



CHAPTER 21

ON ANON

Oh Gupta, wake up and go to sleep,” I speak the old line softly. “Time to get up.” He opens his eyes. “There you are. We’ve got to go. But you can go back to sleep in the back seat of Frannie’s car. We’re taking both.”

“Six,” he mumbled.

“No, no—it’s still seven. Just after dark on the 22nd.”

“Seven?” puzzled Frannie.

“Seven days till we dine with Rudy.”

“Let’s get on it then,” she said with a worried look.

We were on our way back to Rottnest via Freo. I had never driven a Porsche before. Glad it was an automatic cause I think a left-handed gear shift would throw me. It was fun, but it was drizzling so I didn’t hot dog. Anyway, my mind was on quokkas. Frannie and I had figured out the clue walking back to the house. It was a quokka. All the clues so far were things I knew about—as Fenster had hinted.

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Not a cricket call, nor informer in need of bath, the void is, inside out, and under an old wet roof.

It's *not a cricket call*—call rhymes with ball—cricket as in the game then—not a cricket ball leads to a soccer ball or not a soccer ball. Remember the boys who were arrested playing soccer with a quokka? *Nor informer in need of a bath* was Not a dirty rat—that was cute. The first sailors were wrong. The quokka was not a rat. *The void* was the first thing we got—by looking void up in an old Thesaurus in Mary's room. Pocket or pouch were the words that did it. It stood for the marsupial pouch, not some empty, shining Hindu or Buddhist type cosmic void. *Inside out, and under an old wet roof* must mean that we should go back to the cave at Rottnest, which was wet when we were there. I start to see a commonality in the clues. It's not from the list in the pub. It's all stuff I'd written about to Kelly and Clay. He's definitely read my emails. How? Could Sid have gotten into them? I remembered going online from the computer in my bedroom at Fenster's. But not only the emails from that night—they got 'em going back. I felt as exposed as if I'd had the digital equivalent of unprotected anal intercourse with a promiscuous HIV positive Haitian hemophiliac intravenous drug user.

So we were on our way to Rottnest. We weren't going to wait for the ferry from Freo. Frannie was calling ahead on her mobile to charter a plane. Tazi John told me his only trip to Rottnest was on a single engine plane from Freo in a storm so heavy the ferries weren't running. He said it was hairy buffeting over to the runwayette and he was grateful when he stepped back down on terra firma. Glad he told me because that's where I got the idea for flying there and saving time. It was a little pricey but Gupta had the money from Rudy, which would go toward the cause.

I pondered the inside-out part of the clue. Could it indicate where at the cave on Rottnest the next clue was waiting? Like in something outside the cave that was usually inside like... a rock, no—a bottle of booze left behind? Drunk on the inside. Should be on the inside but it might be on the

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outside with the message in the bottle waiting for us to read—or for some hiker to stumble on if tonight we are brutally murdered mid-hunt for shirking our duty to guard Mindy.

Oh god, poor Mindy. How's she doing? Is she being abused? Is she alive? She could be incinerated in one of Fenster's crematoriums as he apparently was threatening to do to the stuffed body of that racehorse.

All of a sudden I was transfixed with a new image. Stuffed. The horse stuffed. Stuffed quokka. Inside out—insides out. Stuffed quokka in the Western Australian Museum near the central train station in Perth. Right under the spot where the roof leak was being fixed, the wet roof. I had mentioned it in an email to the boys cause I'm into construction and stood there watching them fixing it. I replayed the clue in my mind: *Not a cricket call, nor informer in need of bath, the void is, inside out, and under an old wet roof.* I started yelling as I drove along. We should go to Perth! Not Rottneest! It makes much more sense. Fenster's clues so far have been more or less nearby so the closer of the two choices seems to make more sense both from the point of view of likelihood of success and ease of checking it out.

But there's no way to get hold of them. Wait—yes there is. Frannie's got her mobile. I can stop and make a call. Hey! I replay what Mindy said at the pub where we saw the game on that last night together—she'd "Left me mobile in the car" before we went pub crawlin'. I am right now driving her car. I reach into the compartment in the middle just to my left—as I'm on the right—and there it is. It's dead. Found the charger that plugs into the lighter. Nifty.

All I've got to do is call Frannie now. Oh—messages. Wonder what's there.

The first message was from Gupta. It was pathetic and rambling. Oh there in spite of the grace of the Great Mistletoe go I. The next was from some guy much cockier and on the sauce, saying casually if she wanted to come by at any time he would be there. No name—just "It's me." The third started with "It's me" too. I wonder how many of them there

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are? “Bluey! I don’t want to be a pest. I guess I am a pest. But I’ve changed. Give me a chance Bluey.” Bluey? Wonder which night he was. Guess he struck out. There was a “Just callin’ to say hi” from a woman. Then this: “Mindy—if you get this please call me now. My name is Samo and I’m a friend of Davo and Gupta. If however, it’s Davo or Gupta listening to the message, please call me right away.”

