

People in Search of Selves:

a poem

dedicated to Virginia Axeline *

As you said you wanted it, as I said I wanted it
as we said we wanted it
Outside in the streets houses are burning
Fire engines tear down the streets: white ambulances
with sirens wailing: bombs are heard
casualties are reported: somewhere in the distance
people scream and shout and are trapped
inside their blazing buildings

As you said you wanted it, as I said I wanted it:
as we said we wanted it
people like dolls are upended in debris - who
will rescue them? who will dig them out?
a soldier slinks past, his rifle at the ready, somewhere
in the distance a wireless set plays, a pop group
stretches the wires, a man clutches his face, a woman
soundless stares at the body of her mutilated child.

As you said you wanted it; as I said I wanted it
as we said we wanted it
With sincerity and intent to act we prepare our manifesto;
what our anger is directed against, what has been done
what we are convinced should be done: out in the fields
little foxes snuffle outside their lairs: pheasants
crake: black birds chitter: the man with the gun
climbs over the five-barred gate

As you said you wanted, as I said I wanted,
as we said we wanted,
cars are upturned, trees uprooted, the city is in flames
with sincerity and intent to act, the slow rain falls.
a chance to be wanted, respected, accepted as a human being
worthy of dignity, to be loved, honoured, cherished
in sickness and in health: for richer or poorer for
better or worse till . . .

**Readers of 'Dibs in Search of Self' will recognise a few phrases
from the book which have been incorporated into the poem.*

As I said, as you said, as we said, the jail
is next to the barracks, the barracks next to the school
but the houses come in between. In a house not yet
under suspicion a child sings and plays: he unburies
the people: the child drags the people out of the debris,
he places them side-by-side; he smiles and sings
the figures move closer together, outside the wind dies down
buildings are no longer burning, the sirens are stilled.

As you said you wanted it, as I said, as you said

As we said . . .

the flower beds are in bloom twenty seven different
shrubs and plants festoon the yard, red and yellow
are poured out on the floor. The jailhouse is broken open
the barracks are empty, the soldiers are playing with children
with sincerity and intent to act a new generation
accepts the divisions of time, the commitment to share.

As you said you wanted it, as I said I wanted it,
as we said we wanted it:

Let us go back to the playroom - let us go, let us go -
oh let us go!

John Hands
