

I just say I saw it on TV.

So, let's get back to planning the big caper: getting the crooks.

64.

Keenan at Five Years

After Stoli had asked that critical question, that obscenely obvious question that I'd somehow buried all this time, I struggled to find the right answer. What are we going to do to Franks? The vague notion of violent revenge had long been my impetus. But when you chased down the series of events necessary to achieve that outcome, the feasibility of it diminished. I'd have to be willing to die and/or have someone die in my stead, in this case Stoli. He was more than equipped to be an assassin, and would probably pull the trigger for me, but I wouldn't risk him, nor myself, nor my family, in the name of some twisted past-life honor killing. Years of living a re-examined life had apparently cured me of such base revenge... but it didn't mean I wasn't out for justice.

After I'd eliminated the idea of killing Franks, I considered what might be the next best thing—sending that Irish jackass to prison for my murder. This hurdle, too, seemed insurmountable. According to the coroner's report, my demise was ruled accidental death by combined heroin, fentanyl, and alcohol toxicity.

Fentanyl! I had suspected as much. I'd never been near the stuff, a fact you might think would be evidence in my favor, but ... well, no one believes a junkie. Or a five-year-old kid claiming he used to be the dead junkie. It'd been ten years since my death and the world had moved on. Franks would have to admit guilt at the very least. This was never going to happen.

Yes, people had moved on. According to the files on the flash drive, Bart Montgomery had been released from prison at thirty-six months exactly and had spent two years on parole before moving to Atlanta. Dolly had done thirty days in county for possession not long after my death and went on to start a harm reduction therapy practice in San Francisco. Pains had been picked up on an old warrant related to an armed robbery and did a couple years at Solano. He resided in the Excelsior District.

Franks, who in the past had seemed anything but lucky, had done no time and did not go bust. In fact, according to city tax records, he bought a foreclosed

house on Bernal Hill a few years after my death. He also applied for a fictitious business name under GameDaze Merchandise, no doubt a crooked storefront for one of Franks' ill-begotten money-making schemes. GameDaze shared a lease on a private suite at the Giants' ballpark, not an inexpensive endeavor. Finally, if I had any doubts as to Franks' criminal status, they were soon dispelled by images of Franks all over social media, one of which showed him with Steven "Poindexter" Hightower partying at the Giants' ballpark.

Where did all this leave my prospects for justice? It meant the justice was going to be more personal than anything. There would be a showdown. But I'm not going to give it away right now—I've got a story to tell here!

After I absorbed the copious information provided by Stoli's detective friend, Stoli and I decided to put some old fashioned shoe leather toward our goal. Before we could feasibly do this, however, we would have to establish a certain amount of freedom, and that meant my folks had to be comfortable with Stoli and I palling around for long periods of time. I would become a brewery brat, an honorary child mascot of what would indeed become one of a growing number of family-friendly San Francisco brew pubs. Daycare is expensive.

I spent every weekend up at Eleventh Street Brewery. Drew's first job was supervising the installation of all the tanks, fixtures, lines and systems needed to keep the place supplied with a rotating variety of beers. Stoli's job, besides being the manager and financier, was building out the pub itself with a comfy, classic atmosphere and a simple but well-appointed kitchen and bar. The kitchen itself would be run by a guy Stoli and Drew had found at a food truck park. This guy was Hiroto Salinas, a guy who would bring both his trendy customers and his curious brand of Mexican-Japanese fusion street cuisine to our kitchen. Hiro was cool but a little high strung—perhaps he just felt a little out of his element going from food truck to full kitchen. Lou's job, at least for the time being, was keeping the books, accounts payable, etcetera.

I spent hours sitting at a second floor dining table surfing the internet with my tablet, or in Stoli's office on his computer. Sometimes I'd help contractors fetch tools, and they were amazed that I knew which ones to fetch. These long weekends at the pub helped bring clarity to my goal, and finally one day, about three weeks from the pub opening, while Stoli and I tested Hiro's Japanese Street Taco experiments in the manager's office, I laid it on him.

"I think we do it at the ballpark," I told Stoli, as I shuttled loose cabbage and

seaweed salad from the taco to my mouth. “This taco is pretty amazing. If you can call it a taco.”

