



INDIANA TEA HOUSE AT COTTESLOE BEACH

CHAPTER 7

INDIAN OCEAN

Francine and I were arguing when the phone rang. “That was Mindy,” she said to me as I scrubbed the soot on the patio. “She and Gupta want us to join them. I accepted their lunch invitation. At the Indiana Tea House on Cottesloe Beach. Can we leave soon?”

“Where is it?”

“On the coast south of Perth.”

“Good lord, you just got back from up there.”

“No problem. This is a place I wanted to take you.”

“Okay. Let’s go,” I said.

Frannie had just gotten back from driving Mary to the airport. They left before sunrise. Mary lingered over Stubby at

To Find the Girl from Perth

the door and told him she'd miss him. He responded with licking.

As soon as they were gone Stubby and I went back inside, ignoring the guy sleeping in the bed on Frannie's front porch. Stubby went back to sleep but I set about doing things to please my hostess. When she returned I had her enter via the front gate, previously suspended by one hinge. Now it swung and latched smoothly. It's under an arbor covered with twisting vines from which I picked some of the petite white flowers and arranged them in a small emerald green vase in the living room. Impressed by the beauty of that decoration, I'd searched elsewhere in her yard and the bush for more flowers and greenery—like the yellow ones and blue ones that are called... uh... yellow and blue flowers. Before long my hurried and artless arrangements littered the house, many in antique bottles she'd collected.

When I started cleaning the soot off the patio she said I'd done quite enough and could stop now and enjoy myself. I said I *was* enjoying myself and she couldn't make me stop. This is the argument we were having when the phone rang. That ended it. I cleaned up—myself, not the soot—and we were on the road.

One perk for us from Mary's trip to Scotland was that Frannie got the use of Mary's car and Frannie's heap could hunker down in the drive. She said maybe if it got a long rest it would get well.

The Indiana Tea House. Where have I heard that name? Frannie pulled into the parking lot. Beautiful old building. We went inside. It's not what I'd call a tea house. It's a restaurant. But it's a cool name. Still just us so we walked out back to the esplanade.

"It's the Indian Ocean," I marvel. "I'd been thinking of it as the Pacific. I forget. Looks like the Pacific but it's not. It's the Indian! Here. I waded into the Indian Ocean for the first time."

"You're so easy to please," she said.

Indian Ocean

“Not at all. It takes an entire ocean.”

“If it had been a drop of water you would have gone on about how terrific it is.”

“Well, each drop contains the whole ocean—that’s the nature of things.”

“Is that Buddhism?”

“I guess, sure—and a lot of other isms if you dig into ‘em enough—and listen to poets and artists and saints and physicists and lunatics.”

“You’d know the latter best I bet.”

I pick up a conch and listen closely. “I hear the sea calling!” I said.

“Ah, my mobile.” She reaches in her pocket. “G’day.” She listened to her phone as I listened to the shell. She hung up and told me, “They’re up top.”

“That’s not what I heard.”

“What did yours say?”

I do my best to imitate the sound of ocean waves. It’s a Three Stooges answer and I hint at that by doing a Curly “nyuk, nyuk, nyuk, nyuk.” She catches on and thrusts two fingers of one hand at my eyes—I deflect with a vertical palm before the forehead and nose—she counters with a double index finger attack. I fall back onto the sand. The advent of global culture is a remarkable event.

Gupta gazed at Mindy while she went on about an expanded itinerary. “We must go to Darwin—sleep with the feral people in the long grass, go into town with them during the day to bum from tourists and hang out. Mangos are all over—in the trees, on the ground. Get ripped at dusk tokin’ on a bottle bong.”

Gupta smiled happily. It looked much like he would follow her into shark infested water.

“Feral people?” I asked.

“Mainly Aborigines with a mix of bums and hippies,” Mindy said. “They live wild. Some even wear animal skins.”

To Find the Girl from Perth

Darwin's not tamed yet. They say it's a place fit only for misfits, missionaries and mercenaries."

"Followed closely by the merchants, mechanics, and morticians," Gupta adds.

"And then we could hop over to Queensland," Mindy continued. "Crash on the beach. But gotta watch out there—they've got hideous pot laws."

"You can get high on each other," Francine said.

"That we could. Guppy even wrote me a song. Sweet boy."

"Davo wrote a poem for me," said Frannie.

"A platonic poem," I said, somewhat embarrassed at her timing.

"Can you recite it?" Mindy asked.

"No."

Gupta was writing on a napkin. "A poem for Mindy," he announced and proceeded to read.

*Darlinger
Wild thinger
Ferdinker
Your Wanker,
Gupta
PS Good yeah.*

"You've a knack for pickin' up dialect," commented Frannie.

A waiter came up to the table with menus. He looked East Indian. "Would you like anything to drink?"

"Wine anyone?" inquired Mindy. After a glance at the wine menu, she ordered a bottle of—sounded like Lew's Chardonnay.

"I think I'm also in the mood for an afternoon delight," she said. The waiter looked confused but Frannie told him the wine would be fine. Mindy and Gupta looked at each other and she excused herself to go to the loo.

Indian Ocean

"I feel the call of nature myself," Gupta said departing as well.

"Hmm. Afternoon delight," I muttered, looking down the menu.

