



CHAPTER 2

UNCLE RUDY

A serious fellow in a white suit answered the door and let us in without introducing himself. He escorted us to a balcony overlooking the darkened causeway with slowly moving bright boat lights and the shadows of the Malay Peninsula beyond sprinkled with twinklings of human activity. From behind us came the sound of an evening jet descending.

Before long a large man came out to join us and introduced himself as Rudy. Gupta and I responded politely and shook hands with him. Rough hands. He was a tough looking guy with a coarse voice who seemed more like a retired boxer than a businessman. He offered us drinks, which we accepted—all agreeing on Jameson Irish Whiskey. We sat and looked out at the night view while he called for the other guy to bring the booze in.

“So we’re relatives huh?” he said looking at Gupta.
“That’s what my mom says.”

To Find the Girl from Perth

"I know who she is. I never met her. My mother knew her—may she rest in peace."

"Oh, I'm sorry," said Gupta.

"Thank you. It's been a long time."

The booze came. Rudy poured a couple of generous shots in each glass. Rudy and Gupta took theirs with ice and soda. I drank mine straight.

"Who's your friend?" Rudy asked.

"David's a writer from near San Francisco."

"Never been there. What do you write about?"

"I've written about Japan and Japanese Buddhism and about it coming to the West. And I like to write songs. Never sold any of them though."

"I don't know anything about Buddhism," Rudy said. "I don't like Japs. I don't like them buying everything up here. I wish they'd stay home. Umm. That's only half true. I like Japanese women. They can come here."

"Yeah," I agreed, "I love Japanese women."

"Where you going?"

"Perth."

"To write?"

"No—just to visit an old friend—and a Buddhist teacher there I've never met who's supposed to be an interesting musician. I just want to walk around and see what there is to see and get to know people. I'm looking forward to it. I like Australians."

"Yeah, not as uptight as Americans, huh?"

He turned to Gupta and asked him what he did and they went on about real estate.

Rudy's the type of guy I take one look at and know to choose my words carefully—like meeting a redneck or a biker in a bar. There won't be a problem if I don't say too much, don't stick the ole neck out, and most importantly don't do anything that might give the impression of assumed intellectual superiority. Even though I'm a blabbermouth I never get in trouble with people from tough sub-cultures—probably something I learned growing up in Texas. Not saying Rudy's

Uncle Rudy

insecure or looking for a fight—this is just what came to mind watching him talk with Gupta.

Rudy looked at me for a second, head tilted, like he's not so secretly sizing me up. He got up and went to talk to the young guy in the white suit. The sound of the front door closing. Rudy returned and poured me some more Jameson. Good guy. There are two types of pourers—those who pour what they think you want and those who pour what they think you should want. I think he's the former but I can't prove it because he poured himself a generous amount as well. He offered me a cigar, high quality I bet, though I really wouldn't know. Gupta declined. Rudy held up a gold lighter and clicked on the flame. Jameson, good cigar, the Singapore view, unexpected companions, don't need a credit card—incalculable.

They talked about the Irish side of the family, how they were related, the IRA, and the old country. Rudy said family was important to him and therefore Gupta was important to him.

“Even if your mom did marry outside her race. I don't have a problem with that. I got a lot of respect for Indians. They're tough. They're smart. They survive. They stick together. Everybody feels sorry for them starving to death and suffering. I don't. It's just a matter of time before them and the Chinese are gonna be dividing up the whole world. White people are getting lazy and arrogant. Maybe it's better we inter-marry. Anyway, we're all people, I know—ain't room for racism in this world anymore. Don't mean to offend. Just telling you how I see it.”

He said more than I expected. Gupta and I just nodded and sipped.

“Don't come to Melbourne,” said Rudy. “It's not so interesting and it's cold now. I'm busy. Can't really show you around or do nothin' for you.”

“Well that's where my ticket's for,” said Gupta. “I fly out tomorrow. I understand if you're busy... It's nice meeting you here. I don't have to bother you there.”

To Find the Girl from Perth

Sound of the door to the hall closing.

“Hey,” Rudy called out over his shoulder to... his assistant I guess. “Stevo, bring it in now.”

Stevo brought in a large brown hotel envelope and put it on the round glass table in front of us.

“You go to the desk downstairs here and they’ll give you refunds for your tickets—both of you. If you don’t have them with you it won’t matter—they’ll take care of it.”

“What?” said Gupta with some annoyance in his voice. I just sat there wondering what’s going on.

“Now just hang on,” said Rudy. “Here’s two first class tickets to Perth—round trip—open-ended.” He turned to me. “I took the liberty of having Stevo get you one too. I think Gupta here is a little wet behind the ears and could use a mature guy like you along.”

“But I’ve already got a ticket to Perth. It’s waiting for me.”

“This is a better one,” he said.

Gupta started to say something but Rudy turned to him and cut him off.

“I got someone else to look after you there. My niece. She’s young and...” he clicked his tongue searching for words, “young and full of piss—she’ll wear you out showing you around. She’ll be a good guide. She’s dropped out of college. I think you two guys will be a good influence on her. She needs to meet some serious people, people with values, people who think. I get a little worried about her sometimes.”

“Uh,” said Gupta, “uh, well... I guess... okay.”

“Good,” said Rudy. “Good. Here.” He reached into the envelope. “Here’s some money so you don’t have to worry about bummin’. You should have a good time while you’re there.”

Whoa—there were a bunch of hundreds in there.

“Oh, I can’t...” Gupta started.

“Forget it. You’re family.” He leaned back. “Listen—these tickets are for the day after tomorrow. She’ll meet you

Uncle Rudy

there. You stick with them—make sure they don't get in any trouble," he said to me.

"You know," I said, "I've got these friends to visit."

"He's got enough there to bring them along too. Keep an eye on 'em. Anything happens to her we'll all regret it."

That sent a chill down my spine. "Now wait—I didn't sign up to be a bodyguard."

"Well, you just make sure everything's okay," he said pointing. "Both of you make sure and you won't have anything to worry about. It's good you go," he said to me. "She's a looker and they might need a chaperone. And she's a jewel. She's a jewel of the family. I'm asking her to take care of you. You gotta take care of her."

Good lord. What the hell is he talking about, I thought? I tried to talk to him some more but he stood up and said he's tired, gotta get some rest.

"Oh yeah. Let's meet on the 29th of August at Jessica's in Perth," he added. "Melinda knows where it is—that's her name—Melinda Dugan—same last name as mine. Well, Dugan Waters. Waters is her married name. But she's separated. Uses both. Nine P.M. I like a late dinner. The 29th. That's a Friday. Jessica's is a great seafood restaurant. You can sit facing the river. My treat. Look forward to hearing about all the fun you had—all the good clean fun—seeing each of you fit and healthy."

I tried again to beg out of this deal but it was no use. Time to go to bed. Nice to meet you. There's a pre-paid taxi waiting. Have a good time in WA. Neither one of us could get a word in or out as Stevo escorted us to the door without a word himself or a nod and it's closed.

We turned to the elevator door. It was open, a hotel employee standing there.

"This way please," he said smiling.