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Expect nothing keep listening.
This is another alphabet. The radio
is talking to you again, the one
you never have to hear,

the one that is there, there—
midnight in the fold of your mind
right in the middle where the sun
rises, they all see you coming

light gushing out of your clothes.
It is romantic. Nieman-Marcus
expense account, niemand merkt uns
we slip unseen through the flames
the ones we grow around us
shopping our hearts out in the biggest store.

I will give you everything I can think of.
Even your own body will I give back
bent from the fulcrum of my wish
and pried asunder – how else
would the light get in? And out?
Light walks only from pain
the way gamblers hurry to the desert
to blend emptiness with emptiness.

No, I'm not a radio anymore. A root
growing inside you. A pressure,
a slim green blade of grass
to penetrate the murk of human will
where everything is made

19 January 2005

=====

Not say simple say
hand a horse
doesn't have one
he stands up on his middle
finger all men are lonely
some cave is full of fire

a hand brushes snow
off my face we call it wind
how long before we weave

a pattern for your carpet
lie on the floor and smell the dust the wool
the hand feels the soft raised pile
the colors have no feel yet
the hand is blind

the hand loves everyone in what it feels
the touch the hand calls you

there is no old word for this relation
a hand stroking another hand
while people think whatever people think

nothing can be imagined beyond this
situation, a hand imagining a hand

imagining something before rock or fire
something that wanted to touch
and imagined a way of touching
so as to be near and far and near-far together
to be a mind in a hand here.

20 January 2005

WHAT CAN BE SAID

Another world.

When the despairing prisoners “had hanged themselves ... the officers of the Erkennungsdienst hurried to the place and photographed the body from all angles.” (*Guardian*, today, an 87 year old photographer remembers Auschwitz.)

What can be said
to see the *blessed thing*
defiled by the amazing absence
death is

to see people do that to other people
that is what I couldn't bear, I was nine
when I saw the pictures, the living
corpses stagger towards

the camera I have been ever since.
I will not be a man if men do that.

The blessed thing
the body.

All we have.
And by old French philosophy, all we are.

The dignity of meat. The living thing
hyj, we still say that,
twyj, *chayyoth*, the living things Ezekiel saw—

what spoke to me from the fire?

those are what we have to carry.
And the photographer after he was rescued
never “raised a camera to his eye again.”

We have seen the living things
destroyed, we have seen their images
go on living in the caverns of the mind,

all fear is a fear of something to be seen.

Close your eyes now in the dark
away from the dictionary,
tell me the word for sound.

Splashing sound of water
round and round
sound of small electric motor
moving small things round,

what is the word for sound?
for market, for tell me, for now?

Will there ever be a word for now?

We need old Egyptian signs
incomprehensible, sensible, full
of living things and jars and reeds,
we need signs that say
nothing but old earth language,
say to the eye what words say
to the smoky breath-life inside your chest

θυμος

the one that makes you gasp in love
or sob with the sudden light

a little boat far out on the lake.

20 January 2005, Kingston

=====
a knitted flute

a sign

a sign is always a threat

the terrible word
you find written on a piece
of paper god knows how
long you had it in your pocket
and now

if you knitted a flute
image the sound it would make

what a mystery cloth is
the first thing we made

I see the models on the runway
halfway to the sky
I marvel at the little fabric
that shapes them

they hold the gaze
and carry it away

where am I when I have lost my gaze

(sound of a woollen flute
playing over the hill)

20 January 2005

=====
Two a.m. A bright
green star over the hill.
And Orion on fire.
Orion is a wedding party

and I am his drunken guest
all my life at that revel
and one day soon I'll
kiss the bride again

and swoon and wake
to find myself dancing.
O the moon set long ago
there's only us now

my hand on the waist of the sky.

20 January 2005

=====

Be blue with me
and let things follow
as they should
b flat minor

A# slice careful
between the measures
dance queen
downtown LA

so many rich people
prominent in cemeteries.
I walked through Forest Lawn
and thought: the poor must live forever.

20 January 2005

=====
The politics of drunkenness
the Ulsterman tottering home
the dance still in his head

there was no dance, the tunes of it
bark at him, dogs of memory
and their shallow pups, a snatch
of the Snowy Breasted Pearl
and Larry Won't Ye Come Home
a jig or reel, like Hasids
through the Brooklyn street,
alone, alone though,
the jig is fast, the notes of it
tossed dazzling quick between
fiddle and flute and pipe and whistle

and he can't read the letters on the ground
his shadow spells with all these street lights

no light in the world brighter
crueler than the glaring windows
of closed stores, lit up to vex
the eyes with unfulfillable desires
lie down and die, but here
the sidewalk is too far away

nothing stands between the mind and itself—
sinner in the hands of an angry God.

