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ELEMENTAL THINGS

A year is when all the certain people are alive

the last such year was 1969

things forget themselves

away

Flushing 1939 the French pavilion lights
never knew anything could be so bright

I saw then that was language

my nova

the things of mortal childhood

elemental things

1.
Stand by the wall and write them down
big or small as they seem to rate
until the wall is counseled with your elements
this is your Mendeleev Table, you seek
for the order in it, there is order, orders,
there must be, the periods
of linked attention, the augmenting light.
the weights of what you know

the halogens of your desire

Oxidize me, you cry, Great Time,
Great Wheel of Time,
spin me till I come talk-side up
and have something to tell
even You.

“Eternity is in love with the productions of time”

then seek out your proper Azimuth aloft,
the lost element,

the secret name, my home.

See, I believe my lies.
Boys from Brooklyn
usually do.

The wooden bridge to Manhattan Beach,
the teal-blue iron bridge to Rockaway

and in the evening
by Broad Channel
taste of raw clams, littlenecks, cherrystones,
didn’t know anything could have so much taste

the hour of the hedges
west of Nostrand
where America began
a land of protestants and numbers
numbered streets
though of concrete on some steps there sat
a lion
I fed when I was taken walking

but what do such beasts eat?

the succulents, the lobed leaves of memory,

here, take my hand, put it where it longs.

Belongs.

Longs to be.

2.
There is nowhere on the other side
all these things I never said

the elements of ordinary
I say all the time

they are wrapped snug
in silken pronouns
stored in unspoken sentences
stacked beneath the spoken words

the universal rain.

It matters because it touches everyone.

So I wanted to be born
I guess, I wanted to be rain
or dry enough to get indoors
be wind enough to go all the way
across the little inlet
where the flounder boats sneak out
before the sun has risen—
they don’t go far
and some of them are back in time for Mass

whatever that really is.

Memory can’t bear churches,
memory is a cathedral of its own
(Saint-Sulpice is what I see when I say it
sunset on a grey day, not a cathedral, just big,
the vast space inside a stone)

(or the Lady

Chapel in Saint Patrick’s

hot afternoon alive in blue)

memory gives no choices
keeps its prisoners forever

they can all walk into my dining room right now
no one of them is ever far

*when you come into my mind you come forever*

I see my mother standing by the deacon’s bench
haloed with new snow outside

time is a criminal
but on our side

3.

As you go deeper into genealogy
I see that as exterior memory
what you’re looking for out there
might be in here,

here being the place in which you think and speak.
This word
is your ancestor,
the sound of words
in your own mouth
the surf that crashes
on the Western Isles.

Use archive to find inner.
It will tell me
but will I believe it
when the church burned down

what year my oldest memory as me.

(You and me get intermingled here,
agents both, endurers of the obvious
us, both and any, many and none,
none but me and none but you)

Where does the child live before memory
why doesn’t remembering begin when perceiving begins
is there consciousness at all before memory

memory not the trace of event but the trace of awareness

then why do we have to learn to remember
and what if we didn’t?

Memory is a glove
protects the hand
from experience,
too big for young hand,
slips off the aged

memory survival function
high wind = fear
Æolian music of the dense-set bare branches

god Theremin.

4.
Everything scares me—
that is my secret power, cowardice.

A glove. Leaves
in the stone lion’s mouth.

Where shall we go
to learn how not to,
not to believe the words
heard in whose head?
The battle I must do
is listening,
I am the hero—a hero *hears*.
That is the meter of the epic,
swirl-curve inward of the hero’s ears.
And where does he hear?
A hero always hears _here_.
Here is the locus of the epic,
its action is in hearing
on the shores of the river of silence
under the walls of the city

much-talking city.

The first sin.

What a word is _peccatum_!
What is it from?
It means a little stumble when we’re walking,

not the lion, not the street,
not the yellow elmtree leaves

a stumble
on our way somewhere

where is it from
or is it always here,
when was my first sin?

I thought my penis was the Holy Ghost
who always (they told me) warned me
if I did wrong. Could this be wrong then
the exciting thoughts in mind
that made the penis rise
like a nun’s finger shaken in blame

the penis was the sign
the sign was the sin

five years old
a word on the wall

flowers and lions
I liked the pansies best
three-colored, soft to the touch
cool by the shadowy garage.

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I have said all this somehow before
that’s not the same as saying it now

thinking makes things happen, thinking is now

now has blood and semen of its own
now is newborn
now is milkweed sap
now is dandelion fluff
now is snow

and out doesn’t seem so far away
but out is very hard.

