



## CHAPTER 8

### DUNSBOROUGH

Now we're going to be with my family for a couple of days," Frannie said, "and I want you to please remember to be careful what you say—no talk about sex and no talk about drugs."

"We're not *doing* any sex or drugs—except for grog and caffeine and a few bummed fags on my part."

"That's not what I mean."

"Well, there's the ever present possibility of masturbation going on in private. Won't bring it up—I promise. It would surely make things most uncomfortable."

"Yeah, very funny. But you like to talk about drugs—the good drugs, the bad drugs, how everyone takes drugs, the bad war on some drugs, all the poor persecuted people, lying government propaganda. Don't get started mate. And no blurting out about Mindy and Gupta smoking cones in her Porsche or how they hump like hares. My family is somewhat

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conservative. Booze is okay.”

“Yeah, booze, which kills at a very high rate and has a strong link to violence is approved as a subject for polite conversation whereas entheogens that have death rates approaching zero, and which decrease violence, are taboo.”

“Nobody knows what an entheogen is but yes, it’s taboo.”

“Pot, mushrooms, LSD, ecstasy.”

“Taboo. Buddhism’s okay. They’ll be interested in that.”

“Yes dear.”

Della arrived to give us a lift to the rail platform at Waroona, on the way depositing Stubby at a home with the warning signs already posted on the fence. There he’d remain till Mary returned in six months. Francine bid him a loving farewell. I gave him a quick rub. He licked his friendly new keeper’s shin. She squatted down to pat and chat. I love Stubby but was a tad nervous about the Pit Bull responsibility. We’re off.

Once aboard, as I was the honorific guest, Francine kindly offered the window seat. The smells of the locomotive outside and passenger car within pleased me thoroughly. I extolled the virtues of railway travel to her as she fell asleep. The train, no youngster yet comfortable and warm, provided a most enjoyable ride with picturesque vaulting view of hilly countryside, forests alternating with grasslands and cropland punctuated with occasional homes and barns, cattle, sheep, and crows. Our mostly un-peopled route stretched to sleepy stops at Yarloop, Cookernup, Harvey, Brunswick Junction, and finally Bunburry where a little sis, Olivia, picked us up in an SUV.

After introductions Olivia and Frannie chattered catching up as I continued to survey the terrain we passed. Olivia took a detour to Ludlow to go by a thick endangered stand of tuart, full-foliaged trees with dull grey bark resembling the blue gum Eucalyptus we have in California. A hand-painted sign on the roadside beseeched us to help save

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these woods. Onward to Dunsborough, a favored Aussie beachside holiday destination where Olivia and her hubby Riley managed a cluster of time-share condos reserved this weekend for her kin and their canine. Both brothers and triple sisters were there with their spice and young children of various heights who ran around, wrestled, shrieked, laughed, crawled, and cried. The adults ambled, sat, hovered, and yakked. Big tight-woven Catholic family. A hardwood table was spread with crackers, cheeses, salami slices, sausages on sticks, apples, oranges, raw veggies, chips, dips, ice, and beverages squeezed, carbonated, fermented, and distilled. We partook.

Sitting on a couch, mom was quiet, not the outgoing positive matriarch I'd heard of, always providing, lively, taking care of everyone and everything. Her name's Meg. She greeted me softly with green eyes. Her aggressive internalized melanoma was the ever-present unspoken guest. Love and concern mixed in the room's atmosphere. A man with grey, curly hair entered through the sliding glass back door full-armed with firewood. I helped him place it by the hearth. He welcomed me. It was Frannie's pop, Jack. I could see goodwill in his eyes, feel sadness in his handshake.

The kids already have identified me as the weirdo in the house as I have made explosive popping noises with finger in cheek. "No," I told them in duck talk, "I'm not Donald Duck. I'm Davo Duck. I can articulate much better than Donald—with practice." After a while I have to tell them Davo Duck is asleep. It's unpleasant for me to talk that way for long. I wasn't trying to keep up with the vital info on the kids such as names and occupations, but we were doing fine with the random interactions. I did want to remember the adult monikers though. I can't look at each one of them and go, "Nice to meet you Riley. Tell me Riley..." etc., an old salesman's device. Soon, with a little reminding from Frannie, I'd pretty much gotten their names all down by creating an imaginary scene with mnemonic props like Jack on a beanstalk

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and Olivia wrapped around a giant toothpick floating in a martini.