“He calls it a Tokyo Taco,” Stoli said. “A little on-the-nose, if you ask me, but it’s a winner.” He wiped his mouth and went back to the subject. “The ballpark? I am inclined to agree with you. Public space, security check, private suite. But we can’t just knock on the door and invite ourselves in.”

“I say we take a field trip. GameDaze has interest in Suite 903. Third base. Let’s get seats near that suite and scope it out. Believe me, if Franks shows up, we’ll know it. He’s like a beacon of crazy. Can’t miss him.”

“What? You just expect to bump into him? Now that’s crazy.”

“Well, my plan requires him to invite us to his suite.”

“I think you’ve been in the beer.”

“Beer doesn’t agree with me anymore.”

“Does GameDaze have a site? Maybe they rent the suite.”

“GameDaze.com has nothing to do with Franks. It’s a shop out of Phoenix.”

“My guy can find a number.”

“If they rent the suite to us, how are we going to get them to actually share it with us?”

“Goddamn it, Keenan.”

“Let’s just go to the park and check it out. It’ll be fun.”

“I’m not really a baseball fan. What do we tell your folks?”

“We tell them I suddenly have an interest in baseball.”

“That sounds far fetched.”

“They are too tired to question my motives. Have you seen them?”

“I tried to give them the day off.”

“Also, you are going to have to wear this.” I handed him my pad.

Stoli looked at it quizzically. “Wrong sport,” he said. On the screen was the St. Patrick’s Athletic Football Club site.

“Naw. It’s Franks’ other love affair. It’s his hometown soccer team. He used to wear their jersey all the time. If you are within eyesight of him wearing that jersey, he will be all over you.”

“This is your plan: we are going to hang outside his suite wearing his home

colors and he is going to befriend us.”

“It’s almost as farfetched as a guy being reincarnated to solve his own murder.”

“What could go wrong?”



What went wrong was after two baseball games standing around the food stands and bar outside Suite 903, we had nothing. Oh, people came and went from Suite 903, but not our wayward Irishman. No sign of Pains.

To tell you the truth, I wasn’t a big baseball fan either. But I had enjoyed going to games every now and then, when somebody had a free ticket. That said, navigating a baseball stadium when you are four feet high isn’t fun. You can’t see anything when you are in a forest of adult bodies. It feels like any second you might be trampled. While I didn’t like holding Stoli’s hand like a five-year-old, it was necessary in this situation. Our routine was to find our seats, then dawdle at the food stand near suite 903. That was it. We’d return to our seats for a while every inning, then go back to our ersatz stakeout. Frankly, with all the foot traffic, it was a shitty place for a stakeout. A lot of hotdogs were had, nachos eaten, sodas drunk, beers imbibed. Baseball games are long. We got to know the vendors: Barb, the rough-hewn food manager with eyebrows tattooed on her forehead; Sanjay, the t-shirt guy who always winked at us; flirty Marciella, who served drinks.

I guess from a certain standpoint, we were adorable as grandad and grandkid—me in a little Giants cap and a kids’ cream-colored replica home jersey, and Grandad in a camo Giants cap and a bright red St. Patrick’s FC soccer shirt. Cute or not, we grew weary of this unlikely method of finding Franks after the second game. Worse than that, it was midseason with an endless number of home games in front of us. We were running out of patience.

Back in the manager’s office of the Eleventh Street Brewery, Stoli complained, “I feel like we’d have more luck standing outside his house on Bernal than this cockamamie method. I mean, we have his address.”

“Well, that’s way too suspicious. Criminals are highly paranoid.”

“I was kidding, but we can’t loiter around the ballpark forever.”

“Look,” I said, trying to sound convincing. “The Diamondbacks are playing a series this weekend. Franks hated the Diamondbacks. Let’s give it another shot.”

Stoli looked at me sideways, narrowing his eyes. “Hold it—you aren’t actually

beginning to like baseball are you?"

I hesitated. "Um, the Giants are on a streak. They could go all the way this year."

"Oh, God."

So we went back that weekend. Saturday afternoon, we again struck out, as it were, but I pushed Stoli for one more day, since the Giants had won and the Diamondbacks were in for two more.

