

Eschatology

Jason Cook

2009

Train sounds.

Stars are showing and the sun is down, and high above us the sky is crested with an even, purple glow. All around us are trees ripened with green leaves, and vesper bats course fireflies while I stand on the edge of the woods with Apple kneeling before me, obscuring herself with wry branches jutting in all directions.

She takes me in her mouth, and I make the slightest sound, and out beyond the trees a train roars over stonset rails and booms like a muted chorus of dissonant horns raging forth and rattling throughout all of suburbia. I look down and see her eyes blacked with mascara as they turn up toward me and stare.

Her mouth opens to speak, and before she does I reach down and feel myself hanging flaccid in the air.

Am I doing something wrong? she says.

Of course not, I say. Though I'm not certain that she isn't. I've never done this before, and I look down and touch it and try to wrestle it to life. I imagine the dirtiest, most sexual woman's voice shifting between cooing and moaning, squeezing her breasts with dainty hands, and nothing happens, and I can feel my cheeks burning and my legs quaking only slightly, and I want to run and bury myself in the loose forest floor. I shut my eyes to stop the panic, and a pitchcolored anxiousness seems to flood through me as the sound of the train behind the neighborhood begins to fade in a long, aural slope.

This has never happened to me before, she says. I'm sorry.

No, I'm sorry, I say. It's never happened to me.

I thought this was your first time.

Well it is.

Well.

And through the trees I can see the widening lights of my parents' car coasting down the driveway and toward the house. The beams turn off and the doors open and slam shut, and I can hear their voices monosyllabic and distant. Apple runs a palm across her mouth. I think I need to go, she says. And she stands and snuffles and takes from out of her back pocket a small tube of lipgloss. And even in the constant dark I can see the sparkling glimmer of her lips freshly lustered.

How many times have you done it? I say. And suddenly I get this kind of contemptuous flare that causes me to snarl and spit my words. Are you still doing it with someone else?

What the hell, Davy?

I just want to know, I say. And we walk in awkward silence toward the driveway, and my parents are staring back with blank faces. We just went for a walk, I say.

And Apple waves to them and smiles, and she pulls me around to the other side of the yard, and her face is red, and she pulls me close and says: I like you because you're not an asshole. If you're gonna be an asshole then don't call me again.

I'm sorry, I say. I panicked. Just please don't tell anyone about it.

God, she says. Relax. You're not impotent. You're just nervous.

My parents stand in a fog of mosquitoes under the floodlight beaming down from the roof. They talk, and when Apple raises her voice they turn and look like they're trying not to look. I'm sorry, I say.

I'll see you tomorrow, she says.

OK, I say. And she kisses me on the cheek, and I'm left with a sticky smear, and she walks down the driveway and into her car and leaves. I stand there silent for a moment and then walk toward the house.

Who's the girl? they say.

Apple Valley, I say. She just moved here.

Do we know her parents?

I don't know. Do you?

Well we know a lot of people.

Well does she sound like one of them?

Tom Morris, my father says. Tom Morris told me they caught a terrorist at the gas station today.

What was he doing at the gas station?

Tom Morris or the terrorist?

The terrorist.

He was going to blow it up, my father says.

How do you know?

That's what they said.

Who are they?

I don't know, he says. Newscasters.

Why would a terrorist want to blow up a gas station? That's what those ragheads do, he says. They blow things up. Allah commands every raghead to blow something up. It isn't like we live in the city. I say.

Anywhere is a target to them, he says. Where would we get our gas? And the people that would get hurt.

You shouldn't say raghead, my mother says.

Who's that girl? my father says. Whose side are you on anyway?

I don't think a real terrorist would come here, I say.

Oh let him be, my mother says. And I'm not sure who she is speaking to.

Look up in the sky, he says. And I look up, and he raises an arm and points one long, wiry finger toward a low airplane coasting slowly. Look at that plane, he says.

That's a goddamn weapon. Those ragheads turned that airplane into a weapon. Now when you see it it isn't just an airplane. Do you understand? And he stops talking for a while and just stands there in a quiet, palpable rage.

My mother puts an arm around his shoulder and squeezes him. Oh settle down, she says. And she looks up at the plane moving aimlessly under the stars.

