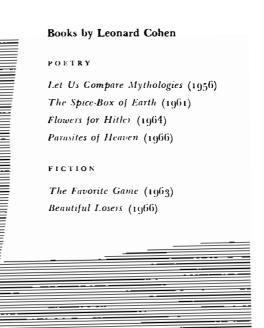
Leonard Cohen selected Poems

1956-1968





LEONARD COHEN SELECTED POEMS 1956-1968

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Contents

I. Let Us Compare Mythologies

```
For Wilf and His House
                          3
Prayer for Messiah
The Song of the Hellenist
The Sparrows
City Christ
Song of Patience
When This American Woman
                               10
Song
     II
These Heroics
              12
Lovers
          13
The Warrior Boats
                     14
Letter 16
Pagans
         18
Song
        20
Prayer for Sunset
Ballad
Saint Catherine Street
Ballad
          26
Summer Night
              28
The Flier
            29
Poem 30
The Fly
           30
Warning
           31
Story 32
Beside the Shepherd
                      33
```

II. The Spice-Box of Earth

```
A Kite Is a Victim
                     37
The Flowers That I Left in the Ground
                                         38
Gift
        39
There Are Some Men
You All in White
I Wonder How Many People in This City
                                           42
Go by Brooks
To a Teacher
                44
I Have Not Lingered in European Monasteries
It Swings, Jocko
Credo
         48
You Have the Lovers
Owning Everything
The Priest Says Goodbye
The Cuckold's Song
                      56
Dead Song
             57
My Lady Can Sleep
                      58
Travel
         59
I Have Two Bars of Soap
                           60
Celebration
Beneath My Hands
As the Mist Leaves No Scar
                             63
I Long to Hold Some Lady
                             64
Now of Sleeping
                   65
Song
        67
Song
        68
For Anne
          68
Last Dance at the Four Penny
Summer Haiku
Out of the Land of Heaven
                             71
```

45

Prayer of My Wild Grandfather	72
Isaiah 73	
The Genius 76	
Lines from My Grandfather's Journ	al 78

III. Flowers for Hitler

What I'm Doing Here 87 The Hearth 88 The Drawer's Condition on November 28, 1961 The Suit 90 Indictment of the Blue Hole I Wanted to Be a Doctor On Hearing a Name Long Unspoken 93 Style 95 Goebbels Abandons His Novel and Joins the Party 97 Hitler the Brain-Mole 98 It Uses Us! 99 My Teacher Is Dying 100 For My Old Layton Finally I Called 103 The Only Tourist in Havana Turns His Thoughts Homeward 104 Millennium 105 Alexander Trocchi, Public Junkie, Priez pour Nous 108 Three Good Nights On the Sickness of My Love 113 For Marianne II4The Failure of a Secular Life 115 My Mentors 116

89

```
Heirloom
          117
The Project
              118
Hydra 1969
             120
All There Is to Know about Adolph Eichmann
                                           122
The New Leader
                  127
For E. J.P. 124
A Migrating Dialogue
                   125
The Bus
        128
The Rest Is Dross 129
How the Winter Gets In
Propaganda
            131
Opium and Hitler 132
For Anyone Dressed in Marble
                             I 34
Folk
       I 34
I Had It for a Moment
                     135
Independence 137
The House
The Lists
            139
Order
         I40
Destiny
          I42
Queen Victoria and Me 143
The New Step: A Ballet-Drama in One Act
                                           145
Winter Bulletin
                 164
Why Did You Give My Name to the Police?
                                           165
The Music Crept by Us 167
Disguises
          168
Lot
      171
One of the Nights I Didn't Kill Myself 172
Bullets
         173
The Big World 174
Front Lawn
```

Kerensky	176	
Another Ni	ight with Telesco	ре 178

IV. Parasites of Heaven

The Nightmares Do Not Suddenly 181
A Cross Didn't Fall on Me 182
So You're the Kind of Vegetarian 183
Nothing Has Been Broken 184
Here We Are at the Window 185
Clean as the Grass from Which 186
When I Paid the Sun to Run 187
I See You on a Greek Mattress 188
Suzanne Wears a Leather Coat 189
One Night I Burned the House I Loved 190
Two Went to Sleep 191
In the Bible Generations Pass 192
Found Once Again Shamelessly Ignoring the
Swans 193
When I Hear You Sing 194
He Was Lame 195
I Am Too Loud When You Are Gone 195
Somewhere in My Trophy Room 196
You Know Where I Have Been 197
I Met a Woman Long Ago 198
I've Seen Some Lonely History 200
Snow Is Falling 201
Created Fires I Cannot Love 202
Claim Me, Blood, If You Have a Story 203
He Was Beautiful When He Sat Alone 204
I Am a Priest of God 207
In Almond Trees Lemon Trees 208

Suzanne Takes You Down 209
Give Me Back My Fingerprints 211
Foreign God, Reigning in Earthly Glory . . . 213
I Believe You Heard Your Master Sing 214
This Morning I Was Dressed by the Wind 216
I Stepped into an Avalanche 217

V. New Poems

This Is for You You Do Not Have to Love Me 223 It's Just a City, Darling Edmonton, Alberta, December 1966, 4 a.m. 225 The Broom Is an Army of Straw 226 I Met You 227 Calm, Alone, the Cedar Guitar 228 You Live Like a God Aren't You Tired She Sings So Nice The Reason I Write 231 When I Meet You in the Small Streets 232 It Has Been Some Time A Person Who Eats Meat 233 Who Will Finally Say Waiting to Tell the Doctor 235 It's Good to Sit with People 236 Do Not Forget Old Friends 238 Marita 239 He Studies to Describe 239

Index of First Lines 241



FOR WILF AND HIS HOUSE

When young the Christians told me how we pinned Jesus like a lovely butterfly against the wood, and I wept beside paintings of Calvary at velvet wounds and delicate twisted feet.

But he could not hang softly long, your fighters so proud with bugles, bending flowers with their silver stain, and when I faced the Ark for counting, trembling underneath the burning oil, the meadow of running flesh turned sour and I kissed away my gentle teachers, warned my younger brothers.

Among the young and turning-great of the large nations, innocent of the spiked wish and the bright crusade, there I could sing my heathen tears between the summersaults and chestnut battles, love the distant saint who fed his arm to flies, mourn the crushed ant and despise the reason of the heel.

Raging and weeping are left on the early road. Now each in his holy hill the glittering and hurting days are almost done.

Then let us compare mythologies. I have learned my elaborate lie of soaring crosses and poisoned thorns

and how my fathers nailed him like a bat against a barn to greet the autumn and late hungry ravens as a hollow yellow sign.

PRAYER FOR MESSIAH

His blood on my arm is warm as a bird his heart in my hand is heavy as lead his eyes through my eyes shine brighter than love O send out the raven ahead of the dove

His life in my mouth is less than a man his death on my breast is harder than stone his eyes through my eyes shine brighter than love O send out the raven ahead of the dove

O send out the raven ahead of the dove
O sing from your chains where you're chained in a cave
your eyes through my eyes shine brighter than love
your blood in my ballad collapses the grave

O sing from your chains where you're chained in a cave your eyes through my eyes shine brighter than love your heart in my hand is heavy as lead your blood on my arm is warm as a bird

O break from your branches a green branch of love after the raven has died for the dove

THE SONG OF THE HELLENIST

(For R.K.)

Those unshadowed figures, rounded lines of men who kneel by curling waves, amused by ornate birds—

If that had been the ruling way,

I would have grown long hairs for the corners of my

mouth . . .

O cities of the Decapolis across the Jordan, you are too great; our young men love you, and men in high places have caused gymnasiums to be built in Jerusalem.

I tell you, my people, the statues are too tall. Beside them we are small and ugly, blemishes on the pedestal.

My name is Theodotus, do not call me Jonathan. My name is Dositheus, do not call me Nathaniel. Call us Alexander, Demetrius, Nicanor . . .

"Have you seen my landsmen in the museums, the brilliant scholars with the dirty fingernails, standing before the marble gods,

underneath the lot?"

Among straight noses, natural and carved,
I have said my clever things thought out before;
jested on the Protocols, the cause of war,

quoted "Bleistein with a Cigar."

And in the salon that holds the city in its great window, in the salon among the Herrenmenschen, among the close-haired youth, I made them laugh when the child came in:

"Come, I need you for a Passover Cake." And I have touched their tall clean women, thinking somehow they are unclean, as scaleless fish.

They have smiled quietly at me, and with their friends—

I wonder what they see.

O cities of the Decapolis,
call us Alexander, Demetrius, Nicanor . . .
Dark women, soon I will not love you.
My children will boast of their ancestors at Marathon
and under the walls of Troy,
and Athens, my chiefest joy—

O call me Alexander, Demetrius, Nicanor . . .

THE SPARROWS

Catching winter in their carved nostrils the traitor birds have deserted us, leaving only the dullest brown sparrows for spring negotiations.

I told you we were fools to have them in our games, but you replied:

They are only wind-up birds who strut on scarlet feet so hopelessly far from our curled fingers.

I had moved to warn you, but you only adjusted your hair and ventured:

Their wings are made of glass and gold and we are fortunate not to hear them splintering against the sun.

Now the hollow nests sit like tumors or petrified blossoms between the wire branches and you, an innocent scientist, question me on these brown sparrows: whether we should plant our yards with breadcrumbs or mark them with the black, persistent crows whom we hate and stone.

But what shall I tell you of migrations when in this empty sky the precise ghosts of departed summer birds still trace old signs; or of desperate flights when the dimmest flutter of a coloured wing excites all our favourite streets to delight in imaginary spring.

CITY CHRIST

He has returned from countless wars, Blinded and hopelessly lame. He endures the morning streetcars And counts ages in a Peel Street room.

He is kept in his place like a court jew, To consult on plagues or hurricanes, And he never walks with them on the sea Or joins their lonely sidewalk games.

SONG OF PATIENCE

For a lovely instant I thought she would grow mad and end the reason's fever.

But in her hand she held Christ's splinter, so I could only laugh and press a warm coin across her seasoned breasts:

but I remembered clearly then your insane letters and how you wove initials in my throat.

My friends warn me that you have read the ocean's old skeleton; they say you stitch the water sounds in different mouths, in other monuments. "Journey with a silver bullet," they caution. "Conceal a stake inside your pocket." And I must smile as they misconstrue your insane letters and my embroidered throat.

O I will tell him to love you carefully; to honour you with shells and coloured bottles; to keep from your face the falling sand and from your human arm the time-charred beetle; to teach you new stories about lightning and let you run sometimes barefoot on the shore. And when the needle grins bloodlessly in his cheek he will come to know how beautiful it is to be loved by a madwoman.

And I do not gladly wait the years for the ocean to discover and rust your face as it has all of history's beacons that have turned their gold and stone to water's onslaught, for then your letters too rot with ocean's logic and my fingernails are long enough to tear the stitches from my throat.

WHEN THIS AMERICAN WOMAN

When this American woman, whose thighs are bound in casual red cloth, comes thundering past my sitting-place like a forest-burning Mongol tribe, the city is ravished and brittle buildings of a hundred years splash into the street; and my eyes are burnt for the embroidered Chinese girls, already old, and so small between the thin pines on these enormous landscapes, that if you turn your head they are lost for hours.

SONG

The naked weeping girl is thinking of my name turning my bronze name over and over with the thousand fingers of her body anointing her shoulders with the remembered odour of my skin

O I am the general in her history over the fields driving the great horses dressed in gold cloth wind on my breastplate sun in my belly

May soft birds soft as a story to her eyes protect her face from my enemies and vicious birds whose sharp wings were forged in metal oceans guard her room from my assassins

And night deal gently with her high stars maintain the whiteness of her uncovered flesh And may my bronze name touch always her thousand fingers grow brighter with her weeping until I am fixed like a galaxy and memorized in her secret and fragile skies.

THESE HEROICS

If I had a shining head and people turned to stare at me in the streetcars; and I could stretch my body through the bright water and keep abreast of fish and water snakes; if I could ruin my feathers in flight before the sun; do you think that I would remain in this room, reciting poems to you, and making outrageous dreams with the smallest movements of your mouth?

LOVERS

During the first pogrom they
Met behind the ruins of their homes—
Sweet merchants trading: her love
For a history-full of poems.

And at the hot ovens they Cunningly managed a brief Kiss before the soldier came To knock out her golden teeth.

And in the furnace itself
As the flames flamed higher,
He tried to kiss her burning breasts
As she burned in the fire.

Later he often wondered:
Was their barter completed?
While men around him plundered
And knew he had been cheated.

THE WARRIOR BOATS

The warrior boats from Portugal Strain at piers with ribs exposed And seagull generations fall Through the wood anatomy

But in the town, the town
Their passion unimpaired
The beautiful dead crewmen
Go climbing in the lanes
Boasting poems and bitten coins

Handsome bastards
What do they care
If the Empire has withered
To half a peninsula
If the Queen has the King's Adviser
For her last and seventh lover

Their maps have not changed
Thighs still are white and warm
New boundaries have not altered
The marvellous landscape of bosoms
Nor a Congress relegated the red mouth
To a foreign district

Then let the ships disintegrate
At the edge of the land
The gulls will find another place to die
Let the home ports put on mourning

And little clerks Complete the necessary papers

But you swagger on, my enemy sailors
Go climbing in the lanes
Boasting your poems and bitten coins
Go knocking on all the windows of the town

At one place you will find my love Asleep and waiting And I cannot know how long She has dreamed of all of you

Oh remove my coat gently From her shoulders.

LETTER

How you murdered your family means nothing to me as your mouth moves across my body

And I know your dreams of crumbling cities and galloping horses of the sun coming too close and the night never ending

but these mean nothing to me beside your body

I know that outside a war is raging that you issue orders that babies are smothered and generals beheaded

but blood means nothing to me it does not disturb your flesh

tasting blood on your tongue does not shock me as my arms grow into your hair

Do not think I do not understand what happens after the troops have been massacred and the harlots put to the sword

And I write this only to rob you

that when one morning my head hangs dripping with the other generals from your house gate

that all this was anticipated and so you will know that it meant nothing to me.

PAGANS

With all Greek heroes swarming around my shoulders, I perverted the Golem formula and fashioned you from grass, using oaths of cruel children for my father's chant.

O pass by, I challenged you and gods in their approval rustled my hair with marble hands, and you approached slowly with all the pain of a thousand-year statue breaking into life.

I thought you perished at our first touch (for in my hand I held a fragment of a French cathedral and in the air a man spoke to birds and everywhere the dangerous smell of old Italian flesh).

But yesterday while children slew each other in a dozen games, I heard you wandering through grass and watched you glare (O Dante) where I had stood.

I know how our coarse grass mutilates your feet, how the city traffic echoes all his sonnets and how you lean for hours at the cemetery gates.

Dear friend, I have searched all night through each burnt paper, but I fear I will never find the formula to let you die.

SONG

My lover Peterson
He named me Goldenmouth
I changed him to a bird
And he migrated south

My lover Frederick Wrote sonnets to my breast I changed him to a horse And he galloped west

My lover Levite He named me Bitterfeast I changed him to a serpent And he wriggled east

My lover I forget He named me Death I changed him to a catfish And he swam north

My lover I imagine He cannot form a name I'll nestle in his fur And never be to blame.

PRAYER FOR SUNSET

The sun is tangled
in black branches,
raving like Absalom
between sky and water,
struggling through the dark terebinth
to commit its daily suicide.

Now, slowly, the sea consumes it,

leaving a glistening wound
on the water,
a red scar on the horizon;
In darkness
I set out for home,
terrified by the clash of wind on grass,
and the victory cry of weeds and water.

Is there no Joab for tomorrow night, with three darts and a great heap of stones?

BALLAD

He pulled a flower out of the moss and struggled past soldiers to stand at the cross.

He dipped the flower into a wound and hoped that a garden would grow in his hand.

The hanging man shivered at this gentle thrust and ripped his flesh from the flower's touch,

and said in a voice
they had not heard,
"Will petals find roots
in the wounds where I bleed?

"Will minstrels learn songs from a tongue which is torn and sick be made whole through rents in my skin?"

The people knew something like a god had spoken and stared with fear at the nails they had driven.

And they fell on the man with spear and knife

to honour the voice with a sacrifice.

O the hanging man had words for the crowd but he was tired and the prayers were loud.

He thought of islands alone in the sea and sea water bathing dark roots of each tree;

of tidal waves lunging over the land, over these crosses these hills and this man.

He thought of towns and fields of wheat, of men and this man but he could not speak.

O they hid two bodies behind a stone; day became night and the crowd went home.

And men from Golgotha assure me that still gardeners in vain pour blood in that soil.

SAINT CATHERINE STREET

Towering black nuns frighten us as they come lumbering down the tramway aisle amulets and talismans caught in careful fingers promising plagues for an imprudent glance So we bow our places away the price of an indulgence

How may we be saints and live in golden coffins
Who will leave on our stone shelves
pathetic notes for intervention
How may we be calm marble gods at ocean altars
Who will murder us for some high reason

There are no ordeals

Fire and water have passed from the wizards' hands

We cannot torture or be tortured

Our eyes are worthless to an inquisitor's heel

No prince will waste hot lead

or build a spiked casket for us

Once with a flaming belly she danced upon a green road Move your hand slowly through a cobweb and make drifting strings for puppets

Now the tambourines are dull at her lifted skirt boys study cigarette stubs no one is jealous of her body

We would bathe in a free river but the lepers in some spiteful gesture have suicided in the water and all the swollen quiet bodies crowd the other prey for a fearless thief or beggar

How can we love and pray when at our lovers' arms we hear the damp bells of them who once took bitter alms but now float quietly away

Will no one carve from our bodies a white cross for a wind-torn mountain or was that forsaken man's pain enough to end all passion

Are those dry faces and hands we see all the flesh there is of nuns Are they really clever non-excreting tapestries prepared by skillful eunuchs for our trembling friends

BALLAD

My lady was found mutilated in a Mountain Street boarding house. My lady was a tall slender love,

like one of Tennyson's girls, and you always imagined her erect on a thoroughbred in someone's private forest.

But there she was, naked on an old bed, knife slashes across her breasts, legs badly cut up: Dead two days.

They promised me an early conviction.

We will eavesdrop on the adolescents examining pocket-book covers in drugstores.

We will note the broadest smiles at torture scenes in movie houses.

We will watch the old men in Dominion Square follow with their eyes the secretaries from the Sun Life at five-thirty . . .

Perhaps the tabloids alarmed him.

Whoever he was the young man came alone to see the frightened blonde have her blouse ripped away by anonymous hands; the person guarded his mouth

who saw the poker blacken the eyes of the Roman prisoner; the old man pretended to wind his pocket-watch . . .

The man was never discovered.

There are so many cities!

so many knew of my lady and her beauty.

Perhaps he came from Toronto, a half-crazed man looking for some Sunday love; or a vicious poet stranded too long in Winnipeg; or a Nova Scotian fleeing from the rocks and preachers . . .

Everyone knew my lady
from the movies and art-galleries,
Body from Goldwyn. Botticelli had drawn her long limbs.
Rossetti the full mouth.
Ingres had coloured her skin.

She should not have walked so bravely through the streets.

After all, that was the Marian year, the year the rabbis emerged from their desert exile, the year the people were inflamed by tooth-paste ads . . .

We buried her in Spring-time.

The sparrows in the air
wept that we should hide with earth
the face of one so fair.

The flowers they were roses and such sweet fragrance gave that all my friends were lovers and we danced upon her grave.

SUMMER NIGHT

The moon dangling wet like a half-plucked eye was bright for my friends bred in close avenues of stone, and let us see too much.

The vast treeless field and huge wounded sky, opposing each other like continents, made us and our smoking fire quite irrelevant between their eternal attitudes.

