

To Run Like The Wind

Sarah Z.

I turned one last time at my family. My mom and Spots, my dear little brother. Oh, what had I done to them? That dumb deal I'd made. I regretted every single second of that meeting. The rough black leash tightened around my neck.

"RUN!" I screamed at them, choking as the rope yanked me back.

The humans behind me muttered something angrily and pulled out a long metal stick, aiming it at my coalition. I watched with dread and foreboding as my family spun and bolted, as fast as us cheetahs could run, disappearing over the edge of the savannah. A shot rang out, then another. Arching my back, I spun around and bit the arm of the human grabbing the end of my leash. He howled in pain and the metal stick was aimed directly at me.

With no other choice, I was dragged to the back of their truck, the long savannah grass rustling as I skidded after them. I knew that this would be the last time I would ever feel this grass. Long streaks of sunlight rays stretched across the sky like an elongated rubber band. The colors of sunset swirled in the sky. How would things ever be the same? I could remember it so vividly. That one male cheetah. I wished that I'd never even met him. Bolt. I remembered finding him on my hunt, where he'd promised good land and prey. At that time, my family was starving, and I was desperate for change. I'd stubbornly agreed to his terms: I'd follow him to good land in exchange for the hard-earned gazelle I'd hunted.

But he broke his promise. Instead of the land, he led us to humans. Not just humans, but poachers. My mother had warned me of them. How could I have been so stubborn? This was all so vivid, so real. It was as if I knew what would happen before it did. I knew that they were going to take me to this weird looking alley. I knew that the- No wait. This can't be. I was dreaming. I had to be dreaming. How could this be happening again? This just couldn't-

My head jerked up abruptly. I was breathing hard, my heart pounding in my ears. I glanced around. Dozens of other animals shared the same old alley with me. Pangolins, sea turtles, and even a lion, pacing back and forth. There were many more, deeper in the alley. Primates, dwarf crocodiles, and hundreds of grey parrots. It took me no time to realize that these were all animals that were being hunted down like me. I twisted around as the leather leash dug into my fur. The small metal cage trapped me inside, with only an old small blanket that was half torn apart, which I guessed was because of some crazed dog before me. My ears pricked at pawsteps. A growl started in my throat.

I watched in disgust as Bolt calmly padded over to me, flicking his tail as if he couldn't balance correctly. I arched my back and prepared to strike. Bolt looked at me.

"Good morning, Swift." He said. I narrowed my eyes at him.

"What do you want?" I hissed. He lowered his gaze.

"I came to say an apology. I'm sorry for deceiving you, but I had no other choice. They would've sent my coalition away. But Swift, I was the one being deceived. They still sent them away anyway." He sat down in front of my cage.

"So what?" I snapped, unconvinced. He licked his paws.

"So, I came for a deal."

I remembered his treachery from before. Now he was going to try deceiving me a second time? Bolt looked at me, as if reading my thoughts.

"You can trust me this time," he said coolly. "After all, what could you possibly lose now?" I looked away behind him, still silent.

"So the deal is," Bolt said. "I help you escape, and you help me find my coalition. Deal?" I blinked at him. I couldn't believe my ears. So now this treacherous cheetah was asking for another deal? I glared at him. Then I thought of my family. Following him would be a risk.

"Fine," I said. "Deal." With swift movements, Bolt snapped the leash holding me and the cage door swung open, the most beautiful sound I'd heard since I had been trapped. I leapt out, my eyes suddenly catching on the other animals. Those poor innocent animals.

"We have to free them too, or else I'm not leaving." I said firmly. Bolt looked reluctant, but to satisfy the deal, he agreed. Together, we unlocked cage after cage, snapping leash after leash. The parrots swarmed out and started squawking like crazy. The pangolins scurried out, their thick scales rattling. The great lion roared out loud in triumph. I heard the sound of metal clinking and footsteps. "Hurry," I urged Bolt. "We have to go now." The alley was a blur of fur and scales and feathers. Bolt and I sprinted out of the alley, the breeze whipping my fur.

I overheard humans yelling behind us, but all that was behind me. I ran on, faster than I'd ever ran before, swifter than my name, and freer than ever before. The metal stick clicked behind me. A shot rang out. A bird squawked. A lion roared in fury. I kept running, ignoring the chaos behind me. Finally, Bolt and I reached the spot where the alley met the wild. I ran on, until I felt the long savannah grass on my feet, the grass I'd thought that I'd never feel again.

The morning dawn sun broke out over the sky. I knew that there would still be a long way ahead of me, but this was a new beginning. Bolt ran next to me, relishing the call of freedom, no longer a prisoner.

Bolt smiled. "Time to run like the wind."