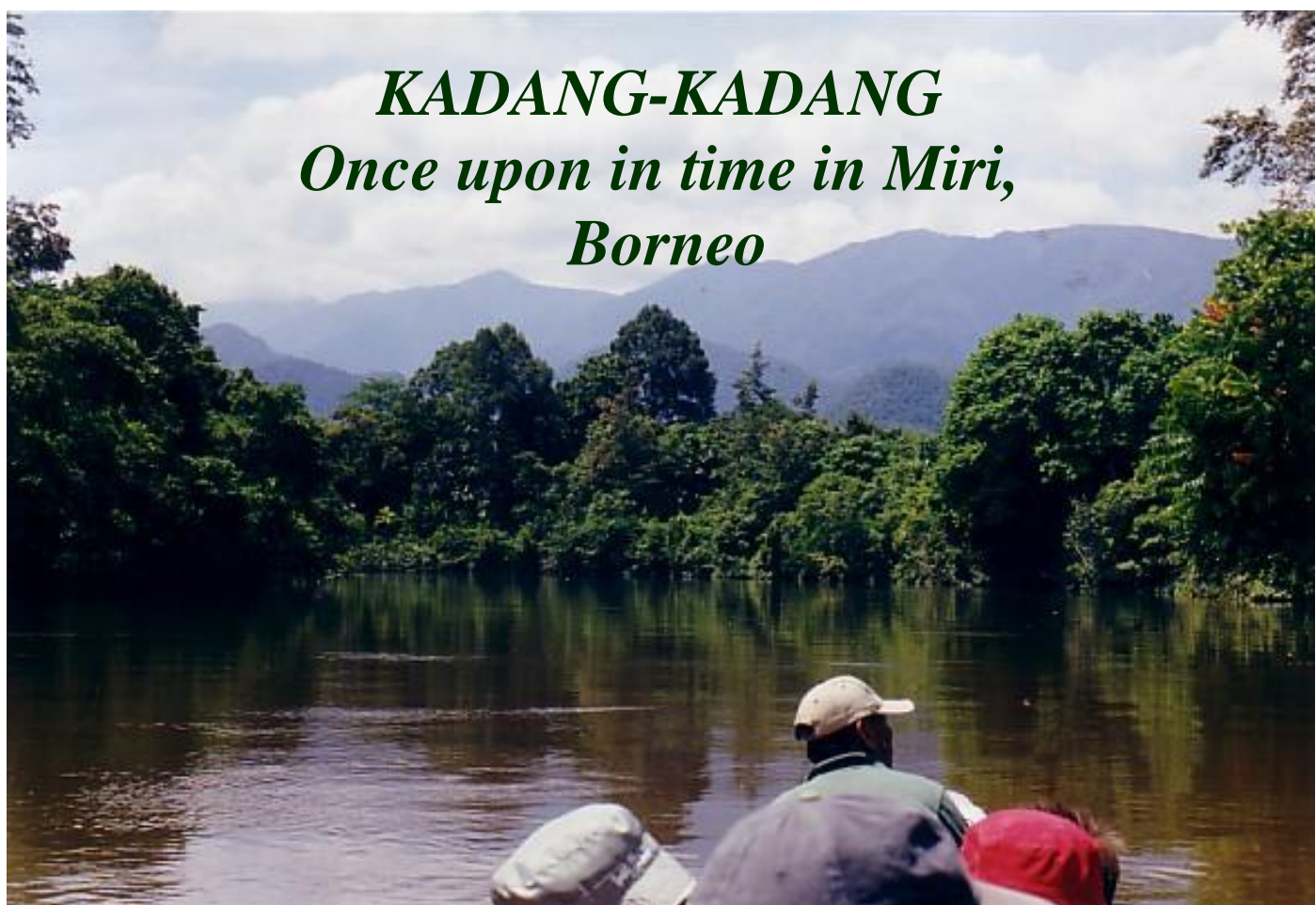
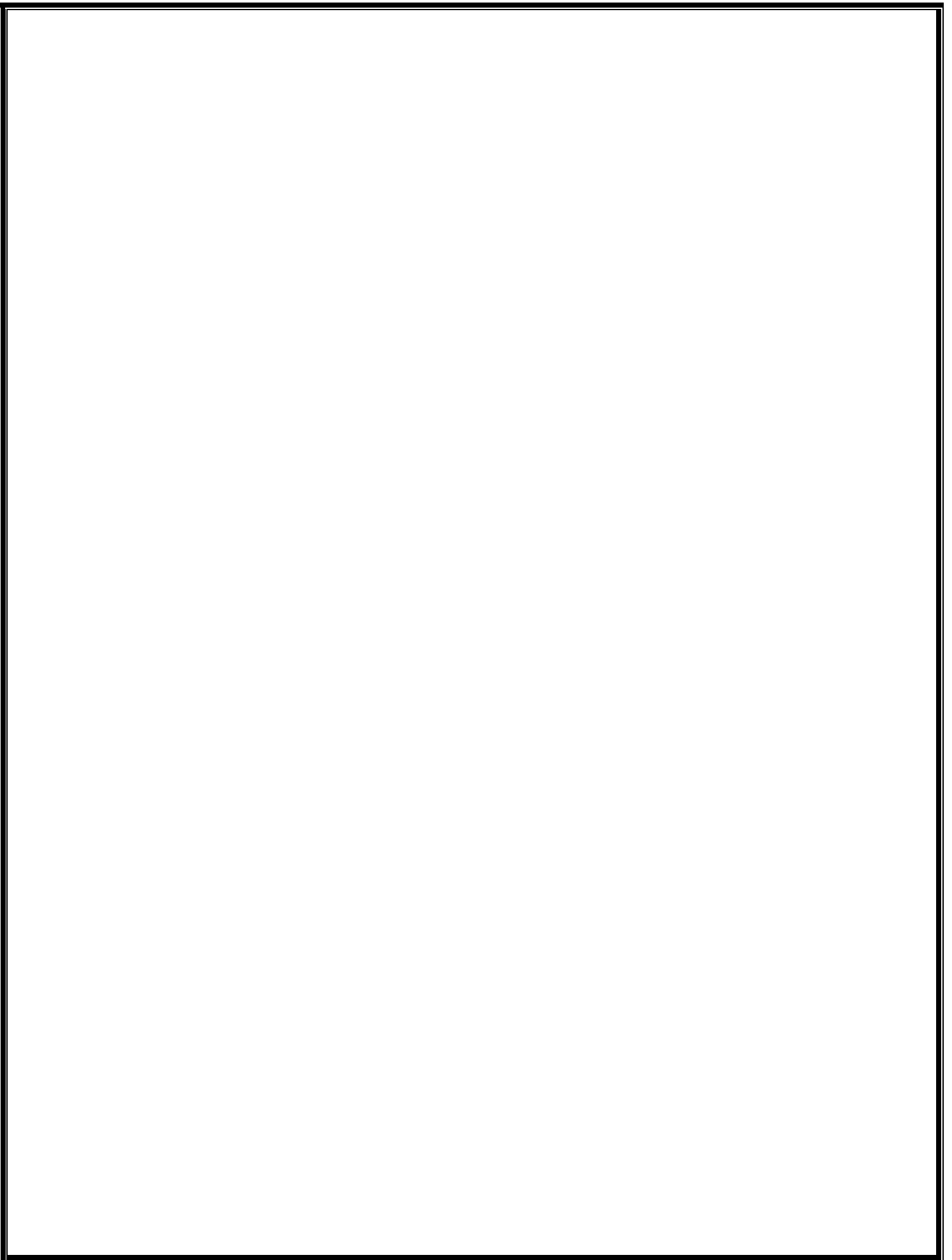




***KADANG-KADANG***  
*Once upon in time in Miri,*  
*Borneo*





*KADANG-KADANG*  
*Once upon in time in Miri,*  
*Borneo*

*by*  
*Zoran Spasic*



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Jungle Co.

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2006



## *Introductory word*

*Those days there are piles of books with beautiful photos all round the world, well done, good work.*

*This one is not all over the world; everything is happening in one small town. In this book you will not find some unbelievable plants or mountains, crazy fishes, birds of paradise or blood suckers from Sulawesi, no!*

*This work is rather collection of pictures and events from every day's street life; whatever you catch on the run. Light and cheap to make, no need to go anywhere.*

*Can do?*

*Actually, best stories are not presented in this book. But...they can be found in other books like, Romantic stories from the jungle and another, comic one... well, leave it open for now!*

*Those others are great ones, never enough.*

*Of course, those stories are not suitable for everybody. They are more for young folks, open minded, without prejudices rather than for old winging rags, who even managed to...well, let's stay out of politics.*

*So, book is not for them, no, no, no; only for those ones under 90, hah!*

*And,*

*in harmony with what's said above, book Kadang-Kadang is for all ages and folks with sense of humor. Some might not understand, but, they might be in condition to look at pictures. And that's something, at least! You know, at some stage in life, man reduces reading to a minimum; usually, looks at pictures and thinks he knows everything. Yet, if that's some cute picture, you know...than, book is great!*

*Yes? No?*

*So, sharpen yourselves, glasses on, and...sleep.*

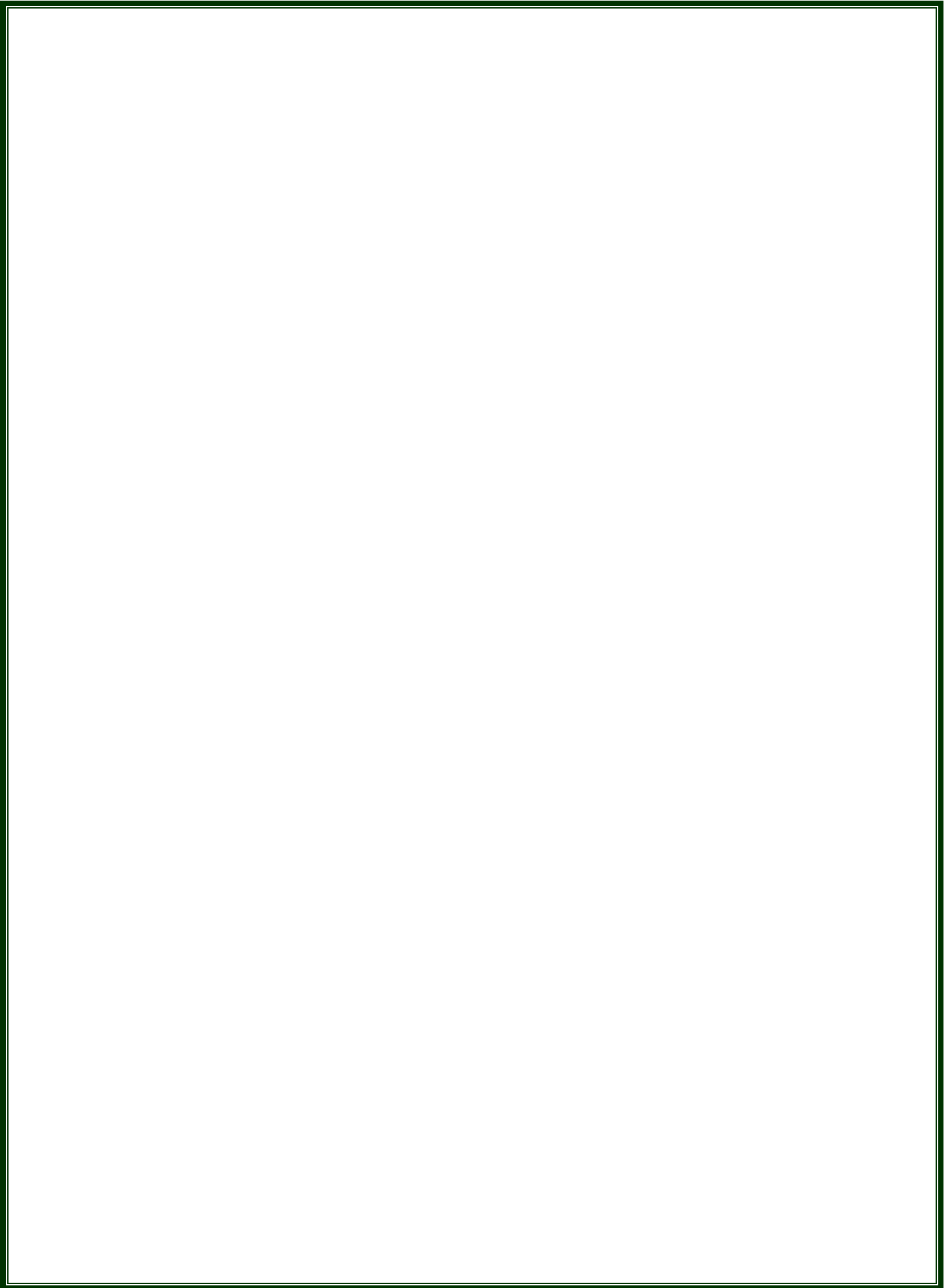
*It's late.*

*This writing may be part of our nature to leave some traces behind, for this or the other reason, especially if it is nice and unforgettable, but, it is also my modest attempt to say thanks to all those good people, habitants of Miri town, colleagues and my family without whom all those great events would have ever happened.*

*Author,*

*...and where are your friends...*

zzz&Jungle Co  
(pssst! La firma)



## *Content*

<i>1</i>	<i>Arrival - And Gods thrown the dice...</i>
<i>2</i>	<i>Town on another side of the Globe</i>
<i>3</i>	<i>Club Balcony</i>
<i>4</i>	<i>Mulu</i>
<i>5</i>	<i>Friends</i>
<i>6</i>	<i>Shop Girls</i>
<i>7</i>	<i>Parmejaya Resort</i>
<i>8</i>	<i>Karaoke Bars</i>
<i>9</i>	<i>Kuala Belait</i>
<i>10</i>	<i>Trip DoReMi</i>
<i>11</i>	<i>So easy, So happy and something else</i>
<i>12</i>	<i>Hash</i>
<i>13</i>	<i>Miss Tourism</i>
<i>14</i>	<i>Ahku</i>



## *Arrival - and Gods thrown the Dice...*

I landed in Miri around 10AM.

Miri?

Hmmm.

After so many years in darkness of down under country, one can easily forget places like this exist at all. But nobody can alter the destiny, not even happy police regime in those "lucky countries".

Home again, free?



From Kuching to Miri 45 minutes flight, easy, quick opportunity to see lush greenery below; where am I? Is this really happening to me? Complex feelings, needs time to chew it all. I see, there is life after all.

Small simple airport building reminds me to those small cute airports lost in the outback of WA, few rarities out of "thoughts control".

Common folks in waiting room, no crowds, more important, no paranoid, bloodthirsty troopers in desperate search for terrorists, so popular in their civilized world. Not at all! Just ordinary folks, little brownish, relaxed, cool, warm, soft, I did not misjudge this place.

Those guys don't steel for living. They work for it.

I knew that immediately.

Actually, one with eyes can see where the trouble comes from. "*All Quite on the Western Front*", ha-ha.

But let's not spoil this nice intro with strangers.

In instant, I recall primary school geography lessons when we learned about Borneo, Huuuuuuh, was it that long ago? Sumatra, Celebes, Java, Borneo, hmm, did I know I'll get here one day?

Yeah. I did. My fault; sorry.

Finally. I feel good, let's go!

Got out of the plane, again, strong feeling like getting home after so many years, this time like in the past, I see my own town "when the grass was greener and the smiles were bright".

My mind crossed memory of similar "deja vu" moment in the Pakistan, Lahore 1976.

Must be that one of my grand, grand, grand ancestors who left those waters some 21.000 years ago, past this place while heading to cold lands of Russia in search for better life. It was different time than and here.

The whole contest of strange, eyes opening circumstances is following me from now on that I don't have time to chew it all. I need kind of explanation but "what a hack" as the brave boy said. Go on, it's good, keep swimming!

Haji, my future host here, one very cool and relaxed character, waits for me with table "*Zoran*".

- Hello.

- Hello.

We shake hands, he has his always friendly smile. We exchange greetings and basics.

Now, contest of circumstances creates new perception, I feel like Haji is taking me to the school. Enrolment into the first year of secondary, best time of our lives, I'm excited, like teenager, how to put it? Who remembers those days, (*psst, they do not in Australia, they hate it*), he knows what I'm talking about.

Am I getting second chance?



*Most popular transport, for young and old.....especially for young*

To town, about 15 minutes, sneaky streets, fences old and new, unusual buildings and houses, square, bricked, wooden, on stumps, new, old, some next to the street, some hidden in the tropical greenery, just roofs and edges stick above. Wooden ones get me immediately, I sense desire to settle in one of them. Most of solid ones have walls striped with grey and black tailings from generous rains that always overflow gutters. But all of those pictures melt into lush tropical greenery that makes this world just, fantastic!







Vegetation is powerful, could swallow the whole town in a blink of eye if there is no hard working "lawn movers" to keep it away from habitats. Those hard working guys would be immediately arrested in lucky country due to their like guerrillas appearance. Dressed in old clothes, top to the bottom, strew hats and balaclavas, buzzing around all the time with their portable machines, no talks, no comments, like shadow aliens from another planet. Remarkable characters.

In lucky countries they would be immediately stripped naked, male or female; Halt! Shnel, shnel!

Ah, forgot to be precise: filthy rich governments in lucky countries, traditionally best of best selection.

But not to spoil those moments with ugly ghosts of the lucky countries where everybody is already dead from the birth since brain is taken out due to infection and lack of education.

Now, I have no idea where we are, town configuration and tangled numerous streets will take me some days to get used to. Because all looks the same. OK, going downhill I finally see few landmark building of Miri, hotel Mega, hotel Imperial and one I named "Black Demon", dark, black, deserted architectural miscarriage, wrong place in the wrong time. Looks like designed by some intelligent architects from down under, typically dead and lifeless. But don't worry; not that bad like scares in some "civilized" countries.





*Mega Hotel and shopping plaza, one of first pioneers of new architecture; if they can, I can!  
But, what makes difference between “us and them” is sentiment inside. Like in the streets, happy, full of life and  
friendly Miki faces. Oh man, what a relief.*





*Typical old style timbre house in this part of Borneo; few have remained*

We are passing through old town Miri, tight dense streets in all directions, some, like in comic houses, chock-a block, tightly compressed narrow buildings full of all kind shops, in and out on the street, chaos, fantastic scene! Those people are alive!

Here we come to my initial accommodation, hotel Dynasty, 10 stories habitat, tidy, sign of new age but not yet that new like those ominous ones that are coming from the west or other similar cultures always ready to execute everything and everybody including spirits of the past just to prove how smart they are.

Well, let's not spoil the day....

Again, lots of smiles, brown faces around, kind and easy, no pressure, no greed, no more hungry eyes, I ask myself: is there going to be anything wrong here to make me angry?

I needed this human environment, definitely, got enough of mechanically cultured, cultures.

No complains.

Quickly, we stopped at the Dynasty so I left my luggage, managed to see part of South China Sea from 9<sup>th</sup> floor and parts of green Canada Hill on left, holiday for eyes, inspiration for soul.

*Old town is full of character; two or three stories tightly packed houses, hips of small shops all kinds and purpose.,*

*In between those cuties is my next accommodation, Hotel Dynasty. So much to explore and to taste...real domestic, mmm; grilled lizard, kukukah butterfly larvae, turtle soup, all that cocked in river water with taste of local crocs, hahaha!*

*OK, I know, I know!  
It's a joke!*





Now we go to office.

We drive along longest street from Miri to Lutong, I learn street name, *jalan Miri-Lutong*, easy isn't it. I wouldn't hurt if some strangers call them ugly or untidy, well, OK, we all have different perceptions of nice and ugly. On my right, jewel of Miri, Canada Hill, stretches for good 4-5 km along jalan Miri-Lutong road; rich, lush jungle full of small broken houses hidden within, here and there few half naked children, happy habitants under the hill.



To me, this hill looked like spine of Miri, gives him that unbelievable image, spirit, privacy and protection, can not imagine Miri without it.

We pass Bintung plaza, City Fan, K-square, Grand Palace, The Boulevard, sometime soon, arriving to the Lutong Bridge, and look this beauty!





*View from the old Lutong Bridge on lush banks of the Miri River*



Lutong is located at very long but narrow peninsula; one side river Miri, another, South China Sea. Hmm, very interesting and convenient configuration. Unique as well.

Here is Shell office, building of an unusual style, huge, reminded me of pentagon, enhanced with bits of local style architecture.

Lots of people work there. Our team is located in an old baraka style building just across the road. I like it, I am bit tired of bare, sterile and cheap iron&concrete urbanism in so called developed countries.

Well, not to mention 21<sup>st</sup> century architecture, will be too much for here.

Classic introduction, few expats already there, some switched, some not yet. But I see they are not from Australia, they look cool, like people, hmm. Good. I would not like too many of them here, they can quickly turn happiness into the misery.



*Dead end old port on Miri River*

- Let's go back for car, said Haji.

Another road to Ferdinand Yee, rent-a-car owner, drives through old suburbs Piasau and Krokop, along green river Miri crowded with old ships and boats. Again, bunches of grey houses even older architecture. I feel better and better, good positive mood is busting me up, is this a moment of reincarnation or what?





*View from tip of peninsula on the Waterfront area*

I keep quite, looking around, now, nothing can disturb this state of peace, all good. Finally, I feel normal again, young and fresh for action, “where is that bear to break his leg”??

And nobody sees this fast ongoing transformation; everybody still thinks that's me.

Ha, ha, ha, what a mistake!

Now, I am put in situation to play with local population because .... **I am not angry anymore!** Even evil big brother ambitions to rule the world don't cross my mind to disturb me.

What a place under the sky!

Free again!

My transport is.....great!

Seems Proton Wira is car made for me. Includes perfect sound equipment and set up, after so many years of 18<sup>th</sup> century sound down under in lucky country.....well, happens sometime. I can again listen to the music, all kind by the way, choice of everything, from Indon dandut to popular pops and rocks, rock me baby until dawn!

I asked myself secretly, is there a God?

I fell into the space that suites me best, all together. Of course, what life would be without those every day's jewels that walk around swiftly breaking out our peace in bits and pieces?

Yes?

But about prettier gender more in separate stories. They are so much prettier that definitely can not be described in this dry, miserable short text.

Ya?

After Haji left me at my hotel I could not resist to run out and explore those rusty streets, trash and treasure chaos of old Miri town. Lots of everything can go for ever, on and on but for now I just observe those faces, look at them, see them close, as closer as I could get. And, in confidence, I could get very close.

Town was full.....of.....Mikis!

Yes. I noticed that immediately. Inevitable fact.

Mikis!

I didn't know that!

So many Mikis at one place, couldn't dream something like that.

I realized, from now on, they are my only pets.

Little Borneo girls with those eyes, those little noses, straight, thin, cute, swift, clean, soft gestures, smooth, black hairs, walk like a whisper, talk like a whisper, light like a whisper.  
I fell down immediately.  
Such beautiful creatures!  
For some reasons, we loved each other at once!

That's how this trip starts.





*Pelita. Behind, top of Canada hill and small church, congregation for local Christians.*



*View from Canada hill*



*Road up to Canada Hill: Settlement for not so rich ones but only if measured by money.*

## Town on the other side of the Globe

God knows where one can end up.  
Maybe he does, but I don't.  
Actually, I did. Kind of intuition.  
I got it that long time ago.  
However, I didn't know how good that's going to be.  
Borneo?  
Hmm.

This time I found myself here in Sarawak, part of Borneo one of two provinces, also known as East Malaysia.



South China Sea, full of pirates; do not think it was “before”, no, boys are busy, that charm is still here in spite International humanitarian police regime so well known all around?  
And famous Sandakan is near by, olalaaaa!



