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LONDON

To be back in the light of it
back in the capital of description

between the huge plane trees and the open river
obelisk foist against a war

to feel the yup of it in Neal's Yard
and the lyric selfishness of Natural Foods

strange new incenses to offer at the altar of the Self!
and the air goes straight up—

yesterday the city was all light
sharp defining northern light

discussing the actual shape of things
the buildings in the Saturday desert of Chancery

arguing with shadows and doves.

16 August 1992, London

ON LUDGATE HILL

I see it is raining my delight to be
here London of the roofs London of the brick
the delight of the city is not its oldest things and
certainly not its newest things
but that *grandmother epoch* or **Edda** time
it preserves more widespread than any other

London's people are handsome and attractive, and fashionably, excitingly dressed in simple, inexpensive ways, move through streets that do not overawe with antiquity or insist on the unreachable Otherness of time (Greek or Gothic ruins), but rather remind us gently, jog the mind to notice something almost of one's own family, a room in one's own house you chance never to have entered before this crisp bright blue August afternoon, beautiful the way it never is in London, the way it only can be in London.

Thames Embankment, Obelisk holding up the sky, wrought iron wyverns and dragons hold up the benches we sit on, raised on daises to see the water better, the modest flowing wide-cast river. The people look so sexy and so happy after our weeks in worried, rayon-sweaty France.

London is of a time and family and circumstance *almost our own*. That is its secret and its charm, and why so many of the English finally have to flee away from it to anywhere, Taormina or Denver or Singapore. And why so many Americans finally have to come to London to come home.

When we walk in the woods near Annandale, we meet deer and foxes and raccoons — they are reminders of grandmother bear and grandfather catamount. These pleasant tawny animals speak our language in a way no lion or elephant could. The ones we meet put us in our places, teach us our place, to be quiet and brown and make do, thorough in the hidden empire of trees.

The modest skyline of London — St Paul's is still the only thing worth looking at against the sky. Against the blunt dull money towers late sprung up, Paul's church holds its own, its dome,

like its patron's severed head, decapitated by sprawl, rising above the low realities of our estate. A beautiful building, and so hard to see *whole*, so embedded is it in life, in multiplicity of structures and purposes and streets. London is like its cathedral, hard to see whole. I think of all the districts I have never entered, the easy suburbs, the weald beyond.

Roofs and bricks and streets — all cities have them. But no city has them so cogently as this, each rooftop a remark in the endless glory of unimportant conversation that is our life. London, capital of relationship.

16 August 1992, London

Reaction shots the pale pioneers
opening the first bank on the moon
sequences of tiresome arrivals.

16 August 1992, London

Never talk to a man examining a dry flower
he might be me
trying to figure out what the yellow *silène enflée* we found
along the walk up to Les Chavannes
might be here, here on England's
ordinary tongue,
 waiting for a dictionary, an authority,
for the poor drugged wilted flower to speak,
waiting for the heavenly city to rise and proclaim
the end of time and the beginning of meaning
don't disturb me it could happen any moment
it could happen in this yellow flower
I am waiting for Her to come back from the bathroom
utterly convinced it's some kind of campion.

16 August 1992, London

BLOOMSBURY SQUARE

for Charlotte

Forget where I am. There are two
angels interviewing a statue—
Charles James Fox reveals his long
meditated views on Cassandra's prophecies
to a pigeon sitting on his head.
They are not ravings. Close to the fence
a man swaddled in used clothes
sleeps under the hedge, he is leashed
to a small wiry dog who sleeps too.

There is so much for an angel to know—
most of the time they think about our bodies
(since they have none of their own), how
it feels to move through space in only one
direction, or to move by means of a warm
effort in the solid thighs while your far-away hair
floats on some cool breeze. Such contradictions.
All their lives angels worry about laps,
those temporary paradises that vanish when we walk.

Forget where I am. There is a light
in the sky and the children's bedroom
across the court with two bare bunk beds.
What Cassandra, any women, was trying to say
was the future history of the human neighborhood,
the whole of it, the bones and flutes and ice of it
tree by tree until we come to twelve.

The bells of St George's wake him but not the dog.
We eye each other both trying to pretend
the only difference between us is twenty pounds
in my pocket and not in his. But all we really
have in common is the same interested angels
standing on our heads, the whole air filled with them
up and up between the plane trees and the sun
all trying to understand us, love us and our dog.

17 August 1992, London

TOWER HILL. NIGHT.

Actually going into the wall
going into the wall
actually entering the
time that is a wall is a time
in my hand

between the river and the night
a wall the fragment of a Roman wall of Londinium so what
a fragment of a broken hour
shoved up between new money and the underground station
under the shadow there is no shadow
of the Tower the white

tower with the blood inside the famous
one that Japanese
come from their hibiscus forever to look at
here in our ancestral Confusion this

sweet rock town.
In my whole hand
is the frail continuity of physical space
by Hadrian or Samuel Pepys or every legion
has its vexilla has its dreary chow come
give them a bottle of carrot wine a box of bread

no one is the wiser even so
and back up there the new insurance building
made all of hardware and blue light
so profitable it must be to die

even Pepys went up the stairs one last time
to where the dreamy stars are ranged
against the infinite receding universe
by size alone, like his smooth calf books at Cambridge

his house his house
lost in the deserts of identity

a place a place

is only continuous
with itself and then we turn

mulberry bricks and sun after supper
away into the remembrance

Christ I will just stand here close and look at the wall.

