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THE MARTYROLOGY

of all who meant me
saints day by day
through the common year
because the calendar
is one long rosary
dhikr I recite the memories
mindful of mind

behind my mind
that brings them to me

the days
the Rumi dances
cycles of harmony
onward in hesitant blood
two beats forward one beat back

one is ibn
means the son of
two, ab
the cluster
of twinned desire
they call a mother
they call a father

so rise and fall by number
the call: whisper the saint’s name
into your hand
so that it tickles the palm
then you know she’s listening
and what you feel there
on your thin skin
is the beginning of her answer
you bend
low to listen
close to every mouth
because who knows who she chooses
to talk to you now
with her words
in someone else’s delicate mouth

rosary handler, the amber
beads rehearsing all your touches
mantra of the luminous negative
the bright Nihil
of the renaissance
those who knew
that meaning comes from music
and the words
are just some silly afterthought
like the taste of her spit in your mouth
after her kisses

mantra of her
telling your lips

things intersect.
Sunlight intersects with wood
fire in winter or spring crucifix

zikr they said in Turkey
all the pronunciations of the single dance
the one the breath does
round the hands

breathe your name into my mouth
so that I love thee

thought forming crystal in the heart
until you see
the unfathomable fact so close to you
at night the bats are scared
by the glow around your forehead

that man is remembering too much, they think
we love to move quickly
among the unremembering newness of the night

where everything is possible again
as sometimes a human passes another on the street
and looks into the vague turmoil of his eyes
and thinks: that man reads too much
he should play with a ball and a stick he should walk in the woods
with frivolous company
he should listen as the leaves underfoot try to answer
the birds’ shrill riddles overhead
he should try to discover
the color of the world with his eyes closed
he drowses under the apple tree
he wakes after twilight
has finished its erasures

the intersection of night with knife
is appetite, the dismal geology of desire
stirs beneath your ground,

    no love

without its earthquake, sulfur fumeroles
spitting insidious commentary
because you boasted of your love
it is your air
your leaf, your laura,
so now the stink pervades
like the nasty look of a footnote
you see out of the bottom of your eye
down at the base of the page of text
you thought was meant just for you
a billet doux

but no, a text is anybody’s

you think I’m yours because you want me
and all want is wisdom
but all wisdom wonders in the dark

nothing belongs to you at all
just the intersection
the insertion point
the envelope slit open
the fatal living message read
So in the old man’s room
a teaspoon of sugar of lead
intersects with a moon beam
how can you answer?

the telephone rings at 4 am
revising the future

she who taught you language erases the words.

The intersection of faith with science:
Tarot card of a woman in a window
we are in the street below
we see enough of her to want her
terribly, vagueness all round her,
the dense numerals of brick
around her aperture — she
is looking at what must be me
but I could be anyone
staring right now
lovelorn out of shared eyes

how many bricks in the picture?
her hands at the throat of her gown
to hide? to spread wide
and offer you her breasts at last?

to be so far from such a conscious thing
can a man climb up there to her
just by remembering?
intersection of history with hands
a handshake
with the invisible
people saying a new rosary
five new alchemies to think about, zikr
as you go around the world
holding the globes in your hand

repetition. Repetition intersects
with remembering, a bead of agate
or olive wood or malachite
or steel, a plastic bead
and each one has a different feel.
What else could we know about the world?

18 October 2002
WITH KANT IN AMERICA

Their religious ideas are very confused. Nothing is crazier than their dream sickness. If someone dreams that
he kills somebody, he goes and kills him just like the dream.

The dream disease the sickness is a quest
to turn the world inside out
the dream become the day
I love you because I dream of you or kill

all verbs become the same
imperative, every action
casts an angry shadow
out there where the innocent non-dreamers live

o you do wrong to call your visionaries dreamers
a Visionary stays awake at night
and reads the face of fire the face of silence
keeps away from that pestilent bazaar inside

a quest is a disease
(suchen is seek, sucht is sick)
deep memory trace
of a place you’ve never been

it makes us move
to it, a ritual
rigid in the mind
to get there

a rose overlooked.

19 October 2002
When I think of the way to your house
I think of the mint and rosemary
my feet crush on my way to the back door

why is there a smell to everything
and every beast has its own voice
the foxes come to talk with us
to tell me what you mean

and everything will be true until I sleep.

19 October 2002
(section of The Language of Eden)

I think my father killed my mother
I'll never know
I tried to warn her

all I want is to know what you want
how can you want what I want
what I want comes from me

menstrual blood or milk or semen
what I want is what stains the world
how can you want a world that smells like me

your world is odorless and full of books
that's why you fill it with tobacco smoke
to hide the smell of your patients

to hide the smell of what I want
if you want to know what I want
stop smoking stop reading stop talking

climb inside my body and try to find your way out
that's what I do all day long
and all night the devils make fun of me

and make me love what imprisons me
you sit there listening stuffed and rigid
is your cock stiff, is that the only part
of you that listens, what do you know
about wanting, want what I want
and you’d jump out the window, nobody
is there for me, nobody in the room for me
nobody outside to break my fall

about your father though, did other people
think he killed her, and the police?
look I am the principal evidence
the crime and the witness all in one frightened woman
if I didn’t exist she’d still be alive
she died in childbirth but twenty years later
I broke my way out of her
I should have stayed inside
I think he killed her I know she died
I tried to warn her I slept beside her
so many nights to keep him from coming to her
to bother her to hurt her
he wanted to hurt her
she kept him from me
I used to lie beside her wanting him to come

but did he actually kill her
isn’t it enough I’m here
and you bother me with your questions
just listen just listen, I don’t know
I don’t know but I’m telling
I wanted him to come of course doesn’t everybody
wanted and wanted not like a fucking daisy
you pick the petals off one by one
pick want pick not want come to me
and be mine, she did because I wanted
you say you want to know what I want
what if what I want makes somebody die
do you still want my wanting then
do you know how terrible that is
I'll never know the truth but I do know what I wanted
and she's dead

and he?
he lives inside himself somewhere
and never calls
do other people think he killed her?

