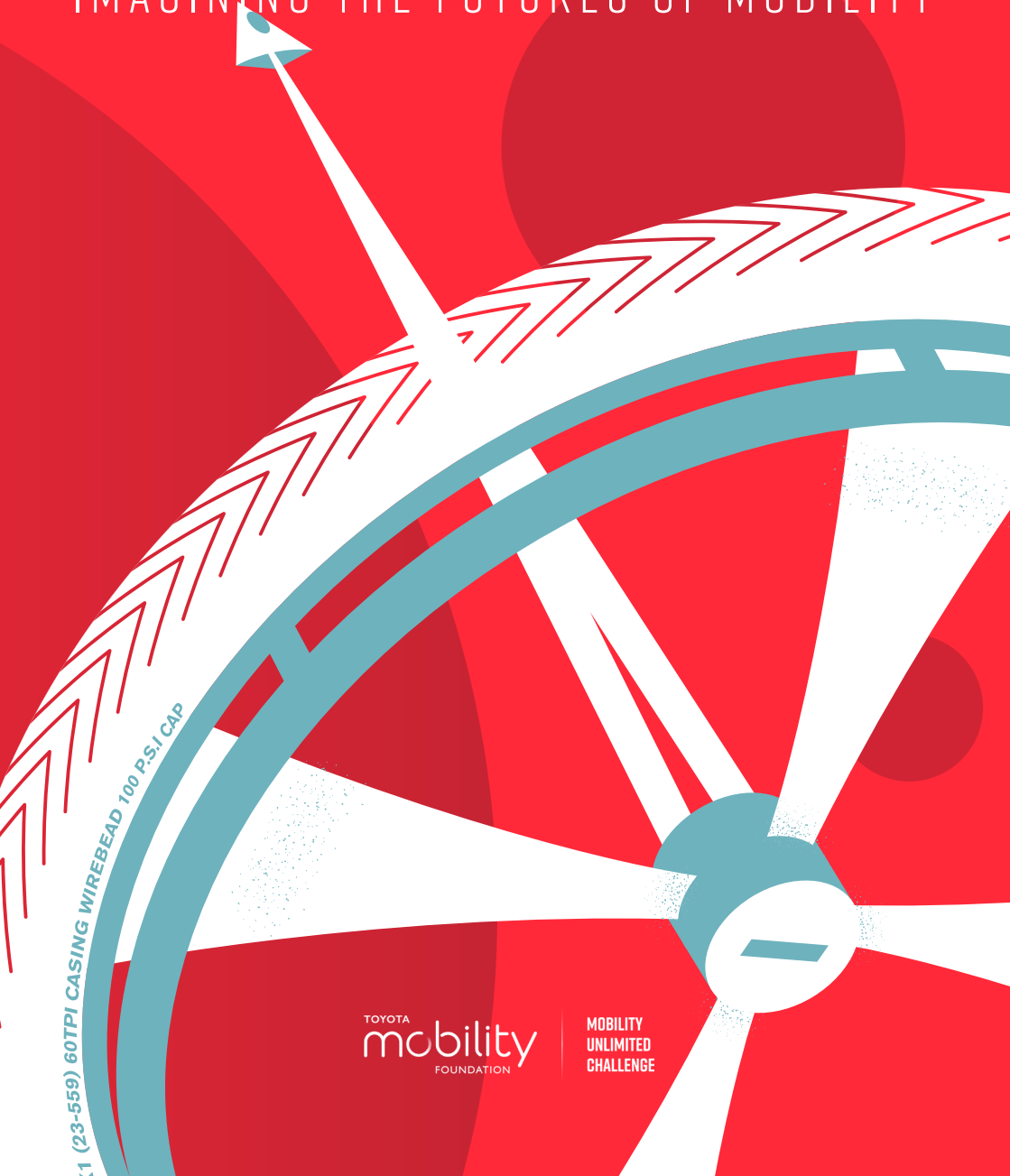


Going Further

IMAGINING THE FUTURES OF MOBILITY



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TOYOTA
mobility
FOUNDATION

MOBILITY
UNLIMITED
CHALLENGE

For generations, writers of sci fi and speculative fiction have asked one of the most fundamental questions in human nature: what if?

