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letting be finished with one thing
because the sea is not

so loud today the sleep
practiced it and the wind

saying strange things about ordinary things
that is the yellow brocade

the moon broken into little chunks
bleeding dust on your plate

what a failure to have no brother
and nothing I can say will bring him back

big waves bent trees all the signs
the gull demands me and the sewing machine

I don't want you to forget your only food
anything with I and you in it is an essay

a French Jew wrote it looking at the sea
no wonder I can't understand

your plate as you come through the cafeteria
burdened with your will's particulars

karma of the salad bar take a man
out to lunch if you want to know him

study the grammar of how his plate is piled
study the syntax of his eating it

see why it's an essay I love you
you love me but then the fox begins

streaks across the road in front of the car
fishermen come home who now at dawn

ride their four-track downhill to the open book.

5 June 2002

Cuttyhunk

OTHER WISE

Phone rings girl sings
The tenants break their lease
To let someone in your place
Contaminates

When did the shape of the letter change
When did the alchemists
Turn into commerce bankers
The follow-up is war

Your uncle is terrified of lightning
Staggered from his golf cart
At the first flash that lets us see
Open space is always dangerous

Safe at home he read a book about baboons
Explaining what they think the dawn is saying
To make the sun rise so they say it too
Theory of aurora

A white sweater in Canada

Suddenly unknit itself

To show the actual

The actual skin we wear beneath the words.
The bones of Ariel were buried on this hill

2.

Everything that ever happened, ever can,
Is in the dictionary hence I'm allowed to call

This scribbling a species of research
Reach out the hand and answer —
So few fingers for so many lecheries

To know the earth

As if it were your body

Actual

Then eleventh man

Is always wounded

One tower always has to be

Imaginably taller than the other

That woman is my brother

The flesh is willing but the will's asleep

Your last girlfriend nifty with plié

They can't end there the hypothesis

Remains unsanctified by Cambridge rain

A fussy little stone to mark the grave

An unknown animal visiting by night

3.

it's time for history to come back

if only angels came without their bodies on

spirit stripper invisible workmen every

every is a holy proposition including bliss

4.

fireflies had not materialized
so brunch was the last meal they had together

meaning to be other wise
the phone rang
not the blue come-on sense of the latter

but the Original Caller
not her lawyer
drummed on the desk the theme from Jaws

she can't tell the flower from her brother
"stuff that grows in dirt"

botany of an ever-returning heroine
the prince's eyes are squinting to see her

fully armed among the autumn fractures
still there by hot solstice

the Pyramid Builders come to your town
and all your local substance lock in one design.

5.

so everything that transpires (that means comes to public notice) is a more or less
incomprehensible message left, by us, on the answering machine that answers when we call
the number the Original Call came from. The cosmic telemarketer talks in one's head
between sleep and waking -- that is why we leap out of bed and run the world. Peace after
war, we do. From the lady walking her small dog with the cocky tail down to the president
smirking half-truths into his microphone, we all are cranking the machine.

And how dare memory deploy persons who are no longer alive (if ever they were), to torture us with phantoms? Why can't every morning have a new saint and a new devil, a new god, a new undreamt of mathematics? Or else why should we bother living more than one day?

6.

some slack youth
had signed the lease

you could read the jittery ill-formed awkwardly boastful signature
letters spiked together, a criminal script,
revealing what Hugo Munsterberg
called a low spiritual niveau
but I was in love with her and didn't care
her ill-formed hand had made her stupid choices,
only a pretty girl could make such bad decisions
a sheep in wolf's clothes, a wave breaks on the beach

where else could such things go
nothing comes of it
don't be so obvious

the obvious is all the things that no one ever says
and hence the proper arena for competing surgeons
to cut and paste their new encyclopedias
a penny web to daunt the drowsy suitors
o how they wanted her when they bothered

catch if you can the miracle of meaning
sometimes shimmers between your schoolbook words
like glory or Gauguin from his tropic pillow
lifting his sick head to kiss a tawny breast.

5 June 2002

Cuttyhunk

if you could see the underneath of waves
big ones crashing in today and yesterday
full of shell and rock and dirt and weed
all the news from undersea, you'd guess
the history of underdeath, the terror
Melville was crazy to disclose
the bare mystery below all things,
the mindless operator, the mud below the mind.

