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DAYS OF THE PRACTICE

Woke stiff as Ötzli
in his leather body
babe-bent beneath the ice,
be fetal, be morning, be ready
for the pain to be born
the pain of being new
again, of being you.

This is the practice.
Every waking an abortion too,
something could have been but didn’t
or you didn’t let it,
world full of blame

you could sleep all the time
in starfish splendor
and let the dream milk out
of your sleeping self,
squeeze out the beautiful phantoms
who march on the runways of the world
glamorous and sleek while you
lie there snoring, faint smell of onions,
reeking of cigarettes you never smoked.
That is the practice,
getting across the border
with your mouth full of language,
while the train from Montreal
stalls in an endless field of snow,
this is the practice
getting across the border
with your dreams intact,
smeared all over your body
to hide them from the law.
One human body
can host a million dreams.

Unaccountably the music slows.
This too is the practice
pain in the bone behind the left ear
all the symptoms of reality
the sky greying over but no rain.
The day of rain: good for girls and turtles,
to hear the word that seeps
up from the soil. So many
of us are sleeping there beneath the ground—
how long since I’ve held a heart in my hands
how long since I sat in the opera house built by Garnier
and watched the dancers far away below me
and I was each one
each leap each glide knew itself in my body
as I fumbled through the bodies of the masked ballet.

The practice. Make
a sound
    softly but big enough
so it fills the concert hall,
globes itself around all the listeners,
every one,
    how long has it been
since I was everyone?

Here the Roman legions march in
in any opera,
    coarse men speaking reasonable words
and every soldier is afraid of women,
afraid of that single word that women know,
the word it kills a man to hear.
    And aren’t you?

Something has happened to the sky
the sky is part of us too, this decision,
decision is part of the practice,
    falling in love
or refusing to, standing your ground,
being alone. Being alone
under the apple tree,
yes, that music.
You have only one mouth
to sing with, your tragic song,
mountain goat slain on the rocks, the wolves
snickering in the culvert,

   the dream

is always a woman,

   don’t you know

even the simplest thing?

9 January 2013
I know the answers
to so many questions
but you don’t ask them

and why should you
you know already
or else don’t want to know

and yet I know
that somewhere poised
almost at your lips

is a question—you hardly
feel it yet but you feel it
that if asked and answered

would set us both free.

9 January 2013
CANZONE: *Donna mi priegha*  2013

It’s easier to do

    than tell

about but

    because a lady asks me

I will tell

    what little I have learned

about how not to fall in love.

    Avert your eyes

first of all, for the love-fall

tumbles through the eyes,

    the pain of it

comes from looking,

and looking is so hungry.

the lover looks so hard he can’t see,

his mind lost in sheer focus—

    so turn

your eyes

modestly from her eyes, from his eyes,

so when she’s not present

    you have nothing to remember,

and never imagine,

    never think about her, him,

    never in the watches of the night

fantasize on the shape or feel of her, or take
that morose delectation the priests
warn us from,
imagine this and that
and doing this and that.

This and that
will slay you every time.

Remember you can be yourself all by yourself
and be free,
don’t need anyone else to be.
Do not enter the terrible prison house
called being in love,
walls you build
with images and recollections,
you block the daylight out
from every window
since all you see is her face,
his face, the special one.
The one it hurts to know.

So turn.

Turn inward and away.

And every
night before you go to bed
let yourself
imagine just this one thing:
that the one
you are so caught up with wanting, not wanting,
stands perfect on the palm of your hand,
then gently, gently, turn
your hand over and let her fall,
watch her image fall
slowly out of sight. And she is gone.

This is all a lover who would not be
a lover can do,
turn and turn away—
and as you fall into sleep
pray
that she or he has not studied sorcery
and is not at this very moment
breathing on a twisted stolen lock of your hair.

9 January 2013
INSOMNIA

You can’t sleep
because they aren’t
ready for you
on the other side.

9 January 2013
A gleam with no glasses
goes up the road
listen to her shine
off what must be a car
clean car in sunlight
trailing a footnote of pure light
to its uphill tract—
that’s better, I can see now
but can’t see them anymore,
all time is lost into now
and the car is gone.

10 January 2013
ON THE DAY 11-AJPU

The sun is a spiral shell
hidden in its own fire in the sky
we see only the blazing mouth
never see in this lifetime of ours
the mathematical curvy wisdom
of those smooth structured
walls of the helix
always leading in
down to where the fire
comes from. From which in turn
everything we ever know emerges.
Next time you pick up any kind of shell
even a cracked clamshell a gull dropped
you can feel like god for a moment or two
then let it fall back to the sand.

10 January 2013
Sleigh bells in the sky
or is it sly Stravinsky
clanking irony
  when I just want
  rhe sweetness of it
  after all
coming close to the only one?

10 January 2013
What in your language
is the closest word for God?

Thing that can’t be measured
that is always there?

I know a better word
a crow flies over no one’s house.

10 January 2013
Have I begun to watch
the wind walk in the doorway

what a rich and thingly world it is
but how much passes me by—

o the meanings of things, of each thing
by itself and the dance of them all together

how shapely the spruce keeps itself
how yew grows every which way

and the sky since I last looked up
has turned out to be perfectly blue.

10 January 2013
Our pale eyes not apt
for such entanglements
as hunting on the grasslands
of a cloudless planet
lonely as a clarinet
we northern lastlings,
glum survivors
of a Viking time,
my body is only good for feeling.

And we know the easiest thing to feel is pain.
I hear voices in my house
who can they be

woman voices in the upstairs
who is there

woman voices not complaining
not explaining

make me glad that I have heard.

10 January 2013
Who knows how much the word will weigh today
when statesmen stammer and Damascus burns?
Does it even matter what they say? Doesn’t fire
start itself and feed on us forever till we’re all used up,
word and oxygen and paper testaments, all
kimdling for a chemistry we don’t begin to understand?

11 January 2013
Gott allein genügt  it said  
on the radio last night  
no gender marker no context  
God alone suffices the schoolboy  
in me immediately said out loud  
and left me marveling  
at the compact enoughness  
of the phrase, the solid  
certainty impossible to  
misunderstand. Or understand.

11 January 2013
EPITAPH

I have been closer than old
wilder than here,
a tune I couldn’t tell you
and that too led me here.

11 January 2013
And there it is again, the beginning
like the first flakes of an evening snow
catching lamp light, so we know
we do not think alone.

11 January 2013
WHAT I LEARNED THAT YEAR IN L.A.

So much coming. So little silence
for me to milk. Cow
size of the night sky over the basin
she has grazed on human daydreams
all day long in every language
and fattens on the sleepers in the valley
now yield to me. Because the words
we write are from silent people’s dreams.

11 January 2013
Sometimes you hear the voice
you don’t want to know who it is
it is everyone
and it is especially
your mother’s voice
speaking from the ground
and from the clouds at once
for she is everywhere
this voice you sharpened your ears
to listen for but half the time
forgot to hear,

and what you do
hear so often forget to write down.
And even then you botch, and call it
music that you’re doing with
what she was trying to make you hear.
Later you call it meaning, written
through your passions one by one
and each blurs a little more the few
words that finally came through.
Try harder. Lie there and do nothing,
naught they used to say, name
of that digit that makes all the other
numbers possible. And you
are a complex number too, you need
other people to solve you, and you try
to do that for them too, and all that’s fine,
but what you hear when you let yourself hear,
that isn’t complex at all. It isn’t anything
but a voice saying, and what it means
is no business of yours. Just write it down.

11 January 2013

End of Notebook 352