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Robert Kelly
Bard College

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Ambisextrous or lustrously the shimmer rain
investigates the last hour of daylight. We know
something will come of this, we have worked hard
to get to this slippery Friday. Tail lights tell us.

But now the careful hour comes, called Happy,
when we investigate each other, just like the rain,
touching, licking, being shrugged off. Think
of all the damp bar towels left after everybody went home.

6 April 1995
Taking stand on it. A complex Dakota: hide in the topology itself, number is just an accident of the way things fold. You are safe there, silent as sunlight on a shadeless rock.

They even see you but don’t have hands. Austerity, waterless for hours. Not even that blue smoke men used to drink. A cave or overhang, like an old man’s recollection

of a prayer he used to say when he was young, a child really, before the world got too dry for praying. Memory shelter. You think you hear birds, but why? What did you ever do that a bird should pass the time of day with you or sing?

7 April 1995
A face
in masonry

an expression
—almost

a meaning—
left

when the builders
finished piling up

mortaring and the white
rough wash

in this world every
thing wants to be

bone every bone
wants to speak.

7 April 1995
LES DEVINETTES D’ÉPINAL

Everything we look at
asks those strange questions.
Here is the cat where is the rat,
how many Arabs are hiding in this tree.
Here is the hunter where is the duck.
And how can this one face
be two? (Upside down
je est un autre)

it is what we grew up with
that questions us, anything we see,
nothing doesn’t ask.
Snow in April, bizarre empalements
of the blue flowers in the first green of lawn,
what is wrong with this picture?
(My father in Frank’s Place, looking
slyly at the mysteriously prim
trim waitress he called
Mona Lisa because she would not
smile at him. Or do more than smile.)

8 April 1995
That takes the cake, we said, meaning the crust mostly, somebody’s nerve, to do something just a bit beyond, and get away with it (they have the cake, are eating it even now, messy tableknives illicitly licked clean of fudge and angel crumb, corners of their shapely lips defiled with icing, cappuccino scum, cinnamon). Where do they get the nerve to act like that? We in our soggy lakeside afternoons, stoned on sheer propriety, would never think of doing anything so bold (except maybe in croquet, badminton, or with one’s cousin, behind the garage, but you’re both so nervous it doesn’t count. Or counts as sex or sin, maybe, but not as boldness. The brassy way they do the things they do.

8 April 1995
Time capsule we need the report
elongated destinies weave in us—
again and again the brain abducts us—
there is a small gateway in there
to a largefold more than molecular
kingdom leads
and thither we are rapt from this
dyslexic creatureverse we dwell.
Take as transitive what is not—
things do us,
and we happen them.
The gate
I guess is simple, rock-built,
weeds round it, rushes, dental sounds [d, t, ð, p]
clicking or dithering.
Hurrying through high grasses
begging for breath. As if
by telling anything you told the truth.

9 April 1995
At Damietta the old man’s jaunty cap
—patent leather bill and a gold ship’s wheel—
kept him from seeing what we all saw:
a book opening amidships and a sky
coming out of it that overran our sky
—like a dawn making? All he saw
was brightness, but it was always bright.
Biplanes fluttered down the new sky,
just hatched. He rubbed his eyes,
palming them gently as Huxley advises,
to see if this world of things to see
would change or go away. Boats creak on divots.
We are safe, or at least we have a chance,
the sun so fierce on the bill of the old man’s cap.

10 April 1995
Then they were trespass
in shamelight the docks
unemptied blue cargo
she asked What
is outrage the green
language books bleat

nothing has
the meaning of its means
threaded filament of,
othercolor. Robe
russetly. No other
language knows this.

10 April 1995
KATA ΙΩΝΑΝΝΗΝ 11:55

Handy anguish— to Paschal tone you die on high, a never sent parley. Is he a rose or lumen? Ache this core, jasper or topaz, kind of agnostic ocean he owed us.

10 April 1995
are there, not coming
not there long, not gone
able to nowhere

and yet this minute

fills the mouth
no room for breath
breath is any other

between one
and the next
the whole of it is

nothing but all of it.

11 April 1995
Edge by basin — bastion of that mystery deity
They found in the desert — for whose unsearchable benefit
They filled with warm blood — ever-flowing from the slaughter floor
Before their Temple — of beasts and birds — no one can count them —
The smoldering basons (my old book spelled it so) of brass
All day long. Cows bulls ewes rams goats doves.

Gone from me the blood that wore me in that life,
Gone from me the grunting name I knew, the nuzzling mate of me.

