

(Every character depicted in the story below is a consenting legal adult over the age of 18)

A/N: V does the 'right' thing.

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... It was certainly tempting to try and convince Panam to leave Saul to his fate. After all, from what V knew, the man had only brought this on himself, going out with a small patrol and getting those Aldecaldos with him killed when the Wraiths took advantage of the far too juicy target that he represented.

Having been the one to all but kick Panam out of the Nomad Clan on top of that, essentially exiling her to Night City and cutting her off from her family all because she didn't agree with selling out to Corps... well, it certainly didn't leave a good impression.

Technically, V knew that Saul could be talked around eventually. If they continued down the same path as the first time around, the man would eventually recognize Panam for the asset she was and not just bring her back into the clan but promote her to coleader for good measure. He would also give up his current idiotic plans and the Aldecaldos would be better off for it.

But at the same time, Panam's connection to the Nomads, to her family... it would always keep her at a distance from V. Especially since he couldn't bring himself to join her and the Nomads on their travels, not when he had become King of the Afterlife and the Living Legend of Night City. Not when he'd acquired everything he'd always dreamed of, even if it came with the cost of only a few months left to live.

Perhaps if he was a better man, V would have been able to accept that while they were insanely compatible, his and Panam's life paths simply diverged at a certain point. Perhaps he should have just been happy with what time he got with her.

... But he wasn't that better man. He wasn't even a good man. At the end of the day, V was selfish and possessive. He wanted what and who he wanted and Panam... Panam was the one who got away, in the end. He'd had her in the palm of his hand and let her walk right out of his life.

That wasn't going to happen again. But at the same time, V is smart enough to realize that trying to convince Panam to abandon Saul to his fate wasn't the way to go about things. No... better to let the man in question burn that bridge himself.

A couple of seconds have passed since Panam admitted to him that she didn't know what to do. A plan already forming in V's head, he can feel Alt picking up on his thoughts and moving to get things prepared.

"Simple, Panam. We'll go and get him back. Together."

Panam's eyes widen on the other end of the video call, her breath hitching before she manages to compose herself.

"... Just like that, V?"

V quirks up one side of his mouth in a half-smirk.

"Just like that. What, did you think I'd leave you high and dry?"

Blushing, Panam shakes her head.

“No I... I guess I thought you’d try to talk me out of it.”

Tilting his head to the side, V grunts.

“Would I have been able to?”

“... No.”

“Exactly. So let’s skip all of that and get to work.”

Truthfully, he thought he probably could have convinced Panam to let Saul and the Aldecaldos go. Especially if he went directly to her and spent the rest of the night ‘persuading’ her in other ways. All he’d have to do is distract her for a day or two and the likelihood of Saul remaining alive would have gone down to zero.

It was what would have come after that he didn’t want to deal with. The regret. The grief. The self-loathing. Panam might not have ever been able to forgive herself... and him being the one to convince her to let it go would have forever tainted their relationship by association.

No, better to handle this... the right way.

“A-Alright. Okay, yes. I’ll call Mitch and get him and Scorpion together. We’ll make a plan with-!”

But V shakes his head.

“That won’t be necessary. Leave them out of this. The Aldecaldos have written him off anyways, right? You said your friends weren’t even going to tell you originally because they didn’t think you’d care. Sounds like they’re projecting to me. No... we’ll go and get him back ourselves.”

Of course, just because he was going to help Panam save Saul didn't mean V wasn't going to continue his prolonged effort of making sure the wedge between her and her clan stayed in place. As previously mentioned, he wasn't a good person.

Panam hesitates, biting her lower lip for a moment before finally asking a clarifying question.

"Just... just the two of us?"

Again, V shakes his head and smirks.

"Us... and the others. In fact... Alt already has Saul's location. Let's pick up Becca and Lucy and we'll head out to handle this, alright?"

Panam bites her lower lip harder but eventually nods.

"A-Alright."

Perfect.

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The first time around, V hadn't been able to do things quite as cleanly or completely as he might have liked. He'd managed to extract Saul alive and get him to Panam's truck of course, but more Wraiths had shown up, prompting a car chase that ultimately led to them hiding out in an abandoned barn overnight to avoid their pursuers.

Technically, that would be ideal this time around too because it was there that Saul had both offered Panam a chance to come back to the

Aldecaldos AND verbally slapped her across the face at the same time. Only for V to so foolishly push for her to take Saul up on his offer the next morning. He thought he was being supportive. Little did he know, he was breaking ground for the grave that his and Panam's budding relationship would eventually wind up in.

If he let things play out the same way, he could reverse course and tell Panam NOT to take Saul's offer, leaning on the Aldecaldos Leader's idiocy to further the wedge between her and the Nomad Clan. However, doing so presented far too many variables... and it involved sandbagging in a way that V simply wasn't comfortable with at this point. Especially not when those involved had already seen what he was capable of.

Instead, as they pull up behind a rocky outcropping close to the Wraith Base where Saul Bright is being kept, V decides there's only one way to handle this... and that's in spectacular fashion, just like with the Voodoo Boys.

"I'm going in alone first."

Before anyone, specifically Rebecca, can protest, V raises a hand and cuts her off.

"We can't go in hot or the Raffin Shiv might decide to liquidate the asset. The priority is asset retrieval above all else. However, they're expecting something. Not precisely us, but they definitely think someone will come for the asset."

