

BREATH OF FRESH AIR

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INT. DATA PROCESSING OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON

A bold logo graces the wall:

Millennia Marketing: winning pocketbooks and minds!

A dented, metal CANISTER huddles in one corner.

Red rimmed eyes flick to a monitor. Across a page of names and addresses. Written in scratchy cursive, the letters are almost impossible to make out.

Weary fingers fly across a keyboard. Tap. Tap. Tap.

The eyes squint. Fingers stop.

RANDOLPH STEINER coughs, bends down. 30s, but the lines on his face scream 65. His shirt bears weathered stains, too.

Studying the page, he brushes greasy hair to one side.

RANDOLPH

(mutters)

Is that "Myra" or "Myrtle"? Can't quite tell in this light...

BEEEEP. A bracelet on Randolph's wrist flashes red:

"Unauthorized work stoppage. Second infraction, in 3 days."

Randolph jumps back to his typing. The glow morphs to steady green. His bracelet settles down.

And resumes monitoring Randolph's work. Big Brother's watching. His bracelet, too.

A KNOCK on the door shocks his nerves again. What now?!?

DIRK (30s) sticks his head inside: a head ripped right from the pages of GQ. Not a hair out of place. A face that oozes comfort and privilege. His \$10K suit's spiffy, too.

DIRK

Hidey ho, old timer!

Randolph keeps typing, doesn't stop.

RANDOLPH

"Old timer?" Dirk, remember the office party? We were born the same year.

DIRK

(laughs)

Dude, you look like death warmed over! Time to install a Vit. D scanner in here, get a tan.

Dirk lingers in the doorway. Randolph shoots his boss a concerned look.

RANDOLPH

If you're here about the alert, I just stopped to read a word. Quality over quantity. That's what we strive for, right?

Dirk steps behind Randolph, rests a reassuring hand on his shoulder. Noticing the stains, he recoils. Nods at the data screen instead.

DIRK

I know you're a busy translating beaver. One of Millennia's best. Which is why I'm here...

RANDOLPH

You mean it's *not* a friendly visit?

Dirk whips Randolph's swivel chair around.

DIRK

More than mere friendly, pal! The Oxy-Ayre meeting just wrapped - and guess what? We won the whole account. With a Ceep Kool partnership, no less!

Dirk waits for congrats. Randolph forces a "Yay, Team" smile.

DIRK

You understand what this signifies? Loads more data processing for you. At least with their "golden-years" audience: fossils that still communicate in dead languages like that...

Dirk's points at the cursive writing. Flashes a shark-just-ate-the-baby smile.

DIRK

Then there's other perks. Remember when we gave you Employee of the Month?

HQ bought you that stylin' tie. But
Oxy swag blows that away. Come to
the boardroom, take a look!

Dirk grabs Randolph's arm. The chair rolls. Randy digs in his
heels - won't move.

RANDOLPH
I can't take a break now!

DIRK
Don't be so defeatist. The pitch
team grabbed most of the promo
gear. But I hid the last behind a
speaker. Clean-up crew's here in
thirty. If you wait to finish that
hieroglyph of a page, they're sure
to find it. And if so, what I've
saved for you will vanish into -
(chuckles)
"Thin air!"

Rudolph eyes his timer bracelet, worried.

RANDOLPH
But Lisa's birthday's coming up.
I'm saving up to send her to a
resort.

Impatience morphs to sympathy on Dirk's face.

He swipes a card across Randolph's bracelet. It BEEPS and
flashes yellow.

Even though he's not typing, labor seconds (then minutes)
accrue. Randolph stares at the override.

RANDOLPH
What if I leave the room?

DIRK
No big. You'll stay on the clock!

Dirk grabs Randolph, drags him out the door.

INT. BOARD ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

In contrast to Randolph's corporate cell, this room is
opulence itself. A generous liquor selection. Full wall
monitor - no expense spared!

Onscreen: A freeze-framed logo for "Oxy-Ayre".

