

# Sanctuary

By Jean Valentine

*People pray to each other. The way I say "you" to someone else,  
respectfully, intimately, desperately. The way someone says  
"you" to me, hopefully, expectantly, intensely ...  
—Huub Oosterhuis*

You     who I don't know     I don't know how to talk to you

—What is it like for you there?

Here ... well, wanting solitude; and talk; friendship—  
The uses of solitude. To imagine; to hear.  
Learning braille. To imagine other solitudes.  
But they will not be mine;  
to wait, in the quiet; not to scatter the voices—

What are you afraid of?

What will happen. All this leaving. And meetings, yes. But death.  
What happens when you die?

"... not scatter the voices,"

Drown out. Not make a house, out of my own words. To be quiet in  
another throat; other eyes; listen for what it is like there. What  
word. What silence. Allowing. Uncertain: to drift, in the  
restlessness ... Repose. To run like water—

What is it like there, right now?

Listen: the crowding of the street; the room. Everyone hunches in  
against the crowding; holding their breath: against dread.

What do you dread?

What happens when you die?

What do you dread, in this room, now?

Not listening. Now. Not watching. Safe inside my own skin.  
To die, not having listened. Not having asked ... To have scattered  
life.

Yes I know: the thread you have to keep finding, over again, to  
follow it back to life; I know. Impossible, sometimes.

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