, jealousy and a craven spirit.  
But I don't know, I may not  
be listening,

you hear so many readings,  
today I hear Rossini,  
we can hear the prompter  
guiding the singers in the unfamiliar  
music of *Count Ory* on this clunky  
old Belgian recording —  
his one French comic opera,

we need a prompter  
to mumble like seagulls  
before us as we walk over our white papers,  
we need a prompter  
to hush our anxieties and tell us  
*Darlings all your words will be all right*

And thatcher is the man who does your roof.  
In Luxemburg we used to hang out  
in a little wine shop called The Prompter's Box  
(something like *puschperle* it sounded like  
with two dots over one of the many e's)

that's when Doug Oliver was courting Alice Notley  
and grapefruits were hard to get  
(pamplemousses) and in the  
decorous Mary mystery cathedral  
the Cardinal of Metz in glorious scarlet  
sat by the Grand Duke  
whose old limousine I leaned on outside  
watching sunlight dazzle Europeans—  
they are so unprepared for weather,  
you'd think after all these years they'd get it right.

1 June 1994

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When I switch on the lamp at the top of the stairs  
It seems to take a while for the light to get down here,  
A noticeable delay, an expectation slurred—

I conclude that there is something quicker than light.  
What might that be. Need. Hope. Desire.  
*Ich bin geschwind als wie des Menschen Gedanken!*

“I am as quick as human thought!” he cried,  
Or lied. But something’s quicker. The mind  
Faster than what it says. Or the dark workshop

From which the light is (finally!) coming.

2 June 1994



PAPER

Paper.

It should be

one word

to say a year

a year with you.

Microcosm: a heart  
unfolded out of paper  
endlessly

intricate  
Western theo-  
logical origami  
breathless with praise

(waking, my lips  
at your hairline

the breath of us

a heart unfolded

a horse goes by  
on Broadway  
color of the coffee  
I'm drinking  
in the sweet cafe

une noisette  
in your honor  
color of a horse

a year  
but what year is it  
with hazelnuts  
and horses on Broadway  
and Bellini and je t'aime?

“This year is 1919,” you read.  
My grandmother  
exhausted by the cold funeral  
of her aunt  
comes home and dies of the Spanish Lady

my mother stands in the freezing flat  
huddled over the coal stove  
grieving, her mother dead in the next room  
the doctor going down the street  
affable and smiling

she is trying to be warm  
to be brave

to live without

and all I’ve learned forever is live with.

To live with you.

Paper

says we're married

a license

by law turns

into a certificate

when signed by everyone in sight

witnesses

to love.

Our love.

The unimaginable wisdom of old signatures

storing all the marriages

each one from two proceeding

a name pretending to be one.

The meaning.

The horse on Broadway.  
After something literary  
I hurry home to my wife.  
Sounds like a sentence  
by Gertrude Stein. The train  
shakes my hands but  
writing is always a mystery.

Meaning the  
cool quiet of night  
you sleep and I come.

And this is paper too  
an analysis of love into times and distances  
—dime in the telephone, a yard around a house—  
something small, not smug, close

the way (this is sneaky) air  
is close to a flower but not the same  
as one, the entity of odor  
is not all flower, there is  
interpenetration, so that happening  
in our head perceiving — a peony  
in the shrine room, suffusing  
all the house with its fragrance —

is movement, we are movement,  
the molecules are actual  
pieces of flower pieces of air

to be discussed into the weave of paper  
till something makes sense.



Simple as paper

I want to be with you  
all the time

that is my mystery

and no mystery

I have never  
known the like

the elegant purchase  
of your mind  
on what is spoken  
what is known

So the cab to the station was a Punjabi of course I told him about my wife crossing the Punjab and said she liked it but there was fighting and he said yes yes it is the politicians make the wars the people are good the people are good yes I said that's what she said she liked the people and I said something about the Sikhs

and in fact your  
beauty does  
make every place our own.

*for Charlotte,  
Paper for our first anniversary,  
3 June 1994*

## GLANCING AT YOU ACROSS THE ROOM I THOUGHT I WAS

Seeing your hand on the doorknob when you said I see my hand on the  
knob waiting to go  
And knowing nothing, needing to stay where one is because the  
alternatives are dreadful  
Are public vapid and of dubious outcome I saw your hand turn  
inconclusively  
The brass doorknob in the fashion of someone leafing through a magazine  
While her mind is as they say in their precise measures a million miles  
away  
At least in this house there is no one I can hurt by language or by silence  
And those are the only sins that are finally unforgivable aren't they the  
ones against telling  
Too much or too little or simply (as you know that, fingertips on such  
smooth rounded metal)  
The wrong thing. We will say the wrong thing (this also is the wrong thing  
to say) and the night  
Becomes an incurable platitude or a dinner where one is poisoned mildly  
And makes one's way home by cab half in tears thinking for some reason  
of that  
Lacedemonian boy who came home with a fox gnawing his guts out what  
can we do  
These things are waiting for us in the world all the time for us to remember  
to be them.

3 June 1994

## PARTYGOING

Is there a tendency for your hand to turn the knob by itself when the  
anxious body  
Wants to stay in the house or at least idle a while in the always cool  
—in one sense or  
Another— lobby of the apartment building out of the sunlight of the  
day and the worse  
Glare of compulsory faux-friendly gatherings vulturing away on one  
another's  
Latest attempt to make sense of being in the world or giving  
something back  
In return for all we have, really, been given. So you wait at the door,  
one side or the  
Other, till you can't stand your own scruples anymore, you're bored  
with your never-ending  
Decency, so you're ready to go trill the meaningless warble—but  
that's the grief of it,  
It isn't entirely meaningless, isn't just jabber, it is words and they  
mean and mean  
And go on meaning forever, out from you away, like those garbage  
scows you watch  
Floating in sinister haze down the Narrows towards Nobody's poor  
old Ocean,  
That's the one nice thing about Brooklyn Heights, you sometimes can  
see where it  
All has to wind up, the windy vacancies of conviction where you howl  
all alone  
No matter that you're right and they're not quite so much so though  
none of you  
Are wrong. We never go even to a party with people who are actually  
wrong.

4 June 1994

