



CHAPTER 12

FREO

I leaned back in my chair amongst friendly young people in the Sunrise Hostel watching *Jackass: the Movie*. The antics of the guys in that flick made us howl and wince, me wincing more than the others as I'm of an earlier generation. A group of us went out together to a nightclub—Aussies, English, a Frenchwoman, a couple of German guys, an Indian and a South African joined in with the crush of other mainly young people holding drinks, downing drinks, buying drinks, dancing, talking, laughing. Don't meet many Americans.

The woman who runs the hostel had free drink cards. We drank freely. We found ourselves later in a bar where the only people dancing were women with women. "Poofer bar," an Aussie called it. I got to talking to a hefty Aboriginal woman and we ended up dancing till a heftier Aboriginal woman came up challenging me to a fight and I said I'm just being friendly and she said then I should buy them drinks which I

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did. When the drinks arrived she said I was free to leave. I did so, thinking Robert Crumb would surely enjoy drawing them.

Met a young Aussie guy at a pub our group wandered into. He asked where I'd been in Australia and I told him the last place was Rottnest. He related with a glow in his eyes about his trip to Rottnest, how he and his friend started off with a six pack of beer before they got out of bed in Freo, how they drank on the ferry over, and how they then sat in a cave on the island, same cave as us maybe, with a bottle of scotch and got pissed till the sun went down and then stayed in the cave for days drinking till their brains ran out their ears. Didn't do anything or see anything except for some booze runs. And he said it as if it was the greatest experience of his life and the best possible way they could have spent their time. People here talk of getting pissed like it was opening Christmas presents. Even I can't keep up with them—not day after day. Being in Australia was often like visiting a fraternity house back in the sixties. A lot of the souvies play on the theme of getting drunk. Looking for a stubby holder to send home (I mail things home periodically when I travel so I won't have to carry them), all I could find were ones that said things like "I got pissed in Freo!" or, "I got pissed in Rottnest!" or, for variety, "Get pissed!" I'm not really a good party animal though. Eventually I lose interest.

Walking affects me in the opposite way—the more I do it, the more I want to. In Freo I walked morning to night to every sight I could find. The grey stone-walled prison, now closed for over a decade, had a row of examples of what the cells had looked like through the years—closet-sized rooms where murderers from Australia and loaf-of-bread thieves from England had been confined. Our tour group took turns going into one cell to admire an example of intriguing surreptitious Aboriginal art. Painting or drawing on the walls was forbidden but this inmate fooled them for years and created elaborate Aboriginal dot paintings, which he camouflaged with a primitive plaster concoction. The Ten Commandments was artist-

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ically rendered on the chapel wall with the sixth scribed as “do not murder” instead of “do not kill” because there was a gallows next door. It seemed like an important distinction, probably more to the administration than to the prisoner artist who made that mural. The gallows was the last stop on the tour. I looked down from the platform as our raconteur guide told chilling hangman anecdotes and I felt the ghosts of a hundred men swim by.

The maritime museum on Victoria Quay also had something hanging from the ceiling. It was Perth’s Australia II, the racing yacht with the winged keel that won the America’s Cup from the United States in 1983. There was another smaller sailboat thus suspended, the Parry Endeavour, the yacht that took lone yachtsman Jon Sanders around the world three times without stopping—once going west and twice east. Now he hangs out at the yacht club bar. I saw a video about his trip and it convinced me he was lucky to have survived the feat. I inspected the compact gear and comestibles he took along, asked a guard why he brought canned tuna, and was told there are no fish to eat in the vast stretches of deep ocean far from land and reefs. Really?

