

In stark contrast to moments of levity there is the bleak sublimity of common persistence; the everyday. It has always struck me as somehow two-headed in its quaking simplicity. On the one hand, existing is like being sucked into a grand void; moving forward without burden or any resistance of consequence, like a breakneck race to our deaths as inevitable outcomes loom and we grasp for anything that will still the moment. But there is nothing. On the other hand, there is density; a density sort of the consistency of jelly, oddly sensitive to stimuli like those fish that instantly change color when conditions warrant it. This is a density latent with every thought and every sense and things unheard and unseen and more. Moving through it is not casual, and it rushes in around us like heavy liquid and often suffocates.

It is likely the greatest moments of creativity dwell and participate in the concoction and brew of banal time. In efforts to quell the notion of hopelessness they unwittingly celebrate the very thing.

And then there are the shining types:

Fixed and gliding those memories that still in our mind and locate us, orient our thoughts of ourselves and our positions, like stars in our conscious; there for navigation.

It was an event of profound clarity and overwhelming acknowledgement. Like I somehow shifted into that brilliant Hitchcock device in which the camera pulls back and the lens zooms in at the same time. Usually reserved for horror sequences, my experience resulted in a ridiculous dumbfounded smile and lightheadedness. They were all true. All true indeed. I stumbled across Shit River and onto Magsaysay Boulevard. It was hot, hotter and stickier than Houston.

There were stories the salts told: "The P.I., the P.I." In the watches as they were, in particular the mid and the four-to-eight tales did get told. Days before our mooring at Subic the stories rolled, rolled out and spilled about like nothing ever mentioned to the youths of people. In the smoke breaks right out of Pearl they started then pitched like fever and the seas themselves the night before pulling in. The unfolding of a bizarre parody of life in which you believe nothing you hear and it is that these things, not only dismissed, but also never considered, turn out.

As the sun slipped behind the hills the weight eased off me, but the smile stayed. Light danced in the periphery and the sound of dugalag and treachery absorbed into the density. I crossed the quarterdeck alone so it happened that I was alone there on the streets of Olongapo. Not alone like there was no one around, but unburdened by committed

companionship, and appropriately so, for the revelation required all my faculties.

A coolness seemed to begin. The eternal vacuum pulled but the density held and time began to stop. It was twilight for hours and nighttime for days. I can still smell the street vendors and food, you know, smoke and meat and such. I ate the meat that was neatly faked onto sticks, and the fruit I pulled down from the carts. Bar girls yelled at me from the galleries and those on the streets would grab my pants and whisper, "I love you, no shit." It was all true. Tales I believed I had ejected from my mind came stealthfully back and were instantly proven in front of my eyes. The smile stayed attached to my face as story after story came in and became real. The lightheadedness of this education was replaced by the effects of mojo and beer and strange foods and the collision of fear and knowledge. There were girls and men who made themselves as girls and there were deeds and there was drink and much more.

When the dark was finally poised, I was gathered by Pete and Randy and we started; Barrio Barretto, Subic City and back to Olongapo and Magsaysay street. The interiors we engaged were odd and unlike anything I'd seen in the states and we enjoyed the pleasures; all the details and more. Like the salts had confessed, but there was so much more, as though in an effort to remember everything some items just couldn't be logged or retrieved. And so, there were the likes of things unpredicted. With remorse I submit they should not be uttered in mixed company, or on dry land, or places where smoking is prohibited.

As the curfew closed in, we ate balut but left its effects untested and, alas, crossed Shit River. On the pier as we neared the mid-ships, I thought to myself: How is it that these things go on? How is it that this education occurs so profound and illicit? How is it that the world may go on? We sat there on the fantail smoking and silent and the world fell in on me. Less than a month later, in a violent place, as a shellback, I would be thinking exactly those things again, exactly.