



## CHAPTER 5

### FIRKIN' SEXES

Driving home from the maze, Frannie followed Mindy onto a side road that led into a shady woods.

“Here we are,” Mindy said as we exited our cars. “Now everybody into the bush for a secret mission.”

She and Francine said bush. Gupta said he didn’t see so many bushes, that it looked like we were in a forest. It was a Eucalyptus forest, but not the kind of Eucalyptus we have in California that Gupta said are Eucalyptus globulus otherwise known as bluegum. Mindy guided us to her special secluded nook.

“I grow one here and,” dancing a short ways off, “one here and,” twirling around to an opening beyond two trees, “one here and,” and she went on to dramatically show us thus six spots.

“First time I’ve been on a garden tour—to see what was not growing,” said Gupta.

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“I’ll be planting in a couple of months Guppy. You’re welcome to join me—and then of course in the harvest.”

“It’d be a long commute.”

Finally I realized we were in a dormant clandestine contraband sacrament garden.

Gupta spied a flowering plant. “Ahhh. Look over there! I think that’s a *modesta*, a rare carnivorous plant. I just happened to have studied it.”

Francine went over to look at it with him and they took a while to get back to the car as she answered his questions, the ones she could, about all the plant life surrounding us.

We stopped at a liquor store where Mindy got some Australian wine because, she explained, I’m from California, and gin because she’s from Melbourne, Irish Whiskey for Gupta who is half Irish, and beer because Frannie is from English stock—and French. She wouldn’t let anyone else chip in. That seemed fine to me but Francine got more beer and paid for it. Good manners. I noticed she included a lottery ticket with her purchase and tucked it into her coin purse.

The woman who checked us out opened her eyes wide and said, ah it looks like a party. How she wished she could get off and join us. I’d never seen anyone in a liquor store be so enthusiastic about what they sell.

Mindy’s got a handsome little white wood cottage by a creek where we sampled the recent purchases, took a pleasantly revealing dip in her spa, and lay back on deck chairs in soft earth-tone Balinese sarongs. Gupta and I fell asleep. We awakened to find Mindy and Francine weaving multi-colored hemp cords they tied around our ankles. Francine said we shouldn’t take them off—just let them be till they fall off.

We walked to dine at an ABC restaurant—Australian born Chinese. Then to a pub with an acoustic Irish band. They three ordered beer but I was full—can’t take the volume—and

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got a shot of single malt scotch. Their beers, Emus, were served in bottles placed in padded sleeves.

“What’s that?” I asked.

“What?”

“The uh foam doomaflochies.”

“This,” Francine said, “is a stubby holder. We drink our beers in stubby holders. Can you say ‘stubby holder?’”

“Stubby holder,” I said.

“Good boy.”

Gupta tried to test the Coriolis Effect by pouring his drink into an empty glass. Then he’s off to the loo and back with a report that the toilets indeed flushed clockwise. He’d tested his toilet at home in New Orleans and said it was counter-clockwise. I commended his dedication to pure science.

Francine and Mindy got all excited making a list of sights Gupta and I should see and things we should do while in WA. I got out my notebook and wrote, “The Wonderful WA Women Suggest:”

“Don’t say ‘women’,” said Mindy. “Makes me feel old. Say girls.”

“Yeah, you’re never too old to be a girl,” said Francine.

“Okay. I’m just... just try to be...”

“Pussy whipped by feminists,” said Francine.

“Yes. Yes—thank you. I obeyed them. Now I’ll obey you. Obedience to females is the key to a successful life,” I said looking to Gupta who remained neutral. “It just gets confusing when you contradict each other.”

“Keep trying,” said Mindy. “Gotta be on your piggies.”

“Piggies?” I asked.

“As in ‘this little piggy went to market’,” she said reaching down and pinching my big toe through my shoe.

I tore the page out and started a new one. “There. The Glorious Girls from Perth Suggest.”

“The girls from Perth, the best on earth,” said Gupta raising his beer in its stubby.

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“Ferdinkum,” said Frannie following his lead and we toasted the girls from Perth.

