

Don't wait for me, I'll be gone

Beth Kapila

Don't wait for me because I'll be gone
Climbing over the top bit of some hill somewhere
You'll just be able to see my outline glowing against the setting sun
I'll reach the peak, look back around to see the house getting smaller than I've ever seen it
before and then I'll keep going so that I'm finally out of view
From you

I've been sat here long enough waiting to go and get my results
Watching the paint peel away from the wood round the window pane
Following the stream of steam floating up from the coffee cup

I don't think you even knew that today was results day
I don't know if you even cared that today was results day

I went and picked them up
The only one on my own
Everyone else crying with their parents
Either the joy of getting one step closer to some sort of goal
Their goal of 'winning' at life
Or crying because they are disappointed in their failures
That their parents are disappointed in investing all of this time and money into raising
'failures'.

Whereas I slid in and out, picking up my envelope trying not to make eye contact with
anyone
Especially not the teachers
I hit the school gate, picking up a rhythm
Looking at my feet racing ahead of me
Envelope unopened, folded and rustling in my pocket
I feel the pointy edge poking into my chest
When I hear "Sim! Simi!
I thought that was you."
Mrs Dunwell's sweaty face, and frazzled hair is chasing me down
"Leaving already?" she breathlessly hollers across the playground
"I have to get home, my Mum's waiting for me"
I gesture awkwardly, willing my feet to keep moving
"She couldn't come with you, ah shame. But she'll be so proud! All of us are.
You have done so well.
Considering"
"Considering what?"
"Well"
Now she's looking awkward, takes a shuffle towards me
"Not really having the same amount of support as some of the other students here. You
have risen to the challenge.
You should really be aiming for top universities next year Simi."
"I don't ... I've never really thought about Uni"
"Simi. Come on, with those grades you could have your pick."
She's shocked that someone with an ounce of intelligence doesn't want it dashed away in
another institution
"I just, don't feel like it's for me"
"Well when we start back in September come and find me and we can continue this
conversation. We can have a look at different courses and uni's and that might make you
feel more excited.

It's also a great opportunity to get out of here, start fresh."
She can feel my feet pulling at the ground too now
Like a plant trying to pull up it's own roots
"Thanks miss.
Sorry, I really have to go"
"Of course, don't let me stop you. Enjoy the rest of your summer."
What's that look she's giving me?
What's she actually trying to say?

I turn and head out of the gates, down the path that winds down uneven steps towards the river, then up towards the house
Knowing in the bottom of my feet that I've done better than anyone ever thought I would

What did she mean when they said they were proud?
Like I was some sort of achievement that they could all sit back and look on from their high chairs in the staff room.
I know I'm just a figure on their list of grades
Bringing their average up
Keeping their reputation high
They only want us to do well so that they can feel proud of *themselves*
"Well done Susan, pat yourself on the back – another year of excellent achievements"
"You too Mark, look how much we helped them reach their *potential*."

Our potential to do what exactly?

Like life is just a series of tests for us to pass
That there will always be some external invigilator giving us their judgement
'Yes, what you have just done is acceptable – you may continue moving forward on this narrow path.'

I don't want a narrow path
Feeling like I am always waiting for someone else's acceptance
I want to step out
Feel the fresh grass under my feet
Not the well-trodden mud

I've seen the photos of older students online who've gone off to uni and they all look the same
Constantly swinging between being mindlessly drunk or at 'brunch'
Isn't brunch just another excuse to get drunk in the daytime?
Filling their brains with bubbles that are slowly pushing their intelligence out
Do they actually care about their course that they're splashing £50K on?
Sorry, that their *parents* are dashing away £50k on
Then they'll get a job in a boring office somewhere that takes up most of their time, crushes their individuality,
But it pays well, so one day when they get married and have kids of their own they can afford to give them the best education and opportunities and lifestyle
Thus completing the cycle
And sticking to that narrow path laid out for them
And they just keep following, stumbling along blindly
Because their mummy and daddy seemed 'happy enough' and everyone is smiling and tanned in the photos of family holidays to Florida and St Tropez

I get home
No one there
Check my phone
No messages there
I don't even know where she is
Maybe she's at the shops
Or down the bookies

I sit down at the kitchen table and open the envelope
Peeling away the edges
Unsticking the stuck
6A*s, 4As and a C
One solitary C glaring back at me

I open the window in the kitchen, the sun is now beating down on me relentlessly
I hear my neighbour in the shower singing along to Red Hot Chilli Peppers
He is really going for it today
It's 11 am
I wonder what he's doing at home
Saturday
The days all seem to melt together in ice cream summers

He works for the council by week
I see him pulling out of the drive in his grey ford mondeo at the same time every morning
Sometimes a blue tie
Sometimes yellow
Coffee cup in hand
Caffeine dependent adult getting through the trudge of a day job
Just to come home and live through the bass lines and drum solos of his favourite bands
In the shower he is a rock god
Playing to packed out stadium when he closes his eyes

I don't want to be a fan
Waiting to feel *something*
In the moments in-between
I don't want to just get glimpses of who I really am
I want to be her all the time
You won't be able to press *pause* or *play* on me

I take my results and stick them to the fridge so that Mum can see them when she comes
back home
So I can show her
She might have thought that keeping me in and stopping me from having any fun to do my
work was for me, but it was just for her benefit
To feel like a good mother when she has nothing else to offer
Really she just enjoys pushing me around
Controlling me
So I gave up the protesting and settled into my solitude, quietly accepting the lack of a life
I know that in her heart she really wanted me to fail so that she can get another thrill at
telling me off
Pushing me even further down
She won't get that now

“If you can get the grades then you can do *anything*”

So I am
I am doing something
I am packing my bag
I am making a sandwich
And then I am going

The funny thing is
I look at my grades
And those 11 numbers are all I can tell you about myself
For sure

I don't know who I am

So I pick up my bag
Leave a part of myself stuck on the fridge
And open the door

Will I be a painter with a studio in an abandoned factory with a million plants populating the space
Or will I be a scientist with a lab full of students, learning more and more about the endless possibilities of black holes
Or the human genome
Will I be an advocate for social change
A champion of the people
I don't know what for yet, but ... there's time

All I know is that I want to *create* something
Something good
Not just follow the vision of someone who doesn't care
Doesn't know what they're doing
Or has been there so long that they don't know what they're doing it for anymore

I open the door to all of these possibilities as I turn and hear my front door click shut

I don't know where I'm going
But if I haven't found myself here, then I have to go somewhere else