

Rescuing Isaac

By Frank Zafiro

"So your guy got pinched. So what?" Angelo's voice coming out of the telephone receiver was thick with New Jersey accent.

"Everybody gets pinched."

Dominic Bracco lowered the pay phone receiver away from his mouth and rubbed his eyes. "I'm worried."

"What's to worry about? Get a lawyer. He gets off or he does a little stretch. No big deal."

"It won't be a little stretch. It'll be a dime."

"Ten years for theft? You're kiddin' me, right? And speak up, I can barely hear ya."

Dom moved the receiver closer to his mouth. "The charge isn't theft. It's robbery."

"Don't tell me your guy flashed a gun."

"No, he had it covered with a paper bag. But it doesn't matter. In the State of Washington, all you have to do is act like you got a piece and if the other guy believes it, it's robbery."

"Yeah, sure, it's like that most places," Angelo said. His tone took on that of a teacher whose patience was wearing thin with a slow student. "But that's the letter of the law, not how they charge it. As long as he didn't actually show them the gun—"

"That's how they charge it here." Dom didn't like his uncle's tone. *He* lived here in River City. *He* knew the score. Angelo didn't. All his uncle did was get a little taste of everything he did. And for that little taste, he was supposed to help out in situations like this one.

"Okay," Angelo said, "if that's the way they do it, that's the way they do it. Get the kid a good lawyer."

"He's got a good lawyer." Dom scratched his hairy forearm.

"And?"

"The lawyer says he's fucked."

Angelo chuckled. "The lawyer actually said that?"

"Not in so many words."

"Why's he so sure?"

Dom suppressed a sigh. He shouldn't have to explain. Angelo was supposed to help, no questions asked. "They caught him in the hijacked truck, with the gun in the cab. The driver picked him out of the lineup. Then instead of clamming up and waiting for the attorney, which is what I told him to always do no matter what, he goes and lies to the cops instead."

"Stupid," Angelo observed. "How about the judge?"

"No chance."

Angelo whistled. "He *is* fucked."

"Like I said."

"So he does some time."

Dom could almost hear the shrug that accompanied Angelo's words. He gritted his teeth. "He might not do the time. That's why I'm worried."

"You think he'll turn state's witness?"

"I don't know. He might."

"I told you to only hire Italians," Angelo admonished him.

Dom rolled his eyes. As if Italians never turned on each other. "Uncle Angelo, there are no *paisan* out here, you know? It's not like Jersey. Any Italians in this town, they shop at The Gap."

"Whatever. Look, if he rolls, this guy, what can he give the government?"

"A lot," Dom conceded. "Too much."

"Too many eggs in one basket, Dommie," Angelo said. "What did I tell you about that, huh? You don't trust no one guy with too much."

"I know."

"You say you know, but now this guy is in jail and you're calling me, shitting water about it." Angelo sighed. "Can you get to him while he's in jail?"

Dom hesitated. Traffic whizzed by behind him. He'd never used this pay phone to call Uncle Angelo before, so he knew it was safe. But Angelo—

"Is this line okay?" he asked.

"New cell phone," Angelo told him. "Out of the box this morning. Now answer the question."

"The answer is no. I've got no people inside and the jail security is tight, too."

Angelo was silent for a while. Finally, he said, "I guess your only option is to break him out."

"Break him...what?" Dom sputtered.

Angelo didn't seem to notice. "I'll send two guys. They're gonna need a wheel man. You got a wheel man?"

Dom shook off his surprise. "Yeah. But who are you going to send?"

"Doesn't matter. It'll be a coupla guys from Kansas City. You can call them Mr. Johnson and Mr. Peterson. They'll take care of the details."

Dom gritted his teeth. Kansas City? Compared to Jersey, that was the minor leagues. And River City was even lower than KC on the pecking order. By sending troops from there, Angelo made a clear statement. Dom's problem wasn't that important.

"Thanks," he managed to say. "I'd use my own people, but—"

"But they gotta disappear after. I know. Don't worry. Time will come I need your guys for something out this way. Just tell them not to wear no flannel shirts." Angelo laughed at his own joke. The laughter dissolved into a hacking cough.