We knew we were intruders. Worse. Intruders unnoticed and undespised.

Through orchards of black weeds with a sigh the river urged its silver flesh. From their damp nests bull-frogs croaked warnings, but to each other. And occasional birds, in a private grudge, flew noiselessly at the moon. What could we do? We ran naked into the river, but our flesh insulted the thick slow water. We tried to sit naked on the stones. but they were cold and we soon dressed. One squeezed a little human music from his box: mostly it was lost in the grass where one struggled in an ignorant embrace. One argued with the slight old hills and the goose-fleshed naked girls, I will not be old. One, for his protest, registered a sexual groan. And the girl in my arms broke suddenly away, and shouted for us all, Help! Help! I am alone. But then all subtlety was gone and it was stupid to be obvious before the field and sky, experts in simplicity. So we fled on the highways, in our armoured cars, back to air-conditioned homes,

THE FLIER

Do not arrange your bright flesh in the sun
Or shine your limbs, my love, toward this height
Where basket men and the lame must run, must run
And grasp at angels in their lovely flight
With stumps and hooks and artificial skin.
O there is nothing in your body's light
To grow us wings or teach the discipline
Which starvers know to calm the appetite.
Understand we might be content to beg
The clinic of your thighs against the night
Were there no scars of braces on his leg
Who sings and wrestles with them in our sight,
Then climbs the sky, a lover in their band.
Tell him your warmth, show him your gleaming hand.

POEM

I heard of a man who says words so beautifully that if he only speaks their name women give themselves to him.

If I am dumb beside your body while silence blossoms like tumors on our lips it is because I hear a man climb stairs and clear his throat outside our door.

THE FLY

In his black armour the house-fly marched the field of Freia's sleeping thighs, undisturbed by the soft hand which vaguely moved to end his exercise.

And it ruined my day—
this fly which never planned
to charm her or to please
should walk boldly on that ground
I tried so hard
to lay my trembling knees.

WARNING

If your neighbour disappears
O if your neighbour disappears
The quiet man who raked his lawn
The girl who always took the sun

Never mention it to your wife Never say at dinner time Whatever happened to that man Who used to rake his lawn

Never say to your daughter As you're walking home from church Funny thing about that girl I haven't seen her for a month

And if your son says to you Nobody lives next door They've all gone away Send him to bed with no supper

Because it can spread, it can spread And one fine evening coming home Your wife and daughter and son They'll have caught the idea and will be gone. She tells me a child built her house one Spring afternoon, but that the child was killed crossing the street.

She says she read it in the newspaper, that at the corner of this and this avenue a child was run down by an automobile.

Of course I do not believe her.

She has built the house herself,
hung the oranges and coloured beads in the doorways,
crayoned flowers on the walls.

She has made the paper things for the wind,
collected crooked stones for their shadows in the sun,
fastened yellow and dark balloons to the ceiling.

Each time I visit her she repeats the story of the child to me, I never question her. It is important to understand one's part in a legend.

I take my place among the paper fish and make-believe clocks, naming the flowers she has drawn, smiling while she paints my head on large clay coins, and making a sort of courtly love to her when she contemplates her own traffic death.

BESIDE THE SHEPHERD

Beside the shepherd dreams the beast Of laying down with lions. The youth puts away his singing reed And strokes the consecrated flesh.

Glory, Glory, shouts the grass, Shouts the brick, as from the cliff The gorgeous fallen sun Rolls slowly on the promised city.

Naked running through the mansion The boy with news of the Messiah Forgets the message for his father, Enjoying the marble against his feet.

Well finally it has happened, Imagines someone in another house, Staring one more minute out his window Before waking up his wife.



A KITE IS A VICTIM

A kite is a victim you are sure of. You love it because it pulls gentle enough to call you master, strong enough to call you fool; because it lives like a desperate trained falcon in the high sweet air, and you can always haul it down to tame it in your drawer.

A kite is a fish you have already caught in a pool where no fish come, so you play him carefully and long, and hope he won't give up, or the wind die down.

A kite is the last poem you've written, so you give it to the wind, but you don't let it go until someone finds you something else to do.

A kite is a contract of glory that must be made with the sun, so you make friends with the field the river and the wind, then you pray the whole cold night before, under the travelling cordless moon, to make you worthy and lyric and pure.

THE FLOWERS THAT I LEFT IN THE GROUND

The flowers that I left in the ground, that I did not gather for you, today I bring them all back, to let them grow forever, not in poems or marble, but where they fell and rotted.

And the ships in their great stalls, huge and transitory as heroes, ships I could not captain, today I bring them back to let them sail forever, not in model or ballad, but where they were wrecked and scuttled.

And the child on whose shoulders I stand, whose longing I purged with public, kingly discipline, today I bring him back to languish forever, not in confession or biography, but where he flourished, growing sly and hairy.

It is not malice that draws me away, draws me to renunciation, betrayal: it is weariness, I go for weariness of thee. Gold, ivory, flesh, love, God, blood, moon—I have become the expert of the catalogue.

My body once so familiar with glory, my body has become a museum: this part remembered because of someone's mouth, this because of a hand, this of wetness, this of heat.

Who owns anything he has not made? With your beauty I am as uninvolved as with horses' manes and waterfalls. This is my last catalogue. I breathe the breathless I love you, I love you—and let you move forever.

GIFT

You tell me that silence is nearer to peace than poems but if for my gift I brought you silence (for I know silence) you would say

This is not silence this is another poem and you would hand it back to me.

THERE ARE SOME MEN

There are some men who should have mountains to bear their names to time.

Grave-markers are not high enough or green, and sons go far away to lose the fist their father's hand will always seem.

I had a friend: he lived and died in mighty silence and with dignity, left no book, son, or lover to mourn.

Nor is this a mourning-song but only a naming of this mountain on which I walk, fragrant, dark, and softly white under the pale of mist. I name this mountain after him.

YOU ALL IN WHITE

Whatever cities are brought down, I will always bring you poems, and the fruit of orchards I pass by.

Strangers in your bed, excluded by our grief, listening to sleep-whispering, will hear their passion beautifully explained, and weep because they cannot kiss your distant face.

Lovers of my beloved, watch how my words put on her lips like clothes, how they wear her body like a rare shawl. Fruit is pyramided on the window-sill, songs flutter against the disappearing wall.

The sky of the city
is washed in the fire
of Lebanese cedar and gold.
In smoky filigree cages
the apes and peacocks fret.
Now the cages do not hold,
in the burning street man and animal
perish in each other's arms,
peacocks drown around the melting throne.

Is it the king who lies beside you listening? Is it Solomon or David or stuttering Charlemagne? Is that his crown in the suitcase beside your bed?

When we meet again, you all in white, I smelling of orchards, when we meet—

But now you awaken, and you are tired of this dream. Turn toward the sad-eyed man. He stayed by you all the night. You will have something to say to him.

I WONDER HOW MANY PEOPLE IN THIS CITY

I wonder how many people in this city live in furnished rooms.

Late at night when I look out at the buildings I swear I see a face in every window looking back at me, and when I turn away
I wonder how many go back to their desks and write this down.

GO BY BROOKS

Go by brooks, love, Where fish stare, Go by brooks, I will pass there.

Go by rivers, Where eels throng, Rivers, love, I won't be long.

Go by oceans, Where whales sail, Oceans, love, I will not fail.

TO A TEACHER

Hurt once and for all into silence.

A long pain ending without a song to prove it.

Who could stand beside you so close to Eden, when you glinted in every eye the held-high razor, shivering every ram and son?

And now the silent loony-bin, where the shadows live in the rafters like day-weary bats, until the turning mind, a radar signal, lures them to exaggerate mountain-size on the white stone wall your tiny limp.

How can I leave you in such a house? Are there no more saints and wizards to praise their ways with pupils, no more evil to stun with the slap of a wet red tongue?

Did you confuse the Messiah in a mirror and rest because he had finally come?

Let me cry Help beside you, Teacher. I have entered under this dark roof as fearlessly as an honoured son enters his father's house.

I HAVE NOT LINGERED IN EUROPEAN MONASTERIES

I have not lingered in European monasteries and discovered among the tall grasses tombs of knights who fell as beautifully as their ballads tell; I have not parted the grasses or purposefully left them thatched.

I have not released my mind to wander and wait in those great distances between the snowy mountains and the fishermen, like a moon, or a shell beneath the moving water.

I have not held my breath so that I might hear the breathing of God, or tamed my heartbeat with an exercise, or starved for visions.

Although I have watched him often I have not become the heron, leaving my body on the shore, and I have not become the luminous trout, leaving my body in the air.

I have not worshipped wounds and relics, or combs of iron, or bodies wrapped and burnt in scrolls.

I have not been unhappy for ten thousand years. During the day I laugh and during the night I sleep. My favourite cooks prepare my meals, my body cleans and repairs itself, and all my work goes well.

IT SWINGS, JOCKO

It swings, Jocko, but we do not want too much flesh in it. Make it like fifteenth-century prayers, love with no climax. constant love. and passion without flesh. (Draw those out, Jocko, like the long snake from Moses' arm; how he must have screamed to see a snake come out of him: no wonder he never felt holy: We want that scream tonight.) Lightly, lightly, I want to be hungry, hungry for food, for love, for flesh: I want my dreams to be of deprivation, gold thorns being drawn from my temples. If I am hungry then I am great, and I love like the passionate scientist who knows the sky is made only of wave-lengths. Now if you want to stand up, stand up lightly, we'll lightly march around the city. I'm behind you, man, and the streets are spread with chicks and palms, white branches and summer arms. We're going through on tiptoe, like monks before the Virgin's statue.

We built the city,
we drew the water through,
we hang around the rinks,
the bars, the festive halls,
like Brueghel's men.
Hungry, hungry.
Come back, Jocko,
bring it all back for the people here,
it's your turn now.

A cloud of grasshoppers rose from where we loved and passed before the sun.

I wondered what farms they would devour, what slave people would go free because of them.

I thought of pyramids overturned, of Pharaoh hanging by the feet, his body smeared—

Then my love drew me down to conclude what I had begun.

Later, clusters of fern apart, we lay.

A cloud of grasshoppers passed between us and the moon, going the other way,

each one fat and flying slow, not hungry for the leaves and ferns we rested on below.

The smell that burning cities give was in the air.

Battalions of the wretched, wild with holy promises, soon passed our sleeping place;

they ran among the ferns and grass.

I had two thoughts: to leave my love and join their wandering, join their holiness; or take my love to the city they had fled:

That impoverished world of boil-afflicted flesh and rotting fields could not tempt us from each other.

Our ordinary morning lust claimed my body first and made me sane.

I must not betray the small oasis where we lie, though only for a time.

It is good to live between a ruined house of bondage and a holy promised land.

A cloud of grasshoppers will turn another Pharaoh upside-down; slaves will build cathedrals for other slaves to burn.

It is good to hear the larvae rumbling underground, good to learn the feet of fierce or humble priests trample out the green.

YOU HAVE THE LOVERS

You have the lovers, they are nameless, their histories only for each other, and you have the room, the bed and the windows. Pretend it is a ritual.

Unfurl the bed, bury the lovers, blacken the windows, let them live in that house for a generation or two.

No one dares disturb them.

Visitors in the corridor tip-toe past the long closed door, they listen for sounds, for a moan, for a song: nothing is heard, not even breathing.

You know they are not dead, you can feel the presence of their intense love.

Your children grow up, they leave you,

Your children grow up, they leave you, they have become soldiers and riders. Your mate dies after a life of service.

Your mate dies after a life of service.

Who knows you? Who remembers you? But in your house a ritual is in progress:

it is not finished: it needs more people.

One day the door is opened to the lover's chamber.

The room has become a dense garden,

full of colours, smells, sounds you have never known.

The bed is smooth as a wafer of sunlight, in the midst of the garden it stands alone.

In the bed the lovers, slowly and deliberately and silently, perform the act of love.

Their eyes are closed,

as tightly as if heavy coins of flesh lay on them.

Their lips are bruised with new and old bruises. Her hair and his beard are hopelessly tangled.

When he puts his mouth against her shoulder

she is uncertain whether her shoulder

has given or received the kiss.

All her flesh is like a mouth.

He carries his fingers along her waist

and feels his own waist caressed.

She holds him closer and his own arms tighten around her. She kisses the hand beside her mouth.

It is his hand or her hand, it hardly matters, there are so many more kisses.

You stand beside the bed, weeping with happiness,

you carefully peel away the sheets

from the slow-moving bodies.

Your eyes are filled with tears, you barely make out the lovers.

As you undress you sing out, and your voice is magnificent because now you believe it is the first human voice heard in that room.

The garments you let fall grow into vines.

You climb into bed and recover the flesh.

You close your eyes and allow them to be sewn shut.

You create an embrace and fall into it.

There is only one moment of pain or doubt

as you wonder how many multitudes are lying beside your body,

but a mouth kisses and a hand soothes the moment away.

OWNING EVERYTHING

For your sake I said I will praise the moon, tell the colour of the river, find new words for the agony and ecstasy of gulls.

Because you are close, everything that men make, observe or plant is close, is mine: the gulls slowly writhing, slowly singing on the spears of wind; the iron gate above the river; the bridge holding between stone fingers her cold bright necklace of pearls.

The branches of shore trees, like trembling charts of rivers, call the moon for an ally to claim their sharp journeys out of the dark sky, but nothing in the sky responds. The branches only give a sound to miles of wind.

With your body and your speaking you have spoken for everything, robbed me of my strangerhood, made me one with the root and gull and stone, and because I sleep so near to you I cannot embrace or have my private love with them.

You worry that I will leave you.
I will not leave you.
Only strangers travel.
Owning everything,
I have nowhere to go.

THE PRIEST SAYS GOODBYE

My love, the song is less than sung when with your lips you take it from my tongue—nor can you seize this firm erotic grace and halt it tumbling into commonplace.

No one I know can set the hook to fix lust in a longing look where we can read from time to time the absolute ballet our bodies mime.

Harry can't, his face in Sally's crotch, nor Tom, who only loves when neighbours watch one mistakes the ballet for the chart, one hopes that gossip will perform like art.

And what of art? When passion dies friendship hovers round our flesh like flies, and we name beautiful the smells that corpses give and immortelles.

I have studied rivers: the waters rush like eternal fire in Moses' bush. Some things live with honour. I will see lust burn like fire in a holy tree.

Do not come with me. When I stand alone my voice sings out as though I did not own my throat. Abelard proved how bright could be the bed between the hermitage and nunnery.

You are beautiful. I will sing beside rivers where longing Hebrews cried. As separate exiles we can learn how desert trees ignite and branches burn.

At certain crossroads we will win the harvest of our discipline. Swollen flesh, minds fed on wilderness— Oh, what a blaze of love our bodies press!

THE CUCKOLD'S SONG

If this looks like a poem

I might as well warn you at the beginning that it's not meant to be one.

I don't want to turn anything into poetry.

I don't want to turn anything into poetry.

I know all about her part in it

but I'm not concerned with that right now.

This is between you and me.

Personally I don't give a damn who led who on:

in fact I wonder if I give a damn at all.

But a man's got to say something.

Anyhow you fed her 5 McKewan Ales,

took her to your room, put the right records on, and in an hour or two it was done.

I know all about passion and honour

but unfortunately this had really nothing to do with either:

oh there was passion I'm only too sure and even a little honour

but the important thing was to cuckold Leonard Cohen.

Hell, I might just as well address this to the both of you:

I haven't time to write anything else.

I've got to say my prayers.

I've got to wait by the window.

I repeat: the important thing was to cuckold Leonard Cohen.

I like that line because it's got my name in it.

What really makes me sick

is that everything goes on as it went before:

I'm still a sort of friend,

I'm still a sort of lover.

But not for long:

that's why I'm telling this to the two of you.

The fact is I'm turning to gold, turning to gold. It's a long process, they say, it happens in stages. This is to inform you that I've already turned to clay.

DEAD SONG

As I lay dead In my love-soaked bed, Angels came to kiss my head.

I caught one gown

And wrestled her down

To be my girl in death town.

She will not fly.

She has promised to die.

What a clever corpse am I!

MY LADY CAN SLEEP

My lady can sleep Upon a handkerchief Or if it be Fall Upon a fallen leaf.

I have seen the hunters Kneel before her hem— Even in her sleep She turns away from them.

The only gift they offer
Is their abiding grief—
I pull out my pockets
For a handkerchief or leaf.

TRAVEL

Loving you, flesh to flesh, I often thought Of travelling penniless to some mud throne Where a master might instruct me how to plot My life away from pain, to love alone In the bruiseless embrace of stone and lake.

Lost in the fields of your hair I was never lost Enough to lose a way I had to take; Breathless beside your body I could not exhaust The will that forbid me contract, vow, Or promise, and often while you slept I looked in awe beyond your beauty.

Now

I know why many men have stopped and wept Half-way between the loves they leave and seek, And wondered if travel leads them anywhere—Horizons keep the soft line of your cheek, The windy sky's a locket for your hair.

I HAVE TWO BARS OF SOAP

I have two bars of soap, the fragrance of almond, one for you and one for me. Draw the bath, we will wash each other.

I have no money,
I murdered the pharmacist.

And here's a jar of oil, just like in the Bible. Lie in my arms, I'll make your flesh glisten.

I have no money,
I murdered the perfumer.

Look through the window at the shops and people. Tell me what you desire, you'll have it by the hour.

I have no money, I have no money.

CELEBRATION

When you kneel below me and in both your hands hold my manhood like a sceptre,

When you wrap your tongue about the amber jewel and urge my blessing,

I understand those Roman girls who danced around a shaft of stone and kissed it till the stone was warm.

Kneel, love, a thousand feet below me, so far I can barely see your mouth and hands perform the ceremony,

Kneel till I topple to your back with a groan, like those gods on the roof that Samson pulled down.

BENEATH MY HANDS

Beneath my hands your small breasts are the upturned bellies of breathing fallen sparrows.

Wherever you move

I hear the sounds of closing wings
of falling wings.

I am speechless because you have fallen beside me because your eyelashes are the spines of tiny fragile animals.

I dread the time when your mouth begins to call me hunter.

When you call me close to tell me your body is not beautiful I want to summon the eyes and hidden mouths of stone and light and water to testify against you.

I want them to surrender before you the trembling rhyme of your face from their deep caskets.

When you call me close to tell me your body is not beautiful

I want my body and my hands
to be pools
for your looking and laughing.

AS THE MIST LEAVES NO SCAR

As the mist leaves no scar On the dark green hill, So my body leaves no scar On you, nor ever will.

When wind and hawk encounter, What remains to keep? So you and I encounter, Then turn, then fall to sleep.

As many nights endure Without a moon or star, So will we endure When one is gone and far.

I LONG TO HOLD SOME LADY

I long to hold some lady For my love is far away, And will not come tomorrow And was not here today.

There is no flesh so perfect As on my lady's bone, And yet it seems so distant When I am all alone:

As though she were a masterpiece In some castled town, That pilgrims come to visit And priests to copy down.

Alas, I cannot travel
To a love I have so deep
Or sleep too close beside
A love I want to keep.

But I long to hold some lady, For flesh is warm and sweet. Cold skeletons go marching Each night beside my feet.

NOW OF SLEEPING

Under her grandmother's patchwork quilt a calico bird's-eye view of crops and boundaries naming dimly the districts of her body sleeps my Annie like a perfect lady

Like ages of weightless snow on tiny oceans filled with light her eyelids enclose deeply a shade tree of birthday candles one for every morning until the now of sleeping

The small banner of blood kept and flown by Brother Wind long after the pierced bird fell down is like her red mouth among the squalls of pillow

Bearers of evil fancy
of dark intention and corrupting fashion
who come to rend the quilt
plough the eye and ground the mouth
will contend with mighty Mother Goose
and Farmer Brown and all good stories
of invincible belief
which surround her sleep
like the golden weather of a halo

Well-wishers and her true lover may stay to watch my Annie sleeping like a perfect lady under her grandmother's patchwork quilt but they must promise to whisper and to vanish by morning all but her one true lover.

