

Letterlocking

POEMS

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Letterlocking

/ˈledər lækiŋg/

noun

The traditional technique of folding and securing a written message using small slits, tabs, and holes placed directly into the paper so that no envelope is required and the text cannot be read without breaking the seal, thus providing a secure way to transmit secret messages.

Letters to friends and enemies

I now sit down to let you know
how I get along:
I am well and hope these lines find you
the same.

I hope these lines find you
at the mailbox
savagely ripping open the seal,
dying to know the news.

I hope this letter is served to you on a
silver platter
by a servant interrupting the saddest
dinner party in the world.

I hope this letter finds you in a suburban
bathrobe waiting for the family shower
to be free, listening to Cowboy Junkies
in the yellow kitchen.

I hope it finds you dreamy, reminiscing
about tongues of talented ex-lovers.

I hope this letter finds you crying at the
sink, turned away from the room,
hands floundering in warm, sudsy water.

I hope it finds you changed, altered
like in the hours and days after the Mah-
ler concert.
Quieter.

I hope this letter finds you chastened
and sober
the morning after a drunken fight where
you slapped your only daughter.

I hope it finds you dehydrated.
I hope it finds you among kin.

I hope it is pink-packed snug among
a thousand layers of white business en-
velopes. Fraternizing.

I hope it sails across the sea in a crate
on the slowest, most exquisite container
ship

piloted by a skeleton crew of fourteen
who exchange only a few cursory

but heartfelt
words a day.

*A photograph is a secret
about a secret.*

—Diane Arbus

I have this secret, see,
and you know it too.

It's a small secret:
a dog twitching in her sleep.

We only discuss it between 2 and 5 a.m.
in the parking lot behind the church.

Sometimes, when I tell you the secret
again, you act surprised
as if it were the first time you'd heard
such a thing.

But sometimes you say *yes, yes, I know
that.*

We smile at each other
from across the room
when someone broaches a certain
secret subject.

If we've had too many drinks,
you tell a grim secret to me
but in the morning you don't remember.

Then, I have a double secret:
your secret and the fact that I know it,
that's another one.

It takes a few tries.

Sometimes it's old:
I'm in the cloakroom with my brother's
best friend. The floor smells like cereal.
He doesn't look me in the eye as he tells
me something he's never told anyone. In
the hallway together afterward, my brother
pushes him against a wall and says
what were you doing in there with her? (The
crime is always intimacy.)

Sometimes it doesn't matter:
a stranger's grocery list found in the
pages of a library book.

Sometimes it's brutal:
a sniper view of a couple
on the street below,
the woman tucking the man
into her trench coat.

About the Author



Stephanie Staab is an American poet living in the Black Forest, Germany. Her work has appeared in *Gulf Coast*, *Lake Effect*, *Lunch Ticket*, *Chestnut Review*, and *Ligeia Magazine*, among other outlets.





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