



A Break in the Weather

Robert Kelly

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for Charlotte

A break in the weather
as kind of meaning
a few over freezing hours
for the first time in weeks
what will Iago make
of this tepid opportunity?

Septentrio the north
its horses winds and crystals
ice compass needle
brave discourse tough skin
then something else happens
birds on a phone line

string sparrow perches through our cities
like the Sabbath-limit lines
used to snake through Brownsville
in my day, a disaster
of geography, the world
turned inside out

erwin

just long enough to remember
how the Tweets read up
from the bottom of the screen
as if language is always
climbing to heaven through streets
that feel like your hands

a device to take off
is it a shirt or a plane
a woman dressed as a tongue
silent in the auditorium
but in Russia only men may speak
in all this hurry no room for change

yazyk

for I was a subway token in a purse
back when there were coins

I took people where they need to go
I was a word and you listened
a ballgame at twilight
what is the purpose of your sport

it is to break the circle of the world
madame, it is to come home
but where have you silly boys been
to need such iffy symbolism
not a symbol, a hard thing in your hand
but the mother thing was silent

we know that to understand a game
is to play it no longer
dying chessmen welter on wet sand
and a tide reluctant to come in
I own the weather
I am what you do in your dark

because I am hollow
I must suffer in and on my skin
all the griefs of body life
this miracle of seeming
Adam creates God on the Sistine ceiling
every stick has two ends

sTong.ra

G.I.G.

all color all skin and in the dark o Lady
where the mechanical raptures
cruise down Bronx avenues
looking for a night that never comes
once you turn the light on
it stays lit forever

the little ring I gave your ancient hand
chrysoprase and sardonyx
gold wire wrought to feign branches
holding the stones like fruit
to a winter god like today
my hands are cold to tell you this

monk I am and all the world a monastery
rough the paper with my thumb the ink
seeps a little thickening the meaning
spill your morning coffee on the snow
this mark is all marks
any real symbol means all the rest

for we live by implication and cheap food
we kill to eat and eat our way to dying
or so the pandits tell us word by word
o Christ the stuff we dare to listen to!
when all we need is the wind abaft
and ice crackling underfoot

"the mu-sick" C.O.

mare Balticum

Christ's other brother went the furthest west
and set up there in dolmens by the sea
an alternate energy to jolt the Spirit down
from heaven and up from hidden earth
to speak a new word breath by breath
until all of Europe heard it

Sant'Iago

but didn't know what they heard
so came on foot for a thousand miles
to hear what the sea was saying
for those Christs invented the ocean
before that was just scary mystery
the way an old house is you lived in once

and where do we live now
among the unspeakable evidence all round
of what had been ours now we are no one
and Xu in prison for fifty months
for commenting on the drift of government
how can wise men live day to day

no one trusts us and we trust no one
is the everlasting motto of the rose
I am beautiful because I am
and soon will not be
and what do you have to say for yourself
captain of many an absent war

while pains of abstract peace renew
o soothe me with your alphabets
sisterhood of signs o sweep my floor clean
brotherhood of ancient instruments
as slim Rameau might once have caused to tune
in candlelit preparations for orderly *ecstase*

opera or wishing glass or pool that spells
tone by tone the message of the stars
as creepy old astrologers proclaimed
this means you and you mean this
and all the while the red light held
the panting lovers motionless from home

alabaster wreath of clouds! he cried
that I remember when all the names are gone
forget them anyhow
they only work when you cry them out
straining your throat on the hillside
and the only answer surges in your gut

H.v.H.

is it always winter where you are
how come your breath is always warm
how come churchbells ring all night long
you always come to me with a simple question
it takes my whole life to unravel
and by then the child has come and gone

as if it were only a matter of beginning
a little thing, the imaginary atom, say
which is really just a locus of behavior
energies convolving in a brisk of being
temporary identity of river marl
and all the rubies of the Irrawaddy

welcome, storm cloud, we are drenched
with reminiscence, what else
could a classic be but norm remembered
almost automatic the way we love and kill
don't blame Homer he sang for love and supper
blame the schools that inculcate his bronze

because metal is the thing that hurts
four thousand years of it refining
swifter ways of delivering that pain
Iago broods about his lost loves, lost
to those who act out their desires
whereas he can only cantilate his grief

fear bottomless despair of someone
who saw the sea once and failed it
turned his back and strutted safe away
into the darkness of common life
scorning these upstart heroes with high C's
I believe in a cruel god who does not believe in me

man with a mutilated soul
the sea does that when you try to escape
your knights and turrets drowned in surf scum
it hurts like the thought of tomorrow
Magdalen forgive my imprecisions
I have to believe any real person is really you

