

Bradford

Chapter 6 – Booty Call

“In a city where the news was all funded by advertising, often the graffiti was the only reliable source of honest news.”

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It was chaos in Jimmy’s Trainers, the public fleeing in all directions. Bradford slowed his pace, while using his personal communicator. He was quickly connected to Roland, who still seemed to be using his office as their war room.

“Glad you called.” Said Roland. “I’m getting a lot of enquiries from the local police, asking if we have anything going on near Herbert Stadium.”

Bradford had been a cop, he could imagine the number of calls the police must be getting, about a team of heavily armed guys and two APCs.

“Tell them they were meant to have been informed an hour ago.” Said Bradford. “Blame an admin screw up, tell them we’re mopping up known subversives.”

“Will do..... good luck.”

Two of his team were going to wait downstairs and clear the customers out of the shop. Yasmine was with him though, holding her weapon at the ready. She may have been small, noisy and a little hyper; someone had called her the glitter fairy of PD489. But she seemed to have courage though, as she followed him through the doors marked ‘Stairs – Staff Only.’

The stairs had long glass windows and there was the glow of an explosion shining through them, then the yellow light of something on fire. He heard gunfire at the rear of the store and someone on the comms link.

“Heavy resistance at the rear of Jimmy’s, we’ve been attacked with grenades and blasters.”

The stairs weren’t that well-lit, it seemed the management at Jimmy’s considered the staff stairs as low priority when it came to health and safety. There was a figure dressed in a Jimmy’s overall, a young guy. Bradford barely had time to take in the scene, before he picked up the glint of light on the barrel of a high powered blaster. He might not have seen it, if it hadn’t been for the orange glow of yet another exploding grenade.

“Schneider has been hit.” He heard over the comms. “It doesn’t seem to have slowed him down much though.”

Bradford fired his Ion weapon, just a fraction of a second before Yasmine fired her standard PD489 blaster.

“Jeeez.” He heard her say.

“Bad guys in Jimmy’s overalls, be careful.” Gupta sent to everyone.

The subversive looked young, about twenty or so. He had a brand new top of the range blaster; it seemed the subs had a decent weapons budget.

“Your first ?” He asked Yasmine.

She simply nodded at him. He had guessed she was a firefight virgin, it made her courage even more impressive.

“It gets easier.”

He stepped over the body and continued up the stairs, Yasmine by his side, Gupta followed, with two other operatives behind him. More blaster and gunfire from the rear of the store. A burst of blaster fire shattered the windows, allowing Bradford to see the mayhem at the rear of Jimmy’s.

“Schneider doesn’t fuck about.” Said Gupta.

He certainly didn’t. There was a commercial parking area behind Jimmy’s and just about every electric truck seemed to be on fire. There were bodies too, quite a few. Bradford just hoped firstly that none were his operatives and then he hoped they weren’t just harmless members of the public, who’d come to buy trainers.

“Central police are asking to join you.” Roland was telling him.

“Tell them to politely fuck off, until we’ve secured the building.”

A thought occurred to Bradford, about just how little he knew about Camila. He’d just put his whole career on the line, based on her information. He had shot the father of her children, she might consider giving him a crap lead as payback. He pushed the thought from his mind. Camila wasn’t the kind to be that convoluted in her revenge, she’d have simply shot him while he had his back to her.

“Down !” He shouted.

He’d just reached the first floor landing. ‘Stores and Shipping,’ it said over the doors to his right. They were the kind of flappy plastic doors that allow easy access for people carrying boxes. ‘Strictly Staff Only,’ was stencilled on the doors, in bright orange lettering. Bradford had heard a sound from behind the doors, like people moving too quickly to be Jimmy’s employees on minimum wage.

Two people in Jimmy’s overalls charged through the plastic doors, drawing blasters as they ran. A man on the left and a woman on the right. Bradford fire twice, hitting the man in the forehead and the woman in the left shoulder. Yasmine finished the woman off with a blaster shot in the centre of her chest. There was no exclamation from her this time, it obviously did get easier the second time.

