

SpeechGeek



Season Four: Nationals 2007



ISSN 1545-9209 Price \$25 US
<http://www.speechgeek.com>

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SpeechGeek is published three to four times per year: August, October, December, and (sometimes) April by Corey Alderdice, 959 Morgantown Rd., Apt. 3, Bowling Green, Kentucky 42101

<http://www.speechgeek.com>

Here we are, fellow speechies, at the end of yet another wonderful season. That only leaves one final note: Nationals.

I have to admit that the idea of the national tournaments was different to me as a high school competitor than most students. I thought it was just an honor to make it to nationals. After all, I was one of the best in my state.

I missed the point.

Why give up at being the big fish in a small pond? I should have worked harder and been ready rather than resting on my accomplishments. What I picked up from nationals was a wealth of lessons and performance styles. New ideas abound in the environment of the national tournament--lessons that can be taken into the next season.

Moreover, I met one of my future college forensics teammates at nationals that year. Take the chance to meet new people from across the county. There is more to this activity than the competition and trophies. Enjoy the people.

Enjoy the ride. After all, it's the last of the season.

Corey Alderdice
Publisher

Breaking the Water

by Lorraine White

Standing knee deep in a net full of tuna, I'm struck by the thought of Christine. I watch the wet wriggling fish bodies squirm and flail in a perverse, slimy dance orgy. All I can think about is my wife's—

Christine's—expanding belly. She's gained sixty pounds during the pregnancy and can't hold her pee for longer than thirty minutes – but she's still as beautiful as the day I married her. She's seven and a half months pregnant and somewhere deep inside her swollen gut is this thing – this baby of ours – floating around in water.

"It's raining like a bastard out here and you're studying the fish like they're a friggin' book?" Mickey shouts, breaking my concentration. Mickey is a human skid mark, a waste of organs that could go to save someone's dying grandmother, husband, or child.

"What are they gonna do – walk themselves over to the market?" Mickey continues.

I reply: "Fish don't have feet, idiot."

"Oh, tough kid over here is trying to get all scientific."

"Shut your pie hole, Mickey, or I swear to God I'll shut it for you."

I fight the urge to throw the first thing I can grab. I consider tossing a fish at his head, but why ruin its last seconds of life? I wouldn't do that to the fish.

I've worked with the North East Atlantic Fishery and Market for going on about twelve years now. Christine and I have been together for eight. In the beginning, the smell of my clothes made Christine sick. I'd come home from a day out on the boat and the smell of salt, fish, and sweat clinging to my clothes made her gag.

"God, you smell like the restroom in hell's seafood kitchen."

Either she got used to the smell or gave up complaining because for the past five years we've been living the dream. I hit the boat with the other boys and make the familiar trek out to sea and back to the markets. She works as an "administrative assistant" with the temp agency. It's hard for Christine to understand why I would want to spend my life with the fishery – why the prospect of being stranded on a boat with a bunch of other guys, hauling and loading fish day in and day out would make me happy. Working for a fishery, she insists, isn't something kids dream of becoming. I said, "Yeah, well...we can't all grow up to be computer jockeys, but somehow I'll manage."

There's a comfort that comes with trusting your life in the hands of co-workers. Your butt is on the line out there, like when the ropes start to give way and you've got a half ton net full of fish dripping and dangling over you, or when there's a wicked storm that's looking to turn your boat into a swimming pool. Even if your co-workers are jerks – they're the jerks who are going to fix the ropes and keep the boat from overturning. Is working for the fishery "emotionally fulfilling"? 'Course not. I don't care if it is or isn't. I'm not looking for a bunch of sweaty men on a boat to keep me "emotionally fulfilled".

Two nights ago – I shot straight up in bed, covered in sweat. I keep

having these weird dreams about Christine and the baby. Sometimes she's breast feeding and when she goes to hand me the baby, it has a mustache and is speaking to me in Spanish. On this night, I dreamt that when Christina's water broke, no baby came out. The doctor kept reaching around, but there was no baby. So then, the doctor starts going deeper and at this point he's in there up to his shoulder's trying to deliver this kid— I say, "Hey pal, that's my wife" and he says, "Don't worry – sometimes they migrate" before stopping and saying, "Yep – there we go. I got it." So the doctor pulls out a ten pound Alaskan Perch from Christine's womb, flicking its tail and its mouth wide open. The doctor hung it upside down to measure it, musing, "That's a big 'un right there." In the dream, all I can manage to say is "Your darn right it is."