I walk inside and open the basement door and walk down the stairs and lie face-down on the bed. The thought of my crushing impotence cycles through me, and I replay the scene, and each time Apple seems to grow until I am smaller than her, and she forces my face between her legs, and I submit and soon drown in some warm, cloven place where I dream she keeps me, and outside of her there is the patter of bullets and falling metal clanking and the roar of people screaming with their voices joined into one echoing cacophony.

I awake not much later to the sound of the train screeching again its muffled howl through the timberline, and I walk out of the basement through the sliding door lighted from above with a single yellow bulb gathering swarms of moths hurling their dusty bodies against the glass. The sky is still and dark, and the stars hang in their loamy masses waiting for some shape to take. I look out above the trees to find the few constellations that I know, and I see again the shifting lights of an airplane locked to its path about the meters above. Quickly I pull on a pair of shoes and jog to the street, and I imagine I can see the plane being pulled gracefully toward the earth, searing with atmospheric fire like some great, dying bird as its fuselage rips in two distressed halves, and the nose plummets far into the asphalt leaving behind the tail to strike the street and render itself into a cascade of destroying shrapnel. I imagine bearded men with sweaty bundles wrapped over their heads, leaving the cockpit unscathed with surreptitious grins on their faces, and my father in his robe with his hair unkempt and his body small and terrified, shouting slurs as some unseen hand rips through the starry sky and plucks the men from their wreckage.

The plane still drifts though, searching its way about the dark. My feet hit the ground hollowly as I jog, and ahead of me are only dim gaslights shining small circles of amber light over the sod tightly trimmed against the sidewalk. The homes are all perched in long rows that run in streaks of slate-colored bodies with stucco and drywall, and shimmery cars sit parked in their drives, and the faint smell of chlorine is everywhere, wafting from the uncovered hot tubs set steaming on their decks, and a cicadasong drone plays lightly beneath the sound of an engine revving and whistling, and in the near-distance two headlights begin to grow. A police cruiser sidles slowly to the center of the road and stops. The figure inside is tall and lean, and it stares out of the window without moving at all. I step out of its path and walk to the sidewalk and start to head off in the other direction but the window rolls down and a spotlight flickers on, and I am somehow caught where I stand. Hold on there, he says.

OK, I say.

Hold on, he says.

And I put my hands on top of my head, and a dryhusked earthworm hauls itself in a death march across the cement. The spotlight stays still, and I listen to the car door open and wooden footsteps clap the pavement.

Turn around, he says. What's your name? And his face is narrow and sad, and his skin looks culled from an animal, and he looks down at me with squarish eyes that squint continuously.

Davy Alabama.

Where you from?

Hellespont.

This here's Hellespont. Where you go n?

I was following that airplane.

You can't follow no plane from the ground, he says. You drunk?

No, sir.

Drugs?

No, sir.

uh huh.

Did I do something wrong? I say.

You just Wait here a minute.

OK.

OK, he says, and he mumbles something into the radio strapped to his shoulder.

And I look nervously into the windows of the dew-glazed homes darkened without moonlight or shadows, and no other cars pass along this street or any other in the visible distance, and no one else is walking on the roads or sidewalks, and we are alone in the night's perfect stasis without so much as the birds watching from trees. I look at him and his body wiry and wrapped in a starch-stiffened uniform, and his eyes seem to coalesce into one blinking, white orb that pans the night for suspicious things like some flesh-built camera. He looks to me, and I can feel him looking inside of me. I can feel him sifting through me for some sort of weakness. The radio in the cruiser responds, and it hisses with fuzz-streaked voices like the sound of dead astronauts speaking, and he turns and walks toward the car. And I watch him scribble into a notebook.

Mr. Alabama, he says. I don't know you but I can tell you with some kind of honesty that I don't like you. You make me highly suspicious. I don't like people who don't got much to say, and I don't like people with funny names, and I don't like people who go Out at night, and I don't like people who're not a Christian which I suspect you're not. You're on my list now but I won't make no crime about it just yet.

And he walks to the front of the car and looks out at the sky, and he turns and hands me a spiral-torn piece of paper. Don't think we don't got a file on you now. Hellespont is a good place he says. It don't need no new ideas.

