BABY, IT’S BEEN TOO LONG

POETRY

Dennis Webster

Flat, dark beetles sheltered in the soil and scattered when I watered.
Rats sipped blood from the floor
outside of Livingston Hospital, where my mother worked in the pharmacy
until the day I was due.
(I was ten days late.)
She was born in August, long before
it turned the city windy and took from it
eyes the dark of a room before you’ve adjusted to the light, and hair
black as a keyhole.
She hid her belly under her pharmacist’s gown,
and craved the ice that they brought to her in buckets.
She was seven months pregnant when she cycled
through Port Elizabeth, cussing and crying.
One man called out to her: “You should have taken the car!”

There is something in a flower that does not like the page.
I started to press them in a dictionary
and drop them into the tattered red postbox in Braamfontein under cover
of ten-rand stamps and the envelopes I scurried from my mother’s office.
I wish you would happen upon this, and say, “That’s lovely.”
That it would turn in your stomach and make you forgetful.
I remember now—it isn’t too late—the way
you were the one who saw the city fall quiet for the first time
from my balcony.

First the Jacarandas.
Bridal carpets the same purple as the delivery truck
I saw stacked with life.
She left paracetamol next to my bed, put tobacco in my mouth
after I found the blonde of her skin in the grass
between Cradock and Bedford.
I wondered if dishwasher squeezed through her fingers the same as mine.
Then the cheap holiday firecrackers.
and rain in sheets of grey bigger than the sky.
A neighbor arrived home to a family of boys who popped the bonnet
while she called into the house: “Baby! It’s been too long!”