SONG

When with lust I am smitten
To my books I then repair
And read what men have written
Of flesh forbid but fair

But in these saintly stories Of gleaming thigh and breast Of sainthood and its glories Alas I find no rest

For at each body rare
The saintly man disdains
I stare O God I stare
My heart is stained with stains

And casting down the holy tomes I lead my eyes to where The naked girls with silver combs Are combing out their hair

Then each pain my hermits sing Flies upward like a spark I live with the mortal ring Of flesh on flesh in dark

SONG

I almost went to bed without remembering the four white violets I put in the button-hole of your green sweater

and how I kissed you then and you kissed me shy as though I'd never been your lover

FOR ANNE

With Annie gone, Whose eyes to compare With the morning sun?

Not that I did compare, But I do compare Now that she's gone.

LAST DANCE AT THE FOUR PENNY

Layton, when we dance our freilach under the ghostly handkerchief, the miracle rabbis of Prague and Vilna resume their sawdust thrones, and angels and men, asleep so long in the cold palaces of disbelief, gather in sausage-hung kitchens to quarrel deliciously and debate the sounds of the Ineffable Name.

Layton, my friend Lazarovitch,
no Jew was ever lost
while we two dance joyously
in this French province,
cold and oceans west of the temple,
the snow canyoned on the twigs
like forbidden Sabbath manna;
I say no Jew was ever lost
while we weave and billow the handkerchief
into a burning cloud,
measuring all of heaven
with our stitching thumbs.

Reb Israel Lazarovitch,
you no-good Romanian, you're right!
Who cares whether or not
the Messiah is a Litvak?
As for the cynical,
such as we were yesterday,
let them step with us or rot
in their logical shrouds.
We've raised a bright white flag,

and here's our battered fathers' cup of wine, and now is music until morning and the morning prayers lay us down again, we who dance so beautifully though we know that freilachs end.

SUMMER HAIKU

For Frank and Marian Scott

Silence

and a deeper silence

when the crickets

hesitate

OUT OF THE LAND OF HEAVEN

For Marc Chagall

Out of the land of heaven
Down comes the warm Sabbath sun
Into the spice-box of earth.

The Queen will make every Jew her lover.

In a white silk coat
Our rabbi dances up the street,
Wearing our lawns like a green prayer-shawl,
Brandishing houses like silver flags.

Behind him dance his pupils, Dancing not so high And chanting the rabbi's prayer, But not so sweet.

And who waits for him
On a throne at the end of the street
But the Sabbath Queen.

Down go his hands
Into the spice-box of earth,
And there he finds the fragrant sun
For a wedding ring,

And draws her wedding finger through.

Now back down the street they go, Dancing higher than the silver flags. His pupils somewhere have found wives too, And all are chanting the rabbi's song And leaping high in the perfumed air.

Who calls him Rabbi?
Cart-horse and dogs call him Rabbi,
And he tells them:

The Queen makes every Jew her lover.

And gathering on their green lawns The people call him Rabbi, And fill their mouths with good bread And his happy song.

PRAYER OF MY WILD GRANDFATHER

God, God, God, someone of my family hated your love with such skill that you sang to him, your private voice violating his drum like a lost bee after pollen in the brain. He gave you his children opened on a table, and if a ram ambled in the garden you whispered nothing about that, nor held his killing hand.

It is no wonder fields and governments rotted, for soon you gave him all your range, drove all your love through that sting in his brain.

Nothing can flourish in your absence except our faith that you are proved through him who had his mind made mad and honey-combed. For G.C.S.

Between the mountains of spices the cities thrust up pearl domes and filigree spires. Never before was Jerusalem so beautiful.

In the sculptured temple how many pilgrims, lost in the measures of tambourine and lyre, kneeled before the glory of the ritual?

Trained in grace the daughters of Zion moved, not less splendid than the golden statuary, the bravery of ornaments about their scented feet.

Government was done in palaces. Judges, their fortunes found in law, reclining and cosmopolitan, praised reason. Commerce like a strong wild garden

flourished in the street.

The coins were bright, the crest on coins precise, new ones looked almost wet.

Why did Isaiah rage and cry, Jerusalem is ruined, your cities are burned with fire?

On the fragrant hills of Gilboa were the shepherds ever calmer, the sheep fatter, the white wool whiter?

There were fig trees, cedar, orchards where men worked in perfume all day long. New mines as fresh as pomegranates.

Robbers were gone from the roads, the highways were straight. There were years of wheat against famine. Enemies? Who has heard of a righteous state that has no enemies, but the young were strong, archers cunning, their arrows accurate.

Why then this fool Isaiah, smelling vaguely of wilderness himself, why did he shout,

Your country is desolate?

Now will I sing to my well-beloved a song of my beloved touching her hair which is pure metal black

no rebel prince can change to dross,
of my beloved touching her body
no false swearer can corrupt,
of my beloved touching her mind
no faithless counsellor can inflame,
of my beloved touching the mountains of spices
making them beauty instead of burning.

Now plunged in unutterable love Isaiah wanders, chosen, stumbling against the sculptured walls which consume their full age in his embrace and powder as he goes by. He reels beyond

the falling dust of spires and domes, obliterating ritual: the Holy Name, half-spoken, is lost on the cantor's tongue; their pages barren, congregations blink, agonized and dumb.

In the turns of his journey heavy trees he sleeps under mature into cinder and crumble: whole orchards join the wind like rising flocks of ravens.

The rocks go back to water, the water to waste. And while Isaiah gently hums a sound to make the guilty country uncondemned, all men, truthfully desolate and lonely, as though witnessing a miracle, behold in beauty the faces of one another.

THE GENIUS

For you

I will be a ghetto jew
and dance
and put white stockings
on my twisted limbs
and poison wells
across the town

For you

I will be an apostate jew
and tell the Spanish priest
of the blood vow
in the Talmud
and where the bones
of the child are hid

For you

I will be a banker jew
and bring to ruin
a proud old hunting king
and end his line

For you
I will be a Broadway jew
and cry in theatres
for my mother
and sell bargain goods
beneath the counter

For you I will be a doctor jew and search in all the garbage cans for foreskins to sew back again

For you
I will be a Dachau jew
and lie down in lime
with twisted limbs
and bloated pain
no mind can understand

LINES FROM MY GRANDFATHER'S JOURNAL

I am one of those who could tell every word the pin went through. Page after page I could imagine the scar in a thousand crowned letters. . . .

The dancing floor of the pin is bereft of angels. The Christians no longer want to debate. Jews have forgotten the best arguments. If I spelled out the Principles of Faith I would be barking on the moon.

I will never be free from this old tyranny: "I believe with a perfect faith. . . ."

Why make trouble? It is better to stutter than sing. Become like the early Moses: dreamless of Pharaoh. Become like Abram: dreamless of a longer name. Become like a weak Rachel: be comforted, not comfortless. . . .

There was a promise to me from a rainbow, there was a covenant with me after a flood drowned all my friends, inundated every field: the ones we had planted with food and the ones we had left untilled.

Who keeps promises except in business? We were not permitted to own land in Russia. Who wants to own land anywhere? I stare dumbfounded at the trees. Montreal trees, New York trees, Kovno trees. I never wanted to own one. I laugh at the scholars in real estate. . . .

Soldiers in close formation. Paratroops in a white Tel Aviv street. Who dares disdain an answer to the ovens? Any answer.

I did not like to see the young men stunted in the Polish ghetto. Their curved backs were not beautiful. Forgive

me, it gives me no pleasure to see them in uniform. I do not thrill to the sight of Jewish battalions.

But there is only one choice between ghettos and battalions, between whips and the weariest patriotic arrogance. . . .

I wanted to keep my body free as when it woke up in Eden. I kept it strong. There are commandments.

Erase from my flesh the marks of my own whip. Heal the razor slashes on my arms and throat. Remove the metal clamps from my fingers. Repair the bones I have crushed in the door.

Do not let me lie down with spiders. Do not let me encourage insects against my eyes. Do not let me make my living nest with worms or apply to my stomach the comb of iron or bind my genitals with cord.

It is strange that even now prayer is my natural language. . . .

Night, my old night. The same in every city, beside every lake. It ambushes a thicket of thrushes. It feeds on the houses and fields. It consumes my journals of poems.

The black, the loss of sun: it will always frighten me. It will always lead me to experiment. My journal is filled with combinations. I adjust prayers like the beads of an abacus. . . .

Thou. Reach into the vineyard of arteries for my heart. Eat the fruit of ignorance and share with me the mist and fragrance of dying.

Thou. Your fist in my chest is heavier than any bereavement, heavier than Eden, heavier than the Torah scroll. . . . The language in which I was trained: spoken in despair of priestliness.

This is not meant for any pulpit, not for men to chant or tell their children. Not beautiful enough.

But perhaps this can suggest a passion. Perhaps this passion could be brought to clarify, make more radiant, the standing Law.

Let judges secretly despair of justice: their verdicts will be more acute. Let generals secretly despair of triumph; killing will be defamed. Let priests secretly despair of faith: their compassion will be true. It is the tension. . . .

My poems and dictionaries were written at night from my desk or from my bed. Let them cry loudly for life at your hand. Let me be purified by their creation. Challenge me with purity.

O break down these walls with music. Purge from my flesh the need to sleep. Give me eyes for your darkness. Give me legs for your mountains. Let me climb to your face with my argument. If I am unprepared, unclean, lead me first to deserts full of jackals and wolves where I will learn what glory or humility the sand can teach, and from beasts the direction of my evil.

I did not wish to dishonour the scrolls with my logic, or David with my songs. In my work I meant to love you but my voice dissipated somewhere before your infinite regions. And when I gazed toward your eyes all the bristling hills of Judea intervened.

I played with the idea that I was the Messiah. . . .

I saw a man gouge out his eye, hold it in his fist until the nursing sky grew round it like a vast and loving face. With shafts of light
I saw him mine his wrist
until his blood filled out the rest of space
and settled softly on the world
like morning mist.

Who could resist such fireworks?

I wrestled hard in Galilee.
In the rubbish of pyramids
and strawless bricks
I felled my gentle enemy.
I destroyed his cloak of stars.
It was an insult to our human flesh,
worse than scars.

If we could face his work, submit it to annotation. . . .

You raged before them like the dreams of their old-time God. You smashed your body like tablets of the Law. You drove them from the temple counters. Your whip on their loins was a beginning of trouble. Your thorns in their hearts was an end to love.

O come back to our books.

Decorate the Law with human commentary.

Do not invoke a spectacular death.

There is so much to explain—

the miracles obscure your beauty. . . .

Doubting everything that I was made to write. My dictionaries groaning with lies. Driven back to Genesis. Doubting where every word began. What saint had shifted a meaning to illustrate a parable. Even beyond Genesis, until I stood outside my community, like the man who took too many steps on Sabbath. Faced a desolation which was unheroic, unbiblical, no dramatic beasts.

The real deserts are outside of tradition. . . .

The chimneys are smoking. The little wooden synagogues are filled with men. Perhaps they will stumble on my books of interpretation, useful to anyone but me.

The white tablecloths—whiter when you spill the wine. . . .

Desolation means no angels to wrestle. I saw my brothers dance in Poland. Before the final fire I heard them sing. I could not put away my scholarship or my experiments with blasphemy.

(In Prague their Golem slept.)

Desolation means no ravens, no black symbols. The carcass of the rotting dog cannot speak for you. The ovens have no tongue. The flames thud against the stone roofs. I cannot claim that sound.

Desolation means no comparisons. . . .

"Our needs are so manifold, we dare not declare them."

It is painful to recall a past intensity, to estimate your distance from the Belsen heap, to make your peace with numbers. Just to get up each morning is to make a kind of peace.

It is something to have fled several cities. I am glad that I could run, that I could learn twelve languages, that I escaped conscription with a trick, that borders were only

stones in an empty road, that I kept my journal.

Let me refuse solutions, refuse to be comforted. . . .

Tonight the sky is luminous. Roads of cloud repeat themselves like the ribs of some vast skeleton.

The easy gulls seem to embody a doomed conception of the sublime as they wheel and disappear into the darkness of the mountain. They leave the heart, they abandon the heart to the Milky Way, that drunkard's glittering line to a physical god. . . .

Sometimes, when the sky is this bright, it seems that if I could only force myself to stare hard at the black hills I could recover the gulls. It seems that nothing is lost that is not forsaken: The rich old treasures still glow in the sand under the tumbled battlement; wrapped in a starry flag a master-God floats through the firmament like a childless kite.

I will never be free from this tyranny.

A tradition composed of the exuviae of visions. I must resist it. It is like the garbage river through a city: beautiful by day and beautiful by night, but always unfit for bathing.

There were beautiful rules: a way to hear thunder, praise a wise man, watch a rainbow, learn of tragedy.

All my family were priests, from Aaron to my father. It was my honour to close the eyes of my famous teacher.

Prayer makes speech a ceremony. To observe this ritual in the absence of arks, altars, a listening sky: this is a rich discipline.

I stare dumbfounded at the trees. I imagine the scar in a thousand crowned letters. Let me never speak casually.

Inscription for the family spice-box:

Make my body a pomander for worms and my soul the fragrance of cloves.

Let the spoiled Sabbath leave no scent. Keep my mouth from foul speech.

Lead your priest from grave to vineyard. Lay him down where air is sweet.



WHAT I'M DOING HERE

I refuse the universal alibi

I do not know if the world has lied
I have lied
I do not know if the world has conspired against love
I have conspired against love
The atmosphere of torture is no comfort
I have tortured
Even without the mushroom cloud
still I would have hated
Listen
I would have done the same things
even if there were no death
I will not be held like a drunkard
under the cold tap of facts

Like an empty telephone booth passed at night and remembered like mirrors in a movie palace lobby consulted only on the way out like a nymphomaniac who binds a thousand into strange brotherhood I wait for each one of you to confess

THE HEARTH

The day wasn't exactly my own since I checked and found it on a public calendar. Tripping over many pairs of legs as I walked down the park I also learned my lust was not so rare a masterpiece.

Buildings actually built wars planned with blood and fought men who rose to generals deserved an honest thought as I walked down the park.

I came back quietly to your house which has a place on a street.

Not a single other house disappeared when I came back. You said some suffering had taught me that.

I'm slow to learn I began to speak of stars and hurricanes. Come here little Galileo you undressed my vision it's happier and easier by far or cities wouldn't be so big.

Later you worked over lace and I numbered many things your fingers and all fingers did. As if to pay me a sweet for my ardour on the rug you wondered in the middle of a stitch: Now what about those stars and hurricanes?

THE DRAWER'S CONDITION ON NOVEMBER 28, 1961

Is there anything emptier than the drawer where you used to store your opium? How like a black-eyed susan blinded into ordinary daisy is my pretty kitchen drawer! How like a nose sans nostrils is my bare wooden drawer! How like an eggless basket! How like a pool sans tortoise! My hand has explored my drawer like a rat in an experiment of mazes. Reader, I may safely say there's not an emptier drawer in all of Christendom!

THE SUIT

I am locked in a very expensive suit old elegant and enduring Only my hair has been able to get free but someone has been leaving their dandruff in it Now I will tell you all there is to know about optimism Each day in hubcap mirror in soup reflection in other people's spectacles I check my hair for an army of Alpinists for Indian rope trick masters for tangled aviators for dove and albatross for insect suicides for abominable snowmen I check my hair for aerialists of every kind Dedicated as an automatic elevator I comb my hair for possibilities I stick my neck out I lean illegally from locomotive windows and only for the barber do I wear a hat

INDICTMENT OF THE BLUE HOLE

January 28 1962

You must have heard me tonight I mentioned you 800 times

January 28 1962

My abandoned narcotics have abandoned me

January 28 1962

7:30 must have dug its pikes into your blue wrist

January 28 1962

I shoved the transistor up my ear

And putting down

g loaves of suicide (?)

2 razorblade pies

1 De Quincey hairnet

5 gasfilled Hampstead bedsitters (sic)

a collection of oil

2 eyelash garottes (sic)

6 lysol eye foods

he said with considerable charm and travail:

Is this all I give?

One lousy reprieve

at 2 in the morning?

This?

I'd rather have a job.

I WANTED TO BE A DOCTOR

The famous doctor held up Grandma's stomach. Cancer! Cancer! he cried out.

The theatre was brought low.

None of the internes thought about ambition.

Cancerl They all looked the other way.
They thought Cancer would leap out
and get them. They hated to be near.
This happened in Vilna in the Medical School.

Nobody could sit still.

They might be sitting beside Cancer.

Cancer was present.

Cancer had been let out of its bottle.

I was looking in the skylight.
I wanted to be a doctor.
All the internes ran outside.
The famous doctor held on to the stomach.

He was alone with Cancer.
Cancer! Cancer! Cancer!
He didn't care who heard or didn't hear.
It was his 87th Cancer.

ON HEARING A NAME LONG UNSPOKEN

Listen to the stories men tell of last year that sound of other places though they happened here

Listen to a name so private it can burn hear it said aloud and learn and learn

History is a needle for putting men asleep anointed with the poison of all they want to keep

Now a name that saved you has a foreign taste claims a foreign body froze in last year's waste

And what is living lingers while monuments are built then yields its final whisper to letters raised in gilt

But cries of stifled ripeness whip me to my knees I am with the falling snow falling in the seas

I am with the hunters hungry and shrewd and I am with the hunted quick and soft and nude

I am with the houses that wash away in rain and leave no teeth of pillars to rake them up again

Let men numb names scratch winds that blow listen to the stories but what you know you know

And knowing is enough for mountains such as these where nothing long remains houses walls or trees I don't believe the radio stations of Russia and America but I like the music and I like the solemn European voices announcing jazz I don't believe opium or money though they're hard to get and punished with long sentences I don't believe love in the midst of my slavery I do not believe I am a man sitting in a house on a treeless Argolic island I will forget the grass of my mother's lawn I know I will I will forget the old telephone number Fitzroy seven eight two oh I will forget my style I will have no style I hear a thousand miles of hungry static and the old clear water eating rocks I hear the bells of mules eating I hear the flowers eating the night under their folds Now a rooster with a razor plants the haemophilia gash across the soft black sky and now I know for certain I will forget my style Perhaps a mind will open in this world perhaps a heart will catch rain Nothing will heal and nothing will freeze but perhaps a heart will catch rain

America will have no style Russia will have no style It is happening in the twenty-eighth year of my attention I don't know what will become of the mules with their lady eyes or the old clear water or the giant rooster The early morning greedy radio eats the governments one by one the languages the poppy fields one by one Beyond the numbered band a silence develops for every style for the style I laboured on an external silence like the space between insects in a swarm electric unremembering and it is aimed at us (I am sleepy and frightened) it makes toward me brothers

GOEBBELS ABANDONS HIS NOVEL AND JOINS THE PARTY

His last love poem broke in the harbour where swearing blondes loaded scrap

into rusted submarines.

Out in the sun he was surprised

to find himself lustless

as a wheel.

More simple than money he sat in some spilled salt

and wondered if he would find again the scars of lampposts

ulcers of wrought-iron fence.

He remembered perfectly

how he sprung

his father's heart attack

and left his mother

in a pit

memory white from loss of guilt.

