



*As the Hand Holds the Shape of
the Stone It Has Thrown*

and other poems

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of the Stone It Has Thrown
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As the Hand Holds the Shape of the Stone It Has Thrown

i. The Dress of Departures

A boat floats above dark reflections, a timeless tableau lost at sea.

Unwrapping the Persian miniatures, he spotted THE FUGITIVE EMU vanishing into twilight.

She says of the baby suckling at her breast, "In giving her breath, I gave her death." Then she turns to me & says, "Hansel, my dear, your mother is dead. I will be your mother."

the empurpled starfish

of her breast

"Do not be ashamed of tears," says the whiskey priest. "They are gifts from God." (His flatulent French bulldog is named Moreau).

At the end of last week, the Sun entered the mutable water sign of Pisces, signifying the last phase of winter. She sat at the table admiring the immense white & yellow umbels of the double-horned amaryllis on their slender stems. She had been reading about cat's paws & catapults: "Nature's technology is typically tiny, wet, nonmetallic, non-wheeled, and flexible, whereas human technology is mainly ..."

By the roadside black magicians with gold beaks pulled out of the sleeve of darkness long red threads, brilliant gold & purple shreds, glistening entrails of the living dead.

Overhead Anatol could see the helicopter gunships circling Kabul before heading north, northwest to escort the giant cargo planes the Russian soldiers called "the black tulips," ferrying the bodies back to Moscow.

"The great missions of pain had been ratified ... There was no earthly parting. She slipped from our fingers like a flake gathered by the wind, and is now

part of the drift called 'the infinite' ... I cannot tell how Eternity seems. It sweeps around me like a sea."

ii. *Stride by Stride, the Traveler ...*

A digital fish in the analog mirror.
Gobs of tar.

"By day one does not see many stars."

Warmed by the sun, one by one the drowsy yellow-brown late winter bees bored their way out of the woodwork.

The walls are *moondance*, the ceilings *ancestral white*.

The fat unlovely man who gets off the #11 bus at W. 47th Street & 10th Avenue this cold damp November evening awkwardly cradling in his arms a woman's leg. Nubbled pink elastic fabric, leather & metal buckled strap. The shapely lacquered sheen of molded thigh, knee, shin poured into a polished black Flamenco boot. Through the drizzled window I watch him shamble off, detached limb slung over one shoulder like a hamhock, singing to himself as he goes, making his slow way home.

Master of the floating life within, D. fetishized different parts of different women: For one, her long legs; for another, her elegant swan neck; for a third, the rose of her clitoris; for yet another, her expressive hands, their touch so soft, busy, like birdsong, & when she cut a finger opening an oyster, the mingled saltiness of blood & mollusk.

Walking on air reduces the unknown to nothing. One learns to know one's limits, the many moods of wire. Narrowing the danger, we make friends with the stranger who travels with us always - the fallen one.

iii. *The Zero of Nothing*

What we were introduced to was a theory of illegibility written in invisible ink across the many lives of paper. Its sympathy, receptivity. The seventy-seven silences. I am interested in letters, he said. The letter K for instance. Oh, yes, we replied. *K is an interesting letter.*

B. wondered what a lion must feel at reading the sentence *quia ego nominor leo* ("because my name is lion") in a Latin primer & knowing one has been transformed into a grammatical example?

Like panicking over a page of Cicero, the translator is coming to the end of the lives of whales. Luminous green shadows under a hull. Flukes of the breaching Salt & her calf. A great white wake's furrowed V's heaving behind us. Hammerheads, sickled dolphins threshing the ocean, scything the sea.

Everyone agrees he had an analytic, an abstracting hand. This hand – male, speculative – knew something the brain did not, i.e., "A woman seldom runs wild after an abstraction."

Yet when the gold coin fell & he heard her ridicule, a friend could feel his arm trembling as they walked away. Looking at him, he thought, What he was, I will be.

What else do we know of him? He did not like losing at dominoes. When someone said to him at a retrospective, You look as though you've been doing this all your life, he replied, One must make art the way some men commit a crime. Invent nothing! Imagine everything!

iv. "A sunray of bliss."