Dirk reaches behind a speaker, and pulls out:

A glossy CANISTER. Unlike the cylinder in Randolph's room, this one (and its attached BREATHE MASK) is a work of art!

DIRK

Look: Oxy's premo *Breathe-Free* line. The stuff in here's so clean, it makes other air supplies taste like mud! Here - take a whiff.

Randolph shakes his head, unsure.

RANDOLPH

That looks expensive. And smooth. I can't afford to replace a tie. What if I drop it, and something breaks?

DIRK

Don't be such a worry wort! Oxy makes the casing from gorilla plastic. SUPER lightweight, it can't be punctured. Juggle it. Hell, bounce it off the floor. Do whatever floats your boat. Whatever happens, it's all yours!

RANDOLPH

You're giving *this* to me - it's not a joke?

DIRK

Nope. Every last cubic centimeter. You've earned it. Breathe it in. Relax.

Putting on the mask, Randolph takes a drag. The bliss on his face: instantaneous. The air inside: beyond compare.

Suddenly ravenous, Randolph huffs more. Dirk laughs: turns the gauge off with a CLICK.

DIRK

This is top drawer stuff. Imbibe in moderation. A kid could make this last. Maybe. But a guy your size? Don't use it up in one place, bud.

RANDOLPH

(gasps)

I don't know how to thank you.

DIRK

Hey, do a few months of data crunching overnights, and I'll write us up as fair and square. I like you *that* much, Rudy.

RANDOLPH

(beat)

That's Randy.

DIRK

Whatever. We're pals. And while we're here, you just gotta see the video that won Oxy over, Rudy. I brainstormed the pitch myself!

Before Randolph can object, Dirk toggles the video to play.

EXT. WASHINGTON DC - DAY (VIDEO)

Patriotic music swells stagnant air.

In the background, the White House! Encased in a miles-wide bubble, the emerald lawn is day-glow green... especially compared to dead terrain beyond.

The US Flag stands at stiff attention. With no wind, the cloth is gone. The replacement model: shiny steel.

An unseen BARITONE VOICE intones:

BARITONE VOICE

Want to keep your home safe from everything life and climate throws its way? Consider investing in state of the art *Ceep Kool* technology. Our new environment domes feature integrated solar powered windows, fueled by the same damaging UV-light they filter out! Guaranteed missile and bullet proof, with imbedded bio-metric security. With *Ceep Kool* at your side, there are no storms in sight!

Two HAZMAT CLAD FIGURES walk by. If a bio suit could look corporate, these beauties do. Presidential seals grace each armband.

In the office: Dirk muffles a delighted squeal.

DIRK

Rudy, guess who's inside!

RANDOLPH
Uh, the President and VP?

DIRK
Kinda. We hired actors to play
them. But wait - my pitch gets
better now...

Back to the video:

SECRET SERVICE AGENTS scurry over with designer canisters
labeled "Oxy-Ayre". POTUS and Veep get jacked in.

BARITONE VOICE
And when one's pesky job requires
you venture beyond home-sweet-home:
make sure you breathe free outside,
too! From upgraded vehicle
recycling systems to personal
cooling vests, Oxy-Ayre delivers
the cleanest air filtration money
and science can buy! In orbit, or
across the globe!

Air hisses through tubes. Flashing thumbs up, the President
and VP wave to an unseen, wheezing crowd.

Tapping a microphone, the suited President clears his throat.
(Almost chokes.) He addresses the audience, once composed:

PRESIDENT
Citizens of our great country, I
bring to you splendid news! Thanks
to the drone strike on the climate
protestors' headquarters, the
terrorist threat has been
neutralized. Even better, the new
Michigan pipeline opened today.
Paired with our Manhattan fracking
initiative, US energy independence
is sure to be a success!

The crowd claps. The video smashes to black.

