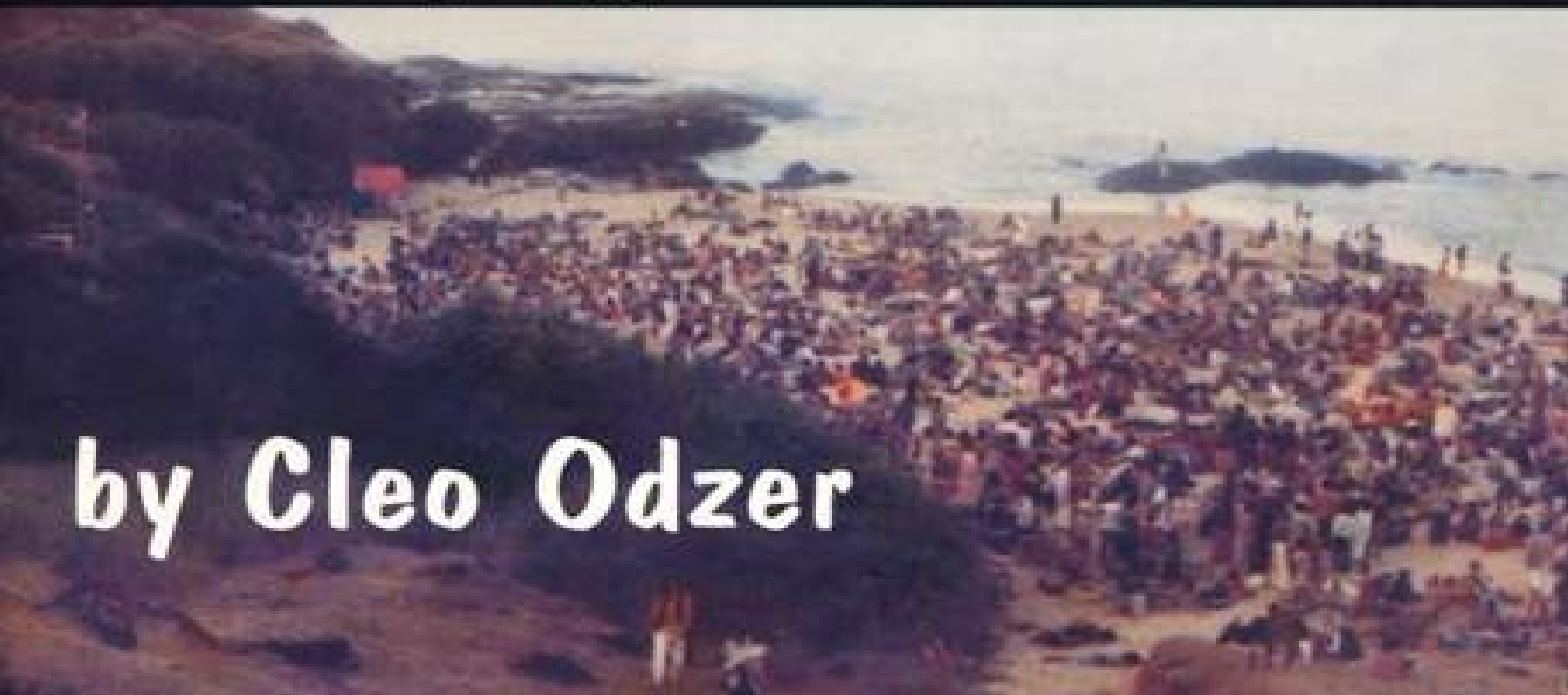




# GOA FREAKS

My Hippie Years in India



by Cleo Odzer

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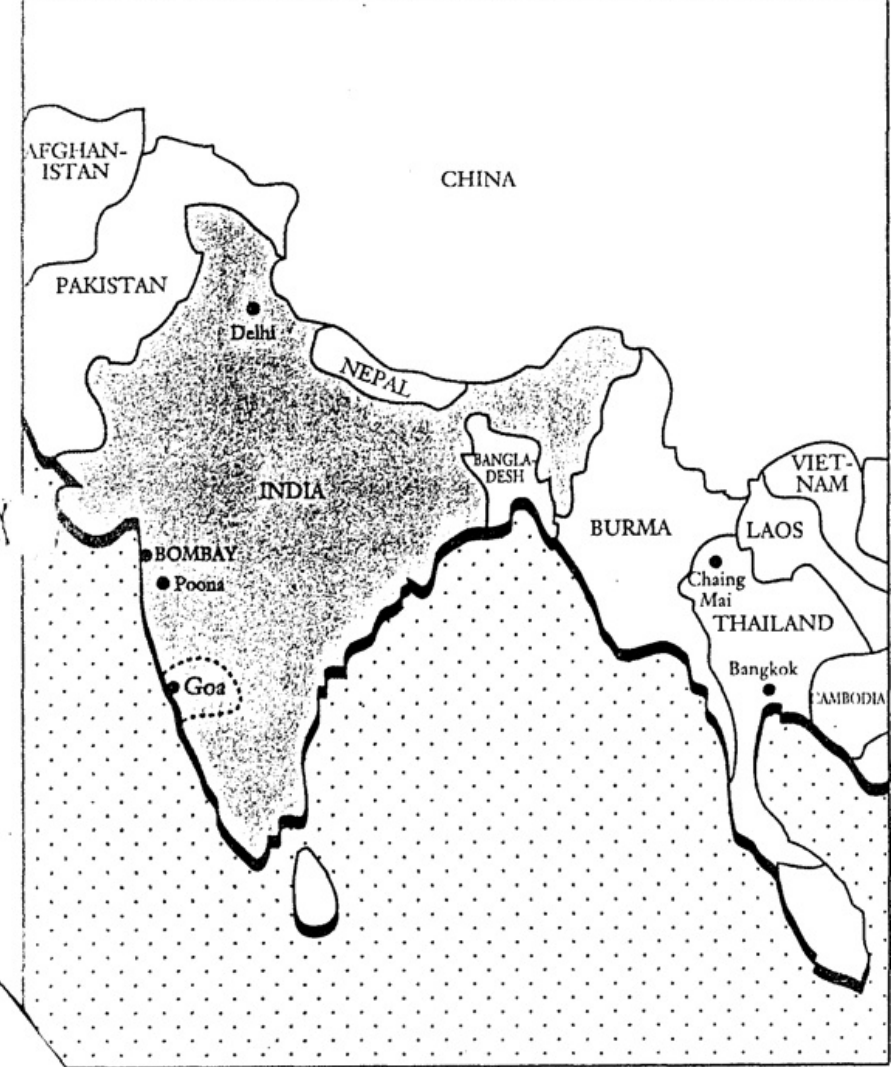