"It's usually off menu," said Francine.

"I've gotta go too," I said. "Back in a flash."

"You might want to wait a moment," said Francine.

"I'll just be a second."

Funny. Gupta wasn't in the men's room. When I came out I heard a racket from inside the women's room. Banging. There was quite a commotion going on in there. Then grunting. A high sigh. I went back to the table.

"Good lord. I just figured out what an afternoon delight is."

"Your Australian is improving in roo leaps."

After lunch we hung out on the beach, white capped ocean waves rolling in beyond. No one but us. Gupta ran out to the car and got the guitar.

"Sharing time," I said. "What you got to share, Gupta?" Happy to be his straight man. I know what it's like to have a new song and want to play it for friends.

He took the guitar and bluesed away.

*Let me tell you baby
Plain as it can be
Bird got sky
Fish got water
And baby you got me*

— chorus

*You got me babe
You got me babe
You got me babe
Babe, you got me*

Openin' a door

To Find the Girl from Perth

*Who is that I see
Rain got air
Wind got leaf
An' it's come to be*

(chorus)

*Babe you got me
Babe you got me
Babe you got me
You got me babe*

*From the first hello
To the last goodbye
Sun got shine
Moon got beam
An' till death do us die*

(chorus)

He handed me the guitar without asking.

“Nah,” I said.

“How about something short.”

“A pocket song. Sure.”

“A pocket song?” asked Mindy.

“You’ll see,” said Gupta.

I composed myself and sang:

Stubbed his toe—oh!—oh!

“Bring the boys with the nets,” said Gupta.

As soon as we were alone he grabbed me and proclaimed, “I love her! I love her! I’ve never been so in love.” Five minutes passed and he’s still going on about how great Mindy is. “When I’m with her, even a parking lot is a beautiful place. We were in downtown Perth and I was so high, high on her. I

Indian Ocean

forgot who I was and what was happening and then I heard something—it was my voice talking to her and then hers saying something to me and I looked at her and could feel this warmth and I was so blown away my legs almost gave out.”

“The madness has taken hold. You poor guy. Hmm, or you lucky guy. She’s young and so yummy. Oh well, this is what people in the South are famous for.”

“What?”

“Incest.”

“Incest?”

“Well, you’re kissing cousins.”

“Kissing very distant cousins. Humph,” he grunted as if insulted and then continued with his love-crazed review. “She’s smart as a whip too. Says she’ll go back to school next year and that she can study as hard as she can play. Wants to be a schoolteacher. She’d be great with kids. She’d be a great mom.”

I put my hands on his shoulders and looked deeply into his eyes. “Come back, Gupta. You’ve been snatched. It’s not too late. Keep awake. We’ll run hide. Or else you’ll become one of *them*.”

He didn’t seem to notice. It’s too late. “What a heavenly playmate,” he sighed. “She’s something to keep up with. There’s been a lot of drinking and smoking grass in the last week. This is one hedonistic culture and she’s its goddess. How do they survive it?”

“They don’t. Like everyone else.”

“Right. Well, we might be poster playmates for co-dependence, but we’re always active together. We don’t veg. I never feel out-of-it drunk with her—or stoned silly—no matter how much we do. There’s something about her presence that makes me feel clear and energizes me. And she’s so amazing.” He turned away from me and looked out over the ocean. “But I can’t help but feel a pain too. I know we’re only gonna be with each other for a while. Even if I stayed she’d move on. And being with her fuels an unquenchable thirst I nevertheless feel compelled to try to satisfy. And when I get

To Find the Girl from Perth

over the edge I tell her how wonderful she is, and suddenly she's not the wild-child anymore and she looks down modestly and waits for me to stop."

"That's what I'm waiting for. No, just kidding, go on."

"Oh—do I have to go back?"

"Hey—look over there," I said. Above the steps to the beach we could see Mindy talking to a man. "That's the same guy as before."

"No!" Gupta said, "The Aborigine. He's following her, man. Mindy won't let me intervene. I ran after him in the city. She got mad at me and told me to leave him alone. She says she'll take care of him. I ask who the hell is he and she doesn't want to talk about it. Says it's her business."

Back in the restaurant, Frannie and Mindy were scheming.

They suggested we get together again at Margaret River, the most famous wine producing region in WA. Frannie's got a weekend family reunion in a few days down that way. They glance at us.

Gupta and I bowed to the floor in unison going, "We obey."

Mindy said she and Gupta had to get going to an aerial ping pong game.

"What on earth is that?" I asked.

"Aussie rules footy," she clarified.

On the way out of the restaurant Mindy and Gupta were cutting up in front of us in all their glory—ridiculously happy and silly, caught up with themselves and letting their infatuation take them for a ride—not just him. Lovers can be disgusting and irritating but their fun was infectious. They were playing Mindy being a school girl and him the teacher who caught her smoking pot in the restroom. They looked the parts. An older guy walking in with his wife took it at face value and said jokingly to Gupta, "Kids! What can you do about 'em?"

"Ah, he naughties 'em" Mindy said loudly as she walked on—shocking the heck out of the poor old couple and

Indian Ocean

leaving Gupta, who instantly knew what she meant, red-faced and looking away.