

Elizabeth McLagan

The Day after Watching *If Beale Street Could Talk*

I am climbing an old street toward an ancient volcano,
breathing hard because of the extra weight I am carrying,
so that some summer day I might still walk out among
the big volcanoes—Hood, St. Helens, Rainier—sweat out
some miles, less each year, but still to enter a wilderness
to pitch the tent I carry, to eat the food I've packed, to bed
down among the alpine firs. But today I remember the sad
and endless burden of my race—white, like those who have
inflicted pain and misery on our darker citizens, and I
want to reach out and say *Sister, Brother*, when maybe
what is preferred would be my simple indifference:
I'm doing just fine, thanks. I could say I am not to blame,
but I have by accident of birth what I don't deserve.
Still, I am here. I remember, step forward, step aside,
stop talking, listen. That is the constant that.
But I'd forget myself, and wonder if I am alone in this,
wishing to ignore the troubled world for an hour or so
and walk through an afternoon of rain and reflection:
trees in standing water, branches in puddles, power lines
crisscrossing, the sky a pale wash gathering us all inside.