Three faint galaxies located between the Big Dipper's handle and the constellation of Canes Venatici, the Hunting Dogs. Just to the north and forming an isosceles triangle with the dog's brightest star Cor Caroli, the second brightest star, Chara, is Messier 94, a very compact spiral galaxy slowly unfurling like a vast celestial flower.

Each Mother's Day they'd show up in a nondescript gray van. Cold shifty eyes. Shaved heads. Long shears. The lilac thieves.

"Her grasp became perfect, and startling, even a little ugly in its truth – the essential disequilibrium, giving more than we can take,

the labor of love and
the touching discrepancy between the soft massive release downward, the nervous, angular, unarticulated stiff movement outward and upward,

the
perfect absorption shadowed by facts, eyes that don't quite meet as a child held tight by its mother will almost always look away, toward the horizon:

a
boat in port looking for the ocean."

When the unknown looks back at you, what does a wink from heaven mean?

v. *“une petite fille qui pleure au bord de l'eau”*

“What we call living is an attempt to read the shadows.”

Once in the theater, I was usually fascinated, but it was neither the story nor the acting but the doors and the wings that captured my imagination. Where did they lead? What lay behind?

Lacrimae rerum?

“great modern tragedies of deficient consciousness?”

“his inability to lift a stone?”

“Wo ist der Schlüssel der Garage?” (Where is the garage key?)

I saw a lake made of parallel rows of blue cardboard with wavy lines, and wavy edges; in the far distance the tiny cardboard figure of a man in a boat, rocking slightly, passed through the painted water from one side to another.

Two men in silhouette on a roof,

a figure slowly opening a door.

A man with gun, but this time it was pressed against a girl's head, just visible on a pillow after dark.

“like a giant ... rapist, ... embrace ... wraps himself in ... her hair ...”

“ne me touche pas”

“swept away”

“the progression of consciousness through ecstasy into oblivion”

“and dies of a wound that, the doctor says, would not kill a bird”

“Elle est née sans raison pour mourir; et elle meurt sans raison”

vi. *The High Hills Mown Against the Setting Sun*

Nihil est toto, quod perstet, in orbe – There is nothing in the world that does not change.

Dove sketched it, according to one report, “while knee-deep in flowing water, looking downstream into the woods ...”

She weighed in her hand the lighter-than-life heart shape, its muslin-shrouded form. Intricate draperies, dual sails, papery pink & ochre webbed wings, the barely visible feelers that caught in their stillness glints of light, mark of the etcher’s stele, effigy & miniature monument to itself – death’s donation – “the finest fretwork of the frailest thing.”

I built it so anything that can get in can get out. There is no why here. You sing in the face of the memory hole, *Immer nach Hause* (Always Home). Sewing scraps together. The double void. Through which we did not live.

Still there are questions. Was Pythagoras left-handed? What is the terror that comes from seeing a smile on an animal’s face? What is war? The contest of words & wounds? Words opening to wounds? Wounds that speak the bitterest words?

“Willingly or not, we all come to terms with power, forgetting that we are all in the ghetto ... and that close by a train is waiting.”

For us death was the listmaker. His name traveled all over Germany, like the rumor of a hidden king. The little magician! The dark man who knew how to cast a spell. “Lo,” he said, “I will tell you a mystery! We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, at the blink of an eye, the last trumpet!”

Knowing, however, is weaker than necessity. Solitary & voyaging, the soul must assume the weight of its destiny. Winnowing the continuous cull, one learns to step back before one who is not yet there. Listen to the cry of the child being born.

"I have never seen the Evening Star set behind the mountains, but it was as if I'd lost Hope out of my Soul – as if a Love were gone & a sad memory only remained – the New River bathed in light."

The river lasts because it flows.

vii. Threads of Time

He sought the resonance of the world caught in one note! The spirit of stone, wavemarks chiseled in marble, churning seawater of a remembered childhood, & the great temptations – the siren song of language. First the poems of disappearance. Then the poems of revelation. When we heard him read the words he had written, his voice trembled. We could see he was moved by his own emotion. "*The tongue is a sail!*" someone cried. The title of the poem? "The Bird that Sings in the Beard of my Father."

