

THE FUTURE IS HERE AND NOW



A YEAR 2000 CHAPBOOK
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in THE AIR

Have you ever noticed that the air isn't normal air in an airplane? I mean, I know they have to pump in the air, and pressurize it and all in order to keep us alive up there, but there's just something about the air in the cabin that's different. It's got a smell to it, that's the only way I can describe it. A smell of all these people, going places, running to something, or running away from it.

And it always seems that you're stuck sitting next to someone that is either too wide for their seat, or is a businessman with his newspaper stretched out and his lap top computer on his little fold out table. Once, when I was on a flight back from D. C., a flight attendant walked by, stack of magazines in her hand, Time, Newsweek, Businessweek, and I stopped her, asking what magazines she had. And she replied, "Oh, these magazines are for men." This is a true story. And I asked her again what she had. I had already read Time, so I took Newsweek.

MY MOTHER MY MOTHER MY MOTHER

We went to see my mother this weekend. You see, my mother has cancer, and we decided to go across the country for a weekend to surprise her and see how she was doing. it was breast cancer, so it really was the best case scenario, i suppose, so i managed to put it out of my mind until we actually had to fly there

The night before i couldn't bring myself to pack. it was two in the morning when i finally pulled my suitcase out from the pantry shelf.

i kept telling people at work, "well, you see, I have to go visit my mother because she has cancer, so I have to miss a few days of work," but I was always able to say it so matter-of-factly until I had to actually visit her

In fact, when my sister told me the diagnosis, it was right around Christmas time, and there was so much work to do and I still had presents to wrap and a meal to prepare and Christmas was supposed to be a happy time

that I managed to postpone even thinking about it until we all decided to surprise her for a visit. And then I had to pack. To decide what to take, what to leave behind, put my life into a little black box with a handle and wheels, and go

It shouldn't be this way, and I knew that, I knew that I shouldn't be visiting my mother under these circumstances and I knew how she never wants to think about bad things because they always make her cry and this would make her want to cry and cry because the only reason why we're there is because things are bad

But I wasn't supposed to think that way, things would be just fine.

So I finished packing at four in the morning and the next thing I remember is I was on the plane with my sisters, cracking jokes as we picked up the rental car. and then we got to mom and dad's house

and everyone was so happy to see each other, it was one big family reunion and we were laughing and talking and trying to figure out where we were all going to sleep

and the sisters and dad walked into the front room to see if the couches were good enough to sleep on or if we would have to get out an air mattress and I was alone in the den with mom

so I suddenly became serious and sat down next to her and asked her how she was really doing. And that is when she started to cry, saying that the cancer spread, but what she was most concerned with was the fact that she didn't want to spoil the time that we came to visit her. But what I don't think she understood was that we couldn't have come at a better time, and nothing she could do would spoil our trip.

COQUINAS

I

I cant imagine
the number of times
Ive been there

visiting Florida,
Christmas with my parents
a plastic tree
decorated
with sand dollars
and red

ribbons

eating Christmas dinner
listening to Johnny Mathis

and after the Irish coffee,
father with his brandy snifter
in hand
mother and the other
girls
putting away the dishes

the carolers would come,
walking in front of our home

singing “We wish you a
merry Christmas”
over and over again

we would walk outside
and the cool breeze

almost felt like Christmas
after the hot
 humid days

and we would stand on our driveway
smile and nod

you could see down the road
all the candles in
paper bags
lining the street

and for a few lights
the bag

burned

2

and we would take
boat rides
off the coast
my parents and their friends
to a tiny island

dad drinking beer
sometimes steering the boat
 control
the women sitting together in the shade
worrying about their hair

i would sit at the front
sunglasses, swimsuit and sunburn
feeling the wind
slapping me
 in the face

and turning my head away from the boat

into the wind
away from them

to face it again

docking at a shoreline
everyone jumping out
little bags in their hands

the women go looking for shells
the men go barbecue

after an hour or two
the sandwiches, potato chips eaten
the soda and beer almost
gone

we turn around
and head back

we have conquered

3

and I remember
the coquinas

the little shells
you could find them alive
on the beaches north of the pier in
Naples

going to the beach
I would look for a spot
to find them

they were all my own

they burrowed their way into the
sand
to avoid the light
worming their way
away from me

