

25/8/24

“Basco,” Nico said, “big things are going to happen, including to you. We are going to have a very big adventure.” Basco pricked up his ears. Nico couldn't tell if Basco had understood. But one thing was clear. He knew his dog's reactions enough to understand that Basco understood that things were going to happen. Basco didn't know who or what an antichrist was. But Basco understood very well that his lazy life of chasing rabbits and playing ball was soon to come to an end.

The used caravan was a good investment. It was sturdy, with enough room for supplies and a small space that Nico had turned into a makeshift shelter for Basco. However, Basco could also sleep on the bench opposite of his bench. Canned food and water were stored neatly in the cabinets, along with Nico's emergency gear. He had read about Petra, the rock city in Jordan, and knew it would be their destination. It was a place that could hide them for a while. The thought of leaving the comfort of his apartment in Jerusalem made Nico's stomach tighten, but he knew it was necessary.

Nico had a job that paid well but didn't require his full attention. It allowed him to spend time preparing for the day the prophecy would unfold. The job was a convenience store clerk, which meant he could listen to the radio for any breaking news while working the cash register. His shift ended at 10 PM, and he often found himself staring at the clock, willing the hands to move faster so he could get home and check on Basco. The dog had become his silent confidant, his only link to the world outside of the impending doom.

The telephone circle was a group of twenty, including Nico, who believed in the prophecy. Each night 5 were scattered across different parts of the city, each with their own escape plan. They called each other every night at 11 PM sharp to share any signs of the prophecy's fulfillment. It was a routine that had gone on for months, but tonight felt different. The air was thick with anticipation. That night, in the middle of the night when he and Basco were sleeping in the caravan it happened that the phone rang. Nico picked it up, his heart racing. The voice on the other end was frantic, “It's happening! The image has been placed in the temple!” Nico's blood turned to ice as he realized the time had come.

Without wasting a moment, Nico grabbed the leash and called for Basco. The dog jumped up, sensing the urgency in his master's voice. "Pee," he said to Basco. "Please quickly"

Basco obeyed and bolted out of the caravan, his tail wagging slightly less than usual. Nico took a deep breath and stepped outside, the cool night air a stark contrast to the warmth and safety of their temporary shelter. The stars above twinkled, seemingly

oblivious to the chaos about to unfold. He checked the locks on the cabinets and made sure everything was secure before heading to the car.

Basco did what Nico had asked him to do. He peed. Nico also tried to pee but he knew that he was really in a hurry. Only a pee, he thought. One or two minutes, not more...

But as he watched Basco sniff around, Nico felt his own stomach churn with anxiety. He knew he had to get on the road immediately. He called Basco over and attached the leash, trying to ignore the way his hands trembled slightly. The dog looked up at him, eyes wide and questioning. "It's time, buddy," Nico whispered, his voice hoarse with nerves. "We're going to Petra."

He opened the car door and Basco jumped in, his tail wagging more enthusiastically now that he knew they were going somewhere. Nico climbed in, his eyes scanning the dark street for any signs of trouble. The quietness was eerie, a stark reminder of the chaos that could erupt at any moment. He turned the key in the ignition, the engine roaring to life, and he couldn't help but feel a pang of regret for the life they were leaving behind. All his important possessions were in the caravan and some were in the car.

The drive to the outskirts of the city was tense, the headlights piercing through the darkness as he clutched the steering wheel. Every shadow seemed to hold a potential threat, every sound made his heart skip a beat. Basco remained calm beside him, his trust in Nico unwavering. He got the creeps from all kinds of armed creeps who were very possibly the soldiers of the antichrist. It was obvious they were busy surrounding the city. Nico knew that every minute counted. even outside the city he was not yet immediately safe.

He heard gunshots, bangs, explosions, the further he got to the outer border of town the more of these creep soldiers he saw. Were these even human beings? He was reassured that he had checked endlessly that the caravan was properly coupled to the car. He couldn't drive too fast because that wouldn't pull the caravan. But dawdling was now fatal. There was more traffic on the road in the middle of the night than he thought, plus the usual loiterers who always drove in front of him at the wrong time at a snail's pace. He heard Basco growl. It had been a very long time since Basco had done it that way. Nico knew it had to do with those creepy soldiers. Basco sensed very well that they were not fluff.

Nico's eyes darted to the rearview mirror, watching the caravan's lights bobbing in the distance. The heavy weight of the caravan made the car's suspension groan and sway with every pothole, but it held firm. He whispered a prayer under his breath, his knuckles white on the steering wheel. Basco growled again. His eyes were furious.

Basco growled like mad, got up, turned, went crazy, panted, looked out the window, climbed over the chair and barked. He only did this when something was very wrong.