Samo answered with, “Can you talk?”

“Yeah, it’s David. I’m driving Mindy’s Porsche to Freo but I want to change and go to Perth but I need to get hold of Frannie for that and I’m not sure...”

“Davo, Davo, Davo—listen to me. Don’t worry about that now. It’s not a problem.”

“Oh—okay, sorry.”

“I’ve been checking up on things. That car Techo identified so positively as a La Salle hearse with the carved wood paneling?”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah.”

“He even got the year right—1937.”

“What do you mean he got it right? You found one?”

“Found the record of registration and listen—it’s not registered to Bobby Fenster or to anyone connected to him.”

“It’s not?”

“No. It’s registered to a Gelar Waters.”

“Gelar. Gelar. I know that name. Who’s that?”

“Mindy’s legal name is Mindy Waters. It’s her husband. I think she may have been kidnapped by her husband—or gone with him. But I don’t know anything about him yet. Just found this out. I’ll look into him tomorrow.”

As my head spun out of control, I think it must have affected the car, or maybe I hit the brakes too hard or something, because the next thing I knew the Porsche was spinning on the wet road and I was just trying to stop it but there wasn’t any traction. I cringed the cringe of a lifetime as it circled and I waited for a deafening crash or crunch or smash but there was just a soft slush and a moment of dizziness. I’d ended up on a grassy slope on the other side. Stars were

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twinkling in my field of vision—not real ones from the sky. I breathed a sigh of great big relief and muttered a thank you. And then I was mad at myself for being uncool and losing control. I heard my name being called—my Australian name—“Davo, Davo, Davo are you there?” Oh yes. I picked up the mobile from the floor.

“Hello again. Sorry.”

“Are you okay?”

“Yes—I just made a little detour onto a grassy knoll. No snipers here though. I think I can get out—not of the car—pull the car away. Ah yes, here we go. Weee across the highway to the right side I mean the correct side.”

“You’re okay?”

“Yes. Just let me catch my breath.”

“Take your time.”

“Okay,” I said trying to talk but still just catching my breath. Finally, “Back to Mindy’s husband. Listen—I’ve got to think about this. I’m not sure what to do. You want to meet tomorrow morning?”

“Sure.”

“How about at the museum when it opens, the natural science museum.”

“Okay. Their snack shop opens at ten I think. Maybe nine. Whenever it opens.”

“I’ll be there.”

“See you then.”

I realized I didn’t have Frannie’s mobile number. Well, Freo’s not that much out of the way. I was just driving and not listening to the radio or anything so I started listening to DAVO 58.5, my thought stream, and started to think maybe I could remember her number and it would be good if I could because what if she’s reserved an airplane and is about to put a non-refundable deposit on it with a credit card. Then again, Samo might be able to get it. His number’s in my phone now. I don’t have most of my numbers on me. Left them at the hostel. Hostel—is my stuff safe? I bet they put it

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in the cage. Slim and I were getting along well and he seems like a thoughtful guy. Better go there tonight to make sure. It's the place to stay anyway.

Let's see—Frannie's mobile number—oh yes—it's 5555-5555. No, just kidding I said to myself chuckling. Eight numbers though. The first four numbers were something to do with her age—forwards and backwards as I remember. Her age last year—in 2002. That's two numbers—three and five—was it 3553? Maybe. Okay—I'll leave that. The next four I said I'd never forget. Oh yeah—the year Clay was born minus how old he was in the year his great grandmother died. I tried it. Didn't work. Kept messing around with the first four numbers till—she answered!

Gupta was awake and they were behind me a ways. I got all excited remembering why I wanted to call her and started telling her about the stuffed quokka, naturally having to let her in on the whole chain of thought starting with the image of Mindy in the crematorium and the stuffed horse and how we shouldn't go to Rottnest. And then I remembered who owned the horse—I mean the hearse—and started getting confused what to do and didn't want to talk more. We agreed to meet at the Northbridge Hostel which would take about forty minutes more.

Forty minutes. That's the length of a period of *zazen* that I'm used to. Good lord, I could use a little *zazen*. Deep sigh. Driving can be *zazen*. I should calm down and do driving *zazen* and appreciate this Porsche. Who knows if I'll ever have the opportunity again. Hands, wheel, road, breath, dark edges of scenery whizzing by, no one here but us skandas—form, feelings, perceptions, impulses, consciousness and I'm not so sure about them. Thoughts arise, each morphing into the next. I let them come and go one by one, not serving them tea as my old teacher once advised. I drive on without a care, without a name. After some kilometers had passed, I forgot I was doing *zazen* and started singing.

Fools together, fools together

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*Fools our whole life through
Fools together, fools together
Whatever it is that we do
There may be times that we are super duper smart
And others that we sail through
But usually we're foolishly fools
And fools together too*

*Fools together, fools together
Fools from head to toe
Fools together, fools together
Wherever it is that we go
There may be heroes, bodhisattvas, good hearts
And moments of clarity too
But usually we're foolishly fools
And fools together too
And fools together too.*

I drove on—humming zazen.