Dom pulled the phone from his ear and waited.

Angelo finished clearing his lungs and grunted. "How's my restaurant doin'?" he asked.

"Fine. It's a hot spot in town. How's things in Jersey?"

"Getting dark, Dommie. But there's money to be made. Always money to be made."

For the thousandth time, Dom thought about asking to come back, but he held his tongue. Now wasn't the time. Not when he was asking for help instead of solving his own problem in the piss-ant city he'd been sent to work.

Instead, he listened carefully while Angelo told him what to do.

* * *

Isaac looked thinner to him. Dom wondered if he'd eaten since the arrest. The young man's usually perfectly gelled hair was a tangled mess. His eyes darted warily left and right as he sat down on the other side of the thick Plexiglas window and picked up the phone receiver.

Dom did the same. "You know they tape these?" he asked, pointing to the phone.

Isaac nodded.

"Don't ever say nothing to anybody except your lawyer," Dom told him. "And him only what he needs to know."

Isaac hung his head. The act made him look much younger than his twenty-three years. "I'm sorry, boss."

"Don't be sorry," Dom said. "Be smart."

Isaac bobbed his head, not meeting Dom's eyes.

"Look at me," the older man said.

Isaac looked up. His eyes brimmed with tears.

Christ, you'd think he'd never gone to jail before. No way will he do the dime without rolling over.

"Listen, kid, I'm going to take care of you."

Isaac's eyes brightened. "How?"

"Never mind how. You just worry about what I need you to do."

"Sure, boss, whatever you need."

"Tomorrow, you call your lawyer and tell him you want to petition the court for new counsel. You want a hearing, understand?"

"Yeah. I want a new lawyer."

"No. You want a *hearing*."

Isaac squinted. "Why?"
"Just do it."

* * *

Isaac Rainey sat on his jail bunk, his knees drawn to his chest. He thought about everything Dom had told him, running it through his mind over and over so he got it right. Relief had washed over him as soon as he realized that Dom was going to bust him out.

Dom had been his second visitor that day.

The first was the bitch detective again, the one working his case. McLeod was her name. She laid it all out for him on the table. All the evidence. Him in the cab, the gun, the witness, his own stupid fucking lies. All of it was worth ten years in Walla Walla State Penitentiary, she said.

When she was done, she put all her papers back into a file and said she could help him out. Dom's contacts went all the way back to the East Coast. She could call in someone from the FBI who worked organized crime and they could work some sort of deal. He refused her, but after the long walk back to his cell and the hard stares from the other inmates, he'd wondered if maybe that was his best option.

When Dom came to see him and told him he'd get him out, it made him feel guiltier than hell for even thinking about turning on the man. Dom had given a job, trusted him, been like a father to him. You don't repay that kind of loyalty by rolling over.

Isaac allowed himself a smile. Everything was going to be all right.

* * *

In the small office at the rear of Angelo's Restaurant, Dom counted out the contents of the envelope and cursed. He began counting again. Joe Bassen stood in front of his desk, rocking from foot to foot.

When he'd finished counting the second time, Dom cursed again. Ever since Isaac got popped, earnings were down. Some of it was because Bassen didn't have a partner to work with him. Isaac was a sharp worker, and productive. He did Dom no good sitting in jail. He needed him back on the streets.

He glanced up at Bassen. The former boxer swayed and waited, probably replaying a fight from the past in his head. Was he skimming? Naw, Bassen was loyal. Not as smart as Isaac, but loyal.

"You hit the auto body shop out east yet?"

Bassen broke his reverie and nodded. "Yeah. They didn't have it."

"None of it?"

"Not even the vig."

Dom swore. Missing a payment was one thing, but not even paying interest? "What'd you do?"

Bassen blinked. "Gave the foreman a little reminder. And said I'd be back tomorrow."

Dom nodded. Collecting was Bassen's forte and he did it well. The bigger operations, that's where Isaac came in.

