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Robert Kelly
Bard College

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VERMILION

be the silk of your satin, your tent
stitched of shadows. Listening in the wind
is how the voice was born — a sound
made me listen, and a candle
sputtered loudly in the shade of dawn.
I bring all this to the soft margin of your wells,
oasis of the next, a glad stumble
as if a dancer understood only half-
way to falling some next and truest sortie of *to rise*.
It is dangerous, the things we do,
walking in our own bodies among strangers
(the slopes, the juts, salients, sockets!
The contours of us!) or carrying down the street
a paper bag full of oil. The monotones of us.
And for all I claim I am just instrument,
so often mean to be the hammer's teacher.
So by the crumbling little bridge across the Tannery
took off all those clothes (we see the white
and scarlet summer dress billowy and frail
float not drenched yet in the sluggish stream—
when we look back, her running form's
half a block away, fleet by library, vanishes
in town trees, appears again, a glimpse
in sunlight, hours later, the annals of the moon).

We see and we don't see. I see with your skin.
Guessway. Song of the sentenceless. Give way.
There are erosions. Early morning we still need
a candle on the porch to see the words
even though we're writing them ourselves.
Those who live in a dusty region inherit ancient lusts.
Hence the hunger for wells, thirst for new-baked bread,
the ordinary trickery we do with things.
Hence one more bitten apple for us to share.
Come see me think about you. Your meaning
drives my hands. Abbreviated reveries
subsumed in weatherwise assent. Enough.
Language implicates me from the start—
that's the mother, the scimitar in my hand, crescent
moon falling over the lost city. It is built
of curves and by curves it goes down, the dancer's
spine curves gracious as the dancer crouches,
balancing the final ceremony on those hips.
I stare, and flags flimmer in the shady breeze.

1 June 1994

Storing things in vaseline. The fruit trees
will not rust. I think the knight intended
no villainy to her, planned
to spend long evenings dotting on her smile. Moods
unpeeled. Birds chipping away at the dark.
Soon it would be day. And no devotions. All night
he had gazed on that silly rictus, a smile
not even sleep could chasten. Rain
answers doubts like that. Strong light for fugitives.
Sweet rain god gift green! The banners
of auspiciousness pink with fading hang limp down.
A season since I sat here, my own life!
Unequaled opportunity, vast store of seed.
“On this rolling prairie, between the forks of Delaware,
to guess at wheat! Or no, apples, tithing,
Gospel, geese! Everything you need
you’ll find in Virgil. Not Caesar, not cider. Not Cicero.”
What we call fire they call ash.
What we call water they call mime.
Lie flat. Cherish these things. You run
through me like a mountain stream
but always downhill I’m afraid. How can we keep
what we know of each other? Part
before breakfast, give me your colors,
I will wear them always as my eyes, I leave you
the edge of my longing, a ruler, a thread
spun out from pure sunshine. Never remind me,
never forget. Be our bond like that
of flower to branch, let loose
and see where we fall then. Miracle of release.

1 June 1994

**Note to Brian Kim Stefans, Number 9.
Or actual answers)**

Paul was Blackburn.
Bernstein means amber.
Howe is Irish her sister
is a Catholic
very now she
used to be a friend
of the Earl of Gowrie
then a poet friend in
Cambridge later
in the House of Lords
Thatcher's Minister of the Arts
that's how I met her
Boston Boston Boston
I lived there too
the loveliness
of its lean angers

and their name
might mean hill
or is that English
for it, a howe. *Howl*
took a while to catch on
from its first Spirit Duplicated
—blue ink that fuzzed
or bent the word
to speak
I loved the process
of its sleek pages,
you read
in a fade of grace
the words like sky
fading towards dawn,
my own Deep
Image notes
came out that way
too first,

It is not clear anybody
has anything to howl about again:
unless (except)
some maybe American
finds the magic way of making Americans
realize the two tremendous things:
the bleak horror that America has
done and is still doing to the world at large
and all the brave maybes we still have to work with.
We will not listen
unless someone tells us what we did
and says she did it too. That was Ginsberg's
genius, being with the thing he put down,
his "queer shoulder"
put to our bad "wheel."
Maybe it will happen, a howl
we'll learn to hear
when someone gets it out,
surely not the drivel
of our usual aesthetic complaints
all based without exception
on envy, jealousy and a craven spirit.
But I don't know, I may not
be listening,

you hear so many readings,
today I hear Rossini,
we can hear the prompter
guiding the singers in the unfamiliar
music of *Count Ory* on this clunky
old Belgian recording —
his one French comic opera,

we need a prompter
to mumble like seagulls
before us as we walk over our white papers,
we need a prompter
to hush our anxieties and tell us
Darlings all your words will be all right

And thatcher is the man who does your roof.
In Luxemburg we used to hang out
in a little wine shop called The Prompter's Box
(something like *puschperle* it sounded like
with two dots over one of the many e's)

that's when Doug Oliver was courting Alice Notley
and grapefruits were hard to get
(pamplemousses) and in the
decorous Mary mystery cathedral
the Cardinal of Metz in glorious scarlet
sat by the Grand Duke
whose old limousine I leaned on outside
watching sunlight dazzle Europeans—
they are so unprepared for weather,
you'd think after all these years they'd get it right.