Precision in the sun

the elevators

the pieces of iron broke whatever thous

his pain had left

like a whistle breaks

a gang of sweating men. Ready to join the world

yes yes ready to marry

convinced pain a matter of choice

a Doctor of Reason

he began to count the ships
decorate the men.
Will dreams threaten
this discipline
will favourite hair favourite thighs
last life's sweepstake winners
drive him to adventurous cafés?
Ah my darling pupils
do you think there exists a hand
so bestial in beauty so ruthless
that can switch off
his religious electric Exlax light?

HITLER THE BRAIN-MOLE

Hitler the brain-mole looks out of my eyes
Goering boils ingots of gold in my bowels
My Adam's Apple bulges with the whole head of Goebbels
No use to tell a man he's a Jew
I'm making a lampshade out of your kiss
Confess! confess!
is what you demand

although you believe you're giving me everything

IT USES US!

Come upon this heap exposed to camera leer: would you snatch a skull for midnight wine, my dear?

Can you wear a cape claim these burned for you or is this death unusable alien and new?

In our leaders' faces (albeit they deplore the past) can you read how they love Freedom more?

In my own mirror their eyes beam at me: my face is theirs, my eyes burnt and free.

Now you and I are mounted on this heap, my dear: from this height we thrill as boundaries disappear.

Kiss me with your teeth.

All things can be done whisper museum ovens of a war that Freedom won.

MY TEACHER IS DYING

Martha they say you are gentle No doubt you labour at it Why is it I see you leaping into unmade beds strangling the telephone Why is it I see you hiding your dirty nylons in the fireplace Martha talk to me My teacher is dying His laugh is already dead that put cartilage between the bony facts Now they rattle loud Martha talk to me Mountain Street is dying Apartment fifteen is dying Apartment seven and eight are dying All the rent is dying Martha talk to me I wanted all the dancers' bodies to inhabit like his old classroom where everything that happened was tender and important Martha talk to me Toss out the fake Jap silence Scream in my kitchen logarithms laundry lists anything Talk to me My radio is falling to pieces My betrayals are so fresh they still come with explanations

Martha talk to me What sordid parable do you teach by sleeping Talk to me for my teacher is dying The cars are parked on both sides of the street some facing north some facing south I draw no conclusions Martha talk to me I could burn my desk when I think how perfect we are you asleep me finishing the last of the Saint Emilion Talk to me gentle Martha dreaming of percussions massacres hair pinned to the ceiling I'll keep your secret Let's tell the milkman we have decided to marry our rooms

FOR MY OLD LAYTON

His pain, unowned, he left in paragraphs of love, hidden, like a cat leaves shit under stones, and he crept out in day, clean, arrogant, swift, prepared to hunt or sleep or starve.

The town saluted him with garbage which he interpreted as praise for his muscular grace. Orange peels, cans, discarded guts rained like ticker-tape. For a while he ruined their nights by throwing his shadow in moon-full windows as he spied on the peace of gentle folk.

Once he envied them. Now with a happy screech he bounded from monument to monument in their most consecrated plots, drunk to know how close he lived to the breathless in the ground, drunk to feel how much he loved the snoring mates, the old, the children of the town.

Until at last, like Timon, tired of human smell, resenting even his own shoe-steps in the wilderness, he chased animals, wore live snakes, weeds for bracelets. When the sea pulled back the tide like a blanket he slept on stone cribs, heavy, dreamless, the salt-bright atmosphere like an automatic laboratory building crystals in his hair.

FINALLY I CALLED

Finally I called the people I didn't want to hear from After the third ring I said I'll let it ring five more times then what will I do The telephone is a fine instrument but I never learned to work it very well Five more rings and I'll put the receiver down I know where it goes I know that much The telephone was black with silver rims The booth was cozier than the drugstore There were a lot of creams and scissors and tubes I needed for my body I was interested in many coughdrops I believe the drugstore keeper hated his telephone and people like me who ask for change so politely I decided to keep to the same street and go into the fourth drugstore and call them again

THE ONLY TOURIST IN HAVANA TURNS HIS THOUGHTS HOMEWARD

Come, my brothers, let us govern Canada, let us find our serious heads. let us dump asbestos on the White House, let us make the French talk English, not only here but everywhere, let us torture the Senate individually until they confess, let us purge the New Party, let us encourage the dark races so they'll be lenient when they take over, let us make the CBC talk English, let us all lean in one direction and float down to the coast of Florida. let us have tourism. let us flirt with the enemy, let us smelt pig-iron in our back yards, let us sell snow to under-developed nations, (Is it true one of our national leaders was a Roman Catholic?) let us terrorize Alaska. let us unite Church and State. let us not take it lying down, let us have two Governor Generals at the same time. let us have another official language, let us determine what it will be.

104

let us give a Canada Council Fellowship
to the most original suggestion,
let us teach sex in the home
to parents,
let us threaten to join the U.S.A.
and pull out at the last moment,
my brothers, come,
our serious heads are waiting for us somewhere
like Gladstone bags abandoned
after a coup d'état,
let us put them on very quickly,
let us maintain a stony silence
on the St. Lawrence Seaway.

Havana April 1961

MILLENNIUM

This could be my little
book about love
if I wrote it—
but my good demon said:
"Lay off documents!"
Everybody was watching me
burn my books—
I swung my liberty torch
happy as a gestapo brute;
the only thing I wanted to save

was a scar
a burn or two—
but my good demon said:
"Lay off documents!
The fire's not important!"
The pile was safely blazing.
I went home to take a bath.
I phoned my grandmother.
She is suffering from arthritis.

mu hours al line

"Keep well," I said, "don't mind the pain."

"You neither," she said.

Hours later I wondered did she mean don't mind my pain or don't mind her pain?

Whereupon my good demon said:

"Is that all you can do?"

Well was it?
Was it all I could do?
There was the old lady
eating alone, thinking about
Prince Albert, Flanders Field,

Kishenev, her fingers too sore
for Tv knobs;
but how could I get there?
The books were gone
my address lists—
My good demon said again:
"Lay off documents!
You know how to get there!"
And suddenly I did!
I remembered it from memory!
I found her
poring over the royal family tree,
"Grandma,"

I almost said,
"you've got it upside down—"
"Take a look," she said,
"it only goes to George V."
"That's far enough
you sweet old blood!"
"You're right!" she sang
and burned the
London Illustrated Souvenir

I did not understand
the day it was
till I looked outside
and saw a fire in every
window on the street
and crowds of humans
crazy to talk
and cats and dogs and birds
smiling at each other!





ALEXANDER TROCCHI, PUBLIC JUNKIE, PRIEZ POUR NOUS

Who is purer
more simple than you?
Priests play poker with the burghers,
police in underwear
leave Crime at the office,
our poets work bankers' hours
retire to wives and fame-reports.

The spike flashes in your blood permanent as a silver lighthouse.

I'm apt to loaf
in a coma of newspapers,
avoid the second-hand bodies
which cry to be catalogued.
I dream I'm
a divine right Prime Minister,
I abandon plans for bloodshed in Canada.
I accept an O.B.E.

Under hard lights
with doctors' instruments
you are at work
in the bathrooms of the city,
changing The Law.

I tend to get distracted by hydrogen bombs, by Uncle's disapproval of my treachery to the men's clothing industry. I find myself believing public clocks, taking advice from the Dachau generation.

The spike hunts constant as a compass.
You smile like a Navajo discovering American oil on his official slum wilderness, a surprise every half hour.

I'm afraid I sometimes forget my lady's pretty little blond package is an amateur time-bomb set to fizzle in my middle-age. I forget the Ice Cap, the pea-minds, the heaps of expensive teeth.

You don a false nose

line up twice for the Demerol dole;
you step out of a tourist group
shoot yourself on the steps of the White House,
you try to shoot the big arms
of the Lincoln Memorial;
through a flaw in their lead houses
you spy on scientists,
stumble on a cure for scabies;
you drop pamphlets from a stolen jet:
"The Truth about Junk";
you pirate a national TV commercial
shove your face against
the window of the living-room
insist that healthy skin is grey.

A little blood in the sink
Red cog-wheels
shaken from your arm
punctures inflamed
like a roadmap showing cities
over 10,000 pop.

Your arms tell me you have been reaching into the coke machine for strawberries, you have been humping the thorny crucifix you have been piloting Mickey Mouse balloons through the briar patch, you have been digging for grins in the tooth-pile.

Bonnie Queen Alex Eludes Montreal Hounds Famous Local Love Scribe Implicated

Your purity drives me to work.

I must get back to lust and microscopes, experiments in embalming, resume the census of my address book.

You leave behind you a fanatic to answer RCMP questions.

THREE GOOD NIGHTS

Out of some simple part of me which I cannot use up
I took a blessing for the flowers

tightening in the night like fists of jealous love

like knots

no one can undo without destroying

The new morning gathered me

in blue mist

like dust under a wedding gown

Then I followed the day

like a cloud of heavy sheep

after the judas

up a blood-ringed ramp

into the terror of every black building

Ten years sealed journeys unearned dreams

Laughter meant to tempt me into old age

spilled for friends stars unknown flesh mules sea Instant knowledge of bodies material and spirit

which slowly learned would have made death smile

Stories turning into theories

which begged only for the telling and retelling

Girls sailing over the blooms of my mouth

with a muscular triangular kiss ordinary mouth to secret mouth

Nevertheless my homage sticky flowers

rabbis green and red serving the sun like platters

In the end you offered me the dogma you taught me to disdain and I good pupil disdained it

I fell under the diagrammed fields like the fragment of a perfect statue layers of cities build upon I saw you powerful I saw you happy that I could not live only for harvesting that I was a true citizen of the slow earth

Light and Splendour in the sleeping orchards entering the trees like a silent movie wedding procession entering the arches of branches for the sake of love only From a hill I watched the apple blossoms breathe the silver out of the night like fish eating the spheres of air out of the river So the illumined night fed the sleeping orchards entering the vaults of branches like a holy procession Long live the Power of Eyes Long live the invisible steps men can read on a mountain Long live the unknown machine or heart which by will or accident pours with victor's grace endlessly perfect weather on the perfect creatures the world grows

Montreal July 1964

ON THE SICKNESS OF MY LOVE

Poems! break out! break my head! What good's a skull? Help! help! I need you!

She is getting old. Her body tells her everything. She has put aside cosmetics. She is a prison of truth.

Make her get up!
dance the seven veils!
Poems! silence her body!
Make her friend of mirrors!

Do I have to put on my cape? wander like the moon over skies & skies of flesh to depart again in the morning?

Can't I pretend she grows prettier? be a convict? Can't my power fool me? Can't I live in poems?

Hurry up! poems! lies! Damn your weak music! You've let arthritis in! You're no poem you're a visa.

FOR MARIANNE

It's so simple to wake up beside your ears and count the pearls with my two heads

It takes me back to blackboards and I'm running with Jane and seeing the dog run

It makes it so easy to govern this country I've already thought up the laws I'll work hard all day in Parliament

Then let's go to bed right after supper Let's sleep and wake up all night

THE FAILURE OF A SECULAR LIFE

The pain-monger came home from a hard day's torture.

He came home with his tongs. He put down his black bag.

His wife hit him with an open nerve and a cry the trade never heard.

He watched her real-life Dachau, knew his career was ruined.

Was there anything else to do? He sold his bag and tongs,

went to pieces. A man's got to be able to bring his wife something.

MY MENTORS

My rabbi has a silver buddha, my priest has a jade talisman. My doctor sees a marvellous omen in our prolonged Indian summer.

My rabbi, my priest stole their trinkets from shelves in the holy of holies. The trinkets cannot be eaten. They wonder what to do with them.

My doctor is happy as a pig although he is dying of exposure. He has finished his big book on the phallus as a phallic symbol.

My zen master is a grand old fool.

I caught him worshipping me yesterday, so I made him stand in a foul corner with my rabbi, my priest, and my doctor.

HEIRLOOM

The torture scene developed under a glass bell such as might protect an expensive clock. I almost expected a chime to sound as the tongs were applied and the body jerked and fainted calm. All the people were tiny and rosy-cheeked and if I could have heard a cry of triumph or pain it would have been tiny as the mouth that made it or one single note of a music box. The drama bell was mounted like a gigantic baroque pearl

on a wedding ring or brooch or locket.

I know you feel naked, little darling.
I know you hate living in the country
and can't wait until the shiny magazines

come every week and every month.

Look through your grandmother's house again.

There is an heirloom somewhere.

THE PROJECT

Evidently they need a lot of blood for these tests. I let them take all they wanted. The hospital was cool and its atmosphere of order encouraged me to persist in my own projects.

I always wanted to set fire to your houses. I've been in them. Through the front doors and the back. I'd like to see them burn slowly so I could visit many and peek in the falling windows. I'd like to see what happens to those white carpets you pretended to be so careless about. I'd like to see a white telephone melting.

We don't want to trap too many inside because the streets have got to be packed with your poor bodies screaming back and forth. I'll be comforting. Oh dear, pyjama flannel seared right on to the flesh. Let me pull it off.

It seems to me they took too much blood. Probably selling it on the side. The little man's white frock was smeared with blood. Little men like that keep company with blood. See them in abattoirs and assisting in human experiments.

- -When did you last expose yourself?
- —Sunday morning for a big crowd in the lobby of the Queen Elizabeth.
 - -Funny. You know what I mean.
 - -Expose myself to what?
 - -A woman.
 - -Ah.

I narrowed my eyes and whispered in his yellow ear.

- -You better bring her in too.
- -And it's still free?

Of course it was still free. Not counting the extra blood they stole. Prevent my disease from capturing the entire city. Help this man. Give him all possible Judeo-Christian help.

Fire would be best. I admit that. Tie firebrands between

the foxes and chase them through your little gardens. A rosy sky would improve the view from anywhere. It would be a mercy. Oh, to see the roofs devoured and the beautiful old level of land rising again.

The factory where I work isn't far from the hospital. Same architect as a matter of fact and the similarities don't end there. It's easier to get away with lying down in the hospital. However we have our comforts in the factory.

The foreman winked at me when I went back to my machine. He loved his abundant nature. Me new at the job and he'd actually given me time off. I really enjoy the generosity of slaves. He came over to inspect my work.

- -But this won't do at all.
- -No?
- -The union said you were an experienced operator.
- -I am. I am.
- -This is no seam.
- -Now that you mention it.
- -Look here.

He took a fresh trouser and pushed in beside me on the bench. He was anxious to demonstrate the only skill he owned. He arranged the pieces under the needle. When he was halfway down the leg and doing very nicely I brought my foot down on the pedal beside his. The unexpected acceleration sucked his fingers under the needle.

Another comfort is the Stock Room.

It is large and dark and filled with bundles and rolls of material.

- -But shouldn't you be working?
- -No, Mary, I shouldn't.
- -Won't Sam miss you?
- -You see he's in the hospital. Accident.

Mary runs the Cafeteria and the Boss exposes himself to her regularly. This guarantees her the concession. I feel the disease raging in my blood. I expect my saliva to be discoloured.

-Yes, Mary, real cashmere. Three hundred dollar suits.

The Boss has a wife to whom he must expose himself every once in a while. She has her milkmen. The city is orderly. There are white bottles standing in front of a million doors. And there are Conventions. Multitudes of bosses sharing the pleasures of exposure.

I shall go mad. They'll find me at the top of Mount Royal impersonating Genghis Khan. Seized with laughter and pus.

-Very soft, Mary. That's what they pay for.

Fire would be best. Flames. Bright windows. Two cars exploding in each garage. But could I ever manage it. This way is slower. More heroic in a way. Less dramatic of course. But I have an imagination.

HYDRA 1963

The stony path coiled around me and bound me to the night.

A boat hunted the edge of the sea under a hissing light.

Something soft involved a net and bled around a spear.

The blunt death, the cumulus jet—
I spoke to you, I thought you near!

Or was the night so black that something died alone? A man with a glistening back beat the food against a stone.

ALL THERE IS TO KNOW ABOUT ADOLPH EICHMANN

EYES:	Medium
HAIR;	Medium
WEIGHT:	Medium
HEIGHT:	Medium
DISTINGUISHING FEATURES:	None
NUMBER OF FINGERS:	Ten
NUMBER OF TOES:	Ten
INTELLIGENCE:	Medium
What did you expect?	

Talons?

Oversize incisors?

Green saliva?

Madness?

THE NEW LEADER

When he learned that his father had the oven contract, that the smoke above the city, the clouds as warm as skin, were his father's manufacture, he was freed from love, his emptiness was legalized.

Hygienic as a whip his heart drove out the alibis of devotion, free as a storm-severed bridge, useless and pure as drowned alarm clocks, he breathed deeply, gratefully in the polluted atmosphere, and he announced: My father had the oven contract, he loved my mother and built her houses in the countryside.

When he learned his father had the oven contract he climbed a hillock of eyeglasses, he stood on a drift of hair, he hated with great abandon the king cripples and their mothers, the husbands and wives, the familiar sleep, the decent burdens.

Dancing down Ste Catherine Street he performed great surgery on a hotel of sleepers. The windows leaked like a broken meat freezer. His hatred blazed white on the salted driveways. He missed nobody but he was happy he'd taken one hunded and fifty women in moonlight back in ancient history.

He was drunk at last, drunk at last, after years of threading history's crushing daisy-chain with beauty after beauty. His father had raised the thigh-shaped clouds which smelled of salesmen, gipsies and violinists. With the certainty and genital pleasure of revelation he knew, he could not doubt, his father was the one who had the oven contract.

Drunk at last, he hugged himself, his stomach clean, cold and drunk, the sky clean but only for him, free to shiver, free to hate, free to begin.

I once believed a single line in a Chinese poem could change forever how blossoms fell and that the moon itself climbed on the grief of concise weeping men to journey over cups of wine I thought invasions were begun for crows to pick at a skeleton dynasties sown and spent to serve the language of a fine lament I thought governors ended their lives as sweetly drunken monks telling time by rain and candles instructed by an insect's pilgrimage across the page-all this so one might send an exile's perfect letter to an ancient home-town friend

I chose a lonely country
broke from love
scorned the fraternity of war

I polished my tongue against the pumice moon
floated my soul in cherry wine
a perfumed barge for Lords of Memory
to languish on to drink to whisper out
their store of strength
as if beyond the mist along the shore
their girls their power still obeyed
like clocks wound for a thousand years

I waited until my tongue was sore

Brown petals wind like fire around my poems
I aimed them at the stars but
like rainbows they were bent
before they sawed the world in half
Who can trace the canyoned paths
cattle have carved out of time
wandering from meadowlands to feasts
Layer after layer of autumn leaves
are swept away
Something forgets us perfectly

A MIGRATING DIALOGUE

He was wearing a black moustache and leather hair. We talked about the gipsies.

Don't bite your nails, I told him.
Don't eat carpets.
Be careful of the rabbits.
Be cute.
Don't stay up all night watching parades on the Very Very Very Late Show.
Don't ka-ka in your uniform.

And what about all the good generals, the fine old aristocratic fighting men, the brave Junkers, the brave Rommels, the brave von Silverhaired Ambassadors who resigned in '41?

Wipe that smirk off your face.
Captain Marvel signed the whip contract.
Joe Palooka manufactured whips.
Li'l Abner packed the whips in cases.
The Katzenjammer Kids thought up experiments.
Mere cogs.

Peekaboo Miss Human Soap.

It never happened.

O castles on the Rhine.

O blond SS.

Don't believe everything you see in museums.

I said WIPE THAT SMIRK including the mouth-foam of superior disgust.

I don't like the way you go to work every morning. How come the buses still run?

How come they're still making movies?

I believe with a perfect faith in the Second World War. I am convinced that it happened.
I am not so sure about the First World War.
The Spanish Civil War—maybe.
I believe in gold teeth.
I believe in Churchill.
Don't tell me we dropped fire into cribs.
I think you are exaggerating.
The Treaty of Westphalia has faded like a lipstick smudge on the Blarney Stone.
Napoleon was a sexy brute.
Hiroshima was Made in Japan out of paper.
I think we should let sleeping ashes lie.
I believe with a perfect faith in all the history
I remember, but it's getting harder and harder

to remember much history.

