

Murder @ Brave New World



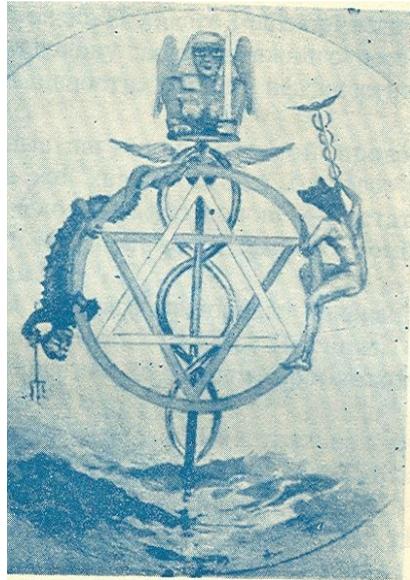
It depicts a situation of distress corresponding to the alchemical nigredo

*Carl Jung, *Mysterium Conjunctionis*, Adam and Eve*

Destiny

The cosmic drama is in reality a myth made flesh

MotT, Letter X, The Wheel of Fortune



I stared at the Facebook feed and felt part of my brain shrivel. Pictures of cute baby animals jostled for space with anarchistic calls to action, spiritual platitudes, photos of people's meals and other none-events from entire swathes of the population I'd never even met in person.

My eyes glazed over yet still I scrolled, as if compelled by a sinister brainwashing force that was emanating from deep inside my laptop. For a nanosecond I contemplated this force: Was it part of a conspiracy to dumb-down society and kill off portions of the human race through some form of gadget-based radiation source?

A piercing electronic bleep from another demanding device punctuated the robotic trance I'd fallen into and my heart leapt for the first time that day. I grabbed the smug smartphone, unable to squash my maddeningly clear desperation:

Was it from Him?!

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I tossed the thing aside, disgusted with myself. If it was proven time and again to never be from Him then why did my heart still jump over the moon whenever it bleeped?

Because according to the eyes of truth that were always watching I was a sad, deluded fool, that's why. I leapt from the chair in distress and stood on one foot with the other wedged against my inner thigh, straightening my hands above my head in a determined praying pose.

OHMMMMMM, SHANTIIIIIIII.....

Sort your life out, whispered my Angel as I settled into the yogic posture and gazed into hyperspace, echoing the words of a vigilant psychic who'd accosted me in the aisles at a recent trade fair.

"The spirits want to know when you're going to start doing what you're meant to be doing!" he'd robustly informed me, having pounced from a well-appointed home interiors stand wearing a magician-like white suit. His tan was orange but his eyes were kind and I'd accepted the insight with teary gratitude. It was the one burning question I also had for myself, but how was I supposed to just do what I was 'meant to be doing' - what was 'it' for heaven's sake?

It wasn't as if I lacked awareness of the futility of my present existence. It wasn't as if I'd ever stopped looking for 'it', but I was a prisoner of desire, a slave to unrequited love - the only true kind according to Oscar Wilde - not that it helped. Who or what could ever set me free?

Who could even say?

The memory of the psychic faded and I discontinued the pose in order to revert back to scrolling. A couple of feet down the indiscriminate page I was accosted by a tight posse of happy, self-actualising hippies. Out they beamed, their radiant, nut-brown faces alive with joy against a backdrop of lush palm trees and endless white sand. I sighed deeply.

Life, eh, why was I not having some of that?

Seized by a sudden reckless urge to get a piece of whatever I was missing I clicked on the name of the girl who'd posted the photo and bashed out a message.

That's a fabulous photo of you guys - I really have to get away soon! I don't suppose you know anyone who's looking for volunteers?

Working for free had to be good for karma didn't it?

A reply pinged back with uncharacteristic speed.

YES!

I wasn't a stranger to meaningful coincidences, moments of serendipity or dream manifestation, but was nonetheless taken aback by this instantaneous response to such a specific question.

Really?

Yes! My friend in Guatemala JUST emailed me to see if I knew anyone who wanted to work on his project!

Another inner exclamation struck me. Were things meant to fall into place so quickly and easily? From where I was sitting it seemed clear that the spirits wanted me to get away too. It was destiny. The metaphorical bag was evidently packed, ready to be stuck on the end of a stick and slung over my foolish back.

Into my head once again popped the magician in the white suit with his wise, all-seeing eyes. The oddest thing was that Guatemala had been in the back of my head for an indeterminate length of time, a seed of strange origin that had somehow pushed its way through the dark matter of my unconscious mind.

I recalled a lucid dream from times past where I was carried on the back of an eagle to the breathtaking Mayan jungle, stretching out as far as the eye could see in every direction, an ocean of emerald green against the cornflower blue sky. Then, in the twinkling of an eye, I had found myself locked in a cage with my face at ground-level, observing mutely whilst poker-backed, hieroglyphic-haired temple priests made ready for the next human sacrifice....

Oui, c'est moi.

Did I detect a pattern emerging?

My hypnosis ended and the laptop came back into focus. I rapidly typed another message, the potent reminder of past death making me overflow with the terrible excitement of future life.

That's amazing timing, it's obviously meant to be! Would you send me his details please?

Yes, she would.

www.nuevomundovaliente.com / zorro@nuevomundovaliente.com

I checked out his website and read the contents with mounting joy, for it appeared that Zorro and I were singing from the same hymn sheet:

Our Mission is to create sustainability centres in regions of great need. We are dedicated to promoting sustainable lifestyles and improving environmental conditions by the implementation of a complex integrated strategy consisting of key modules: Sustainable Living via a model community and Eco Projects, all sustainably funded via eco-tourism. Nuevo Mundo Valiente serves to inspire, teach and assist individuals and communities to live in balance with nature and living by example is our creed. Be the change to see the change...

Sounds quite impressive when you put it like that, doesn't it?

I signed myself up with wanton abandon, shadow tightly bundled into the pack I would strap on my soon-to-be-sunburned back. I knew the time had come to face my karma and I was resolutely unafraid to do so at the crucial moment of funds transferal. Because yes, this was the type of volunteering you had to pay for; karma that mucky costs time and money to shift, dedication is what it takes.

No more being a saddo for me, I vowed, metamorphosing into a Divine Fool about to blithely trip off the top of a very high cliff into a bottomless abyss with ease and grace. The launch date for my escape was set for February 22 2012, precisely the start of Lent and therefore befitting of an hermetic undertaking. This gave me three and a half months to be consumed with dread about the possibility of repeating one of my more exotic past-lives by being human-sacrificed in Central America, my initial bravado having faded with the same dramatic speed with which it had arrived. I never could have imagined that the tables would turn 180 degrees and - far from having my heart ripped out by an obsidian-eyed native – I would find myself complicit in a ritualistic murder committed at Brave New World, half a moon before the Resurrection.

Mockingbird Hill

"It's not easy having a good time, evening smiling makes my face ache"

Frank N Furter, The Rocky Horror Picture Show

Looking back to that fateful night - illumined by a full moon in Leo on the cusp of the 2012 spring equinox - I wondered how things would have turned out had we not eaten Zorro's father. It was one of those classic forks in the road from which alternate realities endlessly unwind.

There had not, however, been a choice of paths when I disembarked the small passenger boat and set my unsuitably shod feet on the base of Mockingbird Hill¹, broiling like a lobster in the unforgiving Central American sun. While the lancha sped away with all the other passengers I surveyed the broken road with sickening dread. I had a definite impression that 'something' was not quite right, as it were, that a very wrong label had been slapped on the proverbial tin.

If truth be told I had suspected as much for quite some time, which accounted for the spiralling sense of doom that began long before my departure from blighty. I mean, what kind of name was Zorro, anyway?²

Although I was a somewhat paranoid individual by this point in my life, my fear of being machete-hacked to death in the crucible of planet Earth was not only based on self-manufactured suspicion. It was also borne out by night-time curfews across half the country and a scarily high murder toll that was due to be reported in multiple regions of the country over Easter.

I assessed the steep upward trajectory of the path. That this was the hillside I'd agreed to climb was beyond dispute but if I was hoping for a sign to the casa at Nuevo Mundo Valiente I'd sure as hell have to make it myself. Struggling to contain my terror I ogled Zorro's deceptively simple instructions with bugged-out eyes:

'Arriving at the dock, walk up the hill past the playing field to the first bridge'.

I looked around anxiously for some kind of clue.

Dock?

Playing Field?

Bridge?

Oh, but the hill was there and I would most definitely be hauling myself up it. With a desperate heave I hoisted the large backpack onto my crisply burning shoulders, hooked the small one onto my arm, grappled the silver body-bag into an awkward bear hug and proceeded to negotiate what

¹ Operation Mockingbird was a secret campaign by the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to influence media that began in the 1950s. Mockingbird was very active during the overthrow of President Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán in Guatemala during Operation PBSUCCESS, when certain journalists were prevented from traveling to Guatemala

² Zorro is the Spanish word for 'foxy' or 'crafty'

transpired to be a near-vertical hill face while a huddle of neat, tidy locals eyed me with suspicion. And who the hell could blame them, for sure as day follows night I was a sorry gringo sight. It was *'only 25 minutes to the top'* according to the gospel of Zorro. 25 Central American minutes, that is, AKA the longest day of my life and soon to be the longest night. The seeds of my compliance in the cannibalisation of that man's father were planted by my leaden feet as they lurched up the unforgiving road.

All became clear as I fought a losing battle with the sun for air.

Viente-cinco minutos, eh, mi amigo?

Finally I could decipher the sinister dreams of four months ago that began as soon as I transferred money to Zorro and the truth was imparted via lucid astral roads and clear etheric signs. Visions of dusty cramped attics and frazzled arguments, gunshots fired in the forest and a woman with henna-dyed dreadlocks who nodded sagely when I told her the spirits were angry.

The good news, at least, was that the present day - Ash Wednesday - was most definitely an ideal moment to cut out easy living and morph into a penitent prodigal. I could still turn the situation to some advantage by using it to climb the karma mountain and fulfil yet another hermetic task.

I thought grimly of my well-thumbed copy of *Meditations on the Tarot* and complex alchemical procedures, the relentless demon lover who'd stabbed me in the heart, soul and back with ten sharp swords and a lone-wolf priest who'd implanted suggestions of Atlantis into my entranced mind.

'If you decide to go remember to ask for protection; a prayer to the angels should suffice....' he'd said.

I had rashly concurred with his outrageous suggestion and in a split second found myself staring from behind some seaweed at an immense half-man, half-serpent at the bottom of a murky green ocean.

'The hermeticist never goes down', my teacher had loftily announced in response to my subsequent reports about near death experiences in the underwater kingdom, offering little in the way of comfort or an easy escape from the water-logged labyrinth. I looked up at the mountain before me and wondered if it would indeed help with the rectification - restore the balance of depth and height, so to speak.

As my brain ran into overdrive the familiar dreaded itch of a hormone and stress induced rash began to flare across my troubled cheeks, blooming like a pitiless thorny weed as poison seeped out of me with every harrowing breath. With swiftly diminishing hope I wondered if Zorro would even be present to greet me when I arrived at my appointed place in the back arse of beyond. It was, after all, the only thing I'd made him promise.

Cross your heart and hope to die, amigo....

I didn't think my heart would ever stop sinking but it was suddenly administered a ray of real hope:

A man on the road!

A paleface with a moustache who looked like he might speak English!

Praise the Lord!

I stepped up the pace and staggered twice as fast in his direction.

'HI, HOLA!'

A friendly but curious look was directed at me by the super-relaxed dude who'd clearly read a few more memos than I even knew existed.

"Hi there, what's up man, where ya goin?" *Yankee doodle dandy.*

"Brave New World." My panting voice was heavy with well-founded doubt, poorly disguised by a veneer of false hope. "You know it?"

"Sure..." *Poor cow.* "That's Zorro's place, right?" *You'll last, ooo, let me make a prediction now, five minutes.*

"Right". *Zipedee do-dah hey*. "Is it far?"

"Oh yeah, man, it's waaay up the hill". He turned around to point in the general direction of the stratosphere. "There's no-one around at the minute though, he's not been there for months, it might even be abandoned."

I stared at the Yankee, aghast, and without even pausing for reflection plunged a psychic knife honed by my worst fears into a mentally mutilated effigy of my absent tormentor.

YES I AM A WITCH PREPARE TO DIE YOU MOFO!

