

AT THE BEEP

By Steph DeFerie

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(MARY CHASE and SKIP ALLEN sit next to each other at a table, reading from their scripts. They do not look at each other. Between them sits an answering machine. When they update their messages, they push a button on the machine and speak into it. Each of these messages should end with a "beep." When they are leaving their messages on other machines, they speak into telephone handsets.)

MARY: *(into machine)* Hello? This is... um... *(whispering in response to a voice only SHE can hear)* What? What? *(giggles)* This is the Chases' house... *(louder)* Chases! So now leave your message now.

SKIP: *(into machine)* My mommy's shopping at the mall and my daddy's playing golf and I'm buried in the sandbox so leave your name and someone'll call you back sometime.

MARY: *(with phone)* This is for Skippy. My mommy says I can come to the zoo with you on Saturday. My mommy says I will have a good time and be on my best behavior. My mommy says I can wear my new pink dress if I promise not to get it dirty. My mommy says can I remember to eat my snacks with my mouth closed. My mommy says thank you very much. Bye. *(puts down the phone; pause; picks up the phone and makes another call)* That was me before, Mary Elizabeth Chase. Bye. *(puts down the phone; pause; picks up the phone and makes another call)* And that was me before again. Bye.

SKIP: *(with phone)* This is Skippy Allen. I just wanted to thank Mary Elizabeth for coming with us to the zoo. I'm almost halfway done with the polar bear puzzle except for I lost a piece that I think the dog ate. We're waiting for it to go all the way through and then we're going to wash it real well. You can see it if you come over sometime. Bye.

MARY: *(with phone)* Skippy Allen, I'm supposed to apologize for punching you and pushing you in the pool yesterday. Even though it was your fault for saying there's no such thing as the tooth fairy. I hope your nose is okay. Don't worry about my hand. It doesn't hardly hurt at all, but I got your blood all over my new sneakers. My mother says maybe I'll think before doing something that outer-ragious again. Maybe you'll shut up next time before you say stupid things like that again. I hope the tooth fairy doesn't give you anything for the rest of your life.

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SKIP: **(with phone)** Scary Mary, I accept your lame apology because I'm bigger than you are. Let me be the first to tell you there isn't any Easter Bunny either, and I wouldn't bother writing to Santa Clause any more. If you're not nice to me, I'll tell you where babies come from - you'll barf for a week. So there!

MARY: **(with phone)** Skippy? It's me, Mary Elizabeth Chase, 'cause, do you know what we're supposed to do for math homework tonight? Is it the 20 problems on page 18 or the 18 problems on page 20? Call me back right away, okay, or my mom is going to make me do them all and I'll miss "The Bionic Woman." Bye.

SKIP: **(with phone)** Hi. This is Skippy Allen. Mare, can you please ask Helen Thompson to be my social studies partner 'cause she always gets A's in social studies and if I don't get at least a C, my dad won't let me go to Camp Kitchywana this summer. If you do, I'll let you watch my hamster Ricky while I'm gone. Thanks. Bye.

MARY: **(with phone)** Skippy Drippy, Helen Thompson says she'll be your social studies partner if you give her your Ding Dongs and your Cheese Doodles at lunch every day for two weeks 'cause her mother doesn't let her eat junk food. Bye. **(whispering)** Oh, wait, don't let your mother hear this or she'll tell Helen's mother and Helen will get in trouble and you'll get in trouble and I'll get in trouble and you won't get to go to camp and I won't get to watch Ricky. Bye again.

SKIP: **(with phone)** Mary E-lizard-breath, stop telling everyone at recess that I like Helen Thompson! I just want to go to camp and you know it! Tell Helen Thompson, too! She keeps trying to kiss me when we're supposed to be studying the exports of Denmark.

MARY: **(with phone)** Hey, Skippy, my parents said it's okay for me to watch Ricky while you're away at camp so you can bring him over tomorrow or Sunday if you want to. They don't poop a lot, do they? Bring your G.I. Joe, too, 'cause my Barbie just got a new wedding dress.