And the paper lists my address and the names of my parents and the names of our neighbors and the name of a dog we had until last year. It says where I was born and where I went to school. And I feel small and sickly, and the paper quivers gently in my hands. The officer steps into the car and shuts the door, and the spotlight dims to a dark orange before turning off completely.

What's your name? I say. I've never seen you out here before.

Officer, he says.

Officer, what?

Just Officer.

The cruiser remains: there for several moments and I can see his shape stiff and idle. I start to walk down the sidewalk and when I feel far enough away, I begin to run, and I pass rows of homes with their faces deadbolted and quiet, and I turn the corner and find myself relieved and facing Apple's house lamplighted on the cul-de-sac. The air is humid and warm and full of gnats, and homes here are unfinished sketches of wood and waxy nails, and the yards are black mounds of crudely shaped earth, the sky is clear and wanting to redden.

I throw pebbles at Apple's window until the light flickers on, and she comes with hazy eyes and looks out of the window. Davy?

I couldn't wait, I say. I had to come tonight.

Hold on, she says. And she laughs.

And I wait, kicking rocks across the dirt. I look at the weeds sprouting from the raw land and the river-colored slices of shale that perforate the lot. Hungry insects loft themselves about the weeds. She opens the back door slowly and peeks out and smiles and with a curling finger draws me inside.

Are you OK? she says. It's almost morning.

I couldn't sleep, I say. I went for a walk.

To my house?

I was following a plane, I say. I felt like it was going to crash.

Why?

I don't know. My parents have me thinking.

I take it it didn't crash, she says.

No.

Come here, she says. And she wraps an arm around me and pulls me close, and I can smell sleep on her body like a mix of sweat and deodorant and shampoo and bed sheets.

What if a terrorist came here? I say.

So what if one did?

Well what would you do.

Not much, I guess. I mean what could I do? Someone would do something.

I would leave, I say. I would just drive out to the desert and stay there.

What good would that do? You'd leave everyone behind, and you'd be alone.

I could live in a cave and eat insects and be safe and free.

You would eat insects?

If the country was under attack and I had to live in a cave.

Oh.

And we sit there in the half-silence of a new home settling at night with all its slight creaking and groaning and aching. And there is nothing but the house shifting to remind you that time is one great, forward motion.

Why would you ask that? she says.

Maybe it's something to worry about, I say. Planes are weapons now. Everything is a weapon now. Everyone should have a plan.

A plan is a weapon, she says.

It's the best one you can have.

I don't have a plan, she says. Tell me what I should think.

You should come out to the desert, I say. I'll share my insects.

And she laughs, and she pulls her head away from my chest and looks at me. I'm sorry about before, she says. I didn't mean to move so fast.

It's what I wanted, I say.

What else do you want? she says. What do you want to be when you grow up?

I think I'm grown up, I say.

Well what are you going to be?

A poet, I say. I think a poet could do well in the desert. Better than here.

What's wrong with Hellespont? she says. I like it.

It's oblivion, I say. With bells.

And we stare at each other and at the walls and the ceiling and the carpet, and nothing happens. There is a subdued heat in the air, and it is matched with solace and the settling. And here we are, and I can't help but imagine that in every other home is a hole deeper than I can reach or than I can see or than I can think, and I can find moments in my day or night where I feel safe and normal and alive, and there are other times where it sinks in. And the half-cracked window lets in the sound of a car circling the cul-de-sac, and I look out and see the same cruiser make a slow pass around the bend, and a clock rings out through the ductwork from downstairs in the house. I lean forward and move in slowly, and just as I touch her lips she pulls away.

I need to go to sleep, she says.

And the lights in all the houses are dim and a car heads down the other side of the street, tossing newspapers from its windows. The moon is partially obscured by a stream of clouds and set in the sky like a half-lidded eye barely seeing the sun already rising in the foreground. A train returns to fill the soundscape with its thunder sounding like a breaking surf.

Proverb (poem)

by Ambrose Nurra

The old wise man once told me
that we must learn to perceive

paper forests

bottled rivers

aerial real estate

tar pastures

liposuctioned mountains

if we wish to pronounce the fugitive form of god

fifth Estate

Jason Cook
Eschatology
2009

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/380-spring-2009/eschatology>
Fifth Estate #380, Spring 2009

fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net