This is Christina's second pregnancy. We had tried a couple of years ago to have a baby and went through the routine of vitamins, doctors visits, and preparing the baby's room. A few weeks before the baby was due – the doctor had discovered that it had twisted and wriggled around in the womb and was tangled in the umbilical cord. She told Christina the staff would induce labor, but the baby would be stillborn. So I stood by her in the silent delivery room. There was no rush of doctors, no mother screaming "You did this to me," or over rehearsed Lamaze...just Christina's grunting and pushing. The doctor pulled out a tiny, wet, bluish gray lump that appeared to be sleeping. Christina kept her eyes closed, waited for them to take it away. To take him away. But to her, if she didn't see him – he didn't exist. If we didn't talk about – it never happened. It's there, though, this gray lumpy cloud hovering over us. We just don't see any point in lamenting the one that got away. Those things just happen.

Between putting in her earrings and pouring out women's nutritional vitamins into her hand, an occupational epiphany occurs to Christine. "I don't think I want to return to the temp agency when my maternity leave is up."

"Come again?" I respond, as I feel the ground beneath me start to sway. I'm not looking for her to repeat her last statement. I'm waiting to make sure she isn't completely out of her mind.

"My job. I don't want to go back to work after the baby is born."

"Sweetheart," I say, "This kid isn't a 'get out of work free' pass, you know. We've got a lot of bills and having a baby is just gonna add to the money strain."

Christine rolls her eyes as if to cast shame on me for allowing the thought to cross my mind. "I know that. I just don't want our child to grow up like the other kids in the neighborhood."

"What's wrong with the kids up the block?"

"They're delinquents, dear. I saw three of them chasing the fourth around with a bat."

"He was probably a Yankees fan from across the river. Christine – don't worry, our kid will be fine."

"Raising a kid these days isn't that effortless. This is a child. They need guidance and love. This baby, our family, needs stability. It needs me here at home, until the child is old enough for school." She at least has the courtesy to allow me to respond before declaring that she has made up her mind.

"You're right." I tell her. I feel the ground beneath me start to swell and rock. I don't tell Christine just how wrong she may be, but I'll figure something out. We'll find a way to push through.

So for those of you keeping score at home – fishing is an issue of supply

Man of Steel

by Joseph Conway

For the past 23 minutes and 32 seconds, I've been engaged in a heated staring contest with our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Sadly, gambling odds favor the Son of God.

For the record, I'm not crazy.

Not officially. Not yet, anyhow. Right now, I'm just bored.

For the past 28 minutes and 12 seconds I've been sitting in the waiting room of a counselor's office, bathing in the blank smell of sterilized plastic chairs and sitting among a fanned-out semi-circle of *Good Housekeeping Magazines*, *Hunting and Fishing Weekly's*, and *Don't Kill Yourself Digests*, all of them are so old and worn out they look like, I don't know, the transient homeless of the publishing world, waiting to die slow, unnoticed deaths on psychiatrists' coffee tables.

I sit and stare at the poster of Jesus. I make a deal with God.

"God", I say to myself, "if I can out-stare Jesus Christ, then it is a sign that I can leave. That I don't need help. That this is just a test."

For the past 4 years, 3 months, and 22 days – I haven't felt a thing. Emotionally, nothing. Rage, sadness, joy, nothing. You could put in a gun in my face and I couldn't even feel faint. Empty.

If I kicked puppies or laughed at nuns with eye patches, I'd be called a heartless bastard. But I don't. so I'm not. And now I'm left staring at a yellowed poster of Jesus – waiting for a sign from God that this too, shall pass. Dr. Linda opens the door, makes eye contact with me, and gestures with her clipboard to follow her. As I turn to her, I notice out of the corner of my eye, Jesus winking.

Dammit.

I've been seeing Dr. Linda for the past eight months, in an effort to resolve the overwhelming belief that I have become a human potato - a lump of white, starchy, blank mass staring out into the world with unfamiliar eyes. The potato metaphor was Dr. Linda's idea. "Describe how you see yourself." I don't know. Sarah would have laughed. Addressing her as Dr. Linda was also Dr. Linda's idea, thinking that a first name basis would be more intimate and conducive to what she calls a "healthy expression of emotion."

