Meters beyond Lafawndá’s sacrificial altar, a sandy circle opened up surrounding a single tangled tree. The monstrosity was probably over a hundred years old, straining for life in a noble effort to suck whatever liquid it could from the arid environment below. *Oh, to stay alive these days,* I thought.

Before rushing towards the pinnacle, we split up, skirted under the surrounding bushes, and peeked over fences, scanning for active human life. To signify the coast was clear, we each produced a soft “coo, coo, coo, coo, cooooo!” with a tailing crachendo. I stepped into the clearing and took a deep breath. “This is the spot,” I said, “This is the spot where my ego will die.”

I looked to Timbo who carried a silver platter with tin foil spottily wrapped around its upper edges. His flat brimmed hat left a shadow spanning the ridges and sockets on his face, but the rest of his body glowed with a brilliant white reflection in the sun. He looked like a deity approaching me in order to present the truth of all cosmic mystery. Under our circumstances, such an observation wasn’t so ludacris.

We convened at the trunk’s shaded base and arranged our gear in a pile where the contents wouldn’t get baked to a crisp or buried in sand.

“You have the seashell?” I asked, sitting down with my legs crossed upon a foam camp mattress.

“You bet your best I do.” responded Timbo. He pulled out a small plastic clipcase box with an assortment of useful and useless items inside. “Here it is, ain’t a seashell though.” He handed me a smooth cup with brown and white speckles forming a spectrum on its porcelain exterior.

“Where’d you get that? We’re in the bloody desert.”

“Cambodia, dude. These giant snails crawl all over everything once you get outside any major city. This one, I caught slithering across my face at two in the morning on a backpacking trek. Nasty mother fucker, left a crusty wad of slime in my hair for days.”

“Well I’m glad you didn’t have to eat it.”

“Oh, I did dude. Fried the mother fucker in some seseme oil and salt. Believe me, deserved it for mucking up my face.”

I took a deep breath and gathered my feelings for a second. After hearing his description of the object I was about to handle, it seemed infinitely less qualified as the utensil intended for pulverizing our precious cactus. But it was the cleanest thing in the vicinity. Timbo laid the metal saucer on the gravel between us and peeled away its lid, revealing a pile of bone stiff cactus shards. I looked at the shell in my hand and then towards Timbo with a nod.

“May the psychedelic spirits of the Universe be with us!”

I brought the tool down onto the green material and felt them fractal by a factor of 5. Each smash produced 5 more pieces at an independently exponential rate, until nothing but a pale green powder remained.

“That’s what we’re looking for!” said Timbo giddily, “Keep on smashin’ white boy!”

“Smasher Man is at it again!” I said reminiscing of my days on the demolition site, bursting through walls with a sledge hammer. I finally got tired of grinding the dusty gunk and passed the bowl to Timbo. He pinched a finger grip’s worth and let it fall back into the pile. The sun twinkled throughout the crystally substance and stopped when his grip ran dry.

“It’s your cactus.” said Timbo, “do you think she’s ready to eat?”

I set it down and decided that we shouldn’t wait any longer, for my brain was whaling for water. While dehydrated,(especially in a desert) every instance becomes all the more dire. In a dire state of mind, taking yourself exceedingly seriously is common. Considering the 3 days of prior fasting and 2 months transporting the cactus over 1,500 km by backpack, theses moments following assumed a brink-of-causing-World War III-by-fucking-Kim-Jong-Un’s-girlfriend  degree of intensity.

I pulled a metal spoon from the mesh exterior pouch on my pack and scooped a substantial quantity of crystal cactus dust to eye level. As a makeshift chaser, Timbo unscrewed the cap of a 4 liter water jug and placed it in my hand. The spoon shook in its position just outside my mouth, but not a single flake fell to the ground. The rarity of such a pure and significant substance raised the intensity another degree.

I swallowed hard and realized how dry my mouth had become from not drinking. It felt like my esophagus had solidified and become inflexible - *deep breath.*

“You oughta go on and put it down or else you’ll pass out from so much tension.” said Timbo.

“Alright then. Here goes nothin’ Gringo!” I lifted the spoon and tossed the dust into my mouth as far as I could towards the back. Only in my haste, the spoon caught my upper tooth and sent a dusting over the tongue’s entire surface. The battery acid flavor I described earlier doesn’t encompass how putrid and unpleasant it tasted. I thrust the water jug to my mouth and began sucking liquid without control. It didn’t help. My eyes bulged immediately and I nearly vomited without swallowing the entire amount. Even as it mushed into a cakey texture, I kept my mouth shut and swallowed, chewing occasionally to move idle clumps.

