Hear Him Roar

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THE RESCUE

Luckily, Don took me seriously when I was threatening to throw a wrench in the works of Cliff Carter’s scheme. If he hadn’t, I wouldn’t be here. The idea of keeping an eye on me came to him at the end of the day, he later explained to me, after he’d dropped me off at the zoo parking lot and started to head home. He was halfway home when his misgivings got the better of him and he decided to turn around and come looking for me. I’d worried him with the corrosive comments I’d been making since breakfast, the odd way I’d been behaving. Also my stomach troubles weighed on his mind.

So he drives back to the zoo parking lot, sees my car there, and decides to wait a while to see if I return. He parks around the corner, not knowing I’m in my car, lying down in the backseat. He waits half an hour or so. Next thing he knows my car is moving. He never saw me get in the vehicle but now I’m behind the wheel, going somewhere. He follows me down to the river access road, where I park outside the locked gate. Then he takes off on foot after me, not needing to follow too close because he knows where I’m headed. He didn’t intend to catch me red-handed or even to stop me. It seems I’d managed to shake his faith in Carter pretty badly. Enough that he couldn’t convince himself what I was up to was wrong.

Good thing he was following me, and good thing I’d given him the EnCompass Kyle had given me. When that cougar started to scream, Don assumed, like I did, that the animal was already trapped. He saw me leave the road and figured I planned to free it. His idea was to overtake me and talk me out of it before I could
begin the job. So it came as a surprise to us both that the animal was still loose.

Not that he ever saw the cat. He was too far behind me to witness the big showdown. Still, the noise I made came through to him loud and clear. When I asked him about it, saying it was the last thing I could remember, he got very uncomfortable. He shook his head, looking like he might say something, but in the end he just released a big puff of air.

By the time he reached the clearing the mountain lion was gone, driven off it seems by my gruesome bellowing. I was lying in a heap on the ground, unscratched, but also unconscious and bleeding internally through the hole that chose this moment to bore clean through my stomach wall and unleash major havoc in my guts. Cleverly, Don activated the emergency signal on my EnCompass. This set off all kinds of bells and whistles on the PNS of everyone in our Clan Plan, and notified various authorities of my exact position on the grid. Like a hero, Don then hoisted me over his shoulder and carried me out to the gravel road. Don is mighty, but not too fit. When the paramedics arrived it took them a few minutes to figure out which of us was the patient.

He shared all this with me the second time he visited the hospital. The first time was shortly after my surgery, and I was so looped on pain drugs I could barely say hello. I do remember seeing his enormous head hovering nearby, framed and backlit by the window of the hospital room.

Of course things began to clarify after a couple of days, but it took quite a while to sort it all out. First I had to get over the disappointment of finding myself alive. This I seemed to view as some sort of failure, mission unaccomplished. Before long disappointment gave way to elation, the kind of giddy disbelieving amazement of a kid who finds himself locked overnight in an ice cream factory. But that too ended. Life, relentless and real, re-absorbed me eventually—it closed in all around me just as the new tissues did, growing tough and tender where the surgeons had opened my hide.