The submarine tour was the be-low point of my trip. I was certain, once we entered, that the dry-docked sub was on greased skids and had immediately plunged to the depths of the sea, the cramped capsule would never rise again, and our tour group would slowly suffocate before we were missed. There I was packed in a narrow steel cylinder stuffed with pipes and equipment and a dozen fellow tourists—feeling distinctly sardinish. How is it possible sixty-five men had lived in this tube so close to each other? Their bunks were tiny and stacked three high so it seemed to me the abdomens of all but the emaciated would touch the bunk above. The spaces for working, eating, and resting were so tight I couldn’t see how they could move or stand—or stand it. The word claustrophobia took on palpable meaning. I wondered what type of men would choose to be in such a place. Baffled, I inquired if the crew was selected from especially short can-

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didates. No—I learned from our guide the average height of these sub-surface sailors was not short. Surely men with mental and psychological make-ups far different from mine, beyond my imagining.

This horror tour rendered the prison, fresh in memory, far less threatening, even inviting. In comparison the gallows seemed preferable. I could feel panic right below the surface and invented a prayer for the moment, the endless moment, to help me to maintain sanity. And this wasn't an old sub from days when they were smaller, as I assumed, but one that had seen service into the seventies. I realized either this was a uniquely compact sub or every submarine movie I'd ever seen was a pernicious lie expanding the interior of the sub so there could be scenes of people standing around talking with lots of space between each other, of men working together with plenty of elbow room—so audiences wouldn't squirm in their seats or run from the theaters. The name alone was enough to frighten one—the HMS Ovens. Boy was I glad to get out of there.

I played pool with a guy from Holland and didn't shoot so straight but I heard a lot about the pot business and potency of the weed there. In the *Botany of Desire*, the author says the pot growers in Holland and California are doing the most creative botanical work in the world today. This Dutch guy went to cannabis conventions and tastings and I wondered how the latter could possibly be reliable. All I would be able to do is take one puff and then I'd lose my bearings. It's not like wine you can spit out, though you could try not to inhale—you'd still get high pretty soon. I guess that's the point. After the pool game, my Dutch acquaintance went off victorious to get seriously pissed on the legally available and far more dangerous local spirits.

I stayed and played a favorite by-myself nameless game wherein I call the shots as in straight pool but can't make any simple ones. They have to be combinations off banks or caroms, also once called billiards—off other balls.

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That's a satisfying way for me to play because I don't miss a lot of easy shots, which is what happens when I play regular pool.

Out on the street walking around looking at late night Aussies doing late night Aussie things such as staggering home or staggering into an after-hours club. I went into one, listened to the music, and had a Guinness. No matter what I sample, nothing pleases me in the beer realm like Guinness. I'm not really much of a beer drinker. I prefer wine. I like Irish whiskey and good Scotch too but they're so strong, better to stay away. I'd be happy to endorse Guinness. Guinness Stout—haven't found better on five continents.

Wandering back to the hostel in the empty street, I see an Aboriginal busker, street musician, who was preparing to sleep in a doorway. He'd done a great job of *Don't Be Cruel* earlier in the day. Everyone seemed to know him. People called him Rags, not a nickname indicating the opposite. I prodded him with a dollar to open up shop again and he got his guitar from its case and did a terrific job of another old Elvis song—*Blue Suede Shoes*. He beckoned me to sit on a blanket he brought out from his pack and offered me a cigarette. I accepted. He played some more.

"May I?" I inquired. He handed me the guitar and I played one that seemed in keeping with the style he was playing.

—chorus

*Oh Francine, how do you do your do
Oh Francine, how do you do your do
Honey you're the best thing I ever knew*

*Met Francine about a quarter of five
Ozzie Queen at a black swan dive
Like pickin' up a wire that is live
Threw back her head and laughed at my jive*

(chorus)

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*She stole my keys and ditched me as well
Said she wouldn't drive and drink that will
Stopped for Maybelline at the top of the hill
Now I'm a runnin' after them women still*

(chorus)

We talked. I learned a little about him and he some about me. It got cold. It was so late no one had walked by for an hour. We smoked more. As the smoke rose in the entryway where we nestled, he spoke in a hush tone, reached over to squeeze my shoulder, looked deeply into my eyes and beseeched, "Hear my story, how I came to be a lost and floating soul."

