

*A
Meteorologist
in
the
Promised
Land*

BECKA MARA MCKAY

**A Meteorologist
in the Promised Land**

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ACM: 'Seventeen Lessons About Utopia'
American Letters and Commentary: 'TABLOIDS'
Columbia: 'Letters to the Minor Prophet'
Controlled Burn: 'How to Picture an Edge'
Cranky: 'T'Philot' and 'Letter from the Editor'
Hotel Amerika: 'The War in the North: A Report'
Rattapallax: 'Epithalamium', 'Good Excuses in Lousy Weather', and 'A
Meteorologist in the Promised Land'
small spiral notebook: 'The Thesaurus Fails to Replace the Direction of the
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Third Coast: 'In Praise of the Overlooked' and 'After the Tombs'.

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*The thorn in turn became the means
to lift the leaves off of the ground.*
—Andy Goldsworthy

For my mother, Nancy McKay,
and for Fran and Marv Tepper

BIRDS IN APRIL

Birds in April

Except for the imperative *wait here*
and what rises to the interrogative,
now? when? the tongues I've learned don't offer word-
for-word translation. They are glass, *aim and*
fire silvered backs scraped clean
of known intonations. *really?* Negotiation
leans a thin shoulder into patience. *repeat, please* Orders
and questions, briefest pleas—only these
surrender directly, prepared for grasping *give*
without mediation. *run* Departing,
the lover suddenly understands all
the world's languages, *go* as though platoons
of dictionaries have stormed re-opened
recesses in his intellect. He leaves
anyway. *again?* What remains is
a space that can't contain him, but which
he will not stop haunting. *hush* The killdeer

feigns a broken wing to draw thieves from the nest.
How fierce was I supposed to be? Cardinals
will battle their own reflections in spring. *how?*
quick, come No one is looking back at me.

T²philot (Prayers: Jerusalem, summer)

1. *For Vesalius*

Jerusalem is Rome
ecorché. Skinned city
teaching anatomy
in her eyeless tomb.
Peeled, the body reveals
nothing. Tendon
plucked from muscles,
muscles cleaved from bone.

2. *For the Galilee*

The Kinneret cannot roll
like her sister does. She sings
in fractured slate.
Haze of breath on a milky bowl.
The crab snaps before knowing
my hands are help,
bringing blood to the tip:
Bright drop. Lost meat.

3. *For the Gatherers*

Combing for membrane, marrow,
remaining tress
at rest in branch and asphalt.
No pieces too small to bless,
to gather and bury.

4. *For Fish*

I loved the smoke-headed birds
hiding gold under tails. Seal-slick,
the boy took my breast
in his mouth. *Do you love it,*
he asked. Hebrew
has no word for like.

The fish persist, unceasing
and unconcerned, an academy of light.
Give me your hand, he said.
Even a smile is a catch
in the flesh. Eye contact is more
water, more light.

Statistics

More good than bad. More blue than black.
More birds than bones. More time than home.
More dogs than horses. More breath than tongue.
More teeth than trees. More blood than wings.
More girl than blood. More light than ice.
More ears. More fingers. More blood
than anything. Less pain than blood.
Less weight than snow. Less silver.
Less care than silence. Less strange
than love. Less love than always.
Less dying than swimming.
More waiting than running.
Less willing than talking.
More eating than asking.
Less drinking than singing.
More burning. Less missing than gone.

After the Tombs (*Tarquinia*)

You are exhuming the distance that connects
your eyes to a lined sheet of paper.
All the symbols of abundance are displayed,

but dry to the touch. You might answer the door
somewhere between the third and seventh knock,
like a bird stopping to bathe in the dust.

Not everyone succumbs to imagination.
When you do, the apricot tree lets down
a single branch distended with fruit.

Nothing else is liquid for miles. The grit
climbing the staircase of your legs tastes of rice
and honey. Only your shoulders think to seek

shelter from the oncoming weather. What good
does it do to wait in stillness, the way
glass waits for disaster?

You Are Not Here

Imperative: second person, future.

(Listen, sweet. Listen. = You will listen. You will.)

*

For my student I write LEAVE LOVE LAUGH.

Not to teach chronology but sound, then tense: I (will) leave.

You (will) laugh.

*

She left him, I say.

*You love him, he says. Repeats. New noise is another thorn
in the throat. (Laughter.)*

*

Today's lesson: Voices that vibrate above the jaw,
that marry tooth to lip. Like feathers, or their opposite.

*

(You are here.

You want to be

here.)

*

The role of the verb "to be" always comes loose in the present tense.
In the desert, it dries up. Flies away.

*

See you you will see you will see you soon—