Uncle James and I walked briskly on the beach. I tried not to let on that I could barely keep up. He used to be a world champion runner. Like Jack he's retired from a career with the State Electricity Commission. He's the philosopher of the group so we quickly fell into truth-seeking speculation. And one geography lesson. He asked me where I figured the sun came up. I pointed back toward the land since this was the West Coast. Nope, he said, we're on a peninsula facing east on a bay so broad as to hide the other shore. Later, on a solo saunter past a sandy beach to mottled rocky tide pools, the sun sinking behind hills seemed miscast.

With Dinner digesting, dishes drying, children sleeping, wind off the ocean blowing, the surviving adults surrounded a coffee table on three sides, a vigorous fire completing the form.

I was peppered with questions. How was my flight? I told them about getting the free round trip first class tickets. That reminded me of another guy I met who flew for free from Australia to the US. I bought an old Volvo from him back in about 1970. His name was something Fox. He asked if I recognized his name and I said no and he said he had stowed away in a cargo crate on a plane to fly himself back home from Australia. He got caught and made headlines all over the world. The papers called him something the Fox—like John the Fox. That's an old memory. I'd forgotten about him.

More questions. What's my impression of WA so far? Of course I love WA and Aussies. Whenever I'm with Aussies, I confided, I do have to deal with the consequences of my booze intake increasing a notch. Sort of like visiting back home Texas. That made them laugh.

"Davo keeps up," Frannie said. "Texans are like American Ozzies. I don't drink even as much as he thinks I do because he doesn't notice that he's drinking most of my drinks."

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I confided I also drink more than all of my closest Texas friends—then downed my shot of scotch. Everyone laughed.

"I went to America," Frannie said, "To work for a family of Buddhists and I think, Oh good—I'm gonna be with spiritual people and I'll be purified. The husband used to be a Buddhist priest—lived in monasteries in Japan. They tell me another priest is comin' over and I meet David. By the time he leaves there's five more bottles of wine in the recycling bin. They drank like Ozzies the whole time."

"Oh, I'm sorry. It's true," I bowed my head in shame.

"That's alright," her father said. "You sound like some fine Catholic priests I've known."

"He's blushin'," Frannie said amidst the laughter. "Good. I thought you had no shame."

"So where you been on your trip?" Father asked, saving me from more public ridicule.

"Just Singapore and WA—after doin' some travelin' from California to Texas with my son Clay. Clay," I whined, "I miss Clay."

"I do too," said Frannie. "And I'm sure he misses you." "He was so sad when we said goodbye at the airport in Dallas. We'd just had a great month together. It was a few weeks ago. I told him we'd see each other this December in Thailand. He said that's a long time. I told him yes, but you do it too when you grow up. Don't get so tied down to family and duty that you can't follow your dreams at least a little. And we'll be back together soon. He liked that. But still it was sad. And now I'm here," I said wiping the edge of my eyes.

"You came here just to visit our Frannie?"

"And you guys and whoever and whatever else I stumble on."

"I owed him after he'd been so kind showing me around. Otherwise I'd a told him to stay away."

"Couldn't have kept me out."

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Frannie told about our trip through the Southwest. “Do you remember,” she asked, “what I said when they wanted to know what I’d like for the trip I was about to go on with you?”

“Earplugs.”

“Righto. He’s got—what is it you’ve got?”

“Oh yea, I admit it,” I said. “I am guilty again—this time of echolalia.”

“Which is?” her father asked.

“The love of hearing one’s own voice.”

“Yeah, you’ve got that bad,” she said. “But he’s paid for it with sweat. He worked like a slave at my house. You should see all he’s done.”

“You do a lot of work on your own home in California?” asked James.

“I used to, but now I just write songs and send them to Frannie,” I said. “Hand me that guitar and I’ll explain.”

James handed me a guitar that had been leaning against the wall.

“Thank you. You guys can pick up the chorus to this song and sing it with me,” I said. “Each verse is followed by the previous verse ending with the chorus so it piles up and gets longer and longer like in *Old McDonald Had a Farm*. You’ll see as we go along.” I couldn’t tell whether that meant anything to them or not. “You go chorus, first verse, chorus, second verse, first verse, chorus and on and on like that.” No matter. Enough talk. Had to start playing or I’d lose ‘em.

