

LOVE AND LIGHTNING

a radio play for three voices

by Patrick Gabridge

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SOUND: Bicycles on a bumpy road.

SOUND: Thunder rumbles.

TERRI: I'm worried, Stan.

STAN: We'll be fine, Terri.

TERRI: Those clouds are black.

STAN: Nothing to worry about.

SOUND: Rumble of thunder.

TERRI: We're riding metal bikes on a road in the middle of the prairie. We're the most attractive thing to lightning for a hundred miles.

STAN: You're always worrying. We're not even going to get wet.

SOUND: More rumbling. Louder now.

TERRI: That breeze is a little damp, Stan.

STAN: So maybe we'll see some moisture. Fine. I love riding in the rain. Makes me feel alive. Sets my nerves on edge.

TERRI: We're going to be struck by lightning.

STAN: Do you know what the odds are?

TERRI: Too high.

STAN: Infinitely small. As long as we keep moving, we're fine.

TERRI: Ah, we'll outsmart the storm. You're right. They always say, in case of electrical storm, try to trick the lightning.

STAN: Just relax.

TERRI: We need shelter, Stan.

SOUND: Terri's bicycle pulling away, as she rides faster, huffing and puffing.

STAN: (calling out) Hey, wait up. Calm down, will ya? You're not going to find shelter by riding faster, the nearest—

SOUND: Incredibly loud crash of thunder.

SOUND: A bike clattering to the ground.

SOUND: A bike screeching to a halt.

TERRI: Stan! Stan! Oh, my god!

SOUND: Running footsteps of Terri approaching Stan.

TERRI: Stan. Stan! Speak to me. Oh, my god. Oh, my god. You're dead. You're dead. This is not what I needed. We were having a fun weekend. A real fun weekend, except for that little joke with the spider. Please don't be dead. Please.

STAN: (groans softly)

TERRI: Stan! Speak to me. Are you all right? Where does it hurt? You don't look so good, Stan. Let's try to get that helmet off. (*loudly, as if speaking to a deaf person or foreigner*) Would that make you feel better? Here, let me try to... Oh, my. Maybe we'd better forget about the helmet. I've never seen one melt before.

SOUND: Tugging and struggling as Terri tries to pry off the helmet.

TERRI: Let's just forget about it. Okay, Stan? I'm sure the doctors will be able to cut it off. Can you hear me, Stan?

STAN: (groans again)

TERRI: Now just be patient while I think of what to do, all right? I'm not good under pressure, you know that. Why did you have to get hit by lightning? I swear, you're such an idiot sometimes. I said we should find shelter, let's seek protection. But, no. No, you needed to ride with wild abandon. Not a thing to worry about.

STAN: Shuhhh.

TERRI: What? What's the matter? Shuhhh? Shuhhh? Just spit it out, Stan.

STAN: Shuuuttt.

TERRI: Do you want something out of your backpack? Here, let me get it off. There we go. Boy, nylon really doesn't handle the heat well. I'm not sure this zipper will work.

SOUND: Terri struggles with the backpack and finally rips it open and dumps the contents on the ground.

TERRI: Oops. Sorry about that. Let's see. Maybe you want some... Band-aids? I'm real good with Band-aids. Always loved the way they smell. Here's one. Smell that. Can you smell that? Nothing smells like a fresh Band-aid. But it has to be the real thing. Generic ones just don't have that same aroma of comfort.

STAN: Shut. Up.

TERRI: What? What did you say? I can barely hear you. You don't sound good at all. But I'm in control of the situation. Don't you worry about a thing.

STAN: Shut up.

TERRI: That's great. You can talk again. I think you're going to be fine, Stan.
(beat) What do you mean, shut up?

STAN: Stop prattling.

TERRI: Excuse me? Prattling? Here I am, in control of your very survival and you tell me to stop prattling. Oh, that's real helpful. Just what I need when I'm trying to stand tall in the midst of a crisis—a pathetic little voice from below telling me to shut up. Do you think that's what I need right now?

STAN: (very, very quietly) Could you please just calm down and be quiet? I have the worst headache.

TERRI: Oh. I'm sorry. I know how irritable you get when you have a headache.

STAN: I am not irritable. I just need a little silence for a moment. Is that so much to ask?

TERRI: Fine. Fine.

SOUND: Stan takes some deep breaths.

