

RUTH TANG

From WORK HARD HAVE FUN MAKE HISTORY

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *WORK HARD HAVE FUN MAKE HISTORY* is a fragmented collection of forced everyday speech between strangers, of polite chatter, of routine transactional conversation—customer-service representatives, phone-sex partners, cold callers, future children calling into the past, prophets calling about the future, and Jeff and Elon, the last survivors of a great disaster on Earth.

EDITORS' NOTE: Inclusion or omission of punctuation is purposeful, and used to indicate tone and speed.



(This is the first time the bodies onstage are the bodies that are also talking. It should look like a TED talk, a stage Q&A at a fancy event, and both people have nice chairs and fancy bottled water.)

ELON: Do you think they'll be okay

Those who were on the harbor waving and sometimes screaming
as we left

JEFF: Oh those we left behind?

Nah they're fucked. Why would you even ask that
You know they're fucked.

ELON: I guess I'm hoping for like an eleventh-hour thing

Person to show up and stop the screaming
It's just I've always been told that must happen, like the fourth law
of physics or something

JEFF: You know anyone? Of those screaming?

ELON: Not strictly speaking.

JEFF: Unstrictly then

ELON: I don't know if I wanna say

JEFF: Come on man

It's just us here

We're the ones who made it, and there's no one that can judge us
for what we did

...

I'm a good listener.

ELON: Well, I suppose there was

My dogsitter

That TaskRabbit guy who came around that one time to steam-clean
the carpets

The cyclist I doored and he maybe sorta kinda died but it wasn't
serious

My mom but we don't talk anymore

JEFF: Oh boy.

That's rough.

It must be. Hard?

*(He's just repeating shit he heard somewhere else, in some other time,
possibly for a completely different occasion. It's not insincere.)*

JEFF: I had a hard time too, before I completely changed my way of
thinking

The thing is . . . The thing is you gotta think about it completely
different like

Like

...

Wouldn't they be happy for you? Yeah! Yeah.

Wouldn't they be happy for you that you're here and not there
screaming with them

because screaming isn't a very pleasant group activity
and I know

I know, I don't just think,
that those I Left Behind are smiling really, inside,
for me
The person who made it

ELON: What is the fourth law of physics

(A silence that ELON reads as thoughtful and JEFF reads as spacey.)

JEFF: You

Aw man

You

Were you even listening

I was pouring my heart out to you, man

It was hard, it was a favor that I did for you

because you told me a heartfelt secret and so I told you a heartfelt
secret

...

You gonna say something?

ELON: I don't have heartfelt secrets really.

JEFF: But you just

Your mom?

ELON: I meant it loosely

We never talked

JEFF: I'd die for my mom.

ELON: That's nice. Where is she?

JEFF: I don't know. I didn't see her on the harbor screaming but it was her favorite activity, screaming I mean, not being on a harbor near the sea, she hated the sea, so maybe I'm a little disappointed and hurt that she wasn't there. When it was her favorite thing to do and the last time she could see me. I told her that it was the last time she could see me.

ELON: What did she say

JEFF: I don't know I wasn't listening

...

But I meant it

I

Would

Die

For

Her

Don't fucking test me

ELON: I wasn't going to say

JEFF: Okay, it's just

I hate when

It's just

I hate when people make that assumption, ya know?

That I didn't love her because I can't remember things like that
that aren't even important

Like the real color of her hair

or her coffee order or like like the top five people she loved most

...

I'm a good listener. Just not a good rememberer.

ELON: I'm not either

Just right now I was trying to remember the fourth law of physics

I tried reciting the first three in my head, but it occurred to me that

I only know one

The one about the equal and opposite reaction

Do you know the one about the equal and opposite reaction?

JEFF: I think that's apposite actually

As in appropriate reaction

ELON: I don't—

JEFF: Like every force has an equal and apposite reaction
Like if I said something to my mom that was
Not mean
Just
Inattentive maybe is what she would call it
Like she would say Were you listening? Were you even paying fuck-
ing attention to the fucking important things I was telling you
that will be the most fucking important things in your life from
now on?
Inattentive
I would consider that an *in*apposite reaction
Ya know?
All I wanted was to be inside my own head for a while but she
wouldn't let me
and then she would just explode, explode like her mother had
and her mother's mother before her
and her mother's mother's mother before her
She said everything gets passed down and that's why I had to listen
To find out what I'd gotten and to figure out if it was good

ELON: I really don't think that's the fourth law
If there is one
I'm beginning to think there isn't one

JEFF: (*impatient*) It doesn't matter
What matters now is
...
What matters now is we are the only ones left
and we have to rebuild everything
We were chosen to rebuild everything because we were the most
important ones with the most important visions
Unencumbered by the people we might have known once
Even moms

ELON: Yeah. Yeah. I get you. I just think that this fourth law is the key
to something.

JEFF: It's not. Now pay some fucking attention.

ELON: To you?

JEFF: Yeah to me. I built this entire city we're in right now
with the money that I made
Which I was very good at
I had a vision for this city that would replace the cities that were
burning
back on Earth where nothing was good anymore,
everything had been dug out of the earth and the air had been filled
to bursting
There just wasn't space anymore for the things that were important
in life
Ya know? There wasn't space and I wanted to make more space
Which I knew a person could only do with money
so I made lots and lots of money
People died? People died
but that is the price of a city that creates the space for the important
things in life
...
Okay.
Now you go.

ELON: Me?

JEFF: Pitch me
Pitch me your vision of the future that we can have in this city

ELON: Just us?

JEFF: Us and all the people that understand the important things in life
Such as the way that derivatives work

ELON: They're a sort of financial instrument?
But okay. Okay. A moment here.

I'm not known for the speed of my thought but for its maverick
originality
and my idea to put all the cars in tunnels
Which I personally put into motion and now we all live like naked
mole rats under the earth
That is the way of the future

...

Okay. My pitch
My pitch for the future of this new city
is that it will be the last great empire
I mean the last because there will be no better
In the last empire first of all we will all be happy
That is the only rule of the last empire
And to make us happy the important things in life will all be taken
care of
No worries
Getting ready for work in the morning and you run out of deodor-
ant? Instantly
there is a giant room filled with shelves of every object that runs out
Instantly your need registers on a screen
and this screen is a screen that someone is holding
and that someone walks to the shelf with the new deodorant that
you need
and puts it in a box
and tapes up this box
and prints a label and sticks it to the box
and hands it to another person who gets into their truck
and they drive for hours until they get to your door
and they ring your doorbell but of course you are at work, deodor-
antless
but it is okay because they have anticipated your absence
and you have anticipated their presence and left a key in a secure
place that is definitely not under your doormat
and they let themselves into your home
your beautiful but tiny home that is only lacking deodorant
And they leave the box
This all happens in two minutes and forty seconds

because your neighbor might be out of dog food
and the woman downstairs needs a new bottle brush
and the man in the car outside needs to buy a condolence card
because he feels it likely that someone in his life is about to die

JEFF: Elon?

ELON: Yes Jeff

JEFF: You're stealing my life's work.