

“Me. I can give you myself. I know everything that Mordecai knows. You won’t get anything out of Priscilla. She knows hardly anything. I keep her in the dark on most things for such occasions as these.” I continued lying. “If you release her, I shall surrender.”

There was silence on the phone, so long that I believed that he had hung up.

“Hello?”

“I’m still here, Mr. Aquila.”

“Do we have a deal?”

“Yes, we will acquiesce to those terms.”

“One condition; let me speak to my wife.”

“Alright,” there was a space of quiet until I heard a familiar voice.

“Aquila?”

“Yes, Priscilla; I’m here.”

“I’m sorry. I meant to just take a peek, not knowing they were nearby. I didn’t mean...”

“It’s alright, Priscilla. I’ve made arrangements to secure your freedom. When you get out, I want you to catch a *storm* and go to the *tower*.” It was a code that only Priscilla and I share and understand: ‘storm’, meaning bus; and ‘tower’, meaning a small café on the outskirts of Dallas, Texas, where we often ate.

“Are you going to be there?”

“Not just yet, honey.”

“You will not trade yourself for me, Aquila. You’re much too important to the cause.”

“And you’re much too important to me. It’s already done. Just follow my instructions and we shall see each other again.”

“Okay, Aquila; I will trust in you.”

“Thank you. I love you, baby.”

“I love you, too.”

“And I love you, too,” the other voice returned to the phone and laughed. “Touching reunion. Be at the old mechanic’s garage on Tallapoosa Street in one hour. When we see you, we’ll let your wife drive off in a dark blue sedan. She will blow the horn three times. You’ll be able to see her face. Once she has passed, you will approach us with your hands up. When you get in front of the ice cream shop, we want you face down on the sidewalk. Do you understand?”

“Yes. I understand.”

“Don’t get any ideas about running or our sharp shooter will take you out. One hour. If you aren’t there, we will kill her,” he hung up.

I immediately headed to my destination, uncertain of where it was. I found it, easily enough, and secured myself behind a dumpster in the alley, just in case they tried to ambush me before I saw them. When they finally appeared, they stopped about a block away. Three men and a young woman with a bag on her head departed the vehicle. A fourth man drove up in a blue sedan and joined them. They put the woman in the car and kept the key. I made my presence known by waving my arms, prepared to run if it was a ruse. Once they saw me, they gave her the key and I walked out onto the sidewalk. She drove off and immediately stopped to let me in. I waved her away, knowing they would have shot up the car or chased us down. She looked at me, understandably and drove away. I proceeded to follow their directions and descended to the sidewalk as they bombarded me. They chained my arms and legs together before throwing a burlap bag over my head. I can’t believe someone still uses burlap for anything.

We drove for quite a while when I heard one of them say they found the sedan abandoned somewhere. I knew then that Priscilla had escaped. She was smart enough to know they’d follow or track her. I imagine she made her way on foot to the bus station. When we finally stopped, they removed that hot, scratchy bag and I adjusted my eyes to the light. We were at the old state detention center in Dallas. They led me in and tossed me in an old, pee stained interrogation room that desperately needed cleaning and remodeling.



“Are you him?” I asked the only guy remaining.

“Who? Justice? Nah, we’re just the pick up crew. He’s in transit as we speak, e.t.a. of twenty minutes.”

“E.T.A.?”

“Estimated time of arrival.”

“I know what it means. I just didn’t think anyone talked that way anymore. What are you gonna do with me?”

“Justice will decide when he arrives.”

“I forgot; you bloodhounds can’t bark unless the alpha dog says so.”

“Shut your mouth before I start the interrogation without him!”

“A coward like you? Unlikely. Yeah, I imagine a guy like you can’t take a piss unless he signs an affidavit.”

He hit me in the face, “I said shut up!”

“Big man; hitting a guy in chains. I bet you’d beat your wife if you weren’t a self-loathing virgin who couldn’t find a woman if he paid for her.”

He struck me again, busting my lower lip. I just laughed. The door opened and another man entered.

“What’s going on here?”

“He keeps running his big mouth.”

“You wanna have to explain this to Justice? I didn’t think so. Get out of here.” They left.

So, now you've been caught up on *how* I ended up in this predicament. What I haven't explained is the *why*. Hold on; someone's coming. A man entered, smoking a recycled cigarette. He dropped it on the floor and stomped it out.

"You must be the *uncatchable* Aquila."

"Justice?"

"The one and only. How do you like your accommodations?"

"Other than the pee smell and the abuse? Swell. I thought it was the Ritz-Carlton, only I didn't see a mini bar or the little mint on my pillow."

"I'll make sure the boys bring you up something. Now, you know what I want and I know what you want, so let's avoid the banter and unnecessary torture that I so detest. Give me what I want."

"Which is?"

"The location of Mordecai and coordinates of your headquarters."

I laughed, "That won't be happening anytime soon."

He called someone, "Bring up a beer." He hung up. "You like beer, Mr. Aquila?"

"I could drink."

"I got one on the way. You sure you can't tell me that location?"

"Sell out my people? Never. I'm ready to die for the cause."

"I'm sure you are, but that shouldn't be necessary."

The man who had hit me reentered with what appeared to be an icy cold beer.

"Colorado, maybe? Or Nebraska?"

I laughed, "We're in Yemen...in an underground sand pit."

Justice laughed, "All this dry air. I bet you're really thirsty. You can either tell me and I'll give you the beer or you can keep your secret, but I'll still give you the beer."

"I'll keep my secret; thank you kindly."

He bashed the bottle across my forehead, knocking me silly, "There's your beer." I had pieces of glass embedded in my head and face. He pressed the biggest piece deeper into my flesh and grinded his teeth. "You think you're so smug and clever, you and 'your kind': Untrackables. I hate the whole lot of you!"

"You're the ones who violate our Constitutional rights in the amendments."

“You are in direct violation of the law, section twelve, part one of Zhang Rule. You are required to reveal the whereabouts of your fugitive accomplices.”

I spit in his face while his mouth was partially open. Some got in. He took his handkerchief and wiped his face. He would have punched me but he didn't want to cut his hand, so he kicked me instead.

“Give him the spa treatment,” he ordered his eager inferior coworker.

“The spa treatment? Yes, sir!”

Justice squatted in front of me, “The location?”

I tried to spit the blood from my mouth towards him, but it went down my shirt instead.

He stood and looked up at the security camera, nodding, "Hook him up, Epstein.”

“Yes, sir.”

Two other men entered as Justice departed. They attached wires and clips to my body, shocking me with minute amounts of electricity. The less I talked the more they increased the amps. I still didn't utter a sound. So they proceeded to dump buckets of ice water over my head, while my arms were suspended above my shoulders. It hurt worse than death, but still I said not a word.

“Give him the ‘Bird Test’,” Justice's voice came through the speaker.