Well, here in Miri we have nice quite life, you feel like at home, maybe much better. After years in that empty, sterile and dead society like Australia, this place comes like mental revamp for me. No wonder only “Australians” can live in Australia. My god! From here, that desert looks like punishment. Real gulag. Brrrrrr...

So, alive again.

At the moment I am staying in hotel Dynasty, can see half of SC Sea, platforms and rigs too, greenery along Miri river and near by hills; what’s missing for perfect set-up is just one little China girl, ha-ha. Just joking but surely David Bowie must have good reason when he made and versed that song of his.

True. Some of those eyes getting me worried a bit, you know. But leave eyes where they belong to, I’ve got job here to do. Lots of gas here, some guys asked me to come and take part on a project, few rigs, why not, I said, can’t stay in Australia for too long, things rotten there too quickly.

Miri is sympathetic town of about, as I initially thought, 50000 inhabitants. That was my first wrong judgement since you can not see 250000 people at once, could you? I couldn’t but I could were Mikis, immediately. Oh man, how nice girls are here, you die quickly if you’re not ready for it.

I died only several times, it’s OK, does not hurt a lot. Than you get used to and you’re happy.

Luckily that was not in job description and that fact saves life.



Town Miri is typical mixture of old and new, signs of new developments but true image is in that old Miri. Old, grey, dirty, full of love and life. Hundreds of small shops, sheds, kafanas, restaurants, all around, crowds of folks any time day and night. Nothing like that miserable and ominous emptiness in “lucky countries” where one can not even see a stray dog after darkness.

Appart from Bavaria, first places I get to go for familiarisation is Chaplin and Another Office. Tiny cafe-bar set by local expat, place where mixed crowd comes; locals and expats. Nice and cosy, good music always, friendly, calm people, no cross eyes or looks, quite world that has not yet been deformed by highly civilised police standards.

Another popular place I get to are bookshops. Usually large space full of all kind of books, cheap and accessible, I learned lots of details on local history, culture, geography, life, name it.

This province, Sarawak, belongs to Malaysia since 1956, I think. Story goes some hundred years ago when certain sultan of Brunei invited Englishman “white rajah” to tame some neighbouring tribes and resolve local conflicts. After successful job has been done, white rajah has got those two provinces as a reward; later in time, he passed them to the British government. Something like that, pardon my ignorance.



Malaysia is state with unusual configuration, geographically and ethnically. West Malaysia is true Malaysia on Malay peninsula and east Malaysia which consists two provinces, Sarawak and Sabah. West Malaysia has mixed population. Indonesians mainly from Sumatra that settled some centuries ago, than, Chinese and Indian population coming from their respective countries. Original Malay people (very beautiful by the way) are minority and I have hardly seen few of them in Sarawak.

Mixture of religions make no issues. As I always believed troubles always come from “big brother”, not from the God, as per famous western philosophers. Here, everybody practices according to his beliefs.

Between Sarawak and Sabah is Brunei, small but rich sultanate, strictly Muslim world, quite, organized, clean little state. Must admit good ruler that guy Bolkan, hope he will have someone to keep them going after his retirement. God knows, I guess depends on British that have economic interest in the area.

Sarawak and Sabah have retained certain rate of autonomy and freedom of choice. I guess.

Along the costal line is road that can drive you from the bottom place Pointianak (in Indonesian Kalimantan) thro Sarawak, Brunei and Sabah ending in Sandakan. Continental part of Borneo is mainly reachable by rivers and sometimes by planes. How good natural protection.

Sarawak population is mixture of local Borneans, Chinese and Malays.

Traditional owners of this land, Borneans are everywhere. And this native people will get me to the bone. It was so easy to live together with them, easy and happy. What a people!

Chemistry, what else.

To me they are all similar but in fact there are many different groups or tribes: Iban, Kayan, Malinau, Kalabit, Kenya, Bidayu, Pennan, Dayak and many more.

In Sabah: Kadazan, Rungus, Lotud, Kimaragang, Dusun Tindal, Dusun Tatana, don't know all of them.

One think they have in common is, good character.

Can you find that somewhere else?

I didn't.

Most of evening my going outs start with stroll thro shops in old town, restaurants, streets, then shopping plazas, there are few of them: Bintang plaza, Mega, Imperial, Boulevard, plus some smaller ones.

I can't miss this happiness.

It is always little show of laughter, intrigues, kocetiering, flirting, you know me.

My specialty is..... of course.

Mikis!



They are modest, simple, shy and unprepared for open conversation with a stranger with such open and direct way of expressions. They are bit confused but it seems we are sympathetic to each other and funny so inevitably we burst in laughter just at look at each other. I don't remember such dosage of collective happiness, smiles and easiness.

I guess, we from other side of the globe are very funny looking for them; for big nose, big eyes, big jaws, big, big, can't resist not recalling "Red riding Hood".

Yes, I love this world, couldn't find that in a wildest dream.

Is that good expression?

Doesn't really matter.



*Huuu...Sunday morning, breakfast at old market. As soon as they see me, City and Ina's irresistible and sincere smiles bring sunshine on the surrounding scape. They know: here comes that crazy stranger that eats 10 "mekikas" at once, whauuuu! Surprised again and again.*

*And not that I'm always that hungry but after my few visits I have no heart to disappoint those happy butterflies.*

*And it worths to me. Those bright smiles in the early morning worth more than all gold of this world. As one old saying quotes:the mornig will forcast the day*





*Cute Iban girls, ready for story and chance to sell something to crazy stranger*



*Left, Suzy, one of my first friends among locals, doing bottles*



*Right, Kalabit and Malay girls at work. Just checking if I'm on Facebook*

Yes, I'm there, ha-ha!

I see laughter will never stop. Unbeivable!

I feel at home again. Nothing here from usual boring communications with lots of swearings and cursing like in those "highly developed" world overthere.



*Foto Upsss...I suppose not to but couldn't resist this interpretation of tranquility and harmony*



*Quintet Relax:*

*Musically oriented girls just before singing session and just after good meal.*

*It came out that quality of performance greatly depends on the quality of provided makanan.*

Working hours for shops are

very “flexible”. Most of them open at 10AM, close at 10PM, seven days a week including holidays. Shops are mostly attended by young girls, one is busy few friends are around to make sure she’s not lonely, nobody is in hurry, nobody is nervous.

Earnings are enough to cover basics and nobody stress for that reason.

At least, work is there.

Food is cheap if you want to you can eat for less than a dollar. Certainly is healthier than some of what we eat. After shops I tend to drive around along tiny streets, no traffic crowd, no lights and infringements, relaxable.

-----  
 Those days my favourite spot is restaurant at *Waterfront*, point at the bank of the river Miri. This section is crowded with slams built of timber, placed on the water. Place is well situated at the river mouth to the sea, good view, breeze, boats and ships, old, and dirty, colourful scenery.

Usually after work I stop there for famous ice lemon tea, my favourite drink in this area.





*Gate at river Miri mouth into the SCSea. Waterfront block, one of usual dining place for common folks. Good food and ice lemon tea which, by the way, I will unsuccessfully keep trying to make again and again, once I am forced to leave this love of mine.*

*There are few restaurant in complex like this one. On top floors live girls and guys that work here, usually pretty naked rooms with basic furniture.*

*Some say that hygiene is not as per “western standards”, so, no strangers come here much. Most of them are getting fat elsewhere, where filtered food is served.*

*Too funny.*

*I made few first*

friends right here. Lilly, Helen and Harry. They like to listen to my stories from my colourful world. Lily and Helen will leave soon, back to Pointianak, their working visas are over. We will miss them.

- So, how you go, I asked them one day. Do you have money for the plane?

- No, they laughed, we go by bus.

- By bus?

- Yes.

That's when I learned about Pointianak, town at the bottom of the Borneo, Indonesian part called Kalimantan. It is about 1500km south, long trip all along thro Sarawak.

OK, I'll visit you one day, maybe, keep swimming girls!



*Lilly, Helen and Salina. . . Dinner preparations start at 5PM. First, taking out dishes of various size and purposes, washing, table clothing, ingredients and spices, cooked rice baby-keilam, rice, vegetables, noodles, cooked rice, and at the end, rice. Fishes and variety sea products are served later. Fish, octopus, sharks, squid, cucumber and other creatures I never discovered what they are? But, everything is good, even rice could not spoil it, ha-ha!*

Lily and Helen are Chinese girls from Indonesia, have brother here that runs restaurant, opportunity to come and make some money. In Indonesia girls have not much opportunities to work, wages are low and coming to Sarawak to work is kind of good fortune.

There are many workers in Miri from Kalimantan, some legal, mostly illegal, not an issue, just walk thro the woods. Interesting point is, staff and service in those places. Example in this restaurant work, 2 women, 2 boys and three girls, plus the owner. You come for drink and procedure starts:

Two or three girls come and after shorter or longer chat ask what do you want. They go across the street to restaurant to pass the message. First comes drink but not the bottle opener. That comes later after crew has voted who is bringing the opener. Opener comes and drink is poured into the glass slowly and slowly.

They stand and look at you if you going to drink.

You do and than they go away happy.

That is common here and nobody's getting upset for that or trying to speed up process. Except me of course. Still too new.



Food is coming much later. Everything is red hot, bit of “everything mixture”, I don’t know “who” I haven’t tasted yet. Sea cucumber soup, pork skins, killed fishes, dead crabs, plants that are not possible to describe by known words, seafood without food, sweet and salty spices for fruits, woodchips and luckily rice. I could recognise it by its white colour, I think. I stick to rice although I don’t like it but, you never know. I might get sloppy eyes as well.

Of course, there are few good restaurants in town, really good, hotels so, so. Only, I try to stay away from those refined and rich tourists, somehow I loose appetite seeing them chewing piece of something for hours, like it is rubber hose, not food.

Jesus!



*Until I discovered ice lemon tea, I had to consume famous invention from lucky country over there, full of “good drinks”. What a miss!*



So, here we sit for awhile, drink, chat and gossip. Language? No French, no Italian, no English. OK. We can make it, all you need is good will, rest just comes along naturally.

*Hary, Ming, Balkanac, Lilly & Helen*

*Many girls from Indonesia come here for temporary work, legally or illegally, whichever way they find. Chance to earn something. Not much opportunities on Indon side especially for girls, way of life is much different, I guess.*



*Nick of time: Sunset at Waterfront*

But food is not in my sphere of interest, for example, after Australia, everything is perfectly good here, as long as it is not poisoned.

On Waterfront, Harry takes care I get basic – soup. Harry is good man, young, in love with Lily and now very sad since she's about to leave. They all behave here like kids. He shy, she shy, sometime my devil wants to stir them so I tell them:

- Come on, kiss her, kiss her, she loves you, don't you see it!

Now, the panic is on. By the way, all girls here scream high pitch voice.

Now, all girls at the table jump up with mixture of laughter and high: eeee,e,e,eeee,e,e,ieieieii...aa..iii..eeee!

Shy, hiding face with hands, running around the table, red cheeks, shiny eyes full of sparkles and happiness.

And when I told Lily she has nice eyes, Harry told me later, she hanged on in front of the mirror for a week or more talking about her eyes.



*Bukit Palapan: Favourite vent place in the near-by jungle. Opportunity to get out of town.*

*Some locals don't get out of town much. Trip even to near-by Bintulu is real adventure.*

*What??*

*So far??*

Making photos was especially difficult experience. At least in the beginning.

Lots of running around and hiding face by hands, cloths, plates and pots, or whatever was nearby.

Once they realised it “does not hurt” I managed to make few photos here and there. Not only few. They could pose for hours for another and another photo although no noticeable movement was present. I had to physically move them little bit by little bit so I don't end up with hundreds of photographs all the same.

Sweet are they, yes.

Sometimes we sit on the river banks and than I tell them all kind of stories from the other end of the world.

Translation was spontaneous since those early days only Harry spoke little bit of English so we all understood everything perfectly but laughter was tremendous.

Yes. Happiness comes only when you don't expect that.

Sometime I bring some cakes or so from shopping, what else. I say, guys, go ahead, I can not eat that, my dentist does not permit me.

Not sure if they understood “dentist” but jump on cake was quick and all is gone in a fraction of second.

They like it. Very simple and open approach.

That's another argument I like. Just imagine how it works at home? Our kids, huuuuu, like it – don't like it, for ever!

Yes. I got used on this bunch quickly. My folks as well.



So,  
ordinary simple crowd, without make-up, without complains and megalomaniac desires, crowd which does not starts conversation with ME and my FAT ass are the best ... lucky country, but ME, but, but ME, no, no, yeah, yeah, ahh, it is gorgeous, it's fun, all kind of buls\*\*\* common in those "lucky countries" like down under.

---

For now, time is fine. Working on the project, not so complex, not so busy as I usually am, more or less same as in country down under. But colleague of mine told me one day, don't stress, thats the pace we do things here. Supprisingly I accepted that, at least I beleive that; kind of slow motion. And it proved later very beneficial. Team is very nice, good people. I feel very much at home here.

Life can be full of surprises!

*Sometimes I think.....: Am I going to feel like this guy...one day .....with such happy smile?*





*Typical street in old Miri town. One of many. Busy by day, quite by night, good for nice drive around. One can ride anywhere. Unlike in developed world, people are cool here, it's real pleasure to move around. Even alone, ha-ha!*





*My favourite vessel, one of many that float on the river Miri. Some for fishing, some for sand or other building materials. Normally parked “in front of the house” all along the river banks; original chapter of seafareing history.*





*Timbre business is very lucrative those days. Loggings is popular, some like it some not.*

*It appears one tribe, Penan, is resisting ways of civilisation attempts, for how long we'll see one day.*

*Penan are very nice people, nomads, moving from place to place occasionally, with no intention to change way of life.*





*Some habitats are modest, simple. Few paces from the main road one come across this little paradise hidden from the sights by dense jungle growth. Well...at least in my eyes*

Of course, this place have also some kind of public shows, funs, performances. And it does. A lot of; various types, various people, various purposes, all colourful from time to time.



*Kids fashion show at Imperial*



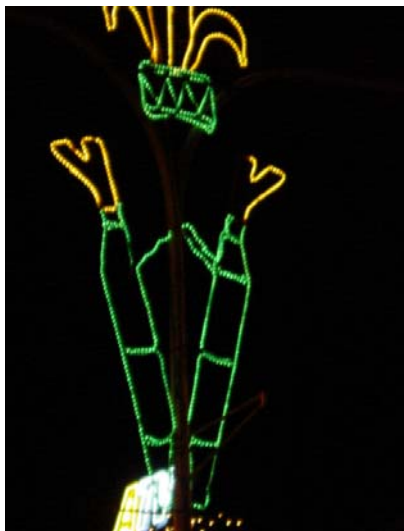
*View from Canada hill. In a distance Mulu mountains. Wetlands in between, covered by reducing jungle, making space for new settlements for growing population*



## Miri by Night

Unlike in "highly developed" and colour blind cultures, where riches can't even have a door lights on, here, folks don't find expensive to spend few bucks on decorations. Colours, colours and more colours. You get to used to this happiness quickly but its presence makes mind open, spirit happy and smile bright.









*Singing together: Trio Ti-Vi-Di show during Chinese New Year*



## Temples

In old town there is an old temple right on the bank of Miri river. It is small, modest but full of life and spirit of times. Real jewel. Was my favourite place for relax and spiritual inspiration from the very first days.



*Eye of Life*



*Some famous  
"Chinese  
miniatures" made  
during selebration  
of Chinese New  
Year*



*Below: Old Chinese stories & Wisdoms in picture*





*Nobody's perfect stories: Sins*





*Favourite animal: Dragons, ah, so unpopular in America*





*Angry Dragon. Actually, very angry dragon.*

*Happy couple*



From collect  
Part 1: happy



*Some Gods that don't speak English*

*Non-flying Dragon*





*Remembrance place*



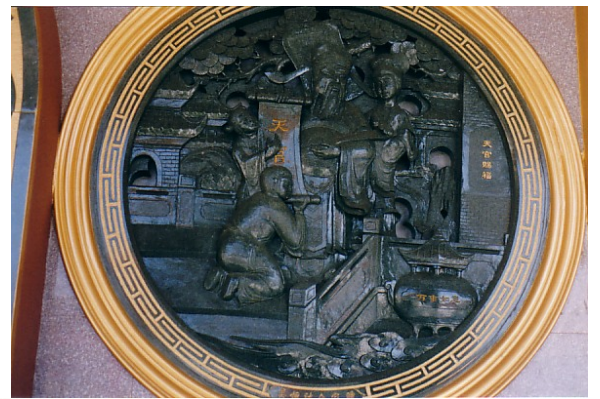
*Beauty*



Some detail on new temple that has been built at Krokop.







*And oh, Unavoidable local tourists*

## The Balcony Experience



One of the rarities of this little town lost in time and space is .....  
Blue sea, yes, that's nice although you don't see it unless you go offshore some miles.

But let's try something else.

Say, night life. Is there any night life here?

There is. Actually, it's not bad compared to some other "International" place's sterile nights. This one has got kind of the image, something that most of ordinary folks have forgotten during long years of boredom and self-consciousness.

There are few places here where you can go out by night. Actually, a lot. Yes.

Two most popular, at least for our kind, are "Balcony", kind of disco bar and "Cheery Berries", kind of night club with still alive local bend and puzzled spelling of its name.

It would be no surprise for one to assume all kind of troubles that goes with it when comes to places like that: tightly packed smoky crowd, slime, sex, drugs, booze, ugly macho man, desperate plastered ladies, so on. All kind of in highly developed civilisation's way of fun.

Well, here, we don't "keep that".

Oh yes! There are flirts and looks that take one's breath away, but what life would be without that?

All the rest..... makes you feel at home.

I ask myself: What is this place? How is this possible?

I wander where are those twisted creatures like in all those highly developed cultures where everybody is pretending to be somebody else but not himself.

No guards, no police, no broken heads?

But....I wouldn't be the guy who graduated on so many universities if I had to wander for more than 3 seconds for anything.

Ha-ha! Am I full of myself?

OK. Pssst! Keep this private.

So, I know the secret.

It is the most powerful force in human kind.

Love.

And now, again, I am happy.

Yes. Habitants of this town do not have anything in common, for example, with population in.....

errr...skip it...let's not spoil these moments.

You have to see that, so, no point to try with technicalities.

It's Wednesday, ladies night.

I got out bit earlier, had a drink and couple of snooker games. My colleagues went home, so, let's see that Balcony above. Not my space but curiosity is my advantage.

Up and... look? Aquarium!!

Huge, at the edge of round bar placed in the middle of the airy clean club space. Lights, dance floor, room for by-passers and nice balcony for smokers and chatters.

In aquarium, three small sharks, Eci, Peci and Pec, young and happy as it goes together. They like music and potential candidates for dinner. All together, very relaxing and quite environment.

In the bar, three nice bar attendants. Is this for real?

Yes.

One most beautiful girl approaches me, asks me what drink I want.

Shock is instant but my brain still functions independently from me (luckily) and asks for:

- Coke-Daniels please.

I couldn't ask for ice lemon tea, could I?

I know I never drank before but now...

Well, from now on I do drink, so what?

As some old wise folks say: "Beauty can destroy you lot quicker than misery".

I question this saying in myself, quietly, suppressing desire to scream, it's not nice, it's public space.

So I drink that bitter liquid and look around for details.

As time goes on, I am regaining control and now I look at environmental facts of constantly changing interior.

For this occasion, I'll use kind of music way, lyrics from one song, to picture the sensation of this place, suits me best.

*Everyone is trying to get to this bar, the name of the bar?*

*The bar is called.. "Heaven".*

*The band in the "Heaven" plays my favourite song,  
play it once again, play it all night long.*

*Heaven,*

*Heaven, heaven is the place, the place where nothing, nothing never happens.*

*There is a party, everyone is there,  
and everyone will leave it at exactly the same time.*

*It's hard to remember that nothing at all,  
could be so excited, could last all night long.*

*Heaven,*

*Heaven is the place, the place where nothing, nothing never happens.*

*When the kisses are over, and everyone is gone,  
everyone will leave it, at exactly the same time.*

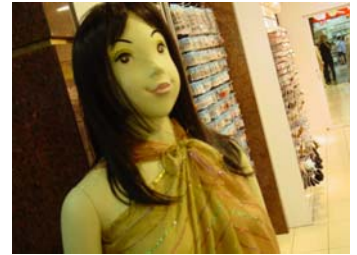
*It's hard to remember that nothing at all,  
could be so excited, could be so much fun.*



Now, compare this above with the text below, so popular in those "lucky countries" overthere:

*Can't tell the women from the men,  
cause they're dressed in the same pollution.  
Her mind is confused with confusion,  
for her problems seem, there's never, never no solution.  
And the music, stands, repeats: People ride on, people ride on.*

*I see ten thousand warriors, and they're riding on their horses.  
The riders, they have covered their faces,  
so you couldn't make them out in those smoky places.  
And that musical stamped still repeats: ride on, ride it on.  
Don't let me down, don't let me down.*



You see the difference?

I love the place even I am not always part of the “band”, nothing new about me, is it? Lonely wolf type.

But, some times, I did something I normally don't do. I get few drinks and than the film gets really different. I socialise with people, I even dance here, ha, ha, ha, ha!

I am happy here, no doubt!



## Weaknesses!?

Yes. Life is easy here but,

If one have any weaknesses towards sloppy eyes he definitely should not come here. Never ever.

Especially if he has got a heart problem. Any heart problem, you know....

I don't mean men. They really look like, how to say..... OK, no comments.

Sorry.

About 9 PM the Chinese invasion commences. I think Chinese, not sure.

For me, they all look alike. Dark, fair, tall, short. As long as they have those beautiful angled eyes. I wish I am Eskimo. Somehow all men are Chieng or Chang and all girls are May, Kong or Pong, easy to get lost, yes.

Girls start gathering, one by one, two by two, three by three, don't count. Watch!

At first, everything looks long and smooth, sneaky, squeaky clean bodies, you see, that's it. They are ready for anything. Except for .....dinner.

No eating seams allowed around but ..... you immediately get hungry and thirsty.

You must. Other ways, you die. On spot. Die and have no regrets, quickly.

Slowly, I'm getting back to normal trying to address details scientifically.

First observation is, Movements.

Like in a slow motion movies, swift, tiny, light, soft, sneaky, like shadow cute moves that has nothing to do with ones you usually see elsewhere, you know where.

How is this possible?

Slow motion is painful and of course, you don't want to suffer. You drink and think about, say, end of Universe? Can do?

For those who are not capable to see thing scientifically, options are numerous: Guns, knives, bats and ropes are easily available in this town and smart guy, with weakness towards slopes, should definitely carry some of those weaponries with himself. Self-execution is the best way unless you like jumping from the "Balcony". Into nothing.

The girls are ..... wait a minute!

No. Not yet.

OK, you watch quick movements under and around, upwards and downwards, like a crosswords, all you can do is .... nothing. You start drinking, just to keep yourself down to earth even you hate those weak drinks since they are heavily watered. I regret I did not take some stronger stuff with me.

Whatever poison you take, you see them. Sloppy eyes, my god, black and clear, some very narrow, killing filling.

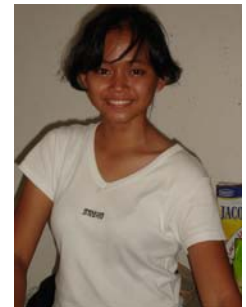
You actually trying not to see them, but, you are surrounded. Can't escape. You even don't go in toilet since you know you must bump in one or two and that means ..... you are lost.

OK. Let's not be carried away. Kicking around won't help.