It was the end of June and the fog had finally burned off to give us a rare sunny San Francisco day at the ballpark. At the third inning break (nobody had scored yet), Stoli and I were waiting for the men's room in a particularly long line that stretched into the pedestrian walkway. That's when I saw Pains talking to a roaming churro vendor in the bleacher hallway around the corner from Franks' suite. Poindexter looked just like himself, just a little heavier, and he'd let his hair grow out, now salt and pepper. Age had given him that spread-out look, like it does.

"Stoli!" I hissed.

I looked up at him, he down at me. I was about to tell him about Pains when we heard a loud Irish brogue issue forth: "I can't believe it, man!"

We both turned and looked toward the voice; a tall thin blond man approached us, a plastic cup of beer sloshing in his hand.

"How do you have a Saints shirt?" he continued, amazed. "Tell me you're not from Dublin." Franks came toward us with a smile, his hands held out in the sort open genuflection he used to affect in the old days. He had on a Giants tracksuit, but under the jacket was his red St. Patrick's jersey. His blond hair was thinning, but his body hadn't caught up to his middle-age. His teeth had been straightened, hopefully so his chronic halitosis.

I have to admit, I was a bit frozen. But Stoli did not miss a beat. We'd practiced this bit of introductory patter, usually during our stakeout, awaiting this moment.

Stoli looked down at his red shirt and tugged on it. "Oh, this? No, I got it at a game in Ireland while on vacation. My cousin is Irish." I could see Stoli giving Franks the once over, his brain finally able to process this fabled criminal in real life.

But I internally winced. The "my cousin is Irish" line could open up a whole

can of worms, since everybody in Ireland is somebody else's cousin.

Franks shoved his hand forward for a shake, ever the charmer. Stoli took it firmly. Franks said, "Ah, good man. Who were they playing?"

"Ah...what's it? The Rovers?"

"Ah, dammit! I knew it!" Franks was slightly intoxicated. By his voice and body posture I could tell he was in the buzzed-but-not-quite-all-the-way-drunk phase of his trajectory. He looked down at me. "Hey, little man. Aren't you a cute little guy."

It was all happening so fast, all I could do is raise my little hand and say, "Hi."

Franks took a gulp of his drink, and opened his Giants warm-up jacket to reveal his St. Pat's jersey. "I'm a fan, too."

"I saw that—very cool."

"So, the Rovers, huh? Who won?"

Stoli sighed. "Rovers, one-nil."

Franks shook his head. "That sounds about right. Fuckers." He looked over his shoulder at Poin. Turning to leave, he said, "Well, cheers, man!"

Stoli said, "Slainté!"

This dash of Gaelic made Franks turn mid-stride, and still moving, he grinned, answering back, "Slainté!" He raised his beer a little, but continued on towards Poin, some fifteen yards away.

Stoli hadn't been ready for such a quick end to the exchange. We both stood there stunned.

"Keenan, what should we do?" he said. The bathroom line had barely moved.

I scrambled to think. "I don't know." Surely, we couldn't just come to more games hoping to run into him again. In the distance, Franks said a few words to Poin, then to the churro vendor. Poin handed something I couldn't see to the vendor. Of course! They were still on the make, right here in the ballpark. Franks glanced over at us; his line of sight followed the queue to the restroom. He said something to Poin and headed back toward us. I tugged on Stoli's leg.

"He's coming back."

Franks said as he neared, "Hey, that's quite a line to the loo you got there."

Stoli replied, "Yep. It's the closest bathroom, though, and Keenan here really has to go."

Franks looked down at me. "You doing the pee-pee dance, there, Junior?" I

shrugged, nodding innocently.

Franks offered, "Look, we got our own suite over here with its own bathroom. You're welcome to use it, if you like. Fourth inning is starting."

Stoli stammered, "Um, well..." I couldn't tell if this was an act anymore.

Franks shot out his hand again. "My name is Frank. It'd be my pleasure to let a fellow Saints fan and his boy use our bathroom."

"Um ... Hi, Frank, I'm John, I..."

I whined at Stoli, "Uncle John, I gotta pee!"

He looked down at me, then at Franks. "Well, Frank, we'd be delighted to use your bathroom."

