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PHOENIX

from the collagraph by Chryssa Saj

1.

Call it phoenix. Call it a city in the desert, red,
I got out of a plane there, lizard on the runway,
call it a bird.

Fire phoenix phoenicam
call it a red bird lost in the blue of somebody remembering
all nobody ever really knew about phoenixes but said, said
they come from ash.

Sift your ashes over the paper
and where the paper's wet with your blood or spit or sweat
some ash will stick and marks will show. That is writing.

Inscribed by the adherent ash, where does this smart wet come from,
snail trail, saliva, a finger wet from some new-found spring
describes a word.

Call it phoenix.
A word, any word, is the trace of a desire.
Desire moves, desire burns
itself out
in each object it takes hold of,
burns to ash and comes again.

Out of the ashes guess what rises. Always new a thing
to want, a phoenix is a bird of wanting

not what it wants but wanting wanting.
A phoenix is all wanting, crashing
into the object of desire, dying, firing, flying
up from the ruins of itself.

The only ruin is what you mean.

2.

Death the bird says, death
is getting what you want.
Even if you're a desert with a city in you.
You have to go into the fire
the fire is what you don't want at all
and from it you come out again

same name no name nobody to be sure
but somebody
somebody to love me
whoever I am

3.
Tesselated. It's like a horse. We know
in China the wind is green

runs on four legs through the dusty city
never dirty never clean

the wind is like the moon.

Moonswept, the dismal prairie
inland, speaking a language thick with consonants,
a going-forward made of stops and starts,

to bright to see any but the brightest stars,
I think you are a bird wants to fly out of me

4.
Blue metabolism, why do you suck
so hard my sky in,
everything separates me.

5.
Once I was sky
and knew the distances
between the actual
and the real,

the pronouns of our romance are just virtual
indicate no people
only mark the corners of the chessboard,

the center called you, the edge called me.

6.

A road runs through your blue eye.
No wonder the bird escapes from color.

The key to color leads out the same door
a hand reaches always in,

your fingers light upon the latch of my attention,
my fingers playing with the withies of your wall.

7.

But what do they do with a road when they come back to life?
What do they do with time?
Is the blood all the language of a small country,
fish in a green field,

can I believe you ever again when you show me some stars
and say That is the Coffee Roaster that one over there's the Porcelain Cup
and you must be the Emperor of China and I must be the Yellow River
with a little boat with silken sails you take your ease inside

(the pronouns are all virtual) hot night on the luminous canal.
Of course I believed. I always believe a picture, or only a picture,
you tell me there are three doors in the wall
I go through all of them at once,
behind one is a hill with a quiet black dog in the mist
behind the second you wait for me with a glass in your hand
ice cubes seem to sound, tinkling as you seem to walk.
But behind the third door some stars are stored
waiting for their blue names.

I don't want to help you here,
you're on your own, I want to be quiet

and reconstruct the flowering tree in the churchyard,
a blue paulownia its petals strewn over the long ago dead.

You have the whole kingdom of sensation to yourself.

8.

Walking through the streets of the skin
small courtyards of accurate sensation

I call out at the gateway Who is there?
And nobody answers, nobody ever
answers but the walls form this square
a fountain comes and goes in the center
where down is just a dialect of up
and there are benches worn as tombstones
there are birds like refugees from the sky
broken things children's faces
filled with amazing absences
the smell of darkness and no one there
or just one, going garden to garden
through the city, like a phoenix
dying my way from house to house

until I come to the edge of the desert
no walls no birds no explanations
but there is always somebody there
who a long time ago forgot how to talk.

15-16 June 2001
Cuttyhunk

There is always another coast beyond this coast.
So emigration, my Vikings, is an eternal road

and all you have to go on is the salt
taste of it left at the corners of your mouth

her mouth you find when you come
to one more indecipherable shore.

15 June 2001
Cuttyhunk

Almost five a.m. two dark
seagulls on the lawn in mist
have told me sleep, sleep
is better than this, it's all
right, we have what happens
under control, it will never
come again but don't think
this is realer than that
only we're more beautiful
is the word you use for this
something the other side of now.