“There’s no need to go on this treasure hunt any more!” Gupta said strongly. “She’s with her husband. She just dumped us and went off. The free spirit theory was the right one. This whole treasure hunt is just a stupid game Fenster’s playing with us. And he’s playing it because you got so involved with him. He just sees it as an opportunity to mess with your mind.”

“You don’t know that for sure,” I said shaking my head.

We were at an Indonesian restaurant near the hostel, eating dinner, and trying to figure out what’s what.

“What if her husband’s working for this Fenster character?” Frannie said.

“There’s her husband, the mysterious Aboriginal guy, and Fenster. Her husband could be working with either or both of them or neither or Rudy. We don’t know,” I said. “But it won’t hurt to go tomorrow to the museum and meet Samo.

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And remember Fenster looks more honest now—maybe. He said he wasn't involved but could lead us to her. So if she's with her husband and it has nothing to do with Fenster and he just has some info on them, Fenster's clues might still lead us to her. We just don't know. We need to find her even if she's not in danger because Rudy will be furious if he finds out we've lost her."

"Yeah, I think so too," said Gupta. "Okay. We know her husband was involved but we don't know if he's friend or foe. I give up. That's enough for tonight. You must be exhausted man. Let's go to Mindy's. I've got two keys to it—hers and mine."

The hostel did have my stuff in the cage and Slim released it to me when I paid what was owed. Frannie was planning to go to her sister's where she stays a lot, but Gupta suggested we all stick together. Good idea.

I was really, really, really exhausted—hadn't slept much since...since a few days back. We opened the door to Mindy's and went in. I told Francine to go on and take the bed and Gupta and I would sleep on the couches like before. Maybe after a dip in the spa. Yes, a dip in the spa we all agreed. That'd put us to sleep deep.

We could see okay from street light coming in through the blinds in the living room, and I squinted rubbing my hands along the wall while saying, "Where's a switch?"

"Don't turn the light on," came a firm voice in the doorway to Mindy's bedroom. "Don't move." A silhouetted figure stood there holding something long, familiar, and worrisome.

"Maybe we're in the wrong house," Francine said. I was happy to hear her voice because it is female and so extremely non-threatening. She knew to speak for us.

"I've got a machete in my hand I'm prepared to use so just what are you doing here?"

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"I'm Francine and this is David and Gupta and we're friends of Mindy's. We were planning on staying here but that's not necessary."

"Oh," and then a sigh of relief. "Oh sure. I know you guys. Sorry."

He did? Who was he? He was in a bathrobe—I could see that much. He turned the light on.

Gupta jumped and I went, "Oh my gosh!"

"You!" yelled Gupta.

It was Mindy's shadow, the mysterious Aborigine.

"Where's Mindy!?" Gupta said, right away in a demanding tone.

"I have no idea where she is. She ran away from me on Wednesday night—with you guys."

"What are you doing here?" said Gupta. "You know she doesn't want you around, man."

"I was waiting for her out there and she didn't come home so finally I just came in to get some sleep."

"Sleeping in her bed? Why have you been following her, man?" Gupta asked. "Why did she have to run away? Why do you keep bugging her. It's obvious she doesn't like it—or you. How did you get in? Where is she?"

"Can we all sit down and have some chamomile tea and cool off and be chums and let things go slow and easy?" said Frannie.

"Yeah, Gupta. We've got time," I said. "Anyway, it's not him who took her—we don't think. Let's just sit down."

Gupta sat down. "And you can put the machete down now, please."

"Oh, sorry. Took her?"

"Yeah, Mindy's run off or maybe been kidnapped. But we know it wasn't you."

"Who?" he asked.

"Her husband," said Gupta.

"I'll check the fridge," said Frannie.

"There's beer in there. I'm gonna get dressed," our sort of quasi host said. "Her husband eh?"

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“Yeah,” said Gupta. “Either he nicked her or she just ran off with him. She was in a crazy mood—drunk and stoned and dancing and singing crazy stuff on the street.”

“Sounds like her. Let me get dressed and we can talk about this,” he said, turning and disbathrobing as he walked into the bedroom.

“Would you like a drink?” called out Frannie.

The Aborigine turned back around, walked a few steps into the living room and said, “Just juice for me.”

Unselfconsciously he stood in full view and we three stared intently, obviously entranced by him in his tight white underwear. We couldn't help it. His dark brown muscular physique was compelling, but what held our attention firmly were the seven letters tattooed boldly across his chest spelling out the name Melinda.

“Oh my god,” said Gupta.

“Ah... ah...” I uttered.

“And your name is Gelar,” said Frannie, “Gelar Waters. I've heard about you from your wife, Mindy. Pleased to meet ya.”