I thought all this while was pure number
but there is something worse than ignorance
a dead bluejay in the snow a sign of it
something worse than war
a poem glorifying it
something worse than death an unspent life

Iago is the common man an everybody
dressed like nobody his skin is resentment
his core is fear forgive him as you forgive yourself
making trouble is the only thing he can,
pity the ineptness that sings its way to tragedy
everybody loses that's the point of it

Iago is rational he chooses what hurts others
to drown out what hurts him and that
he never knows, mind and no soul,
soul and no spirit, gall and no skin,
we don't know what we are at last
we are Iago mostly and glad to die

get it over with whatever it was
clouds come up the sky sometimes it rains
sometimes deer come in from the woods
a kind woman feeds them and for an hour
there is quiet in Eden and no thought
mind as lucid as the clear sky after

but after that no matter, the letter
comes in from India the Southern Kingdom
the People's Thing of China the waves
on every earthly beach defiled by beauty
and transcendence, the lobster trap
broken on the slimy rocks I love you

as everybody says to everybody
meaning it all too true the rocks
are wet continually with coming and going
how can a mineral sleep its ears
are everywhere it has no eyes
so can see everything by touch alone

of course you love me I can listen
and when you learn to listen I will
love you too like a railroad train
running round the Christmas tree
on little tracks over cotton snow
past a little mirror pond your hand

on the switch and always in control
why are we waiting for the pilgrims
to come home they never will
Compostela is further than Mecca
further than Kailas the moon is nearer
the sun is right in your pocket

and here you thought it was just chess
or theology or some innocent misprision
like a fender-bender on Fordham Road
who cares what you think just drink your tea
Oolong means Black Dragon just like me
juice of ginger root and fresh turmeric

whereby you have enough to pray
incense for puja and a beast to ride
or could it be your spiritual bride
phantom bridegroom of so many words
just means a man just means a slow
dance at the approach of twilight

and before you know it it's night
dead night and the freight cars
idling on the siding Barrytown in '64
cover the panting in the old Merc
my god why would it be with a woman
like that who wept all night

but there were jewels in the gravel
water between the ties collected
tadpoles and stick insects in moonlight
who knew such people walked the dark
I thought we were the only dragons here
soaking our cigarettes in laudanum and

never mind spirit the soul is meat enough
for all our living, spend twenty seconds
under anesthesia my life is changed forever
because time is a compromise time is
really our friend time gives us time
to notice and savor and to change

We go in and go out freely evenings mornings or
what makes it a garden, we grow there
and are grown, Eden, *Gan Eden*,
it is the other dreamland, the one
we sleep to enter, not this we wake to find

or it would be Eden if I could
night and day the gates lie open
and the glow of your own skin
is adequate to light the way
through this deep-sunken highway
you must come — *no other way* to Eden

F.S.

or anywhere else where dreams half-free
half frozen in the midnight air
lie around you babbling meek images
you have to learn to energize
with spittle and with sperm, the oil
of Lucifer sweating on your brow

and all that romance busy in the dark
forgive me for slipping back into
a century or two along the past's
half-sunken highway to a crossroad
beneath a barren gibbet and a voice
unseen lifted in the fields nearby

o my mushrooms o my cauliflowers
is there any food that does not milk the mind
so that strange visions totter down the light
o lettuce and the cheese-rind biomes
how can we live if everything's alive
the empty noose swinging in the breeze

I saw the moon caught in its loop
so that for once the sky and earth
were tied together and it was safe to sleep
for normally the atmosphere is narrative
and all its nitrogen explodes in imagery
inside our half-baked longings lost in dream

any open window waits in kindness
mother's eye forgiving weeping child
for I did every wrong there was
I killed the seagull I puffed an ill-wind
into the mainsail of the doomed ship
all nightmares I saddle in my stable

what is thy name? though she keeps singing
the loveliest the lost know how to hear
voice on high asking the lowest question
almost you know it the answer don't you
the time is right *no other way to come*
or go this is the forest of your forgetting

when things fall they are the sky
upon us when things rise up they are the sun
and the rivers of Eden flow from your lips
laps liberties liquidambar all the orient
arched over us as human arētē
transhuman anatomy that bright shade

someday it will be different beast
the wolf will talk the woman bear her child
in a crystal goblet in the moonlight live
and it will be all hers half yours and so
the pine trees tremble in the wind
I can't feel down here for all my lust

despite the liminal the ground gives way
a doorsill open on the Adriatic
I saw once through September fog
all the animals are people don't you know that
even yet after the opera house exploded
and daunted Europe with a final aria