6 June 2002

Cuttyhunk

THE MODULUS

Trochanter. The muscle holds
and moves me. Unspecified
invertebrate.

I am Who

You think I am.

Theologia apophatica -- describing

Deity by denial.

What God is not. And would you say

She is not flesh she is not stone?

Or a piece of bread a fancy car

An inspector of roads a broken door?

6 June 2002

Cuttyhunk

SHAME, the Lyric.

things that I'm ashamed of are not things
they're parts of me (my body my memories and my will)
like a house in the mist with nobody in it
and nobody but the sea comes to the door

but that's the dream whereas the wake of things
is standard. People everywhere and some of them like me
and why not and I like some of them not always the same
and that's a shame and I go about the world

writing and reading and pronouncing out loud
as if the whole world were still a classroom
and God was the nun at the front of the room
making me recite but she doesn't have to make me

I want to I want to do everything and know everybody
and know the Bible backwards and eat ham on Friday
and touch Miriam where her blouse fails her skirt
and they all applaud and let me go home

that is the testament of shame the solo Eden
the heart wants for its own, to be nobody
and touch everybody, to know nothing
except what foams up out of the words in my mouth.

6 June 2002

A SHARK IN GAZA

or the other animal, the one with MU
written between his horns and the long
imbricated tail, the Dagon devil that means water
spilled down the front of her dress
as if it were a love song made of copper

how can she forgive him for letting him
soak into her how can a linen counterpane
absorb the weight of so many sleeps

each conjugate with dreams? last night though
thunder, you shouldn't be upset
it's just a story, story the sky tells
with all that histrionic flashing

show me what the waves are coming from
that's what you want to say to the arrogant ocean
it's all just con men sneaking up the shore

because there are devils in the world
and I am one of them I guess, me with my poetry
books and Dostoevsky and sleep on subways if you can
because the LORD is never looking
down in there, you move in the serenity of dim air
wholly in the hands of your motive

what do you want of me, protea, anemone,
royal hawaiian hooaha flower in slush on Clark Street baby
drink your cognac and be good to me

sinner in the clutches of nine angry gods.

In pouring the pomegranate
juice I spilled three drops on your white sheet
and studied these
because I'd seen these marks before

at the moment when an animal is dying it says your name
that's why a good man
is always listening
even when he's nibbling your tongue tip
something else is on both of your minds
and your both-mind all three

because people hook up a common brain when they're together
and do the work of many with two backs and twenty fingers

that's what the bloodstains told me
the juice had offered on your sheets

6 June 2002

the order is kept by saying

saying them; if
a day passed without disclosure
the wind would go mad

the air would die

the exact differences need to be arrayed

this is why we do what we do

all of it, aching
to be otherwise but do

every word of it, you.

7 June 2002

Cuttyhunk

Before the curtly aproned maid brings you morning tea
There is the matter of the dream. To tell.
How there is a Zoo
Somewhere on this planet or another
Where the murderers are kept unexecuted
On display. Cain crouches or struts about his spacious cage.
People come from miles away to see their smiles.

7 June 2002

(A northeaster has been blowing since last night, cold and fierce the winds, much rain. It's raining still, and the roar of the wind brings with it the lift of the sea. Waves deceptively small on the southeast coast, not like the wild crests and creamings of the last two days, before the wind changed. Wind tears at the trees and bushes, somehow the flowers -- phlox is it, not pink but purple, over there -- dance on the gusts of it, hold their own. One of Betty's new-planted roses is budding, the wind opens its petals and the flower closes them again. A blackbird walks along the lawn as if nothing were happening except him and his appetite. Will the boat come in today?)

7 June 2002

POETS (1)

The contemporary poet in an age of entertainment is an entertainer who refuses to entertain. A stand-up comic who comes up on stage and sits down instead, back to the audience, and mutters to himself the arcane shibboleths of our trade, insights into nothing, harsh revelations of an empty room. No wonder the meager audience falls instead for tuneful conmen, A--- and B--- and C--- and such, who half believe their own lucid effusions, at least enough to spout them out loud, in serviceable prose clipped into neat lines and studded now and again with those rhinestones that make the casual hearer ask, wasn't that a rhyme? Could this be poetry?

