

# *Lay Me Out*

Margaret Cameron

Margaret Cameron, *Lay Me Out*

Indented Head, Australia © 2014

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# *Lay Me Out*

*For David*

Deathbed  
An awkward burnt-black boat  
Or pristine folded white  
Or bloody tangled, straw-filled  
Or sandwiched between walls  
Or locked in with poisonous gas  
Or swallowed in watery collapse

Deathbed, pillow sweet with lavender  
With sheet, prayer, incense, candle and incantation  
O deathbed of the wild, or the wrack of fire  
Or pallid, grey malaise  
Or day's rage and savage fever  
Or bleed out and out and out  
I, the phantom of mother's grief

Contemplate deathbed  
I, the energetic child of suckling  
The milk of sadness  
I who am not a person  
Who has made herself up  
Enjoy unimaginable freedoms  
Way beyond the walls of mother's mind

For I choose innocence  
As the first, second and third pages  
To ride this bed to heaven  
I choose to know the world through feeling  
And its brilliance, light, and a sense of wit, of witness too  
Releasing words that kill the dead and wake the living  
Words with wings

O poor body that I must leave  
You make me feel  
With your ragged wounds and medieval gashes  
O sacred body that I must leave  
You make me feel  
O tender body, once a hero, in vainglory  
How you revelled in the rudeness of health

Now struck, cut and devoured  
See my name dissolving in warm tears  
Come back to my arms, sweet animal being  
With your purple wounds  
Take a form that is breathing  
And rehearse it as a hollow actor  
Until what is said is done and joy is made

Sisters, bathe me if you will and turn me  
In a dance that I have known  
Of a love that cannot be uttered  
Here where the great witnessing breath departs  
And holds each being's cup  
Brimful  
—The last breaths are forever

The day is dying; this is the dying day  
Getting weak and doubtful  
It is so pleasant to feel important  
But one is not at all noteworthy  
Unless one is useful in some way  
Let us get used to that and laugh  
—The crumpled up brown, paper-bag of Monday

—That woman who once lived there  
They say, the seers, that one has purpose  
If only to live in the same street as another  
Or cross and light another's path  
But after so many days, thoughts gather around  
The bottom of the wash-bin, a little bit of lace  
Betrays a wish to be more and to do more

—There are sweet mortals at my bedside  
Their ships are docking in the terminally ill port  
And carrying mortality like a white flower  
It suits one such as you, and one such as I  
To see surfaces so willing to rest  
O lay me down! Lay out a fragrant burka  
—This shield and mesh of being betwixt us

—Where holding hand to hand  
We can unwind endless time  
Here in a conversation where everything agrees  
One such as you and one such as I, smile  
And smiling is enough to destroy doubt  
And encourage love. The sun chooses to stay  
How can this be?

Tears become sun-showers  
I love you  
It is quite sure  
And you agree  
But sometimes in thin reassurance  
All nourishment is sucked from an air  
That is made of regret—

Amid too bright visitors  
Popping in for palliative care  
—My eyes become shining baubles  
I would shatter them  
To carry with both hands, my death  
In every line of poetry  
Dear mortality is not in the brochure

But I will have death  
With me when you visit  
We will be so kind  
Our silent tears will fall silently  
We will cry for children,  
Cry for you, cry for me  
—Till the bed is sodden

Behind the white sheet I am listening  
To the panting breaths of a creature  
That cannot be still, shifting from here to there  
O little one you cannot grasp a second of relief  
Not here, not there  
O never to be relieved, never to be relieved  
Until it is done and hence—to pity

Dear, dear, dear, dear, dear  
And dear little one  
With your puncturing gasps  
And grabbing breaths, your soliloquy  
Shifts from here to there  
O never to be relieved, never to be relieved  
Until it is done and hence—to pity

Inside gobbling food on all fours  
The wind is giving rise to unexpected feeling  
It mimics clothes too intimately touching the house  
A misery is invading; I will lose this, then that—  
The ability to sit and to stand  
Ticking clocks are banned when time is white  
With a frightening nothing to do but gobble, gobble

Perhaps I will just grieve things  
The apple and the chair  
The cup and the curtain  
The book and the bowl  
The pencil and the plate  
Their perfect beauty  
Their unimaginable giving-ness

Ah but this will be a journey that is more than one day  
My loves we must prepare for that  
For the meaning of things changes with light  
And also with food, after all it is hard  
To be unhappy around cheeses and fruits of all kinds  
Especially lemons, even if and especially if  
I am to die soon or even sometime

As you, as you, especially if I am to die sometime  
Just like you ... you, just like me  
All we have is some time  
Sometime and sometime I will die  
And then perhaps take some time to die  
Though some do not  
Some take no time at all to die, but do ... die

We have time  
How blessed we are to talk  
Ah but perhaps you would prefer I do not use the words  
—The words of *death* and *dying*  
They are so full  
Of a fire that burns by itself  
All the way to and past the point

A fire that burns by itself  
All the way to its meaning  
And one such as you is thrown against walls  
Where words are prisons  
Where words do not carry you  
But leave you behind  
Burning to cinders in your ear

This is not what is real  
Nothing that has value is like that  
Meaning does not jail  
It moves you, it moves in you  
And it moves to you  
It does not leave you out  
It does not leave you behind



Ah yes, perhaps I will just grieve things  
Corners and cobwebs  
That particular scarf  
The irreplaceable one  
That beauty!  
The one that changes my demeanour so  
With a colour and a twist to make the heart leap

At the white window  
I am collecting bits of things  
That might otherwise be lost  
In the white bay  
White ships sound white horns  
And arranging the world of things  
A lemon makes my prayer