This was not rightful thinking by the standards of any good philosophy and an expression of mild concern flitted across the ruddy face of the threshold guardian.

"I'm Lettuce, by the way".

Thus transpired the in situ owner of the nearest other farm to Zorro's bedevilled project.

I deflated impotently. "Great, hi, I'm Veggie!" *Please help me now*.

He studied my immense load for a second. "I'd help you with your bags but I'm just here waiting for my wife to get back". *Hey ho, there ya go*.

Great, cheers! As I turned back to face the unforgiving mountain alone, the sombre parting words of Lettuce rang like bells of doom in my wolf-alert ears. "Good luck man!" *you sure will need it - you look real mad - don't go killin' anyone now!*

I gritted my teeth and tried not to think more hateful thoughts about Zorro, but was instantly plagued instead by images of **Him** - the demon lover - being insouciantly chauffeured around somewhere better with a posse of chic acolytes, elegantly robed with auric glamour while I struggled with myself on the narrow, rocky road. Hot, bitter tears prickled in my narrowing eyes but the moisture was soon sucked out of them by the huge flaming orb that was burning me to death.

~

Around half an hour later I completed the first 100 yards and prepared to '*carry on past the football pitch*', as instructed. Shattered and almost broken even at this early stage, without doubt I would have failed to make it to the next level ('*cross the first bridge*') had an angel not descended on a rickety-looking tuk-tuk.

PRAISE THE LORD!

I waved frantically at the unstable-looking and rusting red contraption that was rapidly zooming towards me. It skidded to a halt and the young, handsome driver dubiously eye-balled the three bag-carrying fool making a fuss on the street.

"Brave New World?" I chirruped idiotically.

He arched a patrician eyebrow, the confused disdain impossible to disguise. "Queee?"

"Errr..." I managed uselessly, simultaneously wiping the sweat from my ears. '**Me** ...go....with.... **you**' I pointed at him meaningfully: '*Now...please?*'

He stared at me, non-plussed, so I gesticulated wildly. 'up, **UP**!' I thrust a stern finger in the right direction. *Up the bloody hill mate, you can't possibly think I'm able to walk up there alone with all this baggage?* I wracked my addled brains and somehow extracted some sense. '*Subo, por favor!*'

He nodded curtly (I sensed reluctance, despite the promise of an easy fare) and I dragged my 2 tonne muchillas into the narrow back seat, falling to one side as he executed a speedy three-point turn and set off upwards with a deafening roar of tiny engine and skidding wheels.

I thanked God for small mercies at the passing metres I was thereby avoiding climbing as we zoomed up the bumpiest road on Earth at breakneck speed. We quickly reached the first bridge, whizzing over it in a blur like rusty red lightning.

ZIPEDEE DO DAH HEY, AH WAS CROSSIN' THE RIVER!

One sharp corner three seconds later and the cracked-up yellow bricked road abruptly morphed into the aftermath of what had clearly been a devastating landslide, with rocks heaped upon stones on the kind of track only a healthy goat could take. Goats and impeccably dressed tribal folk bearing a hundredweight of firewood on each of their backs or a week's worth of laundry on their heads, that is....

I set the pause button on my self-pity while I took stock of the situation and admired their colourfully refined and dignified passage. Much better feelings of awe and respect arose in me, momentarily humbling the moaning, groaning, imprisoned soul that was trapped inside my blistering body. As I watched and learned I was rewarded almost instantly by the awesome sudden appearance of another threshold guardian. This one was grey-bearded, hat-donning and wizard-resembling.

PRAISE THE LORD!

I flagged him down like a maniac – virtually pulling him into the vehicle - while the tuk tuk lurched on for another few inches before grinding to a halt.

“HI, hi there!” I cried out plaintively to my new best friend.

He smiled with an air of relaxed and comfortable, Zen-like calm, as if impervious to the sudden appearance of a wrongly-dressed, purple-faced madwoman on the road to nowhere.

“Howdie miss, where ya goin?”

I hung my head. “Brave New World”.

“Aha!” His eyes twinkled meaningfully as he suppressed a spiritual chuckle. “That’d be Zorro’s place?”

“Yeah.....” I sighed dramatically. *That’s my karma....*

“Well, I hate to tell you” (this was not quite true, he seemed to be having fun) “but it looks like there’s no-one up there. I think he abandoned it, it’s been like that for months now, people coming and going, everyone pissed off.” *All up there wanting to kill someone.*

My horror spilled out without restraint, the previous remonstrations with my bad-tempered self instantly forgotten. “But I’m *alone* out here, I accused, “**A-LONE DAMN IT!**” I glared at him stupidly.

“What do you mean there’s NO ONE THERE?!” *How can there be no-one in nowhere except me?!*

The Wizard shrugged and looked away from my longish blonde-ish hair and blue-enough eyes, smiling to himself all-knowingly. *That’s Sorrow for you.* “Yeah it’s a problem that place, he’s got everyone mad at him, taking their money and leaving em’ all to fend for ‘emselves. The locals want to burn the place down, he’s pissed ‘em all off so bad; there’ll be trouble soon, you wait”.

Big trouble.

Massacre.

I stood on one foot and stared at him blankly, calmly reminding myself that this was not happening, all was just a dream within a dream and what we call reality is merely an illusion.

OHHHHMMMMMM.....

My consciousness readily separated from its unhappy body, enabling me to almost believe myself for a few blissful seconds. I was really anywhere other than there, then. Really, I was with Him - here, now - happily being kissed...

But I wasn't, really, was I, I was trapped in the realm of Maya and couldn't leave. *Suffering is the badge of all the tribe of sentient things*,³ a helpful memory reminded me.

Oh good, another lesson, thanks for that, anything else?

*The cause of suffering is desire*⁴

The asphyxiating pain in my heart brought me back down to Earth with a desperate thud and I distracted myself by mentally reviewing the deal I'd agreed for my dollars. Brave New World had promised permacultural atonement with nature, harmony with indigenous populations, sunrise powered yoga and sunset meditations for path-working mystics in retreat from the corporate tapeworm economy. Clean *communal* living, in other words. Communal, as in, surrounded by people; the opposite of being alone.

The wizard's eye glinted naughtily. "Nice website though!"

Hmm, nice website.

"Sure..." I glowered like a soon-to-be axe murderer.

Nice dad.

Nice dinner.

The wizard of Mockingbird Hill proceeded to explain that the stuttering tuk tuk could ascend no further and offered to help me carry my bags if I could wait for him to go down to the village for his shopping and back up again.

I considered the friendly offer and thanked him, but fear of waiting longer than it took the sun to set compelled me to battle on alone like a lunatic. The bored driver requested 5Q for his trouble and wilfully mishearing I thrust 25 into his confused hand before soldiering on up.

The ever-more glorious view that materialised as my torturous climb progressed was marred only by the exponentially increasing anxiety that I might not arrive before dusk and the soon to come terrors of night-time alone in the Guatemalan highlands. All the same, as the late winter sun made its rapid descent I somehow managed to set foot on the final way-marker, '*the blue tin bridge*' that was suspended high above a deep mountain gorge.

Before crossing I paused to savour the respite from climbing and assessed my surroundings. At the near end of the bridge was a small wooden gate through which could be spied row upon perfect row of gloriously chlorophyll-rich salad materials, including a dozen varieties of super-strength lettuce. No prizes for guessing whose glorified mega-patch THAT was.

Over and across the bridge the tops of tall avocado trees rustled gently in the late afternoon breeze, forming a canopy of shade beneath the azure sky that cast a mysterious shadow-tunnel onto the other side. Would there be light at the end of it?

The old blue tin clanged and clattered noisily, shattering the heavy silence as I crossed the foaming river for a second time. My strong sense of doom was still firmly intact, my heart still palpably broken, but something indefinable was tapping at my intuition, speaking to a part deep inside me that was trying its humble best to awaken.

Blowing on the wind...

The shade was a welcome tonic and - fortified by the fact that seemingly against all odds I was nearing the end of this particular journey - I stepped up my pace. The beautiful trees cooled my overheated head as I shuffled more quickly towards a rickety bamboo gate and fence that had appeared up ahead.

³ T.A. Huxley, *Evolution and Ethics*

⁴ Second Noble Truth of Buddha

Gracias a Dios!

Reaching the entrance I paused for an instant as another unforgettable impression hit me with force and my heart leapt for the second time in as many minutes. Standing outside a small, run-down shack was an attractive sandy-haired youth dressed in multi-coloured tie-dyed clothes and rapidly spinning fluorescent poi balls in what was clearly an expert fashion.

Representatives of both joy and trepidation paid me a sudden visit, *'Praise the Lord I'm not alone!'* dropping by with *'that looks like crusty back-packer'* in an atomic second. My knees almost buckled from the weight of the body bag as I stepped over the threshold. It takes one to know one, as they say.

The Zelator and Mystery

...the love-desire must again enter into the desire of the enkindled anger, and quench and overcome the anger with the love; the divine water must enter again into the soul's burning fire, and quench the wrathful death in the astringent fiat, in the desire to nature, that the love-desire, which desires God, might be again enkindled in the soul.

Jacob Boehme, The Signature of all Things

The youth broke his poi-induced meditation long enough to acknowledge me from the corner of his eye. He appeared as underwhelmed by my stressful, sweat-soaked appearance as I was by his dirty ripped t-shirt.

"Hey man, how you doin'?"

Yankee doodle dandy. "Great, hi, so there IS someone here, they told me it was empty...."

"Who told you that?" His voice was nonchalant, his eye contact non-existent, but he desisted from spinning and proffered a hand. 'I'm The Zelator'.

I clutched his grubby paw. "Veggie. Lettuce and The Wizard of Mockingbird Hill told me, I saw them on the way up".

He shrugged. "I dunno about that man.....we're here...." At last there was a flicker of curious eye-contact. "Dude, who's The Wizard?"

I shrugged back.

The Zelator and I eyeballed one other for the first time with a thinly-veiled sense of trepidation that was not exactly unfounded. I hardly dared survey the camp, certain I'd be unable to hide my horror at the woefully dilapidated scene I knew surrounded us. Woodworm-ridden, sun-rotted, wind and rain-weathered, the shack was in complete disorder but The Zelator seemed to be at home.

Sensing my unspoken dismay at the general state of affairs he jerked his head slightly. "Come and meet Mystery and Loco, you're just in time for lunch".

"Sure...." I threw down the last of the bags. "When did you get here?"

"Two days ago - we all seem to arrive a day late and at meal time."

Hmm, meal times, eh, was I about to be spiked with hallucinogens?

I kicked the bags to one side and clambered onto the earth-caked porch, from whence The Zelator led me into a sparse wooden kitchen that needed no close inspection to betray two overriding characteristics. First of all, it was completely, utterly, disgustingly filthy and I could practically smell the Ecoli at five paces. Three-foot-wide cobwebs straddled every falling apart corner and the floor was little more than dirt atop rough-hewn stone.

Secondly, two mesmerizingly beautiful blue eyes were staring fiercely at me from beneath a soft, brown floppy fringe atop a perfectly formed young man in shorts. He was also serving food and appeared so well in command of the kitchen that I was transported out of hell for a second.

Boy, what a catch!

The Zelator beamed proudly for this was indeed an excellent find, a trump card that would prove to never fail:

"Veggie, meet Mystery; Mystery, this is Veggie."

Mystery and I nodded grimly at one another with a spark of instant complicity. We could survive if we put our minds to it and took good care of our great, unwashed child. He had such an air of

authority - of someone who actually knew what was meant to be happening - that I decided (wrongly, as it transpired) that he must have been part of the management/ownership team. The Zelator gestured to a man seated at the table. "And this is Loco".

I looked at the young Guatemalan caretaker with a half-formed greeting on my lips but a studiously cool-looking Loco barely glanced up from his beans and tortillas as he muttered something distinctly rude-sounding in an ancient dialect.

I narrowed my eyes. *So that's how it's going to be then? Well two can play the arse-hole game you crazy mofo.*

"Do you want some lunch?" Mystery held out his spoon and I examined the grey hippy mush with blanching cheeks.

"Errrrr....." **HELL NO!** "That'd be great, thanks...." I felt myself go pale beneath the burn.

At that precise moment a solid, dust-caked puppy came hurtling out of the forest like a scud missile, zooming straight through the broken kitchen door and over The Zelator's feet. It took a flying leap in the general direction of me and the spoon, catalysing a frantic tussle while I tried to prevent him from ripping my clothes, scratching my legs or giving me his fleas.

