

Viaje.

By Daniel Eli Dronsfield

We set out with a schoolboy's knowledge of what lay ahead
I had pored over these maps for a hundred heated evenings
Punctuated by the sounds of tea sips and pontificates
sweaters creased under elbows
elbows who had met men's teeth on dusty afternoons
in other lives
tamed warriors are like lame hounds.

We set out with a naïve lustyness that stank of adolescent gropings to glory
With maps wet from human fingers tracing tracks impassable
Mountain Waterfall Oasis
beneath a thumb on the big blank spot
their toes are naked and curled beneath the foot
on the wet wood of the floor
hours spent squatting and smoking in sunset.

We set out knowing we might not come back
some of us hoping for that no doubt
Hoping to find a Bounty, find a Papillon situation
And settle with two supplicant dark-eyed wives
wear the native dress, speak their tongue,
be known amongst them as a fiercesome personage
Sit with your hair and beards flowing on horseback
looking down with an indigenous eye
when your people eventually come
to take you back.

We set out supplied like royals of old
The first bend in the river rent the raft in two and we were all in the drink
Lucky to have our lives
We lost all of our supplies
two of our local guides and our government minder
were swept off
They may yet survive
We managed to start a fire and now we sit about it
Red-eyed from the smoke, staring at each other with a
silent excited hopelessness
Waiting for our torn clothes to dry.

We set out with swagger and to the noise of many ladies in many languages
Placing kisses high on the cheek

Close to the ear and
Breathy blessings wafted with them headily
Bubbly from champagne and toasting we boarded and flew away
'a plane we sat anxious
silent with scared hope
I rolled and unrolled my ticket between ready fingers

We set out so long ago
It can be calculated by the growth on Ignacio's neck
It can be calculated by the cataract that brings blue to your brown eyes
I count the wrinkles in my skinny leathery neck and know
It has been long
Long as the scar I now carry from left shoulder to right pelvis
Known to shoot up the whorehouse of a Saturday night
Known in these parts for the things I do say
The times I done fallen down right in front of them all
Let them know
Some are not afraid to stumble
If that's the only way you are gonna get anywhere.