



CHAPTER 13

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Yes, I sell Leeuwin wines,” wrote Kelly. “They compete with anything we’ve got here. Sounds like you had a crazy time there, or at least your friends did.”

Since he’s met Francine he can see her clearly in mind, but asked if there are any photos of Mindy and Gupta I can send. I was reading his email in an Internet café in Northbridge, the cultural and entertainment area of Perth, the happening part. So Kelly wants to know what the loving couple looks like. Let’s see, both are so distinctive and photogenic. Mindy had made it easy for me to comply by emailing photos of the four of us she took with her digital camera while we were at The Maze and at Rottnest. I shot some of them off to Kelly with a CC to Clay amidst a detailed update of what I’d done—getting into the horrors of the submarine tour.

I wonder if before there were cameras people drew more,

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like pictures of where they were and the people they were with to send or show to their friends. I know there were more pictures in books. They probably also described the people in detail—what their faces looked like, the expressions, the nuances of mood, how heavy they were, how tall, what type of clothes they wore. Thank goodness there's no need for that now. Just a click of the mouse and they can see for themselves. On the other hand, I almost never use cameras. I hate to travel with them. They detract from the view in two ways—thinking about the shots and worrying about losing the camera. I'll go look at some beautiful spot amongst tourists who are busy concentrating on camera angles so they can see it later. I hardly ever look at anything later, including photos of my children. But I also cheat. It's so easy these days to get fellow travelers to email me photos—so I can not look at them later.

A guy called Techo in the Internet cafe helped me with all this. He was sitting next to me fixing something on a computer. Inexplicably I was having an inexplicable problem. I didn't even understand if he did anything to solve it or if it just went away. It's too complicated and mysterious to try to figure out a lot of stuff with computers and software. If the problem goes away just be grateful. Techo was a trip. He had orange, spiked, stiff hair, tattoos on his arms, and a gold earring. He was quiet and steady, didn't smile but was kind. I liked him.

Aside from Ross Bolleter, there was Mai to look up in the Perth area. I called the number that little Malay lady had given me on the plane and she invited me over for dinner. I knew other people further off in that commonwealth country, that continent, that island, but Perth's too far far-flung to consider looking them up. It's as far away as if it were another nation. America's Cup skipper Dennis Conner called Perth "the most isolated city in the world." Perth's own tourist literature brags it's "the most remote regional capitol on the planet." That seems a little more accurate because there are all the other WA towns nearby and nobody seems to feel isolated

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—they have each other and they seem to like that.

Tazi John says when he's been there he's gotten the sense that, being so secluded, they've developed some odd disconnected traditions and methods of doing things. One example was a musician who had heard recordings of surf (I think) music and had figured out how to duplicate the sound on the guitar without ever having seen anyone else do it, so the way he held the guitar, strummed and fretted it, was unique, totally off the wall. There's an idea of things developing there independently. John also says Perthites are awfully friendly and informal, comparing them favorably to Sydney-ans.

WAers do seem to share a sense of being off in a corner. I walked over to the home of Mai's kin and had dinner with them and later we went out to visit an aquarium and have dessert at a touristy wharf and there was a pole with signs pointing various directions with how many kilometers it was to the other big cities in Australia—4345 to Darwin, 6015 to Cairns in Queensland. Also to places like London, Tokyo, and Jakarta, which I saw was closer to Perth than Canberra, Australia's capital. And it was 3495 kilometers to Melbourne. Hmm. Melbourne. Wonder how Rudy is.

On the way to see Mai I took a stroll around lake Monger to admire the black swans and then headed off to my destination. I like getting to know places that way—even if it means trodding un-scenic byways through non descript commercial zones and into monotonous neighborhoods. To me everything is interesting—indeed, miraculous. I don't think that while I'm walking. I just amble on. People as well are each a miracle—they don't have to be entertaining or wise. I like them to be friendly if possible. These people were.

It was good being in a warm, inviting home, visiting with Mai—eating Malay food, and seeing the workshop of Daniel, her Aussie brother-in-law, an easy-going man somewhat older than his wife. In retirement from a government job, he makes commercial wood carvings on local themes. Back in the house Mai showed off some dolls she'd acquired.

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They didn't drink much—the people, not the dolls—a small glass of wine each. Good—I needed a break.