More than spaceships and alien life forms, it's the "what if?" that puts the science into science fiction. Discovery always starts from two basic questions: why are things like they are? And what if things were different?

The Mobility Unlimited Challenge, sponsored by Toyota Mobility Foundation and administered by NESTA, the innovation foundation, proceeds from the same spirit. Why do so many people still struggle with mobility devices? And what would the world be like if they didn't?

This is why we asked some of the world's leading science fiction writers and illustrators to collaborate on new stories incorporating the brilliant prototypes that have made the final stages of the Mobility Unlimited Challenge.

Our writers and illustrators write from experience: all six of them have close connections with the disability community, and have addressed this identity in their work. All six have now taken inspiration from the Mobility Unlimited Challenge's final five devices to ask what will the world be like when advanced smart technology devices are available for all.

This isn't a simple Utopian vision: any sci-fi writer will tell you utopian visions don't tend to work out well: there will always be challenges.

But just because Utopia doesn't exist, doesn't mean we don't try to imagine a better world, where more and more people can fulfil their potential, in public and private lives, in health, in personal freedom.

That's the vision that these stories share. And that's the vision of the Mobility Unlimited Challenge.

Because challenges are what make us who we are.



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Carter fidgets for the entire drive there. This will be his first hike since the onset of his leg paralysis, and he aches for the woods. He’s grateful for the self-driving car taking them out to the hiking trail. But the wait during the drive is more tedious than any physical therapy session he’s done. Thankfully, Zia is with him.

Zia sits casually beside him in a loose beige sweater, scrolling through pictures on

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her phone. So many high-res memories of the hikes they used to go on together. Half their dates had been on sweltering or freezing hiking trails.

He asks, "Which one was your favorite?"

She makes a lovably theatrical show of thinking it over. "Remember that first Algonquin path? We both slipped trying to climb under the waterfall. And at the bottom we found that gem thing. It looks like jade, but paler?"

Carter says, "That was aventurine. The rangers had never seen anything like it on the trail before. I gave it to you. Did you lose it?"

"I never lose anything."

"Good. It complemented your eyes."

She has the palest greens he's ever seen. Apparently, they're common in the town in Pakistan where her mom is from. He'd love to hike there someday. He's determined to.

She says, "I bet your favorite was that small mountain on a lake. Mount Kineo? You remember the one in Maine?"

He nods effusively. "The one that looked like a grumpy face."

"It didn't look like a face to anyone else."

He reaches for her phone, "Let me find the picture. It totally looks like a head and slumping shoulders. Not a lot of mountains look like people."

Zia sticks her tongue out at him. "In fact, none of them do."

"Well, today's sight is going to knock your socks off."

Zia checks her hiking boots and sasses him. "Was I supposed to wear socks?"

The car quietly hums and slows to a precise stop. It parks itself with the tail-end pointed at the entrance to the woodland path.

It doesn't take Carter long to put on the Quix. It's snug on his hips, and he settles his lower back against the cushioned support. He snaps the bands around his shins with one hand, its carbon-fiber frame lining the sides of his legs. His sneakers land flush against the device's foot rests.

It doesn't look bad with his brown corduroy jacket. Even after all these years, the

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old jacket still fits.

Devices like this used to be rare. Until his twenties, Carter had only ever seen one exoskeleton, used by a senior tech in his factory. It had been much clunkier than these modern models. In just a few years, mobility devices had become common enough that anyone could get one.

Carter's best friend at work has a Qolo, an advanced wheelchair that supports his body to shift from sitting to standing, depending on the task, and lets him maneuver whilst fully upright. It was a lesson Carter was forced to learn for himself – too easily, others see the chair, not the person– the freedom to stand and sit at will and to move with ease at the same eye-level as able-bodied friends and co-workers makes a world of difference in changing those perceptions. Both Carter and his friend use these devices for more than just their jobs. People take them to the grocery store, to town parks, and down wedding aisles – wherever they want.

