



CHAPTER 28

DEMINTED

Oneness,” I said as I entered Mindy’s front door in the early morning.

“Once upon a time,” Gupta echoed poetically.

“One fine day till we dine... or die.”

“Dine on or be dined on.”

“May it be dine with—with Rudy and you and... “

“And Mindy.”

“And aside from that,” I said, “what are your plans for today”

“Our plans are to be concentrated and prepared.”

“And, oh doomed one, has this looming threat concentrated the mind wonderfully?”

“Indeed it has. We are getting it down to Pentium precision. And how was the Brewery watch?”

“Uneventful. Samo came back at about seven thirty in the morning. We watched Queenly go into the far door but John-

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no didn't come out. No big deal. Samo's gonna stay there till we all show up at about one. He says we can take on two of them if we have to but Johnno will surely be gone by then."

"Why wait?"

"It has to do with timing and assuring back-up from the police if we need it. He's had to arrange that on the sly without really saying directly what's happening. He's cautious. He's patient. He wants it done right."

"We should just go in and do it. This is no time for waiting around."

"Samo's in charge. It'll happen soon enough."

"It'd better be sooner than later or Plan B is implemented. One way or the other we'll succeed."

"Gang aft agley," I muttered.

"The gang what?"

"Gang aft agley."

"I don't get it."

"It's what Robert Burns said happens to the best schemes of mice and men."

"The poet? He said that the best laid plans of mice and men often go astray."

"Nope. That's the way it's come down. But what he wrote was, 'The best laid schemes o' Mice an' Men \ Gang aft agley \ An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain \ For promis'd joy!'"

"A pessimist. Blind mice and careless men don't prepare well. We've got Plan A and Plan B. We'll show him."

The phone rang, Mindy's phone. Gupta answered it casually. He tensed up and sat straight. "Yes sir," he said and then, "She's out shopping. Yes it is a little early for shopping but she wanted to meet with a friend and you know women, young women especially. Heck, who knows when she'll get back."

He listened for a moment.

"Nervous? No! Not at all! Yes, he's here. Sure. Yeah, his friend Frannie is here too. Well, they're out as well. Uh. Well, how about..." Gupta stopped mid-sentence. He looked at me with his mouth open and slowly put the receiver down.

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“Who the heck was that?” I said.

”Arg...”

“Are you okay? Do you need a Heimlich maneuver or something?”

“Ra, ro, ru...”

“Yes?”

“Ruuuudy!” he said with fear and trembling.

“Confirming dinner tomorrow?”

“No. No dinner tomorrow.”

“That’s great! Man, that let’s us off the hook—for now, huh?”

“No. Not at all. Quite the opposite. He said we’d have dinner—t-t-t-tonight at Jessica’s—instead of tomorrow! And then he hung up.”

Silence.

“What are we gonna do?!” Gupta said with a pathetic look on his face.

“We’re gonna do it to it, that’s what,” I said. “Where’s a secure mobile?”

The phone rang again. Gupta answered again. He listened, said nothing, and hung up. He looked at me.

I leaned over and looked at him. “What was *that*?”

“I think I can repeat it exactly,” he said, and then taking on the nasty nasal tone of voice I’d grown to despise, “Genghis Kahn here. Can’t wait till tomorrow. Sorry. New schedule. Bring your contribution by sunset tonight. Meanwhile I’ll be sharpening my sword.”

“The phone *is* tapped,” I said. “Gosh, I’d a thought Rudy would have covered that. Guess there’s not usually anything going on through this one he needs to hide.”

“Fenster knows,” said Gupta. “He knows about everything. We’re doomed.”

“But we’ve been careful not to talk about our plans on that phone,” I said. “Remember? We haven’t mentioned what we know—about the Mint or the Brewery or Mindy or anything. All that’s been on the secure mobile phones. Lets just

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hope he doesn't have one of those taps that can hear the room through a hung up phone."

"That can be done?"

"Yep. But let's assume he doesn't do that, cause if he does we'll be going into a trap."

"Okay, please don't be listening Waxo," Gupta says looking at the phone. Then he looks back at me. "Correction. Zero."

"Ooh. Ground zero," I respond.

"Dinner tonight."

"Seafood dinner."

"With Rudy, you, me..."

"And Mindy," I add optimistically.

"And Frannie—he invited her too."

And then Gupta started to scream.

Awakened by Gupta's distressed vocalizing, Techo and Gelar came walking into the room, the former rubbing his eyes, the latter his crotch. Gupta had calmed down and was now sitting and staring ahead. I was staring ahead too.

"Change of plan. I gotta call Samo," I said.

Techo passed me his mobile. I called Samo and told him the news. He sighed. Said for me to come on and, okay—bring everyone now. We'd meet at the restaurant. He said the night shifter never came out. He'd call Frannie.

