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alibi  
(that is : elsewhere)

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One of a million medieval bright ideas was that the air was made of invisible wings.

—Laird Hunt, *The Paris Stories*

nonesuch auguries, egads.  
we will have none of that.  
saying again this place is  
this, only moreso.  
here the air  
rises from beneath it  
seems & is heavy salty—  
whereas there the air is sharp,  
takes corners, comes around  
corners sharply.  
it hasn't rained for fourteen days. the birds  
have thwarted me & eaten the verbena seeds.  
I smell like a girl & tire of profundity.

if it is to be a nor'easter it should at least snow. how do you spell 'forego' ? In 1878 Thackeray wrote : women are not so easily cured by the alibi treatment. concerning the black death, 'hippocratic katastasis' is understood to mean the way the air stood still with malice aforethought. if the air does not move, no one will be well. I believe I managed to arrive here by the invisible string that attaches my car to traffic, to the car immediately in front of mine. See Chaucer (Troilus) : I have eke foundyn by astronomye, By sort, and by augury eke truly. See Shakespeare (Hamlet) : Not a whit, we defy augury. There is special providence &c. if it be not now, &c. I know there is something to wheeling flocks, there is something to droughts & good earth. I will teach you how to chart the longitude & latitude of approaching hurricanes where we go to take the air — they say there is something in the air, negative ions : they ease the mind. they produce good dreams & heavy sleep. ion is from the neuter present participle of "to go."

dear \_\_\_\_\_,

since I left your city, I've grown clumsy  
& have bruises under several fingernails—  
smoke too much & wake up early  
while the sun is still on the porch  
which is a portico because wishing makes it so.  
there is no air there. though I felt  
comfortable when I'd wake up from there.  
for a moment I thought in Flushing  
last week in the morning & everyone  
was much relieved. I continue to hear  
my house sleep & when I hear it is no longer  
sleeping I have words with the yarrow.

it is the property of air to be still

it is the property of air to move when it sees fit

*the highest degree of Swooning*

suspended animation

*or apparent death by Drowning*

the continued pulse with discontinued respiratory action

*it indicates a curious infelicity of etymology*

it was never either/or

it was explicit in its choicelessness

to inhale takes approximately two seconds

to exhale takes three

& when we've asked all we can ask of cigarettes & coffee

commence with the peripheral silver fish



there one is afraid of that  
which is invisible whereas  
here one fears that which is seen.  
with maps, one could endeavor to prove  
one's self alibi.  
no one leaves here ever if  
only there was another.  
it's not safe sometimes to meddle with walls.  
the fall of Jane Scrope's sparrow.  
if by making certain  
conditions of the air— well, that's how they took  
the poison in those days.

nicotine, rain, curry— you see, all yellow things  
one expects to pine for. so watched a Belfast  
movie that began sadly & ended sadly— neither  
more sadly nor less sadly. rather, exact. & started  
a letter : since I left your city.

we force the clock contrary to its hour :

face east, the weather being clear,

watch for birds, noting from whence they

came, & in what sort they wag their wings, &c.

having given my mouth over to your inflections, that glamour  
descends from grammar; having masterfully passed over nine  
burning ploughshares, you propose to address me infanta;  
*morning, like a dog in a manger.*

*placebo*— I allow

it's fatal to kill swallows.

a weather, of another kind I say :

cup of tea, cup of tea, cup of tea ?

he smites me. smitten, again I am

all the words I wear

indicating that this is so only

moreso. smitten—

& taken to wearing more metals

(look this up, what is augured there)

& spent the morning entire

explaining absinthe & semi-colons.

an effort to be sensible, to alter the material of air with mere pronunciation.

