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FLIGHT INTO EGYPT

for Charlotte

Imagine then
the imbrication:
to layer
tiles over
one another
so that the rain
keeps out,

it is a valley
in the Savoie,
a fresco
endures the light
six hundred years.

We are ashamed
of ourselves
suddenly—
the power
of a thing
to be itself
and nothing but

while I scarcely
can compose myself
to stare it
in the eye, be
open-eyed
to this marvel

a pink sky and frightened
Jews fleeing
into Egypt the burden
in her arms
alive,

the image

is alive
we wait
while the greedy
sacristan
pins another group
against the columns
of the arcade

and flee, we also
flee, into the marketplace
of Abondance
to watch the people
who come here
to watch us watch us
only here
to be safe
in the dangerous traffic
of our own kind
and warily
we buy
a staff of bread

a piece of white cheese
to carry
against history.

1 December 1992

TITANIA

Why do I always type "these"
when I test a keyboard or "these
are the forgeries
of iealousie"

as if Herself had all the lines
and I just copied
listless accurate
everything that falls from

her magnificent mouth?

1 December 1992

The two principles operate in the same way—
an umbrella rises and gets larger until it meets
a crisis — the point between your head and the sky.
This protects. It is a sign of many fish eggs
waiting now all through the pond scum of the sea
to make your future. Every living one did mother you.
It is a sign of the kindly makeup of the earth
who keeps her smiling sunlit face between you
and what she is like inside — no horror show
indeed but a dark place, a place where stones talk
and men are silent. Women move between the two
tormenting me with their absent word — but that's
another story. The principles we keep before us
on the blackboard — the blue one — you have written
their equations down as the names of goddesses
to suit an old romantic crotchet in your heart —
but number would do as well. Nephthys. Hathor. How
can we live without these intimate celebrations?
And so the night was made. Isis found it
beneath the silk that lines her lap, and set it free.

2 December 1992

FIRST STEPS IN DAKINILAND

You come off the glider. She comes off the bus.
You drink tea on the Chowrasta guessing
those vague tumbling clouds are Kanchenjunga.
She pronounces everything differently.

Say: I am from the West. She smiles,
is from the South. Silence. On the stainless tray
peppery comestibles tempt and appall.
Be simple, she tells you, there is so little

Time? you guess, but she: No, so little food
for all of them. Feed them first, then
think of me. The tongue in your own mouth
is enough for this moment's kiss.

We will meet at dawn tomorrow and see
through that clear window of the moment
far off the estimable figure of the mountain.
See that, then flee into the man you think you are.

2 December 1992

8.

The hallway crowded with alchemicals
I fought my way downstairs to the coal bin
where under a painting of the old dead king
I found myself forty years ago at work
squeezed as ever between the gonadic engine's
flashing tablets (which are crushing blades,
the lamina Erotis of the old maps) and the cool
ice strata of Greek verbs. *Cat-ice*, the book said,
the thin sheet left when the water is withdrawn
from below. And always from below the mystery
is solved. Meadows outside Montreal. I bent
(the old one of me bent) to see the book
young me was writing at the chinese table.
Terror of the ideograph written in black ink
on the wall — how do I know what it *really*
means? And how do we know what any word
intends for us in the endless midnight of
language between one mouth and another,
where it just is and no one speaking? Maybe it says
"in this sign you will get leprosy and sever
all ties with a humankind you're just about to kiss"
and maybe it says "the Mahler symphony you hear
on that thrown-together hi-fi you and Arthur
rigged of sand and copper and an old wood box
and a Radio Craftsman FM tuner and a Wharfedale
speaker is actually the last sound you'll ever
because you die right now." But it didn't
or if it did I didn't listen, did not know how
to listen to signs on the wall. Did not know how to die.
I watch my pale young hands move vaguely
over the Underwood, tips typing, wrists
keeping time to a measure I was guessing
felt like her. In rhythm I shall find her body
and shall touch, for of rhythm body's made
and all it ever has to say is the melody of this.
And I said this, and the grey crinkly metal
of the typewriter rattled and the painting swayed
on its wire hangers from the beam and the smoke
of his cigarette ascended, young me, my king,
my ancestor, of whom I am one and only one

of your infinite descendants. Most of whom make sense.
But I followed down the hallways past the colors
and into the ballroom of the elements
below the simple basement with its books and subtle
silverfish, I danced as an August peach tree
stung with gum, I danced as a princess
caught in the pages of a book, I danced like a boat
in sunlight and a fish on fire, for dance
is no one's comfort and memory a cold banister
leading nowhere but the dark. I followed the copper
to the silver and the silver to the gold and had the wit
to pass beyond the gold to find the next condition
not yet named in the English language treatises
I consulted in my dreams. No name but cool
to the touch and smooth to my lips as I brought it
close to my breathing so I could hear it say
"If there were any other color it would be me."