Nico's eyes met Basco's in the rearview mirror, and he knew that his companion had picked up on the tension. "It's okay, boy," he said soothingly, trying to calm his own racing thoughts. "We're almost there." But the closer they got to the city limits, the more Nico felt the pressure building. There was a whole army of creeps moving to the city. What would happen if they tried to stop him? Would he drive ahead?

He gripped the steering wheel tighter and stepped on the gas. The car lurched forward, the caravan swaying precariously. He heard a clanking sound and felt the car wobble. He pulled over, his heart racing. Basco was still barking wildly. The good news: they reached the city limit.

Nico kept driving at full throttle towards Jordan, which was not the easiest route because the road was not great and those creep soldiers were still there too. Some of them months him to stop. He refused and stoically drove on. To basco he snarled to be quiet. Basco shut up now but it was obvious he was completely upset.

He had to get out of here, now. The clanking grew louder, and the car began to swerve. Nico knew he couldn't ignore it any longer. He pulled over to the side of the road, his heart hammering in his chest. The soldiers were getting closer, their flashlights bobbing in the distance like malevolent fireflies. He had to move quickly.

He kept driving endlessly. He knew a break was out of the question, even for Basco. Any short delay could boycott his escape forever, not to mention how it would end with Basco, out here in the middle of the desert. He kept praying to God, hoping the caravan didn't get a flat tire. He had also checked those tires endlessly. Everything looked good when he left. The caravan only had to last as far as the mountains of Petra. Then he had another toy with which he dragged the stuff right through the gorge in the mountain to Petra. He turned on the radio softly. A panicked voice sounded from the speaker. Nico realized that all sorts of things were going on. In Jerusalem, it was chaos. People were being dragged out of their homes, all the electricity was out, other houses were on fire. Hysterical voices could be heard in the background and a lot of shouting. Occasionally the voices dropped out and the cheering prevailed.

Nico's eyes remained glued to the rearview mirror. Those soldiers were still there, but they were keeping their distance. Maybe they hadn't noticed the car with the caravan. Or maybe they were busy with something else. He didn't dare to hope too much. The silence was eerie. Basco had stopped barking but his eyes remained fixed on the rearview mirror. Nico could almost see the gears turning in his dog's head,

understanding that something was wrong but not quite grasping the gravity of the situation.

It also looked like thunderstorms were coming. That was still missing. Nico felt a touch safe in his car now that he had been outside Jerusalem for quite some time. He didn't dare admit it out loud but oh woe, how proud he was of himself for taking the prophecy in Matthew 24 seriously. Another question: where were the others of his telephone circle by now? Surely they would also be on their way? As elaborate as he fled was unique. Others also took a cat or a dog or even a caravan. But the way he had prepared the flight was unique. According to his navigation system, he was now halfway to Petra. In the sky he saw strange lights swirling. Thunderstorms... or... UFOs?

He turned the radio up a notch. The news was getting worse. The image of the antichrist had been placed in the Temple, and chaos had erupted across the globe. Cities were falling, governments were collapsing, and reports of strange creatures and phenomena were flooding in from every corner of the world. Nico felt a cold sweat break out on his forehead. This was it. The end times had arrived, and he and Basco were on the run.

The caravan rattled and swayed as he pushed the car to its limits, the headlights cutting through the dark desert like a beacon of hope. The wind had picked up, and sand began to whip against the windows. The storm was closing in. He had to find shelter before it hit, or they would be blown off the road. His eyes searched the horizon for any sign of the rock city, but all he could see was endless sand and the occasional cactus. It was literally a race against the clock.

High above him, in the dark clouds, he saw a luminous disk slowly circling. At first he thought it was a drone but this disc was the size of a soccer field. The disc most closely resembled a luminous cloud that had detached itself from the other clouds. Basco also noticed something and began to growl restlessly after which he dove to the ground in front of the trunk. but soon his snout appeared between the two seats of the front seat. He shivered with fear, squealed and yelped. That luminous disk looked terrifying. Nico got the impression that the disk was spying on him.

He had to keep going. Nico knew that if he stopped now, he might never make it to Petra. The car groaned under the weight of the caravan as he picked up speed, trying to outrun the approaching storm. The sand began to swirl around them, stinging his eyes and making it difficult to see. He squinted against the grit, his eyes watering from the effort.

Basco's growls grew louder, and Nico felt his own fear rising. What was that thing in the sky? It hovered there, unblinking, as if watching their every move. The radio

crackled with static, and then went silent. Nico glanced at Basco, whose eyes remained glued to the sky. "Easy, boy," he murmured, though his voice lacked conviction.

