

## QWERTY STUFF

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It is night and I am in my study. The amber light of the computer monitor warms my face. The hum of the fan plays a continuous melody, moving the air as it cools the circuitry.

The lamp next to me is tall and black with three fish around the base. A poppy is unfolding on the wall next to me. It is on paper, but as I look into the dark center situated inside the orange-red explosion of the flower the image by O'Keefe seems three dimensional. The savage faces of the fish stare out from the base of lamp. It is very dark outside and the warmth of the light guides my way. I remember the old typewriter.

I go to the basement and wield the wreckage up the stairs to my study and set it on the stool. Its frame has been mangled and the carriage no longer moves freely. I remember the day I dropped it from a shelf in the garage. It is a dented, gray Royal.

In the early fifties it used to work in my father's office, pounding out letters and ledgers. Later it was moved to the house. I laid claim to its ownership after years of homesteading it. I used to stay up late at night, trying on the role of writer. Now the computer hums with triumph next to the Royal. It has taken the job of the Royal as it sits on its pedestal.

I sit in front of the monitor and push the keys that return my thoughts and images before me. My fingers are poised, awaiting the conjured images to spill from them and light up before me. The Royal rests there, mortally wounded.

I remember the nights when I would get behind the keys of the Royal typewriter parked on top of the blue trunk, and I would cruise—feel the wind in my hair, see the buttercups burst in the air. I was going places, thinking thoughts. I recall clearly—as if it were now:

I push the keys of the Royal typewriter. It accelerates and I feel *forward thrust. The force pulls at my skin as I go faster and faster. I am careening through space, my face feels like it is about to tear from its frame. I look up—shapes pass in a blur, indistinguishable smears of color, red, yellow, blue, orange until I leave the stratosphere. Now the amber light of the stars illuminates the way in the blackness and*

*the space bar advances my position and I sit in the cockpit, margins set, and punch out codes that periodically ring as I pull the lever that advances me to the next line as I rise higher until the earth turns into a cloudy blue-green ball. I tap on the cap-lock AND BECOME A FIERY COMET WITH A LONG YELLOW TAIL. I HURL MYSELF AHEAD UNTIL I HAVE STARTED AN ARC, BY JUPITER PAST PLUTO AND OUT OF THE MILKY WAY. I AM IMPELLED FARTHER AND FASTER UNTIL I BARELY ESCAPE ONE OF THOSE BLACK HOLES WHOSE PULL IS SO STRONG THAT EVEN THE PHOTONS CANNOT ESCAPE. SO I RELEASE IT* and find I am floating like a dandelion seed.

Then my thoughts veer, and, in a nanosecond, **I am over the Atlantic Ocean and then I turn, aim my craft in. I am immersed.** I go past the kelp beds that reach out with translucent green wavy fingers. I glide past schools of orange crescent-shapes moving around and through pink coral reefs. I look to my left, witness zebra-striped trapezoids moving in parallel, and then they are rocked by a swell and with the ripple they become vertical black lines. Ahead is hammerhead and suddenly I feel the pressure increasing logarithmically. The letters are squashed, black globs of ink, lines of blackness cross the paper. So I push the backspace and suddenly the symbols take ~~the~~ waving <sup>and</sup> rolling with the current. I have reached the depths of the one thousand atmospheres, I am in the abyss of the Marianna Trench. When I look up I see creatures as minute as elite type that look monstrous in their dark compacted world as I impress the letters onto the platen and the darkness of the ink is offset by the whiteness of the paper.

That is how I remember the old Royal typewriter. How I was transported through the qwerty keyboard and transformed to paper. But the reality is that the force of my fingers hitting the keys affected the paper, the striking of two keys caused them to lock up mechanically, and I had to separate them, breaking the rhythm of my stride. And when I really look I see something different than marvelous rides and adventures. In truth and worst of all was that each typographical error and every spelling error haunted me from the paper region where it would reside. And they were numerous. I have forgotten that part when I conjure up memories of that typewriter.

But now I have a computer. And it has taken care of much of that.

As the mind conceives a word, it transmits to the fingers, and the screen lights up appropriately. It is magic. Errors do not matter anymore. Pure thought can flow from my mind, to my fingers, and onto the screen. Later, when the mind is emptied, a few control commands are given and the wondrous machine alerts me to typographical and spelling errors.

The cursor blinks, awaiting my next command. Now I can transport myself anywhere—quickly, easily. With this machine, I can go places and write thoughts instantly. I can save them, I can modify them, I can dissect them. With the computer I can wend my way on any path, drive down any highway, I can swim underwater, I can float in space. I can leap forward beyond the twenty first century, past the famine and droughts that spur on the wars. I can skip up to the place where everything looks just about like it did some one hundred thousand years ago.

And the distance that I am afraid to cross is getting smaller as I transport myself through the computer keys as my thoughts light up in front of me on the monitor. I reach out and raise the intensity and as the letters brighten, the background glows. I look to the printer parked on its stand, ready to spit forth the words that glow on the screen. The Royal sits there, its transmission gone now. I keep its memory, its metallic hulk.

The light streams through the window, I look from my paper out into the third dimension. Royal voices join.

I reveal myself and find that, just as with the poppy on the wall beside me, there is color and the dark center has beauty. So I sit behind the keys of the computer with the wind in my hair and cruise as I unfold on paper.