
WONDER OF BIRDS

Joanna Klink

If I could address your accusation that I lie.

If it is possible
to touch the hour, the burr, that whole up-
ended half-decade we spent wondering about each other—
you slumped on your kitchen floor arms crossed arguments
stockpiled. Will we thief or be brave?

Today, mid-February where the wind is full of snow
that will not fall, brown leaves
curled against the blanched grass,
I suspect there are no gardens in you.
You suspect I am brimming with vast shadows,
the way the mud and sky are brimming with snow.

Winds chafe the maples and somewhere
an animal huddles under woodland trash.

Will it be now, or later?

Will it be now?

.....

When the diagnosis came he said, in his head,
anything to be free from harm.

I too said *anything.*

The lesions hooked down, flew into the nerves,
numbing the left hand and left foot,
blood-threads scorched with orchids, skulls,
white forest fires, ramshackle speculations, your future
fisted and refisted in the neurologists's dusky
speech. You will never be alone.
You will walk the hallways in radiator heat and summer heat,
and the blackboards will be coated with your tiny letters
and the portals of minds will open and close, open and close.
Waterlogged, the cemetery by the highway
sinks further into itself as the violet dirt
darkens. Everything
has changed. The way,
from a tree, a whole curve of birds
issues from one startled call.

.....

We understood we were afraid.
I understood the promise I made in that moment
was binding.
You felt for a moment I was with you—
I was with you.

It stayed with me in the lamp dusk, blue trees and fields,
months of solitude, an occasional gift we exchanged,
the plans you made without hope.

I would give you my hands in the gray blur
of this mid-winter mid-afternoon hour,
mud wicking from cement and wet weeds,
a broom to brush the pooled
sidewalk-ice away.

Something nearby moves just
beyond us. The trees raw from wind
as shadows of birds fly out.

.....

Are you disenthralled?

Avert your eyes if you can.

Have a drink have a smoke.

Spend a month on a kitchen floor—

Stop reading the paper.

You can have a drink—

You can go buy a drink.

Slip outside and smoke.

Find someone and lean back.

Recede, withdraw—

Withdraw, don't be afraid—

But I haven't read everything about suicide bombers already

I don't know how many citizens are being killed each day

How many
How many are *ours*

.....

I didn't think the world *desired* us
or could find our bodies beautiful.
I never thought that when winter ends in February
the seasons might be *lying*.

What can move from your throat
now that some violence has
pulled us apart?

Was it mine?

Listen, when a person throws herself backwards
off a ledge in a small town in the mountains,
late gold-warm brick, a few scraps of weeds,
not high enough to really hurt, she is asking.

If he rushes to catch her out of gratitude,
guilt, self-loathing, obligation,
in effect he lets her fall.

.....

Will it be now, or later?

Will it be now?

Will the moon burn over the tree-line

Will the arteries clutch

Will the brain in its shock-worn pockets smooth itself down

Being small, as we are, and negligible

Scarcely entitled to a name, such as *beloved*

Not known to exist except as *beloved*

As you were, uncertain now what you are

Will the brick houses withstand the rest of winter

Will the wood houses

Will the men be warm enough at night

The women

Will each find his way to another, and be housed, and be free from harm

Will the man who sleeps under the plastic tarp under the bridge be free from harm

The families in the trailers

Will the bills ever ease

Will the tensions ease, slacken, and come to seem unimportant

Will you ever come to seem unimportant

Uncertain now who you are—

And when will this trance end?

Shapes night-wheeling in the breeze

Spurs of bone a patch of trees

Wind-washed and moon-fretted

A night composed of nothing

A herd of deer browsing on lichen

Train-horn pulling through the dark

Wing-splash

Killed in the wind farms

Tangled in the cell phone towers

The birds

The birds

The seed-heads loosening

The seed-heads loosening in bright-and-dull dawn.

.....

Historically, all governments lie to their peoples
Historically: bloodshed for trust

The way a person lies is different
from the way a government lies.
Avert your eyes if you can.

You said it's MY DISEASE.
And that is true.
As my disguises were true.
Private fears my sense that you might not forgive.

A people lie because they believe they can control outcomes.
They believe they know the way.

Today, am I in danger?
To what are you beholden?
By what enthralled?

A war, a nation, oxblood and sleep kits.
If you understand, tell me

When I wake up, I understand what slaughter will take place
today in our name.

What should my response *be*
Who am I responsible *for*
What falsehoods count

And what men at this hour do not speak?
What women at this hour cannot speak?

.....

Wind beneath the bridge, between the cemetery stones,
soundless. Last night's rain
is shaking from the leaves. Light
pours down—

What is it that moves in such weather-
smooth winds that the hills themselves soften?
The pleats of snow in the ridges below the peaks
are cold. Depthless
beauty. I have not been able to say
I trust the world.

The war is with us each morning
With us when we climb into beds

When I wake up I am responsible
When I wake up alone, I am forced to see

Over the ossified earth the waters are rising
I avert my eyes

Each of us who has a home—
we darken

And the wonder of birds is that they still rise
The wonder of birds

I believe in what is gentle in us, despite what we have done

I believe I can praise everything I am not permitted to become

I believe there is no love in bluntness
but in the struggle toward attention
which is light

So that we *see* blades of grasses fog torn in the reeds

Raccoons dropping in pairs from the trees

And the burdens of others

Boys by the building hanging around without shoes

The stargray rivers

Clock-note of coalescent ice

From a girl a simple *hi*

Nightfall sweeps around the globe

Rain-films of oil on asphalt

Crocus-bundles parking garages tickets plastic bags

You live despite disease

You thrive in understanding

Highways and overpasses

A crowded bus-stop someone shouting a finch

The supple swing of its voice laid over the air

As if we had closed our lips and eyes and felt

The cool stone inside us

Threnody of graphite and gold

Men exploding themselves in the streets

Women exploding themselves

Look—a bird is filling with light

Bracelets and mica bits

Greetings on the streets

I will help you although I do not know you

The raft of our efforts

Buoys in the bay

The quintral flowers a few hour-boxed visitors

Senior citizens centers the impoverished schools traffic signs

That man hasn't eaten for days

Tonic and deadlock

Like the sun suspended in amber and flecked

With burnt wings, ancient civilizations of insects trapped in

Cold floating stone

Blotches of light on my hands here where I sense you

A few cottonwoods snowing down on the weeds

Wire fences invisible fences white clapboard steel gates

The raw sweep of the moon

And the water of looking

The ribs of a child an animal's sudden private cry

Tides pouring back

Trade-worn day-worn worn down by desires

And feel the winds move over the ruinous fields

Pesticides dispossession

A few blooms unnaturally early

Spring in February—

A death closes in. Whose is it?

We need each other more.
