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“It is appallingly obvious our technology has exceeded our humanity.”

— *Albert Einstein*

“We’re changing the world with technology.”

— *Bill Gates*

Contents

FICTION

Ken Poyner

Persistence 1

Lewis Gray

Ain't No Tellin' When I'm Down for a Jack Move 7

Larry Lefkowitz

Ben Franklin's Time Machine. 24

Carole Stivers

Faith 31

NONFICTION

Katrina Marks

Leaving My Heart in Africa 40

POETRY

Cathy Bryant

Such a Thing, My Leaping, Dancing Heart 49

Catherine Edmunds

Pinpricks 50

Casey FitzSimons

Reconstruction. 51

Marie Kilroy

GCHAT 52

Fran Markover

Watching the International Space Station. 54

King Tut Gets a C-T Scan 55

Nate Maxson

Tenth Etude: Opposing Sonorities 56

Anne McCrady

Repairmen 57

Lee Nash

Musings on Mars 58

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Contents *(continued)*

Jacalyn Shelley

- Big Data Valentine 59
What I Mean When I Say Goat Rope 60

John Stupp

- Instructions for Reading a Poem 61

Laura Sweeney

- I Kept Meaning to Cure Myself of You, But
Instead I Searched 63

- About the Authors 64

Persistence

Ken Poyner

When she sat down, I was shocked that I could see a difference from her physical state last night to her even more limited corporeal condition this morning. She sat in her frumpy, little, too-old-for-her, short nightgown and leaned forward as she fingered her smart phone, one leg twisted back along the side of the kitchen table chair, one leg extended under the table.

“Fran, it seems to be worse.” I had only brought up the subject two weeks ago, though I had been noticing the change for more than a month.

“I don’t really notice it. It is only you that goes on about it.” She had decided to be difficult this morning, starting out with the defensive its-you-not-me stance. She held her smart phone slightly away from her face, blocking any sight she might have had of me.

I looked her over and what kicked me most was that I could not really tell where the edges of her fingers ended and the clear air around those fingers began. They were not really a blur, but more of an apathetic white-out: an ill-defined set that blended into the unspectacular surroundings. They seemed to disappear, as though a change in electrical phase were thoughtlessly propelling them eerily into unseen dimensions.

Then I noticed her bare feet on the floor and I was not sure where the floor ended and her feet began. Where she became reasonably solid, she seemed almost to grow out of the floor, an extension of the more solid substance: or like a mist drifting from a morning’s untroubled lake. The back foot was coyly tensed on her bent toes, and the tension stood marginally out; but the foot flat under the table dipped into an alloy of flesh and tile, the molecules of her being tethered too far apart, one from another, to appear capable of being distinctly her much longer.

Starting a while back, her facial features had been becoming a bit of a blur; but it was much harder to notice, as she still

used some make-up and there are natural shades of color shifting combatively in any face, so I had only clues to fix on. And the memory of faces last longer than the more practical memories of the rest of anyone's body.

"We might be able to solve this if we talked it out. Maybe we could come up with a reason."

"E-mail," she said, her fingers already alight on the small device's drop down keyboard, flying like amphetamine laced spiders dancing legends on a hot pan.

I turned back to breakfast, fumbling with splitting our English muffins, wishing I had cut them closer to the toaster so I would not have to walk them half way across the kitchen lain open like a morning catch. It is a small kitchen, but the longer I can face the counter, the less likely I am to say anything. I do not like fighting in the morning. And I was sure to lose this fight.

I have been falling out of her life. Last night, like many before, during our checker of love-making, she had kept her headset on and was running over past texts that had collected during the day. The tablet lay beside her and could be operated with one hand, or picked up and held just over my shoulder, both hands arching around my head to each be assigned search and select utility. Afterwards, she sat aslant in bed, as always, sheet bunched at her waist, allowing me to fondle an unannounced, carelessly dangling breast while she tapped out replies, reviewed videos, evaluated the popularity of today's recommended anonymous posts. I lose interest, but I fondle nonetheless, as I think that to do so is part of the role I am supposed to play. This has been our ritual for months, our compromise; but last night she appeared to notice less than usual that I was, at that time, with her in the room. I have always religiously tried to be no bother — to not disturb her, to not get caught up in any peripheral connected to whatever device at the moment draws in her attention. I look for the wires, wait for the day when the few remaining appliances that are not yet wireless do finally go acrobatically free of physical connection. As though foreplay, I expertly position the two of us so that she can access

without much effort whatever device she chooses to work on during my barely perceived pursuit of frenzy. And, once the position is established, I do nothing to obstruct, nothing that might require a movement of the screen, or of us, or which might cause a static in the headset.

Of course, I have wondered: if I were to knock out a cord, or with a misplaced elbow switch off the device, might I get from her an angry buck, or a livid kick, and maybe some life. Fingernails on the back in retribution would still be fingernails on the back.

I have my own devices, but I was never a fan of constant connection. When I met Fran, she was checking her account balances from a corner table in a local wireless hot spot, daintily sipping coffee or tea — I never learned which — while I looked over the engaging length of her. My gaze grew more longing and emboldened by the depth of her electronic conviction. She was a physical potential tethered to a virtual obsession. She was as solid and real as I sometimes still imagine her, and she seemed to be driven by the gravity that was pulling her into her frighteningly fast digital fancies. I imagined us together, our batteries run entirely down. I abandoned my seat and moved to share her table. When I asked if I could take the cheap plastic chair opposite, she waved me in place with but a flick of her exciting wrist. Every movement she made seemed sensual, counter-poised to the limited quickness she played out against her screen and the embedded keyboard. All around us, couples and singles and groups were texting and e-mailing and making small on-line purchases; and in the anonymity I asked her for her handle. She spoke it like spitting out the head of a chicken. I sent her a picture of myself and a vita she could not then know was written by someone else for someone else, and at some point after scanning it all on her device, she looked up.

She seemed to have no concern for the physical; and so, even at the start, I felt I was being allowed to borrow the magnificence of her physicality, though not really being able to engage in the unevenness of a mutual sexual relationship. Nonetheless, at the cold book of our beginning partnership, she would usually put

aside her communications connections long enough for us to accomplish our frenetic prayer to the animal. Or my prayer to the animal; to at least the animal remaining — and perhaps withering even then — within me. Once, she even told me that our sex was nearly as good as something she might catch on one of the personal notifications sites. I should have been proud, I have learned. If it is not in a blog, it is not real.

It did not last long.

At first, she began running a simple connection that required only her visual attention on her laptop, and I learned to accommodate my passion so as not to block out her sight of the screen. I could take as much time as I liked, so long as I was done by the end of the program. Then she began reading e-mails in large text, needing a free hand to scroll; and now listening to text messages converted to voice.

I expect that the fading was already well underway when I met her. I have no idea how substantial she might have been five years ago, or even three: she might have shoved the air around her about and clattered thunderously on simple pavements, or bullied the less substantial gravities of other objects. I might have seen it sooner, had I had some experience with the more full-featured and clear-edged being she surely was back then — when the sharpened drop of her lip meant something, and the dip of a shoulder could birth a man's hope. But I did not catch on to the singularity of her disintegration until I had come out of my infatuation with the unknown, and then improbable, process of making our relationship work: of creating an us out of she and I, no matter the shredded angles and unkempt bends tossed into the blinding bucket of disjointed emotions I had to work with.

I've noticed this fading also to be happening to her friends. When we see them out, hunched over a table at a coffee house or a small restaurant - their laptops or tablets laid out and their fingertips surgically excising cherished attention from the offered mundane in their incoming boxes and bins — and inserting the returned lackluster into their outgoing — or even walking unsteady

in the street with their smart phones or tablets held mid chest, and headphones completing their isolation. Even in clothes they seem to me to be fading: fading, as though losing more unnoticed atoms to the wind than their bodies can be bothered to replace. They seem to be, as a class, each day drawing thinner and thinner — not in weight, but in mass, in substance, in the ability to be subject to gravity and its elemental cousins. Each day they are more diaphanous. Each day more light seems to go through them, rather than around: fewer and fewer photons are blocked by them altogether. Their once full shadows suffer.

I see no sympathy in these friends when she sits unseen down and texts them across the room, or calls them into a chat session, flashes a picture from our table — next to theirs — where I sit watching her work the keys and personlessly fall into the screen. The world outside the box seems to find a path through them that is unimpeded; and she shares this distinction by socializing new rituals, ones that leave me further and further outside of her notice, no matter the event, no matter the climax, no matter the understanding or simple recognition I seek — or which I seek to bestow.

She pulls her back leg forward to meet the other and I swear I can see the chair legs through her leg as she lets it glide inelegantly and almost forgotten under the chagrin of the table. When her English muffin pops up from the toaster, I will butter it before I set it down in front of her. She would eat it without butter or jam or anything, so long as it can be done in quick commitments of only one hand, and then back to the keys. She is lucky she lives in a house with a man who eats, and who is willing to cook — if badly and only out of a sense of self-preservation. She barely touches what I put out for her, but I only cook my own meals and then add a little on the side to leave available, hoping she will find her way to it. And it is enough.

She runs a momentarily free hand through her hair and I am sure the light of the solid and recklessly mundane kitchen fixture passes through it more today than it did yesterday. Or maybe this

morning's light is brighter than yesterday's. The sun may be adding more to what our simple electricity is offering. Maybe with the passage of one day our sun is more rightly centered on our window, streaming in at a more direct and demanding angle.

But I know better. I will soon slide her this capably toasted muffin, and she will eat less than half of it before getting up and going to synchronize her smart phone with her laptop, checking first thing all the feeds that load faster on her top-of-the-line home-based computer than they do on her mobile companions.

I swear, out of pure animal rage I could kick out the chair, throw her face-first over the table and have my will with any part of her; and, so long as she could still work the smart device, she would not care. Actually, I do not think she would notice. But I eat both halves of my muffin, sitting straight in my chair, looking at the dishwasher-tinted wisps of her hair left driveling down alongside the dimming outlines of her occupied face. I know a person who once lived there.

Leaving most of her first half of muffin askew in the plate, she rises, still staring into the screen, and begins to plod towards the workroom we have carved out of our living room, where the electronics thrive and scheme. She holds her smart phone chest high and navigates the hallway by bumping once into the wall. The shoulder of her free hand is drooping like a eulogy.

"Fran," I say softly, but she does not hear. I look for her shadow as she begins to escape the sunlight, and I notice that today, with the carpet in the hallway frisky and flattened for action, she has no shadow at all.

Fran, I think. Is that short for Francine or Francis? Or maybe Frankie, or Frangelica? I don't think I ever knew. I don't think I will ever know. Or maybe her name was never Fran at all.

Ain't No Tellin' When I'm Down for a Jack Move

Lewis Gray

Dan Holland didn't doubt that his hangover and Joey Denton were cosmically and psychically connected. If a thought went through Dan's head, it would travel a similar though corrupted path through Joey's brain. That was the metaphysical nature of his hangover. A bruiser. A prize nauseator. A brain ripper. So while Dan's hangover remained in the classroom, its counterpart psychic head fault, Joey Denton, stood outside, working in complete opposition to any coherent thoughts Dan could muster. Joey could do this. He was eighteen. He was all powerful. An adult. He could sign himself in and out of school at any moment. He did not need to be a student. Education was not important. He was Joey Denton, the Jeff Spicoli/Steven Stiffler/McLovin demon seed remake of Ferris Bueller. A citizen. An Archetype. If Joey didn't want to come to class, he didn't have to. This was the New Century Academy, charter school, 60% white, 30 % Asian, 10% white/asian. There would be no repercussions. The New Century Academy had the zip code. It had the country club. It had the test scores. It had Joey Denton.

