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THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

A priest is walking along a path. It is autumn. Ahead of him, in the dirt and leaves, he sees a few tiny glittering things. He kneels down and picks up what looks like a diamond, small but pretty. He sees more of these glittering things, and carefully picks them up one by one till he can find no more. He blows on them, to discharge the dust and leaf debris. It is not clear to him whether they are diamonds or glass or something else, but he takes care of them, he puts them in his pocket. This is called Trusting the Moment. The kingdom of heaven is like that.

15 November 2003

[dreamt into waking]

[natural eyes, 5]

The small taste of any given thing, the rapture, the bronze penny in your dead man's mouth that turns out to be just one more word you speak, and you're alive after all, blood pressure soaring but alive, and there are medicines, and you are full of ideas about free radicals and Africa, but the taste in your mouth doesn't soon go away. You are Africa, it turns out, your heart has turned bronze in the night, starting with Egypt, and there's no point anymore in saying you're alive or you're dead, just the light shivering through the blue glass vase on the dining room table sluices the newspaper with blue light and the telephone rings. In the vase are irises, differently blue.

15 November 2003

As if we thought
a different thing
able, or lumbago,
or the bible
spitting old stories
in the corner
and grouching about
new syntax
with short shirts
and bellybuttons bared
no we didn't
ever stop thinking
grandmother's pine tree
father's rice pudding
who can listen
to the end
to the deepest
stories never end
the shadows
like cats around
her shapeless feet
she spills, spits,
specifies
she ossified
the truth of yearning
into stone tablets
of the law
how many laws

are there
how many numbers
do you have
each one a law
and then another
no exceptions
ever, every number
is a thing
you have to do
before you can live
old pains
old moralities
old hearts
still trembling
with girlish love
with boyish greed
will you listen
to her babbling
Hosea on
Ezekiel, Amos
on Genesis
always some love
affair the day denies
and the night hides
forever in jabber
these words of hers
the desert winds
all night round
my house did blow
cardboard boxes
world a warehouse

of void commodities
it makes me so sad
to hear her say that
I who came
grandmotherless
into the clay
the city they say
we live in
and the hours speak
in voices of birds
all day the heat
rises till at noon
the man is born
full grown everything
dead around him
except the bible
scaring him awake
landless laws
touch the sinew
of his thigh
he falls
one more time
until he makes sense
of all the telephones
the e-mail the magazine
somebody must be
trying to tell him
something, who
could it possibly be
the bible hisses at him
from the corner

nobody talking to nobody
forever till you die
he breaks out
of the house of dream
dream of a house
and stands cold
in the morning
of course he's not born
of course he always
was, the words
try to get him
but the dawn wind
sweeps them away.

15 November 2003

STANZE

Don't have the think to time with
don't blame her though, the red
berries of the whatever down by the stream
are the only colors of the morning

so soon it will be everybody's b-day
and I know nothing the city didn't teach
all my life remembering to get straight
the somber lessons of the street by
life in these fair fields but not Connecticut

isn't that free verse coming over the hill
didn't that go out with Chesterfields?

16 November 2003

THE PURSUIT OF LITERATURE INVOLVES THE POET IN CEASELESS HUMILIATION

Eleven lines
just written — takes me
a line to say
what Catullus, say,
could spring in one syllable,

I've known this all before
and said it too, a line
of Virgil is a sonnet later,
a line of Milton
a sprawling ode of Hart Crane,

it takes a whole life of writing
to match the dense
beauty of one dumb
song from the Shih Ching
or Western Wind.

16 November 2003

SEVEN YEAR OLD

Rimbaud biting that girl in the ass:
early evidence of how he'd treat
the muses. And they'd get even.

He knew the words, but not the ones
that brought him love he wanted
or whatever peace the heart could take

and so he left off saying anything.
Rational Frenchman silences oracle.

16 November 2003

POETRY

I have grown old at a young man's game —
Pound is more surprising than Rimbaud,
to keep it up and keep it up
line after line long after
you know it changes nothing.
That changes everything.

16 November 2003

TELEOLOGY

How can it caught again
you worry? Becalm rat mind
and spool the jenny free from the mast,
a boat knows where to go —
it's only you with your jittery tiller
and your Bach fugues who's always running
wrongwind into dithering storms.
Death is so frequent it's confusing
any one of us is still alive or that your Last
Occasion is not meaningly recalled
—the reaper's rapture, the surgeon's
mauvais quart d'heure — or the blue
parakeet's in how November weather
could be caught in northern woods
and giv'n a home among believers
and a yellow colleen called Earth
bought to bird beside him and be his friend,
your cage is just a footnote to the world
's identical if larger aviary
where we fowl sing, a woman
who was bored with money,
a solipsist with a feeble sense of self,
you meet all kinds in the final Rapture,
reader, those empty shoes beside you
might just as well be yours,
o Tannenbaum o Hanukah candles
you'll be my liver I'll be your lights.