How could you deny me?  
Simple animal that I am  
Looking so longingly at you  
An animal whose heartbeat cannot help but  
Join in the crash, beat, whip and swell of life  
Contagious life—animal that I am  
I cannot help but pant: quench me

Quench me with all the fluids of being  
Would you deny me a satiated sleepy end?  
As simple as any day  
O tucked in, treasured and perfumed  
Folded in soft cloth ye shall receive  
The love absorbed in baby's eyes  
The gentle care of hands, the quickening breath

A top up with a snatch to catch up the rhythm of a suckling  
Fingers that furl and unfurl  
Going vague, so vague with heavy eyelids closing  
And blessed with the birdsong of evening  
O so simply a cup of tea, goodnight to thee  
With honey and with love  
Yes you can die on your way to visiting the dying

Shush, shush, the sisters are close  
Gathering wool they suture my needs  
With needles, hooks, hands, water and tears  
To close by opening and open by closing  
Folding sweet, irreconcilable hues  
Into a mossy stitch  
Cradling the most little I

The most little I ... and then I lost her  
Mother, body, sister dear  
Then I fell into a hollow void,  
Of panic, of desperate, latching fingers  
From expressionistic novels on thundery nights  
You know the ones, so contagious  
Sobbing in pelting wind

Frightening one such as you and one such as me  
Unnecessarily so, unnecessarily so  
For after a long day of piercing and bruising  
Sobbing is appropriate but not this  
Not this horrible escalation of fear  
One such as I, and one such as you  
Taking blood, a tribal fluid

Taking blood, carrying unspoken  
All that is needed for travel  
To great lands of furs and feelings  
But what does it mean in terms of treatment plan?  
Treatment plan—death by firing squad  
Nil by mouth, nil by mouth, nil by nothing  
Nothing by mouth, never nothing, never nothing

And deep within, deep within all my soft organs  
Are sifting the too manys of everything  
The cares and the woes and so much talking  
Talking, talking and all, and all,  
—Falling, falling away to silliness.  
Isn't it lovely?  
My body is an animal, it needs to curl up and rest  
It needs to purr—a resonating sound

Deep within all my soft organs, that cures.  
In the enclosure is a kind of stillness  
Barely the swish of a tail  
To clear the buzzing eyes  
These jungle days are hospital cold  
The pots around the bed  
Are filling with internal fluids

And boats can be heard in the still night  
On the dark water of this vigil  
No wonder the surgeons are weeping  
And once when I was falling  
I felt a hand supporting my skeleton  
When I woke I tried to remember  
How to stand

Oh this verbal limping  
The words *brave* and *kind* are making me cry  
I am on the floor speaking to a *you* on a phone  
Here in the middle of my nowhere  
I cannot help but weep, open like a wave  
Your voice presents arriving land  
And I break against its witness

And so I put a headscarf on  
And pretend to be a person of interest  
I am walking for that is what I am meant to do  
Not languish here for people and places elsewhere  
After the shark is eating, after the surgeon is wounding  
What is left will always be what I make of it  
That much has not changed

Should I become unfamiliar enough to die?  
And so I look in the mirror for a moment reassured  
By the warmth of flesh  
— A familiar sister there  
And I am telling her not to be fooled  
Only one day from death I am likely to feel like this  
That she is I and I am she

I am writing agonies in the middle of a cold path  
And caught in the rain like an interesting writer  
I am taking shelter with a pen  
In the Teatree and She oak, hurt sky, wet book  
One cold raindrop, one broken poet  
I cry anytime I understand what is happening  
Seeing a great distance between me and life

The afternoon storm has passed  
People are wandering  
There is a nagging pain, homesickness  
I am cold  
My soul is shivering  
One such as you and one such as I  
Should never feel alone

And the animal body grows heavy  
Deep in my bones  
Taking it from my marrow  
This faith I am making up  
With the help of seers, this credo ...  
That it is right to care deeply about something  
If only to honour beauty

The colour of light, the opacity  
Of things and words otherwise meaningless  
That are making the world sing  
How can I explain that the ordinary  
Is more, more, more, more than enough  
That it is holding me in faith  
That the world is holding me in faith

What is breathing behind that silence?  
Locked behind these sisters' eyes  
The sound of footsteps on a gravel path along the thin driveway  
The house, the house where he is spinning an axe  
Where he is flogging a daughter to the screams of a wife and a child  
Where he is knocked out night after night after night  
By his own sons to keep us safe, to keep us safe

And another morning when the sea-mist fog  
Is rolling down the road all white, all white,  
Breaking into a day made of honey  
Where all things sing  
Giving me good pills  
To make me better, better, better, better  
For I am better now, better than before

Perhaps I will just grieve things  
The wash-basket, the cardigan  
The red blanket O  
This day there is no line between  
The sky and the sea and the thick blue paint is still  
So still ... and blobbing with boats  
And I have my arm around you and finally I am saying

I don't want to die  
Sorry to say the obvious!  
It's the bit you can't say  
It's the bit that hurts  
When you look at the thick blue painted bay  
As the just-warm sun of late winter falls down  
And your arms are buried in other people's jumpers

And you feel  
Gathered into them  
Best to say it  
It would be a terrible thing to want  
To want to die  
But please ...  
Don't send me horrible flowers

Shush!  
I am sleeping through the diagnosis  
Letting them think what they will  
And we are all looking magnificent  
On this morning of breezes  
With bright sunlight flooding rooms  
Are there no edges to glory?

Such a gentle night time breeze is caressing my body  
It is barely audible, barely sensory  
Sweeping across the land  
—I feel so embraced  
Its dominion is my soul  
Indeed I would name it my soul wind  
Turning me so ... gently, I barely move