

It was hot. Ungodly hot. The sort of heat that melts you into a pile of goo as your body slowly, inevitably, absorbs the air's extraordinary humidity. Heat that steams your brain into a fog and smothers your last caches of motivation. Heat that stupefies and stultifies and silences and slows.

I lied flat, thoughtless, desireless, oozing into the creases of the couch. The wind, so eager to greet me in the winter, had taken a vacation; maybe it had a summer home in the mountains somewhere, or maybe it, too, had spotted a losing battle and retreated. So I made my own with a box fan set on the dining room table. It was angled wrong and missed me by more than a yard, but the imagined effort of fixing that problem, or any problem—the open windows, neglected herb garden, unread texts, uncooked dinner—was exhausting enough to keep me exactly where I was.

Feet thumped down the stairs, and Jo walked into the room, taking in my partially liquefied state. She grinned. “Hot out.”

I frowned at her. “You’re cheery.”

She walked to the freezer. “And you could be, too, for the low price of \$100 and a sketchy Craigslist meeting.” Ice rattled as she filled glasses with water. “ACs,” she said, turning to me dramatically, “are magic.”

This was our Great Debate, our Grand Philosophic Dialogue: air conditioning. She was for it and I, against. In each round, we marshalled our reason, refined our rhetoric, and unleashed a battery of finely honed argumentation. Each round, we were, both of us, entirely, utterly convincing. And each round, our opinions remained exactly, precisely unchanged. It was, in short, great fun.

Over the last months, I had argued that ACs are: environmentally unjust, unnatural, a visual blemish inflicted on passers-by, a visual blemish inflicted on me, an auditory menace, an energy drain, an American extravagance, and (my strongest point) obviously useless without Air Shampoo. One night, moved to soliloquy, Jo had begun: “To condition or not to condition? That is the question before us. And indeed, nothing can be of greater importance than the condition

of the air before us, and behind us, and all around. Let us examine the question in three parts . . . ”

The real reason for my position, of course, was that I grew up without it. Installing AC in my room would feel like admitting to a moral flaw or weakness in character. But I would never say that aloud, so tonight I chose brevity in my rebuttal: I stuck out my tongue.

Jo placed a glass of water on a coaster and sat gently on an arm of the couch. She nodded gravely. “Well put. To be continued, then.”

Music drifted through the windows. Our neighbor played their records from 5:30 to 7:00 each night, so precise you could set your watch to it. We never did ask him about his schedule. It was just a fact of life. When all the windows were open, as they were today, we were treated to (or patiently suffered) a new mix each night. “Good selection today,” Jo said. “A lot of Fleetwood Mac, but groovy, on the whole.”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” I said. “There’s no such thing as too much Fleetwood.” As oldies rolled through the window, the air gathered itself together, desperate to contain the growing humidity, bending further and further until it broke completely and released its reservoir in a downpour.

Elton John came on, then the Beach Boys, then the Beatles. When ABBA began singing of Napoleonic defeat, Jo turned to me and gestured to the door. “C’mon, let’s go.”

“What? Where?” I said.

“Outside.”

“*Outside?*”

She nodded. I fumbled for a bit, unable to put it together. “But I have work to do.” She looked critically at me, enmeshed completely with the couch. “Really,” she deadpanned.

“And it’s raining.”

“That’s the *point*,” she said. She grabbed my hand and dragged me outside, no shoes, no coat, directly into the summer rain.

I was soaked instantly. I looked at our door, pushing the water through my hair, imagining my dry clothes inside.

“Well,” I said.

“Well,” she said.

I sighed dramatically. “No sense in going back now, I suppose. Seeing as we can’t possibly get any wetter.”

Jo was grinning again. “Now you’re getting it.”

The rain fell on both of us, gentle, warm and steady.

I shook my head, my lips edging into a smile. “So what now?” I ask.

She grabbed my hands and glanced up at our neighbor’s window, where Marvin Gaye was crooning.

“Now, we dance,” she said. And we did.

The rain, flowing freely from days and days of pent-up moisture, didn’t stop for a good long time. And neither did we.