



CHAPTER 27

PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Do you know this guy?" Samo said handing me some photos.

"Yes. I know him. That's Stan. He's Fenster's English valet and I bet, most trusted assistant."

"Right. He's been with Fenster for thirty years."

"He's the guy who planted the clues in Dwellingup and maybe everywhere else," I said. "He went to Frannie's door."

"He was at the Brewery," said Samo, "but he's not on the eight hour shift. That's these guys."

"Nope. Never saw them."

Samo was talking about the building that used to be the Swan Brewery below King's Park. There's a posh restaurant on one side, but on the other there's a section that hasn't been used for years. It's rented in the name of a freight company tied indirectly to Fenster.

"This one's Terrible Terry. He's mainly a clerk. Did time

To Find the Girl from Perth

for fraud and for tax evasion. No violence in his history. This is Queenly from Queensland. Opposite story here. A number of assault arrests. Acquitted twice for murder. And this is Brandon Johnstone, called Johnno. He's a go-to guy. Odd jobs. Been in prison twice—for extortion and robbery. Acquitted for kidnapping a politician's prize dog in Melbourne."

I looked carefully at the photos. "So what do ya think?"

"If she's in there, I figure the best time to break her free is toward the end of a shift, but with plenty of time to get away before the next guy comes on. Johnno, the graveyard guy, looked more beat when he came out. But it may be better to attack in the afternoon when there's a lot of activity in the restaurant and everywhere else."

Samo and I were out front of an auditorium in Fremantle where Ross was doing a tango piano and accordion recital for a packed house consisting mainly of Argentine immigrants. Gupta was in there with Gelar and Techo. We were among a hundred or more people standing. Not Frannie though. She selflessly offered to stay on watch at the Brewery that night to look for more suspicious activity. Gupta and I had arrived at Freo in time to make our dinner date with Techo and Gelar before the concert. Samo came later. It was intermission and I wanted to say hi to Ross briefly but I couldn't get through to him because the hall was so packed. The fire marshal surely would have freaked—if he weren't Argentine.

I told Samo about the unorthodox meeting with Fenster and of his unreasonable demands. I said at dinner Gupta started talking about how we might have to rob the Mint and Gelar and Techo seemed to take it seriously. We needed to discourage them. Aside from being illegal it seemed to me to be impossible. Samo said he'd come over to Mindy's tonight after the concert so we could all talk about the situation and the plan to set Mindy free and that would keep their minds off trying to sneak those gold bricks out of the

Planning Department

Mint. And once Mindy's free we can deal with Fenster. Hmm. Maybe *he* can.

I passed Samo a manila envelope with a color copy of the gift Fenster in Robina drag had bestowed on Gupta and me earlier that day. Gupta had made a copy for each of us before dinner. It was a collage made from photos of Mindy and the treasure hunt gang—Frannie, Gelar, Gupta, Samo, Techo, and me. The unique design aspect of this work of art was that the heads and bodies were separated and spread out without regard to each other. There was a background of familiar Perth sights. In the right top corner Genghis Khan sat on a horse in battle gear with my head on his spike. Samo took his copy and went back inside.

I saw a distinguished looking gentleman light up an American Spirit and politely solicited one. He was most willing and eager to chat. He was from Buenos Aires. I told him I'd spent part of a summer there almost forty years ago and had a wonderful time. I called him *Che*, which they call each other there. The women of his country, "especially one," I added, "had stolen my heart." He smiled widely. He went on and on about how special it was to have such a great tango musician in WA. He said he played some tango on the piano—poorly. Much better, he said, to hear an accomplished pianist like Ross Bolleter. I told him about my connection to Ross through Zen and music and the man about flipped. He introduced himself and gave me his card—Philippe Vargas. He was a banker. He suggested I come to a meeting of the tango club. Superior way to meet women he pointed out. I said it sounded good to me. While he was telling me about the spiritual dimension of tango, I watched Ross climb out of a window onto the balcony of the performing hall. At an appropriate moment I excused myself, caught up with Ross who was being besieged by fans, and told him how splendid the concert was. Similar to what everyone else was saying I suppose. I inquired as to why he climbed out on the balcony. He was trying to get to the loo. It was too crowded to move inside.

