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What does it mean I keep a calendar
invented by a poet to help killers
count the months of human occupation
and keep the gods at bay? Whose side
am I on, Saint Just or Saint Benedict
for whom the human labors are a feast of mind
and mind a blaze of meaning from the sky
emptying my busy head.

I guess I've answered.

I have shoveled the snow. I have dug
out the car. I have driven to two in four wheel
drive and bought the Times, a donut
for my darling. All that inside the moment
an hour back, flick of a Bic, on
the dark red altar a single candle lit.
Every thing is in the glare of it.

10 December 1995

CARMEN SAECULARE: 8

[The husband's song]

Coming close is a possibility, a mask
suddenly tipped off my nose and you see me,
it is me, who else would be here
struggling with his overcoat, the key, the light,
the resonant wooden floor of the hall,
the endless Noh play of a human house
night after night. And the cold.
All day I wore the thought of you
even when you walked beside me, the three of us
casting two shadows, intense sunlight
over the snow and the road glistened
hard to look at in the whale sea glare.
Description. *I have loved your house
until I became the wall and the wood.*

10 December 1995

CARMEN SAECULARE: 9

Exorbitant consequences of the simplest rebellion,
rose petals and love letters scattered on the ice
because winter is always waiting. It is the Roman
Catholic Church of seasons, always stern and finally
forgiving, if it doesn't burn you at the stake
of an unusually hot June. When spring begins,
all pagan and antsy and capable of sudden
beauty and a swarm of bees. Then summer comes,
that ancient Buddhism and everything's alive.
And autumn surely is our own, most Protestant
Episcopal and purple vague and heather breathless
mornings sometimes tinkling with small ice.
And I have hidden once again beneath Religions
of America the wounded animal who talks to you.

10 December 1995

CARMEN SAECULARE: 10

How could he be bleeding, he's made of salt
and paper, I mean salt and distance, he's a map
of inland California, Lake Mono ancient green
and rimmed with white. I mean he's made of
cartridges and treasure maps and liturgies,
you can't get blood from a manuscript, the tears
are oak gall and quotations, the end
of love is surely in Leviticus, the wall
with leprosy and the priests shaking their heads.
And doves are in the way for all their music,
trip you on the steep whitewashed stairs
that vanish up there where women go to sleep
far away from him and his vocabulary, his wounds
he plucks on all night long to make them dream.

10 December 1995

CARMEN SAECULARE: 11

For wounds have lips in common language.
And what other kind would serve us? We need an ear
rehearsed with ordinary listening, then into it
we pour exaggerated melodies and breathless
whispered exactitudes, astonishing ourselves
with our perceptions, awed by our unfailing glib.
This is the chemistry of hearing. Men distill
daylight in blue bottles. Here, drink this.
And when you're out of pain you're out of luck,
since chance does razor-work with us and smears
the feeble daylight of our winter lives
with

10 December 1995

R O S E R O T

The roses. And again the roses.
Pourris. In a blue bowl
floating wounded, nine heads
I counted, aristos,
Rue Picpus. Bury a flower
under an ugly name.
I see them on the bitter cold Frimaire,
nine roses brown around the edges,
ordinary sunlight did this, and the grand
turquoise of the winter sky, the taste
of my own spit in my mouth waking,
said to be healing, wake me
some more, I can't get away
from these ruined roses. It is not sad
exactly, all these withered lips
and others all too loose and liberal,
passionate claret, lees of a lover's
last Médoc before she left.
And now those lips say anything they please.
Some of them whisper she'll come back.
The way philosophers weary us constantly
with their prattle of springtime, balance,
cycles, flux, the great return—
when it comes back it is hopelessly different,
what is gone is gone forever, sure
there is a symmetry in things but so what
when we are always leaving, caught
in a blue bowl of no one's making,
a cloth of no one's weaving. A bowl
a friend gave us. Roses we give
each other in the name of waking.

11 December 1995

PRONOUNS

There are not enough pronouns in this town.
Need a you who's some part of we
and a you that isn't. Need a we
includes the speaker and that needn't.
Need a you who listens but acts not.
Need a she and a he of the second part.
Need a they who is singular, need an I that is not me.

11 December 1995

NETTLES

At the gate of measurement
grew a patch of nettles.
They only hurt, they do not kill,
a man passed in and out
until he knew.