“Two more subs in Jimmy’s overalls.” Gupta was broadcasting to everyone.

Bradford stood up and examined the dead, both young and once again, carrying very expensive weapons. They weren’t the usual bottom feeders that he’d fought against out in the Badlands.

“Search them.” He told the two operatives. “Then secure the stores area.”

They’d grab a pair of trainers each of course, he was tempted to ask them to get a pair form him.

Jimmy’s sold the best and most expensive trainers in San Pablo and grabbing a pair was an acceptable perk of the job. The cops would do the same, half of Central Division would have a brand new pair of trainers by tomorrow.

“With me, next floor.” He said to Yasmine and Gupta.

The next landing had a window looking towards Herbert Stadium, Bradford could see at least fifty cop vehicles, all waiting patiently. On his right was a solid wooden door and it felt like a good place to be cautious. There was no time though, it was too easy to shred or burn vital information.

“Let’s go !” He shouted.

He leant back and used the heel of his right boot on the door, landing a blow with all his strength and weight. Just above the handle he hit and for a brief second, the door bent and resisted the force. Bradford was strong though, far stronger than even a giant of a man like Schneider. He pushed back on his other foot and the door had no alternative, it burst inwards.

“PD 489 ! Hit the floor you bastards.” He shouted.

He hadn’t expected them to give in, it had just sounded good in his head, on the way up the stairs. There were two of them, both male and middle aged. These two weren’t dressed in Jimmy’s overalls, they were in the usual street clothes that half of San Pablo wore. Bradford instinctively jumped left as he went in the door and then right, avoiding the blaster fire aimed at him. One man was firing, while the other fed an old single sheet paper shredder.

“No you fucking don’t !” Shouted Bradford.

He wasn't going to lose the information after going through all that trouble. Bradford ignored the man trying to kill him, he trusted the others to take care of him. Instead, he fired three times at the man feeding the shredder, before running over to the wall and pulling the power cable from the socket. It was ok though, he hadn't managed to shred much and it was all recoverable. Their own shredders at PD489, used water to turn the shredding to a kind of sludge. There was no way back from that, but simple dry shredding could be recovered and read, they had whole rooms full of interns, all eager to carry out such a task.

"Thank you." He said to Gupta.

Gupta had a foot on the other man's chest and the bloody end of a blaster jammed up against his chest. He'd obviously fired a few times, the insides of the sub's chest, were still steaming. Gupta had a huge grin on his face, but he was bleeding from a wound to his leg.

"Hell Gupta, you trying to set a departmental record or something?" Asked Bradford. "Try to avoid some fire will you."

Yasmine was busy looking at the sub's computer, but Bradford remembered something important.

"Stay frosty guys. My contact said there were two rooms."

Bradford looked out of the window, trying to get a feel for how the building was laid out. Herbert Stadium was straight in front of him, there was nowhere to hide a room in that direction. The wall to his right was the end of the building in that direction.

"It has to be there." He said, nodding at the wall near Gupta.

There wouldn't be much space, maybe enough for a small office. Somewhere for the boss to sit, perhaps have his safe for the really important stuff. Bradford got his face about a foot from the wall and began to look over every inch. He found it, the dirty spot, where too many hands had pressed against the woodchip paper. He felt the surface and pressed and was rewarded by a click and a part of the wall folding back.

"Don't shoot ! I want him alive." He shouted.

The man in the room looked like an accountant and Bradford committed the sin of underestimating his opponent. He moved forward and received a well-aimed punch to his throat and a knee in the groin. Most men would have gone down and been finished off with a knife, or a boot to the throat. Bradford wasn't like most men though and he ignored the pain and the waves of nausea. He hugged his attacker, pulling in very close, pushing him back against a desk.

"Shall I shoot him?" He heard Yasmine yell.

Bradford was still struggling to take a breath, his body still using nothing but adrenalin to keep going.

"No." He croaked.