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MAP OF ASIA



**Goa Freaks**

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*8 pages of photographs*

July 1979

"*BAKSHEESH*," MUTTERED the beggar, thrusting his palm at me as I walked through the Colaba section of Bombay. He should have recognized me by now. In that rainy monsoon, could there have been more than one young foreign woman with blue eyes, blonde hair, and a diamond in her nose? He had not gotten a rupee from me yet, and I'd been down that street every day the past week. Glaring at him, I swerved to avoid the palm of another barefoot beggar, a boy in tattered shorts. Something told me they'd had more to eat more than I had.

I waved my arm and yelled, "*CELLO*," one of the few Hindi words I'd managed to pick up during my four years in India. "GO! GET AWAY!"

At the end of the block I turned left to head back to the hotel, which had rusty streaks and the ceiling and jumbo water bugs in its communal shower. The day hadn't seen rain yet, but dark clouds foretell that it soon would. Yesterday's deluge still flooded the streets, and the bottom of my ankle-length skirt had a muddy line that would probably never wash out. How would I survive the next two months of this? All my friends had left for the summer. Nobody would deliberately spend a monsoon season in India if they could help it. Only the losers got stuck in the rain.

"Cleo! Cleo!" I heard someone shout, and I turned to see Birmingham Bobby running toward me. I couldn't believe the scruffy

sight of him. Gone was the thick gold jewellery of two years before and his cocky poise. Pimples

now polka-dotted his once-smooth skin. "Hello, love," he said, kissing me with enthusiasm and no hint of the former bad feelings between us. "How're you doing? You look great. Got any smack?"

His hopeful grin shrunk as I shook my head and answered, "Only opium."

He grunted. "I'm sick of opium!" As his eyes searched the street for another potential source of free drugs, he related his latest failure in the export business. Then he sighed. "It's not easy here anymore, is it, love?"

"Nothing worked for me this year, either," I told him. "I came to Bombay to keep from starving in Goa. Bila from Dipti's allows me one mango ice cream a day on credit, and Yatin from Spaceways Travel lent me rupees for a few days at the Crown Hotel. I don't know what to do when that money runs out."

"Bloody daft how I'm broke," said Bobby, turning around to scan behind him. "Stiffies Hotel threw me out for not paying the bill. I've been sleeping on the street ever since."

Holy cow. I'd heard of down-and-outers who slept on the street with the Indian beggars, but I'd never known one before. Though his was one of the only friendly faces I'd run into, I had an urge to escape him; but before I could utter an excuse, he spotted someone else he knew and dashed off without a goodbye.

To cross an avenue I stepped into a foot of black flood water. Not bothering to raise my stick, I let its already-stained hem float as I waded across. Sleeping on the street with the beggars! Could that happen to me? How far from that was I, anyway? Even with only one ice cream a day, my credit at Dipti's wouldn't last forever, and I'd run out of people who could lend me money. Had he still been alive and able to see me, my nice Jewish father, with his Ritz hotel in Miami Beach, would have med. My nice Jewish mother in New York still thought I was a successful model, though it had been years since I'd sent her a magazine clipping. No, I couldn't let myself fall to that beggar level. Even if it meant leaving India for good.

But I didn't want to leave India. This was my home. Goa was my dream, my fantasy paradise. I couldn't leave it. Everything would be better in the fall, when I could return there—to my house; to Bach, the dog I missed so much; to the nightly beach parties. It was deserted in Goa now—the houses boarded up, the restaurants closed—but as soon as the monsoon ended, my friends would return and it'd be jumping. Goa was my home. I just had to survive the next two months, then I could get back to it.

Having rejected the thought of Rachid for more than a week, I decided I

had no choice but to involve myself with the slimy Indian. Rachid—yuk. The name "Rancid" would have suited him better.

I detoured to leave messages for Rachid at a juice stand and a shop selling yogurt-type drinks called *lassies*, and then continued to the hotel. In my room, I avoided brushing the walls and their

layer of crud. I didn't sit on the chair, where leatherish filth speckled the upholstery. Touching anything in the room brought shivers to my skin. Before I lay down, I spread a kimono over the bed to hide the sheet's circles of yellow and grey. To endore that place, I'd had to shut a sensor in my brain, the sensor of aesthetics.

On the street the next day, Rachid pulled up beside me in a car crammed with Indian men. Like wolves and coyotes, Rachid and his men travelled in packs.

"Hello, darling," he said. "What can I do for you? Want cocaine?"

I told him I needed to make money. "Don't you have people cashing checks for you or something?" I asked. I'd heard rumours about his underworld businesses.

"For you, darling, I have something better. Something safer."

The job he had in mind did concern checks, traveller's checks to be specific, and was part of an Operation he ran in several cities. Apparently Rachid had a network of Indians and foreigners working together. In Step One of the scam, his Indians hunted tourists. I would enter in Step Two, where the tourists were conned into parting with their traveller's checks. Cashing them was the last and riskiest step, and Rachid had a separate group of foreigners for that.

My sensor for compassion must have been numbed also; didn't care what the job entailed.

"Darling, you go back to the hotel and wait," he told me. "We will call you when we're ready. Someone will go with you until you learn the routine."

Here is a hundred rupees. Go eat. You need smack? You know you can always come to me, darling. Rachid will take care of you."