SKIP: **(with phone)** Lizard lips, I can't believe you're not home. Didn't I tell you I'd call you sometime this summer? Anyway, I just wanted to see how Ricky's doing. Does he miss me? Put him up to the machine when you play this so he can hear my voice, okay? Did you have a big parade this year for the bicentennial? I'm making you a wallet in leather craft. Bye.

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MARY: **(with phone)** Skippy? Skippy, I'm sorry, really I am! Won't you at least talk to me? I said I was sorry. It was an accident, honest. I just took Ricky out to clean his cage and I didn't know Fluffy was hiding under the bed and the pet shop man said he was sure the new hamster was a boy and my mom said all hamsters look the same so you'd never know the difference and you wouldn't have either if the new one hadn't been pregnant. But I'm sorry anyway. **(pause)** If you give me one of the babies, I'll name him Ricky.

SKIP: **(with phone)** Mary E-lizard-breath, our VCR's broken. Can you please tape "Charlie's Angels" for me? It's the least you can do after all 'cause it was Ricky's favorite show. You guys do have a beta machine, don't you?

MARY: **(with phone)** Merry Christmas, Skippy Scrooge Allen. I can't believe I spent \$23.79 of my own babysitting money to buy you a basketball, personally autographed by Larry Bird himself, to make up for your stupid hamster and all you got me is a cheap little gold chain that's already turning my neck green! You can take Ricky Jr. to Vicki Vendova's skating party 'cause you're not taking me! I wouldn't go anywhere with you if you were the last person on earth!

SKIP: **(with phone)** Hi! You've reached the Allen home. We're not here right now so, burglars, here's your chance! You can take anything you want if only you leave my hamsters and take my dad's Captain and Tenille records.

MARY: **(with phone)** Skippy, are you guys going to the mall tomorrow, 'cause Vicki Vendova and Megan Arnold and Helen Thompson and I are going and I thought if we saw you, it would be the perfect time to ask Chuckie Snow if he likes me or "like" likes me. Don't tell him I asked you! If you do, I'll ask Vicki if she "like" likes you. Meet us by the Snack Shack. Okay, bye.

SKIP: **(with phone)** Scary Mary, did you come up with a costume for Jimmy Tambolio's Halloween party yet? 'Cause if you haven't, I thought maybe we could go together as the Frankenstein monster and his bride. Cool, huh? You wouldn't even have to wear any make-up! Ha ha! Call me back, okay?

MARY: **(with phone)** Oh, ha ha, Drippy Allen. You won't have to wear any make-up either, just the wedding dress!

SKIP: **(with phone)** Okay, Lizard lips, here's the deal. My dad'll sell your Girl Scout cookies around his office if your dad'll sell my Cub Scout greeting cards at his office. That sounds fair, doesn't it? See ya tomorrow. Bye.

MARY: **(with phone)** Skippy? It's me. Did you mean to leave your fly open when you asked Vicki Vendova to the movies today after fifth period? She was real impressed.

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SKIP: **(with phone)** Mar, if you put in a good word for me with Vicki, I'll let you come visit me over Fourth of July weekend at my Aunt Joan's house on the Vineyard. Okay? Come on, be a friend. I'd do it for you. Call me back, okay? Bye.

MARY: **(with phone, sarcastically)** Skip-drip, as much as I'd love to spend Fourth of July weekend with you and your Aunt Joan, I'm going over to Kris Finegan's house for a sleepover that weekend. We're going to make some-mores and her sister is coming home from college and she's going to tell us all about what's it's like to live with boys. I mean, men. Sorry.

SKIP: **(with phone)** Mar, did I mention that Chuckie Snow's parents' cottage is just five doors away from my aunt's house? They have some stupid tradition about always watching the fireworks from their lawn and they invite everybody to come over. You could be there, too...

