

## THE GYPSY AND THE GIANT MOTHS

After all we'd been through, I inquired at British Steam Navigation in Bangkok about passage to Koh Samui, an unheard of island in the Gulf of Siam, where we might be undisturbed in a natural setting long enough to gather our wits, take LSD, and discover who we were as a couple. It turned out to be the most bizarre trip of my life.

The island itself was straight out of a fairy tale...teeming with giant butterflies, waterfalls, and magnificent birds. For some peculiar reason we were received as visiting dignitaries by the mayor and were escorted to an isolated beach with a small bungalow at the edge of a clear stream. In such a crystalline setting, like our honeymoon at Kiholo Bay, it was a perfect place for magic to bloom...or could've been.

I think I lost my mind there...I've never been the same. Man has two great fears: death and love, and somehow their combination drove me insane on that placid isle a million miles from nowhere. We dropped acid an hour before the sun slipped out of our Siamese dream, and lay on that enchanted beach watching her tiny lantern reflecting in the stream from a bungalow window.

Diaphanous clouds danced as night blossomed into a fluttering profusion of giant, swooping moths and screeching little bats who seemed to be either copulating or eating each other. Over the distant roar of a waterfall, an aum resonated through the teak forest, then stopped and started again. In a distant corner of my mind, something wrenched as if the Mekong's banks had broken ranks from their ominous silence. The natural order had slipped a gear...

A centipede scuttled across the crackled parchment of a dried banana leaf, and I preened my hearing to an origin almost human in the symphony around us. It stood out distinctly above the rest, and I glanced for acknowledgment from Kela. Her flowing tresses swam like goldfish on the sand, where she lay orchestrating the night's music with her hand.

"Baby, do you hear the aum?" I blurted into the sound we were absorbed in.

"Of course, I hear it," she replied somewhat tersely. "I always hear it."

"No, I mean the one in the forest that stops and starts," I coerced, lifting her to lean against my knees.

After a short telepathy of inquisitive glances, we found ourselves swaying with the trees, following a moonlit path, and dodging the bat and moth aerial war around us. A soft glow emanated from a small temple near the waterfall as the human aum separated from the other one, God's heartbeat. I

chastized myself for entering the jungle without my gun, quoting Buddhist scriptures on nonviolence, and actively trying to quash past personality disorders.

The uncanny sensation of sneaking up on a Buddhist sanctuary passed as we got nearer. Two saffron robed monks sat watching a strange third fellow chanting in the patched costume of a gypsy. The monks blinked. The gypsy rose with a great flourish, "Ah, mes amies!" and downshifted to halting English, in a profusion of welcome and delight. I couldn't believe it...human contact in this altered state was beyond me. I bowed deferentially to the monks and shook the palpitating hand of the Frenchman, who then kissed Kela with gusto. Egads, I thought, all this way to be alone! He put his arms around both of us, the mortal appendage like a giant, orange caterpillar crawling across my shoulder.

Of course, Kela and the gypsy hit it off like gangbusters, and after a brief introduction I offered them some LSD. "Immediate enlightenment!" I assured them...no need for long periods of abstention and meditation. It's like instant coffee, and so easy to use."

With that, the gypsy fluttered around the temple exuberantly coaxing and encouraging. The Thai monk would have nothing to do with it, but a slight twinkle appeared under the shaved pate of the other, and he muttered in broken English, revealing his German origin, a token optimism.

The forest parted as our unworldly assemblage of cosmic crusaders plodded off toward new horizons. Back in the bungalow, I distributed sacramental offerings of synthetic nirvana, and dug deeper for the whippets of nitrous oxide and my inflatable, army pillow. The monks watched with incredulity while the gypsy pawed at Kela on the porch.

He came on to the acid almost immediately, and instead of calming him, it only increased his effusion. The Thai monk volunteered to be our observer, and the other, who turned out to be Austrian, was in a full-on trance, squatting in the lotus position. The gypsy did the first bag of laughing gas, coming completely off the floor in cries of, "Merdre!" and other undecipherable exclamations. The monks gazed at each other in silence.