There is sad confetti sprinkling

from the windows of departing trains.

I let them go. I cannot remember them.

They hoot mournfully out of my daily life.

I forget the big numbers,

I forget what they mean.

I apologize to the special photogravure section of a 1945 newspaper which began my education.

I apologize left and right.

I apologize in advance to all the folks in this fine wide audience for my tasteless closing remarks.

Braun, Raubal and him
Hitler and his ladies
(I have some experience in these matters),
these three humans,
I can't get their nude and loving bodies out of my mind.

THE BUS

I was the last passenger of the day, I was alone on the bus. I was glad they were spending all that money just getting me up Eighth Avenue. Driver! I shouted, it's you and me tonight, let's run away from this big city to a smaller city more suitable to the heart, let's drive past the swimming pools of Miami Beach, you in the driver's seat, me several seats back, but in the racial cities we'll change places so as to show how well you've done up North, and let us find ourselves some tiny American fishing village in unknown Florida and park right at the edge of the sand, a huge bus pointing out, metallic, painted, solitary, with New York plates.

THE REST IS DROSS

We meet at a hotel with many quarters for the radio surprised that we've survived as lovers not each other's but lovers still with outrageous hope and habits in the craft which embarrass us slightly as we let them be known the special caress the perfect inflammatory word the starvation we do not tell about We do what only lovers can make a gift out of necessity Looking at our clothes folded over the chair I see we no longer follow fashion and we own our own skins God I'm happy we've forgotten nothing and can love each other for years in the world

HOW THE WINTER GETS IN

I ask you where you want to go you say nowhere but your eyes make a wish An absent chiropractor you stroke my wrist I'm almost fooled into greasy circular snores when I notice your eyes sounding the wall for dynamite points like a doctor at work on a TB chest Nowhere you say again in a kiss go to sleep First tell me your wish Your lashes startle on my skin like a seismograph An airliner's perishing drone pulls the wall off our room like an old Band-aid The winter comes in and the eyes I don't keep tie themselves to a journey

Ways Mills November 1963

like wedding tin cans

PROPAGANDA

The coherent statement was made by father, the gent with spats to keep his shoes secret. It had to do with the nature of religion and the progress of lust in the twentieth century. I myself have several statements of a competitive coherence which I intend to spread around at no little expense. I love the eternal moment, for instance. My father used to remark, doffing his miniature medals, that there is a time that is ripe for everything. A little extravagant, Dad, I guess, judging by values. Oh well, he'd say, and the whole world might have been the address.

OPIUM AND HITLER

Several faiths bid him leap opium and Hitler let him sleep.

A Negress with an appetite helped him think he wasn't white.

Opium and Hitler made him sure the world was glass. There was no cure

for matter disarmed as this: the state rose on a festered kiss.

Once a dream nailed on the sky a summer sun while it was high.

He wanted a blindfold of skin, he wanted the afternoon to begin.

One law broken nothing held. The world was wax, his to mould.

No! He fumbled for his history dose. The sun came loose, his woman close.

Lost in a darkness their bodies would reach, the Leader started a racial speech.

FOR ANYONE DRESSED IN MARBLE

The miracle we all are waiting for is waiting till the Parthenon falls down and House of Birthdays is a house no more and fathers are unpoisoned by renown. The medals and the records of abuse can't help us on our pilgrimage to lust, but like whips certain perverts never use, compel our flesh in paralysing trust.

I see an orphan, lawless and serene, standing in a corner of the sky, body something like bodies that have been, but not the scar of naming in his eye.

Bred close to the ovens, he's burnt inside.

Light, wind, cold, dark—they use him like a bride.

FOLK

flowers for hitler the summer yawned flowers all over my new grass and here is a little village they are painting it for a holiday here is a little church here is a school here are some doggies making love the flags are bright as laundry flowers for hitler the summer yawned

I HAD IT FOR A MOMENT

I had it for a moment
I knew why I must thank you

I saw powerful governing men in black suits I saw them undressed in the arms of young mistresses the men more naked than the naked women the men crying quietly

No that is not it
I'm losing why I must thank you
which means I'm left with pure longing

How old are you

Do you like your thighs

I had it for a moment

I had a reason for letting the picture
of your mouth destroy my conversation

Something on the radio the end of a Mexican song I saw the musicians getting paid they are not even surprised they knew it was only a job

Now I've lost it completely
A lot of people think you are beautiful
How do I feel about that
I have no feeling about that

I had a wonderful reason for not merely courting you

It was tied up with the newspapers

I saw secret arrangements in high offices

I saw men who loved their worldliness even though they had looked through big electric telescopes they still thought their worldliness was serious not just a hobby a taste a harmless affectation they thought the cosmos listened I was suddenly fearful one of their obscure regulations could separate us

I was ready to beg for mercy
Now I'm getting into humiliation
I've lost why I began this
I wanted to talk about your eyes
I know nothing about your eyes
and you've noticed how little I know
I want you somewhere safe
far from high offices

I'll study you later So many people want to cry quietly beside you

July 4, 1963

INDEPENDENCE

Tonight I will live with my new white skin which I found under a millennium of pith clothing None of the walls jump when I call them Trees smirked you're one of us now when I strode through the wheat in my polished boots Out of control awake and newly naked I lie back in the luxury of my colour Somebody is marching for me at me to me Somebody has a flag I did not invent I think the Aztecs have not been sleeping Magic moves from hand to hand like money I thought we were the bank the end of the line New York City was just a counter the crumpled bill passed across I thought that heroes meant us I have been reading too much history and writing too many history books Magic moves from hand to hand and I'm broke Someone stops the sleepwalker in the middle of the opera and pries open his fist finger by finger and kisses him goodbye I think the Aztecs have not been sleeping no matter what I taught the children I think no one has ever slept but he who gathers the past into stories Magic moves from hand to hand Somebody is smiling in one of our costumes Somebody is stepping out of a costume I think that is what invisible means

July 4, 1963

THE HOUSE

Two hours off the branch and burnt the petals of the gardenia curl and deepen in the yellow-brown of waste

Your body wandered close
I didn't raise my hand to reach
the distance was so familiar
Our house is happy with its old furniture
the black Venetian bed stands on gold claws
guarding the window

Don't take the window away
and leave a hole in the stark mountains
The clothesline and the grey clothespins
would make you think we're going to be together always

Last night I dreamed you were Buddha's wife and I was a historian watching you sleep What vanity

A girl told me something beautiful Very early in the morning she saw an orange-painted wooden boat come into port over the smooth sea The cargo was hay
The boat rode low under the weight She couldn't see the sailors but on top of all the hay sat a monk Because of the sun behind he seemed to be sitting in a fire like that famous photograph

I forgot to tell you the story
She surprised me by telling it
and I wanted her for ten minutes
I really enjoyed the gardenia from Sophia's courtyard

You put it on my table two hours ago and I can smell it everywhere in the house Darling I attach nothing to it

July 4, 1963

THE LISTS

Strafed by the Milky Way vaccinated by a snarl of clouds lobotomized by the bore of the moon he fell in a heap some woman's smell smeared across his face a plan for Social Welfare rusting in a trouser cuff

From five to seven tall trees doctored him mist roamed on guard

Then it began again the sun stuck a gun in his mouth the wind started to skin him Give up the Plan give up the Plan echoing among its scissors

The women who elected him performed erotic calisthenics above the stock-reports of every hero's fame

Out of the corner of his stuffed eye etched in minor metal under his letter of the alphabet he clearly saw his tiny name

Then a museum slid under his remains like a shovel

In many movies I came upon an idol I would not touch, whose forehead jewel was safe, or if stolen-mourned. Truly, I wanted the lost forbidden city to be the labyrinth for wise technicolor birds, and every human riddle the love-fed champion pursued I knew was bad disguise for greed. I was with the snake who made his nest in the voluptuous treasure, I dropped with the spider to threaten the trail-bruised white skin of the girl who was searching for her brother, I balanced on the limb with the leopard who had to be content with Negroes and double-crossers and never tasted but a slash of hero flesh. Even after double-pay I deserted with the bearers, believing every rumour the wind brought from the mountain pass. The old sorceress, the spilled wine, the black cards convinced me: the timeless laws must not be broken. When the lovers got away with the loot of new-valued life or love, or bought themselves a share in time by letting the avalanche seal away for ever the gold goblets and platters, I knew a million ways the jungle might have been meaner and smarter. As the red sun

came down on their embrace I shouted from my velvet seat, Get them, get them, to all the animals drugged with anarchy and happiness.

August 6, 1963

I want your warm body to disappear politely and leave me alone in the bath because I want to consider my destiny. Destiny! why do you find me in this bathtub, idle, alone, unwashed, without even the intention of washing except at the last moment? Why don't you find me at the top of a telephone pole, repairing the lines from city to city? Why don't you find me riding a horse through Cuba, a giant of a man with a red machete? Why don't you find me explaining machines to underprivileged pupils, negroid Spaniards, happy it is not a course in creative writing? Come back here, little warm body, it's time for another day. Destiny has fled and I settle for you who found me staring at you in a store one afternoon four years ago and slept with me every night since. How do you find my sailor eyes after all this time? Am I what you expected? Are we together too much? Did Destiny shy at the double Turkish towel, our knowledge of each other's skin, our love which is a proverb on the block, our agreement that in matters spiritual I should be the Man of Destiny and you should be the Woman of the House?

QUEEN VICTORIA AND ME

Queen Victoria my father and all his tobacco loved you I love you too in all your forms the slim unlovely virgin anyone would lay the white figure floating among German beards the mean governess of the huge pink maps the solitary mourner of a prince Queen Victoria I am cold and rainy I am dirty as a glass roof in a train station I feel like an empty cast-iron exhibition I want ornaments on everything because my love she gone with other boys Queen Victoria do you have a punishment under the white lace will you be short with her and make her read little Bibles will you spank her with a mechanical corset I want her pure as power I want her skin slightly musty with petticoats will you wash the easy bidets out of her head Queen Victoria I'm not much nourished by modern love Will you come into my life with your sorrow and your black carriages and your perfect memory Queen Victoria The 20th century belongs to you and me Let us be two severe giants (not less lonely for our partnership)

who discolour test tubes in the halls of science

who turn up unwelcome at every World's Fair heavy with proverb and correction confusing the star-dazed tourists with our incomparable sense of loss

THE NEW STEP

A Ballet-Drama in One Act

CHARACTERS:

MARY and DIANE, two working girls who room together. MARY is very plain, plump, clumsy: ugly, if one is inclined to the word. She is the typical victim of beauty courses and glamour magazines. Her life is a search for, a belief in the technique, the elixir, the method, the secret, the hint that will transform and render her forever lovely. DIANE is a natural beauty, tall, fresh and graceful, one of the blessed. She moves to a kind of innocent sexual music, incapable of any gesture which could intrude on this high animal grace. To watch her pull on her nylons is all one needs of ballet or art.

HARRY is the man DIANE loves. He has the proportions we associate with Greek statuary. Clean, tall, openly handsome, athletic. He glitters with health, decency, and mindlessness.

THE COLLECTOR is a woman over thirty, grotesquely obese, a great heap, deformed, barely mobile. She possesses a commanding will and combines the fascination of the tyrant and the freak. Her jolliness asks for no charity. All her movements represent the triumph of a rather sinister spiritual energy over an intolerable mass of flesh.

SCENE:

It is eight o'clock of a Saturday night. All the action takes place in the girls' small apartment which need be furnished with no more than a dressing-mirror, wardrobe, record-player, easy chair, and a front door. We have the impression, as we do from the dwelling places of most bachelor girls, of an arrangement they want to keep comfortable but temporary.

DIANE is dressed in bra and panties, preparing herself for an evening with HARRY. MARY follows her about the room, lost in envy and awe, handing DIANE the necessary lipstick or brush, doing up a button or fastening a necklace. MARY is the dull but orthodox assistant to DIANE's mysterious ritual of beauty.

MARY: What is it like?

DIANE: What like?

Mary: You know.

DIANE: No.

MARY: To be like you.

DIANE: Such as?

MARY: Beautiful.

(Pause. During these pauses DIANE continues her toilet as does MARY her attend-

ance.)

DIANE: Everybody can be beautiful.

Mary: You can say that.

DIANE: Love makes people beautiful.

Mary: You can say that.

DIANE: A woman in love is beautiful.

(Pause.)

Mary: Look at me.

DIANE: I've got to hurry.

MARY: Harry always waits.

DIANE: He said he's got something on his mind.

MARY: You've got the luck.

(Pause.)

MARY: Look at me a second.

DIANE: All right.

(MARY performs an aggressive curtsy.)

MARY: Give me some advice.

DIANE: Everybody has their points.

MARY: What are my points?

DIANE: What are your points?

Mary: Name my points.

(MARY stands there belligerently. She lifts up her skirt. She rolls up her sleeves. She

tucks her sweater in tight.)

DIANE: I've got to hurry.
MARY: Name one point.

DIANE: You've got nice hands.

Mary (Surprised): Do I? DIANE: Very nice hands.

Mary: Do I really?

DIANE: Hands are very important.

(MARY shows her hands to the mirror and

gives them little exercises.)

DIANE: Men often look at hands.

MARY: They do? DIANE: Often.

MARY: What do they think?

DIANE: Think?

MARY (Impatiently): When they look at hands.

DIANE: They think: There's a nice pair of hands.

MARY: What else?

DIANE: They think: Those are nice hands to

hold.

Mary: And?

DIANE: They think: Those are nice hands to-

squeeze.

MARY: I'm listening.

DIANE: They think: Those are nice hands to-

MARY: GO OD.

DIANE: They think—(racking her brain for com-

passion's sake.)

MARY: Well?

DIANE: Those are nice hands to—love!

MARY: Lovel DIANE: Yes.

MARY: What do you mean "love"? DIANE: I don't have to explain.

MARY: Someone is going to love my hands?

DIANE: Yes.

MARY: What about my arms?

DIANE: What about them? (A little surly.)

Mary: Are they one of my points?

(Pause.)

DIANE: I suppose not one of your best.

MARY: What about my shoulders?

(Pause.)

DIANE: Your shoulders are all right.

MARY: You know they're not. They're not.

DIANE: Then what did you ask me for?

MARY: What about my bosom?

DIANE: I don't know your bosom.

MARY: You do know my bosom.

DIANE: I don't. Mary: You do.

DIANE: I do not know your bosom.

MARY: You've seen me undressed.

DIANE: I never looked that hard.

MARY: You know my bosom all right. (But she'll

let it pass. She looks disgustedly at her

hands.) Mary: Handsl

DIANE: Don't be so hard on yourself.

MARY: Sexiest knuckles on the block.

DIANE: Why hurt yourself?

MARY: My fingers are really stacked.

DIANE: Stop, sweetie.

MARY: They come when they shake hands with

me.

DIANE: Now please!

MARY: You don't know how it feels.

(Pause.)

MARY: Just tell me what it's like.

DIANE: What like?

MARY: To be beautiful. You've never told me.

DIANE: There's no such thing as beautiful.

MARY: Sure.

DIANE: It's how you feel.

MARY: I'm going to believe that.

DIANE: It's how you feel makes you beautiful.

MARY: Do you know how I feel?

DIANE: Don't tell me.

MARY: Ugly.

DIANE: You don't have to talk like that.

MARY: I feel ugly. What does that make me?

(DIANE declines to answer. She steps into her high-heeled shoes, the elevation bringing out the harder lines of her legs, adding to her stature an appealing

haughtiness and to her general beauty a

touch of violence.)

MARY: According to what you said.

DIANE: I don't know.

MARY: You said: It's how you feel makes you

beautiful.

DIANE: I know what I said.

MARY: I feel ugly. So what does that make me?

DIANE: I don't know.

MARY: According to what you said.

DIANE: I don't know.

MARY: Don't be afraid to say it.

DIANE: Harry will be here.

MARY: Say it! (Launching herself into hysteria.)

DIANE: I've got to get ready.

MARY: You never say it. You're afraid to say it.

It won't kill you. The word won't kill you. You think it but you won't say it. When you get up in the morning you tiptoe to the bathroom. I tiptoe to the bathroom but I sound like an army. What do you think I think when I hear myself? Don't you think I know the difference? It's no secret. It's not as though there aren't any mirrors. If you only said it I wouldn't try. I don't want to try. I don't want to have to try. If you only once said I was—ugly!

(Diane comforts her.)

DIANE: You're not ugly, sweetie. Nobody's ugly. Everybody can be beautiful. Your turn will come. Your man will come. He'll take you in his arms. No no no, you're not ugly. He'll teach you that you are beautiful. Then you'll know what it is.

(Cradling her.)

Mary: Will he?

DIANE: Of course he will.

MARY: Until then?

DIANE: You've got to keep going, keep looking.

MARY: Keep up with my exercises.

DIANE: Yes.

MARY: Keep up with my ballet lessons.

DIANE: Exactly.

MARY: Try and lose weight.

DIANE: Follow the book.

MARY: Brush my hair the right way.

DIANE: That's the spirit.

MARY: A hundred strokes.

DIANE: Good.

MARY: I've got to gain confidence.

DIANE: You will.

MARY: I can't give up.

DIANE: It's easier than you think.

MARY: Concentrate on my best points.

DIANE: Make the best of what you have.

Mary: Why not start now?

DIANE: Why not.

(MARY gathers herself together, checks her posture in the mirror, crosses to the record-player and switches it on. "The Dance of the Sugar-plum Fairy." She begins the ballet exercises she has learned, perhaps, at the YWCA, two evenings a week. Between the final touches of her toilet DIANE encourages her with nods of approval. The doorbell rings. Enter HARRY in evening clothes, glittering although his expression is solemn, for he has come on an important mission.)

HARRY: Hi girls. Don't mind me, Mary.

(Mary waves in the midst of a difficult

contortion.)

DIANE: Darling!

(DIANE sweeps into his arms, takes the attitude of a dancing partner. HARRY, with a trace of reluctance, consents to lead her in a ballroom step across the floor.)

HARRY: I've got something on my mind.

(DIANE squeezes his arm, disengages herself, crosses to MARY and whispers.)

DIANE: He's got something on his mind.

(DIANE and MARY embrace in the usual squeaky conspiratorial manner with which girls preface happy matrimonial news. While MARY smiles benignly exeunt HARRY and DIANE. MARY turns the machine louder, moves in front of the mirror, resumes the ballet exercises. She stops them from time to time to check various parts of her anatomy in the mirror at close range, as if the effects of the discipline might be already apparent.)

MARY: Goody.

(A long determined ring of the doorbell. MARY stops, eyes bright with expectation. Perhaps the miracle is about to unfold. She smoothes her dress and hair, switches off the machine, opens the door. The Collector enters with lumbering difficulty, looks around, takes control. The power she radiates is somehow guaranteed by her grotesque form. Her body is a huge damaged tank operating under the intimate command of a brilliant field warrior which is her mind: MARY waits, appalled and intimidated.)

COLLECTOR:

I knew there was people in because I heard music. (MARY cannot speak.) Some people don't like to open the door. I'm in charge of the whole block.

MARY (Recovering): Are you collecting for something?

COLLECTOR: The United Fund for the Obese, you know, UFO. That includes The Obese

Catholic Drive, The Committee for Jewish Fat People, the Help the Blind Obese, and the Universal Aid to the Obese. If you make one donation you won't be

MARY: We've never been asked before.

bothered again.

COLLECTOR: I know. But I have your card now. The

whole Fund has been reorganized.

Mary: It has?

