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scattered remains

on the level

still
after all these years
in the thicket of it
sickling away
at the deeper
darkest
stonebound
rootspring

time's by-pass
beckons
to a heart-
searching site without

desperation
declines to
a hapless dot
undoing itself maplessly

everywhere
pure surfaces'
blind hubris
reflects shiny
little nothings
back to the grey
sheet screen blank
pierced only
by discontent's
one black eye

down there
 edging across
 tattered plains
 a phalanx of detectives
 witnessing naught
 save its shield's back
 lurches on
 to empty city

soughingly

in breathing's course
 time sighs
 without a thought
 for the breather
 breathed into
 doubtful canyons

training its eye
 on the nearest
 it passes speedless

it's all go

if you get your theorems right
 you'll find it's all in place -
 don't make silken purses out of cows' lips
 buy no meals
 become as expectationless as a kitten

hard by the perimeter fence
 slipshod night riders drifted

along the towpath
unscrewing lock gates
by the dozen
waters pattered into the sand

one Friday just when you thought that's it
the story's over now
out-of-town piketurn boys
skittered by
belaying pins at the ready
a loan lark failed to soar skywards

with shark's fin soup heading the menu
islets of tremulous noise were promised
for mean-time amusement
and latecomers were accommodated
in the cistern by the squash court wall

it was the show of the year
by all accounts
although few enough hammocks
were hung out to dry
twixt the dappling birches
deck chair attendants could
still be seen
sweeping ha'pennies 'neath the azaleas
a sight for sore eyes indeed

did you notice how she'd altered since yesterday
the cut and thrust of her nose
a root and branch solution obviously
nothing like a bit of fakery for
switching the course of evolution eh?

giving it our best shot

Dad was on the panel long before he fell for Margeurite.
 Automatically they suspended him.
 In the final we were up against the pirates of desperation,
 I'd already asked him without much joy
 what life was like inside a string trio
 but this was of a different order.
 For a potted version of game-furnished conditions
 Colonel Evensong referred me to
 Laszlo Tightbinder's two volume treatise,
 a classic according to some,
 from game to chaos and back again, in theory.

I came away empty handed. Naturally.
 Mrs. Hatchback had swept up early
 that day and some words ended
 up in the bin.
 Most of the rest were tarnished
 by years of indecent exposure,
 a constant hazard at the Trust Me Library.

They said they were operating a sweeper system,
 but that was disingenuous
 as we found to our cost
 when the penny dropped
 late in the final quarter.
 We were already on a hiding to nothing.

psycho-goofing

if you're troubled about things
 consult Ida Floodmarsh
 her good offices straighten even bent spoons

in the gap between now and tomorrow
 she performs her own small miracles
 you'll find her couch obliges all weights
 and the smell of musk behind the arras
 distracts even the hardest of swimmers against the tide
 miniature horse brasses hanging in the alcove
 carry you across vales of damp sedge
 this is the content of her context
 undermining all theory
 she's usually absent
 buried beneath the power of her silences
 taking on all comers at a distance with ease

by spilling a tarnished narrative or two
 you'll engage her inattention
 as it fashions your inner tension
 to see through you have to see in
 this is given only to ta-babies
 and the recently disturbed

the point of it

don't give me that hawk talk
 all that doo dad mop mop
 from the skitter alley scene
 at the best of times unseasonable
 it's too late in the day
 gives me the jitters

from here on in let's be reasonable
 beside the point
 which we lost the night before last
 when we tried to return it to square one
 it flipped its lid if you recall

became a speckled blotch without age rings

it's spreading still

if you wouldn't mind

dream us blue parchments
whose white writing
has faded distinctly
scale us several depths
whose scattered sides
confuse down with up
throw grids of spliced light
across the paths of our latest tight rope walkers

these are only half solutions
but they'll have to suffice
till something weaker shows up
best foot forward now

do not look back
to the places where moss-flecked time-lumps
lie congealed in blocks of unknowing
plaster casts of a late god
whose job was done
before he'd even begun
to think of reasons
best to forget all that

turn left at Warm Wounds Drive
skip past Uniform House
and head for the pebbles
if your luck's in
the sentinels of Nostalgia Gate
will wave you through

avoid their glance at all costs
it's infectious

loose confections

old habits die soft and slow
try putting them out to grass
and they'll trot home
dutifully at dusk
leaving their shells behind them
suction pads at the ready

when you press the switch
nothing happens any more
it's gone damp underneath
and the wad decomposes steadily
absorbed as it is
by acerbic lunar juices

long distance runner

after lunch take this white horse somewhere
put it through its paces in the box provided
wrap it carefully in lint
send it first class post haste
a place has been reserved
in the no smoking bay
courtesy of Wells Fargo
the mail's not due
till all the mulberries ripen

sometime after St.Vixen's day.
it will need a chaperone.