Dan checked the flashing "missed call" alert on his phone. He knew without looking that Joey was outside, had his cellphone to his ear, was wiping his index finger over his nose as if he could dislodge a booger without having to stick the finger up the nose. His Cal cap was turned at an angle. His Lacrosse team polo shirt was flipped up at the collar. He was carrying a mid-sized backpack. Joey was talking to his dad. And Dan was communicating with Joey. His brain was firing on antithetical brainwaves to Joey's, one pulse going up Dan's teetering hippocampus as another ran down the flashing cerebral cortex of Joey's gray matter. Not only could Dan hear Joey's conversation with his dad, he saw exactly what was inside the backpack without looking. Joey was holding three

grams of indica, five hits of adderall. One gram of pot was for his consumption. Two were for sale in the boy's bathroom closest to the gym during morning break. The adderall was for the A- Asians and the B- white kids who desperately wanted to hold onto their grades and get into a good college, the first group to the UC's, the second to State. Beyond that, there was a collective of assorted "to be described later" drugs that haunted the backpacks of many young men enrolled in The New Century Academy. Nothing new there, a stereotype confirmed by reality. They had the zip code.

Dan felt his guts moving, a sharp pain behind his eyes, and then the impending bowel movement arriving by morning break. He remembered the martinis had been followed by the glasses of two buck chuck. A disaster. The whistle worn kind. The fifty year Burnt Out Teacher kind. His eyes blurred. His brain began to exude, thoughts crumpling and collapsing, telling him, *"You can't drink three martinis with friends after work. You are a middle aged man teetering on the edge of becoming a dirty old goat. And flirting with that waitress, great move. Can't you see your hair is gray at the sides and falling out on the top? You cough for a half hour in the morning. You get hemorrhoids if you drive for more than two hours in your car. You don't think about sex as much as you used to, in fact, hardly at all. You drink a whole mess of martinis because your closest colleague in the department is retiring early. In fact, all the seasoned teachers are retiring early. You are a charter school now. You have core curriculum. You have state mandated racial segregation. You have less pay, less benefits, and you are observed by a camera installed on the wall to observe you. Your students are not rated. The camera is for you. Holy God and Jesus, you wish it were you leaving this place."*

He gazed at his class. The smartly dressed girls with the moderate IQs were texting friends in other classrooms, hiding their electronic devices in the hems of their skirts. The two out-of-district gargantuan varsity athletes were exchanging friendly blows and rabbit punches. The nerdy computer kids were checking notes, planning their attack on the modern world, glancing every few seconds at the smartly dressed girls with the moderate IQs. The

sophomore girl with the plunging neckline and equally plunging reputation was applying lipgloss, checking her Facebook account, making sure the bandy-legged sophomore boy next to her saw every detail of this operation. There was a rumbling noise as their voices competed to be heard, rising in teenage crescendo. Dan ran a hand over his face. Any minute now Joey Denton was going to walk through the door and it was going to explode. This was how it was every morning. Joey walking in, the nightmare from hell descending. Dan grimaced. This class. The life sucking freshman screamers mingled with the sophomore duds and the senior underachievers class. All of this cherry topped by Joey Denton, the incorrigible. And now they were a charter school. Hell buckets full of shit. What was he doing here?

"Jesus," whispered Dan into his hand. "Why are you even here? Take a personal day next time."

He stared at his computer screen, turned his back to the camera mounted on the wall. The usual jumble of high school teacher files and folders looked back at him. An e-mail alert flashed on Dan's computer screen. He took a sip of coffee, opened the message. It took no time at all to recognize the tone of the message. It was The Grade Negotiation E-mail, the one in which parent, administrator, and legal educational specialists (lawyers) wrangled out a grade resolution for the failing student, in this case, Joey Denton. Dan sucked back an acid burp, realized quite suddenly that he was now caught in a long distance psychic three-way with Joey and his father, that the martinis and wine from the night before were the prelude to just this moment. Father, son, and the unholy ghost. Why this? Why today? Why even ever?

Dear Mr. Holland:

Regarding Joey's failing grade. I spoke to Joey last night. He says that it is a mistake and informs me that he can come in and make up work during lunch (as per your stated curriculum on the district website), though when he came in yesterday, you were

not there. I also spoke to his tutor and was told Joey had learned all the materials required for this semester's final. Is there something I need to know here? Are you reaching out to Joey? Are his needs being met? Please get back to me as soon as possible with details so that we can resolve this amicably. Joey and I have both discussed that failure is not an option. I am available until 9:00. Will be in meetings the rest of the day.

Charles Denton
President
Enterprise Solutions, Inc.
Go Cal Blues!

Great. The father entering the class before the son, sending his message from his i-Phone while on the commute to the city. The son flaunting his independence from outside of the classroom, waiting to make his entrance, timing it for massive disruption. They had done this before, probably starting in the first grade. Probably the reason Dan's "missed call" light was flashing.

Dan put his coffee cup back to his lips, whispered "Shithead dipshit punk, shithead dipshit father" to the steaming surface. He should've passed the kid. But a simple pity D- on the transcript was never that simple. Grades were published online now, updated daily. Everyone knew the progress. They were transparent and irrefutable records for the term. Joey at ten percent, his first progress report. Joey at twenty percent three weeks later. Joey at the quarter with twenty-two percent. At twelve weeks an "in danger of failing" e-mail. Joey now with a thirty percent, not even a real reflection of his perfect failure. His thirty percent was his participation in two group projects in which Joey's contribution had been to repeat the same two words over and over, "*Joey über alles*" as he played a Hitler like school thug, the extent of his German language acquisition for the school year. Three words.

Dan took another sip from his coffee, repeated his *this is not a career breaker, it's not worth even a nano-second of your worry* mantra.

The first fantasy of the morning rolled across his eyelids. YouTube movie #1. Joey getting arrested in the school parking lot. Local DEA officer, Jim La Grudda, has Joey face down on the hood of his 2014 Mustang (5 Liter engine, dark blue paint, birthday present from dad). La Grudda's partner, Ralph Cox, is rifling the trunk, comes up with scales, pipes, several Zip Lock Bags stuffed with ounces of super hot shizznastica crystal meth. Cox says, "Looks like little boy here is going to jail. Hope your cute face won't get you in too much trouble." Joey resists as La Grudda slaps on the handcuffs, says, "What the fuck, dude?" La Grudda slams Joey several times on the hood, scratching the paint, splitting Joey's lip. Joey crying now, not used to being whipped around by a real man. Not like the wimp hits he's being taking playing Lacrosse, the real sting without the protective gear.

The girl with the plunging neckline said, "Mr. Holland, are you collecting the homework?"

The YouTube movie came to an abrupt halt. Dan replied quickly, "No, no, no time for it." Because in the event of Joey actually having some work, there would be great fanfare. Joey would rush in from outside, flaunting his workbook, showing how on task he was. As if he were like this every morning. As if he really were the perfect student. As if this moment on this day, the three way mental mindfuck, was really a teachable moment, the Elysium prize of all teachers in educational history. No, there would be no homework collected today because there were no rules to the grade change or the lack thereof, just twists and complications. A point in the grade book now would mean progress. So Dan would focus on his e-mail response. Despite the hangover, he would have to craft his message well. The first volley in teacher-to-parent communication was how to demonstrate that the student was not college-of-choice bound in so many non-offensive words couched in hard to interpret edu-babble. Dan usually started with, "I'm seeing disparities in norm based assessments and criterion referenced tests." That always knocked them back, set them thinking this wouldn't be an easy pushover. He would then show he understood the parents'

position by employing standard platitudes like, “thanks so much for your concern over your child’s performance” and “I appreciate your involvement in his scholastic progress.” Never would he employ the truth. Real grades, the kind that were truly assessed, were never entered. *In loco parentis*, that was how the law looked at it. Dan must love all delinquents as much as if they were his own. He must offer extra help after class. Extra help in class. He must work his lunch breaks because now they were a charter school, there was a new work ethic. There were also extra student privileges to be decided on at some later date, during some later “official” conversation. It was, for all intents and purposes, a racket. They were in the zip code. Those who wanted to learn, learned. The remaining eighty percent faked it. Meaning, he would love Joey Denton, love him right out of his first choice school.

The sword cane incident, perhaps he should bring it up here, see how that flew. A test balloon. A sort of Zen curveball. A wham bam. A softening blow. Dan had nearly forgotten about it. That was months ago. A typical Joey Denton morning. Dan handled it on his own, not bothering to report it to the administration. Sometimes a teacher needs leverage. The moment that sword cane came into class, Dan saw his angle. He recognized it instantly, a cheap copy of a Victorian curio in the days of the rugged London crime scene. Dan waited for Joey to put the cane down during lab drills. He swiped the sword as Joey bungled a conjugation, then later snapped the blade in the men’s room garbage basket. Dan left the sword-less sword cane next to Joey’s desk the following day, watched as Joey inspected his defiled instrument, then the expression on the kid’s face as he scanned the room, looking for which one of his peers had done this to him. Joey’s scrambled eyed look of revenge... priceless.

Dan checked the e-mail again. He could possibly use the sword cane anecdotally, or maybe just a mention of “possibly violent” behaviors. When pressed, he would bring it up in a meeting with counselors present, invent a set of notes made on that day, invoke images of kids with guns. Counselors hated weapons. They feared

the time when, instead of shooting teachers and peers, the aberrant teen came after them.

Joey took a second hit off his inhaler, came through the door.

“What’s up, Holland? Still chillin’ like a villain?”

“Good morning, Joey,” said Dan. “So glad you could join us. And just in time. We’re going to the lab to work on our oral competency final. Next Monday will be the real thing. This is your last chance to work on it, so I hope you take it seriously.”

“There’s a test?” asked Joey.

“Final exam,” said Dan. “Just like every few months at the end of the term. Not sure if you’re aware of that.”

Joey mouthed “Fuck me” to his lab partner Erik Han, the sophomore Korean-American with the ankle bracelet. Erik was the class screwup, the Asian bad boy, though he outstripped Joey in intellect by double digit IQ points. Erik gave Joey the “I know, it’s a fucked up system” look, leant further back in his chair.

The lab activity went well. Warm up was five minutes. Talk about your week. Use reflexive verbs. Then the oral exam practice. Speaking German for twenty minutes with various visual prompts and sound files. Thirty of the thirty-eight students were doing okay. Six stumbled through it. They would pass though. This was German II. Stumbling was okay. An otherwise perfect class except for Joey and Erik. They muttered a few words. *Ich bin Erik. Ich bin Joey.* Then they decided to blow off the activity and shoot the shit. They talked, like all senior boys, about drugs and pussy.

A second e-mail popped up on Dan’s lab monitor.

Have cleared my 9:00 meeting so we can get to the bottom of this. Please get back to me by 10:00. Am concerned the line of communication is not working.

Charles Denton
President
Enterprise Solutions, Inc.
Go Cal Blues!

Right. Joey's dad was setting up his argument, showing that he had sent "several" e-mails. He would also call again, leave a second voice mail, CC his e-mail to the law offices of Christopher Martin, then get a hold of the principal, forward his two e-mail requests to the superintendent, maybe even talk to the superintendent personally, mention that he feared there were teachers "out to get" Joey. This disaster would need to be handled now before things went out of control. Two hours was too long to wait for a student "at risk." E-mails would start to fly like darts on fire.

