

MORE EXPERIMENTS WITH THE MYSTERIOUS PROPERTY OF ANIMAL MAGNETISM (1769)

**KATHRYN
NUERNBERGER**

Finding myself in a mesmeric orientation, before me appeared Benjamin Franklin, who magnetized his French paramours at dinner parties as an amusing diversion from his most serious studies of electricity and the ethereal fire. I like thinking about how he would have stood on tiptoe to kiss their buzzing lips and everyone would gasp and clap for the blue spark between them. I believe in an honest and forthright manner, a democracy of plain speech, so I have to find a way to explain I don't care to have sex anymore. Once I was a high school teacher and there was a boy who everyday came in late, who only came to school at all to sell drugs out of his backpack, upon which he laid his head like a pillow and closed his eyes while I pointed at a chart diagramming the anatomy of a sparrow. The vice principal was watching and taking notes as I taught this class, so I slid the bag from under his cheek, as if not to wake him, wrapped his fingers around a pen. I was trying

to be a gentle mother and also trying
to show I was in control of an unstable
situation. The boy, also trying to be
in control of himself, walked so slow
to my desk and we stood to watch him
push everything – binders, piles of ungraded
papers, a beaker of red pens to the floor.
He was so calm. *How do you like it when
I touch your things.* I do not like it. I live
in a house with many blue mason jars,
each containing a feather collection or starfish
collection or vertebrae collection, and also
there is a fully articulated fetal alligator skeleton.
Each window is pressed by the design
of a sweetgum branch, all the little orange
and red stars of its leaves, you can't see
the perfect geometry this close, just haphazard
parabolas, but beneath the foundation
the roots mirror the branching. I have
a chart of this to pull down. The view is flat
and so quiet on the inside. Have I been
forthright yet? What I want to know is
what happens if I decide to never have sex
again? Or more precisely, can I decide
to not have sex again and still be kind?
And be a joy to others? I should mention
I am a wife. I should mention I was told
my sole purpose is to be joy to others.
The sidewalks outside are very full of people
and when I look at them I feel hopeless.
Benjamin Franklin was so jolly with his kite
and his key and his scandalous electricity.
He was so in love with women and drink
and democracy. Before I was this way,

I was not a house, I was just a jar and what I wanted was to be broken. A cool trick you can do I once showed a class, is crank a wheel covered in felt against another felt wheel. Static bristles and sparks and makes your hair stand on end. But hook it to a leyden jar and the electricity fills up in there, invisible as air. Becomes a glass battery, until you too much the thing, then wow! broken glass everywhere. I remember wanting that. Do I have to always want that? My house is blue and quiet. I can hardly hear the squirrel in my sweetgum tree dancing like a sunbeam to sing his riddles: "A house full, a hole full, but you cannot gather a bowl full." The air of everywhere is wet with electric fluid, you can't even tell, but pop, whiz, everywhere. "In this field," Ben says, "the soul has room enough to expand, to display all of her extravagances." The sweetgum has 10,000 sticky, spiky seed balls. They start green but grow black and fall for want of a barren season. They look like sea urchins. I call them tree urchins and think it's a funny joke. I don't tell it to anyone, as I am tired of being told what is not. Such a secret, I know, is an extravagance, and I like best how it's an extravagance so small you must keep it in a jar with others of its kind for it to ever mean anything all.