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IDENTITIES

1

What should the faltering be
if not what the man is wearing in his hat
between his scalp and its crown
a letter from the lazy lady
we all get mail from on this kind of day

who are those people bothering the ground?
The inspector of skies is standing around

2

it's time for me to change my clothes,
I am a card in your deck, just one,
but you can't play any game without me,

king of hearts or two of clubs, you need me.
I change the look of every hand I'm in —

and sometimes in the night I slip
from one card to another, my face changes,
my change becomes your chance

3

my face is opportunity,
you win money,

you pick me at random you suppose
and I tell your future. I tell it right.

I am the only one who knows.
Grip me tight.

Hold me close to your mouth,
tapping me against your lip

breathe on me and try to think.

4
what if we all are just
court cards in each other's deck

all answers and no questions
crown of water cup of fire.

16 July 2003

TRYING TO REACT NOT TO REACT

Trying to react not to react
trying to crease the paper so it flies
trying not to be ten years old forever

and touching her. But the bus
never comes, you're never
one of them. No chevereh, no karass,
no gang. *We played*, you say
ringaleavio maybe
but it was never we
it was them and you, you liked the game
where you hid or fled or worked
against them from some secret place,
a game that made you more yourself
and made them even further,

the game where you were *it*.
First dance of duality
song of ignorance, be polite, call it nescience,
you sang it, you sing it
still, show the driver
your little yellow pass
in plastic envelope,
he understands such things
he works for the City
the place where all the truth gets made.

17 July 2003

PEN

Could you be leaving me
brand new gel pen
leaving me to pale lettering
desperate pressures
white page? Mark better
come back to life
pale ink, stop doubting
your capacity to inscribe.

We have forever
to get this done
but I have just today
this quiet hour
wedged firm
between one thing and another,
don't fail me now
when now's
the only time there is.

17 July 2003

OMEN

Look at that
and take heart
a big white cloud
sailing fast
over the locust grove
from the north
a northwind
up there cool here
a traveler
coming, a friend.

17 July 2003

PILGRIM

I was happier when I knew a little less
now to be happy again

I'll have to know much more

I'll have to pay attention to my dreams
and send letters to old friends

roll up my pretty maps
and set out on the blue road

I have to find my family again.

17 July 2003

SPICA

Spica soon
and the long afternoon
gives way
to our turn
but not yet

we live inside the gaps
of an ancient message

inside the old wormy scroll
marginalia to its meanings,
glosses, pictures, tables,
graphs.

I am a symbol
scrawled by a mad lover
on the monastery wall
he chose to hide behind
forever. Or never.

Did he flee or is he still
sinning, winning,
fleeing, she-ing,
is he the animal I dream inside
when I trot through the night
hooting and saluting?

All I know
are the twisted lines
I read in the mirror

complex radicals
somebody scribbled
in the ancient style
called *Grass blowing*
in the breeze a drunken
man remembers
later

and I have
to live every dot and
squiggle of it
all the way to
the glory I knew
I trusted
waiting for me
red sunrise in the windows
of vast apartment houses
I saw as a child
the walls of heaven
lit with the light that told me
come to me I am waiting
I will wait for you
your whole life
just enough to find me.

18 July 2003

THE APARTMENT HOUSES OF HEAVEN

When I think of them
somehow it's raining
I look down at the speckled wood
rain drops here and there
on my porch my wood my nowtime

a pencil falls from the sky
hammock under linden tree
how many more are waiting
blue envious
the leaves don't move

all my life I have been waiting for this moment
but still I think I know what heaven's like,
a city of transients waiting for their visas
parks and busses rain every other day
to keep the balance, marble staircases
and you never know the people next door
how long they'll be staying,
they miss their little dog you miss your cat

but there are so many birds
on the roof and in the rafters
even, swallows swifts jays doves crows
and falcons nesting in the towers
of empty cathedrals

no Mass in heaven
needed, no mosque no Sabbath

it's all Sabbath
and all the prayers have been said

peace now, it's all
more like adult education
walking in the park, trips to the zoo,
all writing and no reading

it is said there's a public library
in every neighborhood but no one
seems to have the stamina to find it
what we used to call the vim
in the slang of the 1940s
accusative singular Latin noun for force.

18 July 2003

GLOBE

as theatre,
the mar-now
the nest of beautiful denials
that bunched words are,

clusters, youthful yarrow there
in your small garden, redpurple topped
with lace

how all your flowers
tend to be red,

Globe
with leather heels hammering the floorboards
impersonating action
(Percy Fler, *Shadow of a Gunman*, Provincetown Playhouse,
maybe 1951)

the crime is in the attic,
the polizei come pounding up the stairs

but no one dies [*Dies*]
the moment of the need
when I really need you
is lost into that bright then,
the specious spacious,
dwarf salvia rocket red,
verbena, heather,
Hamlet, Hermione, Ford.

There are too few stories
to go around
so what we do
when we are caught up in action
(caught in the act)
is sullied already, smirched
with the fingerprints of all the previous
occupants of this affair,
all the Othellos before they get to me,
all the Antigones.

So it wasn't just Globe
or Epidaurus, it is telling
itself that told us,
a woman turns to a man
and says Be here for me
and already he's gone
into the raptures of elsewhere,
another king on another throne
and all the lizarding adulterers
are crooning in their chains.

19 July 2003

DUENNA

The earth is a guardian of sorts
for those who live on it or nearby

gravity makes this plain to me
earth's apron strings securing us

but our own comedy enacts itself
a foot or two or ten above the ground

in the weird light of the anthroposphere
where tail lights move and Congress is in session

and judges drive drunk Lexuses off the road
not to mention the high scandalarium of you and me

my hands in your clothes
my money in your bank

literature symphonies skateboards "the horror,
the horror" as the book said

but just behind all that
and all above it everywhere the Earth attends

permanently critical
a lesson plan alive

a classroom made exclusively of windows
a textbook built of rock and salt and light.

20 July 2003

PLANCTUS

Could I possibly be complaining
when everything is so beautiful?

If you dig down in the earth
you get earth under your fingernails

This dirt is my vocabulary
dark words

proof of where I've been
and how I come to tell you now

all the substances I found
down there, what my hand grasped

in the lost places and bring to you
smelling more of my sweat than their source.

20 July 2003

My sleep happens to someone else

or when sleep comes

I go

and don't know where

and a stranger does

my sleep for me

wake now

and let me home

20 July 2003

All the mysterious chemicals
analyze themselves in my womb
the result is Jesus every time
so many planets we've been doing this.

20 July 2003

For men have wombs too
they try to fill all their strange lives
all the empty hours
they never understand,

the man's womb is a windy place
the shaman climbs inside himself and knows

24 July 2003

ANTS

Ants walk on wood

I understand

it is all one to them

places to go

they are their own road

birdwise in small earth

21 July 2003

TIME

I was eighteen when Stalin died
I hardly can believe it even now
he seemed a permanent part of the world
like smallpox or Australia

I was eighteen when Stalin died
I seemed older
that's when the contemporary began
Prokofiev died the same day

how can it be fifty years ago
we were so close
like everyone
Hitler the old Pope Roosevelt

this morning.

21 July 2003

Let the light sink in
from its hidden sources
and soak through me
in this strong dark

after midnight power failure hours now the dark

when the kind of animal I am
can't see to go
my body only knows itself so far
and a tree is a horn
lifted against me

and what will my dream be
what can I bring to longhouse mornings?
I belong to the tribe
that discusses everything

wolf cry and palavering
I am born again
when explanation starts.

21 July 2003