

II. VENI, VIDE, . . .

Our trip to Tokyo was not really the beginning of our travels. In fact we began by going east not west. You might say they started a year earlier in Honolulu. Fred and I had just finished doing some work on the USS Kearsarge and were relaxing over some Mai Tais at the Reef Hotel.

"What does your wife think of our big trip coming up?" Fred asked.

"Wish I knew," I replied. "Sometimes I think she really means it when she tells me that raising those five boys is less hectic while I'm away."

"Does my bachelor status bother her?"

"It hasn't come up."

I took a good look at Fred, since I hadn't known him long and it was obvious we would be travelling together for some time to come.

He had a full head of hair, and an ample nose that more than balances his jutting chin. His ruddy face alternates shades of red and tan, depending on his present balance between dissipation and outdoor exercise. I knew he loved to drink, ski, and swim. He might have passed for twenty—nine except for his midsection, which tended to run over his belt a little and classed him more in the late thirties.

The glorifying effects of the tropical fruit- flavored rum enhanced the already idyllic surroundings. The red glow of the setting sun still tinged the clouds above the fading but distinct horizon of the vast Pacific. Closer at hand the burning torches flickered in the twilight wind. The muted sound of the surf masked the meaning but not the sound of the voices of the younger set still holding hands on the sands.

Fred broke the spell of the south Sea syndrome by stating, "You sure eyed those lovelies on the beach today."

"So...," I parried, "ocular intercourse never hurt anyone. Keeps you young and out of trouble. And in any case, look who's talking."

"Yeah, but I'm still in the business. I'm still shopping and sampling. You've had it. And speaking of having it, what about another Mai Tai, or better still, let's have a Martini."

A week later, two hours out of San Francisco on our way to Athens on TWA's non-stop to Paris, Fred continued his tutoring in "Drinking and the Single Man."

"Bring us Martinis," he told the stewardess when the choice of liquid tranquilizers was offered.

We were soon flying over the snow-capped Canadian mountains, emerald lakes and verdant forests.

A celestial atmosphere prevailed. The cumulus clouds as they rose in their fluffy majesty tried to reach our height of omnipotence, but beautifully failed. The smiling face of the shapely stewardess added luster to our already polished sense of kingliness. And Fred again began his lament on "Sex and the Adolescent Middle-aged Man." His opening gambit was, "Sure wish we weren't going straight through to Athens. Got the stewardess' name and phone number and she gets off in Paris. Can't see why anyone would want to get married."

"Trouble with you..." I replied, "you live at one pace all the time, no time to relax and enjoy family life. Among other things it's hard on your waistline. Alcohol is loaded with calories."

"So is Mary's cooking," Fred retorted.

"That's a great remark coming from the smorgasbord's worst enemy," I countered. After the stewardess refilled our glasses, I continued. "I can enjoy my boys' Little League team at home."

"Sounds pretty confining to me." Fred yawned and added, "Give me a sleeping pill. I'm going to beat that eight-hour time-zone change and get some sleep."

Time-zone-change fatigue is a real problem. It goes something like this: the flying time from San Francisco to Paris is eleven hours; since we left San Francisco at noon we would be in Paris at a most appropriate bedtime. The only trouble is that it's not 11 PM in Paris, but 7AM. It seems the people in France in general (and one specific Parisian General in particular) don't agree with Americans in general (and one specific Gettysburg General in particular); not even as to the time of day. For that matter, Americans themselves cannot agree on the time of day either, since most, but not all, states in the United States have a form of madness called Daylight Saving Time. The Parisians know, and everyone knows they know, that the real pleasures in the life of humans occur at night. They are not about to call a halt to their pleasurable nights an hour early during the summer. They must really chuckle to think that just as Americans are going to work for the day, they, the new pace setters in worldly affairs, are likewise starting their real day's work, namely, a night of pleasure.

