



CHAPTER 10

APOLLO ROUNDUP

Frannie, being the lighter by half, climbed up and caulked the seam between her house and patio roof. I skillfully supervised while leaning on her neighbor Sal's ladder. Back inside I put a check in a box on the fridge by the line that reads "fix roof."

"That's enough Apollo," she said. "Let's leave now, get there early, do our laundry in Freo."

"Agreed."

We had plans to meet Gupta and Mindy in Fremantle the following day, from there to go to an island called Rottneest. After that I'd stay in a hostel in Freo and she'd go visit her parents before returning home. We'd see each other again, but not for awhile. We only had three days left so we decided to get on the road right away. Enough work. We'd already spent a couple of days plumbing, hammering, pliering, and insulating the attic. What a job that had been, especially

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because of ex Banger's unsolicited and inebriated assistance. He came in drunk, insisted on helping, and ended up falling through the ceiling. What a mess.

"Grab our stuff and eat on the road," I said.

"Alright."

"To rat island."

"Freo first."

Now we could be off. Frannie started getting our food ready while I gathered the clothes.

"Look," I said, "I'll wash 'em now while we eat and get ready. We can dry them in Freo."

Her washer is in a hut out back, a packed little hut. I stood there with the overflowing basket of dirty laundry wondering where to put it down. What are shovels and paint cans and old clothes and two-by-fours, and who knows what else doing in there, I thought—and three old tires leaning on the wall outside?

The first time I'd done laundry here, I'd loaded the washer and added laundry soap, but it hadn't turned on. Frannie came up and said the electricity didn't work and told me to run an extension cord, which I did—from the guest room over the door through the corner of the kitchen, to the ante-room, out the back door, down the steps, across the patio, along the walk and into the laundry hut. So this time I did the same but, unlike before, there was no Stubby to come over and sniff the line where it ran along the cement.

Just then Sparky came by, which is what Francine called electricians. I'd asked him at the pub if he'd advise us how to get juice in the laundry hut and storage sheds, the latter to facilitate the transition into an art studio. He looked at the pipe coming down from the house into the ground that came back up at the laundry hut and went into the wall halfway up and saw there was an outlet in the wall inside and asked what's wrong with it and she told him it didn't work. He said he could fix that but she needs more juice brought in from the street and a new panel for the studio in the garage. He said if she digs the ditch he'll do the rest for

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\$600. Sounds reasonable. After he'd left, I walked over to the laundry hut, just on a hunch, took the cord from the back of the washer, and plugged it into the wall. "Come here Frannie," I called as the washer started humming.

"Gosh, I never tried it," she said. "I just believed the people I bought the house from. Maybe I misunderstood them. I thought they said the electricity doesn't work here."

"Maybe it's this light switch they were talking about," I said.

"Yeah, it doesn't turn off. Have to screw the bulb in and out."

We ate mangos and smelly cheese. The clothes weren't yet done so we took a walk in the bush. She got into all the neat rocks on the way and said how excellent they'd look around a fire pit. We lugged a couple of stones back and she went to the storage shed and got a shovel and started digging.

The laundry was done but I suggested I might as well hang it up—at least for a while—so we could do the fire pit. She nodded. Clothes all hung. We discussed how wide the pit should be—about four feet. She carefully placed the rough, pitted rocks, some reddish, some blackish at the edge.

"Well, we've gone this far. I might as well get some more stones," I said, opened the gate, and sped off into the woods with a wheelbarrow. Two hours later the hole was dug—about a foot deep—and was ringed with a handsome assortment of volcanic and granite rock. We panted in mild exhaustion and smiled at the day's latest accomplishment. It was getting dark.

"Should we go now?" she said.

"It's a shame to go without breaking the fire pit in."

"Maybe you're too tired from all the rock hauling."

"Nope, but maybe you're too tired from all the digging."

"Naw," she said. "But maybe it's time to go."

