

Eve Stafford

POST-MONSOONAL TENSION

Six weeks of it since. Constant tapping on the tin roof. And thunderclaps. The lie-awake fright at night, sheet-lightening through membranes of eyes-closed. And water torture, drip, drip. Some of it has driven indoors, finding crevices, defying gravity and travelling uphill, or horizontal, spraying across floor surfaces near every unbarred orifice, no holds barred. And when the siege relents into lulls, the muffled roar of the falls. Low clouds cling as vapours, drift through, the damp humidity osmosing the soft furnishings, saturating cardboard boxes. They sag overnight and collapse.

The car moulders away, fomenting riotous lichens within, reaching such a piquant bouquet that it smells like cat piss, a liturgy I say as a broken record every time I climb in.

The forest is in a ferment of growth, rot and renewal. The oscillation of sun, rain, sun-showers, heavy hung humidity, and the cycle of steamy evaporation between showers, is exciting all the plants. The electro-chemical charge, ions cast from the spheres. Plants spurt centimetres a day, trees turn to vigorous vines, sending out grappling hooks to ride for free up to the light. Odd bromeliads shot sporadically with the early rains, but just what was the trigger that had hundreds of them firing their phalluses towards the skies yesterday? Great red columns like sentinels down the drive, climbing shoulder on shoulder up all the tree trunks. Brought indoors, the overall red gives way to downy pink furry auras and popped miniature flowers of yellow from within the waxy, fleshy external organs.

And the noise. The roof-rack roof-rack football chant of the lagoon frogs during the deluge, gives way in the breaks to the telephone frog that constantly fools us as we drop everything and run for word from the daughter in the bleak, dismal economic doldrums of Melbourne. Or the zulu frogs, voicing alarm like fingers wagging between lips in an oval mouth. The sizzling cicadas send out whole planes of music at different pitches, holding the notes so long, we lose their raga to oblivion, but still their jangle bell song penetrates at lower levels of mind.

It has been pouring since soon after we got home from the party last night, the Chinese New Year, a hundred hot and thirsty people too sloshed in a little rickety shelter in the midst of a sea of slippery mud. The phono lurching drunkenly from track to track on its needle arm, the call-this-music-do-you, mur-

derous with blunt and heavy-handed changes in volume towards assault and battery of the eardrum. This is a dangerous mix of brute noise and flowing alcohol, tropical night heat of male chests bared and emitting pheromones into the atmosphere. The blender of the crowded dancefloor stirring the reeling minglers to meltdown. Menace of the cocktail is in the air, the perfect brew for aggression. And sure thing, the affront of the music, husbands cracking under the rampant processes of monsoonal forces, of wives slipped from view beyond an outdoor piss, the knives handy near the Peking Duck, the flash of moonlight between fast clouds, the dank of encroaching mould in rank fetid beds, poorly sprung, gone haywire. We left before blood, then it rained without mercy until morning.

With the dawn, the black umbrellas of the marauding fruit bats gather above in urgent clouds returning, winged in to claw branches in awkward folding and unfolding, finally to roost screaming in their tree camp.

Lying in. Home. Me snuggled in his musky armpit "wing" as we call it; we both look out through the gaping window at the forest at large. Still raining. From each valley in the corrugated roof, a long streamer. The water curtains fall, feeling for all the world like we live permanently under the waterfall. It flows constantly. The cascade off the roof, we agree, could yield at any moment, a canoe going over, a mishap, a misadventure, such as the one in the papers yesterday. Three in Pete's Canoe Hire went over the dam wall. We who know of treachery and disillusion were not surprised. The river is in flood. At water level, the edge can come up silently, the mirror of the water meeting the sky, seamless and perfect. Sounds distract. Then, to slip between the two reflected pictures, and over the hydro-intake wall. About five canoe lengths, but near vertical, down into another frame, the crazy rock-baffles on the way to the roaring pell-mell of the falls. I'll bet they were surprised! Two were picked up by helicopter from a rock, stranded metres from the edge of the abyss. As we watch from our bed, the canoeists go silently over our roof. We see them fall. Or did they go in a barrel, like daredevils? Coming around the last curve in a barrel. Suicide Bend. Cabin fever, Barcoo Rot, all the euphemisms for the fester and ferment of flux and seasonal decay, the long, dark tunnel vision of burgeoning mania, the reckless beauty of it all.

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