



## CHAPTER 22

### TEAMWORK

Upon realizing we were sharing company not only with the man who had been relentlessly following Mindy but with her husband as well, and that the two of them were indeed one, and considering the serious and unlikely events of the last few days, a good deal of query and explanation were called for. Gupta started off the investigation of Gelar with vigor and a damning presumption of guilt.

“What the hell have you done with Mindy?! Where is she?!”

“Nothing. I don’t know. What are you talking about?”

“We saw her get snatched up by *your* hearse! Yours! Don’t deny it!”

“Snatched up? What do you mean?”

“You know what I mean!”

“I don’t! I want to know what’s happening!”

We had each assumed the husband did it when we heard

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he owned the vehicle that was used to take her away. We'd seen it come and go and that was that. But one small phrase out of Gelar's mouth dismissed our lynch mob assurance as surely as the discharge of a flushing toilet.

"My hearse was stolen."

"Oh—I hadn't thought of that," said Gupta.

"Me either," I said.

"I wondered who'd kidnap someone with a rare collectible vehicle registered in their name," said Frannie. "I see now—they did it to point the blame at you. Any sign of it since then?"

"Nope. If it was any of the guys her uncle is involved with—or fighting with—it's probably been melted down by now. It was one of a kind considering its condition. But that's the furthest thing from my mind now. It's not flesh and blood one of a kind such as her. Kidnapped. Oh no." He sat down and put his head in his hands.

We were quiet for a while. We stared, a group non-think, waiting for the next thought to arise. Gelar drank his orange juice, Frannie and Gupta Emus, me a shot.

"So the treasure hunt is back on," said Gupta.

"Full on," I nod.

That in turn required a lengthy explanation for Gelar's sake, from the start in Singapore up to the moment we saw his tattoo, which brought him equally up to date and in the dark with us.

"But what about your following her all the time?" asked Gupta. "Are you pestering her?"

"Yes," Gelar said. "I admit it. I am obsessed with Bluey."

"Bluey?" Gupta asked.

"It's what I call her."

"Any reason why?" I asked.

"For her red hair, of course," clarified Frannie.

"I know you're hot for her," Gelar said looking at Gupta. "I have no problem with that. However much I'm trying to win her back, whatever competition we would have,

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that's not on my mind now."

"She got tired of me as a lover and regardless of how much I want her, it doesn't matter. Anyway, I'm just here on vacation, so I'm not really in the running," Gupta said.

"She got tired of me as well, of my dopin'," said Gelar. "I've been clean and sober now for a good while. I like it. I won't go back. But so far she isn't interested."

We asked Gelar what he knew of Rudy and Fenster. He said he knew Rudy well and knew of Waxo Fenster. Had heard the guy was crazy and from what he'd gathered tonight, those rumors were well founded.

"We thought you might be tailing her for one of them," I said.

Gelar squirmed a little.

"You were!" Frannie exclaimed.

"Don't tell her. I was. I am. I keep an eye on her for Rudy."

"Oh gosh, did you tell Rudy that I didn't stay with Gupta and Mindy?" I said.

"No—it's not like that. I don't report to him. Just look out for her. And I guess I get a little carried away."

A year before, Mindy had complained to Rudy Gelar was stalking her. Rudy could see Gelar's motives were innocent, was worried about Mindy so he offered Gelar financial support to watch over her even more. Gelar came with motivation and the ability to kick butt. He wouldn't carry a weapon—the machete was of course Mindy's. He was a little clumsy and obvious for surveillance, but it didn't matter because he had an excuse, being preoccupied with her.

"I failed miserably though," he said.

"Welcome to the club."

"So do you think we're justified," Gupta asked, "in fearing not only for Mindy but for ourselves at the hands of Rudy?"

"Yes."

We three guys looked at each other. We had a shared task to protect Mindy and an equally shared threat of reprisal

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for failure to do so, a failure which we'd only be able to hide for so much longer. I told Gelar about the dinner date we had with Rudy on the 29th.

"Today's the 22nd, Friday, so it's next Friday. We've got a week."

"He'll kill us," said Gelar. "He'll kill us all if she's been hurt."

"I knew it," said Gupta.

"But he seemed to be such a nice guy," I said.

"Yep—until you lose his niece," said Gupta.