BARITONE VOICE
Want to know more? Come visit Oxy-
Ayre online at [www.oxyayre.com/
happy-lungs.html](http://www.oxyayre.com/happy-lungs.html). Even if you're
not the leader of the Western
World, health and happiness are in
your reach. Call now, don't wait.
Platinum and bitcoin accepted...

Legalese rolls down the screen. Backdropped by a still-wheezing crowd.

Back in the office: Dirk freeze-frames the video. Beaming at Randolph, he waits for a flood of praise.

DIRK

Did you catch the subtext I snuck in? Subliminally tying Oxy-Ayre to the Presidency itself! "Breathe Oxy-Ayre and the world will be your bitch." That's an awesome pitch, right?

Randolph frowns at a clock on the wall.

RANDOLPH

Riveting. But my shift's ending. Dirk, it's been... fun.

Cradling the canister, he backs towards the door. Dirk scoops a glass of whiskey off the table.

DIRK

Hold on. 'Til the janitor knocks, let's celebrate Millennium's new... uh, "Millennium", as it were.

RANDOLPH

You don't get it...

DIRK

(chuckles)

If it's about the cost, don't wad your panties a bunch. Everything's on the company account. You'll get paid to hang out!

RANDOLPH

Thanks but... Lisa's waiting. Let's "hang" some *other* time!

Tucking the canister under one arm, Randolph ignores Dirk's scowl. Beelines for the door.

Left alone, Dirk rewinds his oh-so-winning video. Grins to himself. Gulps whiskey down.

INT. CORPORATE LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

CORPORATE DRONES and EXECUTIVES file through revolving doors. Each group on a separate side. No-one crosses those lines.

Each man dons a BREATHE-MASK, the only similarity they share. The CEOs' flaunt designer logos. The worker ones: threadbare.

Randolph lingers in the lobby - canisters under both arms.

His old rusted cylinder faces the trickle of execs. The new Oxy-Ayre closer to the mob of "drones".

Men on both sides stop and stare. Randolph ignores the scrutiny. Slipping an old mask on, he steps out into -

EXT. CORPORATE HEADQUARTERS - SIDEWALK

Pure smog. Worse than 2000 Beijing.

Even through his mask, Randolph chokes. Something dark splatters the lining inside.

Wincing, he fights his way through the urban crowd -

On billboards ads blare. Pepsi 3000. Apple wetware. One subsidiary Oxy-Aire pitch stands out:

"Soil-ent Green: Great for the environment, and Oxy A-OK for you, too. With our new prion-filtering system, it's guaranteed safe 60% of the time!"

A PSA from the government scrolls across a separate screen.

"Work = Oxygen. Contribute to the Fresh Air Fund for Orphans today! Used air filters welcome."

In smaller letters underneath: "Tonight's forecast: Level 5 Storm in outer boroughs. Avoid skin exposure at costs."

Randolph grunts: the warning's nothing new.

Reaching a TOY STORE, he steps inside.

INT. SUBWAY - LATER

Poor-man's transport. Trash rolls across the floor. The train creaks like it'll explode. Nothing's been repaired in years.

Randolph slumps on a bench between his two canisters. Off his feet, he looks relieved. SOMETHING bulges in his jacket.

Across the aisle, an OLD COUPLE share one breathe mask and canister. Their gauge is redlined, *almost* empty.

Randolph's cell BLIPS. He ignores the call, more focused on the couple's plight.

On a wall, an Oxy-Ayre ad plays.

EXT. LUXURY SWIMMING POOL - DAY

Another bio-dome bubble. This one by a Club Med-style swimming pool.

An OLD COUPLE (CHARLIE and MILDRED) relax in pool chairs.

Dressed in designer bathing suits, they sport bodies that seem *too* supple. If ever they had a care in the world, they left it in the locker room!

Charlie turns to the camera, flashes a plastic-perfect grin.

CHARLIE

You know, when Mildred first told me about this place, I thought... Nah. Too frou-frou for my style. When it comes to vacations, I prefer to rough it - every time.