there are no other people
there are no papers
you've got to read the story in me
I am your pages
and you're not doing a good job
all this shit about desire
I'm alone
I'm alone
I'm alone
do you get the idea now
alive is the same word as alone
with different letters
I wanted to warn her
I wanted us to be alone together
who?
don't you understand anything
maybe I do maybe I just want you to say it
my kiss is a judas kiss
nobody who matters is alive
he wanted to hurt her
to get at me I wanted
him to hurt me
as if I were a doorstep
and never a real house
she was the house
I lay beside her
my arms around her
and all the things I wanted
happened, happened
but when you get what you want
it doesn’t feel like what you wanted
I wanted another thing
and this thing came
pretending that it came
from what I wanted but it lied
they all lied
she died from my desire he said
I can’t say it any clearer
a woman gets out of a car when it’s moving
she falls on the side of the road
her dress flies over her face
another car goes over her
this is my mother
who can say where all the bruises were born
where she got the wounds that kill her
from the fall or from the second car
the innocent fool who killed her
or still inside the first car with her husband
with her daughter
who knows where she got her wound
or why she tried to get out of the vehicle
nobody can say but you keep asking me questions
don’t ask any more I feel you itching to ask me
did she fall or did he push her
was she crazy don’t you dare ask me
if my mother was insane, I lay beside her
so many nights the thoughts along
the curves of our body
fitted together and we breathed together
we protected each other from him
from wanting him
a long time it was easy, I said
I was frightened I needed to be with her
I pretended to be a little neurotic
to be afraid of alone in the dark
she let me be with her she understood
what we both were afraid of
she knew I was her clever little actress
just like her and we were safe together
though in the daytime sometimes she complained
or pretended that I should learn to sleep alone
well now I sleep alone

how long did you both live that way?
I told you I told you not to ask
it was a summer really only
after my freshman year and he
was home all that summer too the three of us
in the place we had in the mountains
no room for a horse
I hated my room the wasps in the window
I felt them crawl over me at night
saying nothing, I know they really didn’t
but I felt them touch me
the room was too small it smelled of wood
that made it easier for me to sleep with her
and he slept on a daybed for weeks
he didn’t seem to mind he never said
he cooked breakfast every morning and looked at her
but everything was ok
but I knew what was going on beneath
I could feel his mind at night
working its way between her body and my body
and I could feel him wanting us both
I got confused I think I wanted him

<20 October 2002>
EVERY

every needs new
every word
needed every
day for day

or without rain
even too
many cancellations
hand on throttle

motorman wrist
proposing to be

a train not tram
furnace room coal bin
behind me

and what will you do there
cut my hair?

torture of barbers dentists
strange hands on one’s own
tender periphery
plus pain

from the smell of the one
to the drill of the other
the body isolate
upon a tilting throne
people handle
other people
weapons of empathy
so many
sentences so few words

light house or church steeple
sea or piazza
things wonder a child
a word is its location

every word
gets under your skin

even here I can put a house in a dish
or this day set a star on a table
and wear you on my arm
you who are part Jewish but which part?

the undertow scoops sand out from under feet
one falls backwards as if to cure
all the frantic going of the sea

by just lying there, o trusty allopath
in a world where everything's the same
you couldn't get a difference if you died

and you think you're too young for me!
didn't we find a rare Japanese tree
in purple flower in death's garden
didn't we bring the pods and berries home
to plant a new clock in our backyard
a moondial to pace out nights
and go by that
disdaining all the sad escapements of Swiss clocks
fluidly fanciful and
a million years between the message and the envelope
I yearn to read

wake now

forgive my fidelity my firefox
my habit of casting shadows on each wall I pass
and reading them as if they were a proclamation
from the real government,
the aldermen of time.

it’s all a glorious mistake
I think my dream’s a message from the pope

cars need lubes men make mistakes
to soothe the friction of incessant will

I’m not telling you anything you don’t know
since I’m American I try to sell it to you
fearful of the blasphemies that blossom
so easy on my dubious lips
I won’t tell you what I just thought now.

21 October 2002
HOW

How to go on in a time when everything
is memoir and conversation and nothing is made

no creation of the never experienced
have we turned imagination inside out
to make it measure the all too known?

how will we get to the mercy of the dark, beyond?

21 October 2002
Too tired to make sense
I relent
and love you
quiet as a bridge

in cloud shade let me cross
to you
too long I’ve tried
to help the river on its way

a dead tree burns better than a living.

21 October 2002
Resting my head on my hands
I smell soap
reminds me my hands are clean

there are things to do
beyond the senses
someone is waiting.

21 October 2002
PETRA

Find one last word
to describe
Petra of the Nabataeans
the red rock city
you see in the National Geographic
every twenty years or so

rock lives a long time
you do too
you keep reading the picture
you shelter from the desert sun
in those shadow-shallow hard carved doorways

you remember
all the other words you tried to remember
one by one you used them
you used them up
like Dante with his yellow rose
a flower that only blooms
on the other side of your vocabulary
where people are still alive inside the rock.

21 October 2002