Dr. Linda's office is decorated in a way that tries desperately to be considered comforting. Everything is soft. Rugs, soft. Couch, soft. Throw pillows, soft. Dr. Linda, soft. At first glance, Dr. Linda appears to be the love child of Mrs. Claus and Bea Arthur: rounded face and beady jolly eyes resting beneath a mop of kinked out silver curls. Her appearance is that of the perennial grandmother figure, but don't be fooled. Dr. Linda has been through some shit in life. Cervical cancer, a son in jail, a husband killed doing missionary work in South America. Dr. Linda has even been involved in a bank robbery. Hostage, not perpetrator, though the latter would make for more interesting conversations. Despite getting the relative short end of the stick, Dr. Linda still sits quietly and listens intently, smiling with unquestionable faith in Jesus and cognitive reformation.

Dr. Linda begins our conversational dance that has grown to be a ritual over the months. Our own little waltz of psycho-babble and pleasantries. Cope-2-3, journal-3-4, so-what-I'm-hearing-2-3, barriers-3-4 and dip. It's really quite lovely. Only this time, she leaves me lingering in the dip. Dr. Linda holds my gaze and

decides that today – we'll talk about Sarah.

I stare blankly back. "What. Uh...what's there to talk about?"

Dr. Linda looks over her glasses and says, "John."

"I mean. Uh. Okay. My wife is dead. She died. What. What else is there to say?"

"John."

I would like to get out of the dip, please.

John, Dr. Linda says again.

Dr. Linda is frustrated with me. I don't blame her, I'm frustrated with me as well. I mean, I get the obvious. I get it. Man's otherwise healthy wife dies three months after being diagnosed with a rare terminal illness. Man shuts down. Man can't feel a thing. I get it. Not hard to wrap my head around. This isn't an elongated attempt to seem strong. To appear okay. I think there's a stutter in my brain preventing the feeling part from getting anything out. Or maybe my heart is like a dead battery in the car engine – making that rrrrinnininnin – rrrrinnininnin sound when it can't turn over and start.

Dr. Linda confirms that it's not unusual for someone to shut down after a traumatic experience. I'm having trouble re-booting my emotional circuitry, it seems. I've had people die before. I've had family members die. This is the first time that I've gone completely blank.

I couldn't cry at Sarah's funeral.

I stood by her casket and stared as if gazing into a box of donuts pondering if I were in a glazed or coconut icing sort of mood. I stood by my wife's grieving parents as they fell apart over the loss of their daughter. I stood by my wife's grave as dozens upon dozens of mourners came to me with puffy eyes, snot drained noses, shredded wads of Kleenex, and condolences of she was beautiful and she's in a better place now.

If my life were a movie of the week, at this point someone would have inevitably said, "Hmm...tall widower shows no sign of emotion over wife's sudden death. I smell foul play." No, no foul play. Everyone who knew us knew that I loved Sarah with such a whole-hearted devotion one would think I was borderline codependent. I don't know why I couldn't shed a tear when Sarah died. Why I still can't cry.

For the past few years I've tried everything. I mean everything. I've seen every religious leader in a 20-mile radius. I've sat in church, got right with God, found Jesus, praised Mohammed, spoke to Buddha, you name it – I've gotten down with that deity at some point. I've been on uppers. I've been on downers. I've had behavioral modification. I've symbolically and ritualistically put away all of Sarah's personal belongings. I've meditated and ohm-ed so much my lips went numb. I've gone to a psychic. I've had my tarot cards read. I've realigned my chi. I've changed my diet. I've been vegan. I've done yoga and Pilates. I've had tree bark and wheat grass farts explode from my bowels while downward facing dog-ing and chanting some Tibetan monk thing and though the old me would have laughed at how far from myself I had gone, in the end – I was the tin man. A man of steel. Cold. Empty. An artificial human.

Dr. Linda lets out a "Well..." as if she were a tire leaking air.

There is one last option, she says, one of the latest trends in psychology called therapeutic enviro-realignment. The thought is that society has evolved to a state that is foreign to the human condition. Humans are over civilized. That

The Shepherd of Chi-town

by Doug Osgood

You've only got five seconds to hook 'em and if you can keep their attention for longer than a minute – you've got them and almost guaranteed to pull in a dollar or two. There's a few idiots out here who just try too hard. They're too desperate and needy, just begging for attention, hollering and looking like damn fools. The ones that do well – that bring home fat juicy wads of money and get all the huzzahs – know how to shepherd effectively, that's all there is to it. An audience is like a flock of sheep – only on the streets of Chicago – these are pissed off sheep wearing suits and ties or pulling screaming toddlers behind them, their eyes locked on the cement or staring aggressively forward. A shepherd knows how to grab their attention – how to pull them under his control without the sheep feeling controlled and how to – ever so gracefully – make them forget about everything else in the world. Once you've done that – you've got them.