17 August 1992, London

I was trying to make sense of
(= find something to say about the way it
felt to stand in the middle of)
space when sleep felled me

I was an ox in its abattoir
and I fell into the black blood of
then woke after an uncertain interview
into the soft sheen of an August morning

not close to my body, why, closer
to yours, closer even to the dusky
plummy old brick wall across the court
with flower pots at the garret windows

shouldering between hotels. The venture
that space is, the caravan of earthy species
come soft-footed in the night
to fill me, you, with love for this simple place.

In my language a city does all the talking—
or it is all talking, and we are children
of what it says, then prate our version
of what we overhear. The inaccurate.

Behind every door morning is happening.
A different world subtends identical
languages. I am here by listening.
That wolf the sun breathes past the shade.

18 August 1992, London

Every one you ever kiss
adds an essence to
the immense cocktail of responses
that is you.

=====

AIDS then an extreme case of what kills us all. We die of each other. We wear each other out with love and hate, our strengths and weaknesses. "Scientists" clueless hobble through the mists knowing neither to thank nor blame the ceaseless *othering of me* an illness is.

18 August 1992, London

SOHO

By speculation
alone

to find.

A praise of summer and old music
found

without hearing
in car rush under the swish of plane leaves
in the low wind,

to work

such sludge as this

into Going.

O God of Freemasons
are you different from the wood?

I have chosen all things to reflect
the myriad uncertainties of space

(of being a man
watching the frowns of women
smooth a little in this older country

America wrinkled with distaste these days
women against men and both
distracted from their ancient enemy the Government
keeps us busy at one another
while archons greed)

of being a man in a grim time.

I thought it was the body
of a woman moved a man,

but it is the *time*,

the rhythmic
difference

of her alertness

from his own

(animal-fashion, mate choose
who sees
what you can't see,

survival

o Europa
Stores are open late

in a district of hotels
no one lives
except the homeless
in their parks

how to find a loaf of bread
or in any city
the moon at midnight

in its last quarter
hidden in the world

but huge against the sky
in all these little streets
the prow of the Masonic Temple

guarding such intercourse
the wardens of the world are frightened of
we daze ourselves with such insight)

a loaf of bread a laundromat a sailor
to fetch you to the sea again

not easy
to live all day long in space
then lose it nights
in the dimensionless.

And you call these dreams *mine*?
As well call all the women in the street my wives—

we sleep through populations,

sleep our traversal of a huge language
other ages are discoursing. We notice
what is close upon us,

or else the border's down
and all the shadowy futures hurry past
rouged and cloaked and tittering,

if there's one thing my dreams are not it's mine.
And I have stumbled here again
losing my way every time up the rays of little streets
out from Seven Dials into the gaudy
pleasaunces of ordinary night,

 people out on the town
and they are simple
in their pleasures
as the smell of sulfur
or the yellow moon

I come towards them
they are my people
I reach to them
like a gamewarden
from their own groves
bringing them
what they always forget
and I always remember
this warm trembling
bird safe in my hands.

18 August 1992, London

THE RECOGNITION

I saw my father yesterday
shuffle quick along Southampton Row
to catch a red bus
and showed him to Charlotte— There,
that's him, just like that, the coat
the shoes, the hurry,
the vague old eyes pale behind dusty lenses
of heavy hornrims, his face, size, gait.
Only this one is alive
and Samuel's on another island
in earth beside my sleeping mother.

18 August 1992, London

They were changing the colors of things.
Began small, with quiet obscenities
like purple milk.

18 August 1992, London¹

¹Verbatim from dream, woke saying these words, after tousled dreams of blocked roads that led to rights-of-way we really owned and had not known.

It begins by being here
it is a lodger
in an old idea

then the sparrows know it
"there is no way
to fall"²

and then the actual
small English robin
on a twig in Hyde Park
and the geese and taxicabs
(almost said in)

and the Araby women
in black shawls everywhere
this life on earth this widowhood

and the sky is a different idea
chestnuts with spiny seedcases
they all can fly but do not go
those swans in ornamental waters

and the streets themselves can travel
and what we have made
can creep beyond us,

dreams show the way
and then we're blocked in island traffic
as if it were wrong to be anywhere.

19 August 1992, London

²These lines are quoted from my dream of 18/19 August, where I spent some time in dream arranging them in various line-breaks, finally choosing this one, still in dream.

In drowse, throb of engines over
the drowse-mind, slur
of consciousness
could they all be wrong and I be right?
Then why are they speaking German on the intercom?

19 August 1992, in flight over England