

Bradford

Chapter 15 – Gift for the President

“The important bit is not running.” Said Mike. “You have a full fifteen minutes to get back to the car and be driven far away, before the device goes off.”

⊖

Shereen watched the coast approaching and just wanted to get off the plane and away from Mike Lakey. She doubted if it would be that simple though, he was hardly going to let her go home. For one thing, the San Pablo police were likely to be watching the homes of all Lakey Pharmaceutical’s staff, including hers.

“Another forty minutes and we’ll be at the house.” Said Mike. “Hot showers and something decent to eat, you’ll soon feel your old self.”

“Thank you Mike.”

She’d decided to go along with whatever he was up to, play the role of submissive bedroom furniture. Then when the time was right, she’d grab what she could and run. Shereen suddenly realised there was someone missing from their group and Mike hadn’t mentioned her, not once.

“Is your wife joining us ?” She asked.

He was smiling and shaking his head.

“Lacey is probably under arrest by now.” He said. “But she knows nothing.”

Even Nick was smiling, Mike had finally dumped Lacey. She hoped that his moods might start improving, though she realised he’d be wanting her to share his bed every night.

“Well done Mike.” She said and she meant it.

The beach area in front of them was close now; close enough to read the banner at the end of the short airstrip, made by someone pummelling the sand flat.

‘Pandan Beach Air Tours – View The Famous Reefs From The Air.’

Pandan, they were way out to the west of San Pablo, the area where rich lawyers and bankers had their summer houses. An island hopper landing a few rich people wasn’t going to get a second glance from the authorities. No immigration, no baggage check, they were just tourists returning from a quick buzz round the famous reefs.

“We’re a long way from home Mike.” She said.

“This is home now.”

It was a beautiful day and Shereen enjoyed the view of the coast, as their plane slowly descended towards the makeshift airstrip. A few minutes later the wheels touched the sand and they were down and running over the beach, towards a waiting car. Mike had considered everything, the car looked like a holiday hire, even had a ‘Pandan Beach,’ sticker on the rear panel.

Shereen waited for everyone else to get out of the plane, she had nothing to carry. The driver of the car helped Nick, emptying their few bits from the plane and putting them into the trunk of the car. Not the pathogen though, Mike kept hold of that, possessive of it, like a boy with his first real prom date.

“Get comfortable in the car.” Mike told her. “I just have to pay the pilot.”

She got in the back of the car and watched as Mike counted out a large bundle of money for the pilot. A lot of money, but she knew he’d never live to spend it. An accident probably, nothing to excite the Pandan cops. Late tonight or tomorrow at the latest, another loose end promptly dealt with. Mike got in beside her and held her hand.

“Soon be at the house.” He said.

The driver left the sand of the airstrip and turned onto a road heading west. A mile or so later they came to a road sign which said ‘Pandan Town.’ The highest property prices in any of the New Nations, Pandan boasted that you had to be a multi-millionaire to afford to live there.

“You’ll love it; the pool goes right down to the beach.” Said Mike.

Another mile and the driver is out and pressing buttons to open a gate. A long winding and pretty driveway then, which winds gradually up a gentle hill. She expected a compound, full of serious looking guards and several buildings. Instead they were heading for a single large villa that overlooked a private bay. It was beautiful, it was the kind of house she’d always dreamed of owning, but would never be able to afford.

“It’s..... beautiful.” She said.

“HmMMM.” He replied.

Shereen saw the pool, that did indeed go right up to the edge of their private beach. For a moment she considered that Lacey might have chosen it, but no, she’d be giving the police the address if she had. Mike had chosen it, crazy paranoid Mike, who wanted to be the next ruler of San Pablo. It was his Camelot, or perhaps a picturesque semi tropical Mordor.

~ ~

The VTOL landed at a supply base in the farmlands, the usual couple of acres surrounded by two fences and a lot of razor wire. The locals probably had dozens of bizarre theories about the place, but it was just a few long sheds full of military supplies.