YouTube fantasy #2. Several police squad cars arrayed in front Charles Denton's crumpled Mercedes Benz. In the background, two cars on fire. Air bags popped. A woman and her daughter bleeding on the pavement. Horns honking. Traffic snarled. Charles Denton, visibly shaken, nose broken, saying, "I was just sending a text from my i-Phone to my son's German teacher. I didn't see the other cars until too late."

Dan's second sigh of the morning. He pressed the record button for Joey and his lab partner. The light on the MSU flashed as the lab computer began processing the MP3 file of Joey's final exam practice. Joey's voice had static due to the quality of the microphone, but it was still his clarion pitch, his recognizable dudespeak.

"Dude, I still have like a semi-boner," said Joey.

"Holy shit, Joe Dawg," said Erik.

"Yeah, and I took the shit fifteen hours ago and it's still working. I'm like boner hard."

"Dawg, young dudes don't take viagra. It's... like... not supposed to work that way," Erik pointed out.

Joey chuckled. "You do when you've downed two hits of Molly. It goes like soft. No activity down below. I mean, the chemical qualities of you know... like... um... MDMA... are a known boner killer. So you're tripping and you want to get laid, you hit the old viagra. Gets you hard like that."

"No way."

"Way."

"Dude, I took the old bone to Julie Meyers for like six hours. I was on fire."

"Six hours? Is that like a record?"

"Didn't sleep a wink. I'm still jacked up. Had to take like ten vapes on the way to school just to chill out."

"You vaped already, dawg?"

"Hell yeah."

"Epic."

"Totally."

"Dawg, got to ask. Where'd you get the viagra?"

"My dad has like a medicine chest full of the shit. Like you say. I'm young. I only needed one."

Dan frowned, turned his face as if he were listening to Jenny Long and Dennis Kamp delivering their usual stunning performances. The two were nearly fluent in German, took the class very seriously. The reason why Dan was still in the profession even after this place went charter. Kids that wanted to learn. Obviously going somewhere.

Dan pretended to put a grade in his grade book as Joey described detailed sex with Julie Meyers. It was your typical senior boy story. Lots of penetration. Lots of hell for leather riding. No finesse. No foreplay. Just athletic mattress pumping. Though Dan didn't know Julie Meyers, he felt sorry for her. He wondered what age she was, if she were a Freshman girl, in which case he would be obligated to talk to the authorities. A hopeful prospect. Put that in there with the sword cane, he might have a chance. Still, a difficult matter. Reporting to the school no longer worked. He'd have to file it with the police, get a report, then have the school sent a copy. And if the girl were a senior, no luck. Just another young woman going to go off to college with strong perceptions of young men and love.

Joey finished by saying, "And then I kicked the bitch to the curb around five this morning. Drove home so my dad could see my car in the driveway when he got up. I was doing like a hundred and twenty on the freeway. But I had too. Fucker gets up early."

Got to show him I'm around or he gets freak show pissed off. I mean, like scary shit."

Dan smiled. The kid was so damned predictable.

A third e-mail from Joey's dad came up on the monitor.

Regarding Joey's failing grade. I'd also like to know about specific class behaviors you have addressed this term if you have time.

Charles Denton
President
Enterprise Solutions, Inc.
Go Cal Blues!

Specific behaviors? Dan let loose his third sigh. The hangover, which for a moment had receded into the back of his head, came pulsing forward, making his sinuses pound with dull pain. As if sensing his discomfort, the class began to talk louder. He leaned over, turned up the volume on his headphones.

"Yo, dude, you got the answers for tomorrow's Econ Gov final?" asked Joey.

"I do. Got it on my new i-Phone," replied Erik. "Talk about resolution. I got perfect photos of every question. Best thing I ever bought."

"You got the questions and no answers?" asked Joey, troubled.

"No fears, dawg. Answers will be coming forthwith. But you're going to have to hot box Phil Wong at lunch. He gives you the answers, you get him shitfaced stoned."

"Dude, I'm so on it," replied Joey. Then, "What about Geology?"

"Check your Twitter account. There's a tweet fire blazing as we speak. Seems like people are taking the essay very seriously."

Joey extracted his cellphone. His face was lit with the glow of the screen as he read. "Epic," said Joey.

Dan put another "note" in his grade book. Joey and Erik talked more about drugs, mostly peppermint schnapps, oxy, grass and meth. Then Joey announced he had three hits of acid for sale. He

assured Erik acid was much cleaner than LSD, that the two were almost, like, similar drugs. Erik said he wouldn't take LSD but he was down with scoring some acid. Dan wondered if Joey and Erik watched Breaking Bad. He was pretty sure they did. Though they wouldn't see themselves in this show. They wouldn't realize how much they sucked at chemistry, that LSD and acid were the same drug. From drugs they moved to parties, fights, and gangsters. Dan rubbed his temples as they broke into a quick rap redux of Tupac.

"Keep a vest for protection, from the barrel of a Smith & Wesson. And all my niggas in the pen, here we go again. Ain't nothin' separatin' us from a Mack-10."

YouTube fanstasy #3. Dan dropping Joey off on International Boulevard in Oakland. A few pimps and whores are on the corner at the bus stop. Dan putting a thousand bucks in Joey's hand, saying, "Here's your get home money if you run into trouble." Joey making a drug score, flashing his wad. Two brothers jacking up Joey. Joey saying, "Whut's up, my niggaz?" The brothers saying, "You sayin' what? You think you got a ghetto pass?" Joey getting the living shit beat out of him, a well deserved black-on-white violence clip goes viral.

"Yo, I think Mr. Holland is looking at us," worried Erik as he peered at Dan over the glass of his cubicle. "He's got that look. Check it out."

"Yo, Mr. Holland dude, you listening in?" asked Joey.

Dan leaned over the monitor, clicked on the young men's intercom. "You boys have a question?"

"You listening to us, Mr. Holland?"

"No," said Dan. "Though I hope you're working on your oral final. You look pretty excited. I mean, you know, into learning."

"We're all over it," said Joey.

"Yeah, we got this," agreed Erik.

"Good. Very Good. Keep it up."

Dan turned off the intercom. This digital age and they were so damned naive. Didn't they know Big Brother was all around? Christ, the lab alone was a damned gold mine of teenage mind filth.

“Hey, dude, you think Mr. Holland is a faggot?” wondered Joey. “You know, like a dick smoker. I been thinking that. I’ve been getting this vibe for a while. You know, like, I’m thinking he’s into young boys. You know, like he’s blowing them in between periods. Doing it in faculty men’s room.”

“I don’t know, maybe,” said Erik. “Hadn’t thought of it.”

“I think he is. He’s always so freaking uptight, like he disapproves of us. Always looking at me weird. Kind of like my grandma. She can’t stand me. Always yelling at me and getting in my head. Like that bitch knows what I’m thinking. Freaky too, just like Mr. Holland.”

“Your grandmother’s uptight?” said Erik. “You ever had an Asian grandmother? You would know what uptight means. Asian grandparents have a whole new uptight register. They’re like ninja control freaks. And when they’re not hitting you for doing something stupid, they stare at like you are just *there*. You know what I mean? Just *there*.”

“Kind of like Mr. Holland?” asked Joey.

“Yeah, a bit like that,” agreed Erik.

“So you see what I mean?”

“I see your reasoning,” agreed Erik. “Quite possibly gay.”

Joey nodded. “That’s what I’m saying. I’m saying Mr. Holland loves cock. My dad too. He says he’s got this gaydar thing going on. You know, he works in the city, says he can spot a homo from a hundred yards. Says Mr. Holland is straight up butt welding.”

“Dude, you got to send that out, warn people,” said Erik. “People need to know.”

“Tweeting as we speak, dawg.”

“Sweet.”

The two began to chant Notorious B.I.G. “*When I met you I admit my first thoughts was to trick. You look so good, huh, I suck on your daddy’s dick, yeah. I never felt that way in my life.*”

The bell rang. Dan looked up from his grade book, clicked the CAPTURE button on the screen, typed in Joey and Erik’s name. The class shuffled out. Joey and Erik, normally the first to leave,

were the last. Dan reckoned that they wanted to make their “acid but not LSD” transaction in the classroom as he shut down the lab.

“Say, you boys into rap?” asked Dan as he sent the copy of the recording to his classroom computer. “I thought I heard you throwing down the lines, you know, like busting those sixteens.”

Joey and Erik exchanged glances.

“You know, old school stuff like Tupac and Notorious B.I.G.?” asked Dan.

“Mr. Holland, you into that old school stuff?” said Joey incredulously. “Please. Shouldn’t you be rebuying your Sonny and Cher albums on Amazon?”

“I have a decent sized rap collection,” replied Dan. “Goes way back. I got my tastes. Mostly NWA, you know, the *Straight Out Of Compton* album. Classic. *Ain’t no tellin when I’m down for a jack move. Here’s a murder rap to keep yo dancin’ with a crime record like Charles Manson... Give a little gust of wind and I’m jettin’. But leave a memory no one’ll be forgettin’.* What do you say about that?”

“Holy shit,” said Joey.

“Legit,” said Erik.

“You like that?” asked Dan.

“I knew you were listening to us,” said Erik. “I could see it on your face.”

“Good thing no one else was listening to you,” warned Dan. “You need to be careful of what you say. Everything is digital nowadays. See where I’m going with this?”

Joey and Erik laughed in high pitched voices, then rushed out of the lab before Dan could confront them on the homophobic comments.

“*Ain’t no tellin when I’m down for a jack move,*” whispered Dan as they disappeared.

Good old NWA. Classic old school rap. Calling it like it is.

Dan returned to his empty classroom. Second period. His prep. He sat at his computer, considered his dilemma. Warning the administration wouldn’t help. No drug bust there. Joey’s backpack would be gone before they even came through the door, handed

from one delinquent hand to the next. This was a school in a high-end neighborhood. The young men took their drugs seriously. Even the police were too scared to bust them. No sense in biting the hand that fed them. In contrast, the apartment dwellers got arrested daily. It was part of the show to let the community that they were doing something. And then there was the girl. Poor Julie Meyers. He would make a call to her counselor, give Mrs. López-Bermann the heads up, note the date in the grade book, send a follow up e-mail to cover his ass. But that's as far as it would go. Underaged sex amongst the wealthy was properly hidden. And if she were a Cerros Verdes apartment dweller, well, no one really cared.

The recorded conversation. His ace in the hole. Still a tough call. Joey was an adult. His father would litigate, say it was evidence gathered illegally. The twenty percent grade? Another tough one. A tutor was mentioned in the first e-mail. Dan knew who it was, an out of work German language specialist from UC Santa Barbara, Dieter Braun. Dieter would be preparing Joey for the final. As Dieter worked part time for the Get Ahead Fast Tutorial Center, he would have a huge database of exams, many of them Dan's. All gathered questionably, of course, but how to prove which high definition cellphone they came from? So Dan would be asked to base his assessment of Joey on the final. This would be the counselor's call. The principal would agree. This was just what charter schools were meant for, to give the kid a break, a real chance at education. The administration had cc'd copies of Denton's e-mails. They got it. Mr. Denton was hitting the enemy with softening up blows. A good tactic. It would work. The admin would roll over. It would be prudent to let this go. This was the right zip code, after all. Dan would agree to base the grade on Joey's final exam. Everyone would be happy. A win win. During the test Joey would be wearing a knitted acrylic ski cap manufactured by "factory girls" in Dongguan City, China. In the rolled up edge of the ski cap would be pockets for earphones, from which would imperceptibly whisper his prerecorded oral responses and his essay samples. Getting the cap off Joey's head would constitute assault

or "improper touching." Joey would get a 72% on the exam. Dan would pass him. Joey would play LaCrosse in a private college somewhere. End of problem.