SOUND: Rummaging in the backpack by Terri.

TERRI: I found some aspirin. Here. (pause) Don't ignore me. I'm just trying to help.

STAN: I'm not ignoring you. I can't see you.

TERRI: You're blind?

STAN: Seems that way.

TERRI: Do your eyes hurt?

STAN: No. I just can't see anything.

TERRI: That's terrible. Maybe the aspirin will help. Here, give me your hand.

STAN: I can't.

TERRI: Why not?

STAN: I... I can't seem to move my arm.

TERRI: Which one?

STAN: Either.

TERRI: You're paralyzed?

STAN: I can't feel anything below my neck. Can't seem to move a muscle.

TERRI: Just your mouth.

STAN: That's about it.

TERRI: So, you can move just enough to tell me to shut up.

STAN: I'm sorry, Terri. It's just that you were—

TERRI: Prattling. I know. I do that under stress sometimes. Watching your lover struck by lightning can be a little stressful, don't you think?

STAN: Uh. Definitely.

TERRI: So, you agree that maybe I had cause to prattle?

STAN: Without a doubt.

TERRI: Or are you just being agreeable now that you've realized you're completely helpless and unlikely to live unless you start being a little nicer?

STAN: Is that a trick question?

TERRI: Just answer.

STAN: Do you have those aspirin? My head is killing me.

TERRI: Oh, I'm sorry. Here you go.

SOUND: The content of the aspirin bottle being shaken out into Stan's mouth.

SOUND: Stan spitting and choking.

STAN: I don't need ten. How about just two? Thanks. (*with aspirin on his tongue*)

Any water?

TERRI: Your bottle exploded. I'll get mine.

SOUND: Terri walking to her bike.

SOUND: Thunder rumbling.

SOUND: Raindrops.

TERRI: Good thing you like the rain.

STAN: I like to ride in it, not lie in it.

TERRI: All right. All right. I'll get the tent.

SOUND: A nylon tent being pulled out and unfolded.

TERRI: How am I going to do this?

STAN: You can do it.

SOUND: Terri fumbling with the tent.

STAN: (*gurgling*) Could you hurry a little? I think I'm starting to drown.

TERRI: Hold your horses. I've never done this by myself before. Why did you have to buy a stupid dome tent?

STAN: They're less prone to leaking. How's it coming?

TERRI: I can't get this pole to bend. It's too long. Here hold this.

SOUND: Stan being rearranged in the mud

STAN: What are you doing?

TERRI: Just let me wrap your arm around this. Boy, you've got a heavy arm. But that's good. Okay. Don't move.

STAN: I'm not some sort of play toy.

SOUND: Something slips.

TERRI: Ooops. Let me just wedge that in there a little better.

STAN: Terri.

SOUND: More muddy squishy sounds

TERRI: Shoot, I've got to get both of these in. Let's see, right leg here, left leg there.

STAN: Why do I feel like we're playing Twister?

TERRI: Here, hold this cord. Can't you squeeze your fingers at all?

STAN: No.

TERRI: I guess I can just tie it to your wrist.

STAN: No. No. Don't start tying me up.

TERRI: Well, hold it in your teeth then. Here.

STAN: Itth itth almotht finitht?

TERRI: Almost. Just let me put this pole through. You're doing very well, Stan.

Let me just get your foot on this. Maybe it'll work better without the shoe.

SOUND: Shoe tossed in the muddy and water.

TERRI: Okay, okay. That ought to do it.

SOUND: Tent being unzipped.

SOUND: Stan being dragged into tent.

SOUND: Rain on the nylon of the tent.

TERRI: That's much better.

STAN: Thanks.

SOUND: Rain on the tent. Continuing.

STAN: I'm sorry I said you were prattling.

TERRI: Are you really?

STAN: You know I am.

TERRI: Is your headache any better?

STAN: A little bit. Thanks.

TERRI: You know, I was really enjoying this weekend.

STAN: Until I spoiled it, I know.

TERRI: No, you didn't. It's kind of refreshing to see you so helpless for a change.

STAN: It is?

TERRI: Usually you just plow right ahead, no hesitation. Like nothing can touch you.

STAN: What makes you think anything has changed?

TERRI: You're very brave. Very brave. But you don't need to be. Not here. It's just you and me.

STAN: I'm fine.

