

extract from *Butterfly Tree* by Samuel Morgan

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Bay of Dreams

tags: Kung Fu, mugging, theft, Bay of Dreams, Mexico, Chad, Bako Haram, psychedelics, DMT, Mandelbrot, Ayahuasca

At about 10am, with no sign of wind yet, I suggest to Ethan and Christie we head to the Bay of Dreams, a gorgeous cove Evan had driven myself and others to two days earlier.

"How far is it," Ethan asks.

"About a 10-15 minute drive," I say, which is what I remember it to be. They're game.

"How much further is it," Ethan asks ten minutes into the journey. After the three windless days, both he and Christie are keen not to miss out on any more kiting. Especially Christie, who'd managed to extend her flight. I'm in no rush. Sometimes just an hour on the water is enough for me. It's probably why I don't progress as much as I'd like. Yet I want to be as good as the best of them. Always the dreamer.

I recognise the village we're passing through and know we're not even half-way yet.

"We're about half-way," I say.

At least Christie's snail pace would serve as an excuse for why it took considerably longer.

"Sorry," I add. "You know how when something's new time seems to shrink? Well, I think that's what happened here."

Ethan doesn't respond.

I do notice him shifting restlessly in the back a few times. I too am finding Christie's driving a tad unbearable. But when we pass a man trying to push start a car, it proves useful. Without hesitation or needing to apply much pressure to the brakes,

Christie makes a U-turn, parks beside him and she and Ethan jump out. I stay put. *Three* extra pairs of hands pushing is probably too much, right? Plus I'm busy thinking, *that is Canadian "nice" of them*, and having a existential crisis over whether I would have done the same or not were I driving.

We finally make it to the Bay of Dreams, parking beside the restaurant and about ten gleaming Harley-Davidsons. A faint, sweet smell of engine oil hangs in the air. Spotting a promising rustle in the leaves above us, Ethan decides there isn't time to go for a walk or snorkel as we'd discussed we might: we'll have an early lunch instead.

Apart from the group of Mexican Hell's Angels just finishing up desert, we're the only people in the restaurant. Ethan and Christie find themselves a seat while I go to do some stretches in the sun.

I'm halfway through the Tai Chi-type sequence I'd learnt from a year's worth of Kung Fu classes in London (the teacher was a 'wax on, wax off' type guy who didn't believe in rushing the basics) when I hear a laugh. The paranoid part of my brain thinks it's a laugh *at me*. I'd just got to the more snappy Karate Kid type section, after all. I notice the heckle, then my choice to perceive it as such, and remind myself I'm being ridiculous (often happens); letting it go with a sharp "haaa" out-breath, and air-slice of my hand-ninja style. Of course they aren't laughing at me. I'm just a narcissist, thinking everything is about *me, mí, moi*. Or scarred from school where people *did* laugh at me. Though everyone laughed at everyone there. Apart from Sam Salem—real name Osama Salem, but Allah help you if you used it—he almost threw me out a forth story science lab window for doing so once. This was even before the CIA had unleashed Osama Bin Laden on the world. No; no one dared laugh at him. (I would like to point out it was

only at secondary school I was mocked. At primary school, age 6-11, I was king. King I tell you).

When I return, Christie and Ethan are deep in conversation, but Christie kindly guides me in:

"I was just saying this is the first trip I've taken since I travelled to Nigeria."

"Oh, what were you doing there?"

"Environmental capacity building. I was describing this traumatic bus journey I had out there."

I nod in a 'do go on' type fashion, making a mental note to ask her later what *environmental capacity building* was exactly.

"I was the only white person on a bus travelling near the Chad boarder when an armed gang stopped us. They made us all get off and I noticed all the passengers were covering their eyes, presumably so they couldn't be accused of being able to identify the assailants."

"Fair to say you followed suit?" I eagerly interject.

"Yes. We then had to lie face down in the dirt whilst they went through everybody's pockets. They took my money belt with my passport in it, but I had another on my ankle, hidden under a fake bandage."