this is the miraculousness of caulk. the difference between a physic & physics. unstable  
quantitativeness. a gin & tonic with lime & quinine— I've seen you play the saint with  
your bitten fingernails, your sermon-crooked mouth, your iodized preservative. dear, since  
I left your city I bruise easily & sleep too much. butterfly bushes & the flutter cross  
the Atlantic, your lessons in chaos. such a day may require six hours of wittiness, forgoing  
responsibility for long walks, a comedy of manners, or a commentary on social errors.  
I am tidy & grateful & as earnest as all the backyards in Philadelphia.  
made a sheep from wax, a few parallel lines there scratched. happy birthday, Judas Iscariot.

the legal definition of *obligation*—  
heir to your father's enemies. perhaps I am  
curious for this place.  
elsewhere is still  
somewhere— but perhaps not  
where the compass is— your  
compass has fallen to earth & so.  
a bird killed in the yard— feathers (white,  
unusual) hither & thither.  
evidence of a struggle. questions of proof & ethics.

laziness gave us *ampersand* & I am happier for it.  
were we to wake very early to observe  
staccato in the music of spheres or a prowler.  
were we to discover therein the lack— all  
the indignity, advances, & indifference one  
must muster. you start  
the day at odd angles & predestination  
selects the coffeemugs. more spontaneous & less  
superstitious, please. if not lazy, then a slur— in several  
senses. a great unending existential schwa.

she used to find beautiful its angle in air.  
she used to find beautiful  
the juxtaposition of natural & manmade  
things in air. she used to envy  
its underbelly & imagined  
destinations over the expressway. certainly  
there's an accurate phrase for this in a language  
I don't speak well. I'm prepared to forfeit  
my self-righteousness in escrow at this time.  
& (something) in the air— (something) uttered  
or not, renunciation even.

quadrillion is a real word  
& they all alight somewhere like so many  
devices in heraldic lists—  
although we only see  
them wheel (gigantic) alongside the turnpike.  
*the bulk of it in air*: what is augured  
chaotic there. when I see you  
next we will be strangers.  
decisions are made in motion— a body  
at rest decisionless. while there might be a phrase  
that effectively describes it, merely arrive at a number.  
she's a widow in her marrow. this is how  
a person becomes debris.



given birds & the element through which  
they have the privilege to move. a clarity  
known as keening, out of earth  
a body is. the tiny shapes in our mouths  
don't match what we hear. since  
leaving, I'm the occasional  
victim of my own felicity & calculated ennui.  
thus far, a gloveless & scarfless winter— here  
one grows attached to things; or  
bliss & boredom— that unholy alliance & certain  
variability in the air. & remain (dear  
sir, respectfully) aesthetically impatient.

the mud month— this is a leisurely & plural experience.

this is a serious financial gesture :

    a silent consideration of the disposition

    & movement of some thing.

a lit cigarette will lend the anecdote

a certain gravitas. our eye

follows the invisible line left behind.

our eye reads the line; or (rather)

the confusion of lines left by a fistful of iron

nails thrown to disperse things malevolent & airy.

the name by which she entered  
history is not how she would have referred to herself.  
*cras, cras*— the crow's  
call understood as optimism— tomorrow.  
tomorrow, all our accumulated throbbings  
may be exhausted. melancholic & atlantic  
as opposed to sanguine & pacific—  
I have the honor to be &c.,  
at its edges, the continent  
appears to become a solid in the space  
between sounds & the curious  
darkness between birds. from a distance  
one may become convinced of this—

the city in an airless moment— to speak without breathing. : a bridge is a public street crossing a body of water. bodies of water, being traversable, were weak points & medieval cities, as we have seen, were frequently walled off against them. if from my window I could see a bridge, a parliament of fowls. *I would imagine that the world was held together by the courses they flew.* I would argue that semantic differences are among the most important things. burdon : a note of long duration. endura : a foolish monument to starvation. simply not enough blood gets to my fingers. though they are, in fact, solid. a thing cannot be proof of itself; I cannot; you cannot. I could see a bridge.

