

Partridge Boswell

That Vonnegut Thing

*If there's no one beside you when your soul embarks
Then I'll follow you into the dark —Death Cab for Cutie*

My best friend who I haven't seen in ten years
 texts: *It's a Vonnegut thing...when old couples
follow each other back to back like that...*

*within six months I think was the thing he says
 though dang if I can summon which novel
this domino effect surfaced in back in high school.*

Uploading literary sympathy, his way of condoling me
 across an awkward distance—his cite, a secret
lemon juice for: *Hey, you and me, we've known*

*each other a long time too. Maybe that's how
 we'll go...linked in mortal synchronicity—
in lieu of coming right out and saying I love you.*

Didn't Thomas Jefferson and John Adams die
 on the same Fourth of July? With her loop down
under a minute and everything scrubbed from her

cortex but random visions, song lyrics and faces
 of her children, my mother couldn't say who that
old guy in the next room was, where he came from

or went once he was no longer in it—only that
 her soul's bed was unslept in, empty as a crater
on the backside of a moon she hadn't seen in ages...

knew it was time to stop playing with her soup
 spooning letters to alphabetize the passenger list—
time to board the vessel. There must be a word

for it, other than *synchrosympaticoperitaxis*—

something akin to *ya'aburnee** with an asterisk:
and bury yourself straightaway, don't dawdle. A word

that cuts through the creosote of bickering sarcasm—
to when they coasted into the homestretch half
a marriage ago, kids flown, decamped in a sleepy

hamlet, panning the balance of their patinaed
lives for gold. She called one morning in a lather:
He's gone! Left a note saying this time's for good.

A word he might have said upon returning to her
and his senses, never to leave again. A key that
works only when both voices utter in unison

a word only they can pronounce. I want to picture
after all those years of slipping out the back like
a lone ninja: he slips into the ellipsis...then pauses,

holding the door for her, so hand-in-hand they can
bushwhack a wordless wilderness beyond silence.
At their joint service, someone else is bound to tell me

the riddle of their stiff-arm codependency
is a Mark Twain or Jonathan Swift or Hunter S
Thompson thing, exhuming humor when a good

laugh is all we have left and exactly what we need.
And I'm waiting for Kurt to weigh in with
something witty and deep...but all I can hear

is the squeak of a swing some kid's swinging on
six seconds-months-generations ago under a giant
movie screen while his parents cuddle listening

to a tinny little speaker, glued through their
windshield to a Western whose characters loom
so much larger than life they look to him up-close

a massive silent scrim of dancing colored light

that can only be his future as he pumps his legs
higher than Laika, into an infinite summer of stars.

**You bury me*