TERRI: Listen to you. You never stop, do you? Keep those masculine walls up twenty-four hours a day.

STAN: I'm a little concerned. Okay?

TERRI: That's a touching show of emotion, Stan. You're breaking my heart.

STAN: Cut it out.

TERRI: If you want us to be married, you're going to have to be a little more open with me, love.

STAN: If I want us to be married?

TERRI: Why did you set up this little excursion?

STAN: I don't want to talk about this now.

TERRI: You're a hopeless romantic. Planning a desolate proposal in the middle of the prairie. You're so lovable.

STAN: Thanks... What, uh, tipped you off about the proposal?

TERRI: Oh, nothing. Except I just happened to find this ring box in your backpack.

STAN: Put it back!

TERRI: You've been subtle about your feelings. But I should have realized that's just your way. You're not loud and showy about your inner passions. But the emotions you do have, because they're so private, are all the more intense. I'm right, aren't I?

STAN: Pretty much.

TERRI: And you've been with me, these last few months, burning inside. You know, there were times when I thought you were actually avoiding me. But that wasn't it. You were unsure if you could control yourself. If you could keep from blurting out your feelings.

STAN: Yeah. Kind of like that.

TERRI: And now, here we are, like in a tragic novel, our heroine and her lover have finally expressed their love, only now he's blind and paralyzed.

STAN: I always hated those books.

TERRI: And I just want you to know, Stan, that I will always love you. Your condition doesn't change a thing. I'll take care of you. Like they said in

assertiveness class: I can handle any situation. And I can handle this.

You'll be all right. We'll find a way to be happy.

STAN: That's very reassuring, Terri. You're so good. So kind.

TERRI: Go ahead. Say how you really feel.

STAN: I just did.

TERRI: I've got the ring box right here. I know you love me. Just say it.

STAN: Not right now. I don't think I should.

TERRI: Snap out of it. It's not so important for you to always be The Stud. (beat)
Oh... I understand. You're afraid I'll think you're just using me because you're helpless.

STAN: Exactly. I think we should wait to hash this out until I'm on my feet.

TERRI: But it's so silly. You bought me the ring before any of this happened. I know your intentions were sincere.

STAN: It's just not the right time, Terri. I want it to be romantic. Proper lighting and all that. I should be on my knees, not my back.

TERRI: All right. All right.

STAN: I'm glad you understand.

TERRI: You're a romantic. What can I say? Can I at least take a peek?

STAN: No! No. It has to be a surprise.

TERRI: Just a quick little peek. It's not a surprise, anyway. I already know it's coming.

STAN: All the more important for you not to see it.

TERRI: The appearance of the ring is so unimportant, Stan.

- STAN: Please. It's all we have left of what was supposed to be a very romantic moment. DO NOT OPEN THAT BOX.
- TERRI: Fine. I wasn't really that curious, anyway.
- STAN: Maybe we should figure out a plan to get me to the hospital.
- TERRI: I can't leave you. I-- (*a sudden silence*) You slime ball.
- STAN: You opened the box.
- TERRI: She has very nice handwriting. Whoever "C." happens to be. Who is she?
Who is she?
- STAN: Cynthia.
- TERRI: Cynthia? You proposed to a woman named Cynthia? How could you?
We've been dating for four months. Constantly. You're in love with me.
- STAN: I think maybe you're overreacting.
- TERRI: (reading) "Dearest Stan, I am sorry that I cannot return this ring to you in person, but I can't bear to see the pain in your eyes. Although I am very fond of you, I know that we could never be happily married. I will always look back on our time together with fondest memories. Sadly, C." I find this, and you tell me I'm overreacting. What were you doing, keeping me on the side in case this Cynthia didn't pan out? Is that what this weekend was all about? You're on the rebound now. Were you planning to use the same ring on me?
- SOUND: Tent zipping open.
- SOUND: Terri pacing and stomping in the mud and rain.
- STAN: Terri! Terri! Where are you? Where are you?

TERRI: I'm right here you stinking piece of garbage. I can't stand to be next to you.

STAN: Come out of the rain. Let's put this behind us for a moment and—

TERRI: What are you talking about? Forgive and forget? Never. After the way you led me on.

STAN: Terri, relax for a second.

TERRI: Relax? Relax? Relax?

STAN: I didn't mean for you to think that this... That we were serious. I thought we were just friends.

