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The birds take their own way
—the spectrum maybe is innocent—
“no gender in hyperspace” I claimed
meaning something cyber but something suchness
too. We are all immigrants,
nobody ever really wanted to come here.
America (our America) was always a *pis aller*.
Yet it waited, good wife, endured, and finally
came to be loved. We love what permits us.

1 July 1994

Scoundrels turn out to scream they love it best. When we have nothing else good to say of a man, we say, He’s an American. Or, more tellingly, he’s a real American. These same descriptions are applied abroad in an opposite sense.

An animal sweetness in moonlight
she was always telling lies
the way an animal does, an animal is always running away,

it flees from every sign,
and knows that love is just as harsh
as predators,

she runs away,
by sweet mouth to tell, glisten in moonlight
of what we spill

One finds this lovable and fascinating in them
a love affair
made up solely of farewells.

2 July 1994

A flute in the morning. A bad sign.
I will not accept the omen, what I hear
is what is there. Try
to change the pattern
from which it rose. Everything
makes everything, and nothing's left over.

2 July 1994

1.
Working my way through the undergrowth to a bad idea.
How hard we work to win what hurts!

2.
Me write moral distichs! On my blue wings ascending!
Sitting on the porch waiting for me to get here.

2 July 1994

WRITING INSTRUMENT

And what have you to say so
late on the white skin of the night?

Are you ancient like a child
all day long your quiet lies
turn true between your lap and the moon

are you? Is knowing you
a little bit like knowing myself?
Enough so I can look in the mirror

and see your back disappearing behind my shoulder
through a door, you look over yours
and smile, the smile lingers

all day as if it explained something.
The mirror witnesses all my nakedness
and all my veils. It's the way the moon

makes velvet nonsense of the dark
you do to me.

2 July 1994

And the moon must have something to say too,
add to, the break of this broth. “I notice
I write a lot about the weather, but only
the weather I like. Ugly weather I don’t say.”
Blue jay dittoes by. * And everything should be different.
(*Can you tell an hour passed us by right here?)
A fence leans on the air. Ella is not far,
a voice understanding distances and hurt,
no wonder men like her, as if all
women forgave them all at once, we ask
absolution at knifepoint, sky grey a moment,
as if rain would stoop to ease us.
O world full of desperate permissions! *
(*A phrase impossible to express in German,
permission free of someone allowing something
to somebody, freedom free of someone freed.)
And no time passes this time
to get here, all time is here and herein’s born.
Words, texts, scores, sings, songs—
scatter like raindrops till the world is wet.

3 July 1994

To please the local gods
but also carry water
first at and into dawn
along the corridors that lead nowhere else

What is the actual cup
you must have purity to drink from
(purity and intelligence and sense
guided by ancient competence)?

This much is known:
to find this grail
you must bear
it with you on your quest.

4 July 1994

THE CAMELS OF SAMARIA

It is more than an excuse for painting
nine dromedaries in perfect perspective
clustered and foreshortened a la telephoto
in this mediaeval picture I see a copy of
in color on the floor of a room I'm cleaning
out from God knows when. It might be god,
this thirsty bearded man seeminly leading
camels, who stops and drinks from a neat
column-balustraded tank in the dark
golden heat of the day, a sweet woman
gives him to drink from a pitcher, it's warm
enough for a pale woman at poolside
to be half-bare, eased like a naughty Roman
matron and eyeing this stranger with interest,
a man with some camels who wait their
turn to drink. A six-towered wall surrounds
a little city nearby. Another woman carries
her empty waterjug on her shoulder
on the way to the well. Well or eye or pool or
tank, what is this water, and who gives what
to whom? Is it (I thought when I looked at it,
not even giving the camels a chance) Our Lord
being given a drink by the Woman at the Well
in Samaria, the woman with more husbands
(maybe) than good sense, but with love enough
to give this stranger what he needs. To her
he'll tell (for the first time) who he is and what he does
for all living. If this is Samaria, inside the town
a golden bull is being worshipped as Jehovah.
I am alarmed that I understand the story
before I really look at the picture ("Oh, it's Jesus
with the woman at the well, the first one he tells
he is Messiah, come on a lonely road, thirsty,
needing us.") When I start to think about it,
everything begins to go away. No camels

in the gospel story. No other woman with jer jug
empty or full. No naked bather calm with redblonde hair
estimating the prospects of her pleasure.
What story is this? One of the camels
has bent to drink from the trough at the corner,
we see its head beneath the man's arm,
so maybe what dribbles from his lips
bathes the camel too. Maybe we are like this,
and take what is left over or spilled
while great stories are poured out above us
and great men and women drink or offer drink.

5 July 1994

**FOR GEORGE QUASHA
ON HIS BIRTHDAY
1994**

To have something to say to a birthday
(sheets of marbled paper rolled up
like maps of nowhere, o dear, our favorite country)

one should know first how many years
(wrenches . glue-guns . spackle trowels . shims)

how many moons are honored by the festival
(thirteen moons are worth one sun

whereas no sun in the sky is worth a single moon,
up there with her sly Sufi ways,
her silky clouds that sulk all night and suddenly

how many suns are going to the fair?)
One should know how old one is
(the other one, the one with candles, cakes,

uneasy guffaws, magazines and friends)
expressed as years. Then one has to know the years.