You take another drink, slowly getting to the state as described at the beginning of this text.

And only now, we can talk easier.

The girls are ..... beautiful.  
No. Not beautiful.  
Three, four, five times more beautiful than beautiful.  
Face! Hair! Eyes! Skin!  
Did I say beautiful?  
No.  
Cute?  
No.  
Lovely?  
No, no.  
Charming?  
Not.  
Killing?  
Yes. That's the word.  
Is it something like sexy maybe?  
No way??!??  
Let's change the subject.



Do you remember front page story some years back, "The man dies in bed with, hmmm, heart problem, hmmm, breaks did not function since.....hmmm"  
Some say it was "speed". But people that knew him well say he never used drugs. Except this one. Dope "Made in China", was blamed but nobody doubted in that for sure.  
You also may remember famous commercial shortly afterwards:

### **"Speed kills" - don't you wear your safety goggles?**

Wear them all the time. Very dark ones are the best. We recommend "Blind Man" style. They are the best protection for heart weakened ones.

Stop with commercials. I hate them anyway, get back to the subject.

Yes, girls are mental refreshment here. Beautiful, cool and natural. Unlike in places like, say, ....., or not to say, ....., some plastic creatures, covered with chemicals, no showering can help. Well, genetics, can't be helped mate!

Some may remember the stories from the Greek mythology about beautiful Elena, and beautiful Penelopa, and yet more beautiful Ephemera, but most of all, famous goddess Aphrodite. Crazy girls but ..... beautiful. Well, how beautiful can be a woman, sometime you get lost trying to catch how beautiful she can be. Like thinking about end of universe. Stupid guys always think about, how, how!  
Well, that Aphrodite looks like a shop keeper compared to those locals.  
Yes, definitely.



As for me, I am resistant. For sure? Unless I look at the .....eyes.  
Please read next paragraph as a very confidential one.  
Once upon a time .....

Confidentially speaking, those eyes are killing, some guys.  
Like in myth about that mythical eyes that turn you into a rock if you look at them?  
At least, with those mythical creatures, you have a chance to stay alive.

My case is.....hopeless.

But since I know the issue, I am looking for dark glasses. "Blind man" style. Any price-good price.

That's because I have this "Chinese eyes" syndrome since always. I was born like that I guess. My poor mother didn't even know who she carries around. Who knows how I got infected.

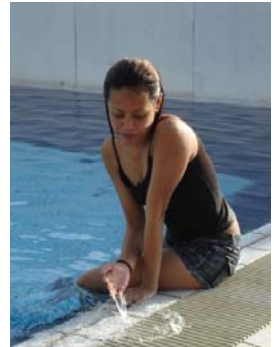
This syndrome of mine manifests like this:

When I look at them, I feel....everything. The skin, the hair, ears, nose, lips, limbs the very depth of her eyes. I sink there and nobody can help me anymore.

Not to forget, the voice that is driving me totally ... crazy. Ching, cjang, piong, wo she, jiandao, hen, hun, ssssss, sm, shhh... wo ai ni, wo siang ni, name it. I love that sound. I do. Like a music. Really. I already learned few sentences from my slow motion book; "Ta hun piow liang", or "Ni yu may lee t yan tzin". What do you say? Hah! Sounds good?

Now, I eat a lot of rice here in hope my eyes will get sloppy as well. A little bit, I am not asking for much. So, I will be able to sneak around not recognised by suspicious locals.

*Love you all.  
Arivederchi,  
ZZZ & Jungle Co.*



## Trip to Mulu



To the Mulu region is about 50km from Miri. You can get there two ways:  
Along two sneaky rivers, Baram and Tutoh, speed boats like local river bus, few transfers and after 8 to 9 hours you're there. Fascinating, lots of crocs but that's not the reason. Only sometimes they eat one of nasty intruders. Generally, you are safe unless "drink and drive" is your favourite moto.  
Another way, small planes, more common for turist, 20 minutes, nice as well.  
Can't compare with river trip but, if you have bunch of kids nagging "when we gonna get there?" you better take plane.  
Of course, there is third way. My favourite way. Through the jungle, on foot or 4WD and good guide, no regrets, thrust me.  
Never been there?  
We took plane.  
Plane was just fine.



*River Baram*

It's cheap trip. Many places are reachable this way, bit of progress, saves time. Apart from water ways, there is no other way to get to kampongs in the jungle.

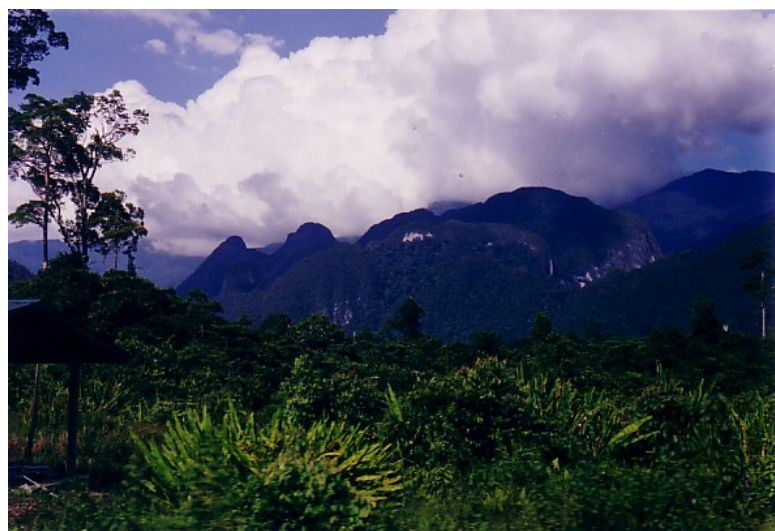


Nice to see whats below. First impression was Baram river. Big and sneaky, I miss its waters on a daily basis.

Can see unusual scenary below: terrain mostly watery, villages here and there, farms, vulcanic hills and among all of that, big river Baram like a yellow snake, slow and lazy. River is permanently muddy because of logging of those remains of Sarawak jungles.



In a distance, we see sharp peaks of the Mulu mountains, so typical for Borneo; wall against those watery planes after which is hidden endless jungle of Indonesian part of borneo, Kalimantan.



What a beauty. You can walk thro, no borders, no patrols, no security fences, no scanners. Just, normal people, been there for thousands of years together.

Luckily, civilisation is making is way to ensure better life for all of us.

You know.

Securitat.

They love people, traditionally.

OK. OK.

Back to humans.

Mulu place is popular cause its numerous caves and peaks, so meanigfull to turists.  
Look cave!

We landed at 9 AM onto the plato, about 2200m ASL.  
Scenary is amazing, we stand and look around for a while.  
OK, we also have mountains but this place is full of spirits. True.

Mulu resort is all in wood. Common building material here. How worm and soft. Set at the bank of the Malinau river, numerous scatered chaleis, all built above the ground, on pillars, interconnected with wooden paths, encircled with steep hills all around. Accross the river, kampong.  
Lost paradise.

I am trying to compare my first impressions here with any of ones in deserted and sad WA, whaaaa...  
Can't find anything.

Huge difference. Like death and life itself.

OK, OK. Say, down under you stay without breath, wherever you go. Here, plantyful of breaths.

Our guide Ipoh is waiting for us, that a custom here.

Modes man, well behaved, you immidiately see he has not lived in "civilised" world, west ans east, he's normal, cool, no complexes, no expectatins, no comparations, you can sense all that, he's man from the jungle, clear like a stream.

We feel we love this place, souroundings, air, people, we happy, kids happy, winging has gone, such a good relaxed filling. I again get that feelin like in my mountains.

Famous "mountain sindrom". All worries, doubts and concerns are disappearing like a mist in the sun.

Strange?

Kids!

They don't argue, don't complain, dont rush, don't "do it first".

We get into our chalet, nice surprise again!

Inside, room reminds you on sketces from fairy tales paper books, kind of stories.

All soft timber, old brown-gold colour, soft, dim light like in favourite Hamilton's photographies, only shedows of time are hidden from our eyes.

But I'll find them one day. When the time comes.



Kids go for swimming, no way to waste time on impressionism.  
Love is in the air, no doubt about.

We mack around until 2PM.  
Make it short.  
Ipoh comes to take us to the caves near by.

Move on. Path thro the jungle, already organised for naive turist.  
Walk about 1 hour, path is OK, timber one, narrow and slippery,  
above the ground, still better than mocking thro the water and  
mud. Cause all jungle here is wet, water, ponds, swamps, tick  
growth bush, lianos, everything.  
Few blood suckers are jumping on us occassionally, hungry  
flock, caterpillars, moskitos and other kinds of habitants are  
weloming us. Trees are huge, can not see the sky but will do.



I ask Ipoh: Ipoh. How you guys go thro  
jungle from kampong to kampong? Or in  
hunt?

- On foot, thro jungle, what else.

- I see.

What to answer. On the end of the day,  
everything is just habit.

Path is slipery, it's raining here several times  
per day, blood suckers paradise.

*One, large, managed to climb the tree pretty  
high. It jumped streight on Memi.*

*He managed to escape her bite by fast jerk  
of his shoulder after what the "black beast"  
hit against the path handrail, so strongly  
that all construction tramed.*

*We stepped on her mercilessly, followed by  
loud applause of the "public".*

OK. Joke.

Don't take me literarly, my God!

Of course, beautiful, large butterflies are  
plentiful, those better student know them  
from geography, isn't it?

No.

It is not.

It is from botany.

Is it?

No. Of course not.  
It is, it is, it is.....  
Huuu. Why this test always reminds me of Australia?  
And one of them, the most popular is: “do not talk to strangers”. He-he.  
I’m happy we no strangers to the jungle.  
OK.  
Back to life.

We are struggling our way thro the jungle. Few times my youngsters managed to slip off the path, streight to deep diches and numerous creeks but we managed to fish them out in one piece.

- Watch your steps! I did not miss to criticise as usually but nobody paid attention. I said: no bad feelings here.



*Mushrooms all around. Nice survival kit if you manage to survive. Well, nobody’s perfect.*

First cave was Deer cave. Big and high.  
Second one is Bat and third, Lang/Cristal cave.  
That one was full of cristals. Specially Chinese ones. Few samples of Chezk crafts as well, hah!



After caves, around 6PM we waited to see flocks of bats.  
And really.

Thousands, no, millions of bats begun to “smoke out” thro openings on the caves, going southwards for dinner.

Amazing streams of sneaking “smoke” was pooring and pooring out. We managed to see about 200000 of them but it was getting dark so we decided to stop with counting them. Too tired.

Back to worm room was a challenge.

It was dark when we reached middle of the road.

Pitch black. Top guy had a torch and we followed, full of hope for “no slipping off shelf”.

Followed with all kind of sounds from the woods, what a music mate!

Beautiful.

Rain is getting stronger and stronger and we are all wet.

To the bone.

Ipoh is smart, he has plastic coat.

Local people get cold if get wet.

They dress on 33 degree C rainy day like we for winter day – 33 degree C.

So we didn’t care, it’s hot for us. So we beleived.

But not for long. We see that in the following stories.

Man is adjustable creature. As long as he’s not westerner.

They never adjust. What a destrucive nature.

Dinner was nice. Dance, dance and more dance. What a nice girls are those locals. HmMMM.



*Cave of broken dreams. One of rarities where you see things nobody else see, shadows, creatures and when you think you found the way out, uppps! The opening is at the edge of a massive steep cliff. Normally, no foreign tourists are brought here, only us, domestics.*

## II

New day brought new adventures.

Trip upstrem river Malinau, also some caves, god knows how many of them. The whole Mulu mountain is like cheese, it seams.

We all get into the canoe, motor driven, of course, and ....

Lots of kampongs along the river, peaceful, tranquility, one can live here for ever.



*Tranquility away from lost crowd*



*Morning wash up. Selamat pagi orang!*

We stopped in few of them to refresh and exchange experiences; make more about next time. By my opinion, this people have very nice features, so different than other Asians, unique I'd say. Big black shiny eyes, sensible lips, smooth skin, all framed with shiny black hair. No doubt, most beautiful people.



Some of them have my favourite brown skin, some are very white, those in mountain regions apparently are less exposed to the sun.

People here live in so called “long houses” that are that: Long, simple, I would say about 20 to 30 families can live in one long house.

Most of man is at work, somewhere, women stay at home, look after kids and make decorations, clothing, souvenirs, tools etc.

More and more young people are leaving those kampongs, heading for towns and cities for search of better life.

Not a news.

Ipoh told me a lot about everything, from the beginning of time to the recent days; head hunters, Brits, Japanese, changes, progress, logging, resettlements, kampongs, name it.

Was he happy?

I'm not sure.

Inspite I know there is no way back, I wonder sometimes how much good we bring to those people. Such a nice and tame island this Borneo.





*Those ladies may be my ancestors as well?*



Trip along river continue. Houses here and there, all along, banks covered with thick greenery right to the water, conical hills all around, like in comics. Crocs are not showing their noses yet but we know they are hungry, hehe. Here and there we collect some food, heaps of souvenirs, girls are getting jewelry, boys are getting blow pipes, spears, bows and arrows, well, boys are boys, you never know who is friend and who is foe down under, hehe. The only transport between those habitats are light long boats. We see them passing by now and then. Everything is quite, peaceful, smooth, we gaze through this tranquility, soundless.

This area is settled by Ibans but there are more than 20 different tribes in this part of Borneo; Iban, Kayan, Kenyah, Penan, Kalabit, Melinau, Bidayu, Bauan, Murut, Saban, Bisaya, Kadazan, Lunbauan, so on. Mostly different language, more or less unique.

For example, “how are you” Kayan will say: Nun dhn gah, Kenyah: Inu dhn gah, Kalabit: Nhn bala i ko, Iban: Nam bri ta?

I like their languages, sound nice and original. Especially when compared to official language here, which is Malay.

For example: “Ikut kiri jika tidak memotong” means: keep left unless overtaking!

But I got used and learned basics quickly.

Helps a lot.



### III

At 11 AM we turned into one batong that ends in the small pond, just below steep side of one hill. Few more tourists from KL are already there, swim, eat, talk. From that rest point we go along steep stairs cut in rock, up hill, to the Clear Water Cave. This cave is 107 km long, about 60 km thro flows this clear water river that ends in the pond mentioned before.

About 500m is accessible without crawling, water is icy cold, fast, clear like tear.

Another Wind cave is really windy, all the time, carries imaginary snow flakes, plenty of stalagmites and stalagtites.

Back to rest point, nice easy lunch, chat, swim, back to oasis.

Rest of the dat fishing, boys were good, we had fish for dinner followed by dance party against local music.

Sasha is icon in this country. For some reason, everybody becomes attached to her, remebers her, can't get of. My beautiful girl, full of love for everybody.





*Temporary skipper with sense for direction in the jungle. I wonder sometimes why they say “like father, like son”? Not at all like that, ha-ha! Everybody felt saver with him inspite his age. well.....*

Next day we explored huge river Tutoh. Malinau goes to Tutoh, Tutoh to Baram, Baram to the sea at Miri. Good way to get here.



Tutoh is fast, deep, huge river, full of rapids and crocs. But our guide knows every passage, kids scared but we safe with him. I haven't seen so much water anywhere else like in Borneo.

Story repeats; hills, kampongs, jungle, plantations of pineapples, peper and other spices, hidden from wild hungry world of gurmans.

Again, we went to one long, deep batang, deep in the jungle, what a trip, what a swim! Sounds of all kind of birds and animals was amazing. Mostly hornbills, not sure for others.

OK, enough!  
Make it short here.  
Nice place this island.



*Group of Buddhists is going back home to Tibet with a story about little skipper that make them free from flying*



*Best way to go home, by my measures!*

## Friends

It is raining again. Heavily. Here, it rains all the time. It's raining "in the winter, it's raining in the summer".

But I like that. Rains. Storm, tunder, lightning, I love Nature, that's my name. Makes me feel real relaxed.

Rains here are not like.... in Australia, for example.

Here, they are heavy but worm and friendly. No wind, no ugly creatures.

Every rain is new experience.

It rains a lot, like a crazy. My most favourite weather, no doubt.

Normally, few meter of water on the streets, here and there, is opportunity for me to swim out.

OK. Don't get me wrong. Oh, you people!

With first drops of rain comes panic: Run!

Tables are moved away, falks running away under the roofs or into houses, everybody is exilerated, shiver, happy to manage to get under the shelter before get wet.

Than, looking couriously, wondering what's gonna happen to me, the only one remaining guest that still sits in the rain waiting for a drink hoplesly.

Is that stranger going to melt?

Or is he going to finish in the hospital with heavy consequences?

Or worse maybe?

It's rain for a God's sake!

Later, I am finding out the reason for this behaviour from the girl on the local fruit market.

"We are not good for rain. We easy get sick just for getting little bit wet. So, we don't take chances. Run as soon as you see it coming. You guys are different".

More latter I find out that we are not that much different. Just takes few years to "get used to". Ask me if I was sitting in the rain on a such day after 2-3 years spent there, ha-ha!

However, can't compare with, for example, down under; well, there, looks like crowd is very sick, have you been there?

It seems, nobody can help them.





*Art crafts shop team at work, with famous ice lemon tea for....me*

One of interesting things I learned quickly is local sindrom, "always together".

Reappearing alone is absolutely unacceptable in this town.

Alone???

Oh, no!

Alarm, excitement, first signs of danger, madness, surprise!

Such thoughts chill to the bone an ordinary citizen when he is faced with such "incident". A l o n e ?

Here nobody goes anywhere alone.

It's a shame!

It's not possible!

Can not be!

Even going into the toilet may be questionable manner.

But they are open minded people and they do not hesitate to ask:

"Where are your friends? Where are your friends?"

Or,

"Are you alone? Are you alone?"

They look behind you to see if any late follower is there, to quench their enormous fear that you may be alone.

Of course, I am exception, lonely stranger, so, I go alone and they get used to it quickly.

And so goes on.

Say, I keep moving around across the shop floor, intentionally, slowly, like a praying wolf, trying to approach some of shop girls for a chat, apparently no attention at all. They, of course, move away, hiding behind shelves. I sneak from another side and ambush them suddenly, just like that. Girl gets frozen for a nick of time, schocked, with wide open eyes and than squeek! ieeeeiieiii!

She runs back confused to her near by friend for comfort and protection from this crazy stranger.

We look at each other for a few seconds and .....we all burst into laud laughter.

- But where are your friends? comes inevitable question that no state of mind can prevent.

Oh man. I didn't play this game since I lef my dear country.

You can't have this kind of fun in higly developed "lucky countries" of a lonely people where everybody is afraid of everybody.

So, yes.

I feel at home here, indeed.



I keep going around.  
I get into the shop to buy shoes; shop girl comes all worried:  
"Where are your friends?"  
Sometimes I look in my pocket for one or two, no way!

I'm trying to buy newspaper:  
"Where are your friends?"

At hairdresser:  
"Where are your friends?" Are you alone? "Where are your friends?"  
In bars, discos, restaurants, the same.

Luckily, I actually do have a very good friend **who joins me occasionally**,  
Nils. So he takes me out of trouble.  
I improved my status. Otherwise.....  
Everything has limits.



*Happy families: If you like real domestic food, come to Lutong... mmmm...*



One day I went to old town to look for a massage place, I've heard there is one serious and good, God knows if you can thrust it.

In a building just across Labuan pub. Match-box type of building as most of them are in old town Miri. Building contains numerous small business, shops, offices, dentist, hairdressers, flats, name it. However, if you don't know which door and which floor it is located, you can not find it easy. No titles, or hardly.

One dark and gray place. But full of life. On top floors live young people that normally work in shops below. Buildings look neglected, dirty, black striped outside from such frequent rains and lack of funds for renovations. But still, some interesting details are scattered here and there, nice colors and frames. Certainly more image than in well "organised", idiotic architecture of depressive western towns, for example like in... well, not nice to mention here those regimes where recent architectural developments are best representation of stupidity, nihilism and destruction. Lucky countries, of course.



Well, I walked in one of those stairways in attempt to find who I am looking for: lady girl I met in Cheery Berries, top massager, no hanky panky ones. Well, not everybody believe this but that's OK. I certainly can not accept male massaur, I'm conservative, from "not lucky country".  
. Nothing without girls, what can I do, it's genetic.

I climbed up to the first floor, all locked.  
Second floor, the same.  
Third floor I see one door open little bit.  
Silence.

I come closer and cracked door open. Large space partitioned in smaller rooms.  
Hmmm. Doesn't look like massage saloon but that can be cheaty. Only few shops look like what it suppose to be.  
- Hello! I break the silance.

Nothing.

Again. Hello?

Nothing.

I walked a bit along improvised corridor. On left, thro half open door I can see pair of nacked legs on the floor.  
Beautiful, smooth legs, just to above knees. Girl.

- Ahh, so here it is! I claimed.

What else can mean pair of nice, relaxed legs on the floor except massage place.

- Nice! I found it!

I enter room freely, observe and...



On the floor, three more pairs of beautiful legs, together with bilonging bodies, sleeping on the floor, covered with towels, from breast to just above knees, I guess not to catch cold, rains are often here. Beautiful legs, more beautiful black hairs, normally tied like in a tail, this time untied, spread all over the pillows, relaxed, fascinating view.

Fourth, even more beautiful figure, is having a refresment bath in the plastic tab, just a half, I mean upper half, in front of the window, looking outwards, probably not to miss potential event on the street.

Huuuuu!

I'm confused for the second with such a beauty but than I pulled out, regretfully, swiftly and quietly, not to disturb this isconic erotic scene that makes man shiver like flag on the wind.

I feel uncomfortable to interupt their private moments, what can I do? I just came for massage.

Girls were Indonesians, temporary workers, kind that live in such places, cheap labour in search for existance in country that have bit better earnings per head than one they come from.

They didn't notice me or didn't want to. That's normal. Relations man-women is human here. Unlike in "developed" cultures called sick christian religious society where talking to the oposite sex leads to capital punishment or at least herassment.

Back in the corridor I bumped into two young man, about 17-18 years old, can not be sure about it, also Indonesians. One holds baby, asked me kindly who I am looking for.

- Masage sallon, I said.

In broken english he explained me that place is next door, no problem to find.

We talk for awhile, they all work in restaurant below, this accomodation is part of the package, baby is not his, it is of his sister, one of the sleeping girls in the next room.

I'm leaving, we do greetings and on the end of it I get hit again with that unavoidable question, full of surprises and worries:

But, where are your friends?



*View: I like reading paper through the window...*



*Most beautiful: Some of my young friends*



*Papaya, not kind of friends but very tasty fruit all around*

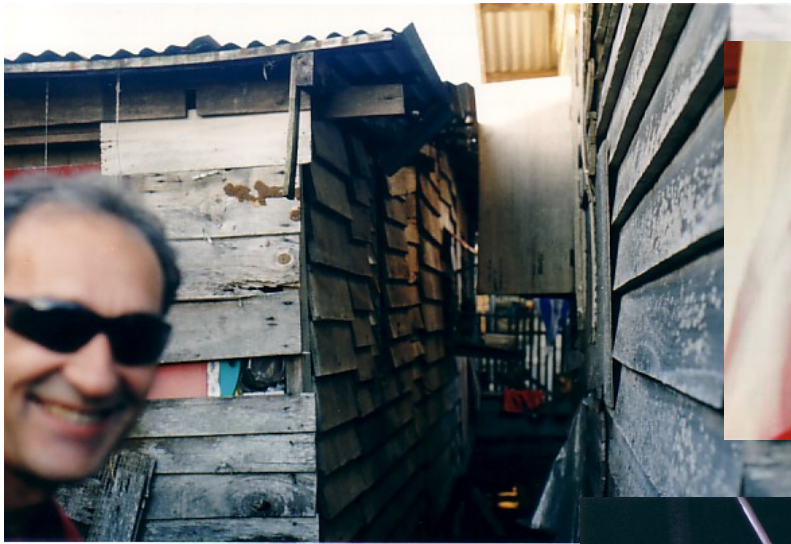


*Welcome team*



*Ha, ha, ha...look at him!*





*Dark glasses model "Blind Man"*



### *Family Friends*







*End after good party of chess, sport! Our energetic team in action.*

## *Shop Girls*

Shop girls are just... beautiful. Most of them. Not very rich but happy by nature, funny and full of fear of foreigners. Who knows what have happened to them in the past.

