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CHARLOTTE AUX INDES O COME HOME SOON

The danger of it
blends into the paper

a lover watches
where the ink blurs

a little into the soft
paper like tears

and smells roses:
it is light enough for that.

There are things
in his house

and outside "It is so long
since I have seen

the stars so bright
clearer than my eyes

can resolve
I know they are."

14 February 1993

for Charlotte

Three crows chasing a hawk
his big pale wings
underlit
serene away over the pines.

15 February 1993

More snow a poor apostle
all the lost information
gathered in the blackbird's beak
he says it till we wake

can you set a sexy word like information
into your lyric music, Masters,
can you song sense

speckled as a starling's breast
to snow sifts down like now
being heavier than the little wind.

16 February 1993

THE BLACK SWAN

Aggravate the implication: the black bird
of the western sands is faithful who in the sense
that water remembers its secret channels, the long
stenosis of the arid season softens, the vein
flows quick again and the bird meets her reflection
wing flurry fast on the quicker smooth water—

can so much motion mirror
and fix and image of such constancy?
who paints the rose tells not its savor
yet has to know the smell to get the color right.

So the despot is representation: a carnival
of resemblances, masked lunatics at midnight
whisk off their dominoes and are
but are nobody you ever saw,
nobody you want.

In the dank courtyard of the huge Holiday Inn
by boarded-up kiosks and video games and silken
flowers mildewing behind the chlorine swimming pool
a teen-aged father tries to nurse his baby,
an eight year old asthmatic gasps for his life
at a bedroom window opens only inward on this dead air
his mother makes him breathe, and only fume
arrives, salty, diseased, a room opening only on another room,
his breath quick shallowing towards unconsciousness.

It is not just a matter of respiration. There is liking.
It is important that the ones you see at night
appeal to your desires. Night is nothing
if it isn't wanting. Wanton. Night is just you,
you pistoning outward into a half-seen world
you want and you need, out there, there, this
is the purging of the images. The night
is just you. Intolerable Tyrolian meadows
full of weird dialects like emeralds,
beryls. The church of the Antipopes
bangs its bells at midnight

when cold white tall slender unlit candles
cast shadows in moonlight on the snow.

Have an erection. The kindest witness
waits for you in the choir — all genders
experience tumescence — an epigram of Martial
ending *in ano* — why can't I get the silken cord
to stretch all the way across the hillside cleavage?
Diamonds down crevasses worth a workers' insurrection
to bring light-filled to your sweaty recollection.

Too much abstraction. The interludes or Adriatic farces,
pretty smile ugly voice, say that in Venetian.
Bocca cruda lingua fredda ma
what a glass of wine she is, or what an earlobe
bears such shadowy alexandrites, feeds a piece of soft
bread to the little white dog—
after so many years who feeds the cat?
The pastor in black vestments chants a saintless Mass,
the sacristan Zdefanu takes up a collection in the galilee—
sentence following sentence like coins
rolled into tubes for the bank deposit a sort of
“meaning” when they have been fingered and fondled
like dry scale of salt on brown shoes you wore in the snow.

16 February 1993

for Charlotte

I see them in my sleep but can't tell their names
can't know their names

like Charlie at Santa Anita four days in the motel
under the freeway in the same underwear

seeing them clear in his dream every night for three nights
they stood before him nervously tapping the earth

fillies every one of them and never a name to her
and he'd stand at the track next day trying to see them

with his old eyes and couldn't make out the numbers
even the colors were hard to distinguish.

but he could tell every one of them every beast of them
just as she stood in his dreams

a filly every one of them never a stallion or gelding
looking at him with her ears and hooves he couldn't

even in dream make out her eyes.
And who could he trust to tell him their names?

He told who they were by their moves and their stillness,
wither-quiver, ripple of rump when a shiver

spilled down the San Gabriels and never a name,
a name is too male for them, a name is too bossy.