17 November 2003

MIDDLE NIGHT GRAMMAR

Grammar is the lost of it. I try.
I try to beak the circle open and seed
spill but the spoken never speaks.
Long wide the avenue runs in rain
cold past the Greyhound depot
with not a hint of noun to warm
my poor bone in, I spin in place
until I see back east a light
resolves film-wise into Burger King
where I am warm and eating,
the act's authentic though the food
is pretty frivolous, not bad as such,
bad is not the order of Our World yet
just wait if you think chicken nuggets suck
see what the Martian comrades have in store for us.

This is about grammar, not history.
This is about now. Language always keeps
spilling into now, warm coat, some slop
I spilled on my lapel, my history
strewn about my house, o god the names,
the names now, and grammar most of all
because all the operations and relations
it supervises are right now in this hard-hat
hour, worksite where deictic I-beams
point to thee or me, there is no other.

Wait while I spool the thread of this discourse
and pat you gently on the northern flank
you've hoisted quietly to lie beneath my hand
while you tell me how you like this well
but still won't go with me to the boring priest
you'll wait up to let me in when I come back
later this endless night even though he was the one
and he bored me too who told you in the first place
how I love Vietnamese vinaloo and you
went and made a huge pot of it for me before
I even came, first thing you did was show me
how it bubbled in a huge galvanized iron pot
weird wonderful to smell and a big hunk
of salmon simmered pink inside the dream,
it's strange to be in Cleveland anyway
though I figured out with some precision
here where we linger on your daybed we
are 350 miles away from somewhere else
but where? And how did you know I was me
anyhow when I wandered in off the street,
anybody could have come through that green door,
grammar is like that, grammar is the sleep
of actual things and how they think themselves,
and think they move around and touch and tell.

You keep kissing me light as a bird pecks,
I guess you're telling me you like me,
but what am I like? If grammar is a dream,
is silence waking? Is that what's in store for us
when the sun comes back on, one more tomorrow
full of other people? Come with me to my hour,

I'll bore you worse than any priest but I will be
your bore at least. And yes, I like your kisses
but no, they are not comprehensive explanations.
I need more. I need your gerund,
you need my participle. No more smiles.
We have come to the heart of the sentence.

17 November 2003

TEA

what tea am I drinking
what is this, the color
that a liquid
should be so dry
a green insinuation
between the morning
and me, an agreement
that I will call you
later, will call you
always, a green
intimation of an always,
a thin tea, a green
bowl to drink it from,
all right, a contract
even, a marriage.

17 November 2003

OPEN THE DOOR

Open the door, the door
always has a lot on its mind
often says interesting things

furthermore you can see the horizon
through it when it's open
the horizon is the other cheek of the door

you have to slap that too
before the sky gets over its distances
and comes in, yes, comes in

your very house and sits down,
the sky at your table drinking tea
with sugar-free jam to go with it

cherry, just like in Mirsuvia,
and your backyard unaccountably
fills up with noisy geese

you wonder what you should talk about
and why you invited the sky to come in
or did you invite it

is it all just part of a world-wide
conspiracy of doors
and here you are

waiting for the sky to say something
did you have a hard journey you ask
o no the sky says I live right close

just over your house
and you too are just somebody
who came through a door one fine day

you have to admit the sky is right
conversation gets easier
when you think about what one another mean

and the door keeps chattering away.

18 November 2003

BUT WHAT IS LEFT OF A WORD?

Don't marry a jaguar.

Those opaque eyes will take you in

forever, take you in

and leave you nowhere,

zinc mirrors deep inside

swallow a man, metal

in the heart, they have no heart

their heart is their eyes.

19 November 2003

VISITORS

When you crack the stone
there are things that live inside
and they come out.
They come to you.

But whether they were living in there
before you broke the rock
or were they born in the breaking
no one can be sure.

And where they go now equally uncertain.

19 November 2003

EL DESDICHADO

Am I really a number in your book
or does the pine tree keep track of all its needles

do you notice when I sob alone past midnight
in middle-class bathrooms, it's a class thing you know,

can you feel me in the suitcase of your heart
struggling to keep you company on your vacation

or just to get out of there and be forgotten
I have my own rendezvous with oblivion

I don't need yours, we all break eggs,
when I was a child I had a blue bridge

from my neighborhood down the road to the sea
and only now it seems strange very strange

to need a bridge to reach the ocean.

20 November 2003

FEELINGS

The way she feels
is not about you.

The way I feel
is not about her.

The way someone feels
is about someone
not someone else.

It is not a message
it is a condition
like a disease or an address
for some real estate.

It is where it only is
and you pass by.

Sometimes you sit on the porch
if there's no dog to chase you away.

20 November 2003

I know more than I tell you
and less than I say.
Watch out for people like me.

20 XI 03