

“What’d he mean by that?” Enoch inquired as they walked.

Romulus whispered in his ear, “He’s saying that I need to get rid of these contacts. Quickly.” He removed them from his eyes, stored them in a small container, and placed them in his pack.

“Shouldn’t we destroy them?”

“No, Enoch. I have a better plan. But, we need to make haste first. When it gets too hot, we’ll make camp somewhere.”

“Sure thing.”

They finally found a wonderful spot to make camp. They ate a bit of jerky and water, while relaxing beneath the tarp that they draped over two Joshua trees. Romulus dug a hole and carved a trap out of mesquite and ocotillo.

“Try to get some rest, Mr. Enoch. We move out at dusk.” He popped a couple of pills.

“What’s that, Mr. Doherty?”

“Got arthritis and inflammation in my neck and this bum shoulder of mines. It helps me sleep too.”

“Oh, well, get your rest, sir. Tomorrow will be the longest day of our lives.”

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“Warden Mancini; we’ve lost visual.”

“That was extremely fast. Believe that might be a record.”

“What do we do now?”

“Keep monitoring the other security cameras in that area. Hopefully, they’ll hang close to a major highway.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Cut to Gachevska’s camera.”

“Not much there either.”

“It’s better than complete darkness. Let me know if something changes.”

“Yes, warden.”

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Enoch popped up around six in the evening at the sound of buzzing.

“Mr. Doherty? Mr. Doherty, wake up! I think the Hunter has found us!”

Romulus jumped up, knife in hand. He saw nothing and no one, “I don’t see nothing, Enoch.”

“Well, what’s that buzzing?”

“It’s coming from Wally,” Romulus walked over to the mule. “It’s a cell phone.”

“Mr. Ignatius lost his phone?”

“No, it’s tucked in here pretty good. He left it for us on purpose. There’s even a message typed on here.”

“What it say?”

“Carry on my wayward son. There’ll be peace when you are done.”

“That’s beautiful.”

“That’s from a really old song, Enoch.”

“Still beautiful. Oh, look at your trap, Mr. Doherty.”

“She’s a pretty one...and big too,” Romulus held the ears of a large antelope jackrabbit, whose foot was caught in the trap. She struggled to get loose, but it only squeezed her foot tighter.

“You want me to skin her and get a fire going, Mr. Doherty? Boy, I sure wish I had a good potato ‘bout right now.”

“This rabbit ain’t for eating , Enoch.”

“What’s it for?”

“Deception. Hand me that container with the contact lenses.”

“Oh, you’re a sneaky fellow,” Enoch laughed. “I wish I could see the warden’s face when you put those contacts in that bunny’s eyes.”

“Me too, Enoch.” Once he had the jackrabbit ready, he released her into the wilderness. She lit out like a man on fire. “Time to head out.”

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“We have the contact camera back, warden.”

“Let’s go live with it.”

“Okay. But, I think something’s wrong.”

“What’s happening?”

“My guess: either Doherty got a hold of a bad batch of crack or he saw the Hunter and took off like a shot dog.”

“Well, Gaucho’s not moving any faster.”

“Maybe he hasn’t seen them, but they saw him.”

“Maybe. Look, he’s stopping.”

“What are we looking at, warden?”

“Is that fur? Dio mio.”

“What is it?”

Mancini laughed, “That crafty bastard. I gotta give it to him; that’s genius. He took those contacts and put them in some sort of animal. Never in the history of the lottery…”

“Wow. Should I cut the live feed?”

“No. Look at how the ratings have spiked. Keep it on. I’m going upstairs. Call me when you find him.”

“Yes, sir.”

∞

They traveled swiftly that night until they stopped in Leupp, Arizona around ten in the morning: Enoch with the map, Romulus with the compass. The following morning, they arrived at Indian Wells and set up camp again.

“We gotta get some horses, Enoch. We’re moving way too slow. I didn’t wanna risk exposure, but we got no choice.”

Later that evening, they snuck onto a local farm and chose out a couple of good horses.

“What we gonna do with Wally?”

“Let’s leave him here. Grab those bags. Do you see anyone out and about?”

“No, sir. Coast is clear.”

Enoch tied Wally to the fence and tiptoed behind Romulus into the stalls. They got acquainted with their beasts and led them out.