Then it was back to the must see sights and the must do deeds. In Perth the Swan Bells top the list. Then there’s Kings Park. Then to other towns, national parks, an island, museums. Mindy wrote them down. I made my own list. She gave her list to Gupta. We ordered more drinks. Soon nature called. Again.

Gupta, still holding his list, and I stood swaying before two doors. Over one was a sign that read *Firkin’ Males* and over the other *Firkin’ Females*.

While eliminating ethanol rich fluid, we read a poster on the wall between us with a photo of a huge, swarthy, unsavory, bald-headed guy in a jail cell. The poster said, “Use the date rape drug and have a new roommate for five years.”

“That’s not right,” I said.

“It’s not? You’re pro rape?”

“No silly. I think it should say, ‘Use any drug for date rape and have a new roommate for five years.’ The so-called date rape drug is just a downer. A drink with something like that in it used to be called a Mickey Finn. Alcohol, which is a downer, is by far the mostly widely used date rape drug. You don’t get five years for that.”

“Nevertheless, it’s a pretty cool sign,” he said. “I’d like one in my bathroom at home.”

“Yeah, I’m reminded of my all-time favorite public restroom sign,” I said.

“What was that?”

“A sign above a urinal at the Sand Dollar Restaurant in Stinson Beach north of San Francisco that said, ‘Please don’t throw cigarette butts in urinal as they become soggy and hard to light.’ It was so good it was stolen, dug out from the wall.”

“Maybe destroyed in disgust,” Gupta laughed while zipping his pants up and dropping his list on the floor at a spot that was a little sticky and wet. “Yuck,” he said looking

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down at it. He gingerly picked it up by a dry corner and placed the piece of paper in the waste basket.

Francine came out of the woman's side. Mindy was not at our table. Francine said she wasn't in the firkin' women's room either. Gupta and I looked around and didn't see her. Finally we found her outside talking to a guy who looked like—like an Aborigine.

"Wow," I said and mumbled on semi-drunkenly, "is that my first Aborigine? Have I never seen one before? Hmm. I'm sure I have. Maybe in San Francisco. We've got people from everywhere there but I can't remember. Seen them in movies."

Gupta was not paying attention to me. He was watching Mindy and the Aborigine intently. Mindy was angry. Gupta walked toward them and, as he approached, the Aborigine went away.

"What was that all about?" Gupta asked her.

"Nothing—just a crazy guy."

Gupta sat next to Francine on Mindy's couch under a strangely hypnotic painting created with many tiny colored dots—a snake in a tree wrapped around a dark-skinned child who looked at us with deep black fearless eyes. There was another interesting object on the wall next to it as Gupta pointed out.

"I see you've got two sharp, dangerous weapons," he said, gently touching the blade of a mounted machete.

"Got that in Darwin," she said, "for going into the jungle. What's the other sharp weapon?"

"The axe," he said eyeing a fine looking guitar. "May I?" He took it down and tuned it while Mindy brought in a bottle of port for night caps. Delicious. Gupta added background jazz chords to our roving conversation.

Francine told Mindy I don't believe we exist and Mindy asked then what exactly do I think is happening? I came out of the painting and said I must have been drunk to give Fran-

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cine that impression but they won't let up on me so I said, "I think religion is about..."

"I don't like religion," said Mindy.

"Spiritual path?" I said.

"I don't like spiritual path," said Gupta causing trouble.

"Philosophy," I tried, "love of wisdom."

"I don't like that," said Frannie.

"How about the universal perennial teaching?"

"What does that mean?" said Francine.

"Let me try it this way. A lot of wise people throughout time all over the earth have said that the key to understanding it all is to realize there is no self, that it's just something we assume exists, an imagining that we think is in the center and believe in. And all phenomena likewise, as Buddha said, is like a bubble, a dream—I can't remember—he said it's all unsubstantial things like that."

"There seems to be *something* here," said Mindy.

"Sure. It's not what we think it is, it's said—everything totally screwed up by the self idea—I don't really know," I said.

"Good," said Gupta. "Then that's the end of that."

"However," I continued, "not knowing is to me the highest teaching. How about this—the Surangama Sutra says, 'Things are not as they appear. Nor are they otherwise.'"