“Welcome to Echo 14.” Said a guard.

He meant it ! There were only three of them there, on a six month rotation and any change in their routine was warmly welcomed. A VTOL full of soldiers returning from active duty was blowing their minds.

“Anything we can do to help, just ask.” One said.

“We just need somewhere safe to fit a fuel cell.” Their pilot told them.

Everyone apart from the seriously injured took the opportunity for a breath of fresh air. Bradford walked right up the fence, accompanied by Gillian and Maria.

“We need to take Gupta with us.” Said Maria.

“I’d like to, but he can still hardly walk.” Replied Bradford.

He hadn’t really worked out a plan. Ask the guards to open the front gate, or simply blow a hole in the wire. It all had consequences and one of those was Gupta being questions for a long time by the security people. He was one of them, a potential terrorist, his career was finished anyway.

“You’re a hero as far as the guards here are concerned.” Said Gillian. “Ask them for something comfortable that seats four. They must have all sorts of stuff in these sheds.”

Maria was looking at him and shrugging.

“It might work,” she said, “as long as they don’t ask their boss for approval.”

Bradford wasn’t sure. If they asked for approval, he’d have three guards to fight and would the soldiers on the VTOL help, or hinder them ?

“I don’t want to hurt any more of our guys.” He said.

Gillian was angry, furious at him. She was up on her feet and prodding him in the chest. She was also giving Maria dirty looks.

“You are Bradford and Maria, the people who took out Samuel !” She screeched. “Strut for God’s sake. Demand that they give you something we can drive out of here.”

Bradford didn't strut, never had, never would. Besides, scaring the guards was likely to make them check in with their controllers, just to cover their backsides.

"You've given me an idea Gillian." He said. "We need to get Gupta first though, find him a wheelchair if we can."

There wasn't a wheelchair, but there had been a pair of crutches going spare and Maria was carrying a folding chair. Bradford approached the guard who seemed to be in charge, though they were all just privates. Maria placed the chair next to Bradford and Gupta took a while sitting himself on it. There were a lot of grunting noises and one of the guards helped Gupta to get comfortable.

"I was hoping you guys could help me out." Said Bradford.

"Yes, of course, what do you need?"

"Gupta needs to be somewhere else, orders right from the top." He said. "Normally we'd just get you to open the gate and hoof it to the nearest town and pick up some kind of vehicle there."

Bradford hesitated and looked at Gupta, who dropped one of his crutches and looked completely helpless.

"You can see how it is." Said Bradford. "A brave soldier injured saving others....."

He turned to look at Gillian.

"It's no good Major, we can't ask them." He said. "They have rules to follow, regulations. They won't be able to help."

The senior guard was looking from him to Gupta and back again.

"What do you need, I'm sure we can help." He said. "We're more civil defence than army, but we've got all sorts of equipment."

They had and fifteen minutes later, they left supply base Echo 14, in a brand new and fully charged electric army truck. There was room for six in the extended cab and the huge truck was surprisingly comfortable. There had been an argument about who drove and Maria won. She was the only one checked out to drive anything with that number axles.

"Those guards are going to be in so much trouble." Said Gupta.

"They'll check in though," said Gillian, "maybe not for a while, but they'll have set times and a routine."

Maria was craning her neck, trying to drive the powerful vehicle and join the conversation.

"She's right." She said. "I love this thing, but every cop in San Pablo will soon be looking for it."

Bradford knew she was right, he was using the vehicle's on board electronic maps to find the nearest town.

"We'll dump the truck as soon as we get to town." He said. "Steal something less conspicuous and then probably dump that and steal something else before we get where we're going."

All of them were looking at him, but Gillian asked the question he assumed they all wanted to ask.

"Where are we going?" She asked.

"The Dunes." He said. "To see Bobby Laszlo and make sure Amoe is safe."