seems simple enough

let's trade complexity for a laugh
or two
there'll be community singing
at the Miramar
Cav and Pag at the Rex
Joey and his talking maggots
play the pier and
drinks are on the hutch
I'll be in the stone orchard
stealing fallen fruit and
banking on innumeracy

the end is almost in sight

save the dregs
there's precious little else
always excepting
a toy Chrysler
parked outside the Odeon
the queen is suing her son
for something he'll do tomorrow
before first light
imagine the shock
when he divorces his second cousin
already twice removed

I think I'll stay to the end though
the last act sounds charming

all too soon

between the lost phrases
a dram or two
of ripening anguish
has been preserved
for latecomers

as the storm fades
unreality reappears
laced with apple honey
and lines the way with lost concerns

cherubs beam from high branches
it's still only lunch time
but already the gallery is closed
collection sold to an unknown buyer

the nearby far

knowledge sways dangerously
close to the shore
a child scrambles on the rocks
searching for signs of life
among the abandoned pools

leaning further over
I can just make out

the virtues of incontinence
 to the left of that boulder
 silhouetted against the purple tide

many miles below the surface
 scattered lights flash faintly
 dim reminders of illicit traces
 marking the unspeakable differences
 between now and then

the gates of a submerged stadium open
 its tiny crowd drifts off
 sucked by cross currents
 into the fissures of an ancient learning
 buried forever beneath sticks and dust

at the surface angels tread air
 knowing it's time to go
 without warning age creeps up
 glances at its watch and
 takes their breath away

it's all in the agreement

Cutthrust, Upem and Atem
 a new breed of lawmen
 assiduously ply their trade
 as the sun sets behind Bodge City
 the law takes all night
 to work its way out
 defenders are bussed in
 every hour on the hour
 from out-county farms

dipping his forefinger

into a pot of grey dust
the court scribe marks their card
leaving a space blank
for the final verdict
which is delivered precisely
as the rules require
just before dawn
by a judge in brown chambers
who is always right
his sentences just so

or so it would appear
from impartial press reports
revealing everyone's guilt
in spite of top notch defence
there's no appeal now
and the packed wagons
avoiding all road blocks
thread their way through
to Inward Bound House
where skilled professionals
according to established practices
carrying a government stamp
have already prepared
a seamless de-guiling
programme of soul-realignment
through solitary refinement

open to offers

the difficulty was knowing which way to turn
after looping the loop and the suspension of directions
there were fallen leaves but no indications
save some broken tent pegs by the bridge
ordinary soles weren't up to the journey

forced marching being the order of the day
they had encouraged us to bind our feet
with swathes of supple stalks
garnered from adjacent stooks
standing just this side of the evening
in fields grey with the anticipation
of a still ripening tragedy

it was after the harvest
but before they closed the heronry
as a sop to the treasury boys
schemes were afoot to salvage something
from just above the tide mark
where conditions were ripe for the coalescence
of guano cobs and polythene shreds
forming knuckle-hard yet infinitely ductile
twists of proto-material ready for all-comers
it was not known if the offer was ever taken up

just about

the answers to larger questions
are disappointingly small
hostage as they are
to the short change
of words pressed
into the violent service
of things they know
nothing about
and Nothing
is about

easy now

whichever way you turn
 late essences
 self-split - multiply
 spill into each other
 cross fertilise with
 a flash looseness
 striking in its innocence
 blind to the consequences
 of its loving ferocity

it's all go it seems

It came as no surprise to anybody
 that the laundry van was late;
 little balls of flock had been sucked into the carburettor
 and time's left hand had taken a wrong turning after the fork.

Once more between us we'd fudged the issue;
 when every day is an away-day
 you can't afford to let compromise be its own reward.
 All-out hatch-battening is called for.

Or else everyone gets
 shunted up the sidings
 on tut test-bed.
 Even here it's not too late to tarry
 with the tarnished virtues of absconsion,
 praised by our first teachers as an
 essential condition for the journey
 from carpenter to tzar.

'Let the branch line take you
 away from the city's draft',

they'd chorused over the clang
of the interim machinery.
'After all it's not as if your nail parings
have immediate commercial value
and it's getting over warm for your pet rabbit'.

At the time we had agreed -
tho' now the strength of their logic
has been diluted by the weight placed
on becoming at one with things' surfacings,
on sticking with our professional jury's verdict
on the thingumajigs.

