

Expensive Air

by Chris Okum



Under The Influence

He doesn't know if any other wife would have gotten him so many friends. Even former friends have come back and joined in. That's why he would never ask his wife to step aside. But the common theme always is, look, no one is expressing dissatisfaction with his wife. Let's look at that. In the last 10 days he's made love to his wife 19 times. Where is she now? Taking a break. That's what she's doing. All his friends should be ashamed of themselves. And now he's got so many friends he doesn't know what to do. One of them is a rapist. One of them is an embezzler. One of them is a thief. He's

hanging by a thread here. How did he make this mistake? He's pleased with his wife, though. She makes a lot of noise. And so much is at stake. It's interesting. And the other thing about his wife that he didn't think about until someone brought it up to him is that his wife is different and has been for years. She does these moves. He likes that. And yet he gets annoyed. But he doesn't think he would really be that happy if he replaced her. It's hard to know what's true and isn't true. Where did he get her from? He didn't even know there was such a thing as his wife. Look, like he says all the time now: he's not very popular with his friends, but his wife is. She listens to other people while they're talking and she inserts herself into their lives. Their words become hers. That's what she does. She tells fake stories. And then she's onto something else the next day. She can't see the big picture regarding the safety of their children. And still, he's like, yeah, there she goes, walking in the wrong direction. His wife, she comes first. Heaven help us.

Beaucoup Dien Cai Dau

Diane Arbus on going to Vietnam in 1966: "Vietnam was not a surprise. It was hot. And beautiful. I had no intention of leaving my hotel room. I took two, maybe three rolls of film with me when I did decide to go outside and the pictures I took were worthless. The people were all very friendly and had no problem with me taking their picture. But I didn't see anything I could use. I thought maybe if I took one or two people back to my room something might happen. Nothing happened. The people got bored with me. They couldn't give me what I wanted. What did I want? To see myself reflected in the people of Vietnam. I was nowhere to be found, though. So I stayed in my room and ate rice and chocolate bars. I read Hubert Selby's *Last Exit to Brooklyn*. I read it in my room and by the pool and in the hotel bar. A Swedish ex-pat tried to strike up a conversation with me but I paid her no mind. She told me I was immature, and I told that I didn't necessarily disagree."

Thunder Of The Rescuing Sea

There was no need to comprehend what he was saying because he only spoke in cliches. He had never said anything that someone else hadn't said first. To him, words, phrases, and sentences were like rooms already occupied, rooms he was kicked out of immediately after entering, the door slamming shut in his face, forcing him to find another room, one that was vacant. He would open his mouth and before he even made a sound the air coming up from his lungs felt old and used. This was something he knew about himself, that nothing he spoke belonged to him, and in his case, self-knowledge didn't lead to a solution to the problem, but to the problem continuing to crash over him like a set of massive waves emanating directly from Neptune's trident. If only he could say one thing that could be attributed to him and him only, then it would be fine, he thought, he could die and be thrown into the ground, where, hopefully, he would one day turn into a flower or tree. He constantly found himself surrounded by people who talked and talked and talked. He would listen to them, and then he would speak, and the words simply refused to stick to not only them but himself. When he was by himself it was no better. He would catch himself mumbling and wonder where he had heard what he just said. It felt to him as if words were working through him, not with him. He was saturated with the thoughts and ideas of other people and he could not locate himself within himself. He searched high and low for a sentence of his own, just one, and it didn't even have to be a remarkable sentence, only one that hadn't been premasticanted and spit into his mouth. He told himself he would give up every single word for just five that could have come from no one else. He thought about giving up speaking altogether, hoping that others would confuse his silence for wisdom.

Eternity In An Hour

When he was a teenager he was certain that his father was going to kill him, so he killed his father before his father had a chance to kill him, shooting his father three times in the chest. He was sentenced to 25 years to life in prison (with the possibility of parole), where he had plenty of time to think about the error of his ways, of how he may have done the wrong thing in killing his father, about how maybe he had acted too soon and was incorrect in his assumptions, an idea he slowly warmed to and finally accepted right before he was paroled for being a model prisoner. Given the gift of a life resumed, he resumed it immediately, meeting a woman who bore him a son, a son who grew up into a teenager with the same sense of paranoia and dread regarding his father that he himself had grown up with. Eventually, he became certain that his son was going to kill him, that his son was thinking the same thing of him that he had thought of his father, and so he killed his son, shooting him three times in the chest. When asked by the police why he had killed his son, he said, "There was nothing more I could have done."