WOAAHHH FREAKIN HELL MAN DIRTY, DISEASE-RIDDEN DOG ALERT!

My eyes turned to saucers as Mystery stretched out a lean leg and gave the puppy a determined kick. "Ged out, GED OOT!" he roared in a marked Irish accent, growling with annoyance while the puppy scooted off yelping as fast as he had arrived, leaving me staring after him suspiciously.

Hmmm, RABIES..... I remembered my pre-trip warnings from the vaccinations nurse and vowed to avoid the dirty puppy as much as I possibly could, nervously wondering if there'd be any other dogs in the area. *Hmmm*

We sat down on benches round the table as mush was hastily doled out onto cracked, filthy plates and slid along the wooden table. I wanted to sob. I was *going to die*. Fork was automatically lifted to mouth, which opened, closed, moved around in a hurry and then swallowed. It was disgusting, but I had to complete my penance for all the bad things I'd done in life. It was Lent. I readily sensed Loco's poorly impressed thoughts as he studied me from behind the safety of his tortilla.

Ignoring the rude caretaker I looked up furtively from beneath lowered lashes to size-up my youthful, healthy-looking, sun-tanned campmates, who naturally conjured distant but not yet dead memories of the Facebook hippies. OK, so maybe it wasn't *all* bad: A blonde and a brunette, one of them toy-boy material, the other closer to my age. Two pairs of beautiful blue eyes. Things could have been worse; I could have been stuck up a rocky mountain in bandit-land with two ugly mofos or no mofos at all.

Three more swallows later I declared myself no longer hungry but the next pressing worry was bearing weightily on my mind. Where on God's green earth would I be sleeping in this terrible, dirty place?

The Zelator belched loudly and got up from the bench. "Would you like some water?"

I stared at him with dead eyes.

WATER.

With the shock of the climb, the threat of nobody being home, the dreadful sight of the dust-ball camp, the possibility of being spiked with drugs and imminent threat of rabies, I'd forgotten my REAL number one fear:

WATER.

Or, in other words: *Bugs, bacteria, stomach worms, cholera, dysentery, death!*

Also Giardia, the local parasite due that was due to infect me before the full moon in April, making me sicker than I'd ever been in my life, causing my hair to fall out, my skin to turn to shit and my stomach to practically rot. But it's fine really, whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger and nobody escapes the final judgement.

I eyeballed the archaic-looking clay filters looming on the kitchen counter and gave a silent, invisible shriek. Surely a full month of this was physically impossible? Why hadn't I at least brought a litre of Evian, one more kilo in the bag would hardly have made a difference?

I can't remember when the stories of people arriving, staying the night and waking up the next day with horrendous stomach complaints began, but they were etched into the ether of that mouldering kitchen for eternity. Like the legend of 'The Canadians'.

Oh man, they were a really nice couple but they were sooo sick. Almost from the moment they arrived she got diarrhoea, started throwing up and basically didn't stop, he had to take her to hospital after a couple of days when she could walk again and get out of here. Last I heard they had managed to get a refund off Zorro. Real nice people as well, hope she's OK, man....

Maintaining a tactful silence as I digested the awful reality of the digs and tried not to cry, The Zelator and Mystery sat peacefully at the table mopping up slop, while a knee-jerk reaction in the face of utter filth compelled me to start washing up like a maniac, freezing cold water and lack of proper soap notwithstanding.

"Tomorrow I'll clean this properly", I stated over and over again, focusing my mind on the terrible matter of the kitchen as increasing numbers of bashed-up pots, plates and dented pans were piled before me. Loco retired to the hammock on the porch and promptly fell asleep.

If only I'd brought those washing up gloves and baking soda as my poor, gentle Angel - woefully ignored yet again - had instructed.

If only, if only, if only wave bye-bye to soft, supple hands and moisturised cuticles for the whole of your immediate life, you mad cow, it's Lent not Lombok.

I might have listened to my mother as well, for she had reasonably advised me to not forget a hat. Why were they always right? I touched the top of my head, nicely burned from the journey up the hill. Why didn't I do that, why didn't I just bring a hat, what the hell was my problem, other than myself, of course?

I contemplated this in a mortified daze as I was shown around the composting areas ('hey Veggie, do you want to see how this works?'), toilet shed ('don't use too much sawdust, we're running out'), shower spot (a hose without a head in the coffee plantation), and unweeded, blackfly infested 'garden' (earth) that was nonetheless redeemed by a breath taking view across the Lake.

From the point where I was standing at the foot of a yet-to-be-planted vegetable and herb patch, a spectacular vista stretched out before me. Shimmering in the middle distance was the great expanse of a glittering, deep blue lake that was cradled to the south by three magnificent volcanoes. I paused to let myself take in the stunning scene, thankfully freed from my mental torments and physical discomfort for at least a minute.

So this was the deal: The living quarters were atrocious but the land was top notch. Not only did the 100 acre plot include magnificent coffee and avocado plantations with banana, pineapple, papaya, plantain and mango trees thrown in for good measure, it was irrigated by two tributaries of the river, one small and one very large, the latter of which swelled to enormous proportions during rainy season. Zorro had even managed to snag a bona-fide Mayan holy site, a pyramid-shaped mound - home to four sacred oak trees - that marked the borders of his territory to the north.

Immediately after the tour, Mystery charged off to work with a ton of energy, hat on head, machete in hand, while The Zelator resumed his poi-spinning, only sidling off down the slope to crack rocks when a fully-siesta-ed Loco finally awoke. It was just enough time for me to get my period. What joy, what fun, what laughter. Oh, how I roared.

I slunk off into a corner to nurse my throbbing belly and let the worrying facts sink in while I figured out the least dirty place to lay my head. At least it was only for one night, I comforted myself, fully

resolved to getting the hell out of there as soon as possible. I decided to inspect the official sleeping quarters and 'living room'.

The former consisted of an attic space reached by a pair of hazardous ladders on either side. Climbing up through the kitchen end and nervously poking my head through the hole, one swift glance at the flea-infested sleeping bags, stinking cushions and matrix of titanic cobwebs informed me that approaching the attic ever again was out of the question.

I went round to the 'living room' (tool shed) side of the shack to examine what The Zelator had dubbed the 'cot'. This flimsy folding sun lounger was so much dirtier than the dust-caked floor, with a pillow that looked as if it had been soaked in shit, it triggered genuine alarm and I backed away in disgust. This left me with only one option, short of perching up a tree. I looked towards the edge of the clearing with a feeling of pure dread:

The Tent.

Oh God.

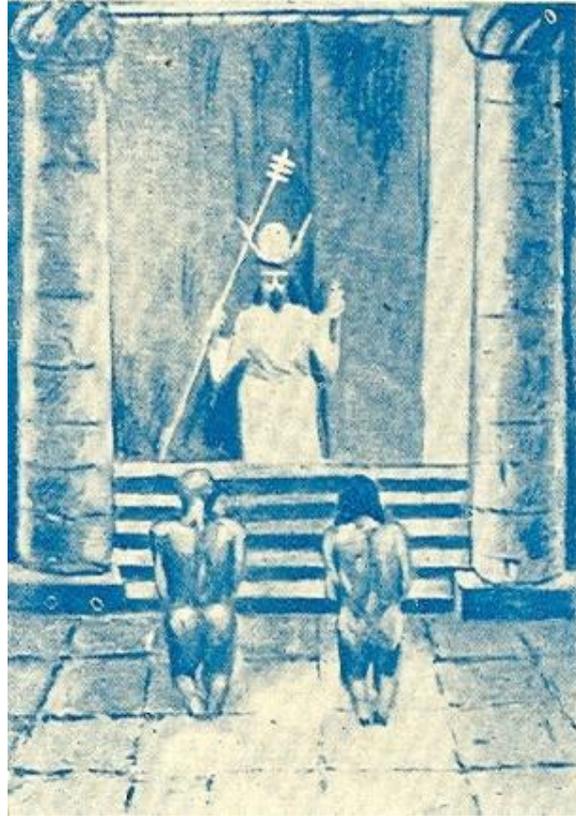
Prior to this occasion the longest stretch of time I'd spent in a tent was during a blurry weekend at Glastonbury, where ritual over-indulgence ensured trying to get to sleep was unnecessary: one either stayed awake all night or simply passed out so the fact of being in a tent was thereby irrelevant.

What was I to do?

Materialising from out of nowhere a beautiful miniature cat - black and white like my options - delicately wound herself around my shins with a sensuous purr. I bent down to stroke her whilst considering the faded green contraption that was lurking at the edge of the forest like a pile of decaying leaves. There was no getting away from it, The Tent WAS where I would be attempting to sleep for the duration of this nightmare.

With a sigh of resignation combined with the bloody-minded resolve that occasionally stood me in good stead, I gently moved aside the cat - Wish, as she was known - divested myself of the blue silk dress from India and pulled a pair of faded combats out of my larger rucksack. If this was going to be a war against comfort and convenience, I might as well be rightly dressed for it.

The Bucket



The prayers of humanity rise towards God and, after having been divinely oxidised, are transformed into benedictions which descend below from above

MotT, Letter V, The Pope

Well, this nice.

Glorious sunshine, pristine waters, a fridge full of Cristal, a beach full of babes and a legion of super-yacht neighbours in the turquoise Caribbean of St Barth's, all recently buffed and ready for the 2012 Bucket. His phone beeped for the hundredth time since He'd woken from a beatific afternoon nap.

All were attentive to the godlike man, When from his lofty couch he thus began⁵

Once again he ignored it. The last but one - to which he had not replied - had been from her and He didn't want any more reminders of anything apart from where he was there and then in the perfect here and now.

He did, however, afford her a relatively deep second thought. In his view this was practically the same as replying by text. He would have taken far greater advantage of such clear adoration from a

⁵ The Aeneid, Book IV

beautiful woman if it weren't for the peculiar feeling and that a deep taboo prevented their union. He couldn't help thinking they'd known one another in a past life, but what had been their relationship?

*He tells it o'er and o'er; but still in vain,
For still she begs to hear it once again.
The hearer on the speaker's mouth depends,
And thus the tragic story never ends⁶*

Still contemplating the enigma, he idly glanced at a small brown bird which had alighted on the deck and seemed to be watching him with its beady little eyes.

He threw it a crumb from his plate and then settled back with his well-formed hands behind his handsome head, gazing up at the cloudless sky, where a lone gull was making melancholy circles in the ether. For some reason it reminded him of himself, although his was an inner solitude because he wasn't ever short of company.

His friends were due to arrive in just under four hours, which left Him ample time to hit the island for a cocktail and see if that beautiful Swedish girl was still serving those awesome Margaritas in his favourite beach bar. He pondered this for a second or two.

Maybe she'd like a ride on the boat.

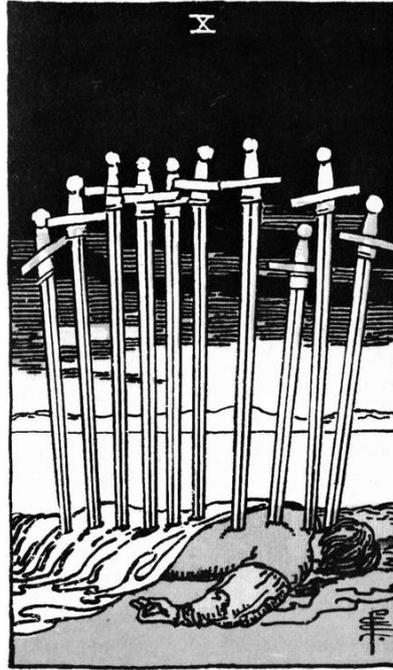
~

*When the Sun of Divine favours seems to them to shine most radiantly upon them, God darkens all
this light, and shuts the door⁷*

⁶ The Aeneid, Book IV

⁷ St John of the Cross

Insomnia



*I must be fixed to this black cross, and must be cleansed therefrom with wretchedness and vinegar,
and made white*

Uraltes, Chymisches Werck

Woefully ensconced in the dust-ridden, flea-bitten, disintegrating, weather ravaged, falling over tent - that was surprisingly equipped with an inflatable double mattress - I wondered if I'd ever be clean again. My thoughts raged like a bull over the unsavoury circumstances and misplaced expectations that had brought me to that hostile-seeming place. Surely there was a way to get my money back from the deceptive creep who'd enticed me there under false pretences.