But that gay comment. That one stuck in Dan's craw. Dan didn't like haters. He had seen Jarred Laetner, his best friend in high school crushed by the jock homophobes. The daily ritualistic gay bashing was not unlike what went on in the district nowadays on a quiet level, but more pronounced, more in the open. Then one evening the jock homophobes took Jarred to Franklin Canyon, made him pleasure them, then left him bleeding and unconscious in a drainage ditch. Jarred was broken after that, a teenage nightmare victim. Dan watched him cry in the afternoons as they walked home, asking why people were so cruel. Two weeks later Jarred killed himself. Five students from school came to the funeral, four girls and Dan. It was as if he had almost never existed, as if being gay in the 80's was a crime. And there was Joey's shithead dad, a homophobe teaching his son the same shit. Dan clenched his teeth, went over his *this is not a career breaker, it's not worth even a nano-second of your worry* mantra a second time, began to respond to the e-mails.

Dear Mr. Denton. Thanks for your e-mail. In response to your question of Joey's behavior, I find him no different than any young man of his age. He is eager to participate and provides stimulating subjects to discuss in German in the lab. I also find...

Cyberspace fantasy #1. The truth. The honest to God veracity of it all e-mail. The telling it like it is moment. The Straight Out Of Compton truth. No sugar coats. No platitudes. No lies. Dan slinging the sixteens like a master rapper. Dan's e-mail going viral, being copied and forwarded a million times around the country. It begins, "Regarding your malicious underachieving homophobe child." Parents and grandparents reading it and discussing the fall of the American Educational system. Quotes of it showing up over the AP. Tea Party pundits calling for more teacher accountability.

Conservative columnists talking about making more cuts to education. Dan getting calls from NPR and daytime talk shows to discuss the failure of today's youth. A spokesperson for Apple denying that i-Phones are the dominant cheating device in America, calling teachers' unions terrorists. Dan speaking at an LGBT conference entitled "The Compassionate Teacher." The sound file attachment of Joey and Erik's conversation in the lab being edited by hackers around the country, then placed on YouTube with pictures of young delinquents destroying school property, backed by pumped up dubstep electronic beats. The lyrics are infectious. *"Ich bin Joey. Ich bin Erik. Dude, I still have like a semi-boner. Dawg, you're like young. Ich bin Joey. Ich bin Erik. Young dudes don't take viagra. Dude, I took the old bone to Julie Meyers for like six hours. Ich bin Joey. Ich bin Erik. Hell yeah. Epic. Totally. Epic. Totally. Epic. Totally. I was fucking tripping. You were tripping all last night? Didn't sleep a wink. Ich bin Joey. Ich bin Erik. I'm still jacked up. Had to take like ten vapes on the way to school just to chill out. You vaped already, dawg? Ich bin Joey. Ich bin Erik. Hell yeah. Epic. Totally. Epic. Totally. Epic. Totally. Young dudes don't take viagra. Didn't sleep a wink. Epic. Totally. Epic. Totally. Ich bin Joey. Ich bin Erik."*

Dan rubbed his eyes, checked his clock. Ten minutes left to the period. He reviewed before him his e-mail and felt his stomach do a turn. What was going on? Was it his hangover that had done that? Was it his mood? Was he that close to becoming the Burnt Out Teacher? How could he have done this? Somehow his fantasy and his edu-babble e-mail had become entwined and it was all there. The drug sales. The Viagra enhanced Ecstasy sex. The cheating. The homophobia. Joey's chronic lateness. The sword cane incident. The attached MP3 conversation from the lab. The cc'd copies to the principle, the counselors, the superintendent, the education editor for the *LA Times*, several of Dan's colleagues in the East, and his mother. The career ender e-mail.

"Jesus," said Dan. "What am I doing?"

He clicked the "new message" icon and began to write again.

"Fucking get a clue. Stay on task."

But as he wrote the official message, the one that was going to get Joey Denton his passing grade and out of high school and into that small private college, he left the fantasy truth e-mail behind it on the screen, clicking back every few seconds to look at it, just to wish for a while to really say what was going on. Just for once to tell the truth. It would be so nice. So damned real.

He was done by the end of second period. Break time. Kids were moving in the hall, shouting. The only time he was going to get to the bathroom in the next two hours. He knew he should get up and move, find something for his headache. Instead he found himself clicking between the two messages, facing this choice, thinking about his world, public education, his old friend Jarred, his place in this whole thing, playing over and over again the *this is not a career breaker, it's not worth even a nano-second of your worry* mantra. And then, the inevitable "tink" of his mouse and the "whoosh" of his incoming breath.

Ben Franklin's Time Machine

Larry Lefkowitz

Note of Ben Franklin's servant

Yesterday, grazed by an automatic carriage and, though not greatly harmed, thus reminded of the frailty of life, I desire to record what transpired, should I fall victim to some other device of this modern age before Ben is able to retrieve me, or should he fail in the effort. If the latter occurs, I assure his descendants that I bear neither him nor them any ill will, for he was the best of masters of servants, if not the best of masters of time.

With his fine wit, Ben would have appreciated the irony of it: "A stitch in time saves nine" being thought of as a maxim for prudence. I'm afraid its origin had reference to anything but prudence. How do I know? I was there, and because of him, I am here — in this building bearing his name, waiting for him to bring me home.

I suppose my present status began on the day I saw him working on a contrivance that looked like a barrel, though comprised of metal rather than wood. "Another stove?" I inquired. "No, something more forward-looking," he replied. "Which reminds me, Peter, you have always expressed an interest in travel." "Yes," I said, "and I'm very grateful for the trips to Monticello when you went to see Mr. Jefferson."

"Ah, yes, Thomas was always a favorite of yours. Of mine, too. A temperament quite similar to my own, even to the inventive spirit. As for Monticello, I was thinking of a longer journey."

"I would like that," I said blithely, not then realizing the significance of my assent.

"One of these days, Peter, you will have your opportunity," he said with that slight smile of his; and as I recall it now, he patted the barrel-looking affair. Then he asked me to hold in place a piece of metal he was soldering, so that I might have a hand in it, I suppose.

A few weeks later, he called me to help further with the device, now considerably fleshed out. A sort of barrel-seat like one sees in lesser commercial establishments, except there were additionally two pieces of metal, two rods, which protruded in front above head level, separated by approximately a foot of space. That was the very day he asked me the question which, were he to put it to me again in the same circumstances, I would give different answer. "Peter, how would you like to see America in the future? — by then we may have reached the Pacific sea." This as casually as if he were soliciting my opinion of the weather.

"I would give anything to see that," I recall saying, an excess of curiosity being my principal vice.

"As would I," he said, "For America to reach the Pacific was one of his hopes. "And if you couldn't get back?"

"Well, I don't know about that. Philadelphia suits me."

"It would still be there, probably considerably different — though whether an improvement, I am not sure," and he chuckled. "But you are sure that you would truthfully like to go?" he asked, sounding more as if he wanted to reassure himself than me, and indicating with his arm that I was to sit in the chair within the device. I not then associating the proffered seat with the line of discussion so far taken and what was to take place next. Besides, I was an obedient servant.

"Yes," I said sitting. "I have thought about doing some traveling in the future (at this he nodded, although I did not mean into the future). You have been generous to me (now, as I recollect, he winced at this); not too many more years and I will have saved enough for a long trip. Another nine years should sew it up."

"A stitch in time saves nine," he exclaimed, pulling a lever with a suddenness that surprised me, for Ben, despite his industriousness, was a slow-moving man. I did not have time to dwell on the significance of what turned out to be his parting remark, for I saw a spark leap across the space between the two rods, in front of my face. I next felt a universal blow throughout my whole body from head to foot, which seemed within as well as without. After

which I felt a violent shaking of my substance, which remitting, my senses gradually returned. A numbness remained in my arms and the back of my neck. My thoughts were of the spark which, combined with the soaring feeling I now experienced, reminded me of the kite experiment of the man who had pulled the lever. As I was thus soaring, it suddenly came to me: my master hadn't been engaging in idle chatter — he was trying to convey me to the future! He who had written, "If you'd have it done, go; if not, send," had chosen to overlook his advice. Dwelling upon the implications of his maxim filled me with not a little anxiety.

It was still Philadelphia. The buildings hadn't changed that much. I arrived near one bearing a faded picture of the liberty bell above lettering that read "7th War Loan," the printing inferior to that of the Franklin press. It is a somewhat differently shaped building — an institute named after Franklin — which interests me more. That is where I spend my time. There a lot of other changes, including a few for the better. Those automatic carriages are impressive. I do not know if Ben had anything to do with them after I left. Probably not, too noisy for his touch. One thing has not changed: America finished a war not too long ago. This time the British were with us, but we were still fighting the Hessians. Had to beat them again like at Trenton.

I guess Ben is having more difficulty than he expected in bringing me back. I hope he gets the knack of it one of these days. I get tired of going in this building of his and hanging about near the lightning machine. I refrain from getting too close. I judge ten feet is about right since the distance from the two metal rods is about five times that from the rods of the machine by which I was sent here, and the spark is five times as long. I figure Ben will reach me in the near future. In the meantime I feel like the brass ball suspended by the lightning between the bells attached to the lightning rod in Ben's residence. He would exclaim that the light was bright enough to pick up a pin. I hope it is bright enough to pick up a man. Yet I am confident that soon the spark that leaps between the two rods will latch on to me. I hear the nation's capital

is now in a city named after General Washington. I would like to visit it, but for obvious reasons I'd rather be in Philadelphia.

4 April 1946

Peter S.

Servant of Ben Franklin

Notes of Ben Franklin

17 July 1788

Have this day made my will, only regretting that I could not include a provision providing for summoning Peter back, though perhaps it would be voidable for lack of enforceability. When we meet in the next stage of existence, I think he will box me on the ear for his one way trip, which treatment I will have earned; of course our respective parts in this affair — he, innocent baggage, me, not so innocent dispatcher, may have put him in a more northern, and myself a more southern, clime. I will make a last attempt to bring him back, if my strength allows.

Poor Peter. And all because, on a warm day of the same month some thirty-seven years ago, having demonstrated that electricity and lightning are one and the same with a certain kite experiment which gave me access to the regions of thunder, I wished to put lightning to use; not having then learned the lesson that he who snatches lightning from heaven may end up burning his — no another's — hands. If the owner of those hands should somehow contrive to come back, with or without my assistance and, finding me gone, be curious as to what transpired, and for anyone else equally curious though less mediately concerned, my entries themselves are the best witnesses.

8 July 1751

I have visited lightning in his realm; let him visit me in mine. To this purpose I erected an iron rod to the top of my chimney, with a wire the thickness of a goose-quill coming through a covered glass

tube in the roof and down through the well of the staircase, the lower end connected to an iron pump. On the staircase opposite to my chamber door the wire was divided; a little bell placed on each end; and between them a little brass ball, suspended by a silk thread, to play between and strike the bells when clouds passed with electricity in them. One night, awakened by loud cracks on the staircase, I perceived that the brass ball, instead of vibrating as usual between the bells, was repelled and kept at a distance from both; while the fire passed from bell to bell, whereby the whole staircase was enlightened as with sunshine, so that one might see to pick up a pin. Might poor Richard do better: an electric device to produce lightning? I believe he might.