And of course all those millions (over the years) of slaughtered ones
Were reborn as the children (grand, greatgrand, so on forever)
Of those who slew them. Somewhere in all this killing and being born
God hid, or was hidden, a puff of wind in the oily smoke
Drifting down the valley, a cry from a bird — unclean bird, who fed
(Like us, now, briefly, mortal, here) on what priests left

12 April 1995
Wordy age, or are they answers everybody gives? This body gives. Enough ink in this bone to write me a letter, dear—here, take it in your lips and verb, and count to ten, and I’ll be done, like willows on the fens, or white cottages under black bare trees, nightfall in middle April, the sky all verdigris and cream—shutters banging in the wind. Put in everything you mean (whether or not you mean to say it to me) and say it to me. I am the sink for all your silver, I am tarnish, I am that curious ancient masculine rose, a thorn to know you. This pen has been everywhere. It knows the sun that only shines in caves, at midnight, burning paper, the broken Kentucky mile stones, the Plymouth with bronchitis, the grease they smear their hands with and wipe their thick hair. Wordage, virgin anecdotes, a woman in tears looks through your window. She has seen the Emissary Goat buckle in the wilderness and die—between one drink and the next—sometimes the air has better things to do than breathe me.
So tell me all you can make up about me, it will be truer than I am. We meet for matter, and take it all back inside this military mind. Conquistador, you overknow me!

12 April 1995
Into the cave
where they’ve been waiting
all whose while
a piece of paper

signed with stars — we rearrange
the alphabet — there is snow
under certain oak leaves still —
I found myself thinking all afternoon
of the rue du Faubourg St Denis, just at the old gate,
just at midnight, all the girls
going up and down the stairs —
and far away near l’Étoile the ambassador
falls asleep as his portrait is painted.

13 April 1995
In the series of instructions
constantly received
or am I a name on a sun lawn
forgiving a rill only spring can fill
fadingly or feather

numbered to be sleeping
dreadwake a cup
full of scenarios
the chatter in my
head outrages

wherefore I have mailed the sea
to my own dark mailbox
gravel studded with blue flowers
a kind of grass.

14 April 1995
COSMOPOLITAN INTERLUDE

Can a picture ever love me?
Who is this cloth?
Clerk of the town
a busy archivist,
humble me to long paper,
I was born from your word.

All flesh becomes
an annalist of her smiles.

14 April 1995
ASHLEY’S MAN HOLDING A BALLOON

He is not small, is not tall,
a man-sized man

holding a predictable balloon.
He thinks: holding a red balloon

is like holding onto a woman.
She wants to be gone, she is full

of going, she wants to be sky.
He holds tighter

as his thought gets wronger.
Vaguer. He wants her

like a prayer, a big soft round easy
prayer full of helium words and everywhere.

Will the air itself
get tired of him and let the red

balloon expire, one lone lover’s
dented valve go leaking down.

And a bad lover at that.
Not like the sky, always full of destinations.

And maybe the earth will get tired
of all his thick entitlements and push him up

with his stupid bag of gas, with his idea
of a woman, with whatever he’s so busy thinking

up into the perfect April sky.
We are locked in eternal ignorance.

14 April 1995
It is Good Friday, the clouds
are practical, some shield,
some menace, some rain down.
It is earth again, the dying place.

The crown of the High Priest
measures creation when he puts it on.
The veil of the Temple
is torn from top to bottom,
a skirt ripped open by its knees.

Abominably nearby, a man
bends all his body up to grab a breath,
collapses, arches up again and falls.
Three hours it will go on like that
until whatever a body is or makes it move
gives out. The ghost is gone.

This is the hour of the soldier. He stands
looking up at this latest triumph
in the smallest, oldest war. We all
are soldiers. We see worse than this
every afternoon. Why am I crying?

14 April 1995
I don’t know why you’d care to know it
but there are goldfinches on the feeder again
and a lawn full of blue flowers.

I, who am ten thousand years old,
still have a lot to say about myself, and how yellow
they are, and bring it all to you,

bird by word by flower. Just let me talk,
we have been doing it so long,
one day we’ll get it right.

15 April 1995
I was thinking about you today,
what it means to get married and the country,
I didn’t get it all figured out but I got something.
Because I was walking along alone
in a huge meadow with the mountains over there
and a ravine full of acorns north down the slope,
grey trees, none of the noisy business of spring yet,
nobody has been here for weeks or years,
and I lay back against a curiously bent beech tree and watched
nothing in particular, but watched it closely,
for a long time. And I wished you
what I wish I could give everybody in the world,
namely a meadow, some no-account trees at the end of it,
an empty meadow with new lush grass and some sun
and some cloud and it’s empty, it’s empty,
everybody has one, stretches straight as starlight
out in front of her, in front of him, a private meadow
no matter how much craziness is going on,
just close your eyes and it’s in front of you,
just keep walking, just keep your eyes on emptiness.
I know we fall in love for each other, I know
we go and get married for the sake of the world,
and I know that what we need are spaces,
meadows and trees and edges, edges, music
is made of edges, but edges are made of meadows.

15 April 1995