Today, Carter is taking his out to reclaim the wilderness for himself.

He takes a test lap around the car. The modular actuators in the Quix bend his knees and lift his legs for him in a smooth stride, while giving his upper body the support he needs to balance. He's heading for the flags marking the hiking trail before Zia's even ready.

Zia shoulders her backpack and says, "That didn't take long!"

He gestures to the frame around his thighs and laughs. "It's not exactly the armor-loader-thing from that old movie Aliens."

She teases, "Are you showing me aliens today?"

"No. But it's still a surprise. You'll know it when you see it."

They embark up the trail side-by-side, along a grove of hollies and sugar maples so bright they're almost teal. These are the most trees Carter has seen in person all year, and he gleefully lets them surround him. Forests like this have been preserved and expanded to help combat the changing climate, and he couldn't be more grateful.

The path is well-packed dirt, with trampled grooves where most people have walked. Carter directs his Quix along those contours and savors the crisp air. He's never been here before, but it feels like coming home.

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Zia keeps an eye on his device-assisted steps, not saying a word, though clearly she'd lend a hand if he asked. That's why she's the only person he'd ask out on his first hike. She's been there for plenty of tedious specialist appointments and physical therapy sessions. They have a rapport he struggles to put into words.

Zia adjusts her hearing aid and says, "Hey. You're making the mad-genius face again. Something on your mind?"

"I was just thinking about you."

She snorts at him. "You were thinking about that mountain that doesn't look like a face, weren't you?"

"I was thinking about a bunch of waiting rooms where I didn't have to wait alone."

"My pleasure. I'd never finish a crossword without you."

She's so distracted being clever that she kicks an exposed root and staggers. It's a graceless stagger, her arms splaying, and she catches herself against a holly tree. Like all the times he's slipped and she's let him decide whether he wants help, Carter gives her space.

While she corrects herself, he adjusts the Quix and stoops enough to grab a fallen tree branch. He tests it with some of his weight, it's fresh and sturdy. He offers it to her.

"Need a walking stick?"

That gets him one of her patented icy glares. It's frigid on top, with a suggestive curl of her upper lip that'll crack into a smile any second now. "Seriously?"

However, she accepts the branch. When he lets it go, she squeezes his hand. Her thumb and his pinky finger snag in a moment that's awkward, but tender and makes the whole trip worth it.

He hasn't even shown her the special sight yet.

Zia asks, "Is the surprise close?"

"You'll know it when you see it."

"I might have a surprise for you too. Depends how good your surprise is."

"We're going to have dueling surprises?"

He's keeping up decently. This is a low-intensity trail, but still, there are nerves. His back burns dully, and his brow beads with sweat, feeling the exercise. This is not the

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same as the gym or physical therapy. His muscles work differently on the trail with the Quix, in the forest. It aches like a good choice.

Zia asks, "Do I hear a surprise?"

The sound of the falls is obvious. A river grows alongside the path, and the trickling becomes the throaty roar of the spill ahead. There are no subtle waterfalls.

The river pours thirty feet straight down, turning into a foaming spray that makes the pond below look like a fresh mug of beer. Carter wipes sweat from his brow as they approach a fork in the trail. One way leads down and around the waterfall. The other to flatter terrain, crossing a sturdy bridge over the head of the waterfall.

He walks the Quix across the bridge. He stops at the center to look down along the spill with Zia. He has never smelled air headier than this.

Waterfalls were always their favorite. Zia dangles over the side of the bridge, snapping photos of everything, her hair becoming damp in the mist. She sidles in close against him to take a selfie with the cascade tumbling behind them. They make peace signs and grin like dorks.

"Thank you," she says. "It's pretty awesome."

"I picked it out just for you."

Then she puts a hand over his and says, "I actually wanted to show you something, too."

