

Stacie Leatherman

Dear B,

No straight way, I'm afraid.
Letters from the dead to the living.

Washing. Warbling. Where are we going but sidestream.
Secondary, stationary, no, the hierarchy's moot.
Dear B, don't get me started. The repetition.

The constellation of it.

The shift. When there's something that needs be said
but too many ways to say it. The line out your own.
The fragments.
The letters standing at your side.

Dear B, we go past. Rangings true as migration.
The traveling companion. Dear B, our arraignment.
The hearkening. The hymn. The Braille of it. Hummingbird wings.
The instantaneous.

It's all in the address. How privileged to cast a shadow,
to be the shadow. How we filibuster night's edge.
But night has no edge, B. Night's all ridges. Dunes.
Confrontation in my blood, but bear me close. It's iffy.
What drives an animal to murder. Any, it seems, has the potential.
We are not original. The bearing out.
The bearing. Dear B, the daily bric a brac, borders and boycotts...

Dear B, the ambushade, road slick like mucous. Luminosity.

Unfinished business. Childhood tightens its belt.
Childhood tired of the human. I want to cross, want to let cross.
We need a rogue arrangement. The assonance goes without saying.

Dear B, the bursting door. Quiet step within. Earthquake, boot,
peninsula sinking, ankles wet, bodies floating away.
You have the ring of the penultimate. A circular motion, an orbit.
You the myth and truth. The precious. B the love I feel
in capital letters. The sheer output. B, the downpour.
Move. Blinking the eye will shed sand out sometimes.
The thing is, we're inextricable. At all points one picks up,
at all points one is lost. The lost find the lost.
The distance in the grass from me to you.
B the incessance. I wish for the unabridged edition.
In case of emergency we will taxi in.

C

Living has a dynamite effect. Chants depart and migrate, live in the folds, the instigation moving. We saw each other and gasped. Transformation, that C. It's all been done before. Who wants the bravado? Much to say about our times, the specifics, the rigamarole. Though clusters I like. Real, complete sentences. Anarchic scents, though routine a godsend. If you're there in the recount, run. Hellbent I understand. Linguistical contraptions, the air we breathe potent as seed. I said the dead change as much as the living, that living isn't the only way of telling the truth. Heat blows through the house like a stranger. That sound a spider in your ear.

Rankling. Some people lock themselves down tight, nuclear shelters, secure from everyone but themselves. Being tardy is relevant. There are no longer such things as roads. There are invisibilities. Refusals. Scant ghosts.

I want to live in the exteriority. The reconnaissance mission. What about its compactness is not genius? What if I'm inflicting again? Sweeping. I would like someone to sweep strong but gently and with open door and the broom itself to open so not a broom at all but a steady wind. Oops a daisy. The real estate complete. What phobia do you have? C for all body parts, body poets I accidentally wrote. Cry out loud, cryptic, there's a separateness, a balloon ride high above, a gas explosion, a rising away from but a need to keep tethered to; will C seem changed because I've changed? Will it execute in the same way? Will I ask it the same questions? Will I rely upon it? Will I ask it to regard its subject differently, always?

Who told you about last night? Who can you shake hands with when most everyone is dealt a bad hand? Who is it that defends you when you can't trust the hand you're given?

E

Clipping of the spine. Random assassinations. Run away with someone like, but not, me. Who will defile you when I'm no longer here? Will you consider this a death threat? Who will follow, place you under house arrest? Who will stay to be realized? Who is not fascinating in their humdrum tyranny? Who deserves to have her ponytail tied in knots? Who will expatiate? Who can't suffer enough? Who can't arm themselves against the armistice of love? Who will not run away screaming? Who will remove her own throat? Who will offer nothing to the gods? Who is afraid to say so? Who does not fit any descriptions? Isn't it harvest? Isn't it colloquial? What do we need to survive in a way that's survivable? Will it happen like something shorn?

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The worms of desire. Hard wired for hope. Where does one draw the moral line? Are we meant to abandon? Did I want something, they say, to speak of? Did I lift it up like a relic, a halo? Was I guilty of inconstancy? Was I the sought after, the grief? The sticking point? The washed up, the cretin, the erogenous zone? Was I the stone that delivered the stones to my body? Was I the question? Was I forgotten, was part of me swept up? Was I fossil or thread? Was I the rangy one, the fleet-footed? Was I the one who stumbled? Was I a bet cashed in? The spell that cast you under? Was I sure of my place? Was I irresolvable? Destabilized? Was I the wrong number? The shadow? The honest woman? Was I the iron maiden, the dark letterpress? Was I the germane snippet? The extolled? Was I the bolt of winter lightning, the story, the animal? Did I do it for the long haul? Did I try to find my way? Was I the golden one? The leaf falling? Did we find the right calibration? Did we send the sign? Was I the sudden implement? The carrier? Was I the bones crackling? The pull of strings? Was I the one that remained? Will I look at you again with just that configuration?

