

SONNET

1.

The graffiti should read *sweep my hair back gently, leaving the cornice its question of light*. If you understand anything about the way we live now, you know how the plot thinned out, the orange peel slides off in one of those perfect citrus spirals, our stare more serious than we let on. Columns of traffic in midtown wait like an intentional misgiving whose tears are iron in place of the god unaccustomed to grief. His children don't live forever and for this he blames them, for this he fashions riddles and labyrinths to keep them occupied until the mouse gnawing at the baseboard triggers a secret spring and the wall flies open and the shield and a tank-top (a little tight, a little skimpy) are revealed.

2.

Summer accumulated in a series of private lines and bee-stings, flesh reddening and peeling like a clock. Constant repair taught the blue and white harbor how pure an event thought was. Perfection was there, disguised as imperfection. Loss was disguised as abundance, to which there was no answering except normally, as if sheer presence sent a shock you could

afterwards appoint notes to, neither aggrieved nor congruent, but another surface which threw you into history simply because you replied.

3.

The green swirl of light, off-center behind a ridge of pines not immersed in darkness but somehow giving that off like a hollow sun. My head is not seen, just as the pines really are there, just not visible in the wedge-shaped dark that intersects the distance to make this the foreground—"this" being where we stand (you are not seen too, so this isn't a self-portrait by any means)—neither one of us looking at the swirling light or the pines and the dark rising out of them: "this" is not a self-documenting universe but an applied chance that tugs at the longstanding yet abrupt sense that it would continue when you weren't there—would continue *because* you weren't there, marking by cadence the having it at all.

4.

That ham and cheese sandwich was delicious. A moment ago I was worrying about something (how we live now is to worry about something, usually one big thing) until I wasn't worrying about it and instead I was thinking about you and that funny half-light I see when I look at you. Part of this island has death written over it a thousand times, part lime juice and salt, part a custom-made sailor's jacket with gold piping across the breast—an essay in the form of a blazer—so that when you turn your head to the side like that, this is holding you here.

THEORY OF TRANSPORTATION

The ones we like stay later than the rest. The snow has already changed from early evening airmail envelope blue to crisp business letter white. In contrast, the sky is the kind of black before night goes brilliant again with reflected light from apartments and street lamps, constellations, the moon and other planets you could identify. This is the first part of night sprouting with haphazardly grouped numerals raised to this or that power: a line of trees or an arm raised in some gesture. Like trying to answer all the questions at the end of a chapter in a textbook: Wasn't it just a while ago we were reading the preface with so much understanding? How did these things come to stand for so much? It isn't as if we were in the front row of an amphitheater looking back on other rows of seats with numbers painted on them. That would be easy. Or even those constellations, once you get the hang of finding them: trunk of a horse (Pegasus) or the Big W (Cassiopeia)—a knack, like making snowballs, and immensely satisfying, as if nature were redeemable because constant, aloof, yet right there to squish between your fingers if you want to get close to it, if you think that might help. A line of trees or an arm raised in a gesture: pine trees stoop lightly in the wind, the arm curves up and out. You might think about what stance

to take at such a moment. Perhaps the radiance of your room, lit with such simple truths as table and chairs, key-rings and painted wood can help. Testimony of friends and those who love you—won't that count? Won't that let them know what you were really up to? Happiness, I can assure you, is this: to be let off the hook a couple of times. It shows you how to treat others, a nonchalance that mounts to a delectable but nonetheless rigorous morality: your father who loved to fish but always threw his catch back in. Too bad he didn't treat his family with the same detached amusement. Either you wander around looking for something larger-than-life to be your life, or you marvel at waistcoats and thick brocade for their splendor and mystery. No, I'm not pretending there aren't important issues to discuss, crucial philosophical movements that arrange our minds for the moment the way a snowstorm arranges a city. Nor do I want to suggest that we can pretend to be "above the fray"—the hook I want to let you off of is made of steel: it has barbs to stick in the soft lining of your throat and not let go. Some don't get off—the ground we've already covered too predictable even if the numbers are astronomical and we can't count that high. Somebody, or something else, can; somebody or something else is those numbers, and we are too, but their telling hangs thick as knotted rope, thick as Welsh coal-mining songs. What would you do? What would you like to do? These questions get answered and an atmosphere condenses out of them, brilliant where you want it to be brilliant, dark chocolate where that makes sense, the raspberry lining of a jacket always a surprise. Even in this

atmosphere, where love can sort it all out, the narrative is unflinching, grinding particulars into a kind of paste. An arm is not a good model for a tree.

I was saying it was getting dark out. People are starting to come home from work and lights go on in apartments up and down the block. Can I give you this? Can I say people are coming home from work and lights are going on in apartments up and down the block? No one can do that. I cannot keep you from disappearing again. I cannot say each light places its asterisk in the window to plead a special case, some exception.

SECRET TAPES

You just know how they will be able to show us it was serially encoded, conforming to a “current” of events like the Gulf Stream, in effect warming us to a love for the just city, meanwhile overlooking others in a fate which is cold and crushing and as surprisingly unsurprising as the tide of shoppers in the checkout aisle where everyone looks pursued by some Fury or other, stony-faced, like high school geography teachers. Ignorance is our own and others’ problem, and the truth is much truer really, but I don’t want to go into that now unless you want me to because the tokens of recognition by which we will learn from each other are as mysteriously funny as European telephone numbers or an address in Queens. I can say a true thing like a false one, and a false one like it was the truth, but also a true thing like the truth. The gates to the Academy of the Future of the Just City have already been closed behind us, gliding effortlessly on their hinges of ice and falling snow, with bars like sluices for the present to keep slopping in on us, a memory of what else is endured alone.

THE LEAVES ARE SOMETHING THIS YEAR

1.

It makes you think when you see it spread at your feet like a magic carpet. If I could speak the language of things, in every description I would be asking, *Do you have this?* Or, *Can I give you this?* It would say how much I loved you. It would be a charm to protect you. And since it is a small thing, it will go unnoticed, you will go unnoticed, although I could look now and then and see what I guess we knew all along, expecting our knowledge or expectations would add up to something, wouldn't only be added on to fall off just because they do that.

2.

Shadowing this is a second set of books where the real accounts are kept: an invisible arithmetic in long rows, some numbers so thick they look like squirrels running up trunks of trees with horse chestnuts in their mouths. They know. They know ordinary methods are best, hammered out of the giant age, the age of giants, which came after the age of smaller things, and before this one, which is called the age of squirrels who know best. Children and methods are

buried in the ground. Do you want to say *so much*? Do you want to say *so much* as if it were your fate, one hand raised to the forehead, brushing back a wave of hair?

3.

Sometimes I think I can keep myself away from you and that it will be less trouble. Or even if I'm there, just not want you so much, in the way of not getting too attached because it's ultimately less painful, because there's no clarity of perception to cut through the invisible braid of desire. You turn your hand over and I kiss your shining wrist, exempt from everything that does not have this mark. And I claim this. Tomorrow, last year, have this geography. What can I give you?

4.

You are supposed to be going somewhere, in the sense of developing and incorporating the different things that happen into who you are, deriving yourself like an equation, factoring in the x 's and y 's, where x equals any discontinuous fragment of memory so strong it makes you feel like you're still there trying to figure out what it was for, and y that you are the one thing that will not translate into the purposely obscure text invented for it. Good, let it be like that, in the sense that what continued was the continuing part, and these other events, some of the people or things you keep thinking about, that just seem to have stopped, you don't get to revisit, and they don't exactly come back, but something in-between seems to be operating, where you don't make sense of it, with