21 January 2005

THALIENSTRASSE

Could this trolley car
understand me. Not drunk,
I don't speak German.
The woman beside me
is nobody's wife, I love
museums, could it?

This is one long street
we ride it to the end.
Sit in our seats watch the rain
and ride back home again.
An old drunk keeps losing
his brown paper parcels
rearranging, dozing,
losing, waking, fixing.

He is trying to speak
a sentence coherent
in an unknown language
but words slop around,
he is trying to be daytime,
ordinary, shopping,
he is trying to be people.
What can we do
to help a drunk old man?

Paper and crumple and fall
and slip from the fingers,
what do we do with a language
nobody speaks?

Earlier today I kissed
the rough stone column

of the opera house
to make a point. Something
about music, love, me.
Music is how I love me best,
listen. Or I meant to say
love is like a stone
as Dante tells us that falls
and gets lost in the grass.

Our old man drops all
his parcels yet again
but still keeps trying,
sleeping, muttering
to hold all things together.

Outside I hope the rain.
I like rain. Sometimes I
almost understand what it says.

21 January 2005

=====

I'm still holding it
a leaf from no tree

fell at no time
and I'm holding it tight

in no hand.
Who is my wife?

21 January 2005

CAMEO

With a profile, whose
I cannot say,
I haven't read
a history of this city.

There's a crown
on this young head,
the faces looks west
where I come from,

I feel good when I look
at this face – somebody
long ago knew me,
was waiting for me.

21 January 2005

=====
But the music
sounds like fire.
Schönberg's *Gurrelieder*.
Outside it is six below zero.
"Sonnenschein!" he sings
with an exclamation point
that sounds like spring
come already
into a new world
long ago forgotten.

Now is so hopeless,
now is so lame.

21 January 2005

USES OF THE DAY

Today is a day
for sleepwalking

for taking out of line
for following footprints of unknown animals
deep into the woods

the runes that fox feet leave
or possum, coon, squirrel, crow.

Birds walk here too.
There are things they can know
only by walking.

It is amazing. the fall of grace
like the blizzard we're supposed to get,
much snow, wild wind, sub-zero temperatures they say.

Today's a day for believing what they say
all the way into the woods.

The woods are everywhere,
roads are just breathing spaces,
houses just punctuation in that green text.
But what does it say?

It says: Be lyrical
while you can,
the snow is coming

today is a day for believing
anything that comes.

22 January 2005

=====
Why don't they feed me the titles of poems
I wrote fifty years ago and see
what I could do with them now.
Smarter, tougher, sadder, weaker?
Probably none of these. Different
as all a man's me's. A man's name
stays the same but his signature
keeps changing. That's the point.
That's all we need to remember.

But what is my signature?
This? Or this?

I am a king whose reign is lost
somewhere between Charlemagne and Frederick,
somewhere in there, my castle and my decades
vanished. Only my haughty insolent forgiving nature
shows what I was.

Pride goeth before oblivion.
A squirrel is eating millet *faute de mieux*
from our feeder, and who remembers
this one in particular from all
the regiment of squirrels
hurrying over the snows of this endless Russian planet?

22 January 2005

[Transcriptions from old scraps of paper found today]

I'm sitting here in the food court at Price Chopper
drinking my hot weak coffee and
wondering why it all seems familiar.
It is the agora the suq the bazaar
the kermesse the Sonnabendmarkt
the weekly market in Thonon
it's all the market fairs of England and the knife
market in Darjeeling and no matter how few roofs
this place has or how much middle management
and corporate iniquity behind the wall this
is the market still. We come here to find ourselves.

1994

*

A year's an old ferry
waddling through mist
bringing us the well-
meaning and well-meant
all together to the far shore.

*

Troubles enter of four feet.
Waves don't drown a man,
his lungs do. The greed
of taking in. The heart
has pulse enough for centuries
but then a message comes
from fire or from water
and his earth is still.

*

The sound of rain
has distant violet mountains in it.

[22 January 2005]

=====

With all these catastrophes
what is the world trying to tell us?

It's trying to tell us it has nothing to tell us.
We tell ourselves this story.

Human anger makes the ocean boil.

22 January 2005