MARY: **(with phone)** Skippy? It's all set. Vicki Vendova thinks you left your fly open 'cause you're a Mormon. It was all I could think of on the spur of the moment. Have a good time at the movies. See you July third.

SKIP: **(with phone)** I just wanted to make sure Mary Elizabeth got home okay. Mary Lizard, remember, it's not my fault it rained and they cancelled the fireworks and the Snows didn't come over after all. We had a good time anyway, though, didn't we? I never thought strip Monopoly would be so much fun. Just kidding, Mr. and Mrs. Chase.

MARY: **(with phone)** Drips, thanks so much for the thoughtful get well card but as large as the pimple on my nose is, I'm sure it won't require a hospital stay, and, no, I haven't given it a name. Too bad you weren't as clever on your English final. **(sarcastically)** Oops, was I not supposed to mention that? **(makes a face at the phone)**

SKIP: **(with phone)** Hey M.E., what do you know about this dance Friday night? I need to talk to you about it, so call me as soon as you can.

MARY: **(with phone)** Skip, what do you need to know? It starts at 7:00 in the gym and it's a dollar to get in and they're going to have refreshments. My mom got me this great new outfit. I look just like Farrah Fawcett. Wait'll you see it! We can give you a ride if you want.

SKIP: **(with phone)** Mar, thanks for the ride, I'll be over at quarter of seven, but what I want to know is if Vicki Vendova is going. She looks so cool with her ears pierced. You should think about doing that. See you Friday.

MARY: **(with phone)** Skippy, have you seen Ringo? He got off his leash this afternoon and we can't find him anywhere. I think the Bergman's poodle is in heat so if you see them doing it, call me. If you can tear yourself away from watching and taking notes, that is.

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SKIP: **(with phone)** Mar, do you know if Village Video has a copy of "A Tale of Two Cities?" I've got a book report due tomorrow.

MARY: **(with phone)** Skip, you can tell Chuckie Snow for me that I hate him forever and he'll be lucky if I don't turn him in for you-know-what you-know-when with you-know-who. I'll bet Miss Beautiful Laura Smith would just love to hear about that and so would Principal Bronstein.

SKIP: **(with phone)** Mar, you don't have to worry about Chuckie Snow making farting noises when you read your poems out loud in English class any more. Bobby Thomas and I pulled him out of the shower and threw him naked into the girls' locker room for you. It was excellent! Laura Smith was there and she saw all of his shortcomings! You're welcome.

MARY: **(with phone)** Skippy, I just want you to know that I wasn't the one who put up that picture of you dressed in your mom's bathing suit on the bulletin board in homeroom. Helen Thompson must have stolen it from my slumber party last weekend when we were looking at my old photo album. Chuckie Snow must have gotten her to do it. I guess she's still mad at you for not kissing her in the third grade. Sorry.

SKIP: **(with phone)** Lizzy, it's official - I got mono! So that's no school for me for a while - I'm sooooo sad! So can you pick up my books for me tomorrow? I sure wouldn't want to fall behind while I'm on vacation... I mean, recuperating. Have a nice time on the bus tomorrow, sucker!

MARY: **(with phone)** Drips, does your mother have any of that red fringe left over from the "Oklahoma" costumes 'cause Betty Bradford got sick and Cheryl Peters is taking her place and she needs a lot more fringe to cover up her butt than Betty does. I guess she's just a girl who can't say no to doughnuts. Bye.

SKIP: **(with phone, whispering)** Mrs. Chase? This is Skip Allen. Can you call me about Mary Elizabeth's surprise sweet 16 party? I forgot what time we're supposed to come over on Saturday. Thanks. **(pause as it dawns on him)** Oh, wait, maybe I shouldn't have... shoot.

MARY: **(into machine)** Hi. None of the Chases can talk to you right now so please leave a message and we'll call you back as soon as we can. And if it's you, Drippy Allen, don't even bother because I wouldn't call you back in a million years if you were the last person on earth.

