

ALICE WINTERS

DUCKING RIDICULOUS

THE HITMAN'S GUIDE

to stately fences and killer defenses

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*Do not read until you have finished The Hitman's Guide to Stately Fences and Killer Defenses

From Henry's POV during the birthday party break-in.

I pause as I see that I have a text from my wife. At least it's not a text from the department telling me that I'm fired for following this group down to hell and back. I'm positive I have something better to do today. Not only positive but *very* certain.

Tracy: I hope you're having fun with the boys!

Me: I'm not.

Tracy: Your face lights right up when they text you. Since you started hanging around them, you've been so much less stressed with work and really seem happier. It's quite cute.

Me: You know nothing, woman. I merely made that face to fool you. They are miserable human beings who drag me off and cause chaos. I should be at home.

Tracy: At home grumping at the TV? You know I'm going to be gone most of the day. It's good for you to have such fun friends.

Me: We are infiltrating a drug lord's granddaughter's birthday party. Which part of that is good?

Tracy: I'm at a baby shower. Which sounds worse?

Me: I will infiltrate the drug lord's den.

Tracy: Well, if you want to torture the drug lord, send him to this baby shower. We are currently looking at diapers with candy bars smeared in them to look like chunky baby shit. We have to guess the candy bar. Sounds cute, doesn't it? Our baby poo has nuts in it.

Me: I would rather listen to Leland talk about his fence.

Tracy: Someone in my group has licked it. She buried her face into that diaper and licked it.

Me: I would rather listen to Leland sing.

Tracy: See? There are always worse things in life.

Me: I have no idea how that is possible but you're right.

And that's when I see the two men in mascot suits and the way Leland is fixated on them. He's like a hunting dog that's caught sight of a rabbit, and I realize that my day just got a whole lot worse. I have half a mind to text Tracy back and see if she's interested in switching. Once she dons that Donald Duck, no one would know.

I might even lick a candy-filled diaper if it meant I didn't have to get into one of those damn suits. What's worse is that whoever made them obviously had never seen Donald Duck or Goofy before. I'm convinced someone simply described what they looked like, and the person tried their best to wing it and failed miserably.

I notice that Leland is over there doing some strange hand signals that make me question if he believes he's suddenly learned sign language. It's clear he thinks I understand what he's trying to convey, but honestly, I just get bored of staring at his fingers and decide that we might as well get this over with.

I see an opening and dart out as I tackle the duck. The man is all flying limbs that can't do much damage in that oversized costume. He crashes into something, and out of fear of someone else hearing him, I drag him out of the back of the tent into a secluded area. The man really shouldn't be so damn easy to take down for a guard. I feel like a cat playing with a defenseless mouse.

As Leland sets to binding the men and taping them to a tree, I stare down at the discarded outfits.

“This has to be the most foolish thing I’ve ever done,” I decide.

Leland scrutinizes the costume, from webbed feet up to fluffy beak, then looks at me. “I’ll call you Daddy Duck now,” he declares.

My face scrunches up in disgust. Honestly, this is all my fault for not arresting him the moment I got free of that basement years ago. Why have I allowed him to drag me into this shit that is definitely not fun? Most definitely not. I could be on the couch right now with a beer. Instead, I’m committing countless felonies and contemplating climbing into a duck outfit while being called “Daddy Duck.”

“I’m leaving,” I state.

Leland looks shocked. “No! Daddy Duck, why would you leave? I thought you loved me.”

“Some days it’s questionable,” I mutter as I climb into the outfit while Leland dons the Goofy suit. And once he’s forced the mascot head onto my head, he tries to give me another secret Leland hand motion that only he can decipher.

“If I die wearing this, I will haunt you in the afterlife, and I have to assume being haunted by a duck like this would be terrifying,” I threaten.

Even being unable to see Leland’s face, I can tell he’s beaming away under that mask. “You can’t die. Waddle I do without you?” he asks.

I glower at him, hoping he can feel the look through the likely toxic fabric we’re wrapped in. “We’re splitting off before I have to hear another word out of your mouth,” I announce and then I charge off, leaving him alone.

I wander off into the crowd, and the moment a child starts toward me, I slide a chair between us, using it as a shield to keep him away.

“You see that one over there? He loves kids and I bet he has something fun for you,” I say as I point to Leland.

The child thinks about it for a second before charging right over to Leland and latching right on to him. The joy I experience as I watch Leland try to disengage this child from his legs invigorates me enough that I feel ready to take on anything.

