

# Love Is A Tree And Vice Versa

by david mignery

I am sitting in this waiting room and this guy next to me keeps popping his knuckles. I talk to him to get him to stop. I find out he is a college rat like me—find out; that's a laugh; he had "fraternity" written all over him in nine foot letters;—and so we talk about how lousy everything is. After we ran through the list there was this lousy silence and he was beginning to pop his knuckles again, so I asked if he knew what happened that was going on behind the door there. He said that he had got the word that it was a multiple choice test and the questions were scientifically and infallibly designed to find out if you were a cool guy or not and if you are you're in and you are allowed to do all these things that are nothing but sharp and there are all kinds of advantages.

"Crazy," I said and then changing the subject, "How did you get here?"  
"Suicide."  
"Oh. Why?"  
"Fed up, you know."

I didn't press him because he was probably sensitive as hell. Then he asked why I was here and I told him the whole lousy story from where I was walking down this street. He was a heck of a nice guy.

I was walking, you know, because I didn't know what else to do, down this street on campus. It was night and all these cars are whipping along and I try to see the people inside who are going someplace in this lousy little town to do something great because they are all in this lousy rush. They drive like their cars are tanks and something and bugs and rabbits watch out. God, I wish I knew where they were going because I got all this nervous energy and I need a release or something. But they never even see me.

Crazy things are supposed to happen when you go for walks but they never do because you never see anybody else walking, if that's a reason. I used to walk so that cops would stop me and ask what the hell I was walking for. They never did though. So everything is lousy so I take off my khaki raincoat that makes me look like everybody else and climb up into this tree. It is early in the semester so the tree is dark green with wet leaves and nobody can see me. But I guess this cop saw me climb up because he comes over and shines his flashlight up at me and says, "What do you think you're doing up there for chrissakes."

"I am picking apples," which was clever.  
"Apples! That's a maple tree for chrissakes." He really breaks me up.  
"The joke's on me, I guess."  
"Well, get out of there."  
"No."

"Do I have to come up there and get you?" He almost went for his gun.  
"You will never take me alive."  
"You been drinking, Kid? You don't look twenty-one to me."  
"Hell no, and I am twenty-one, anyhow."

"You better come down and let me check your ID, Kid." I threw my wallet down to him and he checked it. "Alright, Kid, you coming down? I can't stand here all night." I shook my head. "Alright, Kid, stay up there," and he threw up my wallet, "you will come down eventually so just don't cause any trouble up there. You want your coat?" He held it up to me but I ignored him. He shrugged, hung my coat on a branch and walked away, eyes sharp for someone to shoot.

I didn't sleep too well and so I was awake when the sun came up. Nobody noticed me except this squirrel who came out and looked at me for five minutes while he ate a nut. By eight o'clock when classes begin hundreds of students were passing beneath me but not one saw me. They saw my raincoat, however, and eventually someone took it away. Finally at three this spook with a load of books saw me and I became something of an attraction. For a few days I was big news on campus but then they got used to me and besides it was hard to see me because of all the leaves.

When fall came the leaves all fell off and my best buddy could no longer pretend he didn't see me as he walks by. So one day he stops and we talk. He tried to talk me out of the tree but I have this will of iron. But I did ask him to bring my coat because it was pretty cold at nights especially when it rained. He says, "Well, gee, I'd like to ol' buddy but I don't know where it's at." Then he tells me he has been going with my steady girl and has sold my car and is wearing my clothes. I ask him if he could please get me a peanut butter sandwich or something but he says gee he'd like to but he's got this important meeting.

"Thanks, ol' buddy," I say, but he doesn't hear me.

I also talked with this cat from the journalism school who keeps asking me why I chose a maple tree. I finally told him it was a mere coincidence. He printed it in the school paper and everybody thought I was crazy to live in a tree just because it was a maple. Fuzzy thinking, they called it.

One night I was sitting here looking at my toe that was sticking through a hole in my shoe, when my old steady girl came by with another guy (not my best



buddy). She announced that things had changed between us and she was going out with other guys and she wanted to have some fun before she was too old.

"I know," I said.  
She wanted to be honest with me.  
"I appreciate it," I said.

She said when I came down out of the tree I could still date her but not to expect things to be the way they were before. I felt sick. I wanted to ask her how a love as beautiful and as great as ours could be destroyed by my spending some time in a tree but I just sat there. She went cheerfully on; if I wanted to call it off completely, just let her know and she would understand and she still respected me. Honest! I felt sicker. I'm a real kook.