I love all of them and I often go to see them. There are so many shops in town; one can spend years going around, no way to be bored. They are friendly, they like to talk to strangers, I guess because we are different. We also talk a lot compared to locals; I guess that's normal, of course. Isn't it?

As for my case, common story goes like this:

Assume, you enter the shop and.... shop girls are all on alert Suddenly.

They begin to move around in small circles, kind of thinking to approach you but maybe not. From case to case. Hesitation, curiosity, itchy, you feel they want to touch you, are you real stranger, with big head, eyes, nose.

If I conclude they are OK, I approach one of them. With smile. Other girls move away some distance, the victim is standing alone in front of me, bit confused.

She is happy, with cute smile, shaking her body from leg to leg, little bit nervous, you know, like, just before exam.

I assume they must think something like "This one is crazy and funny". Have a big nose.

This extremity seems very funny to locals, I think.

I wave my hand, tell them all something like, hi, how are you?

And.... laughing and giggling commences.

They are all happy. I tell her few nice words and girl is lost. She did not used to it, that's why.

- Can I touch you hair? I ask lifting my hand towards her head.

Aaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhh is long, beginning from low to very high pitch cry, eyes looking left and right for friend's support and advice.

She falls into mixture of amazement, happiness, fear, pleasure; sometimes I think she has partial contusion.



I try to come closer but she moves backwards. I move on, she moves backwards. Again and again. I don't give up and.... hide and seek between shelves starts.

Now, all two or three, whatever girls are around, run away, hiding behind shelves, peeking cheeky to see if I am coming.

Of course, I am coming with hands lifted in front of me like Frankenstein. Ready to eat little brown girls behind.

Now, screams are higher and higher, footsteps all around the shop, few customers raise their heads to see the chase show.

I stop.

Can't go too far, it's a shop. I try another tactics.

Now, I get par of shoes from the shelf close by and ask kindly:

- Excuse me, can I try this shoes please.

Girls stay put for while looking each other, silently questioning which one is going to be sacrificed. Quickly, nodding and mimicking, one of the brave sacrificial lambs comes closer. She has that cute smile, pearls like line of beautiful teeth, bit shy, bit reddish, very, very nice appearance indeed.

In nick of time, one thought flashes thought my never sleeping sarcastic mind: My God! How could I spend so much time down under among those buffalo shaped creatures? Am I forgetting how people look like? But this nasty chill evaporates away in a fraction of a second in front of this beauty.

- OK, can I try those?

She takes this slowly; she has to, on the end of the day, that's her job.

- What size? She asks with light tone.

- 43.

- 43?

- OK, say, 12.

- 12? Don't have.

- You don't have? How do you know? Are you sure?

- Don't have, confirms she shaking her little head.

- Pity.

- What about those ones? I ask taking other white pair of ugly shoes.

- Don't have that number. You too big leg.

- I stay put for few seconds looking into her eyes, deep, deep like I discovered something unusual.

Girl gets little bit nervous again,

- What, what? She asks worried.

With smile I ask:

- Can I touch your lips please? Just once, you have beautiful lips.

Surprise is huge, she is finished, she looks around for help,

- No, no! Can not!



Her face gets more red, she is mandeling her little hands, moving her little shoulders up and down, she's shy but she likes compliment and her happiness is obvious.  
I learnt by time, those girls don't get many compliments those days, critics, maybe, but compliments? No way. That's normal among all of us among our own, us, I guess.

Now, girl is happy and little bit relaxed, "he no bite", we start talking this and that.  
All other girls are still on distance, set up comfortably to watch potential love story, what else can be? That's the only thing stranger and local women can be involved about, if in conversation. At least, first thoughts definitely.  
I question her about bits and pieces in the shop, few nice words here and there, she loves me already but she knows she can't have me. Unless I offer her a marriage. Yes. Otherwise, she is finished.  
I tell her I am here temporary and can not stay forever in this nice place, she understands, they all know that, common knowledge in Miri.  
Than she starts questioning me, one of the most common question is inevitable:

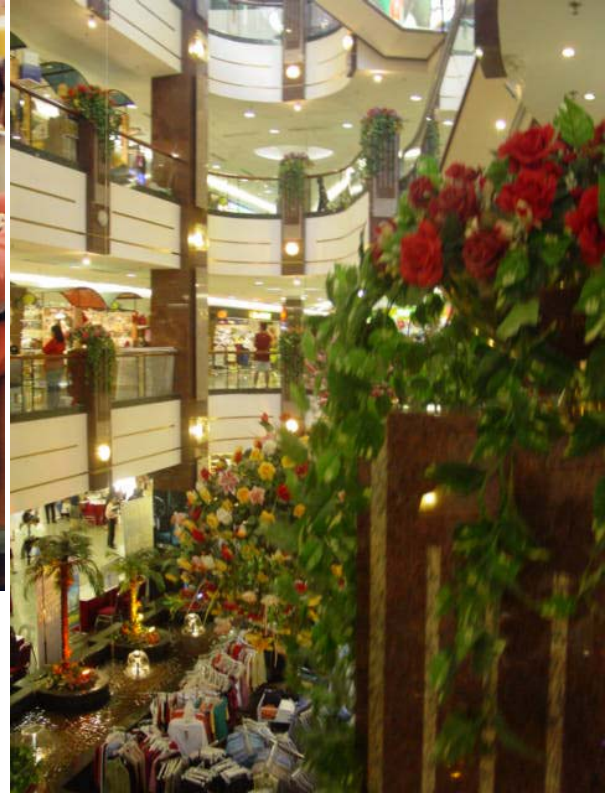
- Are you alone?
- Yes, I am always alone. I was born like that. She is not sure what that means since second thoughts are not common in this environment.
  
- You married?
- No, I lie.
- Don't want to kill her on spot. It is not fair; she's too young for that kind of early disappointment.
- Where are your friends?
- I no friends, I stranger, I accept her style.
- You work here?
- Yes I work here.
- Shell?
- Yes, Shell.
- How long?
- Not sure, 4-5 years maybe, maybe more, depending if I get married here or not.
- She laughs looking occasionally at her friends that carefully follow every my move.
- Since she has finished her conversation, I take over.



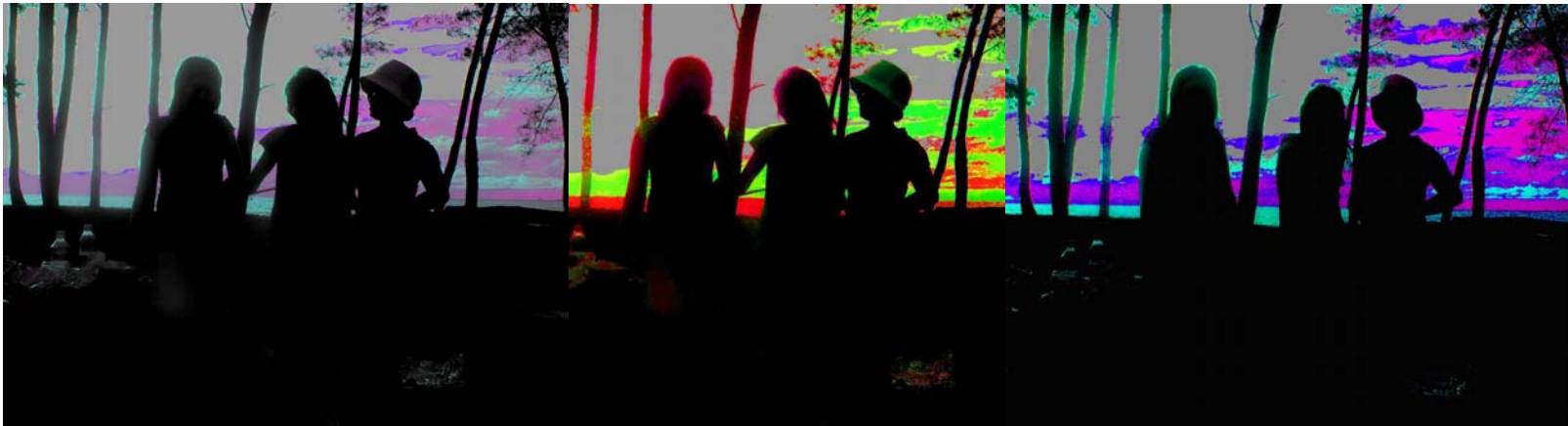
- You have beautiful eyes, really. And lips.  
She is loosing her breath again, can't say nothing,  
just looking around towards her friends, they are  
happy as well, clapping quietly their hands in  
expectation of the best part.  
Even shop manager, somewhere in a distant corner  
of shop gets smile across, he knows what we are  
talking about. I guess, everybody thinks the same;  
what else man and woman can talk about?

- What are you doing tonight, I go ahead.  
- Go home. Sleep.  
- Sleep so early, come on. Let's go for drink  
somewhere, I provoke her.  
- Can not. Work tomorrow.  
- OK, I work tomorrow from 6, you from 10, can  
sleep enough.  
- Can not. Must go home.  
She is lowering her tone, she would like to go, she  
dreams about so many, many things for so long, she  
has opportunity to taste bit of that but.....can not.  
Because she knows, in this town strangers come,  
love them, and one day, they are gone. Forever.  
Not fair.  
Let's talk about something else.





*Fashion show in Empryal*



## *Permejaya Impact*

But days are not bright for all of us in Miri. For some yes, for some.....

One dark and quite night, just before the rain, a shop girl from shop in Imperial where I used to buy some T shirts asked me if I can give her a lift home. She was late, she missed the bus, too much for taxi. OK, I said. I'm driving around anyway, why not. Her name is Jamila, she lives in Permejaya, at her mother's; by the way, mother looks after her kids.



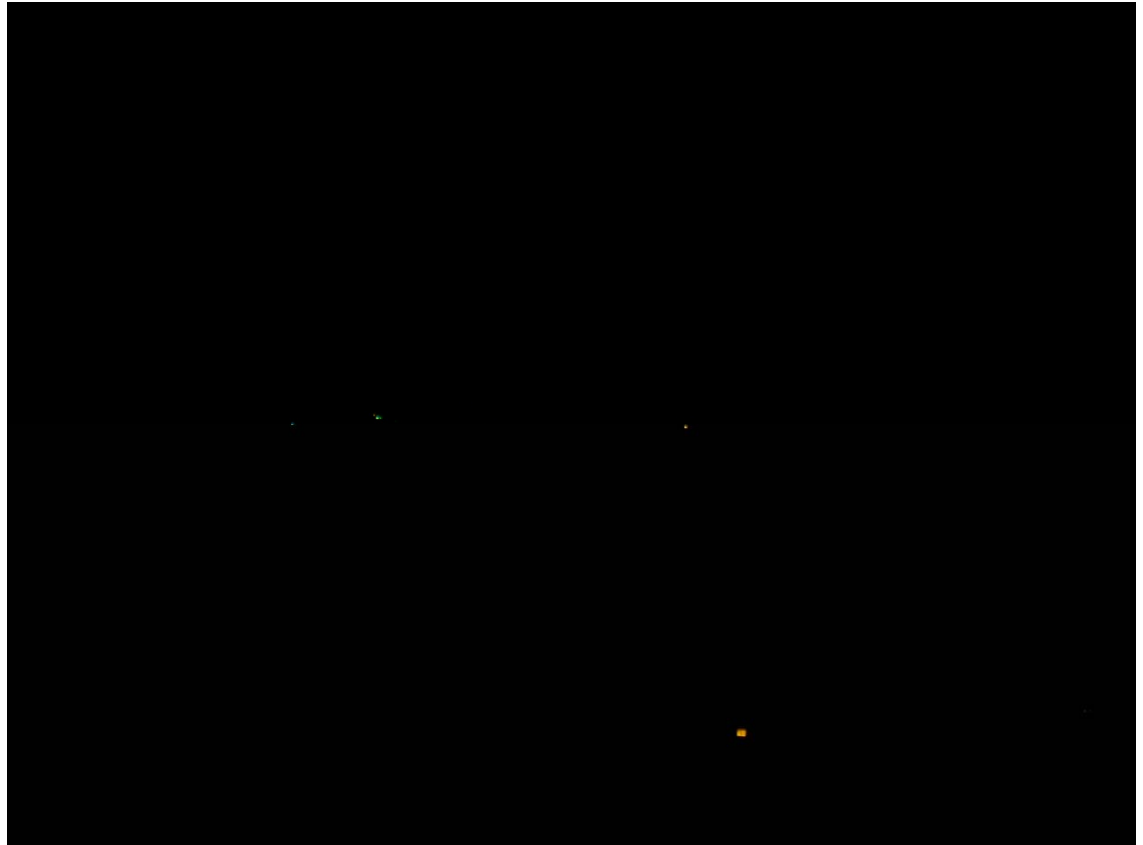
*Preparing for fight: Rooster games are popular as long as it is not for public. I don't like it but at some other hidden places you can meet really interesting crowd.*

We left Miri after 10 PM. At Pujut 7 round about we turned right, then left then right, then straight, then left... Permejaya!

First streets looked OK, obviously newcomers with income. I've been here once before. Big blocks, bearable architecture, only.

More we go, cheaper it gets. Slowly, we are diving out into the darkness, nowhere nobody, God knows where we are now, which area is this, huuuh!. For little while and now we are floating through some empty wetlands around, very, very dark, pitch black night here. Maybe 20 minutes or so later I finally see some distant faint lights, must be that Permejaya, I hope, just. Deep, deep suburbia, I think in myself; bit worried how I'm gonna go back. We are getting closer to that settlement, looks like lost world to me. We turn on right in one long street; nothing on right side, long houses on another. Like a camp. Two stories, like boxes faceless buildings lined up one after another, like dominos, no greenery, as far as you can not see.

-Here we are, she said.  
We turned into one lane  
in between those boxes.  
-No it is a wrong street.  
Sorry.  
How can you tell when  
they are all the same? Go  
back. Next one.  
One way?  
It doesn't matter anyway.  
First match box, second,  
third....  
Of course, I'm already  
lost. I have no idea where  
I'm driving; everything's  
the same, little bit of road  
in front of my lights,  
that's all I see.  
Blackness and dusty  
road.  
My memory flashes back  
thro similar night trip  
from Golden Sands on  
the Black Sea back to my  
civilisation. But that was ages ago!? HUUU!  
Not sure how much time we were roaming around.



*Darkness in Permejaya*

God knows how, but she finally recognised something, maybe washing line, or broken window, or whatever I couldn't see.  
- Stop here. She said. My cousin lives there, I need to ask her something.  
She moved out into the night. Like a ghost, even her shadow was too scared to appear and follow.  
OK, I wait.

I have a smoke, looked around. Darkness all over. Except in this street; I keep my head lights on otherwise will be total and painful blindness. I look around trying to spot anything that makes life; iconic instinct of man to know where he is.  
Nothing. Very soon seconds seems like hours.  
I begin to feel v e r y uncomfortable; only me with my screaming head lights in the middle of the darkness and still rumbling engine, disturbing iconic peace of night and sleeping habitants in the surrounding boxes.  
It's too much. I can't stand that razor sharp feeling on my spine; I switch of engine and lights.  
HUUU! So. Now I'm invisible. Good. I don't feel like a prey in the limelight.  
Darkness. Am I afraid of darkness?  
Hm, certainly I don't enjoy it. At least, nobody can see me now, not sure who or what but, fine.  
Fine... for very short time.  
Minute later I am switching my radio off as well. In this unbearable blackness any sound is like a thunder to my ears.  
What a creature is human. All eyes and ears but in this case only ears is item I can count on.  
So. Back to square one.

My eyes are getting used to, my ears are getting wolf like sensitive, I can hear my brain calculating situation at speed of 2xlight one, good! First signs of life are coming back. Ha-ha!

Self repaired one.

Than, one window, one curtain moved little bit; very tiny bit. Against crack of light I think I see older women, peeks thro the window. I think older but in the state of high tension all versions of imagination are possible, I don't guarantee who or what was that.

She must be curious; who dares to come here at this time of the night?

Probably just curiosity. I've been forgiven, obviously.

Few miniature shadows sneaked along the match boxes, disappeared.

I moved my concentration from shadows and gaze into the dark in front of me. Like in the movies.

Finally my eyes get something alive. Down the street faint light; Fire.

Dying fire.

Seems like three or four guys sit around the fire, dreaming about the time, still. More for fire lights than for something else. As fire burns out slowly, their silhouettes are melting into the dark background. Maybe they are just shadows, or maybe my eyes are getting tired, don't know.

Good. Fire is good friend in no time. Keep it like that for now.



Some stray dog moved under near-by broken truck, hungry.

Again silencio.

Rusty door squeaked somewhere.

OK.

Enough is enough. I don't think she's comino back. Hope she's alive. Now, I'm ready to face my shadows and try to move back.

But... There, she is coming back. I put positon lightes on. Surprise as well! She is with her cousin, follows her, kind of shy, yes and no, not sure, looks all hopes are gone long time ago. If ever had one.

Cousin is wrapped in silky house dress-pyjama-running-suit-anything, hard to say. Large flowers over, I had feeling, good for all occasions.

Dark face, deep eyes, obviously not from good life, she looked like street girl. Exhausted and tired, age, I'd say 38? 40?

- Can my cousin come with us? Asked Jamila.

I think I've got the situation right, my sixth sense is very accurate, mostly.

- Listen, I really would like to help but it's bit late. Can we go as planned if not a problem. Please give her this for taxi if she has to go anywhere, lot easier.

Normally I don't behave like this but I don't want to get myself into those sad life stories. Not tonight.

Cousin does not show any signs, I think she is sad. I felt bad for her cause I know her story. We all know, actually She wraps her silky dress again and they talk shortly, quietly.

We go, cousin looks after our car, standing still in the darkness, like a statue, gazing in empty.

Night was still dark and hot. No lights around, shadows only and fires.

We were quite now.



I passed thro few more streets, drank Iban couple that was chasing each other under the old track, peeking eyes were blinking against my head lights.

Famous Permejaya. Far, dark world of poor, threshold for new generations from deep jungle habitats where happiness had been present. But they are the ones that will one day replace all intellectual and rhetorical chewing gums. On contrary to famous omurikan intellectuals and ideologist with no proper education but can prove we are all in accordance to ISO standards and therefore we can screw anyone and anybody as long as you can get a dollar or two.

We drive deeper and deeper into the lost suburb. Streets were smaller and smaller, narrow, rough, darker. I wandered for awhile if she has habitat at all.

Finally, this is the one!

Turn there, turn here.

- That house there.

It was not easy to detect which is "house there". At the opposite end of street, car, head lights went on.

House was.... just typical.

From the next house someone peeked thro the window.

Than, that someone came out, looking for something, probably nothing.

My companion went to her. Neighbour was actually key keeper.

Jamila went into the house to pick up some things, few minutes and here she's back.

I'm happy didn't take too long.

We go back; she wants to go stop over to her mother to pick up some things again.

OK, no probs.

Way back was easier. relaxed.

I asked her: Do you think you maybe miss-judged me Jamyla?

- Sorry. I know. But I just wanted to help.

- All fine girl. No hard feelings from me, I'm not stranger, I understand things. You're the man!

We laugh finally.

And that she told me her cousin's story:

- No job, no family, lives here and there, lives on what she catches. Kids away who knows where, Her days are gone but, I don't know for how long she can last. I help as much as I can but it is not very much.

She asked me about my family. My happy family. I feel guilty, I can't say much about my happy family and my beautiful country cause she couldn't believe that. I keep it simple.

Than she tells story about her family. Part of. She is ashamed to tell everything. But I know all those thinks in between.

Her story: has got 3 children, small. Apparently with her parents, good.

Kayan, married to Muslim. He finds new girl, beats this one badly, she is not to complain. Does not want to see her around. That is easy cake since women has no much rights around. When family breaks, girl gets kicked out, with or without children, depending on case. Eventually, if she finds work, some money has to be given to father, for drinks and small expenses. Just in case, "poor guy".

In those areas it is great sin to leave "poor" husband in the house with his lover. Without being able to support him well.



*Kalabit: grandmother with basket for white pepper collection*

- How much money you make, she asks me.
- Don't want to talk about that, I say. What about you?
- We girls in shops earn very little. I have 450 ringgets per months. Maximum is 500. I pay 300 for room, plus expenses, children, nothing left. Some of shop girls sell themselves. They have to.

I think for a moment.

You know: When one is in the darkness, fear rules the man.

True love is rare those days, isn't it.



*Old man and kids*





100°C



## Karaoke Bars

Most popular places for fun and relax in late night hours are.....karaoke bars. There are tenths of them, scatered all over the town and suburbs, not very glossy and obvious but well known to most of local, it's part of the culture that is not for everybody.

Each and every of those bars is unique story for itself, and for me, now, seems all will be quite without them. One of them is:

### *Rupan Bar*



*Mata Hari (Sun or Eye of day) take it easy place*

Me and Nils climbed narrow, steep dark stairs, common state of stairs. We found ourselves in front of closed worn door, behind.....?

Music!

Loud.

Nils rushed in, me follow.

Inside, dark, very dark, darkness more than usual.

Few dim lamps at the stage, smoke all over the place, oh yes!

Good one.

In Miri you can smoke anywhere. Unlike in, say, Australia where everybody is honest and healthy, especially, mentally when comes to smoking and other ethnic assistance, internationally.

Go back to smoke; here we smoke non-stop.

No humanitarian add considered.

My eyes get laid on the dancing girls first.

Who else?

Normal attraction, everything is dark anyway, except the stage.

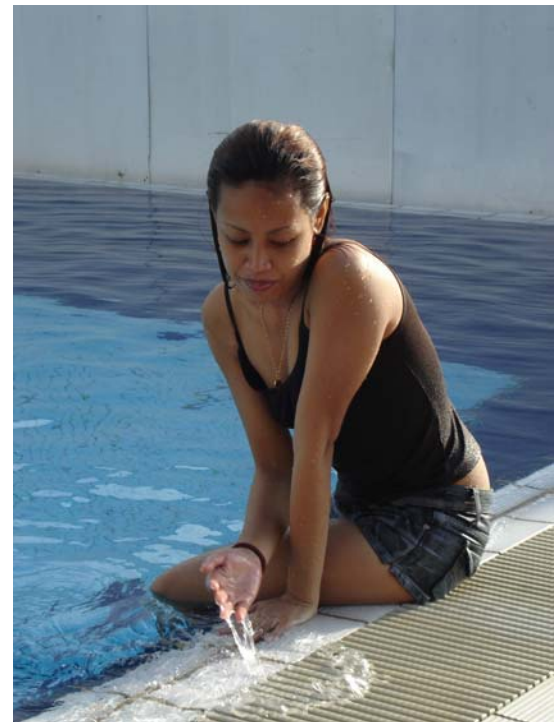
Just to get used to before exploring numerous male faces that are here for the same reason, more or less.

You see, here you can scan anyone's face without danger to be asserted with, "what are you staring to?"

Or, "Why you look at me, why you don't look at me"?

Unlike in developed, "cultured" societies where everybody gets brave for weekend by breaking someone's head.