The real problem with time-zone-fatigue is, however, not just the eight hour time shift, but how to see all the sights (Hudson Bay, Greenland, the three meals with at least that many servings of cocktails, get a good night's sleep, and wake up fit and able at 7AM, when you know darn well it is 11PM.

Fred's solution for time-zone-fatigue was elemental (in fact too elemental): It is well known that for non-belligerent types, alcohol is a great sedative. (Non-belligerents include me, exclude Irishmen, and Fred just ignores the problem.) It should therefore follow that TWA's allowance of cocktails plus a sleeping pill plus the movie en route (when they pull down all the shades) should equal a good sleep.

However, both alcohol and sleeping pills have side effects, usually cured by six or eight hours of sleep. Fred's solution resulted in a good sleep all right, but not a long one. Two hours sleep does not a night make, nor a hangover cure.

Walking into Orly Airport I called upon all my reserve powers of cheerfulness and asked, "What do you think of Paris, Fred?"

"I feel like I've just spent the night here carousing, but somehow I can't remember having any fun."

"You didn't unless you dreamed about that stewardess. Lot of good she'll do you though. she's off here and we're back on to Athens. Who arranged this itinerary anyway?"

"You know damn well who did. Those sadistic travel people at work. One hour in Paris and that at 7AM. Real living, huh John?"

"Who knows what wonders Athens holds? Let's get back aboard before you fall asleep standing up."

Finally, at 3PM Athens time, but a cheery 6AM California time, we were deposited in the hot, dreary and cramped terminal of Athens.

"Well Fred, how do you feel?"

"Just like I'd spent the last twenty-four hours playing poker in an opium den; that's how I feel."

"What do you mean? You know you've been wined and dined in the grandest style. You've been exposed to the much-heralded movie en route. What's the matter, don't you read those airline ads?"

"I've read them John, but two hours sleep in twenty-four is killing, and even those without the stewardess."

"Cheer up, Fred, a couple hours sleep and you can be off on the town."

And so it was. We slept through our first evening's dinner in Athens. But at 1 AM we were wide awake, and Fred decided we should proceed to Constitution Square to start our sightseeing. We found an outdoor table along the square and sat down.

"My God, Fred, you mean you're up to that Retsina wine after that ordeal on the plane?"

"Why not? That's what they drink in Athens isn't it."

"It's not what I'm drinking! It's coffee for me, even goat's milk, but not that turpentine flavored wine."

As the morning wore on, we each had our separate thoughts: mine of hotel, bed, and sleep; Fred's of hotel, bed, and women.

But the elements were in his favor--the full moon silhouetting the Parthenon atop the Acropolis, the sounds of sensuous music from the dimly lighted taverns, the resin scent of the wine, and the incessant clamor of the wandering pimps: "Free drinks at Byzantine Bar...lovely girls;" or "You boys want girls...follow me to Nick's Place."

Finally the amoral conditioning prevailed and Fred said, "Come on, John, it doesn't hurt to look... doesn't cost a penny."

"Go ahead," I replied. "I'll see you back in the room."

With the decision still in the balance we started back toward our hotel. We had just about made it when another procurer reached Fred's ear with his pitch, "Come see girls...just across street." This triggered Fred.

"Let's just look," he said.

We crossed the deserted street and descended some steps into a fog of cigarette smoke. The pimp had done his work well and two "girls" met us just before our eyes and noses were completely immersed in Dante's inferno.

"You boys out for fun tonight? You come to right place."

But now the elements were in my favor. Fred's prospective consort, although excelling in certain anatomical features, was not really very attractive, in fact slightly cross-eyed. And worse still, Fred's pride was obviously hurt because the prettier of the two was sidling up to me.

"Well, Fred," I said, "the free part is over... we've come, we've seen, but we're in Greece, not Rome. Let Caesar do it his way. I'm going back to the hotel."

"Yeah," he replied, "those fool travel agents. I knew we should have spent the night in Paris... let's go!"