

Linger: 21 Micro Essays on Love and Leave-Taking

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October 2025

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Dedication

To Lexie, Christopher, Olivia, Devon

Your breath proves that the years your dad and I spent together mattered.

This book is a reminder that leave-taking means moving towards, moving toward something that may just make one whole again.

Acknowledgments

“The Heist” and “Cassette Tapes,” *Five Minutes: A Literary Magazine for Short Non-Fiction*, 2025

Epigraph

Expert from Blessings in The Dust

“I promise you
there is a blessing
in the leaving,
in the dust shed
from your shoes
as you walk toward home—
not the one you left
but the one that waits ahead,
the one that already
reaches out to you
in welcome,
in gladness
for the gifts
that none but you
could bring.”

-Jan Richardson, *The Cure for Sorrow: A Book of Blessings for Times of Grief*

Bio

Laura Barr is a poet, essayist, and micro-nonfiction writer. Her work has appeared in *Five Minutes: A Literary Magazine for Short Non-Fiction* and *Blue Heron Review*. She is working on several micro-essay collections. A bibliophile, poet, avid runner, and mother of four, Laura lives in Colorado with her partner, Mark, and their cat, Henry. You can find her on [Substack](#).

Preface

On Leave-Taking

With the announcement of your engagement

On Mother's Day

Grief snuck up on me

Kicked me in the stomach

No matter for you to care for me at such a time,

Not even a hint from

The man who swore

He would fight for me until the day he died.

Let me be clear:

My grief is not rooted in regret,

Instead, it is rooted in a missing,

In the loss of what could have been

If there had not been so much

Leaving between us.

If you stop for a moment,

You might feel it—

The space between leaving and arriving.

Since my leave-taking from you

And your leave-taking from me

I have learned how to sit

In this beautiful discomfort

Of loving you,

Of leaving you.

Thank You for the Cassette Tapes

I was nineteen when you “stopped by” Jacque Michelle’s, the chic boutique where I worked on the Hill, to deliver carefully curated music cassette tapes. You titled each tape with songs: “You’ve Got a Friend” by James Tayler, “You Fill Up My Senses” by John Denver, “December” by George Winston, and “Drive All Night” by Bruce Springsteen. Later, with the windows rolled down, we would blast the volume, singing at the top of our lungs; you told me how you loved my voice. Later, our voices blended beautifully, and I learned to sing harmony against your melody.

I Ran Miles For You

I ran miles across town to find you
just to stop by to say that it might be nice
if we spent some time together.

That's the day I remember
as the beginning.

Remember the Air

I know you haven't forgotten how the air flowed in your bedroom on Marine Street. You skipped classes; I didn't finish my honors thesis. Instead, we basked in new love while I read Virginia Woolf, watched you play rugby, ate strawberries at the opera, and made you potato leek soup from Mollie Katzen's cookbook. You told me you were a vegetarian. Later, you admitted that you ate meat when I was not around.

Wedding Day

All the details carefully crafted
a barn raising of sorts
with our friends, families
and our insomniac pastor
we exchanged vows.

What does 'til death do us part mean, anyway?

We laughed our way through
when I threw off my heels halfway down the aisle
when we danced all night
we laughed through the morning
until we woke up
me, in my wedding dress,
you, in your tuxedo,
with no ride home,
drunk with all that was ahead.

A Sentence to Say

When you told me that you took your wedding ring off in Vegas, I told you I was the kind of woman who would go mad at the news of an affair and to please keep any such news to yourself.

Bittersweet: A Family Record

Wedding Date: August 8, 1991

First Pregnancy: Miscarriage, 1992

Second Pregnancy: Miscarriage, 1992

Third Pregnancy: Miscarriage, 1993

First Child: Alexis Erin Barr Musselman

Born: December 6, 1994

Adoption: July 11, 1995

Fourth Pregnancy: Miscarriage, 1995

Second Child: Christopher John Barr

Born: February 11, 1997

Fifth Pregnancy: Miscarriage, 1999

Third Child: Baby Cameron

Adopted: August 11, 2000

Adoption Revocation: August 21, 2000

Fourth Child: Olivia Emma Grace

Born: January 15, 2000

Adoption Day: April 15, 2000

Sixth Pregnancy: Miscarriage, 2000

Fifth Child: Devon Andrew Joseph

Born: July 15, 2001

Legal Separation: 2017

Leave-taking: July 2, 2018

Divorce: 2019

I “Drove All Night” For You

My love

I won't say too much about when

I drove all night for you

it felt like ten thousand miles.

Left the babies at home with my mother

to scoop you up from remembering

a secret, a trauma

through the tumbleweed from Denver to Santa Fe

I brought you all I had,

my love.

I won't say too much about

Celia, the woman

who held you instead

your soulmate, you said

but don't worry, you said

the two of you agreed to meet in your next life.

I brought you all I had,

my love.

and then I brought you back home.

Termites

It's impossible to remember when the tiny termites
found their way into our foundation
nipping slowly
creeping their way
into our bed
into our drives
at the kitchen table.

It's impossible
because through all of it
baptisms, birthdays, Christmases
we celebrated our way
filling our lives to the brim
so that we were gulping joy
ignoring the infestation of
you are right
no, I am right.