If the Canadians had done it then so could I!

I thought bitterly of the cunningly slick website that explicitly ticked all the boxes for a certain type of person wanting to escape from Babylon. The rich array of carefully chosen key words included, in particular:

Meditation, permaculture, sustainable living, eco projects, workshops...yoga...

How dare he cite yoga!

My rage knew no bounds. I was scandalised far beyond a point I'd ever thought possible before this moment, apoplectic and writhing in torment from the ten pitiless swords that were still deeply lodged in my churning abdomen. The face rash itched in accordance with my boiling outrage, enjoying its worst outbreak in at least a decade. It felt as if every toxin in my body was vying with the poisoned, bitter and defeatist thoughts to break free of their mortal coil. I was comforted solely by the thought of getting out of there ASAP and into the nearest decent hotel.

I would surely be justified in bailing out so soon. By The Zelator's account most of the other volunteers who had arrived over the past three months - including women who had men - lasted a maximum of two nights and over half of them had fallen sick with something resembling the vomiting virus. This account would soon be corroborated by the glinty-eyed threshold guardians, with whom Zorro was less than popular for one reason and another.

As if all of this wasn't bad enough, a lightning-bolt brought Him to the front of my mind with gut-wrenching clarity. There He was again, larging it big time, supping champers on his pristine pool deck surrounded by Swedish supermodels while the world revolved around the sun that was shining out of his arse.

Miserably I faced facts. The love of my life just wasn't that into me. The only silver lining to this endless cloud was that in the present moment I actually missed my nice clean sheets more than the fantasy figure who was never inside them. Basic survival was my new priority and a curious form of embittered relief emerged from this unromantic reality.

In any event, the lower-case beloved might be delighting in other models but so could I. The Zelator and Mystery were divine forces that would accompany my soul through the yawning abyss. I thought back to the cold washing up and recalled that before these implacable witnesses I had stated my avowed intent to 'properly clean' the vile kitchen, if it was the last thing I did on this earth.

My overwrought mind tossed and turned like a dinghy in a cyclone as the temperature plunged 27 degrees and night-noises reached a crescendo with devastating alacrity. Not only was it freezing cold but barely five minutes had passed before every stray - *potentially rabid* - dog for 20sq km arrived in camp to sniff out the blood of the latest sacrificial victim.

I listened to the cacophony with profound resignation, not daring to move lest the slowly forming pocket of warmer air escaped from my inadequate sleeping bag whilst the homeless hounds ran through their well-rehearsed hymns to the moon. Speaking of which, I'd searched in vain since arriving in Guatemala but hadn't seen it once, which wasn't exactly conducive to the lunar meditation my teacher had assigned for the next 40 days.

As the scrabbling, scratching, crashing, banging and barking around my decaying bit of plastic intensified I hoped and prayed it was only (non-rabid) dogs running round the tent. What if unspecified random 'beasts' were out there? This was a new concern indeed.

WHAT IF THERE WERE BEASTS?

At that moment my freezing fingers - jammed into even colder ears against the noise of howling canines - absolutely failed to muffle a mortifying high-decibel shriek which assailed my mummified body like a screaming banshee. My shock was so great that it felt as if an unseen force had tasered me at full voltage through the sleeping bag.

HOLYFUCKINSHITWHATDAFUCKWASDATIFITISMYTIMETODIESOHELPMEGOD!

God enjoyed a giggle for several seconds before I realised the astoundingly loud and strangulated noise was in fact a sort of quack-a-doodle-do type arrangement emanating from the direction of my guide ropes. From the natural amphitheatre of mountains and volcanoes ringing the crater of the lake an answering cockerel shouted back, followed by another and another and another. Irrationally, my next thought was not 'damn it, here we go', as every rooster in the region took up the chorus, but rather resentment bordering on envy that the more distant cockerels could at least doodle-do in tune while I was stuck with a mad be-combed super duck with lungs like cracked bellows. With even more resentment I thought of the body bag. If only it wasn't so heavy I could run for my life at daybreak. I mean, how much stuff does a person really need? I vowed that in future I would carry round no unnecessary shit that might hamper my exit from other terrible situations like this one.

Minutes ticked by into hours.

Eventually - sleep proving impossible - I plucked up the courage to take a pee and summoned sufficient energy to move against the bone-chilling cold. The complex procedure of unzipping everything and finding my headlamp in the dark took another eternity, but upon finally crawling outside I was met with a jaw-dropping scene.

Right before my eyes was the Great Bear ploughing its dazzling furrow across the inky black sky with tranquil precision, perfectly framed by the canopy of trees that made a natural observatory through which to see the stars. I paused to marvel at the ice-white constellation and thought back to earlier that evening, when resplendent Orion had risen like Odin as he tracked a determined arc across the serene sky-circle of my roof.

I sighed in wonder and remembered why I had been drawn to this place, after years of dreams that preceded the troubled nightmares and an eagle that had flown me to El Mirador. At last the eagle and I were in the same place again, our spirits united in the stars.

I watered the Earth a few paces from the tent then clambered back inside - trying in vain not to pull apart the taped-up rips and tears around the zipper - and carefully reassembled my cocoon, veiling every part of myself as tightly as possible inside the plastic bag. A fitful sleep eventually ensued and I managed to remain hypnotised for approximately 45 minutes, until what transpired to be the 5.00 am wakeup call blasted out at deafening volume without a shadow of remorse. I would later comprehend that this was a monumental corn-grinder, which started up each morning like an ancient rocket 2km further up the hill.

Wakey wakey, rise and shine, there's work to be done at Nuevo Mundo Valiente!

Has there ever been made a medicine against anger and woe and can one be made, even now?⁸

Mas Comida!

When He spoke of revolution, he did so by concretely fighting against the religious and political power that oppressed people; he denounced these powers and he organised until his martyrdom...He was faithful to his beliefs and to the people until death....in this way he established that praxis is the ultimate proof of faith.

Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes, Guatemala

The Cleaning of the Kitchen strengthened my spirit to such a degree that I resolved to stay on at least until weekend. A significant determining factor was the emergence of Mystery as an excellent cook, the blip of that first inedible lunch being swiftly surmounted and improved upon to quite an amazing degree. This was just as well because he and The Zelator also proved to be the world's hungriest men, an appetite I soon adopted for myself as the basic quest for survival took hold of us all. It seemed we might eat anything at any time, so profound was this concern.

Even someone's dad, should the opportunity present itself.

Morning, noon and night Mystery would assume control of the newly cleansed kitchen, a task that had taken the three of us at least six hours to get almost half way through, with gas masks, hosepipes, scrubbing brushes and scouring pads on the offensive.

This major operation was curtailed by Loco - watching moodily from the wings while we bustled in and out with mouldering jars held at arm's length - who finally cracked under the pressure of multifarious items being haphazardly thrown away, hosed down and strewn about, and ordered us to piece it all back together. At least we managed to get rid of the cobwebs and several suspect jars of semi-alive, fur-covered objects of indeterminate origin or purpose. (Zorro's home-grown stash of Class A entheogens, as later transpired with very much wailing and gnashing of teeth).

The eating then began and barely ceased, despite the well-founded suspicion that our Loco minder was grossly under-providing for us on the paid-for food front. Rice, tomatoes and sometimes potatoes came our way, but nuts, cheese and eggs were a distant memory. Nuevo Mundo Valiente just didn't do protein. All the same, we did get some honey for our money and lemons straight from the trees, along with a home-grown apothecary of herbs befitting of Paracelsus, the mainstay of our fly-infested kitchen.

Mystery soon revealed his uncanny ability to concoct delicious marvels from the dregs of our meagre larder. Heavenly cakes were rustled up out of nowhere. Punela revealed itself to be a magical ingredient as banana fritters and French toast manifested under our noses at perfect moments in front of the raging camp fire.

Food glorious food! We lived to eat at Brave New World. **'Bring us more food!'** we cried.

⁸ *Michael Maier, Symbola Aureæ Mensæ*

A language barrier between myself and The Zelator on the one hand and Loco on the other - with Mystery in between as occasional Spanish interpreter - created a non-taxing form of intergroup communication whereby our caretaker's abruptly bad-tempered exhortations to

"LIMPIA!"

"AQUA!"

"TRABAJA!"

("YOU CLEAN! YOU WATER! YOU WORK!")

were met with the wishfully-mantic retort of "MAS COMIDA!" from Zorro's stubborn posse of semi-recalcitrant volunteers.

"But we *have* come here to work, man...." The Zelator pointed out as he taught me to spin poi with what proved to be masterly success but not exactly busting his balls in the garden. Unlike Mystery, who went about the various Herculean tasks set by Loco with an irrepressible zeal that oscillated between Zen-like hermetic splendour and obsessive compulsive disorder.

He did so much work that The Zelator and I were rendered almost helpless, the usefulness-quotient of the camp tipping irrevocably towards our in-control comrade day after sweltering day. Where the appetite for hard labour was somewhat lacking, however, we more than made up for it with various forms of meditation, ranging from weaving new DNA blueprints with our spinning balls to walking the paths of the Tao te Ching with spirit guides.

As for the limpiando, it was a never-ending story.

Witnessing from the outset The Zelator's total inability to wash up properly, I did what had to be done in the face of Mystery's near omnipotence and morphed into the resident sous-chef cum dish washer.

Not the kind of 'limpiar' that Loco gave any credit for, but I wasn't going to be phased by his sulking remonstrations. Not for as long as we were out of ginger, flour and raisins.

No Hermano Loco, I will not be spending from dawn 'til dusk carrying several hundredweight of sand up from the riverbed and nor will I be planting thousands of radishes in an uneven plot that expressly shunned 'monoculture' on the advertisement. I did not feel the slightest bit guilty about my lackadaisical days because the dead of night was keeping me busy enough.

My second attempt at sleeping in the tent had far exceeded the first in terms of the trials and terrors it offered, while nothing on God's Green Earth could have prepared any of us for the blood-curdling sound of 'the beast screaming' that was lurking somewhere immeasurably scary a fortnight down the timeline. A real beast, that is, not the deafening cockerel-duck hybrid.

It was sometime in the early hours of day three that I managed to nod off during a five-second break in the otherwise relentless noise. I'm not sure how long I was out for because time went into a warp as soon as I fell asleep, but I do know it was the sounds of shouting and screaming that woke me with a start from my semi-frozen slumber.

"LANDSLIDE! **RUN** - THERE'S A LANDSLIDE.... **EVERYBODY RUN!**"

The words delivered a nerve-jangling shock that fully affected my mind without being transferred to my inert limbs, which at that moment were wedged so tightly into the sleeping bag that I was rigid as a cocooned caterpillar.

As I listened with strangely detached terror to the escalating cries emanating from further up the mountain, a bizarre sense of resignation took over me. *Oh dear, there was a landslide....* I had to save myself, to run as quickly as I could to get out of there, but I was trapped. It was obvious I couldn't get out of the sleeping bag in time so there was no point even trying.

True to this surreal rationale, I didn't even struggle as the cries of '**LANDSLIDE!**' came breathtakingly close to my resting place on the formidable mountainside. The mountain where days of stillness could be punctuated by random gusts of hurricane-strength wind in the dead of night, that ripped off roof tops and bent-over trees in single ravenous outbursts, as if the highlands of Guatemala were a gigantic funnel for an air powered turbine that kept the entire world spinning. The wind that purifies, they called it.

It was a matter of minutes before I realised none of this was either real or a dream, that the panic-stricken voices of villagers were an echo from the not-so-distant past. I knew it wasn't a dream because I was wide awake and nobody could actually be urging me to run for my life there and then, because the night - for once - was silent as it could be. It dawned on me that the land itself had retained this agonised charge from the previous year, when a devastating landslide really *had* swept down Mockingbird Hill, destroying everything in its path, killing hundreds and leaving thousands more homeless on the deceptively serene shores of Mockingbird Waters.