To Find the Girl from Perth

“Two” said Gupta as soon as he was done with his yoga. I was cross-legged on the floor behind him, using a cushion from the couch.

“Ah, good morning,” I said. “Again you beat me to the count. And yes, toodaloo it is—day after tomorrow.” I uncross my legs.

“Oh, pardon me master,” he said, “I didn’t mean to disturb your Samadhi.”

“All is contained within this vast mind my son. Nothing on heaven or earth can disturb it.”

“You may be tested soon.” He looked at the clock on the wall and jumped up. Ran into the bedroom and woke Gelar, then zipped into the bathroom. Soon he was dressed, drinking coffee, gobbling food. Gelar did the same.

I asked Gelar what he knew about the painting on the wall. I’d been around enough to know its intricate dot patterns are Aboriginal or influenced by Aboriginal art.

“You like it?” he said.

“Oh yeah, I love it. I keep staring at it and at the boy with the snake around him. It’s part of his power. It’s his spiritual friend. You don’t see snakes portrayed that way where I come from.”

“Good. Thanks,” he said.

“Oh, I see,” I said. “The boy is you, a self-portrait.”

“The whole painting is me,” he said going out the door with Gupta.

I knew where they were going—to meet Techo and then to the Mint to do research for their robbery. Samo couldn’t talk them completely out of it last night. I tried to dissuade Gupta and Gelar as well but Gupta just pointed to the collage he had mounted on the wall in the living room. He said if we get Mindy out first though, they wouldn’t go through with it of course. We talked about how to come up with three hundred thousand dollars, the facsimile Fenster said he’d accept. Rudy could do it but forget that.

Techo went back to the web to see if there were any changes to the Treasure Hunt Maze only to find it gone.

Planning Department

www.dogensays.com.au was gone as well. He couldn't find a trace. No hints, no evidence.

Last night late, after Samo departed, the would-be Mint thieves got to arguing about the Coriolis Effect. They kept flushing the toilet, running the tub, and I'd hear Gupta's exclamations of "See! See!" But it seemed not all his experiments went as hoped. It was still one of the unsolved mysteries. Aside from that, there hadn't been much playing around lately. Or drinking. That's understandable. We needed to be alert to keep up with developments and it was just two days till we all died at the hands of Fenster or Rudy or found out it's all just a big joke. But anyway, it was such a relief not to have to be following the treasure hunt in the real world or the webbed world. A small consolation while awaiting impending doom, the only constant of our recent history.

It was time for me to go too. I was going to relieve Samo on surveillance—keeping an eye on the Brewery till Frannie relieved me. I was to meet him at the restaurant at nine in the morning, well after the eight o'clock shift change. Fenster's guys didn't go near the swank eatery. They sneaked up, darted in the far door on the other side of the building, and disappeared quickly when they departed.

Samo came up to my table and sat down. "Somewhere in that building your Mindy may be," he said. "And if so, we're going to get her out. Soon. Better be soon. Everyone's getting exhausted—and a little nuts. Tomorrow afternoon. I hate to wait but I want to be sure. And the timing needs to be right."

The idea was for Samo and some of us to go in at about two in the afternoon. Frannie would stay in the bushes. If there was a problem Samo would hit a preset on his mobile that would vibrate hers. She was to listen in case he had something to say, but if he didn't, then she was to call the police on a special number. His old partner knew something was up and was prepared to send a force to the Brewery.

To Find the Girl from Perth

I told him how the boys set out early that morning to prepare for the heist contingency. Samo shook his head.

Early that evening Frannie came over. She was on her way to visit her parents who of course had no idea about her involvement in these clandestine activities. They thought I was a good influence. She wasn't wearing the wrist brace. She'd taken my place in mid afternoon in the bushes opposite the Brewery keeping an eye out and knitting a scarf that didn't exacerbate the carpal tunnels. Now Samo was there. And I was going in soon for the later night shift. Samo was going to take my place again in the early, early morning. Not long before we were to go in.

Frannie and I talked about guys. She needed a nice Aussie guy. I really like them all but some can be a little crude at times—and abusive. Like some Texans I've known. She said almost every night in Dwellingup there's a fight at the pub. Really? Those nice fellows? Yes.

