

## On The Beach

"your troubles will be out of reach"

I come out of the water, dumped once—tho not badly—& having caught a few waves—surfacing near some teenagers, all girls in their mid teens, a younger brother amongst them. Brown, all of them, but no more tanned than me. Less confused tho. Steadier on their feet. Make my way up the beach—which is not too tightly packed. A Wednesday, lunchtime.

For a moment I think I've strayed while swimming—from where I was. There is someone lying on a towel very close to mine. Asleep—sunglasses, book on her chest. Why so close? The heavy silver bracelet I recognise, shake my hair so the fine drops can wake her. "Frank," she says, opening her eyes, "How very odd to meet you." "Strikes you that way, does it?" "Frank, yes, I'm sorry."

I pick up my towel, dry my hair, my chest & shoulders. "I feel like I'm Matt Helm or someone—Tony Rome—and you're Jill St John, Eva Marie Saint, & I'm James Coburn." "Frank, I don't know what you're talking about. These people—are actors? you've gone back to the golden years of Hollywood? Americana doesn't interest me." "I have reason to be annoyed with you," I tell her.

"I'm sorry for that, Frank. If you'd been curious enough to travel to Melbourne, you'd have been barely inconvenienced: 'Lost Luggage' for one day only—and I'd be a lot wealthier." "No decent beaches in Melbourne, Veronika. And you advised me: walking in sand, you said, would cure it." "You are walking much better," she says. We head off the beach, back to the cars, the streets.

I hand her my shirt, large, blue, suitable for Sydney suburbs. Her book: *English Biography of the seventeenth century* by Vivian de Sola Pinto. "Why are you reading this?" "I needed something. Picked it up in an 'Op Shop' (I believe that is what they're called.)" "'Lives of the poets' sort of stuff, is it?" "I'll learn something, Frank, even if it's just *what serious minded people*

*were reading back in ... 1950.*" "I don't think any serious person took Poetry seriously back then." "They seem to have, Detective." She waves the book at him. "We quit, in the US, before the fifties." "Is America a serious country, Frank?" "Vonnie, you shouldn't have come here. I'm being watched, at least some of the time—and there are detectives out here

from Hawaii, Christ knows why—very keen to find you." "Okay." A pause. "I need money, Frank, to get out of here. About twelve hundred." "Me?" I say—surprised, but also touched. "Will your wife mind?" "I won't tell her for a while." It seems I've already decided. "Look, move quick. Leave from Brisbane or somewhere—not Sydney or Melbourne. The name they're pursuing, that they think you're using,

is Devereaux. *Don't* use that. They know Stein too." "Okay." "Don't fly into the United States. Go to Mexico or somewhere. Drive across." "This is a big favour, Frank." "Might not see you again," I suggest, firmly. "Keep on with the legs," she told me, when we parted—on Arden Street of all places. No-one shifty about, no Audi. "I will," I called, & turned—

up the hill at Coogee, to Michael & Di's, our Sydney friends. A shower. Something *not* to tell.

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