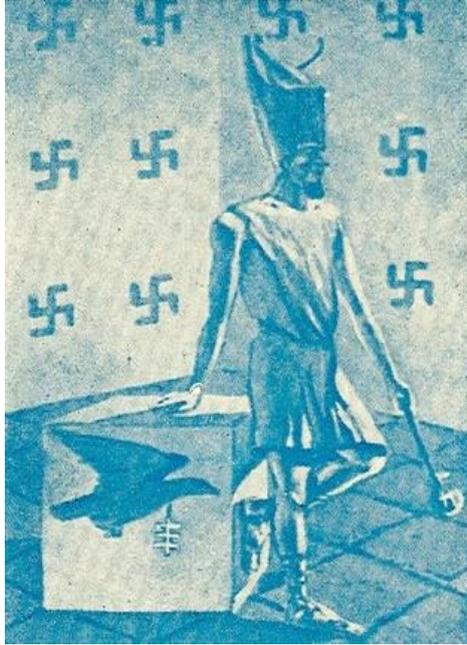
I lulled myself back into an uneasy sleep, strangely tranquilised by the haunting memories that lived in the bones of that ravaged and ravishing land.

~

Dissolve the gold in fire and warm it gently. But if you will believe me, take one sole and unique thing, that is to say the secret of secrets and powerful miracle of nature⁹

⁹ Roger Bacon, *Opera Quaedam Hactenus Inedita*

Karmaville



The key to the Apocalypse is to practise it, ie, to make use of it as a book of spiritual exercises composed of twenty-eight exercises. For as the Apocalypse is a revelation put into writing, it is necessary, in order to understand it, to establish in oneself a state of consciousness which is suited to receive revelations.

MotT, Letter IV, The Emperor

Having survived half a week and feeling rather pleased with myself for this small victory, I decided to go on an excursion before taking the plunge and fully evacuating the casa, undeniably reluctant to throw in the towel and desert my newly found brethren, with whom a welcome bond had swiftly formed. The neighbouring town of San Paulo was famed as a retreat and I was keen to stretch my legs a bit further than the Lettuce patch at the opposite end of the blue tin bridge.

My angel was very encouraging if somewhat crafty on this occasion, enthusiastically bolstering my burgeoning resolve:

You could go there to learn Spanish, escape for a few days a week for some proper food without giving up entirely on the mission....

The walk to this picturesque town, hub of a well-entrenched community of ageing hippies, was an arduous 8km stretch that required a fast pace and steady heart if one was to avoid falling prey to bandits on one of Central America's most notorious hijacking roads.

Safely negotiating the hot, dusty walk at lightning speed wearing a magical cloak of invisibility, I was relieved when signs of the town began to appear and soon enchanted by a roadside eatery called The Condor. This was a multi-coloured super adobe special that confidently announced the reunion of the Condor of the West with the Eagle of the East.

This was good news indeed!

Rounding a few more corners I was further enamoured by the quaint sound of a Mariachi band playing a crazy tune with immense gusto, although it was a few more minutes before I realised the quintet was actually installed in a church playing hymns to an equally enthusiastic, packed congregation.

Removing the cloak and slowing to a leisurely pace, I entered the main square of San Paulo and found me a man who sold water and biscuits. Receiving the sugar-hit with gratitude, I resolved to find a Spanish school as quickly as possible and sign up for as many lessons as my budget would allow. Anything to keep me far from the dreaded tent and close to some semblance of civilisation. Plagued by rapidly dehydrating skin I was equally keen to make time and money available for the first rate therapies on offer at this legendary outpost for the alternative ex-pat community. Essential oils were most definitely in order and I was in just the right place to extract them. Rainbow gatherers rubbed shoulders with crystal collectors and Reiki masters hung out with tantric teachers. Baba Ram Dass disciples discussed liberation with yogis and yoginis, as raw food dilettantes pedalled their nutritious wares alongside weavers, jewellery makers and second hand booksellers.

A beatific sigh of relief escaped my lips as I passed welcoming signs to the Pyramid House and Flower Gardens, noting with contentment that there were chocolate ceremonies every weekend at Quetzalcoatl's villa a few more turns along the road. The following weekend there was even to be an enlightenment festival with all-day preparations for the impending Cosmic Shift, I noted joyfully. Spoilt for choice on the lunch front I eventually settled for what transpired to be the main meeting point for San Paulo's elder statesmen and women. Or to put it more accurately, San Francisco's elder states people who were eking out ever-dwindling savings and pensions in a land much cheaper than their own. They lingered at Moonfish café with the easy authority of those who'd put in long years staking out eco-friendly homesteads, building up immunity to local germs and learning the all-important lingo. Never mind *café y pastel*, these dudes were on the *pan de ajo con queso y cacao caliente*.

Avoiding the tea that I craved but had given up as my main Lenten penance, I tucked into a chickpea curry with relish and took a large slurp of the stupendously good hot chocolate. Scoffing away, relieved at the broken monotony of beans and rice that was my usual lunch fare - Mystery's culinary expertise being mainly being reserved for dinner - I watched with interest as a steady stream of characters descended on Moonfish. Every single one of them knew all about Nuevo Mundo Valiente and I quietly took note of the score whilst soaking up as many calories as possible.

A whole bunch o' people are real pissed off with Zorro, he's sure bin takin' 'em fer a ride out there.

Man, you should have heard him boasting about getting all these dumb volunteers to pay for his project while he spent the winter skiing with his buddies up in Aspen.

That place is gonna get burned down real soon, we've heard 'em all talkin' 'bout it, the locals are real mad by now.

You know he's bought up a Mayan sacred site and won't let the locals go up there any more....

Good website though!

Great, yes, do you know his father?

The other thing they knew all about was the end of the world, which by most accounts was due to take place at any point in the next three to nine months. The trigger had already happened during a potent conjunction of Mars and Venus the previous summer, but the exact end date depended on a series of complex planetary alignments and astronomical clock equations that were (apparently?) well known to ancient cultures but largely forgotten by modern man. Modern man beyond San

Paulo, that is, because nothing was getting past these dudes, they had ring-side seats for the Apocalypse.

"So Veggie, do you ever listen to Alex Jones?"

That'd be CIA Agent Jones. "I used to.... do you?" *umm...*

"Hell yeah, he is right on the money about this corporate conspiracy shit".

"Double dis-info agent if you ask me," I ventured.

"Well, whatever, the jury of the people is divided on that one, but we ALL gotta watch out for Nibiru!"

I hedged my bets. "You reckon?" *Hadn't the psychic girl I'd met at the conference last August mentioned this? I wracked my brains but the events of that strange day were hazy indeed.*

"None o' this reck'nin', dude, *everyone* knows what ELENIN stood for!"

"Extinction Level Event, Nibiru Is Near..."

"You got it girl, that shit is real!"

Verity's name suddenly popped back into my head and I nodded seriously, considering the impending polar shift and three mile high tidal wave that was long overdue. She'd talked a lot about floods and Atlantis, I now recalled.

"And what about the alien agenda, are yawl up to speed?"

Was I, well?

One of them smacked his hands down on the table, making the others jump. "Coz they're watchin' us right now, dude, they're out there now an' you'd better believe it!" The speaker pointed skyward and gave me an all knowing stare. "I got a buddy up in Chichen Itza who's been communicatin' with 'em all for at least half a year, there's some beautiful shit goin' on there man, I'm tellin' ya".

I reflected upon the alien question. "Well I *did* see a UFO a couple of times".

He slapped the table again. "Ya see! It's happenin' man, it's all goin' down, won't be long now, I'm tellin' ya."

"It definitely feels as if we've reached some sort of convergence point", I offered gamely.

They all perked up several more notches and leaned forward into their home ground. "You got it man! You gotta come to terms with your shit, time to work on the old karma before it's too late".

I nodded again and then ordered a *café con leche y cacao* cookie. The hippies spoke facts, there was no denying it.

Mostly facts.

"David Icke, man, that dude has NAILED IT."

I nibbled my cookie, biding my time, for this, too, would pass. I didn't actually think the Queen was a reptile but there was no need to announce this right away and David *had* been right about a few things.

"An' what about 9/11, y'all been keepin' up with the truth movement over in the United *King-dom*".

He sneered the word and spat on the floor behind him, muttering under his breath. "*Goddam reptilians.*"

I ignored the slight on Her Majesty and nodded enthusiastically, for they were finally preaching to the choir. "Of course! no-one in their right mind could believe the official story. Explosions in the lobby, thermite dripping down the walls, Building 7 'just falling down', hijacker's passport found on top of charred and pulverised steel, need we go on?!"

No, we needn't go on, the facts were clear and we knew some of them. Sitting back in our comfortable wicker chairs we sagely and silently communed. At least we were *trying* to escape Babylon, if only for 40 days and nights in my case. While the banksters and gangsters were busy trying to destroy planet Earth at least the folk of San Paulo were *aware* it needed saving, even if our efforts to do so were proving a little short on effectiveness.

Or so it seemed.

I took a thoughtful sip of the excellent coffee and contemplated the lengthy walk back up Mockingbird Hill, which had to be attempted soon if I was to arrive there before sunset. I caught the eye of the waitress: "La cuenta por favor."

One of the older, longer-haired hippies gazed at me hopefully. "Hey man, do you wanna come and watch a documentary about the mysteries of Egypt back at my place, it talks a lot about the divine feminine, the creative power of the female?" he waggled his eyebrows suggestively. "My God is a Goddess...."

Errr no lo creo..... "That's very kind of you but I really have to get back or the guys will be worried about me, see you around soon!"

I gave them a friendly wave goodbye, picked up my backpack and strode off into the approaching sunset in a self-determining fashion, fortified by the hippy communion and super-strength coffee. Happy, Hairy and Herman were right, we'd reached the end of days and the best I could do now was work on my karma. I gritted my teeth as I began the next ascent.

Rainbow, Flower and Music

And what is it to work with love? It is to weave the cloth with threads drawn from your heart¹⁰

As the broiling days and freezing nights drifted inexorably towards the spring equinox the camp was enlivened by an ever-flowing stream of visitors, who ascended and descended on the rocky stairway of a road that ran past our front gate.

One of the first to drop in from his abode on high was the Wizard of Mockingbird Hill, a font of great knowledge who was nonetheless curious to see how Zorro's grubby guinea pigs were faring in the absence of their infamous landlord. We welcomed him with open arms, as befitted an elder statesman of sustainability, and set about preparing the requisite super-strength coffee while our guest began rolling a joint, the first that any of us had seen in well over a week and a sight for sore eyes if ever there was one.

The first relieved toke on this super home-grown wacky-backy - delivered, as it was, at an altitude of over 4,500 m - sent me straight into the stratosphere with an incredible propulsion of rocket-like force. My mind expanded to take in a much larger portion of the universe than it had done previously, then boggled through multiple dimensions as I attempted to take stock of the enhanced situation. Paranoia instantly set in.

Had the joint been secretly rolled with magic mushrooms or other - much stronger - psychedelics?

The Zelator and Mystery observed with undisguised glee as my eyes tried to pop out of my head and The Wizard proceeded to impart the secret doctrine of LOTS (Living Outside The System). This was a Herculean task entailing such skill, drive and commitment that we overflowed with awe at his achievement.

This was a guy who had bought the land, built the house, worked in concert with the tribe, planted acres of crops on ridges, ravines and other barely accessible mountain plots, dug the irrigation, created the compost, purified the water, learned all the lingo, grown the super-skunk and constructed the meditation plinth that overlooked three sacred volcanoes and the world's most beautiful lake. 16 years it had taken him and there was no going back. The remains of his pension wouldn't cover it, for one thing, even if he HAD suddenly felt like going back home to San Francisco. The Zelator looked him in the eye with a serious expression and extended a broad, dusty hand, topped with blackened fingernails. "Seriously, dude, respect."

Mystery and I nodded with deepening admiration and wondered how best to follow in the Wizard's carbon-neutral footsteps.

Following those self-same footsteps down the hill were his temporary tenants, Flower and Music, who bedded down for free on his meditation platform in return for intermittent housework chores and singing. Described by The Zelator - as he groaned on the wooden toilet with a virulent outbreak of giardia while they cooed to him with words of tender kindness - as 'two of the nicest girls in the world', these eco-conscious princesses were a welcome boon for the dreary shack.

*Lovely maiden of the moon
and lovely daughter of the sun
in their hands hold the weaving comb,
lifting up the weaving shuttle,
weaving on the golden fabric,*

¹⁰ Kahlil Gibran, The Prophet

*rustling move the silver threads*¹¹

A bona fide aficionado of living in harmony with nature who milked cows for a living back at home, the Swiss Flower used crochet as a form of meditation whilst singing along with Japanese Music's folk ballads. These were strummed gently on an old acoustic guitar during the peaceful interlude between comida and trabaja in the early afternoons, or around the blazing campfire after the first supper sitting, while Mystery concocted ever-more delectable variants of banana fritters and The Zelator turned poi into a mystic art form.

