

## Accelerando & Retardando

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“Accelerando!” shouts my daughter Abby, prompted by Leo from *The Little Einsteins* on television. We’re snuggled together in my bed, easing into our day together in the way I like best. The music speeds up, as do the kids in their rocket, hoping to avoid the shark. They escape trouble. But more trouble lies ahead. “Retardando!” Abby says, and the Einsteins and their theme music slow down, and safely achieve their objective, which is, in this particular episode, finding Baby Whale and reuniting him with his parents, using music, art and geography. The show works so well at captivating her attention, and my interest, that even on the mornings she sleeps in, I watch it. Occasionally it has a message that resonates with me throughout my day.

(Accelerando.) It’s 8:30 am, and *The Little Einsteins* are over. I need the kid in her clothes and ready, I need my car keys, I need my school books, I need my paperwork to drop off at the office before my networking trip to Olympia, and I need it all now. I need it all ten minutes ago, that’s how late I am. We get to the car and I realize I need shoes. I forgot the house keys inside, so I have to go through the side gate, over the gravel, up the steps, into the house. I get the shoes, run out the back door, slip, and skin my shin.

(Retardando.) We go to the coffee shop and are stuck in line behind a woman ordering a double tall half-caff soy macchiato. “No . . . wait . . . make that a single caff. Or . . . I dunno . . . how about just a single shot grande, nonfat, extra foam?” I get my own one hundred thirty degree venti nonfat latte, Abby’s cocoa, and her plain bagel. She eats about a bite, so I finish it—breakfast of champions. We get to her school. I get my day going.

(Accelerando.) The phone rings, and it’s my mom with *The Voice*.

“What’s up?” I volunteer as my heart speeds up. Already I know the voice, it’s the voice that engages me, makes me respond in anger, in frustration, in sorrow.

“Emineni is getting calls again from Terry, she wants you to go look at what you want from Janosbacsí’s things. Otherwise, Terry gonna take them.”

Her accented English, at once so familiar and so alienating to me, sets me on edge. So does the bitter tone, the tone that mourns the loss of her good friend while envying her sister the role of Mourning Widow.

I become a raw, festering wound around my mom, around the death of my uncle John. I don't want his belongings, his paintings, his rocks. And yet, I want his belongings, his paintings, his rocks. But I refuse to feel greedy, to look greedy.

"Mom," I say, "You know I don't have time right now, things are too nuts between school, and Abby, and my new job, and dealing with the house and Shawn . . ." I feel the lie even as I say it. I can make time, and the guilt of that self-admission ties itself like a noose around my neck.

(Retardando.) "Oh, ja, school, how you doing?" her tone changes.

"Fine." I'm growing surly, removed.

"You have to keep on with school." It's an entreaty, followed by her unspoken, "don't end up like me."

"I know, mom, I won't give it up." I'm impatient now.

"Ja. Well."

(Retardando.) I'm sitting on a wooden bench. Behind me is the Washington State Historical Museum. To my left is Union Station, though the pole I'm sitting beside has obscured the lettering to read "Union Sta on." In front of me, the Bridge of Glass, from which the blue-mineral candy lights jut. Just to the right of the bridge, the urban steel of the upside-down ice-cream cone Museum of Glass gleams. I'm here "observing" as part of a school assignment. But I'm multitasking, taking this moment to be, and feel, and rest. The breeze floats over me as the sound of traffic drones below me. I close my eyes, and breathe in the non-smells of my spot in Tacoma. Opening them, I see a small bird scurrying to the bushes, whose leaves muffle the sounds of traffic.

(Accelerando.) I hear the sounds of traffic differentiate into individual sounds. The Roar of the Harley. The Whoosh of the Semi. The increasing numbers of cars sound loud, and indistinct. The bird scampers, looking agitated as it seeks food, then flies away. A couple in comfortable shoes and linen shirts walk by me. They're followed by a group of four, not together, but looking like a family. A bus passes. The light-rail passes. The power washer across the street hums its ever-present song as a cigarette smoker

passes, wafting acrid smoke I try not to breathe in. The wind picks up, carrying my hair across my face, lifting my skirt into eddying swirls.

(Retardando.) The wind abates. The traffic murmurs under me, into its individual, indistinct sounds, as the power-washer hums. The sun seeps through my skirt, warming my thighs, while burning my arms, which I raise languidly, feeling the breeze cool my sweaty parts. I breathe in the clean non-smells of the broadleaf trees, grasses, evergreens, and small-leaf bushes of the drop-off just in front of me, expanding my lungs to stretch my chest, enjoying the feeling of openness within me.