23 April 1755

My dabbling with lightning have led me to own I am much in the dark about light. I am not satisfied with the doctrine that supposes particles of matter called light continually driven from the sun's surface with a swiftness so prodigious. Must not the smallest particles conceivable have, with such motion, a force exceeding that of a 24-pounder discharged from a cannon? May not all the phenomena of light be more conveniently solved by supposing universal space filled with a subtle elastic fluid which, when at rest, is not visible, but whose vibrations affect that fine sense the eye as those of the air do the grosser organs of the ear?

12 January 1757

I have erected what I believe to be the most powerful electric apparatus till this day seen; producing a spark between the negative and positive ends of nine inches. Altogether an acceptable imitation of lightning, is it immodest to feel like Zeus with my modest bolt?

14 March 1757

My conjectures as to the nature of light and my experiments with electricity have led me to believe it may be possible to erect a device to allow travel in time. For if the elastic fluid in universal

space has existed, as we may assume, since the beginning of time, and connects with the stars — the sources of light whose light is reaching us from the past — must not the fluid connect to the past and future as well? And whereas lightning is also composed of light, may not its introduction, not randomly as caused by clouds reacting with earth, but purposefully to charge the fluid at one spot, by focusing its energy on a point in time, be sufficient to propel an object, including a man, *through* the fluid to a point earlier or later in the fluid's continuum. I am of this opinion. My plan is to adapt my electrical device to this purpose.

20 August 1757

I must put aside for the moment my labors to erect a bigger electrical apparatus to test my time theory. The Indians, abetted by the French, have been raiding the western Pennsylvania settlements. War is a hazard like fire or lightning, and like them to be guarded against. I am to represent the Pennsylvania Assembly in England to attempt to obtain better assistance. Gifts such as Braddock are better not sent.

18 June 1768

My device for moving in time as been much on my mind of late, no doubt because my time is passing, but I have been able to do but little work on it, as British taxation and exploitation of the colonies have kept me busy trying to mitigate them. Unless more astute minds prevail than presently labor in London, I fear we are headed for a breach.

22 January 1778

An ambassador in Paris striving to keep the ship of state afloat with French livres does not have time for science. I did manage to visit Lavoisier in his laboratory. Of my time device his reaction was typically French, "Franklin, my friend, why would anyone wish to leave this age?"

12 March 1786

Leisure in Philadelphia. Have been erecting my time mechanism. I am too old to travel or would test it myself. My servant Peter, fortuitously, has a bent for travel, always inquiring when our next trip is to be. He never tires of the journey to Monticello, though my kidney stone takes a less enthusiastic view. I am working him up for a trip somewhat longer, to the future. I must get his assent without alarming him. I feel a bit of the entrapper, but I have worked too long on this apparatus to forgo testing it before I make my own journey to the future, without benefit of machine, save perhaps deus ex machina. I only hope Peter's trip is not similarly one way.

25 February 1787

Peter is today sent to the future, after having expressed a desire to see it. Good a time as any to travel, though a leap-year would have been more appropriate. I have endeavored to place him in Philadelphia two hundred years in the future, in time to celebrate, Providence willing, the bicentennial of America's founding.

2 May 1787

My reach exceedth my grasp, I fear. Attempts to bring Peter back have so far proved unavailing. I feel somewhat like the magician who made his assistant disappear and was unable to summon him back when he inadvertently stood on the trap door. The difficulty lies, I believe, in a certain aspect of my device. I have been reworking it, but my stone has been most troublesome of late, confining me to bed. I hope to finish soon and try again. Should I not succeed, I will destroy the device lest another person be removed from our times by someone else's equally unidirectional hand. So be it, Peter will be here intact and so remain the device, or both will be gone, the only record of each what is here committed.

[signature of] Ben Franklin

Faith

Carole Stivers

Faith rolled over, her arm shooting out to snatch Rodolfo from the night stand and turn off his alarm. From her hand he sent a warm tingle, his screen lighting up.

*Fe mi amor
Are you awake?*

Wiping the sleep from her eyes, Faith pushed herself upright. She'd been dreaming, and the man with the blue baseball cap was still lurking somewhere at the edge of her thoughts.

*Yes
I need to tell you something*

She rubbed her eyes again, squinting into the brightness of Rodolfo's face.

*Yes
I have to go away
What
We cannot talk anymore*

But

Her thumbs perched tentatively over his surface, she stopped. What was he saying?

*It will be OK
I need
I am sorry*

“Fe?” The door creaked open and she could see Mama’s face, a streak of white trailing through her thick black hair. Faith slid her finger up the side of Rodolfo’s body, powering him down as she gathered her backpack from the floor. Without another glance, she slipped him deep into his special pocket and secured the zipper.

“You ready for breakfast? The bus will be here soon!”

Faith held her breath, feigning sleep. Near her head, her window curtains rustled in a cool breeze as across their tattered cloth, the pictures of calico kittens romped in a garden of catnip. The curtains were among the few things they’d snatched from their last apartment. She and Mama were always moving, always moving. After so much moving, Mama said, it was nice to have something that stayed the same.

“Chiquita?” The door opened further. “Are you okay? I texted...” The light from Mama’s mobile illuminated the foot of the bed. “Where’s your phone?”

Pulling her backpack close beside her, Faith burrowed deeper under the tent of her bedcovers.

“Did you lose it?” Mama’s voice was higher now, louder than usual. The overhead light clicked on. “Dios mío,” Mama mumbled. “We’ll find it. We have to.”

Under the covers, Faith’s hand drifted toward Rodolfo’s pocket. But she stopped herself. He’d been bad. He’d have to pay.

“Ay ay ay...” Mama sat down heavily on the side of the bed, her hand finding Faith’s shoulder through the blankets. “I don’t have time to drive you to school today. Come on, at least have some breakfast. We can look for it later.”

Faith listened for Mama’s footsteps in the hallway, the clatter of dishes in the kitchen. She pulled the wadded bedclothes from over her head and carefully set one bare foot on the cold linoleum. On tiptoe she made her way to the bathroom, where she climbed up on the plastic step stool to look into the mirror. She stared at the strange little face that stared back at her. It looked familiar, but not like her mother’s. She looked like someone else.

She watched as the girl in the mirror brushed her teeth, then ran a comb through dark, knotted hair, pulling it back into a

cock-eyed ponytail. She climbed down to pull on an old pair of jeans and a rumpled shirt, both resurrected from the dirty tile floor. Then she padded to the kitchen to face inspection.

Sitting hunched at the gray Formica table, Mama looked tired. She always looked tired, but today she looked even more tired than usual, her skin the color of clay in the dim light from the kitchen window. “Fe... Chiquita... You look like a mess,” Mama said. “Where are your socks and shoes?”

Turning on her naked heel, Faith navigated back down the hall, her hand running along the bare wall. There were no pictures here, not even Mama’s faded picture of the Virgin of Guadalupe. It was just her and Mama now. In her tiny room, she found her shoes in the corner, her socks and jacket under the bed. She scooped her pack from between the blankets and slung it over her shoulder. As she re-entered the kitchen, her mother smiled a half smile. With her thick fingers, Mama felt Rodolfo’s worn outline, etched on the outside of the pack. “There it is, right where it’s supposed to be. Is it charged up?”

Faith nodded.

“Good. Then I’ll text you to let you know when I can pick you up after school. Remember — wait for my message. And don’t go to the curb until it’s time.” Mama plopped a plate on the table, a spoonful of frijoles wrapped in a warm tortilla. “Eat up. It’s all we have until I get my paycheck.”

A honk sounded from the street, and Faith wrapped her breakfast in a paper napkin. Mama did nothing, only watched as she ran out the door.

As the bus rattled down the street, Faith placed her hand over the spot where Rodolfo was sleeping. It felt warm against her palm. She unzipped his pocket and peeked inside, but there was nothing — only darkness. A boy sat down next to her, his eyes drifting toward her lap. “Whatcha got there?” he asked. But Faith didn’t answer. She didn’t talk.

She’d had a voice, once. Long ago, when she was very little, she’d talked all the time just to hear the sound. But then something

had happened, and she could only cry, her throat swelling and choking with a torrent of words that even she didn't want to hear. When Rodolfo had come, the torrent had thinned to a trickle. Eventually she'd done what he told her to do — she'd stopped talking altogether. And it had worked. With Rodolfo, she'd discovered a new power.

The school had recommended a therapist. “Your daughter is on the spectrum,” Dr. Goldberg told Mama, though where on the spectrum Faith fell, the doctor couldn't say. Was she red and hot, like the sun — or was she the cool, calm blue of the ocean? No one knew for certain. “It's odd,” Dr. Goldberg said. “Faith is eight years old. A child usually exhibits these sorts of symptoms much earlier in life. And except for her lack of speech, she tests normal by every other criterion. Are you sure she hasn't suffered some sort of trauma?”

“No,” Mama said, her eyes secretly seeking Faith's. “No, she has not.”

Faith didn't like Dr. Goldberg, with her paper white skin and her probing eyes. But after her diagnosis, things had gotten better. Faith was a *special child*. The bus, a shiny yellow one that came right to the curb in front of their apartment, was just one of the things that Faith got for not talking. She got to go to a new school, where no one knew her — where everyone was different and no one seemed to notice. In her new classroom, no one talked. No one taunted. From far away, Miss Carey's soft voice droned unheeded over a sea of inattentive heads as Faith cradled the warmth of her phone in her hands, its faint glow illuminating her face.

The phone had been a present from her mother — a gift, Mama said, that someone had left behind just for her. And though she could barely afford it, Mama had kept up the service payments. “I like it when I text you and I see that little word there. ‘Delivered.’ At least then I know you got it,” Mama said. “And when you answer. At least then I know you're in there.”

But there were things her mother didn't know. She didn't know that the phone had a name — Rodolfo. And that Rodolfo had his own voice — one that only Faith could hear. “*Te amo*,”

Rodolfo said. “*I love you. And if you promise to keep quiet, we can talk to each other for as long as you like.*”

Rodolfo told her stories about a brave girl who lived in a beautiful house with lace curtains and a wide front porch. About a girl who could tell the most amazing stories of her own, but who chose to keep them, like treasures, for herself. Other people were not to be trusted. Even Mama couldn't know about their friendship. “*What matters*,” he said, “*is that we can be together.*”

But now he was leaving her.

Clasping her hands together to keep them still, she stared out the window at the boarded-up shops and trash-littered alleyways of her neighborhood. Just across the viaduct, the bus stopped near the walk leading up to the school's wide front entrance, and Faith tailed the ragged line of students out onto the pavement. Through the doors, she turned left and followed the long hall to Miss Carey's room. Her sneakers barely making a sound on the old floorboards, she imagined herself invisible, a no one, a ghost — for without Rodolfo, how could she still be special?

Today was art day. “Just draw whatever you're thinking of,” Miss Carey said. Faith clutched a brown crayon in her fist, working over a large sheet of blank paper as she thought of the kittens on her curtains. She drew a small cat with whiskers that stood out straight. Beside this little cat she drew a bigger, rounder one — Mama. She surrounded them with green grass and floppy red flowers, and drew a yellow sun to keep them warm. And there beside them, nestled in the grass, glowed a little rectangle. As her blue crayon fashioned its glassy surface, she heard a sound. It was a buzzing sound that filled her ears, calling and calling, luring her, making her dizzy... As she laid her head down on the desk, crayons fell to the floor.