"So, aside from Mindy, there are three of us in deep trouble until she's rescued," I said. "You're the only one not in danger Frannie."

"But we're all four committed to getting her back and we're all four sleepy," she said.

"I got to find out when the Western Australian Museum opens," I said.

"Nine," said Gelar.

"Okay—we have a nine o'clock appointment tomorrow morning at the museum with Samo," I said drying off from a soak in the spa. "I'm finally going to sleep. You come with us, okay?"

"Sure," said Gelar.

"I'm gonna call Techo and ask him to be there," said Gupta.

"Frannie should have the bedroom," Gelar offered magnanimously and then added, "I'll change the sheets."

"Nah," she said opening a cabinet by the door. "I got it."

We look at the two couches and three guys.

"And Davo sleeps next to me. We go camping. He's a pal. Like one of the gals."

"Maybe tonight you'll get lucky," said Gupta.

"Don't be juvenile," I said, sort of embarrassed.

"It's okay," said Frannie. "I'm an Ozzie. We like naughty talk."

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Up early. Gupta and I did his yoga and my zazen together. Mindy has two sinks so we brushed together too. I broke the silence.

“Glide Dental Floss,” I said, holding the product up to the mirror. “I treat it as carefully as my passport. I carry one in each bag when I travel—one in my suitcase and one in my shoulder bag. That way if one bag gets lost, I still have my Glide. Of course I can’t carry two passports so I carry a copy in my shoulder bag. Glide, as indispensable when traveling as my passport.”

“What the hell was that?” Gupta asked.

“I’m practicing product placement. But it’s too wordy. Gotta get it down.”

“You think you’re in a movie?”

“Life product placement. I’m placing products in my life.”

“Well, life is like a movie. Myself, I like this thick cottony stuff better. It’s more abrasive.”

“My teeth are too close together. Glide’s the only thing that works for me that I’ve found. I hate hate hate to have dental floss stuck between my teeth. Glide,” I returned to my ad holding it up again, “wherever oral hygiene products are sold.”

“Remarkable,” Gupta said, shaking his head. “You’re insane.”

“You must be insane in some way too.”

“Yeah. I’m still miserable thinking about Mindy. Even though her life’s in danger or she might even be dead, I can’t stop wishing she would come back to me as a devoted lover.”

“Samo can help,” I said.

“The detective?”

“Just wait. I’ll bring it up at the museum.”

“Oh, by the way, six,” he said.

“Beat me to it. Six it is.”

“Six till dinner.”

“Or six till death.”

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“Pleased to meet you mate,” said Samo to Frannie.

“And this is our mystery guest,” I said.

It was great to watch the look on Samo’s face as I introduced him to Gelar Waters. We were at the museum coffee nook. There was a horrendous amount of catching up to do, and it was only two days prior we had been together at the hostel wondering what to do first.

“Oh, I want to ask you something I’ve asked before,” I said. Samo Nods. “Okay. We’re sure now that this is a kidnapping because Gelar’s stolen hearse was used. Right?” More nods. “What sort of kidnapping is this? Don’t kidnapers usually follow up kidnappings with notes that tell loved ones what to do? Where to leave the money and all? I think we’d have heard from Rudy if he’d been contacted.”

Samo spoke. “Your visit with Fenster could have changed the whole thing. You were there quick. Hard to call. At this point Fenster could be playing with us and waiting himself to see what he’s going to do. Remember, he’s nuts.”

“Hard to forget,” said Gupta.

I asked Samo if, while Frannie and I were enjoying the displays, he might tell Gupta about the affect, as in Affect Psychology, of disappointment and what to do about it. Gupta said that was the furthest thing from his mind now. Gelar excused himself to check out some paintings. As I walked off I heard Samo saying disappointment was the response to a blocked expectation. Naturally. Wonder what he said next.

After Frannie and I got a little lost in a hall of beautiful, murdered, mounted butterflies, we went upstairs to a passageway between two large display halls. There it was—not in full lit view, but on a dusty dark shelf maybe twenty feet from where we stood—our stuffed quokka. We were on a walkway that ran next to a balcony overlooking the large room below from all four sides. There were shelves running around the walls holding stuffed mammals, birds, and reptiles that seemed to be stored more than exhibited. Three

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sides of the balcony were closed to the public. When I'd spent the morning at the museum a week before, I'd stopped there to watch some workers repair the ceiling where rainwater had damaged it and noticed the taxidermied quokka. Sure didn't imagine I'd be back to search through its pouch.