I told her how impressed I was the night Banger insisted on assisting and crashed through the ceiling. Still she spoke to him with a gentle and kind voice. "It's exactly how Buddha told people to speak to each other," I said to her.

"He never told me that."

"Uh-huh. You're Miss Buddha."

"I'm Frannie."

"Same thing."

I've heard such extreme stories from Frannie about some of her friends and boyfriends. Like one she'd told me about Banger and Bud at a time when Banger was living with her. Frannie had just tidied up and they came in with a couple of bottles of Jack D. They were bleeding terribly, getting blood all over everything and she got her medicine kit and healing herbs and oils out and fixed them up. Banger had a tomahawk thrown at him and it went into his hand. She said tomahawk, by which I think she meant hatchet. Anyway, the guy who attacked him was known for chasing people he thought were on drugs. That's one reason he was

Planning Department

still out there. If you only throw tomahawks at druggies you're much less likely to get arrested just about anywhere. Banger's friend Bud yelled at him from the street that they weren't on any drugs—just drinking—and threw a big rock at the house of the guy with the tomahawk in feeble revenge and the guy came out with a bat and broke Bud's arm. For an added visual, Banger had cracked his neck earlier and was wearing one of those thick, white supportive collars. Frannie had fixed them up as well as she could and they were meanwhile chugging the Jack D and getting deranged. Then Frannie said something Bud didn't like and he slugged her. Banger said, "Settle down," and Bud pushed him back. Frannie tried to intervene and then Banger said to her, "You're coming between me and my mate," and threatened her with a backhand. She finally got Banger to go to sleep on the couch but then Bud staggered in from the kitchen and started trying to cut Banger's ear with a butter knife and Banger was so pissed he didn't even wake up. Frannie threw the butter knife out of the room and told Bud to go away. Banger woke up and said to Frannie, with irritation in his tone, "Steady on, mate." Finally both guys were asleep and she tidied the place again and cleaned up all the blood. The next morning the boys were just sore and went off to a clinic to tend to their wounds but they couldn't remember enough of the night before to apologize for it.

Although these wild buddies of hers were good hearted, at least when they weren't drunk, I felt she deserved better—someone gentle like she is who would be good to her. I said I know she loves her friends but in terms of a partner, she should be careful not to give her crystals to the hyenas.

I got the guitar, took out a folder of songs, and picked one to play. She leaned over to read it but I wouldn't let her, telling her you gotta have the music with them. So I sang it.

*If you want to get a girl you gotta treat her mean
That's what they told me back in Abilene
Treat her mean, treat her mean*

To Find the Girl from Perth

*I'd rather treat you to a cup o' tea
Cause I—I just want to be good to you.*

*If you want a meltin' mama you gotta be cruel
That's what they told me back in high school
Gotta be cruel, gotta be cruel
Honey, I'd rather be your fool
Cause I—I just want to be good to you*

*Can't keep my cool none
Babbling on these days
Can't hide my love hon
Let me count the ways*

*They'll beg for more if you act real cold
That's what I was often told
Act real cold, act real cold
I'd rather melt before you on the floor
Cause I—I just want to be good to you*

*If you want to be the boss use strategy
That's what the studs all said to me
Strategy, strategy
I'd rather surrender unconditionally
Cause I—I just want to be good to you*

I repeated the first verse and put the guitar down.

“That’s sweet of ya,” she said.

The Mint-robbing trio returned discussing details of their caper plan. Frannie tried to talk the boys out of even considering it, but forceful persuasion is not her forte. Gupta repeated that until Mindy is out they’d keep planning and he said they were getting it down tight. He said their escapade isn’t set till the day after tomorrow at one—zero day—a whole day after we planned to have Mindy out and almost five

Planning Department

hours before the sunset deadline for delivery of the goods or putting our heads on the chopping block.

The three conspirators had spent their day at the Mint going on tours and plotting the particulars of their scheme. Gupta had drawn detailed sketches of the rooms they would be in. I asked him why he didn't just take photos and he said there was a rule against that. They returned to the Mint four times, each in different disguises so they wouldn't be recognized. They bought false mustaches and wigs, wore suits and overalls, changing clothes for each tour. Techo put on long sleeves to hide his tattoos, stored his gold earring, dyed his hair black, and lost his spike. I bet it just made the guards notice them more. They're distinctive. Seemed like putting a wig on a turkey and trying to walk it out of a Thanksgiving feast.