~ ~

Camila noticed the van was still there, it didn't look to have moved since she'd seen the men, fiddling with something in the back. It was a dark blue electric delivery van; there were thousands of them on the streets of San Pablo. It wasn't low down on its axles, so it didn't seem to be carrying anything particularly heavy.

She examined it from a distance and decided she needed to get closer. Ideally she'd have gone back to her apartment for her blaster, something with a hood and a few tools, but there was no harm in just having a look. Camila waited for a while, watching the dozen or so other vehicles in the car park.

No movement, they all looked to be empty, but she couldn't be certain. Car crime had once been the curse of San Pablo, until the courts began giving out mandatory five year prison terms. Camila had survived several nasty situations while with the subversives; she didn't want to end up in a correctional facility for five years, for breaking into a van.

"Bless me." She muttered, running her fingers over her St Christopher necklace.

There were no signs on the van, but that wasn't unusual. Sign writing was not only expensive; it also marked the van out as having something in it that was worth stealing. Camila tried to look in the rear windows, but someone had fitted an inside curtain. Round to the front and there's a partition to stop her seeing into the back. There's a book of some kind on the passenger seat though and she can just make out 'LabSync,' on the cover. Large friendly blue letters on a gold background. Camila had heard Bradford talking about them once, but she wasn't sure if they were friend or foe.

She had Emily's flat to clean and then breakfast for the children. So far she'd just look like being nosey, if anyone looked at the security camera footage. She decided to ignore her curiosity and forget about the van. She was too well known in the building and Bradford wouldn't appreciate her doing anything illegal.

"Don't mess with where you live." She muttered to herself

She saw the man approaching, but didn't see him as a threat. By the time she saw the anger on his face; he'd already punched her in the chest and grabbed her by the hair. He was strong and didn't seem worried about his face being seen. That was bad; it meant that in all likelihood, he was going to kill her. Camila tried to stand, so he kicked her legs away and began using her hair to pull her towards the emergency stairs. No sounds, no curses, no threats, from either side. He pulled her hair, while she struggled. Camila managed to grab his leg and bite his ankle, hard. That made him yell, though he responded by kicking her twice in the ribs. Something cracked and Camila was just a limp body, being dragged along the ground.

"Why?" She asked.

He ignored her, putting his arm under her, lifting her to push her through the door to the stairs. She used her last reserves of strength, bringing her arm back and punching him in the throat. He staggered and coughed, but threw her through the door. Camila went backwards into the stairs, banging her head and feeling close to passing out. He's tough though, had to be special forces trained. He's coughing but still on his feet, actually smiling at her.

"Not bad." He said. "You shouldn't have been nosey. Saw you yesterday too."

A knife now, long and sharp. He kneels over her, pointing the knife at her chest.

"I have children."

He just shrugs and pulls the knife back. As Camila waited for the end, he screamed and dropped the knife. He looks to be trying to feel his own back and then he's falling away from her. Mateo isn't far away, she can see him now and Sofia, still aiming a blaster at the man's back. Camila tried to stand, but her knees feel strange, so she sits on the stairs. Mateo is in her arms and Sofia is handing her the blaster, her blaster, obviously taken from her bedroom.

"Sorry mama, I followed you." Said Mateo. "Saw the bad man hit you."

It had all seemed to happen so fast, yet they'd had time to find her blaster and help her. Other battles had been like that though, time either seemed speeded up, or slowed right down. More faces now, drawn by the fight, soon the police would be there.

"Who was he?" Asked Sofia.

"I don't know."

Emily now and several of her friends, all anxious and trying to help. Camila finds she's crying and everyone is assuming the worst. Why not go along with what they're thinking, rape was common in San Pablo, far too common.

"He said he was going to rape me." She said.

Lots of sympathetic noises and Camila is crying, but really for her daughter, who has just killed a man. She hugs Sofia, but can just see the van over her daughter's shoulder. Once the fuss is over and the cops have been and gone. She'll get properly dressed for the occasion and break into the van. It wasn't curiosity now, someone had tried to kill her because of that van and she was determined to know why.

