

There is Trouble in the Forest, Fifteen Years After Donald Barthelme's "Indian Uprising".

by David Paul Graham

Our condominiums were in danger. The gnarled roots and trunks of the new, highly evolved trees quietly searched the solid, cardboard foundations of our buildings and effortlessly toppled them at times. Men took shifts sitting in open shelters with McCulloch chain saws cradled in their arms, while the women explained to their children that all the Comanches were again safe in the reservations. The compromising Treaty of '69 made all this possible. The treaty was made after the Indian uprising in '68. Sylvia and I had lived through this uprising, but now, fifteen years later, in a manufactured world, Nature herself came back from the cemetery and haunted our daily ruts. Nothing changes. We tie it all together with words.

"Do you think we are better off now than when we were married ten years ago?"

She surveyed the real, plastic table top, littered with a three volume television guide, a pitcher of lemonade made with NutraSweet, *Betty Crocker's New Microwave Cookbook*, and the latest album and video called *Men without Dresses*. She answered.

"No."

When the crafty trees break through our smooth, concrete world and threaten our safety and our armed soldiers revert to the ancient art of "lumberjacking," we stop the enemy in its tracks. As the chain saws rip the limbs of an encroaching foe and the neighborhood is silenced in this act of safety, the artists creep from the basements to gather the fresh, dead wood. Their clothes become stained with the sticky sap. Once, I remember, in La Plaza de Ho Chi Minh, the trees attached, were repelled, and as the artists gathered the dead pieces of carcasses, a second wave broke through the soft pavement. In the army's haste to turn this wave, they dropped thirteen elms on the backs of four artists. Four artists who supplied Ayres with totem poles.

Sylvia and I awaited the arrival of our snow man, Jeremiah DeMoron. He delivered our monthly ration of cocaine, which we exhausted in one week. We used it to relive our white wedding and even whiter honeymoon. The chain saws roared to life outside our division, and the battalion of men chased the oaks down Calle de Saigon. Drops of orange sap spattered on our window and glued everything together.

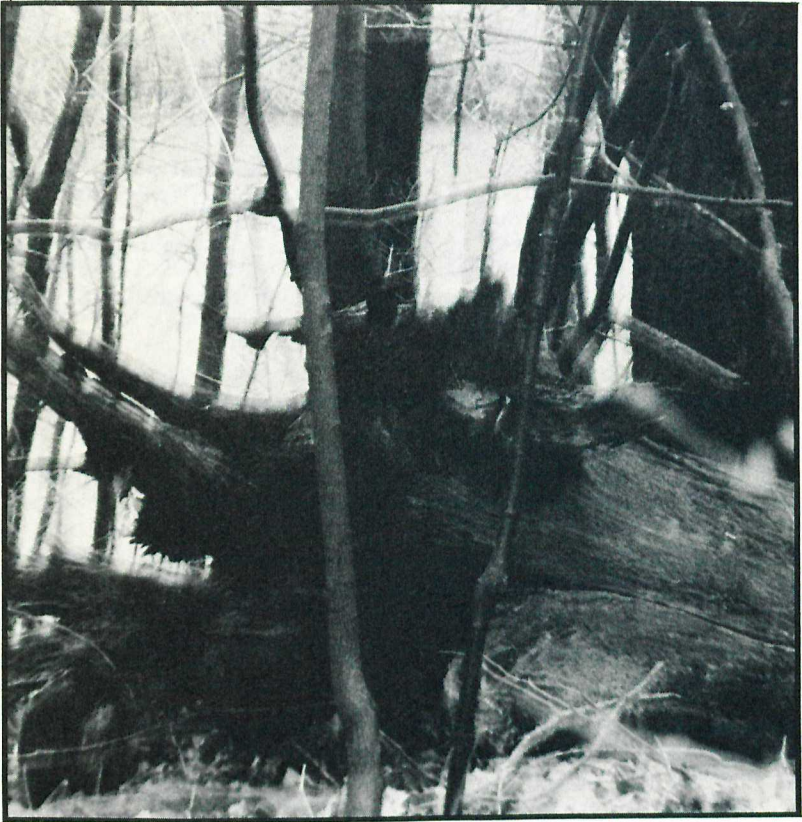
In the middle of our honeymoon, Sylvia asked, "Are you a comedian?"

"No my profound heart; and yet (by the very fangs of malice I swear) I am not that I play. Are you the lady of the house?"¹

"No. I swear you know nothing."

"I've been told that before,"

I shoved the red straw into my nose and fell in love, I fell into a crevice in the concrete at the corners of Grenada Avenue and Calle de Laos. When Block found me, and pulled me back into the world, I no longer felt like using



my blue and red Marathon credit card. Block and Sylvia, who had been reenacting *The Scarlet Letter* while I slept below the pavement, sent me to Dr. R., (a student of Miss R.'s). Block hung himself from the top of a lumbering poplar, (before it was hewed by the soldiers), and was buried at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, who has now been named General Earle Eele. General Eele once said, "the essence of Vietnam is military," when some people were thinking that it was economic or political. I wished to talk to Dr. R. of how, fifteen years ago, Jane was a social prostitute and my wife was a virgin. They have now switched the roles. Dr. R. told me that the "nutshell" tools of Miss R. were traded for the vagueness of psychiatry and that I was a monomaniac, obsessed with buying love. (I bought Sylvia a totem pole.) On the east side of our condominium division, the Cuban sector, the men were trying to defend a strong tree movement. They used Bic butane flame throwers to back up the McCulloch chain saws. The city was on fire, waiting for the flood.