Instead, what I end up doing is wandering around and avoiding children that lock onto me. The people we’re looking for obviously aren’t outside, so I step inside and tuck myself into a corner where I feel like I look like something out of a horror story. I’d felt my phone vibrate so, uncertain if one of the others is telling me something of importance, I pull my mascot glove off and lift my phone so I can see who has texted.

Honestly, I’m in a pretty good spot to see what’s going on while staying enough out of the way for no one to really bother me, so I decide to stay here a minute to see what I can do.

Tracy: The mom-to-be has made me touch her stomach. Like... I had no choice, she grabbed my hand and smacked it against her stomach. Told me her little boy was gonna be a pro footballer when he got older. She didn’t find it funny when I told her that I was feeling more pro gamer.

Me: Sounds like you’re having a blast. I’m having fun watching Leland try to deal with little kids. I think he thought about tossing one kid away. Oh, and for some reason, I’m wearing a duck mascot outfit.

Tracy: Excuse me, I feel like you left a very important part of all of this out. Send me a picture.

Me: My camera doesn’t work.

Tracy: I’m positive it works. Oh... we now have to “birth the baby” for our next game. There are little plastic babies frozen in ice cubes and we

have to suck them free. Definitely how I had my children... the doctor sucked them out.

Me: Take it from me, I know you know how to suck. You're going to kick their asses.

Tracy: Oh my god, I laughed so hard I nearly choked on this damn baby.

Me: Don't choke on the baby. That's not the way to win. Oh shit. I see the guy we're following... And I see Leland... he's talking to another guy for some reason. I need to go. You win that game. You take that prize.

Tracy: I'll win it for you. Be safe.

Me: Always am.

I hurry after Leland, assuming that one of the other guys popped his way into a duck outfit like my own. And then I discover that I'm not the only one Leland tries to speak to using the most impossible-to-read sign language known to mankind.

The other duck seems highly confused, but from Leland's strange movements, it's apparent that Leland wants them to rush up and help him with the woman who has taken it upon herself to verbally assault him. I decide that it's likely Tavish in the other costume choosing to enjoy Leland's suffering.

I do too, Tavish.

I do too.

After Leland finally escapes the woman, he rushes up the stairs with Duck Number Two hot on his trail. I try to follow, but Raul's wife is blocking the stairs, and I have to wait for her to stop having a midlife crisis and move on so I can hurry up.

And that's when I see Tavish and Cassel zip on by out of the corner of my eye. They're so fast that I don't even know how I catch them. But it also makes me realize that the duck that Leland has just mimed our entire plan to... is not one of our guys.

I rush up the stairs and look left and right while I hurry down the hall, but I don't see Leland anywhere. He's probably joined the bad guys at this point. This is my luck.

Just when I start questioning if I've missed Leland completely, I see the back of that damn Goofy outfit through a cracked door, and relief washes through me.

Really... how the hell could Leland not realize that's me? He's over there miming for the man to slit the throats of his own brethren.

I pull the door the rest of the way open and whisper, "Who the fuck are you talking to?"

Leland turns around, looks at me, and then slowly looks back over at the other duck.

"Shit," he mumbles as the other Donald Duck nudges a guard and points at Leland.

"What did you do?" I ask.

"Nothing. What are you talking about? I did nothing at all. I was just like... telling this guy how there's a much better duck out there," he says as he hurries forward and punches a guy in the face. I dive right into the fight without hesitation.

As I settle back into the van while questioning how Leland could mistake me for another duck, I check my phone.

Tracy: I won! I sucked that baby right out of that ice cube.

Me: What did you win?

Tracy: Some handmade soap that smells like wet wood shavings and will likely be about as effective. How'd things go for you?

Me: The norm when I'm out with Leland. I beat up some guys, tackled a few while wearing a Donald Duck outfit from hell, and watched Leland forget who I was and replace me with a different man while thinking he was me. Just normal stuff over here. I think someone blew up a house or something too. Definitely better than birthing babies and licking diapers.

Tracy: Oh? Now you're admitting that you enjoyed it.

Me: I've never enjoyed a moment of being around this group a day in my life.

Tracy: Liar.

"Who are you texting?" Leland asks as he leans in.

I glance back at him. "You've replaced me, right? Go talk to your new Donald Duck."

Leland grins. "Nah, you're the only duck for me. I fucking love being around you."

I just give him a grunt, which makes him beam.

He seems to have understood what it meant.