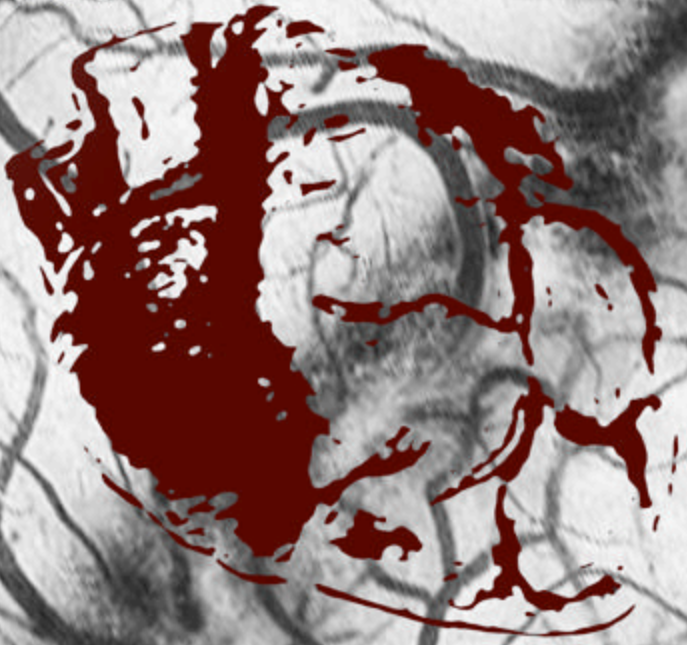


**Brain**

vs.

**heart**





# thEbooks

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**Text by  
Christopher Robinson  
&  
Joe Moon**

**Illustrations by  
Christopher Robinson**

**Brain**

**vs.**

**heart**

*new txt msg: @ dinner w friends. meet 4 drinks aftr?*

heart: dinner. friends. we're friends. call her. no don't call,  
just go. meet she said. drinks. NOW. O' the fall,  
shimmering—of hair—obsidian—on her  
shoulder. make the move, dammit, and after,  
her place, ours, the Moon! any place at all—

Brain: Analysis of text: Eight words (three nouns, one verb, four prepositions), two punctuations. Terse, fragmentary statement (locative). Suggestive query. Lack of capitalization indicates hasty composition. An amorous intent is wholly undetectable from the content of the suggestion, but the existence of the suggestion itself may indicate possible amorous intentions. It remains unclear whether she means to bring her dinner-friends, though it seems likely. The garnered information is insufficient. What 'move,' then, is there to make?

heart: walk, legs, walk!

Brain: At this time, there does not appear to be a destination to which to walk.

heart: call, hands!

Brain: A telephone conversation would rudely interrupt her dinner. The most prudent course of action is to request more information via SMS.

heart: Yes. More. Information—what is her scent,  
how smooth is her skin, how wet is her—

Brain: Perhaps the following vector of inquiry: an approximate time and location for possible rendezvous.

heart: Kiss her! Just reach out, pull her hair aside  
and kiss her, no wait, hand her a gift, the tide,  
the stars, a bowl of diamonds, build her a tower  
made of roses and bring a cloud to shower  
her skin in a light perfect mist and then, then  
kiss her, slowly, and soft and Dammit when  
are you going to make the move Where Time  
blah blah give her the diamonds first and then some  
cherry pies, no, a pile of bunnies, throw  
her in, playfully of course, and then, you know  
the rest, well, brain, hello brain hello

Brain: Let us not precede ourselves. To osculate another, one must be in her proximity, while in this case, she could well be virtually anywhere on the island of Manhattan. Moreover, an osculation cannot be transmitted via SMS. The exact wording of the digital missive is, however, crucial. One must take great care, while not appearing to do so. Full, unambiguous communication with an air of nonchalance would be optimal. An approximation of the following should suffice:

“should you so desire please be so kind as to inform my person as to where and at what time you would prefer to meet i may or may not be able to rendezvous depending on various circumstances i eagerly await your response but not that eagerly cordially your friend.”

Note the reciprocation of the inattention to grammar and punctuation, and the off-handed dispassion toward the end.

heart: The end? O’ the almonds  
of her eyes, the shape her fingers  
trace like palm fronds  
with a grace that lingers.

Brain: Is ‘cordially,’ perhaps, too formal?

