

 **Always . . .**

Always there is the smell of the wind and the sound of the sea . . .

The morning begins with the reveille of roosters. Their throaty exhortations seem to command the respect of nature. They herald the dawn, snuff out the stars, and rouse the sun from beneath the undulating bosom of the bay.

A flush of pastel pink and apricot colors rout the fleeing legions of darkness. Soon, the sea is sparkling as if stars had been sprinkled across its surface, and the sky is a creamy blue. The moon, relieved of duty, yields to the source of the light it reflects, yet lingers awhile to witness the radiant splendor of another birth . . . of another day . . . of another reprieve.

Now what shall I make of it?

A swim, a shower, light a candle, and meditate for an hour. Eat a plateful of sliced papaya with lime juice. Fetch a mug of coffee, sit in my bamboo chair, torch a cigarette, and gaze languidly across a sandy courtyard of palm trees and out upon the bay.

No appointments on my schedule. It must be Sunday, but then so was yesterday.

Perhaps I'll re-read a letter I received from an old friend of mine in Chicago. Yes, that's a good idea. One must have something to do from time to time.

Very few of the letters people claim to have sent me ever arrive here. I tend to re-read the ones I do receive until they become so boring that I burn them.

Occasionally, a couple of the local Thai gigolos ask me to read them letters they receive from their English-speaking conquests. This I enjoy, especially when they allow me to take the letters back to my bungalow to read over and over. These boys definitely have a magic touch with the Western girls.

"Things haven't changed much around here," writes my buddy from Chicago. "Business could be better and it could be worse. I'm still working half days—7 a.m. to 7 p.m., six days a week. Sometimes it seems that there are only six days in a week. You sonofabitch, I think you got all the Sundays in Koh Samui."

This fellow is highly educated and a very successful man. He's got double-digit millions. He's got no kids, a good wife with a bad back, and he's a scratch golfer. He seldom drinks, never smokes, and plays racquetball twice a week. He's a Jew whose favorite holiday is Christmas—always has a tree and a party.

"I can't believe I'm forty-eight years old and have accomplished so little. It's maddening to think about. At the end of every day it's all I can do to drag my ass home and blow a few good farts. Otherwise, I'm at the office dealing with morons all day. Anyway, I'm just beat."

Well, I'm in my mid-forties, got no wife, no kids, a girlfriend with a good back but who lives in Berlin, and I've got a fourteen handicap in golf. Every club in my bag is a handicap.

In fact, my life in general has been very similar to the way I play golf—lots of distance and little direction.

Yet, here I am perched upon my coconut bungalow verandah not exactly making a mark upon the world, nor on the other hand, being marked by it. Simply living a rather unremarkable existence.

Most of the time I'm contented and unbothered. However, occasionally I too am inclined to assess the accomplishments of my life and I'm sorry to say that they're not particularly impressive.

The most notable performance thus far involved managing a small manufacturing company with my youngest brother. The business was nearly bankrupt when we took control, and fifteen years later it was clearly bankrupt. In between, my brother and I made a little money, became dear friends and had a lot of laughs. On the personal side, I've had several stultified romances, and a seemingly insatiable rapacity for liquor and lust.

All in all, my accomplishments to date aren't likely to get me nominated for any Nobel Prizes.

That is, unless they add a new category for those that have distinguished themselves by virtue of their insatiable rapacity for liquor and lust.

My suggestion would be that anyone concerned with maintaining a cheerful equanimity should never attempt to assess his or her accomplishments. Most often we determine their significance by comparing them to somebody else's accomplishments that are invariably more impressive than our own. This is a very disheartening procedure.

Consider the case of Mr. Ezra Pound. This gentleman was a cantankerous and iconoclastic little curmudgeon of a poet who lived eighty-seven years and was widely acknowledged as a mentor to some of the

greatest poets of the twentieth century. Yeats and Eliot both paid homage to him. Yet, at the end of his life Mr. Pound had this to say:

"I have lived all my life believing that I knew something. And then a strange day came and I realized that I knew nothing; nothing at all. And so words have become empty of meaning. Everything that I touch, I spoil. I have blundered always."

Yikes! Awfully grim self-analysis, Ezra.

Having had a university course on Pound's poetry, oh so many years ago, I can only remember the ardor of struggle in wading through his collection of cantos. They were all rather esoteric and confounding.

Actually, the aforementioned quote is the only thing I've read of his that makes sense. I mean, it's a shame the poor fellow ended up feeling so depressed, but after being given a near failing grade for the course, I wasn't in a particularly buoyant mood myself. That grade kept me off the dean's list for the semester, thus denying me what would have been a salient accomplishment at the time.

But enough of this whimpering and weeping.



It's been a pleasant day. One of virtually undisturbed idleness. Nothing for me to cry about. I've read a little, written a little, spoken and heard a little, walked a few miles along Maenam Bay, tasted fresh fruits and spicy curry. Not once was I in a hurry.

Now it's dusk and the night birds are chasing butterflies. A pile of fallen, dead brown palms has been set ablaze. Sparks, the blush of a smoldering pearl whiteness, then a flash and an eruption of fire. Swarthy orange flames cavort in a cataclysmal dance. Passions, heretofore dormant, frolicking against the backdrop of a darkening sky.

Accomplishments?

I found a three-foot plank of wood and nailed it against an inside wall of my bungalow. Now it's a shelf. Several more similarly toilsome projects are waiting to be done. However, I am reminded of a passage from the *Tao Te Ching* that states,

*In the pursuit of The Way (Tao) one does less everyday;
One does less and less until one does nothing at all.
And when one does nothing at all there is nothing that is undone.*

"The Sage accomplishes without having to act," wrote Lao Tzu.

Some of those ancient Chinese sages were pretty clever fellows. Well worth reading, especially for somebody bolting out of the gate into the first furlong of a new millennium who feels that the main things missing from his life are a few more confounding paradoxes to contend with.

The fire is out. The dance is done. The flames are gone. The cauldron of their passion, a furnace of embers. Sepulchral vapors billow from the ashes.

Good buddy in Chicago; sit for awhile . . . quietly . . . alone . . . without thinking . . . at least once every day.

Rest in peace, Ezra. All's forgiven.

Forget the past; it doesn't exist. Nor does the future.

There is only the moment.

And, of course, here, always there is the smell of the wind and the sound of the sea.