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Not to be concerned with that — a river
clocking green arrivals o I dreamed
a cloud-embattled sky and up into it
thin papery irregular balloons they
slowly let loose rose cloud-color
and cloud-shape till everything we made
was no less than cloud vast and beautiful
and soon studied apart into blue
and I broke down and cried and woke
dry-eyed knowing: now the old woman's dead.

25 January 1993

DU PAYS HAUT

for Auxeméry

For all its sensuous appeal the river
understands its business is to drain a wound

and never stanches its operation
but drives our wills before it to the ocean—
the Basin of all sentient desires
once released (forgotten) by their desirers
into the ceaseless agitation. Waves.

The river understands because it's made of thinking,
and we do too, we wading folk who live on estuaries
which are just greedy ocean's probings
up our channels to take more—
to touch and drink *it* where it rises in us:
the thoughts, lusts, lies, loves, fears, fars of us
up here in the high country of the dream.

26 January 1993

This business of keeping the word moving as the eye
never stops in its restless holding
so sentences caress the seamless world
and find no easy resting place except
the sudden access of overwhelming feeling
to touch just this and linger on a name.
To say you where you are by pronouncing
everything there is. To paint the world
around you to define your outlined shape
by every language and the feel or texture of
you by silence. Then the horse bends its head
and nibbles grass and squirrels come back from their terror
and you stare at me It's all been said, and said again.
Now it's a matter of a leaf or a tree, some other me.

26 January 1993

The sky belongs to me.
Strong blue Tibetan sky
uninflected,
 big as the mind
the deep of it,
always being here.

 A sky like that
 puts me in my place.
In space.

Giving something a title
is the beginning of understanding it.

26 January 1993
Hyde Park

Errant, being cautious. She lives
in Shepherds Bush, disguises her knees
as cannibal princesses of some albino isle
where Tropics meet the bottom line

and wine swirls counterclockwise down her throat.
It is a matter of how much we tell our parents,
a Christian Scientist searching for the street
that runs between the city and the sky.

You can't do that with tattooed shoulder blades
or hair the color of bubble gum, your breath
sweet with Snapple and your brain in rags.
You've got to begin with the classics,

pounds and ounces, the gravity of money,
the kitchen sink kept gleaming, your closet
neat and fragrant — an angel could rent it out
to play his zither in and not be scandalized.

Your parents want it this way — be born old
the way they think they were. Be impassive
as they seem to have become for all their dreads—
desires apparently make people dull—

only the great poets maybe had the bravery
to want nothing. And let it all come,
let it hang out with them in their language
till in crazy humility they dared to let it speak.

26 January 1993

THE DAY THREE TOOTH

A good day for meeting your guide
who will take you to the sacred mountain
who will teach you to write poems
with coffee grounds and cornmeal

who will teach you to count your fertile periods
inside your body the weeks of splendor
that go by in an instant while you're looking at a tree

who will tell you the name of the tree
who will drag you up the tree with a new name
into the public miracle we call the sky

who will take you apart up there like a flower
opening or a car crash
until you understand the distances

are things not numbers.

A good day for meeting your guide
who will talk to you with words of glass
and explain the destiny of ordinary things like soap

who will lead you to the crossroads marked
Here There Is Nowhere To Go
then leave you there at the beginning of yourself.

27 January 1993

IN THE CHALAIS

for Charlotte

Here Byron was bored. Comes
from not looking in your hands.
Couldn't dance. The women
of Evian were women, the women
of Thonon were personalities.
The glaciers in the south showed
sometimes through summer mist.
He thought of Jane mixing coffee and tea,
of a sick child on a hobbyhorse, a Corsican
assassin with scarlet kitchen knife.
How cheap desires are, and fantasies!

And he was a man who needed money
all the time. Maybe thinking about common things
and lusting for ordinary happenings like sex
are bad for the bank account. Maybe
he should write instead of thinking
and save the animal of mind for priceless reverie
from which he'd rouse ink-stained hours later,
his lap full of gold. The difference
between wanting and saying. The chance.
He shook himself free from all mere perceiving,
the Jura hills like a rumpled coat on a shelf
across the mild lake chattering with flags.