(Accelerando.) Painting pottery, my friend is correcting my daughter for being angry at hers. I watched as her daughter, Ellie, hid a book from Abby, and I watched as Abby's frustration mounted. I watched my daughter speak assertive words to her friend, I watched Ellie shriek a plaintive wail in response, still hiding the book that Abby would like to see. I watch my friend champion her daughter.

My child says "she hid the book from me!"

Ellie shrieks, "I did NOT!"

Abby says "yes you did," eyebrows knit in consternation, and I watch as my friend's daughter cries harder, heart-broken that Abby is calling her a liar. I explain to my friend that her child did hide the book, and then watch as my friend continues to minimize Ellie's mean actions toward Abby with the words, "you two just had a miscommunication."

(Retardando.) I'm helping our ten year-old cousin Mia paint black on a platter, explaining that black is hard to paint with, a different color maybe? She spills paint, and I carefully mop it up. Abby cries softly and snuffles, then paints her own porcelain fairy as some sort of combo super-hero/evil bandito thing.

(Accelerando.) In the grocery store on the way home, Mia is grabbing my arm with her rock-climber grip. It hurts, I wince, she laughs. She sings a camp song about a gorilla in love. I need to eat, and I've forgotten to get the item we're here for. Finally at the checkout, I discover I've forgotten the milk. Mia is grabbing my arm, singing her camp song. Abby is laughing, acting as if she can sing it, too. It's an annoying song and I am hungry. We need milk. There are three people behind me. I have two kids. I look at the food on the belt, moving forward. I look back, toward the dairy case (so close), I grab my

small kid, tell the big kid to watch the food, smile apologetically at the check-out clerk and other customers, and sprint to get the milk.

(Retardando.) Then the trip home, passing by the green lawns, colorful flowers, water-lookout views of my favorite road through north Tacoma. The camp song is slightly less annoying now, perhaps because Mia isn't grabbing my arm. When we get home, I start bringing the seventeen bags of groceries inside. I need to put the groceries away. I need to eat, I'm so hungry.

(Accelerando.) Mother-in-law is at the house; the lawn guys (unpaid) are here, too. Shawn, his brother, and his brother's son are here, the washer that Shawn's brother needs to clean his camping gear is flooding, leaking water, broken, and I need food. I eat (salad)(standing) while putting away groceries. Then I pee, also a long overdue process. I go downstairs to try to see what the washing machine's issue is. Naturally, I can't figure it out. It's dribbly, wet, wrong.

The two kids paint and explode a royal blue integrated paint tube-and-brush thing all over the easel, the easel's tray, and the floor. They clean it up (so I won't freak out) with *white facial* washcloths (I inwardly freak out) and I spend an extra twenty minutes cleaning and raging. Abby is in victim mode, whining and crying. I'm welling up to burst ugly rage all over the walls like the exploded blue paint.

(Retardando.) But I go outside instead, to see the sun as it thinks of setting, to smell the clean non-smells of our back yard, and discover more, more I can't control, more that's going wrong in my chaotic world.

(Accelerando.) Shawn has replanted roses among the bed of lithadora. I wonder—will the lithadora die? Will the roses get mangy root rot? Shawn has uprooted my formerly prospering dianthus plant (left for dead on the sidewalk) and planted roses in a front bed. He has done all this to make me happy, to lighten my load. He has taken his day of rest and worked, hard. And he's done everything wrong, to my irrational mind. My rage wells. Then I have a glass of wine. Pop goes the cork as the neighborhood kids light their fireworks, pop! CRACK!

(Retardando) And then I have my first sip of wine, in the cool of the shade under the trees. I am breathing in the non-smells of the back yard, enjoying the breeze playing with my skirt, and then I taste another sip, reveling in the sour, sweet, fruity, bitter flavors on my tongue. The air show rages

and roars overhead, and I'm insulated. I replant some plants, reveling in the earthy smells under my fingernails. Later, I sit on the chaise lounge with Shawn, watching the puppies as they chase the bubbles Abby blows. Tank and Bill stalk bubbles, hunt bubbles, leap, bound, tire themselves out, and begin the process again. *Accelerando* and *Retardando*. Speed it up, bring it down. Speed it up, bring it down.