

NADINE SEEPAUL

Notes on a Vacation

UP ON A HILL, looking at the splendid scenery, he stood with a cigarette in his mouth. He spoke of some history and his voice trailed with the wind. He blew smoke. He let his hand pass through his hair. Then he smiled at her while she sat on the rock, trying to keep her balance. She faced the sun and he faced her.

She felt herself lucky to be picked up. Everyone else coupled off quickly. And she was left walking through the small streets by herself. There they were passing in a horse-drawn carriage while she walked. She felt suddenly alone. This was when he came passing on his motorbike. Driving fast until he spotted a female figure looking lost. He slowed down. And they rode away up to that wonderful hill.

He sat next to her finally. She wanted this. And his hand went neatly around her waist and hers on his chest.

"I like you," he said. "I like you a lot."

"Really?" she said, trying to blush. It was very difficult.

"Yes. And your body, it's so firm. What do you do? Gymnastics? Aerobics? What?"

"It's called youth," she piped up.

He let out a deep laughter. It rippled back into the wind. "You're very, very funny."

"Really?" she said hoarsely. And as his face came closer and she moved her lips towards him, she was struck suddenly with the cigarette odour she despised. Yet slowly fluids passed and lips locked tightly. The sun started to beat heavily down on them. Her hand was roaming. His followed. Just like a good pair. Except in

her mind, she could taste his smoky mouth. It was making her a bit dizzy. Ill, that he might think her caught with some passion. The taste was just disgusting.

“Stay with me. Stay with me for a few months,” he pleaded softly. “I do nothing but drive around the island these next few months. I work in the winter. I play in the summer. Good life, no?”

“I just couldn’t,” she said, knowing she didn’t want to, rather than couldn’t. She knew she could in fact leave her job that led nowhere. Those jobs are plentiful back home. She could live a life that she never had before. Imagine that. Waking up to that smoky flavour every morning. That rancid taste.

“Well, what about tonight?” he asked.

“Okay,” she said, as she braced herself for another smoky kiss.

Are you with me still? I’m not. I’m still there seeing her on the hill with the waiter. How do you know he’s a waiter? They’re all waiters. It’s the perfect life, you know. The job ends when you finish it. And then you can enjoy the rest of your life. Where is she now after her one-night stand?

Well, later on the day, she took a stroll on the island. Young boys waving at her. Short skirt and tank top, she waved back, smiling wonderfully. Such a pretty island. Ah, isn’t it just lovely! On her way, she met a couple of English lads. They were going to rent a boat.

“Care to join us?” they asked.

“Yes, I would love to.”

One of them was a social worker. The other was a struggling lawyer. Two girlfriends equals two abortions. So messy. Still, they were awfully fun. How could they not be with dark socks and white trainers. Out in that dinky little motorboat circling the island. Waves, moving rapidly. She’s laughing. They’re laughing. They landed on one side of the island. She ran off to use the bathroom. Pebbled beach. Back, she watched the two boys dressed in dark socks and trainers. Smoking, one of them. The one who lost two babies or foetuses, and two girlfriends. After, they sped around the island for another two hours. What joy.

She’s just having a good time, this girl. Well, that’s what vacations are for. Just to let go and enjoy yourself. Sun, sex, and surf, right? She probably left the boys after the boat. Maybe she went to her hotel to shower and freshen up. Or she’s still wander-

ing about by herself. Maybe she caught up with some of the others. Yes, she did.

Dinner? What time? Now. Great.

"What's this?" she asked the man.

"Ooze," he replied. Then he turned to his wife. "Do you like it, honey?"

"Oh, it's so good," his wife rejoined. She raised her drink to the girl and her husband.

"Yes, it is, isn't it?," the girl noted.

Are you still there? Lost? God, I think I lost myself and I'm the narrator of this rather deep piece. Well, this is how people lead their lives. There usually isn't much depth to people. Usually. I know you're wondering where the girl is now. She must be quite tipsy by now. That couple can pack the drinks, let me tell you. Why, where do you think they met? In a bar. They drank like fishes before and now they drink faster. It's good to meet your soulmate.

"Let's go dancing," the girl suggested.

"Yes," the wife and husband said in unison.

So off they went on the island looking for a dance club. They found one. It was closed. Opens when the season starts.

"Isn't this the season?" the wife asked.

"No, honey, why do you think our tickets were so cheap?" the husband answered.

"Well," the girl said, wobbling a bit, "Another bar."

And so they drank and drank, until they couldn't drink no more. And she heard the waiter's word coming to her in blurs 'The English, the Americans, the Canadians, all they want to do is get drunk. It's disgusting.' My God, he's right, she thought. Though she could hardly think at this point. And any discoveries she might have now will soon dissipate in the abundance of alcohol. Yes, she said to herself. Then not knowing what it was. So she sat there in a bar. The wife and husband left. They may be drinkers but they're tired too. She saw the English lads on the other side of the bar. And then the waiter sipping a glass of wine quietly. The music is old. Music from way back when. Seventies music. Not even eighties. Not a glimmer of nineties. Then decades don't matter much. She still can't see straight.

Don't worry about this little drunk girl. She can take care of herself. She'll probably stumble out of the bar and find her hotel. It's not a big island. And the only thing that might frighten her for

a while are the stray cats. They're all over the place. In fact, when she was sober, she thought she saw more cats. But they're there. Like that ginger-coloured creature that loitered around her door for food. She fed him a pastry one evening. The cat was so hungry it ate it. Crunch. Crunch. Crunch. A cat eating pastry. Now she's drunk, stumbling to the hotel.

She felt okay in the morning. The events of the night were nothing but a blur. She got dressed and went for a walk. Look, there's the wife, sunning herself. That pasty skin browning nicely. Well, not really, but no cause for being nasty about it. She's pink. Whoever said pretty in pink was kidding themselves. What do you call that? Racial pride? I suppose you'd have to. Where's the husband? Throwing up in the bathroom. The toilet. But it doesn't flush well. Imagine the smell.

Still there? Hanging on for the spectacular finish? I hate to disappoint you. There isn't one. It's the typical happening of ordinary people. Drinking. Vacationing. Partying. And the girl. The woman? Well, she's heading back to her normal life. After all, it was on a whim she came to the island. She was trapped in a mindless job. She was wandering the streets, feeling alone. Then she decided to treat herself. Upon her return, her friend asked her, Did you meet anyone? She said no. Because she really didn't meet anyone. No one of substance, at least in her opinion. Her friend was disappointed. So she told her friend about the sun and the waiter. The night of passion, skipping that smoky kiss. Her friend felt satisfied. Though the girl herself felt it was a shame that she wasn't. She certainly must have missed something.