

Oh he is, he is an Englishman

Wooring in India, **Ian Shearer** found that it helps to look like the very model of a gentleman



In the marble hallway, I delivered my speech — about how what he'd witnessed was simply a show of respectful friendship. His face broke into a teary-eyed grin; he ordered a sumptuous breakfast and, his arm round my shoulders, led me to dine.

During the lengthy meal, he hinted at a more permanent liaison between Cheryl and me, before eventually offering to sell me a house for a mere £1,000. "You can let it," he told me with a shrug. "I know what it is to be a student." He wouldn't let me leave until I'd accepted his offer. Bewildered, I headed back to Manali — and the *ménage à trois*.

The following evening, having agreed to a camping trip, I found myself sharing a tent with Cheryl's brother, as she slept next door. I was woken at about 1am by the sound of the zipper slowly opening and Cheryl whispering my name. As her brother snored soundly, I eased myself out of our tent and slipped into hers, with every intention of sticking strictly to cuddling. But Cheryl had other ideas.

I left Manali a few days later, waved off by Cheryl and Pradeep — both cheerfully anticipating my return. I tried to appease my conscience by remembering that I had managed to turn down Pradeep's offer of a house, and without offence. In that matter, at least, I remained an honourable Englishman.

three of us, her brother always at our side. My patience with this antiquated situation was rewarded on the third day when, while walking down the street, I finally got to hold her hand. Unfortunately, Cheryl's father, Pradeep, was also walking down the street — towards us. Cheryl snatched back her hand and hid it beneath her jumper, like an offending object. She spent the rest of the day worrying about her father's disapproval.

That evening, I offered to go and reassure him myself. "That would be a good idea," she said eagerly. "Go soon. Go for breakfast."

At six the following morning, the sun still hadn't risen over the ice-tipped mountains and the light was blue. The automatic gates to Pradeep's house opened. If he was surprised to see me there, he didn't show it. In fact, he rather seemed to admire my initiative.

TO CELEBRATE my graduation, I had embarked on a trip around India.

Suffocating in the smothering heat of New Delhi, I caught the night bus up to the cooler air of Manali, in the foothills of the Himalayas. I met Cheryl (English only in name, Indian by birth) on my first night.

She flicked back her hair with a well-manicured hand and that was it. I moved through the smoky bar towards her, and the smile she flashed was full of subtle desire that disappeared instantly when her elder brother gave us a quizzical glance. Hurriedly, I introduced myself and offered to buy them a drink. "Thank you, you're a gentleman," the brother replied. With my eye on his sister, I assured him that I was.

We spent the next two days together, and by "we" I mean the

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By Jonathan Futrell



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