Clever girl, I think. Whenever I travel to more dangerous territories I usually sew a few hidden pockets into my clothes and carry extra wallets so I can appease any potential mugger. Haven't needed them so far. Perhaps I could use my *Kung Fu* form instead. Mesmerise them with the fluid movements of my Dancing Crane or Praying Mantis. Or just disarm them with laughter—if my earlier paranoia was founded, that is. Hopefully neither strategy will be required, touch wood.

"I flinched when the guy frisking me pulled up my dress slightly"—*I can imagine*—"and felt..."—*oh god: what?*—"...the bandage, but he assumed it was just that."—*Phew*—"He took everything else. But they

kept asking for more from everyone. Then I shouted out, or pleaded, for my passport"—sounds like a risky thing to do..." "Hey, Canadian Woman, stand up,' one of them called a few minutes later. I thought I was going to be killed. Or all the others would be. I mean, it happens—I'd just read about it. But instead one of them throws my passport at me."

"How nice of them," I say.

"Yeah, but just then there comes a shout and they all suddenly jump into their truck as the police come over the hill behind us, guns blazing. Myself and all the other passengers were caught in the middle of a fire fight. Everyone scattered into the desert and dived for cover amongst the scrub, which was pretty sparse. When it was over I remember everyone's faces—black from the ground that had recently been burned—contrasting with everyone's white out-turned pockets."

"So what happened next?" I ask, just to stoke the anecdotal fire, in no doubt she would tell us. Ethan hadn't said anything yet, I notice. Perhaps my interjections were unnecessary. Conversation is a difficult art.

"Everyone just got on the bus again and on we went. No one said a word. In the next town where we all got off, I had no money but someone in the crowd pushed a note into my hand. Not much, but enough to get a taxi."

"Oh my god, that's so kind," I say.

"Yeah. I was suitably pissed off then when the taxi I got blatantly ripped me off by driving the long way to the hotel. I was too spent to argue, though."

"I'm glad you lived to tell the tale," Ethan says.

The food arrives, giving us a nice *empaneada*-flavoured interlude.

"I thought you did still have some money?" I ask, always one to pick a hole in a story if I see one. "In the belt on your leg, no?"

"I did, but I didn't want to be pulling that out in a big mob of people."

"Of course." *Silly me.*

"I normally carried a day or twos' worth of money in a small purse—that's the one the robbers took. You know, they were probably Boko Haram. It happened just a few kilometres from where all those Nigerian school girls were kidnapped."

Jeez—lucky escape, I think.

I look out to the bay: glimmering gold and turquoise where morning sunlight reflects, dancing and leaping between little waves, teasing trough and shadow. Definitely more wind now. I wonder if Ethan has noticed.

The pack of motorbikes growl and grunt, then spit and roar to life, and away the hell's angels tear, tyres slapping the ground, clouds of indignant dust chasing.

Ethan waves at the waiter then scribbles on his palm with one finger.

As we wait for the bill to arrive, and still in Nigeria, Christie tells us about a recurring dream she had out there of being robbed on some hill, and how a month after the dreams started, it actually happened.

"I was up near the Niger border in the medieval muslim city of Kano. I'd walked up to some old fortress on a plateau in middle of the city and was standing at a viewing point. Standing *alone*, I suddenly realised. As I turned around to look for the route back down, there he was. The same man from my dreams. I started walking towards the exit, but he was coming straight for me. I changed tack slightly but he did the same. He said something but then just went for my bag. I screamed and shoved him *hard*, but somehow he managed to make off with it."

"He was probably practised at that type of thing," I say. In the chomp-studded silence I muse how even foreknowledge hadn't helped her. Was it meant to be? Was there anything she could have done to stop the thief? If she'd trusted the premonition more, perhaps? Run at him harder, and earlier? Or, maybe if she hadn't been robbed other more important, positive events might not have unfolded in her life.