Let's see—what's her sister's name? What's she doing in the mental picture I made to help me remember her name? Singing to them. Sing—Bing, Ding, Bling, Zing. Heck—forgot the analogy, the association. Oh well, Wifey, Sis.

I mentioned at the dinner table that I wanted to visit the Swan Bells Tower in Perth and that hit a sore spot. Mai's sister and Daniel thought it was a big waste of money, money that could have been better spent on social programs. Like Mike in Singapore, they said the place to go was the Perth Mint. They planned to go there soon with Mai who was interested in the Mint shop where they sell commemorative coins and medallions, jewelry, and nuggets. I said I wouldn't be adding any such weight to my luggage this trip. My budget did, however, allow for some post cards. Maybe we can meet up there and go on the tour together?

They must have thought I was courting the Malaysian doll collector and I guess that can never be ruled out, but that wasn't on my mind. I was just saying hi. She's gone to college so our education levels were compatible. She brought up Christian mysticism again. But if she knew what a libertarian and often penniless hippie I was, I doubt she'd approve. We'll probably never see each other again—that's traveling. But maybe I'll look her up in KL. I don't know anyone else there. All my life there have been strong platonic relationships with women but I wonder how common that is in her part of Asia. Anyway, I get previews when I'm with women, previews that warn me of what could lie waiting in the future.

Like when I'm with a woman, if I find her attractive, I not only can visualize intimate and exciting recreational x-rated mental videos of us together, I immediately get previews of possible outcomes from trying to make that video come true. I look back on almost all my relationships with women fondly and I credit these prophetic fast-forwards somewhat

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for this (and having learned from my transgressions and miscalls). These at times ominous flashes have spared me grief.

I meet an attractive woman at a party and feel a tug. Internally I experience a precognition: “You didn’t call me!” “You jerk! I hate you!”

Or, “I’m on my way over to make you dinner. I’m bringing a suitcase.”

Or, “David, I’m pregnant!”

Or, “I didn’t think AIDS was contagious!”

Sometimes a grotesque vision: “You and me growing old together, sipping Manishevits, the twenty cats, and my Lawrence Welk records.”

Or just a wordless picture of being stuck in a relationship that is not rewarding where we really didn’t have that much in common, and which is demanding in so many ways—but I had followed my genital tugs, a short-lived euphoric rush and got caught. This thought turns claustrophobic and I shake my shoulders a little as if I’m trying to throw off chains, the grabbing allure falls away, she becomes less appealing and I am careful how I relate. Saved.

These we could call red light previews. Sometimes though the mental preview of a member of the fair sex is a green light: go ahead—minimal problems predicted, or, go ahead—will be well worth the trouble, or, flashing green—go full steam ahead—will sacrifice all for. Yellow light previews are most tempting when under the influence of alcohol or following a long dry or lonely spell.

Anyway, Mai was just a friend and we had a good time and then I headed back. Ah, how nice being carefree and uncommitted, I thought as I sat in the evening air. Of course I’d be happy to roll over and play whatever for Frannie, but that’s not an option so I don’t really think about it. I did at first but it’s not smart to obsess about the unobtainable. I prefer peace of mind. In a warm blanket of that peace I waited for the train that would carry me back to the North-bridge Hostel.

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I sat up late and talked with Slim, the guy at the desk. He said since I liked to walk so much I should take the walk along the Swan River from Perth to Freo. I said I'd definitely do it. Ross's name came up in conversation. He had met Ross, told me to give him his regards when I went there. He said Ross was known all over Australia for live radio improvisational concerts done simultaneously with other musicians in other cities. He said all each would know was the starting and finishing time.

I enjoyed my tiny room with cot and chair. Like the hostel in Freo it's got a communal kitchen, pool table, and interesting travelers coming and going from all over the globe. Among the staff or the customers, someone will know where to go for whatever you're looking for—dancing, twelve-step meetings, a gym, bird watching. They had Internet-hooked computers that took coins, but Slim told me of the better deal down the street where I met Techo. He also pointed me to the cheapest phone cards. I could call home for a nickel a minute on the regular phone cards, but on the ones at the corner store that just printed out a pin number on the register receipt, I could call the United States for 1.3 cents a minute—78 cents an hour—so cheap the cost was no factor, just the time involved. I hardly used them at all, preferring email. Called my mother though who doesn't do email. She said my father, who died when I was eleven, would have loved to have been on this trip.