"Good man, John!" He slammed down the rest of his beer and carelessly let the cup fall to the ground. "Follow me."

As he led us toward his suite, he signaled Poin to join us. At the door he said. "Fellas, this is my good buddy Poindexter." Poin acknowledged us with a nod. "PD, these fine gentlemen need to use the bathroom, and John here is a Saints fan." This last bit of information seemed all Poin needed to know as to why Franks was inviting total strangers into their suite. Franks waved his hand in front of John's shirt, then to his, "Look at that!" Then Franks said to us, "We sell VIP seats to the game so there's a few guys in here with us. Don't mind them."

And with that, Franklin Franklin O'Donnell ushered us inside.



I remember trying not to freak out as Stoli locked the bathroom door behind us. I did indeed have to empty my bladder. The bathroom was nice: classic photos of famous Giants moments hung on the wall and a gleaming basin was crowded with soaps, towels and personal care items. After I did my business, I took a couple deep breaths looking into the mirror; my face came up just inside the bottom of the frame. There was a massive psychological dissonance between my five-year-old physicality and being in the presence of my former henchmen. I felt close to the edge of my sanity.

"What's the plan?" Stoli whispered.

I centered myself. "Let's just see where it takes us. Knowing Franks and how he is after a few drinks, you're about to become quote-unquote *good friends*. They'll invite us to stay, buy a round of drinks, and probably suss you out to see

if they can use you somehow. My cue to leave will be me getting tired after a few innings.”

Stoli took this in. “Okay. We can do this.”

“We don’t have a choice. Get in character.”

As we emerged from the bathroom, Stoli said, “Whew! Thanks for that.” All the people in the room turned to us. Four drunk guys—techie dudes, it was quite apparent—sat at window seats with cocktails and an armada of snack plates in various states of consumption. Behind them was a cocktail table at which Pains sat, paying no mind to us. Franks, however, was ready.

“Where are you off to?” he asked courteously.

“We have a couple seats just around the corner.”

“Why don’t you stay? We have plenty of room.”

“Oh, well, I wouldn’t want to —”

“I’ll get the first round of drinks.” He knelt down to my face. “Hey, little man, you want some fries? How about a soda?”

Turns out his Franks’ bad breath wasn’t gone. But I ignored it and gazed up at Stoli. “Can I, Uncle John?”

Stoli sighed. “I guess we are staying.”

“Great! What can I get you, John?”

“How about a pale ale and a shot of Jameson?”

“Perfect.”

Not long after, we were sitting at the window next to the four techies, who were garrulous and sloppy and sniffly. I had the notion they got the *executive* package from GameDaze, replete with an endless supply of cocaine. John had drinks and chicken wings and I had a cola and a plate of fries. How stupid it was to think we’d run into Franks out near the food stands when they had private wait service in their suite. We had lucked out.

Franks broke the ice: “So, John, tell me about yourself? You’ve got Irish heritage, I take it.”

Stoli was very ready. “Yep, on my dad’s side. German on the other.”

The Giants were behind the Diamondbacks, three-one. The game seemed of little concern to Franks, but the techie boys delivered a growing litany of obscenities.

“Boys!” Franks shouted at them, gesturing to me. “Language! We have a child

in our midst.”

I blushed. Stoli followed with, “Thanks, guys. Though, I’m sure he’s heard worse on the playground.”

One guy managed a “Sorry.”

Franks turned his attention back to us. “Where was I? Oh, so you have a cousin in Dublin. What’s his name, maybe I know him?”

Dammit.

“Damien Galvin. Lives in Dublin...In Inchi-something?”

“Ah, *Inchicore*,” Franks corrected. Stoli had clearly been studying up, but this kind of improvising only made me more nervous. “Galvin...” Franks searched his mind and took a sip of beer. Pains had left the suite on some errand. “I know like three Galvins, actually. Not sure about a Damien...Anyhow, that’s grand. So, are you from here in the City, or just visiting for the game?”

Franks was fishing, as always.

“I live in town,” Stoli replied. “Keenan here is actually a friend’s son. I take him to baseball games sometimes.”

“Keenan is a great Irish name! You like baseball, do you, Keenan?”

