

channel

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Sweet runs the water ever
out of spring and meadow,
frothing low, rising,
weaving through
the sodden grass.
Silver line, transparent flow,
zigzag
and shine and
swerve
where the willow damsel-
fly dives and climbs.

When I think of a beginning ~ before
the beginning,
a needle on a gauge between something
~ and nothing, nothing
and something ~ then sticking at
something,
the core of the earth ~ like a hot fist
gathering force ~ a dance set in motion
by a matrix contracting ~ it's Spring
beginning
or never ending, beneath all
change, continuing ~
look, look again,
at what was there,
is here, and if it is hiding,
it's not hiding
from you.

Veils of gnats and midges hovering
over gravel and muddy
runs of silting clay, sandstone,
and shale. Invisibly, the yellow
iris stirs and sends her spear
swelling through
the duckweed and moss.
Now rills and pools unfurling, coursing ~
inner wind and rhyme ~ the quick,

quickenings, striders pass the stone-still
daddy longlegs ~
Turtles scramble, big to small,
along a log, then
slip and fall, splash
and sink and haul themselves
back into the sun.
The wild geese,
returned, sleep with one eye open
and build their nests from twig
and hiss, lined with softest feathers.
Their chartreuse goslings
stagger in a row, then slide
down the slick bank to the stream ~
wobbling rights to gliding, cluster into
sequence ~ the sharp-jawed ice
melts away without a mark.

Where were they before the days
began to lengthen
and the first red
tips blurred the profiles
of the maples?
The newborns were dozing
in their winter waiting
room ~ as if the world had died
and only conscience could wake them.
Those silent nights, the silent rain
fell soundless on the shadowed snow,
the asphalt night bore down with blank
insistence. Month in and out, the moon
trained its searchlight on the window.
There and then the half-life
of waking from a dream ~
our narrow boat and bed
was thrown from shore to
rock, clockwise, counter-
clockwise, under drifting stars...
the ram, the bull,

the archer, the goat
the scorpion, and heavenly
twins...

It was no dream, or all is,
and now a current runs,
electric, through
the hours and days ~
a drum, a mortal hum ~ alive
until it ends ~
rain on the grass
rain on the sea
rain on the roof
and rain on you
and me.

The perfect whorl within the ear,
an open line can't help but hear
the passing car,
a radio, a robin's dawn *chereet cheroot,*
the peeper's clack and trill ~
and rain on you and me
and then and then and then
and then—a child's telling,
retelling, no cause,
no close, returning,
the long scene unspooling.

The river narrows, widens,
flexes ~ falls over
flatlands ~
coming, going, coming,
going into its own ~
muddy, grained,
translucent,
scouring, churning,
churning, scouring,
no memory of mouth
or tributary,
flowing toward horizon ~

bearing the refuse from picnics and
speedboats ~ the bobbing trash
of distant towns ~ traced by the tracks
of bullet trains and coal cars ~
passing squares of gray-grimed
sheets and dungarees on
sagging lines where shirts
are filled and
hollowed by the wind.

Monday washday

Tuesday ironing

Wednesday mending

Thursday churning

Friday scouring

Saturday baking

Sunday resting,

wearily rest.

Barbed-wire verges and dusty parking
lots,
skeletons of factories ~ and piles of
mangled
iron, where great wheels once crushed
to bits
the grain and bark and apples and
tanneries soaked the mounds
of hides in ash and stink and lime.
There strikers walked their narrow
circles,
holding signs with aching arms,
while the black smoke flew
from the high and tapered chimneys.

The locked gate ~ the sere leaves ~
cellophane in tatters ~ a brown paper
lunch bag
smashed near the curb.

Now girls are skimming stones across
the surface of the water ~ the disks thud
and drop or, lucky,
bounce to bounce
again like
petrels taking flight.

They turn to aim their handfuls
at a passing limousine ~ then scatter
into alleys

where strangers never go.

They cannot know

how little

the lives that stand

before them

will ever follow

from their wills.

The menders and the gleaners—gone,

the trappers and the hunters ~

the darners and the typists ~

the sandman and the sawyer ~

the hawkler with his *sea-trout*,

can't-e-lope ~ the rag-and-bone-man

clanking

his silver pails at dusk ~ no

lamplighter, no

lamp ~ no mapmaker, no map.

Monday's child is fair of face

Tuesday's child is full of grace

Wednesday's child is full of woe

Thursday's child has far to go

Friday's child is loving and giving

Saturday's child works

hard for her living

Some chafe their hands above

the market barrels' flames ~ others

drag wire carts piled

high with laundry or

produce ~ and others

pass their ragged bills in trade

for socks or gloves or pills

or shining toys from China.

The child that is born

on the Sabbath day

is bonny and blithe

and good and gay.

Does the river remember every

thing that I remember? ~ Do you
know you cannot know
everything the river
knows? ~

Mired in the silt, invisible ~ fossils

and candlesticks ~ rungs

and rings ~ forks and greening

coins ~ sheaves turned back

to shreds of cloth ~ bedding for mussels

on the river's floor ~ nothing that

breathes above can say

what these are for.

Every stroke I take

across the river's

dimpled net breaks

the line

and vanishes.

The river only mirrors

changing sky.

rain on the sea

rain on the roof

Born along a river,

to live along a river,

to build a house beside its banks

and think of permanence

(what does not live

in forms

but in the surety that

makes them).

The cargo-laden barge

floats free, drifting toward

the farther shore, the distant

woods, a slip of road—

who lives there? who

are their loves? and where

do they come from?

where do they go?