So by the time he'd spot the ones from his dream,
the night horses, the ones that came from inside him

to trot out there up to their places, by the time
he got them clear and asked somebody to name them

the race would have started already, the hell with it,
obviously he needed a young pair of eyes,

needed a kid with him to couple the beast with her name.
At night with a big lens he'd study the paper

trying to make the names fit the Persons he saw or would
soon see in his dream. Then one night

the dreams stopped. That afternoon when he woke
he drove back west in the grey blur of traffic

into the pain of the down-sloping sun
all the way home to San Pedro, finished with horses.

2.

I see them all of them in my dream and my eyes
are sharp sleeping and waking. I see them

clear in my dream but don't know their names
as they move around me, touch me, bend

into the shadows or sweep from the firelight towards me
I call them and they come, call them by names

they answer to them, yes, but the names are wrong,
always wrong, we live together in a generous house

with sunlight and silence and the wrong names
basement laboratories dry attics full of moonlight and straw

and I am of them, family to them, simple of law or of blood
but don't know their names. They come when I call

but I know the names I call out are wrong

no matter how ardently I call.

17 February 1993

NEIGHBORS

The people next door keep finches
and when I visit I hear them calling
behind all the words and silences of friends talking.
They sound like a marketplace blocks away
where foreigners haggle and celebrate and like to fight.

The little birds are a city full of noise
but we hear only the tops of their voices
sticking out like steeples over a summer evening in the park.

17 February 1993

for Charlotte

The light the light in their eyes
even in a picture especially
in a picture

the sunlight caught
in iris,
the pale

north of the eye. It is this image
images me.

You see it best in winter
when standing at the window she
turns and looks at you. Or at evening
she stands in the south and you see that slanting light
enter from the west.

The light in her eye
(not a gleam, this is not gleam, a gleam is glint
or glibness on opacity, a gleam
is a souvenir of light, plastic, tawdry, but this

is light itself
refracted by the eye
and sent

her light is sent, beaconing, telling
me where I am
asea in such splendor.

18 February 1993

UN POETE, DONC UN PETIT FOU

for Charlotte

Then I saw the turn of those muscles
the ones meant for ardor
muse-meant to breathe
new spring in pinchbeck lives,
sea-swell thronged with satisfactions,
phantom futures, you see
it is hard to hold true
to the simple vowel structures of
the work proposed,
vowed silences, starlight full of steel.

Now in the last days of the monkey year
according to the reckoning of Tsang
I beg to differ with my memory,
impeach the elegant physics of her
flesh recalled. I will attend
to the scholarship of sensation,
study the script of branches on the snow,
Academy of Shadows! I will shelter
in sheer number! I will count
the number of books that mention the moon.

18 February 1993

Brutal excess of drug reverie
the rush of unprincipled ardor up
from the meat pie within to behavior
out there, raving Fourier maxims like a gun
held to the head of pleasure: Yield
unexampled ecstasy! This plain
skin of mine must analyze the world!
Anatomy of every bank is amor— taste this.

Taste this. Now the superior aggression of an urchin
(del mar) defense and attack in some one same
burst of not-blood, a pyramid of prose
built on a grain of perception — walk down
the supermarket aisles with hands in your pockets

strictly, keeping time. Sit on a stone.
If I had a candle and a body
I would put the one into the other and light it
saying Lo! I have invented the Sun. For a star
is nothing but a friend with something in his hand.

19 February 1993

FRAGMENTS OF THALES

for Charlotte

The causes are never Susan
this could be sun
whoever remembers is salt
simples are gathered on the chalk road
carry up to the alpages *the names the names*
fragrances the mouth almost gets to hold
cheese one goes away having eaten

the brown wine

now have they done that to his blood?
“nothing happens” and not to you
his friend showed me a vial of his blood
still liquid after many years

and all I could say was salt or ash or this
deep red is thick and tastes like blood

and I said *water is the ash of air*
and she said how clever you are
I thought the water only touched my *deepest skin*.

