

A NEW JAKSTARTA ☺

1.

On a return to Jakarta, but this time on my own (Grant and Simon, cats inclusive, having moved to a palatial beachhouse in Palawan, Philippines for unfessed reasons, but I'm thinking relationship recharge), I spend a robust 4 hrs in one beautiful, authentic sports bar in Changi Airport, Singapore, getting drunk good. Just the usual beers mixed with various cocktails I've never really learned the names of. There is an NFL game on the TV above the bar that nobody watches so I give it some divided attention. It is a tight game but I never follow enough to choose the deserving team and get overly concerned about the outcome as I'm wont to do when observing any relationship between two parties. Instead, during farfar too frequent adbreaks, I tried, as usual, to pick out fellow alkys in the bar and toast our evanescent, effervescent, imaginarilypresent bond. In other words, it was a 4 hour layover equaling absolutely fuck all to report.

Although, just a word to the wise (those of you who don't drink while flying, or don't drink at all), nothing staves off the soulsuck, speeds up the total suck of a layover like a slow drunk-up at a granted-overpriced airport bar.

2.

Singapore was all right. It was nice to be back in more conventionally modern city, but that came at the price of price. I'm not much for a city of 10 dollar beers, so I didn't really experience the sexy and salacious other than visually, opting for the guarded over the galvanic. Aside from the first night of hotel trashing and mini-bar raid, I spent the next few days there being rather pedestrian and well-behaved, the only shots taken being gluteally and as water washdowns which expedite the ingest of antibiotic medication. That is, among the omnipresence of skin and cosmetic surgery clinics I was able to track down a urologist whose contention was that the urine tests he administered, though tainted, were not entirely conclusive. However, with my insistence the treatment was given, with unprofessional giggles from his twitty hot, syringe-packing assistant, and a prescription to go; and after 2 days flat my ghost was exorcised, at least until the next bout of VD voodoo.

3.

Jakarta, by the way, is still a smoky city, with an ever-increasing sprawl. It doesn't have a discernible downtown skyscraper core compared to Bkk or SG or HK, nor the as-numerous dense, downtown districts of say Seoul or BJ or Manila, Its somewhere in between them all, so therefore looks Southeast Asian to a fault or more. And so do and are the people. Little swarthy, fairly fine-featured dudes, for the most part, contrasted with little, swarthy, fine to frumpy-figured, gals – Jack Ma or Bruce or Jet Lee wannabes and Miss Saigon or Suzie or Linda Wong successors. Butt here's the shitter-: at least ¼ of the girls have dropdead, dropdown and gorge behinds. Not really ever a thing with other Asian girls (especially with monumentally overrated, tragically flat, bony or no-assed K girls). Yes, Asian girls with Latina butts, it's a thing! Est. Indonesia circa 360°. Yet not a thing you can find easily or at all on the internet, curiously and sadly. Maybe I should start my own website... or open my own bar. Or get hotel drunk and chat with my pals overseas about doing that.

4.

Though you've probably heard of the other 4, you may or should not know, Linda Wong was an

Asian legend in the international AV industry. She was considered to be one of the first Asian pornstars during the heyday of slash-her flicks - the rememberforever 80s. As far as I know, she was also one of, if not the first erotic actress to be on the receiving end of a bang-o-thon – where 200 or so guys line up and jimmyjack themselves awaiting a perfunctory plow with a pornstar who is literally and must be truly at the end of her line. All for video. She died really early, but not during that shoot, in her mid-30s of a drug overdose and from all accounts was pretty wrecked up on and off camera most of the time. Legend has it she hooked on the side as well. Definite heroine material.

5.

Jack Ma is a Chinese megabillionaire; a square-jawed, seedy looking (but by all accounts not at all in:) character who is responsible for China's biggest online paying app Alibaba, which is used in conjunction with China's largest online shopping site, Taobao. If Jack's apps aren't in your life, you're probably losing money. That's not a pitch, it's actually probably indubitably true, says this newfangled customer. Anyway, Mr. Ma, in the spirit of many Forbes list-toppers, is also renowned as a philanthropist. In that sense, even two souls as disparate as his and Jenny's may have a commonality. To jab jibe at this quasi-serendipitous connection is an adult-flavored nursery rhyme that has begun to make the rounds among the Chinese who's who (the 'sheishei') that goes: Jack and Jenny went up the peak to catch the sunset vista, Linda went down and choked on his crown, and Jack came back with a blister."

6.

