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People don't die.
Something else happens.
Paulownia trees. Black soil.
Bones you make flutes from.
Stormy coasts. Waves
churn over red rocks.
All the pictures fade.
Something else happens.
It looks like dying
but it's something else.
The images come back.
They stay with you
beyond the end.

8 January 2006

=====

When the births and the deaths interleave
like cards in a quick Gypsy's hands
shuffling the destinies, our faces turned
always away from the numbers
on the cards, only the pretty figures do we see,
queens and knaves and the king is dead

because we like to look at what we understand
and no one can stand beneath a number,
numbers are strange birds that cry overhead,
crows at morning proclaiming an open secret
we and only we have not figured out,
then they say it's your birthday and somebody's dead

and how can we live like this, fire shuffled into water,
air shuffled into earth, yet we have to, no choice,
the numbers yell at us, ages and birthdays,
serials and semaphores and we stagger
beneath the terror of our own guesses, dream stuff,
and the Peaceful Deities stand in the core of the dream

more frightening than wrath. And then we wake.
It's the next thing. The next day. People love us,
language happens, boats sail down the river
nosing their way through the ice, there is a sleep
that takes us, and in my sleep it wrote Nobody
actually dies. Something else happens. Today.

for Susan, 9 January 2006

=====

Listen for the lime reek,
the portcullis opening
and the wolves trot out
eying you in your finery
and knowing you one of them –

this is a man.
Now drink the tea
made from the lime flowers.
It is late springtime,
you'd think the earth
were all about bees
and you drink.

They have labeled you.
You belong.

9 January 2006

PURGATORY

They blow the noon siren
at nine a.m. They call
a haystack a kernel of corn.
The highway peters out
near the dead factory,
a Greek church with broken
dome. Cities like this
fell out of one language
and never found another.
Buses still run but nobody
drives them. The smelly old
orange oblongs trundle
along the streets themselves,
get on if you dare. Nobody
feels safe around here
but nothing actually happens.
At times people pass overhead
as if they were alive and we dead
or the other way round. They
stare down, we seldom
favor them with an upward glance
— we are birds and fish to each other
but which is which? At times
I see a pretty lady in white
saunter a tree height above me
and she smiles. A thing like that
can change my whole day —
I walk for minutes at a time
in the shadow of her twirling parasol.

9 January 2006

BOSTON

In grey of bright day
warm winter arrived
city. City sidewalks
Starbucks. Old man
at Roche Bros said
something welcoming
in Gaelic I guess.
The modes of being
resemble water:
no place it will not go.
Imagine a place
without being—
what would be there?
Imagine a God
without characteristics—
what would you need
to do but conceive
it, slow definition
of god by us?
By everything that happens?
Why not the swift
simultaneous definition
of everything that happens
as everything that
happens? Even this.

9 January 2006, Boston

PROCESS THEOLOGIANS

Schoolboys who come home late to church
ashamed that they lost god along the way.
God doesn't care. He'll still save them some pie.

9 I 06/Boston

MEDIATED MEMORY

Raccooned with respect to eye
a woman walks. What
do words mean? Every image
is an investigation. Dark
eyeshadow, exuberance of kohl.

The way they used to look.

How can I tell my memories from media
when I remember both? Is anyone
I remember real? How to tell.
And when if ever I figure out
how to tell, there is the impossible

question of to whom to tell it.

9 January 2006
Boston

=====

I seem to be writing against the light –
how long (it's not even midnight yet)
the dawn will take to come.

Write all night
in dream if not awake,
write with the blue pencil of my closed eyes,

the green ink of memory,
write with the lean lead pencil of desire,
setting down explicit names and renderings

draughtsmanlike images of what is wanted,
writing down rough in ballpoint fast
the names that suddenly call out their names

and then I wake remembering them
distorted, like the lake water suddenly
filthy with flotsam jammed against the dock

by the blunt ferry lurching into the slip –
that turbid junk is all that's left of
the crystal lake you just sailed so lucid through.

9 January 2006
Boston

CAD GODDEU

The spruce oak arrives.
Oaks pine for their barrens.
The larch lurches into battle
on its way back from lunch
but claims I always walk this way.
The elder alder chides the youthful yew,
threatens the birch, too much time
at the beech. What do I hear?
The bark of a fox. A heron
over a tamarisk. Wet meets dry.
The flowering quince
decides the apple's appeal.
Slowly slowly into judgment
the chokecherry gags on hemlock,
the law makes villains of us all.

10 January 2006
Boston

THE NOMINALIST

All this chatter you hear in the trees
makes me aware of all the harm
sentimentality does. *Schindler's List*
glamour of the one good German.
The wrong one. And in the zoo
imprisoned animals are cuddleized.
Name the pandas. Here we are
right up the block from the Arboretum
with not a thought in my head.
Tree names don't comprise thinking—
Aristotle would agree. Names
don't mean a thing – my students
tell me this when I ask them
What does your name mean? I never
thought about it, it just means me.