Trish knocked at the door and poked her head in. The numerous bracelets on her wrists clinked with each motion. "Coupla guys to see you. Said they're from out of town."

Dom slipped the envelope into his desk. "Sure, Trish. Send 'em in."

When the pair ambled into the office, Dom raised his eyebrows. Both of them were smaller than he was and neither one looked Italian.

"Peterson," said the first, a wiry man with muddy brown hair. He held out his hand and Dom took it. The grip was firm.

"I'm Johnson," the second man said. His frame was well muscled and his grip even firmer. He wore his hair gelled like Isaac.

"Dominic Bracco," he told them both, then motioned to Bassen. "That's Joe. He'll be your wheel man."

Johnson nodded to him, then turned back to Dom.

"When's the hearing?"

"Ten tomorrow."

"Courthouse security?"

"It's tight. Ever since Nine-Eleven, they've got just one entrance."

"Metal detectors?"

Dom nodded.

"How about in the courthouse halls?"

Dom shook his head. "They've got security guards at the entrance and a couple that I think are on call, but no roving patrols."

"And in the courtroom? Bailiffs?"

Dom grinned. "Not like back East. Bailiffs are nothing more than secretaries. Most of them are women in their forties or fifties."

Peterson and Johnson exchanged a glance. Johnson raised his eyebrows slightly. Peterson shook his head. "Too many witnesses in the courtroom."

Johnson shrugged and turned back to Dom. "How about transport from the jail?" he asked.

"Two corrections officers."

"Not cops?"

"No. Jailers."

"Armed?"

"Yeah, they carry guns."

"The route?"

Dom pulled out a piece of paper and drew. "They have a special entrance and exit from the building right here. Once they're inside, there's a short hallway, a pair of double doors and they're in the courtroom hallway."

Johnson pointed to the outside door. "Where's this lead?"

"Just outside, onto the Public Safety campus. They have to walk him about a block to get back to the jail."

"They transport him *outside*?" Peterson interjected.

Dom nodded.

Peterson shook his head in wonder. "Who plans their security? A retarded monkey?"

"Is the campus closed?" Johnson asked.

"Only from cars. It's open to foot traffic."

"No checkpoints?"

"Uh-uh."

"How close can you get a car?"

"From this exit? About a block."

The two men from Kansas City exchanged another glance, both with slight smiles.

"Your boy going to be wearing a suit for his hearing?" Johnson asked.

"Brand new one, yes."

Peterson and Johnson nodded at the same time.

"This will work," Johnson said.

* * *

Back at the hotel, Peterson asked, "Whattaya think?"

Johnson shrugged. "I think that if this mope wasn't the boss's nephew, I'd be banging a showgirl at Taps right now."

"No, I mean the plan."

Johnson shrugged. "Like I said, it'll work. We snatch the guy, turn him over to his crew and we're out of here."

"I wish we could fly back. It's a long fucking drive."

Johnson put his bag on the bed. "We got satellite radio. It'll be fine."

"I wonder what they're gonna do with the guy once we snatch him."

"Who cares?"

"I didn't say I cared. I said I *wonder*."

Johnson considered a moment. "This ain't Jersey, or even KC. They'll probably make little frosted cupcakes together and have a good cry."

Peterson laughed. "Probably."

Johnson removed a roll of cash from his bag. "Come on, we gotta go to the hardware store."

* * *

The next morning, Isaac dressed slowly in his cell, relishing the feel of real clothing against his skin. Especially the shirt. It wasn't silk, but the material was cool and smooth. Nothing like the rough, ill-fitting orange jumpsuit he'd been issued after being booked.

He ignored the prying eyes of the guard at his door and took his time knotting the tie, adjusting his belt and slipping into his shoes. Finished, he put on the jacket and smoothed the lapel. Even in the misshapen reflective film that served as a mirror, he figured his reflection looked good.

He fussed with his hair for a few moments, wishing he had some gel.

