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What one gives away one strangely has. Reading between his lines you feel precise and formidable intelligence working hard to efface itself in genial embrace of the frivolous. Scoring the deadend hobbies of intellectuals like art, science, politics and such. He wants the real to bite down on, mind-chew, something fierce. You could hear the italics, and how much he liked the sound of that, instead of the usual piggy snuffling in the library a huge tiger. A tiger. Hard to be indifferent to one of those. Enough to see it, that creamsicle pelt and bloody fangs, gazing green at you from the underbrush where your native bearer’s mangled bones already attract squadrons of afreets – they too are scared of that rigorous musculature, the animal, patient, willing to kill as many as you bring along to him, his all-purpose, unprejudiced, efficacious teeth.
WHAT IS MISSING FROM THIS PICTURE

Can one eliminate a brother from
the story? I notice with dismay this
morning that in all my haberdashery
of texts and excuses no man at all
has a sister. What does that tell
the curious? Aux armes, critics!
No sib, no Abel, a name the lexicon
suggests means vain or empty.
Just Cain, me, alone: a name
that means strong, enduring,
upright even, like a trombone,
a column of red sandstone
in the desert, inscribed closely
in an unknown language. Cain
alone, cruising the terraces
of Provence, waiting my turn
for glamorous suicide. Semiotics: study of the mark upon
Cain’s forehead. Every human
is protected by his own sign.
Totem. Told him off in wilderness
wrong side of Eden, where art
is born, and crafts and music
and limping poetry, shaded
by the shrubbery along Tigris.
Signs: man, learn this stuff.
It will make everybody want
to love you, to hold your tongue
in their honest mouths. You,
Byronic honeybunch, Teslated
geek, Beethovenish grumpster,
all Cain’s guises, poor dead Keats.
Not a sister in sight at least.

24 June 2007, Cuttyhunk

HILL

What do you do
when you get
to the top. Now
what. You have found the entrance
do you go in.
Do you dare.
The road is blue.
Everything is down.

24 June 2007
Cuttyhunk
It's nice to live at the top for a change
and watch the weather struggle up the road
lured by blackbirds, they make it look so easy.
The ospreys swoop close overhead,
the miracle of a door bangs in the sea breeze.
Start now. Everything was waiting for you
forever. You chose your own mother,
endured the rest of her choices. You chose
only the hill. The adversity to climb.
You keep having these weird dreams
of being somebody else living your life,
messing up your furniture, being scared
of your wife. Meaning anything
is a fool's game anyhow, interpretation
is the last ditch effort of the God in you
to make sense of what He's made,
as if a dream is a kind of scalpel or a rose
the vernicle that stanched your wound.
Everything does it. You can almost forgive
drunkenness and basketball, almost consent
to do a lot of things that people do.
When the day comes you go south in winter
you'll know that interpretation is no more.
Wisdom is wasted on retirees. Eat fast,
even the blueberry muffins are soon gone.

24 June 2007
Cuttyhunk
VACANCES

To know so much
and just want to look at the sea.
Listen serene
to some child crying,
young sparrows chirping for their chow.
Hear the grass grow.
Smile at the horrible dog.

24 June 2007
Cuttyhunk
Other than what. Whom. Who
are these persons who have lips,
who possess personalities that feel like names
I dream of they recur,
cameo appearances in genial nightmares,
I wake up afraid of whom I’ve known.

Curious social life of dreamtime. Dreams
not meant for telling but forgetting
soon as I can into the tilth of mind,
let it die into what comes next, knowing only
some thing has been you don’t need to know
but you are what it knew into being.

Something like that. Let the next
come next, let some living strength
struggle out of that muddy commonwealth
from which I wake baffled
reaching for a hat I never wore
licking off my lips a kiss I never kissed.

24 June 2007
Cuttyhunk
Work on this: it’s all
just sunshine on the beach.
Pebbles. Intensities.
Luminous detachment.
I have used all the words up
and sun’s still warm on the back of my hands.

*

I have told my whole life
and never told their names.

*

In summer islands nice
dogs follow people.
Who do people follow?
Are they no different from cloud?

24 June 2007
MOEURS CONTEMPORAINS

It’s never now. Have you ever noticed? The fact that this is a conversation does not imply somebody’s actually there. Either end of us might be missing – permanently, as when one falls off a cliff or is pushed, or less radically, say. just gone to Philadelphia to see Duchamp.

And stands there at the knothole squinting into the exhausted thrill of someone else’s naked mind, complete with gas light little flame in memory of all the fallen in the wars of art. Praxiteles. Ruskin. Bell invented the telephone but who invented the thing in our pockets we actually use? Sunrise over the moors o ease my questioning. Who invented the language we mutter into it?

And why is algebra like a bicycle, I used to know. I thought it would be both exciting and honest to expose my radical frivolity, then suddenly it seemed a permanent mindset and what does that imply? Celebrated for my attitude, I just sit on the deck and the intellectual tourists jog by each waving a tentative salute that I often good-humoredly return. Fame!

