

Signs of the Father

By

Nicholas Halsey (LettuceBacon&Tomato)

"Chasing Seconds" Episode 5

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EXT. THE DUNES - DAY

James, Malte, and Florence are crouched behind a large dune, one among endless miles of sand spreading to the mountains. Ahead of them is a settlement of adobe dwellings.

MALTE
Battle plans?

JAMES
The coordinates are right in the center of town. Great.

FLORENCE
Perhaps we can sneak in at night. Once we've confirmed coordinates, what then?

JAMES
Worry about that afterward. We've got to be incredibly cautious. I'd prefer if they never knew we were here.

While he's talking, Florence notices something in the sand behind them. A SETTLER covered from head to toe in protective cloth rises from the sand, holding a rifle. Florence dives and socks him right in the face.

THREE MORE come out of the sand. Malte draws his switchblade and swipes at one, who butts it out of his hand with the barrel of his rifle.

Florence incapacitates another with a kick to the solar plexus, before getting tackled by the last two. The first joins in wrestling her to the ground, and the stunned one nevertheless grabs Malte. James escapes into the desert.

As the three drag a fighting Florence to her feet, the settler guarding Malte pulls out a radio.

SETTLER
Contact the boss, tell her we get two of them.

Panting heavily, a beaten Florence glances at Malte.

MALTE
Well...that plan got far.

TITLE CARD

INT. TOWN JAIL - DAY

The town jail is basically a large adobe hut with a steel cage in it. Florence and Malte are dragged inside and thrown into the cage.

FLORENCE

What the hell? Why exactly are you arresting us?

SETTLER #1

Trespassing on private property.

FLORENCE

We were in the middle of the desert!

MALTE

Let it go, Florence. It's obvious this is a flimsy excuse they're using to blow smoke. They know who we are and why we're here.

Pomson strides into the room, followed by an elder man, Werner. She glances at the jailed pair.

POMSON

You idiots missed the most important one! Where is James Zanasiu jr?

SETTLER #2

We've got search parties out looking for him. He can't hide forever.

POMSON

You were not there the last time someone said that about a Zanasiu! (she draws a cattle prod and points it at Florence) Tell me every piece of equipment young Zanasiu has at his disposal!

FLORENCE

Well, in one pocket he's got a small tin box, and in that box is an Altoid, and another Altoid, and another Altoid, and another--

Pomson lashes out and zaps Florence, who cries out and staggers.

(CONTINUED)

POMSON
Your turn, pheasant. One chance.

WERNER
Evelyn, this goes against our laws!
The punishment for trespassing
doesn't include cold-blooded
torture!

POMSON
This is more important than your
laws, old man! This is what we've
waited two decades for!

SETTLER #2
Let's kill these two now!

WERNER
I will not allow judgment to be
passed on anyone until all the
accused are present!

POMSON
Agreed. Young Zanasiu must be
present to see his friends die.
Every available man must prowl the
desert! I will help find him
myself!

She strides from the room. The settlers assume positions at
each corner of the room. The old man sighs.

WERNER
I'm very sorry. Very, very sorry.
Why did you have to come here?

FLORENCE
Who are you?

WERNER
My name is Werner Donitz. I'm the
nominal leader of this settlement.
Normally, we're quite peaceful, but
I'm afraid your parents have a bit
of a past history with us.

MALTE
So, you going to torture us before
you kill us, or make it quick?

WERNER
I'm trying to keep it so neither
has to happen. The Pelvanida
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

WERNER (cont'd)
Incident was decades ago, I don't
want any more bloodshed to come
from that day.

MALTE
From what I've seen, few here share
your opinion.

EXT. THE DUNES - DAY

James slinks back to the spot his friends were captured. He glances at the settlement and sees MEN heading out in all directions. Before he leaves he rummages through the sand and retrieves Malte's dropped switchblade.

INT. TOWN JAIL - DAY

Werner is sitting across the bars from the prisoners. Florence is rubbing her ribs where Pomson shocked her.

MALTE
Did you participate in the
"Pelvanida Incident"?