COLLECTOR: Oh yes. Actually it was my idea to have the Obese themselves go out and canvass. They were against it at first but I convinced them. It's the only fair way. Gives the public an opportunity to see exactly where their money goes. And I've managed to get the Spastic and Polio and Cancer people to see the light. It's the only fair way. We're all over the neigh-

bourhood.

Mary: It's very—courageous.

COLLECTOR: That's what my husband says.

Mary: Your husband!

COLLECTOR: He'd prefer me to stay at home. Doesn't

believe in married girls working.

MARY: Have—have you been married long?

COLLECTOR: Just short of a year. (Coyly.) You might

say we're still honeymooners.

Mary: Oh.

COLLECTOR: Don't be embarrassed. One of the aims

of our organization is to help people like me lead normal lives. Now what could be more normal than marriage? Can you think of anything more normal? Of course you can't. It makes you feel less isolated, part of the whole community. Our people are getting married all the time.

MARY: Of course, of course. (She is disintegrating.)

COLLECTOR: I didn't think it would work out myself at first. But John is so loving. He's taken such patience with me. When we're together it's as though there's nothing wrong with me at all.

MARY: What does your husband do?

COLLECTOR: He's a chef.

MARY: A chef.

COLLECTOR: Not in any famous restaurant. Just an ordinary chef. But it's good enough for me. Sometimes, when he's joking, he says I married him for his profession. (MARY tries to laugh.) Well I've been chatting too long about myself and I have the rest of this block to cover. How much do you think you'd like to give. I know you're

MARY: I don't know, I really don't know.

COLLECTOR: May I make a suggestion?

a working girl.

MARY: Of course.

COLLECTOR: Two dollars.

MARY: Two dollars. (Goes to her purse obediently.)

COLLECTOR: I don't think that's too much, do you?

MARY: No no.

COLLECTOR: Five dollars would be too much.

Mary: Too much.

COLLECTOR: And one dollar just doesn't seem right.

MARY: Oh, I only have a five. I don't have any

change.

COLLECTOR: I'll take it.

Mary: You'll take it?

COLLECTOR: I'll take it. (A command.)

(MARY drops the bill in the transaction, being afraid to make any physical contact with THE COLLECTOR. MARY stoops to pick it up. THE COLLECTOR prevents her.)

COLLECTOR: Let me do that. The whole idea is not to

treat us like invalids. You just watch how well I get along. (The Collector retrieves the money with immense diffi-

culty.)

COLLECTOR: That wasn't so bad, was it?

MARY: No. Oh no. It wasn't so bad.

COLLECTOR: I've even done a little dancing in my

time.

MARY: That's nice.

COLLECTOR: They have courses for us. First we do it

in water, but very soon we're right up there on dry land. I bet you do some dancing yourself, a girl like you. I heard

music when I came.

MARY: Not really.

COLLECTOR: Do you know what would make me very

happy?

MARY: It's very late.

COLLECTOR: To see you do a step or two.

MARY: I'm quite tired.
COLLECTOR: A little whirl.

MARY: I'm not very good.

COLLECTOR: A whirl, a twirl, a bit of a swing. I'll put

it on for you.

(THE COLLECTOR begins to make her way to the record-player. MARY, who cannot bear to see her expend herself, overtakes her and switches it on. MARY performs for a few moments while THE COLLECTOR looks on with pleasure, tapping out the time. MARY breaks off the dance.)

MARY: I'm not very good.

COLLECTOR: Would a little criticism hurt you?

Mary: No-

COLLECTOR: They're not dancing like that any more.

Mary: No?

COLLECTOR: They're doing something altogether dif-

ferent.

MARY: I wouldn't know.
COLLECTOR: More like this.

(The record has reached the end of its spiral and is now jerking back and forth

over the last few bars.)

COLLECTOR: Don't worry about that.

(THE COLLECTOR moves to stage centre and executes a terrifying dance to the repeating bars of music. It combines the heavy mechanical efficiency of a printing machine with the convulsions of a spastic. It could be a garbage heap falling down an escalator. It is grotesque but military, excruciating but triumphant. It is a woman-creature proclaiming a disease of the flesh. MARY tries to look

away but cannot. She stares, dumb-

founded, shattered, and ashamed.)

COLLECTOR: We learn to get around, don't we?

MARY: It's very nice. (She switches off the ma-

chine.)

COLLECTOR: That's more what they're doing.

Mary: Is it?

COLLECTOR: In most of the places. A few haven't

caught on.

MARY: I'm very tired now. I think-

COLLECTOR: You must be tired.

Mary: I am.

COLLECTOR: With all my talking.

MARY: Not really.

COLLECTOR: I've taken your time.

Mary: You haven't.

COLLECTOR: I'll write you a receipt.

Mary: It isn't necessary.

COLLECTOR: Yes it is. (She writes.) This isn't official.

An official receipt will be mailed to you from Fund headquarters. You'll need it

for Income Tax.

Mary: Thank you.

COLLECTOR: Thank you. I've certainly enjoyed this.

MARY: Me too. (She is now confirmed in a state

of numbed surrender.)

COLLECTOR (with a sudden disarming tenderness that changes through the speech into a vision of uncompromising domination): No, you didn't. Oh, I know you didn't. It frightened you. It made you sort of sick. It had to frighten you. It always does at the beginning. Everyone is frightened at

the beginning. That's part of it. Frightened and—fascinated. Fascinated—that's the important thing. You were fascinated too, and that's why I know you'll learn the new step. You see, it's a way to start over and forget about all the things you were never really good at. Nobody can resist that, can they? That's why you'll learn the new step. That's why I must teach you. And soon you'll want to learn. Everybody will want to learn. We'll be teaching everybody.

Mary: I'm fairly busy.

COLLECTOR: Don't worry about that. We'll find time.

We'll make time. You won't believe this
now, but soon, and it will be very soon,
you're going to want me to teach you
everything. Well, you better get some
sleep. Sleep is very important. I want to
say thank you. All the Obese want to

say thank you.

Mary: Nothing. Good night.

COLLECTOR: Just beginning for us.

(Exit THE COLLECTOR. MARY, dazed and exhausted, stands at the door for some time. She moves toward stage centre, attempts a few elementary exercises, collapses into the chair and stares dumbly at the audience. The sound of a key in the lock. Door opens. Enter DIANE alone, crying.)

DIANE: I didn't want him to see me home.

(MARY is unable to cope with anyone else's problem at this point.)

MARY: What's the matter with you?

DIANE: It's impossible.

MARY: What's impossible?

DIANE: What happened.

MARY: What happened?

DIANE: He doesn't want to see me any more.

Mary: Harry? DIANE: Harry.

MARY: Your Harry?

DIANE: You know damn well which Harry.

MARY: Doesn't want to see you any more?

DIANE: No.

MARY: I thought he loved you.

DIANE: So did I.

MARY: I thought he really loved you.

DIANE: So did I.

MARY: You told me he said he loved you.

DIANE: He did.

MARY: But now he doesn't?

DIANE: No. MARY: Oh.

DIANE: It's terrible.

MARY: It must be.

DIANE: It came so suddenly.

MARY: It must have.

DIANE: I thought he loved me.

Mary: So did I.

DIANE: He doesn't!

Mary: Don't cry.

DIANE: He's getting married.

Mary: He isn't!
Diane: Yes.

MARY: He isn't!

DIANE: This Sunday.

MARY: This Sunday?

DIANE: Yes.

Mary: So soon?

DIANE: Yes.

MARY: He told you that?

DIANE: Tonight.

MARY: What did he say?

DIANE: He said he's getting married this Sunday.

Mary: He's a bastard.

DIANE: Don't say that.

Mary: I say he's a bastard.

MARY: I say he's a bastard.

DIANE: Don't talk that way.

MARY: Why not?

DIANE: Don't.

Mary: After what he's done?

DIANE: It's not his fault.

MARY: Not his fault?

DIANE: He fell in love.

(The word has its magic effect.)

MARY: Fell in love?

DIANE: Yes.

MARY: With someone else?

DIANE: Yes.

MARY: He fell out of love with you?

DIANE: I suppose so.

MARY: That's terrible.

DIANE: He said he couldn't help it.

MARY: Not if it's love. DIANE: He said it was.

MARY: Then he couldn't help it.

(DIANE begins to remove her make-up and undress, reversing exactly every step of her toilet. MARY, still bewildered, but

out of habit, assists her.)

MARY: And you're so beautiful.

DIANE: No.

MARY: Your hair.

DIANE: No.

MARY: Your shoulders.

DIANE: No.

MARY: Everything.

(Pause.)

MARY: What did he say?

DIANE: He told me everything.

MARY: Such as what?

DIANE: Harry's a gentleman.

Mary: I always thought so.

DIANE: He wanted me to know everything.

MARY: It's only fair.

DIANE: He told me about her.
MARY: What did he say?
DIANE: He said he loves her.
MARY: Then he had no choice.
DIANE: He said she's beautiful.

Mary: He didn'tl

DIANE: What can you expect?

Mary: I suppose so.

DIANE: He loves her, after all.

MARY: Then I guess he thinks she's beautiful.

(Pause.)

MARY: What else did he say?

DIANE: He told me everything.

MARY: How did he meet her?

DIANE: She came to his house.

Mary: What for?

DIANE: She was collecting money.

MARY: Moneyl (Alarm.)
DIANE: For a charity.

Mary: Charity!

DIANE: Invalids of some kind.

Mary: Invalids!

DIANE: That's the worst part.

Mary: What part?

DIANE: She's that way herself.

Mary: What way? DIANE: You know.

MARY: What way, what way?

DIANE: You know. MARY: Say it!

DIANE: She's an invalid.

MARY: Harry's marrying an invalid?

DIANE: This Sunday.

MARY: You said he said she was beautiful.

DIANE: He did.

MARY: Harry is going to marry an invalid.

DIANE: What should I do?

MARY: Harry who said he loved you. (Not a

question.)

DIANE: I'm miserable.

(MARY is like a woman moving through

a fog toward a light.)

MARY: Harry is going to marry an invalid. He

thinksshe's beautiful.

(MARY switches on the record-player.) She came to his door. Harry who told you he loved you. You who told me I had my

points.

("The Dance of the Sugar-plum Fairy" begins. MARY dances but she does not use the steps she learned at the YWCA. She dances in conscious imitation of THE COLLECTOR.)

DIANE: What are you doing? (Horrified.)

(MARY smiles at her.)

DIANE: Stop it! Stop it this instant!

MARY: Don't tell me what to do. Don't you dare.

Don't ever tell me what to do. Don't ever. (The dance continues. DIANE, dressed in bra and panties as at the beginning, backs away.)

CURTAIN

WINTER BULLETIN

Toronto has been good to me I relaxed on TV I attacked several dead horses I spread rumours about myself I reported a Talmudic quarrel with the Montreal Jewish Community I forged a death certificate in case I had to disappear I listened to a huckster welcome me to the world I slept behind my new sunglasses I abandoned the care of my pimples I dreamed that I needed nobody I faced my trap I withheld my opinion on matters on which I had no opinion I humoured the rare January weather with a jaunty step for the sake of heroism Not very carefully I thought about the future and how little I know about animals The future seemed unnecessarily black and strong as if it had received my casual mistakes through a carbon sheet

WHY DID YOU GIVE MY NAME TO THE POLICE?

You recited the Code of Comparisons in your mother's voice.

Again you were the blue-robed seminary girl but these were not poplar trees and nuns you walked between.

These were Laws.

Damn you for making this moment hopeless, now, as a clerk in uniform fills in my father's name.

You too must find the moment hopeless in the Tennyson Hotel.
I know your stomach.
The brass bed bearing your suitcase rumbles away like an automatic promenading target in a shooting gallery: you stand with your hands full of a necklace you wanted to pack.
In detail you recall your rich dinner.
Grab that towel rack!

Doesn't the sink seem a fraud with its hair-swirled pipes? Doesn't the overhead bulb seem burdened with mucus? Things will be better at City Hall.

Now you must learn to read newspapers without laughing. No hysterical headline breakfasts. Police be your Guard, Telephone Book your Brotherhood. Action! Action! Action! Goodbye Citizen.

The clerk is talking to nobody.

Do you see how I have tiptoed out of his brown file?

He fingers his uniform like a cheated bargain hunter.

Answer me, please talk to me, he weeps, say I'm not a doorman.

I plug the wires of your fear
(ah, this I was always meant to do)
into the lust-asylum universe:
raped by aimless old electricity
you stiffen over the steel books of your bed
like a fish
in a liquid air experiment.
Thus withers the Civil Triumph
(Laws rush in to corset the collapse)
for you are mistress to the Mayor,
he electrocuted in your frozen juices.

THE MUSIC CREPT BY US

I would like to remind the management that the drinks are watered and the hat-check girl has syphilis and the band is composed of former SS monsters However since it is New Year's Eve and I have lip cancer I will place my paper hat on my concussion and dance

DISGUISES

I am sorry that the rich man must go and his house become a hospital. I loved his wine, his contemptuous servants, his ten-year-old ceremonies. I loved his car which he wore like a snail's shell everywhere, and I loved his wife, the hours she put into her skin, the milk, the lust, the industries that served her complexion. I loved his son who looked British but had American ambitions and let the word aristocrat comfort him like a reprieve while Kennedy reigned. I loved the rich man: I hate to see his season ticket for the Opera fall into a pool for opera-lovers.

I am sorry that the old worker must go who called me mister when I was twelve and sir when I was twenty who studied against me in obscure socialist clubs which met in restaurants.

I loved the machine he knew like a wife's body. I loved his wife who trained bankers in an underground pantry and never wasted her ambition in ceramics. I loved his children who debate and come first at McGill University. Goodbye old gold-watch winner all your complex loyalties must now be borne by one-faced patriots.

Goodbye dope fiends of North Eastern Lunch circa 1948, your spoons which were not Swedish Stainless, were the same colour as the hoarded clasps and hooks of discarded soiled therapeutic corsets. I loved your puns about snow even if they lasted the full seven-month Montreal winter. Go write your memoirs for the Psychedelic Review.

Goodbye sex fiends of Beaver Pond who dreamed of being jacked-off by electric milking machines.
You had no Canada Council.
You had to open little boys with a pen-knife.
I loved your statement to the press:
"I didn't think he'd mind."
Goodbye articulate monsters
Abbott and Costello have met Frankenstein.

I am sorry that the conspirators must go the ones who scared me by showing me a list of all the members of my family. I loved the way they reserved judgement about Genghis Khan. They loved me because I told them their little beards made them dead-ringers for Lenin. The bombs went off in Westmount and now they are ashamed like a successful outspoken Schopenhauerian whose room-mate has committed suicide. Suddenly they are all making movies. I have no one to buy coffee for.

I embrace the changeless: the committed men in public wards oblivious as Hassidim who believe that they are someone else. Bravo! Abelard, viva! Rockefeller, have these buns, Napoleon, hurrah! betrayed Duchess. Long live you chronic self-abusers! you monotheists! you familiars of the Absolute sucking at circles! You are all my comfort as I turn to face the beehive as I disgrace my style as I coarsen my nature as I invent jokes as I pull up my garters as I accept responsibility.

incorrigible betrayers of the self
as I salute fashion
and bring my mind
like a promiscuous air-hostess
handing out parachutes in a nose dive
bring my butchered mind
to bear upon the facts.

You comfort me

LOT

Give me back my house

Give me back my young wife

I shouted to the sunflower in my path

Give me back my scalpel

Give me back my mountain view

I said to the seeds along my path

Give me back my name

Give me back my childhood list

I whispered to the dust when the path gave out

Now sing

Now sing

sang my master as I waited in the raw wind

Have I come so far for this

I wondered as I waited in the pure cold ready at last to argue for my silence

Tell me master

do my lips move

or where does it come from

this soft total chant that drives my soul

like a spear of salt into the rock

Give me back my house

Give me back my young wife

ONE OF THE NIGHTS I

You dance on the day you saved my theoretical angels daughters of the new middle-class who wear your mouths like Bardot

Come my darlings the movies are true I am the lost sweet singer whose death in the fog your new high-heeled boots have ground into cigarette butts I was walking the harbour this evening looking for a 25-cent bed of water but I will sleep tonight with your garters curled in my shoes like rainbows on vacation with your virginity ruling the condom cemeteries like a 2nd chance I believe I believe Thursday December 12th is not the night and I will kiss again the slope of a breast little nipple above me like a sunset

BULLETS

Listen all you bullets that never hit: a lot of throats are growing in open collars like frozen milk bottles on a 5 a.m. street throats that are waiting for bite scars but will settle for bullet holes

You restless bullets lost in swarms from undecided wars: fasten on these nude throats that need some decoration

I've done my own work:
I had 3 jewels
no more
and I have placed them
on my choices
jewels
although they performed
like bullets:
an instant of ruby
before the hands
came up
to stem the mess

And you over there my little acrobat: swing fast After me there is no care and the air is heavily armed and has the wildest aim

THE BIG WORLD

The big world will find out about this farm the big world will learn the details of what I worked out in the can

And your curious life with me will be told so often that no one will believe you grew old

FRONT LAWN

The snow was falling over my penknife
There was a movie in the fireplace
The apples were wrapped in 8-year-old blond hair Starving and dirty the janitor's daughter never turned up in November to pee from her sweet crack on the gravel

I'll go back one day when my cast is off Elm leaves are falling over my bow and arrow Candy is going bad and Boy Scout calendars are on fire

My old mother sits in her Cadillac laughing her Danube laugh as I tell her that we own all the worms under our front lawn

Rust rust rust in the engines of love and time

My friend walks through our city this winter night, fur-hatted, whistling, anti-mediterranean, stricken with seeing Eternity in all that is seasonal. He is the Kerensky of our Circle always about to chair the last official meeting before the pros take over, they of the pure smiling eyes trained only for Form.

He knows there are no measures to guarantee the Revolution, or to preserve the row of muscular icicles which will chart Winter's decline like a graph.

There is nothing for him to do but preside over the last official meeting.

It will all come round again: the heartsick teachers who make too much of poetry, their students who refuse to suffer, the cache of rifles in the lawyer's attic: and then the magic, the 80-year comet touching the sturdiest houses. The Elite Corps commits suicide in the tennis-ball basement. Poets ride buses free.

The General insists on a popularity poll. Troops study satire. A strange public generosity prevails.

Only too well he knows the tiny moment when everything is possible, when pride is loved, beauty held in common, like having an exquisite sister, and a man gives away his death like a piece of advice.

Our Kerensky has waited for these moments over a table in a rented room when poems grew like butterflies on the garbage of his life. How many times? The sad answer is: they can be counted. Possible and brief: this is his vision of Revolution.

Who will parade the shell today?
Who will kill in the name
of the husk? Who will write a Law to raise the corpse

which cries now only for weeds and excrement? See him walk the streets, the last guard, the only idler on the square. He must keep the wreck of the Revolution the debris of public beauty

from the pure smiling eyes of the trained visionaries who need our daily lives perfect.

The soft snow begins to honour him with epaulets, and to provoke the animal past of his fur hat. He wears a death, but he allows the snow, like an ultimate answer, to forgive him, just for this jewelled moment of his coronation. The carved gargoyles of the City Hall receive the snow as bibs beneath their drooling lips. How they resemble the men of profane vision, the same greed, the same intensity as they who whip their minds to recall an ancient lucky orgasm, yes, yes, he knows that deadly concentration, they are the founders, they are the bankers—of History! He rests in his walk as they consume of the generous night everything that he does not need.