~ ~

Shereen had never seen either of the two people before, but Mike seemed to know them very well. He must have been living a double life for years, waiting to take on his persona as a rich resident of Pandan.

"Shereen," he said, "this is Enrique and his sister Valeria."

"Just Val will do just fine honey." Said Valeria.

They seemed friendly, but she guessed they were to be her guards when she went shopping. Mainly there to stop her running away she supposed.

"We'll take good care of you." Added Enrique.

Shereen wasn't a fighter, she knew that both of the fit looking young people could outrun her and beat her to a bloody pulp. She'd do as they asked of her and smile, knowing that her chance to run would arrive, one day.

"Go to the Mall in San Pablo City, the one you like." Said Mike.

"You mean the Destiny Mall?" She asked.

"Yes, go wild; I gave Val plenty of money."

It didn't make sense, the Destiny Mall was hours away, even in a fast car. Then she saw Mike reach for the pathogen delivery device and she understood.

"No Mike, not me, you can't ask this of me." She pleaded.

He was looking at her as though she was an awkward teenager.

"There is no one else." He said. "I had someone picked out, but since the problems at the Island facility..... It has to be you."

She'd seen so much of the green back pack, that it already seemed to be part of her luggage.

"I don't know how it works." She said.

"Easy, we discussed this while you were asleep." He said.

Enrique and Val were nodding their heads and smiling, as though they were discussing taking the kids away for the weekend, rather than killing tens of thousands of innocent people.

"I'll have the cryogenic carry case." Said Enrique. "I know how to transfer the pathogen cell to the device."

Val picked up the backpack and pointed at a large red blob that looked like any other part of the pattern.

"You put the pack down somewhere it won't be noticed and press here." She said.

Mike was getting involved now, taking the device from Val.

"The important bit is not running." Said Mike. "You have a full fifteen minutes to get back to the car and be driven far away, before the device goes off."

Shereen now knew why she'd been kept alive. All the sweet talk, all the hand holding. It wasn't love, he needed her to deliver his damn pathogen. She looked at their faces and knew, was actually

certain that the device would go off the instant she pressed the button. She had a card up her sleeve though; she wasn't anywhere near as dumb as they thought.

"Can I buy all my nice new clothes before we destroy the Mall?" She asked.

She even pouted at him and of course Mike was only too willing to indulge her.

"Yes of course you can, a whole car full. Enrique will go around with you and carry it all."

Shereen really was wearing underwear she'd borrowed from a maid and a plain cotton dress from a female guard who was about her size. It all fitted tolerable well, but Mike didn't know that.

"We'll need to stop somewhere on the way." She said. "I can't go into town wearing borrowed panties and a dress two sizes too big."

"The dress looks fine." Said Val.

"Best if you waited and did all your shopping in the Destiny Mall." Added Mike.

A little moody now, Shereen prided herself on being able to spin up a good moody out of thin air.

She grabbed the edge of the cotton dress and held it between finger and thumb.

"You expect me to wear this?! Where people might know me!"

"It looks fine." Said Enrique.

"No, not going to happen." Shereen barked. "We stop at one clothes shop and I'll quickly buy a decent dress. I'm not going to the Destiny Mall in borrowed clothes. Or you can take the device yourselves."

He was going to agree, she had left him no option, they could hardly tie her up and drag her round San Pablo City.

"Fine, one dress and make it quick." Said Mike. "It'll be evening before you get to the Destiny Mall anyway."

"Val can go into the shop and help you." He added.

~ ~

President Herbert's father had always instilled in him the need to make sure everything he did was bringing in a wage. They'd been poor and his father had worked at two jobs, to make sure his young family had enough to eat.

"Make sure it brings in a wage." His father had told him. "Everything you do has to earn money. No one else is going to look after you in this world."

