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JEHANNE

Lead us into the sure, she said
and the angel did, the fire was it,
and the certainty of pain.

We know,

we look away if we can
but we have already taken that
terrible confidence into ourselves
where it burns slow, smoldering turf
deep in Yorkshire mines
dozens of years. Too many lovers
to hold in one mind.

7 February 2010

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I can scarce tell a sheep from a goat
but I know a good deal more about both
than I do about economics. It behooves me then
to keep my mouth shut re what I do not love.
I have enough to do telling what I do.

7 February 2010

1.

Tell it just enough to begin
then the form takes over and tells you

analytic balance in the box
slide the glass open and put in

the precious pennyweight of human cream
to measure it against a feather

yes Lady but from what bird
does such truth almost painlessly fall

an owl feather fallen from crow combat
long September color on a person's lawn

or was it hawk, a prairie harrier
a gull who preened on your roof beam once

a feather is the fact of memory
what you remember is what you weigh

your life against in these Egyptian pans
maybe some god's thumb on the scale

you never know the things you know
till someone tells you then it's too late

and winter is deciding time
the trees are runes you need to read

to look at a lady and see a wooden house
or drink a glass of water slowly and long after

find a pearl underneath your tongue
and you never even touched that southern ocean

just as (fool!) you never once opened
up the crucifix and walked in.

2.

Smart ones would tell you too much
be a mirror until you break

be a tumbler till you fall
or fill or drown, just be unsure

uncertainty is all, and your appeal
is the way your eyes are so steady and clear

while your fingertips are roving
through the frantic jungle of what you really mean

unknown to us both, to us all
for we are never two

two is not a number you can be
the best is three where two can cast one shadow

but most conversations are a multitude
squeezed over cocktails in the intimate saloon,

does the wind even remember me
it comes again and again and each time seems

to speak a different word
and every morning in the snow all kinds of tracks

all left by one animal alone
an animal is just a momentary formal embodiment

of a force not even you believe in
though sometimes in the quiet of a public place

you dare to look up and out from what you're thinking
and watch over there some person sit down on a chair.

7 February 2010

3.

But who was it waiting for
in the sign of you

whom from an earlier time by harp
a hand had wafted into (you thought)

significant sound genesis of a thing
you do it through our ears

as if always as if the thing itself could speak
and you or I were what it said

at least that when it said whatever it did
you were just listening with your fingers

so that all the rest could hear and keep moving
remorseless river into uncomplaining sea

and the man for once consented to sit still
beside her, mute agency of stone

ambiguity of every tree there is
and most the yew the self-born healer

were you ever listening to the sunrise
were the parrots too quick for you

to tell one color from another
is the work of that smallest god

who lives athwart the commissure
waiting for girlfriends in blue sheaths

to light the darkest reaches of the mind
the ordinary miracle that spins your wheel.

8 February 2010

4.

Because I was waiting another one knew
and came up into flesh before me

I fought him for the time of day the pulse in his wrist
I took for mine he sucked my breath

all night the dance concert went on
motionless in our rows could smell the dancers

the varnish of their sexual politics
broke more than one floorboard in my sleep

and still he ventured vaunted even
spoke words he had sucked out of my mouth

dastard lilyings poltroon equivocations
muscular lies like the hips of the dancers

we also are who could be life
or choice as the screaming mummies

vent in bible alleys to persuade
all women to make the same mistakes as they

till once an angel stand up with the air
impregnate with lucidity and explain

another destiny is meant our grueling loins
pleasure bred and breeding

and beget by mind alone
cunning and glass athanors and then

the body full of sentient rapture
uninterrupted liturgy of praise.

8 February 2010

5.

But where the limits are the seals are waiting
they own a province of our dreams too

the red wax your mother's monogram
as in the dark pool you shouldn't be here so late

you see slip in and out of one another's shadows
the limbic Ancestors who move your hands

so that you swim through words to find an island
but an island alas only always is a waiting place

until the god comes and yanks you to your feet
and makes you go with her where the word is lost

no need to worry or grieve in ancient greek
the wind always remembers

eternal vocabulary will never desert you
just the word you need in time

does not stand up inside you
and makes you measure things in flowers

and think it's fun to watch animals at play
when it's you yourself who should be playing

here didn't I give you this lovely bone
play with it make it talk till you understand

Corpus Christi is not even a border town
between the body and the soul there is a field

you call it Christ sometimes when you walk there
thinking about him or her and when you're there

everything seems clear each answer
married to its question that's all God meant by monogamy.

8 February 2010

6.

How curious twilight in that field
and so many shadows move around you

each one thinks you are a shadow too
maybe you are great cubic stones float by

insurgent gravity past your unsuspecting shoulders
you think you're dreaming but I know better

there is a launch of sulfur butterflies goes by
evangelical their wings annoy you with meanings

words make you stumble sweetheart old ones
a word is no more than an entanglement

have you reached the border yet river of refuge
money on one side and meaning on the other

what will you tell the borderguard
what song will you remember from your excited youth

when every sweater held bright winter in it
and you still loved the smells of everything?

keep going you guess you do a lot of guessing
toss your cellphone into that clump of opuntia

though you just pray Cactus cactus be my wife
let me have another life and all your prayers

bray universally at once till sleep arrives
speaking another language an easy one this time

you fight with her about little things
she slaps you smartly and you fall

no pain no gain no loss no finding
your outstretched body is the borderline itself.

8 February 2010

7.

Waking is always another place
that is the secret they sleep you from knowing

who pretend you moved only through time
while sleeping was, but waking is elsewhere

and light's new town alarms you with its laws,
lawns, dogs, churches, high school kids, police

where did my own city go you think
the one you never had that guesswork Gotham

hypothesized in all-night conversations
and studied in sketchy manifestos

where is your actual life now you need it
when all the cobwebs blow away and you have only this

the cuddly actual that you so detest
the mermaid wriggling through the gleam of noon

questions dissolve into answers every one wrong
or noble lie or abstract qualifier

how long in meters is your music

how aft the ship's remembered port?

the glad old-fashioned ratcheting machines abound

but are you even listening?

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8.

And *necessarius* what does that word mean
a servant or a prelate or a little man

who walks beside you with a silken parasol
shielding you both from intemperate inquiry

I saw it on a picture of a stone
any word carved in rock becomes a riddle

every word a riddle
every rock a lost religion

don't think the men knew what they were thinking
who carved it there their hands just hurt the stone

screamed back and you have to hear it now
year after year until you read the meaning

in the blue thin lines of your own pain
the silent dumbness of you try to be a stone

and there is no meaning
that is the point of all this

you have come to me again
traveling long through all the shadows

Madeleine my secret bride all stone and weeping
you sleepy in the heartwood of the yew

it sang to you a thousand years or so
till you were ready to wake into revenge

or were you reading civil books all the while
and listening to Dacian shepherds flute their song

solving all the enigmas in the land of the dead
till you got bored and woke and came to me

so we can play again the way we once
wore out the desert with our wise shenanigans

and trees sprang up to spread our gospel
and streets ran through them full of blond police.

8 February 2010