Zia touches her right jeans pocket and lowers like she's going to fix her boot. Once she's on one knee, she looks up at him and holds out a small, velvet box. Carter freezes, feeling like he's caught in a beautiful wind.

She opens the box to reveal a gold ring with a peculiar outer lining. It's streaked with fine bits of pulverized aventurine, as pale as Zia's eyes. He can guess what stone she used for the aventurine dust.

She says, "Carter. You've been in every best part of my life. I don't even remember when those parts started becoming whatever part you were in. Will you join me for the next part? Will you marry me?"

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Even the crashing water cannot muffle how loud he yells.

“Yes!”

Their arms twine around each other, and soon he isn’t sure if he’s supporting her, or she’s supporting him. Luckily, they don’t tackle each other off of the bridge.

He rests his palms on the sides of the Quix, the ring tapping against the frame. This is the farthest he’s walked in over a year, and sure he’s sore, but he isn’t done out here.

He asks, “Up for a little more hiking?”

“You bet your life.”

“Good. Because there’s a lot more ahead.”



John Wiswell

John Wiswell is a disabled writer who lives in New York. His work has appeared in Nature Magazine, Uncanny Magazine, and Fireside Magazine, among other places. John Wiswell is adept at weaving in humour into his work, no matter the genre. John is an accomplished science fiction, fantasy and horror writer, mostly known for his descriptive and unique short stories.

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SKYE FINDS HER MAGIC

Penny Pepper



Skye stared at a huge globe of the world. It rested on a stand, tilted to one side. Grandma told stories about it. A long time ago, women spun magic into it, she would say every day, and Skye would laugh. Gran was always so silly.

Skye sat in their lounge, which wasn't very exciting. All afternoon, Dad had dragged down old science magazines from the attic. He told Skye it would be fun laughing at them, seeing as it was raining too hard to go to the park as they usually would on a

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Wednesday.

Skye was grumpy, and the magazines smelled horrible, but she tried to stop sulking about missing the park. Sorting the contents of the loft was Dad's world; she secretly loved it when they were together, especially when Mum was away working at the Maneki-neko Energy Hub. Though she couldn't let him know she adored these times. She was almost thirteen, and it was too soppy to let on.

'Look at this, Skye,' he said, holding open a page with a dated photo. 'How do you think astronauts will look in the next ten years?'

Glancing at the dreary picture of a man in an orange spacesuit and great big helmet, Skye shrugged and tapped her fingers on the globe. Dad shook his head at her lack of response, and she flinched that he seemed sad. But these magazines were boring, and it wasn't her fault.

'This is from the film 2001: A Space Odyssey,' he sighed as he closed the magazine. 'It was ahead of its time in 1968.'

Skye contemplated the date. It was a long, long time ago! Before mobile phones and internet. Even Dad wasn't born then!

She shuddered and noticed the rain making patterns on the window. There would be no park today. Dad reached to pick up another magazine, then stopped to reach out his big hand for hers.

'I wonder what's happening in the world, and I wonder what will happen to you Skye,' he said. She knew he was often upset for her because she used an old wheelchair. What's worse was that lots of people didn't understand that she wanted the same as all the other kids. To do fun stuff with no one nagging. No one telling her that she couldn't do things.

But she knew Dad was worried about the future. That people would not be around to help her and that she wouldn't be able to live the life she so deserved. Even when he didn't speak about it, Skye knew that he was scared about her growing up.

The rain kept coming. It wasn't fair that he had to worry so much, it wasn't his fault. Still, a twinge of guilt came across her when she looked at him.

She would show him. He didn't have to be upset because kids knew things, and kids

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were going to make the world better.

'It's OK, Dad,' she said. 'I'm going to take you to the future. Do you trust me?'

Skye took charge as Dad smiled his daft grin. Excitement grew in her stomach as she gently stroked the globe with both her hands, like a fortune teller caressing a crystal ball. She recalled that Dad had said it was antique and in the family for generations. Gran had said time and again it contained magic. Skye would test it right now.