We count the world but years count us.
Something like that. A blue flame creates a cigarette,

glasses fill with spirited instabilities
that taste like apples from a long time back.

A spirit we were born to. A disclosure
sealed. A prophecy squeezed out of some woman's hair.

We have to know. To have anything to say
we have to know. I've got your number

now. What is a year? A year is a day
(as in the fairytales that I suppose are always right,

a year and a day, anything that comes back after sleep
is the same time, flowers

blossom out of nowhere too — you see them coming
and roll over —let me sleep a little longer—

and then the yellow animal of day is there
smiting your zzzz. We have to know

what a day is and what it means to say
things to people even music even
food. To say a thing you have to say

it isn't necessary to know that thing
but only how to say. Or how to know
what kind of thing a year is, then the thing

says itself we say, and all goes well.
Then know what it means to be born.

Uncertainty on any of these scores
sends well-wishers on safari to the mall
to bright emporiums where cards are sold—

devious sincerities of hearts and dogs and rhymes,
flowers unknown to botany, and clowns,

cakes, cartoons, rueful reminders of decay,
gyms, jokes, reassurances, and outright lies.

I suppose you can find such comforts
in any mess of lines and colors

(Venetian marbled paper, the skin of oily pigment
shimmered on the shallow water of the marbler's pan,

paper took on persuasion, dried in late summer sun

and the shadows of over-coursing pigeons

got trapped too in the design. No design,
a sinuous happenstance of ripple-dance.)

You can see everything when you look.
So much to see! There is no end

to the bright contract. No default in color.
We are summoned by stages into seeming—

I suppose that's what birthdays are,
acknowledgement of that great changefulness

our only hope. Every year the sun comes up and asks:
Are you still here? I thought you'd catch
enlightenment by now, zone like a rainbow and be gone.

But we know stuff the sun can't touch.
There's nothing natural in all this fuss,

a birthday is the best day in the year, mirror
of when you got your chance your best your now
your precious human opportunity to go,

all living things hate looking-glasses
because they don't show the one we need to see.

Year by year (flange by edge by trim by thumb) you grow.
At length, one almost is.

Now in the light of my little lamp
a moth walks quickly in dazed circles,

perches on things, capsizes, falls.
Summer is such a strange time to be born,
camels shiver in pure moonlight and their dull bells tonk.

The air is too tired to go far. No wind. No rain.
A softness to the night like a picture out of focus,

I have one from when we first met,
you're leaning on your wrist and looking,

someone is talking, someone is always talking,
nobody loved each other at that table but you.

I'd know the head anywhere (we have to know
these things, the shapes afar of what we are)

but who are the eyes? It is strange to be born.
Born at only one moment of history.

I think that's wrong. Takes time to be born.
Or we go on getting born as long as there's breath,

then what? We have been given the instructions.
We confuse going with being (just like the Greeks, eími,
eimí.) The instructions leave us in charge

of going out and coming in. A spur of wind
reaches through the dark. After that
I generally forget. Though once I found her reading a book.

5-7 July 1994, for the Fourteenth

LAUGHING MATTER

Now flows the airy *Humber* over us
Intinct with labored Archipelagoes,
Java, & Sunda, & steep wet Forests
Till our north Virtue solves in Appetites.
We czar the World to gratify Taste by Taste
Until there is no Stranger left but us.

Muggy day, tropic manners
as they once hoped
the world would be
when they got there, the world,
the place beyond Arabia
where they could live a moist new life
dissolute of all strategies and codes,
astir in countries with no dictionaries,
with grass skirts and mildewed law
lets everybody anything.

It is supposed they wanted that, nos pères,
came on deck with all your hopes intact
and saw it plain, a whole continent
spread out for you like a naughty book.

I smell a flower in the woods,
tender and frightening like the thought of pain to come.
(Who pays for all this sweetness

then?) Not remembered agony — that has no smell.
We live by skin, wrapped in a cloud of reminding.

6 July 1994

To know something. To think
it's out there and then doubt that.
To think it's inside and have
no way to get at it, no probe.
It would be worth anything,
to know something. To be sure.

And on the way to that, walking
to school past the stores not
open yet and the groceries
busy with real people, grownups,
sesame bread, the unchanging,
sharing with them only food,

a taste for their old bread,
morning, milk. They have
without knowing. You neither,
but you know you don't have,
don't know. A woman
is a sign you guess of what you need.

You only know what you don't know.
But they are women too, they have needs,
they are uneasy in their magic
their bodies wield on you. They know
less of than you do. Early busses
full of somber newspapers, nobody

meets your eye. You are ashamed
of having so little, not even a name,
ashamed of not even knowing what you know,
let alone what you think is out there
haunting like those faces you see in fire,
definite, unprovable, gone when you look again—

but you still see it. That one,

the one that let you see it.
All you can do is pray to the revealer
whoever it turns out to be.
There is no knowing without showing.
We stand at best bare-faced to each other,

having nothing else to reveal.

7 July 1994