I just looked at him, unable to speak.

"There is a woman who came to Australia from far away," he began. "She was of the city, not the desert, but she went out to the desert and befriended some of my people. She had read about us. She had a story about my people in which she had an important role. She offered money if we would agree to tell her story. No one trusted her but some were interested in the money. A wise elder said that she was not a good person and warned of trouble. One by one her Aboriginal friends left her. Finally there was only me. She told me she was one of the great ones from the cross in the sky who took our form to come here to bring us back to the place from where we came. She told me to come with her. I went with her in her rented jeep to what she called a dreaming time place. It was just an apartment in a city. She made me give up all that was mine, all that was from my people, the little I wore, and she made me put it all in a box. She flipped a switch and crushed it. Then she put it in the trash. She gave me the clothes of the white people. She made me carry a wallet and put money in it and opened a bank account for me and gave me a credit card. I had to meet with white people and tell them her story. I had to give her massages. She made me sleep in her bed and bring her pleasure every night.

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She was not a woman I wanted to lie with. I told her to lie with a white man. She said I was a real person and all the white people were mutants. I was lonely and begged her to let me return to my people but she said she would hurt me with the power of the two-tongued lizard men. I was her prisoner. In time I realized I could not go back anyway because when I followed her I turned my back on my people. I became dependent on her. One day she was gone and then soon I had no money and the cards were no good and I had to live on the street. Now I am a ghost who has no dreams and sings the white people's songs. Thank you for letting me tell you my story."

I sat there for a while not saying anything. And then I asked if he'd ever seen her again.

"Yes," he said. "There." He pointed to a store across the street.

"You saw her over there?"

"In there."

"She was in that store?"

He led me across the street. It was a bookstore. "There she is," he said.

"Maybe her picture is in that book?" I guessed at his meaning.

"Yes—on the back of it."

I leaned forward to see the book he spoke of. I could barely make out the title. The book was named *Mutant Massage*.

A dharma heir and colleague of Tazi John's named Ross Bolleter started the Zen Group of Western Australia. John had given me Ross's number. I called him and we agreed to meet on Sunday when he wasn't in the studio recording. That got my interest. He said he continued to teach in New Zealand and Sydney, but had passed the mantle of the local group to a therapist named Ian who taught in Fremantle.

Ian and I met in a coffee shop. We covered a lot of Zen, American, and Aussie territory. Like a number of Zen

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teachers and students in America, Ian was a therapist. At my urging, he told me about Affect Psychology, the method he uses. My mind swam trying to keep up with it.

That was Tuesday. On Wednesday evening I walked in rain and wind that severely challenged my umbrella to a building near the maritime museum where Ian's group met once a week. I was in the habit of sitting *zazen* alone when I awoke in the morning, and it was pleasant to sit with a group on an evening—three forty minute periods with two brief walking periods in between. I like to meditate with small groups that tend to have a more humble vibe than the bigger ones. After the sitting was over, we went to another room, drank tea, and chatted. I signed a few of my books people had brought and two from the group's library. For a moment I was somebody, but then the meeting was over and, refusing ride offers, again I was out on the dark street alone in the calm sea air after a rain. And I was nobody again. Wherever I go, there I am not. I liked being nobody doing nothing special. It was the purpose of my trip—just to be here and to walk to there and take things and people in. Hello lamp-post, my new friend.

But then one of the participants in the evening's meditation called out and caught up with me. We walked together back to the hostel and sat in the lobby talking. His name was Samo, short for Sam. He asked about what I was doing in WA and I went through a litany of sights I'd seen and told him briefly about Frannie, Mindy, and Gupta and how Gupta's quasi uncle had sent him here. I said I was enjoying Freo but maybe it was time to move on. He suggested I go to North-bridge in Perth and check out the scene there.

