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CATCHING SIGHT OF IT

for Charlotte

here in the cold sunlight
the fishermen's net left drying
on the table the army
asleep in the bedroom

finches nodding at their manger
hung from the linden

it is the eighth day
from being born
the day of the knife.

The climate changes, the Empire falls.
Troops carry off the golden Temple vessels
silent through unknown avenues
in cities they think they came from,

the sidewalk changes, the girls
are not smiling as they offer
pink straw flowers to long-absent heroes
who may be coming home right now
in these thick bodies they shuffle in
up past the porches of their father's house,

how dull they are
these oafs the women pined for!

All through the town and out the other side
the parade comes and bores and passes—
you hear their footsteps every New Years Day
in the bleak fields, the broken taverns,

a crow screams in the oak.

They cut the foreskin off the penis.
The golden stolen property of the Jewish people
becomes the same as the bones of your body,
same as the stones of this place.

White men sit on porches after dinner
too lazy to lift the rifle up and shoot
that deer they see browsing the edge of the orchard.
Thorn apple mostly, with a few old sweet trees.

1 January 1993

TREASON

I used to have a soft spot for Benedict Arnold
because everybody spoke against him
as if it were simply a part of nature to hate him
and I hated to take anything for granted.
That's how I grew up poor. Be on the wrong side.
Of everything. As he was. Poor Benedict Arnold,
what a courageous thing it must be
to be a traitor, to make your own mind up
and set it ticking against the obvious Values
of your accidental neighborhood. And think
that God is watching you and secretly approves
though he can't say so in the churches they run
in His name to protect the government
from people like you. Me. They always say
God gave us a conscience to serve Him with
and serve Him we certainly do with all our choosing,
our scruples and objections and covenants.
An enemy ship carries us away by night
to some other country we also have our doubts about.

1 January 1993

for Charlotte

Laughing at it
the way you do

you're on its side,
everything's,

there is no darkness
in you,

your smile
has no enemy.

We sit together
on the old sofa

and I watch
the profile

of your laughter.
The stupid TV

is clean as sunrise.

1 January 1993

In the glass of the tabletop
clouds moving fast

our way over the river

embarrassed branches agitate
naked

like untold stories
winter

is about paying attention.

1 January 1993

for Charlotte

What more can the ocean say
the array of dashing cavaliers
charging white in the middle of the sea

the old riddles
laminated with sun and moon
stick to the roof of the mouth.

2 January 1993

SUNSHINE

Golden syrup honey marmalade
the untouchable
virtues of innocence
glossy after all the slutty rain.

2 January 1993

A WARNING TO THE INCURIOUS

Re: Vampires

Beware them. The pale one
with passive sweetness listening
to your every word
 until you have no more
 words to say
no mind, no breath to say it

and pale one moves on to the next
equal-minded as disease or death
letting everybody pay attention
to the need this person simply
is.

 This pale
person is a quiet walking need,
a tomb for intellect, a sly
to build your new house in,
a sleep of explorers and a cornfield reaped
moldering in stubble. This person
is the end of an idea.

2 January 1993

Now in this meek language we taste the sound of birds
yammering forever about love, and squirrels
blaming their competitors, o the business
of being alive
is such a holiday in a foreign city

but we are citizens of this shivaree
born in this local mess.

2 January 1993

THE PARTY

A.

Congratulate me, I am a founder
of a shipyard in this town,
pastor of the Nonconformist congregation,
inventor of devices to retrieve
nets from sunken ruins and fish from nets.
I once saw David Balfour standing in the sea.

B.

My children call me Captain of the Tides
and other children call me the Fierce Old Man
who Pretends to be God. Somebody has to.
I don't tell them that, the silly liberals
with their cars and music and divorces.
Let them think I believe all the stuff they're trying to forget.
Let them think someone's in control.

C.

Born a gentleman I wanted women,
Only in their company could thrive.
Alive I yearned for what dead I became.
A woman reborn now still bored with men
I yearn for the loveliness of my kind, and win
eternal recurrence in scarlet and silk.

D.

A slate fell off the roof and missed me,
I learned Latin but it didn't stick.
In Bengal I saw a tiger through some trees.
What more is there to celebrate in me?

—These voices I clinked a wine glass with
on New Years Day, local potentates
and abstemious monotheles,
torsos wrapped in cloth-of-silver,

food kept fresh in metal foil,
a woman with leaves instead of a hat.

I touched the brow of the patient chocolate labrador,
none of us will outlive this mess,
I touched the candle lightless in some holly
the felt the curious sincerity of wax.
The world is what one feels, the little love I have to give
sent against the stream, against the obvious, here,
a crossword puzzle in a hurricane.

2 January 1993

THE THING IN THE GREY SKY

Here is "what is needed"
it is a quotation from your mind
that best of all resources
this quickly re-inscribing slate.
Wipe me. You remember Hempstead Park
you remember water. Put it
in the water. Enter
that kind of a condition
where no one moves without conviction.
What you believe clings to you
wet clothes you leave a trail
of old religions where you walk.
Chalk. It is a bone.
It is a fragment from Tartarea
with marks on it you decide are Sumerian
because what else can the world be
but something written. The dakinis
write all of it, and a little tiny bit
you learn to read. You are Szekspir,
for example. You are Proust.
Why do we say what we do? We speak
the lines out loud of all the characters
we notice on our way to work. The man
with the bear. The girl on Eighth Avenue
with the tight cocoa colored skirt.
It doesn't matter how many years pass,
language never forgets. We forget it
sometimes, the way the tide
washes in and out of that honeycombed cavern
where the sea keeps its archives of our race.
Ours. The one that fell out of the sun
as far as it knows, the one that sharks are scared of,
the one with aluminum and radios.
And in this stone jar some honey
I bought this morning from a man in town
who spent his whole life understanding bees.
And there is nothing to understand.
They come and go and he sells honey.
Here it is. I bought it from a woman

whose name was the same as what made it.
In some language. We suppose
Mexico is far and the air is close
but we can prove nothing, wherever we go
there is only the morning and the evening
and nothing definite. Fathers
arguing with sons, a wall painted pink,
a dog investigating dirt. But enough for us.