"That's good," said Gupta. "I'll stick with that. You see," he said, "the problem with David is that he's a Zen failure. It says so in the title of one of his books."

"It's true," said Francine. "He really doesn't make any sense, poor boy."

"It's very sad," said Gupta.

"I'm so sorry," said Mindy.

"But that's not stopping him," said Francine. "I never heard anyone go on so much about something they say they don't know anything about."

"I'll stop now," I said, "talking. But I can sing a song that might shed a little light on the subject." Gupta handed

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me the guitar and I launched into a song that starts with the chorus.

—chorus

*Now tell me who did I write to  
When I went and wrote that letter  
I addressed it dear to you  
And it's the best that I could do*

*Did I write it to your head  
Did I write it to your heart  
To your memory your bed  
To your shadow to your star  
Tell me who who who did I write to*

(chorus)

*Did I write it to your face  
Did I write it to your smile  
To your hidden private place  
To your thought stream, to your wiles  
Now tell me who who who did I write to*

(chorus)

*Did I write it to your fingers  
Did I write it to your toes  
To your odyssey your goddess she  
Your doppelganger soul  
Now tell me who who who did I write to*

(chorus)

“Thanks for the clarification,” said Gupta, “but shouldn’t that be ‘Whom Did I Write To?’”

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I hand Gupta the guitar. He plays a sequence of dreamy jazz chords but his eyes are more on Mindy than the strings.

Mindy asked if I was working on something at the present. I said I was toying with a story about my boxer, Lola.

“Lola is beautiful,” said Francine.

“Do you miss her?” Mindy asked.

“Sure I do,” and I sighed. “The story is called, *Lola, Come to Me as a Woman*. It’s about a guy who has not been all that successful with women and who keeps wishing some woman would show up who related to him like his dog. Lola is an inexhaustible fountain of love and devotion. Sometimes I say to her wistfully, ‘Lola, come to me as a woman.’ She always wants to lick my face or my toes or walk with me or be with me or prance around me. So this guy has a boxer like that and now and then says to her, ‘Lola, come to me as a woman.’ Lola dies—of cancer as boxers tend to.”

“Oh,” sighed Mindy. “Lola died?”

“Just in the story. Then one day the guy meets a beautiful woman named Lola and they fall in love and she is his dream come true, his Lola as a woman. She has an insatiable desire to serve him and please him. And she always wants to be with him—to massage him, make love, follow after him wherever he goes. Naturally he gets tired of it and all sorts of problems develop.”

“I’d like that sort of problem to deal with,” said Gupta.

“What sort of problem?” asked Mindy.

“Right now I’ll leave that up to your imagination.”

“Oh—you mean like you can’t lock a girl inside the gate and tell ‘em you’re going off somewhere? Can’t get rid of ‘em?”

“That could be one problem. Constant devotion can get tiresome,” I said.

“I’ve had that problem,” she said. “Maybe when you’ve finished it you could send it to me. Might give me a few pointers. Yes, I’ve had that problem.”

“Tell us,” said Gupta.



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Mindy told us about her failed marriage to a guy named Gelar. She's awfully young to have had a failed marriage. She was maybe twenty. She really loved him she said and he loved her like crazy. He had a problem drinking and taking hard drugs though he never got violent. She liked to have a good time too she said but not hard drugs and he was just blotto too much of the time so she sent him packing. He was a talented artist and had been an art teacher at a school in Perth. Gelar did a dumb thing. To show her his devotion, he had tattooed her name, MELINDA, in large letters on his chest. Since they've been apart he's tried desperately to find another woman named Melinda to be his mate. He searched in phone books, club membership rosters, in bars and gyms, on the Internet, and through the newspapers. He has dated a few other Melinda's so far and even showed the tattoo to one as if he did it for her, but she saw through his scheme. Nothing has worked out.

"Never get a name tattooed on you," she said. "Actually, never get a word. They get old. The drongo!" She shook her head. "Gelar's out there now... somewhere—looking for a true love named Melinda. I hope he finds her."

"Drongo?"

"Drongo," she repeated.