WERNER
Yes, but not in the way you might
think. I was a scientist stationed
at the base.

MALTE
At Pelvanida? What are you doing
here?

WERNER
My father, Hans, lived here. He
entered Pelvanida as an invader,
but switched sides when he
discovered me. Some time afterward,
the two of us returned to help the
ones left behind here, who had just
lost their leader, their entire
work force, and a tragic amount of
their friends and neighbors.

FLORENCE
Then...did you know--?

WERNER
I knew Dr. Shelton, and Dr.
Kerzach, and Dr. Zanasiu, even
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

WERNER (cont'd)

Sharon, the woman Dr. Zanasiu married. I was good friends with all of them, even before we fought for our lives together.

EXT. THE DUNES - DAY

James is creeping through the dunes, clutching the switchblade. He spots a lone armed settler hefting a rifle and scanning the other direction.

WERNER (V.O.)

Dr. Zanasiu led us survivors to victory in Pelvanida. He is an amazing man. Before that day, I knew him as a mild-mannered, hard-working man dedicated to his job...but when the time came, he turned into a ruthless and efficient survivor.

James leaped off the dune onto the man. Sinking the knife into the man's shoulder blade, he broke the rifle strap and wrestled it from his wounded foe. Panting, James points the rifle at his hostage.

JAMES

No words. Clothes off.

Once the man quickly complied, James tore strips of fabric off the man's cloak to bind and gag him.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF THE SETTLEMENT - DAY

James, now dressed in the man's outer clothes, walks into town, nodding to the men patrolling the perimeter. He heads for the armory, walking past the GUARD, who gives a sideways glance after James passed. A second later, James grabbed the man's cloak and dragged him into the hut.

WERNER (V.O.)

He turned a collection of scared inexperienced scientists and security guards into a reputable and self-sufficient team. Your parents were in it. I was in it. And if I can help save his and some of my teammates' children, that's what I'm going to do.

INT. ARMORY - DAY

James slides a set of body armor on under his tunic and grabs a pistol strap, which he slips on his thigh. Finally he clips two different-looking grenades to his belt. He composes himself mentally.

EXT. THE CENTER OF TOWN - DAY

James walks casually to the middle of town, and takes out his flashlight. Few people are outside their homes due to the tense situation, and what few are present don't bother him.

He takes out his flashlight and begins the scan. Tense seconds pass.

Then a shout rings out, and the half-naked man runs from the desert, shouting. Armed men appear in the town. James bolts for the desert, spraying gunfire at random to convince his pursuers to take cover.

He's halfway to safety when Pomson appears on the far side of town and shoots twice, hitting him both times in the chest. James stumbles and drops his rifle.

He still retreats to the desert. The men run to follow, when one spots a grenade left on the dune top. They dive away before it explodes.

INT. TOWN JAIL - DAY

MALTE

So that was James' father...what about my father? What did he do?

FLORENCE

No, do my father first!

Before he can reply to either, Pomson strides into the room, livid. She points her pistol at Malte.

POMSON

I want to know now what weapons James is carrying!

MALTE

What? I don't know.

Pomson pulls out her cattle prod, Malte retreats to the back of the cell, but it's too thin to escape Pomson's reach. Pomson stabs him with it, and he screams.

(CONTINUED)

POMSON

What weapons did he bring from
beyond the deserts? Where did they
come from?

MALTE

I don't know! He didn't bring any
weapons into town!

POMSON

Then how did he threaten one of my
men with a knife?

MALTE

...oh! My switchblade! I dropped it
in the desert when I was captured!

A few guards arrive, carrying the wounded man from the
armory.

SETTLER

Ma'am, he raided the armory before
we saw him. Body armor, pistol, and
two grenades are missing.

POMSON

Can we track where he went?

SETTLER

Negative. A windstorm has picked up
outside town.

Pomson's eyes flash angrily.

POMSON

(to Malte)

I'll be back.

With one last glance at Malte, she leaves. Malte is
clutching his side and hyperventilating.

FLORENCE

Great job under pressure. They
should change the phrase to
"singing like a Cassowary."