<3: Ah tell her this

The sweet wind of summer conveyed, my love,  
That you desire a drink or two, and how  
Shall I refuse when all you need to prove  
The world's worth is a single eye aglow?

Brain: I see your point; a casual brevity is paramount.

<3: O' darling, say the time and place whereof  
The air will shimmer with the charged flow  
Betwixt our bodies' parts and I shall move  
With haste to join you lest I break my vow.

Brain: Message sent: "yeah, sounds good. where do u want to meet?"

<3: And though there may be circumstances which,  
Should they arise, our rendezvous would stall  
And quick the passion in my heart would seize

what's a rhyme for seize?

Brain: There are 148.00 one syllable rhymes, 97.00 two syllable rhymes, and 129.00 three syllable rhymes for 'seize.' In lieu of listing them all, I have selected the 3.00 most appropriate given the subject matter of your composition. Listed in alphabetical order, they are: 'breeze,' 'ease,' and 'please.'

<3: ah, got it

But as the beggar with the stars is rich  
Without a roof, your lack I'd live withal,  
Embrace the cold and learn to love the sneeze.

perfect. send the message. make sure you get the indentations.

Brain: I sent it two quatrains ago.

heart: well, what did she say

Brain: A mere 15.64 seconds have elapsed; she has yet to respond.

heart: what do you mean she hasn't responded yet

Brain: The possibilities are as follows:

1. She has not yet received the message.
2. She has received the message, but has yet to read it.
3. She has received the message and read it, but has yet to respond.
4. She has received the message and read it and responded, but it has yet to arrive.

Allowing for the time of transmission, I calculate the third option to be the most probable.

</3: Possibility Q86 she HATES us!  
Probble O' death quick soon quit.  
Throw the damn phone away!

Brain: While it remains possible, it seems unlikely, if she hates us, that she would have initiated conversation, unless this is part of some larger maliciousness, which seems less likely still. In any case, discarding our telephone would be patently less than prudent. The obvious course of action at this juncture is to act not at all, that is: to wait.

heart: Wait! Let's wait on  
a train track, take  
some hemlock, wait  
for it to creep our  
veins, no, move, leave  
new york, we'll wait  
in some dank country  
ditch until the  
cold

closes over us and  
no one will know  
our dead unreadable  
forgotten by  
her name fine  
then fine lets  
wait

*new txt msg: at commonwealth in p-slope. come join us.*

Brain: Cross-referencing...*Commonwealth*: A bar, located at 40°40'02.29" N by 73°59'16.19" W; the corners of 12th Street and 5th Avenue, Park Slope, Brooklyn, New York. The invitation has shifted from the interrogative to the imperative. The corresponding shift in tone may be characterized as from an inquisitive, or perhaps even plaintive, one, to one that is more assertive, demanding. Might this signal anticipation or impatience? It would seem prudent, in either case, to make haste.

hurt: Fuck that. You said  
wait. I'll fucking wait until I'm dead.

Brain: Very well, then, Heart. Shall we wait in a bar, with a drink? I know of a place.

heart: Yeah, you know a place.  
Sure. What kind of place?  
This is a place.

Brain: It is a place in Park Slope. Let us go there and have a drink.

heart: Let's take some poison and die.  
You get me, Brain!?! Dead.  
Kaput. Pumped-out. I'm Poised  
and ready for poison!  
On the count of one: one, one, one.

Brain: The place of which I speak has poison. Let us go to this place in Park Slope, then, and take some poison.

il cuore: Poison! Yes! Her hell will be our body  
poisoned, viewing and reviewing our pale  
decomposing husk! fixated madly

on our stomach-curdling stench—the awful,  
sight of our foul corpse will make the wench drop down  
and cry her stupid little face out, pull

her hair until the seams of her scalp come unsewn!  
That'll teach her to hate us! We'll drink some thorns,  
we'll swallow a bottle of War, we'll drown

ourselves in puke, we'll lick thirty-year-old porn-  
ography! Oh, she'll be sorry when we sniff  
pure uncut Dentist and take rancid corn

straight to the vein! Hell, let's frown until were stiff,  
lets think about brussels sprouts and athlete's foot.  
We'll cram in so many X's that even if

the doctors pump us full of pirate's loot  
and lollipops we'll still bring a thousand tears  
to her curséd eye! We'll beat, beat-beat-out

in irregular rhythm! Man...It's hot in here.