Check your watch.

One minute, and I've gotcha. Baa-baa, baby.

You'd be surprised how many people think street performers have the mental capacity of a four-year old. Somehow – people look at a guy juggling on a street corner and think that I'm some sweater-vest wearing, bible-toting, milk-drinking, old lady-walking goodie two-shoes. Don't get me wrong, I'm a nice guy. I would venture to say that I border on inherently awesome most days. I don't go out of my way to irritate people and the days where I have altercations are few and far between. But once a week, at least, I get heckled by some random meat-head. He'll be walking down the streets in uniform – some baggy jeans, oversized jersey, and wearing his insecurity like he bought that wholesale as well. Wrapped around his arm is a petite girl with highlights who is either too nice or too stupid to realize that she's dating something that should be tagged, sterilized, and released into the wild.

I'm juggling, and at this point there's usually about a half dozen people gathered around. I'm chatting up the people, inviting them to come over and learn a few performance tricks – anything from pantomime to dance, juggling, or magic. But I'm always juggling when the meatheads come around because they always use the same line when the girl stops to watch. They laugh a *huh-huh-huh* and say, "*Hey dude, nice balls.*" Thinking the crowd will giggle and I'll ignore them, not expecting me to say, "Thanks, your girlfriend can't seem to take her eyes off them." The crowd bellows out an "Ohhhh!" and the guy is pretty much left defenseless because you can't kick a street clown's ass in the middle of a crowd. It's like – the law. Clown, one. Meathead – zero.

As a kid – all I ever did was crack jokes around my mom and pops. They weren't bad people – just unhappy – stuck in a loveless marriage and paying mortgage on a bi-level house in a suburb 10 miles outside of Chicago. Most people don't give kids enough credit. Granted – most eight year-olds lack the cranial capability to do things like balance the checkbook, get a full-time job, or counsel parents on how its impossible to make someone be who you want them to be – but those are just details. Kids don't get details – but they're smart enough to get an idea of the big picture. One September, we had spent four nights in a row eating silently around the dinner table. I stared down at my

mashed potatoes and peas and listened to the *clink clink scrape* of forks hitting porcelain plates. I glanced up at my mom. *Clink, clink, scrape.* I turned my head at watched my dad *clink clink scrape.* No, "Hey kiddo, how was your day?" Just the mind-numbing sound of *clink clink scrape.* I knew I couldn't handle it a fifth night in a row.

So the next night, after everyone had already sat down and prepared to eat – I exploded into the dining room with a pair tightie-whities pulled over my head so that my left eye stuck out of one of the leg holes and a red bed-sheet tied around my neck. My parents stared at me in stunned silence, my mother inquiring – "Sweetie, what are you wearing."

"Mother," I sang, "I'm the Phaaaaaaaantom of the Opera and cannot speak to you unless you siiiiiing...now, before I finish...would you be so kind to pass the spinach?"

They stared blankly at me – which in the mind of an eight-year-old translates into "Do it again, only bigger and louder" so I burst into a gyrating and grunting song of "Unh. Yeah. Unh unh. Yeeeeeaaahhhh pass the peas unh pass the peas unh oh yeah baby please unh pass me the peas." They began giggling and indulged me – my mother singing, "So darling how was your day?" my father, "Dear it was fine in every way." A little off-pitch – but more pleasing to the ear than the scraping of flatware. Dinners became a time to be silly – an opportunity to entertain my parents at the end of the day. I couldn't make them love each other – not the way they needed to. But I could make them laugh. By making them laugh – they weren't focused on bills or unspoken tension. They focused on me. And like the perfect entertainer – I never failed to deliver.

My life is a show. An act. An illusion. My interpersonal interactions are nothing more than the slight of hand mixed with dead-on comic timing. You put me in a group of people – and I know how to shepherd them. I know within five minutes of entering a party how to get everyone in the room to laugh at me, how to get them to adore me. I put people at ease, make them feel prettier and smarter than they really are. This always frustrated my girlfriend Vanessa. She's constantly on my case because "everything is a joke" with me. She says, "I want to date you – not the street performer. Even clowns take off their make-up when they go home at night." But I wouldn't have it any other way – because when people are laughing – they're not asking questions. They're not looking at your list of failures, they're not passing judgment on who you are as a person, not asking you to take life so seriously. When they can't help but laugh – it means you're in control, and they're at a distance. And when they're at a distance – you're safe. You just gotta stay on the stage.