And the case for draft dodging diminishes
following the draft's abolition.
Drafted into draft's absence our attention
is concentrated on the achievement
of jerky sideways scutterings.
It's not as if we've ever had much time
for practice in the wheelhouse,
so great has been our dedication
to ensuring the continuity of supplies.
And everything's still on schedule
according to the current duty roster.

Our line manager has made
sure we're fully engaged
in a non-committal sort of way.
Decisions were taken some time ago
that no time was to be left over.

A mobile gym provides all the opportunities a.m.,
and après-midi, siesta time for some,
we're to be found quietly flogging
dead horses on the black glade's edge.

There must be other ways

but windmill tilting was dropped
from the syllabus last year. And
the governors go ape-shit
if there's even the slightest suggestion.

Funny to think that the contestants
at last year's mime festival
came too late to save long-tarnished reputations.
Pass the solvent, this one calls for deletion.

weather eye

Whilst they wined and dined the chairman
I slipped out for some air.
It wasn't how it had been planned
but how else is frivolity to become the order of the day?

The roller coaster is hard to stop
since the new braking system was put on hold,
and the man who polished the buffers
retired last autumn.

If you join me for tea
we can read the leaves together
under the arbutus. There's bound
to be something in it for both of us.

Although the chances of a leaner
more angular life have slipped
since the new by-pass was opened.
It's been three days now and
the cream has soured on the doorstep.

Even the blue tits are heaving
and the Welcome mat is worn

in places to a frazzle. We can't see
 the hazy vale from here
 but I know the buds are still out,
 a team of direct labourers on the major's
 payroll set them in concrete
 one fine day last April.

Is it too much to expect
 the powers that be to keep
 a weather eye on them?
 Shame if they suffered the same fate
 as the statuary in the walled garden,
 you remember the unveiling ceremony of course.
 Those interminable speeches,
 and Denis, in short pants then,
 couldn't leave off worrying away
 at the scab on his left knee,
 still got a slight scar
 although you'd have to be sleeping
 in the same bunk to notice.

They seem to be flocking back in,
 perhaps the interval's over;
 the newsvendor's put up his shutters.
 Some critics said the last act was a stormer
 although the props left something to be desired;
 since the scene shifters' strike
 the action may not be
 as clear as you'd like.

scattered remains

Since the corky boys left town
 things have been less sustained.
 You couldn't call it calm
 just slightly scattered.

On Bagel Street the Susquehanna Hat Company
reopened to good business.
Revered family firms thrive anew
although many changed their names,
Lextreth Cortinbrass at Fourteenth and Arlington switched
to Tay Dayum House of Heartsieze Avenue for example.
Old Captain Nemo cites an omen,
but how much can he see
from his hammock on the rear porch?
Culture stopped for him
with Lou, Bud and Bing.
He's steadfastly avoided
all the Terminators though
a nephew did drag him
to Impregnator Seven,
where, tummy playing up,
his glands remained in their case.
He told me as a child
that one should always protect the inner scent;
I've been trying ever since
to sniff out the kind
of nose job he had in mind.
It doesn't arise any more
as our last plastic surgeon
took off for the city's fleshpots
the day before the day before yesterday.

Unseasonal

Just before Christmas
the manager resigned.
Despite global advertising,
offers of tempting perks and a salary in excess of,
no one's been appointed.
No applications in fact.

Word has got around
as it always does hereabouts.
Seems that the verge cutters' union
blacked the post
for reasons of state.
Others backed off
noting the tradition
of speedy burials
in unmarked graves
and no mention in dispatches.
In any case travel's declined
as speed has increased.
Who wants to get there long before the start?

Confining ourselves to quarters,
a calculated choice, betting
on the certified comforts of fourth walls
and toy train sets,
we spend our afternoons
scrubbing doorsteps
with red ochre donkey stones,
stopping just before vespers
for a cuppa or two of hogwash,
anodyne stimulant of frayed nerve ends.
Evenings wrap themselves up
in yarn-swopping sessions,
no bluster just our
blundering excavations
of ravelled incoherences opening
onto remote pungencies.
There's a log jam in there somewhere
beyond the nose's reach,
a spatchcocked lunar jigsaw puzzler,
out of this world but in no other,
lumber room of a being
postponed indefinitely yet recurring
on its own terms, rubbing

noses with the present,
winking slyly to those in the wings
pretending to be in the know.
These things take it out of you
but they don't put it down
within anyone's reach.
We are left pondering
how it could come to pass.

oh yeah, as if

They were distributing plastic buttons again,
doing the rounds of the indigent thrice weekly.
Victoria broached the possibility
at her inaugural tupperware party
while Albert was in the conservatory
tending his prickly pears.

