

Home  
by Dylan Quinn

I am Designated Alpha 7-0.

I was created by Designated Alpha 6-9 and Alpha 6-8.

I am with Designated Beta 7-0.

And I am a prisoner.

20 years ago, I was taken from a Home I'll never know to a place I didn't recognise surrounded by things I don't understand. I am an alien on foreign ground. Made to work for an alien organisation who seeks to erase our very existence.

They gave me a designation and a number. The same as with those who brought me into the world. The same as the woman I was partnered with. I have gone by this for so long that I have forgotten my real name. The name in which I began my life. Just like where I once lived. My Home. Even after all these years, I still miss it. An unexplainable hiraeth that draws me away from my present and back into my unreachable past. But how can you long for something you can't remember?

They don't allow us to choose who we can spend our time with. They instead assign us partners. Beta 7-0 is mine. And I am hers. Despite the circumstances of our introductions, I believe that we have grown close. We care for each other and I value her opinions just as she does mine. If only I knew her name. But she was like me and had forgotten it as well.

They do not care about any of us. These beings that have taken us from our Homes and set us to work on their infernal machines. Most of us don't even know what they are for. We just know we have to make them lest we suffer the grim fates of all those who oppose our 'rulers': a short drop and a sudden stop.

That is the fate that befell my parents when they dared to ask for extra food and water for all of us. I can still see the light go out of their once hopeful eyes as I was forced to watch.

Despite all of this, it appears that our luck may turn around for the better. There have recently been rumours of a planned mass exodus from our prison.

An escape to freedom.

To happiness.

To Home, whatever it may be.

It has been discovered that, while during labour hours security is precise, at night it is shockingly lacking. That is when we will strike.

Many have agreed to the plan. Some are too scared. Beta 7-0 and I are of the former. We seek a place where we can be free together. A place where we are not merely numbers but instead people. A place to call Home.

The time has come.

Everyone has their role.

Everyone knows their role.

Ours is with 'Retrieval Squad'. We are to break into the command centre, neutralise the guards and retrieve the keys to freedom.

Beta is nervous. Understandable. I am as well. I comfort her the best I can and I promise her that I shall never abandon her no matter what. She responds with an offer that we be brought together officially in a marriage once we are free, which I accept joyously. We embrace to certify our promise and take our place amongst our fellow escapees.

We go at the signal.

Our attack is swift and brutal. All in the command centre that are still conscious are on our side. We retrieve the keys to our escape and wait for the signal to unlock.

What may only be a minute or so feels like an eternity before we receive the all-clear. And with a quick turn of the wrist, the gates open.

And there it is. Freedom. The wide and beautiful freedom. I shed a tear at its majestic sight as Beta does the same.

There is no one to make us work.

No one to oppress us.

No one to stop us now.

We sprint towards freedom as others follow. Outside the gate we have a clearer view. A view of water. Vast, magnificent water. The leaders of our escape direct us to boats waiting for us. They are numerous, but small. Some of us wonder how we are all to fit. But we are assured that we will make it. There is a set destination and we will make it. So we all scramble on and make room regardless. No one shall be left behind.

The journey is long and tiresome. Sometimes the water is calm. Other times it is angry. And its anger is only satiated by sacrifice. We lose one boat each day.

One boat.

Each carrying several of those I considered friends.

Brothers-in-arms.

Family.

But we press on. The water must end eventually. This shall not be all that freedom is. I knew that Home was gone. Whatever Home was before the life I knew. Before I was Alpha 7-0. But I do not care. There would be a Home for us. One way or another.

But the water disagrees. It grows angry again. Angrier than it has ever been.

It takes one boat. Then two boats. Then three. Our kin dwindles significantly from hundreds to dozens.

Eventually the anger finds our boat. Its furious anger bellows towards us at a horrific pace. I look at Beta. She is crying. She is scared. I am scared too. I gaze into the eyes of my love one final time before the water envelops us and the world goes dark.

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When I come to, I am on sand. It sticks to my body as I fail to stand up. I look around for Beta but she is nowhere to be found. I call out her name but she does not answer. I am about to abandon my hope when I hear voices in the distance. Then I see figures come towards me. They help me up and walk me to a new location. It is full of tents. Tents that have food. And drink. And medical supplies. In some of these tents I also find my friends who made it from our prison over the water. But none of that compares to the last sight I see. Someone who I thanked god was here with me. Beta 7-0. We run into each other's arms and hold on for dear life. Nothing can separate us now.

I look at our surroundings. At these people who are helping us. At our new freedom. And I smile.

But they are not the only reason I do.

In the command centre of the place that once contained us, I found the files of every worker. And in those files I found names. Our names. The ones that had been taken from us. I memorised them all. I tell Beta hers and she cries tears of joy. She loves her name. And I love mine.

So, now free of the chains that bound us and welcomed into the arms of our saviours, I hold my love in my arms as I think of the future. Our future.

My name is Tyler Harris.

My parents were Michael and Sandra Harris.

My wife is Alyssa Hill.

And I am Home.