

I'm Thinking, What A Day

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I don't know if I should write about this, but I have to write something, to get it out of my head, get it out in front of me, where I can see it. I'm upstairs at this very moment in my expensive house—just to give you a idea, I have two air conditioners—*central* air—one for down stairs, one for up. The big unit is for the downstairs; I try not to use the upstairs one too much, to cut down on cost. The house is in something called a gated community. I've never lived in a gated community, but here we are. Get this, last week we had an armed robbery in the neighborhood, and it wasn't the first, and it made me think of that George Carlin bit about everybody wants your stuff, and how you worry about everyone trying to steal your stuff, and how that makes going on vacation even more complicated because you have to take all your stuff with you. Can you imagine taking all your stuff with you on vacation? Pretty funny.

So this morning I'm up at four, an ungodly hour even in the best of times. It's my habit to go upstairs (we have four bedrooms—three up, one down—and four baths). And get this: *five* sofas, if that's important, for the *two* of us. My routine is, first I take a pill for my acid reflux, then I brush my teeth (a light brushing, manually—later I will do two minutes with my electric toothbrush, after I eat breakfast), then buzz my hair and beard with electric clippers—a Wahl, with a number 2 extension—I've worn my hair and beard like that for years now.

But before I do all this I'll open an app on my iPhone, either something on iTunes-U, some lecture, or sometimes Al Jazeera English. I always have to be listening to something. I rarely listen to music though; maybe I should.

Anyway, this morning I decided to listen to Al Jazeera, catch up on the Middle East, for reasons I can't explain—I've never been there and will never go. I suppose I could—my son-in-law is from Morocco, if you can believe that. My son-in-law recently took me to a shooting range to teach me how to use this pistol he gave me, a German police pistol, because of the armed robbery. Jesus, now I have to stand guard at my own house.

So, on the news, first thing, was a segment on a drought in Mali. I have to be honest, I thought Mali was somewhere in the South Pacific. It's not, take my word for it. The segment

starts off with this man (they said his name, but I'm not the greatest with Arabic names) carrying this goat (the camera is in front, looking back at the man as he walks, so obviously the cameraman is walking backwards), and the story was, this man has been walking for two days from wherever he lives, his little village, to Timbuktu. Now like everyone I've heard the name Timbuktu, but I can't remember what the context was, not at the moment. I'm thinking Rudyard Kipling, but maybe not. So he's walking to Timbuktu with a goat, to sell it, because (and this is where my day goes south) he's starving. Unfortunately, so is the goat, which is why the man has to carry it. They don't mention this in the piece, but I'm thinking the man needs to keep the goat alive because if he arrives with a dead goat, well that will be it for him too, although the thought did occur to me why didn't he just eat the damn goat instead of walking all that way, and what with the goat's going to die anyway...

Anyway, putting all that aside, the man arrives at Timbuktu. I'm telling you, if you were ever thinking of going to Timbuktu, don't, although I'm sure they could use any tourist dollars you could bring with you. The camera swings around and shows what passes as the main market, or did, this wide open area of packed dirt, dust, with enough sun to power a hundred houses like mine, and a few unfortunate souls with their own goats (some have what could pass for cows, also on the verge) that no one appears to want to buy. In fact, you don't see *any* buyers, only sellers, maybe a dozen.

So now our man is sitting alone out in the middle of the place (positioning is everything, right?) with his goat, that he's put down on the ground in front of him. The goat's oblivious of course—I'm guessing its internal organs are shutting down by now—but at least it's getting some shade from the man's shadow. For the man, there's no shade, and he can't keep his eyes open. Jesus, if it could get any worse, I can't see how.

Anyway, they show some other people trying to do business. There's this butcher. He's complaining to the camera. It sounds like French. Can you imagine French being spoken in a place like that? And in each hand he's holding up something—legs, I think, of some animal—and the voiceover translation of this French-speaking butcher goes something like, Who would buy something like this? and holds up the meat, and I'm thinking, I bet the man with the goat would. The butcher says, Everyone's leaving, everyone who can, then a narrator with a British accent

tells us at least 100,000 have fled the area. And then the camera pans around the market and suddenly you see some Arab-looking men in one of those little white pickups you see all the time on the news from Pakistan, and they're waving automatic weapons around in the air as they hold on for dear life to the sides of the pickup as it bounces them around, and I'm thinking they probably have food, because they look pretty well-fed. And then the French-speaking butcher looks at the truck and says, It's too dangerous here for us to get food aid.

And the segment ends, just like that. So we're all left hanging, and we'll never know what happened to the man with the goat, but I'd bet the farm it isn't good. And I'm thinking this thing's going to ruin my day. And now I see this writing business, it hasn't helped, so I'm going to sign off. I have to go pick up my wife's watch, at a jeweler's. It needed a new battery. Batteries, what a pain. Between us we have six, maybe seven watches, and they all run on batteries. So do the remotes for the TVs (five TVs, mind you). It takes three remotes just to turn on the big TV in the TV room (imagine, we have a room we call the TV room, like that's all you're supposed to do there). But don't get me wrong, I'm grateful—although I'm always thinking, Why me? But then I think, Why *not* me? And I don't like to have *that* thought either. Jesus. Oh, the doorbell, gotta go.