

## **“Latin Temperament”**

**by Elliot Manches**

That night, after twinkling fireflies finished their nocturnal dance, the heavens opened. The temperature dropped and the entire Caribbean coast of Central America received two soggy days of grey downpour and roaring winds under a black sky.

When the Sun finally rose in a haze, it was as if gravity had fallen asleep. Everyone and everything seemed incredibly light. The people crept round cautiously, afraid they might drift off or knock their few valuable possessions up into the temperamental atmosphere. Colours were deeper and more saturated, so that objects appeared superficial and cartoonish, as if they had mass but no weight. By contrast, the air itself was too thick to carry sound, and all noise was absorbed into the damp earth, which smelt of freshly cut flowers.

By midday, when the sand-coloured sky had cleared, and the blue water no longer looked like chocolate-milk, the muggy warm air began to burn increasingly. Sitting immobile and half-naked in the sweltering shade, perspiration rolled and dripped, salty puddles rapidly evaporating. Yellow butterflies were drowsy and whistling tropical birds had given up on their revised jazz cacophony.

A Jesus lizard made a furtive dash across an open lawn to join a blue-striped salamander in the cool green bush. Whizzing past, upright on its spinning hind-legs, with its fanned crown erect and a desperately determined look on its face, the Jesus lizard stood at over a foot tall: a Jurassic Dwarf.

I borrowed a push-bike and cycled the hundred yards to the beach. This time there were no goliath gleaming cruise ships, shaped like galleons with grand masts, docked in the bay. The water was stormed by ten thousand Hondurans, swept in from the baking cities.

The pale arrived in fancy cars with air-conditioning and thumping speakers, and the dark in overcrowded, barely converted yellow US school buses. A hundred drivers, upon reaching the sea, had decided to ditch their buses by the side of the road and take a refreshing dip with the rest of Honduras.

Despite being barely afternoon, the nightclubs were open and overflowing, throbbing with meringue. Black Garifuna women sold dry cakes on the sand.

The pallid elite made sure their children were well greased in sun-block so that they could be more easily distinguished from the swarthy locals they were berated for playing with.

A young Honduran working at the tourist information shack called me over. He thought I was from Argentina.

"Oh, Inglaterra, huh? This morning I saw such a beautiful English girl, man. Great titties. I was, how do you say?, on the brink, of jumping over my desk and running after her. She would have been worth it. Big titties, little round ass. Oh, yeah, man."

I noticed a young girl behind his counter.

"Habla Ingles?" I asked her, "sabe que el dice?" She shook her head.

"Man," the guy added, "she don't understand a fucking word I'm saying. You know, I try to teach her, but she can't speak shit. Nice titties though."

"Oh. Uh, hey," I interjected, "you're tourist information? Could you suggest anything to see round here?"

"Man, ain't shit to see round here except for her and those titties."

"Well," I said, looking over and smiling politely, "Gracias y adios." And I turned around and rode back to the lodge.

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