Gesamtkunstwerk we'll never escape
the tune like smoke pursues us
through the keyhole where the ghosts come in
keep an iron key there at all times
witches hate the cold of iron love the kiss of air
I came to my love under her locked door

R.W.

as if a word were there to give
against the sun glare a fin rising
from the sheen all your hopes are on it
following where it slices forward into
too bright to be seen the *natural way*
only you're exhausted only thinking stops

standing alone the way an eagle
falls down to its prey *o felix culpa*
for every meal is made of sin
and if we lived in truth we'd live
on air if that and dream hard stone
blue lapis and pellucid sea

for I am water mostly when I take your hand
leave me on you when I slip away
the way we belong to each other
mackerel-crowded mitred-bishop synod
jabbering the imperfections of the truth
while all the while the quiet mind

and nothing more, your eyes this noontime
stayed with me all day and that alone
is ancient Ægypt telling me the truth
the line of haunch the lion sphinxing
the line of light runs through the stone
a mouth to swallow all the vagrant years

just tell me what your body thinks

and that's Derrida enough for me
and all the online lexicons rehearse
the quick toss of one woman's amber hair
then the opera's done the folk song folds
back into the people they don't sing anymore

and give the walled garden room
for those peaches — Persia's — to ooze
summer sap along the trysting bench
loops void around the tree, no lovers more
the bench an empty theater but the tree
still fluent amber juice of Samarkand

as if Shelley were your gaudy sister
and Byron your wicked aunt, don't know,
never read enough to tell celestial
from garden dirt, I bowed my head
deep within an antique book
its letters all dark-graved and latine

wasn't it enough to be a child forever
2 below sun in treetops already glancing
bracket the language of theory let song insist
knew you when you were still thinking
now I dip my pen in tea to write
a skinny wobble on an absent page

last night I dreamed a lucid lecture
I was giving a young candidate to teach
with titanium logic brought to understand
the only goal of teaching is give pleasure
how to take pleasure from the things you do
how to turn observation into ecstasy

thæt wæs true dream I reckon
Saxon in the morning and Celt at night
meet my old friends the words there
wind a sentence round the bobbin
then let it loose, see who hears it
in yene velt the other world behind the light

voice from the closet warm hand on your back
fingertips trace the paths of splendor
down the ever-branching habits of the Holy Tree
your body, that world comes into this
among the pilgrim miracles we are
our green language made the green sea

or is there always waiting to be done
if this word keeps saying long enough
the sparrows will come back and peck their seed
who hide in bitter cold an instant hibernate
wake to their warmer though to us still cold
and who are us this morning you sweet young nun

all sunny disposition and white bib a cross thereon
seems made of fire and your gentle eyes
catch some of that incendiary calm
the fire lit before the world was made, a word
is what it looks like now, you hear
its colors in your darkest certainty

andropogon seems to be the genus
man-beard but why call *that* patchouli
when woman-whisker makes the best of scent
but they rose up despondent at his coarseness
stormed out of bio lab and drank Fiji water
for anything is possible in education

even the worst teacher knows something you don't know
a glass of feeble substitute toast smeared with ovaltine
and yet the morning still comes tripping out of dawn
with all the living children of the night
yapping and baying in the form of words
and every little word has you in mind

since the source is always near to hand
Desdemona's handkerchief the bitten apple core
jealousy needs no evidence but thought
but what is that to me I am no Moor no Hispaniol
I live between the lines of all his plays
I am the heart never happened

or maybe I'm the moon on autumn nights
twinkling around Ophelia as she floats
for I can count my flowers too, every digit
is one blossom on an infinite tree
count me till I come to you in dream
whispering barbaric names to guide you home

there is fear and time to be afraid
is not a fragrant handkerchief or sleeve
dangled before a doting spaniel evidence
or could all anxiety be the furnace rumbling
combustion makes noise, the song of flame
and roaring in the heart your fear

could you lead music into fire
the flame would speak, be angel fire
maybe maybe and chant the fear away
or let a candle in a votive lamp
say your Ave's or your Mani's for you
would that calm your oppression, no,

to be awake at all is to be afraid
they call it vigilance cats have it
or stretch a flag over the sky fatherland
but all loyalty is fear and here I am
in winter complaining to no self
go light a candle and see what it says

my nefesh went out to that form but worry
if it rushes out and never comes back
but cleaves to the target of its *first impression*
and lingers out there lost or with another
so that which is the social me of me, *my outward*
is lost from me and I am winter mere