It took a bit of effort to manoeuvre in her old wheelchair, but she managed to get close. She put her fingers over a few places. Patagonia, Tibet, Borneo. She loved the colours and the deep turquoise of the sea. All that tiny, tiny writing.

'Now Dad,' she said seriously. 'Look at the globe, and I'll spin it. We'll count to ten slowly. The magic will come. We'll fly up in the globe and through the clouds! We'll be like astronauts, but we're not going into space. We're going into the future!'

As Skye counted, Dad started to laugh, and she laughed too because Dad trusted her and knew she had super-powers! He told her that every day.

As the globe continued to whirl, it expanded. A tiny bright circle grew over the Pacific Ocean, getting bigger until they could move inside it. They rose up above the house, into the clouds in slow motion, gazing out from inside the globe which was now almost transparent. Holding her dad's hand, the globe-ship flew gently until they came to their park. Skye noted it looked different, but she knew for sure it was her favourite place.

'It's so green again, Dad!' Skye exclaimed. 'I told you us kids would sort everything out. We've saved nature!'

Together they dropped down, and Skye eased her wheelchair forward.

A boy was sat on a bench. She noticed two large wheels at his feet. He lent his body forward, pushed gently on the seat of the bench with his hand and smoothly stood. He was using a wheelchair like none she'd ever seen – well, not exactly a wheelchair, in fact not a wheelchair at all. Yes, it had wheels, but it supported his whole body and

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allowed him to sit and stand and comfortably move whilst totally upright. He had a cheeky look on his face, and Skye was surprised that she liked it.

Glancing down at her chair, he recognised they came from the past. He could tell she was fascinated by his device.

'Hello, I'm Flynn. This is the Qolo. It helps me stand up when I want to without me struggling,' the boy said and smiled at Skye. 'Wheelchairs have changed lots. So has this park. There are loads of great things here now. Have you seen the WheeM-i? You can go far in that!'

Skye looked at him, then to her Dad, before she looked back at the boy.

'I'll show you,' he said. 'The WheeM-i station is near the wind turbines. The latest models too.'

Skye was never sure about boys, but she definitely liked the idea of following Flynn around her futuristic park.

Everywhere they gazed there were plump birds of all shapes and sizes and red squirrels running across the path before them with juicy nuts between paws. The wind turbines had a soft murmur as they gently turned, producing energy. She liked that they were painted with crazy patterns and fun graffiti.

'Is all energy renewable now?' asked Dad.

The boy in the Qolo spoke up. 'Of course. Lots of things have changed in the last ten years.'

Next to the turbines were a line of boldly coloured machines, like wheelchairs or buggies. Skye tugged her dad by the hand.

'Look, Dad. My chair can get onto this. Isn't it great?'

Flynn moved forward. 'Here's the WheeM-i. Put your palm on here,' he said. 'It will log in your details, and then we'll explore. You don't have to worry about your old chair or getting tired.'

Skye loved how the WheeM-i held her chair in place. She felt safe and excited as it left the parking bay.

'It smells different here.' Dad sniffed the air, looking puzzled. 'It's as though

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something is missing.'

Skye was positioning herself by Flynn, but she turned to her father.

'That's because the air here is clean. I told you we would do it,' she said as he sat down on a blue park bench.

'I like this future, Skye. I'll try not to worry so much.'

A rush of excitement and happiness made Skye's cheeks warm. She placed her hands on the control of the WheeM-i and looked to Flynn beside her.

'Ready?' He asked and raised his eyebrows playfully at her.

Flynn took off through the park, the Qolo allowing him to move at a fair pace. Not wanting to be left behind, Skye followed in the WheeM-i, it purred alongside him as she caught up.

Skye loved the future she saw. Everywhere around her, people were happy, the colours of flowers and trees seemed more vivid than any she had ever seen. Pausing by a bed of giant red blooms, the happy buzz of honey bees filled the air as their crimson petals opened..

'They were grown on Mars,' Flynn said and winked.

'Really?', asked Skye astonished.