TERRI: Please, Stan. Let's be realistic. We were going to start sleeping together tonight.

STAN: We were?

TERRI: You made your intentions very clear.

STAN: What did I say?

TERRI: Oh, nothing. Just how romantic it is to sleep under the stars. About how you really liked being with me. Then, later you said you couldn't wait to hit the sheets.

STAN: Because I was tired.

TERRI: There was a pretty clearly implied double meaning.

STAN: I didn't mean anything by it. Terri, we're just—

TERRI: Didn't you call me at least once a week? Didn't we go to the museum, the symphony, and now this weekend? A long weekend, alone together, out on the prairie, with no one else around. I think the meaning was very clear. And now I see that you just wanted to use me.

STAN: Never. We had a good time together. We got along. It was—

TERRI: Why didn't you ever mention this, this Cynthia?

STAN: I tried. But every time I said the word girlfriend, you'd change the subject. I figured, hey, if you don't want to talk about her, that's fine with me. I thought it was refreshing to have a good, solid, platonic relationship.

TERRI: You were leading me on. And let me tell you, mister, I don't need a weasel like you.

SOUND: Terri's footsteps receding in the mud as she walks away.

STAN: Terri! Terri! Where are you going? You can't leave me here. I need to get to a hospital. Please. I need help.

TERRI: But do you deserve it? That's the big question, isn't it?

STAN: Terri, I think you're a fine woman. A fine woman. Maybe even a little out of my league, and to be honest—

TERRI: You're groveling.

STAN: What am I supposed to do? I'm blind, paralyzed, lying on the side of the road in the rain. Please don't leave me.

TERRI: After what you did to me...

STAN: I'm sorry. I had no idea what was going on. No idea.

TERRI: I find that very hard to believe. I certainly made my feelings clear. Not in an obvious way, but there was no mistaking my intentions.

STAN: I wasn't thinking straight. Please, just get me to a hospital. Terri?

SOUND: A loud, very old truck roaring down the road.

SOUND: Screech of a truck trying to stop.

SOUND: Crunch of truck smashing Stan's bike.

SOUND: The door of the truck slams.

MUDDD: What the hell?

TERRI: Someone found us.

MUDDD: What the heck you doin' puttin' a bi-cycle in the middle of the road.
Somebody coulda been kilt.

TERRI: I'm sorry. I wasn't thinking.

STAN: Help.

MUDDD: My truck now bears the imprint of a bi-cycle on its front bumper. I see that
as a problem.

TERRI: I'm sure you do, sir.

MUDDD: Muddd. F. Leroy Muddd. That's Muddd with three d's. My daddy always
saw the value of bein' differnt. Folks just call me Muddd. I'd be much
obliged if you'd do the same.

TERRI: Nice to meet you, Mr. Muddd.

MUDDD: Just plain Muddd. We're all casual here. No need for a Mister.

STAN: Help.

TERRI: I'm sorry about your truck, Muddd.

STAN: What's that noise?

TERRI: I didn't hear anything.

MUDDD: Sounded sorta like a voice.

TERRI: Must be the storm.

STAN: Terri. Don't do this. Mr. Muddd. Over here. Help.

MUDDD: Now you must admit, that sounds remarkable human.

TERRI: I suppose it could be.

MUDDD: What you got in this tent here?

TERRI: Oh, nothing. Just some raw sewage.

STAN: Mudd. Help me. I need to get to a hospital. Now. Please.

SOUND: Mudd opens the tent flap.

MUDDD: Oh, my. What happened to his head?

TERRI: He got struck by lightning. His helmet melted.

MUDDD: Melted?

STAN: Could we speed this up a little?

MUDDD: You all right, Mister?

STAN: Not exactly.

TERRI: He's blind and paralyzed.

MUDDD: Did you do this to him, ma'am?

TERRI: Me?

STAN: Hello? I need a doctor.

MUDDD: Well, you was hidin' him like you was guilty of somethin'. Mister, are you sure it was lightnin' that hit you?

STAN: Positive.

MUDDD: Then what might you have done to make this pretty young lady want to let you die?

STAN: It's all been a horrible misunderstanding.

TERRI: He's a rotten low-life two-timer. That's what's really the matter with him.
Read this.

SOUND: Paper rustling.

MUDDD: Who is "C.?"

