

by Joanna Klink

## Safekeeping

Where I have been

A scarf wound around my shoulders under sun-  
dry oaks, October's clear dusk as I latched  
the door. The moon  
was with me all night.

Close and damp as breath and the heat of limbs.

Conversations quilted through long sleep—  
my intoxicant, my absent-minded intimate.

Trying to understand the unspoken oaths.

Wild disorder of morning and the temporary  
brightness of tasks. And outside, frost on the roads,  
life waste, spirit waste, the country you moved to  
across town with its soothing private seasons.

Fleeing each astringency, you were my portage,

farrier of a single message: welcome-and-unwelcome.

What kept you from reaching me?

You were there for years.



July to July

My guidebook, unsteady insomniac, my mostly receding  
terrain. I watched you move away,

                  mountain-slow, the sun too bright and flat  
against the mind's stripped channels.

Gathering nerves on cement heat, July's small gray birds.

And your body's anomalies in its newly won rooms—  
where will you find yourself, what dire ravine,

                  what glossy snow-globe?

You walk in the falling salts without me, as you chose.

Please keep safe, my obdurate one,  
now fully proofed against the outer weathers—  
teacher, tree-star, once-closest-arms.



Deep blue or deep black

The nights widen and shrink with phosphorescent  
moods. I have approached the edges of accusation  
and fallen back, set my hands against the table's  
cool wood surface. Can we only  
become what we are, as you suspect  
or by your action propose.

It is true that I too assumed, was proofed.  
When we fought, we fought for *presence*—children swinging  
through late-afternoon wind, heads lunged back in laughter,  
and the air in those swing-sets at night.

The aquifer in its blue-green  
stillness beneath us.

Then geese, strangely large in the distance,  
rising toward the blowing wisps of  
cloud. White light around them in the dark.



Maybe time

Maybe time, you said, will bring us back  
to talk again someday. I would speak now if I could,  
across the door you so desperately shut,  
its grooves flickering like open veins.

I stayed there for months, forehead  
pressed to the hard plane, until somewhere in my body  
an evening wind rattled across a loose corn-husk.  
Farmlands warmed under midnight salt-lights  
and a gray bird sailed through a poplar brake.  
I too saw the transparent dawn at dawn,  
when the small ships of stars fade into a clean white  
sweep of sea. I will try to always be alive in this hour,  
though long ago you turned and slipped  
into regions unknown to me, un-  
willing or unable to be seen.



In this darkness

The house seems to shape itself around me,  
glass, wood, and hanging dresses whose gauze skirts  
catch my wrist as I move by. The kitchen window  
    open to the mountain's radium  
slope. To the nearly exhausted old moon  
I give the weakest parts of who I am.  
Careless with what I love, hiding behind  
kindness. And if I were shatterproof,  
I would square my feet on these cheap kitchen tiles  
then drive over to him, restless and eager for speech.  
In the yard, under the swaying branches of blue spruce,  
three deer have braced their ragged frames.  
If you should be scoured by grief,  
    you too will know how the feet stay where they are  
while the mind, in its winds, burns.



What kept you from reaching me

My scowl or a reserve  
so recessed in me even I cannot  
touch it. As in the clearest, stillest October day,  
a breeze taps against a maple leaf's string-veins.  
You sensed it and recoiled—  
thinking all along I was like you.



## Completely

My beloved, if it has come to this,  
I will try to understand.

From the house we once lived in, from the room  
that was yours, I hold my arms around myself  
and hear you pacing, your thoughts stall and flee,  
                    cold snow in your lungs.

After so many years, if no change appears  
there is either speech or action,  
and you had never said *always* and I had never said  
*completely*. Only I knew.

In my dreams there are geese pulling south,  
                    burdened with cargo. I keep the radio close  
and turn off the voices when I sense something near.  
I no longer know whom to speak to.  
I no longer know what to call you.  
Lost-to-me, nested one, night owl.