'No, we're not quite there yet!', his bright eyes telling her he was only kidding.

Skye giggled as a soft wind blew across their faces. They chatted like old friends, and she felt strong and happy. But as they came around the circle of the park pulling up next to her globe-ship, she knew the WheeM-i was not hers to keep. The globe-ship belonged far away in their lounge and would eventually stop spinning. Soon the magic would fade.

'Don't worry,' said Flynn reading her mind. 'I'm in your future. You will see me again.'

Face hot, she grinned as she slowed down beside Dad.

'I won't worry. I'm not scared of the future. Not so much anyhow,' he said. 'And Mum will feel the same when I tell her about our daughter and her superpowers.'

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Before she knew it, Skye drifted out of the marvellous WheeM-i, with her Dad's hand firmly holding hers. Finding themselves inside the globe-ship again, they floated high into the clouds once more before gently returning to the lounge. Slowly she opened her eyes.

'Look, Skye,' said Dad beside her. 'It's stopped raining.'

She stared out of the window. 'That's alright, Dad, but let's not go to the park. You've got a lot of magazines to tidy, and maybe you can show me some more pictures of astronauts. I think I might like to be one when I grow up.'



Penny Pepper

Penny Pepper is an acclaimed wheelchair-using author, poet, performer & disabled activist based in the UK. A genre-defying and versatile writer, Penny Pepper's focuses on the examination of difference, inequality and identity. She tells stories we haven't heard, connecting her experience of the world to the universal experience, making others see the world differently. Penny was included in Able magazine's list of the 10 most inspiring women with disabilities.

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THE VELOCITY OF FREEFALL

Brianna Albers



The sky is pink tonight. Spotty, with thin, wispy clouds, violet at the edges.

She's never liked that word. *Violet*. Too close to *violent*. Too many consonants, blunt in the air, sharp on her tongue.

Blaire wishes, not for the first time, that she had splurged on inflight Wi-Fi. Her ticket was cheap. Cheaper than she thought it'd be. A benefit of zero-emission flight.

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It would've helped, probably, to have access to the internet, to distract herself from her irrational fear of planes, and clouds, and sitting in a plane suspended midair and surrounded by countless blush-colored clouds. She could've spent another five hours on Mozambique's Wikipedia page. For that matter, she could've scoured the thesaurus for something better than *violet*. *Mauve*, maybe. *Periwinkle*. *Thistle* comes to mind, but if she's going to describe the troposphere, she may as well lean into the aesthetics of—

"Are you nervous?"

"No," says Blaire, wondering all the while about the etymology of the word *nervous*.

"You look nervous."

What does nervous look like, anyway? Does she have a tell? The last thing Blaire wants is for her students to look at her and see—

"I'm not. Nervous." She would be if the sky were violent. If they were in the mesosphere, with a meteor hurtling toward them, splicing cloud and air. But the sky is pink and clear, and if Blaire shuts an eye, she can just about make out the ground beneath them, the wild froth of the ocean. Why would she be nervous?

A baby screams across the aisle. She doesn't have to look at Jacen to know that his eyes are creased at the corners.

"Don't look at me like that," Blaire says.

Jacen blinks with an innocence that would be convincing if she didn't know him. "Like what?"

"Like you're analyzing me."

More screaming. Someone says something about business class and ginger ale and could someone please let a flight attendant know that one of the passengers is requesting diazepam?

"I'm not analyzing you," says Jacen. "No more than you're analyzing me."

Her ears pop. Or maybe it's all in her head. Maybe she fell asleep halfway across the Atlantic and they're nowhere near Mozambique. Maybe she's so desperate to get off this plane that she's resorted to dreaming up pressure changes. Or maybe she's

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thinking too much.

This is what she gets for watching an embarrassing amount of TV.

Jacen shifts. Crosses his legs. Runs a hand through his hair. He can't stop moving. Blaire thinks, not for the first time, that if Jacen isn't careful, he's going to wear a hole in the floor. At this altitude, they'd hit the water so fast they'd die on impact. Broken neck, probably. No need for a lifeboat.