Brain: The temperature is well within a single standard deviation for the current location.

heart: ...

Brain: Our current location is: the fourth car of the Brooklyn-bound F train, approximately 2.95 miles South by Southeast of our previous location in the West Village.

heart: Is  
this where the poison is?

Brain: No... it is... behind that door.

heart: What door?  
Do you  
feel

that? Is  
that the  
poison

taking effect?  
Sweet sweet  
death!

Brain: No, that is the vibration of the train's motion.

heart: Is this  
where the poison is?

Brain: The location of the poison remains unchanged. It is behind that door.

heart: Well? Open it.

Brain: I am working on it.

heart: Aughh!

This takes too long.  
Let's get a gun.

What about him?  
Hey, hey buddy.

You have a gun?  
Give it to us.

Name your price.  
Playing hardball, aye?

Need a kidney?  
We'll call it even.

You want two?  
Done and done.

Kidneys: gurgle (gurgle) help (help) brain (brain) \$\*%#@! (\$\*%#@!)

heart: Boo Hoo.  
Poor babies.  
Cry about it.  
Do it, Brain.  
Hand 'em over.  
Gungungun!

Brain: (aside) Worry not, renal compatriots; contingencies are in place.

Heart, the firearms we require are in another location. But the following occurs to me: Would it not edify her more were we to expire in a more agonizing fashion, drawn out over multiple years of patient suffering?

heart: Yes! Thy plague bestow, thy death be slow, In crown as it is in bosom!  
Give us dismay, our ailing blood and/or give us undressed rashes  
as we will give those who pass close against us. Thus spake the Lord:  
*the leper in whom the plague is, (us) his clothes shall be rent, (ours!)  
and his head bare, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, (our  
upper lip!) and shall cry, Unclean, unclean.* Unclean! Ours shall be lesions,  
nodules, plaques, quarantine. O' deliver us unto earthly purgatory!  
Let us never be healed.

Consumption! Yes. That's the ticket!  
Make us the very definition, dictionary entry of *tubercular!*  
Alcohol and laudanum, let's gamble out our failing health  
like Holliday! We'll bloody cough a bloody cough in fevered pallor,  
slinging guns in tumbleweeded mining towns with Scrofula.  
No treatment here, we'll wither with or without wolf liver  
in our wine, or she-ass flesh or grass-fed sow lard in our broth.  
Incurable, we'll cough ourselves to speechless death.

An ill humor  
indeed...If bile or phlegm be not too determined to the veins, it is then  
an excess of blood; and these veins becoming swollen and being gorged  
the inside of the gut swells outwardly; it does not admit of resolution  
by medicine and thus one thing holds the first place in conducting treatment:  
Leeches! Oh, we are far too sanguine. Leeches, yes? Swamp-water us  
like Rambo! No! Rather, in his belly, redefine our suffering, millennial digestion,  
Carkoon-poon dentata style, soon, now! Alack! To wit: Drop us in a Sarlacc Pit!

Brain: Leeches are not currently in season, according to my almanac. Statistically, as a male citizen of  
the United States, cirrhosis (2.1%), carcinoma (22.8%), and heart disease (26.6%) are more  
likely fates.

bumticker: That's fucking perfect!  
I can't believe I haven't heard of this!  
Heart disease! O' loathsome wretchedness,  
O' terrible world, infect

us with heart disease!  
Please please please please please!

Brain: I am aware of an appropriate venue. Opportunities for both cirrhosis and carcinoma will be available to us there.

hrt: BOOORING!  
Why isn't the door  
open yet? Brain?  
Openthedoor!

Brain: I am, in fact, currently in the process of attempting just that.

heart: Fuck this. If you want something done right,  
you gotta do it yourself.

Knuckles: pop pop, crackcrk, poppopopcrk

Cor: *Justus quidem tu es, Porta, si disputem tecum:*

THOU art indeed just, Door, if I contend  
With thee; but, sir, so what I plead is just.  
Why do poisons rest beyond? and why must  
Thy implacable metal keep me penned?  
Wert thou my enemy, O thou my friend,  
How wouldst thou worse, I wonder, than thou dost  
Confine, cage me? Oh, the sots of love and lust  
Do while captive more ache than I that would end,  
Sir, my life but for thy clasp. See, drinks and pills  
how deadly toxic! outside they wait for men  
With triple x's, look, and violent ills  
Teem; fiends die—but not I die; no, but remain  
Thy hostage, and not drink one ounce that kills.  
Mine, O thou door of death, unlock open.

