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MAGICIANS

Too many not listening
as a ball fits a cup
the magic begins.

Other beings
not visible to us
are commanded to be seen.
Appear.

Their signatures
ever after grace our faces,
you can always tell a man
who has looked at them.
They sear. They are beautiful
in their devious way
not unlike us. They do not
like us, only a constraint
we hex into the system
makes them come to us
and do more or less what it is
we tell them to do,
there is a good deal of reverence
and suspicion on both sides.
Nevertheless things get done
between us.

This is magic;
when I was a child
the relationship of boys and girls
was modeled upon men and angels.
Only extraordinary psychic measures
were thought to avail
in winning their attention.
The world is not like that now
with different fantasies, different
mistakes. Girls are everywhere
for instance, and angels
much more public in their operations.
You hear about them everywhere,
everybody has seen them
going up and down the bright roads.

I do not know to this day
who I am talking to
when I talk to them. I do know
that there is listening going on,
I can hear it,
but hearing
is the strangest language,
I have to parse it
with my skin.

And I have no skin.
Not at that hour
when the listening
turns into a clock tower
and a cloud passes over it
that only a minute before
had covered the mouth of the moon

when she was almost
saying her word at last.

Listening always turns.
It is your key
in someone’s lock.
You think the oil of language
cases it, but that is false.
It wants to turn.
Every door wants to open.

30 October 2002
THE STRUCTURE OF FIRST

What had who heard?

City. Grassland. Put
the harp together:

you
are the frame I am the fingertips

who stretches the harpstrings
and of what are they made?

This is what even Herodotus
doesn’t tell. We belong
of course to the things we see,

the little stream below
the broken bridge,
the girl who slid down
to catch a flower from the rock down there
while I worried about her,
I could feel her backside slither down my skin
as if I were the rocks
and I knew I was in trouble,

we have no right to be,
no right to be things other than we are.
Or seem. The arrogant
presumption of the imagination
swarming like a Mongol horde
over the borders of the actual.
Keep your own shape, man.
Or change it slowly, the way
the rock changes into soil, soil
into flowers, flowers insinuate
themselves blue in her fingers

but never think about it.
Never let yourself see it before it happens.
So it appears I was wrong,

we are the strings, and another
plucks dismal beauty music
out of our distress, our barely conscious
preoccupations stretched as we are,
one single nerve between
the horn and the heel.

31 October 2002
THE GRAMMAR OF LIGHT

Less leaves let more sun through until winter makes it so bright the southeast sunrise stares into the naked window. You. And I shift uneasily in my chair thinking like a grammarian, light should not be direct object of the verb see, light should be always in the instrumental case letting us for example witness the pleasing forms of men and houses as they come to maturity or crumble around me. It should not be something done to, only done with.

Light is a hand.
Or a calendar or an inkwell or a bird settling on the lawn for example, light is two women — here I approach the actual the truth — talking in an ancient underground café, drinking wine prudently, listening to gypsy music or people pretending to be Gypsies.

Light is all about pretending. I'm skeptical of sunrise, it hurts my eyes, it makes my chair uncomfortable
I squirm to change the line of sight,
the sun coming over the hill
after me, immigration polizei
hounding me out of my dim refuge,

light is an officer, light
demands something of me,
I want to go down to that café
but I've lost the way, light
has broken down the stairs,
light has repealed the earth,
maybe light itself is an eye
trying to look away.

31 October 2002
CAFÉ

Writing in public
is a blind gesture
inside which
something bitter is

language wielded
against conversation

talking into the small
notebook and not you

insolent lover
waiting at the gates of me
for the rain to stop
or me to let you in.

31 October 2002, Tivoli
AWAITING A MAN WHO IS ALWAYS LATE

Being late is part of his discourse
an innocent part of him left over still

he’s never on time, he must mean
in his innocence a gentle reminder
to everyone so everyone will know
he never keeps his word and never will.

31 October 2002
Tivoli
SANCTIFICATIONS

scar tissue here
pierced

environment
taken
    beyond the marshes
into another language of becoming.

A girl is wearing a mask.
It is Halloween.
A mask reveals
what we are meant to think.

Cicatrice, idea, a scar
left after thinking.
Being able to accommodate
another meaning.

Let me in. Let me in.

31 October 2002
Tivoli