

Coming of age

for my father

Last night I found the letter you wrote
when you thought I was “coming of age” –
eighteen and leaving home. Was I scared?
I believed, I think, hoped, I was arriving.
The appalling stretch of the chance. There
behind the grandeur of delusion.
A quarter of a century later, I’m still here –
coming of age, coming of age, change
knotting its threads.

And the world? It’s grown. I assumed
I’d travel into it. Turns out the paths we follow
emerge behind us. In a mesh of days, still arriving.
Some of us step. Some squeeze, or fall. Some of us,
through the cracks, carve new openings. You said
to challenge things. I think I’m waiting
for my chance. I’ve become – no surprise –
a sceptic, and yes, that’s a beginning,
often, too, an end.

I’ve learned to sing, of course, metaphorically speaking,
and to tend my own love, though as you say – it arrives
like a child, of ourselves and beyond us.
You wrote that love makes things brighter. And at once
grubbier. And the meaning, you said, intrudes, stepping
through the skin of our questions, the universe
pausing in its spin awhile, tipped by the weight of a heart.

You said to grow my own beliefs.
And to be wary, even of you. And none of this matters.
Because there, at the end of the letter, you say
you love me. And you type my name, first name,
middle name, and it’s true I’d forgotten you saw me
as that kind of creature – my own.

It’s taken awhile, but I’m replying. The two of us

believing less, but feeling, still, where we are.
You are not “Laurence John” to me.
You are the unbidden filling of my well – the weight
of your care having spilled into me, year
after year, through the weathered closeness
of your presence. At times I forget your eyes,
your lips, your hands, for the fact
of their life in me.

The surface of the well reflects the hour.
And look, in its ripples, the fringe-pattern, again,
of your warmth. I wonder if you can imagine you
as you are in me. And yes, this storm in the forest,

you are loved.