20 February 1993

non ti devoro
I heard I thought
heard what is
listening does it
if tin or copper or

I will not or I do
while I hear
what it says
always does it
want to hear
you speak to me

what we hear
is all that is said
waste wind
inside a war
winter campaign
in the Dolomites
an old Italian
talking to the snow

20 February 1993

What will say it to you tell you to keep up the chin that stares at
the sun and makes your mouth talk to its sister up there until
she tells all ever enflashed from the fall of your mother into the
arms of the world till now keep listening to what comes out of
your mouth

you have it to say

say it how to keep it from getting soft is everybody's problem
not to look at their styles and like them but look at the world
you're forced to *look away from into*

the hardest thing is going on caring all these years do you care
do you really care

you can't go on caring and go on living a shabby ordinary life
with cheating and compromising and music and hurting and
getting hurt and getting opinions and getting ideas you have to
stop all that and throw him out and throw out the love letters
from the newspaper they keep sending you and the wine that
pours out of the calendar stop it stop it

if you care

if you care you have to live six inches beyond the edge of the
world while staying at the center of life

you have to be hurt by everything and not get hurt you cant
even trust your body not even skin is an excuse you have to do
it you have to do it by listening and shutting up and letting
your mouth say it

there is no other way of getting your life in order

this is animal this is priest this is sitting on the ground soft
sweep the tips of your fingers over bones of animals you ate

and stones you kicked on the street now you make them speak
by listening to what they say in you

this is the earth speaking and there is only you there is no ski-
ing no dancing there is no car no family and nobody cares but
you

nobody cares and there is no love that isn't answering listen lis-
ten

shut up and talk.

20 February 1993

WISHES

*“just New Year’s wishes in here — be careful, they fall out”
— Susan Lloyd McGarry*

Stars moons palm trees dinosaurs

what do you wish me
with these shiny tiny wishes
and a golden dollar sign

stars moon money trees
and fossil fuel proprietors
sponsoring Saturday operas in me

moon and star and dragon
and they are dragons really
dim remembered—
we think *they* were dull-witted
because *we* find it hard to remember
them but we do, somehow, the hot
girth of them and how they stepped
the earth high as Bessie Smith
glittering in all colors of the rainbow.

You were sending me a rainbow
to hide in, slide on,
a rainbow is a naked opera,
a ferry stripped of music,
our colors freed at last from things—

you were sending me Enlightenment
something that gets learned beneath a tree

something that has stars in it
and a slim crescent moon
rising from some Muslim lap
and waxing

*a moon
that never wanes, a tree
that won't tell lies*

and a golden dollar sign
to buy my breakfast
early on this bitter morning
bagel and grapefruit

gold fruit and great wheel
on my way to the tropics
where a palm tree grows
and people open their mouths
wide slow confident and soft
before the insolent poem starts to talk.

21 February 1993

for Charlotte

How a touch bonds
three years pass
the join is tight

Because a hand
is a flower of the mind
and matters

It finds our way.

21 February 1993

CONVERSATION

Always they call it conversation but there is
no verse no turning in what they say
they talk to each other what do they understand
there is a rifle raised against the west horizon
till snow comes down between our fingers
we call it paper and think to cast our shadows on it
and all I ever wanted to do was enter your body
triumphant like an animal on leave from the sun.

21 February 1993

HOTEL UNIC

Finally capable as if a morning
blue handkerchief pale this one
and a stallion walking in a book

Do you have a horse why do you
stand looking rich at the window
a clock telling more than the hour
I'm sorry I'm sorry for all of it

lift not working climb to heaven
a room to stow one's various parents
send the girl down for the bread
they understand *bien cuit* come back soon
suppose there is gilt on the edges
and people count syllables before they answer
and the newspaper is bare of remarks
you think it's just your copy you're wrong

the whole country is out of language
and the trees know it
let's sit down and get to know each other
pretending to talk about the name of your horse
making sure we use a lot of warm blond words.

21 February 1993