His father had been black and his mother looked Asian. They'd never mentioned their roots, that kind of thing no longer really mattered. His parents were both long dead, but the president always remembered what his father had taught him. Everything he did had to bring in a wage, he even kept a small notebook with the sums written in pencil.

'Planning permission for Harbour 4 – Given to JM 100,000.'

'Support LW as next Mayor of City West - 50,000.'

The book was old and nearly full, over a billion dollars brought in since he'd first entered politics. It was absurd to keep a record at all, but he needed to have a record. No one else knew about it, not even his wife. The book was kept in a small safe in their bedroom that was there for any confidential papers he might bring home. Three wrong tries at the combination and the contents were incinerated.

He didn't consider himself to be a bad person, just a realist. He was always one election away from being just another citizen of San Pablo and that meant losing any opportunity for extra wages. As far as he was concerned a competent and corrupt president, was better than an incompetent but honest one. Herbert had several lines he wouldn't cross though and the main one was the security of San Pablo. His first duty was to protect his people.

"You're sure about this Graham?" He asked. "The picture looks very foggy to me."

Graham Molyneux was with him, the current military DisOps. They were looking at the last few seconds of images from the helmet camera of a dead soldier, the soldier Bradford had killed.

"Pity there's no sound." Added the president.

Graham was glaring at him, the military had wanted sound, but the government had refused to sign off on the budget. He didn't mention that though, Graham was a realist too.

"It's him sir," he said, "facial recognition gives an 82% certainty that it's Bradford Scott."

They ran the recording again and Herbert shook his head the whole way through.

"You really issued an arrest on sight, based on this?" Asked Herbert.

"82% sir, don't forget that."

"Software Graham, you set the dogs on a national hero because a piece of software told you to. It's not good enough, nowhere near good enough."

"It's him Otis, I know it! Why else would he steal a truck and run?"

Graham was an old friend, they'd been friends since the beginning of his political career. He was one of the few people to be allowed to use his first name. Herbert didn't really like the name Otis, but no one gets to choose the name they're baptised with.

"Reverse it Graham, call them off." Said Otis. "Do it quickly and issue a statement to the media that it was all a terrible mistake."

Was he going to oppose him? Graham wasn't moving, just glaring at him and looking angry.

"Do it, or I will!"

"Yes sir, of course, I'll do it right away."

A jellyfish, but the president liked his people to be.....pliable. Still, they'd been friends for over thirty years and he wanted them to remain friends.

"Graham."

The DisOps had the door open, about to flounce out of the room, still looking angry.

"Yes sir?"

"Bradford will come out of hiding when he needs to. You can trust him, ok?"

"Yes sir."

He looked at the recording again, knowing it would eventually leak to the media. It really could be anyone, without the software facial analysis. He was safe from being accused of favouring a murderer, at least for now. He pressed a button that locked his door and told him PA that he was working on something confidential. That usually meant a nap and no one would be allowed to disturb him for an hour. Others did the grunt work of running the nation, he just got the tough decisions and at his age, that meant needing a nap once in a while.

The second drawer down in his desk held at least a dozen phones, none of them the property of the government of San Pablo. His political people bought them and even then he used four or five different individuals. None could be traced to him, in theory at least. He was careful though, assuming everything was overheard. He picked one he'd used a few times. Bradford was a relatively safe call, he was now officially an innocent man. Bradford had called him earlier and that had been different, the PD489 squad leader had been a wanted man then. The phone was answered by a male voice he didn't recognise.

"Yeah?"

"Bradford Scott please."

A brief rustling sound as the phone is handed to Bradford.

"Yes?"

“Give it an hour to circulate through the system. You’re no longer a wanted man.”

“Thank you, I won’t let you down.”

“I’d still like to know the target they’re going after.”

A moment of silence and muttering, a female voice, probably Maria Gonsalves.

“We’ve seen what that leads to sir. Gillian almost died ! We will stop them, I promise.”

“You must ! This is the last time I can protect you. Now put Bobby on the line.”

More rustling and the first voice is back, obviously the infamous Bobby Laszlo.