Along with their endless balls of wool, cotton bracelets and tinkling charm, the nicest girls in the world came with a top-up supply of cannabis - an essential facet of camp life since the Wizard's addictive arrival - and a treasure trove of travellers' tales. As Orion strode wilfully across the northern sky with Sirius snapping at his heels, Music evoked serene images of cherry blossom over still waters, while Flower spoke in her lilting accent of initiatory dreams and magical swords. Then there was Rainbow, whose mission in life was to persuade a critical mass of earthlings to assist in the creation of an infinitely expanding art work. The idea was that starting out with 12 A4 drawings made by a representative of each astrological sign recruited from the environs of Mount Shasta, each new link in the chain of universal peace and love was to add a drawing of their own that joined up with one or more of the others at the edges.

By the time he arrived at Nuevo Mundo Valiente Rainbow had a stack of papers 6 inches high from around the Americas and he wasn't going to leave without enlisting The Zelator and I to his ambitious project. A solid afternoon of silent, studied effort was spent creating our suitably mystical and/or earth-celebratory designs, The Zelator proving much less adept with a pencil than he was with spinning poi balls. My contribution, on the other hand, was 'sick', as my admiring comrades put it, a neat little rendition of life around the sacred lake and holy mountain, complete with local wildlife and a waxing crescent moon. Mystery was allowed to keep his esoteric imaginings to himself.

Determined to exercise our minds as we relaxed between bouts of Zen-like herb-bed watering and plantain peeling, ignoring Loco's ever-more truculent glares, The Zelator and I drank in a dog-eared copy of *Be Here Now* - turning it up, down and sideways with widening eyes. We also marvelled at *The Secret Life of Plants* and made a stunning foray into the *Tao Te Ching*, a book belonging to Mystery.

"Open it at random, dude", The Zelator instructed one balmy afternoon, "and we'll do whatever it says".

Believing the time was ripe for a guided meditation I acquiesced gladly and peeled apart the fabled tome. I looked at the cryptic seeming header: "It's 54 (10)..."

"Awesome, man, let's do it, you start...."

We took a few deep breaths and then he closed his eyes while I described the vision:

*While you cultivate the soul and embrace unity,
Can you keep them from separating?
Focus your vital breath until it is supremely soft;
Can you be like a baby?
Cleanse the mirror of mysteries,
Can you make it free from blemish?
Love the people and enliven the state;
Can you do so without cunning?
Open and close the gate of heaven;
Can you play the part of the female?
Reach out with clarity in all directions;*

¹¹ 41st rune of the Kalevala

*Can you refrain from action?
It gives birth to them and nurtures them,
It gives birth to them but does not possess them,
It rears them but does not control them.
This is called 'mysterious integrity'.*

A divine sort of stillness hovered over us while the sacred words sank in and a sublime vision unfurled.

Cleansing the mirror of mysteries, wasn't this just what I had in mind when I'd booked that fated flight across the ocean, all too conscious of the polluting elements that had muddied the waters of my soul and tarnished the former clarity of my second sight? Later that day we looked up at the cloudless azure sky with mystified eyes, as rain finer than cobwebs fell diagonally across the camp from no discernible source. Barely even visible, like skeins of priceless silk that glimmered when struck by rays of the sun, this cloudless rain made me wonder if the sky itself was weeping. The three of us were consciously preparing for the impending vernal One K'an with its added promise of a full moon, as our unspoken determination to greet the spring equinox with some form of esoteric ritual increased exponentially with each passing day. The Cosmic Plan was falling into place with the sublime precision of an Atlantean Atomic Clock.

Thoughts of leaving as quickly as possible had subsided. Day by day I was intoxicated further by the magic of the mountain, seduced each night by a flawless pantheon of stars. Meteors and asteroids zoomed by overhead with gratifying frequency. The signs were in the sky! I felt myself becoming realigned with the Spirit of the Universe and Heart of Mother Earth. Peace would once again guide the planet because love really did steer the stars.

The Condor of the West was rising up to meet the Eagle of the East!

Thirsting for yet more progress, I decided to treat myself to an intensive chakra-cleansing Reiki session at the Flower Gardens with crystal therapy thrown in for good measure. A date was set for half an hour after my Wednesday Spanish class.

The auburn-haired woman who met me at the Gardens' gate had an unmistakably vibrant aura, which pulsed around her with distinct but well-balanced force as she greeted me cautiously with a pronounced Slavonic accent. I had every confidence she would remove the sticky load of mud that was clogging up my third eye and, furthermore, had high hopes she might be able to improve the state of my right ankle, sprained when I'd fallen off silly shoes at the Stationers' Hall and still woefully swollen after more than a year. It served me right, I supposed, for trying to turn the world with it.

Lying flat on my back in the beautifully serene open-air treatment room, totally surrounded by choice pieces from the best collection of crystals I'd ever seen in my life, a sense of unassailable tranquillity washed over me.

Praise the Lord, I was finally being healed!

It took at least an hour to shift the mud but when I eventually felt it loosened and cast aside with a resoundingly silent 'plop', I breathed an inner sigh of relief and observed the mirror rinsed clean, sparkling like the moon on a river at midnight.

*From the dark of the unconscious comes the light of illumination, the albedo*¹²

¹² Carl Jung, *Mysterium Conjunctionis, The Personification of Opposites*

As the sun began its descent I skipped off home up the mountain with renewed zeal and thought of my soul mates with affection. They would be pleased with the bunch of small, sweet bananas I'd procured from the toothless old lady by the side of the road in San Paulo, happier still with a bumper packet of biscuits I'd also obtained en route. Filled with the joy of approaching spring I allowed myself a metaphorical pat on the back for work well done. I'd not had a cup of tea for almost four weeks and was making good progress with the detoxification of my body, mind AND soul. Within the frozen confines of the tent that night I secretly polished the magical mirror and by the light of the waxing moon performed the meditations as my teacher back at home had instructed. The Zelator spun strange shapes by the dying embers of the camp fire with formidable energy, Mystery smouldered and held his silence, whilst Zorro's father lurked on the edges of our consciousness, preparing for manifestation.

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It is therefore the mineral, plant animal and human realms of Nature – in a word, Nature in its entirety – which constitutes the domain of sacred magic. The reason for the existence of sacred magic stems from the Fall and the whole domain of the Fall – comprising fallen Nature, fallen man and the fallen hierarchies. These are the beings belonging to it who hope 'with eager longing' to be 'set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God.'¹³

¹³ *MotT, Letter III, The Empress*

One K'an



Its father is the Sun, its mother is the Moon, the wind carried it in its belly, the nurse thereof is the Earth

Tabula Smaragdina

When One K'an finally dawned it was with an air of quiet expectation that was destined to build to a studied crescendo by sundown. Up early as usual, Mystery and I beat off the morning chill with hot coffee and steaming porridge whilst The Zelator remained habitually silent in the over-sized hammock that passed for his bed.

I poked my head around the cracked kitchen door and observed him for a moment. Was he actually asleep or just meditating? It was impossible to tell. Somehow bolt upright in a sitting position beneath his mound of musty bedding - flea-ridden puppy nestled blissfully on his lap – The Zelator maintained this position for approximately three hours leaving nobody any the wiser. Whatever could have been going on beneath that mop of dust-caked blonde hair and visage of intense concentration, none of us knew, but at least he wasn't sleep talking, which was more than could be said of him every night between 1 and 4 am.

I cast my mind back to the night of the 'Shrieking of the Actual Beast', by far the most terrifying episode in the annals of Nuevo Mundo Valiente. Occurring approximately two weeks into my stay, this particular event was so unutterably scary that the three of us had made an unspoken vow to never mention it again beyond our shocked acknowledgements the morning after, when we had emerged in relief from our respective sleeping areas, praising the lord that we'd made it out alive. I had insisted on dragging my inflatable mattress into the hideously dusty tool shed/living room for the sake of not sleeping alone for one more night. With The Zelator on the cot and Mystery in the attic above, I reasoned that at least I would be safe and unafraid if neither clean nor comfortable. No sooner had I started to nod off, however, when the complex and highly disturbing dialogue began, not even at a whisper.

"Oh my God...."

"OH MY GOD"

"It's the Ouija board...."

"Dude.... it's the OUIJA BOARD, damn it! Dude - **DUDE!** - Hey Dude, what are you doing man? Where are we, MY GOD.....what is this?"

"....."

"DAMN IT DUDE THE OUIJA BOARD!!!"

Wrestling with the blankets and writhing in torment he leapt up like a rocket, hit the roof and screamed in confusion as I lay there rigid with shock, blood running cold in the pitch black shack. Before that moment I had been blissfully ignorant of the distressing nightly escapades that were a regular occurrence according to Mystery's sanguine account the following morning. It was par for the course as far as The Zelator was concerned.

My entire family is like this, we do it all the time, dude, my dad and gramps sleepwalk every night as well, the whole house just goes crazy when the lights are out, we have fast asleep parties. Once I woke up as I was just about to step right into the Pacific Ocean....

Beast or no beast, I had dragged the mattress back to the tent at daybreak and determined to take my chances rather than run the night-time gauntlet with The Zelator ever again.

The morning of One K'an passed with deceptive regularity. Mystery went to dig more furrows in the garden, Loco uprooted all the radishes and carried them off home, smacking his lips, The Zelator settled down with the Mystical Kabbalah and I tried to coax the last lemon off the tree outside the gate with a broken stick of bamboo.

"Hey *dude*", he announced in wonder. "It says in here that the reunification of soul mates is a miracle greater than the parting of the Red Sea?" he paused to digest the implications of this miracle. "Man, that's sick!"

Make that the Caribbean. I gave the tree an almighty thwack and lunged after the avoidant lemon as it bounded off down the path.

Lunch came and went as normal and I whiled away the afternoon practicing my newly acquired poi skills. We all agreed that these had advanced dramatically under The Zelator's expert guidance in the fresh mountain air.

As the sun got lower we set about gathering firewood and contemplated the feast we had in mind for Earth's impending transition to the first day of the 'Seed' week. This was, according to the almanac, a time of growth and new beginnings, creation and manifestation, a time when 'experimental urges' would come to the fore and we would be 'driven by the awareness of a need for change, to take a risk, to try something new'.

I will never forget the moment when The Zelator came striding into the kitchen with an air of great purpose and intractable determination, nursing a very large peyote plant as if it were his baby.

Mystery and I looked up from our respective chopping boards with their piles of neatly diced vegetables, eyebrows raised, knives poised. The stubbornness of youth was plastered on our camp-mate's demeanour in a 'can't stop me now' kind of way that nobody could argue with. He marched over to the sink without looking at either of us and, sensing our unspoken question hanging in the air, kept his back to the room as he made the portentous announcement:

"We're doing it, man."

There was no point trying to dissuade him, especially as - by some remarkable twist of fate - a copy of Plant Spirit Shamanism had found its way onto the kitchen table. I picked it up and looked thoughtfully at the chapter headings. "We'd better see what it says about this..."

"Whatever it says, dude, we're doing it," he repeated firmly, "Zorro's never coming back..."

At the mere mention of Zorro's name the atmosphere darkened perceptibly. Mystery stabbed a carrot as I butchered another tomato and The Zelator self-righteously scrubbed the squat, prickly plant. Everyone's aura went an angry shade of red. None of us had even met him yet somehow this person had managed to bug us more than anyone else alive, so incensed were we at his gross mis-advertisement - *interview questions!* - and glaringly rude absence from the place to which he'd lured us. We weren't in the mood for taking prisoners.

Where the hell IS he?

We've paid for this shit!

We cleaned his lame-ass kitchen!

I flipped a few more pages and found a pertinent sentence. "It says here to do it on an empty stomach..."

Mystery murmured a soft protest in his lilting accent. "What about dinner?"

I nodded. "Yeah, I'm pretty hungry too..."

The Zelator cast a baleful look at in our direction. "Dude, pass me a knife."

15 minutes later we set the timer on my camera and posed for the photo that would immortalise our journey through Nuevo Mundo Valiente: Mystery on the left, right eye glinting like an archon possessed him, The Zelator incandescent with mischievous joy while half a dozen images of me blurred in front of him, as if through myriad dimensions, complete with lime green orbs and streaks of light, all of us translucent, none fully in focus.