"If Mindy's there," Gupta said, "we'd better go get her out right now. If she's not out soon, we go to the Mint."

"It's happening," I said. "Let's go."

Soon Gupta and Gelar were ready to go, but not Techo. "Techo! get off that computer! We gotta go." Gupta called out with irritation.

"Just a sec!"

Twenty minutes later we were all at the Brewery restaurant except for Frannie who was on watch just above us and over some. Samo wanted only Gupta and me to go in with him. Us? We're not qualified—not like Techo or Gelar. They're tough as nails and Ozzie nails can penetrate jarrah. Gupta could get his glasses broken. I could freeze with fear.

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But I didn't want to say anything. Samo's the trusted sergeant. Gelar and Techo are to stay at a table in the restaurant while Frannie stays in the brush with the phone waiting for an emergency call that could be the signal for her to send the boys—or to contact the police. Oh I see. He's leaving the number two and three ranking soldiers behind to save us if need be. But Samo intends to take care of anything difficult by himself.

Off we go. Samo's got a gun. Guns scare me. I can see that guns scare Gupta too—at least this one. Samo's at the door. Gupta and I are behind him. The door's locked. It takes Samo about ten seconds to get it open and with almost no noise. We walk quietly down a dark hall using sunlight reflected from windows at the end to guide us. The doors to the rooms also have opaque glass windows so we're not trying any. We're looking for light and listening for anything. In the back of the old brick building we ascend stairs to the next floor. Light and sound from a room. Approaching slowly. Samo motions, whispers to us to let him go in by himself and then to follow when he calls. Abruptly he throws open the door and rushes in gun pointed. We hear him say, "On the floor." And then, "Come on in." That was quick.

There's a man on the floor face down with his arms spread out. There's another man tied to a chair who is gagged. His eyes are wide. Samo keeps his distance from them and tells Gupta to watch the hall, me to frisk the guy on the floor. I say I don't know how. Samo said to just feel around for something hard and rest assured, his John Thomas won't be. I find nothing. I glance quickly around the room. There are some dried flowers in a vase, a bookcase filled with books, a table with water and glasses and a phone, some flat rectangular mats with cushions on them, a couple of chairs, a poster of a Tibetan temple on the wall, a photo of Robina, another of Phar Lap, another of Joan Sutherland, another of Genghis Khan, two samurai swords on the wall, and a Buddha statue on a little table behind a candle and incense burner sans incense—but no Mindy.

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"Looks like Fenster was the interior decorator," I said.

I recognize the man on the floor as Johnno, the one on the midnight shift, and the one in the chair is Queenly, his replacement.

"Where's Mindy?" asks Gupta strongly from the door.

Johnno shakes his head.

Samo ungags Queenly in the chair.

"Where's Mindy?" Gupta repeats.

"Who?" said Queenly.

"Who? The woman you kidnapped for Fenster, the woman you've been hiding!"

"Let me do the talking," said Samo. "Was there a woman in here?"

"No."

He repeats the question to Johnno.

"No woman," he said.

"Then what are you two doing here?"

"Today?" asked Queenly.

"Yes. And yesterday and the day before that."

"Well, we were practicing this. Would you let him get up and untie me?"

Johnno sticks his head up to see if that's okay.

"No," said Samo. "Practicing what?"

"Tying each other up and seeing how long it takes us to get out," said Queenly.

"What have you three blokes been doing here on eight hour shifts?"

"Meditating and doin' the moves and stuff," said Queenly.

"Meditating?" repeats Samo. "Moves?"

"Yeah," said Johnno on the floor. "Waxo has us come here to meditate and do martial arts. It's part of his training. And other stuff."

"And what was Stan doing here?" I asked.

"Checking up on us, of course. Making sure we're on schedule. We've been doing it solo but now we're supposed to overlap our shifts to practice tying each other up and other

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things. Fenster calls it our practice. There's these Asian exercises too we do with and without swords. I can get the list if you want. And pictures of the moves we go through."

"What about Mindy?" barked Gupta. "You've got to know where she is!"

Both men looked at him dumbfounded.

"I'm sorry," said Johnno. "Who is she?"

"What's this about?" said Queenly.

Samo picked up his phone, said something pre-arranged quickly to Frannie, then turned to me. "They're coming over here to go through the building with you and Gupta. I'll stay with these two till you're done."

Downstairs, I let Frannie, Techo, and Gelar in. It took us twenty minutes. No Mindy anywhere.

Gupta, Gelar, and Techo sped off in Techo's car leaving Samo, Frannie, and me wondering what to do. We decided they must have gone back to Mindy's to prepare for the Mint job so we raced there to talk them out of it. They weren't there.

"They can't have gone to the Mint!" Frannie said. "Don't they have to prepare?"

