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Two mourning doves waddle determinedly down
to seed newly spilled from their feeder by purple
finches and a red polled —hence macho— hairy
woodpecker. All over Poland snow is not falling.
We have come back to our language — *zhena* —
which changes like our wife's expression
in all the radiant differings of what she means
now. Language is now. Is seed. Is seen to be spoken.
A squirrel has joined them, color of whereon he feeds.

18 March 1995

No exceptions will be made. They all are there already,
built into the breakable of things. Last night, this
eleven a.m. hard sunlight gentle. Snowdrops
have come up. The coordinates. The report is endless.
And music: last night one brought home
a hired companion and after making love
one heard that lover mouthing childhood prayers—
o how sincere this meretricious is! The voice
(Dawn Upshaw, Gorecki's 3rd, the radio, a little
static to remind me of myself in all this
listening to itself) reaches out to God
but a God no further away than our little sleep.

18 March 1995

AT THE END, THE CITY

I am now where it has all been from.
Undaunted, the paladins come over the Gora,
shuffling down masterless and with swords
deep and silent in the sunless valleys

until they have filled the city with their prowess
and football players drift uneasy
from the muddy maidan in middle park.
No point in confronting them,

they win by silence. Our eagerness to explain
strangles us. We even try to justify
why we laid our houses out on streets —
why not cabins hidden under trees,

a whole city made of forest and ourselves
silent as foxes? Silent as they are,
these powerful ones from the other side.
And each them pretends to be alone,

knows nothing of the other. Each of them
is “I,” and we’re all deep entangled in our “We.”
Everything we’ve ever done needs explaining.
They’re not interested at all, I think,

but they listen. Christ, how they listen!
As if we were birds or the wind in trees,
they smile at us and nod their heads
and keep on walking through our streets,

waiting patiently for us to be gone.

19 March 1995

We have kept so many measures near us,
To be sure we know our own when it comes close—
Hand, anklebone, sleek turn of throat, a dream.

19 March 1995

P A R T Y

Someone you thought was nobody
turns out to be somebody.
But who are you?

19 March 1995

It is a smallness in me to forget your birthday,
though I mentioned it out loud a few times
at the back of my mind — alas, we never entirely
forget — I had nothing to say about you the world
could overhear, the world, your amateur, lover
that I am I have forgotten all your joining arts, the deft
mortise and tenon work that held a spiritual meaning
(I'm being honest) firm in a physical world. No wonder
you're like a tune on the outskirts of the mind
breezing by on its way to the sea, I set a place for you.
Yesterday I found some china in the storeroom, cups and saucers
green as Germinial, leaf green, the wizard's chemicals
at work to make us think the world still worships us.
When it's you all the time, you I let slip my mind,
once loved is never loved, it must all come back again,
suffer freshets of jealousy, walk among thorns,
flee into Egypt, even die before the opera is done.
In quietness and beauty and delight you spent your life
perfecting the instruments of martyrdom. On such art
lifted up the Savior dies, and love makes it seem
(or is it springtime?) suddenly right and accurate and just.

20 March 1995

GERMINAL

As elegant as energy — be me a steersman,
Lovewise — slip me through the stream of them,
Place-seekers, fondling the morning, options
Tingling in their reach — and I am fill of
Suffered wisehead, offered sacrifices, burnt
Wood smell as I step out, I am blink
The cameraman and bleak the bailer
And blue the bleeder and bim the snailer.
All false professions delight me with their Other!

21 March 1995

There is time now.
(Is there time then?)
In Greek-pale summer clothes,
in espadrilles they walk
along a sing-song ocean.

She stands on her right foot and raises her left straight out.
He stands on his left foot and raises his right straight out.
Their bare feet touch, sole to sole they stand
trying to be firm, it is, it is a relationship, they totter
the way people do together, are they afraid to commit?
Her left foot and his right foot sole to sole
try to walk up each other, excelsior,
lead us on, but they only keep tottering.
After a while he feels only the warmth of her foot and thinks:
This is her, her foot is actual, we are here
or here we are, there is time now
for this and for that. She feels the same.
An angel hovers over them in blue, weeping—
To come together (says the angel) you have to come apart.
Foot let foot go, walk alone alone,
then take each of you
one step towards the other and you'll be together.

In time to come we'll see if so they do.

22 March 1995

WHERE WE ARE NOW

To impose an story on the stars the way some Greeks
found a bear or a huntsman, to build a house on the hill
and fall in love with a neighbor woman, to find a dollar
lying in the street, hear God talking in your pillow,

these are the forgeries of the senses, the stricken veldt
gasping with drought and a million hoofed animals
streaking across it from morning to night, the endless
plain inside. In pain we have come to the dark land.

22 March 1995

MARCH DAY

All the things we guessed
stand dove-puffy strutting
stumbling on the lawn
and the lawn is hardly
there yet, a ruddy drench
with scrim of green,

Lent now
and the thoughts
are dead thoughts, gravel
calling, tharrap on coffin
lid the clods and little
clutter falling,

only blackbirds understand.
I smell the rose of a
waning moon, the iris
of a broken cloud
and even I am somewhere
in all this, sorting

the seeds, stones, seems,
seams, sads, scars, still
stale stultifying senses
that tell me again and
again I want I need I feel
when there is no feeling

only the accurate dispersion
of impressions
on whatever it is I am you are
that bears such notice.
Whoever we are you are
I am written.