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The voltage of waking. Did I trip the wires? Did no one learn the language again? Was I a willing accomplice? Was I the opposites attract? The operatic moment? Am I the governor of my loneliness? Am I the arch villain? Should I never have brought you here? Should we call the cops? How have the rest adapted? Is what doing fine? Will someone need us? At what point in time is there no crisis? How good am I at hollering? What is the size of one's voice? Who needs to be addressed? Who finds the shell-shocked? Who croons? Who performs the erasure? Who is atonal? Apocryphal? Loose canonical? Hymnotic?

Sequel

The twilight within twilight moves.
Do not let the sepulcher fool you,
there isn't a shred of indifference anywhere;
do not think that everywhere people are dying,
have died around us. Birds light
the tomb as robin torches;
moon the color of morning frost,
moon rubbed bright as an evening coin.

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Write, says the tulip all May and ready. Up, says the stem.
Ring around the lamplight. Scorch says the white sky.
Blue says the sky to the woman buying a blue dress. Her skirt,
shorts are color of cloud. I think she may carry me away.
I touch a leaf and see violet. I touch an insect and hear fugue.
This morning I drowned all the kitchen ants.
The killing of something small is not small.
I touch a stone and smell ink, feel my mother's shoulder,
soft as a stone's color. I touch. Music smells like bread rising,
and when more disjunct, cold rooms in major keys.
I touch an icicle and hear a scale of cold notes.
I touch my skin and hear again. Instruments, you know, instruments.

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Sweep of the tongue, a hair-pin yell.
Slight chip of a verb as it becomes noun.
Pumpkin smooth and cool beneath fingers
suddenly becomes a chord, C# major to be exact.
The pumpkin under your hand sounds
of slow ridges. The slope of low hills.
You touch my hand and there is also sound.
You touch my veins: an oboe making its long solo.
The long loose strings of violins. I touch your hand
and there's a summons from the brass. Long notes in minor chords.
The grasp is as tight as the grass. Movement is a butterfly or the memory
of a butterfly or the image of a butterfly or the idea of a butterfly.
It does not flex within my hand. My hand is a butterfly flexing.
I clasp you like a dragonfly and angrily, violent as a seizure.
You cling to me like sawdust. Relief is the scent of spasms.
I wouldn't want to alarm you. I heave you to me.
I hold you like the bag of gardens you are. I can carry you as far.

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If I can hold you in your body of garden,
all your rose bushes wounded and restless
and raking me in distress. The alimony of love is love.
The shirt you wear is a lost note
that's come back to the score, a flown bird.
I would weave you in like a fugue. Such is the weave.
I can make a fugue sound like a kiss, like bread.

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I smile like crinkled paper,
look at you and sing songs of colored smoke.
You could almost pluck them.
You hear the sky, the sound of blue and illusion,
sound of hard light, you hear sounds of humans
and you hope that you hope. The earth for now tastes
like an orange, your forehead,
chilled oceans at the top of the world. You hope.
The light is fresh and the grass wild. The domesticity
of chocolate is wild. The trill of fruit is wild.

*

We are some mad bridge. A sturdy little story.
Sharpening star. You shoot a gun and a garden fires out.
Bullets fall like seeds, strike a man,
he holds his chest, thinks pain,
looks down at the wound, hand covered in young shoots
and blooms straining to lick his face. Bombs overturn us
with soil and blossom. They knock and bump with their flowers,
their grain, their crop into outstretched hands of boys,
of thin children. The glass that took your eye did not take your eye
but planted a vine and wherever you go,
your eye sees twice as well and you can help sow any field,
call any man to you. You are beautiful. Your mother not killed but planting.
Trash heaps not refuse and tied blasted bodies not kidnapped dead,
but sad flowers, no, not the dead, only roots not yet kindled by rain.
When the first rain falls, the flowers of the dead raise their heads
and untie themselves, faces cupped like tulips to rain,
and walk home to their families, their seeded, aerated walls,
the soil-rich halls, a man walks in and the walls
are the color of zinnias, he leans against the bushy furniture,
the men outside his door are flowers too,
and there are apologies but not from flowers—
who will take the people into this young sunlight,

after so long and bitter a year?
Who will move them in such fragile winds,
to seed themselves and sway in wide fields?
Who will rescue them by the wildflower roadside?