I talked to a traveler from Florida who went to a local clinic where she was seen without much of a wait. It didn't cost much either. This would be true for many places in the world. Nothing brings home the pathetic state of health care in the US like getting health care in another country. At least where I've been and heard of. I was in a national park in Washington state camping with Kelly and Clay and bought some firewood from the caretaker who lived in a trailer there. Somehow we got to talking about medicine or health care or whatever, which led him to say, "America has the best goddamn health care system in the world." I fear I got a little

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rude in my response. Right now I'd say the quickest solution to America's health care problems would be outsourcing. It's being done more than most people realize.

I'd talk to travelers from all over the world, mainly Europeans and Brits. Some Canadians. I didn't meet many travelers from the US. I don't know why. Maybe because lower-middle class Americans make less money. I stayed in cheap places frequented by students, but also by working class people, people who worked in convenience stores and drove taxis and could still afford to travel for three months, or six, or a year. Not so easy to do for Americans with those sorts of jobs.

Talking to folks in the hostel and around town, one thing that is distinctly different from when I've traveled before, is almost everyone has a negative opinion about our president. It's so embarrassing. Many people are downright disturbed by how he conducts US foreign policy. A lot of people brought it up right away when we met—not Aussies so much but Slim did. Only the Israelis tended to like Bush Jr. An American who'd lived in Argentina for many years summed it up when he said in his lifetime every American president up to Bush Jr. was popular in Argentina regardless of how right or left they were or even what wars they were fighting—Clinton, Bush Sr., Reagan, Carter, Ford, Nixon, Johnson, Kennedy—all popular. Junior not. That concurred with my experience of Japanese over the years and other folks on this trip. Junior just doesn't give foreigners the feeling he cares about them or their opinions or the future or that he knows anything about them or what he's doing. A German school teacher I was talking to said Bush seems like a guy in a bar who, in response to another drunk's attack, fuels the flames of anger, turning the whole place into one of those old Hollywood movie scenes where everyone's fighting each other and smashing chairs over each others' heads. He's seen around the world as ignorant and reckless. I was on my way to India eventually and picked up a Hindustani Times at a Perth newsstand and read a review of a book called *Jihad*

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that said Bush would be remembered for two things over there—greatly increasing the size and power of jihad, and ending 1300 years of Suni rule over the Shiites in Iraq thus paving the way for an Iran-Iraq Shiite front against Western hegemony. We'll see.

Slim told me no matter how bad we get the Aussie government will support the US. The reason goes back to the dominant role of the US in stopping the Japanese from conquering that part of the world. One of the Japanese plans called for exterminating the Aussies and turning that continent into another Japanese Island. They probably wouldn't have done it but better we didn't have to find out. The US is still Australia's ace in the hole in terms of defense. What, for instance, if their Muslim neighbor and third most populous country on earth, Indonesia, were to change its ways and become fundamentalist and bellicose? Australia would then need the US to protect them. So they support us with a few troops even when they think we're invading someone we shouldn't, even when they think we're nuts.

Tens of thousands of people were dying in Europe from a hellacious heat wave that August and there was some talk about that and about global warming and whether it was happening or not. Slim said like the US, Australia hadn't signed the Kyoto Protocol to reduce Greenhouse gasses even though it would allow them to increase their emissions—I think because they have so few people. I didn't understand why they didn't sign—industry pressure or US pressure I guess.

Local people seemed truly concerned about skin cancer and the hole in the ozone layer that protects us from ultra-violet rays. Australia has the highest rate of skin cancer in the world. They are also world leaders of getting out in the sun. There was a skin cancer prevention poster on a wall in the hostel with a kangaroo exhorting people to "Slip, Slop, Slap!" before going out into the sun. Slip on a shirt, slop on sunscreen, and slap on a hat.

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There was plenty of talk in the hostel about the situation on the local streets. Gangs exist but know to leave innocents, tourists, and spending locals alone or the cops will come down on them like... um, like gangbusters. But beware of Aboriginal youth on petrol or other vapors—those deliriants can put them into unexamined states. Three fifteen year old Aboriginal girls just got busted for beating the tar out of a guy cutting late through a nearby park.

