

Never Stop Running

INT. PRISON CELL - DAY

Four steel walls enclose MASON, (32) in drab prison wear, as he sits on his rack. A slim beam of light from the lone, meager window shines along the crack of the solid cell door.

He snacks from a small silver packet. Empty packets are thrown in the corner.

His jacket hangs off the end of a pneumatic tube that runs down from the ceiling. A humming sound accompanies a canister which is delivered through the tube.

Mason stands, alarmed. He walks toward the tube. Grinding gears shriek out and his cell door opens just a crack.

He turns to the tiny window, looking past the back lit picture wedged in its molding, to the

EXT. MOUNTAINS - DAY

The last moments of daylight splinter over the jagged horizon. A stiff wind blows through the forest of oak. From a small

CAVE

MASON, now soiled and scruffy, pokes his head out and scans the landscape. He checks his watch, surface scratched almost illegible: 8:32.

He sticks his hand out of the narrow opening, wiping away leaves to find a thermometer. Reading it, he sighs.

MASON

Let's give it twenty.

EXT. MOUNTAINS - NIGHT

Mason pulls a canvas sack out of the cave and throws it over his shoulder. A patch with numbers is sewn onto his left breast pocket.

Grabbing his walking stick resting against a boulder, he stabs at the ground in front of his feet.

Rusty metal teeth clamp to it, sending leaves flurrying into the air.

He pries his stick out, picks up the bear trap, and walks towards the woods.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Stars peer down through the cloud and foliage ceiling. Mason walks with purpose towards a tree with knots like knuckles.

He takes a map and compass out of his bag. He determines south and looks off into the distance. A few hundred yards away he spots a rock similar to a face.

Marking the map, he continues on his way.

EXT. STREAM - NIGHT

A water bottle collects from the stream. Mason lifts it to his lips.

He bends over to collect more. The moon's reflection in the water is obscured by a cloud. The wind blows it away, revealing a silhouette of a MAN.

Mason slowly reaches into his pants' cargo pocket pulling out a corroded chef's knife.

He turns, lunging. His parry is swatted aside. A boot clobbers him in the chin.

His blade falls into the flowing stream. He latches onto the man's leg, twisting it, sending him to the ground.

Mason wraps his arm around the man's neck.

MAN

Wait! Wait!

The man pulls back his jacket showing a patch with numbers.

MAN

I'm one of you.

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Mason and the man, GERALD, (38) extremely worn looking, huddle around a small fire. Gerald holds a stick with his boots tied to it over the fire.

GERALD

You moved so slow. You know? Like them cold blooded jokers. You can see how I --

MASON  
I understand.

GERALD  
Don't run into many people. Where  
you from?

MASON  
Upstate.

GERALD  
Son, your in the Appalachians.  
There's a lot of upstate.

MASON  
Sing Sing.

GERALD  
That is upstate. Kinda going in the  
wrong direction if you ask me.  
Shouldn't you be headed towards the  
border?

MASON  
I know some people.

Gerald eyes him. Mason looks at his watch.

MASON  
Should kill this fire. Want to get  
some distance before the sun rises.

GERALD  
Yeah. Good idea. You, uh, mind if I  
tag along? Nice to have some  
company.

MASON  
I thought you said I was headed the  
wrong way.

GERALD  
I've been going in circles for  
months now. Could use some company.

MASON  
Suit yourself...

GERALD  
Gerald.

MASON  
Good to meet you Gerald. I'm Mason.

INT. CAVE - DAY

Mason wakes in the cramped space and sees Gerald's empty blanket. He follows the faint light towards the cave's mouth.

Gerald sits, staring out. The cave is dug into the side of a bluff.

GERALD  
They're out there.

Any of Mason's drowsy residue is wiped away.

MASON  
Where?

GERALD  
The valley below. Been there for an hour or so. Don't think they're here for us. Just searching.

Mason lets out a sigh of relief.