Tales Of Brave Ulysses (Live)

From *There Is No Clock: The Ontology Of Staged Events*, by Dr. Catrine Mouëllic, 1998, University of Minnesota Press: "There is a strange paradox related to the mockumentary form in that in order to create a mockumentary which faithfully captures not only its subject (e.g., the Vietnam War in Patrick Sheane Duncan's stagey, wooden, and unconvincing 1989 mockumentary *84 Charlie Mopic*) but the form as well, the performances have to reach a level of naturalism that breaks with normal industrial production techniques, i.e., performances shaped through directed behaviors and script-written dialogue and meant for mise-en-scene not possible in a documentary. To create naturalistic performances that feel spontaneous to the situations a mockumentary is trying to simulate, the actors have to be as fully immersed in the world the mockumentary is exploring as possible, demanding that directors break with the Hollywood monofilm and put their faith in the

contingencies of the world they are trying to recreate by letting reality itself (with all its vagaries and uncontrollable elements) impinge on the actors acting in front of the camera. In other words, for a mockumentary to succeed it has to document situations and behaviors that are as close to the real thing as possible, forcing the actors to behave and speak in ways that seem more like honest reactions to the environment and less like hacky bits of performance that they've picked up from other, more successful narrative films about the subject. To make a successful mockumentary about the Vietnam War would require that the actors be immersed in an almost verbatim recreation of the Vietnam War. And herein lies the paradox at the heart of the form: the fake can only seem real if the world the fake is taking place in is as close to real as possible. Then, and only then, will the cliches and tropes of the documentary form seem un-staged and spontaneous. You can mock something successfully only if you first take it very seriously."

Say It Again

His world was small, cognitively speaking. It was the same with ethics and geography. There was where he was, both internally and externally, and nothing outside of the space could possibly exist. Sure, there were other people in the world, and they lived in actual countries that one could find on the map, but as far as he was concerned, this was nothing more than a cosmic error. Family and friends would try and tell him of their travels and as soon as they opened their mouths he would wave them away. He didn't want to hear about it. No, there was nothing else but the world he lived in, where men who looked just like him got up at six in the morning, walked their dogs, took a shower, ate a protein bar and a container of fat-free yogurt, commuted into downtown where they worked in an International-style skyscraper, got home at half past six, and had dinner in front of the television. This is what he did, day in and day out, and he didn't care to know about anyone who did anything different from what he did. When he would buy a book he made sure

that the book had an easy-to-read font, and that the story herein was about a man who got up at six in the morning, walked his dog, took a shower, ate a protein bar and a container of fat-free yogurt, commuted into downtown where he worked in an International-style skyscraper, got home at half past six, and had dinner in front of the television. Sometimes, on his days off, he liked to visit or museum or two, but he would not look at any art that wasn't a picture, painting, installation or sculpture of a a man who got up at six in the morning, walked his dog, took a shower, ate a protein bar and a container of fat-free yogurt, commuted into downtown where he worked in an International-style skyscraper, got home at half past six, and had dinner in front of the television. The same went with music. There were many songs to listen to, songs about love, songs about food, songs about the weather, etc., etc., but he wasn't interested in any song that wasn't about a man who got up at six in the morning, walked his dog, took a shower, ate a protein bar and a container of fat-free yogurt, commuted into downtown where he worked in an International-style skyscraper, got home at half past six, and had dinner in front of the television. Movies were no different. He didn't go for superheroes, or monsters, or spaceships, or stories about the indomitable human spirit. There was only one kind of movie he was willing to watch, and it was the kind of movie about a man who got up at six in the morning, walked his dog, took a shower, ate a protein bar and a container of fat-free yogurt, commuted into downtown where he worked in an International-style skyscraper, got home at half past six, and had dinner in front of the television. As far as what he watched on television, it went without saying what kind of shows he would watch. Because there was nothing else. There was only him, and only the things he did, and as far as he was concerned, nothing else could be permitted, and if it was, if God forbid there was any reference to the kind of man he was not, a man doing the sorts of things he didn't do, well, it would be over his dead body.

