



# *Vulnerability*

## *To Kevin, from Colleen*

By Katharine McLennan  
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Poem continues on the next pages →

Page 1

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He told her once of his brother, so gorgeous, so brazen  
Who could walk up to any woman, and take her his maiden  
Knowing what they wanted seemed all that was required  
To be adored, to be touched, to be taken, to be acquired . . .

And she wonders how much he was explaining his own form  
How much she falls under this spell, and how much is her own storm  
A passing woman, seemingly random in her walk  
Easy for the picking, naive in her talk

She could attempt to hypothesise what he believes  
Estimate what he feels, triangulate what he grieves  
That would be fallacious, dangerous, and highly artificial  
So she steers her focus within and thus evades the prejudicial.

On Easter Monday, he asked her to be a friend  
He told her of his illness, his burden, his soul to mend  
Lovers have no space here and maybe never will  
Or at least not in the form she offers, regardless of skill

And “friendship” is what he offers, but she doesn’t know his ways  
So quiet she remains, focusing on work and steering through a phase  
Of youth and of adulthood that is libidinous yet meaningful  
Of seeking companionship that is mental and physical

She finds the latter all too easily but she has been mightily spoiled  
By his depth, by his intellect, by his touch, he has uncoiled  
Something that has been asleep for years, and possibly for lives  
She had been alone on this Earth, and then he simply arrives

The first time she sees him, knowing without knowing that she must connect  
It takes her years, a failed marriage, a plunge into her own wreck  
And when she finally comes up and knows that a meeting is due  
She sits across from him, he is beautiful, wise in his 2011 debut

Not knowing whether he's married, whether he's in love,  
Whether he's gay, whether he's a priest, she gives herself a shove  
Vulnerability is welcome along, she has nothing to lose  
Life is too short to miss him this time doesn't matter if he will refuse

And he says yes – albeit reluctantly, she reflects in hindsight  
On one hand he is “astounded” she should consider him her white knight  
Astounded she could fall in love with he who is not to be cherished  
With he who does not need people, whose own company most relished

So he allows her to make love with him, to enter his den  
To care for him, to play with him, to alleviate her yen  
He invites her into his world, his unfolding world of new friends  
Of stories, of brother, of family . . . and her body he tends

She honours his privacy and as such, she must leave  
He whispers into her ear to stay and they love with great reprieve  
He tells her “I love you” and she believes him in childlike bliss  
How naive, she reproves, this anomaly she must dismiss

That morning was the highlight of her life, but he doesn't know  
To him, she is another casualty of yet another overdose  
But he allows her to meet the people he does love so frankly  
His brother, his sister-in-law, his anchors, his family

So we go through life on such uneven roads  
Never knowing how we impact the other in all our unwritten codes  
Never realising how much the other sees you  
How much the other loves you, how much she believes you

He asks her to step away and she does but not completely  
She turns to her motherhood, her work, her dating discreetly  
Her lovers are “lovely” but they lack the depth  
In the same way he feels his age in and amongst his own work and breadth

She has studied his disease, spoken to many fellow abusers  
She knows the literature which says “a year of sobriety” with no love manoeuvres  
And even then, there will always be a third person in the connection  
A “lover” in the guise of the bottle, either in drinking or in abstinence

And so for this reason, they say, such trysts are fraught with pain  
And will provoke her own agony, her own form of illness insane  
Common sense would say to move on and find Clark Kent  
Someone to hang laundry with, someone to sip tea with no torment

Common, however, is anathema to both  
Which is why the gods did play with their meeting, demanding their growth  
Whether they sort it in this life is really the question  
Or perhaps he will write it off as only her obsession

Which it could be, indeed, she is willing to admit  
She sees in him beauty, wisdom, kindness and wit  
All of which are new in their mix  
New in their telling, new to her their tricks

She reckons he thinks she does not understand  
That every breath, every step he is wrestling a command  
To drink just one drop, one sip of elixir  
One second of relief from believing himself on this earth a stray visitor

Relief from the boredom, respite from the inane  
An opening of passion, of creativity, of relief from the pain  
Of not belonging, of not loving, of senselessness and rage  
Of shame, of guilt, of loss, and the pummelling of age

If she could live with this grappling and still love him in peace  
Would he accept her in her ways, in her touch, in her speech  
She wonders, she loves him, she lets go, and yet once in a moon  
Her heart stirs and feels that instant he played her his tune

Her punishing side laughs at her derisively  
Makes fun of her in her ludicrously romantic idiocy  
She taunts as she watches the women 'round him hover  
She reminds herself she is just one of the many hoping to be lover

And yet there is something she knows lies deep within her  
Something so beautiful that only he can with her confer  
Only he knows how to unlock it, to coax it, with her to exalt  
Only she knows how to honour him, in no need of his stage default

So the universe keeps pushing him into her obsession  
She wishes she could be "cool" and work on her suppression  
But this is not her, and vulnerability will always thrust  
She hopes that he understands and can her honesty trust

She is enjoying her own presence, her soul and her mind  
She does not expect him to complete her, or even a relationship to define  
She thought she would just tell him the words he once whispered  
That she loved him, that she cared for him, that his company is always preferred

She understands that his task to get healthy is his critical focus  
That love affairs get in the way, and may not offer him any solace  
But she wonders whether some of his truth could be altered  
Could be cared for in different ways, still honoured

And these are the ways that the universe whispers  
By sledgehammer or nightingale, by words or by figures  
Vulnerability indeed but more importantly, of love primordial  
Of knowing, of care, of laughter, and of friendship immortal

With Love, Colleen

By Katharine McLennan  
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