



CHAPTER 23

DUNDER

hanks,” I said, handing Techo back his mobile.

Ross didn’t answer. I’d left a message. Gupta, Techo, and I went there anyway and rang the bell a few times. We could see his ruined piano through a small window in the front door. We knew we could get in but were hesitant to do so. We only wanted to look inside the broken beast for an envelope. Front door was locked but Techo said he could get inside in a minute.

“They didn’t go inside Francine’s,” I said. “Why would they take that chance?”

“Exactly. Let’s go around back,” Gupta said.

Oh. In the back yard there were three pianos of the ruined variety. After a period of snooping around the dilapidated innards of this keyboard bone yard, Techo found an envelope.

“Let’s get out of here before we open it,” he said.

To Find the Girl from Perth

“Thanks Ross,” I bowed to the house before entering Techo’s souped-up Chevy.

In a coffee shop near the hostel, Gupta, Techo, and I opened the envelope and read the new clue. Hmmm. We scratched our heads and tossed the new conundrum around for a while. Frannie called Techo on her mobile. She was on a stake-out staring at the door of a big brick building. I told her what we’d been doing.

“What does this one say?” she asked

“I’ll spare you this one,” I told her. “It’s so cryptic. Well I guess that’s what they all are. We’ve deciphered enough of it to know where to go, so Gupta and I are off to Freo.”

I didn’t want to say where this clue led. I didn’t even want to think about it for it brought us to the dreaded submarine at the Maritime Museum, but exactly where to look inside that nautical coffin, we didn’t know. The key word was “fell” and we couldn’t figure out what that word, or anything that rhymed with it might indicate. Techo had called a veteran friend with sub experience and searched the web at the Internet café to try to hone in on where exactly we should look, but no cigar.

Gupta and I grilled the sub guides. It was easy to do without arousing suspicion—we just wanted to know where the bell was—or something that rhymed with fell or was suggested by it. We went on a tour and checked it out. My breath was shallow, my arms shook. I wasn’t much help. I was too involved with being buried alive. We strayed during a couple of tours looking all over. It was a day-mare for me. I didn’t get acclimated. Like a bad acid trip—paranoid expanded consciousness—or should I say enhanced contracted consciousness—just an awful claustro-sub-ic feeling with panic on the horizon every moment. Oh Mindy what I’ve suffered for you. Gupta teased me. It didn’t bother him at all to be in there.

The imaginable horror happened. We had to stay behind on the last tour. I shuddered as I heard the echoing clang of the fore and aft hatches closing. Locked in that

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dreaded coffin for the night. We had little flashlights and used them sparingly. We didn't know where to look. We tried everything bell-like including the mock torpedoes. We looked at every part that rhymed with fell we could think of: well—where they got water from, cell—any little rooms, the brig but we could find no brig, jell—lubricants—that took us just about everywhere, yell—one thing we couldn't do but I cried and shook a few times. In the course of following every lead we could think of I imagine we looked at or touched just about every surface in the whole sub. We kept moving. It was cold. It was dark. It was cramped as could be.

At about two in the morning I was reaching my hand into an almost inaccessible spot behind a cluster of pipes when I felt, not the envelope I was seeking, but a bottle. Carefully I placed my fingers around it and brought it back over and under pipes and around valves until I could place it on a surface and inspect it. "Bundaberg Rum" it read, and I found a date—1969. It was half full. Made in Brisbane with premium ingredients and their carefully guarded, ancient dunder. I cried again, this time with a single tear of joy. We drank the whole thing.

Sitting in the dark depths passing the bottle, Gupta said nothing. I said nothing. We'd given up for the night. We weren't freaking out—just sitting there resigned to our fates. The only sound was our breathing. Finally he broke the silence.

"I took her for granted. I was foolish. I wish I had it to do over. I could be with her in a way that made her want to stay with me. Maybe. Maybe I could have handled things differently." He paused. "Nah. Wishful thinking. There was nothing I could have done. All roads lead to this nothing. You're right. There is nothing."