I wasn't at the hotel long before I received the phone call. I'd picked up a feast of food, and the call came after I'd wolfed down a pepper steak and was gobbling the third raspberry doughnut. I wasn't sure how the scam worked. I did know I was to play the role of a tourist, removed

the diamond from my nose and put on my "government dress," the one I wore to renew my visa. Another crowded car pulled up to the hotel, this time without Rachid, and I squeezed in between an Indian and a seedy looking Frenchman who had dirty hair and dandruff.

"We have an American waiting in a cafe," one of the Indians told "This is your husband." He pointed to Dandruff, who managed a droopy-eyed greeting. Rachid probably employed every junky in Bombay. The Indian continued, "You are to pretend you made money with us yesterday and are back today to make more. Here, take these traveller's checks. Do not worry. It is easy."

At that moment, my stomach was so nice and full I couldn't have felt other than blissfully content. And one more raspberry doughnut awaited my return.

The car left a block from the café as light rain began. When we walked in, Dandruff recognized another one of Rachid's men, who waved us to the table where he sat with a crew-cut American.

"Hello, hello," the Indian welcomed us warmly. Then, turning to the tourist, he said, "Here is the couple I told you about. Yesterday they earned, what was it, almost two hundred dollars, right?" He looked at us. We nodded. "You had no problems, did you?"

"No," replied Dandruff, my dirty, droopy husband. "Piece of cake."

We drank tea, and then Rachid's man purposely stepped away a minute so the tourist could confer with us and be reassured. "What does he want us to do exactly?" the American asked me. "Buy traveller's checks for him? That's it?"

"That's all," Dandruff informed him. "He gives us American dollars and we buy him checks. There's a rule that Indian nationals aren't allowed to have foreign currency. But they need traveller's checks in foreign currency to leave the country. Typical bureaucratic bullshit. We make a percentage of the amount we change."

When we left the restaurant, the four of us took a taxi to a less commercial part of town. The square buildings looked like factories, and fewer people walked the streets. By this time it was pouring, and Dandruff, the tourist, and I huddled under the tourist's umbrella. Rachid's man, standing in the rain, explained we were to wait there while he went to get the money.

Meanwhile, since he would be trusting us with his cash dollars, we were to let him hold our traveller's checks. The amount of cash we'd be given would match the amount of our traveller's checks he'd be holding.

"The money is in a safe around the corner," he said, hunching forward to keep the rain out of his eyes. "You give me your checks now and I will put them in the safe and come back with the money."

Following Dandruff's lead, I handed him the traveller's checks I'd been given in the car. After watching us give the man our checks, the tourist didn't hesitate more than a second before handing over his.

Uh-oh. I suddenly realized we'd be left waiting there with the nein American until he figured out he'd been ripped off.

"Are you sure this is okay?" he asked as we watched the (Irene had Indian walk away with his two thousand dollars worth of American Express. The rain formed a blur around us. Dandruff left the refuge of the umbrella to sit on a concrete wall. Oh, terrific—now I was alone with the guy. I tried concentrating on my furry Bach back in Goa. Had Bach run away from the Person I'd left him with? Was somebody feeding him? Did he miss me?



"Where are you from?" I asked our victim. Water cascaded off the umbrella, over my elbow down my leg, and into my left shoe.

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"Wisconsin. Ever been there?" Water poured down his back and ruined the crease in his trousers.

I shook my head. My shoe squished as I shifted my weight. I wondered how long this would take.

"We certainly picked the wrong time of year to vacation in India, didn't we?" he stated.

"Um . . . really! My travel agent didn't say anything about a rainy season. Did yours?"

"This isn't a considerate place to have us wait," he commented next. "Is this where you waited yesterday?"

I looked at Dandruff on the wall, eyes closed, letting the rain flow over him. I nodded and tried to recall the taste of the raspberry doughnut. "What do you do in Wisconsin?" I asked, wishing the guy wasn't so close. I could feel the heat of his hand next to mine as we held the umbrella.

"I manufacture nuts and bolts in specialized sizes. What do you do?"

"Oh, um . . . uh . . . this and that. You know." I'd have to think up

better answers.

Fifteen minutes later, our victim started to worry. "Where is that man? He's Tate. Did it take this long yesterday?"

Again I looked at Dandruff. His eyes were still closed. "No, yesterday he came right back. I hope nothing went wrong."

After another twenty minutes our victim groaned. "He's not coming back," he said. "I think we've been robbed."

At this point, Dandruff joined us and wrinkled his forehead in an effort to look concerned. "No! You think so?"

"What can he do with our traveller's checks?" I asked. "You need identification to cash them."

"The bastard!" exclaimed Dandruff forcefully.

"What do we do now?"

"We must report to the police."

"But we can't tell the truth," Dandruff said with feigned dismay. "What we planned to do is illegal. It will be us who'll be in trouble. We'll have to say the Checks were lost."

"You're right. Or that they were stolen from the hotel room," I added.

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Finally, when the tourist surrendered all hope, we agreed to leave separately to report the lost checks.

Later, Dandruff and I split three hundred dollars, our fifteen percent of the man's checks. If the foreigners who cashed them received the same percentage, that still left Rachid a juicy profit; and who knew how many others like us Rachid had working for

"Listen," I said to Dandruff, "do you think I can ask them not to leave me in the rain next time? There must be a place with a doorway or an awning or something."

"Don't do that. The more comfortable it is, the longer you'll have to wait. Believe me, it goes fastest when you're out and exposed in a torrential downpour."

After devouring the remaining doughnut, I moved to a room that had its own toilet. What a luxury. Though I wasn't thrilled with my new vocation, the compensations eased my conscience. I went to the Sheraton to buy French bread, Camembert cheese, and a bottle of American shampoo. Oh, boy—I'd be able to wash the sticky soap mess from my hair. I just might survive until September after all.

After four more days with Dandruff, I worked alone.

But I hated it. I hated standing there as the tourists realized their checks weren't coming back. The long wait while hope faded was torture. As they agonized over what the loss meant, I agonized over being the one who caused it.

"I've been saving for this trip for years," said a German woman during our second half-hour of waiting. "I always wanted to visit the Ganges River." She paused to look mournfully in the direction she'd let someone walk away with her traveller's checks.