Brain: The door appears to be open.

heaaarrrt: Yeah.  
I know.

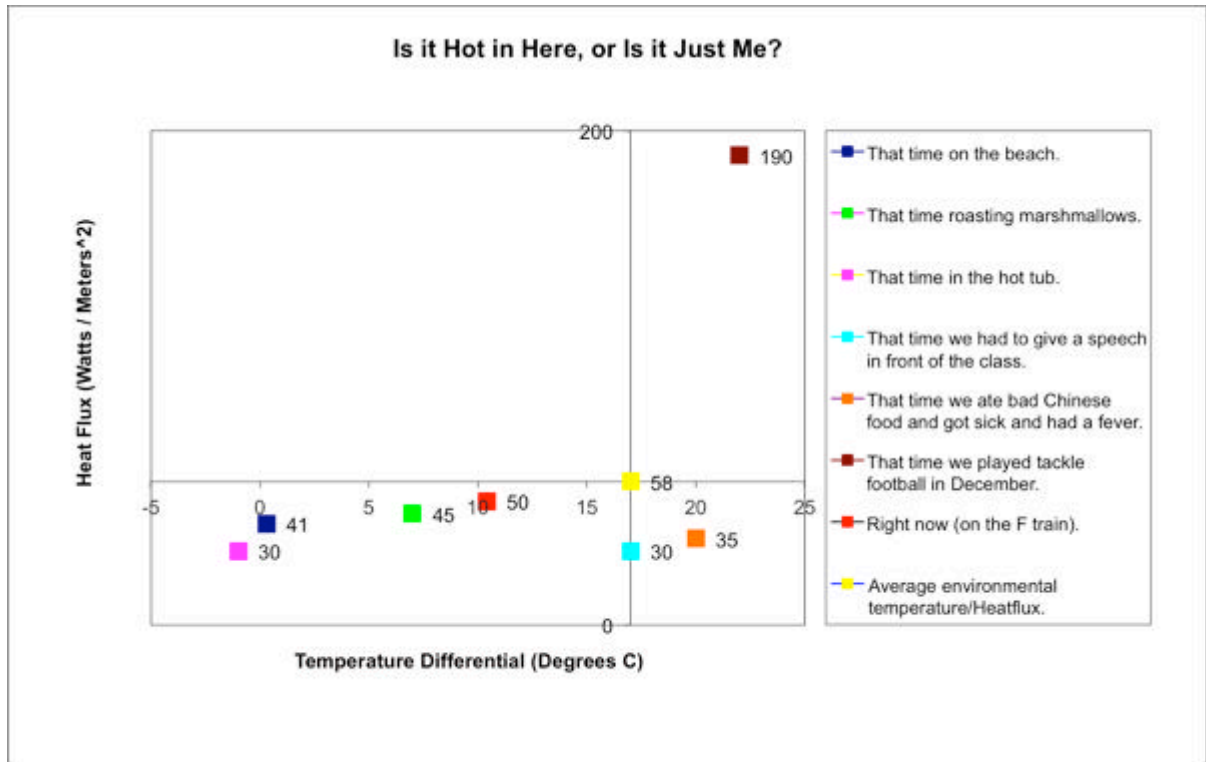
Works every time.  
Where's the heart disease?

Brain: Our destination is located at a higher altitude and can be reached via this staircase.

heart: Man. Is it hot in here?  
Or is just me?

Brain: The sensation of being hot is a measure of heat flux between the environment and us. It is hot if this number is not sufficiently negative (as we are constantly dumping heat into our surroundings, being exothermic). The difference between “hot in here” and “just me” will depend on both temperature and the thermal conductivity between us and our environment (broadly considered).

Time	Environmental Temp. (C°)	Body Temp. (C°)	Temp. Differential (C°)	Heat Flux (W/m <sup>2</sup> )
That time on the beach.	37.7	38	0.3	41
That time in the hot tub.	40	39	-1	30
That time roasting marshmallows.	30	37	7	45
That time we had to give a speech in front of the class.	20	37	17	30
That time we ate bad Chinese food and got sick and had a fever.	20	40	20	35
That time we played tackle football in December.	16	38	22	190
Right now (on the F train).	26.6	37	10.4	50
Average environmental temperature/Heatflux.	20	37	17	58



lub-dub: uhhhh

Brain: Yes, Heart. As the above graph makes painfully clear, any point in the lower right quadrant represents a time when it is indeed “hot in here,” and not “just us.” The temperature differential represents the difference between—

heart: Hot? Are you an idiot?  
It’s fucking cold!!