So, no surprise, I'm pounding pints in my supposedly-upgraded hotel room. Here's to you, the long lost Ms. Wong and all the ilk and ill that came before you, because of you and after you. I sink a bitter Bintang and suddenly remember a female colleague who, with her unrequited sights set on me once remarking, but as a question, and in a typically female show of feigned concern cum jealousy, if this was all my holidays were to ever be – getting wasted and womanizing. She had a point. And after a sincere mull, I told her she did... have a point. If she had had a proper response in mind, that wasn't it. My words have always spoken far louder than my actions, and I really don't see how logically and by definition they couldn't. I might as well have told her that. After the scull of a pint of Indonesia's best-selling pale-stale lager, I wince and hold back a twinge of nausea and posttoast to my grungy, puke-colored, cigarette-burn mottled, Labrador-plushed carpet a drunken colloquy to Jack and nobody in particular : Oh, and fuck you, Mr. Ma for making so much goddam money in this goddam surface crusty world.

Oh well, so I saunter to the bathroom, phone in hand and unlandlined from chargesocket, cause my Bluetooth speaker to skip for lack of steady reception, pull another chilled Bintang tallboy out of the puny, stooped cabinet fridge and toss it on the bed, wonder where I've put the bottle opener, make for the bathroom that's always next to the front door like almost no apartment or house ever, have a quick look in the wall-to-wall, selfie-serving mirror and decide before a leak that I'm still a pretty good looking guy going nowhere, but that'll be quite all right for one more night.

7.

Exiting the hotel, past the sexy front desk night staff I once would have had a chance of a chance with but who've already had enough of me having assisted in a room safety-deposit box

malfunction situation earlier, and into the wall of sickly air, my bardar tunes in as accurate as ever pinpointing a nebulous shack of a joint not 500 metres from my hotel, looking like it's a 1000 miles from home, and as much a part of heaven as hell. Dirty, already used-up, 20-something hussies cacklelaugh and houndbark at me to come in, and I, being a gentleman of extinguished taste, oblige. It's a bar straight out of old American WW2 movies where the GIs hang with the locals and the native girls work their wares. Except there's not that sense of foreboding like something bad is about to go down. And there's no GIs and we aren't fighting for anything save a penny for your ears. The whole joint is a mish mash of din and dun, only brightened and somehow-soothingly ambianced by strings of colored lights and a few store-bought neon signs. Maybe just the comfort of familiarity. It has a tiki bar with about 8 stools, and a further 8 elevated, circle tables for 1 or 2 evenly spread on the floor. This set up belies the bar's target customer and operational goal, as do the abundance of young, bubbly female staff. Almost all guys in this bar have come alone, and most are being happily loitered by these hired girls of the bar, or perhaps greenlighted freelancers accepted into the bar. The men ply sideways attention to them and look at the bar while trading expat observations with each other. A few grizzled men sulk alone, but they'll cave soon enough. No matter, we all feel extraordinarily important for a change. Instead of at the bar, I'll sit at one of the small, elevated tables somewhere on the inside looking in until I plateau to a new outofdoors-friendly buzz and join the rest of the booze jocks there. As if on cue, Sweet Home Alabama comes on to the screechy cheer of some of the more desperate lasses of the bar and I can't help but smile at everyone's simple, repetitive pleasures, not much different from my own, as much as my gold-plated ego keeps me from that unqualified admission. Of course, at there's got to be least one guy who twirls a 30ish, past her prime for this trade, brown, emaciated hobbit in a 2 dollar dress at a spot between tables on the dirt floor. The dance falls somewhere between a grade 6 graduation hip and shoulder shuffle and a TV-learned salsa which gives us all a laugh. He thinks he's the shit and she thinks he's a good-natured fool. They'll probably go home together later and kill the humor with some clumsy, pointlessly-serious bed rolling. That is something I've promised myself will not happen tonight. But, as always, tell that to the liquor.

8.

I've found myself sidle-saddled into a conversation with the dancing dude – who turns out to be an Aussie of 10 years here and retired, sort of. Now he deals in some kind of tech-support consultancy which I won't ask him to elaborate upon. Name's Stuart. He's sporting some indo-guayabera top buttoned down 2 buttons too far, salt n pepper chest hair with Magnum curls, knee-length khaki cargo shorts that look to be thinning they're so unwashed, and probably pricey, giant leather sandals intersticed by gnarly bulbous toes though the skin of his feet have that bizarre youthful look in full contrast to their otherwise epidermally-wrecked middle-aged wilted leather look. His face is hanging on for dear life to his skull, seams everywhere, and his teeth are clearly dentures being overly straight and square and white, with stains. His hair is too long for his age - down to his shoulders – and poorly dyed to a singed jaundice- orange, and has aged to the point where it is at once oily and crispy like the ubiquitous pubic strands stuck on the moist urinals of every public bathroom here. He's got a greening tattoo of a schooner on his forearm parched into his oversunned concertan arms and sinking beneath his armhair mesh. And, of course, while his arms, particularly his biceps - which he seems to pattern his clenched gesticulations around - may be toned and big and look like they've spent plenty of time in the gym, his gut is there to stand in alongside his arm ink and power pump and quell any fairy-boy