ANOTHER NIGHT WITH TELESCOPE

Come back to me brutal empty room Thin Byzantine face preside over this new fast I am broken with easy grace Let me be neither father nor child but one who spins on an eternal unimportant loom patterns of wars and grass which do not last the night I know the stars are wild as dust and wait for no man's discipline but as they wheel from sky to sky they rake our lives with pins of light



THE NIGHTMARES DO NOT SUDDENLY

The nightmares do not suddenly develop happy endings

I merely step out of them

as a five-year-old scientist leaves the room where he has dissected an alarm clock

Love wears out
like overused mirrors unsilvering
and parts of your faces
make room for the wall behind
If terror needs my round green eyes
for a masterpiece

let it lure them with nude keyholes mounted on an egg

And should Love decide

I am not the one
to stand scratching his head
wondering what wall to lean on
send King Farouk to argue
or come to me dressed as a fast

A cross didn't fall on me when I went for hot-dogs and the all-night Greek slave in the Silver Gameland didn't think I was his brother Love me because nothing happens

I believe the rain will not make me feel like a feather when it comes tonight after the streetcars have stopped because my size is definite Love me because nothing happens

Do you have any idea how many movies I had to watch before I knew surely that I would love you when the lights woke up Love me because nothing happens

Here is a headline July 14 in the city of Montreal Intervention décisive de Pearson à la conférence du Commonwealth That was yesterday Love me because nothing happens

Stars and stars and stars keep it to themselves Have you ever noticed how private a wet tree is a curtain of razor blades

Love me because nothing happens

Why should I be alone if what I say is true I confess I mean to find a passage or forge a passport or talk a new language Love me because nothing happens

I confess I meant to grow wings and lose my mind I confess that I've forgotten what for Why wings and a lost mind Love me because nothing happens

SO YOU'RE THE KIND OF VEGETARIAN

So you're the kind of vegetarian that only eats roses Is that what you mean with your Beautiful Losers

1965

NOTHING HAS BEEN BROKEN

Nothing has been broken though one of the links of the chain is a blue butterfly

Here he was attacked

They smiled as they came and retired baffled with blue dust

The banks so familiar with metal they made for the wings The thick vaults fluttered

The pretty girls advanced their fingers cupped They bled from the mouth as though struck

The jury asked for pity and touched and were electrocuted by the blue antennae

A thrust at any link might have brought him down but each of you aimed at the blue butterfly

HERE WE ARE AT THE WINDOW

Here we are at the window. Great unbound sheaves of rain wandering across the mountain, parades of wind and driven silver grass. So long I've tried to give a name to freedom, today my freedom lost its name, like a student's room travelling into the morning with its lights still on. Every act has its own style of freedom, whatever that means. Now I'm commanded to think of weeds, to worship the strong weeds that grew through the night, green and wet, the white thread roots taking lottery orders from the coils of brain mud, the permeable surface of the world. Did you know that the brain developed out of a fold in the epidermis? Did you? Falling ribbons of silk, the length of rivers, cross the face of the mountain, systems of grass and cable. Freedom lost its name to the style with which things happen. The straight trees, the spools of weed, the travelling skeins of rain floating through the folds of the mountain-here we are at the window. Are you ready now? Have I dismissed myself? May I fire from the hip? Brothers, each at your window, we are the style of so much passion, we are the order of style, we are pure style called to delight a fold of the sky.

CLEAN AS THE GRASS FROM WHICH

Clean as the grass from which the sun has burned the little dew I come to this page in the not so early morning with a picture of him whom I could not be for long not wanting to return or begin again the idolatry of terror

He was burned away from me by needles by ashes by various shames I engineered against his innocence by documenting the love of one who gathered my first songs and gave her body to my wandering

With a picture of him grooming her thighs for a journey with a picture of him buying her a staring peacock feather with a picture of him knighted by her smile her soft fatigue I begin the hopeless formula she already had the gold from

Live for him huge black eyes
He never understood their purity
or how they watched him prepare
to ditch the early songs and say goodbye
Sleep beside him uncaptured darling
while I fold into a kite

the long evenings he scratched with experiments the empty dazzling mornings that forbid me to recall your name

With a picture of him standing by the window while she slept with a picture of him wondering what adventure is wondering what cruelty is with a picture of him waking her with an angry kiss leading her body into use and time I bargain with the fire which must ignore the both of them

WHEN I PAID THE SUN TO RUN

When I paid the sun to run
It ran and I sat down and cried
The sun I spent my money on
Went round and round inside
The world all at once
Charged with insignificance

I SEE YOU ON A GREEK MATTRESS

I see you on a Greek mattress reading the Book of Changes, Lebanese candy in the air. On the whitewashed wall I see you raise another hexagram for the same old question: how can you be free? I see you cleaning your pipe with the hairpin of somebody's innocent night. I see the plastic Evil Eye pinned to your underwear. Once again you throw the pennies, once again you read how the pieces of the world have changed around your question. Did you get to the Himalayas? Did you visit that monk in New Jersey? I never answered any of your letters. Oh Steve, do you remember me?

1963

SUZANNE WEARS A LEATHER COAT

Suzanne wears a leather coat.

Her legs are insured by many burnt bridges.

Her calves are full as spinnakers
in a clean race, hard from following music beyond the maps of any audience.

Suzanne wears a leather coat because she is not a civilian.

She never walks casually down Ste Catherine because with every step she must redeem the clubfoot crowds and stalk the field of huge hail-stones that never melted,

I mean the cemetery.

Stand up! stand!
Suzanne is walking by.
She wears a leather coat. She won't stop
to bandage the fractures she walks between.
She must not stop, she must not
carry money.
Many are the workers in charity.

Few serve the lilac, few heal with mist. Suzanne wears a leather coat. Her breasts yearn for marble. The traffic halts: people fall out of their cars. None of their most drooling thoughts are wild enough to build the ant-full crystal city she would splinter with the tone of her step.

1963

ONE NIGHT I BURNED THE HOUSE I LOVED

One night I burned the house I loved, It lit a perfect ring
In which I saw some weeds and stone
Beyond—not anything.

Certain creatures of the air Frightened by the night, They came to see the world again And perished in the light.

Now I sail from sky to sky And all the blackness sings Against the boat that I have made Of mutilated wings. Two went to sleep almost every night one dreamed of mud one dreamed of Asia visiting a zeppelin visiting Nijinsky Two went to sleep one dreamed of ribs one dreamed of senators Two went to sleep two travellers The long marriage in the dark The sleep was old the travellers were old one dreamed of oranges one dreamed of Carthage Two friends asleep years locked in travel Good night my darling as the dreams waved goodbye one travelled lightly one walked through water visiting a chess game visiting a booth always returning to wait out the day One carried matches one climbed a beehive one sold an earphone one shot a German

Two went to sleep every sleep went together wandering away from an operating table one dreamed of grass one dreamed of spokes one bargained nicely one was a snowman one counted medicine one tasted pencils one was a child one was a traitor visiting heavy industry visiting the family Two went to sleep none could foretell one went with baskets one took a ledger one night happy one night in terror Love could not bind them Fear could not either they went unconnected they never knew where always returning to wait out the day parting with kissing parting with yawns visiting Death till they wore out their welcome visiting Death till the right disguise worked

IN THE BIBLE GENERATIONS PASS ...

In the Bible generations pass in a paragraph, a betrayal is disposed of in a phrase, the creation of the world consumes a page. I could never pick the important dynasty out of a multitude, you must have your forehead shining to do that, or to choose out of the snarled network of daily evidence the denials and the loyalties. Who can choose what olive tree the story will need to shade its lovers, what tree out of the huge orchard will give them the particular view of branches and sky which will unleash their kisses. Only two shining people know, they go directly to the roots they lie between. For my part I describe the whole orchard.

FOUND ONCE AGAIN SHAMELESSLY IGNORING THE SWANS . . .

Found once again shamelessly ignoring the swans who inflame the spectators on the shores of American rivers; found once again allowing the juicy contract to expire because the telephone has a magic correspondence with my tapeworm; found once again leaving the garlanded manhood in danger of long official repose while it is groomed for marble in seedily historic back rooms; found once again humiliating the bank clerk with eye-to-eye wrestling, art dogma, lives that loaf and stare, and other stage whispers of genius; found once again the chosen object of heavenly longing such as can ambush a hermit in a forest with visions of a busy parking lot; found once again smelling mothball sweaters, titling home movies, untangling Victorian salmon rods, fanatically convinced that a world of sporty order is just around the corner; found once again planning the ideal lonely year which waits like first flesh love on a calendar of third choices; found once again hovering like a twine-eating kite over hands that feed me, verbose under the influence of astrology; found one again selling out to accessible local purity while Pentagon Tiffany evil alone can guarantee my power; found once again trusting that my friends grew up in Eden and will not harm me when at last I am armourless and absolutely silent; found once again at the very beginning, veteran of several useless ordeals, prophetic but not seminal, the purist for the masses of tomorrow; found once again sweetening life which I have abandoned, like a fired zoo-keeper sneaking peanuts to publicized sodomized elephants; found once again flaunting the rainbow which demonstrates that I am permitted only that which I urgently need; found once again cleansing my tongue of all possibilities, of all possibilities but my perfect one.

WHEN I HEAR YOU SING

When I hear you sing Solomon animal throat, eyes beaming sex and wisdom My hands ache from

I left blood on the doors of my home Solomon I am very alone from aiming songs at God for I thought that beside me there was no one Solomon

HE WAS LAME

He was lame as a 3 legged dog screamed as he came through the fog

If you are the Light give me a light buddy

1965

I AM TOO LOUD WHEN YOU ARE GONE

I am too loud when you are gone
I am John the Baptist, cheated by mere water
and merciful love, wild but over-known
John of honey, of time, longing not for
music, longing, longing to be Him
I am diminished, I peddle versions of Word
that don't survive the tablets broken stone
I am alone when you are gone

SOMEWHERE IN MY TROPHY ROOM ...

Somewhere in my trophy room the crucifixion and other sacrifices were still going on, but the flesh and nails were grown over with rust and I could not tell where the flesh ended and the wood began or on which wall the instruments were hung.

I passed by limbs and faces arranged in this museum like hanging kitchen tools, and some brushed my arm as the hallway reeled me in, but I pocketed my hands along with some vulnerable smiles, and I continued on.

I heard the rooms behind me clamour an instant for my brain, and once the brain responded, out of habit, weakly, as if thinking someone else's history, and somewhere in that last tune it learned that it was not the Queen, it was a drone.

There ahead of me extended an impossible trophy: the bright, great sky, where no men lived. Beautiful and empty, now luminous with a splendour emanating from my own flesh, the tuneless sky washed and washed my lineless face and bathed in waves my heart like a red translucent stone. Until my eyes gave out I lived there as my home.

Today I know the only distance that I came was to the threshold of my trophy room. Among the killing instruments again I am further from sacrifice than when I began. I do not stare or plead with passing pilgrims to help me there. I call it discipline but perhaps it is fallen pride alone.

I'm not the one to learn an exercise for dwelling in the sky. My trophy room is vast and hung with crutches, ladders, 196 |

braces, hooks. Unlike the invalid's cathedral, men hang with these instruments. A dancing wall of molecules, changing nothing, has cleared a place for me and my time.

YOU KNOW WHERE I HAVE BEEN

You know where I have been Why my knees are raw I'd like to speak to you Who will see what I saw

Some men who saw me fall Spread the news of failure I want to speak to them The dogs of literature

Pass me as I proudly Passed the others Who kneel in secret flight Pass us proudly Brothers

I MET A WOMAN LONG AGO

I met a woman long ago, hair black as black can go. Are you a teacher of the heart? Soft she answered No.

I met a girl across the sea, hair the gold that gold can be. Are you a teacher of the heart? Yes, but not for thee.

I knew a man who lost his mind in some lost place I wished to find. Follow me, he said, but he walked behind.

I walked into a hospital
Where none was sick and none was well.
When at night the nurses left,
I could not walk at all.

Not too slow, not too soon morning came, then came noon. Dinner time a scalpel blade lay beside my spoon.

Some girls wander by mistake into the mess that scalpels make. Are you teachers of the heart? We teach old hearts to break.

One day I woke up alone, hospital and nurses gone.

198 |

Have I carved enough? You are a bone.

I ate and ate and ate,
I didn't miss a plate.
How much do these suppers cost?
We'll take it out in hate.

I spent my hatred every place, on every work, on every face. Someone gave me wishes. I wished for an embrace.

Several girls embraced me, then I was embraced by men.
Is my passion perfect?
Do it once again.

I was handsome, I was strong, I knew the words of every song. Did my singing please you? The words you sang were wrong.

Who are you whom I address? Who takes down what I confess? Are you a teacher of the heart? A chorus answered Yes.

Teachers, are my lessons done or must I learn another one? They cried: Dear Sir or Madam, Daughter, Son.

I'VE SEEN SOME LONELY HISTORY

I've seen some lonely history
The heart cannot explore
I've scratched some empty blackboards
They have no teachers for

I trailed my meagre demons From Jerusalem to Rome I had an invitation But the host was not at home

There were contagious armies That spread their uniform To all parts of my body Except where I was warm

And so I wore a helmet
With a secret neon sign
That lit up all the boundaries
So I could toe the line

My boots got very tired Like a sentry's never should I was walking on a tightrope That was buried in the mud

Standing at the drugstore
It was very hard to learn
Though my name was everywhere
I had to wait my turn

I'm standing here before you I don't know what I bring If you can hear the music Why don't you help me sing

SNOW IS FALLING

Snow is falling.

There is a nude in my room.

She surveys the wine-coloured carpet.

She is eighteen. She has straight hair. She speaks no Montreal language.

She doesn't feel like sitting down. She shows no gooseflesh. We can hear the storm.

She is lighting a cigarette from the gas range. She holds back her long hair.

1958

CREATED FIRES I CANNOT LOVE

Created fires I cannot love lest I lose the ones above. Poor enough, then I'll learn to choose the fires where they burn.

O God, make me poor enough to love your diamond in the rough, or in my failure let me see my greed raised to mystery.

Do you hate the ones who must turn your world all to dust? Do you hate the ones who ask if Creation wears a mask?

God beyond the God I name, if mask and fire are the same, repair the seam my love leaps through, uncreated fire to pursue.

Network of created fire, maim my love and my desire. Make me poor so I may be servant in the world I see,

Or, as my love leaps wide, confirm your servant in his pride: if my love can't burn, forbid a sickening return.

Is it here my love will train not to leap so high again? 202 | No praise here? no blame? From my love you tear my name.

Unmake me as I'm washed far from the fiery mask.

Gather my pride in the coded pain which is also your domain.

CLAIM ME, BLOOD, IF YOU HAVE A STORY

Claim me, blood, if you have a story to tell with my Jewish face, you are strong and holy still, only speak, like the Zohar, of a carved-out place into which I must pour myself like wine, an emptiness of history which I must seize and occupy, calm and full in this confine, becoming clear "like good wine on its lees."

1965

HE WAS BEAUTIFUL WHEN HE SAT ALONE

He was beautiful when he sat alone, he was like me, he had wide lapels, he was holding the mug in the hardest possible way so that his fingers were all twisted but still long and beautiful, he didn't like to sit alone all the time, but this time, I swear, he didn't care one way or the other.

I'll tell you why I like to sit alone, because I'm a sadist, that's why we like to sit alone, because we're the sadists who like to sit alone.

He sat alone because he was beautifully dressed for the occasion and because he was not a civilian.

We are the sadists you don't have to worry about, you think, and we have no opinion on the matter of whether you have to worry about us, and we don't even like to think about the matter because it baffles us.

Maybe he doesn't mean a thing to me any more but I think he was like me.

You didn't expect to fall in love, I said to myself and at the same time I answered gently, Do you think so?

I heard you humming beautifully, your hum said that I can't ignore you, that I'd finally come around for a number of delicious reasons that only you knew about, and here I am, Miss Blood.

And you won't come back, you won't come back to where you left me, and that's why you keep my number, so you 204 |

don't dial it by mistake when you're fooling with the dial not even dialing numbers.

You begin to bore us with your pain and we have decided to change your pain.

You said you were happiest when you danced, you said you were happiest when you danced with me, now which do you mean?

And so we changed his pain, we threw the idea of a body at him and we told him a joke, and then he thought a great deal about laughing and about the code.

And he thought that she thought that he thought that she thought that the worst thing a woman could do was to take a man away from his work because that made her what, ugly or beautiful?

And now you have entered the mathematical section of your soul which you claimed you never had. I suppose that this, plus the broken heart, makes you believe that now you have a perfect right to go out and tame the sadists.

He had the last line of each verse of the song but he didn't have any of the other lines, the last line was always the same, Don't call yourself a secret unless you mean to keep it.

He thought he knew, or he actually did know too much about singing to be a singer; and if there actually is such a condition, is anybody in it, and are sadists born there?

It is not a question mark, it is not an exclamation point, it is a full stop by the man who wrote Parasites of Heaven.

Even if we stated our case very clearly and all those who held as we do came to our side, all of them, we would still be very few.

1966

I AM A PRIEST OF GOD

I am a priest of God
I walk down the road
with my pockets in my hand
Sometimes I'm bad
then sometimes I'm very good
I believe that I believe
everything I should
I like to hear you say
when you dance with head rolling
upon a silver tray
that I am a priest of God

I thought I was doing 100 other things but I was a priest of God
I loved 100 women
never told the same lie twice
I said O Christ you're selfish but I shared my bread and rice
I heard my voice tell the crowd that I was alone and a priest of God making me so empty that even now in 1966
I'm not sure I'm a priest of God

IN ALMOND TREES LEMON TREES

In almond trees lemon trees wind and sun do as they please Butterflies and laundry flutter My love her hair is blond as butter

Wasps with yellow whiskers wait for food beside her china plate Ants beside her little feet are there to share what she will eat

Who chopped down the bells that say the world is born again today We will feed you all my dears this morning or in later years

SUZANNE TAKES YOU DOWN

Suzanne takes you down to her place near the river, you can hear the boats go by you can stay the night beside her. And you know that she's half crazy but that's why you want to be there and she feeds you tea and oranges that come all the way from China. Just when you mean to tell her that you have no gifts to give her, she gets you on her wave-length and she lets the river answer that you've always been her lover.

And you want to travel with her, you want to travel blind and you know that she can trust you because you've touched her perfect body with your mind.

Jesus was a sailor
when he walked upon the water
and he spent a long time watching
from a lonely wooden tower
and when he knew for certain
only drowning men could see him
he said All men will be sailors then
until the sea shall free them,
but he himself was broken
long before the sky would open,
forsaken, almost human,
he sank beneath your wisdom like a stone.

And you want to travel with him,

you want to travel blind and you think maybe you'll trust him because he touched your perfect body with his mind.

Suzanne takes your hand and she leads you to the river, she is wearing rags and feathers from Salvation Army counters. The sun pours down like honey on our lady of the harbour as she shows you where to look among the garbage and the flowers, there are heroes in the seaweed there are children in the morning, they are leaning out for love they will lean that way forever while Suzanne she holds the mirror.

And you want to travel with her and you want to travel blind and you're sure that she can find you because she's touched her perfect body with her mind.

GIVE ME BACK MY FINGERPRINTS

Give me back my fingerprints My fingertips are raw If I don't get my fingerprints I have to call the Law

I touched you once too often & I don't know who I am My fingerprints were missing When I wiped away the jam

I called my fingerprints all night But they don't seem to care The last time that I saw them They were leafing through your hair

I thought I'd leave this morning So I emptied out your drawer A hundred thousand fingerprints Floated to the floor

You hardly stooped to pick them up You don't count what you lose You don't even seem to know Whose fingerprints are whose

When I had to say goodbye You weren't there to find You took my fingerprints away So I would love your mind

I don't pretend to understand Just what you mean by that

But next time I'll inquire Before I scratch your back

I wonder if my fingerprints Get lonely in the crowd There are no others like them & that should make them proud

Now you want to marry me & take me down the aisle & throw confetti fingerprints You know that's not my style

Sure I'd like to marry
But I won't face the dawn
With any girl who knew me
When my fingerprints were on

1066

FOREIGN GOD, REIGNING IN EARTHLY GLORY ...

