

Walking To Gibraltar, Chapter 4: In Which A Long Walk Is Considered

by Frank Indiana

The summer before cancer—the summer of the boy/friend, the summer before Max started high school, the summer when all the decisions about blowing apart their marriage were made—they drove to Martha's Vineyard. Astrid had insisted she wasn't going, right up until the week of the trip. For a month, Frank carried her refusal in his stomach like an unexploded grenade. But she changed her mind. "The way you hugged Max when you left last night," she told him. "It made me see how much you love him."

Of course, he loved Max, and of course he was hurting. He was dying. His wife was choosing a housepainter she barely knew over her husband of twenty years. His son—what was going to happen to Max? If Astrid didn't love him, he could adjust. But he could not imagine waking up in a house without Max.

Having Frank and Max out of town gave her opportunity to see the boy. He knew this to be true. But some rogue ribbon of sentimentality must have wrapped itself around her heart. At the last minute, she announced she was going with them.

So they drove. They packed the Subaru and pinned their bikes to the back. They'd made the drive a half-dozen times before. Indianapolis to Syracuse. Syracuse to Woods Hole. Ferry reservation. Wave goodbye to America.

The tension was low. They rode bikes and shopped. They ate pizza with *linguiça*; the Vineyard still had a healthy Portuguese heritage. Astrid didn't talk much. Frank and Max played paddle ball on the beach, counting the number of hits back and forth. Every time one of them missed—usually the result of a bad return—the other would act disgusted. "You suck," said Max, when Frank dived for a short

serve and missed. "God, you're terrible," said Frank. They rolled in the sand and laughed and laughed.

One afternoon, they loaded the bikes onto the Chappy Ferry and rode around Chappaquiddick. It was quiet—few cars, fewer bikes. They took the dirt road past the Japanese Gardens to East Beach. They crossed the Dike Bridge—the famous bridge Ted Kennedy had driven off. Such a shitty little bridge over a shitty little inlet. Frank couldn't imagine how anyone had died here.

East Beach was almost deserted. Frank sat in the sand and stared out at the horizon. He watched Max and Astrid walking north along the shoreline, poking at the sand with their toes, looking for shells and sea glass. Suddenly it occurred to him that this might be the greatest peace he could imagine—this place, at this moment. He thought of the Japanese movie *After Life*. If he were allowed only one moment to take with him forever, what would it be? Maybe this—the sea, the sound of the waves, the endless horizon, alone, but with Max and Astrid right there—would be it.

The next day, they lounged in their usual spot on South Beach. Max bodysurfed. Astrid read *Self*; Frank read *The Stars My Destination*. Gully Foyle, consumed with rage. Amoral. Rapist, deceiver, destroyer. Savior of humanity.

"I know I said I wouldn't see him anymore," Astrid said. "But I was thinking, maybe when we get back, I would call him."

"What?"

"It's his birthday. I thought we could have lunch."

"Astrid—no."

"There's nothing there, Frank. He's just my friend."

"Jesus Christ, Astrid. He's not just your friend. He's the guy you wanted to fuck."

"We didn't do anything, Frank."

"Not because you didn't want to. Jesus."

"I'm just talking about lunch. It's his birthday, for god's sake."

He tossed his book in the sand and stood up. He turned his back and walked up the beach. If he kept walking, he'd eventually get to

Chappaquiddick and East Beach and he could make a right turn into the ocean and just keep walking.
Just keep walking. If he just kept going, he could walk to Portugal.