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SKIP: **(with phone)** Oh, ha ha, Mary E-lizard-breath, very funny. Look, I'm sorry I spoiled your party. I thought your mother would get home before you. Didn't you like the sweater I got you? Your mother said you were saving up for one just like it. It was wicked expensive. Can't you forgive me? Call me. Bye. **(pause; with phone)** Mary Elizabeth, I can't believe you're being like this. I know you're home. Just pick up and talk to me. Please? **(pause)** Come on. I said I was sorry. Did you get that big box of candy I left with your mom? Won't you talk to me? Jeez. I forgave you when you killed my hamster and that was pretty traumatic for me, especially when I saw him giving birth. Just call me. **(pause; with phone)** Mary Liz, are you there? You can't avoid me forever. Look, if you don't talk to me, I'll tell everybody about the time I saw you buying you-know-whats in Thayer's Pharmacy. It's up to you.

MARY: **(with phone)** Mr. and Mrs. Allen, will you please tell your pathetic little son Skippy not to clog up the Chases' answering machine with his annoying, juvenile messages? Thank you.

SKIP: **(with phone)** Lizard, this is the last time I'm going to call you. I've got tickets for the Bay City Rollers at Boston Garden Saturday night and I talked to your mom and she said it was all right for you to go if you wanted to and I know you love the Bay City Rollers so come on. My treat all the way. Call me. **(pause; with phone)** Mary Lizard, this is absolutely, positively the last time I'm going to call you. If you don't call me back by tomorrow, all you're going to hear on your answering machine is a big, giant silent sound which will be me not calling you any more. I'll take Vicki Vendova to the concert and you'll miss out on a great time and you'll be kicking yourself for the rest of your life because you'll only have yourself to blame. It's up to you.

MARY: **(with phone)** Skippy, I promise to talk to you again if you promise to never, ever, ever again come into my gym class and sing "You Are My Sunshine."

SKIP: **(with phone)** M.E., are you going to the club dance Saturday night? Vicki Vendova said she'd go with me but my dad said we can only go if it's a double date. So if you don't have one yet, Steve Rogers said he'd make it a foursome if I spring for the corsages. I've got my dad's car, so, hey, no parents! Call me.

MARY: **(with phone)** Skippy, "Bend-ova Vendova" is a tramp and if you think I'm going to suffer through a whole night with Steve "The Tongue" Rogers just so you can lose your virginity, you're sadly mistaken.

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SKIP: **(with phone)** Lizard-breath, my parents really appreciated your little joke. But if you come on this date, I'll forgive you. Come on, it won't be so bad. Steve promised to be on his best behavior and I'll do anything you want. Just name it. Anything. Almost anything. Call me right away so we can set it up.

MARY: **(with phone)** Skippy, you do not have enough money to make me do this, so stop groveling. It's unbecoming. I'm staying in and washing my hair that night so "The Tongue" will just have to stay in, too.

SKIP: **(with phone)** Mary Elizabeth, I've taken out your garbage, mowed your lawn, washed and waxed your mom's and your dad's cars and I'm going to baby-sit for your little brother next Sunday. I think that's everything, so we'll pick you up Saturday night at seven.

MARY: **(with phone)** Skippy, if that's what Steve Rogers considers his best behavior, he's a very sick individual and he should seek professional help. I never want to see another human tongue again. I'm going to take another shower now.

SKIP: **(with phone)** Lizard, my tape deck ate your "Saturday Night Fever" tape so I can get you another one or you can have my "Grease" tape, which ever you want. Sorry.

MARY: **(with phone)** Skippy, I got my driver's license! I passed the test and I'm on the road, so look out! We're going to have to pick you up at 9:00 tomorrow morning because we still have to finish doing the float. All those little plastic cranberries still have to get stuck on and it's going to take forever to get you into that bumblebee suit. Bonnie Richards is bringing lunch and the parade starts at one. Do you have any of those little peanut butter crackers your mom always gets? Tell your mom we'll be between the dancing turkeys drill team and the marching pilgrims. See ya.

