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Glennon Jarachovic

Lauren Dial

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View From Pisgah Crater



Glennon
JaraChovic

Raking Clouds Lauren Dial

There was a line of broken fences all the way down the Wyoming state line. It happened after the hills let the sun roll down their slopes to rest. Ranchers scrambled to their artillery safes, stuffing rounds into their pockets and strapping rifles around their chests. Cattle bellowed. They could hear the wolves coming. Closer. Closer.

The knock on Edgar's cabin door came two minutes after the stroke of midnight. He hadn't seen any headlights through the windows. His neighbor Hal was the only person close enough to walk all the way from his own porch to Edgar's. Another yew might've been trying to give birth backwards. He slipped a pair of acid wash overalls over his nightgown. He rolled up his left pant leg.

Still for a moment, Edgar then tried to slowly close the door back, but was blocked by the hoof wedged in the door-frame. The buffalo forced its way into the cabin's entry way. It rolled its head up, letting the hickory smoke waft into its coal black nostrils. The first order of business was the smell, the second was Edgar, who was wide eyed and stumbling back to the leather couch. The bison's shoulders barely squeezed through the hallway. The floorboards groaned from the beast's incredible weight. It smelt of upturned dirt and freshly filed keratin. In fact, his hooves were completely free of grime. There was a polished gleam that reflected the stray embers from the firewood.

So it was owned, or that's what Edgar assumed. Someone's stray bison must have escaped, seeking refuge in the warmest place it could find. The cold had just begun to sit on the land. Soon the area would be nothing but a white blanket

for miles on end.

Screws jingled as he attached the prosthetic. He put the lid over the fireplace, unable to monitor the flames if he was going to be out in a pasture with his fist crammed inside a sheep's cervix. Out came the yellow rubber gloves stashed in a kitchen cabinet and into the front pocket they went. The pair was greeted by the flashlight snatched off the coat hanger. The chest pouch bulged with supplies, and his single rain boot squeaked across the wooden floor.

He opened the door-

It was not Hal.

He would have to coax the creature out slowly, easier said than done. There was a sack of deer corn under the porch, but it was unclear if a couple of dry kernels could persuade the buffalo away from the warmth of the cabin. He also didn't want to make any sudden movements, for fear of facing the wrath of a one ton boulder made of muscle. He had felt the crushing pain of being underneath an angus steer. He had no intention of finding out the comparisons and contrasts of being crushed twice. In his expert opinion, once was enough.

"Do you have a phone?" the buffalo asked.

Edgar's eyes bulged, threatening to pop out and tumble across the floor. He raked the bangs out of his face. It left more sweat on his fingers than he predicted. Mustering up his will once more, he finally nodded. "T-there's a wall phone in the kitchen."

The buffalo lumbered to the wall. He knocked the receiver off, the curling cord bouncing, the speaker ringing. His long, pink tongue touched each number so precisely, as if he had memorized it before knocking, knocking, on the door.

It rang twice before a muffled voice answered on the other end of the line. The beast replied in a similar quiet tone, the most Edgar could hear was the deep thunder rocking inside its broad chest. When the conversation reached an end, the creature grabbed the phone by its mouth and hung it back in place.

"Sorry for the intrusion," the buffalo said.

"It was an urgent call."

"That's... fine." Edgar tapped his fingers on the armrest. "Do you uh, want anything to eat?"

"No. I should be gone in a few moments. Water would be nice."

Edgar cleared his throat. "I have-"

"Questions?"

"Lots."

"Then trying to be brief will certainly not suffice."

"W-well I don't want to keep you longer than you'd like."

"Hmm." His tongue scooped the water out like a ladle. He pushed the empty cup back across the counter with his nose.

"So."

Sniff.

"Where- where are you headed?"

"Westward down."

"Westward down?"

The buffalo's head rocked back and forth. "We've gathered enough numbers to carry the rains again." He noticed how Edgar stayed quiet, brows furrowed. "The Chihuahuan is too dry." "It's a desert."