Of course I didn't know for sure if the next clue was there or not—but I'd touched on it in an email—"stuffed quokka on a shelf caught my eye"—so I was expecting it. There was a guard with his back to me standing across the way looking into another room. I dared not try to go past the wooden gate with the sign that read "Staff Only" as long as he was in my view. Frannie walked around to him without a word to me, said something, and in a moment he went off with her. I opened the gate and stole swiftly to the quokka, slipping my hand into its pouch and there it was. Quickly I snatched the envelope and returned to the other side of the gate, closing it just as a guard walked in from the opening near me and called out, "That area's closed, sir." I thanked him and went to get Frannie.

Conversation stopped when we returned brimming with urgent priority.

"That was quick," Gupta noted.

"Let's open the envelope," said Frannie.

"Nice paper," said Samo eyeing it.

"My turn," I said, used a knife at the table, pulled out the message, and read the following to an attentive audience.

*What started on cue by the first sign of the rise, flew to the let-down kingdom, and now in those bowels pecked, it hides where all the kings men are at loss.*

"What the hell was that?" Gelar looked stymied.

I leaned over toward him and said, with heavy drama in my voice, "Welcome to the treasure hunt." And then more humbly, "Anyone?"

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We looked around at each other, everyone obviously hoping someone else had an idea as to what any part of it meant. Nope.

I showed Samo and Gelar the quokka clue and told them the other steps we'd climbed in the treasure hunt. Then we worked on the new riddle for an hour and a half. We solved it. But only after Techo arrived.

Gupta figured that *flew to the let-down kingdom* pointed to the disappointed ravens. He scratched his head. "Went to Rottnest? King's Park? There are ravens everywhere."

*What started on cue*—Samo said Cue is a town up north so we went with that and it held.

*By the first sign of the rise*—took a long time and the very abridged version of how we got there is rise is sunrise is sun. Frannie said the first sun sign is Aries. Gupta said Aries is a Latin species name for sheep. There are a lot of sheep stations up there. So we agreed on "What started at a sheep station near Cue."

We were at that point when Techo came in. We didn't fill him in on the big picture, just this clue.

"Remember to look for rhyming clues," I said as we resumed our sleuthing.

Techo didn't take long to tell us to look at the last word—*loss* rhymes with *Ross*. He put the parts together for us in greater relief. It was at a sheep station near Cue that Ross Bolleter first played ruined piano. Raven Kingdom leads to *Crow Country*, the name of a CD Ross put out in 1999 that includes ruined piano music.

"Wait?" I said double-taking. "How do you know who Ross Bolleter is?"

Turned out Techo was familiar with Ross's music and had worked as web master on an avant guard music site that featured Ross's work. They had some articles on Ross's CDs and concerts. And he knew I'd been to see Ross so he hadn't just pulled it out of a hat.

So we had quite a bit of it figured out: Ross's ruined piano music as heard on *Crow Country* started at a



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sheep station near Cue\ *And now in those bowels pecked—* inside the ruined piano played\ *it hides—* is the next clue\ *where all the kings men are at loss—* couldn't put something back together—what? A Ruined piano it seemed.

"Cue's a long way off," said Samo.

"Let's try Ross's first," I said. "*Where all the king's men at loss* may mean we can put things back together at Ross's. Who goes to Ross's?"

"You guys go," said Samo. "Gelar and Frannie and I can work some other angles. Okay?"

"Okay," said Frannie.

"You game Gelar?" Samo asked.

"I'm your man."

Before we left, Samo handed Techo a mobile that scrambles the conversation. "Phones of course can be bugged," he said. "Mobiles are easy to pick up on." Discussion amongst us we want to make sure was not overheard by the bad guys should be made on these secure mobiles. He had three others. He said the phones we used probably weren't bugged, it's a lot of trouble to go to, but judging by how much they knew about my emails and the gravity of the event, we couldn't take any chances. It's not like this treasure hunt was a just game. Even though it was wrapped in such a civilized cover, it felt more like a no-holds-barred death match.