preconceptions, implications, imprecations that might arise as a result with a well-kept figure. One of those guys that looks menacing but isn't. Small town skank fodder becomes other-side-of-the-world hero to the native English-passable speaking, destitute hobbits. In other words, he could be any middle-aged expat here. I'm not being hard on this guy. In fact, I like him. I need more of this guy in my life. His reality is certainly way the fuck more tangible than mine, after all. However, I remain me, and so throughout our talk, I'll be preoccupied with my worry that I'm finding it hard to maintain eye contact with his decaying aged visage – to imply nothing better of my own, and instead looking down to pretend to ponder a point will only result in my being drawn to lookawaylookaway from those obscene feet; hence, at the expense of (as always) any decent dialogue coming from my end, I'll be left to look at my drink, the table, rudely and aimlessly around the bar or alternatively I'll likely check out his tiny purse of a girl a few more times than he'd like. For all of this I apologize for I'm an abject failure at social interaction and always will be. And believe me, I won't even be really looking at the girl. She just represents the best perceivable kind of outcome to an episode of social interaction in this environment and the kind I'm more accustomed to, and she's the easiest to look out among all these expat hooligans and miniature temptresses. I don't want her, not in the least really. Which is not to say that she's bad, or that I'm too good for her, or that he's a sucker, or she is, or that these two losers deserve each other ha! Just she's a little too ragged, too dark, too not-young, too cliché for my game, is all. And he is just not any kind of guy I'd ever become – from the skin tone to the muscle to fat tone, to the fashion to his overall tone. Admittedly, there is a fraction of me that wants me to want her to want me though. And I think this guy can really spice up a convo so I want him to like me, too. Alas, I can see Stuart is wondering where it is I keep darting glances too, and what the hell I'm going on about in my head.

He dangles a fag in the corner of his mouth and pats the bottom of the pack on his palm, and all out of order remarks, "I tell you what, mate, it isn't the worst you could do", motioning eyes and nodding off to the right. I'm not sure if he means the bar or the whole expat life here, but I guess it's both. He cuffs his hands around his whiskers and lights his smoke to signal a moment to pause for thought. His companion locks her arm a little tighter to his. My lord that tat is godawful, but at least it has the character of age. She seems totally content to have us chat forever here, and seems especially mollified when he speaks to someone else in the voice of a man, a wise tough man.

"How do you mean?" I ask a little thrown off by the sudden change of topic to one more far-reaching and contemplative, and frankly a bit weepy. I know fullwell where this is headed. He doesn't disappoint- "Well, you know, back home my mates have got mortgages, and their kids have mortgages and expenses coming out their arses. Million dollar homes there that would cost you 50,000 here and this is the real paradise, isn't it, eh? It's gotten so even the blade of grass you're left hanging onto gets taxed. But, over here, over here we've got it all handed to us, don't we, then? We are way better off here but don't tell that to them! Sure we have to take it in the ass here too, you know take a bit of wear and tear dealing with the bullshit of living here... but you know, at the end of the day, at the end of the goddam day, we're doing way better than back home and this one here'll tell you" he carries on motioning to his missus "she'll tell you that its nowhere near the bullshit they go through. These people. The flesh and blood, law-abiding Indonesians, country and home. These people don't have a pot to piss in and it's all thanks to Charlie Chung" he elbow points to the manager of the bar as a representative of I guess the Indo government "yet they are happier than dingos in diapershit, if you catch my drift." I do. "All this whingeing and moaning we do, sure it's too right, you know, but we don't have to deal with half

the shit they do. We are walking in the park, they're sleeping in it, eh?" He squishes out his half-done cigarette, which I'm relieved about, my having hit a wall in this lifetime with cig smoke, and gives a deep forlorn look down into his girl's eyes. She smiles an "ohbaby" warm smile and though she maintains an air of absorption in him offhandedly tells him, worried he's once again overstepping boundaries, to have another drink. "Don't mind if I do, babe. Anyway, here I go again, so what about you? What is like working over in Vietnam for you, is that where you said you're working out of?"

