**Chapter VIII India**

Thursday—September 5, 1935

Because of her bum foot Marge gets to sleep in these mornings while I get up, take my exercise and go for a swim. That’s wonderful way to start the day. Fee brought up the pictures taken yesterday. We all look like wild-eyed daisies who has seen a ghost. Smitty is still on the sick list.

At 3:00 o’clock we went up on the top deck to watch the S.S. President Harrison as she entered the harbor of Bombay; passing Butcher’s Island, Middle Ground, Cross Island, and the famous Island of Elephanta with its ancient Brahman caves hewn out of solid rock. These caves, five in number, date back to the 8th Century and contain some wonderful carved reliefs and huge statues—the most impressive image being the three-headed bust of Siva opposite the entrance to the Great Cave.

The recently built Gateway to India is an imposing archway situated on the seafront of the Apollo Bunder and it is here that the city greets her most distinguished visitors with civic ceremony, on their arrival in India. The City of Bombay is on an island of the same name, eleven miles long and three miles broad, on the west coast of India facing the Arabian Sea; and was ceded to England in 1661 as a part of the Dowry of Catherine of Braganza on the occasion of her marriage to Charles II, who leased it to the East India Company at an annual rental of ten pounds.

Bombay is connected to the mainland by many bridges and causeways. Its splendid natural harbor is formed by an arm of the sea lying between the island and the mainland, well protected by the island’s long tapering tongue of land. On the other side of this strip lies the shallow, crescent-shaped Back Bay, with the 220 foot high rock ridge of Malabar Hill forming the other point of the crescent.

Passing several small islands, we entered Bombay’s admirable harbor, with its impressive buildings along the Apollo Bunder, the seafront to the left and to the right, the palm-fringed shore of the mainland with the peaks of the Western Ghats dim in the distance.

We went ashore with Mr. Fee and Mr. Foster, a bachelor friend of his from Bombay. Mr. Foster took us up to his place on Malabar Hill for dinner. His home was elegantly furnished—I was enraptured by a nest of black ebony tables trimmed with ivory, the legs of which were cleverly designed to look like elephant hoofs. Later in the evening we went dancing at one of the fashionable night clubs.

Marge had gone over to the Taj Mahal with Peter J. They returned to the ship about 4:00 A.M. and awakened me to help dispose of a tray of toasted sandwiches. It was 6:00 A.M. before Marge called it a night.

Friday—September 6, 1935

8:00 o’clock came much too soon—before we had scarcely closed our eyes, but we had to grin and bear it and be ready to go sight-seeing at 9:00. What an effort. Peter J. was our escort today, our first stop was at a beer parlor—we needed an eye-opener so that we could really see the city.

When we were in Shanghai, Hong Kong and Singapore, we were impressed with the military appearing Sikh police. Now we learn that these Sihks are followers of Nanak who was born in 1469 A.D. His philosophy was that “As a man thinks—so he is”. He raised them from a low cast people to the haughty, fighting, self-respecting race that they are today.

Bombay is a busy modern city throbbing with strenuous life; a steamship and railway center, it is also the heart of the cotton and textile industry. Its population of over a million is composed of an incredible variety of tribes and castes, the largest element being the Mahratta Hindus. There are also many Parsees, a sect of Persians who are generally rich and influential merchants, and a scattering of Arabs, and Afghans, Singhalese, Siamese, and Sikhs from northern India, Negores, Tibetans, Chinese, Japanese, Malays, and Europeans. The colorful procession throngs the streets, a wealth of picturesque sights—brilliant turbans, gold embroidered robes, vivid scarves, ear and nose rings, Parsee skirts and girdles, laden ox-carts and ambling sacred cows.

The business section is known as the Fort area, with the principal business houses on Hornby Road. The residential section is on Malabar Hill, where many fine houses and villas of the wealthy natives and European residents occupy the terraced slopes. The native section, north of the Fort, has an amazing collection of bazaars where all the products of India are for sale—delicate gold and silver filigree work, superb rugs, beautifully embroidered shawls, textiles, intricately carved blackwood furniture, inlaid boxes, and pearls and gems of exquisite beauty.