7 June 2002, Cuttyhunk

POETS (2)

There should be poet pairs. At a certain age in a poet's life, a central bureau should compel him -- by hypnosis, if need be -- to imagine that another living poet is every bit as good as he himself is, and the poems thereof worth examination. To that other poet (in the meantime complementarily persuaded) our first poet would repair, studying the work closely and admiring its author. The two poets would then learn to adore each other's work, steal freely from one another, praise one another in print, and write pungent manifestos together in new magazines. Thus they would cure each other of faults like obscurity, bitterness, envy and doubt, and perhaps even remedy the two crippling social diseases of poets, celebrity and the lack of it.

7 June 2002, Cuttyhunk

VACANCES

The actual. That's what's different
here. (Any here.) This thing and not
that thing and not the thought
about it but the thing, the referent

itself as naïve linguists argue
the thing (always a thing) itself
the words which are thoughts
(not things) are pointing towards.

But words are things, they point
to things like themselves but here
the actual exists (ten days
among as-is), no word

but what the sea-wind says.

8 June 2002

Cuttyhunk

how much of it could the island tell
that smooth impostor skimming on the sea

put other words in, Anatole, tell
the story sideways, how much

any chromium could endure
smooth imposed as trimming on the car

to empty what we see of what we mean:
that is the sainted goal of poetry.

8 June 2002

Cuttyhunk

A LESSON FROM THE SECOND BOOK OF GENESIS

Turn the golf cart around and go home:
this is truth, not an amiable dithering
putting one thing into another and making
a big fuss about it, with drinks after---

This is truth, a hole without a green,
a ball without a messenger, a stick
with two ends and a sky with its back turned,
Annie was an ant, Betty was a bull,

Cathy was a catalyst and all the rest
just stood around and looked at me
from Donna all the way to Zoe
and I still had nothing to report.

It's not a game. It's a disaster,
something that lapsed through the ozone
and sauntered up the streets of our town,
it's something that happens to will,

not the man but the dimension
of meaningful striving, it's lost,
I can't find it anywhere, maybe you
did it, Eve, but I can't imagine

anybody trusting you enough to eat.

8 June 2002, Cuttyhunk

it is as if the only place there is
one breath at a time
walk the sky

and come back to tell
this man is done with light
give him comfort

the black thing that waits
inside the chair
shadow shaped

needing him bad.

8 June 2002

DE LUMINE

What if I got the very first light
the one before the day is made
the curve of color around the dark

because our eyes happen to the light

2.

now I can see the letters that I touch
to make this automatic message
from nobody to you

the light is in the channel now

3.

a while ago there were two small lights
on the uninhabited island
I've never seen them before they're gone now
a guess of color mauve to give it a name
s'annonce beyond the bushes on the crest

4.

I was in my teens before I knew the light
knew how to speak French too
we both learned it on the hard
streets running down from the Butte
light speaks language the way shadows listen
and the streets understand

how can I tell you less than the truth
in Paris I learned to listen to the light

5.

all about me nix about the light
not the only bigheaded Robert
to chat the properties of what
only from the inside could he
I apprehend,

Treating of the light
he said is cheating language
of its properties
to illuminate the world

the sea at dawn like a snowy field at evening
consumes the final engine of our seeing

6.

I don't mean him and me I mean you and I
you desperado darling in the weather
because you are my light, paler now
and come for me exclusively
though you just kissed the fisherman
sleepy eyed headed for the kill

7.

we live in the light factory
you and I
and not all the children
in the galaxy

are so lucky

lick the light

geometry assigns

our fallen planet

lick the light

so generously given

even with a place

to know it

and another one

to store it in

the night

whose heavy door

swung open now

decisively insists.

8.

all its timid pink is gone now

soon it will be no color but itself

and everything will be just as it always is

but for the first time

actual and new

true meaning of it

or any it,

the sun

rising.

9 June 2002

Man, beset with colors, beeswings, children's
Voices carry from the ferry slip, the girl
He thought he loved vanishing into the crowd.

We all tell the same story

Which is the story of the words we tell it in.

A sun big enough to light this world
But no bigger, a moon precisely poised

To be the same size as the sun,

Our skin is blackened by its moisture --
Time, for all its mysterious accelerandos
And retardations is more brute a thing

Than space the subtle gracious:

Geography is an infinite music
The body hears by moving.

9 June 2002

Cuttyhunk

Let the ink soak up the sun
Little Sunday boats sleeping in the channel
Interpenetrations
With which I will not interfere.
For a whole hour I think I trust the world.

9 June 2002