“Uh?” She sat up straight, staring into Miss Carey's kind blue eyes.

“Faith, it's time for lunch. Are you okay?”

Faith could feel her face growing hot, her teacher's face swimming much too close. As she pulled back, her stomach grumbled. But she wasn't hungry.

“Come along,” Miss Carey urged. “I know you love chocolate pudding. If you don’t hurry, it will all be gone!” Instinctively, Faith snatched up her pack. “You don’t have to take your things,” Miss Carey assured her. “I’ll be locking the classroom.” But determined as she was not to let him speak, Faith could never leave Rodolfo behind. She slipped out the door, the pack firmly installed on her shoulders.

In the brightly lit lunchroom, she sat alone near the window, her spoon tracing circles on the dark surface of her pudding. She didn’t dare look up. Even at this school, there were people who stared, people who tried to guess your secrets. And unlike her quiet classroom, the lunchroom was noisy, chaotic. All around her were girls, their high voices squealing, and boys, their fists beating the tables in mock battle.

At last the bell sounded and it was time to go back to class. Fortified by the few spoonfuls of chocolate, Faith followed the stragglers out into the hall. But halfway to her classroom, she felt her legs go numb. Near the door, someone was talking with Miss Carey — a man in a dark suit and cap, his thick neck bent under the low ceiling. He wore a holster, and a strange voice croaked from a radio at his hip.

Faith fell back against the wall, trying her best to disappear. She remembered flashing lights, piercing her bedroom curtains. The sound of a voice, barking unintelligible words. She remembered peering into the night outside her window, a tall, dark form silhouetted against the lit cabin of a black and white sedan. The door near her window flew open, the wall shaking as another tall man came out into the yard, pushing someone in front of him. Then the door of the black and white car slammed shut, and the car sped off. She remembered Mama’s eyes, wet and frightened. “Fe. It’s nothing. Go back to bed.”

Regaining her senses, Faith ducked into the girls’ washroom. Huddled in a stall, she gathered her pack close against her racing heart. She could hear toilets flushing, the older girls coming and going, their feet shuffling on the tile. Then, silence. Slowly, she

crept toward the door and peeked down the hall. The classroom door was still open, but Miss Carey and the man were gone.

Faith ran. Down the hall, past the classroom, out the emergency door at the far end of the building. As the door closed behind her, she blinked in the light of day. Then she took off again, this time to the right, heading for the woods behind the school. The trees swayed in the wind, low clouds just beginning to spit rain as she ran, her shoes kicking up thick clots of mud. Soon the forest was closing in behind her. In the dark, mossy cold, she climbed the little bridge that spanned the creek. She leaned over the railing, heaving gulps of air. She waited, listening as raindrops pattered against the canopy high above.

Then slowly, she reached into Rodolfo’s pocket, withdrawing his body from its depths, pressing his power button. In her hand he shuddered and shuddered. And soon his face was filled with words.

*I am sorry
I meant what I told you
You will grow up to be beautiful and strong
You will live in a beautiful house
You were born in the US
You are legal
I am not
I don't belong
I only hurt you and your mother
Please forgive me
I just wanted to be close
Fe?
Are you there?*

Her index finger dancing across the words, Faith remembered a warm man with thick brown arms, hugging tight. She remembered his sweet, musky smell, the blue cap he wore pushed back on his wide forehead. His smile, full of white teeth. His voice. She grasped the phone, her thumbs punching the letters.

Papa?

...

Papa?

Sí mi amor Soy yo

Where are you

Going back

Where

Almost to Mexico

Come home

This is not my home

I cannot keep hiding

Papa

...

*Why did you tell me not
to talk*

...

Lo siento

I am sorry

*It isn't right for a little girl to be
silent*

Can I talk now is it OK

Sí

You must talk

Or you might lose your voice

Just

...

What Papa

Just don't talk about me

Behind her, Faith could see the leaf-strewn path leading back to the school. She could hear voices, someone calling her name. Soon they would find her.

Cocking her arm back, then forward, she let Rodolfo go.

He sailed high, his silver form soaring like a bird before he dropped out of sight. Looking up through the trees, she imagined him going back, almost to Mexico. She let go a sigh, a breath she'd been holding for so long.

"Goodbye Papa," she said. "Te amo."

Leaving My Heart in Africa

Katrina Marks

I want to throw my phone out the window. I can feel it in my hand—light, buoyant almost, like it knows what it’s done and actually wants to fly from my hand. I can see it—the way the thin web of fractures will spread over the screen. It will be satisfying for about a quarter of a second. And then I will be devastated. I will cry.

And I refuse to cry over a broken phone.

I was never one of those people: the ones who have the Apple logo scorched into their palms, who see a dead zone as a precursor of a post-apocalyptic world, who make faces at Snapchat like they’re trying to entertain a fussy two-year old. I always rolled my eyes at those people. I was that bitch.

And then I entered a long-distance relationship.

WhatsApp is the most successful messaging app in the world, according to a 2015 study by *The Economist*. Over 700 million people worldwide have downloaded it, and they use it more often than traditional text messaging. So I have to wonder, how many of those 700 million people have thrown their phones out the window?

My screen is staring at me expectantly, anxiously. There is a little green bubble with the word “Hi” inside and one check mark next to it. One means it was sent. It’s drifting through the air above my head and out into space. Two would mean it’s bounced across the right number of servers in the right order to arrive at his phone. Apparently, this time, it’s stuck somewhere among the satellites, ricocheting between servers like a metal ball in an arcade pinball machine.

At the 24-hour mark, I google WhatsApp troubleshooting and send an email to a support address. The message is more frantic than intended.

“I read the FAQ articles on your website and tried everything. I’ve rebooted my phone several times, deleted and reinstalled

WhatsApp, updated my iOS, disconnected and reconnected to Wifi and 3G, and reset my network settings to the factory standard, but nothing has yielded a result. Please help!”

After 48 hours my message finds its way out of the maze.

I receive a prompt response from the WhatsApp Support Team two months later.

“Hi, thanks for contacting WhatsApp. Our support team has received your request. It may take us a while to reply, so please check out our FAQ in the meantime.”

I close the email and stand in front of the window with my phone in my hand.

I’m not your typical romantic. It’s not that I have any particular animosity toward the emotion. In fact, my reluctance is probably a cue that I hold it in a high and anxious regard. Like everyone, I’ve read the fairy tales and seen the rom-coms. I just prefer adventure stories.

Here’s one.

When David Livingstone, the famously intrepid and infamously irritable 19th century explorer planned for his death, he had one stipulation: *leave a part of me in the land belonging to my heart*. He died under a tree in Zambia. His best friend, a medicine man named Susi, cut out his heart and buried it on the spot, then mummified the body and carried it back to England. His heart remains in Africa to this day.

I didn’t have plans to die in Africa, though my mother was sure it would happen. She filled my suitcase to bursting with every type of medication, bandage and mosquito repellent approved by the requisite number of doctors. She brought family members by the house in a rotation to say goodbye—and good luck. She reminded me daily, all the way to the airport parking lot in Detroit, that I could just stay home this summer.

I smiled, hugged her, picked up my 46.7 lb suitcase and made my way through the polyester-lined maze to security. A brief 36 hours later, I touched down in Zanzibar.

Zanzibar—like Timbuktu and Mars—is one of those places people use as a synonym for “exotic, far-off location.” And it looks the part. The semi-autonomous island off the coast of Tanzania is small, spotted with palm trees and covered in white sand beaches and tourists. Stone Town is the capital city, comprising about two square miles of limestone cityscape. Its population is almost entirely Muslim, and the sound of the muezzin’s call to prayer is woven with salt and humidity into the air itself. The people are of more varied backgrounds: Omani Arabs, Indians, Goans, Tanzanians of various tribal descents. They don’t all get along. They do all speak Swahili.

Though I was asked many times, I’m not sure what I expected to find in this place. I was there primarily to work, to volunteer at a female empowerment NGO and to conduct fieldwork for my senior thesis on the collective memory of the East African slave trade. That’s what I wrote on the visa application at least. What I was really looking for, I think, was an adventure story. And I found one.

It just also happened to be a romance.

I was proposed to four times in my first week. Most were young boys. Most were joking. The one I wrote home to my mother about was a member of the Maasai tribe. He claimed to have killed a lion, after all. And it always works wonders for the self-esteem when a girl knows her exact value in cattle.

My friends at my research site laughed at me. For my thesis fieldwork, I was spending two or three hours every day with the tour guides at Christ Church Anglican Cathedral and Former Slave Market Site. When visitors came for tours, I would follow them around and observe, scribbling notes and drawing suspicious glances. The guides found it odd, but were willing to help. And when the afternoons were slow, we sat in front of the church and talked. They taught me Swahili and asked about my life while I tried to glean wisdom about Stone Town.

“Hahaha! How many cattle for you Kathrin?” David, the first guide I met, assumed my name was more like Katherine than Katrina, and it stuck.

“300.”

“Haha, *hakuna matata*. Some people here like to joke with tourists, you know.”

I knew. *Hakuna matata* itself was a joke, a Kenyan phrase pulled out for Disney-bred tourists who periodically broke out in chorus: “it means no worries.” None of the tour guides lacked a sense of humor, though some exercised it more than others. Elvis was one of those.

I started following his tours because of the comedy. He introduces himself as the “King of Rock and Roll.” Then he asks the tourists if they speak Swahili. They say no. So he starts speaking Swahili. They laugh at first, then start looking at me in desperate confusion. Finally he takes mercy and starts again in English.

“You know of David Livingstone?” He asks. They nod.

“His body is buried in Westminster Abbey, you know, but his heart is not there with it.” Cue looks of surprise.

“His heart is in Africa. After he died, his friend cut it out and buried it in Zambia. So, now, his heart is in Africa, his body is in England. Who can say where his soul is?”

I couldn’t answer the question of Livingstone’s soul. But I did say yes to a date.

“So we will go together, *sawa?*” He looked at me expectantly, trying to lean casually against the gate. But I could tell he was nervous.

“*Sawa*, okay.”

I don’t think he expected me to say yes. He paused for a beat, and then stood up straight and smiled at me. I smiled back. We made a plan to see the football (read: soccer) game that evening. We exchanged phone numbers, I said an awkward goodbye and stepped through the gate, out of the church compound and onto the street. I caught stares on the walk home. Why is the *mzungu* girl smiling like that?

The *mzungu* girl smiled like that for exactly two weeks.

The night after the football game, we went to the beach for a moonlit walk: coral rocks, crashing waves, blue bio-luminescent micro-algae embedded like stars in the sand.

The next night he gave me a walking tour of Stone Town's most historic structures: The House of Wonders, where the Omani Sultans lived throughout most of the 19th century, Fordhani Port, where everything from cinnamon to slaves were shipped out, and the Old Fort, where the Portuguese held their stronghold in the 16th century.

We sat in the Fort and talked about the tourists. I was still following tours and interviewing people for my research. On that morning, a British family had told me I was brave. They'd heard about a bombing at the church the year before.

"Yeah, it was there. A small one, more like a grenade." He was casual about it, though he had been standing by the gate that day half an hour before the bomb went off. He promised to show me the crater it left in the pavement, but never did.

He, like the rest of my friends at the church, was disappointed in my Swahili.