We went out to the Tower of Silence which is surrounded by lovely gardens, which may be entered with a permit, but noone is allowed inside the Tower where the Parsee sect place their dead upon iron grills and give them to the birds of the air. Within ten minutes after a body is placed in the Tower of Silence the vultures have devoured every edible bit of flesh.

Stopped at the Taj-Mahal Hotel for lunch and a few drinks as a builder-upper for what was to follow, we had coaxed Peter J to take us out Queen’s Road to the Burning Ghat, which is enclosed with a high stone wall much the same as our prisons. We were admitted through a heavy iron gate to witness one of the most gruesome sights I have ever seen, the funeral services of an Indian mother. Her two sons—the only mourners—stood by and watched her body placed on a pile of wood which had been cut to a specified size and weight. On top of her dead body more wood was piled before the fire was started. Part of her skull and feet extended beyond the firewood. The two boys looked on solemnly, never shedding a tear. The odor of burning flesh alone was enough for me. These poor souls have one ambition in life, and that is to be able to save enough money (about $5.00) so that they can have a funeral such as this one.

Across the courtyard children under eighteen are buried in a circular community grave which is ploughed under every six months to make way for more bodies. Everywhere we looked we saw bones and bits of skull scattered around the ground. This would be a ghastly place to visit at night—on our way out we snapped a picture of a nine-year old bride. We were glad to move on to a more pleasant scene, up to Malabar Hill and the beautiful Hanging Gardens, 180 feet above the sea—to help blot out the ghastly sight we had just left.

We all returned to the ship for a cat-nap before dinner. Kenny awakened us at 6:00 o’clock with a Prarie Oyster in each hand. That got us on our feet in a hurry. Dressed up in our best bib and tucker and went over to the Taj Mahal to the dinner dance. The floor show was comparable to any put on by our first class night clubs in New York City. Mr. Barr and his Bombay friends joined our table.

In the very prime of the evening along came “God Save the King”; sometimes we wonder why the King has to be “saved” so often.

At 3:00 A.M. I suddenly remembered I had promised to send Mr. Miner, Goodyear’s Tax Expert, a postal card from “Somewhere east of Suez” and this was my last chance. Scribbled off a note in the hotel lobby—went in search of some stamps—no luck. Bob and I gave up and returned to the ship leaving Marge and Kenny to continue the search. They didn’t have any luck either, but they were feeling rather kittenish and so they dropped the cards in the mailbox without any stamps. Of all the cards we’ve sent, Mr. Miner’s is the last one I would have had go “collect”. Here’s hoping it never reaches its destination.

Saturday—September 7, 1935

The President Harrison sailed sometime between 3:00 A.M. and noon today, while we were off in the land-of-nod. Learned from Peter J and Fee that we are now in the woodshed because we went ashore with Kenny last night. These men are getting to be worse than school boys. Complications are beginning to set in for Marge and all her admirers. A ship is no place to have half a dozen Romeos on your trail at once—they keep tripping over each other’s feet and through the Chinese grapevine wireless your every move is recorded and used against you. I hope she can keep all the boys pacified until we reach Naples.

Mr. Barr was telling us today about the wild women he saw in Bombay—they are brought down from the hills and locked up in barred cages like animals at the zoo—to be used as playmates for the coolies at a nominal fee of a few “Annas” (approximately 10 cents). We saw “Anne of Green Gables” tonight and then went to bed early.

Sunday—September 8, 1935

Awakened bright an early this morning feeling like a million. Back to our old schedule of setting-up exercises and a swim before breakfast.

Pete is becoming a little too attentive and insistent in his demands these days. Have to figure out some way to put a damper on him. He is becoming obsessed with the idea that he can live our lives for us—not this little girl. He always arranged his parties so cleverly it is impossible to decline his invitations and what’s more he is the sort of a person whose animosity we do not court. Am beginning to sense the need of our body guard—Mr. Shively had the right idea after all. Have advised Mr. Fee to keep pretty close tab on us from now on.