Clearly manifest in the middle of my forehead was the Spanish word for 'stairs', somehow showing through from where it had physically been stuck on the ladder behind us. Floating in the air were the equally prophetic-seeming 'la puerta' and 'la ventana', similarly uprooted from their respective positions on the lintel and ledge. Reclining majestically on the table - the only thing that came out crystal clear in this bizarre image - was a pile of luscious, glowing, emerald flesh, atop the sacred text.

Having scraped the prickly skin from his priceless booty, The Zelator cut it into three sections and put one in front of us all. I nibbled at it experimentally then pulled a face as the overpowering bitterness seeped into my mouth. I pushed my piece back towards him. "Here, you can have mine, I can't eat that".

He stared at me, wounded. "C'mon man, let's do it all together...."

Mystery scratched his chin. "You know what, there isn't really enough for three of us, you can have mine as well if you want."

The Zelator gawped and then rocked back on the bench, arms outspread in supplication. "Awww, you gotta be kidding, c'mon man...*dude?!!*"

I thought he might cry, but after half an hour spent fileting vegetables Mystery and I were secretly united in our desire to eat a large plate of normal food, drink some milky coffee and then smoke a joint. My voice was soothing. "Why don't you have it all and we'll look after you?"

The owner of the Tao Te Ching, a man of very few words, was gently encouraging also. "It's a waste to split it...."

It didn't take much persuasion. With a significant degree of panting and retching that fairly reflected the overweening bitterness of that particular plant, The Zelator managed to hold down the single biggest peyote button that any of us had ever seen in our lives. This was an operation that took almost 20 minutes to perform while I went off to light the mother of fires and Mystery got to work on the ratatouille.

Sixty minutes later, respective dinners digesting, we could all be found sitting - sated and reasonably uncomfortable - around the heated circle of stones, flames licking left and right as we fanned them into a steadily building inferno to ward off the night-time chill. We'd already brewed some coffee, smoked our first joint and were quietly psyching ourselves up for the earth's cyclical climax and a moon that would rise full around midnight.

The sturdy, energetic puppy - by now three inches taller than when we'd first arrived - nuzzled us by turns, biting, scratching, whining, enthusiastically kicking up dust and fleas as he attempted to take root on someone's unwilling lap. Likewise - but with infinitely more success - did the slender, delicate Wish make overtures towards the cosiest parts of the camp, naturally close to our bellies.

As the evening wore on The Zelator prepared for his impending revelation by spinning poi with furious energy and genuinely impressive skill, while I imparted to Mystery an analogy that explained the process of rebirth.

"It's like slowly waking up with the realisation that you've been lying with your face down in the earth for thousands of years - and *that's* why it's so dark, as if nothing were there - but from out of nowhere this irresistible urge to just *turn around* takes hold of you. I began to demonstrate, arranging my arms into an orans gesture and letting them pull me round, torso first and then legs until I was fully face-up, staring into endless, starry space.

I turned my head towards my left shoulder to look at Mystery, who was sitting at the other side of the blazing fire with his flinty eyes fixed on me. "And when you finally *do* turn around the first thing you see is *light*....! Everything changes in the twinkling of an eye".

We forget, we sleep, we die; we remember, we awaken, we live.

Mystery held his peace but his blue eyes twinkled all the more. We looked over to admire the twin balls of fire being vigorously twirled around the peyote-eater's head and wondered if he'd begun to feel anything yet. An indeterminate time of observance passed and then I held up another joint.

"Have some of this, man".

The Zelator did a few more complex manoeuvres - one of which involved throwing the poi extremely high into the air and executing a kind of double somersault - then extinguished the raging orbs and came to sit with us beside the fire. He took the joint and inhaled deeply as we gazed into the rising flames.

A peculiar sort of silence had descended, a tenor of illumination that cut through the chill night with unearthly, pearly light. I glanced up, searching for something we'd be waiting for, and inhaled sharply as it struck me in that instant.

"IT'S THE MOON!"

Mystery and The Zelator followed my eye beams through the canopy of tall trees to where the huge, silvery sphere had suddenly manifested, so incredibly bright in the crystal clear sky that her brilliant rays penetrated each pore of skin on our upturned faces. She rose like a triumphant White Queen who had arrived in conjunction with the hero of the story, a legend of sublime reflection. The vibration passed through me as if I, too, were a mirror, entranced by the heavenly body, which through the rustling veils of silhouetted leaves danced into the shape of a light-robed angel, author of the transcendental vision.

Suddenly, with no warning whatsoever, The Zelator leapt to his feet and without saying a word stepped over the circle of stones surrounding the fire, strode to the edge of the camp, opened the bamboo gate and marched off into the night in the general direction of the river.

We gazed after him for quite a while, not speaking, until a nervous giggle finally escaped me. "Do you think he can feel it?"

The silence was pregnant as Mystery paused before assessing the situation with characteristic understatement, "I reckon..."

My eyes strained against the inky darkness. "Do you think we should follow him to make sure he's OK?" I wondered if - strong and fit as a salmon - he might try to swim up the river.

Another pause, longer this time. "Nah, he'll be right."

I shrugged. Very unusual behaviour was normal for The Zelator, who just a few nights ago had kept me awake for hours longer than usual by leaping round outside my tent in an amazingly vigorous dance/gymnastic/poi-spinning form of meditation. This had involved huge expenditures of energy if the relentless thudding, gasping and heaving were anything to go by.

Mystery glanced over at me. "He'll be right, let's 'ave another spliff."

And so we did, hypnotised in turns by the moon sailing above us and flickering flames rising in front, while puppy charged off in the direction of the river and Wish made herself even more comfortable.

Falling asleep that night was for once easy, for little did we know what shocks the morning would bring along with the customary 10-decibel corn grinder and army of hybrid cockerels.

We could never have imagined what was waiting for us six short hours down the line.

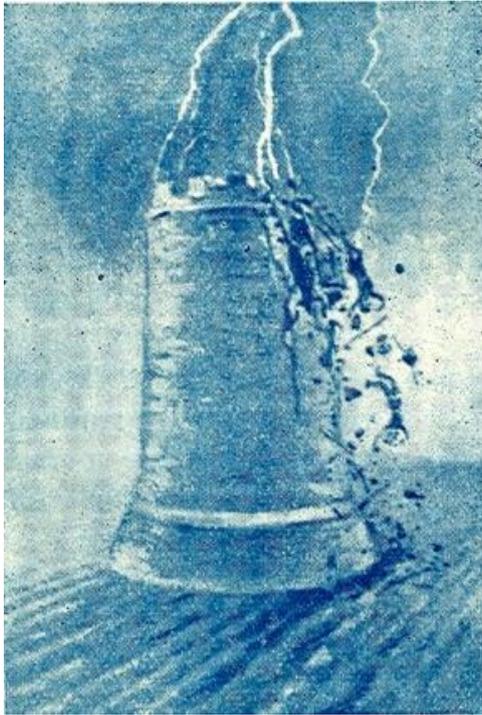
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In so far as Hermeticism is concerned, it has a history of continuous and sustained effort aimed at an alliance of intelligence and the intuition of faith, the alchemical marriage of the moon and the sun. Is this marriage possible?¹⁴

¹⁴ *MotT, Letter XVIII, The Moon*

The Awakening



There is in man – notably in his soul, and not in his body – a seed of evil of his own, without which temptation coming from outside would not exert any action on him. Because temptation would be impotent if it did not find a terrain already prepared in the human soul

MotT, Letter XVI, The Tower

“WAKEY WAKEY, RISE AND SHINE !”

I stirred slightly.

“WAKEY WAKEEEEEEE” hands were clapped loudly.

What an incredibly annoying voice....

“**UP NOW EVERYBODY THERE’S WORK TO BE DONE!**”

Was somebody having what’s commonly known in East London parlance as “a Turkish Bath”? I stared at an insect of indeterminate breed advancing across the side of The Tent at a creeping pace and had a sudden, violent urge to kill.

“EVERYBODY UP NOW, WAKEY **WAY-KEY!**”

This was accompanied by more clapping, a creaking of stairs and then a faint murmur from Mystery as he made the precarious descent from attic to kitchen.

“GET UP NOW..... **GET UP ALL OF YOU!!**”

Was this actually happening? I waggled my rigid limbs inside the uncomfortable sleeping bag and decided to let the hapless bug live a while longer, but nonetheless eject it from my hotel room. Scooping it up on the cover of How to Know Higher Worlds I tugged at the fragile tent zipper and flung Billy Six-Legs out into the dust before focusing on the real nuisance.

A few paces away stood an **extremely** small, hirsute male wearing combat shorts and Jesus sandals with long, white socks. Rampant black hair flowed over his shoulders and merged at the ears with an equally voluminous beard and moustache. He looked around at me, faked a friendly smile and deceptively sweetened his tone.

“Good morning, it’s 6.00 o’clock, there’s work to be done and who’s going to start on breakfast?”

I glanced over to where Mystery was standing in the doorway of the shack, scratching his hair, then to The Zelator’s hammock that was piled up with dirty blankets between two wooden posts supporting the overhanging tin roof. Nobody was in it.

Trying to remain in denial, I zipped the tent back up and began the laborious procedure of getting myself fully out of the tent and somehow cleaner, wriggling out of my grubby night jumper so I could dunk myself in the river wearing my worst vest and tie-dyed trousers.

Just focus on your breathing....

Anything to distract me from the rage-inducing truth: After half a year of total absence, during which he’d hoodwinked a steady-stream of well meaning, *paying* volunteers into doing his work for him - including a month where The Zelator, Mystery and me personally had been abandoned to his filthy shack without any place to do yoga - Zorro had showed up like a bad smell with the express intention of kicking *our* butts.

Right....

My sense of injustice was tightening up like a camel’s arse in a sandstorm but I intended to hold back The Furies for as long as it took to figure out what this dude’s game was. I unzipped The Tent again, somehow manoeuvred myself outside without ripping it further and headed for the kitchen.

The calming presence of Mystery offered some respite, silently making porridge with the remains of a powdered milk packet and eight left over peanuts but no raisins, no honey, no bananas - nothing else at all – because Zorro’s volunteer- rationing programme was still in effect, despite his miraculous appearance.

Zorro himself was seated at the worn pine table, whence emitted a stream of petty gripes in the most unbelievably pretentious – *deceitfully soft, 'I AM enlightened'* - tone of voice it was possible for a human being to generate. If only I could have tuned out his actual words the tone itself might have been relaxing...

If only.

“How did it get in such a state around here, I’ve never seen it so dirty, this table seems to be stained, those dishes weren’t cracked before, whose are all those bags in the work-room, the garden is looking a real mess, *blah, blah, blah*, the bricks over by the fire could do with restacking, *moan, whinge, complain*, why isn’t there any cheese?”

I edged as far away from him as possible, looming over the rusting stove with my fellow victim as we attempted to tune out the monologue that seemed pre-ordained never to cease.

“Coffee?” I muttered, aghast.

“Yeahthanks”

“I told Loco to fix that leaking hose-pipe in front of the toilet, it’s so dusty out there, I can’t believe it’s in such a state, when I left six months ago everything was perfect, I notice the villagers keep walking past, that’s not on, I wonder why the gate is broken, *carp, gripe* .”

That wasn’t all:

“Someone’s been using my hat it’s all dirty now, I’m sure I left more than one hammer in the tool box, somebody else stole all our chickens, *bitch, moan*, you can never tell what sort of people you’re going to get when you open up your home to volunteers, they’re not usually my kind of people, *why am I the most unbelievable tosser you could ever have imagined in the whole of your sorry lives*”

I rattled the saucepan viciously. “COFFEE?”

“Yes, I’ll have some coffee.....oh, but wait, you didn’t use the grinder and I need to drink proper coffee. Is that supposed to be porridge you’re making, why aren’t you using honey and raisins in that, it’s much nicer, the local honey is the best in the country, I always eat it, we’ll have breakfast then you can start clearing rocks.”

Rather than smack the little eejit over the head with his coffee grinder I quickly left the room, marched out of the gate and headed for the blue tin bridge for some deep breaths of peaceful, Zorro-free air.

Shit.

That was one *hell* of an irritating dude.

This had to be a test.

