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LATE WINTER ELEGY

As much of all this as we had cause to propagate—
sudden as peacocks skirling on a mud wall in the mist
— an arrogant energy that leaves people ready to earn,
learn, yearn, burn and read newspapers, it is a fact
and fact is life. Really sudden, like a child being born.
Really propagate, like scattering known seed
in a well-watered sunny soil. Like a woman born
to an unknown family. Like an old flag.
Who is waiting for me while I get all this straight?
A distraught social worker, a dusty heliograph.
Mind my mirror, is that my face? What manners!

2.
Elegant, a shadow elegy, low fog in the graveyard,
I am comfortable sitting in such places, an angel
cast in plaster, smiling as if those artful lips
could press against mine in meaningful (soft)
distortion. As if the sun had a message of its own
the fog did not want me to hear. Spare me
such clarity. Like a man born blind.

3.
Then there were three of us and a fourth
sitting on the floor looking up at us wondering
what we had been saying all the while
and we were saying nothing we weren’t
even wondering what she was thinking about
us because from our point of view we
weren’t even an us to be us with, we were three
wanting to be four and four wanting to
be one and one and one and one and
sometimes two. And now we all were wondering.

4.
Things becoming tolerably swift beneath our glances
disappearing treewards leafless though they were so like so many birds. Blackbirds here all winter this one, hosanna, hosanna, all the Easters of the world coming to us by snowflake by melting ice eaves by dreams of fair treatment, a court of lapwings, a flotilla of newsmen hurrying towards a war. I will wait here till you need my broken vows.

9 March 1995
IN THE MIDDLE OF LENT

There are margins or
and there are margins for
the sea thing and the money and
the radio gives only the numbers.
Information, or the opera
with no end. It sings all the time,
inserting its precisions
which are pointless brutal
insinuations
of systematic banality into
this merely ordinary head.
Of mine. That sees the sea
inwardly all the time and sometimes
goes to where such seeing is.
I also travel
to keep my eyes company
while the world happens to them,
not a fact for miles
if fact means something made
or given as a proposition
upon which a crucifixion
disguised as an equation
depends. Banks close
on Good Friday
at three p.m. as usual
but in any case the man
in question is already dead.

10 March 1995
MIDNIGHT

What will my house look like,
this airy box I’ll fashion out of night,
bricks, sticks, myths,
mild meats, oriels, an eye
in the top of a wall, & a mouth
open in the ground? How many rooms
do I have? Will you come
visit me in each?

And what will the dark look like
when I have nailed it all together,
tight-seamed, no light shows through,
no lip breathes a purely human word
to sneak through this mortal business.
A house is all wood and waiting.

10 March 1995
Out of the human world eloquent mechanics
Stand before whiteboards with prismatic markers
Explaining the last life you dreamed you had.

The engineers of afterspace consent to know you.
These characters you made up — Eva in leaves,
Adam on Ararat — clutter the blue space you plan,

Cocktail party personages you thought were gods. Then
The pain people crash your party, you knew they would,
You turned the elevator off to make it hard for them

But up they came, all seven hundred storeys to your brain.
If you live a million years (and you will), you’ll never know
Whether your body’s in the world or the world’s in your body,

Which the scabbard and which the sword. And for all
Your postcards and pilgrimages, are you just some kind of door?

11 March 1995
Exorbitant interludes. People always waiting.  
A gap in the middle of the line a man could walk the plank there and fall into the turbulent language — what are they waiting for? Or is it who? 
This separation is the life of the thing, Scheidekunst, the life of music, of ardent silences interwoven. Here come from somewhere, a tune of tones bent over our gasps for breath, 
Pan did it, call it song, a maiden or a dozen fleeing, wet-ankled in sedges, spring again, the snow relaxing into the browns that He’ll make green, my master, fur-foot that tyrant, 
There is nothing but what happens.

Saturday, 11 March 1995
As if? No. The sequestered beginnings, locked in shy grammar like a pigeon trapped in a classroom and all the students have gone home.

Breathe chalk. Beat against the glass. There is a kind of pallid oak that poisons anything you say and makes it obvious, authoritative,

a boss’s word. I went to school to learn the worst they could do, and dared them, and they did, and I survived. Or did I? What am I that I can speak of being? All I ever was is saying. Not talking, there is no to whom in my oration, just the shimmer of clarities optioning against the light of touch until the random utterance almost by accident makes sense. And that is me. For the moment.

Martyr to my recentest remark, I belong to what I say. Once I called this speaking, and said I live (or let me live) in the house of it,

no other walls make sense. No other doors know how to open. Hear me, I said to the brick. Listen, I said to the cinderblock. Rock.
You understand me, you are various
and specified, I am what you dream of,

I am the shapely fleeing
that makes you look as if you endure,
the beautiful fugitive
whose shadow turns into steel.