MILDRED

(pats his thigh)
I love my Charlie; he's so manly! One year, he insisted we vacation in Alaska.

CHARLIE

Bad mistake. Much too warm.

MILDRED

The next year, we flipped a coin and jetted to Australia. But the underwater tunnels were so confusing to navigate...

CHARLIE

Honey, they beat the alternative. Your stomach can't handle boats.
(whispers to the camera)
Halfway from Melbourne to Sidney, Mildred threw up over the side!

MILDRED

Vacation Three was our ticket to paradise - the year we got it right. After a bit of...
(giggles)
Personal persuasion, I convinced Charles to buy 1st Class Tickets here. What a ride!

CHARLIE

I gotta admit, the minute we got off that rocket, it's like this place was *built for us*.

MILDRED

At the Mile High Resort, all our favorite foods are prepared on demand by gourmet chefs...

A WAITER hands a SUSHI ROLL to Mildred. And to Charlie: an Oxy-Ayre CIGAR!

CHARLIE

That's the nice perk in this joint. Fresh O2 mini tubes - every flavor, and style!

Mildred lovingly pats Charlie's thigh.

MILDRED

Darling, don't forget to tell them the best part.

CHARLIE

Er, the anti-aging spas?

MILDRED

No, not that. You know what I'm talking about!

CHARLIE

(blushes)

Uh, alone time with my sweetie-bear? Dear, how could I forget?

MILDRED

No, silly -

Mildred points to one side of the dome which reveals...

A dirty, pollution clogged Earth - hanging in the black void of space! Yup, the Mile High resort's "out there". Literally.

MILDRED

The view! It's to die for.

CHARLIE

(chuckles darkly)

Only if you're too poor to travel. But we *worked* for our retirement. Our golden years are well earned.

Charlie picks up Mildred and strides towards the pool.

CHARLIE
Prepare to cannonball, Darling!

MILDRED
Whee! I wanna stay all year!

Charlie jumps. Water splashes. Freeze frame. Followed by a tag logo:

Mile High Resort Orbital Spas. "When it's time for your second honeymoon - you'll find heaven in our skies!"

Followed by more push-promos:

"A new life awaits at Mile High's Dome Mountain Colonies - couple and family rates available. Tell 'em Oxy-Jen sent you, and you'll get a free Air-Refill, for just one look!

Think you can't afford it? Ask about our Indenture Packages, too! A few years of servitude could be your ticket to Retirement in Paradise! Work in a fresh, oxygenated environment. Who could ask for more?"

INT. SUBWAY

The commercial ends. Something RUSTLES to Randy's right. He whirls around to face:

A PUNK TEEN - poised to steal his Oxy-Ayre cannister. Randy grabs the teen's throat and pins him against the wall.

The boy scrambles for a knife...

With his free hand, Randolph seizes his rusty canister. Rears back to whack the kid in the head -

PUNK TEEN
Shit, man. You wouldn't!

RANDOLPH
You steal my air? Try me, punk!

Randolph releases the boy. Snatching the knife before the punk can move, Randy slashes him (lightly) across one cheek.

RANDOLPH
The next cut'll be your air apply!

PUNK TEEN
(grumbles)
Fucking selfish Richie. Only cares about himself. Hoarding double tanks...

The teen stumbles to his feet. Puffs out his chest, walks away.

Leaving Randolph and the old couple behind. The octogenarians shrink from Randy, terrified what he'll do next.

RANDOLPH

(stammers)

I'm not rich. This was a gift! And
I didn't hurt him much. Please...
I'm the good guy here!

The train screeches to a stop. Randolph's exit.

Just as the old couple's gauge slides to empty. They're not home yet, but their air's... gone!

Randy holds out his old canister. An offering.

RANDOLPH

Here. I filled this yesterday.
Filtered air. It's fresh, I swear.

They stare at him, shocked.