MALTE

Shut up!

EXT. THE DUNES - DAY

James crawls behind a rock which shelters him somewhat from the windstorm. He inspects his body armor, it absorbed both bullets. He checks his flashlight, it beeps and flashes red.

JAMES

What? They aren't right? But those are the last coordinates...

He takes a deep breath and lays back against the rock, tired and disheartened.

INT. TOWN JAIL - DAY

Malte is sulking embarrassed and aching in one corner of the cell. Florence is sitting with her arms folded in the other.

WERNER

I'm sorry, I really am...I wish there was something I could do.

FLORENCE

Why don't you stand up to Pomson?
Actually start acting like a leader?

WERNER

I am not the young man I once was...and that raptor is a dangerous woman. Besides, this settlement was never really loyal to me. My father Hans was the leader everyone respected.

FLORENCE

What happened to him?

WERNER

He died of Shelton's disease, just as I will. By my calculations, I have less than two years.

Florence leaps to her feet, alarmed.

FLORENCE

"Shelton's disease"?

WERNER

You do not know about it? I am sorry I must be the one to tell you...Shelton's disease is

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

WERNER (cont'd)
contracted by traveling through the Einstein-Rosen bridge. We of course only learned this after several of our old friends died with that in common. Anyone who contracts it is inflicted for life.

FLORENCE
What does it do?

WERNER
Nothing. There are no symptoms at all. But, by using the traveler's species and age when they first jumped through a bridge, it's possible to calculate down to the year, the future time of their death.

FLORENCE
But I was with Shelton when he died. It was a--

WERNER
--brain hemorrhage. It's always a brain hemorrhage, always comes without warning, and always fatal. Mammals have the least amount of time to live, elder ones like Shelton get 20 years, younger ones like me get 25.

MALTE
Does my dad have this disease?

WERNER
No. When the others tested traveling in the bridge, Dr. Kerzach always stayed behind to run the control panel. Many of our old teammates used the bridge at some point, but never him.

MALTE
Wow, lucky choice on dad's part...

WERNER
I'm sorry, but I must add that there is one more step to the disease. It transfers genetically to offspring. 100% of the time.

Dead silence.

FLORENCE
Then...that means...

MALTE
That's why mother told me its
important that my father never used
the bridge!

FLORENCE
How...how long do I have left?

Werner bows his head.

WERNER
It's far easier to calculate the
offspring's maximum lifespan.
Mammals have 25 years.

FLORENCE
That's...that's two years! Less
than two years! I can't die in two
years! I haven't done anything but
be poor my whole life!

MALTE
People know about this disease, and
yet they opened the
intercontinental bridge portal
system?

WERNER
I only know about it because it
claimed my father without warning,
and spoke to Drs. Zanasiu and
Kerzach for consolation. They
noticed an alarming frequency for
freak brain hemorrhages within our
old circle of teammates, and put
the pieces together. The rest of
the world hasn't been using the
bridge long enough for people to
start dying, and far as I know your
fathers haven't told anybody.

MALTE
Florence, our parents knew about
this! Maybe that's why Dr. Zanasiu
used the bridge, he knew he was
gonna die, and--

FLORENCE
--who the hell cares, Malte? I'm
going to be dead in two years! Just
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

FLORENCE (cont'd)
when I thought I could stop being
miserable and make it somewhere in
the world, I find that because of
something that's not even my fault,
I've been doomed from the day I was
born!

She's sobbing. Pomson walks in.

POMSON
What on Earth has gotten into her?

WERNER
She's learned an unpleasant truth.

POMSON
I see. Does that make her any more
interested in talking?

Florence snaps her head, seething.

FLORENCE
Yeah, it does! I feel like saying
that since I'm already going to
die, I've got no reason to care
what you do to me! I'm not going to
tell you a goddamn thing about
anything, and you and your dead
father can both suck my nonexistent
cock!

Deathly silence. Then Pomson opens the jail, pulls Florence out, and slaps her so hard across the face she goes skidding across the floor and against the far wall.

WERNER
Evelyn!