So it's a bright and breezy Sunday afternoon in May and I've taken up temporary residence near Buckingham Fountain where most families and young couples stop by to check out the water and light show. It's a high traffic area of people willing to throw street performers some change and if you're lucky – some paper currency. So I start working the crowd – inviting young kids to try and juggle some foam balls I have with me – I throw in some dancing, balancing and get a nice little crowd started. I begin juggling when I hear a distinct *clink, clink, scrape* – only it's less like the sound of forks hitting plates and is actually the sound of a young woman's purse that's been knocked over and spilled across the sidewalk. I continue to juggle while reciting my usual witty lines on auto-pilot and split my focus between the crowd and the young woman. She's kneeling down and scraping the contents of her purse off the ground while a tall and stocky man hovers over her, shaking his head and refusing to bend down to help her. People

Scene 1

GWEN. Hello? Oh, hello Ted. Yeah. Yeah, okay...so far at least. And you? That's great. Mm-hm. Did Susan have the baby? Ah. Another 3 weeks? Oh, I bet you're excited. Yeah. About five minutes, just walked in the door. No, I haven't seen him yet. No. He said what? Really...uh huh. *(Andrew enters, over hears phone conversation, starts to leave when Gwen snaps her fingers at him and exchanges a look)* Uh huh. Nice. Uh huh. Mmm. Okay. Yeah. *Laughs* Not when I'm done with him he won't. Okay Mr. Martin. Okay. Yeah. You take care. *(Hangs up phone, Andrew starts to leave, again)* No, you don't. You. Short stack. Here. *Now.*

ANDREW. *(Irritated)* What?

GWEN. Watch it.

ANDREW. What?

GWEN. Watch the tone.

ANDREW. Ugh. *Fine.*

GWEN. Excuse me?

ANDREW. Sorry.

GWEN. Thank you.

ANDREW. Yeah, yeah. My pleasure.

GWEN. I bet. So how was school today?

ANDREW. Riveting. Absolutely phenomenal. You'd never believe it, ma. There I was, just sitting, minding my own business in fifth period science when all of the sudden – Sir Isaac Newton himself *resurrected from the grave*, and used his own decomposing head to demonstrate the laws of gravity.

GWEN. Andrew...

ANDREW. The janitor had to use that sawdust powder they use when kids puke to clean up all the pus and junk from his rotting corpse.

GWEN. Andrew, that's disgusting.

ANDREW. Not as disgusting as when a girl in class slipped on one of his eyeballs and landed butt-first in a pile of maggots.

GWEN. Stop it, you're making me nauseous.

ANDREW. Heh. Better get the sawdust then, mom.

GWEN. Funny. I got a call from the school counselor, Mr. Martin this afternoon.

ANDREW. Oh.

GWEN. Yeah. Take a wild guess as to what it was about.

ANDREW. I dunno.

GWEN. I think you do.

(Andrew doesn't respond.)

GWEN. It seems that a certain someone who, by the way, is just barely passing English by the skin of his teeth, has been excessively tardy to this class after lunch. When this certain someone is questioned by the English teacher as to why he is so tardy – all of these wonderful stories emerge about his father taking him out of

school to go to whisk him away to fancy restaurants for lunch because the father believes, quote: "The nutritional value of meals provided in the public school system have yet to be determined, end quote." The funny thing is, the principal's office has no record of the father stopping by to pick up this student. Which makes sense – given that this certain someone's father lives *three states away*. Any possible explanations?

ANDREW. Well...air travel has become far more affordable – but the father was probably too busy to think about signing out...

GWEN. *(cuts him off, angry)* DAMMIT, Andrew!

(pause)

ANDREW. Sorry. I'm sorry.

GWEN. "Sorry" people change.

ANDREW. I know.

GWEN. I can't keep fielding phone calls from teachers at school about the ridiculous amount of crap that seems to stream from your mouth on any given day.

ANDREW. I don't get what the big deal is. I bet if I made better grades, you'd call it "*imaginative fiction*".

GWEN. Then get a pen and write it down, Grisham. You're busted.

Scene 2

ANDREW. *(calling out)* Mom! Hey mom! *(sniffs)* Oh god...what are you cooking for dinner – the floor of an outhouse?