“Abo” was one diminutive not to be used. I’d heard it here and there without realizing there was anything wrong with it. It seemed strange a little word like that could have so much weight. I had to think of the N word to appreciate it. It has so much baggage I don’t even like to write it down. Where I grew up, I considered anyone who used it to be ignorant and prejudiced. I can feel the history, hurt, and harm. Blacks can use it anyway they want but I’ve learned the hard way not to try to do that. So I eschewed the A abbreviation and stuck to the whole word, Aborigine.

On a drizzly day, after an inexpensive and satisfying Indian vegetarian meal at the Hare Krishna restaurant a block down from the hostel, Frannie’s guitar in case in tow, I met Gupta at the hind-quarters of the main train station a block further down the street and over the tracks via pedestrian bridge. We were on our way to meet Ross Bolleter at his house.

Slim backed out at the last minute. Every time I’d seen him I’d reminded him about going to see Ross and he’d nodded and been agreeable. He was getting off just when I left and I asked if he was ready to go and he said sorry, he couldn’t make it. He never meant to. I could tell. No big deal. It was just a tiny bit irritating. Gupta said Mindy did stuff like that too sometimes—agree till the end and then say no only when she had to.

On the back side of the station we ran into the Aboriginal buckster from Freo, the one I’d sat up with and who’d told me that incredible story. We listened to him for a song

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and dropped a bill in his hat. He didn't seem to remember me.

On the phone that morning Francine said she'd been sad and wanted to join us. Today she'd be in Mandurah but would try to break away and come for a while if she could. She said after Rottnest she had been some time at her parents and then gone back to Dwellingup. She'd spent the day before just walking in the bush and crying. That made me sad too and I urged her to come.

Gupta said Mindy had gone out the night before and had not come back. She'd called early in the evening and said she'd be a while and nothing since then. He said it made him real nervous—remembering Rudy's admonitions. "It got to me man. I really got scared. I mean, why did he make such a big deal about protecting her? And then she didn't come home. I think about that guy who follows her. I know she's a grown up and doesn't like to be tied down and is unpredictable and undependable... and let's see what else—a list of stuff like that. But I wish she'd call."

"Well, just to up the ante, Let me tell you about a conversation I had with a retired detective from the Perth police." And I told him what Samo had said about Rudy.

"Oh that's great. Well, it figures. I suspected something like this. Pretty obvious actually. God, he probably knows. I'll bet that Aboriginal guy has sent him film of her and me doing the dirty deed in beds, on floors—hell, in the park."

"In a public restroom," I added.

"We've been a snoop's dream. Mmmm. Dangerous huh?"

"Very dangerous he said. He suggested I consider leaving the country."

"Maybe we should," Gupta said. "Except then I'd just want to come back."

"Anyway, we could always be followed."

"Rudy kept telling you to keep an eye on us."

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“Now wait. That was unreasonable. Anyway, she’s probably okay.”

“Now you’re scaring me. Jeez. I wonder where she is.”

“Well, she can’t get hold of you now.”

“Why did I have to fall for a gangster’s niece?”

“Because you’re a gangster’s distant nephew.”

Gupta groaned.

“Let’s go to Ross’s and call her from there,” I said.

We traipsed under gray skies through a field wet with recent raindrops to streets that brought us to the brick house of Ross Bolleter who greeted us warmly and invited us into his modest living room, jam packed with two pianos—one of them looking rather worn, an accordion, a bass, and recording equipment. He’s a solid bear of a guy with a beard and broad smile. The instruments, furniture, books and art in that room and the next attested to his dual roles as Zen teacher and musician.

“Pleased to meet you,” I said. “I’m glad John gave me your number.”

“Taswegian John,” he said. “Ah, I haven’t seen him in too long. How’s he going?”

“Fine in general, but right now I’d say he was asleep.”

Gupta had brought cheese and crackers and Ross opened some beer—Emu, obviously the pick of discriminating people. Ross started off by having me sign a couple of books. I said I was pleased as Judy (as in Punch and Judy)—showing off an Aussism I’d heard.

Gupta asked if he could use the phone and he called both Mindy’s home and mobile numbers and left messages. He didn’t look pleased. I told him to forget it—that we’d see her later. He still didn’t look pleased.

