

Love Letters

Aaron Pinnix

oh shiloh

(what it is to lie next to someone with the lights off)

Says Jennifer:

With all my heart Cyndi, forever and ever,
your name spelled and spoken as a valentine.
I stretch out the C and over the i one heart
and a dozen kisses.

There is too that secret summer joy
of found ways to curl our names together,
my J and your y seen substituting our legs,
flourishes only barely holding
my silenced exhilaration at the stubble of your legs,
your calf a continuation down of grandeur.
Oh chaotic spinning wonders of a lover's body (!)
asleep even here tonight and facing away.
This world, the stars, even your apartment, your room
seem nothing but for your hair
cut shorter since high school.

Says Cyndi:

There was once when—
Along exposed spines and ridges
a sharp suck in then aquatic squirm away.
Wet fingertips caressing again blood red bumps,
salt licked like icing off my lips,
the coarse and cold experience of an education
set to waves, constantly pulling then
roaring back again against the Pacific, the rocks,
the spray, enough to cover me cold.
Leaving you starfish,
and your odd little tidalpool,
I climb back to the beach, back to my father.
That is what life seems it should be—
Worries of dresses drying scratchy and crude
and on the ride home carrying still
ocean smells. Not, therefore,
the Tupperware existence this town affords.
Look here, life stretches out many ways
but my days refill again the same.

(a sister glances past)

Says Angie:

Billow is such a wonderful word!
Look, it curves through the curtains
and surrounds my life—
The mason jar of wildflowers,
the slight shiver of petals and
walls painted sunbeam yellow.
How too the streets beyond the window,
people as swirls over concrete
gripping close to their hearts
memories of earthly saints
and love in the time of television.
I don't see how this city could deny me anything,
not here with my new complete eloquence of life—
The old words a dying language,
Dyke said like a punch to the face.

But the city disrobes ahead
with an arch of the back and sigh of the leg,
displaying only surprise and the quick order of potential.
The night fills with kitchen lights and bare bathroom bulbs,
a bloodclot sunset fading to night.
Somewhere underneath this, somewhere
my brother edges and glows, stepping I'm sure
from a gravestone while above
the first star appears.

(and too oh burning brother)

Says Mark:

After that and the heartbreak
you learn to hide the quick inner spark,
no more the
falling to pieces over you
or the deep knowledge of my head in your lap,
the clouds curling somewhere around your chin.
Remember as I stood in the shower
watching shampoo bubbles slip the drain
till looking up and there you stood,
shoulder against the doorframe,
watching me but more—
The look on your face,
maybe just the parting of your lips,
my life unwhispered,
though for all my trying.

The idea of your face has gone
and turning my back to the wind
I blow bubbles for the neighbor's kids.
Their fingers reach upward though I,
I know now the answer—
Yes, I am still the ember of a long dream
and yes, I am the exceptional note drawn long.
This is all easy to say—
Hold fast the breaking light.

(turning aside with tears)

Says Cyndi:

I'm sorry but the taste has gone from sweet to sulfur,
so enough of this long cold prying apart
and I will make the motion
that makes the cut.

Perhaps you believed my fingers
still moved from my heart,
not the feeling in my stomach
as I tried to grab and anchor.
But this world is too large
and Jennifer, I'm leaving you,
despite the C tattooed on your arm
and not your curls or your giggles
can hold me here.

Says Jennifer:

This world is full of burning pictures.

(come back truly)

Says Jennifer:

There was a once with you, but now
only this, the introduction of the wedge.
I spend cleaved days turning sick aside and
do you understand what you're losing?
You're losing me.
Cyndi, I miss you—
How tiring of wishes to wither and dominate my dreams.
Come back and I'll cut my hair,
come back and I'll curl again inside you.
How much happiness depends
Upon your hidden whims.

(reply with wine glass in hand)

Says Cyndi:

Sure there are echoes and aches,
memories of waking to my body disappearing
along the peach fuzz of her arm.
Not however enough, old blurred lines
long lost and left. My new time now
fills loud with conversation and glances
as if vodka spilled along the table.
I've answered again myself so now
dinner and dance, moving again with
some mixture of the social urge
and a belief in the power of eyeliner.
With what ease the party, with what ease the people—
They fall towards tight pants
and the grace of a slight grin.
Sure steps outline their faces
and I get what I want, as that
memories falter in the spotlight
and I glance aside with a fresh look.