“Just listen Bobby. I know you ! Not personally but the people you work for have asked for favours in the past, they’re in my book. Do you understand ?”

“Yes sir.”

“Give Bradford everything he might need and put it on my tab, we’ll settle up later. Again Bobby, do you understand ?”

“Yes sir, I do.”

~

~

Shereen had written the note while in the bathroom, having what she told them was a safety pee. Enrique and Val were now treating her like a child that needed to be constantly mollified, her moods tolerated. It was hardly a flattering attitude, but it suited her. She had a lot of information in her head, far more than Mike Lakey realised.

‘Please call Bradford Scott or Roland at PD 489, San Pablo 15 5579 1748

This is a matter of national security and confidential

Tell him the pathogen target is the Destiny Mall at about 8pm tonight

This is not a joke; thousands of lives could be lost

Give him my name - Shereen.’

Said her note, written on a piece of her breakfast cereal box. It gave all the essentials and she just needed to find someone likely to use the information correctly. They’d driven halfway through Pandan Town when she’d seen the boutique. There had to be frock shops of course, there were a lot of rich women in Pandan, all needing something to wear. They wouldn’t all spend hours driving into San Pablo.

“There !” She shouted. “Sarah’s Sensations.”

They managed to park outside and they were covering her like a Band Aid . Enrique in front, Val behind, it was suffocating.

“Easy guys.” She said. “They’ll be suspicious if you’re treating me like a prisoner.”

“Fine.” Said Val. “But any funny stuff and you’ll regret it.”

Shereen strutted into Sarah’s Sensations as though she’s a visiting celebrity, quickly deciding which one of the two assistants looked best to entrust her note to. The small brunette looked up as she came in and made eye contact. She’d do nicely.

“Baggage calamity.” Said Shereen. “My bags are probably still going round on a carousel in New Borongan. Can you help me please ? I need everything.”

“Yes of course, we stock everything you might need.”

“Thank you..... I’ve actually had to wear borrowed panties.”

Shereen laughed and the brunette was laughing with her. Lingerie first, with Enrique staying at the front of the store and looking awkward. Val was with them though, always a few steps behind.

“My driver, a dear girl.” Said Shereen, by way of explanation.

Expensive underwear and then she simply had to buy shoes and a matching bag. Lastly came the dress, which really was beautiful and far better than her salary as a PA would have paid for. She held

onto it all and headed for the changing booth. The brunette now, touching her arm and looking awkward.

"You aren't allowed to try on.... Intimate items of clothing. Company policy."

"I'm not trying on, I'm changing my clothing to wear these when I leave the store. We're buying them, aren't we Val?"

"Erm, yes, yes of course."

Val merely showed the brunette a pile of cash, enough to probably buy the store's entire stock. Shereen was allowed into the booth with her new clothing. She had the underwear on and the dress over her head, deliberately shoving some of the dress into her panties. She peeked through the curtain.

"I need help please. There's a slight problem."

Val was there, pushing her face through the curtain. There was only once chance of it working, just the one opportunity.

"Not you!" Shouted Shereen. "I'm virtually naked."

Val didn't like Shereen and she didn't like being shouted at. She backed out of the booth and Shereen looked at the brunette.

"Be a darling and help me please."

She was in there, the curtain closed. There might only be a few seconds. Shereen pushed the note into her hand and looked straight into the girl's eyes.

"It really is important. Please do as I ask."

A count of four or five and Val had her head through the curtain, just in time to see the dress being straightened and Shereen admiring herself in the mirror.

"Perfect, everything perfect. My people will pay for it all."

Val wasn't a fool, she picked up all of Shereen's old clothes, shaking them and putting them in a bag to take with them. Nothing looked amiss, but Val carefully examined anywhere that Shereen might have left a note. Val paid, a fairly large amount of dollars, Shereen had deliberately picked an expensive pair of shoes. The brunette held the door open as they left and briefly nodded her head at Shereen. She was now confident that Bradford would get her message.