I felt awful for her, knowing myself the ordeal of reporting lost checks. If she came to India for only a two-week excursion, she'd probably never dip

her toes in the Ganges now. I tried not to think of it. I resisted the image of me as a cretin. I thought of Goa instead. And Bach. And the food I could now afford.

Though I could tell that speculation about my role flickered through people's minds while we waited, nobody accused me outright. What worried me was the possibility of running into somebody at a later date. The tourist area of Bombay was small, and I knew our victims would learn the details of the scam as soon as they returned to their hotels. Undoubtedly their desk clerks had heard of it. It was notorious at American Express, which had even posted flyers with descriptions of Rachid's people. This was big business, and I, for one, received the call at least once a day.

After a few weeks, anxiety that I might be spotted grew to fear and then terror. Visions of being

dragged through the street, kicked and cursed at, haunted me whenever I went out. So I bought a black wig and a pair of sunglasses. Now, on top of everything, I felt ridiculous as I slinked down alleys in disguise. If I glimpsed a Westerner on the street, I'd turn to a store window to see if I could recognize the person in the glass reflection before he or she recognized me.

When Rachid suggested I go to Delhi, I was enormously relieved. "Darling, you will like it better in Delhi," he said. "All my people stay in one hotel. It will be like a party. See how I try to make you happy, darling?"

Dandruff came, too. Apparently tourism was booming in Delhi. The three of us flew together, and Rachid took us personally to the hotel. As we entered, the Indian employees steeped their hands and lowered their heads respectfully to him. He must have owned the place. Upstairs, Dandruff and I were introduced to six Westerners, all male, all droop looking, and all sleazy.

A porter showed me to a room. I was impressed: it had its own bedroom.

"Here you are, darling. Is this not cosy?"

During the day, we sat around a central area waiting to be called. The hotel manager would summon us.

"Your turn." The Indian signalled Dandruff.

"What, again? I already went twice today."

"Cleo, you're next."

"But Tin in the middle of a Tandoori chicken," I moaned.

Sometimes we were all out at once. Rarely were more than three of us there at one time. In Delhi I relaxed. With the hotel outside the city centre, I no longer feared running into a victim after the feed. I still hated the job, but I was surviving the monsoon. And there was a wonderful Bengali restaurant down the block Food! Soon soon I would be back in Goa.

One evening Dandruff didn't return. We notified Rachid. Late that night a knock woke me. Half asleep, I didn't think twice about opening the door until two police officers strode into the room

Oh, shit.

"You are tourist?" asked a little inspector, looking into corners. "Uh ... yes."

"Please, you Show me your passport."

When I did, he sat on the bed to examine it. The other policeman searched the room at first poking into empty drawers and then rummaging through the suitcase where all my clothes tangled

into one big knot. "But you are staying in India what eleven months?" the inspector said, trying to figure out my entry dates. "No, you are making one trip to Bangkok and return. What is your occupation?"

"Oh, um ... uh "

"Is this correct? It is saying that you are born in 1950. You are twenty-one?" He looked closer at me. "No, you are being no more than eighteen." People always mistook me for younger than my age. He compared me to the passport picture.

Just then the other officer came across a set of traveller's checks hidden in a bikini bottom. He brought them to the inspector, and the two of them smiled Humpty Dumpty-style.

"So! These are your checks? This is your name?"

They weren't and it wasn't.

The police took me away.

A canvas-covered jeep waited in front of the hotel, and in the back wrapped to his ears in a blanket sat Dandruff.

"What happened?" I asked, climbing in and sitting beside him.

He waited till the engine blocked his voice from the driver, then answered, "A tourist recognized me from last year. She called the cops. They beat me. Look, they pulled my earring out." He motioned to his bloody lobe. "The pigs ruined my ear."

Was that supposed to justify his informing on me? Obviously he'd led the police to my door. He must not have mentioned anyone else from the hotel just me.

Thank you very much, Dandruff. I'm going to get you for this, I thought, while I smiled at him. "Are you all right?" I asked. At that moment I needed a fellow sufferer more than I needed an enemy.

It was still the middle of the night when the jeep brought us to the police station, and our arrival woke the servants who'd been sleeping on the concrete floor of the courtyard. After depositing Dandruff in an empty cell that said "Lathes," the police escorted me to a narrow room overwhelmed by yellow folders and smelling of an earlier curried meal.

"We are having no facilities for you," the inspector told me. "You must be spending the night in this office." He spoke Hindi to a servant who'd scurried in behind us. After producing blankets of the same type I'd seen wrapped around Dandruff, the servant was dismissed for the night. "Here, you sleep here," the inspector said as he spread blankets on the floor; one, half under the desk and another, a few feet away. Then came a clanging of chains. "Come, you are lying down now." I sat on the floor and tried to make a pillow of my handbag, bunching it into a ball. He approached me. "I am sorry, I must manacle you. Please, you are lying down." He knelt near me with a gigantically

thick chain that should not have been used for anything smaller than an elephant. "Here. You are putting your foot here." I moved as directed until the bottom half of me lay under the desk. He chained my ankle to its initial leg. Then he went to the other blanket and turned out the light

The ceiling fan revolved slowly. I could barely feel the stirred air passing through the top wisps of my hair. Outside in the station courtyard the sounds of activity grew quieter as the servants settled back down for the night. A door slammed at the end of the corridor, and I heard a foreign shout in the distance. An answering shout came in more words I couldn't understand. My shoulder blades dug into the floor, but I couldn't turn to the side with my foot chained to the desk.

I cried.

Chained under a desk, deep inside a police station somewhere in New Delhi, in India, in the middle of the night—I didn't want to think. I wanted desperately to sleep—sleep and let all this go away for a while.

I suspected, though, I wouldn't be able to do that just yet.

And there he was. As the last thump and shuffle moved off in the distance, there was the inspector at my side, right up against me. He stroked my hair and, with a sexual smirk in his voice, said, "You are not having to cry. I can make everything okay for you. I can take away this manacle even, if you are wishing."

