

## Deceiving Hearts

“Let me sketch the background to my request. When my wife returned from Australia, she described how she and three lady friends drove from Brisbane to a resort near Melbourne. But when I saw her photos, after she’d arranged them in an album, my mind did a double take. The sequence of photos begins at her friend’s house in Brisbane and then jumps to Sydney – and there is not a single photo either of the three ladies or the trip from Brisbane to the resort. Strange, don’t you think?” I queried.

“Decidedly,” Hunter, agreed.

“Tell me,” I asked, “Why would someone visiting an unexplored country want to spent a week in a resort in the middle of nowhere with three ladies whom she’d just met?”

“Makes no sense,” He said.

I continued, “It’s also interesting to note that, apart from the destination cities of Brisbane and Sydney – with the exception of Melbourne - there are no photos of towns and town centres. Only cosy little out of the way resorts.”

“Here,” I offered, “Have a look at these photos of her in Sydney.”

As he perused them I added, “To me they show a radiant woman beyond simple happiness. And what adds to my suspicion is that she must have attended the release of the Titanic with someone who made an impact on her for her favourite song has become *My Heart Will Go On* - which she plays incessantly. Having known her for a long time, I think she’s completely infatuated.”

“I think you’re right,” he nodded.

“Now, she ostensibly went to Australia to visit a friend of hers in Brisbane whom she had visited five years previously in New Zealand,” I explained. “I suspect that this was the convenient cover. She basically went for a love tryst and the whole story of the three ladies was concocted in order to throw me off track.”

“What you’ve said so far seems to agree with that assumption,” Hunter said.

“She could have hidden or destroyed the photos not of Brisbane and MacLean and not said a word about anything else,” I suggested. “But, as you know the human need to record and share experiences so often brings about our downfall.”

“Did you ever suspect anything beforehand?” Hunter asked.

“Yes,” I replied. “The whole thing started on the internet. A friend of hers got her interested in “meeting” people on the net. One day I chanced upon an e-mail in the delete box wherein a bloke in the States had passed some very interesting comments following a photo of her she had sent him. Her response was that if the relationship was going to take this turn they

had better go to Hotmail as there 'are other people' who use this computer. A short while later she gave me an email to read, the top of which had been torn off. When I emptied the study bin a day or so later I saw the torn off top – she had styled herself as shirley.valentine@hotmail.com.”

“Quite evocative,” he smiled.

“You bet.” I said, “As you know computers keep the last internet file in cache so I was privy to a few odd e-mails. In one this first chap said, ‘All that is left is to ask you when and where we’re having sex tonight.’ Her response started with, “Are you making a pass at me?” followed by a cutely worded acceptance. What a shame there were a few thousand miles between them.”

I continued, “Ironically, this was not this bloke she went to Australia for but another who signed one of his e-mails rather touchingly as, ‘Miss you, Harv . . . ily.’ His name actually was Harv. That’s his surname there, and his other details.”

“Thanks,” he said.

I carried on, “She told me that she came upon him on the net as he had a son with similar problems to our daughter and that it was fortunate that he and his wife had to go to Australia on business at the same time that she would be visiting her friend.”

Then I added, “As far as this trip is concerned, I can pinpoint the exact time when this assignation was finally agreed upon. She began a flurry of medical visits and embarked on a rigorous campaign of dieting and treatment for a psoriasis condition.”

Hunter looked at me questioningly, waiting for me to continue.

“I traced the following probable route by the sequence of the photos. Isn’t it funny that the human mind’s penchant for sequence is another one of those things – like the need to record and share experiences - that tend to give the game away?” I asked.

“It’s what makes my job easier at times,” he mused.

“I think her photos in this album are all in the sequence they were taken. This is a summary of the photo sequence from identifiable names in them,” I said, handing him a copy of my notes. “Brisbane, Sydney, Wyong Shire, Pebbly Beach Murramarang and Snowy River. Look, then follow photos of the house where she says she and the ladies spent time at the resort. Note that there is no sign of any occupants in any of the numerous photos of the house. If one of the ladies photographed her in Sydney why not in the house? Odd.”

He nodded.

I pointed to a place on the notes, “The next sequence of places visited was, Melbourne, Stony Creek, Bung Yardna, Berrima Bakehouse Motel and MacLean. In MacLean she stayed with the friend who had introduced her to the internet people game. Interestingly enough,

this friend was shackled up with someone she met on the net and had gone to Australia to join. Another net relationship that was doomed, but that's another story."

"After the photos of MacLean there are the ones in Brisbane when she returned to the friend who, ostensibly, had been the sole reason for her visit," I said, "Supposedly she met Harv and his wife in Sydney and went on a short tour with them but because his wife was difficult and wanted to curtail their stay he left his wife in Sydney and drove her to the friend in MacLean. I wonder how a difficult - and probably jealous - wife would have agreed to this." I asked.

He shrugged, "Not at all."

"In contrast to this story, if you look at the rough map I've drawn of the itinerary you will see that MacLean was no chance thing," I handed him a copy. "The whole trip was deliberately planned from the beginning with MacLean as the end point. What's more, I believe that the friend in MacLean was in cahoots with her from day one. Perhaps, being a woman," I suggested, "She did have a possible love interest but, being a man, he just saw this as an opportunity for a couple of weeks of no comeback sex."

I continued, "During her trip, from her sporadic e-mails I got the impression that she might return to the States with him but something obviously happened to change that idea. Of course there are neither any photos of the bloke and his supposed wife, except for this one. Have a look at it. I'm sure that the bloke standing there is him. A chink in her chicanery?"

"It's good enough for a positive identification," Hunter said examining it closely. My contacts will be able to identify him from that, and the other details you've given me," Hunter said."

I nodded, adding, "After she returned I noticed from our medical accounts that through her gynae she had an AIDS test shortly after returning and another one six months later."

After a long silence I was the first to speak, "I'm sure you'll agree that all this evidence is a little more than circumstantial?"

"I've seldom had so much to go on," he agreed.

"Good. I need answers to the following questions," I said. "Is the sequence as depicted in the album's photo's; how did she get from Brisbane to Sydney; was his wife safely in Oregon; and what were they booked into the various places as." By way of explanation I added, "Perhaps I have too fertile an imagination but I'm trained as an analyst and what I've been told and what I've seen doesn't add up. All I want you to do is to confirm or deny my suspicions. Will you accept the brief?" And then I threw in a bit of bait, "After all it'll be a bit of a paid Ozzie holiday for you."

"You have a deal," he said extending his hand.

"Good," I said, shaking it, "I'll deposit a cheque for the agreed amount into your account in the morning."

\*\*\*

Two weeks later Hunter sat opposite me with his report.

I leaned back in my chair, "Give me an overview response in your own words."

"OK," he began, "You were right. There were no girls and no trip. She flew from Brisbane to Sydney where she met him. His wife remained safely in America. The album event sequence is perfect and, just as you thought; they booked in together at all the places. They were alone in the house."

"Hah, I knew it." I exclaimed putting my hands behind my head and savouring my victory.

After a while he asked, "Do you intend to use this report as evidence in a court?"

"Oh Good Lord no, never." I exclaimed sitting bolt upright in my chair.

He looked puzzled, "Never?"

"Never. Don't look so puzzled," I laughingly responded before adding, "She'll get over her infatuation with time. I just wanted the satisfaction of knowing that I was right.

And, what's more, the exquisite pleasure of knowing that she doesn't know that I know."