But let's not to spoil this story.



This time there are five singers-dancers, all like.....

Unbeivable scinery!

Most beautiful girls that one can rarely see in such a number.

Tall, slimm, huuu.

High, 20cm heels, regardless, such beauties.

*Many western superstars, with their long time ago deviant mind and character 'cause of such honest and good education and, of course, quality nutrition (you do not have to understand), will be so envious on them if they have human properties in themselves but.....lets not spoil this text with slime.*



Deep, soft boots made of green leather, just to above knees than nacked flesh up to the black tiny, again, leather shorts, than, flesh, white and smooth up to white tiny, well filled, blouse up to the neck, no sleeves and than.....hair. long and black like a starless night itself, streight and beautiful like in any other girl in other parts of the world. And those eyes, black like night as well, dark smooth skin and than such a beautiful faces with that small “Miki” nose that makes them so envious to us Europeans.

I tell them:

- Why? You are beautiful, “jangan bodoh”, your nose is perfect, I like it a lot.

Doesn't help.

They want to be blond, tall, big eyes, big nose, big ears, huuuuuu!

As they say, “the grass is always greener accros the fence”.

Me and my big nose have discovered that this is right place for us. Any girl in the vicinity can't resist it. Right for my nose. Some ask, some not, they can't control themselves.

- Can I grab it, can I touch it?

- Of course. I can't say no to girls.

I think my nose is bigger now than before. So many times.....oooh!

Well, all is well and nice here. I love this simple world as is, everybody is here, calm and equal, not pissed off and full of themselves like „we are the best on the west, oh, lucky country, oh, oh, oh.

*But lets not spoil this text with other side of the world.*

Girls I'm talking about are Indon. Bindung, Java. Source of nice looking girls that have that talent for dancing and singing. Few places in Miri have this kind of bend. Four or five. Beside this one, Jaka Tarub, Mata Hari (sun), Guns&Roses, Sandakan, Old Miri..... so.

But the bends are allways good. Those places make good business this way, there's allways customers, of course.

Girls are pretty, friendly, appetite rising, they mostly sing songs about love, dreams, one by one has a turn, nice alt, famous triplets, singing flow easy as water, you can see they like what they do.

Girls dance and shake and spin like wind, watching them is true holiday for eyes.

No? Oh yes.

Band is accompanied with single musician, programmable keyboard, good, organised, he is the band leader, happy man. He also take care about girls, up to the extend, not to get lost with the stranger. Whatever, there is no way anybody complains or criticises anything. All happy.

Show starts slowly, around 9 o'clock, still quite in the office.

With the first customers it winds up. Girls are not shy, they know the job, begin to pick up customers, one by one, big, small, old, young, shy, open, "let's dance"!

I am not a good figure for dance but couldn't say no. Of course not. You have to dance only once with one of them and that you can't stop. Such lightness, smell, touch.....

So we all dance in rounds since only five girls are there but nobody is getting possessive or angry. It's just a fun. No touching please. Girls are muslims by default so, limits apply.

During the breaks each one gets with the customers, preferably once that can pay drinks. They drink rhabina only, the most expensive rhabina I've ever seen, 0.05 l glass costs 20 ringgits, about 7 dollars. They drink quickly and very few locals can have them sit for their table for more than one break.

Sorry mate!

Here is where we expats come. They know we can pay drinks all night long without going bankrupt.

So, if you like one of them more than recommended by your GP, make sure you have a job. Expat job.

You can have the most beautiful girl all the time.

I'll tell you this. That's not difficult at all; to like at least one of them.

I know some friends of mine that beat the record. 32 drinks for night. Short night.

OK. OK. Once, I was very close to be the one but only once. Luckily I don't drink so .....

Normally, that's easy set-up. Music goes, you and your chosen one hold hands, look each other into the eyes, romance is complete.

Now, me and my amigo sit for one table, look around.

All those places are very simple equipped, few tables, few chairs, pure iron stuff, concrete floors, dirty walls with, sometimes imitation of kind of painting, DJ's cabin in a corner.

Few bars are nicer, softer, few very rough. But who cares, nobody stares in furniture neither comes for such a reason.

Customers, mostly Chinese, seldom Malays, no ladies, you don't bring them here, it is men's world by default.

Men look rough, simple, dangerous, tacky but again, nobody pays attention to that. In fact, just ordinary people, of far more civilised manners than those ones in "civilised" cultures.

Customers normally drink a lot, Tiger beer, again, nobody gets pissed off or loud, or screaming, or, or, or.

Unlike, say, in Australia, here there are no bouncers or securities or cameras or police on horses, cars, bikes, or queues or, or, or. Their "good" character is well known, traditionally. Especially on weekends.

Ma que?.

Here we not safe so we can go anywhere without police escort.

Ha, ha, ha, ha!

OK. Back to the reality.



Rupan is simple but have got a dance podium with wall mirrors around it. So all dancers can see what they are made of. Girls specially like to see themselves in there, use it to practice some particular movements like in belly dancers, he-he.

Girls.

According to Nils, there are about 100 karaoke bars in this town. Hard to find unless you become very familiar with local population. No displays, no commercials, you just have to get out there. They are hidden on first floor of those square buildings where you can get only by mentioned narrow stairs.

Daytime outdoor image of those buildings is completely differen; all kind of small businesses exist next door. Shops, restorans, agencies, services, lawyers, doctors, unrecognisable environment completelly.

Many times in first days I couldn't recognise place from the last night.

And when the night comes and most of falks shut the doors, karaoke bars come to life. After 10 usually.

Most of working or dancing girls live on the second floor, above the bar, provided accomodation, sleep by day, work by night, from 9PM to 3-4 AM, depends on day. All kind of; Iban, Kayan, Malenau, name it.

Chinese are rarity. They are mainly well situated, no need to do this kind of low paid work.



*Unforgettable Jaka Tarub bar, directly from Bindung, Java*

As we set, in nick of time two of girls arrived:

- What you drink want? With smiles, from ear to ear.

They are nice, cute, happy they were quick to reach us first, it is very likely they'll get drink and 5 ringgets bonus that goes with every drink they order.

They bring our drinks, sit accross table, looking at us with smile like alredy in love.

Few minutes latter question comes:

Can I have one drink please? Just one.

Saying that with finger lifted bit up just to make sure she is talking about one drink only.

Make it clear. We couldn say no for anything on this world.

Tigar for us, domestic brand very popular, rabina for them. Beer cost 5 rinngets, rabina 25 in this place.

Nice business, I said.

Girls can earn 300-600 ringets per months, drink bonus is significant extra income for them. There is large family somewhere there in Indonesia awaiting for daughter to bring some survival *duit*.

Now we sit, we look at each other, love is in the air, such a happiness.

I start story with my broken Malay, they happy we can talk a bit instead of sitting and gazing hoplesly.

They like what they maybe miss back at home town, compliments.

I do not hesitate to tell them what I think, I tell them they are beautiful and I'd like to kiss them so much. This is followed laughter and *tenggolan*, they like it, they happy.

I really love them for that, so sincere, where you can find that those days?

In Australia?

Ha, ha!

Brake is over, girls are going back, picking up customers for dance. One very old man, regular customer here, is number one. He dances all the time but he is really good dancer; anyway all locals are good. Skeleton issue I recon.

*Muze* is going non-stop, girls are changing in singing, it's worm, soft, floating.

We also get there, can't resist. Few dances than leave her to some other guys, we are not greedy here.

Break again, DJ' half an hour, local karaoke singers take round.

Nils is hot now, he talks to his simpaty, he does not speak Malay, she does not speak English but sometimes you don't need words, do you?

He learned there is no more to expect here than drinks and flerts but all happy. Maybe that counts more than "another day, another dollar"?

Love?

Happens as well, of course.

But that is for another romantic chapter: *A touch of sacred night*.

### De Vogue Bar

More often, we move away to another place, one by one. Sometimes 7-8 bars for night. It's colourful, always on the move, always interesting.

Our most popular place for awhile was De Vogue.

De Vogue is very popular, just karaoke bar but with very good music, staff, friends. Lots of TV's, huge screen, pictures, pool, right place for the beginning. Girls were specially nice. Mostly Iban, but best ones.

Linda, Tracy, Jenny, Sandy, Lucy, Jessy, we become so familiar that I felt there more at home than at my own town, indeed.

They way they were cute, so well dressed and smart, made them everyones pet.

When we weren't there, of course.

Our love for each other quickly become a common knowledge in the area.

Linda was my best friend. I never went beyond the line but we were so close....

Just if I wanted to marry her.

But of course I couldn't. And plus, so many girls that I liked there.

Could have been married several times if I am not what I am.

But I always tell every girl:

Darling. I am man for one night only. All the rest is a metter of good luck.

So, no cheating but I did get well with most of them. As time went on and they learned who really I am, they felt safe and attached.



OK. Not that safe. There's always one danger with me if you are cute girl, ha-ha.  
Well, I survived. My torture never stops.

But my friend enjoyed all freedom of this world.  
He immediately fell in love with Jessie, I knew this is his end.  
Was it expensive trip?  
Nerves, of course.  
I'm crazy but he is ..... no, no.  
He stands everything with dignity. And DVD.  
That Miri would never have a such image to me if Nils wasn't there.  
Brave and persistent. I regret I wasn't that good drinker like him.

Lovely Jessie. You should see her eyes!  
This material is classified and we skip to later stage.

Music was loud and apart from few poor singers, enjoyable. Lots of Chinese popular songs but latest stuff as well.  
As I mentioned before, syndrome of deafness, this people, will remain secret for me. Nobody ever mentioned music is too loud except us. In another hand, they all can communicate easily without "what and what".  
We hardly can talk.  
What a fine and selective hearing those people have.



I met few more girls there. Every new girl in the bar was dedicating few first nights to me. Kissing to the bone, I was ashamed sometimes from locals. They never do that. Guess, domestic environment. I wouldn't dare to do that back home.

So sweet lips and soft shoulders, my God.  
Was I a tester?  
They suppose to kiss boss first?  
Lucy and Ann are coming for drinks, I cuddle their hair, shoulders, tummy.  
We drink, sing and dance in a darkness below the Picasso painting, "should I stay or should I go".

*Lets jump in with Freud.*

*Poor Freud did not have sense for music so he was not able to discover that phenomena in us Serbs and Borneans. He was more concentrated on sex and brain, I guess that was prohibited at the time. You're never sure with those kind of western experts, something was always forbidden to them so now they want to export those prohibition down to the south of the planet.*

Common for all people of Miri is singing.  
Everybody sings a song occasionally, so normal here but... not for us Europeans. We shy.  
They couldn't understand why?  
I think they were thinking we are retarded or so, mad maybe.  
Songs are available in whole range, from 60s to 90s. Maybe more, hard to say.  
All kind of people, all kind of music.

Figuratively speaking only, singing can be sometimes very amusing.

A fat gangster that just beheded his oponet somewhere in darkness of town, just finished "love story", so passionately, you would nevre doub such temper.

Than comes girl without anything common with music and screams for awhile.

Pain is high but we politely smile.

She's cute.

Next is graduate, lelaki, he sings Saya cinta padamu (I love you).

Struggles but manages to get alive.

All falks like him, he's brave.

Coal laborer is presenting "Yesterday", does not drink while singing, he is normal.

Another figure is coming back, still handblooded, from well done job somewhere in the dark and he starts famous son "Eyes of my mother".

Sings very passionately.

And days go by.

Beautiful life.

We drink Tigar beer and talk.

Where now? Maligai, Monte Carlo?

"No, no, First we go Philipino than shortly in Spider for party of pool.

Little bit early. Lets go to Balcony for awhile.

"OK.

One, two, three, four.... lets go!



## 9 - Kuala Belait

Just across river Baram is border between Sarawak and Brunei.

Simple installation, no kiosks, no shops, no restaurants, dogs and massive police apparatus with those scary eyes. Unlike in those highly civilised countries where things are highly organised and regulated by regulations including procedure for safe, 6 hours long border crossing. Certainly, you can find all kind of scams there. Not to miss terrorists that are waiting behind every corner or under the bed with weapons of masssss destruction.....

As old people say, you can't make pie out of crap.

But lets not spoil this tranquillity with the those highly developed countries that have everything except education and human habits

Here, all quite and in order, no strict rules, have papers, no have papers, all OK, we are still people.

First town after crossing is Kuala Belait, about 15 km drive. Terrain is flat, watery, all lush green jungle, lots of animals, monkeys jumping across the road.

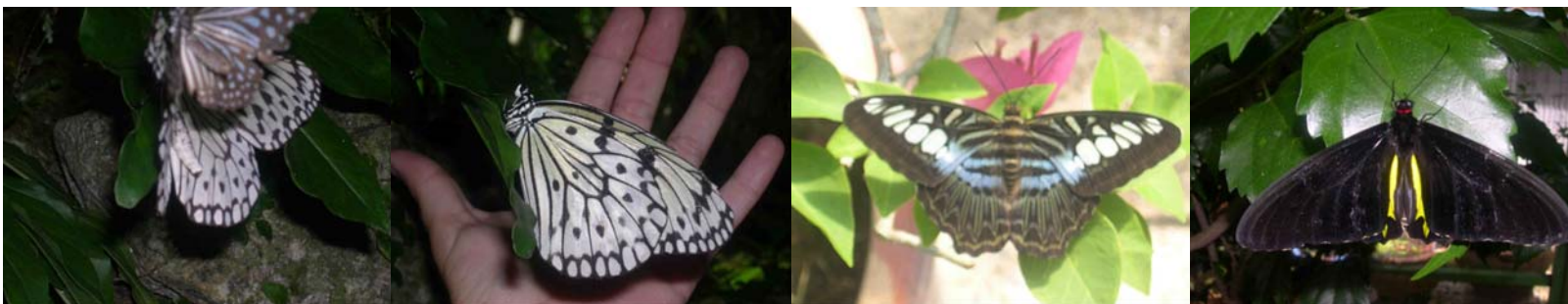
Here and there shack, baraka, hut, field shelters for field workers in their inevitable straw hats, column of smoke, brown people. Such a nice colour. Well, at least in girls, suits them perfect, can't miss desire to touch the.

No touching here. At least not Islam part of population, laws are strict, if you touch it, you have to marry her.

Yes. And you become Muslim as well. Not that strict practicing is expected from you but officially you are eligible for what goes with that,



*Family shop near the ferry port; local sweets and candies, nice to refresh before leaving for Marudi town upstream the Baram river*





*Mademoiselle "Misty" in visit to settlement at the Baram bank.  
Generous purchase of candies in large quantities successfully managed to irritate our family dentist until he found out that candies are of non-american origin and actually don't affect teeth.*

*Banks are covered with thick mud and lost timbre logs. Timber harvesting and export is one of major businesses and source of revenues for Sarawak.*

Two monkeys ran across the road, very carefully. Not like at crossings in those in developed countries?? Surprise!

Brunei is very organized and tidy country. Kuala Belait is located on the bank of another huge river Belait, so much water, you definitely don't get thirsty.

Can't work out how coca cola managed to sell them that shifty drink that all civilized world drinks while eating. I guess, makes nice sweet&sour mixture of that suits character. I wander if their ugliness comes from that side.

People here, nice and tidy as usual, Lots of shops, small and clean, no shopping centres to waste time on crap. I come across cake shop and look, all nice! Couldn't resist to try several pieces. After so long time in lucky country down under I needed some sweet stuff.

Young man in shop is Indian, he likes to talk, asked many questions about almost everything.

He even asked about communists, he has heard about. I tell him the truth; they are same as other normal people all over the world. Only difference is they normally go to schools, they socialise and talk to each other, they have kids all over the town, they sleep with women instead with the men, and they work for living, not for the money.

He was bit confused with that large text.

- I went to school as well and I work now. Am I a communist?

- Yes, you are, so, be careful when going overseas, can be easily arrested there.

- Why? They arrest you if you work?

Oh no. Only if you tell them you went to school to learn.



- But don't you think people work for money, to have lots of money, in America people very rich.  
- Oh yes. America is special place. Some people there do work for money instead to keep stealing for survival. It's legal to be rich there anyway you know. That's really lucky country. But, stay put here.  
He looks happy now, he understood it all:  
I just couldn't tell him real reality about "lucky countries". He wouldn't believe it anyway.  
Didn't wait for his next question, can't tell him everything, he's just too young to get worried too much.  
He'll find out one day.

I explore around. No alcohol here, no karaoke bars, bit boring by night but can never compete with boredom in those lucky countries. Here, there are always people to talk to.  
So I visited few shops to learn few things, from cute girls of course, about this nice world of Brunei

I keep strolling, from shop to shop, everybody is turning head after me, nobody notice few some accidental ugly white and fat ladies, speaking some non-local language, empty and lazy from "working for moneeeey".  
Yes, me and my brown people are on the same frequency, can't miss each other to talk or to look at.  
Love. I know.

CD shop have two cute teenage girls, like lollypops. Sweet to the bone.  
I named them immediately in my mind: *Sayanku dan Cintaku*.  
I enter, they take off headphones and look at me, silent and still like time itself. Awaiting me to say something.  
I am testing them, keep quite for few minutes, looking into their dark shiny eyes.  
Can't wait too long. I know they will not move until I speak, so, I have to give up this time...  
OK. My turn.

-*Apa dangar perempuan-perempuan? I ask them.*

- *Baik dan cantik musik?*

- What are you listening?

They show me CD cover, nice Malay singer, soft, worm voice, good, nothing like some screaming western pop stars with a pedigree.

- Nice, I say. I cuddle their black hair and cheeks, they turn reddish, look at each other, put hand on lips to prevent oooohhhh, happy.

- *Tolong saya Miki.*

I must not confuse them any longer, they are sensitive nature, like butterflies.

We talk for awhile what and which, who's good, who's popular, some local music is favourite to them. They are very pleased I liked few numbers that I readily buy. Everything is so cheap here.

Than I look on the shelf for some different music....

Ahaaa, Estaban Brothers, salsa.

- Girls! Try this for change, it's yours now, my gift to you.

Girls are bit confused again but they take CD with smile.

- *Saya cinta padamu.* Bye.

I get out quickly leaving them with ahhhhh and big, black, wide opened eyes like the sky itself.

In lamp shop I learned so much about lamps. We talked about big, small, old and new, about their, like a pearls teeth and shine in their eyes that no light on this world can compare with.



In photo shop I had to tell them everything. Since my childhood days. Had to give them all my personal details and contacts, just in case they come to Miri.

Finally restaurant. Girl that served me lunch could not take her eyes from me. Not sure is it because my nose, you know already. But I had to eat my meal that she supervised so carefully like my mother many years ago. She looked and looked and looked, after meal, after tea, after chat and smoke. I got a feeling she is waiting me to ask her, come with me. Anywhere to the world. Apart from smile I didn't dare to say a word. I knew, she'll die from sadness. Let her be, have hope, is good, and time heals everything. Yes. Such a beautiful world.





## 10 – Trip DoReMi

But this life would not be the same if one can live for ever. I hated the idea always. I always believed that sentiment is reserved only for rich ones from “lucky countries”. I’m sure they will pay some pharmaceutical company to work it out; deep freezing, injection, dope - already on use, name it. Than, when all poor people die, they can live happily, ever after. No more suffering! Ah, those lucky countries of profitably policed societies.

But this introduction is in wrong, chapter, upssss! Sorry. Actually, my philosophy is: it’s better to die earlier than never! All right, all right. Agree; that does not exclude fear factor.



I came across Lina the Flower in DoReMi bar, just around the corner of De Vogue. But before I go to that romantic chapter, let’s see why and how all this happened?

### *Trip-Trip*



That morning sky was dark, wind, few drops of rain just as a warning. Typhoon season was raging over Philippines this summer, stronger than usually. At least strong enough to be felt on distant shores of Borneo. It was Wednesday, 21.08.0?

Me, Ken and other members of F23 crew, all in yellow overalls, were waiting in boarding room for signal to board helicopter. Generally I prefer boat, 12 hours to the platform, who cares, as long as you are on the water and not above. Wishful thinking, but, no way.

We watch interesting video, about safety, so we know what to do when we drop into the sea. That is cute and nice worming up for the flight.

We all like to watch how craft dives into the blue, how easy is to kick out the window and remove safety straps, and how enjoyable can be floating in the cabin full of refreshing water.

Ha, ha, ha!

Funny?

Some time later we’re up in the air. Pilot, very nice fellow, comes with routine: announced 45 minutes flight, 180km, don't worry, everything's going to be fine.

I was looking from the chopper at my dear Righa chalet, on the shore of South China Sea, on beautiful Tanjong bay, my favourite beach near by, thinking how smart were Iban pirates to choose this nice hide away cape for past hundreds of years.

Never the less, this trip came in time when natives of Borneo take care about their crops. Burning bushes and young growth to prepare for next season crop is traditional way of survival.



Fires, fires, fires, all over the region, seems to me all over the island, Consequence: Hundreds of square kilometres of this island and sea is covered with smoke and haze, more or less, here or there.

Quickly, any sight of land disappeared as we went away from the shore. No blue water to see, no fishing boats, no platforms, nothing to see. Only smoke, haze and clouds alternating across the window. You have to see those enormous white clouds! Massive bubbles of steam, boiling and tumbling one over other, creating unbelievable images and shapes, only Aladdin lamp is missing. Clouds are thick and dense like a pudding, you feel chopper is struggling to go thro. Plus strong winds = nice trip.

Actually, last night was also funny weather. Heavy rain with storm. It was blowing seriously. If I were at home I could be seriously affected, you know what I mean.

Well, I love storms and winds but not this time, thank you.

My dear moody Borneo.



*View – out of window*

We are flying.

I can hear chopper is breathing heavily, struggling with the gusts of wind.

Than, kind of jerk, than slow down, than sound of, wouooooo, wouoooooo.

I don't like if I can not see around. Hmmm.

Most of guys were sleeping, or pretending they are sleeping, used to, every 2 weeks.

I don't. I never sleep. I wait, listen, hold on, observe. Not good but that's it.

As time goes by wind gusts are worse and worse. Chopper is dropping down and up, left and right, kind of unusual route for this flying object. Maybe pilot is driving blindfold? Or maybe this is training or exercise, who knows. Rules are getting tougher and tougher those days.

Next to me was Ken, reading his famous book, title. "I'm sure I know what I read". Normally, after return to the mother land, he throws it away. I tried to say something but I look like a puppet; no sound gets out from my lips. OK. I will count blades on the propeller above us. Just to pass the time. Also, I can make myself useful. If one is missing, can tell the pilot, maybe he will know how to fix it?

One, two, three,.....

Hmmm, bit fast to catch up every blade.

To me, 45 minutes are gone, no platform to lend on. I was getting angry with pilot, already wanted to jump there and ask him: Hey, what are you doing? Why you don't go to F23 instead of cruising around, we are not tourist, we have job to do!

That was crazy idea since, besides I was lying myself, no one can hear you anyway due to enormous noise in this kind of craft. What do you think, why we have our ears plugged? Just for information? No, no. Any talk is impossible and that's good. Those driver don't need another paranoid idiot to tell them what to do.

Simply speaking: nice day for fishing. What else?

Than one real jerk. I had to hold myself for the seat. I feel choper is changing direction, 180 degrees, looks like going back. Maybe pilot forgot cigarets? He could have ask me for few smokes.

Again change of direction. I think we are now heading towards Vietnam or Mindanao, deep waters are safer. I realise wind is now faster than us and not ready for joke. I try to see rotor and hope it will hold bit longer. I check time on young man's hand watch, we are late.

I see pilot is talking something but my headphones are questionable so I guess he's talking about which side is good to jump out. Two options: with or without parachute. Except, we don't have them. Umbrella won't do.