2.

In France one time
one touched my thigh
and all night I felt it and remembered
me and my skin were once so sensitive
and now a pain is mostly just surprise.

12 December 1995

Stalking a nude terrain
with shaggy maps,
find the ore
to leave it in its place

the place
is all we have to honor.

What we have done is ground up emeralds and rubies
into a brown paste.
All they had was beauty, difference, translucency.
And we made them all the same.

Somewhere a mountain in Suanetia
keeps the difference.
From the pinnacle looking west or north
you see a war.

I think the place alone could save us.

12 December 1995

We were dreaming and we dreamt about monsters.
Little by little as we dreamed, the shapes
that terrified us so began to form around us.
There were things with legs and things with arms,
flashlight eyes and seashell ears and hair,
so much hair, with luster like amber or coal.
And when we woke up we had bodies!
Awkward and grieving we stumbled and moved
“hand in hand” as the poet was to say later,
we moved but each one of us so like
the others after all the differences of Dream,
each one of went “solitary” on our way,
trapped in dream and banished from it
to seem to dwell in bodies but to die alone.

13 December 1995

Here's a poem with a name or two scrawled on it, earth salt and quick contour.

What is quickest lasts longest. Did you know that? It is important, and harks back to the first time you sat down on a rock. The truest rock's the one you're actually sitting on.

This was dedicated to someone who sent me a kind note in an envelope made from a USC&GS map. I thought of different people as I read through it, places you've known, places I've known.

Method: Take a pinch of the salt and toss it in a clay cup. Gradually add tap water, watching the grains of salt carefully as they dissolve. When every grain is dissolved, sip the water, Hold the water in your mouth a while before swallowing it. The taste of the water plus the pattern of crackle in the glaze of the cup will equal the three dimensional elevation of the contour map at the point closest to the watershed between this arroyo and the one to the west of it. You can stand on the taste and look out into the endless plain.

14 December 1995

What was coming.
What was a man
doing with a road.
The things we see
every morning
exclamation point.
The browsing crows
the snow's continuous
discourse. It must
mean something
since we are built
for deciphering.

So many syllables to the snow,
an archive settling past me, not
the most we've seen this winter. Eye
is a man. You see him on money,
masculine gender, Latin, Freemasonic,
looking at you from the pyramid.
How do I know the eye's a man's eye?

Because we fall to earth
from the gaze.
Jefferson's eye
still watching me.
I you he all
add up to she watches me.
Glamor, famine, welfare, strife:
the four horsepersons of our house.
Our American
hour. The speech
we offer, an unlit candle
burrowing in the dark.

What is a man
on a road alone
a sign of. Nothing,
and it grips the heart.

14 December 1995

Asgard is the name of the place the gods lived, Earth or Middle-Earth where they worked. This is Great Labrador, the weird of work pursues us night and day. To rise is to go to work, to fall asleep is to hurry down the dusky arcades where dreams are made, dozens and dozens of them every night by every one of us that lives. Who needs literature? Or we would need no literature if dreams could be obsessed, musical with order, shaped into sharable event. Literature makes up stories we can share. We dream alone. That is the difference. That is what all this is about. Listen, I tried to get the gods to understand, but they were busy dying, just as we are busy dying. The name of their death is called listening to guitars, smelling flowers, forgetting your friends. The name of our death might be the gods. Or might be the sound of flowers, the taste of the dark.

14 December 1995

Have I finally become who I am?
Is this the time?

It would be about time.
About this time

the snow and so forth.
Die Frist ist um,

and the sea's empty.

14 December 1995

Examine this: a bird with a throttle,
a road with wings. Now you know something

(rose mallows by September lagoons, between
here and there, a candlestick,

a bullet made of butter) but the trucks knew it
first. They have been wheeling all night.

Why does it bother you so that your knowledges comes
late and is shared? Did you want the eagle

to fall from heaven to clutch only your hair?
Doesn't the sky have its own language

it freely converses in, night and day
to begin with, talks to anybody, lightning,

rain, sleet, hail, and the continual chatter of cloud?
The one beside you on the bench has been

talking that language all her life. And that one.
And the pigeons falling off the roof, and the powerful truck singing.

15 December 1995