I unearthed a group of cocquinas once,
fascinated with their color of
their shells, the way
they moved

before they could hide

I collected them
in a jar,
took them home with me

what did you teach me
what have you taught me to do
is this it
is this what it has become
is this what has become of me
of you of us

and I took them home

I added salt water and sand
but I couldnt feed them
I realized soon that they
would die

so I let them

EVERYTHING WAS ALIVE AND DYING

I had a dream the other night
I walked out of the city
to a forest
and there were neatly paved bicycle paths
and trash cans every fifty feet
and trash every ten

and then a raccoon came right up to me
she had a few little baby raccoons
following her, it was so cute, I
wish I had my camera

and she spoke to me,
she said, thank you
thank you for not buying furs,
I know you humans are pretty smart,
you have to be able to figure out a way
to keep yourselves warm
without killing me

and I said, you know they don't
do it for warmth,
they do it for fashion, they do it
for power. And she said I know.
But thank you anyway.

Then I walked a little further
and there was a stray cat
she still had her little neon collar on
with a little bell
and she walked a few feet,
stretched her front paws,
oh, she looked so darling
and then she walked right up to me

and she said thank you
and I said for what?
And she just looked at me for a moment,
her little ears were standing straight up,
and then she said, you know,
in some countries I'm considered
a delicacy. And I said how
do you know of these things?
And she said
when somebody eats one of you
word gets around
and then she looked up at me again
and said, and in some countries
the cow is sacred. Wouldn't they
love to see how you humans
prepare them for slaughter, how you
hang them upside-down
and slit their throats
so their still beating hearts
will drain out all the blood for you
and she said isn't it funny
how arbitrary your decision
to eat meat is?
and I said, don't put me
in that category, I don't eat meat
and she said I know

And I walked deeper in to the forest
managed to get away from the
picnic tables and the outhouses
that lined the forest edges
the roaring cars gave way to the
rustling of tree branches
crackling of fallen leaves
under my step

when the wind tunneled through
the wind whistled and sang
as it flew past the bark
and leaves

I walked
listened to the crack of dead branches
under my feet
and I felt a branch against my shoulder
I looked up and I could hear
the trees speak to me,
and they said
thank you for letting the
endangered animals live here amongst us
we do think they're so pretty
and it would be a shame to see them go
and thank you for recycling paper
because you're saving us
for just a little while longer

we've been on this planet for so long
embedded in the earth
we do have souls, you know
you can hear it in our songs
we cling with our roots
we don't want to let go

and I said, but I don't do much,
I don't do enough
and they said we know
but we'll take what we can get

and I woke up in a sweat

so tell me, Bob Dole
so tell me, Newt Gingrich
so tell me, Pat Buchanan
so tell me, Jesse Helms
if you woke up from that dream
would you be in a sweat, too?

Do you even know why
we should save the rain forest?
Oh preserve the delicate balance,

just tear the whole forest down,
what difference does it make?
Put in some orange groves
so our concentrate orange juice
can be a little cheaper

did you know that medical researchers
have a very, very hard time
trying to come up with synthetic
cures for diseases on their own?
It helps them out a little if they can first
find the substance in nature.
A tree that appears in the rain forest
may be the only one of its species.
Or one like it may be two miles away,
instead of right next to it. I wonder
how many cures we've destroyed
to plant more orange groves.
Serves us right.

You know my motives aren't selfless
I know that these things are worthwhile in my life

I'd like to find a cure to these diseases
before I die of them
and I'm not just a vegetarian
because I think it's wrong to kill an animal
unless I have to
I also know the excess protein
pulls the calcium away from my bones
and gives me osteoporosis
and the excess fat gives me heart attacks
and I also know that we could be feeding
ten times more people
with the same resources used for meat production