“Yes,” I said.

I kept mostly quiet and absorbed absolutely everything. The end of the fifth arrived. The Giants had scored but were still behind.

“What about you, Frank?” Stoli asked. “Do you do this sort of thing for a living? Renting out ballpark suites?” Stoli gestured around the room.

Franks thought about his answer a little too long, then said, “Oh, this is just a little side hustle—a way to pay for my baseball addiction.” I had the feeling he was choosing from a selection of prepared remarks, contingent on how he was reading his mark. “Let’s just say I *facilitate*. I make things happen. I’m semi-retired.”

“Ah, must be nice. Cheers!” Stoli was working it well. “Let me get the next round.”

Just as a new round of drinks arrived, Pains returned. He and Franks shared a meaningful look: a transaction had been made. I knew all the looks. Initially, the excitement of this farfetched plan coming to fruition had canceled out the revulsion I felt towards these characters. This excitement had worn off, and I

wanted to seal the deal and get away from them as fast as possible.

“So, John—you said something about a brew pub?” Franks asked.

“Yeah. I’m pretty excited. The Eleventh Street Brewery.”

“Hold on—the new place opening up on Eleventh and Folsom?”

“Yessir! Opens next Thursday.”

“That’s fantastic! What do you do there?”

“It’s mine! I own it.”

“Fucksake! That’s great!”

This bit of news piqued Poin’s interest and he finally chimed in. “That’s dope, bro. Can we come down?”

Franks looked annoyed at Poin. “PD. It’s not—”

“Of course you can come!” Stoli cut in. “For one thing, it’s open to the public. But you’d be my guests. Why don’t you fellas come by and let me repay you for your hospitality?”

I rested my head, eyes heavy, against Stoli’s arm. Stoli looked down at me.

“Uh-oh.” His hand brushed my hair. “Must be close to the seventh inning. Happens every time.”

I opened my eyes and Poin was looking straight at me. Odd and unsettling. I glanced away.

“Little guy looks ruined,” Franks said.

“Yeah. Look, fellas. I think I have to get Keenan here back home.”

“Oh, well ... okay.” Franks seemed genuinely disappointed.

Stoli made a show of rousing me and preparing to go; I complied docilely.

“Look, guys, come to the opening on Thursday. We open at three and I have a little speech and toast at eight. There’ll be a DJ. You’ll love the food, Poindexter.”

“Right on,” Poin replied. He continued to clock me. It was weird.

Franks, quite loaded by this point, came in to give Stoli a hug. “Great meeting you, John.” He pressed a card into Stoli’s hand. “Here’s my card. I may be

of assistance somehow. Let's talk."

Stoli took the card, held it up. "GameDaze. Franklin O'Donnell, president."

"That's me."

Stoli took my hand. "You ready to go, Keen?"

"Yes, Uncle John."

"Say thank you to Frank and Poindexter."

"Thank you, Frank and Poin—"

I almost said Poin.

"Poindexter," Stoli finished.

Franks laughed.

"Poindexter," I repeated.

They showed us to the door, and we were gone.

Making our way out of the stadium, the urge to gush on what had just transpired was overwhelming. But the words that would need to come out of this five-year-old were too strong for public consumption. Stoli saw my frustration.

"You can vent back in my office." Stoli used his phone to call a ride. "That guy is a great actor. Puts on a good show. But you can't bullshit a former Golden Gloves champion of bullshitting." I looked at him. "That would be me. He was completely full of shit. We are definitely going to have to watch ourselves."

As we climbed into our ride, I blurted out, "He's the lyingest crooked piece of shit on the fucking planet."

Stoli rolled his eyes, and I looked over and saw the shocked, open mouth of our gray-haired driver. Her eyes landed on Stoli, and she asked, "Are you John?"

65.

Keith, Welcome Back to Sober January

Imagine my surprise when I had my first overdose!

Actually, let's not rush into that quite yet. Let's go back a few months when I got the double whammy of Dolly leaving, immediately followed by Bart getting locked up.

I stayed high enough not to feel the full impact of my abandonment, but not so high that I couldn't take stock of my predicament. I had plenty of money, plenty of H, a nice house, and a couple henchmen left to serve me. With a first