"I think they *were* prepared," I said. "Everything was in Techo's car ready to go and now I remember him lagging behind when we were in a rush to get to the Brewery. I bet he was setting the programs for the Mint security systems and traffic signals—so he could activate them with a phone call. Look—it's not long till noon, till the next pour! Come on let's go!"

"Good luck," said Samo. "I can't get near that. Anyway, I've got to figure out where Mindy is." He got in his car and was off.

We were off in Mindy's Porsche, Frannie at the wheel. We rush up to the ticket booth at the Mint. The clock behind the attendant reads 11:55. Frannie steps to the front of the line, saying, "Let me buy yours for you," and while the couple there was trying to figure out what was happening, she gets a

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bunch of tickets, handing all but two back to those whom she cut in front of. We rush into the Mint and then to the back where the pour is about to begin. On the way I bump into a small woman.

“Excuse me,” I say.

She turns around. “Oh hello David.”

“Mai! Daniel! And... Mai’s sister! Hello. So good to see you.”

“We finally made it here,” she said.

“Let’s meet after the pour. I must go stop it, I mean see it, uh... and catch someone before they leave. See you in a jail—I mean a jiff.” And I squeeze my way past them.

At the pour room I can see Techo, now fairly straight looking, standing by the doorway to the side hall that leads to the small display room with the bigger gold ingot in the Plexiglas box. I see Gelar in there. I wave frantically at him but he’s not looking my way. I wave to Techo but he’s staring intensely at the guide. There are some punk kids who have taken the front left seats where Gupta wanted to be. Instead he sits in front of the pour spot near the right end. The wild hair and sloppy clothes of the punk kids are in stark contrast to the reserved appearance of the rest of the demonstration crowd. The punk kids are acting up a bit. Security keeps a close eye on them. I stand on my tiptoes and can see Frannie trying to move toward Gupta. Gelar’s in the corner of my eye through the hall in the next room. He’s trying to inch toward the center, but it’s so crowded he can’t move anymore. Neither can I.

The demonstration starts. The demo man gets into his rap, throwing in the same humorous comments with the same timing as before so everyone chuckles on cue. He pours the brick into the mold while prattling away data I had once found interesting, now just disturbing. Gelar is in the other room standing behind a group of people crowded around the Plexiglas box with the gold ingot in it, pushing in on them excusing himself. He’s got gloves on. Now the boys don’t seem so confident. Sweat beads on foreheads and hands tremble.

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The ingot is placed on the paddle to be passed almost red hot before the seated and standing group. I wave to Techo again and whisper “hi” loudly. He sees me and makes the “shush” sign and hits something with his hand. He looks down alarmed.

Boom!!! Boom!!! What? Oh my god! The smoke bombs go off! Go off too early! Accordion tango music shrieks madly! Thick smoke billows swiftly into the air! The fire alarm screams! The security alarm screams! People scream. The demonstrator is startled, slips forward and the dreadfully hot gold ingot falls from the paddle bouncing off Gupta’s forearm instantly incinerating his sleeve. He screams in pain falling to the floor as his arm sizzles. Gelar’s struggling to get the cap off the can of Super Cold 134. Gupta is on the ground screaming. Techo looks around confused but can’t see anything much through the smoke. Gelar finally gets the cap off, the people who were in his way are pressing coughing through the smoke toward the emergency exit sign that can be seen as a red glow. Gelar sprays the Plexiglas, which fogs up with super-frozen crystals. He pulls out the hammer and strikes it with all he’s got. Nothing breaks. He sprays it again and hits it again. Again, nothing. Guards go chasing the punk kids out the front exit pushing through a throng of panicked tourists. Gelar uses his spray can up then hits the frozen case again with all the strength he can muster. It holds. Everyone’s eyes are watering. The demo man leans over Gupta in the smoke with great concern but keeps one foot stepped over the gold bar crunching on Gupta’s glasses on the floor afraid someone else will get burned because there’s almost no visibility and people are hysterical and coughing in the din of other sounds. A guard at the doorway yells at Gelar to go out the emergency exit, not being able to make out the frost covered Plexiglas, the spray can, or his hammer in the smoke-filled room. Gelar drops the can and the hammer, and runs to join Techo standing over Gupta who continues to scream in pain. A guard asks them to leave, strangely polite in the chaos. They do. Sirens are heard, the

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room empties of tourists, fills with firemen, policemen and medics. Gupta is taken off in a stretcher, groaning and coughing. A flash illuminates his face as he's loaded into an ambulance. Techo runs up and asks the driver which hospital they're going to. He and Gelar run to find his Chevy booted. "Should have paid off those parking tickets," he mutters. The traffic lights are all flashing green except for the intended escape route Techo notices with disappointment—it's flashing red. Cars are banging into each other, honking horns can be heard from all directions.