

The Great Ice Cream Heist

Synopsis: A young band of small-time, would be thieves, plan the heist of their career.

The sun above beat down relentlessly, heat reflecting off the golden sand so there was no escaping it. Duchess lifted the last remaining water from the pail and poured it over the final layer of construction, strengthening the ramparts of the castle walls. She stepped back to admire her work, nearly falling over Rattler, who seemed more intent on eating the golden grains than applying them to the fortification they'd spent most of the last hour constructing, while the gang hatched their plan. It didn't matter anyway, the castle was itself a distraction, as elaborate as the plot they'd formulated undetected in its shadow.

"Okay, let's go over it one more time." Hatter, his cap turned backwards, shading his neck from the sun, stepped away from the sandcastle. He took a piece of driftwood, drew a line in the sand, then scooped up a pile like a baker turning flour into bread, patting it down until it formed a squat round loaf. "This is our target. Cold George's ice-cream truck." He drew three crosses alongside the small mound. "Duchess, Rattler, and I will be positioned in line here. Any questions?"

"Why can't you just call me Sally?"

"Because it's too risky, that's why. Take a look at the target." Hatter pointed along the beach to where an old ice-cream truck was parked. "On a day like today adults will be buying popsicles for their kids. If one of them overhears our real names they could rat us out to Cold George. Do you know what Cold George is like Duchess?"

"Me and Cold George are like this," said Spokey, crossing his fingers together.

"You're friends with Cold George?"

"No way. I meant every time I see him, I cross my fingers he doesn't see me."

"So you get the point Duchess, if Cold George catches us, or finds out who we really are...well, I think we know the consequences of that would not be pretty, am I right?"

"You're right, Boss." Said Spokey.

"But Rattler can't even say more than a few words yet."

"You might be willing to bet your allowance on that Duchess, but it's a risk I'm not prepared to take. Okay, so where was I? Oh yeah, we'll take our positions in the queue. Then all we need is a distraction. Wheeze, when you see my signal, that's when you come in. You got your inhaler?"

"Got it Boss."

Hatter drew another cross in the sand. "While Wheeze sets up a distraction here, Duchess & I will sneak in the back and load up the goods. Spokey, you wait round the back with the getaway vehicle."

"How come Spokey gets to take all the loot?" Asked Wheeze.

"Because Spokey's the only one who can ride. Unless you've got a better plan?"

Wheeze looked down and shuffled sand between his feet.

“I didn’t think so. Okay, let’s go.”

Hatter inched forward in the queue, checking his calculator wristwatch. Three minutes to go. Timing was everything. Spokey needed to be in position ready to make a getaway with the loot.

Another customer paid and the lady in front of him reached the window. Hatter checked his watch again. Two more minutes. By now he was right in front of the truck. There was no way to know whether Spokey was in position or not. The woman in front took her order. He was counting down in his mind. There was still another minute to go.

“Are you going to move up?” Asked the boy behind him.

“I’m waiting for someone.”

“You’re holding up the queue.”

“Why don’t you go ahead?”

“Because that’s not how a system works. If everyone stood around waiting for someone else then no one would get served.”

“Okay, okay.” Hatter reached the window and pretended to read from the menu of assorted flavors on offer.

“You gonna order kid?”

“Sure.” As he answered he scanned the faces waiting in line behind him. When his eyes met with the person he was looking for, he knocked the small container of plastic spoons from the corner of the truck window.

A voice from the line screamed.

Showtime.

Hatter knelt to retrieve the spoons, exposing a view to Cold George of the line behind him. A row of heads turned toward where Wheeze was lying on the ground, his inhaler in the sand beside him.

“I think he’s having an asthma attack!”

Wheeze’s prone body was convulsing.

“Get the kid some space!” Cold George emerged from the truck and started running toward where Wheeze lay on the sand.

In the melee of confusion Hatter signalled to Duchess, and the two of them cut the line and slipped in through the open rear door of the ice-cream truck.

“Remember the plan,” said Hatter, “we’ve only got thirty seconds at best, before he finds out Wheeze is okay.”

They opened the freezer hatch, snatching as many popsicles as they could carry, then hurried back to the rear side of the truck. Spokey was ready and waiting. They piled the haul into the side carry bags of his bike and told him to go for it.

All they had to do now was get back to the sandcastle and they were home and dry. The greatest heist of their careers.

Except that's when their plan began to unravel.

Hatter started back toward the others. The game was already up for Wheeze. Cold George had already realised he wasn't really having an asthma attack. Duchess was severely slowed, having to push Ratter in his chair, and nobody figured to tell Spokey a bike is twice as hard to ride on soft sand.

Hatter made a break for it. Maybe he could still fake it if he could return to the sandcastle and make like he'd been building there the whole time. Except the encroaching tide had already beaten him to it.

Behind his shoulder the melodic chimes of Greensleeves were getting closer.

It was time to face the music.