You know, I know you're looking at me
and calling me an extremist
but I'm sitting here, looking around me
looking at the destruction caused by family values

and thinking the right, moral, non-violent decisions
are also those extreme ones

everything is linked here
we destroy our animals
so we can be wasteful and violent
we destroy our plants
we destroy our earth
we're even destroying our air
we wreak havoc on the soil, on the atmosphere
we dump our wastes into our lakes
we pump aerosol cans and exhaust pipes

and you tell me I'm extreme

and these animals and forests keep calling out to me
the oceans, the wind

and I'm beginning to think
that we just keep doing it
because we don't know how to stop
and deep inside we feel the pain of
all that we've killed
and we try to control it by
popping a chemical-filled pain-killer

we live through the guilt
by taking caffeine, nicotine, morphine
and we keep ourselves thin with saccharin
and we keep ourselves sane with our alcohol poisoning
and when that's not enough
maybe a line of coke

maybe shoot ourselves in the head
in front of the mirror in the master bedroom
or maybe just take some pills
walk into the garage, turn on the car
and just
fall asleep

in the wild
you have no power over anyone else

now that we're civilized
we create our own wild

maybe when we have all this power
the only choice we have
is to destroy ourselves

and so we do

COMMUNICATION

I

now that we have the information superhighway
we can throw out into the open
our screams
our cries for help
so much faster than we could before

our pleas become computer blips
tiny bits of energy
travelling through razor thin wires
travelling through space

to be left for someone to decipher
when they find the time

II

got into work the other day
and got my messages out of voice mail:
mike trisko left me his pager number
and told me to contact him with some information
mike wright told me to call him at the office
between ten thirty and noon
lorelei jones told me to check my email
because she sent me a message i had to read

so i first returned mike wright's phone call
but he wasn't in, so i left a message with a coworker
and then i dialed the number for mike trisko's pager
listened to a beep, then dialed in my own phone number then i got online,
checked my email
read a note from ben ohmart, emptied out junk mail

realizing i didn't actually get a hold of anybody
i tried to call my friend sheri
but i got her answering machine
so i said,
"hi - it's me, janet -

haven't talked to you in a while - "
at which point i realized
there was nothing left to say -
"so, give me a call, we should really
get together and talk"

III

sara and i were late for carol's wedding rehearsal
which was a bad thing, because we were both
standing up in the wedding
and we were stuck in traffic, and i asked,
"sara, you have a cel phone, don't you?"
and she said "yes"
and i asked, "well, do you know carol's
cel phone number, cause if you do, we can
call her and tell her we'll be late -"
and she said, "no - do you know it?"
and i said "no"

IV

I was out at a bar with Dave, and I was explaining to him why I hadn't talked
to my friend Aaron in a while: "You see, we usually email each other,
and when we do, we just hit 'reply.'
when you get an email from someone,
instead of having to start a new letter
and type in their email address, you can
just hit the 'reply' button on the email message,
and it will make a letter addressed
to the person who wrote you the letter originally.
so he sent me a letter once, and
it had a question at the end,
so i hit 'reply' and sent a response,
with another question at the end of my letter.
so we kept having to answer questions for each other, and we just kept reply-
ing to each other,
sending a letter with the same title back and
forth to each other without ever having to
type in the other's address. well, once i got an email
from him and there was no question at the end,
and so i didn't have to send him a response.

so i didn't. and we never thought
to start a new email to one another.
so we just lost touch."

and then it occurred to me, how difficult it had become to type an extra line
of text, to type in
his email address, because that's why
i lost touch with him

and then it occurred to me, no matter how many
different forms of communication we have,
we'll still find a way
to lose touch with each other

V

now that we have the information superhighway
we can throw out into the open
our screams
our cries for help
so much faster than we could before

but what if we don't want to communicate
or forget how
too busy leaving messages, voice mails,
emails, pager numbers
forgetting to call back

what if we forget
how to communicate

VI

i wanted to purchase tickets for a concert
but i was shopping with my sister
and wasn't near a ticket outlet
but my sister said, "i have a portable phone,
you can call them if you'd like"
so she gave me the phone, and i looked
at all these extra buttons, and she said,
"just press the 'power' button, but hold it down
for at least four seconds, until the panel lights up,

then dial the number, but use the area code, because
this phone is a 630 area code, then press 'send'.
when you're done with the call, just press 'end', and
make sure the light turns off."

so i turned it on, dialed the number,
pressed 'send', pressed my head
against the tiny phone

and the line was busy
and i couldn't get through

VI
i checked my email address book recently,
and the people i email the most
are the people that live in the same city
as me, all of whom i know the phone
numbers of, all of whom are only a local call away.
in fact, one of my friends lives a block-
and-a-half away from me,
on the same street as me, but
i still email her as much as i call her,
even though i could just walk over to her house
and have an actual conversation with her.

