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WE WHO ARE ABOUT TO DIE SALUTE YOU

For starters, my ignorance is what resents what outlasts me.
A friend shares the same story differently every time we meet.
They are all my favorite version. Dense with fairy-tale splendor,
Its premium rises as if a currency. All downturns used to feature
Philoctetes, but that's another story, and the original was lost.
Everyone resumes what they were doing, believing they do things
A little better for each other than they did the day or generation
Before. How then to describe the wars? Not finger puppets aping
Proportion, but as news comes out, there will be a clipping saved
In hopes the situation would improve one day. Heads half-buried
In the sand are unceremoniously exhumed, however, the halfway
Point is a phantom load getting out of hand. But vengeance springs
Eternal where the call to keep appearances kisses history as smoke
Blown in a straw through a cell wall to a lover on the other side.

ATOM AND VOID

The duty of the damned is to be exact.
Candles burn low, thoughts grow clear.
Uncertain how long this night will last,
I open a book, forgetting how to read
The moment the sun begins to shine.
I open the door to go out for a stroll,
But run off like a rider without a horse
All night, hearing flying insects circle,
Chancing thoughts from I don't know
Where, as they crowd upon me, dying
Music I have lost a way to understand.
The tourist trap ends where the river
Enters the sea as outlined in the bargain.
I was never told the soul is not for sale.

BETWEEN THINGS AND WORDS

You can make a man in no time.
A day of joy for a year of trouble.
I grow older but not less wrong.
The errors pile up and compound
My eyes, I have no one to talk to
About interests I have developed,
I am amidst people whose ways
Are not mine, I refuse to be
Troubled by the withering hearts
Of chrysanthemums on the wall.
Seeing too much is seeing too little.
An image passes, then that possesses.
I dismiss this heaven and call it hell.
I belong to the silence of the end.

EVERYONE A PARSIFAL

You have just entered the room;
Our eye contact is a moment old
But my face retains the expression
It held long before you appeared;
There's a flicker of actual time—
Persuasion in a void of reason
Or reality without consequences;
There's an art to doing nothing
As something for something—
A revelation of ordinary love
In majestic images that cure me
Of art for art's sake—a oneness
Of abstract form and feeling—
A spy forever in enemy territory.

THE ZEBRA LOUNGE

Debbie the bartender is drunk and showing off
The lamb-shaped pound cake she made for Easter—
The back legs broken and soaked with Grand Marnier.
Last week, she was studying from her *Gray's Anatomy*
Then turned it in her lap for me to inspect its scale
Diagram of the female reproductive system, tapping
A spot on the page asking: "What's the glans clitoris?"
I turned and wrote: The bar dog, looking starved,
Got tired of loyalty. Tommy the pianist always says,
"Time is fun when you're having flies." He only plays
The opening chords of "Bennie and the Jets" and stops,
Which never fails to piss people off. If a tourist dares
To make a request, he mondegreens the lyrics to insults
Every regular comes to know better than the originals.

COCAINE IN SEARS TOWER

High as fuck and I can't come down, drinking
Whiskey after whiskey, at some kind of party
On the top floor—getting kind of tipsy, kind
Of slurry, I come to mid-screaming at the new
Divorcé who took us here in a hurry with his
Bag of coke, apophenia, and claims he grows
All the tomatoes for McDonald's. He goes on
And on about volume. Says he wants to teach
Me fly fishing, but I know he's intent to fuck
Her. And I know she knows this. I pretend
I don't. I know they know I know. So, I go
To the john, throw up on the borrowed blazer,
Take the elevator down to the street, and hop
The Red Line home in the wrong direction.

THE WHOLE OF IT CALLS FOR TEARS

Just give an honest picture of what went on.
A crowd jumps to its feet. The Texas sky looks
Surgical in its severity, disconnecting the noise
From the brightly colored crowd out shouting
A name at the sky, though I have never heard
The name. That's to say, I see something on
My morning walks with the dogs, as my eyes
Try to adjust from sleep, and then I lose track
Of it, and it doesn't seem to matter. Keep
Quiet and pay the price for paying attention:
You will die looking for a place to die in peace.
I burst into tears years before this happened,
A word circling around me without sound, saying,
You will never know who has died for your sins.