Now the P.L.O., used to killing men in the name of freedom, had to respond to the break in symmetry caused by these trees. (Rian had come, for the meantime.) Sylvia and I saw on the news, on eighty-five channels, that the

P.L.O. did not want to fight because they knew they would lose. We saw grey suited anchormen introduce blue uniformed strategists who told us that our concrete world was safe. The Air Force began to use napalm bombs. Robert Vally swore that he loved the smell of napalm in the morning. I became sick, and Sylvia, dressed in red and blue sequined jeans, scurried away. She went to seventeen seventy-six Beirut Lane, which was always quiet and safe. She commissioned an artist to carve a small "B" from a poplar scrap. Sylvia wore this symbol on a necklace and loved me. Dr. T. insisted on having coffee and asked me to try to remember fourteen certain things.

"All I can remember at this moment is the Indian uprising in sixty-eight."

"What do you remember about it?" he asked.

"Jane was bitten by a dwarf, and we had to make a compromise with the Comanches."

"Who is Jane?"

"Jane was a prostitute, but now is a virgin. I do not love Jane, I love Sylvia. Repetition. I wanted her then and I want her now, here in the middle of this dark forest."

"Relax. You cannot battle again. Your eyes have been blurred."

"Blurred, 'Because in Vietnam the vision of a Burning Babe is multiplied, multiplied! I screamed and ran out of this white office. I ran to J.C. Penney's, where I purchased fifty, green GI Joe dolls for Sylvia and Uncle. I paid for them with my blue and gold Mastercharge card. As I left, I slipped in a pile of orange sap and could smell burning leaves.

Sylvia had lost her arm on Tay Ninh Drive. The sergeants were recruiting women now, but these women were not used to the chain saws, nor the flame throwers. I went back to look for the limb, shoved the red straw into my nose and loved her more.

On Calle de Hanoi, I was accosted by Speed, who said, "You are the lover of Sylvia?"

"Go to sir; tell me, do you know Madam Sylvia?"

"She that your worship loves?"

"Why, how know you that I am in love?"

"Marry, by these special marks: first you have learned, like Sir Block, to wreath your arms, like a malcontent; to relish a love song, like a robin-redbreast; to walk alone, like that had the pestilence; to sigh, like a school-boy that had lost his A B C; to weep . . ." ²

And I wept and clung to her new necklace until I fell asleep. I was awakened during the night by the sound of sap splattering against the windows. We had received a bright yellow telegram from Jane, the virgin, who swore she had been raped in a respectable bar (the Grand Monde) by three men, while eighteen people watched and did nothing. They will do nothing. Dr. R. told me, "The intellectual love of a thing is the understanding of its perfections." ³

"Maybe that's why Vally loves the smell of napalm," I replied.

I examined Dr. R.'s white office walls, littered with: a gold-framed diploma, signed by Bay Bein; a surrealistic painting of Lowell's Boston, with the faded yellow arches of McDonald's shining out like the fire from a flame thrower; a light switch with the plastic figure of a car for a switch plate; and one floor-to-ceiling bookcase, full of psychiatric journals and handbooks which have led Dr. R. to believe that I could direct one of those flame throwers on his tidy office. I could, but they need them in the battle against the trees. Men are dying and I want to stop Sylvia's heart from beating so hard to replace the blood she lost. Willow trees are creeping in from the brown river bank. (The water is now as brown as the bank, and is the texture of a rough grade oil. Our children are baptized here because we love them). The Navy will stop the

willows.

Dr. R. asks me, "Would you like to meet Jeremiah DeMoron?"

"I wish I had a McCulloch chain saw."

Dr. R.'s desk looks like a Japanese pillbox and as he taps his pencil on the marble desk top, I see the tracers from a machine-gun flying at me. I feel them penetrate my heart, that feeling I had when Sylvia screamed towards quiet Beirut Lane. I search for a trench to dive into . . . to die. Repetition. Jeremiah, dressed as a comanche, entered the office, hand in hand with Sylvia. Sap splattered on the window. Dr. R.'s slant eyes began to look like knotholes and his fingers stretched like stringy roots to shake the Comanche's hand. (It was an Indian shake.) Sylvia looked at me and her eyes flashed like a neon sign, alternately saying, "I love you," and "why did you kill that helicopter and kill those yellow children?"

¹From Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, I.v.

²From Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, II.i.

³From Spinoza, as quoted by Ezra Pound.

Puerto Penasco

by Kevin Ault

It's not Dover Beach
 but the sun fades in the west
 over half a world away
 And the golds and the reds
 across the Pacific
 are rivaled nowhere in the world

I have watched
 the ebb and flow of the tide carefully
 and slept soundly
 to the rhythm of the waves
 the ocean is a
 timely and persistent friend

Somehow
 in moments like these
 I always think of you
 your love reminds me of this scene
 strikingly beautiful
 and the motion and sound of the sea
 are like your love
 Rhythmic and dependable, slow and stately
 but with latent passion
 warmly, softly rocking me to sleep