My teacher, Joseph, was hired by my volunteer program to teach my roommate and me every weeknight from 6 to 7 pm. He was a short man, completely bald, with a round stomach and seven children at the time—one of his own, two adopted and four fostered—whom he taught English, French, German and Spanish. Like Elvis, his day job was guiding tours.

Technically, it was supposed to be a "Survival Swahili" class, but our vocabulary list wouldn't have helped us survive anywhere. Joseph preferred to focus on the pronunciation of the double consonant. So I learned words like *mchele* (uncooked rice), *ngombe* (cow), and *mwenyewe* (alone). Elvis told me I pronounced Swahili like a local, but he laughed out loud every time I showed him my notes.

Unauza maji hapa? (Are you selling water here?) was the first sentence he taught me. I used it, along with its frequent precursor, *leo joto sana* (today is very hot), almost every morning. He taught me *kubusudu* (to adore) and *kupenda* (to love) as well, but I didn't use those as often.

I taught him very important words too. Unlike Joseph, Elvis didn't speak any languages other than English and Swahili. He'd gone to a prep school in Kenya with an intensive language program,

so he was confident in his English, but still willing to learn more. Once, while walking through a dark and uneven parking lot, I stumbled. To me, a person who has accepted her lifelong misunderstanding with gravity, it was nothing. Elvis stopped and stared.

"*Pole sana*, sorry, are you good?"

"Oh, yeah, I'm just clumsy." Blank stare.

"What is clumsy?"

"Oh, um," *what is clumsy?* "It just means I trip all the time. I'm not very graceful." He asked me to spell it, then made a note in his flip phone. I tripped two more times before the week was done. Every time he repeated the word and smiled at me, holding out a steady hand.

Shortly after our third date, he asked me a new question in Swahili: "*Lini utarudi Merikani?*" (When will you return to America?).

"Two weeks."

He frowned.

I'd known from the start, of course, that it would be a short-lived thing. The few people I'd known who had carried on relationships abroad had accepted them for what they were: fun and brief. I wasn't accustomed to short relationships—or any relationships, really—but I figured I would enjoy it as long as I could, assuming he was thinking along the same lines.

"Do you have to go?"

"Um, well, yes." *I have a flight booked.*

"Are you sure?"

"Elvis, what do you want, exactly?" I surprised both of us with that one. *Honest confrontation? Me?*

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, do you want to go out now and say goodbye in a few weeks or what are you thinking here?"

"Katrina, I want your heart." *Oh.*

"Oh."

He looked at me with a pained expression. *Do people actually talk that way in real life? I am not one of those people. What do I say? I need to say something. Fuck.*

“Like Livingstone? Should I leave my heart here?” *Really, you’re going to bring up the dead British guy? Romantic choice.*

“Haha...wait, no, no, I don’t mean the actual—“

“Yeah, I got that.”

There were challenges, 8,237 of them—not to mention the fact that he owned a Zantel flip phone. Local numbers only. He’d lost his smartphone months before, when a man with a machete followed him on his way home. I could email him, but he only checked it at the Internet café once a month or so. Mail to the island was unreliable, and at least as expensive as international calling rates.

There are few things I consider impossible, but this seemed to be one.

When I was a child, I was obsessed with two love stories: Cinderella and Prince Charming, and Carol and Steve. Carol and Steve lived across the street, and every Friday night they and my parents drank fine wine and discussed the current political climate. Sometimes they reminisced about younger years. Carol met Steve in high school in the 60s. Three years later he was drafted for Vietnam, and they got engaged before he left. For two years, they communicated only by standard mail and infrequent phone calls. One day she wrote him a Dear John, and that seemed to be the end of it—until they realized they were miserable and got back together. He came home. They got married, and now I babysit their grandkids in the summer.

Elvis asked me two more times if I could cancel my flight, stay one more month in Stone Town, “just have more time.” I told him I had a job to go back to, people who were expecting me. Silently, I was telling him this was impossible, there’s no way we could even try. And in the back of my mind I was thinking about Carol and Steve.

So for two weeks we dated, a terrible goodbye looming closer every day. And then one night at my doorstep he announced he was going to buy a new phone.

“Wait, really?”

“Yes, you know its time for me to get a new one. And also we will be chatting on WhatsApp.”

So we said goodbye, and at 3am on July 4th I got on the plane to go back to America, feeling overwhelmed and anxious and guilty. Smartphones in Zanzibar cost at least \$100, or 200,000 Tanzanian shillings. With a special deal worked out with a friend at the phone store, it took him two weeks to save up the money. For those two weeks, I checked my email every day at 11 am Eastern Standard Time (6 pm Eastern Africa Time), waiting to see if he made it to a computer after work. He did, every day.

Then one morning I heard a ping from WhatsApp. And I became one of the girls with the phone at the end of her arm. I became a girl who dives across the room when the screen lights up, who stays up all night because of a seven-hour time difference, who emails WhatsApp support over a missing check mark and imagines men with machetes and bombs in churches.

So here I stand, staring through a pane of glass, waiting for the light and the ding that will end the silence.

It’s not the technology I’m frustrated with, really. It’s the distance: 8,237 miles. And the time: 10 months. I knew him for six weeks, only two of which we actually spent dating. And now I am spending the greater part of a year getting to know him through a keyboard. No Skype. No calls—unless we count those two- or five-second breakthroughs when I can hear a muffled “Hello? Can you hear me?” before the line cuts out.

And yet what is that distance? It’s the span of a server, a satellite drifting through space. It’s the distance of my finger from the keyboard, of my face from the camera. We use WhatsApp. We trade selfies back and forth. We practice English and Swahili. We memorize each other’s time zones. I have near-constant communication with a man who sees his sun rise when mine sets.

We still feel the miles, of course. Every single one. We still imagine what the other’s hand feels like and wake in the dark clinging to phantoms. We still watch each other forget the small

things, the memories that slip through the treasured vault of our time together, and type out frantic reminders on glass screens. We still fear silence.

I would like to roll my eyes at myself, really I would. In my mother's words, it's "impractical." It probably won't end well. It will probably hurt.

But what if it doesn't?

What if I don't need to die to leave my heart somewhere else?

What if an adventure and a romance can be the same story?

Such a Thing, My Leaping, Dancing Heart

Cathy Bryant

I'd expected the ECG machine
with its beep beep beep beep
but not the scan monitor
on which my heart leaps and dances
as I haven't for thirty years.

From one angle —
(the nurse moves her hand
from here to there.
She frowns minutely,
then gets the shot)
it really is heart-shaped

— but mostly it's pure energy,
a fist of pumping muscle,
though it looks to me as if a colony
of moths has set up in it,
or hattifatteners
on some tiny electric journey.

I turn my head to share this
with my husband and see him
flooded out with tears —
"Such a thing to see
your lover's heart beating,"
he says. "So miraculous
— such a thing."
— which makes me liquefy too,
save for my solid, dancing heart,
which leaps. Which leaps. Which leaps.

Pinpricks

Catherine Edmunds

they've invented a new fish, a minnow, a silver-finned slippery thing,
and I'm supposed to love it to feed it, to care.

far off, an animal screams; I look up, distracted,
they call me back.

care for your fish, your minnow, they say.
that's no minnow.

the fish explodes, stinking, its skeleton shatters, tiny spines
fly out cactus-like, stick in my cheek, pinpricks, tiny, tiny,
a clockwork mouse scuttles away to hide,
every second a hundred-billion neutrinos pass through my heart.

Reconstruction

Casey FitzSimons

They could describe the centrifugal blur
of asphalt, tell how road signs and headlights
were chrome-framed for that inauspicious instant
in the windshield of dun sky.
They could describe the banging
of arms, legs, and heads inside
against the chassis, explain it
as the inevitable protocol of
human and canine physics.
If scientists knew all the variables—
speeds, masses, angles, coefficients of friction—
they could reproduce the disaster
in detail, in slow-motion, say
just which bash against
the side post killed my brother.
They might even know
if the dog barked, if my brother
cried out, if my mother
was conscious in that moment still
and knew.

GCHAT

Marie Kilroy

Monday, October 26, 2015 9:45 AM

Jessie Lynch

I'm so fucking hungover and I have actual work
gonna barely make commissh the way things are going

Megan Murray

goaled wrong? took away your good accounts? both/

Jessie Lynch

it's all around bad
so I just got in to the office and my co-worker's stuff is all packed up
on her desk,
OH SNAP
and the thing is
I knew they were gonna lay either me or her off
so I'd been shit talking about her to her boss for months
and over that time I really became good friends with her
even though I thought she was basic
and it turns out she's been missing all that work
because she was prego and then lost the baby
but didn't tell anyone
they had enough of her skipping school I guess
oh man I just got a text from her
she wants to talk
NO DICE BITCH
god I'm really a horrible person
maybe I should throw myself into a ditch
full of gas and light a match
it's only Monday and just wanna get turnt
I had a dream this morning that I needed to go to paris to meet

up with a boy
and then I woke up and was like FUCK
ok I'm just gonna say this
and move on
I think New York is killing me
Are you still there

Watching the International Space Station

Fran Markover

Hard to believe a huge tinker toy can float.
How disparate components hold together

in such photo-voltaic array, lights
from the flying lab traveling the night sky,

visible as it passes Venus and Orion's belt.
But what I think about are the painted ladies,

butterflies encapsulated in space. Where are
their fields of mallow or hollyhock?

Do atomic clocks record their thirst for thistle?
Can astronauts on thermal porches sip ice tea,

sit on rocking pods, watch gossamer wings
open and close, the way I stay by woods' edge

long after the space station has re-configured
its attitude. All evening I look at fireflies, mini-

novas, cattails like stowage platforms where
red-winged blackbirds nest. Where frogs

twang in concert and micro-gravity signifies
mist, weightless, ghosting a canorous pond.

King Tut Gets a C-T Scan

Fran Markover

For my friend Tom (1990-2005)

For a teenager, home should be a palace
filled with light, cousins gaming, beer,
not a lab to languish in with ungodly pose.
Instead, portentous scribbles chart scar,
fracture, bone, glyph DNA, scoliosis,
inflammation. If he could clasp jewels,
hug his beloved. Suffer battle wounds
manning a chariot. This is not the after-
life promised—no walking canes relieve
his club foot, no second opinions offered
from underlings who weigh the heaviness
of a heart for rigors of eternal thrones.
Death is a distant wave—fields of grain,
divine boat rides, not an antiseptic tunnel,
a boy without the Book of Breathings.

Tenth Etude: Opposing Sonorities

Nate Maxson

Who knows what trench warfare without an enemy would be like,
you just wait faithful that someday there will be one while you dig
deeper and deeper down into the earth
Scarification of the old world, Europe pulling into itself while
America yawns but we were this close to the future: to the machine
as it began to move
Launch delayed and now, it's never too late to pluck out a star
And eye
A fruit for an offering
From some suburban branch
Where the streets are wide enough for an army
Or an orchestra
Or a new language
If thy right hand offends thee, or something like that
It's never too late
Each night a man climbs the spokes of this device and sings bird
calls into the exhaust vents

Repairmen

Anne McCrady

He comes when I call,
unlike the other men in my life,
and does exactly what I ask of him,
so devoted that I like to pretend
money will not change hands.
In his khaki slacks and labeled shirt,
he is comfortable with me.
His calloused hands know all
about springs and sprockets,
wrenches and regulators.
Like the old appliances he adores,
he is a little worn but always dependable,
a mature man who knows what women want
done, he never talks me out of my desires
to have the soggy faucet tightened,
the oven door adjusted. Last spring,
when the washer bolted on its clutch
in the middle of a rinse cycle, he laughed
with me about the weight of private things
dripping wet and needing to be moved.
Today, when the deep freezer died, he smiled,
as he helped me haul ingots of frozen meat
into ice chests, showed me how to pack them
in newspaper so nothing would spoil,
while he retrieved the replacement part,
a simple device no one else carries any more,
the solution that is, like everything he tells me,
exactly what I want to hear.