Kela went next, and in her usual exuberance came out of it loving the whole world and hugging us all. My turn came, and I remember the initial motor-like sounds of the universe giving way, and then I regained consciousness to find myself a terrified, lost little boy. My mind was blown...scattered like chaff in a whirlwind across the breadth of the cosmos.

"Mon ami, "I am here. I will guide you." I heard the gypsy say over the fading whir of energy. Blinking through a webbed maze like a bug in a spider's web, I peered through layer upon layer of colored patterns at Kela's face and heard soft pleading, "Kerry, why are you crying?"

I couldn't tell, but think I knew deep inside, or outside, or wherever I was, that this chaos which engulfed me

was gonna last a long time. Who was I, anyway? Where did I come from? Was I afraid of my ego's death or its need for her love? Was she leaving me for the gypsy who had no fear of change? How many had I killed back there, and could I just drop all that had happened? I became smaller and more helpless...each thought magnified a billion times. I was unable to affect my own existence--no guns, no games, and nowhere to turn.

My princess sat enthroned like some petulant goddess, while Jacques entertained with stories of his travels through hedonistic realms to this culminate moment of unity with us. What kind of unity did he mean?

"C'est trop facile, mon amie Kerrie!" he exclaimed. "The ego loss and we are free! Maintenant, you must choose to be someone!"

Kela was encouraging me to rejoin her in magic, as Jacques pointed to the beach crying, "Alors, tout suite. I will show you!" The monks remained in a trance, and we left them to go onto the moonlit beach.

"Ici et ici!" Jacques explained. "God is here, and here, and here!" Scampering about he made art from driftwood, and a hanging mobile from seaweed and a buffalo skull. She was enthralled, while I sat in catatonia, silent observer to it all. I heard her explain to Jacques about the war and how I was hung up on control, but not to worry as I would soon come out of it. Jacques asked me who I wanted to be, but I could only say, "Who are you?"

He replied with a little ankle-kicking Greek dance, "Why, I am Jacques, the gypsy, of course!"

That was my cue to come out with, "I am Kerry, tugboat Captain and Chief Petty Officer to boot!" but I didn't. I could've claimed the role of Prince Charming, but didn't feel up to that either. I was just a lost little boy, and when he suggested we go swimming, it got worse.

What is there to say in retrospect? With ego loss a fearsome mystery, I couldn't drop all I'd become to pick some new personality that would be enlightened. I simply wasn't deserving, and who could understand this but me? I held on to my known world, and frozen in time with it and my questionable past, could not function in the now at all. It's still quite beyond me, and if you haven't taken acid or come to this pregnant moment, you can't comprehend my grief and confusion anyway.

What power and control did I have being a spaced out non-entity watching my woman slip naked into a rippling lagoon with some Frenchman successfully playing the part of a gypsy? None! Yet I clutched at those values that made me whole, whatever they were...Captain, killer on the river, and director of destinies now unable to play any part in the game at all.

Later, I curled in my sleeping bag, but wasn't really there either, at least not in my body. I ventured into the

farthest corners of my mind...running to, and then from, changing truths, down a labyrinth of corridors filled with nightmares. It was my first really bad acid trip, and it changed my life forever.

Morning came with Kela by my side, but I still wasn't home. By afternoon, the effects had worn off enough to gather myself and plunge into the ocean. I emerged with, "Wow, what happened?" and wanted to move on. The monks went back to their shrine, and good 'ol Jacques invited himself to accompany us, much to my dismay, and Kela's delight.

I probably read a thousand National Geographics waiting at the mayor's bungalow for the untimely steamer to arrive, as Kela and Jacques chattered in the shade, eating mangoes. Imagine looking at pictures for two days, while under the lackluster gaze of the curious mayor, as I suffered silently in defeat. I sat in trystful reverie, while he wondered how I could come to his island so confident and depart such a wimp. I couldn't even look him in the eye.

