

10.00

Agnes awoke as the alarm from her watch buzzed in her ear.

She stared up into his cold grey eyes. She had become lulled by the normality of being with an old school colleague, but it had been stupid and dangerous being unconscious whilst leaving a virtual stranger in charge. The stranger lying next to her shuffled in her sleep.

“Didn’t trust me eh Agnes? Thought I’d nod off and let the bogeymen in?”

Robert whispered scathingly.

She glanced at her partially open rucksack.

“Why is my bag unfastened?”

She replied sitting up and checking through its contents.

“I was looking for food.”

He snorted.

“It’s ok to eat all mine but you’ve not given me anything in return.”

Agnes stared at his bloated face, she was aware of his dilated pupils and flushed skin.

“What happened to the rest of the biscuits?”

He tilted his head and smiled sarcastically.

“She was hungry and oh so grateful, she only had three biscuits, and it was a much better investment for less food.”

Agnes adjusted her clothes and secretly checked her gun was still strapped to her back.

“Are there others?”

Agnes asked nodding at the woman at her side. Robert glanced out of the window.

“She said not, she heard the car horn and saw the flames and followed us. She was pretty broken up about her family.”

Agnes stroked her hair.

“What’s her name?”

Robert turned surprised.

“How the hell do I know?”

He snorted. Robert’s voice seemed deeper. Agnes shivered she had been so wrong about him, he wasn’t stupid at all. Robert was playing the game; he had used her own soft left wing ideals against her, had made her feel guilty because she had thought him stupid and had used that guilt to convince her to trust him. With this new woman he was being more forceful, giving the impression of taking charge when in reality he didn’t know very much or did he? Maybe that ignorance was a lie too. Agnes moved to stand up.

“Where are you going?”

Robert snapped. Agnes felt fear shiver down her spine.

“I need to stretch my arms ok. Chill out Rob.”

She commented mocking his nickname. Something was wrong with him, he seemed edgy. He laughed suddenly.

“You watch, I really need to pee.”

Agnes nodded and pointed to an outhouse to the right, he headed in that direction. As soon as he entered, Agnes opened the door and flung her rucksack into a bush quietly closing it behind her. She bent by the side of the woman and shook her shoulders. The woman sat bolt upright and stared at her in panic.

“Listen to me, I understand you don’t know me but something is wrong, he’s planning something, we need to leave.”

The woman stared at her, struggling to get free of Agnes.

“Piss off and leave me alone, he’s said he’ll protect me, he’s said he’ll help me look for my family.”

Agnes knelt by her legs and reached out to her.

“No he won’t, I know him from college he’s reckless and selfish, please come with me.”

The woman pulled her legs into her body.

“He’s told me about you, about how you mocked him at college, bullied him, made him feel stupid.

Leave me alone you bearded freak.”

Agnes stared at her frightened face. This was all so ridiculous, faced with the fear of death most people became stupid and selfish. He had manipulated this woman with chocolate biscuits and hope. Agnes stood up and felt suddenly so very tired. She couldn’t really criticise this woman it had worked with her too.

“Please be careful I’m going to go soon.”

“Good riddance its better if it’s just us two.”

Agnes nodded and waited at the window.

Robert constantly turned his head as he closed the outhouse door. Agnes moved through the door leaving the woman alone.

“I need to pee too.”

Robert shuffled slightly.

“Just don’t be long; I think there’s something out there.”

Agnes nodded and headed to the toilet. She turned as she heard the woman begin talking, their voices were growing louder, an argument was building. Agnes returned to her rucksack and headed off up the hill. There were fewer of them the higher you went and she had to get to her next safe house before it started to get dark. The hours of daylight were so limited at this time of year it was difficult to move about; she stretched her legs out into a long stride and smiled into the silence. As time passed and the meters turned to miles she felt worried about her behaviour, was Robert really that bad, perhaps she should have stayed with them for the woman’s sake, then as the sky darkened with an impending storm she shrugged off the concerns as the views got more spectacular.

Agnes stopped at a stream and guzzled bitterly cold water. After the initial epidemic there were considerable numbers with acquired immunity but they soon succumbed to disease. They lacked the common sense to survive without any infrastructure support, with no water treatment plants, no sewage systems, no medical facilities, their sickness and subsequent weakness meant fighting was useless. The zombies soon outnumbered everyone and then before the whole system totally imploded there was talk of others, a type of zombie that had attained a level of intelligence, that could lead groups, with the ability to logically remove all trace of humanity. Fresh human meat was now a definite delicacy. The sound echoed across the valley, instinctively the hairs on her arms rose. Agnes had never heard a sound quite like it; it bounced off the walls of the valley, moving upwards towards her. She filled her bottle of water and jogged up the hill faster and faster desperate now to get inside her next safe house.

Agnes ran a quick circuit of the buildings and then checked all the doors and windows then she locked herself into one of the outlying huts. This had an underground heat source and she settled there to cook some warm food. There were still several boxes of dehydrated chili left and at the bottom she found a fruit rice pudding. Agnes removed her outer clothes and set the food to cook on the integral cooker. The eerie wail penetrated the hut; she checked the metal shutters again and then stared upwards at the glass roof. This had been used for long term animal observation, with eagles a speciality, she wondered about what she could use to block it if necessary and

suddenly without warning became calm, if they broke through the reinforced glass all she needed was her gun. A single bullet through her brain would solve the problem.

Agnes boiled some water for washing. As she slowly soaped her sponge and ran it across her skin she marvelled at how toned she was, limited calories and exercise suited her and this was one of the only places with heat and running water. Though Agnes never drank from the tap it was nice to use the endless supply of heat to get a wash, cleanliness helped the minor scratches and cuts to heal. The smell of the chili started to build and she settled back to read a book. Agnes had wanted to settle here but despite the obvious advantages the station was in clear view on all sides and a raid would mean inevitable capture.

Agnes checked the windows for the last time and settled down. She had learnt the best way to survive was to travel fast and then relax for the rest of the day. With a stomach full of good nutritious food, warmth and a book to read she felt almost content. Would she have felt better with two friends to share it with? The answer would have been undoubtedly yes, but she only had Robert and the woman, and that would have made her feel outnumbered and vulnerable. Agnes fell asleep to the thought that maybe she had survived not because of her physical agility though that was much improved, but because of her mental strength. She made a mental note that she should clean her gun when she woke and fell into a deep dreamless sleep.