

Storyboard-18

The black market clinic Johnathan operates out of is a free clinic located on North Cave Creek, on the Mountain Village side, of that and Paradise Valley Village division. Being located in one of the poorer area of Phoenix, no one questions its presence. This close to one of the wealthiest area means his clients can stay in the luxury they are accustomed to while recuperating. Johnathan must arrange transportation to and from in a vehicle that both is inconspicuous for the area and of a level the clients will stand. As a paramedic, he will have access to a database of ambulance. He might even borrow one without raising suspicion, ensuring even that part cannot be traced back to him.

“There’s no way they go in the front,” Alex comments as we drive by the clinic. “They’d draw too much attention.”

It matches the surrounding. An old building of worn bricks with signs of recent and imperfect repairs. The parking lot is shared with the building next to it. A used automotive parts store. There is only one car is it, Johnathan’s. The clinic’s windows have a variety of posters giving general health advice.

A large sign on the door indicates the clinic is closed.

The side road angles to the back, but the view of the clinic is obscured by another business. A seller of electrical engines for cars. To get close to the clinic requires using the lane on the side that turns behind and between the two building. All I see of the clinic is a delivery dock with raiser for a vehicle’s back door to be level.

“The converted dock is how the ambulance will come and go.”

Alex cranes his neck. “Is it how we get in?”

“Do you have the blueprint?”

“I’m good.” He shows me his phone. “But I’m not that good.”

This is why we should have waited; planned. “The dock means this used to be a store of some sort. There will be a door along it, but Johnathan will know to expect us to come through there. The front is also out of the question, as it’s too visible.”

“You don’t think Wagler left it unlocked and rolled out the red carpet for us?”

“That would imply he expects us that way also, which means we don’t was to use it then.”

“There’s a door on the left side. Probable for employees.” He’s looking at his phone. He grins at me and shows me what he’s looking at. “I told you I’m good.”

The picture is of the used automotive parts store, but taken by an amateur, poorly framed and showing much of the space between the two. There’s a three star review attached to the picture with text I don’t pay attention to. I don’t see the door he mentions in the glance I can afford.

“How far back?”

“Can’t be sure. More to the back than the front.”

Back on Cave Creek, I pay attention to the exposed side. The door there is halfway. It doesn’t have handle, but the hinges’ pins are exposed.

“I didn’t see any cameras,” Alex points out. “You’d think a medical clinic of any kind would have that basic level of security.”

“Johnathan’s clients wouldn’t want any chances of being placed here. He can justify the absence as having been broken by vandals. In this neighborhood, it will be plausible.”

Four access, two that Johnathan has to cover because they are our likely entry points, one that he must keep in mind as a possibility and one that he might have written off as inaccessible. It’s more exposed, but not fully. With Alex keeping watch, I can breach it.

I park three blocks away and we use alleys and back street to make our way to the clinic. I make a stop at the recycling center, jump the fence and acquire a crowbar. Exposed hinges on commercial doors have their pins welded to prevent a thief from popping it out the way they can on most residential doors. It is mostly effective, since it would require tools to cut; tools I would have if we had taken the time to plan the assault. But welds are never as strong as an unbroken bar. The proper amount of strength can undo it.

The proper amount of brute strength can undo most things.

Alex stands against the wall looking, for any paying attention, like a worker taking a break. The gap between the head of the pin and hinge is small, but the crowbar is good quality, its end still thin. When he nods, I jam it in place and apply brute strength.

It’s snaps off with too loud a sound. I catch it and wait. The clinic is large and will have multiple rooms. Each one provides a layer of sound insulation. The odds of Johnathan paying attention to this door are low.

But they are not zero.

I give him five minutes to react. To check the door or send someone around to see what made the sound. When nothing happens in that time, I nod to Alex and prepare myself. He gives me the all clear and I pop the second pin.

Another five minutes without Johnathan reacting. Trying to lull me into a false sense of security? Or truly not aware of my capabilities? He is cunning enough for the first, but how much time has he spent surveilling me? What can he have seen beyond what I gave away tailing him and breaking into his house? Alex gives me the all clear again and the third pin gives after only a little more resistance.

Again, no reaction from inside the building as I take the pins out of the hinges.

