
SORTING

Joanna Klink

June 16, 2000—we heard the echo of a meadowlark.

Let go the meadowlark and the valley in which its song
repeated itself and the valley in which its song unfolded.

Let go the dream of such clear sound.

Let go the walks, dinners, drinks, talks, senses of beginnings, let go
the beginnings, we will never begin again.

Let go the still gray sky. It has propped us up long enough.

Let go the nights.

Let go the voice that answered me in earnest in all things I find
I can no longer imagine it.

Imagine the rents in the driveway cement from the rain that pooled
and stayed and the way the cement buckled wildly in the years that followed
and the years that followed in which no one came to the door.

You came to the door and said my name and the whole weathered mess
glowed beneath the afternoon's hanging clouds and weeds
grew in blunt stalks from the cracks.

Who would you change for?

The maples change more in an hour of wind than we change.

The aspens shatter light I have felt the leaves in their wind-glittering
strangeness. Let go

the town and its dry river paths the white bellies of the swallows
under the bridge flashing in the last minutes of dusk and I knew I could not
continue as I had been nor did I sense a course.

Who are your friends.

What do you care for.

What would you give up if you could give up
anything. When were you afraid there is no extreme need that is not
warped by fear. What does the world

require of you have you loved the time you have spent here.
Was it because of the people with you. Or that the silence

was never silence it was always the fan's white noise in the window
at night and below that the new rain on the grass
and below that the grass as it bends under the water
and night buried under the water and the town
at night under rain and grateful for rain in this dry season.

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There and not there like the wind in the yard.

There and not there in a smile that is not
itself but a thought in a far country and a brush
of the shoulder that in a single minute means

everything. Everything you have said in support and questioned.
In support of love that unfolds where one least
imagines it for example a year of endings.

A white shirt. A shoelace a razor. A pacing in the hallways at night
like the steady lines of bicycles fanning across flat green fields.

The shadow of an airplane over the field or that shadow
as it ripples over a building through the thick windless
heat. Are you paying attention
to what passes through you.

Through you
I came to see a better life but cannot
account for why I have not always
lived it.

A polite vagueness in the *Good bye!* and *Good luck!*
Goodbye to the laughter I love I did not keep it close enough.

Goodbye to the mind that moves along walls and roads its un-
ceasing spirit I wish I were always in its path.

To the boys playing soccer at five in the leafy park goodbye
their gamesmanship goodbye
goodbye to the gravel they scattered the ground
they scuffed the houses they return to, may they always have homes.

Goodbye to the busses and the poppies that flew
past us behind bus-windows in deep red-orange-dotted-
smudges and the edgeless fields where you
walked when I wasn't
there, with you, in your head,
where you walked, were you
alone, were there
fields, how alone
were you. How

alone can anyone
stand to be. Any one of us might be
tapped any one lead away when that day
comes will you be
ready. Will you be prepared for what you
have not said.

Will you know what you love.

.....

To have been alone together is to have been
alone within an
illusion. Step into a dream
of life its tapwater and shoes its
coffee-cups paper-clips sheets the white light
that backs every curtain every room casually
shared every question will you help me with this I will help you.

Step into a life that is not
dreamed and try to say now if there are
remnants of illusion. Is what you say every day real.

Are the lesser estrangements
deeper and if so how much can you bear and if not
what will convince you.

Does the sparrow on the t.v. antenna convince you—it is there every day.

Every day the sun hits the red roofs of the village where you lived
and every evening the swifts dive through the crooked stone streets chasing
bugs we cannot see. The birds rose
level with our torsos on the terrace and whistled
their strong eerie whistle I heard it each morning a lone swift
veering past our bedroom window.

The rains rose and fell through the winter
and the spring rose and the beating summer
arrived. The birds arrived
each night and often we took the stairs
to the terrace after dinner to watch their black bodies
in hundreds rise and spike and dive, each in its own private
depth, sharp hap-
hazard wing-splitting
rolls. As if there were hundreds of separate skies.

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So that nothing will ever again be for us what it was.

The long walk to the grocery store in noon-white
heat. The men standing immobile at boulevards, murmuring with the toss.

Constant church bells, the apple you set on the counter to eat,
the shake of a head saying no. Let go

the bistro the woman by the creek the disease.
Notes, letters, poems strung word-to-word.

Let go the young girl walking toward a building at the end of a long city-
sidewalk I see she is looking
toward someone there in the highest window her mother or a tutor
watching her child and neither one of them

needs to wave. Had I been able to read the signs, had you been able
to speak more clearly, had I
noticed, not
assumed, had you come to me
in understanding linking need to
need, had I
heard you, had you
spoken, I heard, as you
said the words, the harder
course, you
insisted, nor
have you always
lived it, persist, and cannot any longer
pass lightly over
anything. You came to me
in understanding and brought with you the need of a whole life,

having for months looked elsewhere, the streets of the town after midnight,
a nullity in each livingroom's blue t.v., letters
to others, drought

in the mind drought in the neighborhood
grass. Certain
you would always be there.
Certain you would follow. The night's

hours in talk and the paths our thoughts took
together. The dust-choked house and its un-utterable shag carpet
or the blue house and all the passing cars stranded in its
snowbanks the bitter arguments sweet reprieves the funny
Midwestern meals you cooked the mountain ash years without cigarettes
heaps of sweaters dishes the fire
in the kitchen the purple
kitchen. The absurd red car your mother gave us,
the books we wrote, sentences we took out,
pencil in the margins your shrinking
penmanship new shoes your smile the one that
seizes at what's
real. The laundry the prosody. The refusals
the constant generousities every desperate apology.
You have to hold it in mind all at once.
You have to need it enough.

.....

If I let go what will be left. Too hard
to sort each sorrow from each joy

and why, instead of answering, we passed into silence.
Clear, deep green, like a lake we've never been to

and stood at its blue edge-grass and felt nothing, like sunlight,
as it moved across our faces, slow
warmth, amber-

white, and when it passed we didn't
know. But we stayed.