air, dear [your name here]—  
to see, to speak, to leave  
the city choking & etched  
inside my eyes. ex humus  
corpus est : a stone for useful  
objects, the materials of minimalist-  
boy-sculpture. you should not  
believe me. vernacular only  
means not Latin but how else are we to talk  
about plants, about practicality.  
a manmade object, I  
turn lights on & off, speak,  
am spoken to, reply, dress, undress— yes,  
I undress manmade & otherwise  
engage with objects external  
to myself. a gesture of location.

heavy things shift in flight. another  
bird in the interim, an intermezzo circus.  
knots in the air, unco lair. & history. I take these losses  
personally, I admit. it is unseasonably  
chilly & he effortlessly exchanges war for postwar  
correspondent. we make these  
preemptive & arrogant movements. vaulting is not too  
ambitious a subject for summer travel, however—  
the story goes like this & has too many commas.  
the story was told to me as follows & will be on the final.  
we eat beyond our means & recognize  
the timeline as an absurd artifact. here, have a year.  
a place where you resemble yourself, where they  
resemble themselves. here my research  
is far from complete & my reading insufficient.

we were there. & then  
we came here. *queens under cabbages*—  
a beach of little teeth, bleak horse.  
under a word for not-rain in a language  
we cannot call with any  
honesty my grandmother's. speaking metaphorically  
we can make this nostalgic  
& nonsensical gesture, however.  
what kind of thing is that to say ?  
is that to say, that is. yes—  
as though the phrase was itself  
a soteltie & hence : a thing made  
useless but pretty. baked in a pie.

if you turn left  
here it is the end of earth— a more  
solid earth you put your foot  
down with a satisfying sound.  
a scraggy field separated by another  
scraggy field with over a thousand  
given names— small, crooked, oddly  
sequenced, loosely interpreted  
rectangles. & inside those rectangles, shapes of a domestic  
sort, the shape of gravity— roofless  
things, their gables sharp. lapsing into the fantastic  
or romantic a failure thus exhibited, the thin mimicry of it. taller, walls  
crossed without knocking stones loose  
                  this monu  
                  mnt erectd  
                  by his wyf



not the violent, disinterested property of air; nor one of the various categories of possible devastation; not sighing back at birds; not stitching clothes while in them; not that they don't have a gift for gentle, greatly understated euphemisms; not more likely than not; not territorial divisions; nor the space above those walls; it is not the particular twitch of every inch; not a relict, derelict house; nor a relict in a derelict house; it is not a catalogue of wind gusts & storm surges; not a chart that might predict something; not something about systems; not the confidence to say 'if it doesn't rain here, it will elsewhere' (however confident we may feel about that); not ankle-clutching vetch; not that vetch doesn't invite suspicion; not that cake wouldn't be nice; not that they didn't have a word for it during plague; not that they didn't have a word for it during famine either; not the roads & circles & not-quite roads that got us here; not this progress necessarily reversed; it is not asking : *should we have stayed at home & thought of here*; nor an accurate word between us in answer; not that I'm not amazed to find that there is something & not nothing; nor explaining a preference for land excerpted down to crag

it is our duty to doubt  
we are obligated to a certain skepticism  
we still say the air  
is better here. we take overly dramatic  
deep breaths as proof. the air here  
: vegetable in quality & bigger. at night  
it is darker & resists  
suspicion in its very healthful spookiness.  
I have no will to disprove this.  
the air is autumnal, sheeogy & we've become  
familiar & snobbish enough to profess to only  
loving the place in winter, in inclement greyest weather.  
it consoles us with the fiction that there might  
be something still unknown here.

the faded marks, a revenant of an arch  
which once led to an anchoress' cell—  
a wall there now, but outside  
the wall in the grass a cracked  
long stone where here she lived & died.  
where we are currently  
wintering, there is no excess of granite.  
the effects of wind  
& rain & centuries (*of filthy weather*) of devoted  
or merely curious hands on the carved beakheads—  
or the finger labyrinth set in the wall.  
also a recessed slotted box— it says 50p.