GERALD  
Still, we should keep an eye on them. Keep track of which way they clear out. Do you mind?

MASON  
Uh, yeah, sure. I got this.

Gerald scurries towards the back of the cave leaving Mason as the sentry.

MASON  
Hey Gerald. Why were you locked up?

GERALD  
Pretty much the same reasons I'm still alive today.

Slinking out of sight, Gerald carefully unfastens the straps on Mason's bag. He ignites a zippo.

He rummages through, finding extra socks, a shirt, and knit cap. Digging more, he feels paper. He extracts it: the map.

GERALD  
(to himself)  
Well looky at this.

Unfolding it, a photo falls out. Mason picks it up.

It's of an attractive woman with a young boy. Neither are smiling. The background is of queues and military police.

Looking at the map, Gerald spots a long line moving south with a drawn-in red star below it.

Gerald, carefully stuffing the map and photo back in, feels another piece of paper. He takes it out to read it.

The small print is obscure but the headline: PAROLED.

GERALD  
Sonnuvabitch.

EXT. MOUNTAIN BRUSH - NIGHT

The two men walk single file: Gerald then Mason.

GERALD  
Everyone's screaming. People just ripping each other to shreds. The kind of riot you only see in movies and the guards left a long time ago. Now I knew if I don't bear down, I'm gonna be on the bottom of a pile... or worse. So I climb. And boy, you can wrap whatever you want around your mitts, leather, burlap, what-have-you. It don't matter.

Gerald displays his thrashed hands over his shoulder. Mason looks, wincing.

GERALD  
Hey. Consider the alternative. Safer out here than in there, right? So what about you? When'd you break?

MASON  
Week ago. Maybe more.

GERALD  
Don't bother to elaborate, son.

MASON

Not much to tell. I was in. I broke out.

Gerald stops. Mason keeps walking, then turns around.

GERALD

Where we going, Mason? I mean, we've been walking some pretty straight fine lines. Must be somewhere good.

MASON

I told you. I know some people. In a settlement. It'll be safe for us.

GERALD

Whoever you know, they ain't there anymore. No one's anywhere anymore.

MASON

They'll be there. Then we can stop running.

GERALD

You never stop running. You stop, you're dead.

EXT. WOODS - LATER - NIGHT

Gerald revels in his own voice in front as Mason slyly consults his map. The line almost touches the red star now.

GERALD

Girls and booze. No law fifty U.S. couldn't handle. Man, Mexico used to be great.

MASON

We should camp.

GERALD

Now. It's only, what, 4:30?

MASON

I saw some tracks. Rabbit. Could make a nice dinner.

Gerald looks at him uneasy, then smiles.

GERALD

Rabbit does sound nice. Lend me  
your walking stick.

MASON

Huh?

GERALD

My doggies are killing me and you  
don't need a stick for tracking  
rabbit. While you do that, I'll  
look for shelter.

MASON

Sure.

Mason gives the stick then turns to leave.

GERALD

Oh, and Mason.

Mason turns to be belted in the jaw with the stick. Gerald  
continues to pummel him.

GERALD

Why didn't you tell me you were  
paroled?

Jaw broken, Mason pleads with his hands. Gerald rejects it  
by dropping a knee into Mason's gut.

GERALD

Slipped your mind? Or maybe the  
fact that when parolees' cells open  
they get assigned a safety bunker.  
If they can make it there, that is.  
I'm guessing the bunker is...

Gerald rips the map out of Mason's bag; points to the star.

GERALD

...here. What's the code?

Gerald rummages through Mason's pockets.

GERALD

Can't get into your assigned bunker  
without a code, right? One entry  
per code, right? Gonna leave me to  
the animals, were you? And here I  
thought we was friends.

He can't find it. He slams his fists into Mason's chest. Stopping to catch his breath he notices that Mason's patch has dog eared. It's been newly sewn on top of another.

GERALD  
Sonnuvabitch.