At first they had the idea of getting locked in at closing time a la submarina, but Techo said there were all sorts of precautions to make sure that didn't happen and more security after hours than when open. Their plan is for after lunchtime when people are the most tired. Just at the point the tour was about over and the poured gold brick has been cooled in the vat of water and placed on the ledge, Techo is to set off several smoke bombs that will obliterate visibility and trigger the fire alarm. At the same time a CD player with a super powerful micro-speaker he'll have planted under a bench in the demonstration room will blast Ross's ruined piano music sped up insanely—at an ear-splitting volume that will further confuse and encourage everyone to flee as quickly as possible. There will be pandemonium. Techo will split as soon as the smoke bombs and noise attack commence. At that moment Gelar will whip out a can of Super Cold 134 and spray the Plexiglas with a minus fifty-two Celsius stream. Then he'll whack it hard with a hammer, which will shatter the Plexiglas to smithereens. Gupta is to sit on the front row left during the demonstration. He will hop the railing, go around, grab the cooled gold ingot, and, wearing heavy gloves, slip it into a special padded pocket in his overcoat—

To Find the Girl from Perth

just in case it's not as cool as the guide had indicated. Techo nixed the nifty accordion grabber and the wasabi spray idea has been replaced with pepper spray to be used only if necessary. The gold ingots are not too heavy to carry. The big one is twenty-five pounds and the small one-half that. Gelar and Gupta will take the emergency exit with the crowd and run to the side street where Techo will be waiting with his getaway Chevy revved up. Afterwards he'll paint it a cherry red. Techo has already accessed the Mint's computer and security systems and the police communications system and planted programs in them that will activate just before the anointed tour, deactivating and scrambling those systems, plus a program to make all the traffic lights green for the getaway route and red behind them so they'd be difficult to follow. They will drive straightaway to the Amenity Funeral Home to deliver the precious booty and retrieve Mindy.

I said it sounds like they've covered everything except knowing how much time they'll do in Australian prisons. Meanwhile, I announced I had calculated minus fifty-two Celsius is a little over minus sixty-one Fahrenheit. Next I'd start trying to figure out where Celsius and Fahrenheit meet. Techo and Gelar looked at me confused. Gupta advised them to ignore me.

They attended to details, getting everything ready, going through their choreographed moves. Techo handed out ear plugs and gloves and went on his laptop checking the programs to aid and confuse. Gelar sprayed a Plexiglas box with Super Cold 134 and then hit it with a heavy ball peen hammer. It shattered. He had a new big can and a small backup can if he needed it. Gupta put Mindy's mobile phone charger in Techo's car so he could communicate—couldn't use Samo's phones on this gig. He read the instructions that came with the pepper spray, their only weapon. Tested one container out back, emptying the whole thing and getting some in his eye, which made him stagger howling into the bathroom. Good thing he'd read the instructions, which said to wash with mild soap to cut the oil if that happened.

Planning Department

I was preparing to go to the Brewery for the night. The partners in crime were discussing who should sleep where. Techo's staying for the night. They're arguing over whose turn it was to sleep in the bed. I said if the Three Stooges could sleep together then they could too. It was a big bed. But of course, I pointed out, the Three Stooges left their clothes and shoes on.

"Minus forty," I called out from the door.

"What?" said Gupta.

"Fahrenheit and Celsius meet at minus forty."

"Commit yourself as soon as you can," he called out.

"Techo does look more like Curly now," I added, and went off without knowing how the boys solved their bedding dilemma.

Sitting in a clearing behind the bushes and keeping an eye on the door, where the thugs supposedly watching Mindy would come and go, presented a new difficulty—trying to stay awake. I learned the meaning of sleeping with one eye open—like being in the monastery but with a greater sense of urgency. Actually, this sense of urgency is exactly what some spiritual teachers try to instill in the minds of their students. It's not unrelated to the stillness and concentration found by hunters and warriors. Life and death is the great matter—as the wise of old have said. Heck, as Fenster said, and which was apparent as I stared at the door below and wondered who's inside—and if I'd be going in there.