2 December 1992

[A section of *The Physiology of William Blake*]

9.

Then it is a fish that swims inside and doesn't veer
though the vein veers and the artery decides
a delicate precision is best for all that light
seeping in at the gates of the capillaries
close to the Imaginary World out there
where other people are and oak leaves fall
sluggish all through winter but when they do
we shuffle through the gold and amber treasury
trying to find each others in the silent trees
windless on the slopes of Mount Qaf.
You bring me back. A woman walks towards
my house timelessly pale, at tea time,
under the squalls of desire and resignation.
Recumbency, mute along the horsehair,
needing me. Should I wake up now or push
this dirty finger through the web of feeling
and let the bad light in. Here it is ambergris.
Here it is dusk. Here is it the gorgeous silence
after unnecessary music. I am the Emperor here.
To vomit praises as a lark spills sky.
Answering comforts, woke too soon, the world
is still not ready for such a mathematics.
Treasure house of silt. The carp along me creep
seek the relative, the open water, flukes
weary from the shallows. Who came in us
when we were sleeping? Why is an army?
I am trying to decide the preposterous islands
where you lift high your last shred of clothing
as quick flags of triumph or surrender.

3 December 1992

Alternation
the spirit
lost with the wax

left the form
impermeable
under the glass

erection,
spillway
an armature

of grassy hope
tilted backwards
down the hill

by your house
you bird.
Behold

the conferencers
wisdom
is mostly forgetting.

3 December 1992

for Charlotte

Then they were moving
quick with the deft certainty of a
leaf placing itself athwart the light

into an energy they found. Just found—
preparation was nowhere.
And no research,

no more than a rock falling out of the sky.
Or a man's head held
cocked to one side when the sun is setting

and he's startled by his shadow.
O blue thing my body means,
you can touch with your thinmost hands

the queenliest distances love can hope.

4 December 1992

10.

It is after all the apparencies. It is after all
the valve of the neglected, the sanhedrin
of neural fibers, the lighthouse in the skin.
Wake up, they cry to me, you have slept
forever in the wood of words while we
who are your mothers and your sisters,
you leave us to work the world alone.
It is after all the morning, even the blood
looks different as it skims strait-banked
between fire lower and these light
evolutions of air up here where I am talking
to myself — by definition the one
of all ones who does not listen. Wake?
That's not what they said. Something more.
So down the portulus amicarum (under
the armpit on the right side, a twist of smoke
emitted from your old blue pocket) a zigzag
process like cartoon lightning lights
long enough (all too long) the furrow of the wise
choked with elm leaves and tobacco.
Poke it with a pencil. The soft masty stuff
keeps the point you made, longer than
you remember what you meant by making it.
Add rubber bands and clothespins and there it is,
the precious human body, lord of elements,
all done in a dream, nothing for you
to bother with at all but waking. Wake.
That really is what they said.

5 December 1992

[A section of *The Physiology of William Blake*]

These are the
words were they
rivers when they
no the birds
fell through them
they were colors
only they were mine.

5 December 1992

AN EXERCISE IN BIOGRAPHY

1.

Short pardon brass forgetting a ship
balanced on a wave "good pictures
good night" smell of the lantern
showed me where I had been
stumbling in the dark a tree
between my arms was I always silent
born so and into the last alleyway
likewise alone though attended
by the Bishop of R—r later
author of the notorious *A Wasted Life*.

5 December 1992

11.

The first cathedral previous to any mud caked anklebone
of any hardwitted Pict or Celt or me proposing fist-wise
a block of bluestone from under Onteora to heft in apses
to assuage the absences of deity and screw down the earth
lest it blow away in the pervading winds of the Néant
that primitives in me (son of a collarbone and a throne)
are always frantic with anxiety about — look at the ocean
for example — was probably the breast bone itself
with all that *tet*-work or spine of Osiris in or as it,
a harp to pluck maybe while women try on clothes
and a serene folkloric music plays — Rhinebeck,
color of Christmas — so that you see her movements
out of the corner of your mind and —blue now
muscl'd in the evening— you want. Want but not that.
Touch but not this. Because this arrowing erection
of masoned stone into a thousand tons of ordinary sky
meant to be music and to mind you, meant to protect
against inadvertency. The sky wants you. Your wants
are strictly momentary and passionate and vague.

