

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.