Ross remembered Slim and said to return the greetings. He said Slim had been in the Australian left wing underground and had had to hide out for years. Tazi John ran in those circles—conspired, hid in them. I wondered if Slim might know him too.

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Knock at the door. Ah, good. Frannie's arrived. She brought Simon with her. And more cheese and bread. And apples.

After lunch and repartee it was back to the living room where Ross played some cuts of the two CDs he was simultaneously working on in a studio. One was tango music, the other experimental, his fifth or so CD featuring ruined piano.

Ross explained there's ruined piano and devastated piano. A ruined piano would be one that had, for instance, been left outside for some years but was basically intact and, though not at all in tune, still made notes. A devastated instrument would more likely be decomposed and lying on the ground in a heap with rusted strings. He got into this particular artistic niche while on vacation with wife and kids a decade back. They stopped at a sheep station where he'd come across a piano in a field, broken down and falling apart. He had some microphones and a tape recorder with him, hooked them up, and played away on the wounded beast. The ranchers were perplexed yet permissive. A career was born.

Ross played both recorded and live piano and accordion music. I was right at home both with his charming, beautiful, heart-string pulling tango music, in which he multi-tracked piano and accordion and also with the intriguing ruined piano work. I'd been exposed to disparate musical traditions by my mother. In recent years a string quartet she composed was performed in Texas. When I was growing up she enlivened the house with classical music both solo and accompanied and played so much of the great music of the thirties, forties, and fifties—Cole Porter, Gershwin, Berlin, Kahn, Arlen. I ate it up. But she also exposed me to non standard music at times. I remember once she took me to a meeting of her music club to hear a prepared piano concert—that means the strings were messed with—for instance by having objects placed on them. A prepared piano technique Ross used was to place one or more balls on the strings that, when struck, would bounce them around. In high school I

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got into atonal and twelve tone music and then all sorts of wacko stuff through the years. So I was prepared for Ross's ruined piano.

I got out Frannie's guitar and Ross had a better one for Gupta. We played a few songs. Gupta was more helpful to me than I to him since he had a knack for lead. Ross played the accordion. He asked Frannie to woman, I mean girl the controls of his tape recorder. Simon seemed to be content just sitting in the corner listening and drawing pictures in his sketch book.

I did a number, derivative of Yun Men, the Zen master who is well-known among Zen folk for saying, "Every day is a good day."

*Sittin' there is who you are
Be you bozo, be you star
On a cushion chair or fallen tree
Callin' to the fallin' in thee
Happy to be just who you are*

—chorus

*And as the mountain man say
Every day is a good day
Every day is a good day*

*Standin' up is gosh almight
Beyond the good and wrong the left and right
But any names like Buddha, Tao
Allah, God, Mind, Holy Cow now
Don't begin to cast light on your light*

(chorus)

*Lyin' down the run of day is over
There you are in dreams of streams and clover
Now you know why they say one way
Like the stars up in the sky they*

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Shine upon the branches and the boulders

(chorus)

Gupta took a more romantic turn, yet with an edge of realism. Ross followed him closely with understated accordion.

*My babe—don't take no sass from me
Instead—she pours the glass for me
And my babe—she ain't mine*

*My babe—look in her eyes and see
She maybe—have a surprise for me
For to play with the shine*

—interlude

*She could dance with hunters or with reindeer
She could charm ole Satan on his knee
She could paint the moon or moon the painter
She could hug the sap right from a tree—could she*

*My babe—don't give me time of day
She ain't—got a watch anyway
She say—it's about that time*

*My babe—some sort of crook is she
The way—my babe she look at me
Tells me all I want to find*

He repeated the interlude and the first verse and then it was...

Time to go. Ross gave us three CDs of his ruined piano music to divide amongst ourselves as we wished—*The Country of Here and Below*, *The Night Moves on Little Feet*, and *Piano Dreaming*. I took with me some of Ross's commentaries on old Chinese Zen stories including one by him called *Yun*

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Men's Bright Light. Wow. We're both Yun Men fans. Also some of his poetry, which would be included in a collection called *All the Iron Night* to be published in the following year. I glanced at one of them.

*That sweet ring!
It straightens the spine lifts off the roof unclenches
the heart and as if that's not enough
takes down the walls.*

Sound images indeed—bouncing off what Buddha had said after his great enlightenment. I slipped the material into my shoulder bag and, taking my turn at the door, gave Ross a hug. We agreed we'd try to get together again to do more music.