The scratchy surface of the handbag itched my neck. How had I gotten myself into this mess? Somewhere along the way I'd lost control of my life. Something somewhere had escaped me. But it had all been so wonderful—hadn't it? I'd created the perfect home for myself in Goa. Goa was my dream community, my fantasy paradise. It represented everything I'd ever wanted.

But I wasn't in Goa at the moment. Goa seemed worlds away. What had gone wrong?

As the inspector fondled my hair, I remembered my mother's night time touch when I was a little girl. She'd sit on my bed and caress me until I fell asleep. Sometimes she'd sing a Song about dolls or a Swiss man who made cheese. This only happened on Thursdays, though, because that was the government's day off.

The only child of a wealthy family, I grew up in a large New York City apartment overlooking Central Park. We had a cook and a cleaning lady. I had a French nanny and went to a French school, driven there in a chauffeured limousine. Nobody in the family was French; but French was chic and the family was very chic. We spent the nasty months of the year in a Florida hotel, the Eden Roc, in which my father had a partnership. I was raised in the good life, destined for LaHood—the coddled existence of a Jewish American Princess.

As I approached my teen years my father developed Parkinson's disease. Stories of his falling in the subway and being helped home by strangers made my heart ache. During New York's famous blackout, his blank gaze as he sat in his candlelit wheelchair made me realize he was no longer cognizant.

As I watched his mind and body deteriorate, I was unaware that our finances were doing the same. By the time I was old enough to appreciate grandeur, we no longer lived in it. It took my father years to the, years spend as a vegetable. In the meantime, my mother thought it better to let me run wild than to keep me home while he wasted away. And run wild I did.

"What's going on here?" she asked once, entering my room.

A group of us lay on the floor, speechless, enraptured by a swirly design

that circled round and round. Marijuana smoke fogged the air, but my mother couldn't identify the smell. I was fifteen.

"Hey, Mommy. Look at this! Psychedelic!"

The guys had long, straggly hair. My mother stared at one wearing a toga and makeup. Over the sound of the Rolling Stones she yelled, "Cook said dinner will be ready at seven."

"We're going for pizza," I answered, my eyes pleading her not to object. She glanced again at the toga. "Mommy, I can't eat here. Please?" She hesitated but, as always, she let me go. She knew how it hurt me to watch my father's spastic body be fed by the nurse, food dribbling from his chin. "And, Mommy, would you dose the door, please?"

Out every night from the age of fifteen, I became a regular on the disco scene. No club charged me admission; everybody knew me by the age on my phoney I.D. At seventeen I wrote a column in *Downtown*, a Greenwich Village newspaper. "Pop Sounds by Cleo," it was called. I got free concert passes to interview musicians backstage.

Despite the nocturnal pursuits, I did not drop out of school. In fact, achieved my highest grades while at my wildest. I'd always hated being told what to do— when Mommy said be home by eleven, I sneaked out again at midnight—and until my junior year in high school I'd been a terrible student. Three schools had expelled me, the French one and two others. But then I transferred to Quintanos School for Young Professionals. For models, actors, and rock musicians, this school catered to the weirdo. At Quintanos, students weren't required to learn at all. In this atmosphere I flourished. Rarely would I be graded less than an A. With no one forcing me to study, I did it because I liked it.

By my nineteenth birthday, my father had died, the money was gone, and my mother had to move to a smaller apartment with no room for me. Though it had been my idea to live alone, I'd wanted privacy, not excommunication, which was what the Break in standard of living brought me. With the cessation of my weekly allowance, I felt immediately excluded from my previous life. Our

old kitchen had been so big it needed a sink at both ends; now all I had was a toaster oven on the bed stand of my rented room.

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When I visited Momsy, she took me on a sad tour of the apartment she'd crammed herself into—five huge rooms on the sixteenth Floor of an elegant building on lower Fifth Avenue.

She wailed forlornly, "I don't know how I'll avoid claustrophobia here. And I can only afford the cleaning lady three days a week." The second bedroom had been converted to a library, and she gestured defeatedly, telling of the books she'd thrown out to accommodate the smaller shelf space.

"Momsy, I have a cavity and need a dentist," I told her.

"Baby, I wish I could help, but I just sent the sable to the furrier to be shortened and I haven't a cent left. With short skirts in style, I look retarded in a long coat, and I can't afford a new one."

With my mother barely able to maintain herself. I'd have to make my own way. There wasn't sufficient insurance money to support us both. But what was I supposed to do? I'd been raised to be a rich man's daughter. No one had geared me for the proletariat.

Bootlessly adrift, I felt homeless and even stateless. New York wasn't hospitable. There was nothing for me there. I tried modelling, but my measly five feet three inches disqualified me from the profession. What to do?

Eventually I decided to go away. My bank account totalled twelve hundred dollars, a life's worth of birthday presents from relatives. And so, after closing the account, I left the United States, bought an old car in Paris, and became a free-spirited traveller.

"Where are you going?" the European border guards would ask as I drove up in my colourful car. I'd painted a smiling face on the hood; on the roof, a cracked raw egg ran yellow and white into the bright colours of the car doors. A purple ghost on the trunk snarled at riders behind me who objected to my novice driving skills.

"I'm just going," I would answer.

"What happened to your front license plate?" they'd ask next, noticing its absence.

"It fell off. But the numbers are there—see them?" I'd painted the license number in the smiling mouth. It looked like teeth.

During the two and a half years I travelled around Europe and the Middle East, I modelled. In countries without blue-eyed blondes, I did well. In Greece you couldn't turn on the TV without seeing me with a tube of toothpaste or a can of deodorant, and I even performed minor parts in movies. In other countries, though, such as Holland with its lofty blondes, I was again too short to model. When winter made it too cold to sleep in the car, I

lived on people's floors or in hippie hideaways in abandoned buildings. Poverty was okay if you were a traveller; then it made it a statement: I'm a rebel in search of a better world. I'm a flower child

protesting capitalist values. I'm not part of your system.

"Hi, there. Remember me? Can I sleep on your floor again tonight? I'll be leaving soon for the Sinai in Israel. Heard there's a scene happening there in the desert."

