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## A River in Egypt

Coffee ritual. Deracinated sacredness. A  
daily awakening done without reason  
or its resources.

Attempting to write. The dream, just out  
of reach, in which  
    Robert Duncan under halo  
    reads "Passages" in a black  
    limousine  
is unhelpful this time. Night's lingering  
confusions. Sleep on the face.  
To eat lunch without guilt.

Letters between friends. A poem.  
A grocery list.  
    A eulogy.

It's glaring at you, stuck like a shadow.  
Duncan's veritable obsession  
    with lineage.  
The dog leaps in and  
    takes you out of it. The shadow out  
of sight out  
    of mind, peace of that peculiar kind  
that arises in morning. It is the *u* that is missing,  
    what the you now addressed  
was made from. It is the phonetic proximity  
    of nature and nurture

that makes the problem  
interesting. To exist without becoming  
*is* impossibility.

Too late for more coffee. Switch to  
tea. Afternoon's blossoming of light.  
Perhaps a walk. The jungle of attention,  
rapt or  
trapped by the raptors of habit  
and complacency, ashamed of the comfort.

You cannot ignore what you cannot see.  
The thunder of dreams  
heard, not so easily. Dogs  
enjoy a walk so simply, so utterly  
without fret. You wonder  
what their memories are made of. You  
wonder

how the canine mind  
draws its line  
of flight from the present  
to anything else. Death, it seems,  
would be only an event.

Nothing more.

Nothing less.

Nothing's threat made  
in the animal body  
where it belongs instead  
of the mind.

Snow begins to fall upon us.

You remember

in childhood  
wondering how the claims made for snowflakes  
could be true. How it could be that, excepting  
man's ability to capture every last one,  
we could know  
there are no  
duplicates.

Returning home, the dogs shake snowflakes  
and drink, each in succession.

Attention is a jungle.

The dogs can tell the snowflakes apart, can differentiate  
morning and mourning, memory and dream,  
                    can learn lessons in their muscles  
without so much as a word.

                                    They know what this is,  
                                    what you are.

They know where we go.

One more cup.

You'll stay up a little later

                                    tonight.

Dreaming of his namesake poet,

                    the dog convulses in his sleep.

O Sun God.

                    Open yourself to sound.

Then I'll see it.

Then I'll see.

## Lost Image

There is no second chance at making sense.

I've seen it now, and it  
cannot be erased. I have always  
disliked black and  
white images—color carries  
reality's crucial content, gives a face  
its feeling. I see color  
in the black and  
white picture—tone, shade, shine.  
It speaks silently to me  
and will take years to unmoor.

Fatherhood is a becoming  
seen from two directions  
at once. There is no child  
in *with child*, only  
content  
yet to be formed, and its forming,  
wet and dark, is physicality's  
residual twist.  
The mind has its source in the body.

A code transmitted by bodies in time  
or by nature's seventh sense  
is the blueprint  
for the forming  
but the image is insufficient  
to apprehend  
the cipher. I do not believe  
in apprehension, but in  
man's movement in  
unmovable muck. *Officers apprehended  
a suspect  
but they got the wrong  
man.* The wrong man  
gave images to posterity, gave

color to imagined progeny, and I, the voice  
made man by  
appeal to images, am left  
to encounter the truth  
on my own. The picture presents  
itself at only the right  
moment, in the face of  
future changes  
and unbidden disruptions, volcanic eruptions  
and seismic activity  
perceived on ashen shores, inhering  
in earthen flesh, the planetary *body* and its  
internal organs,  
a continent generating  
all there is to know. The ancestors have brought  
me here  
and I think I'd like to stay.  
The table is set  
for serving, serving  
food and drink, serving  
time, serving *a purpose*.  
*It is purposeful* she said  
*that the visual details*  
*are obscure.*

In the act of looking alone  
I will recover what was stolen from me.

Forward, it travels  
and the body (my body, but I  
do not own it) is its vehicle.  
I am the it it names me as.

My friend, the Catholic, tells me  
Father and Son  
are synonyms, but  
the earth's axial center, turning and  
burning at once,  
elicits circumstances  
making meaning

unassailable, ungovernable, unacceptable, inadmissible  
in a court of law,

saw with my own eyes  
the image  
hidden by—memory bank  
stolen by—wheelbarrows  
destroyed by—a demon or a duck

and those features, given out in all directions  
by linkages of line  
liminal messenger of Time  
and earth  
and flesh  
and bone  
and soul

what I give, even so, if I can.

A life begins with only what is there.

Death walks.

Earth talks.

The drums keep it moving.

And the future and the past recede entirely.

Under the auspices of a false sky,

illusory as in dreaming,

what seems to mean

makes a mockery

of the flesh

and its excretions.

We are natural things.

Bone to bone.

Stone.

## C Natural Blues

The sky is not a color.

It is a universal particular  
and an eternal event, a *sameness*  
transcending locality.

The sea presents it to itself.

The sky sees. Eyes  
seek solace  
on the high seas  
the heavenly seas  
where ships rocket and sail.

The stars make pictures in the eyes  
alone.

Constellate! Blueblack except in winter,  
blueblack hands from winter's chill,  
the thrill of the sky  
seen white. A portrait in blue  
still wilts when wet, and a sky seen  
on the edge of the horizon  
is a scene of  
abyssal proportions.

To evacuate color of meaning.

Zodiacal emblems in blue and  
black, fraught heaven unearthing  
buried waters, fresh and cold.

The melody repeats, but altered.  
The memory repeats, but altered.

What sadnesses persist here? under  
the sky's withering glance?