The luminous disc suddenly descended, swerved a bit to the left and right, seemed to be indecisively above the ground, after which it hovered right in front of his car just above the ground. Nico had already made his decision to continue driving. Probably the caravan would just flop under the disc. Otherwise, those aliens would have to fly a little higher. Basco growled all together, remained super restless and squeaked and screamed all together. Nico had never seen him like that. The moment he slowed down, three small grayish creatures with pitch-black eyes appeared in front of him. They told him to stop. Nico honked his horn once and drove on. The creatures intimidated him and smashed the car. Nico quickly locked his door, the door next to him and the one behind him. Unfortunately, he couldn't reach the lock of the other door. This was precisely the problem. That one door diagonally behind him was opened, after which a bright beam of light shone in. He heard Basco jeering. He had the presence of mind to grab Basco by the collar. But it was too late. When the light disappeared, he only had the collar in his hands. Outside, he heard Basco shouting all together. The terrified screams of a dog went through the marrow. There was one thing apart from his faith in God that the outside world had to stay away from. That was his dog that actually belonged to his mother who had died a few years ago.

Nico felt a sharp pain in his chest, a mix of anger and despair. He had to save Basco. He didn't dare to get out of the car. Those creatures were too scary. With trembling hands, he tried to call the other members of the telephone circle. The call did not go through. The network was down. Panic began to take hold of him. He had to keep moving. If he stayed here, he would be found by the soldiers of the antichrist. Or by those creatures. Or by the storm. Or by all three together.

He grabbed a crowbar that was next to him, because he was prepared for anything, and he got out. But it was too late. He saw how these creatures with basco were beamed into the UFO after which the thing slowly took off. He ran towards it, screamed and screamed, threw a boulder at the UFO and raised his middle finger. The UFO blinked back once more, and then blasted off into space. Nico was out of his mind with rage. He intended to personally turn the balls of that damn antichrist around. He stood like this for a few minutes, staring at the dark clouds. Until he decided that there was no other option than to drive on to Petra alone.

Nico felt a deep sadness, but he knew he had to stay focused. He climbed back into the car, his eyes stinging with unshed tears. He took a deep breath and started the engine again. The storm was now just minutes away. He had to find shelter, and fast. The wind was howling, and the sand was a wall in front of him. But he had to push through.

As he drove on, the exhaustion of the last few hours finally caught up with him. His eyes grew heavy, and he felt his grip on the steering wheel loosen. The car swerved slightly, and Nico jerked awake. He blinked, trying to clear his vision. And then, through the dust and sand, he saw it. The mountains that hid the mysterious city of Petra, etched against the horizon. The ancient city was his only hope.

He pushed aside his grief for Basco and focused on the task at hand. The car's headlights flickered and dimmed, the storm drawing closer. He had to find a place to hide the car and caravan before it hit. The road grew steeper, the wind howling like a banshee around them. The rain had started to fall, not the gentle pitter-patter of a spring shower, but a furious deluge that obscured his view entirely. He leaned forward, squinting into the gloom, searching for any sign of shelter. He fell asleep.

In his dream he heard a voice. "We won't hurt your dog," said a calm, soft, pleasant voice. You'll see him again soon. "Then why did you just take him away?" he replied in his dream. "To protect him," said the calm voice, "it had to be done, but you will soon get him back." "!" he shouted back. A bright light opened his eyes. The door of his car was open. He saw a large shining saucer hovering above the ground in front of him. The same creatures that had taken Basco were standing next to the car with a collar in their hand. "Take this," they said. "It's for your dog. We're going to return him to you soon. But now we need your help. We need to get to Petra. We are the good guys."

Nico looked around in disbelief. The storm had passed, and the sky was clear again. The ground was wet, but the car and caravan were untouched by the storm. The creatures looked friendly, but his mind was racing. Could he trust them? "Why should I trust you?" he shouted. "Look," one of them said, holding up a small device. "This will show you where Basco is. He's safe with us." Nico took the device and saw a blinking dot moving away from him. His heart was racing.

They explained that they were not from this world and had been sent to protect the faithful from the coming apocalypse. They had taken Basco to a safe place, where he would be cared for until Nico could retrieve him. They needed Nico's help to find a sacred artifact hidden in Petra that could stop the antichrist. In exchange, they would return Basco and help him find the others from his telephone circle.

Nico hesitated, his heart heavy with doubt. He had never encountered anything like this before. But the desperation in their voices and the sincerity in their eyes convinced him to take a chance. He climbed out of the car, the cold metal of the crowbar still in his hand. The creatures stepped back, their posture non-threatening. They led him to the UFO, the door sliding open with a soft hiss.

