

BAHÍA DE COMPECHE

As though imprisoning the secrets of the dead in its hidden depths, the flat, slate blue sea lay motionless while, near the shore, the wind dashed foam-lipped waves against the rocks, swirling, troubling them to a murky brown. Huge black drops of rain, released by ominous wind-tossed clouds, splattered the impassive earth.

The cold, blowing through wide cracks in the bathhouse walls, raised goose bumps and I fiercely scratched last night's mosquito bites before braving the piercing needles of the icy shower. Darting out, wet and shivering, I grabbed the soap from the saucer on the rustic wooden bench, lathered quickly and stepped back into the shower. As rivulets of suds negotiate downward through angry goose bumps, I wonder why, in heaven's name, I am still here.

The obvious answer is that, until this cold wind blew in across the bay this morning, I was "muy tranquila," lulled into euphoric contentment by an abundance of fuel for a quixotic muse.

Awakened each morning by the sunrise salutation of tropical birds and the fragrance of orange blossoms, I spend blissful days in the cool shade of fruit-laden orange, lemon and mango trees. In this idyllic setting, the writing flows smoothly.

Each morning, the owner inspects his orchard, gathers the fully-ripened fruit, and leaves a few choice specimens on my make-shift table.

Yesterday, a family came to gather coconuts which will be made into candy for selling on street corners to "los turistas." The oldest child, a boy of about twelve years, agile as a monkey, shimmed up and kicked loose the coconuts nesting high in the swaying crowns of the towering palms. Dogs and humans scattered as they pelted to the ground.

When the pickup drove away, the bed heaped with seventy-four coconuts, topped by five, black-eyed, brown-faced children and two spotted dogs, thirty unripened coconuts still nested in the fronds of the lofty tree.

When the sun sinks behind the hill, dark falls as swiftly as if a black velvet shade has been drawn. Hushed birds slumber in the broad branches of the mango tree and all is still. Then I have nothing to do but lie in my hamaca and stare into the night and, perhaps, to say a prayer or two.

The storm has abated now, the wind a mere whisper among the leaves. The clouds have miraculously disappeared and the stars, twinkling through the trees, promise the dawning of a sunny day. Before I close my eyes, I remind myself that there are miles to travel, much yet to be explored in this vast, enchanting land; that I must be moving on.

"In a day or two," I murmur as I yield to the arms of Morpheus in soporific contentment.

But not tomorrow.

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