Being "on the road" was a great way to meet people and have adventures. After a while, though, I tired of leaving places. I wanted a home, but I needed a place with people who had my kind of visions, people free from societal mores and the restraints of tradition. So far I hadn't found anything like that.

"Go to India," someone told me. "That's where the Freaks five."

I'd met a few Freaks here and there in my travels. From a variety of nationalities, they were people who'd given up their motherlands and their former lifestyles. They had a creative outlook on life and a collection of utopian ideals—plus an urge to have fun and avoid work.

"Really?" I asked. "Where in India?"

"Goa."

1975

September

I BOUNCED INTO India on an overland bus I'd boarded in Athens. Specks of dirt and dust hovered in the air and covered everything by the time the other young passengers and I crossed from Pakistan via an unpaved road. The flies that'd joined us in Lahore were still with us, though their buzzing couldn't be heard over the blasting rock music. We'd been on the road six weeks, and as one of my feet scraped the floor, it gouged a path through a melange of dirt from Greece, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. A sample of this international sniff could also be found in my ears, in my nasal passages, under my nails, and now a chunk of the Indian variety was crusting in the comers of my eyes. But this was India—INDIA!—and I was ready and eager to experience the East.



Something special awaited me here—I could feel it. Maybe this was where I'd find a home.

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In New Delhi, our first stop, some passengers got off and we picked up new ones. The new people had an indescribable quality about them. You could tell they'd been in the East a while. Their clothes hung looser, their mannerisms seemed freer, and they had a certain inner tranquillity. One American couple, Paul and Pam, both with waist-length, wavy brown hair, told us they'd been living in Goa four years. Paul, in white, flowing pants and a white top, stood in the front of the bus and helped with directions. I watched Pam to discover what gave her that "devour."

Whatever it was, I wanted it.

In Bombay, we parked overnight to sleep in the bus near the marble columned Taj Mahal Hotel where two German women and I took a refreshing sponge bath in the lathes' room of the lobby. On the way back, with washed underwear in our hands, we noticed what seemed like oblong bundles of garbage against the hotel's wall. I froze as a bundle moved, half expecting a rat to run out.

"What's the matter?" one of the Germans whispered.

The three of us remained still as we realized the oblong shapes lined both sides of the street.

"Look!" A bit of hair protruded from the far end of one; from the other, bare feet. I pointed to a baby arm sticking out from a tiny one. "They're people!"

"*Baksheesh*," someone said, suddenly taking hold of my elbow. I turned to see a woman in a ripped sari holding a baby with an oily streak across its face. "*Paisa*," she said holding her palm out and then gesturing toward her mouth. "*Paisa*."

Another beggar appeared next to us, and two were detached from their rag bundles and headed in our direction. A child took hold of my ruffled dress and stuffed the edge of a ruffle in her mouth.

Was this where I wanted to live? "Let's get out of here," I said.

The next afternoon we were to leave for Goa. I spent the morning looking for a place to leave my enormous suitcase, so full of clothes they'd called me Hippie Deluxe in Europe. I wanted to bring only the minimum with me—a few outfits packed in a sleeping bag. I also needed a safe place to leave my portfolio of modelling pictures. If I lost that, I wouldn't be able to work.

By ten in the morning, Bombay's heat had baked my bones. Though it didn't take long to find a hotel storage facility for my luggage, I was at a loss over what to do with my pictures. After hours of unsuccessful inquiry. I parked myself in six square inches of shade under a traffic signal. Sweaty and exasperated, I was sure I'd scream if one more beggar touched me.

"Yen are Indian mm asked when I remained under the traffic signal after everyone else had crossed the street.

I moaned and stamped my foot. "Uii! I don't know where to leave my portfolio; my feet are

killing me; it's too hot here; it's too crowded; my bus is going to leave any minute; and these beggars are driving me CRAZY

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The man smiled tolerantly and gave me his card. "I work for Indian Airlines. You see there—it is just down the roadway. Would you like for me to show you around the city?"

"I'm heading for Goa soon," I told him. "Do you know where I could leave my portfolio? It's my most valuable possession and I don't want to take it with me."

"Why, I will hold it for you if you wish. You can find me in the office every work day. Perhaps on your return to Bombay you will let me escort you to dinner."

I looked him over—grey tie; pointy, polished shoes. Perfect! Where could I find a safer place than with this nice business man in his nice suit? "Great!"

I handed over the portfolio. He looked so reliable, I didn't bother to ask where he'd put it. Hidden behind a picture were two hundred dollars in traveller's checks, half the money I had left in the world. I wanted to set that aside for an emergency.

That afternoon our bus began the final lap of the journey. It took fifteen hours from Bombay to the border of Goa and would take another ten to Calangute, our destination. A colony of Portugal until 1961, Goa revealed itself to be different from the India we'd seen so far. No desperate poverty, for one thing. And the countryside—wow! All we'd seen previously had been dry desert land; Goa was green and lush with vegetation. Giant leaves hung over the road, periodically skimming the roof of the bus.

"YEOW!" yelled a surprised passenger as a super-leaf slid in the window and poked her in the cheek. We drove through the oversized greenery in awed silence. Having travelled, cramped and hurled about, for six weeks, we'd finally arrived in Goa.

The road lay bare except for the occasional ox cart, a few bicycles, some cows, and chickens—lots of chickens. At a ferry crossing, we had to get off the bus. From a mound of dirt on the side, we watched the old-timers Paul and Pam direct the big vehicle onto the small boat.

Apparently the government was in the process of building a bridge across the river. Steel structures strode a hundred yards into *the* water and ended abruptly, looking as if their construction workers had just then for lunch.

"It's been like that for years," said Pam, "and I've never seen anyone working on it." Nothing happened fast in India.

Half an hour after reaching the other side, we arrived at the ocean.

Tall palms leaned over the calm water, and pastel Portuguese-style houses could be seen through bushes. Occasionally, a dog would run out and bark at us for disturbing the quiet.

