

Interim

Bear had spiked the door he'd come in through into the admin building, assuming Jake would figure it out when he returned. He found the electrical room pretty quickly, and shut down the external lights. No need to advertise to the outside world, he thought, and he knew Jake could operate just fine in the dark. He left the eight cube-multiple in an equipment locker next to one of the load center panels.

After that, he explored the rest of the facility. It felt strange to walk under artificial lighting after all this time, and he could feel temperature-controlled air begin to flow from vents everywhere. He had to shut down thoughts about that and focus on what they really needed, and eventually found it.

It turned out that all the buildings except the aircraft hangers were connected by underground hallways, but he did find the armory, and the gun range. Both were located below ground-level.

His swipe card got him into the armory, and he knew that was a stroke of luck. He'd picked the right pocket, as it were. It lit within on a motion sensor as soon as he opened the door. There were racks of automatic rifles, mostly M-16s, but also a small bank of the shorter M-4s. There were many empty spaces, but plenty remained. He opened each of a series of tall cabinets, and in one found side-arms in individual cradles, predominantly 9mm but also some .45s. The rest of them held ammunition, tens of thousands of rounds in varying types, including stacks and stacks of .50 caliber belt ammo boxes. That reminded him one of his next destinations needed to be the motor-pool.

Bear looked at the destructive bounty that lay before him, and knew that he'd been right to bring them here. This was power no longer available to the rest of the world. He knew he was making an assumption about that, but also knew any decision required such underpinnings each time one was made. He also knew that overwhelming power was the only thing that would give them a chance to get what they wanted. The memory of Brin draped across the shoulder one of the retreating contingent at Garnet infuriated him. It threatened to call worse memories from under the ephemeral veil he been able to knit over what happened to Elise. It was all he could do to leave it alone. Better to forge ahead.

Pulling the armory door shut behind him, he made his way farther along under fluorescent lighting to the gun range. It was pretty straightforward, six shooting lanes fronted by the pass-through cubicles with the mid-height table bisecting each one. The paper target transport ran the length of each lane up high, from the cubicle to the earthen backstop many meters down-range. There was a single metal desk behind the shooting line, and Bear stopped, sitting down on the edge of it as he looked at the range.

He knew what he was capable of. Jake was another matter, though. It was part of Bear's plan to re-wire Jake's shooting ability, and thought that was going to be the easiest part of this. He also understood what Jake would have to invest here in the next couple of weeks. But beyond that, what he'd have to do after. What they would both have to do.

The motor-pool was probably something for tomorrow. His stomach growled, he was tired, and so he rose and headed back to the stairwell, thinking that he'd try to meet Jake when he came in.

He made his way back up to the employee entrance foyer, and sat down in the only chair in the tiny little room to wait for him.

And immediately fell asleep. Jake woke him some time later, tapping a booted foot against his shin. Bear came awake as Jake asked him,

"Let's go, old man. Someplace I can dress this?"

Jake had a small fawn draped across his shoulders, its blood still slowly migrating down across its neck onto a red stain on his t-shirt. He had one hand on the back of its neck, and the other held his bow.

Bear ran a hand across his face and beard, and stood up, blinking sleep away.

"Yeah. C'mon."

He led Jake to the kitchen attached to the mess hall, and they spent the next forty-five minutes or so making room for themselves from a culinary perspective. Jake butchered the carcass while he cleaned out one of the two industrial-sized refrigerators. It was a chore, but over a year of non-operation had helped to get everything left inside to a fairly solid, slightly less smelly version of itself. It helped that they had hot and cold running water, as well as a cold interior in the appliance itself.

Bear filled a garbage can with the leavings of both the fridge, and what remained of the little deer after Jake was done with it, and dragged it outside. He made sure the lid was securely fastened, and left it there. It was another thing to deal with in the morning.

Jake had started cooking some venison on one the big gas stoves, and the exhaust hood fans had drawn most of the remaining spoiled food smell from the fridge out of the kitchen. The glare of the fluorescents winked off of all the stainless steel surfaces.

Jake looked at him.

"This is just so *weird*, Bear."

Bear nodded, but knew he couldn't add anything. That's exactly what it was, for both of them.

They ate in silence for a bit, facing each other across one of the metal tables in the mess hall. It was clear they were both hungry, and it wasn't until they'd eaten that they would talk. As usual, Jake was first.

"Did you find what we need?"

Bear didn't make him wait. He nodded.

"I found what *you* need. But I'm not worried about the rest. It's here. I know it."

"Show me."

This was a different kind of hunger, but Bear understood it. He pushed his plate back, and stood.

"Ok. Let's go."

As they made their way from the mess hall to the stairwell, Jake asked him about something else. It gave him hope, because it meant that Jake was not just thinking about the quickest way to get back to Brin. He was also considering tactical issues.

"How visible are we? You know, with the big cube? I assume that's what you put together."

"I don't know. I shut down the base's connection to the grid. The outside lights were on, but I shut them off. The problem is I don't know the eight cube-multiple broadcast range. It could skip right past the utility box to the power-lines, and we could be sending power to whatever is around here. It's great this place isn't right in town, but there's one a couple miles down the road."

Jake was silent until they reached the armory, and Bear opened the door and ushered him in.

"Holy fuck."

He looked at the rifles for a second or two, but then looked back at Bear.

"Ok, so?"

Bear thought to inform him, and started to.

“Well, that’s an M-16. It’s more accurate, but--.

Jake interrupted him, and the look on his face was one of frustration and impatience.

“I don’t have time for this, Bear. I get what I’m here for. You choose, and then we’ll get on with it. Please.”

He felt chastised, but did understand Jake’s angst. He pulled one of the M-4s off the rack, liberated several empty magazines, and then went to one of the cabinets and added a few boxes of the correct ammunition. He carried it all to the door, and headed down the hallway to the gun range, knowing Jake was right behind him.

When they reached it, Bear set the rifle and the rest of it down on the first shooting lane table. He turned to face Jake.

“This is all you have to do here, except maybe hunt. I’ll take care of the rest until we leave. You understand?”

Jake simply nodded.

Bear showed him how to perform all the steps necessary to get to the shooting part, and then Jake got to it.