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A WORD

1.
Not a word.
A word.
A word about it is not a word.
Waiting for it is another word.

This one also is another.
A word is wanted
and someone wants it.
Wanting a word

is not a word
not even close.
A word is somewhere else
also, as far

as far from wanting
as it can be.
A word is
away from wanting.
2.

You will ask.
You will ask me
if a special word is meant
or any word

will do.
You will want to know
how much I know
about how a word gets
to be wanted
and what word it is
and I will answer truthfully
if I knew I could tell you

but I don’t know
what word is wanted
or wanting or for what.
I don’t even know what a word wants.
3.
So let’s decide what a word wants.
Or decipher it, using the tracks in the snow
left by those who have been looking for it
using the smell of the word’s absence,

the sound of thinking about it.
If we knew what a word wants
we could speak it scrupulously
so that those who heard us heard the word too,

a word is something to eat, people
who heard us would not be afraid
their palms would be dry whereas I
myself fear a word when it’s ready to speak.
4.

Find a place to lie down
and look at the sky.
The word will be there
waiting at the top of your eye.

It reaches you,
a word reaches.
A word stands in the sky
the way words often stand for things.

The word that’s wanted
doesn’t do that though.
It does not stand you think
for anything else.

So the word is just like you,
it stands only for itself
just as you mean only you
and not another one or another thing

not even the sky. A word.
A word stands.
That at least is
something you can know.

1 February 2010
BOOK

Move the dried lily petal
from the pages you dried it between
to some earlier page, close
to the pages that were open
when the lily, still soft, fragrant,
but failing, fell, let it fall
onto the table
onto the book
and you left it.

Things find their places
among us.

Sometimes
invisible, invisible things are.
Like the leaf suddenly gone.

1 February 2010
I wanted to be close to it
as a thing would be
to another thing,

a rose-red interval
between being and non-being,
nothing like a river.

1 February 2010
History belongs to me.
I make it.

History is what I think happened,

who gave me this fountain pen
and when, who kissed
whom behind the synagogue,

how many caissons
bogged down in mud at Waterloo.
An old man I knew

knew an old man who
knew Lincoln.
Nothing older than that,

no history before someone you knew.

1 February 2010
While listening to something
something else says what it says:
the names of some people who
live by the northern sea.
Coast names, sand names, rock
names, wild rose names.
Horses are running on the shore.

The wind plays the flute, low,
low, the pebbles on the beach are
all tattooed. I’m trying to listen
to the distance all by itself
but the natural circumstances
keep interrupting: the wind
you call a flute is just the sun,
the horses are waves, the rocks
are shadows, the salt itself
is in your eyes, you’re crying,
you will never come home.

1 February 2010
SOME BIRDS

To have been here at last
among all the sparrows who
somehow seem to mean springtime
early in the world as it is
though no scientist will agree—

are they like prayers
someone said with such abundance
that most winged their way
to wherever deity may hide
but these stayed?

Or are we
the ones to whom prayers come,
to remind us of the good mind in the world
when people will well upon
each other and all things?

Christ,
they’re just sparrows.

Yes, but they’re our
sparrows, and they come to us
     to see what we have done
          and what we have left
for one another and for them
      in the way of seed.

1 February 2010
RESCRIPT

Sometimes time
and sometimes nine.
The empress rules
her Byzantines.

Men wonder where
she came from to begin,
others who she is
and how her soft voice

pervades the city
and the fields of wheat
outside, even the pale
mallows that grow

by every stream, they
tremble pinkly
at her spoken word.
What words?

The one that women
always say:
*I am the undecided,
come help me choose,*
all art and skill and craft
come put to use
till every wall
is thick with images

and the bars are loud
with questionable song—
then I can fold
my hands and sleep

and in my dreams
my dark and quiet
sisters will come to me
and we will play

all night alongside
the pale river of waking
with each other
and never get wet.

2 February 2010
Trying to figure her out is a way in.

2.II.10
Boy hope
look look
a star is dancing
to watch her
is worth it all.

So I promise
to build you a city
and all I ask
is everything.

2 February 2010
SLEEPING ALONE

Sleeping alone is a prayerful art,
it somehow helps the world a lot
in ways you cannot reckon
but you know it does and even
the summer pillow is cool on your cheek.

2 February 2010
HOUSE

Ready to be a barn for beavers
or a hospice for the dead.
a house stands. Anything, anything
is what a house says.

Loki built me, sparrows
lord it over me,
I am a thing of comfort, I am
the best thing most men ever do.

From my windows you can see God,
I am the most mysterious thing in the world,
the more I am, the more the mystery,
I am here even when you turn away,

my door thrills to your amazing key.

2 February 2010
My mind exists to explore you,
my body only to know yours.
I am an afterthought only,
a palpable machine.

2 February 2010
The sun rose bright then disappeared
in the sky, winter’s flag
waved in my face, the trees
themselves look cold today,
elongate missionaries from the underworld.

2 February 2010
VOCABULARY

1.
You get to read everything again—

I am Sumer. You knew me
when we each had different names.

I have ice but no word for snow—
eagle-dust my poets call it, or crumbs of sky.

Don’t listen to them—
anything we don’t have words for

doesn’t really exist—
it’s merely personal.

We just have to find the person
to whom it belongs.

2.
I asked God for a mountain
he gave me a river too

asked for a well in the desert
gave me a big flock
black-faces sheep drinking from it
at ease, drinking their fill.

3.
Why do I wake up
at midnight wanting
and what I want
is something else?

And whose is it,
nameless thing I want?

Someone somewhere
has a name for everything.

2 February 2010