(he means by *nefesh* appetitive soul
he thinks he can lose it, then where will he be
but drowning men never lose their lust for air)
and we are drowning in a sea of necessity
nede hath no lawe says the *Lover's Confession*
and "I will never walk through this door again"

J.G.

the one I left out is Othello of course
you hardly need him for the tragedy
malevolence and innocence adequate
together, just use his tender sturdy fingers
then let all fall, now let her rise, a person
of the mind and mind alone

my eyes are on all this from the seashore
the deer at browse beside me and a clam
forced by gull its house beside me
every story is a tragedy every song
a wolf howling in the forest, fire
sounds like water when you listen

it became clear to me later that a stone
heals itself in moonlight of those sicknesses
a stone — tourmaline obsidian jadeite — can
transmit to humans or a glass of milk
have you ever listened to one of those
carefully while your lips were busy at it

and what business have they not done
through all these eras of deduction
in the homeland of the first Critique
some part of my mind a dozen years after
is still landing between the peaks
in Innsbruck gateway to the Roman land

can I be truer than you my skin
my moult my serpent mind my claw
uplifted to scribble with the clouds
your lipstick on my manuscript
my eighty-volume novel you have to read
because everything ever is in it twice-over

rabbit rabbit she cried because the month began
and we are citizens of time but never loyal
expostulation is as bracing as strong-brewed Assam
with the tigers growling nearby in your mind
we delight to hear such travesties of truth
as old Omeros conferred on his pale Greeks

before dusky Asians came sexy out of Lydia
where rivers run with gold but no fish to eat
hence the parable of Midas and his golden fingertips
for everything we think becomes commodity
and money makes a prisoner of mind o god and
Kant and Fichte and Hegel are just music,

and music means nothing but Nietzsche *means*
I rest my case in those piquant palabras
that wake me mornings with a taste of sugar
granulated like sunlight on this week-old snow
is this enough for me to believe, philosophy
is the symphony of men who can't carry a tune

blink (the last man blinks) blank balance sheet
the pillow sweaty from sleep how hard we work
to muscle through that other consciousness
but when is that Our Lady of Intuitions
language is the working class's vengeance on the rich

we wrote this war too, we win by word
and all the pyramids take off to heaven
till every acre is a shadow of them
why don't you advertise the moonlight
that smells better here than anywhere
you thought it was just a glass of milk

no, but I am, the engine idling, the train
ready to north its way into vacancy
I am the empty polar regions ear to ear
thick with rock oil to keep the girls away
leave me arctic sunlight and a bear
until the stars come out to stab me

Back to life again mavourneen, a sea
between my feet, my shadow topples
over all your steeples, okay, no protest,
only the lipid aftertaste of light
you are you are most blessed in so moving
ice dance of the frozen Hudson

hummocky and buttocky and almost free
the one lane icebreakers kept open
so the barges can bring the flame from Albany,
god, we all are made of skin and not much else
a hollow house with snow on the roof
a crow lands on it and makes a few remarks

you think I'm talking but the wind knows better
the name of our discourse is going places
even now a diesel horn honks southly
yes yes I'm getting somewhere
just like the train from Rochester
and it will be a city wherever I stop

and I will be your mother, metropole,
my fetid breath your blue cathedral,
those sins your mothers explain
to pass winter nights through your mind,
the greatest mystery of all is sleep,
the why of it and the someday of why not

so it ends at Glastonbury after all
in early spring snow trudged up the Tor
that modest mountain starts below the sea
and reaches to the nearest star,
St. Michael's Tower links both together
an arrow of light comes down and replaces the spine

one only weapon our war with heaven
you lift it whenever you open your mouth
to give or chant melisma or to forgive
so full of life you make the meager sunlight
and every shadow comes alive with counter glow
Bruckner's Eighth the horncalls dwindling

agnostic reveries in new-plowed fields
the best treatment in most cases
case means fall, fall means happen
happen means chance and there's no such thing
I rest my case *im Kristall dein Fall*
cries the weird old woman to the poor young man

E.T.A.H.

