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IN RECOLLECTION

for Charlotte

Turn off the sun
there are sacred
answers
to be done
man's work
or need fire
 a blame
of virgins
spun across the oak
branches fresh
sallowed for spring

Where does the rose
come from
that has so much
red night?
I woke there
late afternoon
and hugged the light

tried to work
my body into it.

8 May 1992

SEAPLANE

for Charlotte

The moon's interminable solo
is something to listen to
all through the doubt. I have to be quiet
about how difficult it really is
to understand what I wrote down,
meaning no more than beauty and music
and facing both with an awed desire
that bubbled up as language
easy as sin. Sometimes I wonder.
A day will come we'll see the earth
at least some islands of it
from the middle of the blue-green air
and you'll ask the pilot to skim low
over the lepers' graves and ruined dock
and the quarry in deep shadow
that looks like a cathedral inside out.

8 May 1992

NORTH OF MOUNT MANSFIELD

How far have they come from the animal the grace
of being beholden to a piece of wood or a store
in East Calais, Vermont where they sold cheese
off the wheel twenty five years ago and still
I haven't learned how to ski, assuming
it can be learned and isn't just natural
like sweating in summertime or falling
downstairs when drunk. There are men
(mostly) who teach the shapes of poems
as if you could carve an egg from the outside
and find a living chick inside. Not so.
It grows from inside out. Like the taste of cheese
from the angel of cow's milk, or grass
from red earth, or this meager sonnet for my wife.

8 May 1992
for Charlotte

A hero an Achilles no
stronger than his teeth
a car no further than its tender pneus
—we are beset with our root nature
and we cringe

I can't go out the door without coming back in
twice yea thrice for some forgotten needment
key or coin or cup or document
trumps of my scattered deck I carry
butterfingere into mortal fray.

9 May 1992

Don't say you'd rather be a seagull.
All that flying.
Above a world of food
hidden in movement.
Don't say you'd rather be the sun.
All that sleep.

9 May 1992

The fierce yellow dandelions on the lawn
change color when I close my eyes.

9 May 1992 KTC

The elusive outfield
where the ball drops fair

& no one is there
to spare the runner

or save him from the golden light
that knows all our dreams

dragons shames furtive sharings
songs.

9 May 1992
for Charlotte

SUNDAY MORNING

for Charlotte

Caught in the complex
necessity to be simple

he pauses in sunlight.
This is like summer.

Five purple finches
eat seed.

It sounds like thunder.
No one awake.

10 May 1992

Oriel eye in the ruined house
grey on the brow of a hill

woodchuck woodchuck
quiet here late sunlight

in the Word Perfect character set
we find the Macedonian soft k—

what shall we do with all our differences
o Angel of Language you tight-skirted girl?

for Charlotte
10 May 1992, Millerton

rang.sems

for Charlotte

That the outside is a way
and the mind-in-me
whoever you are
craves light

and this light is silence
and the bear whose bones are made of stars
falls forward on four paws
to hold this earth his sudden prey

I am. Howler-monkey in the cloud
bitter lamp to show the dark
its own svelte motives.
Why am I a forest?

And who are you
who play chess with the sun?
Who are you who move your houses
like someone else's big flat feet
over the green permission we call Earth?

Moieties, the brown.
Midnight, the ships
bowed like the new moon it is over the wave-fangs
seeking imputed souths.
The carriage, the charioteer
of uncertain gender and godly eyes,
the buoy in the channel,
the grail squirreled away in the moon,

the same place the light
doesn't actually come from
however much we see it so.
Safe landing, argosies!

The condiments

from Fauchon, the peppercorns
white green red & black
from the vague islands we used to own,
and ruled from Gaul.
Islands where the Priestess sends the dead.
Islands where they scratch their alphabets
against the summer skies at night
so their words come back forever
subtly repronounced by weather
over the angelish channel
between us and the lowest heaven
where language can be hardly heard.

But the letters of the world came before language,
the beechen book staves stammered before speech,

when all we heard shivering by the water
was a little vibration, maybe,
as if something meant something else,
the kind of shake a poor old cobra might perceive
and raise himself up to dance
in all the cruel markets of exploitation
before the white man lost his wrist watch in the crowd.

11 May 1992

THE FIRST BOOK OF NUMBERS

for Charlotte

The divisors of reality the murk
waiting at the end of sunset
to eat the mountain and

and and
the halfmoon caught in the branches of an oak
unfledged by spring

catch me
these are the triads
of my weasel-welsh my spur

off Caer Idris and a spoiled
senator waiting for his grapes
to come back from the mouths of women

as words. As words
we live and as silence
we lie down under the stone and say why.

2.

What does it mean to say a number
say a number to a woman
like a quince

not yet flourishing and suddenly
what I thought was one
has thorns

it is another
and what does it mean
to say a number

when whenever
there is counting
there is a mystery

something clear
and something not
a river.

Say a river.
What does it mean
to say a river to a woman,

a number pours
forever and forever
I think that's what it means.

11 May 1992

3.