Panam's hands curl on the wheel of her truck, her lips thinned out. Rebecca reluctantly nods, while Lucy is busy checking out the enemy base's systems. She can do so with impunity because Alt and Sasha have already mapped the entire place out, selectively blinded the Wraith

Netrunner to their presence, and basically turned it into their own personal playground.

“I infiltrate alone and secure the asset. Once I have eyes on and have made sure he’s safe, that’s when we’ll go hot. You’ll take the front Rebecca, while Alt, Sasha, and Lucy will back you up by turning the base’s defenses against them.”

Rebecca flashes a wicked grin at that, her hands stroking the assault rifle she’s carrying. Not her shotgun, but still in her colors.

“Sounds like a plan, boss.”

Panam on the other hand...

“I can fight too.”

Looking over at the dusky skinned woman, V raises an eyebrow.

“I know you can fight, Panam. But you and I both know you can drive a lot better.”

Panam flushes but can’t exactly refute that statement. Of course, V doesn’t intend to even have a car chase happen this time, but he’s not about to tell her that.

“We need you ready to get us out of here at a moment’s notice if it proves necessary. That’s your role in all of this and I trust you to do it. Trust me to do mine?”

Eyes widening slightly at the request, Panam ducks her head before nodding quickly.

“O-Of course. Always.”

With that, V slips out of the Warhorse, his feet already silent as they touch the ground. From there, he makes his way out from behind the rocky outcropping and towards the Wraith Base where Saul is being kept. It's an old Corp-Bud cement factory, abandoned for years before the Raffenshneider moved into it. They've set up minor defenses here and there, but the place is too big to cover every possible entrance.

V goes in through the roof, ultimately. Saul is in the basement, but by starting on the roof, V can take a top down approach. One might expect him to take the path of least resistance with the fewest bodies between him and his goal, but in spite of what he'd told the others... that's not entirely what he's planning. Yes, retrieving Saul safe and sound so that he can make an ass of himself is still the main priority, but part of that also involves killing every single Wraith in the building.

He does so methodically with Alt's help and the knowledge that Sasha and Lucy are both watching on. He moves wordlessly and silently, executing each man and woman he comes across without mercy. The most they get from him are quick, quiet deaths before he stashes their bodies somewhere they won't be found before it's far, far too late.

The Sandevistan comes into play a few times, though V has to admit that it feels less like an asset on this type of gig and more like overkill. He was already more than capable of killing anyone before they registered his presence. In the end, the speedware just made the work all the faster.

After clearing from the roof to the basement, V finally arrives at where Saul is being kept. The Aldecaldos Leader has seen better days but is really no

worse for wear, even as he's handcuffed to a metal pipe and clearly hasn't been fed or given water since his capture.

Blinking up at him as V approaches, Saul furrows his brow in confusion upon taking in V's appearance.

"You... you're no Wraith."

V shakes his head, even as he begins working open the handcuffs.

"No. Mercenary. Here to extract you."

Saul sucks in a lungful of air at that before cursing under his breath. He thinks V can't hear him, even as he mutters about how they really don't have the funds or supplies to be paying for a merc. At the same time, Saul is smart enough not to say that directly to V. After all, telling a mercenary they might not get paid for rescuing you is a great way to derail your own rescue.

Once Saul is freed and able to rise to his own two feet, V passes him some water while at the same time contacting the girls up top.

"Asset retrieved; area secured. Go hot now."

Saul barely has time to register V's words before the sounds of bullets flying, people screaming, and explosions rocking the earth reach them from up above. The Aldecaldos Leader's eyes widen in shock before flicking back to him. A look of recognition suddenly crosses his face.

"You... you're V, aren't you? The one who sold an entire Wraith Base to my men for a steal."

V hums and nods, even as he's kept updated on what's happening above by Alt. The outside Wraith forces are decimated in short order between Rebecca's enthusiastic assault on their fortifications and the sudden yet inevitable betrayal of their defense turrets. Not to mention the quickhacks from Sasha and Lucy.

Meanwhile, the same reinforcements that would have sent him, Panam, and Saul fleeing across the Badlands the last time around are already on their way. However, this time around V has a scary AI on his side. A very scary AI.

"Come on. Let's get you out of here."

Saul sighs, the look in his eyes making it clear that he suspects Panam is behind all of this and isn't too happy about it. Good. From the look of things, the man is going to try to read Panam the riot act for this. And that's perfect for V's plans.

Up top, the Wraith reinforcements pull up but before Rebecca can even turn in their direction, engines shut off, doors lock, and the Raffen Shiv are trapped in their own vehicles, snarling and growling and trying to break free. Alas, their propensity for bulletproof glass and armored rigs works against them there. Meanwhile, the cabins are already filling up with carbon monoxide, redirected by Alt to make swift work of the Wraith Drivers.

By the time V and Saul have made it up out of the basement of the Corp-Bud cement factory, the place is silent as the grave. A mass grave to be exact, because not a single Wraith within a mile of the base still lives. Alt has double and triple checked with Sasha's help.

As Saul looks around at the devastation that a still cackling Rebecca has seemingly wrought all by herself, V pings Panam and has her come over. Leaving her truck, Panam double times it to where they're waiting.

"Saul!"

The Aldecaldos Leader stiffens and then lets out a weary sigh as his suspicions are confirmed.

"Panam..."

V watches Panam slow down a bit upon seeing Saul's reaction. Crossing his arms over his chest, he very deliberately keeps the smile off of his face, even as he waits to see what will happen next. But to be fair... he has a pretty good idea.

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A/N: Remember to go back and VOTE!