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linn

(the British word for cascade)
(ten years ago you could
have looked east from the Serpentine
and seen in August nothing but trees
on the skyline, and in the other direction
in the gold dissolving cloud relenting sky
only a solitary steeple

ten million people were all outside those trees
and one of them thought so little of his love
of his fellows he
 dumped a stack of offices against the sky
dumb as pancakes
 where everybody had to see —

what is the ancient word for that?

18 August 1992, London

POSTCARD

At a white metal table between us and the water, the Peruvian ambassador is writing his suicide note. Here in Hyde Park, by the Serpentine, his long cigarette stands upright from his right hand holding the paper flat while his left hand drives an expensive Mont Blanc on its last careering tour. Ducks remark constantly. How rich does a man have to be to outwit his own inclination to die? We could send you a picture of the ducks or the meek London skyline, but instead I want you to see this poor well-dressed man, delicately scented of violets, on his last lovely evening. We want you to see the great, even noble, city he takes leave of. We want you to mourn him and his left-handed desperation, his sense that *things were once right and are not now right* — that is the anthem of suicide, the last futile tourniquet twisted round the limb with its incurable wound.

18 August 1992, London

We go
to where the earth
says

this word

and only here
and that
word (only
there)

a battle
to attend her

endless sentence

rings of light
refracted in the glass of ice
tilted to the lips
while the sky
comes through
the airline plastic
ticks my teeth

*What I'm saying you have to be in every place
to hear the whole word that earth speaks.*

A baby cries at 38,000 feet
and everybody knows.

19 August 1992, over Atlantic

Place as segment of word
vowel me
believe my cathedral

anxious for
a catalogue of spells

arrive past time
blue lane
of coming home

19 August 1992, in flight

AT HOME

for Charlotte

in the character
or national
seal
 a cool
wet morning
netted
from the night
and first things a

CROW

and sparrows on the feeder
and a jay
carries an offering away.

This also
is the sacred city
down this street
Samuel Pepys
once gets a glimpse
of the king
lost in thought
watching birds

this also
is Lud Hill
beneath this porch
where chipmunks shelter
the bleach'd and sacred Skull
of Bran the Blessed
saves this island from itself

the drunken brokers

who sell the sky

The character
studies us
to become

we meet
our contradictions
the light
up the little hill
prayer flags
soft white in heavy air
the colors
hidden in memory
hidden
in the actual green

the national
bewrays us
for we are in our dignity
where we stand
there is no Rome beyond her legions
Rome is where you stand
scurry
to inhabit this money
villatici quidem in urbem transeuntes
made a killing
in the City cheap
men and chapmen and keeves
soft as the fur on your arm Ladie
under this feeder of small birds

daylight on earth lust
the finch machine

a glow of light amidst the morning Grey
at the greeking of the Day
I want to hold you
this place
this miracle

just because

in the dignity of our hands
by authority
of what we have done
we do

so we stared
at the hotel
where the old
poet kept her love
perennial
brighter than pansies

Montreux
of late blossoming jasmine
and small palms,
of bronze beasts,
Montreux of fuchsia
and her ardor,
all ardor
lived here

live still
in the tropics of cash
we came back
to our cold
motherland
perennius her love
more lasteth
than the bronze statue
of her knighted
beloved
Marshall of the Air
before St Clements

and all the quiet windows

browed with canvas
awnings to vague
the in-pursuing ardor
against a common sun

o Lac Lemane was lapis our day

that day dark and still
beneath the assawte of sun's sheen meek
and striving slowly
blue downwards
(the way Syrian
glass does
in the museum cases)
all light seeking the core of earth

so that the afternoon
not afflict
even a lover
with unnatural permanence

awningless we live
another country.

20 August 1992

THE CHARACTER OF THE THING

A Frenchman
will let you in his heart
but not in his house

an American conversely

whereas an Englishman
meets Englishmen
during certain boundaried
hours of the afternoon and night
in common ground
called Public
Houses

 in front of which on city nights
the sleek young businessmen
clutter the sidewalk highvoiced with their pints,
inside's too private for them,

they want the world.

And we are travellers
in this place too,
you sacred Japanese
you sparrows
on my seed

is this not love, all of this coming and going and staying put,
is not this love alone
among the tumultuous Shanghais
this mousy calm
of a cold August morning, Madam?

20 August 1992

Vindictiveness is just a way of holding on.
She looks at the photo he took of her
washing the Mustang and smiling up at him
and hates him. She feels her jeans still
wet from his horseplay with the hose. Hate.
Jokes of onetime love choke her now.
Detail is anger. Color is fuel. Every texture
is a wind roaring in the chimney of her
hate. The breath of hating him, tight
chest of clutching to the situation. So long.
She remembers everything. That he could be
so wrong all along and she not see it,
or played along with it so long, the force
of that bent love comes to squeeze her throat.
And here she still is, no one can live here.
She is trying to. She will live in this impossible
judgment against him as she lived
years in that impossible marriage, a word
from hell that wants to be spoken on earth.

21 August 1992