Dia, Bageot
Title: Genesis 19:26
*I: Planet Earth, 1995*
        I remember the day I woke up for the first time. I had just landed a gig. It was a sweet gig, mind you, sleeping to appease my miniverse and heart-strumming to the auditorium of heavy bubbles in my presence, when World War III started. But there were no nuclear bombs. It was all on an interior basis.
        I was there. Existing in this bath of primordial soup and gooey fluid, I lived rent-free until the noise pervaded, and I was spit-out like a cannonball on the European Theatre.
         Those bubbles didn’t know what hit ‘em, man. They were wedged against the squishy red and slathered on the walls of Dante’s ninth circle. Casualties of a conflict far beyond them. I’m certain the ringing that followed assaulted my newly formed ears like a weighty object to pavement. Why else would I have left?
     To ring up the past: it was warm as hell. And I was sweating up a storm, I think. Even the contours of my cognitive nexus betrayed some stress -- the crevices were as deep as the lowest points one can find on planet Earth.
        Now, my mother says I was born at Lebanon Hospital, located on the Grand Concourse, noted as a blimp in the huge machine people called New York City, a flickering point of light on the even smaller planetary rock we called home.
        But I don’t really believe her, I like to think I made that decision myself: you know, the whole being *born* thing. She also told me everything I just divulged here, so I’m not lying.
         That was my Last Judgement. My condemnation to life. My personal inauguration into the shit-show. It sucks. But let’s not talk about that. Let’s talk about apostasy. Give yourself a lobotomy if you have to.
       So I officially renounced my belief in the sky fairy way back in 10th grade. It was a momentous occasion. I put it up on Facebook and everything. Slapped the term “atheist” around and felt that the fedora-tipping was imminent. Got no likes whatsoever, but I felt so *smart*, because I could tell myself that the nonsensical absurdity that predates tomorrow justifies that the present has no meaning. Big words!
        When confronted in high school -- challenged by those with a vestige of intellectual faculty, I felt the need to readdress my worth and reaffirm the nihilistic nature of my actions. In short, I was edgy.
       But I felt that I had a secret worth spilling. This inward knowledge of the abstract. What if there was no such thing as a God? What would happen when that crucial day arrived -- the day the sun would stop rising -- the day forever would begin? Well, I didn’t really give a shit. I still don’t. I just wanted to tell others they were wrong. After all:
    *“If you make people think they're thinking, they'll love you; but if you really make them think, they'll hate you.”*
       That was an idea proposed by the science-fiction nut, Harlan Ellison. Good guy.
       So here we are. Teetering on the edge of oblivion with tricycles for a mount. I can’t see the bottom. Oh well. According to conventional wisdom, my life began as an egg and a bundle of cells. This story starts the same way. Since it was written by a bundle of cells.
       I can’t see into the future, but I’d want it to end with my epiphany after 9/11, long before the dumb cynicism, and long before high school graduation, and long before I sold my soul to the elite in the form of loans, my patience, and my sanity. I suppose I’ll take a page out of Vonnegut’s book.
The story, as you already know, begins like this: *“I remember the day I woke up for the first time.”*The story ends like this: *“They want to be happy!”*

*II: The Spider’s Web, 2000*
          I was a child when I realized how terrifying school was. And not because of the old, decrepit textbooks with bad penis drawings, or the algebraic algorithms in math class that required a solution to X + 1 and not just 1, no, none of that. It was because the place was riddled with people.
          It harbored human beings as securely as a spider nest encircles a fruit fly. And by God, human beings were the worst thing ever. They ruined me every time I was forced to converse with one. I’d rather bind my lips with crazy glue, and force anyone that wished to look at me to register a response through paper.
           That was step one of my devious, never-actually-completed plan. The fruits of my labor would be realized through the myriad of big words at my disposal, confusing the monster that wished to assault my inner circle. That was key. Eventually they would cease talking to me. I would be like Holden Caulfield.
            A victory I repeated in my head over and over again, for sure, but I never found enough crazy glue to do the job. Most days, I cried on my way to school.
             Looking back, it’s all so vivid in my brain. With reluctance, I would roll through those front doors like a sad, baby hedgehog. And I’d enter the classroom with a SLURP, sucked into the world of alphabet blocks and colorful rugs and 2x4 miniature desks like a noodle into the hungry man’s mouth. Sucked right into the spider's den.
            When I emerged out of the chicken broth, there they were. Students, lodged in the open segments of the web. They all seemed so content, so tranquil, so bored. I would do the next best thing, and assume my position, nestled like one of those fruit flies facing capital punishment, near the front of the classroom, second row.