The inside was unlike anything he had ever seen. It was brightly lit, with panels of shimmering lights that danced along the walls. The floor was cold and smooth, and there was no sign of Basco. The creatures gestured for him to come aboard, and with one last look at the desolate road, he stepped into the unknown.

The ride was smooth, quieter than any car he had ever been in. The creatures explained that they were part of a benevolent force that had been watching over the earth for millennia, waiting for the moment when the prophecy would unfold. They had come to guide Nico and protect the artifact. The city of Petra was the key to saving humanity.

The UFO soared over the desert, the rocky landscape a blur beneath them. Nico clutched the device tightly, watching the dot that represented Basco. It was moving at a pace that no dog could match, confirming that they had indeed taken him. The creatures spoke in a language he couldn't understand, but their gestures were clear. They pointed to the city below, the ancient structures barely visible in the moonlight.

As they approached, the UFO descended, hovering over the entrance to Petra. The creatures gave Nico a strange set of goggles, explaining that they would help him see in the dark. He put them on, and the world around him was bathed in an eerie green light. The city looked otherworldly, the sandstone structures carved into the rock face standing tall and proud despite the millennia that had passed.

They touched down gently, and the creatures led Nico out of the craft, the night air cool and still after the storm. As he stepped out of the UFO, he heard a familiar sound: Basco's barking. He also couldn't believe what he saw: the car and caravan were also there. They had never been able to go through the long mountain gorge and for that reason Nico had put together a mobile thing with which he could transport the most important things through the gorge. But now all that was not necessary and all his possessions were here. How did those UFO beings manage to get Basco as well as his car and caravan over the mountain ridge to here?

The creatures politely said goodbye and stepped back into their dish. They left Nico with all kinds of questions. Why had they done this for him and why did Basco have to be kidnapped? He could only think of one logical answer: they wanted to show him their power. They could pick it from anywhere and put it back anywhere. For the same money, they brought him back to Jerusalem. They had shown their power, in a friendly way, admittedly. Next time, I'm sure they'd be less friendly.

Basco had certainly had a bit of adventure left over. He shivered all over his body, let the pee run and winced against the door of the car. It was clear that something wasn't right with Basco. He didn't have much time to think about things. Others had also arrived in the meantime but he was the only one who had his car and caravan with

him, plus Basco. He saw some guys playing with a cat. Normally, Basco would go wild when he saw a cat, but now he was huddled like a pathetic heap.

Nico understood how fortunate he was to have his caravan and car at hand and then Basco. One question that lingered was how did he ever get the car and caravan out of the mountainside again? The answer was: never again. His car and caravan were doomed to rust away in the end. That was perhaps the least of it. At least he already had a hiding place in the caravan. He thought it would be a good idea to prepare his own place in the cave cavities of the Petra complex. Only in flashes did it dawn on him how impressive it all was here.

He took Basco out of the car, let him pee for a while and put him in the caravan. He was aware that Basco could have disappeared again as long as that UFO was still flying around somewhere. Basco had turned into a frightened heap and wanted nothing more than to quickly enter the caravan where he dived under the folding table. Nico thought it was fine. He brought some rugs, and a duvet that he would display somewhere in the caves of Petra.

Nico grabbed a flashlight and looked around. The others had already started exploring the city, their own pets in tow. He saw a few cats, a parrot on someone's shoulder, and even a small wild swine trotting alongside a man who looked like he hadn't slept in days. Everyone had gathered here because of the prophecy. They were all believers, looking for the same salvation he was.

He followed the others inside. For the first time, it dawned on him that he was really here. He stood in the huge rooms that seemed to be made for giants. He was thinking of the Nephilim giants mentioned in the Bible. It was still not clear who had carved out these huge chambers in the mountain. Officially, the Nabataeans had done this, but he could hardly imagine it. He knew that Esau, the son of Isaac, had had something to do with the territory. And also Job, who had been King Jobab of Edom. But had Esau or Job carved out these gigantic chambers? He didn't believe a word of it. In awe, he wandered through the huge rooms until he found himself in the back of a huge cave. The others speculated whether it would not be better to stay in the large rooms. But Nico said they were safer deeper in the mountainside. They could use the large rooms as common areas. He came to a large flat space in a colossal cave where he laid down his mat and sleeping bag. There were also some protrusions to which he could tie a dog leash for when Basco was here. It was an obscure fairytale landscape here, extremely safe but also very unreal and away from everything that had to do with civilization. And there were water sources. For the time being, they were in a good place and, above all, very safe. It seemed that there was even wifi.

