

eavesdropping on / a conversation with the elders

don't you miss  
the trees? the lush  
greenery which provided shade  
underneath for you to lie in the  
welcoming green grass, the  
short blades tickling your chin  
as you laughed, holding the  
hand of the person you truly  
loved?

or the birds in the trees, nature's  
alarm clock, ranging from delicate  
chirps from the largest of the feathered  
to piercing blasts from pin-sized chicks.  
they greeted you as you woke, as you  
walked, as you went to work in another  
dreary office building, alike to the gray  
one on the left of it and the gray one on  
the right of it and the gray ones beside  
those two and beside those two and  
beside those two... doing something that  
seemed to have meaning but now, when  
you look back, really served no purpose  
at all

i had a dream last night,  
about the time when I was eight  
and we visited the beach. Oh what  
a long, tranquil, undisturbed strip  
of sand it was then. the periwinkle,  
wait no cerulean, or was it azure?  
pardon my confusion but it's been  
eons since i've been to a clean  
beach. but the waves, whichever  
shade of blue they were, as they  
gently washed up against your feet,  
offered peace and solitude, offered  
an escape from the hounds we  
collectively defined as our  
problems: stress, depression,  
anxiety... the beasts may be  
somewhat subdued now but the  
beaches too were euthanized

and the simplest of things -  
the sky, what a beauty to take in. from  
left to right all one saw was bright  
blue, no boundaries, no limitations.  
the clouds seemed like a hindrance but  
really, just big packs of marshmallows  
so high up always moving this way,  
that way, never staying still  
except for when they had to  
pee of course

\*laughter\*

the rain was an  
inconvenience at times, an  
unstoppable army against my dry  
socks and shoes, but it always cleared  
the bad things away. it was always  
sunnier and clearer after it rained.the  
flowers smiled wider, the snails and  
slugs withdrew from their hidey-holes  
into the brave unknown

...

i miss the  
good old  
days

...

agreed

...

agreed

but grandpa joseph  
grandpa joseph what do you mean  
we don't have trees  
we have trees  
why they're right outside our window  
if you didn't have such bad eyesight  
maybe you could see them!  
here let me help you  
polish your glasses lens  
what do you mean by we don't have trees  
when there's BARK-1, CEDAR-2, YEW-3...  
there's even a rare subspecies BAOBAB-8-4-7  
right next to school!

ha!  
have you ever climbed  
those trees? caressed them with  
tenderness and felt its heart  
beat? those trees are inklings of  
what real trees were: big,  
strong, mighty...  
baobabs are native to  
botswana, dear child, they  
don't belong here anymore  
than the himalayan cedars or  
the english yew  
why has society  
yearned for globalisation so  
intensely that we've exchanged  
even our trees! only the very  
lungs of this planet that combat  
all the pollutants we pump into  
this fragile, failing ecosystem.

look closely, my love, and  
you'll see these trees are dying.  
they're dying because they  
weren't made to be thousands  
of kilometres away from their  
birthplace. they're dying  
because we're killing them and  
ourselves along with them.

what do you mean!  
we live in the greater bay area  
life has never been greater

oh honey  
but you see that thin veil of  
grey, shielding the sun from what  
would otherwise be a brilliant hot  
glare that would hurt your eyes,  
instead of only irritating them?

what about it grandma eve  
it's been there forever

no dear  
it wasn't  
certainly not when we were  
young and sprightly just like you  
pollution wasn't so bad back  
then. every now and then it got  
smoggy but never permanently  
now it's like a cloud that's  
never left us  
a presence always looking  
over our shoulder  
like we did something wrong.

but then what did you mean about the beach?  
what did grandma mary mean about the birds?  
what did grandpa adam mean about the sky?  
we have beaches  
we have birds  
we have a sky

a beach without waves and  
waves of plastic bottles washing  
up on shore, again and again,  
tomorrow and tomorrow and  
tomorrow?

birds without those little plastic  
contraptions attached to their rear ends,  
to ensure no faeces dare splatter on a  
human, perverting nature's humour?

a sky without perpetual  
grey?

they don't have unclean  
beaches in fiji you know

they also don't have grey  
skies in fiji

lord, they don't have these plastic  
pieces of junk anywhere!

so is there nothing  
nothing at all  
that you like  
about this megalopolis?

well i suppose... the people

what, you mean the  
broken relationships and  
strained marriages which come  
from overworking and huge  
stress loads? just look at the  
child's parents, for goodness'  
sake! last time they all spent a  
day together was christmas two  
years ago!

although that can be true,  
i meant how it sometimes feels like  
you're just going for a stroll in the  
park and instead you come out of it  
with a new friend. the ease of  
forging lifelong relationships and  
finding those who you truly love  
and care about is unbelievable.  
never in such a large place have  
people felt more connected.

decades ago, i would never have  
fathomed that one of the ten highest  
GDPs in the world belonged not even to  
a country, but rather a cluster of  
powerful cities that have pushed Silicon  
Valley out of business. all we ever say  
now is "buy, buy, buy!", and it's acting  
as steroids for our inhumanely strong  
economy. family businesses are  
cropping up everyday and the question  
facing budding entrepreneurs is no  
longer "should I?", more so "when?"

the places and their history, so  
intangible and rich in culture...  
portuguese, british and chinese  
influences all under one flag. the  
colonists may have left but their  
delectable food and complex  
traditions remain always.

the opportunities are  
endless - long were the days  
when unemployment was rife  
and we lived our days hoping  
for a better tomorrow. why  
bother, when we now know  
tomorrow will just be the same  
as today: perfect?

perfect?

no, not quite perfect. i guess we're  
content with our lives now, but...

life is beautiful, certainly  
much more so than in other countries,  
and we really should treasure how far  
our country has come, but...

it's a utopia of sorts: high  
wages, high savings interest rates,  
high life expectancy...

and?

it's a grey, concrete  
utopia in which everything that  
matters the least is valued the  
most.

then what does this mean?  
what does this mean for us  
for everyone living here  
for me?

...

be true to yourself. listen to  
your heart and not other people's  
voices. choose kindness.

work hard, but not for the money.  
find your passion and we'll support you  
in it, be it animal husbandry or  
conspiracy theorist.

value those who love you.  
treasure moments and do what  
makes you happy. care for the  
environment and others. try make  
this region a better one than it  
already is.

but  
this doesn't apply to the greater bay area specifically

and so it doesn't. doesn't  
that make it all the more  
important?

because when we strip away  
the borders we're left with people.  
when we build up borders we're left  
with people. the only constant is us.

a lot of the time we create  
problems. but a lot of the time we create  
solutions.

the answers to our  
difficulties lie in the limitless  
minds of our innovative  
youngsters; those whose ideas  
have yet to be distorted by the  
mainstream, those whose  
thinking is entirely theirs

the greater bay area may  
have its faults, but you  
can solve them.

we believe in you.