             But there was one day in particular that shifted my brain contours like tectonic plates. My home room teacher just so happened to display a special kind of air. He was white, bald, clean-cut with a classy dress-shirt, but was so quiet. Didn’t really talk much unless it was relevant to the lesson -- whatever it was. And he always sat in the same position; left leg over the right. At the time, I thought only girls sat like that.
            I felt no attraction for him, either. Didn’t like him, didn’t hate him. Rather, his presence imposed upon us all the feeling of a cat harrowing over a mouse den. With the stickiness of the network of webbing keeping us arrested.
             Speaking of girls, from what I can remember, that day, he told one of our classmates for whatever reason, to hit the closet. To elaborate: “to hit the closet” meant to undress, in the closet, while we were all in the room and he blocked the door and watched her.
              It was insane. Nobody said anything. Especially me. Since I disliked them all for being there. The room was as deadpan as the very vacuum of space. But that wasn’t the real crazy part.
              Whatever her name was, she reveled in emotional trauma so strong, it’s hard to convey in the written form. She substantiated her fear with a brave complex of ataraxy, and justified her tears with the clenching of her tiny, not-completely-developed hands. She was a saint. She didn’t squeak.

             Hell, even the anchor that held us all together as a class grew three sizes. With the struggle for understanding that pervades the human heart only made more powerful with the threat of the giant cat, our terror was mutual.
             Now, given that time had stopped and the compass that lead to our futures laid broken over all our heads, we didn’t know how long it took for the authorities to barge into the room. Even if they were there, I didn’t see them.
              Rather, according to the stiff RAM hard-drive lodged in the cognitive nexus, my five year old brain supposedly conjured the following sentence at some point during the ordeal:
              “Man, God sure must love seeing little girls naked.”
              That set me started. Later during the year I tried verifying further if my accusations held any substance. So I asked my parents. Inquired for the extent of our mighty overlord’s magic powers. Because I was curious: why did people talk to something they could not see?
                They told little me, still a fan of drinking milk from a baby bottle, that the Big Man was essentially three things: Omnipotent, Omniscient, and Omnipresent. More big words! Those terms basically mean that he was everywhere and knows everything that has happened or ever will happen.
                Which means that he not only expected to see the girl’s squishy bits potentially ruptured in front of a class of 5-year-olds, he had the popcorn ready ahead of time. Argh. What a bastard!
                I figured that same logic must apply to other things, too. And that made the tectonic plates shift even more. It applied to murder, drownings, and that one incident -- of which happened a year after this -- that ended the lives of around 3000 human beings, well, more or less. That was a product of ideology, and ideologies are always destined to clash.
              As for our homeroom teacher, the school let him stay around us. They couldn’t afford to dump him. We were poor folk, after all. That’s probably why I hate cats.
*III: Water Street, mid-2000s*
               I thirsted for knowledge like a vampire thirsted for blood. But, goddammit, all it got me was a fuck-ton of sad feelings.
               And at the same time, those sad-feelings had me so familiar with the dying process that you could’ve called death and I distant cousins. But we’re all optimists here.
               See, the dying thing didn’t pertain to my person as much as it did to two distinct people: my father, and my lovely grandmother, of whom escaped this mortal coil before the likes of a Trump-dominated house a decade later could give her a heart attack. But I digress. Let’s talk parental matters.
                 Now, my father was an advocate for stoicism, a cultivator of introversion, a master of the voiceless persona that defined his existence and mine. His craft could never be bested by any living man. Yet his demeanor demanded attention like a quick strike to the esophagus. Although nowhere close to the example I demonstrated earlier, my father’s aura was paralyzing.
                 He stood at a stark 5’9-5’10, which to me, embodied the definition of a colossal tree trunk. Unmoved by any one force. And he shifted as calmly as a dove, although his conduct, at times, looked no different from a sloth.
                 His character, way back when, drove excessive correspondence to Meursault, from Albert Camus’ *The Stranger.*  For if his being was one that necessitated surveillance (and, ohoho, it did), his inner circle also perpetuated the uncaring apathy that paralleled with Meursault’s nihilistic tendencies. And just like Camus’ absurdist hero, my father probably would’ve taken shots at any opposition towards his somatic, hedonistic fashion.
                It’s unfortunate that he failed the ultimate test, though. Because he couldn’t save his mother from the pedophilic disposition of God Almighty. His repertoire of alcoholic beverages and Marlboro cigarettes had failed him miserably.
                Kinda sucks. I never particularly viewed him as the *ideal* parent, as his indifference was the one device he allowed me to cup in my hands, but I wanted to *love* him, so to speak. Because that was how kids were supposed to feel towards their parents. Yet his cold, steel exterior kept me away with reflections, and echoes, like a soliloquy on steroids.