23 March 1995

PURITY

When you find the opening in the mountain
The tiny crack turns out to be a road.
You are water. Rain left you here. Or from a secret
Spring you found yourself suddenly in light.

These are measures. They intrude
On ordinariness and say: Not accurate
Enough, your morning and your vespers,
You need sleeker numbers, you need birds.

The measures have at us. Until we score
Notches on the willow twig and grow to match,
Until we know our size. Then a smile
Happens to water. Then the mountainside

A mother flank. Then a tank of pilgrims
Bathing noisily. Then a sky. If you have listened
To the rain, it will work out. It will
Though it may take a long time. Things do.

23 March 1995

JULY 1954

A mouth on the window.
All senses
pry. Gastanks
seen far out at sea,

signifying urban needs.
Mehr Licht, the dying
man demanded or proclaimed,
what can we tell

except along the taffrail
clustered we stand
gazing at the land
we come home to.

There is a pair of sensuous
pale lips open gently
but irresistibly
in the sky itself.

There is no way
not to listen. Not to kiss.
Kissed, told, claimed,
tamed, we do

and we are told.

24 March 1995

BLUE LEGACY

So high this sky of asking
all I want to tell is what you'll always have,
the moon the tree the afternoon

and this Gypsy standing by a sycamore
looking funny,
the water running,
this gold fleck on my hand from where the curtains fail

and I will give you the high priest
and the little mouse that eats the offerings
and the concert where they sing in silver shirts
but I won't give you the sea or the gull

because the Gypsy is laughing at me
I won't give you the little stream,
streams can dry up, Gypsies finally
go to a secret place inside the woods
put on their silver shirts and die

but all I want to tell you is what you'll always have,
the moon whoever walks on it, the tree
and here are crows to wake you in it
and the afternoon when all this will be quiet

and you'll look at the sunlight on your hands
and be happy with all I've given you
and for a moment you will know
exactly who you love
and then you'll smile and forget
what even the little stream remembers.

25 March 1995

ACROSS THE STREAM

When there's a car in the woods
what can I do? Imagine the midnight
drunkard driving too far.

The car is peaceful in the soft
woodchuck brown of no green yet,
the woods, what color are things
before the leaves' manifesto?

A metal grey thing in the woods,
on a hillside, peace, peace,
egg on an Easter lawn. Never find.

25 March 1995

Children come from their piano lessons
and the sky is still blue. No number
of wrong notes untunes the day
despite what old Chinese used to say.

Or if there is a tune that untunes
the rest, this little boy and girl
don't know it yet. Toccata.
It will come later, when every
touch betrays us, and we hear.

25 March 1995

A CATALOGUE OF PROPS

We build things, carpenters, to
take their pictures
("shoot them"), then take them
apart, burn them,
disperse. Thirty-six winds
and seven seas and where is it now?

We should keep, programmers,
a catalogue of every artful thing
for actors to dissemble living in
and cameras to behold, mumbling
sensuous Magyar technicolor
over the common properties of things.

We need a catalogue, lovers, of every
thing that's ever been, Notre Dame
and Winter Palace, sultan's harem and the car
Hippolytus drove into the sea,
Aston-Martin was it, burbling about
Johann Sebastian Bach (rhyming it with 'dock')

while Phædra grieved along the hard corniches.

25 March 1995

BOY WITH NOTHING TO DECLARE

Silence comes by inclination wild

to put something inside
something else — call that Something said
and not be shy any more in front of the house
when the people step by “passing
the time of day” they hope with me

and I am mute as a cormorant
with the low wind, at night, at sea,
my brain full of salt

and what do they want of me?
Can't they see I am young and quiet
and sitting on an adirondack chair
with a glass on the arm and a book on my knee?
Can't they see the chair?

I am seventeen and don't want to talk
not to anyone until it is her
until it is she and I keep finding her name
in all the Greek grammars and the old poems
I get no closer to her than slippery declensions.

Or look at the weave of my shirt, my chesty hairs,
my map of Greece, my enthusiasm
for unread poets, for dying outside of battle,
for windows, hedges, closets, watercourses,
salt marshes, debates carried on in foreign languages,
doesn't matter who wins, they're all wrong,
only language is right, and it's too holy to use
for anything but talking to her and she's not here,
here in all the bread and water of daily life,

I said a chair and I mean a chair.
Uncounted, cars and city buses pass.

Two esses. Perhaps some friendly old Italian
in a two-tone sportscoat, with a black cigar
is still waiting for my answer

what did you ask, what did you say,
why did you speak, have you news
of her, where she is now, when
she will be coming?

Are you Dante, standing with one foot in the Adriatic
absent-minded, trying to remember
something he wanted to say?
Maybe he can find a flower
that will say it for him, and maybe not.
It's the kind of evening when the sea
actually a mile away smells very close.
The kind of evening she might decide to pass,
but I keep wanting to go
go down there and walk through the empty
marshes and look for her all over the sky.

25 March 1995