



Terminal City Picaresque

My flight from California comes in at night. I don't see the city from the air. I'm not awestruck by its beauty. My brother picks me up at the airport and we tool into town on his motor bike. Crossing the Oak Street bridge, the mighty Fraser in darkness below is filled with log booms, its banks crowded with belching sawmills. We pass mysterious pyramidal silhouettes of beehive burners and exotic crews of turbaned lumber sorters moiling their midnight green chain. It's a cool for July 1969 evening as we putt through drizzled streets lined with old wood frame clapboard houses. We arrive at his place on West 7th Avenue just off Pine Street. He lives next door to Big Pink, the Alexandra House, a one time orphanage that looks like an oversize, post Victorian institutional version of the surrounding houses but painted pink and now used as a community centre. My brother tells me that if it were a clear night that we'd see the mountains but tonight it's overcast and all I see is the rotating information tower on the Molson's brewery. The sign has three sides with data spelled out in light bulbs; one with the temperature, one with the time and one with a four letter word to describe the weather- it reads DULL.

The next morning the DULL sign has changed to RAIN. I'm still not awestruck by Vancouver's beauty. In fact, the local hippyland neighbourhood seems a little, well, grotty. Lots of Volkswagen vans. Lots of dogs. As I look out from the second story window I see about ten ferro-cement sail boats in various stages of construction parked in people's back yards. Down the street a bulldozer is knocking over an old house. I'm an early riser and go out for a photo walk. Just past Big Pink I find the BC Electric tracks which I walk along, winding across 4th Avenue near a ten story high Army Navy sign standing beside the Granville Street bridge. The tracks lead down to False Creek where an impenetrable thicket of blackberries separates the train shed from fishing boats tied up at water's edge. The tracks curve around close to the RAIN sign and then along side the Burrard Street bridge where native guys are cooking something on a Coleman stove and a little further along a bunch of hippy kids are sleeping on the ground in sleeping bags, wet, next to a smoking garbage fire. I reach the Kitsilano trestle and want to continue on across but it's swung open for boats to pass. False Creek is full of log booms, sawdust barges, fish guts and oil slicks. The city looks flat and gray. Ugly. It rains and I don't take my camera out. California has me spoiled.

After a ham-n-eggs brunch at the Aristocratic with my brother we go to a Committee to Aid American War Resisters meeting near 4th and MacDonald. Of course this is an American crowd and it's interesting to hear about the issues they face here in Canada, one common complaint is boredom. Canada is boring. The craziest guy there actually likes the army and approves of the Namwar but is pissed off that he got drafted as he wanted to be