

Katie Vogel

EDITORIAL CHATTER

I'm talking on my antediluvian landline
to the Mother of All Things
She's fab & I'm a nervous reck
twitching on someone else's mattress
as I undo my internal knots
for someone else who isn't *out* there

This fantastical matter kicks debt-collectors
to the soiled curb--you think I'm a joke--
regurgitating miscellaneous puzzle pieces
I've seen enough movies to know
this soundtrack arches across a finite timeline
to deliver perfected catharsis

I'm barely stopping to collect language
these days
Instead I resurface those recontextualised options
trying not to accumulate unwanted luggage
Those fickle words fit the bill
flop in the air just to dissolve in the rain

I encourage you to come from nowhere

You'll grow out of it & we'll dance along the treeline
to taunt the devil
recreate the fervent first love
music to words--back again if you dare--
stride from the marsh with head held high

That's the way of your tribe.
Heavy boots, a sense of service, unimaginable
tenderness in the face of total cardiac retreat
It feels good--perfect enough
reason to keep it to yourself
Or teach it to the moms when you've got time
They can hear the voice rattle around
in the walk-in pantry's back corner
what a nice young-- it's just across the street
one elbow-bump away when hands won't suffice

I'm shot through the heart, darlin'
& you're a knockout 6' away
from loving yourself the way you should
I see you on the cusp--damn
you've got good balance

We're a New Yorker, hon (at least a fifth of the way there)
see-- these poems are always about the Subway
going somewhere, arriving with the pride
you can't quite believe fits your frame
The tulips hang out between the railing
that kind of beauty only happens if you let it
tug on the difference between you
& that woman over there

I've got all the arguments in the world
but you're just as stubborn as I
--you'll come around, love, just you wait
& see-- I stand a much greater chance
of being all the wishes you cripple under

We won't live to see a second book--after all
it's April & tomorrow is Bread Day
Don't ever mistake this shell for deflection
--I'm almost over you--
We keep the loose change in our left hand
pass it back & forth, make our way in this world
by accepting our right side as the true slacker

The risk is never the failure
just the next best swing set
 across the street--that's the real academic hard work
My neighbor of 45 years just left (I'm edging toward 21
if you're nosey as you should be) & I'm halfway through a dissertation
 that ain't due for two years
You want to know where I am?
Here. I won't budge.

I hand this story to you for a reason--
 Everything that comes to this island comes by boat
 & swims the last fifty yards to port
You can grow things in the city you never expected to
 Like a backbone constructed from atlas to ass
My neighborhood is my beloved
 in all its future uncertainty & window succulents
The architecture shoots up, shakes around
 settles in the self-referential

Live your life in a friendly way
 then *pass on*
 pass on
Do better by the altercations to come
These creatures grow into people
 Who can speak--you bear no legal responsibility
but all the wonders of the world would shit on your grave
 if you let go of your humanistic attachment
--love your chosen material possessions enough
 to haul them up four stories
 pass it through the window
 to the waiting hands of someone
 who needs it more

I'm shrouded in a sense of indecency--
 for your sake--it's just *keep walking*
 until I recognise this throng of bodies
 belongs to noone
feels delicious
 examines each edge
of the behind
 & you're about to get the reigns, love

FIFTH FLOOR WALK UP

Suddenly we have causation
Maybe we're here with Frank
Someone holds me face to face
with Alice & Bernadette
(everything's a dead end)

I take on one, deny, erect all other
partitions

(It's none of your business which, but
I have a high stakes bet on your attachment
to accuracy)

My low stakes crafting gig demands
I mean what I say, never lie about that
which I can build on the least stable binding

My danger is conceivable &
You're out there dreaming

A language unknown to humankind
slices the divide & transports us to
one who will trust you enough/
go That Far/ tether you, too, as you spin down
into your personal dungeon
flick on the light/ unfurl for ages

I come up screaming bloody murder
to go just that much harder-- *I can't do it/
you're not here yet--*

If I'm reading/ crying/praying to the body/
I negotiate everyday for peace

for conversational understanding
just what I am when no one is watching

The cyclone abaits &
I've stitched most of these new ones
to the margin--
what they wanted depends
on how much leeway you entertain

& I am aware enough of my vices to stay
with the first impulse/ ask
where the automobile drops me off
& I get out to wander, exposed, unbound
leaning into a post-pandemic step-off

Ask *What if someone grabbed me?* I adjust
Someone is going to capture this beautifully
but it ain't me- I won't let it be

I'm interested in the existential evidence of the moment
I take my text messages with me wherever I go
My phone is a memory device/ a gesture of mercy
when I stash it in my pocket
memorize the turns to the UPS store
send you more than \$400 of your life
for \$35.67

To know that what the writing needs now
is a visual backbone defies all begging
for the unseated attraction
I'm thinking about the vices I want to carry
across the bridge
the presumed safety of a car
my physical rumination on a point
creeping closer to the ocean
waves cracking in the distance
one week away from the true long-run
afraid for certainty's loss
of my incredible strength
getting down to the business of attraction
with each molecular push to the next paver
unclear to all those gawking lookers on
I know where I'm going & you can only look on
bated breath/ anticipation for some uncertain gain

it's left/right/onward for a gentle lurch or two/then
the end of a walk saunters up &
I've made a decision
to find you at all costs
relinquish the underpinnings
graduate from my locational exceptions
& meet you when we arrive &
I've already done *it*

AFTER DINNER STROLLING

This will be the summer that's a question
birds & sirens & Inequitably Distributed Vulnerability

Cut out your torment--
reliant on its dutiful third--

Each sundown inhales your incredible aftertaste
-- *I can't do it/ you're not here*

yet-- the most tender expectation for time
rides along your fingertips

gripped & throttled or whatever
all the dead-heads cluster & touchdown

I flip the pages & understand I can't escape
but it's THIS CLOSE & I WANT YOU SO

BAD & maybe you wake up in NYC
(Brooklyn, let's be specific)

to a pretty face cased in slumber
hands folded over a chest

yours or hers or someone else's even
(it's not too crazy a world for that)

(you just want her alive)
but you know there's room for *one more*

& you don't know where s/he is
(Ocean Ave, look it up, etch it on your ribs)

& I'm negotiating with myself-- the *for* being
contemplating my examined life alone

zoning out to set the insurmountable conditions
for the with-you --communicable by my very silence

-- *I can't do it/ you're not here*
yet-- out in the city somewhere

just a breath--a beat--a stab --a strike

maybe the next grocery aisle over
when I leap to snag the top-shelf baby wipes

& wrestle with the *who I am* I want
to carry through this wormhole

I write a letter to the theoretical tectonic plates &
heave & coil & ease up

I've got all the available space to shift & shake
take my battles a bit too seriously--

-- *I can't do it/*
you're not here yet--

with coffee in a canister--whips on the door--stockings
under my laptop--closet full of furs

I tuck my head in that post-animal odor
slip on the sexless gloves to consummate

the pulse: *I don't know* that
& *I let it take me*