

# —THE ORANGE MAMMOTH

*by Matthew Lee Bain*

Devon Georges had been drawn to what he termed deteriorating towns long before he came across Smolth. That these towns possessed such a quality was presumed by Devon simply by the names on their guideposts. For the names themselves appeared to be etymological deteriorations of known words or cities... suffice it to say, these guideposts with quaint names were periodically seen by Devon during his frequent business travels.

Often Devon would return in his free time to these deteriorating towns to pursue his hobby, which he excused as photography; though in truth, photography was simply the medium by which Devon pursued his true interest: preserving moldering vistas—immortalizing deterioration—suspending decay indefinitely. And these towns, which he found himself drawn to, only encouraged this hobby, with their patchwork of decaying structures left to rot in fallow fields.

Smolth was no different. It possessed the requisite structures: abandoned homes, decayed cottages, rotting sheds, barren silos, and defunct barns. In fact, it was one such barn that caused Devon to pull off the road.

This gambrel-roofed, dun specimen, as fallow as the fields around it, sat crippled in grape vines. Their woody tendrils had crept over every surface of the structure, naturally locking what was out, out and what was in, in.

*When nature condemns a building*, Devon thought while setting up his tripod. As he began to snap off pictures, the sky turned dusty with a false twilight of wind-borne debris. Devon waited for the debris to clear, sensing something like dust in the back of his throat. When it did not, he lit a cigarette and packed up his things while embers consumed the cylinder. Twilight was soon to come, and Devon had no time to wait. He would hit the road again, hoping for more majestic and better-lit tributes to decay.

The roads were long and empty, mostly paved, which surprised Devon as there were no driveways or visible residences; nothing but dusty offshoots, most gated or blocked by homemade barriers; others thick with hunter-orange warning signs. But Devon had enough experience with these overgrown expanses of deteriorating towns to know he would find “a legal in” if he kept looking.

Eventually he came to a dirt road—Glather—and decided to turn onto it, heading north. Now he seemed to be driving into the sky instead of against it, and he felt that he was getting closer to his presumed destination, as the dense reek of vegetables infiltrated the car...

There, the top of a silo, aesthetically missing every other slat, or so it seemed,

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leaned over a nearby rise. As Devon crested the rise in a cloud of dust, the red blur of a run-down tractor came into view. Better yet, thought Devon.

Though the scene was something of a gift, Devon—rather than setting up his tripod—went freehand while his car idled. His hunter's sense told him that there was more, to just go further...there—follow that two-track alongside the barren silo. Quickly, before you lose the light. Devon clicked off some pictures of where the tractor had bled, rust-red, into the overgrowth tangled in its wheels, and he was off again, down the two-track.

His car bumped along, the grassy hump between the well-worn ruts tickling the undercarriage. He came to another two-track branching to the right—he could almost smell his destination now. And he drove off into the sky again. The forest closed in from both sides, the foliage of low-hanging trees blocking out the rudiments of an orange twilight.

Then another rise and, as the forest opened, a stomach-losing drop into a vale. Devon slowed his speed and cast about the open expanse. Turning to his left, his head abruptly stopped and his eyes narrowed. “Fuck me!” he said aloud, wondering if he was seeing correctly. Deep in the crater-shaped vale sat a cyclopean, rust-orange barn, bulging into perspective. But how could it be that startlingly dull, impossible color? *That barn is the color of Mars—an amber body suspended in the middle of nowhere.*

Devon wondered if his car would traverse the vale safely, but as he momentarily pondered this, he saw that the car's shadow had already penetrated the vale. There was no time to seek an alternate route. Twilight was burning. Devon wrenched the wheel westward and tore into the field, riding the shadow down, all safety abandoned, toward the ruddy prodigy.

His hands shook as he gathered his equipment and stepped from the car. Wading through the weeds, thick with spittle-bug nests that slobbered at his thighs, he found a place to set up—a bowled depression, where a deer had made its bed.

Devon tingled with excitement—tingled!—as he placed the camera on the tripod and gaped through the viewfinder, focusing on the Mars-colored barn. Never had he found a deteriorating structure of such anomalous color.

Devon took his first photographs zoomed fully out—the postcard shot, as he thought of it; after which he slowly zoomed in, snapping off a picture for every delicate turn of the focusing ring. At full zoom, he stopped and hurriedly unscrewed the lens, trading it for a macro lens from his case. Again, he zoomed fully out and, snapping pictures along the way, focally crept up to the very walls. Through the lens, they appeared to be covered in hairy offshoots or stringy rootlets. “What?” Devon brought his face away from the camera and stared at the barn. He took another look through the lens. It appeared as if he had some biological specimen under a microscope where he was observing the outer membrane. Removing his camera from its perch, Devon approached the barn.

With each step, he further disbelieved his own eyesight. They were like thin, carrot rootlets—sprouting from a dried and fibrous gourd-skin. The entire structure had the appearance of hirsuteness. Devon ran his hands over the organic hide of the barn.

*This is beyond deterioration. It's...*, he thought, unable to finish.

“Orange Mammoth,” came a voice, which, for a moment, Devon took as that