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A METHOD FOR EVERYTHING

And blue exceptions
teach humankind
ever ways of being
outside ourselves
in language lost—

two deer
standing by an empty road
no need to cross

the trees beyond
are of no different breed
but their shadows beckon

we are waiting for something
beyond us, a danger,
a gospel, a headlight
far up the road.

4 May 2010
You and me staggered by desire
athwart the common space

a room is a chemical retort
condensing common space

I am bothered by everything you say
I want to be you

I want to be you making love to yourself
there is no room in this world for someone like me.

4 May 2010
Less difficult might be a red coat
worn thirty years ago by a dead woman

it is painful enough but birds still fly.
Song of the station but no train.

The rails cold in moonlight,
people crouch there, considering.

Of course you go to church
in every town when you are traveling

She is your Mass just hope she lets you in.

4 May 2010
There are no proper names in this city. All the pain is in the vowels, absurdity of being gone. All that breath lost into one dumb sound, Mute.

At least French death politely fades away.

4 May 2010
FRAMED LEAF

for Gracie Leavitt

A two lip leaf! How I want to take it in my own lips like a child whistling on a blade of grass (we are infants, Whitmans, wobblies). But then there would be four lips, and who has ever seen a Fourlip Tree?

Or to kiss the leaf the way one kisses the relic of a saint, Saint Liriodendron the Tulip Bearer, the tree that stands closest to heaven of all the trees in our forest. But the relic is safe from my caress, immured in glass will keep it snug forever.

So the eyes alone must worship, and do the work of reverence for the whole body, the way it is when we, walking through the streets or on the beaches of foreign cities, observe the appealing bodies of strangers, and do them honor only with our glance. One gaze says all, as the harsh critics explain.

But then the harsher scientist looks at me askance and asks (askance must mean askingly) “What makes you sure that this small leaf, all mulberry and douce, is a leaf from that immense kind of tree you mention? Why not mulberry, the tree with three different kinds of leaves, Holy Trinity, but all one tree? It grew in your mother’s garden. But now I see I’ve made you cry…”

For one does cry, thinking of the lost, lost parents, lost lovers, lost opportunities to touch the cool skin of not so strange a stranger, losses, little losses, less and less until one stops crying, seeing around oneself a world of losing and finding and I’m so sorry and come again. I look at my leaf and know it is our leaf, our walk from nowhere to nowhere by way of everywhere and a
mottled leaf lifted, was it by you or was it by me, that became ours. We stopped crying long ago, thankful for all that is ours.

4 May 2010
LILIES OF PERU

Dumb folding policy
or founding or polity
the grass needs mowing
but who says so?

broken letters
fell out of the mail
women hover near the
banister alstromeria

on the gateleg table
little sandwiches
salmon paste watercress
to such a hostess

these flowers are like
a bite on the lips
the wrist but now
the girls are sitting

up and down the stairs
the night is late
the gate needs going
smokers on the terrace
but one rude jade
inside her smoke
following room to room
her restless quest

why do we come
at last and so often
to such places and
why are flowers?

5 May 2010
Too music to begin.
Maybe nervous
will soothe me,
calm me into frenzy
where a little quiet
sense gets made.

5.V.10
The falsities
unspeak the world
the vocabulary
has to contract
to the shortest
densest words
until at last
it says the one thing
language means.

5 May 2010
Not an hour's worth of going gone
and the princess still slept on her throne

the small one birds lifted through the air
thousands of sparrows thousands whirring

yet never woke her the Imam said
and we listened joyous that there'd be a second heaven

one unbooked and undescribed. a lunar brightness
we could play all night in with our guesses

all the ways we'll try to make her wake
and come down to us from her bothered chair.

5 May 2010
Lost in something found.
The cars snarl by at 80.
There is truth in little things alongside the road, a live bird worrying a dead one.
Prayer really does work, wind comes up, sandstorms cover the Gobi. Underneath everything there is a city.
It maps us from below, streets us, houses us, and we belong to its archaic design.
The country came later.
Eden was a city, the apple was the sight of the blue sky.
Eve was the sun. Adam struggles towards her still.