"What about affect psychology? Did what Samo tell you help?"

"I can't remember. It has joined the nothing."

"I could use a little more nothing," I said, "And less of the coffin effect. And a warm blanket."

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“And pillows.”

As we lay there in the dark, Gupta started singing.

*She's got her stars—I've got mine
Once was we were valentines
But now—we divide the universe*

*She's on her side—I'm on another
King and Queen of something or other
Who have split the cosmos*

*There's nothin' else in the ten directions
That's not either hers or mine*

*She's the southern—I'm the north
For whatever it is worth
Lord and Lady of all space and time*

*We've our poles and we've our spheres
Infinite and empty dears
Only Nirvana can join us*

*There ain't no answers to no quantum questions
That don't fall in his or hers*

*There it's counter—here it's clock
There it's glove and here ol' sock
Same dancing sunlight upon us*

*She's got her stars—I've got mine
Once was we were valentines
But now—we divide the universe*

“I have an appropriate pocket song for the occasion,” I said.

“Wail away.”

Dunder

*There's no hope for us all
No hope for us all
We try so hard to do what we can
But there's no hope for us all*

We slept cold and huddling for a few hours in a cramped steel nook where we were confident the first tour would pass us by without noticing. We followed them out at ten thirty, like refugees being released from a concentration camp. Once we were in the daylight, Gupta turned to me and said, "Five."

"Five indeed," I responded. "Sunday the 24th. And we're free. Oh lord, free, free at last." I kissed the sky.

"Free to die in five days," said Gupta.

Nevertheless, we stood in the sunlight gratefully absorbing the heat and feeling the expansiveness of just being on the earth without being confined. I felt a great pity for people who are incarcerated, a favorite pastime of my native land. With us it was just overnight. For so many it is a lifetime, and so many of them harmless victims of zealous fanaticism or just the old habit of putting others in cages.

But this comparative analysis of degrees of suffering didn't stop me from shuddering. What we'd gone through was for nothing. "God man," I said to Gupta. "That was so bad. It was hell."

"Hell!—that rhymes with fell!" he said.

Great. Hmm. Sounds like hull he pointed out. We looked around on the hull and then, Gupta saw a little bit of something white sticking out from the underside of one of the propellers—propel!

There was easy access as a scaffolding was up for some maintenance work. Gupta slipped over a chain, climbed up and yanked the envelope from under the propeller without worrying about anybody seeing him.

"It was outside," he said.

"Outside. Outside. That's too hard to guess," I said feebly. Propeller was the word.

To Find the Girl from Perth

“Let me look at that clue again,” I said. Gupta reached into his pocket and dug it out. Then the problem was obvious. The word was feller, not fell. If we’d noticed that we might have figured out “the feller” rhymes with propeller. Part of the note had gotten wet from dew in the ruined piano—and some ink had run—or maybe Fenster had it done that way on purpose.

“Fenster set it up so we’d be likely to be buried alive in there all night,” I said, “knowing from having access to my emails that it was the cruelest thing he could have done short of murdering family.”

“Oh well,” Gupta said. “Something to tell our grandchildren—if we live that long.”

We staggered out of the Maritime Museum and got a room at the Sunrise Hostel where I’d stayed before. After cleaning up, we went out to a restaurant and ordered breakfast. When our plates had been taken away, slowly we opened the envelope and read the next riddle. We looked at each other puzzled, more puzzled than we had been by any other clue. Here’s what it said:

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?” Gupta said.

We went back to the hostel, slept for a few hours, took showers, put on clean clothes, got some tea and kangaroo pie—thank you kangaroo, and went back to the Porsche. I called Techo and told him we were coming, but was too dejected to say anything more.

“Do we have to go back to Ross’s or does this mean we have to go to that sheep station near Cue? Or is it a mistake or what?” Gupta said.

“I don’t think it’s a mistake. It’s a loop or a dead end. This is no ordinary treasure hunt. We’re in a treasure hunt maze.”