“Real quiet now, Enoch. Don’t need to get caught.”

“Yes, sir.”

They trotted outside of the fence and mounted the steeds.

“Hold it right there,” A voice called from the darkness.

“Ride, Enoch!”

They sped off on their newly acquired horses, ducking at the sound of every shot. They were followed for a while, but finally slipped pursuit. By the time they stopped, it was morning in Albuquerque.

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“Gachevska, are you there? Hello? Gaucho?”

“Don’t call me that! What the hell do you want?”

“There are reports that Romulus may have stolen horses in Indian Wells, so their pace has quickened. The victim found a mule tied to his fence. They were spotted in San Mateo not long ago. My guess is that they’re in Albuquerque now.”

“I don’t need you helping me. I hunt on my own.”

“But, I...hello? Bastard hung up on me. Are the people still watching that rabbit view, Donnie?”

“Record-breaking, sir.”

“Americans are morons. Keep it rolling.”

“Got it.”

∞

“Do you need your pills, Mr. Doherty?”

“No, Enoch. The shoulder actually feels decent. I’m gonna read my bible and write a little before I go to sleep.”

“Could you read me some? Mother used to read me the bible before I slept.”

“Any scripture in particular?”

“I’m real partial to the story of Joseph and his brothers.”

“Joseph, it is,” Romulus opened the bible to Genesis chapter thirty and read aloud until Enoch was asleep. He silently finished the story for himself, then closed the bible and his eyes for some rest. Romulus opened his eyes at the sound of whispering voices. He slid the knife from its sheath in anticipation. In a flash, the former Navy Seal rolled to his feet and stood, armed before two shadows in the sunset. “Stop right there!”

“Whoa, dude. We come in peace, brother.”

“Who are you?”

“I’m Drew...and this is my girlfriend, Victoria.”

“Hi,” she smiled. “We are such huge fans. Could we get, like, a selfie with you guys?”

“It would mean a lot to us, dude. My friend bet us that we couldn’t get a picture with you guys. We really need this, bro.”

Romulus sighed, “Real quick. But, I’m keeping the knife in my hands, in case you got any ideas.”

“Cool beans, bro. In fact, put the knife to my neck. That’ll make a killer pic.”

“Sure,” he obliged. “Enoch. Enoch, wake up. We got company.”

He leapt to his feet, “Who’s there? Who’s there?”

“Calm down, Rip Van Winkle. Just a couple of crazed fans wanting a picture with us. Get over here.”

Romulus threw his arms around Drew and Victoria with the knife close to Drew’s neck. Enoch squeezed his face in the frame as Victoria held up the phone.

“Everybody say, ‘Jubilee’,” she grinned.

“Jubilee,” they responded. She snapped two more for good measure.

“You two have a nice night,” Romulus removed his arms.

“Hold on, bro. You guys wanna blaze the yard before you go?”

“What’s that?”

“He’s asking if we want to smoke weed, Enoch.”

“But, we have to leave soon.”

“Just five minutes, brother. Victoria and me will help you load your horses. Come on, man. Just a couple of hits, dog.”

“Five minutes,” Romulus sighed.

“Rome, my man. I knew you was cool.”

They puffed and passed, Victoria excluded, until she asked a question.

“I can’t believe a cutie like you would kill your wife. Babe, what if we went to Paradise Island with them?”

“Oh yeah, Vicky. We could help protect you guys and stuff.”

“Enoch and I are good on our own. Thanks though.”

“Alright, bro. Maybe we’ll have to sell your story to the media for a spot in New Jerusalem.”

“What are you talking about, Drew?”

“A lot of people are whispering rumors of why a bunch of Navy Seals were out in the middle of the desert. Any particular reason why? Inquiring minds, you know.”

“Enoch, load the horses. These people aren’t who they say they are. It’s nice to meet you Victoria and Drew. But, we have to go now.”

“Not just yet, dude,” Drew removed a baby Glock from his waist. “Vicky, get the horses.”

“I knew we should’ve picked a gun,” Enoch muttered to himself.

“Be careful of that horse, Victoria,” Romulus warned. “He kicks.”

“But, Mr. Doherty...”

“He kicks, Enoch. Remember? Yesterday morning?”

“Oh? Oh, yeah. Be careful, Ms. Vicky.”

“We’re not buying that crap, dude.”

“Look out!”