Randolph gently lays the canister at their feet. Cradling his Oxy-Ayre cylinder, he shuffles towards the exit.

RANDOLPH

Have a healthy and safe trip.

EXT. RURAL DECAYING OUTER BOROUGH - RURAL ROAD

Randolph inches through dense smog. Slaps on GOGGLES to shield his eyes.

Every few feet, he sips from the Oxy-Ayre canister. Out here in no man's land, the pollution's three times worse.

INT. RANDOLPH'S LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A decaying hovel that may have been middle class once. But thanks to years of grinding poverty, everything "extra's" been ignored. Peeling paint. Tech that's twenty years old.

On the couch, LISA (5) plays with an almost bald BARBIE DOLL.

A breathe mask covers Lisa's baby features. Obviously a hand-me-down, from some adult.

Randolph gathers his daughter in his arms. The joy on his face: pure bliss. More than his taste of Oxy-Ayre before.

RANDOLPH
Where's my little girl, Lisa?

LISA
(giggles, muffled)
Right here. Where else could I be?

RANDOLPH
And where's old Auntie Sarah?

LISA
Silly. There she is!

Randolph follows her pointing finger towards:

AUNTIE SARAH (40s). Hair cinched in a bun, she looks as world weary as her brother. With her breathe mask off, even worse!

Randolph gasps. Setting Lisa down, he hisses to Sarah.

RANDOLPH
I told you, the house filter's on the fritz. You've got to keep your breathe mask on!!

AUNTIE SARAH
We had a *tiny* emergency this AM. Which I handled, thank-you-very-much...

Sarah points to a GIRL SIZED CANISTER on the floor. Gas HISSES from two holes. Oxygen and green gas melt into air.

RANDOLPH
God. What malfunctioned this time?

AUNTIE SARAH
Lisa. She dropped it. But don't scold her - being clumsy's normal for kids her age! She got excited, ran and fell. Good news: no knee scrapes peroxide can't vanquish. The bad: that puncture can't be welded. Coolant's contaminated the insulation. It's not safe to use at all. I tried to call, and ask you pick up a replacement at *Walmart*.

RANDOLPH
Walmart? We can't afford the markup!

AUNTIE SARAH

As a purchase? No. Rental? Perhaps. Randy, you're a good father. And a great provider. Maybe you'll earn another Employee of the Month soon?

RANDOLPH

That was last year. And the prize was just a tie. You know I'm saving up to send Lisa away from... everything. We don't have time or money for mistakes like this.

AUNTIE SARAH

Whatever comes our way, we'll suck it up. Anyway, after you didn't answer, I lent Lisa my air. She's a growing girl and needs it more than this old soul. When I get home, I'll dig my emergency spare out of the guest room and breathe stale air for awhile.

RANDOLPH

That's miles away. You won't make it home!

Grabbing Lisa, Randolph fits the new Oxy-Ayre breathe-mask on her face.

RANDOLPH

Sweetie, stop squirming. Try this on.

Lisa inhales. Then giggles with delight.

LISA

That tickles!

RANDOLPH

It did for me too, honey. It's all for you. Enjoy.

Grabbing Sarah's canister next, Randy shoves it at his sister. And slips the breathe mask over her head.

RANDOLPH

Here. Now Auntie looks like you!
(hisses to Sarah)
Don't take that off. And hurry home. Without a level five Hazmat suit, an "old soul" like yours can't take the coming storm.

He guides Sarah to the exit. Weak, she bristles and turns.

AUNTIE SARAH

Wait a tornado-tarnished minute.
What was *that thing* you put on *her*?

She points at Lisa's shiny new Oxy-Ayre canister.

RANDOLPH

Uh, bonus for employee of the
month?

Auntie's not buying it. She points to the bulge in Randolph's jacket, frowns.

AUNTIE SARAH

You're stealing from the office,
now? Randolph Steiner, what's going
on?

RANDOLPH

Don't waste your breath on
questions. Just call me when you're
safe at home!

