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Mere aptitude is agreeable enough.
Wait for him, the organized
flow is steady in its disclosure
of what it has long desired to signify.
Awkward reaches, rivers
without a single motorboat
and you, drooping over an upturned canoe.
The sequences of dactyls on the skin,
the interpretation. Signaling
by campfire a faraway permission,
Indian smoke calls, come see me,
I am a game that plays itself out in you.

I am a wind that scatters all your leaves.

That kind of weather. You too
have been waiting. It is not like chess
but it has pieces, aggressions, alternate
permissions to make moves. Move. But no rules,
only history. (My only history, you said,
staring down at your naked body
as if it were somebody else, and you a calm
intruder in this appalling motel.)

Not like chess, not like Brazil,
but its jungles are burning all day
and its tribes are running away
clutching flowers, pig bristles, logs,
spider eggs and parrots, blue parrots
screaming before the forest fires.

So I need to lay my hand on you again.

21 September 1994

GRACE

Suppose life is just itself after all,
full of striving, like a Sicilian in Brooklyn growing
tomatoes on that rich glacial outwash
plain my mother, the warmth
of grey weather-beaten wooden fences
between backyard and backyard, zucchini,
basil, and the old fig tree wrapped tight
half the year in burlap to keep it warm
and then the leaves come in the mild
sea spring wind and I am home.

Everybody had one, it was grace
and hidden from the street, a private version,
like a Milky Way nibbled in the dark at the movies
or fat Father Dolan making the bigger
boys —I was the biggest— shovel snow
all the schoolday till his paths were cleared
on which he strolled to say his breviary
under the twin pigeony bell towers
whose birds scooped and gyred no matter what weather
and the el train rammed past a block away,

south, sea-wards, where all I meant was
and waited for me like a thrilling book
laid aside at breakfast for the work of the day
but kept reading in your mind all day,
infinite plots running onward
guessing the dim-spelled trceries of your desires.

22 September 1994

It came back from Brazil with her, a suspicion
that she would never be alone. She had gone
too many places. Not bizarre ones, just far
enough to be hard to leave. Places stick to you
when you try to go home. The way the feel
of your body is. I'm talking to you

maybe for the first time on the stairs, we can stand
on different steps and be the same height, we can sit down
on the carpeted treads (*les marches*) and the risers
dig into the smalls of our backs. We can talk. It is dark.
And suddenly we are all the people we used to be

when we weren't talking. We're in another room
and all the delicate tentative detail was for nought.
You light a candle we have used before, we sign something
with a pen you find lying in front of the table
all by itself. Adequate ink. Call the floor to witness
we have stood in this place together. Nothing more.

You blow it out and we're back on the stairs. There is nothing
left in my heart but these details. Ask me. I can tell you
the color of the carpet. Things make us promises
we have to keep. I let you go to what you understand.

23 September 1994

So the numbers turn me round, the sun comes back
to tell what they have done to me, these *mois*,
these Muses who are months, a dozen of them now,
always three more arts to fathom or to exercise.
I am fifty-nine. The incredible has taken place,

I am alive. The wave is still cresting on the sand at Santa Monica,
the Ethiopian moon, last sliver of it, balsamic,
thick with arcane science, still mirroring in the bay where I was born.
And yesterday I had a taste for fish, I don't eat fish,

fluke or flounder, bottom feeders of the south shore,
deep fried in great kettles of boiling oil,
what kind of oil? I caught a taste
of my original life. And then I thought, This is it,

my wife beside me is my first life, my only, my wave
unalterably water, poised to fall and never falling.
A chipmunk is complaining. The crows already
have finished preening the shady lawn and flown away.

24 September 1994

ALL QUIET ON THE NORTHERN FRONT

Bei Männern, we ancient who
remember, a Mozart variation,
Beethoven, Chopin und so weiter
until the bookstore closes, the radio
dreary Billie Holiday acedie
is ended and light with a kind of
German accent starts to fade out
over the north half of the sky
like Erich Maria Remarque looking
up in Lower Saxony at the hubbub
of clouds and knowing: War is everywhere.
There is no end to strife.

Vaguely

a schoolboy memory comes to console the man
with conviction that what is so
must be so. Leave it alone.
A quotation from Heraclitus like a small
sticky fist clutching two fingers of my hand.

24 September 1994
Great Barrington

A goose across the moon
for you

a sign
of what has no sign

quick compassion, lucid eye,
eternal, empty, openness, serene,

and then it calls you,
loud, incredibly loud, from the sky.

Midnight. You are the pond it heads for.
You are all the water, mirror, it ever needs.

24 September 1994

A goose
nesting on the moon

a silence
holds you

a wedge of them
flying,
an alphabet.

Who am I
to read these things?

24 September 1994

They would be waiting for me there, archons of elsewhere,
standing straight in the middle of what by their
standing there becomes my path. A man can go
right through them, and that's the risk, to penetrate
and pass beyond, as if such passage were a ceremony
not your home. I immigrate in you. The walls are brick
and my burden light, I dream of you all night
just standing before me, enduring my approach
exhausting all the math I know to get there, not the right
answer but the method, the method! I woke
like a window. They were waiting for me
disguised as my hand, the wall, the washcloth,
the soap with its faint sweet smell of seaweed. You island
after all.