* * *

Dom waited in the car sipping his mocha while Bassen checked out the house. It was one of the rentals he owned and was supposed to be empty, but sometimes kids or druggies broke in and camped. When Bassen found them, they didn't come back, and word spread.

Bassen appeared in the doorway and waved him in.

Clutching his coffee cup, Dom climbed out of the car and went into the empty house.

* * *

Peterson slid his pant leg down and tossed the masking tape into the courthouse bathroom trash can.

Johnson hefted a wooden hatchet handle, smacking it into his palm.

Peterson slid his own handle up the sleeve of his jacket and held it in place by bending his wrist. He met Johnson's eyes and flicked his wrist. The wooden handle snapped into his hand.

Johnson grinned.

* * *

Judge Petalski looked up from the short legal brief and stared at Isaac Rainey. Isaac smiled back at her. She considered him for a moment then dropped her eyes back to the brief.

Isaac leaned toward his lawyer. "That judge is hot," he whispered. "No wonder they called her Judge Petals."

His lawyer shushed him.

Isaac watched the judge read, admiring her long black hair and pretty face. Even the librarian glasses she wore were sexy.

When she pushed the brief aside and looked back at him, he shot her another smile.

"Mr. Rainey," she said, "this brief contains no legal reasoning for your lawyer to be removed from the case."

Isaac nodded, enjoying the sound of her smoky voice.

"It is your prerogative to dismiss him if you wish, since he was not assigned by the court. But I will not rule that he has provided inadequate counsel."

"Thank you, your honor," his lawyer said.

Isaac tried to appear hurt.

Judge Petalski acknowledged the lawyer's thank you and turned her attention to Isaac. "Frankly, Mr. Rainey, this hearing has been a waste of the court's time and, I suspect, nothing more than a ploy on your part to spend some time outside of your jail cell. While I intend to ensure that you get a fair trial in the matter before this court, do not think that I will tolerate any chicanery or manipulation of the system. Is that understood, Mr. Rainey?"

Isaac cleared his throat and stood. "Uh, yes, your honor. I'm sorry."

She regarded him for a moment, then gave them both a curt nod. "Very well. Dismissed."

When she banged her gavel, Isaac couldn't help smiling.

* * *

Johnson expected the transport deputies to flank the target. He was pleasantly surprised when he saw the large wooden courtroom door swing open to reveal them walking single file. The thin kid in between the two had his hands in front of him, the cuffs hidden by the length of his jacket sleeves. He kept the pace slow, but Johnson wasn't sure if it was just simple defiance or him playing to the plan.

Peterson stood near the exit door, looking at some legal paperwork they'd downloaded off the Internet. He did his best to plaster a confused look on his face.

Johnson fell in behind the second deputy, glancing at his watch and playing the part of a harried lawyer. He double-checked and saw that both deputies were armed.

The first deputy, a lumbering fat slob with a scraggly black mustache, stopped at the exit door. He removed a ring of keys from his belt and unlocked the door. Peterson lowered his paperwork and gave a frustrated sigh.

The deputy swung the door open wide and walked into the hallway without a backward glance. The second deputy, red-haired and red-faced, stepped forward and grabbed the door, holding it open for the target.

Peterson made eye contact with Red. His face brightened and he stepped toward him. "Hey, officer, can you help me out? I can't figure out where I'm supposed to go for this hearing."

Red shook his head. "Sorry, I can't. I'm transporting a prisoner."

"I'm a lawyer," Johnson said, stepping close. "I can help."

Red looked over his shoulder at Johnson. "Thanks, sir—"

Peterson flicked his wrist and the short axe handle appeared in his hand. He drove it into the deputy's sternum and followed it up with a wheelhouse uppercut beneath the deputy's chin.

Johnson grabbed hold of Red and forced him into the hallway. Peterson bounded past him after the lead deputy.

The door slammed shut behind them.

Johnson let the wooden handle drop into his hand. He struck Red behind the ear, delivering three hard shots. The deputy collapsed and lay still.