He pushed back hard, forcing his opponent against the edge of the desk, making him use his hands to stay upright. Bradford used his left hand to feel the man's face, get a good idea of where everything was. Once he knew the direction, he lifted his right hand and dug his thumb into the man's right eye. He knew he'd caused real damage, his opponent yelled, a really shrill yell. It made Bradford feel slightly better and was a little payback for the pain in his balls.

He wasn't finished, his opponent was still on his feet and Bradford wasn't going to underestimate him again. He kept pushing, shoving him over the edge of desk, bending him back until he fell. Then and only then, did he draw back. He noticed Gupta, getting closer and aiming his blaster. Every word hurt his throat;

"I said ! I want this one alive."

Bradford drew his arm back and hit the man twice in the stomach, knocking the last bit of resistance out of him. His right eye didn't look like it would ever see anything again, but he was alive and interrogation might get something out of him.

"Bind him and get him picked up by interrogation, Gupta."

Most men hurt like hell from a kick between the legs, most women too for that matter. Bradford seemed to suffer worse than most and he was in the line of work, where kicks in the balls weren't that rare. He'd have waves of nausea for hours and ache like hell for a week. Gupta dragged the man into the main room, Yasmine helping. They bound him with plastic ties, Gupta calling for a secure transport to take him back to base.

Bradford felt the nausea begin, a mixture of the kick in the nuts and the punch to his throat. He knelt down and vomited into the waste basket, just under the edge of the desk.

"Shall I call a medic?" Asked Yasmine.

"No..... I'm fine." He said, between bouts of vomiting.

He was waving her away as his communicator brought more problems;

"Bradford, the police commissioner himself has called." Said Roland. "He's demanding that his men are allowed into Jimmy's."

His balls really hurt, the kind of pain that tells you seeing a doctor might be a good idea. He wasn't trusting his precious parts to a PD489 medic though, he'd go and see Gillian.

"Ok Roland, but they can't have access to the top floor. Not until Yasmine has been through everything."

"He won't like that."

"I don't care. Threaten him with a call from the president, if you have to."

Bradford banged his head on the desk as he got up and winced. As he turned to curse the desk, he noticed something taped to the underside. It was a single piece of paper, sticky taped to the bottom of the pull out tray, the one usually full of paperclips in most offices. He carefully pulled it free and quickly realised how important it was. The subs really hadn't expected anyone to raid their base above Jimmy's.

"We hit the jackpot." He said, passing the paper to Yasmine.

A single sheet that gave the address and location of six other bases in central San Pablo. There was even a small map, with each base highlighted with a yellow marker.

"They'll be clearing these bases as we speak." She said.

"I know, but we might get lucky. I'll arrange to have all of them raided tonight."

Schneider came through the office door, snorting in disgust at the bound prisoner. Bradford had seen Schneider get the red mist in front of his eyes on several occasions.

"Leave him Schneider, I want him interrogated."

"Ok, six I got Bradford, maybe a seventh, but Enrique is claiming that kill."

He had what looked like someone's shirt, wrapped around a leg wound. The shirt was beginning to go a nice shade of cherry red, but Bradford knew Schneider would avoid seeing a medic, until the mission was over.

"Make yourself useful Schneider." Said Bradford. "Get to the top of the stairs and persuade any cops who might come up, that they're not wanted in here."

"Great, fine."

The huge operative was grinning from ear to ear. He'd been given a speeding ticket about five years before and still seemed to bear a grudge against every cop in San Pablo. Bradford looked at the PC in

the small office, it was still on, the cursor blinking at him. If they'd left the base locations out in the open, what might be on the PC ? He pressed his communicator.

"Roland, I need two or three more people to help Yasmine." He said. "Interns will do, as long as they're clever ones. I think we've hit an intelligence gold mine and I want everything bagged and brought back to base."

"I'll have them brought over to you Bradford, anything else ?"

"Just make sure everyone is masked, there are certain to be a lot of TV crews and press guys outside."

"Will do."

Will do indeed ! Roland was actually picking up his sayings.