It’s not all bad. The primary colors are a little brighter now, now lime-green is off the menu. Somewhere, in some gallery, is the knot from the knothole Duchamp punched out or the sawdust left when he simulated a natural vacancy, sly boots.
Even the hole is one more fabrication
I now suspect. Just more art after all.
But as we agreed before, there is no now.

25 June 2007
Cuttyhunk
THIS QUIET MORNING I HAVE TO SHARE

with a noisy cardinal and a mourning dove
they tell me is taking over the avian biome round here—
revenge of the passenger pigeon? It should be
just me and my sunlight and my banana
and a beach stone painted with a map in yellow
of this green island where someone found it,
the stone, the birds, the idea. Or is it some
other planet where the sea is made of stone
and the land is a quaggy place where no one
sleeps easy? When I was green, like the banana,
just the bird and sea and me, but then
those dreaded polysyllables butt in: other
people. travelers, cloud inspectors, fishermen.
So I abandon the whole project to them.
Let them build 7:30 out of plywood, carve
Monday out of sea foam and sunlight.
I’ve done my job, opened the windows,
even opened the door, smiled at the rabbit,
frowned at the neighbor’s little boy.

25 June 2007
Cuttyhunk
Everything depends on the weather. My state of mind especially, from which my Fate emerges with everything else, stately as a hanging judge swaggering into the courtroom, weeping over his propensity to kill.

25 June 2007
Cuttyhunk
AN HONEST HAT

Heartfelt insincerity yet
a disgust with innovation
for its own sake. Nicely
dressed, adverbial haberdashery.
Gents’ suiting. For whose
sake should we all be? Gosh!
You’re asking a lot from your
binoculars. Telephoto compresses,
telegrams are obsolete though
the distance is still there
but nobody notices it now.
We get to walk as far as the neck
then everything is private.
Turn back. Be a common witness.

25 June 2007
Cuttyhunk
THINGS TO PACK

My spotty collection of Patristics—good on the Gregories, poor on the rest though I have a soft spot for Origen. Sunshine. A box of 5000 staples in case I meet some sunset on the cliff a pale romantic with a stapler in her hand. A sheaf of rose leaves. One thorn wrapped in waxed paper. Snug things around anxious things, socks in crystal, tide tables, that snapshot of my daughter where she looks like Lana Turner. Who?

For the 72 hours before leaving anywhere at all for anywhere else, foreign or familiar, easy or risky, makes no difference, my dreams turn frightening, vexed. Dreams that I remember if at all like the taste of spoiled milk still in my mouth at waking. In daytime my right hand, the so-called dominant member, feels cold, even numb at times like the hand of a man midway in writing a suicide note I imagine. Never have I written one of those. My own suicides are wordless, strangely incomplete.

And I would never come right out and tell what I thought I was up to. Never apologize, never explain. But isn’t that just what I’m doing now, going on about sick dreams et cetera before leaving, isn’t this explaining? No, because nobody’s listening. This is just talking when nobody’s around—it’s what’s called writing. I dreamt I was in the wrong body, and all the math was wrong—not much of a movie in that.

Yet it hurts. Unclarity is the worst pain, so humiliating, as a society woman would say, to be baffled by your own mind, baffled and irritated and bored and confused. If it even is your own mind. Whose else
could it be? If nobody is listening, nobody's talking into me, my head the Dixie cup into which some bored child is mumbling words and situations he doesn't understand? I wake drenched with his spittle? I wonder.

26 June 2007
Cuttyhunk
MOVE THINGS BY EXPLAINING

Structure is inherently unstable.
In any given day breakfast
is a fracture zone. A clinamen.
O dearest friend I yearned for you
to experience me so I could learn
myself in that exchange. But a self
is a kind of simper, isn’t it,
one word too many
in an otherwise faultless argument.

26 June 2007
Cuttyhunk
Who will one day watch this mind at work?
And say how it is if it is different from play.
It needs to be studied, spoken, quietly known.
A painting of a lagoon at sunset might serve just as well, three girls in an aluminum canoe.

26 June 2007
Cuttyhunk
Her smile becomes
a point of light
that shrinks
without dwindling
into immensity.

26 June 2007
Cuttyhunk
OPINIO

To be for once the message itself. To come to another, a listening woman, ear pressed to a lamppost. A priest pretending to be the sunset.

How does the grass grow? Is everything the same as it always was only we keep losing our place in the text, changing our minds, feeling differently about the tulips or the Dolomites?

Is it all just thinking? We are born between sixes and sevens some famous saint remarked, Original Sin, the one without a sinner. Just the wind hissing in some woman’s ear.

26 June 2007
Cuttyhunk
The minute you sit down the wind comes up. Springs out of the hill behind you and rushes into the sea. Something to do with temperature does it, gradients, pressure, the whole sun. The ignorance of mortal mind. Means me. Wind brushes the fog off, shoves it back a little, heaps it on a neighbor island. O charity will we ever learn love? Even the dogs don't know what to make of all our music when they mosey along by the window and hear us playing Brahms?

26 June 2007
Cuttyhunk