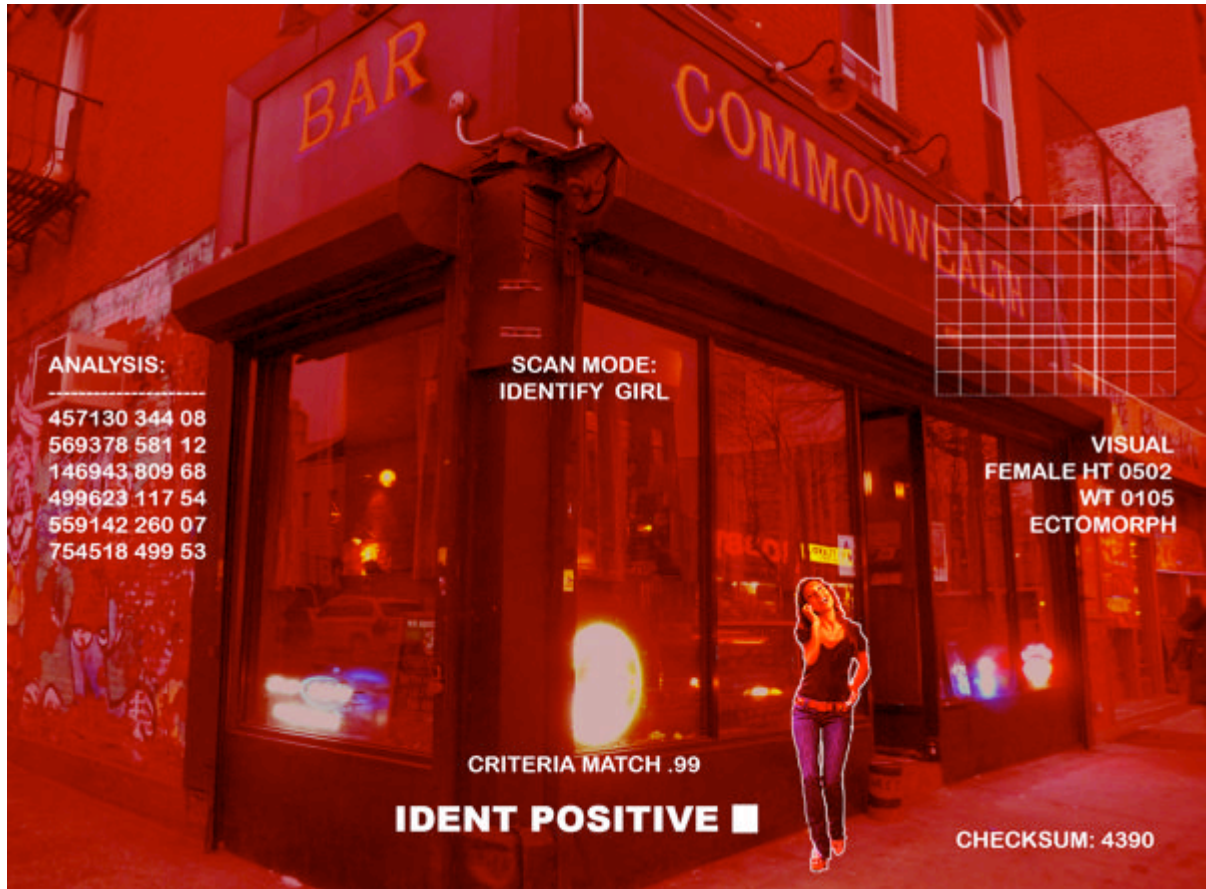
Brain: Our current location has changed, and thus so has the ambient temperature. The differential between the ambient temperature and our body temperature, then, obviously, has changed accordingly. As I was saying, the temperature differential is, especially when accounting for the amounts of oxygen and nitrogen at this altitude, affected by—

heArt: Shut up. Shut up! Shut! Up! Is that... is that...?



well, well, brain?

Brain: A moment; parsing.