After she left, I got drunk on a bottle of vodka I had sent a kid after. It was a pretty wild night because I had never been drunk before not being in a fraternity and all. Pretty soon this guy came along who said he had come all the way from the edge of the woods just to talk to me.

I panicked. "You!" I cried, "Get lost!" I was pretty rough on him.  
He got mad and said, "Kids like you are a dime a dozen."

I yelled after him, "Phoney!" I don't know why. He is a heck of a nice guy and I'd like to call him up sometime.

The next guy was really wild. He was an old alum and he came clanking along in this suit of armor. He had some difficulty walking and he ran into my tree. Apparently he had come just to rescue me from the tree. "Son," he says, "you can't run away from life like that. You have to face things, so pull yourself together and come on down."  
"Never," I said.

"Listen Kid, you think you are original?"

I read a story about a guy in a tree. It was a lousy story."

"You're in a story too you lousy jerk!"  
"Speak up will you, Kid, I can't hear too well with this suit of shining armor."  
"I am not coming down!" I shouted.  
"You in a fraternity, Kid?"

"No."  
"Thank God for that. Well son, I didn't think you was. You are giving this school a bad name, Kid. What you need are some Christian values. Look at me, Kid, I am a millionaire. You know why I am a millionaire? Christian Values. Listen, Kid, I've been around a lot longer than you have and I know some things. A guy who has made a million bucks can't be all wrong. You don't make that kind of dough by being stupid so come on down from there."

"Go to blazes."  
"Well I can see there is no sense talking to you. I didn't have to come here you know. By God, I am coming up there and drag you down."

He tried to climb the tree but his armor was so heavy that he fell on his back. Two hours later he was able to struggle to his feet and clanked off.

After that it was very quiet. The cars had stopped roaring past and the squirrel awakened by the silence came out for some air. He looked at me for a few minutes, yawned and went back to bed. The campus was wrapped in a night mist. Very late I heard a thin piping noise and from behind a bush danced a satyr. He was a rather raggy old satyr but he looked magnificent dancing there on the lawn in the soft light. For five minutes he danced there and then he danced behind McClung Hall still piping away. Everything was soft and still. I leaned over and reached out and as I reached I fell from the branch.

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In the far distance appeared a serpent of dust, chasing a bug. It grew swiftly to a light truck trailing a sinuous dust-plume, rattling over the rocks of the dry wash, and grinding to a halt beside a newly-burned field, the brilliant green of the new grass showing through the black remains of the old, like a phoenix rising from its own ashes. Two men stepped from the cab of the truck and walked to the back. The flap, carefully tied, was unfastened, and two soldiers with rifles dismounted, followed by a third man in civilian dress. The little group walked slowly out across the burn, sweat-beaded black faces glistening in the heat, and every step leaving a crushed impression in the ash, crushing the new life under the old. Four men stopped, and one walked on alone. Warm sun flooded the afternoon in rippling waves on the breeze. In the man's mind an idea grew suddenly, just as he heard the muttered command, "Fire," and blackness quenched all thought. A lean black body tumbled into the fresh green of the spring grass. Dreams of empire, hopes of a new nation vanished in the brief instant of hot metal crashing through the consciousness. Leader of men, bringer of chaos, nourisher of worms.

Two persons lay on the soft green carpet of the young grass, lost in the wonder of the moment, the infinite joy of a new love being created suddenly from nothing at all.

"What are you thinking?" he asked.  
A long pause. Then, shyly, "How good it is to be here . . . with you."

"But everybody must be happy on a day like this. God, but it's beautiful. I don't think there could be a person alive who's sad right now."

And they returned to the contemplation of each other.

He lay on his back, staring up at the gray ceiling—the same gray ceiling that he'd watched for — what was it? Five years? Ten? Maybe forever. "God, I wonder what it's like outside," he thought. Outside. That didn't mean much any more, either. Out in the yard, during recreation period (so called), he'd been able to smell the freshening grass outside the wall, and feel the warm breeze, but it seemed only a half-reality, a breath from another existence. This was all his universe, these gray walls and ceiling, neatly separated from all else by a row of steel bars. Two smudges on the ceiling stared back at him, like a pair of unblinking eyes. No matter how he turned, they were still there, always watching, the very symbol of his captivity, like the ever-present guard. He rolled over on his side and closed his eyes. The words of an old song ran vaguely through his mind: "The eyes of God are shining in the sky tonight." The eyes on the ceiling stared down on the sleeping form.

