

PRISON BREAK

GEORGE PLANS HIS ESCAPE

by George Ding

I found myself in a locked cell. It was barren save for a bookshelf and a cabinet with a locked compartment.

Martin was locked in a similar cell to mine. We could see each other but it was too far to reach or pass anything between us. Both cells were cinched with a padlock; mine required a four-digit code, his a key. Outside our cells were a desk with a computer, and a door handle locked and chained to the wall. That handle was our ultimate goal.

I rummaged about in my cell. The bookshelf contained a key and the unlocked part of the cabinet held a length of string, tied across pegs in a mysterious shape. The key did not fit the cabinet's lock.

The two serial killers had escaped and locked us in their cells.

I heard a click.

"I've got it!" Martin said as he stepped out of his cell.

Not that we were in competition or anything, but I was sure I'd get out of my cell first. This development was a severe blow to my self-esteem.

Martin started searching the outside room. There was nothing on the computer but he found a locked box inside the desk and a safe which needed a key code. I handed him the key I found in my room and he opened the box. Inside was a USB stick. Martin stuck it in the computer. As the explorer window popped up, the computer crashed. He restarted the computer but it crashed again. Martin pounded on the door to call for help.

Up to this point, I had convinced myself that I really was trapped in a locked room with no one to save me. When she came in, she found me sitting against a wall, thinking about how I'd have better luck tunneling out, *Shawshank*-style.

"You still haven't gotten out of your cell?" she asked. I didn't appreciate the sound of surprise in her voice. "Do you need a hint?"

"No."

Martin told her our problem and she shifted the computer desk. His leaning on the table was nudging the plug out of the power socket. She left, and the illusion was shattered. I checked my watch. Forty minutes of our allotted hour had passed.

Martin pulled up files on the computer and I stood, trying to get a look. That's when I noticed a folder I hadn't seen before on the computer desk. I grabbed it and inside was a picture of 12 saints, each with a unique number and shape on their vestments. Recognizing them immediately, I went to the cabinet and saw that the pattern of string was actually four distinct shapes.

I matched them to the numbers on the picture and tried the combination in the lock. It opened.

The flash drive contained a series of ciphers and a set of police dossiers. Before we could decipher what this meant, there was a knock at the door. The employee came in and told us we were out of time.

As she reset the room, she walked us through the rest of the puzzle. The news clippings revealed which policeman was on duty at the time of the escape; his birthday, included on the dossier, was the key code to the safe; the safe contained the key to the locked compartment in my cabinet; inside we would have found the floor plan to the prison, which, combined with the ciphers, would have given us the password needed to unlock the chain around the door handle.

We had spent an hour in the room and only gotten about halfway through the puzzle.

"This is only the medium room," she said. "Maybe next time you guys can try easy."

With our tails between our legs, Martin and I walked out of our fake prison. I thought about what would happen if something like this happened in real life. Forget solving mysteries. I'd have to do what Andy Dufresne did and tunnel my way out with a rock hammer.

