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LISTENING

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When I sit here at this table, as I have much this past year, I look out over an ordinary neighbourhood with textures of lawns, houses, roofs, cats, a few dogs, cars and people whom I do not know, but whom I know live in this same cul-de-sac. From the high hill - we call it a mountain - I can see in the distance morning mists are clearing and a steady breeze is blowing from offshore. If I shift my attention to the tree named Eleanor in the front yard, she speaks to me of steadiness, uprightness, and of the seasons, even though she is evergreen. Sometimes I know a cat lurks or leaps beneath her on the bed of fir needles she sheds.

Today it looks as if the overcast will not clear completely; a flock of starlings wheels in the air between my window and our mountain, the first I have seen flocking this year. I am reminded of auguries, thinking I could make something of this, but I make no connections except that between now, here, and the river of living that I am and the starlings are a part of, and those for whom birds could speak of the future. I am reminded of my loneliness, which feels like, at times, a flood; at times, a gentle reminiscence of how for me living is.

Sometimes I know that there is no time, that everything exists now, in the greater Matrix I call God and that the number of connections and influences is infinite. I can know this in any season, but usually it is in autumn, when I know most that things change, that there is no time, that the beauty of the world waits patiently in some way just within and just without grasp. Even more rarely I know I am a part of the turning, and that when the world breathes the wheel of starlings into the sky, she breathes me also.

My daughter made me a wooden duck when she was twelve, whose wings turn in the wind. I could save it, but I choose to ear it out as she made it, in the turning of the river of air. It turns, and I take a simple pleasure in knowing she made it and it works. Just so I take a simple pleasure in the turning of the world. It too is a gift to me. If it goes somewhere I do not know it, but for me the turning can be enough. I know that I am in there.

One thing I admire about the world is the detail. No matter how I choose to listen to the world there is detail. I look out the window and I hear a constant concert of clouds, cats, dogs, people, thoughts and feelings. Amy the cat has fleas. Any intention makes itself visible eventually. My hand, at 46, does not seem particularly different to me than it did when I was 20. But I have watched the lifelines deepen and my ring become worn. I can sometimes - rarely - observe how my intentions bear fruit in the world. I can even say, at times, the loneliness - my loneliness - teaches me something.

So at 46 I know sometimes when to light the fireplace and when to call a friend for tea and when to talk with my wife. And when to just look out the window. I think the world is beautiful and beautified: my wife, my children, my one or two other good friends are as well. And so, when I stop to look, are others I know in passing. They show me who they are. This is indeed what I know

about the world, that I am shown the beautiful. If I sit and wait, if I turn over a rock, when I sleep next to my wife, or talk with my children, I am shown the world I live in. I am amazed at what people tolerate, live with, accept, like, love, and learn from.

I did not always like having a winter of rain; I wasn't raised here. Now I usually do; it shows me myself. I meet people, I read, I talk, drink tea, hope to be rich and famous, and I try ever so hard not to know just how ordinary I am, how just like others I am - and so, I miss myself most of the time. This is just like many of us. It's hard to accept self, the ambitions, the ordinariness, the loneliness, the loveliness. The rain helps.

Today, it seems, is clearing after all. I can usually tell autumn is here by a change in the light, and in the way the trees talk to themselves. There are acorns and Maple leaves on the ground. The world seems like a great amber crystal sphere. We live in small houses and we are a part of what we see. The dome over us holds us as it turns on its axis. The earth below us supports us. We breathe and we are with others who breathe as we do. The trees speak differently in the autumn. They begin to clatter where they whispered; they move at night more, restless. The cats prowl more in the dawn. My wife sleeps closer to me. The light, I think, concentrates somehow, focuses, somehow is more longing and slow. It is pleasant to feel the air move, to walk in this river. This river, like others, flows to an ocean.

Those who listen to themselves can know this, that we live in a city and are not cut off from the way the light falls onto us and from waking at night to listen to the poplars clatter. We live in the turning of the world into autumn. It enters into our bodies in so many subtle ways which we do recognize and which our hurry tells us are not so important after all. But, after all. If you do not listen to the trees, your cats, your wife, your children; if you do not live in the light.

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