16 June 2001
Cuttyhunk

There are too many stories after all
translated from the Chinese, Lao-tse and all his old German
being wise the way Americans play golf, easy, oxcart,
smiling, doing deals, all of life converging on a shallow hole,

too much wisdom, too many stories, too many voices in the silent night.

16 June 2001
Cuttyhunk

**I WANT TO WRITE A POEM
THAT SHUTS UP FOR A LONG TIME OUT LOUD**

**WORDS THAT SAY NOTHING, WORDS THAT ANSWER
NO QUESTIONS, I WANT**

TO WRITE WHAT I DON'T WANT TO WRITE.

16 June 2001
Cuttyhunk

Or the Chinese poet tossing
his poems into the river
I've tried that, the water
always remembers

recites them to this day
can't get away from poetry
once something is in words
it's never free

16 June 2001
Cuttyhunk

LET HER

Let send letter
let her, letter what

litter left along the beach

poppies rosa rugosa beach pea

yellow red white purple letter

Send her let her let her know
the litter left along the letter what
every letter knows what every letter
says

the rest the letter of what people mean
litters the letters
the few the so few letters left

2.

meaning is all wanting anyway
meaning is an absent scholar pretending to be present
meaning cheats meaning has another scholar raise his hand
and cry present in a phony voice when meaning's name is called

here I am here I am

meaning is always missing
always wanting

who is the teacher in this story?
Who calls the name?

17 June 2001
Cuttyhunk

Hawk in fog
crying above the house

hawk in wind

some weather coming
hawk whistling

look up see nothing
wind moving fog

hawk in the head

17 June 2001
Cuttyhunk

Vacationers spend a lot of time with doors
going out and coming in and fetching
fish from the dock and garbage from the kitchen
and the wind comes in and out all day

Sometimes the night is quiet and no one goes out
no one comes in
sometimes the night is a door.

17 June 2001
Cuttyhunk

STRANGE ALPHABETS

These are the experiments of common order
to see how little we know of all the letters that write us
mangy stars against the darksome sky below

17 June 2001

But as it were the texture of it
(rainstorm at sea) not just the light
the Turner similitude of (how he differs
from the bald abstract) opulent cloudwork
always geared to a grasped horizon
marked as here we see none — you can sail
Turner's ocean but here you'd be on a reef
before you hit Nantucket — troubles of color,
troubles of shape. He invented a line,
and so he invented a sea, a something seen,
the horizon as orient, every
painting staring into the East. Luminous
sea fog customizing software values. Red
is missing from fog. Here are sea roses.

17 June 2001
Cuttyhunk

Still at my age
learning the alphabet
what men call
the ropes and
rabbis call your face.

18 June 2001
Cuttyhunk

With some discretion small faces turn
to see where all the noise is happening
a band of light beneath a band of cloud
out over the Vineyard a strange radiance after storm
the headlights of Atlantis.

18 June 2001
Cuttyhunk

(Passagework from *Phoenix to Forest Meadow*) (The Saj Project)

1.

Have I seen enough of what I haven't seen?
Wasn't looking. You showed me the picture
as if you suddenly pulled off your dress
and I ran out of the room.

I was a child

I knew nothing. I didn't want to see
what I wanted to see, so much wanted to see.
I have seen you every day of my life ever after

Do you understand? Any picture tells too much.

That is the beauty of Kandinski
he first showed me how to see without looking

at the old Guggenheim mansion, his seasons
like doors on the left wall in that narrow basement room,

doors, dance it, doors.

A picture is not something to look at
or it is, but that observation has its own fatality,

a door is to go through.

Into his tropical Russia
where blackbirds are bellowing in blue corn
and his red house, yes his, not yours,
ramps and stamps the wind up
that spans the breadfruit and the sallow palm
and the ocean is full of white horses

don't look at the horses the horses are houses
don't look at the picture see my way in.

2.

Be my subject, little wolf.
Let me answer at last
Your actual desire.
Let me be the man at your pleasure

Fulfilling forest and sky
And all that zoo of feeling
We escape from every morning
And sit frozen with politeness all through breakfast

While you are busy at the edges of the actual
That thing the natives call their woods.

18 June 2001
Cuttyhunk

OF CATS AND DOGS

Of course they can see things we can't see.
But we can see things that aren't there.

18 June 2001
Cuttyhunk