Johnson looked up in time to see Peterson reach the fat deputy. The deputy half-turned, his expression bored. When he saw Peterson bearing down on him, his eyes flared open wide in surprise. His hand flew to the gun at his side, but Peterson cracked him on the jaw before he was able to grab the handgrip of the pistol.

Peterson swung several times in rapid succession, choosing a different target for each blow. The deputy crumpled to the ground, rolling in agony. Merciless, Peterson dropped his knee onto the deputy's back and struck him in the head until the deputy went limp.

Meanwhile, Johnson plucked Red's handcuffs from the case and cuffed the deputy's hands behind his back. He pulled the deputy's Smith & Wesson from the holster and tucked it into his own belt. Then he glanced up and down the hallway, searching the ceiling and above both doors for a security camera. He saw none.

"Unbelievable," he muttered. This place was definitely Hicksville. Peterson cuffed the fat deputy and took his keys and gun.

The target stared at them both with wide eyes. "Wh-who are you guys?" he asked in a tremulous voice.

"Never mind," grunted Johnson. "Walk between us. Don't look at nobody."

The men from Kansas City took up a position in front and behind the target and walked confidently out the door and into the courtyard.

* * *

Isaac struggled to keep his face neutral. Adrenaline coursed through him as he walked between the two suited men.

I can't believe Dom just broke me out of jail!

He realized he was smiling and forced his grin into a frown. The two men walked quickly but casually and he kept pace with them. No one approached them or even seemed to give the group a second look.

Despite the cool air, sweat trickled down his back. The weight of events settled on him and his stomach churned. He kept expecting to hear yelling and gunshots from behind them. He glanced over his shoulder and saw nothing but people going about their business.

"You look back again," one of his escorts growled, "and I'll break your fucking arm."

Isaac snapped his eyes forward, focusing on a point on the ground about fifteen yards ahead. He kept his eyes lowered. The trickle of sweat turned into a flood.

A block from the courthouse, Joe Bassen waited in the driver's seat of a white Ford Crown Victoria. Isaac heard the engine rumble to life as they approached. One of the suited men broke off and went to the passenger side. The other opened the back door and pushed him in.

"Move across," he grunted at Isaac.

Isaac slid across the seat to the passenger side. The man climbed into the back seat and closed the door.

"Go," he directed Bassen.

* * *

Dom sat in the canvas folding chair and watched the small TV on the kitchen counter. When he heard footsteps on the back porch, he snapped the TV off.

Johnson walked through the door first. He ignored Dom and his eyes swept the room.

Isaac came next, rubbing his wrists and smiling.

"Hey, hey!" Dom said, holding his arms open wide. "He's free!"

Isaac leaned into the bigger man, who slapped him heartily on the back.

"Thanks, boss," Isaac whispered into Dom's chest.

Dom pulled Isaac away and held him by his shoulders. "You're my best earner. I couldn't let you take a fall."

Isaac beamed.

Johnson cleared his throat. "Everything went off clean," he told Dom. "We're done."

Dom let go of Isaac and offered his hand. "Thanks."

Johnson looked at his hand for a moment, then shook it. "It was the job," he said simply.

Peterson opened the door and the two men strode out to the car.

Assholes, Dom thought, watching them go. *Arrogant assholes.*

"Who are those guys?" Isaac asked him.

Dom shrugged. "Professionals."

"I believe it. You shoulda seen it, boss. They kicked the shit out of those two guards."

"They kill anybody?"

Isaac's face fell. "I...I don't think so."

"Good."

Isaac swallowed. "What do we do now, boss?"

Dom grinned and clapped him on the shoulder. "We get you a fake ID and send you on a vacation. You like San Diego?"

* * *

The Yukon rolled slowly through River City. Bassen navigated the SUV along the streets, careful to obey all traffic laws. Isaac hunkered down the back seat, wearing sunglasses and a River City Flyers ball cap and smiling. He felt like whistling, but he knew he'd never be able to pucker his lips with the perma-grin plastered on his face.

