

THREE



Boxing Day. I sat up to examine the state of my tan. After two hours' sunbaking, it was looking quite good. I adjusted my brand-new pink bikini and checked out what else was happening on the beach.

Nothing, as usual. The tide was coming in. Andy was reading a comic book and Gina seemed asleep. My father, of course, wasn't there – he hated the beach – but my mother sat in her chair, a newspaper spread out over her knees. Down at the water's edge, some toddlers were trying to drown themselves. Heat haze shimmered above the sand and a catamaran skimmed across the sea. Somewhere a transistor was on, but not loud enough for me to hear the songs.

I sighed. I'd been coming to that beach all my life and frankly sometimes I wish I hadn't. It was always the same. Boring. The only excitement we ever had was when some day-tripper got his car bogged in the sand launching his boat. Or when Buster decided to lift his leg against someone's beach umbrella.

Still, a beach is a beach, I thought and lay back on my towel. I rolled onto my stomach, hitched up my bikini bottom and nestled my chin into a hollow in the sand.

I was almost asleep when I felt the vibration of approaching footsteps.

‘G’day!’ It was Scott’s voice.

‘Hi!’ Gina answered. ‘Where’s the rest of your family? I thought you’d all be down here.’ I knew she’d be hopefully scanning the beach for Rob.

‘Nah,’ Scott scoffed, ‘they’re all too damn lazy to walk down the track.’

There was a disappointed sigh and a pause in the conversation. I had just begun to raise my head from the towel when a huge dump of sand landed on my back.

‘Hey!’ Scott said. ‘Aren’t ya talking to me today?’

I leapt up, furious.

‘How dare you, you—’ I stopped, distracted. ‘Scott, what on earth are you wearing?’

‘Like it? I got it for Christmas. I don’t think I’ll ever take it off.’ He turned around slowly, like he was some kind of a model, showing off his new sheepskin jacket.

I couldn’t help myself, I just had to laugh. He stood there in the blistering heat, wearing shorts and a thick woolly coat.

‘Well, yeah, I know it’s hot but that’s why I cut off the sleeves. Anyway, wanna swim?’

‘But how can you go for a swim when you just said that you’ll never take off your precious jacket?’ I asked, somewhat smugly.

‘For you, sweetie,’ he replied, ‘I’d get completely naked!’

I heard my mother groan as she turned over the pages of her newspaper.

Scott proceeded to rip off his coat, then grinned and picked me up.

‘Hey!’ I screamed. ‘Put me down!’

He carried me into the sea, even though I was kicking and struggling with all my strength. Finally, when I felt the cold water around my waist, I bit him as hard as I could. He dropped me immediately.

‘Bitch!’ he shouted.

I fell into the water. When I surfaced again, he was waiting for me.

‘You weren’t really scared, were you?’ His blue eyes studied my face. ‘Sorry, maybe I was a bit rough.’

Before I could think of a reply, he swam off. I adjusted my bathers and tried to make a dignified retreat back to my towel. I thought I’d succeeded, until I saw the smirk on Andy’s face. Sometimes I’d like to kill that little brat.

When Scott returned from his swim he didn’t even glance in my direction. He flopped down next to Andy and together they began talking about different types of cars.

After a while Gina sat up and began madly brushing her hair. Following her gaze I saw Rob walking up the beach with two other people. She waved at them and they came over. Fiona Allen was just a kid. The oldest of the family, Duncan, immediately fanned out his towel, sat down on it, adjusted his glasses and began to read a book. He obviously was not going to be a whole lot of fun.

Andy suggested a game of cricket. As everyone completely ignored my pained expression and began arguing about teams, I decided to head home rather than be forced to join in. I picked up my things, walked along the shoreline and made my way up the track through the pine forest. Since it was a steep climb, I paused for a few minutes at the top to catch my breath. Looking back down over the beach, I could just make out my mother, standing ankle deep in the water, talking to someone. Her huge ridiculous hat always made her easy to spot.

The cricket match was in full swing. I watched Rob whack the ball hard, sending it into the sea. My sister Gina was jumping up and down enthusiastically. Scott raced off in hot pursuit of the ball and leapt into the water. Andy was flapping his arms, obviously encouraging him, while little Fiona was simply standing around looking useless. There was no sign of Duncan.

I'd barely turned away from the scene when I heard a loud shriek. Fiona was standing stock still, her hands over her mouth, and I saw Scott plunge underwater, half a second before a catamaran zoomed straight over the place where he'd just been.

I held my breath. An eternity passed. Nothing. I felt sick.

But suddenly a head bobbed up and there was Scott. He flung an arm into the air and cheerfully waved to the others. He'd got the ball. Fiona looked as if she might be crying.

I guess the whole thing made me wonder about Scott. I mean, what sort of person risks his life just to get a ball? Surely he must have seen the yacht so close in to shore and known the danger he was in? He really was a crazy kid.

My pounding heart began to settle. After all, it was really nothing to do with me. I shrugged my shoulders and continued to walk along the well-trodden track.