Musings on Mars

Lee Nash

I can leave the crow but not the swallow.
 I can say goodbye to ants and insects
 but today is shorter than tomorrow
 so we must have sushi, saunas and sex.
 I can do without my morning coffee,
 and propagate tea in the geodome;
 I'll find a good spot in the ancient sea
 to fashion myself an alien home;
 it won't be spacious, but it will suffice,
 my starter-pod on the planet of war —
 a corner to hang my breathing device.
 We know you'll forget us on Earth's fine shore
 but hope that at times you'll look to the skies
 and ask what we do when one of us dies.

Big Data Valentine

Jacalyn Shelley

If person #2's liquid assets > fixed assets, then	.60
Calculate Affection Quotient. # of times A in name #2 / # of times A in name #1.	-.60
Calculate Loyalty Quotient. # of times L in name #2 / # of times L in name #1.	.70
If person #2 has no children, then	.50
If person #2 has been married twice before!	-.70
If person #2 likes aphrodisiacs & eats asparagus (retrieve from Shopper Database), then	.20
Bring back #2's results from NIH Blood Sample Database. If serotonin > norepinephrine, then	-.46
If #2 has receptors for oxytocin released during sex / age (obtain from Social Security Database), then	.12
Take from state DMV Driver License Database photos of #1 & #2. Cross match. If distance between eyes =, then	.27
Capture from NSA, NYPD, ATM surveillance. Cross match #1's father's physical features with #2's physical features, if =	.36
Probability of successful relationship = SUM(O18:O26)	.99

BE MINE!

What I Mean When I Say Goat Rope

Jacalyn Shelley

My grandmother held her story of flight
between her fingers: *This is how we face
and leap into a man's arms for a pas de deux —
at full throttle.* This is how we count on each other.
She taught strength before reliance — to fly,
and then to join. My fingers carry

the cold memory of a jet window at 30,000 feet,
transponder lights blinking, circling down,
circling into a spiral. Back home, gazing
at the fog drifting across the Blue Ridge, she laughed,
*Someone was responsible for that goat rope:
Hundreds of things had to go right!* Then,

she pointed to the thousands of starlings —
a murmuration of iridescent pirouettes
inking the morning sky black.

Instructions for Reading a Poem

John Stupp

A poem
may cause drowsiness
use caution when operating—
if images of women appear in spring bonnets
if images of naked men who look like David Beckham appear
drinking pina colodas
if images of a coastal skyline of levitating saints
are loose, cut off, or wrongly connected—
or if there is a burning smell from the narrative generator
from swaying trees
near ball field lights
from parachuting corpses
caught in wicker nets
from sternwheelers
plying mountain streams
from strings of rivets
in a wave trough of iron plates—
and if the control valve for lowering speed is screwed in too much
or malfunctioning
then readjust the adjective pin assembly
get all contact points welded
before the metric junction box is vulcanized
lock the poem in an upright position
and consult the manual—
if the manual is missing
or damaged
contact the poem's manufacturer—
do not lubricate moving parts
do not use chains or ropes for towing the poem
do not stand next to the poem
while operating a hydraulic lift—

do not read the poem
if you are pregnant
nursing
or taking anti-depressants
herbal preparations or dietary supplements
and if you have allergies to medicines, foods or other substances
or have an erection lasting more than four hours
and have a false or unusual sense of well-being—
alcohol could intensify these effects
limit your exposure to the sun
and other sources of ultraviolet light
and prepare to read the poem
warning—
sound will disappear
when the poem has no load
or runs at a slow speed
in a twitching
twisting
controlled repetitive movement
of the tongue
lips and face—
like a cigar stub rolling
downhill
in a thicket of bamboo—
like a farmer
towing a reciprocating cutter bar
in silent air

I Kept Meaning to Cure Myself of You, But Instead I Searched

Laura Sweeney

pages of Anna Karenina and Dr. Z
an Italian soda flavored raspberry
Irina's Restaurant menu fix prix
the Christofferson Park spruce tree
the prose poem I Love Karate
the Russian New Year's party
texts that say 'move to Portland with me'
the glove compartment of the silver Camry
the parking ticket issued January
Akhmatova and Mandelstam poetry
my submission to Sharkpack's L Theme
the gazebo at Andres and Katie's wedding
texts that say 'wrong # oops sorry'
a bottle of white from Snus Winery
the red picnic table by the Hotel Esprit
texts that say 'I'm leaving the country'
a chapter on Van Gogh and broken beauty

About the Authors

Cathy Bryant worked as a life model, civil servant and childminder before becoming a professional writer. She has won 22 literary awards, including the Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Prize and the Wergle Flomp Humor Poetry Contest, and her work has appeared in over 200 publications. Cathy's books are *Contains Strong Language and Scenes of a Sexual Nature* and *Look at All the Women* (poetry), *How to Win Writing Competitions* (nonfiction) and *Pride & Regicide* — a Mary Bennet Mystery (a novel). See her listings for cash-strapped writers at www.compsandcalls.com, updated on the first of every month. Cathy lives in Cheshire, UK.

Catherine Edmunds was educated at Dartington College of Arts and Goldsmith's College, London. Her first poetry collection and three novels were published by Circaidy Gregory Press, for whom she also works as an editor. Her most recent full length work is the biography of her holocaust-survivor mother. Catherine is a full member of the UK Society of Authors and has twice been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, and three times shortlisted in the Bridport prize. Her poetry has appeared in the *Frogmore Papers*, *Butcher's Dog*, and many other literary journals.

Casey FitzSimons has poems in print and online in *Red Wheelbarrow*, *Mezzo Cammin*, and numerous other journals. She has had first place awards from Mendocino Coast Writers Conference, (San Francisco) Bay Area Poets Coalition, and Ina Coolbrith Circle. She has published 12 chapbooks, including *Against the Familiar Wall* (2014) and *Standing in the Open House* (2013). Casey taught art for many years. Her reviews of SF Bay Area exhibitions frequently appeared in *Artweek*, and her studio drawing book, *Serious Drawing*, was published by Prentice Hall. She has a master's degree in Fine Arts from San José State University.

Lewis Gray is a West Coast writer. His short stories in English have appeared in *Zyzzyva*, *The Berkeley Review*, and the *Redwood Coast Review*; in Spanish, in *Azahares* and *Acentos*. Anthologies that have included his writings are *Stories From Where We Live*, *Milkweed Editions*, *The Breast*, *Global City Press*, *Creatures of Habitat*, *Mint Hill Books*. His spoken word recordings in English and Spanish have aired on public and college radio stations in San Francisco, New York, Los Angeles, Houston, and Miami. He is also the winner of the Laine Cunningham Novel Award, the winner of the 2015 Trajectory Journal WildBilly Short Story Contest, the 2nd place winner of the SF Bay Guardian Fiction prize, and a group winner of the Gondwana Press Lost On Route 66 competition.

Marie Kilroy has recently been published in the *Silver Birch Press*, *Loveliest Magazine* and the *Lummo Press*. She graduated from the University of Mary Washington with a B.A. in English and lives in New York City.

Larry Lefkowitz. The stories, poetry and humor of Larry Lefkowitz have been widely published. His literary novel, *The Novel, Kunzman, the Novel!* is available as an ebook and in print from Lulu.com and other distributors. His humorous fantasy and science fiction collection, *Laughing into the Fourth Dimension*, is available from Amazon books.

Fran Markover lives in Ithaca, NY where she works as psychotherapist. Her poems have been published in journals including: *Calyx*, *Runes*, *Rattle*, *Karamu*, *Earth's Daughters*, *Redactions*, *Sow's Ear Poetry Review*. Recent awards include a Pushcart Prize nomination, a poetry residency at the Constance Saltonstall Foundation for the Arts. She has a chapbook *History's Trail* published by Finishing Line Press.

Katrina Marks is currently a senior at Villanova University studying Communication and Humanities. She has previously published pieces on *PinkPangea.com*, a women's travel website, as well as *The Main Line Times*, based in Wayne, PA and *The Cedar Springs Post*, based in Cedar Springs, MI.

Nate Maxson is a writer and performance artist. He is the author of several collections of poetry and lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Anne McCrady is a poet, storyteller, motivational speaker and peace advocate. She has published two full-length collections and one chapbook of her poetry. Her poems have won numerous prizes and awards, and her writing appears in literary journals, anthologies and arts magazines. She also has editorial and review publication credits, is a frequent poetry contest judge and workshop presenter. Her poetry has been performed as art song and used in worship settings. She is co-founder of Texas Poets Podcast, and posts news-related poems on her blog, Poet with a Press Pass. Her website is InSpiritry.com.

Lee Nash lives in France and freelances as an editorial designer for a UK publisher. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in print and online journals in the UK, the US and France including *The French Literary Review*, *The Dawntreader*, *The Lake*, *Ink*, *Sweat and Tears*, *Orbis*, *Sentinel Literary Quarterly*, *The Interpreter's House*, *The Journal* (UK), *Brittle Star*, *The World Haiku Review*, *Black Poppy Review* and *Poetry Salzburg Review*. You can find a selection of Lee's poems on her website: leenashpoetry.com

Ken Poyner often serves as unlikely eye-candy at his wife's powerlifting meets. His latest collection of brief fictions, *Constant Animals*, can be located through links on his website, www.kpoyner.com, and at www.amazon.com. He has had recent work out in *Analog*, *Asimov's*, *Poet Lore*, *Sein Und Werden*, and a several dozen other places, both in print and on the web.

Jacalyn Shelley. Before she became a member of the South Jersey Poets' Collective, Jacalyn Shelley was an insurance executive and business systems consultant. She earned a master's degree in History at Monmouth University and taught there for two years. She now leads an extension literature class affiliated with The Richard Stockton University.

Carole Stivers is a biochemist by day, writer by night who lives in Northern California, in the heart of Silicon Valley. She is currently at work on her first novel, a science fiction. She was particularly intrigued by the idea of an anthology dealing with the impact of technology on contemporary life. Modes of life and methods of communication that were once thought impossible are now commonplace, and the lines between the devices and the people we love have become blurred. This was her inspiration for "Faith," her first ever published story.

John Stupp is the author of the 2007 Main Street Rag chapbook *The Blue Pacific* and the 2015 full-length collection *Advice from the Bed of a Friend* (also by Main Street Rag). Some recent poetry has appeared or will be appearing in *Cactus Heart*, *Vending Machine Press*, *Icarus Down* and *Weirderary*. He has lived and worked in various states as a jazz musician, university instructor, taxi driver, radio news writer, waiter and paralegal. He currently lives outside of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Laura Sweeney facilitates Writers for Life which offers grant-funded creative writing workshops throughout central Iowa. She represented the Iowa Arts Council at the First International Teaching Artist's Conference in Oslo, Norway. Her recent poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Appalachia*, *Evening Street Review*, *Negative Capability Press*, *Folia*, *East Jasmine Review*, *Balloons Lit Journal*, *Yellow Chair Review*, *Main Street Rag*, and *Nuclear Impact Anthology*. She is a reader for *Eastern Iowa Review*.