From there, do they feel the river's moods

as we do?

Do they suffer its changes

and fear its depths

as we do?

Are they, too, drawn
to the wild light it carries,
to the light below
the bridges—wavering
shapes thrown up in sequence
on the black
fretwork of the piers?
—and to the other light
the waves will send,
twisting, straining,
waxing, waning,
tugging as if
it were leashed.

They share our sky and thunder,
but their rain is only theirs,
as our rain
is only ours.

mending,
rain on the grass
churning,
rain on the sea
scouring,
rain on the roof
resting, rain
on you
and me.

Your magic is only mine,
my magic is only
yours. The disdain
in thinking the source
of a thing—
is it fear
of the mother, her power
and her weakness, that
gives the ship, the river, and
the sea her name—
her secret,
familiar, name?
(And the name of the storm
that destroys them.)

The barge tips and shivers,
then rights itself,

the rope, thrown
to the dockhand,
is caught and wound around
the bollard. What stays
stays anchored, umbilical,
and open twenty-
four seven.

A paperboy props
his bike against an alder
that dangles down to
touch the water's edge, and there
the bike and leaves and boy
are doubled for a moment,
before the wind,
like a palm
across a slate,
erases boy and
leaves and bike,
and all is literal again.

and fair of face

Nearby, where the silt
drifts between the reeds,
sheltered from the current,
minnows race their shadows.

full of grace

The wild geese over-
head in their equi-
distant Vs.

The sky cannot mirror the river.
But each could
hide you in its way.

If it's not the season for making nets,
it must be the season for fishing.

full of woe

and far to go

works hard for her living

One cormorant will love the sea
and the other will love the city.

The nervous gulls fill the silence
with their clatter,

while the cattails bend
in synchrony.

The river surges,
then eddies toward the port
where the great cranes
huddle and the rusted ships
hang stranded high
in dry dock.

Men are strung in slings
like pendants on a necklace.
They jump with each punch
of the riveting guns
while the welders hunch inside
the penumbras of sparks
sent up by their
infernal torches.

What are their daydreams
and their worries at midnight—
the work out of scale
with a human thought?

The miniaturist and the embroiderer,
the circuit maker and the atomist
—are they bound in mazes
of their own
devising, or does pattern
multiply to bud
and constellation—

to the starfish
now a mile
out to sea, shaped
like the center of
the radiant apple?

bonny and blithe

and good and gay

We held each other, palm folded
into palm, barefoot,
when we crossed the limpid stream
cut in the sand—
the spot where one water glides into
another and neither
returns to tell, and none will tell.

After the eelgrass
 and the coral reef,
 a line of the river
 stays true to itself,
 struggling against
 the force of the waves,
 diving lower
 like the path of a simple song
 beneath the crash of the sea's
 orchestration ~ *rain on the grass*
rain on the sea
rain on the roof
and rain on you
and me
 flowing for a mile and then
 for thousands, darting
 past the giants and the drifting
 plankton, plunging
 to wrecks brimmed by
 phosphorescent swimmers, where
 the chambered nautilus works
 its pinhole camera ~
 and on through vastness,
 nameless ~
 unknown ~ the limits
 of nerve and human
 senses ~
 lightless ~ airless ~
 Is there a mnemonic for its hidden
 constellations?
 Are there mirror forms blooming in
 the pressing dark?
the man who carries
the water pot, and the fish
with glittering scales
 While, miles above,
 container ships
 and solitary tankers
 float suspended
 beyond the law.
 Steel under sun
 as cruel as the sun,
 abandoned and un-
 forgiving.

~~~  
 I was dreaming and awoke  
 to the boat turned counterclockwise,  
 the purple loosestrife  
 flowering and the heron  
 taking flight.  
 Was my dream inside  
 the river, or the river  
 in my dream?  
 (The constant form  
 of motion, shape  
 of time.)  
 ~~~  
 The river nymph, daughter
 of Nereus, survived as
 an underground stream,
 far below the marshes
 and the brackish pools.
 She rises forever in
 a clear-water fountain
 ringed by papyrus
 and circling swans.
 There, at the limits of the shore,
 where the waves—
 exhausted, retreating,
 returning—pound
 and pound against
 the seawall,
 unending, climbing,
 falling again only
 to climb
 and fall.
 ~~~  
 Do you remember our return  
 to that place?  
 The blue rooms, the twilight,  
 a wooden bowl of oranges  
 the lifeblood revealed  
 when each was opened?  
 ~~~  
 Tacit, invisible,
 the secret form that travels
 through memories of
 music, sunlit, and

surprises in a story
 misunderstood and
 understood, star-crossed,
 unrequited,
 then required.
 ~~~  
*the heavenly twins,*  
*the lion, the crab,*  
*the virgin, and the scales—*  
*full of grace*  
*and fair of face,*  
*mending, churning,*  
*loving, giving*  
 ~~~  
 sweet shape flowing beneath
 the coarsest sea,
 the blinding tears at midnight,
 endings beginning
 and sweetness, sweet
 water that erodes
 the hardest
 salt. Sweet and salt,
 sweet to salt, is the song
 the sea remembers
 long after the river
 has lost its line to wave—
 the melody, like honey,
 sweet and salt, sweet to salt
 the song the sea remembers
 and the trickling path.
 Beginning ever
 out of spring and
 meadow, pulsing, rising,
 weaving through
 the sodden grass.
rain on the grass
rain on the sea
 salt to sweet,
 sweet to salt,
 salt to sweet.