3 January 1993

Take this note
to the horseman:
ride fast,
the wind is savvy,

the muddy roads
curve up from the shore
and no one waits
on the skyline

for you. No one dares.
The sun comes up
behind me
I see myself three shadows worth

spilling down the hill,
a man and his memory
staring at the empty field
tilted towards noon.

3 January 1993

CONFESSIO

for Charlotte

So these are the slim chances
built like boats and hugging shore
unlikely periplous of this enthusiastic sea

for Ωkeanos is a current strong
that wraps us round,
not *extent* is it but holding, holding us—

and those he touches
are crazy after,
the deer that brushed my fender in full light
bounded onto the road to meet me & keep going,

all the misprints of a long life
spoken together like a cough inside the skull,

and an old man staggering from a coal mine.
This was the color of the world I knew,
the barge at Gerritsen and the chute
that took the coal down into scows,

into the coal cellar through the sidewalk, a gap
meant to slip into the backparts of a house,

all my mistakes my only music.

4 January 1993

THE DISEASE INTERROGATES THE MIND:

Do you still want to live in this town
with the railroad running down the main street
and the summer-slutty boys and girls
stalking the cinder track and the elm trees
quivering plagueless in side streets
and the firehouse pancake breakfast
and an old man sits on his steps
remembering French opera? Do you need this,
you who are luminous and thin and quick,
all these ricordanze, these connections,
this glue? Do you need the diner,
the deer dead in the gully, the stop sign
sieved with buckshot? Do you need
the shallow August river, the moon, the snow,
sun, bone, altar, lilac, do you need the waltz?

Rhizomes. Words root me
to their this place. I book
an open sky. I dawn.
My wife tells me a cloud is a naked woman
I believe the bottom of my heart—
anything you can find in emptiness
you can find right here.
Presence inside absence, till my hands shake.

5 January 1993

“some song we fail to keep”
— Hart Crane

How do we keep a song
the best of times
blue jeans used to
stain the thighs and cock all blue
when they were new

the old days my tender skin
I remember this as swell as indigo.

5 January 1993

for Charlotte

I can't find a single noun that I can't verb.
This is the liberty of the town

to speak
and nothing can't
be said,

only a laggard leaves a thing unspoken.

5 January 1993

Opportunities, certainly,
an old woman playing whist
and a dog looks out the window.

Or a bus slams open its rear door
and two high school students dismount
carrying bright mouths.

Tartans are worn.
The dog. I am thinking about
lamp standards, the bronze floor lamps
that used to be in everybody's house.

But everybody moved. Now I only
have a few of them left,
only one of them works.

The bronze gets dull. The priest
trudges up the hill.
From the top you can see the shipping
slip up through the Narrows,

knowing the city. The dog
knows nothing
but more than I do.

As it seems. The woman,
it can't be whist, she moves
one card on top of another,

she's all alone.

6 January 1993

Stalwart claim air apple breakage in the cart
Bearing bluestone for sarsening this meditation court
Believes the dignity a messenger by midnight
Strumming an air-viol —that was good cunning—
The Christmas cactus timely bloomed an earthside
Daisy a poltergeist grown calm (our old geology)
Until this very ground perceive a talisman
Which is a summoning which is a rascal routed
From the henyard where he hid in glory apt to dine
Ovivores and chanticleers together but Lancelet slept.
Lancelet was a farmer when he should have sung
Was mass-priest when he should have swallowed
Wheelwrights pushed him and he slept and varlets
Shouldered him aside he slept and never recollected
Her in whose fealty he found his fate standard.
All a knight's sleeping anyhow one mode of getting ready.

7 January 1993

Lo, it is too late to tell.
It is a bell
so must be told.

What is urgent only
is what pleasures us,
be bull our cow

a pizzle answer in spring thaw
rampling on a green moor
freedom customs—

you thought I was a gypsy! (I was the moon.)

7 January 1993

FULL MOON DAY

for Peter Lamborn Wilson

Full moon day:
Plant
shadows in the earth.

Accept the offer
the man will bring
proposing a university in fields of corn.

The words and numbers
are strictly accidents,
what matters
is sitting and walking together
under the vagrant
shadows of birds of clouds
sometimes of trees—
this is the Academy.

The interminable
pleasure of the Company.

8 January 1993

Waiting for the coffee to percolate
I remember Charles Olson
the last man I know who used one

sitting at this table
I remember him too
though tables have not yet
stalked out of our lives

as they will,
nothing remains, those everything, those flowers

and the maps roll up like the moon and sail away,
you man of maps
you man great for walls and distances,

o blessed Charles who dared
to think we live alone in this huge house.

8 January 1993

for Charlotte

Clambering? A sand
filled sneaker
bloody knee.
Something up.

There. Where the sun
hits the dune.
Not a dune a hill
of mud and sand.

This is America
you live here
forget the words
the fancy images

the earth
spreads out for
you and you
alone it is enough.

8 January 1993