



Riparian Repast on the Third Day of War

Pondering Oblivion on the Banks of the
American River

by BJR
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Dirty crumbling buildings populate the south side of the river as I walk along the levy- red bricks, black windows smashed. The swaying, sun-kissed palm trees rising amid the decay tell me much about not just the city, but the entire country- smiling denial amid the rot. The red brick warehouse is a massive empty building with concertina wire fence surrounding its acreage. The front, I think, is somewhere on Richards Boulevard. From the front it must look like an old prison, but the back is loading bays and rusted-out auto shells, some still with engines.

I look away and walk across the levy to the south side and the American River. My riparian repast has become a meditation on sadness at the civic level. Perhaps this is what London is like, or better yet, Sheffield or Newcastle bathed in gentle California sunshine. At the edge of the river is a rusted steel beam among the cottonwood trees. I stay on the levy and look to the Northeast. It is one of the clearest days I have experienced in my almost two years in the valley. I can see the Sierras clearly some 40 miles away. I wonder if maybe that's where they meet the Cascades. I'm amazed at how close 40 miles can be on a clear day when there's less crap in the air. It seems closer because there's less between you and the object in the distance.

The river is clear and looks like its really cold. The snow on the Sierras will begin melting soon, making it that much colder. In April and May, just a mile or so westward from where I stand, at the confluence with the Sacramento, fog will prevail most mornings where the cold and warm water meet. This is not the tule fog shroud of November through February, but a localized high fog that loves creating rainbows and playing other tricks with the spring sunshine.

The trees are in bloom. They've been blooming since late February.

"It's an early spring" one of the cashiers at the Natural Foods Coop commented.

I nodded in agreement, only to snort, "Too early."

"Yeah," he flashed his knowing agreement, his sharp eyes giving an implicit essay on the dangers of global warming, mine shouting back, "Amen brother!"

Three women, maybe in their mid-forties, walk by on a lunchtime power walk. I smile and nod my head. They nod back in unison, without pausing their discussion of the ongoing war.

"It'll be easy," I heard one say.

"No, it won't be like last time. We actually have to get Saddam this time," said another.

I turn and watch their backs. They are all carrying dumb bells. They're plump, but have rather healthy skin tones for sequestered state-employed administrators. Low-slung state offices line this portion of the levy. One sports a T-shirt with an American flag on the back, a barking dog superimposed over the banner. "You can run, but you can't hide," it says in red, white and blue.

"Is she talking to Saddam, the Iraqi people, or to the oil wells?" I ponder.

It would be interesting to see oil wells in retreat.

These are the beneficiaries of the Bush Administration's pre-emptive strike policy, international law be damned. These are the SUV driving suburbanites - 40 miles round trip everyday to work, plus god knows how many more miles hauling their kids around and gathering consumables for their brood. The sprawling masses these are. The well-fed, the well-paid, the "well-educated," or at least given enough entrenchment in consumer ideology to get into some sort of somewhat lucrative position. Thousands, tens of thousands, maybe more will die to keep gas cheap for the sprawling masses of America so private consumption can continue its rampant march toward oblivion. Oblivion cannot come soon enough.

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