

AND NOW, A BRIEF RANT:

I Hate Google

I have a favorite recurrent fantasy.

It is the 19th century; I am a rich lady living in a splendid villa in the countryside of France. I read loads of classic novels. They are actual books with black leather covers. When I want or need to communicate with somebody, I write a long and florid letter with a quill pen by candlelight, in my ornate handwriting. I then summon my horseman who leaps on his steed and rides off to deliver my notes directly to my people. He waits for their responses, then rides swiftly home to me with their letters.

To my mind, this is the perfect art of communication: personal, relaxed, speedy when need be, simple.

But life isn't like that anymore, is it? The computer, with all its complexities and, to me, its incompre-

hensibility, has altered our lives forever. Most people would say it's for the better (see how fast I'm typing this and correcting mistakes and looking up spelling); I say that for the most part it's jumbled my life in more ways than I value. When was the last time I sent somebody a letter or even a birthday card where I used a pen to write my message in longhand and had to look up their mailing address? When did I last use a stamp?

Oh, don't mistake me for a batty old lady in a rocking chair. I participate on Zoom meetings at least three times a week, and it's so much easier than driving twenty-seven miles to meet the friends in my women's group. We got used to this during the pandemic siege of course and many people I know, including Tom, are working happily from home, on Zoom with his clients and colleagues almost all day, wearing sweatpants, no ties, and bedroom slippers. I like Zoom. I wear mascara for it.

Like most people, I check the emails and text messages on my iPhone and Mac many times a day—too many times. That's the compulsive computer nut case in me. I always tell myself that I'll really stop looking every time I hear the "ping" signaling a new message and, if I'm not expecting anything important, I assure myself I'll only check messages twice a day. But who am I kidding?

I know most of the texts coming in will be from Nancy Pelosi and Joe Biden asking for money, but maybe there will be that one message inviting me

to a private, glorious musical theatre event where there will only be forty-two guests and a handful of celebs, so I'd better be on top of this.

Years ago, I used to write *Playboy* Interviews, which were the length of entire books. Early on this was in the days of my Royal typewriter. I wrote pages and pages and spread them out all over the floor of my office to organize them into themes and topics. Then I cut and pasted, I mean literally cut with scissors and "pasted" with Scotch tape. If I had made a typo, I'd have to either retype the whole page or use whitener to erase and neatly retype the single word or phrase. How much easier is this process now, when cutting and pasting on my Mac is simple and quick? Make no mistake, I do indeed appreciate this aspect of computer life. Typing on my computer is my good pal.

But: I am basically a dork. I don't understand Google and all its permutations. I use the search function a lot, but I don't know anything about Google Maps, Gmail, their calendar, or Google drive and I don't care. I also don't understand all the initials that plague me constantly on my screen like PDF, DM, MP3 or MP4, URL. What am I supposed to do with them, except ignore them? And I have no patience for passwords. It seems to me every time I want to order a pair of shoes or doggie treats from Amazon, they require a different password from me, usually one I'm unfamiliar with. My mode of behavior is that I try once or twice, then give up and turn the project

over to our assistant, who is in his early thirties and seems to me to be a genius at this stuff.

Now a question for readers: Do you really understand the iCloud? Do you care? Do you know anything about Linked In? I do not. Tom has tried to explain these to me many times, usually telling me how much money Amazon and Microsoft have made from selling these features. Since I have no interest in either of these features, I sure as hell don't care how profitable they are.

Now to social media: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, as well as TikTok, Snapchat, and What's App. There are probably more that I've never heard of. I know and appreciate the truth that these allow people around the world to connect. It's rewarding, on the rare occasions that I find my way into Facebook, to hear news from my friend Richard in Paris. I also know that a lot of what appears online is drivel, people are obsessed by what they find on these platforms (forgive me, I had to find out from Tom they are called "platforms"). I believe that people who hang out on social media don't read many books or watch Masterpiece. But maybe they didn't anyway before TikTok.

To go back to my fantasy of life in the 1800s: on any day back then, I could master whatever I needed to know of communicating with the outside world by myself. I didn't need any help from assistants or husbands telling me how to use a piece of parchment paper to write a letter.

But I also didn't have an older brother as I have had in my true life, who having assumed that a much younger sister couldn't do anything on her own, didn't teach me but instead did everything for me. He fixed things, assembled things, understood how to make things work. I succumbed to his power and never got over it.

Ever since then I've relied on other people, alas usually men, to take care of things in certain areas for me. My assistant just set up Audible on my iPhone so I can listen to mystery novels while I ride our stationary bike. I'm grateful for that. But I tell myself I don't do any of those chores myself because I'm very good at what I'm good at, which is located mostly in my right brain, the creative area. And that I don't want to bother with the rest, some of which, to be frank, makes me anxious. I don't want to learn how to set up Spotify in my car because I like to listen to the news. I don't care about the many permutations of Google. And if my computer crashes and I lose everything I've ever written because I'm not connected to the Cloud... well, so be it.

I just wish Amazon would accept my password.