"Are *you* nervous?" Blaire asks. Better to keep herself distracted. Better to focus on something that isn't the plane, or the pressure in her head, or—

The water. How, at terminal velocity, it would barely cushion their fall.

Tabi said it was a bad idea. Months ago, when Blaire applied to the Peace Corps. It was a whim on her part—volunteer, see the world, share the stars with people she wanted to know. A fantasy. A dream. Something that, for the longest time, was better suited for people with working legs. She still feels like pinching herself.

She didn't expect Jacen to go along with it. It was a joke. One she shouldn't have made. By the time Blaire realized that maybe she shouldn't have mentioned going overseas to the man who nearly lost his life in a freak accident, he was looking at her like she was the sun, blinding and fatal.

"It's a bad idea," said Tabi, rummaging through the freezer.

"You don't know that."

"He thought he'd never be able to walk again." When Tabi emerged with a tub of ice cream, it was with an unmistakable aura of victory. "What could possibly compel him to do that again?"

Blaire thought, but didn't say, that when it comes right down to it, she and Jacen are the same. Nothing will satisfy them but the world. Even if the world leaves them unconscious on the side of a dirt road, or staring at surgical lights until the room goes dark.

In the end, all she said was, "I think he's ready."

He wasn't. So Blaire waited. She took him to support groups, watched him fumble

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through physical therapy reps. She didn't need to see the EvoWalk to know that it was working. His muscles grew stronger with every passing day. Sometimes she saw the flickering light of the sensors, tracking Jacen's motions, learning his gait. They shone in the dark like a far-flung star.

Soon he was walking. Running. Unsteady, at first, wobbly on his feet. But he wasn't unconscious on the side of a road or lying in a coma in a Macedonian hospital, and that—

"Are you sure?" Blaire asked. "I wouldn't blame you if you didn't—it's traumatizing, is what I'm saying. I totally get it if you're not ready or if you've completely reconsidered your choice of career—"

"Blaire," said Jacen.

"—and, you know, just because you don't want to join the Peace Corps again doesn't mean you can't teach English or learn about other cultures! Besides, everyone's saying that Mozambique has plenty of teachers, between Peace Corps volunteers and university grads. And there are plenty of places that could—"

"Blaire," said Jacen again, lips twitching.

"—use a professor. And consider your resume! You're a shoo-in, Jacen. And I can teach physics anywhere, so..."

"Blaire," said Jacen a third time, crouching in front of her. "I want to go."

It was, all things considered, a miracle.

"Of course I'm nervous." Jacen shifts again. Curls his fingers in his jeans, so tight his knuckles shine. "I haven't been out of the country since..."

She dreams about it sometimes. Jacen in the hospital bed, pale beneath the operating lights. He looked fragile, skin drawn tight over sharp, jutting bones. Blaire wanted to touch him but was afraid that, if she wasn't careful, he might just break.

"To be fair," says Blaire, "I've never been out of the country. Like, ever. So you've got a leg up on me, at least." What is it with her and unseemly jokes? She should really consider a meditative trance. Hypnosis. Something to keep her quiet. "We make quite

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the pair, don't we."

The baby is getting restless. That or there's something in the air. Blaire forces herself to still, if only to keep her chair from tilting forward, adjusting its center of gravity in accordance with her body.

"It's okay to be nervous," Jacen says. He's still moving. Still tapping his fingers against his kneecaps, like he'll die if he doesn't. "You don't have to pretend. Not with me."

"I keep thinking about plane crashes." And violence, and velocity, and synonyms for the color violet. But Blaire is getting ahead of herself. "I know that zero-emission planes are safe and whatnot, which is great, I'm all for eliminating greenhouse gasses—"

Jacen sets his hand on her knee. "Spiraling?"

She laughs. Or tries to laugh. Whatever sound she makes is lost in a flurry of activity at the front of the airplane. "Maybe a little."