VIII

i was suntanning outside on my patio
with a friend on saturday,
and we decided we wanted to order a pizza.
we brought a cordless phone
outside with us
so we would know if the phone in the house rang,
so i picked it up
and dialed.

and the phone needed to be recharged,
the batteries were wearing down, because
there was so much static
that i was worried the pizza man
wouldn't even be able to
hear my voice.

while waiting for the pizza man
to pick up the phone, i said,
mocking static on the line,
“hi, i’m calling from the
space shuttle,
i’d like to order a pizza
for delivery.
call mission control at houston
for a credit card number.”

IX

i got a program for my computer

it’s a phone book program,
and it sorts people by name or company,
lists their phone number,
and has a complete file for them
where you can store their birthday,
their address, past addresses and phone numbers,
faxes, email addresses, there’s room for
any information you want to store about them

and i love this program, i’ve created a file
with all the phone numbers i’ve ever needed,
i always add information to this file,
i keep a copy of it on my computer at home,
on my computer at work, on my laptop,
even on a floppy disk, in case there’s a fire at
work and my hard drive at home crashes

but it always seems
that every time i desperately need
a phone number
i’m nowhere near a computer

any computer

IX

i wanted to get in touch

with an old friend of mine from high school,
vince, and the last i heard was that he went to
marquette university. well, that was five years ago, he could be anywhere. i
talked to a friend or two that knew him, but they lost touch with him, too.
so i searched on the internet, to see
if his name was on a website or if
he had an email address. he didn't.
so i figured i probably wouldn't find him.
and all this time, i knew his parents lived
in the same house they always did, i could just
look up his parent's phone number in the phone book, and call them, say
i'm an old high school friend of vince's, but i never did.
and then i realized why.

you see, i could search the internet for hours
and no one would know that i was looking for someone. but now, with a sin-
gle phone call, i'd make it known to his entire family that i wanted to see him
enough to call, after all these years. and i didnt want
him to know that. so i never called.

X

now that we have the information superhighway
we can throw out into the open
our screams
our cries for help
so much faster than we could before

but then the question begs itself:
who
is there
to listen

SOME PEOPLE WANT TO BELIEVE

so we were sitting there at
denny's in some suburb of
detroit, i don't know which
suburb it was, but we were
there at like ten in the morning
eastern standard time, i was
grabbing a bite to eat before
i crossed the ambassador bridge
and travelled into canada. you
know, i really only associate
places like denny's with
travelling now, i always
stop at some place like denny's
only when taking a road trip
and just stopping for some
food. i think if i went into a
denny's and i wasn't travelling,
i'd get really confused. well,
anyway, like i said, we were at
denny's, and it was morning, so
the both of us got breakfast.
being a vegetarian, i ordered
eggs with hash browns and toast,
right? and the waitress says
to me, like they always do in
some no-name town in the middle
of america, "yuh don't want any
MEAT?", like it's so unheard of
to not eat meat at breakfast.
so i say, no, no meat, thank you,
and then my friend orders pretty
much the same thing, and we
sit for a while, and talk and
stuff, and then the food comes.
so then she asks me, "you're a

vegetarian, right?" and i say,
yes, and then she goes, "but
you're eating chicken."
and i'm just like, well, no, i'm
not, an egg is an animal by-product,
not animal flesh, and i was about
to say that that was the difference
between being a vegetarian and
being a vegan, and she says,
"but if a chicken sat on it long
enough, it would become
a chicken."

and i'm just like, well, no, it's
an unfertilized egg, there was
never a rooster around that hen,
so it could never become a chicken.
and she's like, well, it's a
chicken, though,
and she just couldn't think
that this wasn't a chicken. and
i'm just thinking, my god, does
she really think that a chicken can
lay eggs without them being
fertilized? like only worms and
stuff can procreate
without two sexes present. so
our voices start getting a little
louder, and then it ends up where
i'm saying "so are you having an
abortion every time you have a
menstrual cycle? are men who
have wet dreams mass murderers?"
and she's looking away and saying
"i'm not listening to you -"

and then i realized that some
people, with logic thrown in their
face, will still believe what
they want to believe.

The background of the entire page is a grayscale photograph of classical columns, likely from a Greek temple. The columns are fluted and have papyrus capitals. They are arranged in a row, receding into the distance, creating a sense of depth and architectural grandeur. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and shadows.

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