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In late afternoon we pulled into Calangute. My fellow travellers collected their gear and dispersed in twos and threes. I'd never noticed before—was I the only one travelling alone?

"Bye," I said, waving to the German women as they dragged away a duffel bag. "Ciao," I said to an Italian couple after lifting a backpack onto a back.

Now what do I do?

The blue Mercedes bus seemed friendly and familiar. I hesitated to leave it.

I looked around. It was parked in a paved square near the sea. The sun was almost down. Soon the drivers, Tom and Julian, with whom I'd barely spoken during the voyage, were the only ones left by the bus. Tom, an American, with red hair and pale skin, leaned against the rear of the vehicle. Julian, an Englishman with shoulder-length brown curls, stood next to him. I knew they'd been driving Freak buses back and forth from Athens to Amsterdam, but this was their first trip to India. Suddenly alone after weeks with fellow trail mates, I began to find Tom appealing. I looked once more around the empty square and back stepped to where he stooped over a rear wheel.

"Is it okay?" I asked.

He knocked the tire with his sandaled foot and looked up. "Sure. We're just, you know, checking that everything's tiptop for the trip to Delhi."

"When are you going?"

"Tomorrow."

"So soon?"

"We'll be back in ten days. We plan to, you know, return here for a vacation after making a bit more money driving."

I hung around until they locked the bus, and then the three of us went to an outdoor restaurant. We watched the sky darken pinkish over the beach. I leaned toward Tom and asked, "Where are you staying tonight?"

"I guess you know, find a room somewhere."

"Can I stay with you?"

The freckles on his cheeks shifted as his face crinkled in delight. "Sure."

After dinner the three of us took a walk to the beach and then back

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around the square. Palm leaf shacks, called *chai* shops, edged the asphalted area.

*Chai* means "tea" in Hindi, and though they probably did have tea, from their many misspelled signs I gathered that they specialized in milkshakes flavoured with the fruit of the season, the current one being mango. The *chai* shops were full of travellers, barefoot, tanned, with hair that had that bristly, salt-water look. As we strolled, Julian kicked along a coconut shell. A curl fell in front of his eyes when he looked down. Cute. Meanwhile, Tom's arm leaned heavily across my shoulders. Annoyingly, he kept trapping my hair under his arm.

When Julian left us, Tom beamed at me. "I've been, you know, waiting to sleep in a real bed for six weeks now."

"Me too," I answered, as much aroused at the thought of stretching out as by Tom's body.

We found a guest house on the sand behind a *chai* shop. After weeks bent into a seat, I lolled luxuriously on the narrow bed. Red designs on the bedspread matched the red freckles on Tom. India—I'd made it to India, to Goa. Wow. Even the ocean air smelled of impending adventure. I couldn't wait to wake up in this new place. But, disturbingly, as I lay anticipating morning, I couldn't stop thinking of Julian.



The next day, after breakfast and a quick look at the wide, empty beach extending in both directions, Tom and Julian boarded their bus for the trip to Delhi. Time for me to find my own place to stay. Paul had told us a house in Goa could be rented for as little as seven dollars a month.

"Hey;" I shouted to the bus window, "I'm going to find myself a house. You guys can stay with me when you get back." They smiled and waved and drove away, leaving a trail of red dust.

Now what?

I made a tour of the *chai* shops. Actually, the people there seemed touristy. They reminded me of the backpackers in Europe, vacationers who'd soon return home with a couple of stories and crates of photographs. Tourists! Where were the Freaks I'd heard about? This was not what I'd expected. Was this it? Was this Goa? Where had Pam and Paul gone?

"Try Anjuna Beach," suggested a man with a camera around his neck and white cream on his nose. "That's where the parties are."

"It's in Goa?"

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"Of course. Goa's a whole state." He took out a guidebook and leafed through it. "See here, it says Goa has eighty-two miles of coast." "How far is Anjuna Beach?"

"A few hours. You go down this beach to the end. That's Baga. You cross the Baga River, then go over the mountain, and on the other side is Anjuna. Can't miss it."

Mountain? River? Sounded like a real excursion. I made another tour of the *chai* shops. No, nothing happening there. I decided to check out Anjuna Beach. A Frenchman offered to let me stay overnight in his Baga house and I accepted, enjoying the company for half the journey. I unrolled my sleeping bag on his floor.

I declined his unwanted midnight passes. "Shh, no! I'm sleeping. Goodnight."

Early the next morning, I made my way to the Baga River. The tide was out. Following the Frenchman's instructions, I waded across through shallow water.

On the other side was a hill (not a mountain), which I climbed by following a rocky, and in some places nonexistent, path. Halfway down the other side, I had my first view of Anjuna Beach, bordered by another hill about three miles away. I could see only the tops of palm trees and acres of paddy fields. It was getting hot, and the ocean to my left looked welcomingly cool.

The first house I encountered was a *chai* shop called Joe Banana's. Three steps led to an open porch bordered on either end by cement benches and wooden tables. Scantly clad Freaks sprawled there passing a chillum of hashish.

Fat clouds of smoke drifted by. Aha! Now these were a different type of people from those in Calangute. No white-cream noses here. No cameras. No guidebooks. And they had that elusive quality I couldn't put into words. This was it. This was for me. Now I had to find a house.

I tapped the shoulder of a guy with a mass of long curls. "Excuse me," I said, "do you know where I could find a house to rent?"

He gave me a curious smile and stared a second before answering, "You asked me that question before. On Ios, in Greece, outside of town. Remember?"

You stopped me and asked for directions to a cave. You asked in the exact manner you did now."

Hey! An old friend, almost.

"You're still on the road?" he added, laughing. "I remember thinking you were just a vacationer."

A vacationer! He called me a vacationer. I was crushed. That was like

calling me a nine-to-fiver, a worker, a peasant. "No!" I protested in a voice pitched higher than usual

"I've been on the road three and a half YEARS! Before Greece, I lived in a tree house in the SINAI! Before that I was on a KIBBUTZ! And before that I drove ALL OVER EUROPE living in a painted car! It had a big face on the front and an egg on the roof".

