

Farewell

There is a tenderness
deeper than these words,
deeper than the power
I have to express—
it goes out to you
unsettled
like the sudden flight
of migratory birds
rising from a field
after a rifle crack.
I still don't know
why I left,
or why you left me;
it almost seems as if
nothing were decided,
as if I am still waiting
for you to enter
and stand behind me,
poised and silent.
I know now
that the way I tried
to help you
out of yourself
was unkind.
You only retreated
further away from me
like a captured bird
holding itself
at the far corner
of its cage
afraid
of the man who stands
in the open door
motioning wildly
about escape.
I don't know why
you remind me of birds—
maybe because
the air around you

was always
 so filled with flight,
 maybe because my words,
which always
 so impressed the others,
 only frightened you.
You're still with me,
 here even now,
 hovering just outside
my day
 like a presence
 that never quite
goes away,
 that fills
 my every gesture and attitude
with a concern
 that I can never
 be gentle enough.
How can I describe it—
 with memories?
 Yes, with memories
that are part of me,
 that have shaped
 what I am now,
that have opened
 to my view
 a picture so human,
so beautifully moving
 that I can never again
 entirely distrust life.
You stand before me
 again
 bending forward
as you calmly
 unbutton
 and step out of your slip,
and then,
 quite undressed,
 without turning toward me,
realize
 that I have been watching you
 and become strangely tall
and proud.
 My best understanding
 cannot equal this.

Farewell,
 it is only
 by your example
that I know of
 an intensity
 that rises to a place
where all faults
 are forgiven,
 to a place
where feeling climbs
 transfigured
 above all blame.

Farewell,
 I would overreach myself,
 but my words
fall short,
 and just now
 outside my window
a whole flock of sparrows
 chirp and jump
 and fly about the underbrush.