MEN WITH SCARS ON THEIR HEADS

Nothing stays in place
Or rests in peace—
A desire to be taught
What hasn't been done
Before is an erotic riddle.
You wait while they
Change out the lenses.
I find it preferable
To read things I do not
Understand. The brief
Sign that presents itself
To the pitying eye
Promises we will all
See ourselves in the end.

DEEPPFAKE

Once you
Realize you
Cannot be
Anything
More than
Who you
Already are,
Why would
You ever
Want to
Let anyone
Know who
You have
Always been?

APORIA

My heart will never
Make me. My heart
Will never make me
Who I am. My heart
Will make me who
I am. My heart will
Make me. My heart
Makes me. My heart
Makes me who I am.
With inexplicable,
Invisible delicacy—
I was driven out here
To forget by a long
And careful mythology.

ASTERISKOS

In what world do you think I would say such a thing?
We waded through possibilities to curb our absurdities.
In youth, I often ran through fearsome rows of corn.
That is not a metaphor. Primary trouble rests its case.
People were after monuments: Less talk, more rock.
A neighbor nearly knifed me open for others to see.
Words are atoms beaten by myriad uses and abuses.
Sweet inevitable, make yourself useful, sing without
Purpose, and time things out in such a way that when
You speak your mind over matter, with catastrophic
Drawl, beautify the plural—its interstices so radiantly
Untrue, a figurehead for all, rinsed of the workaday
Symbols and the impermeable occlusions of power,
Twice-told tales with pages of explanatory notes.

A NEW WAY TO PAY OLD DEBTS

Have you ... have you ever tried in the water, sir?

No, sir, but I swim most exquisitely on land.

Do you intend to practice in the water, sir?

I content myself with the speculative part;

Yet, I aim to build houses from the roof down;

To sow farmland with chaff instead of seed;

To transmute ice, at high temperatures, into

Gunpowder; to soften marble for use in cushions;

To test a subject's loyalty by examining his stool;

To abolish language in favor of talk with objects

To be carried always and everywhere in sacks

Slung across one's back; to extract sunbeams

From cucumbers. I seldom bring anything to use;

It's not my way. Knowledge is my ultimate end.

THE PASSENGER

I try to face the world as it is
And not as I would have it be.
Suffering is a desire for what
Is the case to be other than what
It is—that violent quintessence
Of the romantic impulse toward
Metaphor, the supplanting of one
Thing for another. The way you
Walk into the room tells me some
Of who you are, but there's nothing
Like hearing a person sing, which is
Like listening in on a private phone
Conversation between strangers—
I have put something down to let it go.

THE CLOUD OF UNKNOWING

The solution to most problems
Is to destroy the illusion of clarity.
Before you sing my song,
It must first be burnt to
Ashes so all we have left
Is a theory and a few facts:
Flesh may smile or weep,
But the skull sits stone still
Inside and the twin purpose
Of loss or gain is that we
Arrive, without fail, at
The wrong conclusions.
The story never ends, which
Means the story never changes.

RINGS OF SATURN

I pissed on my face in the mirror.
I am telling you that because I am
Not the man I meant to become.
The solution to most problems
Is to destroy the illusion of clarity.
I know about being shut off from
Primary experience. I try not to
Touch things for fear I will have
To then clean up the fingerprints.
These are mere facts of the seasons.
I never gave up a chance to kiss you.
Those courteous faces in the crowd
Sleep themselves to death waiting
For blood to run cold in the streets.

CHRONOPOLIS

The yellow dress closed in the yellow Pinto door—
Openly sentimental with the naturalness of her way
Of climbing out of experience and into your life—
I do things, too—now I'm breathing, now I'm numb.
The object is suspended in a declension we mistook
For a renaissance. What is it? A gleaming apposite?
I feel the riverbed in my bones, and it makes me sad.
I am used to the deluded permanence I give to things,
One can't do away with what was always there to begin
With, this piece of glass inevitable light passes through
Is a field guide for the centering of inexplicable ideas
On guard, my ears are desensitized to something more
Than the sound of the wind as it exists in the body
Screaming thoughts to itself—inventing perfect horror.