And that's all I wanted, a phrase
to say it straight. But they wanted more, I heard them
all round my house, secret as stones, whisper
my name at midnight. That was all.
Or maybe I heard one of them say even softer I have come.
Or was it my voice saying that to tell them
(for I have always tried to tell the truth when I remember)
that I have gotten here at last, this house under maples.
Just here. But I hid from the doors. And I was glad
all the windows were curtained and closed.

I think this was a rebel midnight. A deaf ear
turned to the lady in the woods. Meant me no good.
Or only the good it takes a death to analyze.

25 September 1994

ALIEN WITNESS

So much happening at this weather. I kept
pulling her leaves off and she kept talking of a friend
who kept the strangest daybook. Finally she read it
out loud while Monday traffic roared — in rain all sounds
are close, world under water. What's her name?
In stone chapels on her knees, but in her fantasies
a different sanctity stretched her to extremes.

I have never understood some things are private. What is,
is all there is. It belongs to us by being.
Or by being seen. Thinking also
is not so different from remembering. I am an
alien witness, to me all things equally are strange.

So who is it who was doing this -ing they call dreaming?
I wasn't doing anything at all, it passed before me
helpless, like that Nazi parade down our street
in 1940, fluttering its flags, its unimaginable desires and reproaches.
How many times can you lose the same war?

So I woke enamored of my distances again. Someone
reading someone else's diary to someone sleeping.
That is our gospel and our science. It passes our houses
and leaves small sores on the flesh, and if we're lucky
some mist in the trees for the rising sun, now,
to pickle briefly into a golden shimmer
before the weary clarity of day takes hold.

26 September 1994

BEFORE THE COMMITTEE

The distance I kept insisting was mostly air,
we could inhale it and it would be gone.
Are you trying to be funny, they demanded,
no, I was serious, I have stood on my feet in Arabia,

I must come from a Crusader family, have a yen
into Orient and a large capacity for good intentions,
bad actions, captured cities, hurrying home
to find the rain-swept morning. They thought it unlikely,

they were like any scientists merely shallowly suspicious.
Deeper down, the thick marl of credulity began
that made them fall for every revolution. It was silly
as they did to doubt my motive, my motives

were the only part of me that welcomes scrutiny.
With benevolence prepense and poor performance
I made my way almost to the gates of China —
I saw it over the hill, bewilderingly ordinary,

Cathay. Don't you think that changed me? Maybe
not in this lifetime, but that rock I sat on
will form a city in a future life, this rain
will be my planet's ocean come millennium.

Which comes and comes, like weather, and touches me.
Are you satisfied, my senators? Have I explained
how little of a man is living now, yet all there is?
Then let me get on with it, these miles of final saying.

27 September 1994

sun or some
thing makes
after all my rain
a cobweb sparkle

over all the woods
a girl again
I understand
this place

where spilled
ink never
reaches, milk
out of rock.

28 September 1994

Determined to measure
something he bought a boat.
He figured where it went
was water, and where it wouldn't

was something else. A start.
Then he saw a bird
stop flying and had another
angle. Then something was dead

on the road and he had all
he needed to decide.
Not going and not staying,
there was something else.

Again and again he said it
till the tree above him
started to believe.
The fulcrum: not becoming,

not dying. Was there anything
in that something he could use
for all of them? Not the wood
and not the leaves

and how far does a flower go?
Wait for it never to come.

28 September 1994

Not certain of the road or so
a mailman knocking on the window:

Call from here
the exquisite,
offer to the night sky (that notch
between Galatea and Sparagmus)
this despised heirloom of conscious life.

Tell lies. *Vertellen*, to tell tall tales,
to lie. Tall is from tell, a tale told tall
all the way up to the sky. A lie
from the ground up.

To explain
the harbor not leaving out a single gull.
Or sluice or crane. Awareness is this stone
that floats along in the air
above fainéant strollers on the esplanade.

29 September 1994

As if this itself were the sparrow
naked to the wind, driven
by all the precautions (“feathers”)
it’s taken against the cold,

the stretch of color
into the lift of day. Believe me,
socialists, it is a raptor’s grace
we need to bend the sky

down onto this nourishment,
this earth. And here you are.
And it is not the sparrow
spoken of before. It is a water

or a city or a bread. Or you
are fragmentary and need me.
Or I am not even present
to your thought, you are sky

without a bird at all in it,
a bird at all! And so we dream
nightly for each other,
turning the big pages of the paper

whose fascist lies turn out to be life.

29 September 1994

Caught in the gridwork of it, parables of Lent
(I don't think that word is right, is lent, I think the fast
is in the middle of us, and evades the suppleness
—no oil, no meat, no cheese— of our comprehension—

strong black Greek lent, green leaf and coarse bread
and salt, just salt. And still I'm not sure if that's
the word I mean. But the suppleness is gone
that slimed one though gleaming to another—

the slick of stick. Association. Wait a minute —
I hear some geese cry in my private sky. Now
pick up the dictionary: *tam*, 'talk, discourse,'
and then *tam durwa*, 'to compare

eof
eof-dNÒ^c-d-

different versions told, to put on trial,
to cross-examine. These things that are barely told
suddenly leap into the air, blue stories, winds,
rebellions. I walk there with them

sustained by *dâkinis* at last. Soft stones, lawyers in fleece.

30 September 1994

What did my parable invent?

A person locking up a cloud.

A dog biting the north wind.

30 September 1994