

Three

A half mile from the warehouse, Edward and six of his fellow workers travelled from abandoned home to abandoned home, tending to their hemp plants. Solar panels line the roof of every abandoned structure employed for growing. Some panels provide power to the garden lights and others juice up the batteries.

Edward, a blue-eyed, tanned, mellow guy and his cast of expert growers consider themselves the Dolce and Gabbana of the nest. They are tasked with providing the hemp needed to make clothes and other essentials.

“Hey, Edward, I got some news!” Jimmy, the pock-marked, skinny redhead, said as he sprinted into what they dubbed the Pepto house because of its hot pink exterior.

Edward, Steven, Mildred, and Moose had been hunched over their plants, inspecting their progress, when Jimmy startled them into an upright position.

“Oh, sorry. I didn’t mean to startle you.” Jimmy fumbled.

Edward rolled his eyes. Jimmy was always going out of his way to accidentally annoy the people around him, and yet he was considered a loveable guy.

“Spit it out, Jimmy.” Mildred growled as she brought up a portly hand to push up her wire-rimmed glasses that sat on her greasy, blackhead covered nose.

Jimmy was sweating, huffing, and puffing, when he said, “I just heard one of the engineers say that as of next month, no meat consumption will be allowed.”

Edward rolled his eyes again and said, “Really, Jimmy. This is why you blew in here?” He shook his head and went back to what he was doing. “We all knew that was coming down the pipe. Moose has already started working on his diet.”

Moose, whose nickname befitted his thick, husky stature, gave a big unhappy nod of confirmation. Jimmy noticed that he was dripping sweat from every neck crevice and smirked.

“We can’t be self-sufficient if we can’t stop being dependent on meat.” Mildred said, repeating what Gary, the nest’s founder, had said just last week during their group meeting, which Jimmy had attended. She shook her head and rolled her eyes at his aloofness.

Mildred was a small, somewhat robustly built woman of Filipino origins. She was as mean as a tiger but as smart as a whip. No one messed with her, especially since she seemed to be in a constant state of irritation.

“Well, I’m only telling you what I just overheard.”

“Thanks, Jimmy.” Moose said, with sincerity. “At least now I know that I have one month to ween myself off of sausage, ham, chicken...” He was salivating.

“Enough, Moose. You’re making me nauseous.” Edward was a devout vegan and couldn’t stomach the smell or thought of meat, which was why

he was secretly ecstatic about the definitive date finally having been set. “Jimmy, what about the dwarfed willow and the other medicinal plants?”

“Oh,” Jimmy said, searching his thoughts for the correct answer.

Edward could actually see the thought process taking place and shook his head, thinking to himself that it was a good thing that Jimmy stopped sniffing glue when he did; otherwise, he’d be operating with far fewer brain cells than he presently had, and it was already a dicey situation.

“Jimmy?”

“Oh, yeah. Sorry. So yeah. We will have some samples to work with. I was told that Marco is going to be given some seedlings in the next few weeks.”

“I can’t believe we’re going back to the indigenous ways for pain meds. I never thought I’d be chewing on tree bark to get rid of a headache.” Moose had to wipe the sweat off his red face as he spoke and accidentally knocked the sunglasses off his face and onto the floor. The price for his mistake was high for someone of his girth, and the regret on his face showed it.

With laborious breaths he placed his hand against the wall and leaned into it for support as he brought himself down, onto his knees. Once he had the sunglasses in his hand, he followed the same procedure to get back up, only it took a couple of extra tries before he was fully upright again.

“Jimmy! You were saying?” Edward said, moving the group away from the awkwardness of having stared at Moose as if he were a side show.

“Oh...oh, yeah. So, Gary said we’ll have enough antibiotics and pain medication to last us a year, but not much more beyond that.” He crinkled his brow. “Did you know that antibiotics lose their effectiveness with time?”

“That’s why they have expiration dates.” Steven, the usually silent, resident genius, chimed in.

Jimmy’s expression said that he just learned something new.

“That’s right.” Mildred confirmed with another eye roll meant for Jimmy.

“Jimmy! Anything else?”

“Oh...yeah. There’s this lady... a Shaman lady from the heart of the Amazon that Gary recruited.” He was basking in the sun because for the first time in his life he was the one with all of the information. It helped that everyone in the room was hanging on every one of his words—what a glorious feeling.

Edward knew exactly what Jimmy was doing and regretted his decision of having tasked him with such an important fact finding mission—he had known he had made a mistake when he had given Jimmy the task, but he couldn’t bring himself to take it back.

“Jimmy!” Edward warned with gritted teeth. “Please, just...”

“Oh, yeah. Anyway.” Now he was nervous, seeing how irritated Edward was with him and all. “So...so,” his face contorted as he tried to recall something important, and when it came to him, he said with excitement, “Oh, yeah. So, this Shaman lady...her um.” He bobbed his head sideways a few times and just as Edward was about to burst at the seams with frustration, he finally said, “Her name is Diana. She

supposedly cures diseases with plants that grow in the Amazon. So I think Gary said that...what's Marco's wife's name again?"

"Yesenia, dumbass." Mildred chided, unable to control her own frustration with him for dribbling the information.

Steven, the resident herb expert, was suddenly interested in the conversation. His head popped up from what he had been busy with and began to pay attention.

Edward took notice.

"Oh yeah, but wait, it's not Yeseniadumb..." Then with a pause, he gave Mildred a disapproving look and chose to move on. "Right. So Yesenia is going to go down to the Amazon...the part that hasn't permanently flooded, and she's going to spend a few days there with that Shaman lady. They are supposed to come back together with all of the saplings."

"I'd like to go." Steven seemed resolved on going. He looked at Edward, his boss, for approval.

"Hey, talk to Gary. I think the more cross experience we have in the nest the better."

Steven's expression and the nod of his head told the group that he had every intention of doing just that.

"Oh, yeah," Jimmy interjected. "One more thing. It's kinda creepy, if you ask me." He looked around and was thrilled to have everyone's attention again. But before he could bask in it, Edward cursed his name, causing Jimmy to jumpstart right where he had left off. "Oh, yeah. Well, this Shaman lady, the farmer guy that recommended her to Gary said that her fingers were like all gnarly and stuff from like arthritis and stuff."

“You’re an ass, Jimmy.” Mildred said.

Everyone agreed and walked away, leaving Jimmy to wonder what he had said to earn that.