Dust coated Albert’s face as he hauled himself out of the newly-dug tunnel. The humid air of the museum’s bathroom, thick with the scent of disinfectant and old stone, filled his lungs. They’d done it; after weeks of painstaking work, they were in. Now, the real work began. He quickly surveyed the bathroom, the gleaming white tiles reflecting the dim light. Two porcelain sinks, pristine and unused, with mirrors above them. Two closed white toilets, oblivious to the clandestine activity taking place just feet away. He saw the barely noticeable hole in the tiled wall. "Josh, get moving! We haven't got all night." He barked the order, his voice tight with impatience. He needed to move, needed to get to the good stuff, before anyone discovered they were here.

Josh coughed, wiping dirt and sweat from his forehead as he followed Albert out of the cramped tunnel. The cold, sterile air of the bathroom was a stark contrast to the stifling heat of their burrow. He felt a jolt of adrenaline, mingled with a growing sense of dread. They were in. He glanced around the pristine bathroom, acutely aware of every shadow and sound, already imagining the alarms, the guards, and the certain prison time. The weight of his daughter’s health, the reason for this risky venture, pressed heavily on his shoulders. “Right. Just, try to be careful, Albert.” He replied, his voice barely a whisper.

"Careful?" Albert snorted, already moving towards the hallway entrance. "We’re going to be rich, Josh. Careful is for losers. Come on, let’s go." He ducked through the hole, disappearing into the darkness of the main hallway.

Josh hesitated for a moment, then followed, his heart hammering against his ribs. He knew, even before setting foot in the museum, that Albert wasn't one for caution. But the thought of his daughter’s face, her small hand grasping his, spurred him forward.

The main hallway was a long, echoing tunnel lined with display cases. The faint hum of the museum’s climate control system filled the air. Exhibits of ancient artifacts offered a tantalizing glimpse of the potential loot. Gold coins, ornate pottery, jeweled daggers, all behind the thick glass of the display cases. The reflective, polished stone floor offered no cover. Small, black security cameras, their lenses gleaming, offered a constant, silent surveillance. The velvet ropes, intended to control the flow of legitimate visitors, now served only to highlight the vulnerability of the museum.

Albert, ignoring the ‘DO NOT TOUCH’ signs, was already halfway down the hall, his eyes scanning the displays with predatory intensity. He moved with a cat-like grace, the years of experience etched in every movement. “Jewel Exhibit first,” he muttered, already planning the route. “Then the Egyptian stuff. That’s where the real treasure is.”

Josh, struggling to keep up, his eyes darting nervously from camera to camera, from display case to display case, pulled Albert aside. "Wait, Albert. The security room first. We need to disable the alarms, at least temporarily. And maybe cameras…”

Albert stopped, his face twisting in annoyance. "You worry too much, Josh. Time is money. And you're being slow. We don’t have time for that. We go in, we grab the goods, and we get out. Simple."

Josh stood his ground, his usually timid nature hardening slightly. "It's not simple, Albert. If we set off the alarms, we're caught. My daughter needs me. I'm not risking that." The words, born from a place of absolute desperation, felt alien to him.

Albert stared at him, his eyes narrowed, sizing him up. He could sense the anxiety emanating from Josh. He could see the fear. For a moment, he considered just leaving him behind. It would be easier. But he’d promised their mutual contact they’d work together. And Josh, for all his caution, was surprisingly good with the tools. “Fine,” he conceded, the word grating in his throat. “But you’re wasting precious time. Security room, then the Jewel Exhibit. Then, the Egyptian stuff.” He pushed past Josh, already heading towards the heavy metal door.

The Security Room was a mess. Desks overflowed with papers, coffee cups, and half-eaten food. The air reeked of stale donuts and the metallic tang of anxiety. Monitors displayed feeds from the various security cameras, including the one in the Jewel Exhibit. The constant hum of the computers and the flickering lights of the monitors added to the oppressive atmosphere.

Josh immediately went to work, his nimble fingers flying over the control panels. He’d spent weeks researching the museum’s security systems, pouring over blueprints, and studying camera placement. He could see the patterns, the blind spots. He quickly began disabling the alarms. “Give me a minute,” he said, his voice focused. “I can reroute the feeds, create some dead zones.”

Albert, impatient, began rummaging through the desks. He found a keycard, a half-eaten sandwich, and a crumpled pack of cigarettes. The cigarettes went into his pocket. He glanced at the monitors, studying the feeds from the Jewel Exhibit. He'd memorized the layout, the guard patrols. He could practically taste the diamond necklace.

“Hurry it up!” he said. “We’re running out of time.”