He glanced at the hulking figure of Dominic Bracco in the front seat. Another rush of gratitude washed through him. Dom could've left him hanging, abandoned him to do ten years, but the big Italian didn't. He rescued him instead. He called in *professionals* to break him out. Isaac's throat constricted a little and his eyes misted. The man in the front seat had showed him more love than his own father ever did.

He leaned forward. "Boss? What do you want me to do in San Diego?"

"Huh?"

"San Diego. What am I supposed to do there?"

Dom cleared his throat. "Keep your nose clean, that's what. Hang out on the beach. Chase trim. Get a tan. Just don't get busted."

"What about money?"

"Deliver pizza or something," Dom said. "I don't care. But stay clean. And grow your hair out, or cut it off."

"Cut it off!" Isaac's hands flew to his tangled locks.

Dom laughed, a booming sound that filled the car. "Fine, fine. Grow it out. In a year or so, we'll bring you back home. I want you clean and looking different. Everything will blow over by then."

"A year? That long?"

"Better than never," Dom said.

Isaac squinted. "You really think this'll blow over, boss? I mean, it's a robbery beef, right? And then those guys clubbed the shit out of the guards. Plus—"

"Fuggedaboutit," Dom said, slipping back into his old Jersey accent. "In two or three months, the Russians will pull something twice as big and everyone will forget. Trust me." He reached back, rested his hand on Isaac's knee, gave it a hard squeeze.

Isaac nodded, satisfied. He sat back and thought about bikinis and beaches.

* * *

Dom sat quietly in his seat, watching traffic pass. When the Yukon dropped down toward the T.J. Meenach Bridge, he pressed his elbow against the hard metal of the .45 tucked in his belt under his jacket.

"Turn here," he directed Bassen, who took the narrow exit before the bridge. It led to a small two-lane road.

"Where we going?" Isaac asked.

"I told you. To see the guy about your fake I.D."

"Nobody lives out here," Isaac said.

"It's a shortcut," Dom told him. "I wanna avoid traffic. You're still pretty hot."

"Oh."

Bassen guided the Yukon along the wooded, two-lane road. The land on either side of the road belonged to the small state park along the Looking Glass River, which flowed on their left.

They passed the sewage treatment plant and kept on.

A half-mile before the Bowl-and-Pitcher picnic site, Bassen turned onto an access road that led north, away from the river.

"This guy live in a cabin or something?" Isaac joked.

Dom grunted.

Bassen drove the Yukon along the road for another two minutes. A heavy silence settled in the cab. When Bassen slowed the vehicle without any houses in sight, Dom heard Isaac's frantic voice from the back seat.

"Oh, no," he whimpered. "No, no, no, please, no."

Dom turned, but Isaac kicked the door open and scampered from the back seat. He landed on the ground awkwardly and fell in heap, but bounced back up immediately and broke into a run.

Bassen stopped the Yukon and got out.

Dom swung his door open and stepped out, drawing his .45. He took careful aim at the center of Isaac's back and fired.

The sharp crack filled the air, but the echo died on the trees and brush along the road.

The force of the bullet threw Isaac forward. He collapsed face-first in the dirt.

Dom strode purposefully toward the fallen man. His designer shoes snapped small pine needles with each step. He reached Isaac, who was struggling to drag himself forward, moving like a man in slow-motion. A gurgle rose from his throat.

Without hesitation, Dom leaned forward and snapped off a second shot right behind the ear. Isaac jerked and lay still.

Dom turned to Bassen, who lowered the hammer of his own gun and went to the rear of the Yukon. He swung open the rear door, tossed his gun into the truck and pulled out a shovel.

"I only brought one," he said.

"Good," Dom said, "because I ain't digging."

Over thirty of Frank Zafiro's stories have been published or accepted for publication in such magazines as Futures Mystery Anthology Magazine, Crime Scene Scotland and Mysterical-E. A former military intelligence linguist, Frank is currently a 13-year police veteran at a Pacific Northwest agency. "Rescuing Isaac" is a River City short story and many of his short stories share that setting, as well as his novels. The first novel, "Under A Raging Moon," is due out in 2006. Outside of writing, his other passion is hockey.