~

~

Rachel, the brunette, had called the number and spoken to Roland. He called Bobby and Bradford received the message before his call to President Herbert. Bradford had Yasmine sent west, to pick up Rachel and keep her somewhere safe, just in case.

There had been time to get naked with Amoe and enjoy each other, but literally half an hour on a bed used by one of the hotel's night security guards. Not even a proper hotel bed, but a mattress he'd hidden away in a storage room. It had been sordid, grubby and hurried..... and it had been wonderful, it always was. No talk about her abduction, that would have to wait. Their current main priority was stopping the pathogen device from being used and rescuing Shereen. Gillian was far from complimentary about Shereen;

"If the fate on San Pablo is in her hands. Then we really are in trouble!"

He knew they had a history so he took the comment with a pinch of salt. She'd managed to outwit her handlers and that meant she must have more common sense than Gillian believed. They were all going to be there, at The Destiny Mall. Even Amoe, though she'd have to wear a disguise of some kind as she was still officially a kidnap victim.

"No complications." He'd told her. "Call your parents once we've dealt with Mike Lakey's device. Please."

She agreed, though Mike Lakey himself was another complication. Where was he and what was he doing? He'd given the pathogen to Enrique, did that mean he was running again, heading for whichever New Nation has employed him. There were a lot of unanswered questions and Bradford was going to handle them one at a time. First they'd find Shereen at The Destiny Mall.

'Destiny Mall, over two and a half million square feet, spread over four levels.'

It said on the map they'd copied off the net. It wasn't a barn of a place, it was four massive barns, linked by lifts and moving stairways. Bobby was very co-operative after his short talk with the president and had provided Little Vic, Tony and two others, to help search the Mall for Shereen. Roland was sending over half a dozen interns, all in civilian clothing. They had no idea why Bradford needed them, but interns tended to do anything they were asked to do. It began to sound like a lot of people. They'd all be needed though, it really was like looking for a needle in a large, four level haystack.

Roland was who they needed, to co-ordinate the search and keep everyone connected. Using Roland would make it official though and the Mall would quickly be waist deep in cops and soldiers. That would be a disaster and might actually cause the pathogen to be released. Mainly, Bradford didn't want to see Shereen end her days, cut in half by blaster fire.

"Gupta can be our Roland." He said.

Some in the room smiled, others just look bored, some looked mystified. They were in Bobby's storage area, being given full access to his extensive stock of blasters, hand guns and grenades. Bobby had also provided them with four unmarked vans for the evening.

"Try to bring them back in one piece." Bobby had told them.

Bobby was going too of course, Bradford just hadn't found the right persuasion yet.

"I mean, Gupta can stay in a van and co-ordinate our search." Added Bradford.

Maria had been given the job of inspecting everyone's kit, taking away things like gasmasks. Very few, if any, normal shoppers tended to carry things like gasmasks and rocket launchers. In the end she seemed happy that everyone looked like a normal shopper and they were herded into the vans. Little Vic stood out a bit, but there was no avoiding that, he was just naturally huge.

"Come on Bobby we left room for you." Said Bradford.

"I've already been shot at recently and I've got five stitches in my leg."

"You can limp; I'll even give you one of Gupta's crutches."

Bobby was walking away, waving his hand over his shoulder.

"Probably best if you stay here." Said Bradford. "I did guess Amoe was talking crap."

Bobby stopped walking, but didn't turn around.

"What did she say?"

"That you were some kind of hero, saved her life." Said Bradford. "I did guess it was probably your guys who rescued her and she was just being nice."

Bradford began walking towards the vans.

"Not everyone is cut out to be a hero." He added.

Bobby shoulder barged him, knocking him out of the way and picking up a two way radio. He took Bradford's seat, next to Maria, who was driving the lead van. Not that Bradford cared, he'd scrunch up in the back with the interns.

"Easy fucking peasy." He muttered to himself.

~ ~