Francine gave Gupta and me a ride back to the hostel. On the way we dropped by Mindy's to make sure she wasn't there. Gupta called her mobile again. Francine and Simon had to get back to Mandurah to make pizza but they had a little time to come in the hostel and hang out. We went to the funky open air area out back, a place for lounging, smoking, pool and ping pong. A corrugated fiberglass roof protected us from light showers while amplifying the pitter patter. A couple of young Swedish women on a couch were deep in conversation. One of them nudged some tobacco and papers toward me when I showed interest. I rolled one up. Gupta was inside in a phone booth trying to get hold of Mindy. Francine got Simon to help her rack for a game of Eight-ball. Stripe solid stripe solid. Simon asked if I was coming back to Mandurah to play catch with him. I said I'd be there as soon as I got a little more sightseeing done in Perth. I didn't know really. Frannie still needed to have some space.

Gupta came back. He was agitated. Francine challenged him and me to play her and Simon. We told her to go ahead and break. I suggested we play that everything you sink counts—don't have to call anything. Agreed. Gupta said

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he still couldn't get hold of Mindy. Francine spread the balls pretty well but nothing went in. Simon applauded. Gupta nodded to me to go first. Said he wonders where the hell Mindy is—it's been too long. I missed an easy shot and told him not to worry—she's a big girl. But I was worried too. Simon knew more or less how to hold the cue. Francine suggested he try the ball I missed, which was on the lip of a pocket. Helped him line it up. Gupta said we've got to do something. Simon hit the cue ball hard off center so it careened sharply to a side bank, over to the opposite bank and back to barely tip the ball into the pocket.

"You're stripes," I said as Simon and Francine celebrated.

"Don't worry Gupta. She'll come home soon—when she wants. She's wild."

Simon hit the cue ball on the side again and it rolled to hide between the bank and two stripes.

"Wild? Really? Tell me. But we're still responsible for her," Gupta said.

"Your shot," I said.

He looked at it.

"There's nothing you can do," I said.

He looked at me.

"About the shot," I said.

He looked at the shot.

"About Mindy either. Enjoy the game. We'll call her again later."

Rather than make a safety play he tried a ridiculously difficult shot. "Do you forget what Rudy told us?" he said. "Do you forget who Rudy is?"

"I don't forget Rudy," I said. "I'm the one who told you."

"Have you noticed in the papers there's been more gang violence in Melbourne?"

"I have noticed. A killing just yesterday."

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“Rudy’s gonna get you,” said Francine shooting one stripe into another that went in. She knew about Rudy from Mindy but had never taken it very seriously.

“Just what we need—feed his paranoia,” I said as she and Simon celebrated.

“Good shot,” said Gupta. “She sounded sort of stiff on the phone when I last talked to her—like there was something else happening.”

Francine shot the other nearby stripe into the opposite side pocket. She and Simon celebrated.

“Good shot,” said Gupta. “Like what if she’s being held by that Aborigine and he told her what to say?”

“OK? What if? What can you do about it except wait?” I said.

Francine made another shot down the length of the table. Celebration.

“Good shot. We’d better do something,” Gupta said.

Francine finally missed. My shot. “Where do you want to start?” I missed the easy shot and left Simon with an easy shot. “Sorry.”

“I don’t know,” Gupta said. “Good shot Simon.”

Now Simon left Gupta with no shot again. Gupta and I kept getting nowhere both with pool and our conversation till all the stripes were gone and all the solids still on the table and Francine had a long shot at the eight ball. All quiet. She drew her cue back. A mobile rang. Francine put the cue down and reached into her pocket.

“Man, I think she’s in—and thus we’re also in—trouble,” Gupta said.

Francine walked off, talked for a minute, returned, lined up the shot, and said, “That was Mindy. She wants us all to get together the day after tomorrow to go to the beach up north. Says she’s waiting for you, Gupta.”

She missed the shot. I missed. Simon missed the eight ball too. Gupta then ran the solids making one great shot after another but he just barely missed a difficult cut on the lone eight ball. Francine missed then I missed. Simon’s

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turn. Long one. He shot without really looking at it. Bam!
Gupta and I look at each other. Ball's in. Mindy's home.