"That's sad," I said. "Of course men are more like dogs than women. Your story's true. Mine is fiction. Yours would make a good song too—*Lookin' for Melinda—a true story.*"

"Hmm—'Lookin' for a Melinda,'" said Gupta. "It rolls out of the throat nicely. Hmm. I've got a fictional love song. It's got a machete in it too."

"Good. Let's hear a fictional love song with a machete," said Francine.

"This was written during the initiation ceremony of a fraternity I was pledging."

"Frat boy!" I said.

"Yeah," he responded without enthusiasm. "I had to write a love song on the spot for the president of the fratern-

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ity and sing it to him in front of a bunch of hooting drunk Southern frat boys.”

“A gay love song?” I said. “Shocking. And with a machete as well.”

“You know who John Belushi is?” he asked.

“Animal House,” Said Mindy.

“He OD’d,” said Francine. “The dummy.”

“Yeah, sad. And to me mainly Saturday Night Live,” said Gupta. “Anyway, his name is invoked.”

“Delightful,” I said.

Gupta sang.

*You're lookin' like a dream tonight  
Spread out on that bearskin rug  
Before the crackling oak log fire  
You've got—John Belushi butt*

*At first was your Karl Malden nose  
And then that Marlon Brando gut  
Not even now Depardieu toes—not those  
Can vie with—John Belushi butt*

*Are you ready for my Teddy  
I'll go steady if you let me  
You are heady—better 'n Betty  
Take machete's wild confetti*

*I'll bring to you your favorite pipe  
And latte in a heated cup  
Jojoba oil and Handy Wipes  
For you've got—John Belushi butt  
Yes you do, yes you do  
You've got—John Belushi butt*

That was almost the end of the story because we nearly died laughing.

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Gupta and I spent the night on the living room couches. He went right to sleep but I sat up at Mindy's computer and checked my email on Sonic.net's excellent webmail center. There were Internet cafes in Singapore but I didn't yet have a digital jones so I hadn't connected to my boys. I wrote a lengthy report to Kelly the wise elder in Spokane and Clay the fierce younger in Sebastopol, telling them about what had happened since I left Texas—the flight to Tokyo with a five hour layover. There I met a man who was going to Inner Mongolia, or was that Outer Mongolia? I showed him my little short wave radio and he said he wished he'd brought one and I said he could probably buy one right there in the airport but later I thought I'll probably never use it and I wished I'd given it to him. I wrote them about Singapore, meeting Gupta and Rudy, and lots of what had happened all day including The Maze and list of things to do and see in WA. I saved it. And I told them I loved them and missed them and felt a little melancholy.

The next morning I rose late. Gupta was doing yoga.

Mindy and Francine were chatting and making breakfast. Gupta wound up his stretching and said good morning to everyone. Soon Mindy handed us two glasses of orange juice. Glug glug. Correction—mimosas. I gasped appreciatively.

“Didn't want that gin to go to waste,” she said.

We ate and hung out for a while and then I said, “Bout time for Francine and me to be on the road.”

“Oh no!” cried Gupta. “You can't leave! You've got to stay with Mindy and me. Remember what Rudy said?”

“Come on. I remember, but Francine has things to do and I want to go with her.”

“We'll come with you.”

“No we won't,” said Mindy.

“Uhg, uh—then I'd better get a hotel room,” Gupta said.

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“Don’t worry, it’s fine for you to stay here,” said Mindy.

“Then uh... well... he was quite um convincing that... oh please stay.”

“Let them go. Rudy is overly protective. Don’t worry about him. I’ll take care of him. He’ll do anything I say. We’ll smoke another cone and you’ll stop worrying about Uncle Rudy.”

“See Gupta,” I said.

“Oh, okay. But I do remember how serious he was about your sticking with us.”

“Me too, but tough luck. He’s not my boss. So Bye!”

“Goodbye Mindy and Guppy! Good to meet ya!” said Francine.

“Bye Frannie! Bye Davo!” Mindy said, coming up to hug and kiss us goodbye.

“We’ll see you both soon Gupta. Mindy will take good care of you,” I said.

“Bye-bye,” he said with resignation.

He’d accept his fate. I knew the most important thing to Gupta was not that I stay but that he do so. He’s clearly smitten with Mindy.