Time is color's first condition,  
a natural blue arrived at only after  
the slothful sun toes its crooked line  
and, staining the eyes like glass,  
passes overhead  
and warms the world.



## Times Like These

It's difficult to consider the past's vastness.  
A winter storm dissolves its boundaries.  
Serial screening seen behind borrowed eyes.  
I am the space that remains.

We've been among these trees and stones before.  
A book written backwards but read as though legible.  
Sacred song's effervescent gesture made material.  
The window remains in its place.

There's never been a time like this until now.  
Paltry elision evades inward expansion.  
We sloughed our husks like inveterate snakes.  
My eagerness betrays me.

You've got to get that thing off the ground.  
Energy is lost in a moment's myopia.  
There is fragrance, flavor, fire, freight.  
My emptiness avails itself.

Don't tell me anything I've already heard.  
Coming here, being, at life's liquefaction.  
The opening at the mouth of Time seems to widen.  
There is nothing in this place.

There is peace in this splendor.  
Vagueness at its edges.  
Death at its core.  
Sitting sideways, singing, hair made a mess by the wind.

It's times like these the stars align for real.  
It's times like these we wait for  
a becoming.

## The Numbers

Synoptic serendipity. Synoptic serenade.  
The wind is but a symbol for what it carries.  
    The flags and the good fortune  
        they portend.

A strict reluctance denigrates the void.  
Like jellyfish in a bucket.  
    The wind, rough  
and rugged, made meaningful by  
the swoon of its sweep, the white  
of its whip.  
        To burgeon in this fetal dark.

*Sotto voce*, that natural movement  
    of air, fair weather meaning's  
favored foe. It is a horse, the wind, bearing  
three flaming jewels on its back, made manifest  
    in paper image, colored flags gifted  
    from the Himalayas,  
golds of every shade. Meant metonymy,  
met mudslide, set the sundials to ride  
Time's current, the wind or its mind or its  
    mountain.  
        Prayer  
        the price  
        of pulse.

Say it softly: The flags have lost their markings.  
Ink on the wind, carrying its implied blessing,  
its whimpering wisdom,  
all the way back to Tibet. We hung  
those flags three years ago. It's a wonder  
they've stayed up.

The void poses its question. The flags, now  
blank, plain colors folding along invisible  
thread, speak the truths of their origin.

Rucksack on his back, a man treads lightly  
on a poorly lit path and the inkwind  
blows his jacket, makes him cold. A whispered prayer  
it makes. A feminine name sung  
as if by the universe.

He'll walk all the way there, across  
land and sea and sky to where  
the Buddha waits for him, a baby  
mid-emergence, slick  
with blood. *Sickness of the soul*  
the baby Buddha spoke, lips  
moving and lips  
parting, and seas, red as  
blood, parting, and the suffering  
of that treacherous path, designated  
by the terrible trees, fallopian or otherwise,  
reminds the man  
of our inkless flags.

There are feathers in his rucksack.  
Seashells in his beard. Seen thru  
a prism of pure crystal, like  
that kitchen window,  
where I watch the flags flutter, the man  
seems stretched, misshapen.

The Buddha, being born, catches  
the ink on the wind  
in his tiny hands, fledgling fingers  
fondling material text and  
ephemeral motion.

The wind sends its message:

*OM MANI PADME HUM*

Color, solid and inkless, is a void,  
an infinite nothingness of  
orange, green, pink, yellow and blue.

I have said my prayers at that kitchen window,  
just for kicks, and I've  
heard the silence of the flags'  
revelatory reply. Five colors appear  
in the closed eyes of the man  
walking, and I think  
he hears it too.

He is being born, right now, like  
every one of us, birthed in  
this very instant.

As in waking, the eyes open slowly to light.  
Detritus clears.  
My bedsheets are stained with red, red blood.

Five colors, four dignities, three blazing jewels.

Two worlds. One body. Void.

## Any Given Evening

With what sweetness night descends.

Reading by lamplight, the mind  
makes tired meanings. Dream drifts  
in before body reaches bed. Head  
begins to unscrew.

Sweet spirits sing soul, sinister  
silence serves severance, pre-packaged  
dream given to night by day, say  
what the spirits say: *sleep*.

Dim light renders text only  
faintly legible. Eye becomes ear  
on the moving page. Sage  
sounds abandon their objects.

Head and neck grow apart, mind  
and body joined on the same page  
dancing, each step taken forsaken  
as the eyes close, unwilling.

Pain in the shins. Speech in the hoarse  
throat. Day's sadnesses surrender deeper meanings  
to restless legs. Stinging eyelids blink, think  
thoughts only night permits.

Snowy window. Sunshine door. Soul  
unsticks desire and prediction, daily  
dose of wisdom, born and shorn  
on the same shore.

Eternal arrival. House made of  
creaking. Ghostly poet, a voice  
in the hands, stands  
as if to speak.

*I am dust. I am wave. I am  
night's sudden onset. I  
am the hearer of ancient sounds.*

Is there a dream to dream  
beyond the bounds  
of biology?

The eyes close. The book  
closes. Even the wind  
outside the window falls silent.

Life lived here is life lived  
anywhere. Lamplight  
grows insufficient  
as head's removal  
nears completion.

A nightly lighting, ceremonial  
song sung only in  
the innards.

Mind's twist  
soul's grist  
and the walls fall down.

A light from elsewhere  
comes for mind, comes for body,  
comes for  
soul  
and the seeing enables  
a real dream  
with real doors  
that open fast.

I have seen you in this afterlife.  
Spare me your explanations.  
I sleep with the closed book  
pressed against my heart.  
It is only the beginning.

Death and light  
sound and sight  
    night's extraordinary passage

is all that there is.