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Gillian had her eight teams working on various ideas, which they hoped would bear fruit quite quickly. Six of the ideas they were testing seemed promising, and one was borderline. Gregory though, the person she thought of as the best mind at LabSinc4. He'd insisted on going after some daft dietary idea, something called 'Prison Belly.' She'd given orders not to be disturbed, but Tamara was putting her head round her office door.

"Sorry Gillian, it's Mike Lakey calling. He's fairly insistent, can I put him through ?"

"Of course Tamara, put him through."

Damn the man, he seemed to sense her moods and know her routine, always calling when she least wanted him to. She swore he'd be calling her when she was on the toilet, if he could possibly find a way or being more of a pain in her backside. She had the minute it took Tamara to walk back to reception, to calm down and sound confident. Her phone made the soft trilling noise, which now sounded so unpleasant;

"Hi Mike, nice to hear from you."

"I think we need to move this to the secure connection."

No greeting and that vacuous bitch Shereen, was muttering something to him.

"There have been no developments Mike. I will call you as soon as there are."

"Secure line Gillian. Now !"

He hung up and she rose and left her office. The secure line wasn't far away, she just knew that he was deliberately showing her who was in control. The room had an electronic key card and an old fashioned brass key. No one seemed to trust electronic keys, since a few celebrities homes had been burgled. She sat at the machine and Mike was already on the screen, Shereen waving at her from the side..... bitch.

"Hi Gillian."

"Hi Shereen."

May your split ends gang up and strangle you in your sleep. Mike had her latest update email printed out and in his hands. Nothing had happened since, he didn't seem to realise that good science was a long game. He did of course, before becoming CEO of Lakey Pharmaceuticals, he'd been a researcher at the sharp end. Part of the problem with Mike was that he knew if she was bull shitting him.

"Mike, perhaps we could agree times every day. It's just that....."

"No." He cut across her. "I never know when I'll have a free moment. Surely you're not too busy to talk to the guy who signs off your payslip ?"

"No Mike, of course not."

He leant over and whispered something to his PA. They both began sniggering. Once he'd treated her with total respect, but that had all changed, since she'd lost control of Michael Reece.

"I was reading your report Gillian and something confuses me." Said Mike.

"Oh, what part is that ?"

"When we spoke last, you mentioned diet as being too broad an area to investigate. Yet I see that Gregory is working on a dietary project. I'm confused Gillian."

"Gregory's team are looking at something that is more than just dietary. There could be....."

"But, Gillian but." Interrupting her again. "Something called 'Prison Belly,' sounds a lot like a diet problem to me. Can you explain this ?"

More sniggering, more whispering to Shereen. She was beginning to feel like a wife, who knew her husband was preparing to leave her for another woman. Was he going to bring in someone else to run LabSinc4 ?

"As I was saying Mike. Gregory is my best research person. I have full confidence in him."

"Would you risk your career on that ?"

Here it came, well telegraphed, the blow was about to land.

"Yes Mike, I would."

He leant into the machine at his end, his face filling the screen.

"Let's be clear Gillian. You're risking your career on Gregory finding the marker we're looking for ?"

It wasn't what she'd meant, but there was no way out.

"Yes Mike."

"So be it. I'll contact you again later today."

"Mike, before you go....."

"Yes Gillian, what is it ?"

Abrupt, always abrupt these days.

"What is your intention, once we find the marker ?"

"To make money of course."

He'd gone, the screen was dead, just a few flickering pixels as the line died. She'd thought of running, throwing a few things into a case and getting a low level job in a lab somewhere. There were other new nations besides the three hundred islands that accepted the rule of San Pablo. It was no good though, Mike was powerful and he held grudges for a long time. A few well-placed rumours and she'd never work in a lab again.

"Bastard." She muttered.

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Bradford made sure his prisoner was delivered to interrogation, mainly to see the department. He'd expected a dungeon with sharp object, perhaps branding irons being heated on a brazier. Instead he found just two people in white lab coats, armed with syringes full of the latest truth drugs.

"We'll know everything in his head, within twenty four hours." A woman had told him. "Then we'll send you a transcript."