Marge and I spent a quiet evening playing bridge with Kenny and Pete. We were in bed ready to go to sleep by midnight—when Mr. Fee, making his evening rounds, stepped in to see if we were alright. A few minutes later Peter J came in an tried to get Marge to go down to his quarters for a drink. Fee, suspicioning Pete had some ulterior motive in mind forbid Marge to go. Very few words passed between the two men but they glared at each other like outraged bulldogs. Pete made a quiet exit, but that wasn’t the last we heard of him. He sent his boy up with one note after another trying to break down Marge’s resistance. With so much excitement in the air Fee refused to budge from our room until he was sure Pete had given up for the night. He makes a wonderful watch dog—there isn’t a man on the ship who would dare start a fight with him—I finally fell asleep and never did know when “Hank” went off duty. Have a hunch there’s a little trouble brewing on the horizon.

Monday—September 9, 1935

I went down to see Dr. Cutting this morning because my side has been bothering me. After a thorough examination he said my appendix were causing all the trouble. He ordered me to bed immediately with ice packs on my side, and said I should remain very quiet and was to have absolutely nothing to eat for a day or two. He didn’t want to take any chances of having to operate at sea. He did say, however, that I could have a highball—but who wants to drink on an empty tummy? I didn’t mind going without lunch but when dinner time came, I was ready to eat the bed posts. This was the opportunity Pete has been waiting

for—first he sent up Victrola to help pass the time; next came a generous supply of liquor to entertain the guests that might call. When the supplies were all in the crowd lost no time gathering round. It was like old home week. Being sick gets one plenty of attention, I have only to lift a finger and there is someone on hand to hold it for me. I might enjoy convalescing if I could only get rid of those gnawing pains in my bread-basket. Fasting was never meant for me.

The Doctor made several trips during the day to see how I was getting along. About 11:00 P.M. he came by again and sent the whole gang scooting out of the room so that I could get some rest. I pleaded with tears in my eyes for some food—he only turned a deaf ear. I had it all figured out that as soon as he left I would ring for our room boy and have him bring me some food. But the doctor had other plans, he gave me a sleeping tablet and stayed at my bedside until it took effect.

Tuesday—September 10, 1935

Whew-w-w what a powerful opiate the doctor must have given me to keep me out from 11:00 P.M. until noon today—on an empty stomach. Learned this morning that a notice had been posted to the effect that any Chinese boy taking food to cabin 200 (our cabin) would be discharged on the spot. Wouldn’t I have had fun trying to get a snack.

Peter J arranged to have us moved over to Suite F—just like living at the Ritz. This is really a lucky break for us—or is it? I can see the handwriting on the wall. Peter J will now use his influence to keep out whose company interferes with his plans of progression; that means Fee and Barr. He knows they see through his actions and he intends to takes steps to get them out of the way entirely so that he can have a free reign. It is rather amusing to sit on the sidelines and watch people hang themselves. My illness at this time has been a blessing—it has saved me from the sly old wolf, who is trying to make life miserable for everyone about him; and at the same time he is smothering Marge and me with so many sugar coated words we are on the verge of becoming diabetics.

The doctor was very lenient today, he allowed me one small cup of bouillon—could hardly call that a banquet.

There was a hard time party in the dining room tonight. Marge had a great time getting ready. She went as an Apache. Kenny put the finishing touches to her makeup and made her look like a real toughy from the sidewalks of New York. Everyone makes their headquarters in our suite these days and so I can enjoy watching the makings of the parties even if I can’t attend. I somehow don’t mind staying in. The doctor came up and spent the greater portion of the evening with me. He never forgets that sleeping powder. I personally think he doesn’t trust me alone during the night. In the daytime I know he has his spies on me all the time because everyone has been well posted on what to do and what not to do for me. It is a great life when everyone is “agin” you.

Marge told me later that Pete tried to send her off to bed at 9:30. She reared up like a billy-goat. When that didn’t work he sent her up to our suite to tell Fee and Tyrell to scram-m-m-m, in her very best apache manner.

She went strolling around the deck with Tyrell, and Pete got angry again—this time he told her I needed her very badly, he frightened the poor girl half to death. She came rushing to find it was only another one of his false alarms. Somehow she gave him the slip again and went meandering with Kenny, until Smitty showed up—then she gave Kenny the air.

My little sister has turned out to be Madame Butterfly—on wings, and if she isn’t careful she will get her pretty wings singed. There already has been so much jealousy stirred among her rivals. I dread to think what will happen when someone’s toes gets stepped on. There might be murder in the air.