Samo's a therapist now and used to be a detective with the Perth police department. Perth is not far from Freo. He met Ian through their Affect Psychology connection. Samo was in his forties, soft-spoken, and had questions about the San Francisco Zen Center, especially Tassajara, the SFZC's remote mountain monastery. He wanted to go there for a year as a student. But he was also interested in studying with

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Tazi John who's in that area. I said he could do both or either—just had to arrange it ahead of time and get over there. John's group is the Pacific Zen Institute and they're a mellow group. But the SFZC has residential possibilities.

Samo told me more about Affect Psychology. There are nine affects, most with double names sort of indicating a sliding scale of meaning. There are two positive—joy/enjoyment and interest/excitement. Then there's the neutral surprise/startle. There are six negatives—disappointment/disillusion, fear/horror, anger/hate, disgust/dismell, contempt and shame. Dismell meant something like smell based revulsion.

"Affects," he said, "are biological responses to stimulus. After the affect follows the response, which is thinking and acting."

He suggested I find something in my experience we might apply it to. I tried to apply his system to the shock I feel when I'm grabbed from behind in the ribs or poked there. Most people don't invade your private space this way, but because I am the way I am some think understandably they have permission to kid with me like this. They have no way of knowing what it does to me, the electric shock. It's like I have a rare condition. But here we were focusing more on the reaction, which can be rage, especially if I'm grabbed or poked hard.

Rage as an affect is not directed, Samo told me. It just is. That's exactly how I felt. Also, it has a signature—it rises quickly but doesn't last long. Anger tends to simmer. The stimulus, affect, and response tend to happen so quickly we don't notice them as distinct. What we want to do, he said, is to watch the stimulus and affect closely so we can get a handle on the response. The stimulus would be the electric shock I feel when someone grabs me in the ribs from behind. Rage is the affect. As I remember it, the only time I ever got a handle on the response was when I was the host at the SFZC's restaurant, Greens. I'd be standing looking out over the floor and a customer, someone I knew well, would come

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up and poke me in the ribs and from the first I'd just let the shock go through me, didn't swing around and grab their hands and command them fiercely not to do that. I was motivated there to change the response. As soon as I was away from Greens, I lost that composed response. He said that was because the constraints of my sense of obligation toward customers had forced me not to allow an unacceptable response to happen. I had naturally, instantly isolated response from stimulus and affect. It would be possible to continue to do so in other settings. Oh I see. This gave me a way to work with it. Good. I thanked him.

"There's something I'd like to ask you about," I said. "Especially because you were a detective in the police department."

"Certainly."

"Well, like I told you, I came here with a guy named Gupta who's being shown around by his distant relative Mindy, and there's this guy we call 'the mysterious Aborigine' who is always following her around. She told us not to worry about it but her uncle Rudy who set Gupta up with her told us in so many words to make sure she's safe. Let's see—what am I asking? I don't know. It just seems sort of weird this guy spying on her."

"Intrigue," he said laughing. And then he cocked his head to the side and asked pointedly, "Rudy who?"

"Dugan."

Samo's demeanor shifted. He sat up and looked at me straight on. "From Melbourne?"

"Yes."

"Chunky guy? About seventy?"

"Yes."

"Balding?"

"Yes."

"Do you know who he is?"

"Nope. Sounds like you do."

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He breathed out heavily. "He's the head of the biggest organized crime syndicate in Melbourne, hell, in Australia. He's a very dangerous person. You met him?"

"Yeah. In Singapore." I told Samo all about the meeting.

Samo told me to watch out. He was worried about me being involved with Mindy and Rudy. He said it might be best for me to leave the country. He really didn't like that Rudy expected me to keep an eye on Mindy and that I wasn't doing that. He looked at his watch. "Last train's leaving soon. Here," reaching in his wallet, "my card. Keep in touch. Call me anytime." He looked at his watch again. "Be careful," he said, shaking his head with concern, and was off.