POMSON
How dare you mention my
father...How dare you insult him!
He united an abandoned mass of
people to the peak of glory, he
struck a blow against the world
where none expected he could tread!

FLORENCE
And then our fathers squashed him
like a bug! I hope my dad killed a
hundred of your dad's followers!

POMSON

Your father was an intercom operator, he didn't kill anybody! Which was why I was prepared to let you go with a fortune and the freedom of luxury this society had denied you! You were starving on the street when I gave you your second chance at life!

FLORENCE

Well, it turns out all your money couldn't have done anything but buy me a really good-looking tombstone!

POMSON

That's more than you'll get now, you shortsighted ingrate!

Pomson drags her out of jail.

EXT. THE CENTER OF TOWN - DAY

Pomson and her men erect a large H-frame and tie Florence spread-eagle to it. Pomson has a megaphone.

POMSON

James Zanasiu Jr! I've tied one of your friends up in the center of town and will torture her for a full hour! An hour after that, I will kill her and repeat the sequence with your other friend...unless you give yourself up beforehand! I am prepared to let both of them leave this desert without further harm, but only if you show yourself in unconditional surrender!

She holds the megaphone up to Florence's mouth, and begins stabbing her with the cattle prod in various places. But Florence bites her tongue and refuses to make a sound. Tears stream down her eyes and she shudders uncontrollably, but she just glares back at Pomson.

WERNER

Pomson, she won't scream! Stop this!

Pomson continues for ten more seconds, then stops angrily.

(CONTINUED)

POMSON

James still only gets one hour.

Time skip. Florence remains tied on the frame, choking for air. Pomson and people stand guard. Werner stands by Florence's side.

WERNER

I don't know if it helps to hear this, but you are far stronger than Shelton ever was.

FLORENCE

...Well...that's good to know...I guess...

POMSON

Don't speak to the prisoner.

Florence looks out at the desert and sees a dark figure peering from behind a sand dune.

FLORENCE

(whispers)

Please...save me...

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF THE SETTLEMENT - DAY

James has fashioned a large makeshift slingshot out of the elastic from his jacket, two rocks, and his feet. He sends something flying through the air at the settlement.

EXT. THE CENTER OF TOWN - DAY

A grenade hits the dirt at Pomson's feet. Her eyes grow wide. It explodes and fills the area with smoke.

POMSON

Guard the girl! Guns ready!

Men race to aid her, others strafe the perimeter of the smoke cloud and look to the desert. Nobody comes.

After a time, the smoke dissipates, and the choking and coughing settlers are standing confused. Florence is still tied on the frames.

SETTLER #1

He didn't attack or anything!

Pomson narrows her eyes.

(CONTINUED)

POMSON
...It was a distraction.

Then they hear a gunshot elsewhere in town.

SETTLER #2
That came from the jail!

POMSON
Quickly!

INT. TOWN JAIL - DAY

James has shot the lock off the cage. One guard lies unconscious by the door, another lays inside the hut clutching a nonlethal knife wound on his leg.

JAMES
Come on!

The two boys race out. James spots Pomson's men coming, and fires erratically with his pistol so they take cover. James and Malte make their escape.

EXT. THE OUTSKIRTS OF TOWN - DAY

James and Malte stumble through the sand. James' pistol clicks empty, and he notes he has no more ammo.

MALTE
I can't believe you rescued me somehow!

JAMES
I'm a bit surprised myself I've gotten this far. Do you have any ideas or knowledge that will help rescue Florence?

MALTE
James, they have her tied up in the middle of town and every single man guarding her. We gotta get out of here. We can't help Florence.

JAMES
We're not leaving Florence!

MALTE
Look, there's this old guy in town stopping Pomson from killing her,
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MALTE (cont'd)
and we could help her way more by
going and getting help...at the
very least supplies!

JAMES
...No...

James stops running. Malte sighs.

MALTE
Look...James...I wanted to tell you
before, but you stopped me.
Florence was working with Pomson at
first. That's why she flew to
California and met us. Pomson was
gonna pay her a fortune after we
got captured.

James is silent for a few seconds.