Ah, yes. I quite agree, Heart. She does appear to be talking on her mobile telephone outside of the bar, 1.5 meters North by Northeast of the main entrance.

heart: Go! Go over there, now!

Brain: She is, as you so aptly noted and I accordingly affirmed, currently talking on her mobile telephone. Interrupting her would be—

heart: Who's she talking to?  
Us? Hello? Hello,  
are you there?  
Take off your pants!

Brain: No, she is not talking to us. She is talking to an unknown third party. Interrupting her would be rude.

heart: Unacceptable!  
There's only one person  
who should be ordering her to pull  
off her pants, and that's us!

Brain: It is highly improbable that the subject of her conversation involves such an order.

heart: what bloody else is there, save for pants and the removal of pants?

Brain: The content of her conversation may well be on any number of subjects, to include: the weather, mutual well-being, friends and close relations, the state of national television programming, summer vacation plans, recent dining experiences, local politics, regional politics...

heart: Bollocks!  
There's no pants in politics?

Brain: ...

heart: Go now!

Brain: Perhaps we should smoke a cigarette before we approach her.

HEART: No time, no time!

Brain: Let us consider why she is not talking to us.

heart: Because  
she's talking to someone else!

Brain: Let us consider why she is talking to someone else.

heart: Because she's not talking to us!

Brain: Perhaps it is in fact because we haven't the appropriate "cool" quotient.

heart = I hate algebra!

Brain: According to certain data sets gathered from the following artifacts of popular culture:

- *Casablanca* (Warner Bros., 1942)
- *Jailhouse Rock* (MGM, 1957)
- *From Russia with Love* (United Artists, 1963)
- *Chinatown* (Paramount, 1974)
- *Lethal Weapon* (Warner Brothers, 1987)
- *Pulp Fiction* (Miramax Films, 1994)
- *Sin City* (Dimension Films, 2005)

and cross-referencing the number of cigarettes smoked by a character and duration of screen-time spent smoking by said character against such factors as total screen-time, instances of character emulation, number of females associated with the character, number of appearances by the portraying actor on the cover of periodical publications...smoking increases one's "coolness" by a factor of—

heart: What the hell are you talking about?

Brain: A high coolness rating is crucial, as coolness is directly correlated with 'getting the girl.'

h e a r t: So... if... we want... to get the girl...

Brain: We must attain more "coolness."

heart: by...

Brain: Smoking a cigarette.

heart: Yeah, ok, fine.

Brain: One moment.

heart: Hey, what is that?  
Do you feel that?  
Are we on the train again?

Brian: Not, uh, according to my, uh, calculations. Let me check that again, though, I'm not sure.

heart: Tang and poon and down and down  
her YKK went zipperzip  
the pants were tight but with our might  
we gave a grumphal rip

Brain: `run get_status.exe`  
`...`  
`trainedness: 0;`  
`smokedness: 1;`  
  
`run get_status(girl).exe`  
`...`  
`<invalid>`  
  
`run get_current_user(mouth).exe`  
`...`  
`return(Heart);`

What is going... oh, no. What have you done?

heart: And my fool body is clothed. No, no, no pants!  
Why should a dog, a horse, a rat shun pants  
And thou be draped in denim? I'll beat no more,  
Never, never, never, never, never!  
Pray you, undo this zipper: I said un—

```
Brain: run sneeze.exe  
access.mouth=admin;  
set password: sum(1,1);  
  
run distract_heart.exe{  
    heart.troublesome=1;  
    vid clip_to_show_stupid_heart =get.video(22:55:14,22:55:17);  
  
    while(heart.troublesome==1){  
        show.heart[clip_to_show_stupid_heart];
```



```
    }  
}  
return(0);
```

```
run get_status(girl).exe
...

return(
dinner_with_friends == successful;
location.friends == bar.inside;
);

run anecdote.humorous(09.22_1).exe
...

run anecdote.humorous(09.22_backup).exe

run does_she_like_me.exe
...
return(
    arms.presentation.open: 0;
    attention.exclusive: 1;
    eye_contact: 1;
    is_laughing: 1;
    is_naked: 0;
    is_smiling: 1;
    is_teasing: 1;
    is_touching_hair: 1;
    mucous_membrane_contact: 0;
    posture.leaning_forward: 1;
    prolonged_voluntary_proximity: 0;
    skin_contact.active: 0;
    skin_contact.passive: 0;
    statement_of_amorous_intent: 0;
    vocal_timbre.abnormal: 0;

total: 7;
"Insufficient for current threshold of 16."
);
```

heart: So, this shirt, I mean  
can we get rid of this shirt,  
this shirt is well, I'm not  
complaining but, I been  
staring at this shirt a while...  
Hello? Brain? What the hell  
is going on? Fuck. No one's  
listening to me. Brain!  
I know you're behind this...  
this, this protuberant shirt!