Says Mark:

This girl answers with the primitive habit
of being lost in herself,
shining some surprise sparkle
and all the ways of smoke
blown through the nose.
And when like that, yes of course
the world is for you, while I,
tonight, gleam like chrome.
And knowing now the words, they're easier
because they're the ones without much thought.
I think too that is what we want,
this casual curve of lightness
as that it can get so heavy here.
So yes we end up at her place
and the candles still fail to hide that
she is still her and I still I
and so what, the sun rises again the same.

(how casual the night)

Says Cyndi:

I've the background of twenty watt romances against
this city screeching up and
a perched sky waiting and edging above—
Mine the memories of a girl fading to fog.
His body seems excitement or maybe
my stomach giddy with the odd curves of men
too fast and sharp and no
don't turn off the lights.
What a jest—
our lives, the idea of love, to waste
time on the phone. The answer seems
a joke I missed. So I don't
want anyone to change me.
I don't want anyone at all.
I don't want anything but no questions.

(on being 24)

Says Angie:

Dear Mom let's be straight
(ha! what a word for me),
life is wonderful, yes of course,
though across expanses of skin
spread wrinkles and still you've never told
how realizations slip in—
Well, sure you're not gonna get it like you want it,
but even if, the day will be dimmed.
Or how things tend to crumble in,
conversation turning towards the television,
the faces falling from our lives.
I guess you just never mentioned this growing up
(or even how I'll never be John Lennon).
Yes, true, though don't worry,
I've still time for gin and pills and
the crush together of bodies,
the crush together of lips,
the walls of this city they strip off too—
Days measured in words,
nights weighed with smoke.
Look, dammit I'm bored
and I have intentions towards Mark's new girl,
that one caught hanging around—
She swims through conversations
toying at a cigarette
almost to fall though held by grace—
fingertips along a red skirt, the muffled sound
of slipped off shoes,
wet sideways kisses.
I swear she's...
I've caught glances you know,
her voice tapping at the window.
We believe we're past awkward stages
so here's to say—
I'm going towards it,
Happy Mother's Day—
You've a family falling apart,
a son turning again to ghosts,
a daughter secret at his glow.

(sunrise and how it glares at the eyes)

Says Mark:

Carry these the nights of our comfort
where it's yes the easy warmth
under our blanket, filled and
stitched of pretend and tales and takeout chinese
because we both want something.
So what, we lie?
Cyndi, I seem strong to you,
striking myself against the world.
And no I don't giggle and clench tight
while twirling all lace and curls.
But we know when you're along my arm
the finger felt is long gone.
I'm sorry that this place, this city, these streets
curve beyond horizons and
hold hard memories of her and I
down the stairs and into the light.
Old loves linger long,
but now here's us, and while we kiss
the dark scrawls along her lips.

Says Cyndi:

What to say, flower petals rot?
I was casual and ease but you all muscles tensed.
Sliding was the bedroom to dinner and back but
past dreams haunt the weak.
Well at least there is that,
the eyes of his sister
from somewhere across the memory of a room.

(the last letter)

Says Jennifer:

Small stuck moments grow unglued
and tiny spaces fade.
Post-it notes and pictures fall off.
Yes, once I sat with awe and completely
but now a dragon covers your name.

(exit Mark)

Says Mark:

All seasons end with a cure
and this has been the longest yet.
I've a sunset alone on a roof top
and the air is changing.
You don't notice, of course, how blurs
over against the edging light
is the all of birds.
No eyes or feathers or form at all—
Just shadows pair and curl down
then spin and fret folding back.
If truths are told that's all you too—
You who are gone and hold stiffly still yourself.
And yes I know rain against the window,
I've heard it since, even too with others.
It is mine, this world of gray
and all things, even yesterdays and
the stretching of the last syllable.
So off, and this the reconstruction of myself
while the sky holds pregnant the night.

(to reply and to reply)

Says Angie:

Dear Cyndi—A Few Questions

Are we yes two ducks on an oily sea,
our lives scattered by reflections and
doesn't love taste like an avocado?
Or perhaps, would you hold my hand,
even with faces aimed apart?
The rolling leads to wonder,
as I sense sweet that deep sweat
near underneath your perfume—
Would you like to have dinner perhaps?
(though in meaning to spin off this globe,
these attachments, these clothes)

Says Cyndi:

Finally one who sets forth her fingers through the world
(her fingers through my hair, her fingers over me
as I tighten to her)
Then again the darkness of her eyes,
her back curved as a viola and
my whispers secret in her hair.

(May 15th)

Says Cyndi:

Come whether whatever future
I still twirl to Bob Marley in the shower
and with my eyeliner too
a reflection filled with humming,
a spring look of suspense.
Okay yes, I'm excited about tonight,
our first date, when too I see her apartment,
her life further and hidden from others,
the magnets on the fridge, the pictures and paintings,
all speaking of her thoughts and ways.
So I spray on perfume and
who knows what of this place, its weird ways
rugged with grace and splendor
as I lock the door and leave
to a night stretched waiting and full.