STAN: Cynthia.

MUDDD: And you're...

TERRI: Terri.

MUDDD: Son, you have worked yourself into some serious difficulty.

STAN: It's not my fault.

TERRI: He's been leading me on for months.

STAN: It doesn't really matter whose fault it is. Can you please put me in your truck?

MUDDD: I would love to do that.

STAN: Let's get going then.

MUDDD: But I have a rule 'bout meddlin' in other people's domestic affairs.

STAN: You're not interrupting anything of value. Terri and I can fight after I've seen a doctor.

TERRI: Thanks for your consideration, Muddd.

MUDDD: It's just a part of my own personal moral code. For my own safety, too, really. Broke that rule once, for Sherman and Esther Tuttwiler. I mean, they were really going at each other—names, blows, pitch forks, you name it. And I opened my big mouth and got myself stuck slap in the middle of their domestic whirlwind. Aftermath from that little misjudgment cost me

my two best sows and my own wife still walks with a limp. And, actually, there was another time when my cousin Fred and his wife started up. At first, I—

STAN: Mudd! Please. We are completely harmless. Helpless, even.

MUDDD: Tell you what... If y'all think you'll be settled in the next hour or so, I can come back. I just have to drop off that load of manure, then I'll be headin' into town.

STAN: I need to go now.

TERRI: I don't think we'll be reconciled in a hurry.

MUDDD: Well, if you folks can't settle your differences...

STAN: This is a matter of life and death.

TERRI: He's prone to exaggeration.

MUDDD: Imagine I would be too, if I were in his situation.

STAN: How can I possibly exaggerate my difficulties?

MUDDD: I feel bad for you, Mister. I really do. But personal rules are personal rules. If you and Terri fix things up, then I'm fine with haulin' you into town. I'll even wait to deliver my manure. But to jump in the middle where I'm not wanted—

STAN: You're wanted. You're wanted.

TERRI: Mudd is absolutely right. We should settle this before going anywhere.

STAN: If you feel for me, Terri, let this man put me in his truck. Show me a little compassion.

TERRI: You've broken my heart, Stan. You lied to me, cheated on me, proposed to another woman. What could be worse than that?

STAN: Letting me waste away without medical attention would be worse.

TERRI: We're talking about damage to my psyche here. I'm emotionally bleeding to death.

STAN: I'll make it up to you, I promise.

MUDDD: It was nice meetin' you folks. Like I said, I'll stop by in an hour to see how you're getting' on.

STAN: Hey. Hey! Where are you going? I need to get to a hospital.

MUDDD: I'm sure you do, but this young lady thinks I ought to leave you here.

STAN: No, she doesn't.

TERRI: Yes, I do.

SOUND: Mudd walking back to his truck.

STAN: Mr. Muddd! Wait. Stop. I'm afraid Terri here is a little unbalanced.

TERRI: Don't you see that Muddd is a man of principle.

STAN: Why don't we just forget about Terri?

TERRI: He's just trying to weasel out of his rightful situation.

STAN: Now wait just a second. Are you saying—

TERRI: I'm saying that I should have left you out in the middle of the road with your bike.

MUDDD: Sorry about your bike, by the way. Didn't handle the impact all that well.

STAN: I hate to resort to this, because I like to think that humans are basically decent on their own... but if it's a question of money, I'm sure I can make it worth your while.

TERRI: Isn't that typical? So concerned with the material.

MUDDD: Well, it's clear y'all aren't going to make any progress. Pity one of you won't finish this thing and get on with your lives.

TERRI: What?

MUDDD: Never mind. Like I said, I shouldn't intrude.

SOUND: Door of truck opening and Muddd climbing in.

STAN: Muddd! Muddd! You can't leave me here.

TERRI: Please, what did you mean?

MUDDD: I hate to intrude, but... I do have my shotgun in the back, should you wish to finish the job.

TERRI: Shotgun?

STAN: Shotgun?

MUDDD: Just a twelve gauge.

TERRI: I don't think I could.

STAN: This is...

MUDDD: You're absolutely right. It's not proper of me to offer.

TERRI: I mean, I've never used a gun before.

STAN: And now is not a good time to learn. Never learn to shoot in the rain. Isn't that the rule? I think that's a safety rule. That and never give a gun to a crazy person. Are you listening to me, Muddd?