—chorus

*I got nothin' to do but sit around singin' songs for you  
I got nothin' to say but gushy stuff and memories.*

*The bills pile up, the dishes too  
If I don't sing you a song I'm blue  
Cause I got nothin' to do but sit around singin' songs for you*  
[always followed by chorus]

*The grass grows high, my shoes ain't tied*

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*Tons of trash outside, the clock's not right*  
[followed by prior verse as are all verses]

*The fridge is foul, neighbors scowl*  
*The dog she howls, the cat he growls*

*Clothes all dirty, house ain't purty*  
*What ain't got dust got mold or rust*

*The phone's alright but the plants have died*  
*Lectricity's cut, the gas is shut*

*My agent calls, the auto's stalled*  
*The toilet's stuck, the bathtub's yuck*

*My ex-wife calls, nother ex-wife calls*  
*Ex girlfriend calls, mother sister call*  
*Nother ex calls, nother ex calls*  
*Nother ex calls, nother ex calls, nother ex calls*  
[include these two lines last time only]

*Repo man hauls, child he bawls*  
*Apples fall, the landlord calls*

*Earthquake strikes, tornado skies*  
*Towns on fire, angry mob outside*

Everyone could remember the chorus and since each prior verse repeated there was a learning curve there. By the end in which the whole thing is sung from end to beginning, the house was shaking. I quit while I was ahead, something that took me decades to learn—I used to keep playing till the last person had left.

I walked into town alone in the late afternoon on the second day in Dunsborough, letting Frannie and her family have some time without me. Stopped at a coffee shop with tables out on the sidewalk. Sat most pleased reading and sipping a

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latte. Fell into a chat with an older couple—which means older than me—late sixties I'd say. The topic was, of all things, a sculptor from Northern California whom I didn't know of—Hobart Brown. This guy sounded out of the ordinary. He lives part time in Margaret River and is involved with a kinetic sculpture race that happens once a year in the States. I told them how weird it was I had to go to WA to hear about this. It sounded like something I'd be interested in—sculptures that are also human powered vehicles. The couple had even gone to California to see the parade and said they had a grand time. Well thanks a lot and g'day and they're off to a winery—something like Lou Anne's. It sounded familiar.

Then I thought I heard my name. Looked around. Nope.

Back to the notebook. Saw three suggestions from Mike who'd driven me all over Singapore one afternoon: "Indiana Tea House, Perth Mint," and—there it is—"Margaret River—best Australian wine." Interesting. I've already been to the former—I knew I'd heard that somewhere too. And now Margaret River—where we meet Gupta and Mindy tomorrow. One down Mike, and the second one on the way.

I heard my name and looked around. Hmm. Just my imagination I supposed. My brain at times spins words into similar sounds, especially my name. It happens to me more when I travel, especially in foreign tongue lands. It just happened in Dunsborough, which is a bit foreign of tongue. It's the type of thing that can easily occur when one is high or paranoid but also to me when I'm sanely strolling down the street. Sometimes I hear whole sentences that seem to include my name, like "David's got the bag of rutabagas" or the more sinister, "Be sure not to tell David about it." This day I just heard my name. Then I heard it again. I looked around. Oh well, I've had lots of strange things happen to me.

I heard it again and turned my head. I was sure this time it was really my name I heard, but there are a lot of Davids in this world—maybe a mother calling her child. I kept writing notes.



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Then someone did something no one should ever do to me. I felt a hideous stabbing electrical shock in my lower back ribs. Instantly I hurled around in my chair striking out and knocked someone back surprised and off balance. Good lord, it's Mindy!

"Oh god, Mindy, I'm sorry."

"You're a quick one!" she said regaining her bearings, one hand holding the edge of the table I'd thrust her into.

"Sorry. But please don't ever do that to me—I can't take it."

"I won't. Sorry. Just sayin' hi."

"Hi," and then, "Mindy!" and then "Gupta! Where'd you guys come from?"

"Remember? We're meeting at Margaret River tomorrow. Just stumbled into ya on the way down," Mindy said.

"Oh yes. Frannie's borrowing her sister's van. She was waiting to hear from you. You want to come visit?"

"No—we don't want to intrude."

"It'd be alright."

"Rather not."

"I'm sorry about hitting you but I have a condition—or something."

"A lot of people are ticklish," she said.

"No. Uh. Listen—I never met anyone who has it as bad as me. It's worse than ticklish and I'm that too but this is much worse—it's like getting shocked by electricity. It's painful and triggers an immediate unconscious reaction. It's happened all my life. I can't help but strike out. I apologize."

"Okay. Me too. And I'll not do it again. I promise."

It's true. I was holding an umbrella once in the Zen Center's grocery store and a woman I know came up from behind me and grabbed my ribs. I used to be a tennis player and I instantly hopped back and knocked her to the ground with a full two-handed backhand umbrella. Something like this happens now and then and frequently I get little shocks that make me shudder by barely brushing against someone or something.

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After we'd recovered from our altercation, I offered to buy them lattes but they were fasting—just drinking water all day. I asked if they'd turned into ascetics and they just laughed.

We agreed to meet noon tomorrow at the winery with the sculpture exhibit the couple told me about, Lou Anne's. Mindy said she'd never heard of it, but there are a lot of new wineries popping up.