

The car is a Shelby Mustang I have kept track of as a potential replacement for the Chevelle. It was built in nineteen seventy-three. Its advantage is that it predates the introduction of computers into everything and is a classic, so no collector will add a car alarm to it. I can easily pick the locks and start it with what I have on me. The downside is that it is currently in the garage of such a collector and it has the best in security, all the way to a guard controlling who steps onto the property.

With Edwardo Aleman in police custody, however we get our hands on him will result with us being pursued. When that happens, I want a powerful car under my control.

Alex is at the rental property, gathering intelligence from the police computers about Aleman, his story and what they intend to do with him. The most likely one is the one that is true. Someone is looking to kill him and he needs protection. That will mean moving him to a secure location, as per what the Phoenix police department considers secure. Once in their computers, Alex will be able to control where that is.

The extent of the security at the entrance of the garage is also its flaw.

The guard.

A stop at a costume shop lets me look the part. Knowing who owns it and having researched them and how they work and do business, let me fabricate the documents to support what I'm there, and adopt the persona that will let me get in.

The guard steps outside the booths as I pull up to it and I stop.

"Can I help you?" he asks before bothering to look through the window.

"I'm with Olgot Automotive," I reply, giving myself traces of a Texan accent. "Got a reclamation for me to look over a..." I take the tablet that leans against the toolbox on the passenger seat and read. "A seventy Road Runner." I gave him a slightly confused look. "That's a car, right? I thought it was a bird."

The guard eyes my overalls, doesn't question the driving gloves, looks at the toolbox, then motions for the tablet. I hand it over. He taps through the pages, looking for telltale signs they are forgeries. Unfortunately, Asyr built them a few years ago, when I became aware of the Shelby and made the plans to acquire it. They even rebuilt Olgot's website in case he taps the link. The contact number will put him in contact with someone who has all the needed information to pass herself off as an Olgot representative with all the information needed to support my claim.

I had to arrange for them on my own. Asyr doesn't do 'people'. But I pay her extremely well to always be ready and I sent the information before I left Alex. The call is unlikely, but there in case the guard hasn't grown tired of the unexpected mechanic showing up to work on one of the many cars kept here.

The collection's owner is not someone who cares to keep his underling apprised of what he does. So Tristan is not the first such visit this guard will have to deal with. A call to the owner is also unlikely. If the guard hasn't been warned against disturbing the owner, the first time would have been sufficiently traumatic to ensure it didn't happen a second time.

The hesitation is visible on his face, as is resignation. He hands the tablet back, had me sign in, then instructs me to only touch the car I have been instructed to do maintenance on, then he gives me a one time code to open the building's entrance, and he lets me onto the property.

Inside it is one large, impeccably clean room with thirty-three collector models in

perfect working conditions. The Shelby is next to the Superbird. Unlocking it is simple as it doesn't cause enough of a shift in the car's weight to trigger the sensor it rests on. A cord down the gas tank tells me it has a quarter tank, put in as part of its maintenance check four months ago. Adding more will shift the weight sufficiently to trigger the alarm.

At the back is the loading dock through which new cars are delivered. Unlocking that is a more time consuming, but the build of its security, like most security systems, is to prevent entry, not exist. The one thing I don't have is a way to silence the alarm once I have to rolling up.

I run to the Shelby, get in and reach under the steering wheel, finding the right wires by feel and starting it. Then I'm rolling, accelerating, and out of the building. Unfortunately, the only way off the property is through the gate, but I can clean up the scratches driving through leaves on its surface.

The guard is on the phone, calling the police, or possibly the owner. This may be a call he feels is warranted. Regardless, it will take time for anyone to react. More so because the owner will be confident the tracker he installed on everyone of his cars will lead to a quick recovery.

I activate the jammer.

This, and the fact this Shelby is a simple black, will ensure I make it to the rental without problem.

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Once inside the rental's garage, it takes only three minutes to locate, remove, and disable the tracker.

Then I'm inside the house, to a worrisome sight.

Alex paces the kitchen. The military laptop in surrounded by cups. A cannister of grounds is by the coffee machine.

I quiet the boxes his blatant disobedience triggers. The worry on his face isn't because he left evidence of what he did.

"This just got fucking complicated," he tells me. "The bastard didn't just ask for protection. He fucking handed himself over to the police as material witness."

"To what?"

"What do you think? The whole fucking trafficking ring."

"Alex, that makes no sense. Edwardo Aleman wouldn't turn himself over just to be safe from us. The crimes his is responsible for would earn him the death penalty."

"Only if it's him they find responsible for. But that's not the problem. Because of what he told them, the cops escalated this to the federal level. You have any idea the kind of security on the FBI's computers?"

I grab his shoulders and force him still. "Alex. You are not making much sense. Start from the beginning. Of what you found," I add, as he opens his mouth. No matter how serious the situation is, there is always a chance he will go for irreverence.

"I hacked into the police department. It was easy. Those guys really aren't trying very hard. Then it was just a question of finding the interview, since the reports hadn't been finished then. And he spilled the beans about discovering that his company had been used to finance crimes. He was smart enough not to give details, but he had documentations. Enough that I don't think we caused him to prepare them. This was something he setup a

long time ago.”

I nod. “Edwardo Aleman was careful in how he established himself as a respectable businessman. Any contact with the criminal side of his business will be obfuscated, as indicated by how difficult his link to Juan Manuel Fernan was to find. Having a way to shift blame will be part of his strategy.”

“Yeah, well. Human trafficking isn’t a local problem. It’s a federal one.”

“Hence your comment about the FBI being involved. What will they do?”

“I don’t know.”

“Haven’t you hacked their servers?”

“With that?” he points to the laptop on the table.

“This is you, Alex. You are a master at this.”

I see the rebuke form and be discarded. His breathing slows as he thinks.

“Okay, yes, I can probably get in there with that thing, but it doesn’t have anything like what I’d need to do that in time for the information I get to still be useful, or make sure I’m not caught in the process.”

“What do you need to ensure this goes smoothly?”

“My rig,” he snaps.

“That can’t be built in time.”

He sighs. “If I have to take a second best, I know what it’ll be.” He smiled. “And fortunately, they’re already used to me being there after the office has closed.”

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