SIGNS OF THINGS TO COME

Echoes of echoes of those
Who loved to rehearse
What was best left behind,
Video copy of a copy until
Only white noise remains.
Invincible passions ignore
Slight changes in repetition.
Suppose there was no song
In the melody you made
Your own, a sigh returning
Through the air gone out
Of the music for good.
I no longer get the book
That changed my life.

A LAST SPARK BEFORE THE NIGHT

If I could plan every horror in advance,
I would've been sure to write you a long
Note on little cards spritzed with perfume
That smells of burnt tires and church incense
To warn you, but I can't, so this will have
To do—my bed of newspapers confirms
A detailed secret everyone knew all along,
The animal kingdom in me comes out
From hiding to hunt and be hunted down,
Taking the sky out of a mourning dove
To sing in the voice of the storm it travels
Through with the aura of an emissary,
Desire gripping the clear promise of a dead
Giveaway I will never know by the signs.

ON A DRIVE-IN VIEWING OF *THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WIND*

You can see how these missing scenes tremble against interpretation—
Casting aspersions as you might waking from a pornographic dream,
Who dares enter upon the daylight despairing the nothing there?
Clutch one shimmering image from this rough magic to drive away
The dream one here abjures and never ceases to revel in the loss.
We were told a rumor of collapse upholds stability—as if that’s what
We are. Failure involves apotheosis. One—far away, lifting—who
Stayed and died an echo of the age. Sunlight and the dream of sunlight
Keep us from staring. How many words make up the majesty among
Deniers? Unable to fathom what compels me to speak in the clear
Voice of an emperor’s auctioneer—the passenger in the body looms
Against another surge made miniature by this monstrous concern:
Knowledge wears us down, and I fear you can only see what’s missing
From what is plain to see. Beneath the surface there was nothing.

THE NEAR FUTURE

Soon, a stolen
Letter will be
Hand-delivered
To you at light
Speed across
Light-years to
A place it will
Not arrive on
Time or in one
Piece, but, sad
To say, it
All turns out
The way it was
Meant to be.

PRETTY SOON

The self is lost. One less thing to care about.
As I walked, I held a tiny soft pencil against
The paper folded small inside my pocket.
It has been formulated but not established.
Everyone keeps asking if I can see the cat.
You were meant to eat the fortune cookie
Whole and unread. So little time. I want
It now. Look at the blurry reality. A world
Too real for our sensibility. Find something
Softer. There is a split second from the film
L'Inhumaine that lit the whole gallery pink.
What is real is everything we know is false,
But what we know is currently the best false.
It might be considered less than successful.

INTERMISSION

Instead of going to see an old movie,
We go for a ride. You emit a feeling
That makes anyone in your company
Certain we are all loved by someone.
I have several memories of each place
We have been. There is no reason you
Should remind me of my father's long
Silences, but I miss them now, and not
Because of you—which reminds me
Of how he would get emotional when
He saw a barn had fallen into disrepair.
I miss his sweetness and you are dear
To me in the way he was dear to me.
Absent God, it is nearly inspiring.

AN ATLAS OF RARE AND FAMILIAR COLOR

Movements toward the unexceptional,
Benediction of the voice's manning
Vagrancy expires to tilt at beatific winds
Tacking ships into a salty harbor of blood.
Let us dispense with muttering receipts
From Pentecostal fire in the chimney
Where the jackdaw builds its nest of straw
For weekend escapes to the empyreal stark.
Ghosts zone out upon the philosopher's stone—
Vacuous processional full of restless spaces.
Charter your tributes to the ritual mystery
Melting fats in a meditation on incarnation.
You wipe your mouth with a piece of gauze,
Steel glittering mirroring messages on the sun.