GWEN. *(calls from off-stage)* It's Tuna Helper, funny guy.

ANDREW. Mmm. *(Sees her purse and begins to rummage through it)* Even better. Hey mom...can I borrow some money?

GWEN. No.

ANDREW. Seriously?

GWEN. Very seriously.

(Beat. Andrew takes money out of wallet and puts in his back pocket anyway)

GWEN. Where have you been?

ANDREW. Huh?

GWEN. I said, where have you been?

ANDREW. Uh, out with friends. Why?

GWEN. Have you been in my purse?

ANDREW. What?

GWEN. Stop acting stupid, Andrew.

ANDREW. It's not an act. I don't know what you're talking about.

GWEN. Have you been going through my wallet?

ANDREW. No, why?

GWEN. Andrew, there's twenty dollars missing from my wallet.

ANDREW. That's weird. Are you sure you didn't spend it and forget?

GWEN. Not likely. So, where did you and your friends go?

ANDREW. Out.

GWEN. Out where?

ANDREW. To the movies.

GWEN. Uh huh. Where'd you get the money for that?

ANDREW. I borrowed it.

Why I Tutor at the Int'l Center

by Grace Bruenderman

It looks good on a resumé
I look nice for volunteering
I look nice to the hot Russian receptionist
who sees me volunteering, so I can
say his name I've been practicing
that sounds like Bak Bak,
bakvar-ack, what's his
name (so I can learn to pronounce
said Russian guy's name)
Because I have forgotten how
important words are lately.
I have forgotten the thrown out drug out
shiny spiny quality of the way words hold
on to the rungs of my tongue, how English
knocks itself together with its click clacks and
talk backs so stiff it is as if my Ps and Qs have
learned to walk on stilts and crawl
into the International
Center tutoring room.

Because here I sit, trying to spit English
to a man whose writing looks like circle circle
dot swirl, swiggity-swirlin'
round like a whirling dervish
on paper to me, while he explains to me
that the letter A to he
really just looks like a triangle with a tightrope
in the middle, and don't get him started on B.
And his language, Arabic, just look like
fancy sticks that have learned to dance so very
flexibly to me.

But...

after weeks we learn to speak
words like mother father niece nephew
learn just enough for him to spew,
"I miss my family. I miss my niece.
I miss my m-o-t-h-e-r, moth-mouth-moth
Muuuuther.
He tells me that the Arabic language is like
water, like the ocean. It is wide and it is flowing and he
can pull whatever he wants from it, sail his
words like boats on it, and I tell him
he could be a poet.
I make that stupid English rhyme
"You're a poet and you don't even know it,"
but instead of laughing he kind of stops and asks
"What's poet?"

And I stop. I have taught him rivers of
have has had was were will all the chewed up
verbiage from the "Marta and her dog" book series
the queries on why he thinks our coffee tastes like crap
how the p-h is a "f" sound, and
how "c" is just one crazy letter on the wrong side of town
that goes "c" and goes "sss" and goes "ch" but now
I frown and tell him to put his Arabic-English dictionary down
because:

"You are a poet, Abdulghani."
You are a poet. When you rub noses
to greet me, take the time to fry rhymes in
your fresh baked bread sweetly and neatly
wrapped up in your swirls that I am trying to get
when you
remember that your daughter has your grandmother's face
when you tell me you rescued that mutt that's been hanging
around outside your place from those evil American dog catcher faces
you are a poet. When you tell me you want to put English in jars,
when you want to pickle "onomotopeia" and "pi-men-to" just for their
flow, you you you are a poet.

And we have come so far from a "My name is Grace"
"The dog is brown"
"The cat is yellow"
"How much does that cost?"s and
"I live on the corner of 1312 Chestnut St."

But even before he could call a jar a jar
before he could say "the ocean really goes that far?"
we both knew that we were friends.
Before he knew what words to send sails
across his Arabic ocean, I could see in f-a-c-e
things were changing up there, down here, that
he was changing me. And I feel so
freaking hopeful if I vomited
it would probably come up as candy hearts.

It is Tuesday when I tutor
and Abdulghani is not here,
but I hear from another teacher
some college boys got to him.
They told him to go home
back track to his own country,
get rid of his beard, and called him
a little somethin' somethin'
they thought was funny
like towel-head or Aladdin
but he didn't understand them,
at least not the words, not the verbs
they threw at him. But he saw their
faces, and sometimes, that is enough.
Sometimes, a look can tell hate well enough.