"A song to urge you to stay," I said, ran inside, and got the guitar.

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*Hey diddle lonely one
Stay till the light is gone
Sit here in the dark
Underneath the stars*

*When the day comes to end
You'll be beside your friends
Love you as you are
Underneath the stars*

*Hm mm mm mm mm mm
Hm mm mm mm mm mm*

*Painted in evening hues
Dimming with fading views
Leaving only the heart
Underneath the stars
Underneath the stars*

“How’d you know I was lonely,” she said.
“It’s just the way the song goes,” I answered.
“I miss my mom.”

That night Mars was at its closest ever in some enormous length of time and we took our gazes off the flames rising from the fire pit that did function perfectly, and looked up near the edge of the sky at the red god of war who still seemed pretty far away.

“An astrology article I just read in the Mandurah paper,” I said, “claimed Mars is a channel to help you to be who you want to be. It magnifies your potential.”

“Okay. I’ll be me here now.”

“Good. Me too—be me—not you.”

Frannie got a coffee can from the back patio, took out a couple of chains with cotton balls on the ends, soaked

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them in kerosene, lit them, and danced around the fire with her own twin fireballs spinning.

Breakfast at the still smoldering fire pit, strong coffee with hot milk. Frannie packed the tent up and put it in the trunk of the Mazda while I took down the clothes from the line. We were going camping on an island. We get flashlight and matches and what else? A couple of books and her string-challenged guitar. We're all ready to go, but I had an idea for the side gate by the driveway, the entrance most used. My plan was to build a funky new gate out of branches.

"I have an idea too," she said and went to her storage shed. At the back wall she picked up an exceedingly rusted object. She'd found it in the bush and said it was once an ornate head board for a small bed, really rusted—rusted through in parts, just the right size. After a trip to the general store, where we purchased hinges, we hammered and reshaped them so they'd suit our purpose and soon she had a new gate of corroding iron swirls that swung eloquently. We celebrated by conducting a ceremony wherein she approached the gate and opened it for the first time.

"One small step for a girl," she said, "one beautiful addition to Dwellingup."

"One more gate!" I pronounced. "Come around back."

"Maybe we should go?" she asked.

"What appears to be procrastination from one point of view," I said with a grave tone, "is revealed from another as the march of progress."

"That sounds too important to argue with," she admitted.

There was a grate, a square meter of galvanized rods that looked like one side of a cage. It was propped against the opening to the firewood shed so Stubby couldn't get out when he was there, the shed being wide open in back to the alley. We had a spare set of hinges and, after some finagling, got it secured to where it was swinging nicely.

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Now it was time to go for sure we agreed.

But there *was* that unsatisfactory side to the firewood shed by the fire pit. There were two long sections of corrugated metal leaning up against it, again so dogs couldn't get in or out. It needed to come up to the standard of the rest of her estate. She went and got one of the old tires and leaned it against the end. I got another for the other end and she got the last one for the middle. I asked if she had any spray paint and soon we were drawing the outline of a van on the side of the wall with three wheel wells around the tires. Last she added a top-hat sporting driver.

I got my rolling backpack suitcase packed and she her backpack. We were ready to go but she decided to make some sandwiches—haven't we been here before? Oh yes, yesterday—and while she did that I got the fireplace and water heater loaded and ready to light for her solo return and swept out the ante-room and picked up a few last out-of-place items from the yard—a board by the fence, a length of rope in front. We documented all our handiwork with a throw-away camera and were off.

"Finally," she said as we pulled out of the drive.

"That was one long goodbye. Man you are really game," I said. "It was great fun! We couldn't stop."

"What do you mean *we*?"

"You and me and Apollo."

"You turn Apollo into Dionysus. You're the most extreme person I've ever met," she said.

"Ah gee," I blush, "you're just sayin' that."

"No I'm not."

"Well someone did," I said looking around as we cruised past the jarrah rising high above the asphalt highway.