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READINGS IN THE *ALCESTIS*

Mouse touch

sound of leaf

insolent as if

samurai a leaf

cold as no wind

walk out in

a crystal

a paint to breathe

sunlight out

a little house

with no one home

all the children

have grown out

and come to me

brides and bridegrooms

myriad marriages

the simple light

something walked

around the breath

something wooden

something wish

the old plastic

salad spoon

so many witnesses

in actless love

watching one tree
do nothing
the River Sermon
mothers!
where is your ice
and old John Bridge
investigates Euripides
a daughter patient
and a husband glad
no one in this place
without a mother comes
that is Tella herself
her house
nobody knows or
name her water
soft skin of her feet
the local news
short breath
the afterlife
respect another's
imagination
but do the work yourself.

22 March 2004

ELEMENTARBUCH

a borrowed language is always
a little blue by bird wing
flew around in it nervous
the way they do constantly
distracted by food and from
food by fear into flying
because the new words don't fit
your careworn patterns the old
mother in your mouth to tell
But are you really trying
to say anything, of course not
we all know the truth
already, there is nothing to report
you love me and I love you
and it's perfectly natural
hence quiet as a fox asleep
but all this other stuff
keeps going on, startling dreams
of the dictionary keeping
people awake all night
talking to the window pane
praying for it to fill just
one more time with light.

22 March 2004

CONSOLATION

I can learn Old Assyrian
because there are no Assyrians
I'd have to talk to.
Silent ancient languages
half breath half rock.

22 March 2004

FORTRESS & CANNIBAL

what comes next
midwinter salmon
solomoj the wise
now the wisest
creature on this
world of ours is
strangely the eldest
too, the salmon
in the pool beneath
the Hazel Tree
but if he's so wise
why has he lived so long?
because life is sweet
and pink and meat
and nothing follows it
but more or less
and there is nowhere
to go but here
so why not stay?

But the saddest
creature on this world
is a voice no one
can ever own

an echo kind of thing
that speaks at dusk
I ate my life and then
my life was gone

Now Solomon
had many wives
but not that one,
and slaves who dressed
as women, but not this one,
and concubines like
leaves on maple trees
and every one of them
knew how to play
the sorrow card
but not one of them
had a voice like that

where can I go
to keep from hearing it?

22 March 2004

MORNING SICKNESS

something runs through beneath
moon and cluttered beach
noise birds

we spoil
the world but the world's still there

this thing they're trying to turn into Mars

Hollow in the head
no breath

valetudinarian poesy
the kind that sells
because it has everybody's
symptoms on display

but they will not say
the thing that only saying says

Divide me into simple words
the rest is only true

Something wrong in me
uneasy sunlight

the lawn has a headache
morning shadows keep some of their mystery
water the house plants
be quiet and wait

in the afternoon
shadows have no history in them

silence
my last conversation

What are all the books about?

23 March 2004

B-13

: bus over Cemetery Ridge into Ridgewood

through the stone urns and stone veils
they said was the Jewish cemetery
Catholics had angels Jews had urns

through yew hedges and poplars
to come home three hours later
with a Charles Williams novel
half read already and some cheese
from Finland wrapped in tinfoil

o god those were the days the graves
shadowy in the last leperlight of
island summer, who knows
who is still alive in there, always
there was movement, grey
among the graves, I was the kind
who hung out with the dead,

by this stubby miracle of a bus
strange places it knew how to climb
and come down again and pass
my own front door on its way
to the coast not far away, so obvious

a vehicle it's taken me all my life
to understand how magical its scant
hour journey was, from sea to hill,
wandering through the network
that under-rides every stubborn city
and brought me home every day,
lunar Brooklyn, safe among the Russian Jews.

23 March 2004

=====

after Ali Feser

“And therefore a back is closest to the hard inside”

Because adversity always flows forward
it meets you as you move ahead
hard times in a hard town
and Christ is just a sketchy silhouette
in the open church doors, sunset,
Mexican food, the waitress
never remembers you.

Because the back is soft.
Look at her back soft in her peasant blouse
carrying steaming chimichangas
to other people's tables or
I should think about my father's back
the last time I saw him, getting on the gurney
going into surgery, his back all soft and pale,
like skin hardly born and just about to die.

The back is soft – we touch each other
on the back to be friendly, a pat on the back
we say, a caress, a lingering contact
with the soft eternal part of you,

the inexperienced, unshaped by all the
adversity to come. The you that is young.

Yet you hunger for that hard place
in front of you, you are always running
away from your back, did you know that?
Running from your innocence into the hard place,
the hard animal you become inside
from all the lousy little towns you have to see,
from all the people who call your name
or never answer the phone, from all the houses
with lights on in them but nobody home,
from the tv news, the heartbreak living room,
the burnt down church, your pockets
full of money and the bars all closed.

23 March 2004

ARCHITECTURALS

On the afterimage of the *peristyle*:

to be in someone's mouth
behind the old teeth

a serene dowager
who knows too many things

*

Or *nave* meant ship
upturned and under it
we huddled from the hail
while praying to the god of sky

*

Apse is anybody's guess
round and at the rear
like a delirious secret
publicly flaunted
a miracle of sensuality

behind the altar's
rigorous abstract

*

Maze meant to go
down in circle to
the center and come back

from pilgrimage
anything else
is just walking around

*

Like water whirling down the drain
the light comes in

to such dim trajectories
a *church* is a door

a dark hole carved in the light

*

Stairs are made of steps
but have a phallic
upthrust of their own

Steps add, *staircase* multiplies

Because they are built of numbers
they get somewhere and take us with

*

Dialects of stone
limestone
cathedral
granite bank
marble monument –

go home to your chemistry set
your little Bunsen burner
your jars of goo

I can change any substance
into any other
or even into none

by pure forgetting.

24 March 2004

Her feast the hearing

she grows from the word
as it begins to speak
inside her

the fig
she will become
to give birth
to that tiger

all the natural world
confused into clarity

a son, a new born
three-quarters of a year away
the strange fraction
of our most intimate
relation

how short of breath
I am today, Miriam,
greeting you, me too,
every person eventually
has to act
as somebody else's angel

who gets to say the word
you took as a question
but that I meant as answer

when all I said that time
is He is with you

and you answered your
answer to my answer,

how short my breath today
to say or ask
three-quarters of my breath

what is the rest of it
not saying, what other word
yet to come
is busying all our breath
for the next annunciation?

25 March 2004

CATERWAULING PARALLELOPIPED

it said, leaving him to wonder
who spoke and why,
a piece of paper, a box
at no opera, the best seats,
some crying in the night
some alleywork, lives
do not converge,
there is no infinity
the world has too many corners
we come to
and turn, must turn
at some angle to our original
intention, and always
remembering to ask
Who are we? What is our motivation
in this scene? What is God
trying to express by setting me
in this situation?
and by the time all the questions
are aligned, the situation
changes, the new path
peters out, some dogs are howling
deep inside or just beyond the woods.
In the night I knew now I had lost her
but I had not lost my way.

25 March 2004

=====
Somebody else's voice
needing hearing
or stand alone
hoping the animal
quick arriving
sandblast the new brick
so fashion old
give it an answer
long before a question comes
so they can ripen each other

every day is a test
for which no one is prepared

even the final blow
comes as a surprise,
you daffodil.

Probe. Medical fingers
of distracted lovers
pry into the last hiding places,

no refuge, it is spring
when such things are,
and midnight deer leave

hoofprints in our gravel,
you never say anything
except to someone
I talk to myself
and let them listen,
plant bulbs now
something left to do
always, ranunculus,
narcissus,
who is your hand?

25 March 2004