The woman I slept with suffered from "morning terrors." Waking, she saw white-lead roses peeling from the ceiling. Each evening, after sex, she made me leave her bed & walk home alone. She dreamt a fantastic series of ongoing dreams, harrowing sagas of pursuit, capture, & escape that extended like a long flowing iridescent silk scarf night after night after night. It was she who introduced me to "the celestial phonebooth." Years later, I saw someone coming toward me in a dream. With one hand I held the glass door open. With the other I sheltered her frail form. How little she weighs, I thought, no more than a feather. Taking the receiver from its hook, she looked up at me, & smiled. "Son," she said, "I know how to save a dime."

The Angel Protecting the Artist from Blindness

The end was near. He had measured the cold exactitudes of light. He had drunk from the glacier's melting snow. What did it taste like? The sky, the sky!

From his former life as a sailor he painted images sailors could be assured by as they pitched & swayed in their cradles at sea. He had swum in the sexy thick of it, the sensual underflow, both slick & dry. An unsettled mass whose turbulent edges bled into a series of nervous shimmers across large black action-filled abstractions until blossoming outward like an immense red rose.

He knew the eye as an island of shadow & light, a necessary illusion that must be experienced in order to be denied. "The unreal is real," he said. "We pray to a God who exists only in the prayer that calls Him into being." & what was justice after all? Witnesses could serve as barbers & shave their oppressors, holding a razor to their throats.

Haunted by the sharpening shape of his absence, he saw a red rose tossed into a current, a white rose laid among ashes. He saw the nave as an inverted hull of the great boat of the world-soul each of us rows across the weave of space-time into the fabric of eternity.

So he continued. There were fits & starts. A toll & a tolling. A silent song carried him along through perturbations, arrests, successive undulations. "In the hour of the shortest shadow, the Golden Ball." As a blind seamstress listens to the singing of the scissors, he heard the blackbirds quarreling over fallen grain. Crying out in fright, he risked his life for a shipwrecked pianola, its percussive strings, the single wing of its glossy ebony thunder. In the ritardando, the atolls, archipelagoes of breath, a shapeless fog flowered, whitely.

Light oars feathered the ocean foam & he could see a frozen wave, a thumbprint in stone, the periwinkle's glistening eye, & now the red heart of the Medusa opening out to him. Mare nostrum! The great ocean giving birth to itself at last!

Tilted Mirrors

A knife passes through the lips, dividing the tongue.
You bleed the blood of the world.

When the head is lifted, the beak is open, as when a bird sings on a branch.

“Cellular time is toxically atonal, motionless.
The mountains in my journeying are more structurally resonant and confluent
to the ‘real’ than myself.”

The key of D awaits me.

I was jolted awake at one a.m. by a high-pitched cry. Once ... twice ... a third
time. Then a terrible silence. Screech owl? Some small animal *in extremis*?
Mortal terror? I looked out the window. Nothing moving. Everything frozen
in place. Sharply etched shadows of tree limbs, railings, outbuildings, barn
floated in a sea of silver under the July moon.

I am thinking of the non-writing of writing. Against what sky?
It is pointless to ask. As if ... as though ...
The exactitude of “that” is *that* (& that).

Dear M. Roget,
What is the synonym for “synonym”?
Yrs sincerely,
Signor Ensign

Cascading over cliffsides, gold shocks of forsythia. The man beside me
falls asleep before the pages of a book inquiring, *Are you a mustang or a
burro?* Smearred across the glassy blue liquidity of light a fading
N A B I S C O sign. Blood’s barbed wire. The river.

“If it floats, it’s not art,” the boatmaker says.

On the anniversary of his death, I left the city to stay for a week at a friend's house outside Naples, Pousilopon – “respite from pain.” But I found it difficult to reconcile the beauty there with her deliberate unawareness of the brutal cost of wealth, the meanness of poverty, the careless cruelties of history. It was there he came to me in a dream of snow, speaking about our “child,” which turned out to be this letter he held out to me. It read: “He who is willing to work gives birth to his own father.” That same day his daughter emailed me out of the blue about how he had “transferred” himself to her like some ghostly overlay or palimpsest, so that her new careers in acting & photography – the dark room, the brightly lit stage – were reflections (& refractions) of his.