27 January 1993

AN ABSENCE

To live inside a reed

the perceptible residue of stars
left on earth at first light
is the dry crystalline *ausencia*
at the heart of every dew drop

to it he gave the name *nostoc*
as if to say at once it's "ours" and
it is our pain, pain
reminds us of our first home lost above.

28 January 1993

I want to reach up as far as the wall
I want to reach beyond it

and find the tree
that waits and fills the sky

invisibly
the tree disguised as light

we think we fall
through the dark towns of Pennsylvania

when we go back to the mothers
to nurse shameful diseases

our brassy hair the only
light in those coal measures

from which nothing comes but grief
to run away into bigger trouble

so that you can come home to a stone
bleeding unrepentant done.

28 January 1993

TRYING TO BE GOOD

The desperate thing or water boiling
as if the skin of a turnip were washed loose
not in the cooking but the remembering
a Sunday taste with your mother's masher
pounding the side dish with righteous wrist

this was your virtue then to do
what you were asked to do and keep your peace
thinking forward into the great body of the world
launched around you in successive viking invasions
women's bodies overwhelming your poor street

whereas you have to scrape it free worse
than a potato you have to work hard to eat the resemblance
is almost always fatal the girls by the bus and the waves
thronging in at Rockaway and you standing in the shade
of lilac wondering what a summer is for

when those limbs of hers are so pale so pale
the north language in her mouth the smoke of her lips
the red of her absent-minded kisses o the things
a child remembers instead of what might help him
he holds all this happy horror in mind all his days

don't you you with your habit of facing north and west
and being so doubtful of summer wind you with your fjords
chock full of imaginary kingdoms and your bookshelves
dusty with orris root and talcum and salt
there is no one at home in the memory do you understand

no one inside the heap of details and made-up particulars
you have spent your life worshipping as if they
the blue and the wool and the china of them the candle
of them the gas flame before breakfast and the flickering coal
were the gods of the whole universe and nobody home

but you and you're not home you never were you leaned
on the kitchen utensils you ate the plate clean you read
at the table you understood nothing you never asked
why they got married or who walks through the house
when everyone is sleeping and blesses them until they wake

you atheist you eater of cheese you inspector of labels you man.

28 January 1993

IN THE HEART OF WEATHER

for Bosnia

Ears numb, cold
to the point where I thought
how nice it would be to curl
up by the hot spotlight below a sign
to shelter

 when I smelled
the pine trees, the sheer
clear heavy horny balm of them
like a noontime in July—

and I understood a man's relation in the world
crucified in joy between space and time
with nothing ever on his mind but weather.

I am trying to say that desires
and fears are the weather of the mind,
mind the blue unchanging sky.

But this is the thought
of a man with a house a mile away
to go home to, be home in.

What would this cold
this smell of balsam
be if there were only here?

Would it be dwindling into mere sensation
till the dark hides life
wherever it came from,

or is there an energy in what just happens
that would sustain me or any person
in the long exile it is to be just *here*?

I think of the children of winter
trapped in Lebanon
and in the hills above Sarajevo

fierce young men hell-trapped in hatred
freezing with hate and warming
their fingers on their guns

and in the bombed city someone lies in the street
wanting something, smelling something,
feeling whatever he feels.

29 January 1993

THE THIRD SYMPHONY,
"THE SCANDINAVIAN,"
OF FREDERICK COWAN, 1852-1935.

This could have been Brahms across a crowded schoolroom
a woman outlined against the huge window
reaches up to pull the yellow linen shade all the way down.

29 January 1993

for Charlotte

Whose name means "You desire this"
middle syllable of the world
you are

 the secret word
 say it and the wall falls down
and there The Temple is

it's been there all the while
hidden as silence.

 Because of your great beauty
 you believe that all results
are alive in their causes, and all actions
are shadowed by their consequences

shadow-heavy autumn clusters in the hand.

29 January 1993

AND I IN ARCADE

Theater sets hearty happenstance
we call what happens
there firs stand tall Cybele's quotas
joker hurt aside chatter a lode's guilt
gauss sup on idle magnetism?

Do we dare to dance or do we? Is the mast
ready for the Ponent shore? Do we even
now recall to disencumber
the blatant discos of our history
(timeless mindset, mindless repetition).
Why daunted don't we do something to Serbia?