"It doesn't have to be."

"Well. You're gonna' need a lot more than a glass of water to irrigate an entire desert."

The buffalo did not change its expression. He looked toward the cuckoo clock, watching the second hand flicker at the pace of a heartbeat.

"Can you read that? The clock?" Edgar asked.

"It is the sun's language."

"The sun's language..."

"The sun pushes down the arrow's shadow."

"That it does. That it does."

"Do you have a hat?"

"Uh, what kind of hat?"

"Any will do." The buffalo stepped back into the living room. It positioned its rump toward the cage of fire. Its eyes followed Edgar as he made his way down the hallway to the master chambers. Before rummaging through the closet, he made his way to the bath and turned on the faucet. He dunked his head into the cold water. Red blood rushed into his cheeks. Five minutes ago, he had mentally prepared himself to soon be covered in amniotic lamb fluids. He had not thought about watching a bison from Yellowstone giving tongue to his wall phone.

His face was flushed, but not of a drunken demeanor. There was no redness in his eyes, though his eyes were dilated to pinpricks.

After shutting off the sink, the rough surface of a towel rung through the dryer a good hundred times met his forehead. A shout found its way into his throat, but was it even worth it? The closest person that would hear would be Hal and well, clearly Hal was somewhere else tonight.

Most of the closet was just half pairs of shoes and modified pants. Edgar did not have a great collection of headgear. Those he had were mostly gifted or lended. In fact, the red velvet box on the forth shelf was from his grandfather's will. He had been a member of the Knights of Columbus. Edgar didn't get to keep his sword, a strange part of the uniform for a religious organization that condemned Cain for using violence against Able. However, he did get to keep the ostrich plume hat, the feather a bright artificial purple.

He carried the box back into the living room.

The buffalo was still there.

He sighed and pulled the chapeau out.

"Will this work?"

"It exceeds my expectations. Do you care about parting with it for a short time?"

The bison seemed oblivious to the thick mask of dust over the box. "I think I'll survive." Edgar set the hat atop his creature's head, fluffing out the feathers to look presentable. "What's the occasion for?"

"The messengers need a good first impression."

"The messengers?"

"The messengers. The, the..." the buffalo closed its eyes and clicked the roof of its mouth, letting the word come to him. "The press."

"Why would you care about the press?"

"Would a person be more likely to kill a buffalo with nothing on, or one with a hat?"

"I've never really thought about the intricacies of bison wearing hats to prevent their own demise."

"It appears to be only a concern to us."

"Seems so."

"Why do you love the desert so much?"

"I don't."

"Then you must hate the rain."

"I'm indifferent to the rain."

"We carry the rain, you know."

Edgar could've said rain came from the sun. He could've told him how the particles would rise, cluster, and fall where the sky took them. Instead, the buffalo went on to explain how weather worked without the water cycle.

"We have feathers on our hooves. When we run, we make the melody of thunder. Thunder is the love language of the wind. It follows us in waves of dust. Higher and higher, the waves become thinner, sharper. These knives cut through the skies. Blue. The blue dribbles down the spires. The color blue is the rain. We have to rake it from the sky."

"That sounds like a big job to do."

"It's one I haven't been able to perform to the full extent."

"Well, it's not really your fault. The world changed."

"Very quickly. Very quickly." The bison rolled its neck to the window. A drizzle of stray snowflakes landed on the glass. "I should be going now. I will return your hat when the leaves fall again."

"You can keep the hat."

"No."

"Oh."

The bison stepped out onto the porch. The feathers of the cap whipped and curled around his horns. The wind blew against his mane, each hair flowing like a dark river. As the real lakes began to freeze, the running water of the bison's fur became a constant current. He turned back one last time to Edgar.

"Thank you for your time."

Hundreds of heads peered from the evergreen. A sea of thick pelts curled around the cabin. They headed north, at the start a beast wearing a catholic medal. A new crusade.

The farmers dropped their guns. The wolves fled on their heels, their howls drowned underneath the approaching thunder.