                Our entire family, in fact, was a testament to a perfectionism that could never be achieved. Ironically, my father defined what it meant to be perfect, unwavering in form, without necessarily stating otherwise. His masculinity in quiet, unobtrusive fervor was the catalyst. This entailed the application of standards I could never reach. But I wanted to be his son, so I tried anyway.
               Tried for good grades. Never spoke back. Refused to look him in the eyes. Worked. Worked. Worked. Cried in math class. Worked some more. Got high off crayola boxes. Kept to myself.
               For a long time, this template was predisposed in my head as the quintessential model of living. Until it was shattered. Here’s the kicker: there was no immediate companion to fulfill some semblance of humanity in my father as Meursault had found, albeit vapid, in Marie, when the time came.

               The stoic person of which I had become acquainted with by birth had to deal with his own problems. My mother couldn’t help him. I couldn’t help him. As companionship, I’d come to realize, does little to ease the innate, complex fear of dying, especially when one realizes that it’s a one-way trip.

                This was where the differences surfaced. Where Meursault began his odyssey with a stark lack of empathy towards his mommy’s death, my father began a story of self-fulfillment and revitalization. But he was dead for a long time otherwise, more than usual. It was my first experience with this kind of stuff. And it blew my mind, as, for the first time, a man of his stature started to spill tears in my presence.
                 Looking back, I only had a single encounter with the woman called my grandmother. She was visiting from the land of perpetual heat and tyrannical suffering. Juxtaposed with a harrowing plateau of sandy rock, goofy-colored clothing and wooden huts -- most people just called it West Africa, though. She was visiting my father’s sister, of whom lived in lower Manhattan.
                  My father and aunt never really liked each other. But they spared the shenanigans for this specific occasion. Because grandma was here! God, I’m sorry. But when you entered the apartment, you almost knew she had arrived. It had that funky old people smell. Although at the time, I thought it smelled like a dying person.
                 Looking at this woman didn’t help her case, either. She was a skeleton. Yet she greeted me with open, flimsy arms. Her eyes were like glass, the ethos of an Africa subjugated by civil war shone right through into mine. Her legs pointed straight forward, like two sticks on the verge of falling apart. And her face, well. It looked like a spilled plate of spaghetti. Did she not eat? She couldn’t fold her legs either, I thought. But man, that wasn’t the most prominent aspect.
              It truly was the smell. It wasn’t a bad smell, because it was hers. It told me two things. One, she’s pretty damn old. And two, she isn’t gonna last very long.
               And I was right, because a few months down the line, she fractured her lower-half and submitted to the perversions of the mahogany coffin. My father, devastated. Myself, rather ill at the thought of knowing a now dead human being.
               In most respects, this experience benefitted my father. Because it took away his mommy. That death added dimension to his personality. He graduated, like Meursault, from a stoicism of ingrained proportion to a man that learned to appreciate the time he had left on planet Earth.
               That was nice, I guess. It was a cloaked second coming. Even though I could never believe, with every ounce of my being, that the divine would sit by and watch the impassive man suffer as he did, falling victim to the killing machine by which humans are so familiar. I wanted to be optimistic.
*IV: I watched the Kit Kat bars crumble, September 2001*              I won’t bother stating the obvious, the inevitable, the resurgence of an event that continues to play like a broken tape recorder in the cognitive nexus, to you. Because that wouldn’t be very creative. And you’re probably wondering just where the hell I’m going with this.
            But in the year since the giant cat conducted his harrowing display, I’ve found that God, if he exists, isn’t a very nice person. Less because he felt like getting his rocks off to a kid; mostly because he didn’t do what I asked. I would ask for things politely, if you were curious. I considered myself a good boy.
          Before my epiphany, I sent him letters of praise and admiration. I laughed and cried in his name. I made judgement with him in mind, telling myself that only good people go to Heaven. Only good people go to Heaven.
          And I imagined my personal Heaven to be filled with Hot Wheels and intricate toy-train sets and every Nintendo game system that ever existed. The streets and sky would be paved with fruit-roll ups and skittles. The airplane exhaust would materialize crushed up Smarties. Oh, and I wouldn’t have to be around those icky girls and have to suffer under the throes of constant ridicule. Every day would be worth living, because I’d be with my real father and everything would be A-OK.
          I would jump on fluffy clouds and coddled those dreams like a baby to breast, extending that vision like an eternally verdant foray of grassy plains, drenched in tasty and solemn air, and dissolve. My mother would dissolve. My father would dissolve. I would reemerge as a goopy, edible version of myself and sail on the dissolved remains of all those bad things and captain my own ship. This was what it meant to be happy.