Randy shoves her out, slams the door.

EXT. RANDOLPH'S FRONT YARD - MOMENTS LATER

The wind howls on the horizon.

Auntie buttons her jacket over her breathe-mask, all the way
past her nose. Keeping her face shielded from the caustic
air, she strikes off down the road.

INT. RANDOLPH'S LIVING ROOM

Lisa watches through the window. She turns to her father,
blue eyes wide over her breathe mask.

LISA

Is Auntie sick?

RANDOLPH

No honey. Just tired, as usual.

LISA

She was coughing all day. Yuck!

RANDOLPH

She was? Baby, how long?

LISA

This many.

The girl splays out one hand. All five digits in the air.

RANDOLPH

Minutes?

LISA

No. This many TV shows.

RANDOLPH

5 Hours? Geezus. That's.. Not good.

Randolph's eyes betray his concern. But he puts on a brave face for Lisa. As a distraction, he pulls from his jacket:

A NEW BARBIE - from the toy store! He presents it to Lisa with a flourish. The child grabs it, eager.

RANDOLPH

Play with her gently, sweetie.
She's going to resort with you to
this summer. So she's gotta look
pretty by your side. Barbie'll
protect you at nighttime, too...

He guides Lisa to -

INT. LISA'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Faded unicorns and teddy bears make peeling walls almost tolerable. Randolph tucks Lisa in; new Barbie under her arm.

LISA

You're coming with us to camp?

RANDOLPH

Oh no, baby. This resort's not for
grownups.

LISA

Don't leave us like mommy!

RANDOLPH

(frowns)

Honey, Mommy got sick and... had to
leave. But I'm staying here for
when you, uh, come home. At resort,
you'll have lots of fun. There's
clean water to swim in. So clear,
you can see for miles!

LISA
Water's not clear, silly.

RANDOLPH
Honey, in some places you've never
seen, the water's blue. But you can
see right through it. And the air
will be so yummy, you won't have to
wear this outside!

Randolph taps Lisa's breathe mask. Then tickles her - a
familiar, cozy game. In a moment of carelessness...

...he breathes deep. Choking, he almost coughs up a lung.

After awhile, the convulsions stop. Lisa stares.

LISA
Daddy, you sound like Auntie. Do
you need a mask, too?

Randolph rolls bloodshot eyes, forces a grin.

RANDOLPH
Daddy'll use your old one for now.
Your job isn't to worry, just
sleep. If you wanna earn powdered
blueberry pancakes in the morning,
you and Barbie best start snoring
soon!

He strokes Lisa's hair as the girl drifts off; rocked to
pleasant dreams on her Oxy-Ayre "cloud".

Randolph hums. And tip toes to...

INT. RANDOLPH'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

He settles down at an old Salvation Army desk. Even that
effort triggers a wheezing fit.

Pulling over Lisa's punctured canister, Randolph takes one
whiff - recoils.

RANDOLPH
This stuff's worse than Flint...

His tired eyes flit to a framed PHOTO on the desk. With
effort, he picks it up.

INSERT: a picture of younger Randolph, and a smiling WOMAN.
INFANT LISA in her arms. Randolph caresses her printed cheek.

RANDOLPH

Honey, you'd be proud of our little
angel - even in a hellscape like
this. I promise she'll grow up
someplace good.

COUGHS rack Randolph's body. He covers his mouth to muffle
the noise. Don't want to wake up Lisa now.

He removes his hand, stares at bright red blood on his palm.

RANDOLPH

Damn. Even Oxy-Ayre can't filter
this out.

Head swimming, Randy leans back - closes his eyes.

RANDOLPH

Buck up Rudy - uh, Randolph! It's
just a few more months. If it wins
Lisa a ticket out of here, what's a
few lungfuls of sludge?

EXT. RANDOLPH'S FRONT YARD

Outside, pollution clouds MOAN. The only thing louder than
the gathering storm are Randy's growing coughs.