Timbo took a spoonful for himself and slugged back three gulps of water before squinching his nose and consuming his first dose. He swallowed, took a deep breath, and shook his head with a loud scruff.

“That’s some nasty shit.” he said. “Best not to think about it. I’m gonna take another one.”

“Be my guest” I said, rolling around on the tarp, trying to regain normality of sight. It wasn’t the hallucinogenic effects giving me trouble, but rather the fact that my body was now required to process something after 3 days of fasting. My throat and muscles slowly became more malleable as the water soaked into their spongy structures. I never thought of muscles being spongy, but when they lack water to the extent mine did, it’s simply the best description. Timbo handed me another spoonful and gave an endearing look.

“You heard the old sage, three scoops or nothing will happen.” I took the spoon and thrusted the contents, again towards my throat, and slammed a liter of water in reactive intuition. The taste fought back and lingered for another 5 minutes. I contemplated eating something, a few peanuts maybe, but the idea of consuming anything else -- especially that putrid powder -- made my stomach twist.

“Take it easy man, your brain is, like, super susceptible to insanity right now.” said Timbo. He reached in for another scoop and swallowed with an enormous gulp. “That probably counts for two, I think. But, fuck it, I’ll take another”. Gulp number #3.

I thought about the Sea of Uncertainty and how sweet the shores of the Land of Destiny would be if I could just knock back one more dose. The symbolic emotional realm of my mind became realer than ever, filling each layer of consciousness with awareness in accordance with the progression of imaginary concepts. I could literally see the golden coast in my visual receptors, calling for the actualization of my most innate instinct - to grow. Face the abstract power of fear and rage against the darkness within. A flower blooming in a dark room.

“Gimme that spoon” I said, cringing into a sturdy half lotus position. Timbo passed the shining utensil and bowed with his hands together like a monk. I dipped into the remaining material and chugged water with my head back, stopping for a second to dump the spoonful into my mouth-hole and swallow.

We retrieved and strapped our headbands. Mine, purple and tied in a coil across my forehead. Timbo’s, green and flat, covering his hairless dome. We laid with our heads angled towards the massive tree and took a deep breath in shared understanding that there was no going back. I closed my eyes and focused on not vomiting for the next 15 minutes until the ground started vibrating.

Or was it the ground? A heartbeat-like rhythm originated in my central nervous system, then reverberated through my body, head to toe, en más, like a heartbeat. A breeze came from the open desert, sweeping warm clouds into our clearing and around the tree. Upon sitting up, I soaked in the rich, spectrified rays falling from the sky. They developed subtle drips of yellow, silver, and green - The sky was melting like rainbow chocolate syrup.

My visual acuity narrowed on a micro level as if a new world existed beneath everything I could normally see. Staring at the tree’s roots, I could see beyond their exterior shells, like an ingrained x-ray illuminating their sub-atomic structure. Constantly changing flashes of energy manifested and disappeared beneath the first layer of bark, as if an infinite flow was always there.

I looked over to Timbo who was laying on his back, but leaning up slightly with his arms floating out to the sides, and shaking. His eyes were closed and his mouth gaped slightly as quick breaths cycled through his respiratory cycle. If he were glowing, I would have guessed his soul was being abducted by aliens.

Instead of jumping into panic mode, as a suburban mother would if their child behaved in such a way, I sat there staring at his facial features, which slowly rearranged themselves like a fleshy Mr. Potato head. It occured to me that people of an uncontacted Amazonian tribe might consider Timbo’s actions a blessing, or a gift from the Great Spirit in the Sky. “In fact,” I thought, “I’m gonna get me some of that!”

I sat cross-legged and meditated, aligning as best I could with the intention of being “transported”, in a spiritual sense, to some realm not yet experienced by human beings. Timbo was probably already there, floating around in pure timeless bliss, realizing the dream of every psychonaut.

Within seconds of closing my eyes, an undeniable wave of nausea sparked near my sacrum and crawled through the mushy path of internal organs until an unpleasant bubble inflated inside me . I couldn’t bare the swelling feeling while laying down and broke my focus in a frantic scramble towards the clearing 5 feet from the base of our tree. I bent over and gazed downwards, noticing visible rays of sunshine cutting through the dehydrated atmosphere and reflecting from the ground towards my shirtless chest. I could feel the cells of my skin roasting and shriveling, while at the same time, the recent influx of water continued filling their capacities. It was an experiential paradox, where my body was physically doing two opposite things at the same time.