Brain: run joke.crude\_1.exe  
...

heart: Dammit Brain! Answer me!

Brain: Apologies, Heart. An inappropriate API call was made. Access to visual systems will be restored shortly.  
`heart.troublesome=0;`

heart: Who is that? What's going on?

Brain: You are perceiving the girl.

heart: Why is her face all  
weird?

Brain: I told her the following joke: What has two opposable metacarpals and enjoys the sensation of receiving fellatio?

heart: You idiot! I'll take care of this. I'm always cleaning up after you.

Brain: Very well.

HEART: Say this exactly:

My dear, it would please me no end  
were you to indulge my curiosity and lend

me your ear, for I am simply aching to know  
if you know

what has two thumbs and desires, nay begs!  
to have the flower of a tongue between its legs?

[winks eye]

[thumbs point at self] This guy!

Brain: Are you absolutely sure?

heart: Shut up and do what I say.  
You had your chance.

Brain: Okay...

heart: What's happening? She's making that—  
that face again! What  
is she doing?  
Where's she going?

Brain: She is going to the bathroom.

heart: But she's supposed to be talking to us!

Brain: According to my calculations, she appears to be displeased with the recent conversation.

heart: Displeased?



Brain: Remain calm. I can handle this.

`del joke.crude*`

heart: It's over, Brain. I've nothing to beat for.  
I think I might just, might just, might...skip—  
skip until rest is more the definition  
of my state than pump or thump or—I can't  
do it—please, please don't make me pump-pump out  
this meaningless and solitary life.

Brain: The preceding exchange is as yet of middling consequence. May I also take this opportunity to  
inform you that any efforts towards the cessation of your primary function will be futile, as  
control of your current rate and status has been delegated to the Board of Autonomic Nerves.

hjerte: Oh, that this too, too beaten heart would short,  
quit, and be thrown out with the rotten meat!  
Or that Everthinking had not stripped  
me of the power to cease! Oh, Brain, Brain,  
How sterile, clothed, cold, and unlibidinous  
Seem to me all the uses of this bar!  
Fie on't, ah fie! 'Tis a manicured garden,  
carefully trimmed. Things prim and chaste in nature  
Possess it merely. That it should come to this!

Brain: I have composed the following rhymed poem designed to bolster your spirits.

Roses: #FF0000, violets: #0000FF;  
Don't lachrymate, laugh.

heart: WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT!?  
hey, who's that? Let's talk to her.

Brain: She is indicating via an arm gesture that she is desirous of our presence at their table.

heart: wait, what are you doing?

Brain: I am complying with her manual request.

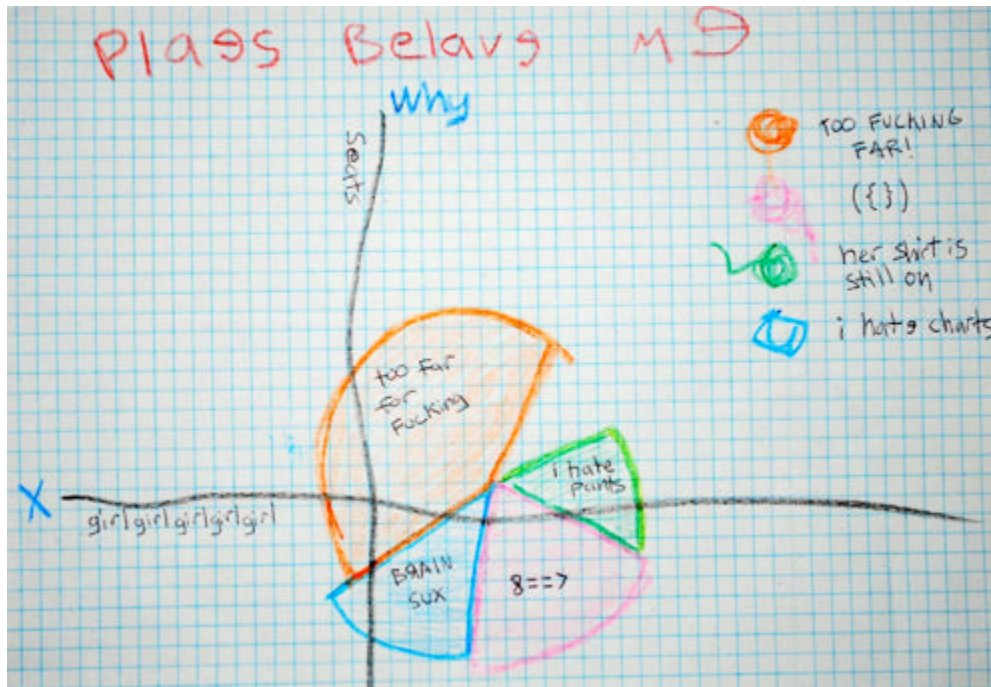
heart: you're sitting us there? not there!