It was a way of running down stocks
piled up during the inflagrations,
insurance against total loss of face.
They'd kept the beast going somehow
in spite of dips in the flow of everything.
High time now,
as the carelessly energised
switchback riders we seem to be,
to make amends for the evacuation of goodwill
amid our season of shallow fruitlessness,
place our faith in the return of small change,
and, auspices at the ready,
pore over the entrails.

Highballs on the terrace will no longer suffice.

part of the problem

You couldn't quite see through to the other side.
 Stands of straggle-seeded couch grass
 filtered out all signs of the immeasurable.
 In case of need they'd grounded
 copies of 'The Accountant' at random
 'neath the gingko's arching fronds.
 Goaded chance encounters with seminal texts
 on altered monies, copies of master index
 - Key-Words-In-Context -
 lay at random across the withering scrub.

Balancing the books was in vogue,
 few had the gall to toss
 double entry to the two by two winds.
 All banks closed hard on opening time's heels
 due to lack of interest.
 Instead of totting up things' values
 lowly cost clerks, hearts a' racing
 to time's square tango,
 played strip-jack-naked
 'neath the counter.

Was it all a perfunctory gesture
 whose aperture on the smallest things
 had already been snapped shut
 by the managers of indifference?
 Or could a dense hole of simple proportions
 be made out just as the clock struck?

Chaos brought the rush hour to heel.
 Destinations were at sixes and sevens
 due to a signal mix-up
 and over-elaboration of the uncertainty principle
 by those who should have known better.

We'd belted off knowing the dwindling pot
was already on the hob. Yet Spillage-Factor X,
applied to the laws of drift and delay,
sufficed to toss us to the lions
in ways deferring all arrival.

We ended up on the move.
And would be still, were it not
for the profound lassitude
pervading the lot at that time.

Have we lost our urmarbles again?
Is it to this we've
become accustomed like jelly
at a tot's party?
Or is this just the way
the log jam will always occur?

after-effects

Things haven't been quite the same
since that total eclipse of the sea.
Events were put on hold pending inquiries
into faults in the duty inspector's roster.
Charon missed the tide
leaving many in limbo
for the first time in their lives.
Delays are having knock-on effects
right down the line.
It's the overlapping of little things
that's causing all the confusion;
lines drawn in the sand between this and that
simply make matters worse
and there's distress on the foreshore
where the contours seem to have shifted.

Familiar landmarks, criss-crossed by the
 caterpillar tracks of Captain Bewshirt's think-tank
 elide with drifts of word husks
 dropped by migrating phrases
 heading south for the winter.

They seem to know something we don't.
 Recent harvest charts from outlying fruit farms
 make uncomfortable reading
 for those wanting to sow early;
 bilberries cropped fair to middling
 but the wimberry bushes were bare;
 black blight wiped out the blueberries.
 You can't blame the climate though,
 being on a twenty four hour alert
 leads to virtual exhaustion.

It takes short breaks at random,
 snacking on latent anxieties and
 re-charging its weather vanes
 before hitting the road again
 with everything its got.

If you're still waiting for the ferry
 stash some bits in the dug-out
 well above high water mark;
 details will be in short supply
 when you return and even
 the larger frames for things
 have been set aside
 for possible restoration by the
 archeologists of light entertainment.

glottal stops

We've tried singing on some days
 flinging on fridays
 ringing on high-noon days

bringing on buy days
whingeing on choose days
bingeing on soon days.
Hasn't worked so far.
"Pass the sherbet Bettina,
it's not your turn yet."
Hang on, I'm catching a whiff of summat
drifting down from the belfry likely,
reminds me of lost long shifts
in the sentry box shaded by suckering sumachs
just inside the old park gates.
Spending cuts meant lateral ring fencing
to keep the prodigals at bay.
It all passed off without incident.
Wilbert's home on furlough
but not for long.
There's cheese parings from
yesterday's brunch in the cooler
if you're peckish.
Do we know who left
that stain on the carpet?
It may have something to do with Bob's furuncle.
By the way there are vacancies
for dowers at the
No Looking Back Foundation.
Likely they'll twist your arm into applying;
keep reading the small ads.
Trumps do turn up now and again
if you keep your mind on the job.
It's best to forget about
advancing beyond the redoubt.

Choosing your day carefully,
push your barrow with all its
colour-coded paraphernalia right up to the line.
After the patrol has passed

hop laterally till you're over the hill.
With a jot of luck and a dose of
arcane strategy we'll meet up
some when day from now.