Josh, without looking up, said, “Nearly done. Just a few more adjustments.”

Suddenly, a red light began flashing on one of the monitors. “Damn it!” Josh exclaimed. “One of the camera feeds is offline. They’ll notice soon.”

“Notice what?” Albert scoffed. He was already reaching for the door. “They won’t notice anything until it’s too late. Come on, let’s move.”

Ignoring Josh’s protests, Albert raced down the hallway, his eyes fixed on the brightly lit Jewel Exhibit. He could see the glimmer of the diamond necklace through the glass. He could almost feel the weight of it in his hands.

The Jewel Exhibit was a world of dazzling brilliance, cold and sterile. The diamond necklace, the centerpiece, radiated light, its facets catching and scattering the light in a thousand sparkling directions. Rubies, emeralds, gold bracelets, antique watches, all lay within locked display cases, the promise of unimaginable wealth.

Albert, ignoring the operational high-definition security camera that constantly monitored the display case but with a blind spot, produced a small, specialized tool. He carefully worked at the lock of the necklace’s display case. The sound of the lock disengaging was a low, metallic click.

Josh, having caught up, watched him, his heart pounding. “Be careful, Albert. This is it. If we get caught here…”

Albert ignored him, his focus absolute. He gently lifted the necklace from its velvet cradle, its cold weight settling in his palm. The diamonds blazed, reflecting the artificial light. It was magnificent.

Suddenly, an alarm blared, cutting through the silence. Albert froze. He cursed under his breath. “Damn it! They must have fixed the feed.”

Josh’s eyes widened in terror. “We have to go! Now!”

Albert hesitated. He looked at the necklace, then at Josh. His debt was substantial, and this, this was the key. He could still make it out. “Go!” he roared at Josh. “I’ll catch up!”

Josh didn’t argue. He turned and fled, running towards the Egyptian Exhibit. He didn’t trust Albert. Not anymore.

Albert, with the necklace now secure in a satchel, turned back to the door. He heard the distant shouts of security guards. They were closing in. He had to make a decision. He looked at the other display cases, filled with the promise of further riches. But time was running out. He had to get out. He ran, as fast as his legs could carry him.

In the Egyptian Exhibit, Josh was already at work. He was using his tools to open the case containing the gold funerary mask. He knew it wouldn’t be worth as much, but it would be enough. He was desperate.

The room was hushed, the statues of pharaohs and deities watching him. The air felt heavy, filled with the echoes of ancient rituals. The hieroglyphics, the sarcophagi, the sheer weight of history pressed down on him. He was so close.

Then, he heard the sound of footsteps echoing in the hallway. They were getting closer.

He looked up and saw Albert, running towards him, pursued by two security guards. Albert was empty-handed, the satchel with the necklace gone.

"We have to get out of here!" Albert yelled. "Now!"

Josh made his choice. He grabbed the gold funerary mask, a solid piece, the craftsmanship exquisite, and followed Albert out of the Egyptian Exhibit.

They sprinted down the hallway, dodging security guards. They ran back towards the bathroom, toward the tunnel. Josh glanced behind him. The guards were gaining on them.

They reached the bathroom, gasping for breath. Albert, out of breath and with nothing to show for it, turned on Josh.

"You! You could have gotten the necklace!" He spat out, his voice laced with rage. "Why did you run?!”

Josh, clutching the funerary mask, felt a surge of defiance. "I had a daughter, Albert. And you lost everything." He'd bet on the wrong horse, but he could still get his family out of this.

Suddenly, more guards burst into the bathroom. They were trapped. The end.

Later, in the interrogation room, the bright lights reflecting in the sterile environment, Josh sat with a lawyer. He was weary, but the relief on his face was obvious. The prosecutors had, against all odds, offered him a deal. His cooperation in the capture of Albert, who was going to be charged with grand theft, and they would greatly reduce his sentence. It was likely, with good behavior, he could be out in time for his daughter’s operation. He made the choice. The life of the other man would be his.

He thought back to the moment the guards had cornered them in the bathroom. Albert, with the fiery look of betrayal still burning in his eyes. “You set me up!” Albert yelled.

Josh had looked at Albert, his face impassive. He had seen him choose personal gain over their shared mission. He, in turn, chose his daughter over the chance of a large payout. The decision, in the end, was clear.

Albert, too, was being questioned. He, on the other hand, was already planning his escape. He knew he'd be able to make bail. With the right connections, he'd be out in no time. He'd learned a hard lesson: never trust anyone. He wasn't going to give up. There were other museums, other targets. His debt was large.