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MERMAIDS

for G.Q.

Now there is a love of which Dante does not speak unkindly

said Robert Duncan about the Sodomites
Dante interviewed in hell, running ever anxious for a ‘joining’ as the later poet chastely said, all manner of unions,

communions. How do we make love?
The phrase itself is wonderful, argues we are a race of artificers, when even love, that natural and most difficult ordinary

thing has to be made. And we make it however we can. Now there is a love that seeks for joining, ok, we’ll borrow Duncan’s chastity (though he reproached

me once for writing all the time about fucking, fucking, he giggled it twice, I was abashed, startled even, to think I wrote about anything, let alone that)
a joining that is not a going in (whatever
goes in must come out, sorrow, sorrow)
that is no rough insertion or sly
intromission, a joining that is
continuous and subtle and all-
embracing the way water is,
always on the level, always close
as two substances can be

and I suppose the mermaid
was her love (I too have been
all my life in love with mermaids
back from the days of Esther

Williams before I even knew
what her white one-piece concealed),
was pure woman in her element
welcoming her lovers in sheer equality

as if they could become another
chemical, a radical enstasy
of being with her deeper than
any possible being in.
Think of the gloss on a blackbird
in strong sun—we are wrapped
in sensation—think of roses
growing by the sea in June

but your eyes are closed,
think of a sip of Moët
in a pretty woman’s lips
across the room and music

you’ll never see her again—that’s
how mermaids make love
to you. But how do we,
you ask, make love to them—

the nub of love is to be
nimble mindful in the space
we in some moment share—
beast with two backs

they used to call lovers
at their work, so too
you with her, you share
an element and hour
though she is all image
and you all animal
your accidents unify
in one single essence

(forgive my Thomist
grasp on her lovely
greenish hair)
so that a sailor passing

would look out and watch
only a man cavorting
and would cry out
Look, there is a man

making love to the sea.

20 June 2012, Cuttyhunk
Having what you need
this song of grace
bird not yet
all one far gull—
fish crow at the western end
of time—awake
over the island
the flesh of sky.

21 June 2012, Cuttyhunk
Storms pass us by
speakers with no signal
sea calm—one
cat grinds downhill.

The nowhere language
of a pampered minority
I speak. My grammar
slips over your hips.
Dommage they say in France,
too bad we are not bad.
Level-headed almost dumb
all I am is motivation.

21 June 2012, Cuttyhunk
Time for confession
I have nothing to confess.
I’ve been here from the beginning
maybe that’s crime enough.

21 June 2012, Cuttyhunk
But if they saw what they sang
what would they see?
Would it look like a woman
standing on the path in the woods
delighting in the sounds of birds
and calling out to them from time to time,
even trying to imitate their calls,
rufous towhee, Carolina wren?
How slow she saunters.
How radical their noise,
profound trace of an information
tea-kettle tea-kettle-tea.

21 June 2012, Cuttyhunk
All songs seek symmetry—
why twelve-tone music excites
we charge through chambers of our hearing
to find and almost hear the missing
lovers these sounds cry out for.

21 June 2012, Cuttyhunk
I used to have so many Geminis
now I have none
it’s strange to me, estranges me
from what I thought I was
or must have been.
Am I finally another?
Is chance romance?

2.
Can there be a day when wisdom fails?
I asked the brickmaker I asked the smith
I asked the girl who rides the horses
they all had convincing handshakes
but no words, or I had none
because none of them understood what I was saying.
What was I saying?

3.
Is it this day, sun glare, haze much,
is it all about weather?
Metarsimancy, it’s obvious enough,
just read what the day is telling
mostly your skin.
4.
I mean mine, I keep getting distracted
by what I see from what I know.
A handful of white radishes from the garden,
interesting dirt around their stems, dirt,
this earth I stand on.

5.
Or how far the apple falls from its tree.
Sheen on morning windows.
All day long we eat the air
and think nothing of it, chew and swallow—
this root is life, and all the rest
is spring and summer, face in a mirror,
a piece of bread chewed slowly,
vows’ renewal, sadly serpent
on the gravel a leash without its dog.

