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FIVE

REBELLIOUS

PLEASURES

Christmas 2002

I. BEING CALM

It's such a trick to play on power,
seeing through the feeble madness of the news.
What a comforting rebellion to be calm,
to refuse to goose step with the nearest fool.

Calm never lets us forget
how fearlessness is sweeter
than the dearest freedom granted by another.
Only one thing works, and it

can't really be spoken, except to say
that love will not deplete us, that generosity
is an ease so steely true, it overrules
blank cruelty every time, unbounded,

free as the calmness of leaves
reclining to the snowy ground.

II. KNOWING WHAT WE REALLY THINK

We are told the world is falling apart,
that nothing will ever be the same.
Don't believe it till you see it.

Sometimes humor is the only test,
an acid jest. Let's go see for ourselves
if the joke's on us:

our own way of thinking spreads out before us;
we are the first to see its false horizons;
the first to report if the old maps are right,

or criminally charmed and wrong.
What a joke on force it is
to know our own minds. It makes us

like truth is, stronger than the strongest
and stronger than the worst.

III. PEACE

In the early, distant, first freedoms of the morning,
when we're released of all reproach and all encroachment

we can feel the torture of old anger for what it is,
the silly death blows ego tried to give to conscience.

It used to feel so noble, that pain we couldn't bear.
But now, to live as if the whole world were asleep,

moving wide awake through its nightmares with a hush,
that's a peacefulness we cannot seek

in the way we try to understand why a strange day,
vaguely sad, isn't worth the sorrow when it's over.

What if we all woke up, free and early one morning
and lived the rest of our lives as if we were safe,

as if it had dawned on us
there's nothing left for us but trust.

IV. KINDNESS

It catches everyone off guard.
It's an affront to fear.
It pushes the absurd smothering of joy
back out the door.
What a sweet dissent to refrain
from brutal truth.
Honesty for the sake of honor
has ruined everything it's touched.
Fulminate to yourself, but shut up for a while.
Break the rules. We were made for acts of kindness.
All the rest – the suspicion, the nastiness, the greed –
is a bumbling, pitiful fraud,
and even indelible time
just wants to forget it.

V. FORGETTING

It's not stupid to be unafraid.
Mistakes do not replace us.
How happy it makes the stars

when we douse our pettiness and they can feel
all our tiny generousities
glow like interstellar dust.

Who's to say that such and such a wretchedness
makes a whole life sour? What a final act
of defiance it would be

to forget the pain, the wrong, the shame, the panic,
and know with "certainty and praise"
that love does not deplete us, that the beauty

of whole lives can be seen sometimes
if we only look the other way.