I erected from my keeled over position and stared at the tree line separating us from the infinite planes of Mars rock and stray dogs. The dangling branches crawled and dripped through the sand as if a thousand-armed octopus was stretching its tentacles into my mind from a metaphysical realm, where truth dwelled in isolation. Limbs moved on their own terms with claymation-like aerobics and definition. The animation was visual confirmation that I was, indeed, tripping my balls off. It was the sweet culmination of a two month dream, all tied up with the ultimate hope of discovering some real enlightenment.

That’s what people claim happens at least. I heard countless tales of a mystical entity known as “Grandfather Earth”, or in some cases, other manifestations such as “Moneta”, the spirit of money. Or even Jesus himself appearing  to provide “the answer”, just because some skinny white dude decided to consume some high potency drugs in the desert? Their minds manifest otherworldly internal and external hallucinations that rival everyday detail and realistic discernment. That being said, people also recall enormous dragons appearing to swallow them up before being spiritually digested like a cosmic hamburger. Then, without a doubt, their ego is stabbed to death by a glowing angel wielding a crystal dagger - all within the dragon’s stomach - and finally (very vividly they remember this) being shit out in a resurrected manifestation of light.

This trip turned down a slightly different path. My knees shook and hands wobbled to the point where a state of shock was possible if I didn’t calm down. *Deep breaths*. Timbo was still vibrating away and floating like a zombie beneath the tree. He had no idea what was happening to me, and I, no concept of his experience. After the brief, yet intense, molecular sensations and visualizations, a rush of nauseous waves finally hit shore, this time with disasterly power. The trembling wobbles dominated my stability control, as if I were an Islamic man dropping to his knees in obligatory prayer. My eyes bulged as I lurched parallel to the ground, simultaneously launching an amount of putrid green vomit and water onto the sand before me. The green liquid ran for a few feet before being sucked into the ground. I felt bad for our monstrous tree. Albeit minute, a percentage of that slime would reach its roots, probably triggering a one-of-a-kind “tree trip” against its will.

Acidic remnants of the substance pushed through my internal flaps and hatches, burning the surface of my esophagus. The same lurching action repeated again, and again, and again, against my control, until I could finally press back into an upright kneeling position with my hands floating to the sides. Chunky drool poured from the corners of my mouth and the world seemed to shrink into that moment. For my body, nothing else mattered except evacuating whatever remnants of the cactus still remained inside.

This is where it became clear how the ego and attachments to an expected ideal rarely coincide with the physical whims of our universe. I wanted to float away, but reality brought me crashing down to Earth. I wanted to be shown absolute truths in a cloud of rainbows, but I threw up 6 times instead. It happens often. It’s not the lack of enlightenment itself, but rather the reaction to the lack of enlightenment that causes discontent.

I garnered what was left of my consciousness and stood with confidence that whatever was happening had stopped happening. I looked over to Timbo who hadn’t moved an inch. He was still planked in the hovering position with his eyes closed and lips pursed. It was about time I paid him some attention. A foot away from his head, I stepped on a twig, snapping it under my bare foot.

“God!” yelled Timbo. His entire face blinked awake. “Thank God. Really and truly, thank God.” His face was no longer moving from my perspective. The vomiting fit reduced the effect of my dosage significantly and I wasn’t hardly tripping.

“Yo, it’s just Charlie. No need for excessive ninja moves or lizard-like reactions.”

As if I weren’t even there, he began reciting the soliloquy I guessed had been whirling around in his head for 30 minutes.. “To love from the heart, you have to know your heart. To know your heart, you have to know yourself. To know yourself, you have to be yourself. To be yourself, you have to like yourself.”

“Wow, that sounds great. I wouldn’t disagree.”

He seemed to snap out of whatever trance sucked him under in the first place“Oh shit, you’re here. This is the best drug I’ve ever taken, man. Thank you, seriously, you’ve helped me love for the first time. I’ve really been a total shit head, shitting on everyone, all over the place. For my life honestly. But today, I learned how to love, sitting here with you, under this tree. How’s it been for you?”

“Magnificent… for the first 15 minutes. I just threw up about 8 times and now I feel kinda nauseous.”

“Noooo” he yelled at my reaction, “I’m so sorry man. This was, like, your climax and nothing happened? It’s like the greatest prank ever played by the Universe”

“Guess so, but I’m not really that bummed. It was a much needed slap in the face.”

“How’s come?”

“I don’t know, I guess it's a metaphor. All theses greatly anticipated events, or destinations, aren’t hardly as interesting once you get there. Living them is cool, but it’s the stones stepped on  that’re really peculiar. ”

“Yeah, maybe. But this is a damn cool drug!”He laid back on the blue tarp and closed his eyes once again, probably getting transported to some other dimension comprised of perfect Love and Unity.

I sat under the tree and ate peanuts. They were some damn good peanuts. Until I threw those up too.