Sunday, 12 March 1995
Give good counsel. Accept
the gold from my necklaces, my knees
twitch with anticipation
of your weight,
    how weigh you,
the gold of you how know,
you tin roof by the lake in driest summer
how gleam you, maiden?

14 March 1995
Not to think about his plans, his Manitou in local heaven, deer scat on his lawn. Morning is exclusively for earth. No other element needs this renewal but we do. So much of us is place.

14 March 1995
Wolfsbane is a pleasant habit
bleat of moonlight warning off
those sting-eyed strays from forestry,
sly scientists of bite. I wonder
in all my pilgrimage how to shun
these lopers with their welcome throats.
Dogbane I pray thee, Wizard, comfort
me with their absences. May every road
be bright and empty as this March moon.

14 March 1995
SEMÉ

Things that scatter. Semé they say in heraldry, ‘sown’ with stars. Or tears, bells, knots, whatever it may be. The sower and his seed, a parable of how things fall out. How we do not listen, or even listening do not hear. Eating lobster with Marge Keller and dreaming — each of us — of some new life. Which always means a marriage, early for her, late for me. Death is a potter, creates the ultimate shape with one last twirl of the wheel, one hand to shape and one to cut the vessel free. The one that had been me. I become what I am just in time to leave. For there is a field where all the acts I scatter (acts, arts, ways, means) suddenly and terribly matter. This is after all after all. Semé by my hurry consequences spatter, the stars can’t lie, things follow suit. The little morning myths we lived by fall away like broken masonry. Noon. It turns out the house protected us from nothing but the sky.

14 March 1995
Wraiths rawly. The ides are ideas come back, old desires vamping our now.

Brief neck, you hold apart a planet of desire from a galaxy of fact. Strictly between, yours

is the power to speak, the breath of the one in the measures of the other, specified into the mutinous air.

Language is nothing but control. All sound is mantra — mean well and bide unwanted. It all serves.

15 March 1995
You would want to have more time for it, the coffee, the castaway. Alone on Money Island each one is. Hard words, my masters. And moon so lately new is full — something’s incontrovertible, and tough.

16 March 1995
AFTER HORACE

Once the Bandush fountain sprawled
rose-attar’d spatter on the cooled
limbs of desirable bedmates who
in all the luxury of light looked dark,

pelts leathered by sun’s glow such
once candidates worshipped. Muscleish,
worn out by pleasing, green and amber
battle in their eyes, these Parthians.

Moon wit in sunburn. Merry ardor
as if they were born far, while we
keep secret skins and hide our loves
as the accurate unforgiving City teaches.

16 March 1995
But skim the hour of its meant?
A bold balled skein, fistful barely,
stuffed into a leaking yawp — smite
critics with muffins — terrazzo
floors awash with suds, ammonia,
Greek restaurant at dawn, forgive
the Constitution, that sieve of lewd
permissions — we need a nastier
republic, Genoese. For any man
that bears to rule confounds
his enemies with the facts of life—
death is the scabbard of renewal—
how can Hell hold so many? A crumb
left for pigeons, a church tower
abandoned to the sky. Think
what it would be like if work meant
for the benefit of everybody else.
Then the shooting started and we died
by pieces, gunned down by this natural
catastrophe called men. We fell
without an image to hold onto
and called that absence liberty, and died.

17 March 1995
Those things stand to face you, they are sweat from someone’s brow. Whose (stars) are they? They fall. Everything with them, past ice rink, o city people are so talky why is that, is talk so cheap they spread it thin, and why laconic countrymen down east, what does that mean when even the trees give lectures all night long. I mean you can hear them. The way you hear me now, or that time outside Cairo in the Mena House you heard what you pretended were the ghosts of all the prostitutes who gave pleasure to the poor well-paid workingmen who lifted their share of stone up into that Alternative Universe, the Pyramids. You stood on the terrace pretending to hear them, their five thousand year old professional endearments, their practiced spontaneities, and deep beneath their voluptuous jargon you claimed you heard their own individual lusts. For they had desires too, you told me, and far from satisfying them, their rigorous obligations left them keenly wanting, focused, feeling, yearning, but for an embrace that was not on this side of the Nile, not any Nile. You never figured out what they wanted but heard them wanting it all night long. I heard the summerwind in sand, car tires, conspirators at their everlasting whispering, men at prayer. I thought the desert was silent and the city spoke. You tell me again it is the other way round and I don’t know what to believe. Men are impossible to please.
BUILDING

Jefferson’s brickword
Fleming bond
dot dit dot dit
until the course ends

a corner in a turbulent wall.
A house is a man’s
self-image

bind my walls
on this slate or shale
befell to build

„„17 March 1995