

The Zanzibarfication of Porto Santo

-I.P.



Whenever I get on the plane, I'm scared this is gonna be the one that gets a terrorist attack.

I can see it clearly, the cabin ripping open, Hellfire clearing row after row, the stewardesses screaming bloody murder and, me saying my final prayers, but kinda annoyed somewhat by the loud noise around me and the theatre of the terrorist saying something benign and not cinematic enough or scary enough but almost normal, like we had all rehearsed this on The West End. Even his accent seems put-on and his voice cracks and the beard falls off because the elastic is too loose and cheap.

And I'm sidetracked, wondering if this is a false flag.

We're both distracted. A car had blown up outside Euston Station this morning. She would have to spend the next few days in calls and meetings and so would I.

The Earth was too small for us.

We wanted more.



I'm high in Green Park, and hoping that the police horses don't think I'm a terrorist.

The sun hands overhead this morning and I'm wearing my Dior Homme 2007 jeans. My suitcase is next to me. Soon, I'll be on the Victoria to Victoria. But before then, I take a shit in Pret. I'm paranoid in the Pret bathroom. I buy a sparkling water. Then I call my parents. They're OK.
Train.

The security guy at The Brighton Promenade is sitting manspread in fatigues by his desk in the shipping container office, prodding the intercom I stand behind him.

He's got warts on his neck and his arms are bursting through his cotton shirt.

He scratches his ear, 'You didn't get the email?'

'No.' I say.

He grabbed his vape, and blew a big cloud of strawberry smoke.

'Someone's coming.' He said.

●

We're having lunch at a sushi place in Brighton that she chose.

When it's her team, she chooses every place.

Her answer for where to go this summer was Israel.

The table went silent expectantly.

'I'm going out for a smoke'

She joins me.

Every street became a street.

Every meal is the same.

'You shouldn't have walked out,' she said.

A kid fell from his scooter.

She took the cig back.

●

FUNCHAL. I forgot my lighter. The sun's coming up and I'm by the boardwalk, drying off on the lizard rock we perched on the first day we got here. There's already runners, shirtless, in slow-motion, tight lycra, foam runner, 180 degree shades, zig zagging the promenade, and I leave all my stuff, to try to get a lighter, not from any of these guys but the only one guy walking my way. He's wearing cargo trousers and a college sweater, 30 something, trekking determined but Lindy-like.

'Do you know if the tunnel is open?'

This catches me off-guard. He sounds Portuguese but the intonations, the twist of his tongue, were almost American.

I look ahead. He is talking about the Poças do Gomes, the dark tunnel between Formosa beach and the natural pools. I squint but from where we are, I can't really tell myself.

I shrug, 'I'm not so sure, maybe.'

'Ok.'

He's about to pull away, then I remember what I came to him for.

'Isqueiro?'

He nods and fishes in his pockets and hands me a blue Bic.

I light it and he smiles.

'Thanks'

'There's good shit in Camara des Lobos'

'Oh, I went there a few days ago'

'Very good shit.' He looks off into the distance.

I'm watching him. I hand him back the Bic.

'I sleep over there'. He points at the bridge. 'I sleep under the bridge.'

'Ah wow'

'I'm going to the tunnel to Funchal to beg. I hope you have a good day'.

'You too'

Then he keeps trudging, posture correct. He'd have never struck me to be homeless.



I'm on my nth poncha, when these two fat Germans sit next to me. Stupidly, I begin making conversation, and we exchange small talk, talk about all the hikes we did, they're going to Porto Santo, already visited, and then talk drifts back to the awful place. I think the song is Sadness by Enigma. Our real lives. Family, I avoid. Careers, too. These two oafs, beautiful blonde blue-eyed dolts, both SWEs at a German bank. Then chat landed on her.

'It's funny, we both met at work. I always thought of her as a really tough person. And she was tough, she'd never tell you what she thought. Ever. It drove me mad. But then we both got posted to Israel'. I waited for the wince but no reaction. Fuck, thank goodness, they're Germans.

'And she's Israeli.' I couldn't tell so I kept going. 'Well, half-Israeli and half-Brasilian, so of course, she knew all the best parties in Haifa. I was kind of young but I was glad I had a manager that could show me the ropes.'

Then, they made a face.

'All consensual, of course.' Then, they relaxed. 'We broke up but we're still on very good terms. She actually was here in Funchal with me.'

'How was that?'

Fucking Germans.

'It was great. She left this morning.'

'Without you?'



Her assistant, Jasmin, hands me a hi-vis.

When we get to her trailer, she's doing her makeup in the full-length mirror.

'Hey there, how are you?'

The kiss is polite. The door closes.

My finger graces hers for a second too long and she retracts. 'Did you see the money?'

She rubbed her arm, flashing her 'Coexist' tattoo.

I began, 'Regarding the issue, I-'

'Don't worry about it.'

'Okay.'

She's working. I look at myself in the mirror behind her.

•

Back at the grounds, Enjoy The Silence is playing. And there's a billion people around us. I can't hear anything.

This was our crazy era.

Wondering whether to say I love you.

Watching old people float by with their families, solemnly. It's all so solemn, it was boring.

She kissed me briefly and disappeared into the crowd.

We flew from NY to LA then Tokyo then Dakar.

Because we could.

•

It's my last morning in Brighton. I'm having fish and chips. And I realise the strange feeling over me, the constant headache and fog over my head, the pattering of my teeth before I eat. I am bored!

And I think she blocked me.

•

She must be on the plane already. I didn't see her leave, I watched her go.

•

'CAUTION MIRROR BEHIND'

The elevator to go back up the room still had the white blanket over it.

My room was pretty high up. I needed to pack my bags.

The smell's gone and the bed's made.

•

I'm in swim trunks watching the black rectangles between captions. The bed vibrates. And I check my bank balance. Why hasn't she called back. It's like this four times a year, when she and I tour freeports. There is one dead pixel on the screen.



I was having a sad Cornetto on Queen's Road when I felt a pat on my shoulder.

It's my old friend Softy.
'How did you spot me?!'
'I can spot you anywhere!'
I'm still wearing my hi-vis.
'What are you up to?'
'I'm working the bag collection, you? What about after?'
'Seeing a friend, let's hang?'
'Yes, text me!'

*

Softy's in the lobby and wearing a keffiyeh and he waves at me. We go up to my room and I crack open a window and he rolls a joint and puts the kettle on so we can have mint tea.

He shows me his new tattoo that says, Coexist.

The window's open and he, NO, I, whisper to myself, never doom.