What is this thought of numbers this cascade
of unrelentingness begun
when a tongue

or when it says
whatever it says
and that is city

enough for the likes of me
to infest
with my unending sense of streets

the salmon of the story
tastes the wit
ever after

and all he knows
is where we go
I read that book

on the subway
in the grid of numbers
absolutely going

nowhere to reflect
or recollect
the simple passage

reading a book
and being young
and being in a tunnel under the river.

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4.

But there is something
there to catch
to spite the light

a glimpse
of darkness
hidden in the count

like an albino buffalo in a snowstorm
guessing at the north
the house

where the stars come from
that is the city again
our guesswork

the only
philosophy west have left
it suffices

to eat lichen
from under the snow
to moss.

11 May 1992

A crow is a cat in a tree.

The day
has already begun.

Now what?
Your friend is your wife.

Some dried red roses
she gave you fresh
rest scarlet
atop the Indian accordion
whose busted bellows
in this bright sun
are lenten purple and a dream

of flowers.
Again
I have inherited my life.

12 May 1992
for Charlotte

for Charlotte

Because nothing is happening
in the happening
because the golden sunlight
of a million English books
is scattering my poor cold spring
into wish and reminiscence
re-dogs hopes and fears
a person at the door
inculcating Woe

there is the wished-for silence
and the spiræa I wonder
how it will do this year
when last was a foam of love
tossed up everywhere

and all of this
is just some time that's travelled
from one part of the mind to another
to flee from imputation.
Polygala is I think the name of a flower
like a goose in flight or an airplane
or those are the resemblances
I remember. That and its hot pink
on a mossy cliffedge over a waterfall

when the woman was very far.

12 May 1992

5.

Here they are
waiting for the character
that will change their lives

the blue thorn
pressing in
from a manuscript

a rune of clouds
rimming her head
and you pray to her

because it has been said.
The bible
is her shadow

and the nest of her
breeds the savage crows
that fly up in my face

when I get between her and the truth.

12 May 1992
for Charlotte

The champions of it wait in their bistros
bothering decent people from Detroit
who do not ride up in gilded cages at the Willard
to ballrooms with the topbrass of the UAW

this is simple as grass
I'm trying to explain it to myself
like a house
or Buddha talked about a house on fire
and a certain king or merchant
with children trapped inside

who would not leave
until they heard of his white horses
elephants oxen
snuffling in his safe outdoors
--the real benefits of imaginary animals

by whom we are recruited to the dance.
And these villains snuggle up to bars
and write checks in antique shops
and make the decent people of Detroit
wish for one red afternoon in Washington
to see justice done.

But justice is not for the doing.
Justice is a white horse
just beyond our burning door.

12 May 1992

for Charlotte

That it is mathematical
and a game
that it is a problem
in the state that borders on the mind
and flows it
scrubbing it like Mexican washermen
in the Los Angeles river
there are places
where the beginning is still trying to begin.

That it is susceptible to analysis
is our grief. That we believe
our reckonings
sinks the ship of the mind time after time.
The shape of the mind.
Number is our white whale.

And you won't believe me. You go right on
in the heart of the glorious insertions.
Touch me was the other things I was going to say.

12 May 1992

Evening the wind from shore shears
away from us, the seaplane is flying
low into the sunset that is Massachusetts
but the wind from us carries the sound away

into the land before us. It is still
and a bird hangs fire at the top of the sky.
Imagine it like this. I do. The trees
of the island are low and few. Beyond them

a barge is creaking up against its pier
too amorously for me not to get ideas.
I think it will be like this where we are

when there is here. The island and the evening.
Tall-masted *Shenandoah* white in the outer
harbor. Ducks drift in the soup of the sea.

13 May 1992
for Charlotte

THE SCREEN

for Charlotte

The geometric lines constantly changing their colors
in the screen-saver pattern leave an afterglimpse of words
when they pass through each other, shadows inside shadows,
on the way of change. Nested in movement, these multiple
contours insinuate a meaning gone when I focus clearly on
where the words had been. What words? In the south
or in the north, the moon or the river, man or the flower,
our ordinary lives. Telling what? Telling me to change.
The lines that led to me have gone on long enough, I am
an apparent pause in their meaning. Not different from that.
Gone by the time you look. I remember myself
the way you recall a long-dead friend, someone interesting,
something nice about him, out of touch, worth a pause
and then back to work watching the computer play.

14 May 1992

Is it the smell of someone's mind
you remember
the feel in the kitchen
when they sat and talked and picked at things
or rubbed breadcrumb into a little ball on the glass table
and spoke about the weather loyally
like someone keeping troth with a wife.
You wish you could hear them complaining.
It is so hard for you to trust
anyone, let alone a friend.
When you're married to the world
everything that happens is your business
and the one thing you can't do is tell lies.
That's why you let your hands remember.

14 May 1992
for Charlotte

I wanted to be small
to waste the sunlight
on finding me

I wanted to hide
inside your skin
until I found me

I wanted the milk
and then the wine
and then the water

I watched the woods
I watched the roads
until they ran

I wanted to be one
and then another
one wanted to be me

I wanted to disappear
into the smile
of city people seeing things

14 May 1992

