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Is technology out to kill us? Or is the idea just to make us feel like fools?

Technology is slowly working its way into every aspect of our lives, usually for the better. But when you allow it to supplant your common sense, that's when it's time to tune out all the digital interference for a bit.

This story begins, as a true horror story should, with weary travelers visiting an isolated house. Of course, it was a dark and stormy night.

We'd retired to our hosts' first floor guestroom (OK, the TV room with the fold-out couch). Shortly before midnight, I woke to hear shuffling steps and a low moan.

I elbowed the Scholarly Gentleman into consciousness.

"Strange noises," I hissed.

He made a few weird noises of his own, but I kept up the elbowing. Soon we were both listening.

"Ghosts?" I asked.

We cracked open the door just in time to see a spectral figure emerge from the basement – a wild-haired woman in a trailing robe. She pulled what looked like an antique pocket watch from her robe, stared at it, and gave a dismal moan. Then she swooped down the hall toward us.

"Aaaaaah!" I shrieked and slammed the door.

"Sorry," said the ghost. It's voice sounded remarkably like that of our host, Debra. I opened the door again, just in time to see the ghost – or, rather, Debra – go racing by and rush up the stairs to the second floor.

"Fitness tracker," she moaned, in a tone more exasperated than ethereal. "Got to get in 700 more steps before midnight."

We went back to bed and spent 10 minutes muffling our laughter as our host trudged from basement to attic and back again until her digital fitness tracker registered the magic 10,000 steps for the day.

In spite of this incident, I soon broke down and joined the lumbering horde of fitness-tracking zombies clogging the sidewalks and jogging paths around town. But I hedged my bets. I bought the cheapest, most basic digital fitness tracker on the market: a tiny, lightweight blob of plastic that clips onto my clothes. It counts steps and calories burned, grins at me (when I walk a lot) or sticks out its tongue (when I sit at my desk writing humor columns). There's a website where I can enter information about the other types of exercise I allege I've done and the foods I'm not too embarrassed to admit I've eaten. The website then bombards me with finger-waggling analyses of my lack of fitness via email and a smartphone app.

How painful. Not the walking, but the discovery that there are days when my pattern of locomotion could be

easily confused with that of a 2,000-year-old redwood. I have contemplated attaching the device to the collar of our most hyperactive cat. And all too often I find myself in the same position as Debra, with just a few hours left in the day, and quite literally, miles to go before I sleep. This happened last week when I'd spent a long day at a client's office and an hour driving home in the car. Dusk was approaching, I was due at an evening meeting, and I'd logged only 3,000 steps.

When I got home, I changed clothes, threw in a load of wash, fed the cats, pulled on my walking shoes, grabbed my rain gear and headed out the door.

"Make sandwiches!" I shouted to the Scholarly Gentleman as he passed me in the driveway with a load of groceries. "I'll be back!"

Uphill, downhill, around the neighborhood, through puddles I walked. Sweaty and panting, I arrived home just in time to change clothes for my evening meeting. As I staggered up the steps, I reached for the fitness tracker to bask in the glory of its little bit-mapped grin and my well-earned 10,000-plus steps.

I checked pockets. I checked the waistband of the pants. I checked the collar of my fleece jacket. No tracker! No grin! No points!

I had a vision of the little blue tracker upstairs on my dresser, but I was wrong. Turns out it had wandered off on its own and logged an impressive 6,000 steps in the washing machine, attached to the blouse I'd worn that morning. But not all was lost. The website gave me credit for 35 minutes of swimming and 10 minutes of spinning.