Dangerously we are inclined on left side, about 55 degrees but I'm safe since centrifugal force  $F_c = m \times a_n$  is holding me back.

Sometime later we got to the F23. Can not see but feel it. Standing in place, driver was trying to touch the helpdesk for awhile. Tup-tup, tup-tup. Now I could see the deck, just meter below, we were shaking here and there, from edge to edge for sometime.

Finally!

We're down.

Luggage first!

Wind was still strong that we had to crawl to the staircase downwards.

They say above 100km/h.

Nice and easy.

Life on F23 is great so you forget everything easy.

Needless to say what a crew! I wish few of them are on facilities down under to brighten the day. And after hard day work there is fun after dinner...band! Music to clear the mind and body. Yes.

That's never gonna happen in ozi land, for example.

We were special guests, no way not to take part. Ken was singing, surprisingly very well, I played guitar, hmmm, rusty, rusty. We like those guys. Never unhappy, never mean.

I met medic at the stairs bit later:

- How's life amigo?

- Good. You guys are lucky. Such a nice day for fishing!



## 11 - So Easy, So happy and bits of Something else...

Sometimes.....

Some times?

I don't know. What's happening sometimes.... I can not explain.

Do I know myself? Am I too sentimental?

Crazy? Yes, that's OK. But at least I'm not mad.

Don't know what to say sometimes.

Like now.

Better to go ahead with the subject.

At first, my view is limited. Like a frog, I see only as much as "opening of the well" allows.



*Birds are beginning to migrate and night slowly creeps from behind; now, only faint shapes play against the sky. I guess it's more by memory than in the eyes. Occasional boat, yes. Otherwise darkness like in England but not so bad and black*





*And if you are sufficiently patient to gaze for a long time, you finally experience total darkness. Almost like, for example, in America.*

I sit and I gaze into the surroundings. In some parts of the world it is not always good convenience but here, it's easy.

And this is where I "complain" and argue with myself. I guess nothing else to do although I do have so much to do. Confusing statement, for those who believe they are busy, ha-ha.

They are busy, ha-ha-ha!

But let's not be cynical at this great end of the day and beginning of the night. I told you, I never sleep.

As a matter of fact, my little pearl also never sleeps. She rests, only. In the middle of the night, I touch her cheek and here she is. One eye opens, scans the state of the vast space all across the universe and sinks down into the depth of the night. And all that in the blink of an eye.

My God? Am I getting old?

For me, all that takes more than two seconds those days.

Yes. It's true. I worry lot more than hundred years ago. And that sucks my memory banks. Overloaded with punk?

Luckily, here I have so many good people around me who make my days so bright with little thinks that make pointless moments disappear like a shadows in the night. Here they are!



*Left: Mystery painting, source of inspirations and enlightenment. Took me long time to discover that. Middle: Iban shield. Right: Some of little things.*

But...all this introduction is not about me, oh man! I almost forgot.

It's about one most beautiful girl and her story. All begins in the Bat karaoke bar.



## *Bat*

It was raining. Heavily. Looked like it's raining all over the world. It was pitch dark night. Difficult to drive through narrow street full of streams of water. I stopped just downstreet of Bintang plaza, next to dim-sum restaurant. Was closed already.

But look!

Shy sign above narrow door, BAT.

Hmmm. Here it is! I recalled this place. Once before, friend of mine took me here for drink. Wasn't that flashy place; small, smoky, few guests, bored Indy girls, sad faces, friendly barman, loud music so, so, already forgotten like a place not to be. Well, weather is so ominous, not so good for cruising around, I did not look for anything that evening so, why not? Maybe I can sing them something hot for change.

Get upstairs, exactly as I remembered. Dull situation.

Ice lemon tea please, that's all I need to lift atmosphere up!

Ice lemon tea comes with...Look? Who is this here?

Little sunshine face, *yang sedang, sedang saja*, but much sunshine. Whauuu! I felt warmth in the room.

I did see her before. Yes, I know her! She's Lyn's cousin. Veronica. We had long friendly kissing one dark night in Bibi club, year ago or so; was so nice place to go after everything else went silent.

Ahaaa! I was surprised that she works here.

Hmmm. She is getting better and better. Pretty lady.

As a matter of fact, she looks nice, not very sexy, not that type but, pretty.

OK. That's what I need. Pretty, love story for everyone although everyone does not deserve love story since lot of them are stupid.

Actually.

I was surprised how she looked. She was not fat as before, her face was relaxed, smile like Mona Lisa, don't know how that crossed my mind, light like a feather, cruising around like a nightingale, kind and happy like a spring stream. She had scarf across her head, like a pirates, all tip-top.

I looked at her, she looked at me, speechless, for awhile.

- Darling, I break the silence. You look great! I like you. I wonder how much time will take me to tell you I love you?

We burst in laughter on this and we hug each other, yes, that's custom where I come from.

- What a lady here we have how; I continue. If I am single, darling, no doubt I'd ask you to marry me. You really look great. True Bornean girl, my God!

She now has again that unpredictable smile, such charm one can rarely see those days.

I could not take my eyes off from her face.

- How are you, she asks?

I'm happy, you know. No I'm even happier. Look who I'm sitting with.

She keeps her smile, she's quite like mountain lake, modest, tranquility, completely opposite character of dynamite me, sits and looks in my eyes.

I was so happy. What a twist!

Aren't you guys happy when you come across such rare flower among friend?

You know that old story, I think, it was one of Buccati's stories: happiness can not be seen but is all around us, often behind your back. If one search for that blindly, rushing ahead and never turning his head around, he can miss best thinks of his life.

We got some drinks and put ourselves comfortably. Place was almost empty, out was dark rainy night without signs to improve. What else one need in life.

OK darling. Tell me all. I know you have what to tell.

She sips her drink and look at me.

I had a boyfriend.

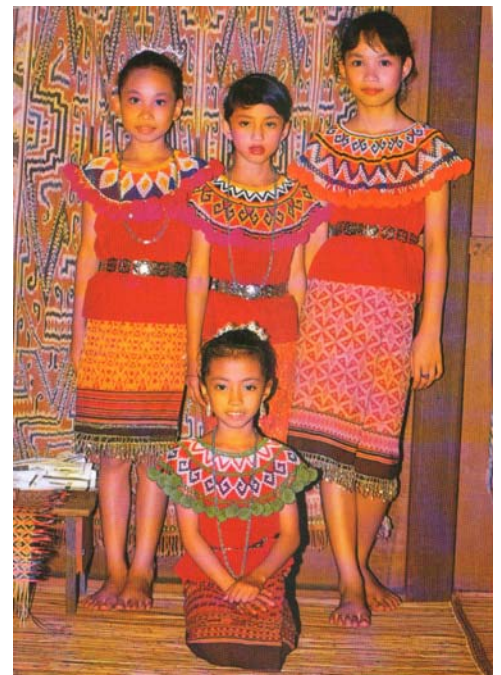
And hear come one of the greatest love stories I've heard in recent years.

*(Will continue in separate book of love stories from Borneo, section 23).*

*Dia tidak cantik, mak  
Dia tidak jelek, mak  
Yang sedang, sedang saja,  
Yang penting, dia setia.*

*Aku suka dia, mak  
Aku sayang dia, mak  
Kasih dan rindu ku ini,  
Tantunya, untuk dia.*

*Se dalam, dalamnya lautan India,  
Lebih dalam lagi cintaku padanya.  
Secuci dan sebeningnya embun pagi.  
Begitu lah cintaku, pada, dirinya.*



## *Anything Else?*

Life would not be feasible if things could have stayed the same.

Two blue-green kingfishers in lush green field between our offices are still there. I see them every day hunting insects and other animals from open rain drains aside. What else?

Changes are taking place slowly. Rihga Royal hotel is now Marriott, from the land far, far away. New owners have brought that sense of "future", spreading quickly even in the most hidden corners of the globe. Timber is being replaced with hospital white tiles, native paintings with cheap photos of famous presidents, halls and bars turned into bistros, greenery replaced with concrete, prices international, stop!

More old building in old town disappeared, new building blocks are reshaping old town.

Bars were visited by people more nervous people, many faces have gone from the scene, teams hold for a straw. Chaplin, place of first impressions of this nice place, has been turned into cold, dark bistro likewise one in forgotten railway station somewhere in Bulgaria. Even pool game is prohibited and declared gambling, Monika, owner of cafe-restaurant Bavaria has house for sale, many poor news in short time.

Closing time for bars is restricted to exactly 2AM, just in case that some good Samaritan do not report problem to the UN Council and than ...trouble is inevitable. Some jobs been lost, poor girls have stayed without work and left them in search for happiness that once was blossoming here.

Rains were severe with the beginning of New Year, tsunami ads up a lot Is this one of those years? Only El Nino is missing

But my archery club, hash, Chinese classes and famous ice lemon tea still hold on, not bad for the beginning. Not to mention friends, ha-ha. You can change the rules but not people. We don't give up as fast as big brother wants



*Old flower shop, demolished recently*

### *Miri town, promoted into City, 20th of May*

Well, I lived long enough to see this change as well. Howgh!

Celebration took place, program and parade were great. Kaleidoscope of colors, music, singing, dances, people of all background, young and old, happy, fantastic harmony of natural and spiritual colorit. I'll take freedom to comment: Many international artists would be ashamed of their expensive, so called avant-garde performances so hard to train, to prepare, but with little success.

In those local people here, of course, Art is part of their nature, obviously. No probs to do it mate!



City Fan park was overcrowded with folks all over the place. Teams of various ethnic groups dressed in their national costumes performed numerous dances, stories and legends followed by traditional music. I regretted I missed my recorder.

I roam through the crowd, mostly young hot and swift bodies , some sing, some dance, some eat or drink soft drinks, here and there family groups sit on the grass, kids run around, full of real life. Every now and then I stumble across people I know, happy chats with congratulations, God know why they all so happy, I prefer towns rather than cities, ha-ha. You know what means is life in city, than you. But there, those thoughts don't even cross my head.

Suddenly I come across little Alia, very cute girl from Chinese classes, with few of her friends. Huge greetings, she's always so cheerful whenever we meet in town. She's the only one who can speak so much and so fast that I feel jealous sometime. Can tell me the whole history of this town in a blink of eye. While we talk, comes one music number, on the main stage, nice and fast 8/8s rhythm so girls start kind of dancing in already restricted space.

- Come on, come on, dance! She cries.

Of course, I'm so bad dancer when comes to those ethnic rhythms. Although I suppose to be, very much "must to know" where I come from. I swore in myself why I was so stubborn to learn that when the time to learn was but I can't be stubborn now, I can't be Englishman: "No thank you". Rejection will hurt them, I learn that already and I can't do that. Especially not now!

So I begin to cling & clung. Oh, if I can only have sip or two of tuak, will be much easier. But I keep moving with the girls and alter few seconds they all look at me, begin to laugh happily. How good I dance you can not imagine. I must record that one day for some comic show.

Certainly, near by-standers see us as well and the whole circle gets very happy that they didn't miss today's "show".

Thanks God those people don't know for sarcasm as we from another side of the world practice a lot. So, happiness is genuine and I don't feel so much down anymore. I take a part in what I am and we all have fun.

Finally, music stops, change of crew, nice to relax, I'm all water.

Alia brings some can of during.

- Here is drink but no dinner Zoro. She says laughingly.

- Oh, so how you start, with a drink and than use me later?

And we burst in enormous laugh that everybody around look at us with amazement.

Actually, this game of words is linked to one of our previous comm's during on one of Chinese lessons.

One day I was kind of tired or whatever, not in best mood. She sits next to me, she noticed I don't talk much as usually I do, so, kicks me in the rib and ask; Hey, what's wrong?

I turn to her melancholically with that empty look, lean closer and after meaningful pause of a second, tell her:

- Listen. You are great girl, I like you. Why don't you take me out for dinner and try to seduce me? Maybe that can help me to get rid of melancholy. What do you think?

She looked at me for a friction of second, only that long, and we burst into the laughter that all class got up to the ceiling. Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!

My God! That's what I call happiness.

Alia is real fox; really smart, sharp, confident and has very quick mind. One of those persons you can easily rely to.

We are not of the same age but those young people I see as my best friends. They can understand me right, no bad feelings, no crossed eyes, they are not mean, we make each other happy sometimes, what else you need from a good friend?



*Tong Ho Tse group –  
story about rise of the  
town*



*Right: Beautiful Dayak girls dresses for the occasion*

*Right top: Women from various local groups.*

*Left: Chinese drums*

*Down: Night market at Saberkas*



## *Last Days of Rihga Royal Hotel*

Rihga Royal Hotel was something than one can never forget. Measured by its location, architecture, orientation, exterior and interior, access, restaurants, food, night bar, swimming pool, rooms furniture and setup, paintings on the walls, greenery, facilities and most of all people who worked there.

My God!

Am I baby that they care so much for me? Yes. That's how it is.

I'm not saying everybody may have same experience or sentiment but, after some time, I felt like we are all one big family.

If I looked for place like this, I would never find it. As I said before, you can't find happiness if you search for. I surprise you when you don't expect.

My chalet was great. Exactly what I need; clean, timbre, view, air, light, complete interior, exterior and environment.

I still dream, one day I will be able to buy that chalet. Only for me.

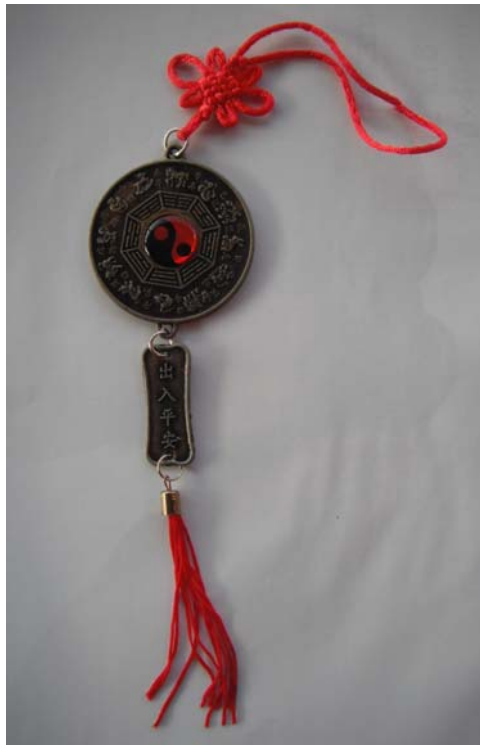
I have difficult personality; all my folks over there know danger coming to discussion with me. Because I know too much and any little stupid question gets punished with explanation how stupid one can be. I guess, occupational deformity: everything must be right!

Well, in this place and town I have never even raised my eyebrows.

Nervous? What is that? Pissed off? What is that? Angry? What is that?

And so on. I would warmly recommend anybody with hot temper to come to Rihga Royal Hotel, Miri, for recovery and healing.

Unfortunately, I can't do that. Because Royal Hotel, Miri does not exist any more. At least not as per description above. Now, it is Marriott Hotel. You know what that means.



I don't know why current owner sold it to Marriott Corporation but, never going to be the same tranquility. Immediate renovations took place, took time and I don't agree for some things that has been done. One detail only. Key changes to the chalets interior were scary! Once cozy, worm space was turned into necked bedroom with some huge bedding...nursery type. That's it. Only think you can do inside is...sleep immediately.

But I wouldn't be the one who knows the future if I didn't do next.

I organized with my people to preserve my chalet as is. Yes. So, when renovation was done, I had my space as it was before. And soon, my room was secretly known as famous Mr. Zoro's room. Ha-ha-ha!

Of course, I didn't ask for illegality room. New management was very good, as well, they appreciated my stay and wasn't big deal to have this exception.

However, it's not that bad as maybe see, you know me by now.

This place is unique and don't miss opportunity to stay there if you ever come in this Miri paradise.

This world is mine! I love these people!





*Farewell dance - performed by staff at some occasions*

Kind of celebration is organized for the handover event, many guests, local and state representatives, including Prime Minister of Sarawak, by the way, interesting character indeed, some speeches, some company men, beautiful ladies, so on.

Again, local dancers, music, well, music? That's another amazing comfort here. I personally appreciate local ethnic stuff, from this island. Exceptional experience before although I was with music since the dawn of time.





*Time to eat: Refreshment preparations around the swimming pool area.*

As a matter of fact, you won't find choice of food and fruit in many plastic society hotels over there. Here. It's pure and fresh, light and tasty. Every now and then I invite some friends here just make them envy, ha-ha. But really, I hardly eat in this hotel. By myself? No way! My favorites are small, clingy restaurants all across Miri town. It's nice to eat with friend.



## *Bavaria restaurant*

Bavaria Cafe – Place full of nice things and good food for all kind of people. It flashes with colors in the night among dark buildings in old Miri town, near the Waterfront. My first night here that was first place I spotted and stop for the coffee. Monika, the owner, of German origin, was here for many years and became one of our close friends. She has collection of records, real good one; we had great time with great music here.



*Good local food is prepared as well. Cook Roy, exceptional character that we will remember by his cooking but more than that positive attitude, intelligence and power to cheer you up at any time of the night. True friend indeed.*



### *Work Celebration*

For every well done job, modest celebration is organized. Team work is greeted for achievements and than, dance and makan.

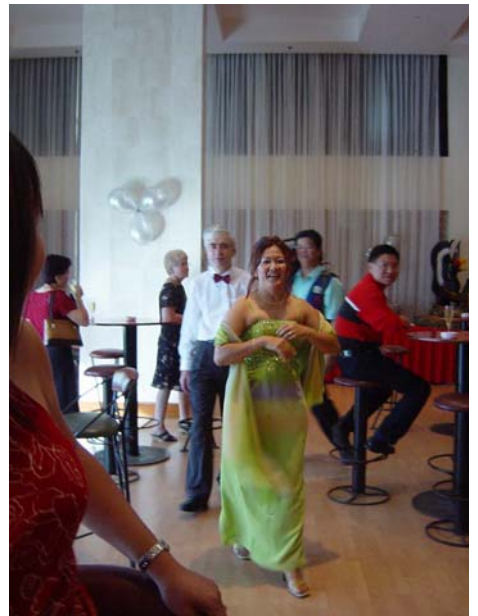


*Multicultural group performs dance at the mark-up of completion of the rejuvenation project Grand Hotel*

*Love is in the Air*

As I said, this is place where love is present in every corner of this mystery island, real but not visible to everyone, only to ones that truly deserve it. Wedding day for our remarkable friends, Wee and Al







## *Bits and Pieces*



*Market during Chinese New Year celebration*

*Kuching*



*Nutty boy's fun*

## 12 - Hash

One of funs for local population is ..... hash!

Every Tuesday 5PM crowd gathers somewhere out of town and goes in the ...jungle.

*Jalan, jalan.* Fitness test, no joking!

All kind of trips and tracks, you never know where and when you're going to be finished.

I guess, locals know what they are doing?



The trip is like this:

One of them, grown up in this environment, goes first, running. He carries bunch of white cotton strips that on the way stacks them against bushes and trees so we can follow the route. Easy.

And the rest follow. Rest is us, middle aged folks enthusiastically dressed in unbelievable dresses for this occasion, hah. Mostly locals, few of us strangers who like to be fit and ready, wow!

Nothing terrible. Sometimes, somebody gets lost but he is quickly found next day, for now alive, no missing person reports yet, we'll see in the future. No rush.

For sometime I was thinking to get out with this exercise but too busy, too lazy, OK, maybe not sure if those retirees may be boring to walk on with?

Nils said it's nice to see jungle, he likes it, he's always first running like wind. If I don't know him I would believe him but... why not. Nobody's perfect.

So, last Tuesday some kind of melancholy and overload driven me to get out from "civilization" in desperate hope to "get lost" from everything. My folks went to Sabah, *jalan-jalan* thro KK, Sandakan, mountains, rivers, name it. I know. I was stupid. Always wanted to see that famous pirate's place Sandakan but



look! They went first. I deserve that, *bodoh. Mahu, tidak mahu?*

OK, *duduk de rumah. Kami pergi.*

And they left me.

OK. I go *jalan-jalan* jungle. Let it be!

- Nils, you go?

- Yes, if not raining.

- OK, I like rain as long as it is thundering and lightning, my favorite weather, because all crap gets washed from the streets.

Luckily for him there was no rain.

Until we reached middle of the jungle.

Ahaaa! Caught unprepared. I told him to take umbrella.

Gathering was at the unknown house across Miri hospital. 5 PM, just fine time for coffee.

Lots of cars, dust, of course, interested folks that have a drive for this kind of excursion.

I looked at them, yes, they are the once. Middle age people, no young girls, pity, could have been nice to run after some pretty Miki through the jungle, at least to know why risking the head.

Most of them were locals, few strangers; Nils was the only one I knew, OK, let's go!

We go like ..... flock of sheep. Everybody for himself, some small groups scattered all over, free preferences. First bunch of enthusiasts went on running, Nils with them, others, bunch by bunch followed.

Up and down some new dirt roads just cleared through the bush, signs of increasing demand for new habitats, thick layers of dust mixed with hot air and smells of everything.



We passed couple of kampongs, locals looked at us with bit of curiosity, I guess they already used to see this colorful crowd. Seeing their smiles and seeing us dressed like "*ma non che male*" I had irresistible filling of "what those crazy people doing here".

I started wondering if this is a joke or I picked up wrong day.

"Jay walkers falling on my head....."

Hmmm, "never again" was just about to come out from my judgment box.

In next kampong I learned that first group already managed to get lost. They missed little white cloth, didn't see it, well...I wandered what would they do in the woods?

On their way back they met us coming.

- Hi Nils, where you've been for so long? Going back?

He likes my favorite style for expressions.



Actually, I am getting angry with myself, I could have gone road walking by myself, better even beach, don't need dusty roads over there. Thinking about "finding taxi" and go back. Since I have no idea where we are.

OK.

They found the right way finally, thro someone's backyard than another than garden than path, few trees around and huts...

All right, at least not that dusty roads.

Now, I am across wet lands, high grass laid over ground like a pillows, nice walk, can do, and feel better. Few guys in front of me, few behind, main bunch is rolling slowly far behind. I decide to follow that first group, seem they are in kind of hurry, OK, maybe they have small children at home, you know how it is, always required.

Still not talk to "strangers" in the vicinity, just in case not to get angry again.

Downhill thro rare forest than bit denser and again denser. Nice trip, I said to the guy next to me, very colorful indeed. Just to break silence, not nice.

Go, go, go.

Trees getting taller and irregular in size and shapes, have to jump here and there, have to lean or bend there and here, but ground is solid and visible, clean like a baby.

Sometime later I noticed no more overtaking, path got narrow and steep, wetter, somehow obstacles became too frequent, bush denser. Trees covered with creepy crawlers, lianas like snakes up and down, you have to exercise more and more in order not to get hanged on.

Then I realized I don't see guys that were in front of me nor behind me, ok, do I still hear frequent screams like "we are here" but no eye contact. I concentrate now more on white strips as I realize it is now much darker.

I rushed up to get to guys in front of me; few times almost went into the wrong direction.

The leader is intentionally missing few strips on the way, just in case we don't get sleepy, I was thinking.

Luckily few guys are behind, no overtaking please, somehow I recall myself like Mr. Bean, he, he, he, he.

Faster and faster.

My breath is now heavy, air is hot, wet and heavy.

Suddenly I leaped on open wide space covered with water, mud, growth.

This is exactly what I need. Water in my shoes. I tried to cross it walking along slippery sides, like others, just about.