FRANCISCO GOYA

For Jeanette Hayes

If you put something on the Internet, it's mine. Your mind
Isn't the only thing art damages. Believe none of what you
Hear and half of what you see. The Devoured Son action
Figure takes the cake. I knew that painting was a fucking
Fake. I went to the deep corners of my mind and all I got
Was this enlightenment. Or entitlement? Maybe the real art
Is the friends we made along the way. Two separate men on
Two separate occasions tried robbing banks for my mom.
Both are still in jail. You see, the assassin you sent after me
Is part of my found family now. And there are three messages
In Hello Kitty. First is, you should be loved, and you should
Be nice to others to be loved. And the ribbon represents human
Connections. Also, having no mouth means we need to express
With our actions, not only by words. Those are the meanings.

INTERACTION OF COLOR

Approached each day ready to return
Knowing no knowledge in safety—
Day eventually discovering day,
Nothing is forever new tomorrow.
All along songs that need to grow
On us spring into action unlocking
Stolen loves still too much to bear.
An altar of air colors how hard this
Is to say—your true love remains
Marinated in a marble-box planter
Filled to the rim with Pepto-Bismol.
Composite horrors rendered endless,
Barren minds are full of tendencies.
May we all hang well with our wall art.

CARPETS IN THE MUSEUM

Who cares what your name is or where you're from?
A glance at so-called history proves nothing can be done
Where enlightenment, spiritual education, and similar
Absurdities are concerned. One preaches and is praised
Or spat upon, one is promoted king or sent packing
To the afterlife. And everything will remain the same.
There are surveillances on the other side of our behavior—
Destiny is one thing, amendments among ruins another.
You're already dead if you don't become supernaturally
Cheerful when someone mentions the word *revolution*.
Thousands of years of people who have tried to dress
The part practice prayer and are deformed by form.
Hiding in plain sight, the riddle is the case against us
Explaining the lampless light of an uncaused cause.

VARIATIONS OF INCOMPLETE OPEN CUBES

She slowly entered the room but arrived all at once.
Her smile, in an already forgotten way, tells the truth
About a lie, beautifully. A genealogy of flaws conspires
Behind a common name. Adam's sin is still within us
Miming away—travesties yield, chronicity astonishes,
And love resumes an impenetrable hell resembling
A doctrine fading under a foreign ethic of despair,
And, torn between epitaphs or oracles, bitterness
Hollows out the phosphorous mind's broken mirror
Where the pageantry of exile takes root off-camera—
It's an argument without directions to mislead you.
I dance around the dances of the age—the pattern
Is bizarre, the rest is a mania for what remains
Missing from this worthless amazement of things.

A KIND OF LIFE

I follow the wind in the trees until fast asleep.
Not chaos exactly but maddeningly precise.
How can I not envy its lines and contortions,
This absence that hosts and brings us so near
Here, still in a personal dark without arrival?
Unutterable apologies for cares I cannot name.
Forms tendrils away while fixing to narrows.
Impartial elegance devouring the way I feel.
Staged energies compete to pierce the actual.
Are we now finally fully divorced from reality?
It turns out, we turn out the way we turn out.
I hid the details to reveal the feel of details—
As in a realm abstraction might converge upon,
Washing potatoes in ocean water before the fire.

UTTER THINGS HIDDEN

Still nothing new under
The old chaos of the sun,
No idol in the alchemy
Of occurrence to declare,
And beyond the sea at last,
Adapted eyes, with trials
Old as earth, will ends
And aims to consecrate
A face loved for all a face
Is worth, blurred out,
With nothing left to see,
An untitled ray of light
Strains against the waves
Of self-emptying stars.

HEDPHELYM

The telephone rings but no one is there.
A rubber band abandoned by the postbox.
Butterfly wings blocks and weeks apart
Among all kinds of garbage in the streets.
Late last night I told you half my secrets.
A long assortment of empty promises,
Anonymous content in familiar voices.
Pleas to return all of the proceeds fail
To convey data to the inured parties.
The watch at first ran fast now slow.
We sleep and wake all watched over
By unseen machines. A circle invented
The wheel while wisdom slept off
Its catalog of embarrassing wonders.