The End

The day you left me

I was on the bike path

you were riding a mile ahead

I crashed

for others to say,

are you okay?

I am not okay.

are you alone?

I am alone.

it turns out.

With blood and bruises,

I rode home.

I packed my car, and my art,

and I left.

That is the day

I remember

as the end.

I Took My Wedding Ring Off Today

I took my wedding ring off today. If I had been near the ocean, I would have thrown it into the depths, watching it sink to be devoured by sand particles or swallowed by the mouth of a giant whale. Can't you see it floating down as the sun's rays catch a glare, settling into the abyss? Instead, I put it in my underwear drawer.

Twenty-six years ago, you gave me that ring. There was no extraordinary fanfare, just the two of us by the window at Sushi Den. I am jealous of the women whose men got on one knee, were serenaded by violins, or were surprised by five hundred hand-folded origami airplanes when they came home from work.

A Few Sentences to Say

I am the kind of woman who would have rather stayed in my home, my nest. You are the kind of man who would move to Prague, move in with your mother, and then move mountains. You are the kind of man who wouldn't leave. So I did.

How to Leave Your Home after 30 Years

When you are ready to leave,
don't forget
the tiny shells in the blue bowl
you collected when the babies first went to the beach
or your dad's Dubuffet poster art
that he hung in his kitchen
when he lived in Toledo
(before he died of a brain tumor).

Remember to grab the ceramic milk pitcher
that Grandmommy used at her breakfast table
for Granddaddy's coffee.

Pack your boxes to fit your first editions of
In Search of Your Mother's Garden,
Beloved,
Robert Frost,
and *One Writer's Beginning*.

You won't be able to take

the three hundred bulbs you planted last year
or the forsythia
or the cherry trees.

It would be best if you take all you need from the start
or else you will need to grab it every time
you walk back in to visit.

To take just one thing
a copy of *Goodnight Moon*
a vase for the hydrangeas
and a little cutting board for apples and onions.

You will need to pick up the pieces
to keep the memories
until you have time to make your own.

Tantrums

I won't say much about the tantrums.

My tantrums.

Like the Big Green Hulk, the veins in my temples start swelling. My skin turns green with anger, and my body swells and then regurgitates the same hairy, bloody-boned pellet woven together with the hair strands of a bully, contempt, and general disgust.

Then, the Edwards **Scissorhands** claws, metal springing from my fingers, long, sharp, and ready to cut, strike, and scratch at your eyes. My darling, kind, sweet husband barely makes it out alive.

There is a wanting in my pleading for more: more time, more affection, more love.

Like a child with a sweet tooth, I wanted to hoard you like jelly beans in my pocket, savoring each one, each moment.

Instead, you walk out the front door, whistling through the cherry trees.

What Jenny Said

Insert the key into the perfectly matched keyhole

turning right

(listen for the click)

lean into the opening

stretching the unused wings

tucked deep in your scapula

(yes, they are there)

and off

you go.

Over

I am comforted that you are held
and that someone fills your flower pots
pansies in the spring and the fall.

I doubt that you fixed the chimney flue
so the air
flows and cools
circulates around you
and your new sheets
in the bedroom where we used to sleep
Are they white and crisp?

I know the Hawthorne is blooming now
I saw the giant branches when I drove by
reaching over where I used to lie in the grass
lulled by the sway
the to and fro.

Those tangled and rotten roots of our marriage
still produce the ripe fruit of memories
the blossoms of the wedding day

the birth of our children

the quiet moments of grief

the grief of losing one another.

Mostly, I am comforted that you are held

and that someone fills your flower pots.

Instagram

I wish I did not delete the photo
of your dad sleeping on my chest.

I posted it on Instagram
after Sam shared with me
the *I LOVE* book.

She was trying to inspire me
you are so mean, she said, and it was true
my anger was nestled deep
like a grapefruit-sized tumor unable to be removed.

But for a moment
your dad's breath steadied
and I closed my eyes.

In black and white
I captured the moment of

two friends

drifting into sleep.

A Note to My In-Laws

When Dee Dee died
the celebration of life was in my backyard
while I sat in the back
invisible.

To be a ghost is no easy thing
eyes seeing through you.

You wonder if you are imagining your beating heart.

You start to wonder

did I live this life?

did I raise these children?

did you all forget that I was part of you?

After the leave-taking
there will be those who erase you
who see right through you.

You will have to depend on your breath
and the arms of the Hawthorne tree
holding you
to remind you
that you do, indeed
matter.

A Sentence to Say

I tell everyone our divorce cost seven hundred dollars, split fifty-fifty down the middle, but I don't tell them there was no restitution for the sixteen years I stayed home, raising four babies, reading over seven thousand children's books, singing ten thousand lullabies, and making six thousand school lunches—it was easier to leave than to fight.

Anniversary Poem

After all of it

he's right

and she's right

he left

and she left.

Every August 8

on their wedding anniversary

they wake up and remember

what a day it was

and will always be.

Capacity

Six years later
at coffee
you mentioned to me that you
never had the capacity to hold
what I needed from you.

Your container was full
no room left
your cup runneth over.

And so I found loneliness
to keep me company
my shadow, my companion
my pen, my life vest.

