

Todd

A little piece of fiction amalgamated from a variety of real observations

The noise of outboard motors on pangas roused Todd from his usual morning drugged-like state. Sunlight streamed through the port-side porthole, a sliver of the deep azure sky over the Sea of Cortez visible. Another day in paradise. What will it bring?

Todd slowly rose and looked around the inside of the 42-foot sailboat that he lived on, moored inside the breakwater at Santa Antonio. It was carnage, total carnage. It needed to be cleaned up and someday he was going to do just that, get this thing ship-shape and sail off. But not today.

He made his way the few feet to the kitchen. He cleared off a large enough space on the cluttered counter that he could work, then proceeded to find the coffee, rinse the pot out and make a fresh batch. His hands shook a bit as he held the pot under the faucet. Too much partying last night - again.

He reached up and slid the hatch back and stepped up the companionway ladder just far enough that his head was sticking above the cabin - what a view. The sky, the sea, the sharp crags of the Baja peaks, the buildings of the village. There was a lot wrong with his life, but this was some consolation. \$450 USD per month to be moored here, excellent meals in town for less than \$10/day, and \$1 beers on the honor system in the marina office - just get one and put down a check mark on your tab. Nobody cheated Emilio, it would have been bad karma.

The coffee was finally ready, Todd poured a cup and opened the companion way up so he could go topside. Stunningly clear, a typical December day. The pangas had gone out early and in force today. The weather had been bad and they had been unable to fish for a few days, one of the worst systems to come through in years - even the La Paz ferry had stopped running.

The vapor from the cup was highlighted by the bright sunlight, the aroma was pleasant and as the hot fluid went down his throat he could feel strength and hope returning, at least for now.

His mind went briefly, very briefly back to Long Beach. To the years of living aboard this very boat, to his successful career as a computer programmer, to his family, to his daughter. To his estranged daughter. Long Beach where every day had been an adventure of sorts. A deal to be put together, work to be delivered, problems to be solved, people to meet for lunch, phone calls to return, calls to important people. He had been a player in Long Beach, and now he was living in a marina in Baja. His choice to be sure. He had worked hard to make this happen. And here he was. "Maybe I'll go back there some day soon", he thought to himself. But briefly, very briefly. Those thoughts didn't help, they just made it seem even more hopeless.

Todd sat in the cockpit for a while, drinking his coffee and enjoying the view, every direction a postcard vista. Even the run-down copper mill on the hillside had a historic look to it, especially with the ravens lined up on the power line running in front of it. That picture would probably be worth some money - the birds had gotten it back. Years and years of producing copper and boat-loads of money and now the birds owned the place. The factory had lost it's purpose. "Just like me", he almost thought, but that thought didn't fully mature - just almost. For some reason these thoughts were persisting a little longer than normal today, maybe it was time to walk the 1/4-mile to town for breakfast.

\$3 and an hour later he was back, pleasantly contented on a breakfast of chiliquilies, tortillas soaked in salsa and baked with cheese and eggs, onions and green peppers. A Latin omelet.

Emilio was in the office, Todd walked in and chatted a while. The other denizens of the marina were ambulatory, attending to various little tasks that would evolve into their entire day when strung together - Henry

working on his mastless salvage sailboat, Terry and his wife sitting on their boat talking and listening to the weather on shortwave radio. This was Todd's world. Sometimes a transient boat would come in, a new face or faces for a few days, then gone. "Good luck, I hope to see you soon!", but both parties knew that the chances of that were slim. The boating community was close, but they graduated. They hung out in the Sea of Cortez for a while, then south or back north. Sometimes staying for years, but usually moving on. The Sea of Cortez and Baja were world class destinations, with lots of breathtaking places to drop anchor. But even breathtaking beauty fails to take your breath away when you live in it. Most people move on, a few stay. Like Todd.

Emilio finished his tasks in the marina office. "Be sure and lock it when you leave" he called to Todd as he walked toward his rundown pickup truck. Anything that wasn't locked would soon be visited by two-legged scavengers. The slips themselves were through two locked gates, both of which were locked from dusk 'til dawn. Sailboats have lots of useful things on them, best to be careful.

Todd walked over to the cooler and brought out a cold beer. He marked the tab on the table with a check in his column. There were lots of checks in his column. The book-exchange rack had an interesting new addition, a mystery novel about a priest in London. Might as well, nothing better to do. He glanced at the clock, it was 9:45 a.m. He could probably finish it by mid-afternoon.

A successful career, in an All American City, a family, living aboard his own boat - the American Dream for a significant portion of the population. A dream that never comes true for most of them. And he had it. But he wanted more.

He was sick of the routine, of the regimentation. Sick of the rules, sick of his wife and daughter putting demands on him. He wanted to see the world, live life. He wanted to be free. So he chucked it all and headed south, in a minor fit of anger, but nothing serious, just a little pique that ended up in "If I'm going to do it I have to do it now or forget it - I can't just keep complaining." So he did it. Pulled up anchor and headed south.

It had worked for a while. The exotic vistas, the food, the smells, the sounds, the adventure. Then it started to become routine. And his relationship with his daughter deteriorated until they seldom spoke anymore. And he really didn't have anywhere to go back to. It would take years on the waiting list to get a moorage in Long Beach harbor and he didn't know anywhere else he'd ever go and he'd never consider living in an apartment or a house on land. So here he was. Another day in paradise. Those thoughts took less time to enter and leave his head than it took for him to walk to the cooler for his second cold beer of the day. He marked the tab on the table, by all his other marks, pulled up a white lawn chair and sat down to read.

Maybe someday he'd go back to Long Beach. Try to repair his relationship with his daughter. See if any of his old contacts were still around. Or maybe someday he'd head just out for Hawaii, or the Marquesas. He'd been in the marina in Santa Antonio now for three years. Maybe it was time to do something else.

But not today.

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