The young man sat unmoving, cursing

## On Fields Forgotten

by  
bill  
holland



softly to himself. "No good dame anyway. Don't know what the hell I ever saw in her. Dammit . . . Too busy to go with me, is she? Seems to have plenty of time for other people, though." The hollow feeling in his stomach grew larger at the thought. Resentment burned in his gut. He carefully traced in his mind how she had looked, walking hand in hand with someone else, so damned beautiful he thought he couldn't stand it. The breeze stirred softly in the grass around him, and her dark eyes, quiet voice . . .  
"Hell, this is silly," he thought. "I wonder what it is in people that makes them enjoy being sorry for themselves. She's not that important." He forgot his sorrow for a moment as he pondered this point, and then she came back into his mind, abruptly, and anger rushed through him. He leaned back against a tree, able to think only of her, exhausting his pain in the exquisite self-torture of a spurned lover.

"Here now. You're too big a girl to cry over spilled ice-cream. Why, what would your mother think if she saw you? Big girls like you shouldn't do that. Now, I tell you what. If you'll stop crying, I'll give you a dime and you can buy another cone. Would you like that?" A shy nod, the preferred dime was accepted, and the little girl ran happily back into the shop.

"Cute little kid," he thought. "Makes a guy feel just all right when he can be nice to kids." He walked on, feeling very satisfied.

The small child whimpered softly, too exhausted now to cry any more. He was hungry, and tired, and puzzled. He wondered, in a child's vague, half-animal way, where his mother was, and why he hadn't been fed, and talked to and caressed. He was too young to understand why his home lay in smoking ashes, but old enough to know hunger; too young to realize that his parents lay in those ashes, but old enough to know loneliness; too young to understand war, old enough to die. He moaned quietly sitting alone in the warmth and freshness of the afternoon, a dying ember of life among the already dead ashes of other lives.

The sun sinks smoothly into the western pit, drawing behind it the curtain of darkness. Two lovers wander down a hidden path, among the sprays of delicious-smelling lilacs, each lost in private thoughts, alone in a moment of shared joy. In the cage, the lights come on. "Solitary. I wonder what that's like. Anyway, what could be more solitary than this? No one to talk to, and no one worth talking to anyway." The iron bars stretch away, row on row, to the roof high above. A young man leans back against his tree, lost in his self-pity, trapped in the prison of his own mind. Off in the darkness, a small figure stirs restlessly, waiting . . . A young, lean black body lies in a shallow grave; unknown, unnoticed, un mourned.

## Batrachomyomachia II

by stephen abbott

When He popped the scene  
the cats wailed.  
It was real cool man.

Here come the stars (about several)  
and some grass and jazz and—oh ya,  
Some fish in a big juicy wet puddle

then the rib scene . . .  
It was real cool i guess

Then some fruity snake says "lets sin"  
and they do  
and then its not too cool anymore

For about too many years it wasn't cool.  
And the cats made with the clubs and hairy clothes.

(a couple hep fellas  
say the cats was monkeys  
but thats alot o bull  
cuz everyone knows cats  
aint monkey i guess)

Anyway everybody juiced it  
except one cat  
called Noah, cuz he knowed it wasn't cool

and lucky for him  
cuz like one day the world washed away.

Some cats made temples and tombs  
but our cats made it on the peak  
which is somewheres in the desert

Like the trip was tough i guess  
but they made it  
and sat tight for some more years.

They were waitin to swing  
with the biggest, coolest cat of all.

But when He makes the scene He aint got the monguls horn  
He swings to a new arrangement  
but lotza cats bop . . . cuz its cool

The high priests dont bop (i guess)  
and they like fix Him up with thorns and jazz  
and say "now cool it daddy, swing out"

But the biggest cat of all dont quite swing out  
Hes gotta do a couple rounds of handjive  
before blowin the last strains with us

But what of today you ask  
nineteen hundred and sixty some years later

Well, some cats are still juicin it  
ya . . . and some cats are lost in the ivory temple swingin  
kind of sick like  
and some cats are wailing about the rest

Its too bad i guess  
that such a cool arrangement  
aint played