1 June 1994

When I switch on the lamp at the top of the stairs
It seems to take a while for the light to get down here,
A noticeable delay, an expectation slurred—

I conclude that there is something quicker than light.
What might that be. Need. Hope. Desire.
Ich bin geschwind als wie des Menschen Gedanken!

“I am as quick as human thought!” he cried,
Or lied. But something’s quicker. The mind
Faster than what it says. Or the dark workshop

From which the light is (finally!) coming.

2 June 1994

PAPER

Paper.

It should be

one word

to say a year

a year with you.

Microcosm: a heart
unfolded out of paper
endlessly

intricate
Western theo-
logical origami
breathless with praise

(waking, my lips
at your hairline

the breath of us

a heart unfolded

a horse goes by
on Broadway
color of the coffee
I'm drinking
in the sweet cafe

une noisette
in your honor
color of a horse

a year
but what year is it
with hazelnuts
and horses on Broadway
and Bellini and je t'aime?

“This year is 1919,” you read.
My grandmother
exhausted by the cold funeral
of her aunt
comes home and dies of the Spanish Lady

my mother stands in the freezing flat
huddled over the coal stove
grieving, her mother dead in the next room
the doctor going down the street
affable and smiling

she is trying to be warm
to be brave

to live without

and all I’ve learned forever is live with.

To live with you.

Paper

says we're married

a license

by law turns

into a certificate

when signed by everyone in sight

witnesses

to love.

Our love.

The unimaginable wisdom of old signatures

storing all the marriages

each one from two proceeding

a name pretending to be one.

The meaning.

The horse on Broadway.
After something literary
I hurry home to my wife.
Sounds like a sentence
by Gertrude Stein. The train
shakes my hands but
writing is always a mystery.

Meaning the
cool quiet of night
you sleep and I come.

And this is paper too
an analysis of love into times and distances
—dime in the telephone, a yard around a house—
something small, not smug, close

the way (this is sneaky) air
is close to a flower but not the same
as one, the entity of odor
is not all flower, there is
interpenetration, so that happening
in our head perceiving — a peony
in the shrine room, suffusing
all the house with its fragrance —

is movement, we are movement,
the molecules are actual
pieces of flower pieces of air

to be discussed into the weave of paper
till something makes sense.

Simple as paper

I want to be with you
all the time

that is my mystery

and no mystery

I have never
known the like

the elegant purchase
of your mind
on what is spoken
what is known

So the cab to the station was a Punjabi of course I told him about my wife crossing the Punjab and said she liked it but there was fighting and he said yes yes it is the politicians make the wars the people are good the people are good yes I said that's what she said she liked the people and I said something about the Sikhs

and in fact your
beauty does
make every place our own.

*for Charlotte,
Paper for our first anniversary,
3 June 1994*

GLANCING AT YOU ACROSS THE ROOM I THOUGHT I WAS

Seeing your hand on the doorknob when you said I see my hand on the
knob waiting to go
And knowing nothing, needing to stay where one is because the
alternatives are dreadful
Are public vapid and of dubious outcome I saw your hand turn
inconclusively
The brass doorknob in the fashion of someone leafing through a magazine
While her mind is as they say in their precise measures a million miles
away
At least in this house there is no one I can hurt by language or by silence
And those are the only sins that are finally unforgivable aren't they the
ones against telling
Too much or too little or simply (as you know that, fingertips on such
smooth rounded metal)
The wrong thing. We will say the wrong thing (this also is the wrong thing
to say) and the night
Becomes an incurable platitude or a dinner where one is poisoned mildly
And makes one's way home by cab half in tears thinking for some reason
of that
Lacedemonian boy who came home with a fox gnawing his guts out what
can we do
These things are waiting for us in the world all the time for us to remember
to be them.

3 June 1994

PARTYGOING

Is there a tendency for your hand to turn the knob by itself when the
anxious body
Wants to stay in the house or at least idle a while in the always cool
—in one sense or
Another— lobby of the apartment building out of the sunlight of the
day and the worse
Glare of compulsory faux-friendly gatherings vulturing away on one
another's
Latest attempt to make sense of being in the world or giving
something back
In return for all we have, really, been given. So you wait at the door,
one side or the
Other, till you can't stand your own scruples anymore, you're bored
with your never-ending
Decency, so you're ready to go trill the meaningless warble—but
that's the grief of it,
It isn't entirely meaningless, isn't just jabber, it is words and they
mean and mean
And go on meaning forever, out from you away, like those garbage
scows you watch
Floating in sinister haze down the Narrows towards Nobody's poor
old Ocean,
That's the one nice thing about Brooklyn Heights, you sometimes can
see where it
All has to wind up, the windy vacancies of conviction where you howl
all alone
No matter that you're right and they're not quite so much so though
none of you
Are wrong. We never go even to a party with people who are actually
wrong.

4 June 1994