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Oratio Recta

The thrill of purport
the schooner nosing out of the bay north
to be west of you
and you can see it from the house
assigned to you in the magic of the stars

the street address counting down from heaven
so many houses
and each of them with people
and each people stinks with star sulfur

each slips by the other
terrified as mercury

to touch the other is to become her

32 million people in Chungking the newspaper says
it withdrew from its province to be its own
as a house withdraws from its street
to collect itself

when I was a child men collected stamps
or said they did alone in their studies at midnight
I sat in the kitchen reading
everything I know is from that hour

now without looking down at the page
I can see the schooner sliding west through the straits
taking aim on the whole sunset

it is motoring
the sails loose reefed, ready for the ocean out

I can see you seeing it from your front yard
but you have to look
up from your book to do it

you have to look up from your book

Say what do you know about horses
did you ever get there on horseback

the way the knights had to, had to come
to the broken chapel. hear mass
said by the crazy old priest
who turns out to be your uncle

god, do you have enough uncles

and he has to hear mass without leaving the saddle
the priest hobbles over and lifts the Host to him
he has to bend to
Domine non sum dignus
has to bend to take
on the tip of his tongue
a red lance to pierce again
the Savior’s side

the actual messiah came and went
while you were reading
while I would not look up from my book

her shadow healed us

so the knight kept going on his long persuasion
and the priest made crosses in the air behind him

we feel the breath of the cross still
it is the last whisper of the Empire

the one that reigned from me to you
all the way

the knight had to cross the whole world
to be sure he hadn’t missed an acre

we follow clues too
we watch the sloop until it hurts our
eyes I watch you watching
we fade in sunset

what are we even doing here
why haven’t we done it all already
done everything and left nothing
and why aren’t we at it even now

the this of it, the thing that leaves the shadow

just put it in your mouth
no taste just heat
no spill just tell

so it was coming through the dark
the way a story comes back through the mind
the whole shape of it intact
a broken jug glued back together
some pieces missing
some out of place
but the shape shows

forget the livid dragon the green lion the red maiden
who poured silver in your skirt
how many horses
the ones with names
how many names
the ones you forget

how can you tell the Grail Legend all over again
with no horse and no maiden

but she is a maiden and you are a maiden
and the horse with horns
carries us all, Duncan said so
and he was born in a myth and died in a number
proper romance of the modern age

the strange language

we traveled side by side in a tunnel
we clattered through the ivory reeking walls
carbon monoxide and water vapor drifted
against the dingy light
we were inside the hollow thighbone of a giant of old
buried underneath the Vosges
seven kilometers we drove
gasping for breath in that foul air
it came on daylight in St-Die
where the Grail also had been sought,
and since sought there, found there

that is Its station,
to be there
wherever it is to be found
and to be found
wherever it is sought

seeking

glance, eyebeams gently
firmly held, touch,
caress— these
are all the instruments of knowing,
all the probes of love
and no further need be gone

and all that anxious going further,
your suckings and your fuckings,
do nothing but violate the astral sheath
of that beloved other whose sacred otherwise you spill
by the act of trying to go in

we have no in

we live at the surface of ourselves
and that is where we are

that is where the you of you is stationed
the station of the Grail

to force your way inside
or swallow one another in
just breaks the very identity
in which love consists
insists

    reduces
otherness to surgery and meat
the cannibal manners of the middle class

that is not the way of Albí
that is not the way of Tamalpais

this a glance and a then
a gaze sustained and answered
so long it can be held
and then a touch
and then caress that lasts
even to the rising of the dawn
when the man you tussled with     *ha-ish*
blesses you and he is gone
leaving you lame with fulfillment

and full of your own self
his love conferred
as you to him
in that weird reciprocation
the winter knows
the sun comes close but gives less heat

you rise strong from each other’s
knowledge of the particular difference

where else can you be found
but where you are sought?

inside there is nothing
a beautiful woven fence
and inside it nothing but the prance
of the silver unicorn

a creature best known for its absence
it flees when the fence is broken

*rompe la tela deste dulce encuentro*
John said
let my unicorn run free
in the imaginary pastures of the lord

he meant
but that is not our meaning
not on Tamalpais
or among the quiet eagles
nesting on Whaleback
or where the cougar slipped down last winter
along the Sawkill past our summerhouse

where we are
is where the gaze rests
and the light
touches us
with its radiant enough

no selves and no circles

are you still watching the boat
Charles was one hundred years old yesterday
and he was one for whom a boat
meant what it brought or bartered

for our commerce is not with waves and latitudes
but flesh and blood, the gorgeous annals of exchange,
the money of our minds poured out to know the business of the world
what there is and where it is

the mushroom—name it—under that boulder on your lawn
and there is no such thing as a tree

and what that schooner’s doing
is pleasuring some rich folk out to sea
where they have no more business than here on shore

but I’ll grant them liberty to go and come and sell and buy
as long as they keep looking

and for god’s sake be good to look at
that’s the least you can ask money.

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