Ethan is itching to get on the water, and as soon as we've paid up, the grand sum of \$3 each, we're back in the car and on our way, though not at any great speed: Christie is driving. Chris' rush, and my apathy, makes me dwell on the fact I'm not into kiting, or any sport, as much as I'd like to be (despite having spent thousands on all the equipment). For a moment that's a bad thing, but then I realise it's just me and we're all different. I'm fine. I like to cruise. If that means I never get amazing at a sport, then so be it. No point forcing it. (Self-invalidation attack 969754 thwarted).

Somehow we get onto the topic of psychedelics. Maybe I instigate it; I do enjoy the topic. I'm doubtful it's Chris; he admits he's never touched a drug in his life. That's kind of refreshing to hear, in an admirable, almost cute, though certainly not enviable type way. It's Christie that's talking, perhaps it was her. Perhaps she's remembering our conversation from the bar two nights earlier. She's saying how she took Ayahuasca one time, and smoked DMT twice. I want to ask her 'what it was like' but know it's a bit of a crass question. I mean, *there's a transcendental dimension beyond language... but it's just hard as hell to talk about* ¹ Luckily Ethan is sufficiently intrigued to dig for more details on my behalf. What we get for the next five minutes is a very entertaining account of outer body experiences, meetings with feminine spirits, and journeys through strange alien realms.

Though I had tried Ayahuasca, I hadn't smoked DMT (that's N,N,-Dimethyltryptamine if you didn't know--a psychedelic compound present in many plants and animals, including humans, and structurally synonymous with serotonin) and wasn't willing to. I'm too sensitive. I had a full outer-body, alien-encountering, meet-your-maker, die-and-be-reborn type experience from a mere sip of whiskey and toke on a spliff one time when I was 18. If I smoked DMT, I might never come back.

"How about the DMT, specifically?" I ask. "How was that?"

"Hmm. How can I put it?" Christie begins, hands gripping the steering wheel, road slowly trundling by, cacti peering at us, thorns like listening antennae. "It was an internal journey of deconstruction. Of oneself. It was lengthy, though probably not in earth time."—DMT trips never are; I'd read a little about them. Apparently it's a few, long draws on a pipe, then you're gone for 6-10mins. Experiences varied, of course, but often reported were floating mandalic, chrysanthemum-like patterns at first, then crumpled up plastic, crackling sounds; or a buzzing or ringing—the prelude to bursting through some membrane—then when you did (break through), thoroughly alien worlds, entities² even, cheering at your arrival. Singing, chanting in some utterly unfamiliar language. Thousands of details per second. And so on.

"I had a long, hard look at a lot of things," Christie says, pausing. "Then what followed was a euphoric tour of the cosmos, on some cosmic alternative plane of consciousness. It was like travelling through a Mandelbrot set."

"A what?" Ethan asks, seeming more interested in this conversation than the Nigeria one.

"It's fractal geometry," Christie replies. "Google it."

I had an inkling of what she meant. "Like the Chaos theory pattern?" I suggest.

"Exactly. It was flowing though and multi-dimensional, not just static."

"Could you perhaps put your foot down?" Ethan asks. I glance at the dashboard; our speed had dropped to 15kph. I'd barely noticed. Christie obviously hadn't. We'd been travelling at hyper speed on a chemical starship bearing inward as she recounted her travels.

"Why haven't you ever taken drugs, Chris?" I ask him once we'd reached a cruising speed more to his liking.

"I never really felt the need."

"Fair enough. Perhaps you don't need to. That's a complement. You're not 'missing out' on anything."

I meant it. He seemed just fine without them. Perhaps he was 'tuned-in' enough. He always seems to be smiling, at least.

"Out of interest, Chris; why are you smiling so much of the time? It's nice."

"Well, I try to find the fun and good in everything and everywhere."

Nice answer, I think. Maybe I'll learn to do that too someday...

¹ Terrence McKenna

² or as Terrence McKenna described DMT entities, among other names, "translinguistic machine-elves," "friendly fractal entities," "elf legions of hyperspace," "tykes," "meme traders," "syntactical homunculi," "jewelled self-dribbling basketballs," ,or simply, "dead people."