SKIP: **(with phone)** M.E., do you guys have any marshmallows? We ran out and my dad says it's not Thanksgiving without those little mini-marshmallows. If you only have the big ones, that's okay 'cause dad's had about a million cocktails and if we cut them up, he won't know the difference. Come to think of it, we could cut up some cotton balls and he wouldn't know the difference... okay, forget it. We've got cotton balls. Thanks anyway.

MARY: **(with phone)** Skip, do you have those pictures for the yearbook yet? You were supposed to have them in by Friday, and make sure nobody's making any obscene gestures in any this time.

SKIP: **(with phone)** Lizard, are you going skiing for Christmas 'cause if you're not, do you want to go to Helen Thompson's New Year's Eve party with me? Don't worry, it won't be a date or anything, I just don't want to go alone. It'll be a hoot. And I hear her mom's springing for party platters so there'll be plenty to eat. Give me a ring. Bye.

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MARY: **(with phone)** Skip, I heard about you and Vicki. No big loss, you can do a lot better. Football players aren't all they're cracked up to be. Between them, Vicki and Carl don't have two brain cells to rub together so they should get along perfectly. Anyway, I was going to go with Kathy Martinez but I guess we could go together. As long as it's not a "date" date or anything, okay? Bye.

SKIP: **(with phone)** Hey, M.E., what happened? I was going to kiss you at midnight but I couldn't find you. Anyway, I've got your coat; you left it in my car. Hope you didn't catch pneumonia.

MARY: **(with phone)** Skippy, I'm sorry I left with Chuckie Snow after the party but we did agree it wasn't a date date and after all, it was Chuckie Snow and guess what? He asked me out! Me! I'm going out with Chuckie Snow! So now you're the first to know. I'm already picking out our silver pattern! Congratulate me! Bye!

SKIP: **(with phone)** M.E., can I catch a ride with you and Chuckie to the SATs on Saturday? I don't know why my dad won't let me drive my car just 'cause it needs new brakes. What a drag. Call me. Bye.

MARY: **(with phone)** Skip, Chuck's going to drive on Saturday 'cause I'm going to be way too nervous. Can you believe our whole future's riding on this one test and I don't know anything? Have you studied? I'm going to spend every minute between now and Saturday studying. Anyway, we'll pick you up at 7:30 AM so don't stay up too late. Bye.

SKIP: **(with phone)** Lizard, can you help me get ready for the biology final? With my SATs, I've got to ace my exams or I'm in big trouble. I don't know what happened. I only had a couple of six packs with Steve and Larry the night before we took 'em. Anyway, call me so we can set up a time. Can we use your notes? I don't know what happened to mine.

MARY: **(with phone)** Skippy, did you hide an Easter egg in the back of the hall closet last year? Very funny. We had to throw away all our coats after Ringo found it and broke it. My dad's pissed. And the poor dog! Honestly, it's worse than being sprayed by a skunk. I wouldn't come around here for a while or he's liable to bite you, and Ringo's not very happy with you either.

SKIPPY: **(with phone)** Hey Lizard, congrats on winning the science fair and going to Yale. Of course, you realize that you're not the only genius on the block - I just got accepted to Fisher Jr. College. So congrats to me, too.

MARY: **(with phone)** Skippy Drippy, Vicki Vendova's telling everybody that you're taking her to the prom. Is that true? Do you mind if I tell you something? You deserve a lot better than that. You're way too good for her. She's just a tramp out to trap you and you know it. Sorry.

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SKIP: **(with phone)** Mary Elizabeth, thank you so much for your thoughts. Winning your approval is the goal of my life. Of course she's a tramp, smart butt! It's the prom, not a Sunday school picnic. It's a dream come true! Now leave me alone, Lizard-breath.

MARY: **(with phone)** Tonight's the prom, Skippy Allen, and if you don't mind a word from the wise, make like a boy scout and be prepared.

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