Foreign God, reigning in earthly glory between the Godless God and this greedy telescope of mine: touch my hidden jelly muscle, ring me with some power, I must conquer Babylon and New York. Draw me with a valuable sign, raise me to your height. You and I, dear Foreign God, we both are demons who must disappear in the perpetual crawling light, the fumbling sparks printing the shape of each tired form. We must be lost soon in the elementary Kodak experiment, in the paltry glory beyond our glory, the chalksqueak of our most limitless delight. We are devoted yokels of the mothy parachute, the salvation of ordeal, we paid good money for the perfect holy scab, the pilgrim kneecap, the shoulder freakish under burden, the triumphant snowman who does not freeze. Down with your angels, Foreign God, down with us, adepts of magic: into the muddy fire of our furthest passionate park, let us consign ourselves now, puddles, peep-holes, dreary oceanic pomp seen through the right end of the telescope, the minor burn, the kingsize cigarette, the alibi atomic holocaust, let us consign ourselves to the unmeasured exile outside the rules of lawlessness. O God, in thy foreign or godless form, in thy form of illusion or with the ringscape of your lethal thumb, you stop direction, you crush this down, you abandon the evidence you pressed on its tongue.

1965

I BELIEVE YOU HEARD YOUR MASTER SING

I believe you heard your master sing while I lay sick in bed
I believe he told you everything
I keep locked in my head
Your master took you traveling
at least that's what you said
O love did you come back to bring
your prisoner wine and bread

You met him at some temple where they take your clothes at the door
He was just a numberless man of a pair who has just come back from the war
You wrap his quiet face in your hair and he hands you the apple core and he touches your mouth now so suddenly bare of the kisses you had on before

He gave you a German shepherd to walk with a collar of leather and nails
He never once made you explain or talk about all of the little details such as who had a worm and who had a rock and who had you through the mails
Your love is a secret all over the block and it never stops when he fails

He took you on his air-o-plane which he flew without any hands and you cruised above the ribbons of rain that drove the crowd from the stands

Then he killed the lights on a lonely lane where an ape with angel glands erased the final wisps of pain with the music of rubber bands

And now I hear your master sing You pray for him to come His body is a golden string that your body is hanging from His body is a golden string My body is growing numb O love I hear your master sing Your shirt is all undone

Will you kneel beside the bed
we polished long ago
before your master chose instead
to make my bed of snow
Your hair is wild your knuckles red
and you're speaking much too low
I can't make out what your master said
before he made you go

I think you're playing far too rough
For a lady who's been to the moon
I've lain by the window long enough
(you get used to an empty room)
Your love is some dust in an old man's cuff
who is tapping his foot to a tune
and your thighs are a ruin and you want too much
Let's say you came back too soon

I loved your master perfectly I taught him all he knew He was starving in a mystery like a man who is sure what is true
I sent you to him with my guarantee
I could teach him something new
I taught him how you would long for me
No matter what he said no matter what you do

THIS MORNING I WAS DRESSED BY THE WIND

This morning I was dressed by the wind.
The sky said, close your eyes and run
this happy face into a sundrift.
The forest said, never mind, I am as old
as an emerald, walk into me gossiping.
The village said, I am perfect and intricate,
would you like to start right away?
My darling said, I am washing my hair in the water
we caught last year, it tastes of stone.
This morning I was dressed by the wind,
it was the middle of September in 1965.

I STEPPED INTO AN AVALANCHE

I stepped into an avalanche
It covered up my soul
When I am not a hunchback
I sleep beneath a hill
You who wish to conquer pain
Must learn to serve me well

You strike my side by accident
As you go down for gold
The cripple that you clothe and feed
is neither starved nor cold
I do not beg for company
in the centre of the world

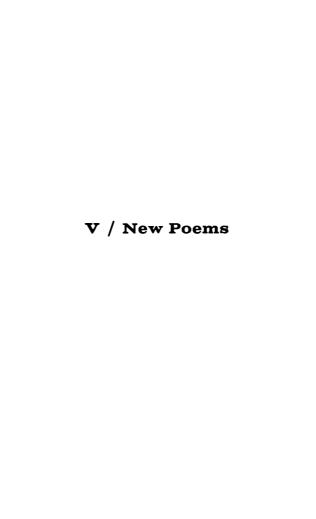
When I am on a pedestal you did not raise me there your laws do not compel me to kneel grotesque and bare I myself am pedestal for the thing at which you stare

You who wish to conquer pain must learn what makes me kind The crumbs of love you offer me are the crumbs I've left behind Your pain is no credential It is the shadow of my wound

I have begun to claim you
I who have no greed
I have begun to long for you
I who have no need

The avalanche you're knocking at is uninhabited

Do not dress in rags for me
I know you are not poor
Don't love me so fiercely
when you know you are not sure
It is your world beloved
It is your flesh I wear



THIS IS FOR YOU

This is for you it is my full heart it is the book I meant to read you when we were old Now I am a shadow I am restless as an empire You are the woman who released me I saw you watching the moon you did not hesitate to love me with it I saw you honouring the windflowers caught in the rocks you loved me with them On the smooth sand between pebbles and shoreline you welcomed me into the circle more than a guest All this happened in the truth of time in the truth of flesh I saw you with a child you brought me to his perfume and his visions without demand of blood On so many wooden tables adorned with food and candles a thousand sacraments which you carried in your basket I visited my clay I visited my birth until I became small enough

and frightened enough to be born again I wanted you for your beauty you gave me more than yourself you shared your beauty this I only learned tonight as I recall the mirrors you walked away from after you had given them whatever they claimed for my initiation Now I am a shadow I long for the boundaries of my wandering and I move with the energy of your prayer and I move in the direction of your prayer for you are kneeling like a bouquet in a cave of bone behind my forehead and I move toward a love you have dreamed for me

YOU DO NOT HAVE TO LOVE ME

You do not have to love me just because you are all the women I have ever wanted I was born to follow you every night while I am still the many men who love you

I meet you at a table
I take your fist between my hands
in a solemn taxi
I wake up alone
my hand on your absence
in Hotel Discipline

I wrote all these songs for you
I burned red and black candles
shaped like a man and a woman
I married the smoke
of two pyramids of sandalwood
I prayed for you
I prayed that you would love me
and that you would not love me

IT'S JUST A CITY, DARLING

It's just a city, darling, everyone calls New York.

Wherever it is we meet

I can't go very far from.

I can't connect you with anything but myself.

Half of the wharf is bleeding.

I'd give up anything to love you and I don't even know what the list is

but one look into it

demoralizes me like a lecture.

If we are training each other for another love what is it?

I only have a hunch

in what I've become expert.

Half of the wharf is bleeding, it's the half where we always sleep.

EDMONTON, ALBERTA, DECEMBER 1966, 4 A.M.

Edmonton, Alberta, December 1966, 4 a.m.

When did I stop writing you?

The sandalwood is on fire in this small hotel on Jasper

Street.

You've entered the room a hundred times disguises of sari and armour and jeans, and you sit beside me for hours like a woman alone in a happy room.

I've sung to a thousand people and I've written a small new song

I believe I will trust myself with the care of my soul. I hope you have money for the winter.

I'll send you some as soon as I'm paid.

Grass and honey, the singing radiator, the shadow of bridges on the ice of the North Saskatchewan River, the cold blue hospital of the sky—

it all keeps us such sweet company.

The broom is an army of straw or an automatic guitar, The dust absorbs a changing chord that the yawning dog can hear, My truces have retired me and the truces are at war. Is this the house, Beloved, is this the window sill where I meet you face to face? Are these the rooms, are these the walls, is this the house that opens on the world? Have you been loved in this disguise too many times, ring of powder left behind by teachers polishing their ecstasy? Beloved of empty spaces there is dew on the mirror: can it nourish the bodies in the avalanche the silver could not exhume? Beloved of war. am I obedient to a tune? Beloved of my injustice, is there anything to be won? Summon me as I summon from this house the mysteries of death and use. Forgive me the claims I embrace. Forgive me the claims I renounce.

I MET YOU

I met you just after death had become truly sweet There you were 24 years old Joan of Arc I came after you with all my art with everything you know I am a god who needs to use your body who needs to use your body to sing about beauty in a way no one has ever sung before you are mine you are one of my last women

CALM, ALONE, THE CEDAR GUITAR

Calm, alone, the cedar guitar tuned into a sunlight drone, I'm here with sandalwood and Patricia's clove pomander. Thin snow carpets on the roofs of Edmonton cars prophesy the wilderness to come. Downstairs in Swan's Café the Indian girls are hunting with their English names. In Terry's Diner the counter man plunges his tattoo in soapy water. Don't fall asleep until your plan includes every angry nomad. The juke-box sings of service everywhere while I work to renew the style which models the apostles on these friends whom I have known.

YOU LIVE LIKE A GOD

You live like a god somewhere behind the names I have for you, your body made of nets my shadow's tangled in, your voice perfect and imperfect like oracle petals in a herd of daisies. You honour your own god with mist and avalanche but all I have is your religion of no promises and monuments falling like stars on a field where you said you never slept. Shaping your fingernails with a razorblade and reading the work like a Book of Proverbs no man will ever write for you, a discarded membrane of the voice you use to wrap your silence in drifts down the gravity between us, and some machinery of our daily life prints an ordinary question in it like the Lord's Prayer raised on a rollered penny. Even before I begin to answer you I know you won't be listening. We're together in a room,

it's an evening in October,
no one is writing our history.
Whoever holds us here in the midst of a Law,
I hear him now
I hear him breathing
as he embroiders gorgeously our simple chains.

AREN'T YOU TIRED

Aren't you tired of your beauty tonight How can you carry your burden under the stars
Just your hair just your lips enough to crush you
Can you see where I'm running the heavy New York Times with your picture in it somewhere in it somewhere in it under my arm

SHE SINGS SO NICE

She sings so nice there's no desire in her voice She sings alone to tell us all that we have not been found

THE REASON I WRITE

The reason I write is to make something as beautiful as you are

When I'm with you
I want to be the kind of hero
I wanted to be
when I was seven years old
a perfect man
who kills

WHEN I MEET YOU IN THE SMALL STREETS

When I meet you in the small streets of rain-streaked movies and old-fashioned shaving equipment, you smile at me from my blood, saying: an obsolete wisdom would have married us when I was fourteen, O my teacher.

I walk through your Moorish eyes into sun and mathematics. I polish Holland diamonds, and deep into Russia I codify in one laser verse the haphazard numbers leaping from each triangular story—oh all world-hated flashing work I make precise for the sake of the perfect world.

Like jigsaw pieces married too early in the puzzle we are pried apart for every new experiment, as if simplicity and good luck were not enough to build a rainbow through gravity and mist.

IT HAS BEEN SOME TIME

It has been some time
since I took away
a woman's perfume on my skin
I remember tonight
how sweet I used to find it
and tonight I've forgotten nothing
of how little it means to me
knowing in my heart
we would never be lovers
thinking much more about suicide and money

A PERSON WHO EATS MEAT

A person who eats meat
wants to get his teeth into something
A person who does not eat meat
wants to get his teeth into something else
If these thoughts interest you for even a moment
you are lost

WHO WILL FINALLY SAY

Who will finally say you are perfect Who will choose you in order to edit your secrets

I sing this for your children I sing this for the crickets I sing this for the army for all who do not need me

Whom will you address first thing tomorrow morning your dreams so bureaucratic you refuse to appear in them

How beautiful the solemn are Yes I have noticed you Whoever gives you money will be remembered for his pride

I love to speak to you this way knowing how you came to me leaving everything unsaid that might employ us

When you are torn when your silver is torn take down this book and find your place in my head

WAITING TO TELL THE DOCTOR

Waiting to tell the doctor
that he failed
and that I failed
I count the few remaining coins
I should have dropped at Monte Carlo
in the little wishing well
they offer you with the gun

still thinking about you and the sparks between us dull, milky and peculiar now like dimes that have been dipped in mercury too long ago

Last night I asked my brain to put back into my loins my love for you

Free at last I fell asleep both of us naked and hungry
I am sure you willed me the fullest audience with your body on condition I die

What did you leave in my room on my bed against the wall that is so cold and impossible and greedy It's good to sit with people
who are up so late
your other homes wash away
and other meals you left
unfinished on the plate
It's just coffee
and a piano player's cigarette
and Tim Hardin's song
and the song in your head
that always makes you wait
I'm thinking of you

little Frédérique with your white white skin and your stories of wealth

in Normandy
I don't think I ever told you
that I wanted to save the world
watching television

while we made love ordering Greek wine and olives for you while my friend scattered dollar bills over the head of the belly-dancer under the clarinettes of Eighth Avenue listening to your plans for an exclusive pet shop in Paris

Your mother telephoned me she said I was too old for you and I agreed but you came to my room one morning after a long time because you said you loved me

From time to time I meet men who said they gave you money and some girls have said that you weren't really a model Don't they know what it means to be lonely lonely for boiled eggs in silver cups lonely for a large dog who obeys your voice lonely for rain in Normandy seen through leaded windows lonely for a fast car lonely for restaurant asparagus lonely for a simple prince and an explorer I'm sure they know but we are all creatures of envy we need our stone fingernails on another's beauty we demand the hidden love of everyone we meet the hidden love not the daily love

Your breasts are beautiful warm porcelain taste of worship and greed

Your eyes come to me under the perfect spikes of imperishable eyelashes

Your mouth living on French words and the soft ashes of your make-up Only with you

I did not imitate myself only with you

I asked for nothing
your long long fingers
deciphering your hair
your lace blouse
borrowed from a photographer
the bathroom lights
flashing on your new red fingernails
your tall legs at attention
as I watch you from my bed
while you brush dew
from the mirror
to work behind the enemy lines
of your masterpiece
Come to me if you grow old
come to me if you need coffee

DO NOT FORGET OLD FRIENDS

Do not forget old friends you knew long before I met you the times I know nothing about being someone who lives by himself and only visits you on a raid

MARITA

MARITA
PLEASE FIND ME
I AM ALMOST 30

HE STUDIES TO DESCRIBE

He studies to describe the lover he cannot become failing the widest dreams of the mind & settling for visions of God

The tatters of his discipline have no beauty that he can hold so easily as your beauty

He does not know how to trade himself for your love Do not trust him unless you love him

INDEX OF FIRST LINES

A cloud of grasshoppers,	48
A cross didn't fall on me,	182
A kite is a victim you are sure of,	37
A person who eats meat,	233
Aren't you tired,	230
As I lay dead,	57
As the mist leaves no scar,	63
Beneath my hands,	62
Beside the shepherd dreams the beast,	33
Between the mountains of spices,	73
Calm, alone, the cedar guitar,	228
Catching winter in their carved nostrils,	7
Claim me, blood, if you have a story,	203
Clean as the grass from which,	186
Come back to me,	178
Come, my brothers,	104
Come upon this heap,	99
Created fires I cannot love,	202
Do not arrange your bright flesh in the sun,	29
Do not forget old friends,	238
During the first pogrom they,	Ij
Edmonton, Alberta, December 1966, 4 a.m.,	225
Evidently they need a lot ,	118
Eyes: Medium,	122
Finally I called the people I didn't want to hear from,	103
Flowers for Hitler the summer yawned,	134
For a lovely instant I thought she would grow mad,	9
For you,	76
For your sake I said I will praise the moon,	52
Foreign God, reigning in earthly glory,	213
Found once again shamelessly ignoring ,	193
Give me back my fingerprints,	211
Give me back my house,	171
Go by brooks, love,	43

241

God, God, God, someone of my family,	72
He has returned from countless wars,	8
He pulled a flower,	22
He studies to describe,	239
He was beautiful when he sat alone, he was lik	e me,
he had,	205
He was lame,	195
He was wearing a black moustache and leather	hair, 126
Here we are at the window ,	185
His blood on my arm is warm as a bird,	4
His last love poem,	97
His pain, unowned, he left,	102
Hitler the brain-mole looks out of my eyes,	98
How you murdered your family,	16
Hurt once and for all into silence,	44
I almost went to bed,	68
I am a priest of God,	207
I am locked in a very expensive suit,	90
I am one of those who could tell ,	78
I am sorry that the rich man must go,	168
I am too loud when you are gone,	195
I ask you where you want to go,	130
I believe you heard your master sing,	214
I don't believe the radio stations,	95
I do not know if the world has lied,	87
I had it for a moment,	135
I have not lingered in European monasteries,	45
I have two bars of soap,	60
I heard of a man,	30
I long to hold some lady,	64
I met a woman long ago,	198
I met you,	227
I once believed a single line,	124
I see you on a Greek mattress,	188
I stepped into an avalanche,	217
I want your warm body to disappear,	142
I was the last passenger of the day,	128
I wonder how many people in this city,	42
I would like to remind,	167
	•

If I had a shining head,		12
If this looks like a poem,		56
If your neighbor disappears,		31
In almond trees lemon trees,		208
In his black armour,		30
In many movies I came upon an idol,		140
In the Bible generations pass ,		192
Is there anything emptier,		89
It has been some time,		233
It's good to sit with people,		236
It's just a city, darling,		224
It's so simple,		114
It swings, Jocko,		46
I've seen some lonely history,		200
January 28 1962,		91
Layton, when we dance our freilach,		69
Listen all you bullets,		173
Listen to the stories,		93
Loving you, flesh to flesh, I often thought,		59
MARITA,		239
Martha they say you are gentle,		100
My friend walks through our city this winter night,		176
My lady can sleep,		58
My lady was found mutilated,		26
My love, the song is less than sung,		54
My lover Peterson,		20
My rabbi has a silver buddha,		116
Nothing has been broken,		184
One night I burned the house I loved,		190
Out of some simple part of me,		III
Out of the land of heaven,		71
Poems! break out!		113
Queen Victoria,		142
	1	243

Several faiths,	132
She sings so nice,	231
She tells me a child built her house,	32
Silence,	70
Snow is falling,	201
So you're the kind of vegetarian,	183
Somewhere in my trophy room ,	196
Strafed by the Milky Way,	139
Suzanne takes you down,	209
Suzanne wears a leather coat,	189
The big world will find out,	174
The broom is an army of straw,	226
The coherent statement was made,	131
The day wasn't exactly my own,	88
The famous doctor held up Grandma's stomach,	92
The flowers that I left in the ground,	38
The miracle we all are waiting for,	134
The moon dangling wet like a half-plucked eye,	28
The naked weeping girl,	11
The nightmares do not suddenly,	181
The pain-monger came home,	115
The reason I write,	231
The snow was falling,	175
The stony path coiled around me,	119
The sun is tangled,	2 I
The torture scene developed under a glass bell,	117
The warrior boats from Portugal,	14
There are some men,	40
This could be my little,	106
This is for you,	221
This morning I was dressed by the wind,	216
Those unshadowed figures, rounded lines of men,	5
Tonight I will live with my new white skin,	137
Toronto has been good to me,	164
Towering black nuns frighten us,	24
Two hours off the branch and burnt,	138
Two went to sleep,	191
Under her grandmother's natchwork quilt	65

Waiting to tell the doctor,	235
We meet at a hotel,	129
Whatever cities are brought down,	41
When I hear you sing,	194
When I meet you in the small streets,	232
When I paid the sun to run,	187
When this American woman,	10
When we learned that his father ,	123
When with lust I am smitten,	67
When you kneel below me,	61
When young the Christians told me,	3
Who is purer,	108
Who will finally say,	234
With all Greek heroes,	18
With Annie gone,	68
You dance on the day you saved,	172
You do not have to love me,	223
You have the lovers,	50
You know where I have been,	197
You live like a god,	229
You recited the Code of Comparisons,	165
You tell me that silence,	39