10 January 2006

=====

But what if I did get to sleep
and dreamed about Mexico?
And all the stones come to life

and it turns out that language
is a way to walk, and the stones
walk their way to me?

And all the pale houses
are full of pale dogs
and the only green is in the limestone well

down there, where thinking stops
and time's tendons go slack
and you can see the stars in daytime

and the stones have it all their own way?

10 January 2006
Boston

=====

Almost everything we do
we do in desperation.

Give me the other things
we do, the ones we do
with our minds on other things,

relaxed, skilful, like sleep
when a man coming come from work
falls asleep on the subway
and rides past his stop and into his new life.

10 January 2006
Boston

DREAM OF THE MOIETIES

There is a plague.

One half of the population remains intact, as ever, as usual, no change. I am of that moiety.

The other moiety *goes quiet* – I think that’s what the expression is / will be / was. Grows weaker, indifferent, will-less, and then one of two things happen:

--the person changes gradually into an animal, an animal no more vigorous than the person had been, an animal rather like the person it had been. This animal gradually fades away and is gone.

--or the person starts fading away directly, withers, ultimately dematerializes, is gone.

The plague simply arrives. No cause is known, no pathogen identified, no behavior makes it more likely to strike.

Sometimes, people being what they are, some of the healthy pretend to be victims – to tease their friends, scare their loved ones – “just as people used to pretend to have the Black Plague in the old days,” I assert confidently in the dream. Not because I had read any evidence of such imposture in seventeenth-century London or fourteenth century Genoa, but just because that’s what people are like, what people *would* do. What I’m afraid I would have done, to tease or scare or plain bloodmindedness. Or maybe even to ward off the disease by pretending to have it already – a kind of playing possum.

I thought all that out in the dream – that’s the point.

Both routes of those who are afflicted lead to the same end—the animals have their brief, sad, weakened animal life, then they fade away.

I can imagine choosing the animal fate, for the few weeks more of life.

In the dream we were healthy. But one feared for oneself or one's friends every time you or they yawned or felt sleepy – was this the onset?

Perfectly natural sleep, weariness, yawning, drowsiness, continued among the healthy. So at any given moment, say at a boring dinner or a pointless party, the healthy could not be told from the sick.

11 January 2006

=====

Wait, morning,
I have to tell
you more than that.

You came for me
over the harbor
and now up Bellevue Hill
you spilled your light
to tempt me out of bed,

mackerel sky, pine tree
tip quivering, shaken
with wind when all the bare
trees are motionless.

Something breathes.
I think it's my breath
answering dawn
that makes it move

since the breath I have
is not different from
what hurls out there,

the secret notebook
open above
this early street.

11 January 2006
Boston

=====

And then to be home
where the Iliad is still fighting
and every word wants its way
and I will not kill.

This breaks my book.
A book is supposed to be all murder and revenge,
a poem is supposed to be all loss.

But what if I find this flower?
What if I pick it up?
And didn't hear the battle, Diomedes,
Hector, Andromache, none of them,
none of their loves and wounds.

Not even my own losses.
What losses? I am holding this flower
we bought before we went away.
It still is fresh, a cadmium-yellow deep sort of rose,
the kind of color you call orange
but there's hardly any red in it,

is there? That sort of flower. Home.

11 January 2006
Annandale

=====

You live in the future.
That's why travel
is so easy, the Next Place
is always in the future
and this place is
the thing to leave.

You come to yourself again
in the destination. You live
where the plane goes.
You live where the mail comes from,
you live where the little gods
of money and meaning
make the phone ring.

12 January 2006

=====

But that is the right way, isn't it,
Bedouin? We live by tabernacles,
the book says, not by settlement.

Land is a commodity, investment,
no kind of truth, no intimate
landscape where the heart's at home.

You've never rubbed against
the trees you own, you've never,
well, fill in all the rest.

Matter doesn't matter. A tent
named tomorrow
"and a name to come."

12 January 2006

=====

What should I climb
if not this hill?

What should I drink from
if not this cup?

And what other hand but this
should I touch you with?

Isn't it obvious, the obvious?
Doesn't it love us best?

12 January 2006

=====

The years that are animals—
some snuffle, some howl
far back in the woods, some
bolder come slinking up to me,
some bite.

The days
that are women look
through the windows:
some look out to the open
air and liberty, some
look in, looking for
the freedom that only is within.

The hours are themselves alone,
march past like children
trying to make a wooden
footbridge tremble and sway and fall.

12 January 2006
Kingston

=====

Everything is
too much.

Nothing is
too little.

Anything
is unlikely.

It is a game
with no beginning,

you lose
by winning.

12 January 2006
Kingston