6.
About wisdom this old was
with questions, no? Across the border
they look at you a different way,
as if you were really there
taking up space, even casting a shadow.
Here we wouldn’t dare to. Honey
keep your shadow in your pocket
if they step on it you’ll never be the same.
7.
Well I got no answers from the lawyer
and the priest was out of town
I picked a leaflet from the gutter
read DEPAR OF ARKS
and knew the flood was coming.
Or had come and left me here alone.

8.
At last, as if this
is what I was,
a solitary and a relic man,
and all the rest had floated off
in animal snug security
following an inspired leader
and left me here awake.
Wisdom turns a man to face the wall.
Wisdom stitches feathers to his heels.
Wisdom lights a candle in his skull.
Wisdom tells him Now you are invisible.

9.
So walk in the shadow
walk in the sun
it’s like a story but it never tells.
Can I say I wrote
my whole life’s work
for you because I like
the way you sit on a chair
the way you sometimes
look at me as if I’m there?
Everything anybody ever did
is with them all the time.
*Kairos*, the appointed time.
This is where you were headed all along.

22 June 2012, Cuttyhunk
I wrote it with seawater
wrote it with glue
one way or another
got through to you

this is not what I meant
not what I started to say
sun in the doorway
and the air is still

should I use milk
like invisible ink
should I use blood
that darkens in daylight

I meant to say nothing
at all, meant to be quiet
and let the birds out there
do all the lecturing

it’s all gossip anyhow
the mind and its friends
body and soul and the strange
fact that we feel inside
where nothing really is
just the shadows of what
we’ve looked at,
echoes of what the stranger said.

22 June 2012, Cuttyhunk
A TORINOI LO

The plodding horse in the first shot
seen in profile as he trudges
into a whirl of dust and fog
after a while his muzzle
his jaw begin to look like
a wolf. All animals
are the same animal.
Every mouth swallows
having bitten. Every eye
stares out at me
in terror and confusion and rage.

22 June 2012, Cuttyhunk
Dogsled skimming on the sea
I try to tell you what no one saw
there are rhymes that feel like miracles
in old poetry, a shallow comforter of cloud
below the sun. And mist. Visibility
half a Roman mile. Hen pheasant
walked across the grass, catspaw
of mainland reaching out to the island.
Fear. Try not to notice. Live in the past.

23 June 2012, Cuttyhunk
We’re not trapped.
Isolation is Eden.
To be alone outside for a day
is to recover something I lost
without knowing it.
To be alone is to accept
my freedom. Not independence,
there’s no such thing, but being free.
For a day to do and not do.
And then this freedom is my habit
surfacing like seals in sunlight,
meaning so I know they’re there,
then sinking back into what I am.

23 June 2012, Cuttyhunk
Where does the weather *go*?

Does yesterday’s heat

rush to torment

the middle of the sea?

23 June 2012, Cuttyhunk
[SENTENCES]

Spelling words the old way opens doors.

The skull oft forgets the face outside it.

Mind on something else he called flowers the whimsy of God.

Not thinking just speaking let the words show the way.

I am a crow I eat what dies at my doorstep.

Explaining pain a way of bearing it.

Aimless traces of a night well spent.

Footsteps on the stairs the sun rising.

Shrill blackbird mother leaf.

To caress matter itself most intimate.

Cool breeze a signal from a distant hunt.

Venus falls and draws us all upon her.

We are she loves.
Luster of lost things still shines in mind.

Musit a hole in a hedge take Shakespeare’s word for it.

Light in cloud Adriatic tell one glass of water from another.

Taste and be.

Random interlopers girls in the flowers.

Drop shiny keys on the grass to find the door.

Swallows fly away with the sky.

What is the name of a bird seen in dream.

A shadow of a silhouette I follow through the woods.

They begin the celebration carrying baskets of fish.

Everybody knows everybody but me.

Aligned with the obvious small fish in shallows.

Nacreous humor women glow in the dark.

…23 June 2012, Cuttyhunk