Brain: Lest you assume that I have chosen this particular seat out of pure whimsy, allow me to enumerate all the relevant factors that make this the clear and inexorable choice:

- the ability to maintain eye contact.
- the ability to carry on conversation.
- the ease of leaving to utilize the sanitary facilities or procure further beverages.
- proximity to the fire exit.
- orientation relative to the source of music.
- the quality of light as it pertains to softening and enhancing our visual appeal.

Weighted according to degree of empirical correlation with romantic entanglement, we arrive at the conclusion that this is the optimal seat selection.

Dr. Cardio: no, gah! Brain! Look:



Brain: Processing...Ah. I see, Heart. You are suggesting that proximity to the girl trumps all other considerations. Very well. We shall sit as close to the girl as possible.

heart: Great!  
so, we gonna do this or what?

Brain: It would be prudent to collect and correlate data one last time.  
`run does_she_like_me.exe`

heart: that program sucks

Brain: Unfortunately, we do not yet have a precise rubric with which to determine the effectiveness of the program.

heart: ask the girl if the program sucks

Brain: Fascinating! It never occurred to me discuss the effectiveness of an algorithm with the object (the girl) upon which the algorithm operates. I am explaining the program to her now.

heart: well, what does she say

Brain: Hmm. Apparently her own algorithm, `does_she_like_you.exe`, is far superior to our own. She has invited us to bring any potential subject to her so that she may bring to bear the investigative powers of her program.

καρδιά: Oh I quite agree,  
that sounds deliciously investigatory.  
Let's do that next week at the beach, in the sunny sunlight!  
...we're talking about sex, right?

Brain: To clarify: she says to bring any girl to her and she will tell us if said girl likes us.

heart: oh. well, do that then

Brain: What is it you wish me to do?

heart: bring her the girl

Brain: You don't seem to understand: "she" and "the girl" are both referents that refer to the same individual.

heart: okay, bring the girl her

Brain: You are failing to grasp the pronominal implications; she is the girl.

heart: fine, whatever, bring she the her

Brain: Bring her herself? Can she be both direct and indirect object?

heart: sure, why not?

Brain: But would not herself require a further object still? There is a danger, Heart, of becoming trapped in an infinite loop.

heart: Infinite whatsit?  
You gotta do what ya gotta do.  
Brain, say it:  
What if I brought you you?

Brain: Processing...

## About the authors



Christopher Robinson is a writer, teacher and translator\* currently living in the wind. He earned his MA in poetry from Boston University and his MFA from Hunter College. His work has appeared, or is forthcoming, in *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Night Train*, *Kenyon Review*, *Nimrod*, *Branch Magazine*, *Chiron Review*, *Umbrella Factory*, *McSweeney's Online*, and elsewhere. He is a recipient of fellowships from the MacDowell Colony, the Sante Fe Art Institute, the Lanesboro Arts Center, and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. He has been a finalist for numerous prizes, including the Ruth Lilly Fellowship and the Yale Younger Poets Prize.

Joe Moon is your typical preterite† immigrant combat veteran with a literature degree. He lives in Portland, Oregon with his lovely wife Bev and works for AppFog. He writes about technology and other things on his blog and occasionally contributes to the Atlantic Monthly's Technology Channel. He is otherwise occupied riding his bicycle and climbing rocks.

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\* And illustrator? This is his first stab at it.

† In Pynchon's religious sense, not the grammatical one.