Several more deep breaths later I felt a whole lot better and soon after approaching the blue tin bridge was sufficiently distracted to forget about Zorro completely for an instant. Sitting in the lotus position on a large, bumpy rock in the centre of the rushing river, one hand upturned on his lap and the other held at right-angles to his chest was none other than The Zelator. A number of wasps had settled on his face and head, where they appeared to be bothering no-one.

I clambered down the rocky and precarious bank to take a better look, where I was greeted by a rather dejected puppy, who’d clearly been keeping watch all night but hadn’t quite resolved to getting his feet wet. I stood watching for eleven minutes, soaking up the welcome morning sun with my arms outstretched and wondering whether or not to rouse my comrade.

Deciding against it, simply because his choice of activity looked like a grand idea, I sat down on the nearest other big rock I could find for a spot of my own meditation. Anything was better than listening to Zorro’s unbelievably irritating bullshit.

OM TARE TUTARRE TURE MAMA AYUH PUNYA JNANA PUSTIME KURU SVAHA

I repeated it out loud in a low voice 108 times, at which point I sensed something stirring, followed by a dreamy voice.

“You got it, man....”

I opened my eyes and smiled. “Hey, what’s up, you been here all night?”

"I've been everywhere and nowhere."

I waited for him to continue.

"It was far out, man, I've seen the moon dance in the sky and the spaces between spaces".

Nice! "That's cool man!"

"Yeah..... So what's up?"

The massively unwelcome reality came back to mind. "Zorro's here."

The dream abruptly ended. "Are you serious?!"

"Fraid so..."

"Oh man, you've gotta be kidding, today of all days..."

"Yep." *One K'an* . I looked over at him. "Seriously, man, he got us all out of bed like some kind of army captain and has done nothing – *nothing* - but complain. He says the place has never been so untidy, seriously dude, he's cruising for a bruising..."

There was a long groan that made the wasps fly off angrily. "You cannot be serious! Man, I've gotta see this."

"Ok, just wait for me to take a dip and we'll go back." I waded into the deepest part of the river towards a pool that had formed between some miniature waterfalls, and gasped with shock as I splashed the icy water over my upper body and face. The Zelator leaned back, with the air of one to whom eternal mysteries had been revealed. "The river told me her secrets..."

He fell silent and once again I joined him, so infinitely superior to Zorro's incessant carping was sitting on a rock in the sun and silence, right in the middle of a river.

By the time we returned to the casa our hirsute landlord and Mystery had eaten breakfast, finished off the coffee - presumably after the midget ground it with his very own teeth - and were sitting together in tense silence while Zorro rolled a joint.

Well that's something, at least.

The Zelator took a deep breath. "Hey, how you doing man, so you *finally got here*, huh?"

Zorro studied his roach for a moment longer, checked his watch, then slowly stretched out a hand, fixing a withering gaze onto our young friend. "Good morning, you must be *The Zelator*."

"Yeah....so what's up?"

"Well Mystery has just been filling me in on all the work that *HE* has been doing."

So, divide and conquer was his game, but we weren't about to fall for that old chestnut. Mystery wagged his eyebrows at The Zelator, onto whose shiny face an obstinate expression had swiftly arrived. He dropped his eyes and sauntered over to the stove. "So what's for breakfast..."

"*Mystery* kindly made us some porridge". The prat gave me a meaningful look. "I'm not sure whose turn it is to do the washing up?"

I looked at him. "Yours, I reckon."

Mystery got up hastily and headed for the sink. "I'll do it."

Zorro sparked up his reefer. "It's great when people like to work, those are *my* kind of people."

The Zelator doled out some cold porridge with an unusually loud clatter of pots and spoons then slouched out of the kitchen to sit outside, while I set about making a herbal brew from the bits and pieces of leftover leaves that were lying around in Zorro's fly-infested baskets. The joint made a slow but progressive journey round the table via Mystery and I found myself desperately in need of a long, hard drag on it. A bit of conversation might speed things along.

"So, what have you got planned for this week then Zorro?"

His eyes lit up. "Well, I need to hire some real workers so we can make a start on clearing the area and digging foundations for the main super adobe house. He manifested a huge, expensive-looking Mac and pulled up some plans on the screen - see here."

Mystery and I peered over; the plans sure looked impressive.

"Looks great..."

"Oh it will be. It's costing me a fortune but it's worth it. I've spent over £100,000 on credit cards that I never intend to pay back, it serves the corrupt bankers of Babylon right, and they'll never be able to find me here."

I exchanged glances with Mystery. We'd already heard how the original group ownership arrangement of Nuevo Mundo Valiente had fallen apart within a year with the majority of members storming off and vowing never to speak with Zorro ever again, but this credit-card maxing escapade was a new one.

"I think they *would* find you, Zorro, even Guatemala has Visa...."

He shook his hairy head. "They won't. What I've done is spend the money on cars, laptops and other things I can sell when I need cash, beat them at their own game."

"Right...." Not so smart then, after all, despite his neuroscience PhD.

I finally got the reefer and gladly inhaled, wondering if we could maintain this uneasy 'getting along-ness' for the remaining week I was due to stay there. Despite the deeply flawed financing and almost totally absent people-skills (joint excepted), Zorro's plans DID look fantastic and his knowledge of sustainable building systems was evident enough.

He closed up the laptop. "I'm going to get some tools and start working, if you'd all like to join me."

As he left the room The Zelator slouched back in and I handed him the joint. He drew on it with palpable relief and the three of us managed to relax for all of a split second, before an ominous voice came through from the other side of the shack.

"Guys....."

We looked in the general direction of The Voice.

"Guys, this isn't good...."

We waited. Was he merely stating the obvious or was there a new source of bullshit to contend with?

"This really is....NOT....good." There was a dramatic pause while we arched our eyebrows at one another.

"YOU ATE MY FATHER ."

A thunderbolt; we inhaled sharply and my heart began instantly to race: *WTF? A dreadful crime! What the hell was he on about?* I racked my brains to no avail.

"I cannot believe you have done this....what kind of people.....**MURDERERS!** This is too much, this is.....much too much too much too much too much..... **YOU MURDERED MY FATHER.**"

Wow, this was heavy, the guy was deadly serious. We anxiously shuffled round the kitchen door, hearts pounding, as Zorro emerged from the workroom with the world's most baleful expression, holding an empty cactus pot.

"Do you realise what you have done? **YOU**.....have..... **KILLED**my.....**DAAAD!**" he roared.

I was horrified for a moment as his words took effect. Clearly Zorro's father had died and he'd put some of the ashes in the peyote pot, which had then served as a sort of memorial. I swallowed my alarm while Mystery looked quizzical and The Zelator clasped his hair in his hands, slid down the back of the wall and rolled onto the dirty floor, writhing and whimpering in extreme spiritual shock. *Poor dude, what a come down...*

I took a step forward, my eyes wide with concern. "Shit man, so your dad was cremated and that's his urn, I'm so sorry, we had no idea...." A loud wail came from the floor as Zorro tugged at his hair with the hand that wasn't clasping the pot.

"SILENCE!"

I blinked at him.

"**YOU ATE MY FATHER!** You *ate* him". He curled his lips into an aggressive sneer. "Do you not understand that this plant was the spirit of my whole project, the protective spirit, the guiding force,

and without it nothing can happen? It's over, you've killed my dream, you've destroyed the spirit of my life, my EVERYTHING...."

I gulped back air as I fought a tremendous urge to laugh hysterically. Mystery, I sensed, was doing exactly the same thing. The Zelator, on the other hand, really began to sob, tears flowing out of his grief-stricken eyes and down his rosy cheeks - "*omigod, omigod, omigod*", he chanted - as Zorro continued to rant and rave.

"Didn't anybody teach you not to steal, what gave you the right to murder and eat my father, to kill the spirit - have you any comprehension of what you have done?"

If we didn't at that moment, he would do his damndest to make sure we discovered it over the course of the next week, until we packed our beaten up bags and headed back down the hill from whence we came.

Could this be returning karma for all your senseless moaning of the past? Whispered my angel helpfully.

Well surely I paid my dues that day, for nothing on God's green earth or the brave new world was ever going to shut this dude up. Not even when I spent eight hours carving *Nuevo Mundo Valiente* into a plank of hardwood with a medium-sized screwdriver so other lost souls would find their way to the casa with far less anxiety than I had suffered.

No matter that far from having nurtured the hapless peyote from inception to full maturity, as would a true Shaman - and as he claimed - when he had "*actually bought the sucker over the internet*" according to evidence later supplied by the Wizard. We attempted reasoning:

"You should have stuck a label on anything you didn't want eating"

"We were hungry...."

"Get another..."

It didn't help matters that the mould-covered lumps in jars we'd binned during the kitchen clearing were actually the beginnings of home-grown psychedelics. Nor that his other two cacti had also, somehow, gotten eaten the night before by an ultra-keen Zelator. No wonder the river had spoken. The interrogation didn't let up for one second.

"So *Veggie* - or should that be *Vee* - what has been your contribution to the project?" He inhaled addictively and blew acrid smoke in my direction. I pretended not to hear him as I squeezed a wizened lime into the tin pot.

"Did you hear me, Veggie?"

I held my tongue a second longer.

"Well?"

I folded my arms and turned to face him. "Oh let me see now, what exactly *have* I been paying for.....ummmm.....nope, sorry, nothing springs to mind right now. What have YOU been doing?"

"I'm the director of this project, don't question me."

"And I'm a paying guest who's been helping to keep this place going...."

"The questionnaire was supposed to weed people like you out."

I stood on one leg.

OM TARE TUTARRE TURE MAMA AYUH PUNYA JNANA PUSTIME KURU SVAHA

He found another victim. "So, they call **YOU**.....The *Zelator*, what exactly have you done to earn that title, you can't possibly have made the grade? I see you attempting meditation a few times a day, have you actually done a course in correct meditation procedure or do you think you can find your own way without guidance from an expert teacher? I've done several courses myself and led many meditations, I can guide you and help you address your problems with stealing and killing if you'd

actually like to know how to improve yourself. Have you ever even worked for a living or do you just plan to live off charity?"

From where I was standing in stony silence - ten paces away so I wouldn't attack him - I saw The Zelator stare at Zorro for a few seconds then shiftily avert his eyes and look down at the table. I sensed extreme violence in the air but somehow he held it in, ruefully confiding later that day how he had: *"A very clear fantasy of slamming his head down hard on the table again and again until he died a horrible death, I can't believe I had such evil thoughts about another human being, man, this isn't good."*

I nodded my head. Much to my shame I had also experienced evil and murderous thoughts, which were certainly NOT in keeping with the path of purity and peace I had assigned for myself. Turns out it was a long and narrow path after all and there I was spilling over at the seams with resentment. I sighed in near-resignation - would I EVER master my shadow and walk the via pura with my head held high?

Mystery returned from the garden, sweating and mud-stained, pitchfork in hand, as Zorro emerged from his recently erected deluxe tent and flicked back his over-abundant hair with a supercilious toss of the head.

"Lunch-time already, did you clear out all those weeds from around the foundation area, I don't think you should stop until that's done?"

Mystery glowered a little but remained passive. "Do you want to give me a hand?"

"I'm a scholar not a worker."

~

Human sacrifice and baleful retribution was supposed to end with the coming of Christ into this world, the old law of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth making way for the key philosophy of loving one's neighbour as one's self. But what was one to do if the neighbour was as maddening as Zorro?

We would leave that question for the arse who had spoken to answer for himself, alone up the mountain with the world's biggest credit-card bill, surrounded by highly volatile natives armed with machetes who wanted their sacred site back. Our time there was up, the pyramids were calling us to leave the highlands and head for the deepest jungle.

I thought about the words of the psychic Slavonic lady at the Flower Gardens. *I can see things about you, she'd said. I see it in your soul. There is a man and a God. More than one man, more than one God. It is such a great Enigma; many lives and many faces.*

Later that afternoon in Moonfish cafe, surrounded by our massive muchillas and enjoying a well-earned triad of cervezas frías y bollos de canela, Mystery, The Zelator and I mused on the limit of our capacity for unconditional love and resolved to keep on trying until we'd at least expanded it to fill the universe. A toast, I felt, was in order:

'Come, lift the cup, and in the fire of spring, the winter garment of repentance fling'

'Ah-yeah.'

'Amen Ra, dude'

Ahhhh.....Men.