5 May 2010
Know where the breaks are
in the tunnel the light comes in
under the Vosges but right here
a starling on the windowsill
looks in. I worry about all signs.
Every token is ambiguous.

6 May 2010
And then pull away
from what is need, or known,
an apple,
one, I dislike the taste of it,
or not the taste so much as the sensation
of so mild a taste beneath the barricade
of that pungent skin, pierced,
into so subtle a yielding, one bite
and everything is known

whereas the pear
—another malid— lets down
into a deeper odyssey of taste
almost without core,

such a fruit,
so sweet, eat all of it almost,
is a Mass said for the poor,
leper at his little window,
we squint also in at truth.

Over in the corner the famous
apple now rolls along the floor
gathering dust where it was bitten,
ill-eaten by the sinner even,
who dropped it after one nibble,
alas to taste a thing
destroys it, to know a thing
wounds some part of the world—
but what if nobody listened,
would the sin still cry out,
and who would hear it in the empty chapel?

6 May 2010
A bird perches often on her windowsill, pecks once with its yellow beak against the glass: inside the room that sound seems louder, a person knocking on a door. The woman looks up and sees and knows it is her own bird somehow, the one that comes, so often, to her window. Why. To greet her. Know her. Inspect her. Protect her. In the soft twilight she begins to get ready for bed. One by one her clothes come off, she is slow and serious, she folds them neatly, each one where it should go in the small room. Now she is naked and watches the bird who watches her. Dips his beak saying Yes. Yes you are you, we are safe in the world again, you and I, each of us as we really are. Yes, you are certainly you. Now she puts her pajamas on, still studying the bird. Yes, we investigate each other,
we protect each other. How
can I protect this bird
she thinks. Now she likes
to sleep with the window just
a little bit open, the fresh
air from dreamland, a sense
the air carries to her of being
continuous with everything
that is not her. Outside.
The bird. Won’t lifting the sash
scare the bird. But birds
who know how to go also know
how to go and come back.
She is not afraid. She lifts
the window. The bird
flies upward, to the right.
Something has been offered,
received, understood.
In bed a few minutes later
she drifts in peace away
into the deeper exchanges.

6 May 2010
ALIA – in memory

I think she knew the most important thing is how we think about our thinking. The constellation of our whole project of thinking, the light it sheds on the materials for thought that we've gathered. Not many people know how to know this. It is really letting yourself think about your thinking, so you know when you are thinking and when you are doing something else, like sleeping, or (as we are always so tiresomely doing) getting ready to be about to be making love. Oh those other people! But other people are the chief materials for thought, along with colors and numbers and how each uses the others. All we know of history, for instance, is colored shadow with some numbers flashing in it – years, reigns, miles, casualties—or flashing on the faces and bodies of the people we meet who from time to time unconsciously impersonate the names we have heard about—the Emperor Frederick or the Virgin Mary or my uncle who died in the war before you were born.

I think Alia knew how to think about these things and could prescind—tell the colors from the numbers, tell the numbers from the people and keep the people, tell the woman standing in front of her from the Queen of Sheba without losing either. When we met, I knew she knew I was an envoy from Atlantis, as so many of us here are, and I knew that she would never tell. See, I am scattering her thinking here and now, the way a friend of mine scattered his father’s ashes from a headland onto the Etruscan Sea. Now we have all the materials for thought, but no one to think them aright. Until we do.

7 May 2010
I

But the star my father gave me
that counts too,
a way of drawing it
so that one line makes five points and comes
back to itself

as the mind also
sketches out heaven and earth and the skies
then comes back to itself
the point of it all
and then takes the point away.

What is left is what is so.

2.
He also drew horses,
liked them, sometimes
bet on them, never rode,

who would presume
to ride on a horse?
We see stars every night
but never go to visit them
shyly, carrying a white
box of cake from Ebinger's
tied snug with baker's string.

Never go empty handed into the dark.
Where the hungry poets are waiting,
Tiresias, Pindar, Shakespeare, Rilke,
bring them sugar to nibble
and they'll tell you stories by starlight
till you wake. And you'll never wake.

7 May 2010
I don’t have time to have feelings
I am a happy man.