Although I like this guy and would have jumped nimble-mouthed into this kind of conversation years and years ago, it really isn't and has never been a narrative I care for. I've been through the dialogue more than enough times to know it's a circle jerk, and essentially nothing more. The usual we rock cuz we are brave enough to work overseas and, moreover, we make so much money taxfree and doggonnit we never have had it any better while all those poor suckers suffer paycheck to paycheck in the real world and shit. Throw in a little sympathy for the natives, peppered with some historical facts you just read up on or insight from the common resident to show how much you know and care about them. It's the most necessary, unnecessary conversation ever among expats and it just stinks of denial, delusion and defense. As fortifying as it might feel, it is certainly not the groundwork for genuine positive feelings of accomplishment and content; but denial and content seem to have that symbiotic union in the same way as regret begets scorn, jealousy begets projection, money begets happiness, bravado begets confidence, sex begets levity and so on. So I decide to agree to kind-of-agree, fairly certain he'll cut me off soon enough anyways, because that's just how I'm pretty totally sure convos run their course when he engages them:

"I've worked in a few places, wasn't really working in Vietnam per se.. oh god I'm not really sure what I was doing in Vietnam truth be told. Writing stuff, mostly... but yeah there's a definite escape from reality working over here. It's a good life for sure. I mean the money is good, it's all good and, yet, it isn't probably because it doesn't really quite feel like life at all. I totally agree with what you're saying but this seems less real than what everyone else is doing, you know people back home, if you know what I mean? I mean, for example, don't you find the time sort of flutters away here? And feel kind of purposeless, maybe?" Fuck, do *I* even know what I'm getting at here?!

He breaks his perplexed but affirmational string of nods and says: "Ahhh yeah oh sure, sure. It ain't real but cmon look around, mate, this is as real as it gets! Don't go all sour on me, now! We got drinks and sun and lovely women. Isn't that all anybody wants? There are blokes back home that would kill for this life, and especially these fine creatures, you follow me?", and yet another go-to nod to his little brown escort. Unfortunately, I can see us three are not really going to hit it off. I just didn't say what he was looking for. I didn't even say something I'd be looking for!

At this point, I long for Grant's drinking buddiness; somehow Grant can pull this sorta back and forth way better than the rest. There's a demonstrable rejoice but humorous self-rebuttal in his thingsaretheshit diatribe but from the likes of Bogan Stuey and co., it all seems too rehearsed, repeated, forced, and frankly and bit dimwitted. Realizing I won't get through to Stuart, and there's no earthly reason why I should want to, and surmising he feels it, too, but as a fullflagrant foul on my part, I agree with him to whatever it is I'm supposed to agree with, and order us 2 wifebeater cocktails and a cremedementhe for the girl. Of course, he makes sure to assert himself in the arrangements for his lady's drink despite my non-threatening, friendly address of her. Truly, I do like this guy's company but it's not really the direction I want my night to go. If someone is going to be outspoken it ought to be me, and more and moreso the drunker I get, and

it would certainly be better if I were conducting this speakeasy with someone or somefew similar to his better half-sized half. In the end, I can only deal with a man's company for so long before I become self-absorbed in self-awareness, or something. With a girl there's always that external, aesthetic factor that keeps me driven towards the flesh and away from the self-conscious. So I excuse myself from the bar that I don't want to leave in search of the same bar somewhere close, but with better girls and fewer men, or a higher ratio of former to latter, formed to fatter.

9.

I'm feeling peckish, but I don't want to kill a buzz, which calls for streetfood. Down a sidestreet smoked to the nines by food carts giving off fetid funks that mix badly with the humid city air and seem a far cry from mouth-watering, I grab a quick nasi goreng variety – spicy fried rice with a whole lot of veggie victuals mixed in - for under a buck, wolf it on the fly swished down with an allegedly-strawberry Fanta while targeting a large brightly lit warehouse in the distance that is presumably a gigantic entertainment complex, hopefully primarily part and parcel of a colossal drinking establishment where I can get lost in the vacillating crowd of yappers, foodies, gamers and straight-up boozers. Food is out of the way and buzz remains intact, if not quite as lucid.