5 December 1992

[A section of *The Physiology of William Blake*]

WINTER

This quiet session this December
waiting for the nothing is waiting
it is here it is like a pigeon vague
because grey and the sky is sometimes

—go no further than that. This
is an old barn with old the me in it
the men who were your fathers
also hiding in the hay. The War

Between the States. Duck prattle
in the barnyard clearly hearing
another savagery waiting to start
click of the rifle two men in neon orange

creeping drunk through this morning woods
sundaying on death's behalf to stalk
persons with other agendas to attend
deep in brown thickets past our cheap songs

these sing with their money their metal.
I want to save them from them and them
from themselves I want to save the winter
from the absentminded light I want

to save the world from hasty wanting
and me from what I want. Where they
can't see it a body is waiting forever alive
quick in the fastnesses of free.

6 December 1992

12.

Wanting to know about it the blood of old
sought to refluent the adolescent veins
of American society — the sunrise came up blue
and Nilish motives overtook our lawns:
asps and obelisks. That old blood recaptures
local influence, a neighborhood is made of dream
exclusively. The rest of it is buses.
So from the citadel of the Ulnar Neuroclast
a word trickled down this frightened lordly arm
and spelled a document in Nether English.
The word is larger than the rete or net of speech
or who speaks it. The stretch beyond the skin
lights up a parallel remark — this is the famous
Elsewhere that glows soft goldly green
at twilight in English-speaking countries
and some France. A word is larger than nerves—
if enlarge— a yew tree growing in the open sea.
At Christmas time the sister nerves do sit around
the smokeless fire breathing silver songs
they caught like meek diseases from the sound of rain.

6 December 1992

Although we rue, we'd rather.

There is a port too that we'd gather
idle windlasses to wind us in

dreading the consequences we
work so hard to bring about.

6 December 1992

Maybe the sun will make me remember
it's in my eye now over the barn
so the silhouette is any ruin any
jagged black ruin strong against the light

let it remember in me like software
absently configuring behind the scenes
changing my path without a word of per-
mission leading me to bliss

— it happens like this. How long
can your hand hold a sentence?
Eventually the invading squadron
will fly in low over the Ewa district

in huge ocean sunlight so the poor Kiribati
migrant workers will look up and see
quick alien colors over the pineapple fields
amazing them. Nothing is durable

but from the fermenting pulp and rind and mash
a drink is made that makes men happy
(sole of all fruits it does this without help—
sugar of light enough for it) a little while.

7 December 1992
Pearl Harbor Day

for Charlotte

Windchimes
going
as they please

she pleases
I meant
to say

given the brightness
of the clouds
lit from under

as if the bare
trees make light
the blue only remembers.

7 December 1992

WHILE I WAS WAITING NEAR THE BEGINNING

While I was waiting near the beginning
the edict of the Procurator overtook me
trying to send me back to Ecbatan—
I hid like a troll under an old stone bridge
I hid like an afreet in the cellar of the temple
where women with green eyes worship a goat
I hid like a sparrow in my own henna'd beard
I hid in the sky like a vast exhalation of blue
and came down from heaven at nightfall to find him
and there he was with his animals round him
with parents praying wordless at his feet
not yet knowing the name of this God or
how far outside their minds and bodies
his limits lay — ah faithless parents
he has no limits this Buddhachild of yours
no more than you have no more than I
who came here shaped like everything at once
to stand at your side and pray my own silence
at him and at you and let the Romans
rave before the marble haunches of their deities
who when they were flesh also could remember
what it is to have no limitations at all
before the dreary habits of art endowed them
with beauty o how haunted stone itself is
how hard even for me sometimes to leave
the formal shadows underneath my broken bridge.

7 December 1992



this is a house
and will be for a long time
itself because the air
has come to recognize it
and call it by name.

"Hello, House,
the birds are getting ready
down in Bolivia to come back
and bother you again."

With its eaves
the house is listening, "o brother,
o bother, the birds
again, and their seeds, their seeds
have trees and their trees have birds
and there we are again,
all over me and the morning
too loud for me and the men and women
running down my halls
crying for their children and their children
with birds on their knees.
O it is hard to be me, it is hard to house."

"Cheer up, brother," says the air.
"I care and care and hurry everywhere
at once, and wherever I go
are people and their things
and every thing must have its man
or woman, and every house
must have its birds. I endure the clouds
and their unseen attendants,
I endure the morning choked with light
and the evening drowned in darkness

and none of it bothers me. None of it
should bother you, after all
you are a nest of things
and what a thing is
is a kind of sleeping. Isn't that so?"

So so was it that the house was fast asleep.

[A Fairy Tale for Charlotte, 7 December 1992]

QABALAH

And these things also
I permitted
boat under barrow
till the children came

and woke the wood
beneath their fingers
all the gold beakers
cried out for wine.

7 December 1992
for Charlotte, l'écossaise