Wednesday—September 11, 1935

The doctor awakened me at noon with the thrilling news that I might have some food, providing he did the ordering. I never knew a bowl of broth could taste so wonderful. Marge, bless her heart, ate lunch with me to help celebrate my first bite of food in what seemed like centuries. There is absolutely no feeling in my side now, and it isn’t much wonder after three days on ice. I doubt if I shall ever again be able to feel anything there.

If Marge isn’t careful we will have to put windows in the eight-ball for her to see out, she has too many irons in the fire. She was making truces all day. Looks like I’ll have to get on my feet again to keep her out of trouble. That’s what too much popularity does for one. Pete occupied her entire morning

and afternoon, but Kenny steps in before dinner and takes her to a champagne party in the Purser’s office. He has learned from past experience not to let her out of his sight for a second. He had her alone beneath the full moon tonight, and even tried to persuade the Gods to turn the ship back to Bombay—and with that comes the outpouring of his life’s story.

Thursday—September 12, 1935

There is some funny work going on behind the scenes these days. The only communication from Barr and Fee has been verbal messages trough Marge. They never come around in person anymore. I have a hunch they have been ordered to stay out of Suite F.

Would like to bring some of this under-cover work out in the open; but the instigator has ingenuously arranged everything so that he will be the cock of the walk.

I am still pretty weak but the doctor gave me permission to go tottering down to the Fancy Dress Ball tonight. Kenny dressed Marge and me in sarongs like South Sea Islanders. He went as an organ grinder. To make his part more real he borrowed “Pop-Eye” the ship’s monkey. “Pop-Eye”, a lover of the ladies got so excited when he saw so many pretty ladies at one time, he misbehaved most beautifully. That rascal of a Marge gave Kenny the slip for Smitty again. If she doesn’t get shot it won’t be her fault.

And I gave the whole gang the slip for my bed. The doctor made it his business to see that I didn’t overdo my first time out. He wants to get me in condition to go ashore in Egypt.

Friday—September 13, 1935 Pete called Marge on the carpet first thing this morning. Both he and Tyrell agreed that she wouldn’t live long unless she mended her ways. Kenny has gone on a brandy bender—all because Marge gave him the air again last night.

I was up most of the day today—the doctor, however, still orders my food. Am gradually regaining my strength, and am trying to do a little more each day—I wouldn’t dare miss Cairo.

Marge went swimming four different times today. She and Tyrell seem to be having a game of “duck-me” There was a bridge tournament tonight. The gang spent a quiet evening in our suite. I stepped out for a few minutes

to talk with Fee, and Pete became furious with me. I am beginning to think the man is mad, he wants to be the center of attraction in everybody’s life. A battle royal ensured and we definitely agreed to disagree—from now on. Marge and Kenny made up amidst all the confusion.

Saturday—September 14, 1935

Our (erstwhile) friend Mr. Peter J. Oreb is off Marge and me for shattering his well laid plans. The tables have turned. Fee and Barr who were bitter enemies at first have now joined hands and formed a “protective league” for Marge and me against the onslaught of cowardly blows—looks like we will need their help too. Pete went around all day like an angered bull. The tension is increasing hourly, anything can happen now.

The Chief Engineer took us on a tour of inspection through the Engine room. The temperature down there was only 148 degrees. Don’t understand how those boiler men stay on the job. The iron rails leading down the engine room are so hot we burnt our hands merely touching them. The Chief congratulated us for not fainting in the heat. Will never complain about the heat on deck again.

“Broadway Bill” was on at the movies again tonight. We refused to sit through it a fourth time.

Sunday—September 15, 1935

So many complications have set in since we moved over to Suite F, we decided to have all our things moved back to Cabin 200 this morning.

Whatever spell Pete thought he had over us is broken and now that he realizes his grip is gone he is storming around like a wild man. I feel so much safer in Room 200 where Fee and Barr can stand guard in case something goes wrong. When Pete saw the “I don’t care attitude” we had taken he tried other tactics. He sent for Marge to come down to his cabin so that he could tell her the reason he had acted so badly. He said the captain had put both he and Tyrell on the carpet for paying so much attention to us—I wonder if he thought that flimsy excuse would hold water with us?

He is dynamite as far as I am concerned and I want no part of him, but I’m sure we haven’t seen the last of him yet.