From now on terrain is wet land, there is no more path or walkways like on the platforms. Just wild, dark, wet jungle. And more, now, hundreds of thin creepers hanging around, I have to cope with them permanently, I learn they are anchored at both ends, strong and thin, can cut you like cheese if you trip on it. In addition, nutty branches and lianas are all over, above and below, you don't see them until your feet gets tangled into, dense vegetation obstruct vision of the ground just to make sure you don't forget this trip.

Jumping from hump to hump for while still trying desperately not to get full dosage of water into shoes, but.... not for long.

My legs are already unhappy, on last few spots with minimal possibility to stop and look for little white cloths breath guys behind me managed to overtake me.



OK. Am I alone now? No, I am not. There are few little white cloths here and there. Good.  
What am I doing here anyway? But still pushing ahead thro the green spider net.  
Still trying to find few hard spots to step on, leaping from hump to hump, from "bank to Bank" by the way few are not that what I thought to be. Main concern is not to get sliced in cubes by creepers all over you while trying to step over sneaky branches under the growth.  
My friend! I'm already tired like a dog. I begin to think I'll not make it to the end. Unless end is somewhere near by. Hope to see next kampong is high.  
No. No kampongs in this area. Not yet. They didn't know I'm coming, sorry. Next time we'll built one for enthusiastic tourists to get cup of tea. 2 ringgets please.  
Hmm.



Maybe I should start screaming? Why not. Heeeeeey! Where are you?  
I'm sure bunch of retirees will here me soon.  
But I keep quite as usually, I'm not really that type of tourist.

I'm finished, where I'm going to sleep for the night, I think. There is no room to even stand, not to talk about sitting or lying. That's the problem. I say that because I still don't know what is ahead.  
"Totally lost" feeling is closing by. Can not stop, can not go, should I stay or should I go?

Those thoughts about snakes and blood suckers I forgot already long time ago. I'm not interested in them anymore. I only think how to get out from this unbelievable dense mash of living trees. Like in the movies. Survival. What a joke!

Legs??

*Ma que?*

I don't have legs. Who said that? I don't know, I don't feel anything below my stomach.

What's that there?

Again stupid. Unlike colorful crowd I am in my favorite shorts and thin T-shirt, sport shoes, .going beach.

Actually I wanted to come in my tongs but in last moment changed my mind. Just in case.



My poor legs are already full of cuts and wounds; I even managed to trip over a log in order not to have my throat shaved. My left knee is bigger somehow. I discovered that at home later, as I said: no legs I have.

But, I was lucky because....this was just the beginning of the trip. Hahhh!

Some people say: "you can't have cake and eat it".

But I know better one: you can have cake and you can eat it as much as you can".

Sounds good?

If sounds good let's go ahead. I said I can not stand on any spot longer that 2 second.

First signs of fatigue I noticed in my eyes. I see, my sight begins to be delayed. Means, I turn my head left for creepers but I still see little white cloth on right, I look below for crossed branch but I still se creeper, I gaze ahead for humps and supports but still see branch, .....

I should have brought my sun glasses as well, helps?

I also feel irresistible desire to lie down and sleep, mmmmm, nice, if I only find nice bushy spot....

I haven't felt so tired for years.

Terrain has now become absolutely wild.

There is no room for words like paths and clearances, humps and openings, stands and stops.

All around is swamp, jungle, opaque, dense and wild, I realized those guys are serious this time.

Who can find you here?

Now, I'm all alone, can not hear screams and voices, I'm pushing ahead, now on all four, you have to catch up for anything around you regardless of shape and nature. Like Tarzan but little bit lower. And I discover not all branches are the same. Some are full of spikes. Small and thin, I have full hands of them, like a collector.

I switch on lower ones, nice, handy, from branch to branch. Until they got to my neck. I mean ants. Small, tiny, byte you to the bone. Smart animals in this jungle, no doubt. You have to give up this way of crawling otherwise only skeleton will get out.

Cheers!

Another specialty from the area is.....*Nyamo*. Mosquitoes.

Small, tiny and unforgiving. Actually, I left them for the end since it has no any sense, any more.

I just simply left them to eat me. Ignore them. What they can eat? Just suck some blood, that's ok.

Fortunately that day no little snakes were falling from the trees. Good. At least something.

I couldn't care less anyway. One animal more or less does not make much difference.

Now I am tired to the bone. Is my heart going to manage?

Because I hear it now. Good news. After so many years, I almost forgot that organ exists. I don't have legs but I hear my heart. At least something is around.

I hear it in my eyes, my ears, hands, in my chests, I see how it works fast, few ribs in the vicinity are going up and down, hmmm, strange feeling, I hope it's not going to break my ribs.

Think about legs again, seems knees can not lock in position, OK, natural, no keys around.

But I still grab ahead, I saw in the movies, still remember that famous instruction from Healthy Heart Organization charts: "Even when most tired and collapsed and you don't have legs anymore, keep walking. Good for heart!".

It's true! I could hear it knocking: help, help, help, 187.5 times per second.

I recall, what one of my optimistic friends said once: you are lucky you were not in the desert. Imagine how you could have been very thirsty. Thanks! I'll remember that.

But my thoughts still function well like this:

OK, if I fall into the mud, those coming from behind will find me. Or me or my body, all the same, fine, I'm safe.

This thinking comes handy in the moment when I come across one large mud hole surrounded by angry trunks that one can not hold on. My legs were already stretched to their maximum span of 2m, from "bank to bank".

The question is: am I going to drop into soft black mud and wait for crowd to collect me or am I going to swim across. Rain just started so.....possibility exists. The only worry was what if they oversee me in this darkness and use me as a hump to go over?

Luckily, in the very last moment I spotted one little hump on the middle and jumped on it in the using last Jules of remaining energy.

I was wrong.

It was not a hump.

I was standing in the middle of the muddy pond, drowning slowly up to the knees than stopped.

Huuuh, not bad.

I tried to pull out one by one, my shoes ...were... tight. Lucky.

I can only imagine me going without shoes here. Brrrrr....Finished mate!

I recalled my tongs again. Lucky, lucky.

I get out somehow saying in myself: man, man, why do you need this, why?

Never again. Never!

But my thoughts still function well like this:

Now, I see myself all alone in the jungle. I see myself standing next to the tree, waiting my legs to collapse and than to sit in the mud and let blood suckers to suck me all night.

No! Can not. Blood is rarity those days. I see again one little white cloth hanged on the branch, I go ahead again.

Hmmm.

Don't know how long time all this took but... I managed.

Last obstacle was trunk across the creek, easy cake.

On the other side of the creek was dusty field and house we started from.

How come? Hmmmm.  
Big rainbow across the sky, nice welcome.  
It was 7 o'clock. Good time.  
Nils approaches me: - How was?  
- Not bad, never again.

Than I realized how actually I feel good, so good I forgot that amazing feeling many years ago.  
There was no that heavy feeling of sloppy stomach, heavy legs, clung body, constant boring feeling of tiredness and sleepiness.

No!  
Unbelievable!  
I felt like a bird. Light like a feather, chill and happy, happy.  
Joking mate.  
I'll go again. True.  
And that's it.



*Logging road through the heart of the jungle is used for timbre exploitation. When rains, trucks can easily get bogged.  
Road is not recommended for cars since outcome is uncertain.*

Flora and fauna on Borneo is very rich and diverse, I believe half may have not be discovered yet. Every now and then, you stumble on one of them but for the real ones you have to go deeper in woods. Thank you.

Island is about 750000km<sup>2</sup> configured with high, sharp mountains covered with bushy, dense jungle full of surprising ditches and cliffs. Everything here is unbelievable different. Metaphorically speaking, it's riddle how all this happened. All kind of creatures live here, from miniature to large, happy men eaters. Few samples are presented here rather for information than for education. There's lots of book made by those whose job was to collect that vast knowledge or those ones who wanted to quench their amazement for enormous power of nature to create such fascinating creatures and life. Every new day there is brad new adventure and surprise. Never ending story. If there are places of complete happiness than this island is one of them.

*Nosy beatles*

*Popular name is Lantern Beetle, usually can be seen on the tree bark. They feed on sap. Name came after its nose/horn yellow colour very visible in darkness ae well Some locals say it lights in the night time.*



*This is probably the largest stick beetle recorded. It is about 30cm long. Male is lot smaller than female and has got wings; can fly so to chase females unnoticed and happy.*

*Female, when attacked, defend herself by ejecting liquid substance that has very unpleasant odor. On human skin makes burning sensation.*

*Shield beetle*

*Don't eat it if become hungry. Not recommended at all.*

*Distinctive colors on her back are signal for predators; this will be bitter bite.*



*Left: Dreadful Fig*

*What is seen here is just a basket of giant creeping fig. Creeper grows around host tree and for some years everything looks green and lush. But as years go by, fig completely surrounds its host, gets stronger and stronger and on the end chokes and kills the tree. Tree rotten slowly and only hollow like a chimney shell remains.*



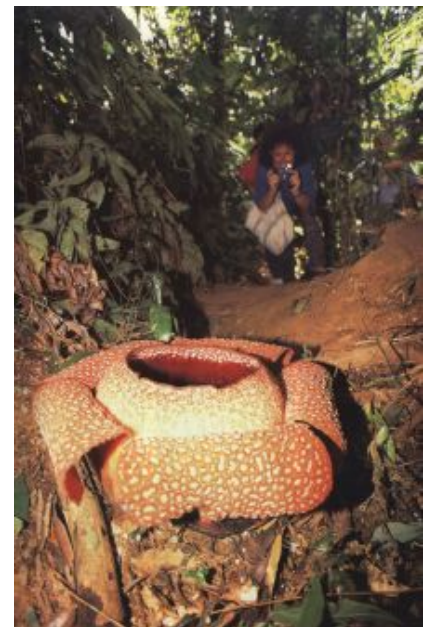
*Diameter of this net made of creeping fig is about 2.5m*

*And this is how host tree looked like some 10 years ago or so.*



*“Meet eaters”*: Borneo has many plants of this kind, small to very large. Normally they feed on small insects attracted by unpleasant odor generated by plant for the purpose. As soon as victim enters the flower, it closes its lattice like a trap. Some say, small mice have been found inside as well.

*Right*: It is believed this is the largest flower found until those days. Diameter about 1 meter. Inside the flower is usually 2-3 liters of juice where victims get digested slowly and completely.



is

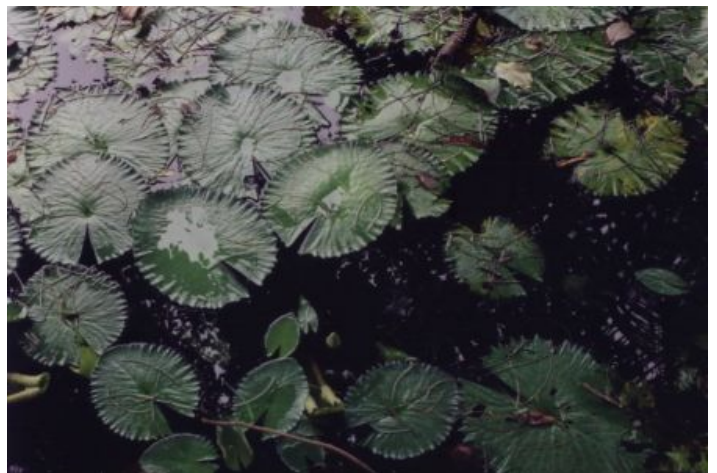


*One of most attractive and popular bird, Hornbill. While flying, generates distinctive and characteristic noise, easily recognized.*



*Otherwise, it is very tasty after cooking!*

*Right: Milky cap mushroom. After rains, they grow very quickly from wet and fertile forest floor. Considering that rains come so often, this tasty bite is almost always available.*



## 13 - Miss Truism

Don't think that this Miri is meaningless place somewhere there.  
Niht! Proof: Here it is!



*South Seas paradise*

Some 300 years ago, when local tribes welcomed first tribes from Europe, locals believed newcomers are some humans or something like that. Of course, it turned out they are not; actually turned out newcomers are just result of wishful thinking or imagination which still invisibly drags underneath, like bloodsucker, blood thirsty, pure curiosity, of course?

Yes. Don't be cheated Miri is some forgotten, meaningless place far, far away.  
Not at all! World scene; Miss Truism competition is just about to happen in front of our eyes, in cozy and pretty ambient of Siti bar, Righa Royal Hotel, set up like in 1001 Nights story book.

And coincidentally, all this is happening at the same time when Great Big Brothers are persistently trying to prove that bombs and disorder are just result of religious imagination but have no anything to do with stealing, robbery and hunger, well. But let's not spoil this text with the stories from the "developed quarter of the world".



*Press representative with some of pigeons that take one's breath away*

This nice story begins at 6.30 in Siti bar, guests are warming up with all kind of selected drinks so necessary in those critical moments when pulse jumps up to 180.2 bps

Many known and unknown guests are here, ministers, citizens, managers, villagers, two expats, heaps of ladies and girls, man and women, don't know the rest. My duty is also to interview few of those remarkable characters. We are exchanging experiences from the past and future, well fed and drunk, with concerns for the humanity, in expectation of our beauties from all over this cute world.

Gong announces arrival of beauties. I immediately recognized those ones from Asia: Slim and thin, ayyyyy,

What a scene! I experienced temporary blindness, well, old people do that sometimes.

*Kashe votre belles!* Some yelled in French.

About thirty girls are now on the stage to show us how they spent their first milk.

Excitement? No.

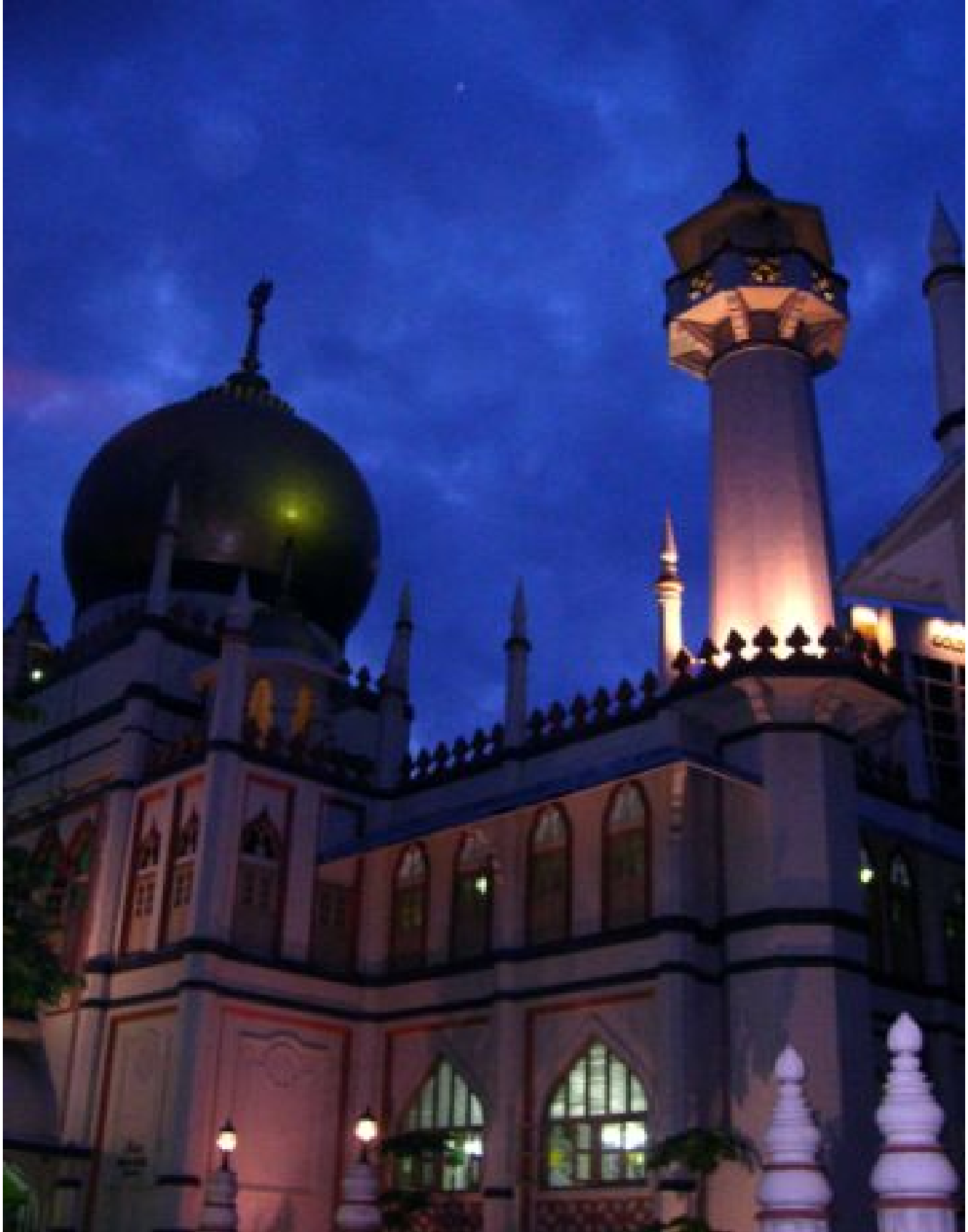
Expectations? No.

What then?

Nothing. We're strangers. We don't react publicly. We keep quite and suffer like hungry dogs.

Atmosphere has got that famous tension. Music goes, Gilbert Becaout. : "and now what"?





*1001 Nights scene*

First kill was Miss **Panama**, huuuuu....

The beginning is hot, I think to myself emptying near by glass of gin just to hide excitement of uncertainties. Little one had topless, just half of, bottom half, dark, creole tan was giving up her intention to be the best of the best by any cost. I wasn't wrong, just fine above.

She gave little speech about her and her intentions and modestly slides along the bar desk, straight across me so I can see her better.

I did. Does she know I am shortsighted?

Don't know but I examined her thoroughly, I had two good reasons for that. At least.

Luckily, mother of my children was very considerate, she didn't hit me with the bottle or so, just moved away few steps from me in case people don't get idea she knows me.



Next beauty was from **Pakistan**.

I start singing "killing me softly with this bottle", she didn't notice, good, I alive.

I must admit, last time I was in her country, some thirty years ago, brrr, I did not have chance to know them better. They all were wrapped in black robes like they knew what's coming.

This is new experience, surprise; prove that beauty does not know for prejudices and barriers; after you served your term.

Dressed in a modest but extravagant house dress, thin and toll, tanned with dark shy eyes, only her shivering body behind thin, transparent fabric told me, it's true.

In left hand carries an apple, a gift of a nature for ones that believe in her. Apple was wrong tactics. Not long after, some guys jumped on her apple and eaten in one bite.

Luckily, her mum and dad weren't here, just been arrested in UK because of peanuts.

I looked at her bit closer to check if she carries some hidden bombs, treat to world peace and order but.....no. She was definitely clean below thin, transparent, green dress.

Although I wouldn't bet if two secret agents James and Bond didn't already put her on a black list of innocents. Later, she repented to me: They prohibited her to ride buses and trains.



Many more: Miss India, Filipinas, Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brazil, Ukraine, Russia, Finland, Thailand, Vietnam, China, Burma, Venezuela, Tanzania, Mozambique, Poland, Sri Lanka, some others from developed countries are missed due to educational reasons.

Desperately I looked for Miss Kosovo but could not see her.

Went back home in Albania for propaganda materials, so critical for independence.

Some say she is dealing with making her own suit for new parliament but couldn't make it.

Miss **Ghana** impressed mother of my children. She was well spoken, cute and decent with attitude of a person that knows what she wants, without prejudices although everybody knew where she comes from.

Good work, no doubt.



**Miss Philippines** has blue sport shoes made out of jersey, robe and scarlet green blouse up to belly button, narrow and swift like a pine tree, just little shorter. I saw her eyes, shy for public, last chance to get away from Amers. She gave us nice little song about democracy and run away in tears of happiness. Few more classical samples that no need to talk about since no need to come again next year, you know, cost saving exercise.

**Then, Miss Thailand.**

Soft and worm like cotton in the morning, little sloppy eyes and hair like in prince Valiant style, beautiful kid. Told us her story in pure Thai language, we understood all of that. She talked about her home town, about fascinating shores with coco palms where she used to climb for nuts in days when she was child.

That's where she earned her tinny, huuu, attractive, huuuu, figure and two coco nuts so well known around the world and in USA and to strangers and tourists from the surroundings.

**Miss India** was much more modest than she looked like. Peculiar beauty, undamaged by frost and crayons, wrapped in silk sari and told us a story in her fluent mother tongue, English. Told us how all this started with her grand mother and grand father that thought her first steps in a garden, than market place than shops, so that finally managed to get to this place Miri where we all can see who is the most beautiful kid in the World.

I already knew who. My little girl. But let's not mix my family girls into this business.

**Miss Italy, Miss Austria and Miss Denmark** was.....I can not find words for them.

All make up can do them no harm. Same with or without. Well, where we were? Ahaa!

**China failed a bit.**

Seems, kind of rebellion spirit of Taiwan mixed emotions and politics so we all applauded: China! China! She gave us nice monolog about rice cultivation and preservation so we all felt that spirit from 1001 nights. Girl was not to be blamed, we all forgave her at once. Especially after nice soup she served to some of us that have soul and heart, still. With rice noodles, of course. Breakfast, lunch, dinner, always the same. Like in lucky country, just missing famous fish&chips.



**And than....** Lights went off.

A creature, like a wild cat, sneaked silently to the stage, on four legs. Slowly, cautiously, not to be detected or seen, like all wild cats do anyway.

You guess?

Yes.

This is now wild cat from deep **Brazilian** jungle, nice and brown in color like those here just hot blood and fire in eyes gave her up her background, ancestors and heritage. She is dressed in.....

Nothing!

Nothing she needs.

Perfect body, only cute bum peeked above the bush, bum and tail she couldn't hide, twisting and shaking left and right, lazy, sleazy, while she was examining in bar present fauna with her big, shiny eyes.

Big miyyaooowww... was the only sound in her defense.

Than, when she realized there is no other dangerous samples and characters and that mother of my children holds me tight for hands and legs, Brazilian cat walked out behind the bush, stood up and released one loud:

- Meyaouuuwww.....

So calling, so strong that all present pensioners reverted in one voice: - Viva!

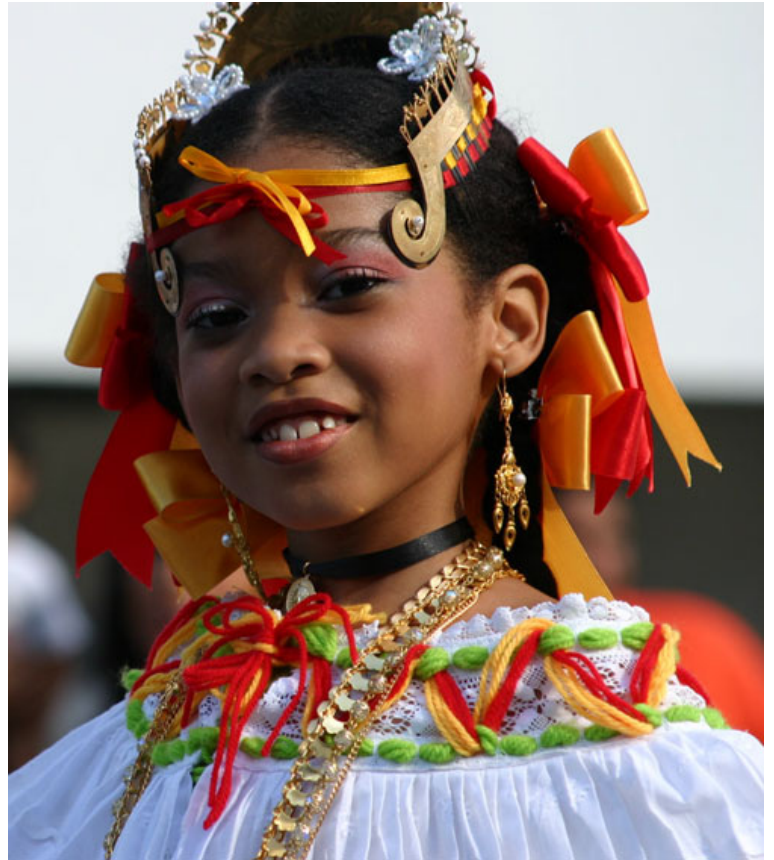
Now little jungle girl purred us her story from early days when she had to run so hard in order to get away from so many hunters that hunted her for ages. Well, now and then but lets not be malicious.