Boxes react and I’m concerned. Johnathan is too smart to believe I can’t find a way in. This is a ploy. We need to leave now before he—

I still the boxes, bring my paranoia under control.

The crowbar goes into the gap between the door, and the jam, and I carefully force away. When I can see inside, I pause and ready myself for an attack... that doesn’t come. The other side is dark. Ideal to lie in wait. I pull it away and light reveals a utility room. Panels and analog dials and counters. Electrical and gas.

I rest the door against the wall, then Alex offers me a gun. It’s too large for his hand.

“Where did you keep it?” I pull the slide, check the chamber. Look for the serial number.

“In my car, I remembered to bring it when we changed.” He opens his jacket to show the large gun pocket there. “I know you said no guns, but I don’t think there’s any danger of anyone out here hearing what’s going to take place in there.” He looks at the Desert Eagle. “Okay, maybe they’ll hear that, but what are the odds they’ll call the cops in this neighborhood?”

“Not zero.”

He shrugs. I step in and press my ear to the other door. No sounds. Not even that of someone moving about. Johnathan should have people patrolling the clinic in case I found a way in he hadn't considered. I crack it open. The corridor is well lit, two doors on the left and right and one at the end.

No one.

I check the rooms on the left, Alex the ones on the right. Empty examination rooms. He shakes his head both times. His also have no one waiting to spring a trap on us. He raises an eyebrow in a silent question I can't answer. I don't know where Johnathan's people are. Why he isn't covering every possible approach?

Listening to the last door, sounds of the road are louder than I expect. While central, the room on the other side reaches the front of the building. If the free clinic aspect is more than a lifeless facade, a large triage section will be vital. This door also isn't locked.

Fading daylight illuminates the little I see through the gap. Rows of chairs, a runner marks the path from the door to the reception desk, which is out of side on the opposite of where the light comes; the front of the clinic.

I step in and sweep the room. Johnathan leans back against the reception counter, and the only thing stopping me from shooting him is the utter lack of anyone else there. He smiles as I motion Alex to check the door opposite ours, while I step to the large window, keeping my gun aimed at him.

“I really wanted to believe we could coexist, you know.” He's too relaxed. “I mean, I don't know you all that well, but you two manage to make it work, and it's not like I was asking to move in with you.”

A glance outside shows that nothing has changed. His car is the only one there. If there is someone among the pedestrians with orders to intervene, they are too far to save him.

“But something told me it wasn't going to work. It's the way we went about learning everything about our neighbors. You need control, right? You have to be the one in control, and here I was, someone who had already outsmarted you once. You couldn't let me be.”

Alex gives me a shake of the head.

“Oh relax. It's just the three of us. I wanted us to be able to talk before you did—”

The detonation of the Desert Eagle is loud, but Johnathan has already thrown himself behind the counter. I wait for a sign of where he is behind it. It comes in the form of him popping up at the left end. Before I adjust my aim, I make out he's holding a gun. I don't recognize the model, but Johnathan is going for a center-of-mass shot.

I move as he presses the trigger. There is no gunshot, but something hits my left pectoral. I reach for the injury as Alex empties his magazine in the counter. I pull the dart out and frown.

“You're still standing?” Johnathan asks in the silence of Alex reloading.

I raise the Desert eagle, but it wavers. I don't shoot, it's going to be a waste of a bullet. I grab the chair closest to me and throw it, along with the three others attached to it. Johnathan's surprised expression vanishes as he drops and the chairs take off the cheap counter top. Alex fires again as Johnathan jumps over the counter, tranquilize gun aimed at

him and runs. The dart misses Alex as the Beretta clicks empty. Alex reaches in a pocket, and when his hand comes away empty, I reach behind my back before the worry reaches his face.

“Alex.” My voice is slurred as I will myself to remain conscious. The lob of the Ka-Bar 2211 is sloppy. He’s going to have to reach for it if he is going to defend himself. Johnathan has discarded the empty tranquilizer and pulled a scalpel from the inside of his suit jacket.

I see the fear on Alex’s face as he realizes what is heading in his general direction. As I worry he will give into it, it morphs into determination and with a motion too fluid to be possible, he catches it by the pommel, the smile already forming on his lips.