"Okay, okay." He laughed some more. "I'm sorry. That's what I thought at the time."

"I found that cave on Ios you directed me to," I continued, still affronted. "Lived there a MONTH. Up on a cliff, with nobody for miles— it wasn't TOURIST season."

"I believe you, I believe you."

"Well... so now I need a house. Know of anything?"

"Not right here," said Greek Robert, as he was called. "All the houses are occupied. Everyone wants to live on Anjuna Beach."

"Try in back of the rice paddy," someone suggested in a strained wheeze, holding in a lungful of hash smoke.

I asked Joe Banana, an old, wrinkled Indian wearing grey shorts, but he said the same thing. Beachfront houses were taken. He let me leave my bag in his back room, though, and I set out to explore.

A vacationer. Huh! I was NOT a vacationer. Never had a real job in my life. What kind of drudge did Greek Robert think I was?

Anjuna had no paved roads, only paths created by tramping feet. The thick cover of palm protected me from the sun as I walked. I passed Goan houses made of stones and topped with thatched roofs. Few Goans seemed to live there, though—only Freak foreigners. European women, naked above the waist, lounged in hammocks. They smiled at me as I went by. The men wore a rectangular piece of material called a lungi. It wrapped around the hips to form a skirt. They smiled too. I passed three people bathing at a well. One stood naked and soapy as the other two poured buckets of water over his head.

"Whoa, that's cold," he exclaimed. "Hi there."

"Iii," I answered.

Then reached the beach, I surveyed the scene. Over a hundred people, all naked, sat together soaking sun. A group of tan, naked guys played volleyball. A laugh and a yell reached me as someone crashed into the ocean after a Frisbee.

I felt flurries of excitement grow within me. This looked exactly like what I'd been dreaming of—a community, a Freak community- in par-advise. This was it. Here was a fellowship I could belong to. Here was something to be part of. This would be the place, I just knew it. This was where I'd make my home. I didn't want to live in Calangute or in back of the paddy field, though. I wasn't a worker

on vacation. I wanted to live right there, near the sea.

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I turned away and walked toward the hill at the other end of Anjuna Beach. A mother pig and a bunch of piglets screamed at my footfalls and scampered away. In a yard, some chickens pecked. A water buffalo lifted its head at me and shivered an ear. I wanted to find a house so badly. I wanted my own territory in that wonderful place. I passed people sitting under trees. Everyone smiled and said hello. I belonged there, I just knew it.

Crossing rocks, I stopped a blonde guy in a *lungi* coming the other way, carrying an instrument he plucked unmelodiously.

"Excuse me, do you know where I can find a house?"

His answer came in a German accent. "Good timing you have. My name is Ramdas, and I am leaving for Poona. You can have mine until I return."

"Oh, really? Where is it?"

"Right on the beach. I will show you. It is a marvellous house."

## FIRST SEASON IN GOA

1975 - 1976

YES, IT WAS A MARVELOUS house, and only a ten-minute walk from the south end of Anjuna Beach, where the crowd gathered. Ramdas left the next afternoon, and by the day after that I was settled in. As I opened the shutters facing the sea on my third morning as an Anjuna resident, a crow whizzed by. Its "caw, caw" mixed with the squeaking sound of someone drawing water from a well. "Oh, I love this place already," I thought, as I prepared to step out of my seaside abode.

I put the lock on the door, opened my purple parasol, lifted the hem of my ankle-length purple dress, and stepped over the boulders that separated the sand of my yard from the sand of the beach. Though starting daintily, I had to sprint the last few yards to the sea to cool the burning soles of my feet. The water barely pulsed against the shore. Not a wave in sight. I hitched my dress another inch and proceeded south through the water. Nobody swam in the middle or at the north end of the beach, partly because of the rocky bottom, but mostly because the south end was the place to be. As I approached the hill that marked the southern boundary of Anjuna, I could see tanned, naked bodies lying in the sun. Aside from a few isolated groups of twos and threes, everyone collected in one big troupe. Near where the shore met the palm trees, the volleyball net had been set up. I watched a naked guy serve the ball. His penis bobbed as he jumped back against the force of his

fist. To my right, three people

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bounded into the ocean in a chorus of shrieks.

I slowed my steps and desperately scanned faces. Maybe I could find Greek Robert or one of the people Ramdas had introduced me to. I'd the if I reached the end of the beach without finding a place to sit. That would brand me a tourist, new to the scene. I was NOT a vacationer.

"Hi, Cleo!"

Saved! I looked toward the waving arm. It belonged to Saddhu George, an American I'd met the day before at Joe Banana's. I recognized the blonde, matted hair reaching to his naked waist. He wasn't really a *saddhu*, the Indian term for a holy man. Supposedly, at one time in the past he'd relinquished his possessions and stopped combing his hair to wander through the hills of India in search of inner knowledge. He had given up that holy life, though, his matted strands the only sign left of his spiritual foray. Much relieved, I veered around sunning bodies and laid a piece of cloth next to him.

"Hi, George. What's new?" As I folded the parasol and took off my dress, I noticed that the most popular Anjuna faces were nearby. Good. This was an excellent Spot. Saddhu George's quest and his long stay in India had bestowed upon him respect and notoriety. I longed to be an insider too.

"Are you going to the party tonight?" he asked.

"Where is it?"

"At Bombay Brian's. On Joe Banana's hill, third house from the sea." THUMP. A Frisbee slid by. George scooped it up and ran to the shoreline to throw it back.

"Want a drag?" asked a guy offering me a joint.

Though I'd smoked marijuana during my teens, lately both it and hash made me confused and paranoid. I accepted the offer but tried to inhale as little of the smoke as possible.

In the States one takes a drag of a joint and passes it on, but I'd noticed in India, with hash abundant and legal, one held onto it as long as possible, even if it meant finishing it off. I took another hit, this time trying to blow out instead of in. That made the end glow and look like I'd inhaled.

"Do you five around here?" I asked him, looking at the joint that, unfortunately, was only a third gone.

"At the other end. And you?"

"Just down from here," I answered. "You can see it. That white house over there. As I turned my



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