After jungle performance she walked to the bar just next to me. Her claws were sharp but I dared to ask in Spanish: - *Usted es muy afortunado. Madre esta aqui.* But I'll be in Rio for New Year.

- What did you tell her? Asked mother afterwards.

- Nothing, just what's the time. It was late.

She didn't believe me, neither did I?



Break time, Half time!

I lost interest after this performance, claws bite was bad omen.

All girls are now waiting for the few last contestants so than can jump on meats, schnitzels and other self-inviting eateries to be eaten.

Hunger was common feeling in that moment. All on diet, ha-ha-ha!

Somebody underestimated timing and signal went on. They all jumped on food in a way that I couldn't resist to ask myself:

- Have poor creatures eaten something last month?

Of course, cameras were flashing, oldies were reddish, trying to persuade some of victims that "he is the best party ever", for sleeping and Sunday times reading on Sunday day.

Didn't work well, and I couldn't tell them the "way" since that will be the sin.

School of ways is my personal secret, can't risk everything.



*Makan place is waiting for starved customers, all night long*

And than.....

Look! What!

Still another competitor?!?

Yes, yes!

**Miss Vietnam** was first among the last exhibits.

Bag a pardon, from now on I'll call her "my little Vietcong girl.

Because, from now on, I'll be dead man until the day one of them comes and kiss me so to return me **to** life.

All I say below is uncensored and can not be taken as a valid conviction material.

My little Vietcong girl....

She killed me.

Instantly.

I new for little Vietcongs since school days. Those, for them, hard days, we liked them for bravery, I even had few photos on my student's room wall, among many, kept one little cute girl that looked so much like this one. We all knew them well but, I didn't look at them as women. Guerrilla, yes. Women, no way.

What a huge mistake!

She walked in with her so characteristic small but firm and fast steps, long legs, with a straw hat from that part of the world, shielding her forehead and magic eyes, cute, all so well blended with the ambient that I love the most. Tiny sandals with strips climbing half of her left leg was all nakedness one can see.

Up to the neck she has a robe of colorful silk, huge flowers, like trying to hide her figure.

In vain. All was visible, firm, shivering, sensual to the end of this world. But, to my eyes only.

Everybody looked at her while she was talking about rice planting.



I noticed, she is shy, trying to hide under the shadows on the stage.

I sensed her, I felt her smell, it was unusual experience never to happen before or again. Hope so.

She had that power to drive me crazy, the only think I really miss in this world, don't I?

Her eyes .....,

No.

Her one eye was only visible. Another was covered by her long, black hair, half face. Did she know I am going to be here? How she knew how I like eyes and hair combination?

She walked up to the middle of the stage and than stood there for a moment before telling us her story in pure Vietnamese dialect.

- I come from one South province where my grand father is building new house so is a bit short of money and he asked me to act as Miss Vietnam, may bring few bucks in return. But he told me not to misbehave. His words before I left were: If somebody tells you how unbelievable eyes you have and how beautiful you are, you must answer him: "but I don't like it"! That way you will be always safe and I can finish my house in peace and tranquility.

Her speech took me unprepared; I kept my mouth wide open listening to her. The same gesture she had later while listening to some dumb idiots. I knew immediately we are of the same structure. Hard one.

I realized girl is young, wasn't sure if she's 33 or 23.

Who else can be so open and sincere in those times?

She slides down to the bar desk along with others, looking considerately to them if they have no objections. Such a beauty!

I couldn't resist. Came close and told her:

- You are beautiful girl. Your eyes reflect the most beautiful character I ever met.

- But I don't like it. She replied as she was advised by her good grand father.

- I know, but I like it. I wish I am a young man, than I would steal you, take you to deserted island and never let you go with our 100 kids. But this way, it wouldn't be fair; now, I couldn't make more than 50 kids.

We laughed a bit but she still does not forget herself:

- But I told you I don't like it. She replied as previously mentioned.

Her eyes fired few sparks, short, quick, just enough to tell me, she really didn't like it.

I don't give up, I always happy in this Miri of mine:

- OK. I'll talk to your grand father; maybe he can advise you some more lenient statement, just for people that like you. I tried to switch this to fun so she can relax from centuries old fears.

She was bit confused but her eyes melted down little bit so I could see her true nature.

Unbelievable one!

Whoever gets behind hers grandfather advise and those beautiful eyes, will find him on that island.

Maybe alone, but, nobody's perfect.

You see! This place of mine is not so ordinary place.

Wish you a nice day in Miri.





*World without make-up*



## 14 - Ahkui,– Spirit of the Island



### Part I - Venus Trap

It's, six o'clock in the morning, I sit on the balcony gazing at calm blue sea, greenery, great sunshine day is around the corner, and everything is just like it suppose to be. Nice and quite. I'm having coffee, flicking pages of story about character which, for awhile, kept amusing some habitants of this nice old town.

I've been thinking about suitable title. Maybe... The Beauty and the Beast?

Hm, already used.

Or, Old Man and the Sea?

Hm, same.

Something more popular, say, Illusionist in Trouble?

OK, fits the ambient. "Illusionist in Trouble", full stop.

Now, I concentrate.

Some days like this one, I think life for me will never be the same.

I'm getting worried thinking about that twisted crowd over there obsessed, bad looking, unfit, sick, stupid, uneducated, slow, lost, locked, lonely, problems, problems, problems, ha-ha-ha! I have to go home first, I must.

It's ruined a bit but guys are at least normal.

Viva Mexico!

-----  
This story happened in Relax karaoke bar, some months ago. Pitch dark, rainy night, thunder and lightening all over the world, looked like hell. Relax was one of many dark, plain places where anything can happen to the man over night.

But I like those kinds of places because people are simple, open and friendly. No strangers, no negative waves, only us locals. Can play pool to the exhauster, picado too, very good music fed by Egan, smart young amigo, all together, good for relax after hard day work.

That night was very quite; few of us and stuff.

Me and Ann play pool, Chew is doing his practice on picado, others sleep at the desk, huh!

Little girl comes and ask me what I want to drink. She was cute, soft and quite, no usual cheerfulness.

Well, they all know what I drink but I see she's new face in the shop and asked her for her name.

- Ahkui. She keeps hand over the lips.

- Right. Coke-Daniels *tolong*.

- Who is this? I asked Aini; she was waiting in a que for pool.

- She's crazy girl. Just started few days ago. And already managed to break her tooth. That's why she's down.



-So?  
I find out Ahkui was a Dayak kid without front tooth no. 2, up, left. She fell from pool table!  
Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha.  
Imagine little, small, sweet girl falling down from pool table, tup, tup, tup! I regret I didn't see that show, I'm sure I would die from laughing, ha, ha, ha!  
You can imagine now what kind of creature is this about?  
To make it short, she was very experienced with all kind of thinks: story telling, dancing on the table, boating, fishing, jungle exploring, name it. She surely showed us some tricks during few river trips. As days went on I learned her more and more.  
She was type that likes very much when folks around here are happy. All the time she does some little thinks that make someone happy. She normally watches for some seconds, like a pet, for reaction and if positive, she jumps so happy with high pitch squeak like a night bird so everybody knows she's happy  
Completely unpredictable Miki!  
Once, I asked her to find me on the market one CD with some song I wanted to have in my collection. She did it, I guess because she also liked one number on the disc, "*Saat Jumpa Pertama*" (moment we met again). So I called her to say thanks and to hear that number, I put mobile on speaker. When she realized I liked that number she went squeaking, I hardly could calm her down. Of course, I had to turn that number three times in a row for her to listen again and again. Cost me a lot for phone, almost 3 ringgets ha, ha.

## II

Another rainy night, another stop over, let's cool down little bit, too tired for typical night trips. Everybody is still there, I count them personally. I must break the monotony in case noses are down. Aini is the best. She's smart, professional, cool and measured. She controls the crew and first 20 minutes are reserved for her. Refreshing conversation always. She's beautiful anyway, not difficult to spent time with her at all. Does this sound like I said something new? Than pool, than, picado, than sitting at the desk, didn't go well at the pool table, last in the que.

Now, here comes Ahkui; she was hiding in dark corner of the bar, hmm. Happy, smile, asks how we are, what I want to drink. I wonder what's happening suddenly. Not like her, usually.

I ask if she wants a drink.

Oh yes! She's happy for that. Normally, she doesn't ask, unusual but, I like presence of dignity.

She sat next to me, I observe her closely, her hair was sleazy like from 50's, simple, no fashion, no make-up. We talk for awhile, I see she can not follow my Malay; it is obvious that each of us have his own story. But she laughs all the time. More than usual, kind of too much fun for what? Must be something?

Half an hour she manages but than, she just can't hold any longer and breaks out:

- Look! Look! And she is showing me her teeth. she fixed one that was missing before.

- Ouoooh! I stretch long sigh. Tooth! Beautiful! Now I can kiss you finally.

- No, no! She cries in panic.

She jumps of chair and runs away; I chase her with widely open hands. We burst in laugh.

She is happy that I am happy and that I like her new teeth.



You see, I just have to do this kind of things. It wouldn't be me if I missed that. And disappointment? Ouch! Girls are happy when you tell them something nice even if you are not hers prince on white horse.

It took me some time to realize she hardly understood what I was saying. She just says: mmm (yes), *tidak No*) and *besok (tomorrow)*. She hardly listen to me, she is talking to her friends while I was talking; she was somewhere else all the time. For example, one of our provoking conversations goes like this:

*Me: Darlingku. Apa kamu kerja esok?*

*Akui: Tidak tau.*

*Me: Mau pergi jalan-jalan?*

*Akui: Tidak tau.*

*Me: OK, kalau tidak sibuk kami boleh pergi makan malam?*

*Akui: (looking into different direction) Ann, Ann, ada customer sana. Pergi beri dia microfon. Dia mau makan nasi!*

*Me: Darlingku, mengapa tidak mau jumpa besok?*

*Akui: Ann, Ann, mana Sofia?*

*Me: (desperately) Akui, Akui, mari kita bersalaman?*

*Akui: Tidak tau. Ann, Ann, minta Sofia mau pergi Pakston besok.*

*Me: Akui, apa kerja esok?*

*Akui: Mmmmm*

*Me: Mau jumpa taman buaya?*

*Akui: Tidak tau.*

*Me: Mengapa tidak tau. Jumpa. Pergi doctor, kamu gila.*

*Akui: Tidaka tau.*

*Me: Akui, Telur sangay murah sekarang?*

*Akui: Besok*

*Me: Tida boleh. Saya suka cermin itu*

*Akui: Mmmmm*

(on and on for hours)

Needless to say what fun surrounding crew has. Oh man, we really have good fun some days, all of us.

Never boring since Ahkui came.



Money didn't mean to her much like to the others. Say, you buy her some think, gift, decoration... She takes in her hands, look at it, turns up and down, left and right and if can not be eaten she throws it away with ha, ha, ha, ha!

One of most powerful skill Ahkui had was... story telling. Invented story telling. She was the best. It was spontaneous and instant inspiration; sometimes she couldn't remember anything of that after five minutes. Most interesting are her personal experiences; probably few hundreds or more, all different, brand new. I regret I couldn't pick up fine details due to my still poor language skills.

Many kids in my world wouldn't even dream about what kind of stories Ahkui made of her dreams; instantly. Generally, few things hold constant for her ever changing profile. She came from Pointianak, she's original Dayak, wild and swift like leaf on the wind, she couldn't read or write. The rest...?

Apparently, she left her family four years ago, manages to get to Kuching somehow, she worked there 2-3 years. She had one abortion but no passport or other documents. I believed only her charm saved her from police and deportation. How can one arrest such happy creature?

But after some time and investigations we all lost hope to work out her identity.

### Story I – First Job

Little girl of 16 is heeding from Pointianak to Kuching with firm intention to get some work there and help her eight member family back home. Trip is long, through the dense jungle with friends that know the way across, no papers; untouched, invisible, adventure is working out well. She works hard and fair in karaoke bar, she likes Chinese crew; nobody touches her since she knows how to defend herself. No hanky-panky jobs, work, sleep, and at the end of the years goes back home to deliver her mum 7000 ringgets out of her savings.

I calculate in myself,  $12 \times 300 = 3600$  plus bonuses but can not work out her figure.

She also doesn't know since she does not understand numbers and that's now solved, exactly 7000 ringgets.

What? You don't believe me?



She manages to complete few course, how to cook, eat and drink. Her teachers are best Chinese cooks. Best results she achieves in drinking since that way all pains disappear instantly.

### **Story II – Baby girl**

In this story Ahkui is mother. She has four years little girl and she would be very happy if she can buy her one doll or so. I am buying her nice dolly for her baby girl, of course, little happiness never hurts. I am trying to find out if she has more kids but she forgot.

Little girl is sweet little flower, she lives with her grandmother in Pointianak and girl's name is Tita. I'm telling you, she knows everything about.

Ahkui doesn't say who and where is father but she loves her baby girl and work hard for her and to provide her with better future. Girl grows without mother and Ahkui takes it very hard and that's why she dreams about day to return home.

Since situation in Kuching becomes uncertain due to many wounds and scars, Ahkui moves to Miri, not sure how but it's worth to try.



### **Story III – Speed of Light**

One dark, dark night, nasty rains again, sometime around 3 in the morning Ahkui must go to see her ill mother, it's urgent.

- Where is your mother? I asked.

- Mother is here, in Kuala Baram. She lives there quietly and happy since she has daughter near by to take care about.

- But Kuala Baram is here, near by Miri, I try carefully.

- Yes. My mother lives there.
- And your girl?
- Which girl? She replies.

Ahkui leaves bar with her friend, rushing, by taxi which will take her to her mum and little girl whose origin she can not remember anymore.

#### **Story IV- Saat Jumpa Pertama**

Once I asked her if she knows some of old Dayak stories, maybe she remembers some from early days. We agreed to meet on Sunday 2PM at Tip-Top karaoke bar where she works part time every Saturday and Sunday 2 to 6Pm, extra 50 ringgets for her savings. I wonder they pay so much there but? She will bring me one book of stories that her mother used to read for her when she was kid. Than she can take us upstream, across the river to see her mother as well. Just ask DJ for me, he will call me in case I am busy with my little girl. I pretend I got the message, OK; secret mission is on the way!



Sunday 2PM, unnoticed, I sneak through the back door into Tip-Top, pitch dark inside, I stumble across to back corner bar stand; well rounded waitress or so sits behind and gaze into the darkness of the interior.

- Hi. I start.
- Aaa. *(usual greetings)*
- I am looking for DJ.
- Mmm *(usual, yes)*

- Where is he? I need to ask him something?  
 - Mmmm. She points towards small stage for bends in opposite corner of the space. I walk there, really, somebody's there fixing something around PA equipment.  
 - Hi.  
 - Aaa.  
 - Are you DJ?  
 - Mmm.  
 - Listen, I am looking for Ahkui. She told me to ask you where she may be now.  
 - Mmm.  
 - Do you know where she is?  
 - Mmm.  
 - Can you call her? She has to give me a lift across.  
 - Mmm.  
 He slowly walks away to the desk, talks slowly with rounded waitress, comes back with some phone number.  
 - Mmm.  
 - OK, thanks.  
 - Aaa



I begin to think, hard, hah.  
 I call that number several times...finally.  
 - Hi, where are you?  
 - I was there at 2PM, where are you? Wait there. I'm coming.  
 I go for 10 min walk around; it's hard to sit in that dark, depressive place on the bright sunshine day.  
 Coming back; she's there with two friends.  
 - Aaa.  
 - Aaa  
 I buy them a drink and go away tired.  
 She is busy, has got brand new cleaning job.

### Story V – Part Time Job

In this story Ahkui works in one saloon somewhere in old town, nobody knows where, she too, no names, no place, truly correct: no memories is intentional observation, yes?  
 Her statement: “As more you know, more you suffer” was top hit answer on my question why she doesn't want to learn to read and write.  
 In that saloon she works as hairdresser, extra earnings so necessary to support her family, this time in Kuching: they moved there recently. Boss is very nice lady; she can bring her girl sometime if nobody to care about. She will also help her to establish her own saloon if she works hard.  
 Well done! So, let's explore that. Luckily, DJ from Tip-Top told me name of the saloon; Bibi, old town.  
 I walk there with my notebook ready for interesting notes, all fits the picture!  
 Well rounded Chinese lady welcomes me at the door  
 - Hi.  
 - Hi. You need massage?

- No, thanks. I'm looking for Ahkui.
  - Ahkui? There's no Ahkui here.
- Are you sure? I've been told she works here.
- Sorry, no here. Do you need massage?
  - No thanks, I'm fine. Still.
  - You sure no here Ahkui.
  - No. there is one fat little, from Indonesia but no 'Kui.
  - You massage? Come look, all girls are there.
  - Thanks, I'm in hurry. Buy.



### Story VI - Dancing

Night.

Bus is toggling along old road from Kuching towards Miri. Ahkui is dozing next to her friend, tired. Just about to reach destination. It's hot, humid night, perfect set up for romance. But Ahkui can't think about romances or love. She dreams about little girl which dreams about her mother in the bus that quietly floats through the night and jungles of Sarawak towards better future. It's almost dawn. Here we are. Final stop.

Passengers are sleepy, messy; they waddle out from the bus at empty bus station next to Boulevard plaza. A face, known like "toke" is helping two exhausted friends with their luggage. He drives them to promised land, brand new workplace; small room on the second floor of gray building. Maligay is popular place for new comers, fresh and happy comrades have many stories to tell.

In this story Ahkui begins to understand how small this beautiful world can be. She quickly gains many new friends, they take her around to get familiar with local environment; she gains popularity immediately. She also learns Chinese language very quickly, "bu yao".

She visits all meaningful places, gets introduced with numerous meaningful folks, she's lucky, all same as before. Oh, how easy is this new job! Few more part time jobs are provided so she can save lots of money. She also works in restaurants at Waterfront, in and out of that. In Maligay she finds her new love and she gets beautiful present from him, baby.

Bus as we've learned, money and presents mean nothing to her. She's not greedy.

So, she gets rid of present after few weeks and moves to new workplace, Relax, to find herself comfort for lost love by dancing on the pool table.

Surprise!

Well, stories never end.



### ***About author***

*Born many years ago in the most beautiful old town Krusevac, Serbia, those past days part of paradise called Yugoslavia, where he made his first steps and introduced himself with magic of this planet. He completed high school and, by the way music school as well, in this town after which moves to special engineering studies in Zagreb to consequently moves to Belgrade to complete multidiscipline engineering studies. Well, not exactly western type of education, luckily, otherwise he could have also end up like "Tabula Rasa".*

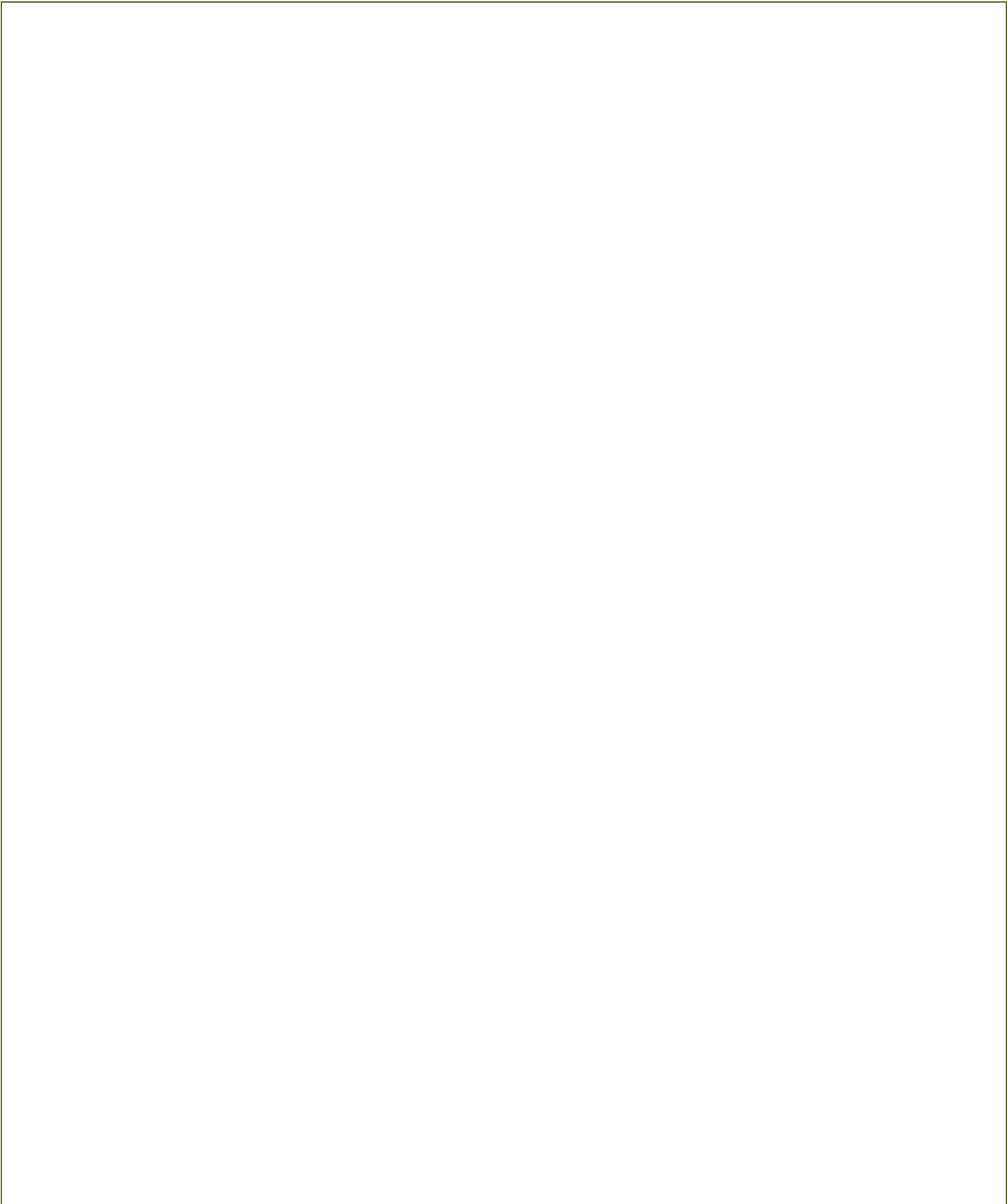
*And all that was for free, provided by silly communists, so much hatred all over the world until those days. Luckily again, all that achieved thankfully o, so called dictator, Tile, one smart guy whose passion also was... movies! Ha-ha!*

*With exceptional memory capacity, he worked in various institutions and companies, doing music as well as a hobby that makes people happy, and explored some Asian regions, by the way.*

*However, as old people say, evil never sleeps, so, international community, and some locals, of course, couldn't stand much longer fact that we are all equal. Finally comes to destruction of paradise of Yugoslavia.*

*So, author decides to stay in the "civilised & developed world" down under for some time. Chance came by chance to get out back to greener pastures, and, here we are!*

*Cano*





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