



A green and red parrot flew past the window of their apartment. Stella put down her book for a moment to watch it perch on the tree outside. The sun blazed down from a clear blue sky, Sean lay back in the couch watching television with a beer in his hand. Things really couldn't be better for a New York girl stranded in Australia by love.

She sighed. Then her eyebrows shot up. "What are you watching?" she asked.

"Cricket."

She got up for a look. "No way. I definitely heard someone say the bowler's holding the batsman's willy. I didn't know cricket included homo-erotic foreplay." She peered at the screen. Men in white clothes. Fully dressed, thank goodness.

"It's a game from the seventies," Sean pointed with his beer. "The bowler - the big West Indian guy - that's Michael Holding and the batsman is Peter Willey."

Stella jumped. "Ouch, did that hit him in the nose?"

Sean grinned. "You'd like cricket. It's just like baseball."

"This is nothing like baseball. If a batter gets hit in the nose at Yankee Stadium the benches empty."

"But in cricket you field and bowl - like pitching - and they score runs."

"Okay, I love baseball." She curled up against Sean and watched for ten minutes. "Have they scored any runs?" she asked.

“Err, no. We’ve had four maidens in a row.”

“Maidens? I don’t see any girls. Not even cheerleaders. And they’ve had a lot more than three strikes and what are those funny little sticks the batter stands next to?”

“The stumps. Three make up the wicket.” Sean explained. “These days the stumps light up when they get hit.”

Stella burst out laughing, as much at Sean getting defensive about a game he liked as the silly idea of sticks that lit up.

“And it’s better when you’re at the ground.” Sean’s cheeks had gone pink. “We should go to a test match.”

Stella kissed him on the chin. “Sure. What’s a test match? Is that like a trial game?”

“No, it’s the quintessence of the sport.” He bit his lip. “But maybe not the best for your first time. The quintessential spectator experience is T20 cricket.”

“Okay.” Stella shrugged. Sean obviously had no intention of explaining what tea twenty meant.

“In fact.” Sean went looking for the newspaper. “There’s a perfect opportunity, with girls bowling maidens, a women’s match in Perth, tomorrow.”

“We should go.”

They had to park in a big field with hundreds of other cars. Sean carried the ‘Esky’ cooler bin with their drinks and picnic. Stella had their fold-out chairs. Her first sight of the Lilac Hill ground took her breath away. The cricket pavilion stood on a slight rise overlooking an oval of perfectly mowed lawn surrounded by a white picket fence. People crowded around on beach chairs while their kids chased each other. The organisers had set up bouncy castles and an under-sized carousel by the trees along a curve of the Swan River

“Wow, this is great.”

“And it’s all free,” Sean said.

They claimed a spot next to two ladies wearing bright orange Perth Scorchers shirts.

Stella took a cloth out of her bag.

“What’s that?” Sean asked.

“Val gave it to me.”

“Your best friend gave you a tea towel?”

“She says it tells me everything I need to know about cricket.”

“Give me that,” Sean grabbed it and read the cartoons. “‘The batsman who’s in goes out until he’s out and then he goes back in. When the whole team’s been in and out, the fielders...’ This is rubbish.”

Stella tugged it back, spread it carefully to shade her knees and pulled down her New York Yankees cap. "Look," she said, "the pink team are coming out to field and there are two orange batters."

Sean nodded.

Stella drew his attention to her towel. "So the batters in and if the pitcher.."

"Bowler," Sean corrected.

"...Gets her out, she'll go back into that cute little change room."

Sean crossed his arms and grunted.

The older of the two orange ladies sniggered. "Can I see that?"

Stella handed it to her.

"Oh, I love this. It's like that baseball thing, you know, Abbot and Costello."

"Sure," Stella agreed. "Who's on first, Watts on second."

"Yeah, bloody hilarious."

Stella gave her a high five.

Sean grumbled. "You should be watching this, Meg Lanning's on strike and she's just about the best woman batter in the world."

"Ooh, sorry." Stella sat up straight to watch.

The pink bowler sprinted. Her long blonde ponytail bounced on her back. She threw the ball so hard Stella couldn't see it. Meg Lanning leaned gently forward and prodded with her bat. The pink fielders jumped up and down and yelled. The crowd groaned. The world's best put her bat under her arm and walked off.

"Is that it?" Stella asked.

"Golden duck," Stella's new lady friend said, "she must have tickled it to the keeper."

"Yeah," Sean said, "looks like the wicket's a bit sporty for T20."

Stella looked from orange lady to Sean. "What are you two talking about and what have the stumps got to do with it? They didn't flash or anything."

Orange lady snorted out a mouthful of soda.

"No," Sean said, "the wicket is the grass between the two sets of stumps ... as well as the stumps."

"This game is crazy." Stella searched her towel for an authoritative explanation of wickets.

"Never mind," Sean said, "the bowler is Elyse Perry. She's quite possibly Australia's best cricketer, man or woman."

"I bet she doesn't hold any batsman's willy," Stella said.

The famous Ms Perry ran in again, for four paces, then she skipped a few and clasped her hamstring.

Sean put his head in his hands.

The Perth Scorchers' innings didn't last long and the Sydney Sixers beat their score in no time.

So, all too soon, they marched back to Sean's car. "I'm sorry," he said.

"Why?" Stella couldn't see the problem.

"It wasn't much good, was it?"

"I loved it," Stella said. "A warm day in a lovely place, silly names for everything, people having fun. Elysse Perry hit some huge home runs."

"Sixes."

"Whatever, that lovely lady bought my tea towel for fifteen dollars and," she swung to kiss Sean on the lips, "I was here with you."

Sean smiled. "There's about forty world-class wineries in the Swan Valley. We could get lunch."

They did.

So, after all, it proved to be a wonderful Australian day out.

Stella and Sean are the stars of [Meet Me Under Brooklyn Bridge](#) To keep up with my latest releases, why not [sign up](#) for my newsletter? You get a free book for joining and there are links to more free free books every month.