or any other word that fits Homer's meter
he's Baltic to begin, ship foundering on land
much snow has melted over one mild night
fear of river pirates Chinese paper lanterns
I'm telling you the kind of truth retired
Brits natter on verandas in St. Kitts

o history, you can read me in any book
these words I pilfered from the lexicon
so you won't see the scum of handsoap on the sink
wouldn't hear the telltale finches of high noon
squealing from the bird clock on the wall
and you'd forgive me for one whole life

get me ready for another, a house
holds almost everything, I give you
everything something, wooden blocks
sufficed me as a child, A especially
and B and C, blue grooves fit together
build them my fingers and forget the war

but the puzzle thing comes back
Orpheus caught between his need
and her identity, *ohime!* identity
is the mother of needs but not
necessity, there's always something wilful
in being somebody in particular

me for instance, my shadow cast
by porch light on the snow, forgive me,
I can't resist being in a body, even mine,
word-soaked adventurer with wind up his sleeve
in the straits twixt north and south the dolphin Jack
spared the life of many mariners, but me

N.Z.

I'd never go to sea, once was enough, came here
over the addictive Atlantic I still drink
when I can but never walk again that deck
speak unFrench and think I'm on my way home
because no language has a word for house
any more than English has a word for you

what it looks towards soon will be
so *seize before* is to make it so
remember not the picture but what it said
in me as I turned to look, gather to me
it cried out to the lens in all of us
see me into your own dark, I am yours

I had not yet begun to snow, a cougar
walked later over the hill above the yard
they have so many names, years,
they have fire in their eyes, and diamonds
often in their safe-deposit boxes, glisten
on the edges of their prayer books

gold is greasy nowadays, the ground
is asking for it, weather is always an answer,
some Utah Protestants are praying for rain
one week this song has worked
I embarrass myself with particulars
need the argent fountain of sheer must

did you say childhood or wildwood
did you say caravan or yet again
lick my ears clean o lordly lady
so I can hear the consonants divide
sacred breath cleaves or makes them cleave
and did you say weather or a feather

spend a whole life listening and get it wrong
bu hao, this is New Year's I'll never know your name
dim sum in paradise busy street outside
invisible diners plucking palpable food
to be served dinner is to disappear
only the waiters are there the deep *personnel*

for them we are phantoms, we eat out for them
we sit invisible with joyful wallets,
braced by their *stronger existence*,
those eyes-away girls and wifty boys who carry
heavy plates and beefy arguments around the room,
we sheep look up and think we're fed

R.M.R.

the servers are the only people here, we vanish
into agency, chat and chomp and soon are gone,
oh what a bistro this sad earth is
and winter waits outside, a week of this
no fins no feathers just a clock remarking
evening news from Budapest catch a word or two

it will be over soon they say the snow
and say the pine tree shelters in the mist
I will not go where such things live
angry partisans belonging to their guns,
I use the simplest words I can
because my journey up the river is so long

I'd give all this to drink the light
among the trees thicker, it grows the snow
Faust gets young again with strength enough
to be hurt again by what he thought was done
but nothing's there and nothing's then,
old age is a permanent condition in some men

"you are or will be the Prince Novo
who changes the way we do the world"
(dreamt, in Armenian, before woke
into sun on snow with more to come)
(end of my history of the American Republic)
but who is this prince I or another must be?

who knows to whom a dream is talking
if I swam it would be against the current
sub-heroic but it functions this way
with any old book for my larder
and a man shoveling snow quietly outside
remember that lawn we saw the northern lights?

I am not finished with this form
who pulls me downe? irony of rapture
we give so little and get everything
each one a springboard to the next
but there is a cenote in this world
where lost things sink to rise in their time

C.M.

like Easter through the snow-laced trees
yes something is coming miracle or otherwise
the counting numbers never get you there
a quiet moment's Eden enough, the four
rivers of it are what the compass shows —
to move at all is to lose your direction

certainly tried to tell the road
from the river the moongate from the sea
trampled snow smell of a horse
the Prince has fallen — now you know he's a prince —
raptors busy in the lower air, where Greeks
were mostly free of gods, safe from all but self

L.T.

so be contrary all you choose
the secret name of this is everything
help the prince up from the mire
avoiding the hoofsteps of his horse-machine
put a word in his mouth and set him loose
now comes the revolution the voice set free

and all those rights you dreamed you had
your body all your own with what it does,
hollow network of a vast enclosure
fence round nada but how the nada gleams!
don't you sometimes wish you were
the only one the language means

but the frost of snow on the yew trees
everybody wants to get into the idea
Japanese *No* mask you carry in your eyes
ready for the hour of disguise
when a hand reaches out and makes a sign
your skin makes sense of before the mind

let me be light
and be of use to dark around me
let me learn something
and give it to you let me
be you as much as we can
until the sacred difference sleeps.

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