I fled the island like a somnambulist shaking off a bad dream. We would lose Jacques at the airport, I reasoned, as not too many gypsies flew, so figured I could bear with our threesome a little longer. At night on deck, as we steamed through starry seas, I watched him sleeping near us and sensed a close companionship, as if he were some secret sharer. Joseph Conrad had sailed these very waters, and perhaps Kurtz had suffered his self-wrought purgatory nearby. I began to talk again as we neared Bangkok, figuring the drama we played together would be wasted unless I participated at least a little. So I cheated and discussed "being" off the record, as it were, until some part I liked came up.

"What method to the secret, Jacques?" I blurted out of the stillness, surprising myself.

"Ah, oui, c'est trop facile," he began. "I have met them all, the Maharishi, vedic and tantric masters, and modern gurus who all give the same advice. You must surrender and leave your expectations to experience the death of your past. Only then is rebirth possible. Yes, the resurrection will follow the crucifixion of your old identity. The fears you concern yourself with, love and death, are only keys. If you enter them fully, you will find immortality, my friend!"

We sat in silence, Gemini twins, his smile of unperjured friendship issuing a genuine wisdom as our ship shuddered into another cyclic dawn. Tears filmed his vacuous eyes as he gazed encouragingly for my trust. He was another, knowing my fear of self-disintegration, as Tom had on the wheelhouse in the dawn of doom firestrike.

"But who were you before Jacques, the gypsy?" I begged, almost in tears.

"Why, I was Jacques, the seeker," echoed his voice across the somnolent sea.

A sudden stillness prevailed, holding the only beings who might break it. There was a moment right then to simply become, but I didn't take it. I stalled, guessing I could choose from a variety of roles when I was ready. Everyone else seemed to be doing it, but somehow I couldn't think of one that fit or a way to let my past slip away.

We entered the River Chao Phraya winding its way to Bangkok. In our wake, featureless shapes noiselessly flowed as though born immutably on the surface of some rank and oil-smearred tide. The sun drew itself above the jungle, and its first rays cut a swath like a projector's beam through milky mists, spreading a fluorescent membrane upon the firmament of life.

Struggling through diesel fumes and choking exhaust in an endless stream of pilgrims, we trudged on and took a room at the Thai Song Greet, an infamous den of iniquity peopled by the seekers of our times. I wondered how Jacques survived as I bought his meal. We sat smoking ganja and sipping "chai" with the gathered troubadours, nefarious smugglers, and self-proclaimed saints muttering trade routes and mystic innuendos in clouds of acrid smoke.

We slept the afternoon away in sweaty concupiscense, while Jacques snored in a curl on the floor nearby. I longed for the snows of Everest and the crisp mornings of reverence in Nepal. Maybe there I could shake my karma and slip into something more comfortable.

Evening found us embroiled in the topics of our times, whacked-out with our peers as secrets exchanged hands like the passing of joints. These cigarettes were really something else, sprinkled with crystals of pure morphine. An easy comfort flowed over me as the hum of voices changed to the buzzing of a beehive. My mind perked to any particular conversation in the room, and my spirit moved from table to table, gleaning bits and crumbs of meaning from many sources. I remained the silent observer.

This stuff was easier than acid, and nothing passed my watchful eye. Kela was queen of the hive, with no end of drones at her beck and call. It didn't matter then...fear could not catch me, for I'd taken another step on the long path to self-knowledge, albeit a drugged one. It should've been a diary entry on my first taste of the phony promise to deliver these drugs inveigle upon the willing mind.

We left our gypsy guru at the airport with an incongruous mixture of relief and apprehension. Like escaping the knowing gaze of Raskalnikov, free of Jacques, I now had to deal with Kela, humanity's masses, and the mystery of losing my ego on my own. I couldn't believe it. My power to deal with life's daily challenge had left me! I knew India would bring no peace...the place was an utter catastrophe for a lost soul, but Nepal held some hope.

The jet roared down the runway, as my mind recoiled in a line-up of all the mentors who'd taught me. I ordered drink

after drink, and began to tell Kela about them all, but somehow it sounded like an excuse for not being me, and I struggled to ferret truth and direction from my story.

She said she'd wait for me to get it together, but sensing a time frame on her offer I gazed out the window, curled up, and took refuge in dreams. Helicopters, screams, and fire consumed me. Familiarity can be comforting.