

Anyway, I'm taking off...

Her face is crying like the flaring sun. I have kissed her and hugged her and now must leave her. I stand in the tiled concourse facing her. My face speaks to her a long and worthy monologue. An impassioned speech. I never utter a word, yet muscles contract beneath my eyes and draw an enormous map containing the history of the world and the birth of culture, the sulphurous flutes of the ocean and the crawling bugs, the swirling gas of clouds and the unstable earth. I stand there until she understands. Finally, I lean forward to her and whisper, it is ok, you will marry five times and this will make you a great human being. You will be like Willie Nelson and Richard Pryor. The survival of the human race depends on you and on these heroes. It depends on our optimism!

I am high and towering now like a stuttering omnipotent.

After that, he didn't turn back. Boarding a very long train, he appeared headed for a drowsy future through an unfathomable night. He had never mentioned to her the pills and the shakes. Nor any mention of the illness. His face was deeply lined yet his eyes gleamed and were prepared to suck in the dripping world. His steps however, one after the other, were laden with saltiness. Ducking his head he entered and realised the cabins were low but functional. Maroon vinyl always appears in such circumstances and the fixtures were peppered with a thin veneer of dust that seemed to hover wherever you put a hand. A seated and elderly man grabbed his arm just above the elbow as he passed, and with the squeezing pressure of an ancient doctor, cautioned him, 'people are watching'. He struggled free and helped a young mother with her bags. Her two maddening children wove trails through the linoleum floor and as she smiled at him, he smelled a scent of pear custard. Moving on, his own bag clumsily clipped the face of his daughter who had boarded already and had been waiting for him to say goodbye. She was a pretty and chattering teenager. He apologised to her and then climbed over her into the empty seat, that was his.

Long trips into the desert are fraught with uncertainty. Molly wore a threadbare cotton dress and the small label at her zipper was ripped and hung open with the print of a faded rose. An earphone swayed and dangled like a small berry from her left ear as she giggled into her phone and clutched a thick and glossy magazine between her knees. Huge containers were outside the window emblazoned with the words E-V-E-R-G-R-E-E-N and an indistinct bug was crawling on the outside of the window. Its wings were translucent and rippled with bright green veins. It seemed to be studying him before something else caught its eye, and it flew off. He seated himself with his small film camera bag and an edition of The Tribune. The train jolted forward and he almost immediately fell into a withering asleep.

The train followed the railway and the railway snaked under the mammoth concrete pillars that held aloft jammed freeways. Vast tracts of industrial land, rusting machines and suburban housing limped onwards. On the underneath of the carriage the shell of a cicada was hidden beneath them. A piece of Hessian cloth had been torn from a fallen sack and had wedged itself in between two machine parts. The folds of the cloth had become home to a host of small bugs and inside the shell of the cicada a little moth hid from the battering wind.

No dialogue as yet.

SWACK! A tawny frogmouth drifted off course and got slammed by a train antenna. It's blood and feathers splattered the roof as tall cane-fields cracked by the window. He had been asleep several hours when he awoke to find dry biscuit crumbs and a banana skin lay near his drooling face. He held his head in his hands for a very long while. He wouldn't realise it till much later but the ink from his newspaper had blackened his palms. His sweat had absorbed a section labeled 'News of the World' and now it smeared his face. Dozens of words from an article on an Indonesian earthquake were sucked into his skin, and with ashen eyes he stared across at his littering companion.

Molly was awake. She was eating and reading and bobbing away to some hypnotic tune. A million thoughts were being released into her mind like spores from carapaced backs. She seemed to be a girl who constantly blinked her eyes and he imagined she would soon devour hearts like cows eat grass. She flipped her magazine open. It was the size of an ancient bible and yet her hand was light and angled and flipped the pages swiftly. Her tongue twisted playfully in her mouth and he noticed the word HERZOG under heroes.

"Grandma spoke to him once" He said, pointing to the page." He was drunk and rang her house in the middle of the night from Zurich. He screamed something about suit measurements and the K2 Mountains."

Molly popped an earphone from her ear. Small skin-mites were attached to it and they drifted in millions, almost instantly dying.

"I was wondering when you would talk to me. I'm so bored. I always hope something exciting is going to happen on these long trips. It should all be like a good action film, with fights and explosions and violence and rape."

"I don't know about rape," The word EAT twitched slightly underneath his left eye.

"Well, I don't mean rape exactly but maybe where these dudes are trying to get it on with a really hot babe of a girl. They think she's easy prey, but they are wrong. It's all dark and lit with shadows and then she kicks their arse and steals their sunglasses and motorbike. She could be laughing as she roars off with her clothes slightly ripped and the baddies are lying down with knife cuts in their groin. How about something like that?"

"Um, well yeah, that sounds like it could work. You know Herzog is dead now but he was German and made some movies. Not quite action movies but they were good. I was in one in the 80's. It was terrible and never got released."

He remembers his agent was waiting for them outside a Greek restaurant in the downtown. Tony was an excellent agent. Highly camp and flamboyant he was hard to miss waving a large breadstick in the street like an ancient Hellenic messenger. His girl-friend Maggie spotted him first and she yelled out to him from the taxi. Entering the restaurant the scene inside was crowded and lively. Ouzo was being drunk in rounds with roared cheers and the bouzouki chorused in the background. Herzog seemed highly sprung and intense. As they were introduced Tony dragged Maggie away to dance with some jolly Greek women. Herzog cornered him to a small table for two. He glared into his eyes and their arms were locked into an arm wrestle. Herzog was crazed with visions of death and chaos. He wanted them to clash horns. To enter battle. So, he agreed. A smile broke out on Herzog's face as they both stood on chairs and smashed plates to the ground.

A few months later the accident happened. Herzog had been working the crew into the ground. He was trying to find their essence. To break them. Every night they would leave the set and begin drinking heavily in an underground bar. In this mining town full of a thousand holes it was easy for people to get lost, sometimes permanently. He missed Maggie and at night lonely stray dogs could be heard barking having wandered in the dark and fallen. One night he'd pushed himself too far. Dread awareness dawned as he awoke to a split bottle of rum and his legs all ablaze. The warren of dug tunnels and the dirt walls confused him. He barely made it out into the open. By the time the hospital had revived him he struggled mostly with the fact he would be cut from the set. He'd never see Herzog or make a film again, and busting loose had really cut him adrift.

Molly noticing his distant nostalgia rested her head on his shoulder and offered him one of her earphones. At least in this final year we still have songs to comfort us he thought. They listened to a new teenage song full of Auto-tune and he tried to remember his favourite of Willie Nelson's. It was either Whiskey River or Blue eyes crying in the rain.

Simon Taylor 2010 (*excerpt)