Is it that mounted king or dragon whose
bronze image in the hands of Cat People woman
my first love turn squirming in the park
into the animal I thought a goddess would
distinguish herself from the actual tree
but no never she is the smell of it
for all my prayers to her for all my life
she is the wood.

29 January 1993

The tradition of writing with ink
stiff pen a burden of opinion
to express on this and that
(it is dangerous to put yellow and red
together in a national flag, sugar
causes social unrest, birds talk)

the tradition of being wrong
at length and to music

the tradition of remembering
names of those who never lived
or if they did
 hid themselves from us
behind time's bodice

a scent of person lingers
after the dream is gone.

30 January 1993

Find a nest of hawks
find a chalk cliff
find a soup boiling with the moon in it
find a sealskin coat your mother wore
find a crow's nest

This is what I've wanted for two days
And to take molasses to Barbados
and say Here, give the sweetness back to the world
I want only the thickness and the fear

fierce taste tropic noon the knife

30 January 1993

CELEBRITY

Smooth face the eye slips off
people impossible to see

here if anywhere the dubious
benefits of photography.

30 January 1993

A WHIFF OF CHEAP CIGARS

There is a kind of patriotic gall
thinks This is best. And that's all right,
thinking that way. But saying it!
Out loud and on the radio!
With a guitar!

That's the horror,
ferocious ignorant sentimental rumble
like all the bowling alleys from here to Dallas.

30 January 1993

Grey cat stalks towards bird feeder.
Shikari. Snow supports alternative
life styles oxygen animates.
Why should I disquiet myself
rescuing one life from another?

30 January 1993

(Yet I leap up and run to the porch
and breathe like a maniac to save
those many from this one.)

Look
the first map
of it

of anything
our eyes

taking,
mistaking.

It is a place.
Smoke goes up,

you remember
a dream of don't

smoke (you
don't smoke) Walk

more (you walk)
There are consolations

such as silence
the thrill of waking—

day: the mind
in control of itself

a little
not thrown

from thing to thing
lusts and lunacies

down the admirable
cataracts of sleep.

31 JANUARY 1993

THE CONDITION OF THE WORKING CLASS

They wanted to come across to us these aging men in wet
Woollen suits their grey fedoras brim-bent down over grey
Glass or blue-green eyes that will not look in yours the Labor
Representatives in ochre mandate shown malingering
Along the beach spas of the southern shires my father
Was a worker in those wills, he swept his hat off at a maiden
Passage he held the squibs of damp November in his sky.

Then being born I took the spring out of his heels and my day
Stretched into his evening. Time is. No one trusts the ones
He trusts to represent him. One. There is a gender in these
Images, the sex of fire and holy marriage of blank things.
There is something wrong with people they fight too much.

War is a systematic madness. There is no vegetative power
In the broken clock the bombed out tower, there is no grief
Like the burning book the starving child the withered leaf
And all things runs that way the river has no insight the oil
Falls out of the sky as rain the prisoners long for night to hide
Loneliness of their all too private skin. To be trapped in many
When you are not even one. When we were kids we called this
The troll. It was the voice beneath the bridge, the footsteps
Late night in the cellar. It had a blank white face and looked in
Every window. That it meant no harm was more frightening

That it was just this stupid looking calling treading calling
And if it knew nothing else it knew we didn't want to hear.
No body wants to hear. It wants to dream forever safe
In the sierra of its bones the endless archipelago of sensations
From which that stupid other person rouses us to mean what?
Where workingmen are out on strike. Where the blue Platte
Skims the music of sweet prairie poas and leaves us gasping
For more smell. For sound. More light. No one's body
Snug in our arms and very real. Like a road. Like a camera
Never there when you need it. When it finally comes
Down out of the sky and shows itself. You are dressed
For a different occasion. You touch yourself with identifying
Purpose. They know who you are and maybe always did.
The men shuffle in their overcoats. Miners wear tweed jackets
And white silk mufflers. The steamfitters worked three shifts
In the Navy Yard until they dropped dead. The way men do
From failure to recall their dreams. Sleep is a pretext for it.
And that too we called the avenue of the troll, the long long
Street shadowy with ailanthus and streetlamps. A battle
In wet clothes blue of the gas stove on a grey morning. Victory.

31 January 1993