He tears it off and gets up grinning. Mason, groaning, writhes towards him.

GERALD  
Where you going, champ?

Gerald unties the bear trap from the Mason's pack and sets it open on the ground.

He grabs Mason's leg and holds it over the trap.

GERALD  
This might hurt a little.

He thrusts Mason's leg into the trap. It bites down hard into his ankle. Mason's scream echoes through the forest.

GERALD  
I'd pipe down if I was you. Sun'll  
be breakin' in an hour or so and  
you don't want them to hear you.

The pain overcomes and Mason drifts into unconsciousness.

EXT. CLEARING - NIGHT

A small shack sits with the purple hint of day ascending.

Gerald, in some bushes at the clearing's edge, looks at the map's red star, then at the shack.

GERALD  
Little bit of a fixer upper.

He scampers to the building. A small American flag is etched into the wood at the door frame. He opens the door, much heavier than a simple wooden door and steps

INSIDE THE SHACK

to find steel walls. Hydraulics shut the door. Two footprints light up on the ground. Gerald steps on them and a section of floor slides away revealing a hatch.

GERALD  
Very James Bond.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Dawn causes Mason to stir. His eyelids open, breaking a caked layer of blood. He begins to roll, then feels the pain of the bear trap.

He looks down at the mess that is his leg. Trying to pry it open, his fingers slip from the wound's blood.

A rustling sound in the bushes puts in a sense of urgency.

With all his remaining strength he opens it and slides his foot out; the trap clamping shut when his leg is clear.

Mason drags himself into nearby bushes and collapses.

INT. SHACK - DAY

Gerald, patch in hand, puts the code into the hatch's entry panel.

With the last number comes the sound of releasing air. It opens revealing a ten foot tube with a ladder. Lights flicker on at the bottom.

The entry panel flashes a countdown: 10, 9, 8.

Gerald climbs inside the hatch. Countdown complete, it closes. Gerald tests the hatch door but it's locked. He climbs down.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

The sound of cracking leaves draws forward. Mason, in the bush, can't see much, but he can see...

A FOOT. A gray, veiny foot steps into his view and stops.

The body it's attached to sniffs the air. It drops to the ground. Mason can somewhat make out it grabbing the bear trap and licking the blood on it.

Sniffing again, the body turns towards Mason's bush.

INT. HATCH

Reaching the bottom, Gerald finds an air tight door with a small window. He looks through seeing no activity.

He turns the door's handwheel and it unlocks.

INT. HATCH - HALLWAY

He steps inside, foot landing in an inch of standing water. Cautiously advancing, he spots a shoeed foot hanging out from around a corner. He approaches.

GERALD

Hey, chief. What the hell is --

Turning the corner, he finds the foot belongs to half a body. Mangled in two, remnants of the other half lie scattered around.

GERALD

Holy shit!

He runs back into the main hall. Looking at its end, he sees two double doors fly open.

Grey, emaciated, manic ZOMBIES flood towards him. Through the double doors, he can see a section of collapsed ceiling where more zombies dive in.

He runs for the

HATCH

and locks himself in, using all his strength to hold the handwheel shut. The zombies on the other side ram against the door in a frenzy, their blood gradually smearing across the small window.

The banging of their bodies echo in the small space. Trapped in this cell, Gerald screams. The zombies howl in favor.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Mason's zombie inches forward, sniffing the air and flickering its tongue. Mason screams barely contained by his broken jaw.

Just as it's about to reach into the bush, the zombie hears the howling. It stands alert and Mason gets a good view.

Streams of dried blood trail down it's gray, scarred chest from its lipless mouth. It cries to the zombie call and sprints off.

Mason finally breathes again.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Foot wrapped in a spare shirt, Mason rests against a rock, his photo in hand. With a tear in his eye, he kisses it and puts it back in his pocket.

He pulls out his compass and finds north. Propping himself up with his walking stick he heads off into the dark forest.

THE END