As with many a search, distances prove farther, time takes longer and that entertainment complex seems to defy rules of perspective remaining as far and as small big as it did moments and steps before, and moments and steps before that (Not that I'm a spatially brilliant type, barely having graduated artistically beyond the perspective and overlap judgement and applications needed to successfully master the finger and potato paints of kindergarten!). I still can't make out the cursive neon sign emblazoned wide across the top, the building itself appearing low slung and expansive like a factory outlet or warehouse. Besides, I'm not at liberty to focus-squint or fixate at my destination, tourist-like or lost-like, and come to some more useful conclusions about its what and whereabouts unless I wish to attract the numerous taxis and motorbikes passing by - all of them all too ready to take me for a ride, in both senses. What I can tell is that the parking lot outside of this structure is at least half-occupied meaning that this is not some not-yet-and-will-it-ever-open club or a once-fleeting-famous disco relic of the past, so that's already beating the odds of these parts with respect to such unwarrantedly large, questionable money-pits. And just as I start to feel I'm entering a real-life "frustration dream" (among the dozens I have recurring most every night, no matter how hunky-dory my waking life is), just as it seems I'm in that particular dream where my faculties are becoming a big blurry mindslop, my gait becomes a staggering power-limp, and I'm lost in the highrise, downtown core of a nimbustropolis, the porno-pink neon materializes legibly reading— Cabana Bar and Disco. Well, all right, that might work!

With my sights set, I feel at ease to slow down a tad and take in my surroundings; also it's a good chance to commit some landmarks to memory in case my final escapade of the night will be from discobanabar to hotel in a foreordained drunken stupor, and very possibly further discombimbotated by a floozy at my side. Sure, I may not be able to recreate geometric or geographic images or scenes in my mind, but I have a beautiful neuronatal, neuroromantic support system marked by nearly eidetic recall for numbers and sequences, especially if they are harbored in association with memories of good times and good climes. For example, you plant me in this very neighborhood 20 years from now, especially if tonight provides significant experiences, and I could walk you around it from one noted spot to the next, noting changes and not, without a single misstep like some valiant crusader of nostalgia. Tonight I commit to

memory a high curb, an electric line-swallowing tree, a rundown café with numerous English misspellings, a motorcycle repair sidestreest, a small confectionary funnily named “Little Brave Man”, a cuboid, white apartment high rise with foliage terraces throughout, several stand out makeshift, street or traffic signs and this neat, cubby-holed apparently Chinese-owned or themed (owing to the distinctive scripture), but English-entitled or translated “21 Tin Cups” shop into which I can’t resist entering.

Now what’s cool about this shop of well over 21 tin cups, and more shelves than a chemist, is that everything on sale here seems to represent various historical drinking containers including steins, mugs, alembics, teacups, watercups, various vessels and whatevercups of possibly many a generation. The origins seem to be primarily Chinese, but also include European heritage and some trendy neo-American versions of suspect historical legitimacy and value. Particularly catching my interest is a section of the shelves displaying alcoholic flasks made in several metals with all sorts of nifty pictorial engravings and messages.

I pick out a copper (I think, and so I’m told) flask that fits my hand nicely, too nicely, and also has a black velvet purse to encase it with a loop to attach to a belt, but the whole ensemble could just as easily fit in any men’s clothing’s pocket. This is, or is supposed to be Chinese, and has a wicked engraving of a mightily-horned, nostril-flared, charging-posed muskox. On the reverse, concave side is an inscription in Chinese which I imagine has some relation to the muskox, or likely more generally it’s temperament or nature in general. With sparse hope of success, I ask the crotchety old Indonesia fellow shopkeep if he can tell me what the Chinese translates to. With a placatory smirk and shrug he says “It is an old famous Chinese poem, that I know. An old keepsake from a Singapore family. But I haven’t a clue what it says, I’m sorry, sir”. Excellent English and one which I can’t help but feel lends itself to the legitimacy of these products. It’s certainly not the typical huckster English I’m used to around here. Bonus points are scored, though they are the kind of offering I’ll never accept myself when speaking another man’s tongue.

In recognition and reward for his admission, and because, frankly, I’m in a buying mood, as I almost always am the moment I enter a store, I express interest in purchase and haggle a price that suits 1 part my daily budget and 2 parts my spendthrift tendencies when on the sauce.

Utmost in determining my willingness to purchase this alcifact is that I have always, always longed for the drunk-man-walking tragedy of ambling the streets of foreign places with a flask in hand, being a sip away from improving any situation my travels should find me in. There are certain items in life we have always wanted, yet the very want of it somehow never presents or realizes itself in coincidence with our shopping venture moments or expeditions. The flask is such an item for me. I need this flask - the price is right (about 25 dollars), the overall look is sharp as shards, the design is slick and muskox on point, and the feel is a perfect fit. I’ll figure out what the poem says some other time, or probably forget about it altogether. I shake hands with my seller and walk out of the shop feeling a fortuity has been lent to my night, an omen been cast.