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The lock ticks clearly. Outside is brisk. The word itself—*brisk*—is brisk.
That's organic form. I believe in the disbelief of tombs.
I am rattled and groomed. I did not understand when I was young
that I am a metaphor. And what am I a metaphor for?
Sea glass.

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What effect does noise of wings have
on other creatures, on flowers? Does it make
pollen come forth, push powder out a bit more,
sound of sex, sound of being carried off?
I am bound to sky and to soil.
I deny this in the most potent colors:
the counterpoint of *we*. Grass grown so green
its green grass tongue is tied into ropes of grass.
What remains is metaphor. The moon is and isn't the moon
and makes me love the moon
all the more because it bears a twining. I wasn't sure
how to shade the moon this time
but now I see its lace color,
and the moon insistent on reflecting light means
I must love the sun, stormy fruit in the stormy universe,
its appetite for gas-light, we all eat ourselves to stellar crumbs.
If energy is neither created nor destroyed,
the dead are particles of crumb, perhaps somewhere an infant sun
or new animal. If stars lean against trees with long cigarettes hanging
from their mouths, I love them more, and more because they explode
into supernovas of polyphonic color, for their violence,
look at him, blown away by a white daisy. Look at her,
blown away by a grasshopper, look at us, blown as the blossoms fall,
shedding like a late spring day and we're walking
though choked with their softness,
we breathe the soft choke, we become the blossom, we become

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Yet lines are elastic—open metaphor like an open word,
a drawer opened, shallow water clear to the bottom, a ghost,
cadaver on the med table, fish on the block, vivisection,
a sex opened, coquina shell, when I open my flesh to you,
a left-on light, an empty house with lights flowing out,

empty dim streets, an unmade bed, a bird's outstretched wings,
the empty branch, collision of those things as in life,
the breeze is blowing it back like your hair
opening us like a ripe shell,
an artichoke peeled right back to the start

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The sounds of water were as carp threshing
it with their love. So much love
I thought a piece would jump in the boat, I would catch it,
or it would land on lap or feet, I would stand in fear
of so much flapping, straining love and fall overboard.
The water was churning with bodies
splashing the yellow blossoms of lily pads, the water
broken with love. "Don't stand up, Stace," Mike said in case
a fish leapt into the boat. But I would have,
turned us right over into the braiding bodies,
amid the boat-slap, thump and reverberation, thunder of fish
against kayak. We were the still ones by the long long grass,
floating through this orgy of carp,
love among the lily pads, dark water, long grass, stillness.
When we returned all the bodies quiet in their watery palaces
a droplet of history
the history of carp on a humid day in spring
in the blooming hollows

Land Lights

Couldn't see the turn, but I wanted it.

What holds me in its non-gaze.

Road carving up the roads. Mystify and pave, pave, pave.

I believe in it as I believe in notes, stars. That we are redeemed
though the manner of redemption is fugue. Take this, look it through.

If there's a secret lost, throw it like salt over your shoulder,
it will find its way again.

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I don't have time to doubt *everything*.

Doubt so solid it masquerades as something other than itself,
becomes perception, paradox. I cannot tell you how to bleed.

Only that you will. Stand before yourself
and count the birds lifting off each fence-rib.

Dying is doubtable if we spirit ourselves away somehow,
in jars, chipped containers.

We cannot help but perform some broken act.

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Reaction of movement to movement. The blinking of a body.

I charge through the connections. I speak in my own language of other languages.

Invitation. Rhythm of lamp, of prisoner. Let me hush.

This only the beginning. Not a question of returning
but of mapping the way.

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What tragedies have forced our hands, make it difficult to breathe
and yet the wordbodies keep on, not in their permanence, but in their impermanence,
taken in and exhaled, at last opened fully for other entities to pass
on and through, this chatter

*

This bewitching silence. I flatter the universe to no avail.
Anxiety over source. Anxiety over the right thing.
The last the last the last. Think of the ghastly particulars.
Where am I in the plainspokenness?
The pleasure of befuddlement?

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The only sure thing is that tyrants enter the poem and they exit.
Careful, frail fern. Blooms bustling. The insecticide of will. The bendings.
Wilt of bodies on a pike. Dry but green out there. Missteps brooding.
The livelihood of us! The serendipity! Cornets of fate!
What right have I to be so damn inviting?

*

Mass zenith, mélange of slim pickings,
time for answers really means
time for questions, means tell me now, means
tell me never, means what we perceive as hints,
the un-faith. What of interest?

Run off, bind on, circumspection, leaf pool.

Lots not tossed aside. Locution.

We against the perfect perforation, flown.