JAMES
...So, does that mean she's not in
danger right now?

MALTE
Well, no. She turned her back on
Pomson after a while. But that just
means she can do the same to us!

JAMES
We can't leave her. Even if she met
us for the wrong reasons initially.
She's on our side now.

MALTE
Pomson and men with guns are
following us *right this instant*,
man! It's a miracle you survived
this far, you said it yourself.
Let's get out of here! (when James
doesn't answer) Well, *I'm* getting
out of here.

Malte starts running away from the town as fast as he can.

JAMES
Malte--

He hesitates, but ultimately follows after his friend.

EXT. THE DUNES - DAY

Malte is leading James through the desert when he steps on something and there is an echoing BANG. He falls to the floor, instantly paralyzed. James reels, having been hit badly by the effect radius as well. Staggering and crawling, he brushes sand and finds a line of stun mines.

He can do nothing as Pomson and her men run up.

POMSON

It worked! The perimeter of stun mines worked! Ha ha! We've got them!

EXT. THE CENTER OF TOWN - DAY

Florence looks up to see Pomson and her men dragging Malte and James through the desert.

FLORENCE

No!

The settlers guarding her start cheering.

POMSON

We got them when they tried to escape! They stepped on our mine perimeter!

The stun was beginning to wear off, and the boys could walk again. Pomson pushes them into the center of the town next to Florence. James immediately cuts Florence free with the switchblade, but any attempt at escape would be instantly blocked by the ring of settlers encircling them.

Pomson draws her pistol and levels it at the trio.

POMSON

This is for all the death and the heartbreak caused unto us twenty-three years ago! This is for the loved ones we lost, and the dream that was taken from us! But mostly...this is in memory of my father, our beloved leader, and his glorious vision!

A gunshot rings out...and Pomson's pistol clatters from her hand. Werner steps in front of the three, armed with a Beretta. Pomson draws her knife and snarls.

(CONTINUED)

POMSON
Get out of the way, old man.

WERNER
I shouldn't have let this go so far. I should have spoken to you all before outsider's lives were involved. I should have been a leader like Hans.

He looks at each settler in turn.

WERNER
Look at us! About to execute three teenagers who weren't even alive at the time of the incident we're punishing them for! What would this motiveless killing accomplish? Would it bring our family and friends back from the dead? Would it retroactively win a battle long gone?

POMSON
It would give meaning to the senseless deaths 23 years ago!

WERNER
How? An eye for an eye? Dragging three innocent people out here and shooting them somehow vindicates all of our brethren who died in an invasion instigated by us, perpetuated by us, and that ultimately accomplished nothing?

POMSON
What do you know? You weren't one of us back then! You weren't there for the aftermath, the pain of waiting for soldiers and loved ones who never came home!

WERNER
I was unanimously chosen to be leader after spending my entire adult life helping this community. You, Evelyn, if I must note, struck out on your own mere days after the failed invasion, and we never heard from you again, until now when you stormed in here demanding blood sacrifices!

POMSON

I am the daughter of Halsey himself! I carry his name, I fight for his memory, and I too have spent my entire adult life planning for the community. Planning a vengeance that will now be ours! If you want to deny us that vengeance, you are unfit to lead these people!

WERNER

You have killed and schemed just as your father did, both traits of which lead to his downfall. And while you have thrown our townspeople's lives in danger repeatedly to capture young James, he has used only nonlethal force in response! If your father had tried to solve problems the same way, this tragic cycle of killing would never have started!

Pomson sends her knife spinning into Werner's chest. Werner falls to the ground, as numerous settlers cry out in shock. Struggling for breath, Werner addresses the people.

WERNER

Please....let go of the past...before more blood is spilled.

He dies. Pomson addresses the community in disgust.

POMSON

I can't believe you all elected a Pelvanida scientist as your leader in the first place. Now, my brethren, ready your weapons!

The settlers look at each other. A few palm their guns, but most are unsure.

POMSON

Draw your weapons! Fire!

They hesitate. Some shake their heads and step back. Pomson has lost them.

