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Letter to an Imaginary Friend

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THOMAS MCGRATH

from *LETTER TO AN IMAGINARY FRIEND, VOL. II*

1.

_____ and always halftime at The Funeral—but once, in Samsara. . .
That is: NOW—start in the empty anytime: arrive.
Ahead of time: HERE: in the filledup nowhere, and go
FORWARD

—“Cain’t hear you boy—ain’t no color but the night
Down here—get out in the stream and sing!
Who be ye?”

’Tis only myself. . .
the last man of the century. . .
going
Home

“Who you talk to then?
Dark here, cain’t see
You.”

I’m just a worn piece of leather that was once well put together. I am
The one who has come at last to wake the reluctant dreamer
Out of his surfeit of continental sleep.
to free the Bound Man
Of the Revolution
to make your jawbone book and heavenly
Credit card.
Sunrise in the rock. . .
the light of my house
Burning. . .
Do you read my blaze
down
there
in the dark?
Over.

“Ah—that old resurrection man!
Talk like you found it—

Place you get out.

But my foot

—stuck here in the stone. . .”

In the time it takes to make one step is the life of my poem.
And unless the step is endless, hell is forever.

But hell

Shakes at one step; shatters.

It is not daybreak

Provokes cockcrow but cockcrow drags forth the reluctant sun not
Resurrection that allows us to rise and walk but the rising
Of the rebel dead founds resurrection and overthrows hell.

2.

What I am doing

ain't nobody

nowhere

done before. . .

Have come a long way and arrive tired, the feet
Of language: raw: trailworn: needing to be reshod,
And myself with saddle sores from the long night ride.
I arrive near death, near the stall of silence. . .

but that's no matter—

What began in the first blaze—despair—is to end in joy:
After showing you hell I'm to blaze you the trail to heaven. . .

Arrive cold—after the long fall into
The past that must be the future the future that is my past.
I see the bus go by advertising DOGMA and the blind
Veteran asking bread in the cold teeth of the night O
Ancient Witness

—and all unchanged in the time of this poem. . .

All to be changed.

I offer as guide this total myth,

The legend of my life and time.

But the message arrives from far off:

From some future galaxy—arrives very fast, very faint, in a language
I can barely translate. . .

and always the danger of shortfall, noise,

And the plaindamn inability of readers to know good sense and song. . .

And so—nights of waiting for a single word and nights
When all arrives at once like a migration of birds.
Days when I turn it off in order to breathe, days
When only an enigmatic phrase comes through from another galaxy—

Poem

—nights. . .

when I am only food for the moon. . .

But hang-ups are no substitute for real agony.

And I

Am born every morning. . .

And once

in Samsara

and the ceremony done. . .

—Warped and bandaged arc of a broken bow I am bent

On straitening. . .

3.

Begun before Easter of a different year. . . Skyros. . . Dakota

The world:

outside my window

changed and unchanged.

I have come

Back toward the light

(my brothers houses all burned this year)

toward

Morning.

Beyond my window the armless windmills are marching

Into the sea.

And the iron poet strides over

The dark village.

Cockcrow. . .

—and always springtime in Hell. . .

* * * * *

I have come here—too young for this world and too old for the next—
From my violent acres crying for incarnation, to claim you,
To found our hungry legend in the field of bread, to find
Our bread in the bank of hunger, in the lame streets of the dawn,
To find our sign past sleep or the sleepy reveries of an insomniac Harp. . .

_____ have come to claim you, to build, on the angry winds of the renegade
Angels, the four blueblowers of the compass points, this stand
For the round song and the commune;

in the moon of bad weather to build

The pure rock of this passage oasis of song in the cold
And desert night. . .

(first the stars and the sea, now

The rock and the wind)

—have brought you here: beyond the four

Elements: stripped: naked for travelling. . . (the dead fly up,

Having lightened load, through the rock. . .)

Now: all the trails are blazed:

The evidence is given, the Fisherman is rising, the Kachina is made—

The ceremony is done.

—Now only the incantation.

I confidently wait

Your rising.

Night, pure crystal,

coils in my ear

like

song. . .

4.

Begun before Easter. . .

Sign of the Fish. . .

wind whining

Out of the black north's cold quadrant, the moon

Glistening on the folds of the coulee snow and a far scar

Where the river sings and ceases, locked in its house of ice;

Cold front sliding in: a wisp of high cirrus

Rides over the Indian graves, the barometer drowns, the burning

Clock of midnight turns on its axis of darkness. . .

Had come there,

To that House, first sign in the blessed zodiac

Of all my loves and losses. . .

—to sing and summon you home.

* * * * *

Now: the wind shifts

a star

falls in the sea.

Skyros

the statue of Brooke on the citadel.

Time interposes

A discontinuous strata, the sediments of the summer:
 What was and what is slide along old fault lines, history
 Condenses its marble heroes

a metamorphic palimpsest

Hardens between the farmhouse and here: and I dive
 Into the nightrock

terror

Now I call you:

I call

You:

from the four Winds and from Fire, come forth now

My thunderbird jawsmiths and soapbox phoenixes;

out of the ice-lined

Rolling coffins of the U.P. Line: rise;

I call you

From Water;

blind marble of those tolling bones

Walk home forever now from the cold dismembering sea;

I call you from holy Earth:

boneflower: starform

I call you now:

Goddess, sweet land I love, Old Lady, my darling ones—

Come:

We'll walk up out of the night together.

It's easy. . .

Only:

open your eyes. . .

slip your foot out of the stone. . .

I'll take you. . .

my darlings, my dear ones. . .

over the river.