He decided to get Basco. He didn't quite trust the caravan. In any case, the thing was in the hot sun for part of the day. But that UFO abduction had scared the hell out of



him. He decided to park the car and caravan near the Petra complex and turn it into a base of operations. While his further area of residence was now the cave. This also applied to Basco who had to get used to the cave.

Back from the cave, the large square in front of the Petra complex had become a bit busier with Jews who had fled here from Jerusalem and the surrounding area. A few did not believe in God but had heard from acquaintances what was about to happen. There were also more animals, pets, including some horses, a cow and a deer that had been picked up from a ditch on the way. They were busy discussing how to close the mountain gorge against the army of the antichrist. They had brought in an improvised shovel that could bring large stones to the gorge to block the passage.

As if this impressed the antichrist. Nico got a supply of food, water and his laptop from the caravan. Basco didn't seem to want to move. Eventually he managed to drag him out on the leash. It was familiar to be in his own caravan for a while. The only place where normal life still seemed to exist was in his caravan while the outside world was rapidly becoming grimmer.

That night they all slept together in the cave. The large animals were housed in the large rooms, but otherwise everyone sat together. There was wine, coffee, chips and the cats and dogs were there. Basco was there too. Awkwardly, he lay on a large cushion on the hard stone surface. Nico had put it on the leash and attached it to a protrusion. Someone wanted to play guitar but stopped after five seconds. The mood was a little bit better than before, but no one was in the mood for celebration.

That night, some LED lights stayed on. Nico had a flashlight with him in case the power went out. He caressed Basco, who was still completely upset. That night they heard the horses and cows and the roe deer standing in the adjoining rooms. But they also heard plenty of other ghostly sounds. Basco barked from time to time, but Nico told him to stay quiet.

They talked about what they had heard from the news and from each other. The prophecy was coming true. They had seen it with their own eyes. The image of the antichrist had been placed in the holy of holies. The city was in chaos. Nico decided that tomorrow he would set up his own camp in the cave and leave the car and caravan somewhere in the shadow or even in the large room.

The next morning, Nico awoke to the sound of whispers and rustling fabric. The cave was bustling with activity as people prepared for the day ahead. He untied Basco's leash and the dog immediately crawled under the sleeping bag, his trembling body seeking warmth and comfort. Nico knew that today was the day he had to start setting up a more permanent shelter for them. He couldn't stay in the caravan forever.

He grabbed his backpack and climbed out of the cave into the early morning light. The square outside was already a hive of activity. People were constructing makeshift barriers, others were praying in small groups. The smell of coffee and burnt toast filled the air. Nico's stomach growled, reminding him that he hadn't eaten since before they left. He decided to make his way to the large room where people were sharing what supplies they had brought.

As he approached the room, he heard a commotion. A group of people were arguing with a man who looked like he was trying to sell them something. Nico recognized him as one of the members of his telephone circle, a guy named Eli. He had always been a bit shady, but now he looked desperate. Nico made his way over, his curiosity piqued.

Eli saw him and called out, "Nico, thank God you're here! These people don't understand the value of what I have!" He held up a metal object that looked like a USB stick. "It's a GPS tracker," he said, his eyes wild with excitement. "It's been blessed by a rabbi. It'll keep us safe from the antichrist's soldiers.

The rumor grew louder that the antichrist's army was approaching. The animals were restless and no one knew exactly what to do to stop the antichrist. That mountain canyon had to be blocked but would that stop the antichrist's army? Nico tried to help where he could but they depended on a makeshift shovel to push stones and rocks into the gorge. Nevertheless, he was worried about Basco not getting out of the cave. Those UFO creatures had told him they had peaceful intentions. They had even helped him get the car and caravan here, something he had not considered at all. For months he had puzzled over how to transport the most important things through the mountain canyon to Petra. That question was suddenly off the table now that those UFO creatures had provided a solution. Nevertheless, Basco was in shock, so much so that he couldn't get out of the cave. Occasionally he returned to the cave to find Basco still with his snout under the sleeping bag. Nico was afraid he would suffocate, so dispatched was the dog. He decided to do what he had planned before: explore a round of the cave with Basco on a leash. He had to get used to this place.

Fifteen minutes later he was walking through the cave armed with a flashlight and with Basco on a leash. It was much larger than he had thought. Again, he didn't dare venture too far into the cave for fear of getting lost. At one point he sat down on the hard stone surface. Basco sat down beside him. The sound of running water in a deep well diagonally in front of him inspired awe in him. He would just slip and fall into that well along with Basco. No one on earth would find him again. Here they were, far away from civilization, deep inside a cave, a man and a dog. He felt the warm body of Basco, his only faithful companion on earth. At times like this, he needed a dog more than a woman.