            So one day, without any real thought put into it, I attempted to reach that vision. It was after I broke a rather expensive glass that my mother treasured, her beautiful glass. A glass that was situated on the top shelf of our kitchen camaraderie.
              Unfortunately for mini-me, I strived too high for the cups that my mother and father would typically use. I wanted to indulge in the holy grail of adulthood, you see, so I made the endeavor to pick one up, to drink orange soda from the mug of sacred pedigree, thinking it was a good idea. But the grail slipped from my hands as swiftly as a bar of soap. My mother dashed right in and took witness to the casualty.
              So she hit me in retaliation. It was a physical hurt, of course. And it seared my tooshie like the flames of undignified damnation.
               Dragging my rage like a dog bound to a leash, I indignantly waited until she left the room. And pulled out one of those really sharp kitchen knives she used to cut steak and other chewy meals with. I looked at it with my own, tiny-undeveloped hands for a long while before I heard my mother’s footsteps and quickly stuck it back in the little cubby. It was a failed experiment.
              The second time, I tried starving myself. Determined to prove my moral conduct, I provided an appeasing thesis for this maddening conviction, adamant to show my mother. And it was easy to spill, actually: since all I told her was I’d stop eating meat. Because eating dead things meant condoning the killing machine.
               I didn’t really like eating dead things. Which was everything humans ate. My mother, however, championed the chicken, and the cow, and the dozens upon hundreds upon thousands of potential meats as God’s gift to Earth. I was therefore condemned from thinking otherwise, according to the doctrine we followed. So eventually, I did.
               But in the throes of psychological warfare between that thought and this, I’d pretty much go to the Big Man for answers, since he apparently wanted me to keep eating meat.

               Well, He never said anything back. Even after I gave up the Gameboy for a full 24 hours, hoping the offering would appease. Nothing. I was starved for virus-busting that entire day. Kinda ticked me off. Although I kept lobbing those hand-written letters out the window, hoping that the fairies that worked for him kept notice. It wasn’t too long after, when big planes hit big buildings and everything went boom, that I caught my epiphany like a stray leaf.
           Being a child, I had no idea that stunt was propagated by a bunch of moral nihilists trying to find their rightful place in the world. I actually thought it was a high-budget movie that had the stations rolling in their seats, until mom told me dad would be late.
            I thought it was bad-mannered to have these weird terrorist guys making my dad late. So I tried talking to God again. I remember praying like a loon for things to be okay, clapping and waving my hands like one of those Christmas plush toys. And see, I was so *sure* everything would be okay as my endeavors were genuine and full of love, since I concluded those dumb terrorists had nothing on my dad, even if I didn’t like him all that much. It was all so somber, actually. I sat around thinking like that until he staggered home like a dead, lifeless zombie. Less from terrorists picking a fight, you see, but more out of shock and surprise.
              It was my first real expedition into the life and times of my father, exploring his face as one does an untouched mountain face. He was rather pale, from what the brain chemicals tell me, despite his naturally caramel-latte skin otherwise looking the same in other, similarly-constructed moments.
             My memories tell me that we all gathered round the television screen like packed up sardines. My parents expressing their utmost disgust at the events being shown. With the television relishing in the terror of the day, ravaging the screen like bullets through skin.
             For instance, you had words like “TERRORISM” and “CRASH” displayed with prominence, taking the whole bottom half of the screen. I imagined people being really sad because their moms and dads weren’t coming home.
            Then I saw words like “EXPLOSION” and “SHATTERED” and “ATTACKS” and “JUMPING”; as CNN perpetrated the terror of the day, with those giant monoliths rolling down in waves like you unwrapped a Kit Kat bar from the cornerstore.
                And I imagined being in one of those super, tiny office rooms. I would be looking down from the 70th, 80th, or 90th floor and wonder just how far of a jump I could make and still walk in the end. The sights I would see on the way down! The fluffy clouds and the sparkling glitter glass from the windows and the entire world going WOOSH with the tiny ants waiting on the bottom.
          The ambulance ride would be annoying. But it’d be fun to tell those clowns at school that I fell from a high-up window and lived. I don’t think He would’ve minded. He liked watching people go “SPLAT!”, I figured, just as He liked watching my classmate get her insides shredded like loose-leaf paper. Or, as was later exhibited, the subjugation of my father, as his life was bound to the buffering wheel, as He watched his sanity gush out like blood.
               The whole day was like a huge dream. It was one of those September days with a warm sun hugging you but a cool wind leading you around, at least where I lived. Fall was coming soon. Things would be great, I would think, over and over and over again. People would be happy again tomorrow!
                They would be happy!
                       They would be happy!
                               T h e y w o u l d b e h a p p y!!!