



Dear Cora,¹

My train stopped suddenly between Newmarket and Cambridge. Something to do with a signalling problem. Outside I could just make out brambles and a large muddy field with a grey horse pacing its edges. The lights flickered for a second before dying. My thoughts travelled onwards, up the carriages with confused pale faces looking out, past the driver, out into the dusk, up into the grey filamentous clouds.

I thought about light. Light, travelling. Light is light. It weighs nothing and yet if you ever reach its speed your mass increases infinitely and time slows down. Imagine this train suddenly moving off again, going faster and faster until it's as fast as light. When it stops again in 40 minutes (let's forget the distance) at King's Cross, you will be dead. The faster the train goes, the heavier everything will be. My phone will weigh a hundred tons. I won't be able to hold it up and call you. Imagine trying to pick up my book, or my pair of trousers and three pairs of socks. You always tell me I hardly bring enough. Perhaps this is why. The further I go, the heavier I get. The faster I leave, the longer it feels I've been away from you and the older you seem.

How is it for you? Does it seem to fly by, time? They say time speeds up the older you are. Does that make you feel heavier or slower?

I imagine you now, sitting in that uncomfortable chair, your legs stiffening and swelling. I want to come back to you. But the train starts, the lights flick back on, the bramble and the field and the horse rush by the window and my thoughts come back to me from the dark like so many photons. I lift my suitcase from the table, and I find that it isn't heavy after all. Perhaps it was all left with you.

I will come by sooner next time, I promise. I might bring more with me.

Love,
Michael^{2,3}

Notes:

1. We asked Michael Bennett for some background to his letter, and he sent us the following:

'It's addressed to an aunt, who was born in 1936. She worked in houses, for rich families, as most young girls of her class had to. She cooked, cleaned, and, once married, kept a cottage by working for the farm it was attached to. She had seven siblings, and all but one has died. She doesn't write letters. She does crossword puzzles and knits. One of her brothers had two children, and the children depended very much on their aunt as a mother figure; as someone who was gentle, selfless, patient and wise. When their parents died, the children still had someone who could tell them stories about their past, and so they didn't feel so lost. One of them, the boy, left home to study, and his experience of travelling is inextricable from trains. Each time he travels back it becomes harder to leave. Each time he brings more items to his aunt's house and leaves with fewer, so that it seems he's not really left.'

2. Michael Bennett was born in 1987 and grew up in Suffolk. He has had short stories published by *Litro* and *the Lampeter Review*, and appears on *Visual Verse*. Whilst not writing he enjoys looking at plants through lenses and playing the viola. In his spare time he works at a university, on the admin side.

3. The illustration here is from David Rittenhouse's observations of the 1769 transit of Venus, taken from the Wikimedia Commons website. [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rittenhouse_1769_observation_of_Venus_transit.jpg?uselang=en-gb]

Dear Cora,

My train stopped suddenly between Newmarket and Cambridge. Something to do with a signalling problem. Outside I could just make out a bundle and a large muddy field with a grey horse pacing its edges. The lights flickered for a second before dying. My thoughts travelled onwards, up the carriages with unlatched pale faces looking out, past the driver, out into the dusk, up into the grey Llanrhonau clouds.

I thought about light, height, travelling. Height is light. It weighs nothing and yet it goes ever reaches its speed goes ever increases infinitely and time slows down. Imagine this train suddenly rising off again, going faster and faster until it's as fast as light. When it stops again in 45 minutes (let's forget the distance) at King's Cross, you will be dead. The faster the train goes the heavier everything will be. My phone will weigh a hundred tons. I won't be able to hold it, much less open. Imagine trying to pick up my book, or my pair of trousers and then put it back. You always tell me I hardly bring anything. Perhaps that is true. The faster I go, the heavier I get. The faster I have, the longer it ~~will~~ ^{feels} take to get away from you and the older you turn.

How is it for you? How is time to fly by, time? They say time speeds up the older you are. How fast can you feel time as it flows?

I imagine you sat, sitting in that uncomfortable chair, your legs chattering and shivering. I want to come back to you. But the train starts, the lights flicker back on, the bundle and the field and the horse muffled by the winds and my thoughts have been torn from the dark like so many photons. I took my suitcase from the trolley, and I find that it isn't heavy after all. Perhaps it was all left with you.

I will come by some time ~~next~~ ^{over time}, I promise. I might bring more with me.

Love,

Michael