People prize what they do not understand.
“Strange music. Disjointed voices.”

The *diktat* of the mind brings things to attention, orders experience. Left. Right. Left. Right. Lockstep we march off the edge of the known world – in our progress stamping the old names onto new terrain.

“Nothing is absurd. Once you've seen a black swan – not just seen one, but lived and faced death as one – it becomes easier to imagine another one on the horizon.”

He was an object of ironic scrutiny, wry self-amusement, especially when he considered his habit of scurrying for cover whenever the light shone upon him. As it searched all the shadowy crannies & crevices, he cowered at the heart of his hiddenness, a dark star.

Down in flames, up in smoke.
All are reborn in the fire.

At the museum she said: “When everyone leaves & the lights go out, I sit here holding a piece of *Contingent*.” German is like pebbled glass to me,

but I could dimly see what she was getting at. When I stood as a boy before Goya's firing squad, May 3, 1803, laughing & weeping at the same time, a delirious feeling of liberation swept over me because, or despite of, the subject matter. & when I saw his "Laughing Blind Man" I was hurled back across the room. Eva refused light - angelic light, demonic light - she wanted bare, unadorned, unforgiving light. It oozed from, seeped up out of, her objects.

After the fireworks, a black lab wandered into our yard, lathered with sweat, foaming at the mouth. The next morning his owner showed up on our doorstep, smelling of whiskey. "Joe always gets spooked on 4th of July," she apologized, & handed me a basket of fresh-picked strawberries.

Who dat humming shtetl blues?
Selling black market body parts in a chop shop off Michigan Avenue?
Let us guzzle ghazals with Captain Bly!
A yellow star flickers in the night sky.

Have you heard the Theodor Adorno Jazz Quartet play *I've been tickled pink by blacker feathers*? Read Bloch on jazz, jitterbug, boogie-woogie? "Imbecility gone wild." The vomiting forth of "American filth." Translation is so iffy, so I dare not bear down too hard, but the self-important arrogance shines through.

"The dance allows us to move in a completely different way to the way we move in the day, at least the everyday, it imitates something which the latter has lost or never even possessed. It paces out the wish for more beautifully moved being, fixes it in the eye, ear, the whole body, just as if it already existed now. Light, exhilarated or strict, in every case the body steps out of the difference here, into something different. And a drive remains to carry on going within it more and more strongly."

"... it sought to be the natural school. It looked at the beautiful animals with their superbly fit stride well-suspended within them. It was intent on breaking down from top to bottom the purposely concealed or frozen

posture which the master-servant relationship brought with it.”

Here are the stories my grandmother told me out of the Russian night:
The straw man riding a horse on fire, the fool drinking the moon in a cup.

Whisper of silk against skin. A sleepwalker in a long blue gown waves
one pale hand over the gravestones. Voila! The violas ...

Ulan Bator. A horsehead fiddle. Underbowing. A voice that travels from
hilltop to hilltop under a turquoise sky.

Silvery tinkle of a mandolin.

What are these wishful images in the mirror?
Return to a place you've never been?
Hay for the winged horses?
Meno ... Nemo ... Omens, omens ...
Show me your face before your parents were born.

Yes, there is another world (but it is inside this one.)

“I long ago lost a hound, a bay horse, and a turtle dove, and am still
on their trail. Many are the travelers I have spoken to concerning them,
describing their tracks and what calls they answered to. I have met one or
two who had heard the hound, and the tramp of the horse, and even seen
the dove disappear behind a cloud, and they seemed as anxious to recover
them as if they had lost them themselves.” Thoreau, *Walden*

So a dove disappears behind a cloud, a jellyfish hides in its own transparence,
a squid jets away leaving behind a shadow-body of ink. Yes, mountains are
hidden in mountains, moonlight on the tips of ten thousand grasses. Like
a child playing *fort-da*, hide-n-seek, we know it is a joy to be hidden, but
a disaster not to be found.

A mountain floats like a mote in the eye of the sky.