Says Angie:

They come new again,
these feelings forgotten of how a body
rests fresh and all moments sit
electric and potential, as too
here in the kitchen, right warm smells with us.
I'm cooking, pushing vegetables across the pan,
the silverware already set and her
on the counter, bouncing her feet and
leaning to look.
What a shape we make,
a bottle of wine between us
and orbited by conversation
flowering from Coltrane to Kerouac,
all as if our mouths were roses
gathered for to bloom
on this, our cool night of ease and wonder.
After perhaps even the backporch
where a blanket is brought for warmth but more
our covered excuses of nearness.
All things kind as these moments come in quiet
and the world bows out,
because all times
are wonderful and mostly of her.

This some satisfying and apparent addiction,
new memories replayed again
as life shakes and stomps,
clapping quietly its hands.

(universal is the wonder)

Says Angie:

First kisses are unstoppable moments
when even ones skin is not enough.
The brain rebounds and sweet as sangria,
your eyes an indigo ocean,
your heart an open throb.
How false the idea of quiet longing—
It clamors breath as if the dream
and all for the like of grabbing
while there can never be enough.
So I melt soft soft with such shock
as you pull and hold close my lips.

Says Cyndi:

*Last night, our first kiss, you know baby,
That was the best kiss that I had ever gotten.
It was so good, and I was so overwhelmed with feelings,
I could not even kiss right.*

Old bricks of buildings warm crumbly in
Sunday light as the street unfurls ahead, the sheets
a pile aside, people moving across apartment steps,
the cinder block holding open the door,
church bells blossoming in a blue sky.
Only morning could display me so incubated and surrounded,
my hand imagining yours. There is, I swear,
a tingle in my fingers, my lips, my body shaped
as a story ending with you, seeming now obvious—
Love lacks subtlety. It is not done in degrees,
it is not done but as while promises
flutter easy as mayflies,
the quick curves of my throat turning
again towards you, still gone and still
my stomach shifts, the strange return of memory
a warm wave across my face, surf seen flecked in my eyes.
How familiar seem smiles reflected in laundromat windows.

(the world as if only in fingertips)

Says Angie:

What luck we're not virgins,
our fingers knowing now
to fall down the back
like blossoms in a breeze.
There is too the gasp and sigh
as one blurs the other,
for surely we are far more than flesh,
something perhaps more white light,
more shift and shiver, more now
than ever, your breath
weighed against my cheek.
In all responses we
dig deep towards the little secret
hinted in the smell of sweat—
The ocean is all around you,
it's on your skin,
do you feel it in your body?
I've tasted you rise with tides
and sinking into night,
the sheets crumpled,
the stars somewhere above spinning.

(too the glow)

Says Cyndi:

There was a snap in the stomach
in turning towards her
laughing with an ex at a party.
Really what absurdity, knowing sure
that I'll wake by her tomorrow. But still,
this is jealousy— Am I there yet?
That point of wanting so hard to hold—
Relationships seem so much a leap in a puddle,
knowing sure to get muddy
but giggling the whole time.
We have no choice,
how could we say no.
So hold tight wandering worries
and realize too
what actual wonder is love.

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Says Angie:

The moon probably is as always, out
through space and my windows with breezes
whispering winter. It's 2 a.m. and
people— Neighbors, strangers turn in their beds
dreaming the American dream of long cars
and organic gardens behind the picket fence.
People turn to touch and don't know it,
night holding secret the arm placed over naked hips,
cold toes tucked under a leg and the alone hand
along a pillow. I can't sleep so put
my chair by the window,
the city murmuring to itself, shallow streetlight
distilled among my room. Lighting a cigarette
the smoke waits and wavers, curling, then
out the window, melting in the dark,
finding easy a city heavy with itself.
Streets and streets away, pass a thousand quiet faces,
Cyndi is probably wrapping again
the blanket around her, as always, and too
how subtle her eyelids, her nose soft in the dark,
her hair haloed. Within the silent currents of sleep
I wonder if she dreams of me while here too
I of her.

(translator's afterwards)

Says Me:

Cyndi, Jennifer, Mark and Angie
were all discovered in the shed disintegrating
behind my old apartment—
One small “Thank You, Have A Nice Day” shopping bag
holding the traces and outlines of their loves.
From those letters this sequence grew,
becoming something a bit more.
I suppose they are all out there still (ten years later)
and I plan on sending them copies.
If you're curious about their reply or
have any comments please email me at
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