POMSON

What are you doing? You cowards! Redemption is upon us! Stop being a disgrace to my father's name!

The settlers draw away, giving her and the trio a wide berth. Pomson walks up to Werner's body and retrieves her bloodied knife.

POMSON

It was always going to end this way, I knew it. I'll kill all three of you myself!

James steps out between her and his friends.

FLORENCE

Junior...

She tries to get up, but convulses with pain and collapses.

JAMES

Florence, for once you can't fight for us. I'll take her myself.

He draws the switchblade and holds it at his side.

Pomson screams and charges him. James flips the radio-flashlight out and flashes her in the face, temporarily blinding her. Taken by surprise, she doesn't notice when he drops to one knee, sending her tumbling over his back in her blind rush.

Pulling a stun mine out of his jacket, he primes it and flings it at her. It hits her in the face and detonates, and she cries out as she quickly becomes paralyzed.

The three stand over her. James hands Malte his switchblade back.

JAMES

Here.

MALTE

Oh, thanks...what do we do with her now?

JAMES

Take her back to Carson City Camp. I suspect all this wasn't an authorized use of her security clearance and their resources. They can do what they please with her.

EXT. CARSON CITY CAMP - DAY

Pomson has been bound, gagged, and tied to an almost mummified degree to the Carson City double doors.

EXT. CARSON CITY STREETS - DAY

The three are walking down a mostly empty street.

MALTE

So...what do we do now that we've found the portal point?

JAMES

Huh?

MALTE

That was where the bridge is going to open up, right? Did you scan it?

JAMES

Actually...I did and it was another dud.

Malte stops.

MALTE

What?

JAMES

It wasn't the portal point.

MALTE

But James, that was the last of the coordinates.

JAMES

I know.

MALTE

Well...that's it then! We're sunk! We struck out! We lose! That was our only lead!

JAMES

Don't be so hasty--

MALTE

We've been running up and down the American coast, we've lost \$1,000, I've almost been killed a dozen times...and it was all for nothing!

(CONTINUED)

JAMES
We'll find another trail!

MALTE
James, tomorrow is Monday! Our finals being then! We've got to call a break until at least afterward.

JAMES
How can you possibly think of school after all this? Florence, why are you being so silent?

FLORENCE
...Were you two really going to leave me in there, tied to that rack?

Silence.

JAMES
Flo, we had no choice. We were hoping to go get help--

FLORENCE
I can't believe you two would do that! You knew she would kill me!

MALTE
Oh, come on, you of all people can't complain about leaving teammates to Pomson's mercy!

JAMES
Guys, not now, please--

FLORENCE
(to Malte)
I'm not interested in listening to you Malte! Once again, you don't appreciate how lucky you are! You're going to live a full and healthy life, while James and I are dead in the ground! (to James) How can this not affect you? We are both going to die!

JAMES
Everybody dies, Florence. I have more than enough time to find my father, that's all I need.

(CONTINUED)

FLORENCE

That's cause your life has been perfect up to now! Well, I'm living as good a life as I can with the time I have left! I'm going back to Hughes Island. If I've got two years to live, I'm gonna go be a Chieftess!

JAMES

Florence, don't say that--

MALTE

She should have done that in the first place, if you ask me. I need to catch the next train to Three Rivers. In one week we'll keep going, assuming you've found any more leads. I'm not going to flunk out of college for no good reason.

Florence and Malte walk in opposite directions down the street away from James.

JAMES

Where are you both going? You're just giving up like that? After all we've been through? Fine! I'll go it alone! My dad, my problem I guess...Go have fun doing other things and *never knowing the answer!*

They are both gone. James sighs.

JAMES

I don't need them anyway...I've made a bunch of other allies since we started. I'll see if I can find my way back to Tenant's Way.

James walks down a darkened side street and comes across a different street. Then another. He sees a regular-looking MAN hurrying somewhere.

JAMES

Excuse me, could you tell me where--?

The man pulls a knife and stabs him in the gut without warning. James cries out, falling to the ground and clutching his stomach. Groaning, James' eyes slowly closes, and he passes out.

FADE TO BLACK