

Yarnell Perkins

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Overheard in downtown Knoxville, Tennessee, December, 2002:

“If they hit Y12, will they call it a terrorist attack or a pre-emptive strike on weapons of mass destruction?”

**War Report from Black Oak Ridge to Marshall University
February 20, 2003**

In East Tennessee we have a nuclear physicist next door.
No one has demanded to carry him away yet,
No one has threatened to bomb us for his sake, and
No one yet is avoiding the word “interrogation,”
But there is a nuclear physicist next door.

Terrorism is both cause and effect.
It is the sign the feds erect:
“Everybody keep your mouths shut” and
“Aren’t you glad you’re free?”

It is outsiders laughing when you dare give voice to thought.
It is the man preaching property rights come to take your farm.
It is the J.O.B. they gave you in exchange for your land.
It is the refusal of successful society to take you seriously --
That is the prelude to their decision that you don’t exist, not really,
No, not really, all things considered, after all.

They take your land and then
They tell you you’re just jealous --
They don’t know why you’re not as rich or as smart as other people.
They just know resentment causes poverty, not theft.
They say this when they explain to each other why you hate them.
They say this a hundred years.
Then Rush Limbaugh gets a Homeland Security permit to tell the truth:
“We fought a war. You lost.
“Get over it,” he editorializes.
Terrorism is the Yankee technocrat’s remark,
“People you never heard of come here,”
They visit the white folks’ graves
There where your granddaddy’s farm lies hidden
Under 60 years of frozen nuclear history,
There where you, you strange old woman, are not allowed to go

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Except with this federal escort to see your people's graves,
Here where you're not allowed to go
Except with this federal escort who tells the newspapers,
"People you never heard of come here."
And you know you are gone, you are dead,
You know you no longer really exist.
You have become those people you never heard of who come here.

Terrorism is the knowledge of what they are perfectly capable of doing.
Here you are, living next door to them, suicide bombers
Driving through the hospital in a tractor trailer full of death,
But they're our suicide bombers, by God,
And they only commit suicide with East Tennessee grade A enriched uranium.
And all they're really guilty of is that they don't mind building nuclear bombs.
And they are my kinsmen and I love them
And they are my enemy and I hate them.

What will they *do*?

What will they do to me, and to you, friend, and to you and you and you --
On the day they truly understand what we really think of them, the universe, God,
 good and evil, and mountain Republicans.
The day they truly understand that the poor --
Those mourning the theft of their land and their ancestors and their dreams --
Will not let them own moral absolutism too.
We will take Christ back for ourselves.
We will not let the GOP hijack Christianity.

What will they do

The day they understand that the people have come to take good and evil back?
The day all Christian people cry out as one to the Creator of Creation?
And the Republicans hear us crying to our Savior for deliverance from *them*?
*Oh the day they find out what I really think, will I escape to urge the people on
To pray, to pray, to pray?
On that day, what, dear Lord, will the mountain Republicans do?*

This, dear friends, is terrorism:

The daily grinding knowledge that your neighbor once set off a nuclear device in a test.
On the whole, he quite enjoyed it.
He writes letters to the editor explaining how fallout really isn't so bad.
Terrorism is living next door to him.

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Terrorism is wondering how far the feds'll go with this torture thing.
Terrorism is knowing that the torture of no human soul will ever make me feel safer.
Terrorism is wondering how well Black Oak Ridge --
My people's old home place in these dear hills of Tennessee --
How well will Oak Ridge stand up
One cruise missile every four minutes for 48 hours?
What will become of us here in the Shock and Awe factories of mass destruction?
Terrorism is conviction of treason because you love your home place.
Terrorism is the day coming when those signs the feds erect say:
"Treason is love of home beyond what we want from you."

Terrorism is having a boss.
Terrorism is working for a man.
Terrorism is working for a woman.
Terrorism is working for a man
Who calmly informs you he tolerates you,
Who tolerates your idiotic stand with those idiotic women, the Women in Black,
Who tolerates "your thing for the A-rabs."

He is a Republican.
He is for property rights and he is against abortion.
He is for Jewish settlements and he is for the Israeli army.
This makes sense to him:
Citizens attacking soldiers are terrorists.
Soldiers attacking civilians are heroes.
To him, this is consistent with Holy Writ and Mother Church.
He believes in a people born chosen for criminals
They sit on Israeli's death row, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

My real boss is a Jewish carpenter.
My real boss is a Palestinian peasant with an attitude.
And that is why they crucified him,
Lord God, that is why they crucified him,
The one Son of the One True Lord, the One Creator of all Creation.
He is a Jewish carpenter Palestinian peasant with an attitude
And that is why they crucified him.

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My worldly boss,
He is a Republican.
He is for property rights and he is against abortion.
He is against the Women in Black standing in silence for property rights and children.

He doesn't think much of Appalachian people either.
He just lives here and does his business.
Bought him a McMansion and a five-acre gentleman's farm that his Guatemalian mows
with his John Deere tractor
And he tells hillbilly jokes,
oh God! does he tell hillbilly jokes.

He says you are aiding and abetting the terrorists.
You are aiding and abetting him in his business.
His business is so slowly ripping down Tennessee --
It does take longer with a 'dozer than with a bomb,
But the hills and the people and the trees are all just as gone as they'd be with a bomb --
You are working for him,
This proud American hell bent on leveling East Tennessee, one way or the other.

He tolerates you and your silly Women in Black because he knows
You'll never change anything, anyway.
He tolerates you enough to let you work for him,
Working his job for him, it will all be okay, so long as you can be a profit unto him.
He can point out the passage in Proverbs to justify everything.
He is, after all, a Christian businessman.
He never misses the special prayer breakfast
Every single month for Christian businessmen.
He tolerates you as so long as you can make him believe
Yes, this job really does make a better life than your grandparents' farm.
He tolerates you as so long as you can make him believe you're satisfied,
Yes, your life has meaning because you work for him.
He tolerates you so long as you can convince him he is not
Really the monster the best part of him knows he has become.

Terrorism is your tolerant boss telling stories about the Air Force.
He was part of the chain of command of sending the nukes flying into Armageddon.
He tells you he is a patriot.
He was willing to be a suicide bomber suicide bombing the entire Earth,
He was willing to be a suicide bomber of all the Lord's Creation.

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Terrorism is working for a man
Terrorism is working for a woman
Willing to be a suicide bomber in a good cause.

I see the day they come
For my money, my land, my rights, my life.
They are already standing there in front of me.
They are my boss, my boss the conspiracy against me.
Terrorism is the constant preparation against the day
They need you in their investigation of whatever it is that's coming next.
Against the day Ashcroft decides you are no longer an American, a Christian, a human.
Against the day Ashcroft decides you no longer exist.
Against the day Ashcroft strips us all of our white skins.

Or State Farm decides your policy doesn't cover that particular disaster,
whichever comes first.

Terrorism is knowing your life is claimed by a white man in Washington who has
proclaimed unto himself the right over your life and your death.
Terrorism is hearing a white man brag on his own righteousness.

This is not paranoia.
This is the way white people treat each other.
No, East Tennessee has not become Gaza yet.
It is far, far from Gaza yet --
-- growing closer each day --
But this is terrorism, just a top secret federal project we are working on.
Ask any Cherokee, Palestinian, Guatemalan, Paki refugee.
Ask anyone who has been removed.
Ask the descendants of the removers who now have been removed themselves.
They say "Amerika." We say, "the govmint."
But you just go on,
Ask Black Oak Ridge
Why Tennessee hates you so much.

by Yarnell Perkins in honor of the Women in Black of Knoxville, Tennessee