The P.A. crackles to life. A flight attendant says something about clear skies, deplaning procedures, estimated arrival time. Blaire exhales, slow and steady.

Jacen bumps her shoulder with his. "We're not going to crash, Blaire."

"I appreciate the sentiment, but we both know you're hardly qualified to—"

"Blaire."

"Besides, I'm not worried about *crashing*. I'm worried about *drowning*. I love this chair, it's literally the best thing that's ever happened to me, but not even ultra-lightweight carbon fibers—"

"Blaire."

"—can keep me from succumbing to the cold depths of a watery grave—"

"*Blaire*."

She hums, thinking about velocity again, equations, final position minus initial position divided by time. What she wouldn't do for inflight Wi-Fi. She should really calculate the drag coefficient, but to do that she'd need to know air density and the size of the reference area and—

"If we crash," says Jacen, infuriatingly cavalier, "I promise I'll find you."

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“Dead in the middle of the ocean, you mean.”

“Not if I help you put a life jacket on.” At least he’s stopped wearing holes in the floor.
“Think of it this way. The Phoenix AI is so light you’d probably float.”

Blaire would like to believe him. But not even smart wheelchairs can float.

“You can’t just expect me to take your hypotheses at face value. Which is what they are, by the way. *Hypotheses*. False until proven true.”

“I thought you hated math.”

“I do,” Blaire says, all too aware that Jacen has somehow managed to distract her. So much for a meditative trance. “But my love of astronomy trumps even my dislike of numbers. You can’t shoot for the stars without calculating the distance between them.”

Jacen squeezes her knee. “Tell you what. Once we’re settled in Mozambique, I’ll teach you how to swim. That way, if you ever *are* in a plane crash, you can swim your way to safety.” She doesn’t need to look at him to hear the smile in his voice. “Private lessons under the stars.”

Blaire thinks that, if their plane crashed in the middle of the ocean, she’d die of dehydration before reaching Africa.

She says yes anyway.

*

The sky is clear in Mozambique.

Blaire holds her breath. Recites pi to the 15th digit. Remembers, not for the first time, that the chances of dying in a plane crash are one in 9,000-something. 9,881? 9,853?

What she wouldn’t do for inflight Wi-Fi.

The plane lands, wheels against tarmac. Jacen holds her hand, so tight his knuckles shine. By the time they exit the terminal, Blaire is buzzing—high on adrenaline, or maybe just the relief of making it out alive.

Jacen is halfway to their rental car when Blaire stops. Her palms are sweaty against the rims of her wheels. She can feel her heart pounding, sharp against her eardrums. The sky is clear, but if she squints, she can just make out the faint light of a star.

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Jacen turns, quirking a brow. “Okay?”

She laughs. Or tries to, anyway. “It’s silly.”

“I doubt that.” Jacen crouches before her. Rests his hands on her knees, warm and familiar, impossibly alive. “What is it?”

She bites her lip. “Take my shoes off?”

When Blaire sets foot in Mozambique for the first time, it feels curiously like freefall.



Brianna Albers

Brianna Albers (she/her) is a storyteller living in Minneapolis-St. Paul. In 2016, she founded *Monstering*, a magazine for disabled women and nonbinary people; in 2017, she co-founded ZRIE, a private new media collective. She consults as a patient ambassador for SMA My Way and writes the column “The Wolf Finally Frees Itself” for *SMA News Today*. She recently finished the first draft of her space fantasy, *#WaxingCrescent*, and is in the process of making the book of her heart the best it can be.

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GOING FURTHER



Original Illustrations by

Ciara Chapman



Ciara Chapman is an award winning illustrator living in Cork, Ireland. With a background in Fine Art Printmaking and Graphic Design, she is a member of Cork Printmakers Workshop, Visual Artists Ireland and the Institute of Designers in Ireland. In 2016, Ciara Chapman started an illustrated blog to chronicle her experience with chronic pain. Her work received press coverage, as well as a Commendation from the Institute of Designers in Ireland and a Silver Design award, for her illustration “Invisible Pain”.

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