A few calls to sweeten Central Division of the real cops, the ones the public did know about. And it was going to be another hectic day. He took a car from the garage, the same large electric powered saloon he'd used to move Camila. His balls hurt too much to be bounced around on his bike and he needed a trunk for his purchases from Bobby Laszlo.

Bradford knew most of the illicit gun dealers in San Pablo, the ones who had blasters with no serial numbers and military grade explosives. It was a necessity for the favours he did for Gillian and LabSinc4. Most weapon dealers on the wrong side of the law, were housed in the worst parts of town. Units on industrial estates on the eastern edge of San Pablo, or the cellar of an anonymous looking office block near the Badlands. One of them, Krueger, sold munitions out of an old

underground car park in 32 East and areas didn't get much worse than 32 East. Not Bobby though, he hid in plain sight, under one of the best five star hotels in San Pablo.

"Here to see Mr Grainger." He told the carpark guy.

The gates began to roll back and the armed guy with the heavy blaster relaxed. 4 West was a good area, one of the best. The hotel patrons at The Dunes Hotel took their privacy and security seriously though and the management employed a dozen, well-armed ex cops.

"Far row, right up against the wall. Park in any bay." He was told.

He knew the routine, he was a regular, but usually on his bike and wearing a full face crash helmet. Bobby paid off the security guys and the hotel management were sympathetic to his business ethos. The place wasn't called The Dunes by accident, one of the owners had a sense of humour and love of old 20th Century gangster movies. The mob may have gone, but crime still paid and a lot of their money had gone into building the lavish Dunes Hotel.

Bradford parked the saloon and walked towards the doors that led to Mr Grainger's emporium of all things that went bang and boom. There was no Grainger of course, never had been. Bobby could hardly use his own name. A short ramp down and Bradford was in the hotel's emergency shelter, with room for fifteen hundred staff and guests, to sit out whatever disaster had afflicted the city. It was another paranoid left over from the past, all hotels had to provide adequate shelter in case of.... funnily enough the statute didn't say. About ten percent of the sub-basement had been bricked up and converted in Bobby's place of business. Not a lot of space, but it was enough. Another armed guard waved Bradford through, he was a regular customer.

"Bradford, haven't seen you for a while. I heard about the promotion."

"One word about Sanitation and I'll buy from Krueger, I mean it."

Bobby actually winked at him.

"Sanitation Bradford, sure, anything you say."

Of course he'd know about his real job, every crook in San Pablo would know. All public departments leaked, there was always someone who had information and a need for a few extra dollars. Crooks, politicians, senior cops, they'd all know that he now ran the busiest squad in PD489. The only people who wouldn't know, were the public who paid for it all.

"So, what are you shopping for today?" Asked Bobby.

Bobby was the kind of nondescript crook that San Pablo turned out by the hundred. Difficult to place his physical characteristics and the surname Laszlo was probably fake. Bradford actually liked him.

"Squibs Bobby and I want a good price."

"Oooh, MCA Corp have been reviewing their security. Fewer squibs are falling off the backs of trucks. I have a few, but they'll be more expensive than last time."

It was the same speech Bobby had given at least four times. Either he had a crap memory, or he thought Bradford had.

"I want six of them Bobby, but I'm not paying more than five hundred each."

Bobby was shaking his head and looking insulted, the usual routine that could go on for some time. Bradford's phone actually began to ring. Usually he left it on vibrate all the time, but he'd set it to allow calls from Roland to ring.

"Roland. Is it important? I'm right in the middle of something."

"You've had a parcel delivered. Erm... well... We had to put it in the outside rec area."

The outside rec area was really just a patch of weeds with two or three benches. Some architect's idea of a place for staff to eat and commune with nature. Everyone hated it.

"I don't understand Roland. Why would you put my parcel out there?"

"It was scanned, but the result was inconclusive. As it might well be a bomb of some kind, I had it placed in the rec area."

"What ?" Why is it likely to be a bomb ?"

Bobby Laszlo had stopped pretending to be offended by being offered five hundred per squib and was now staring at him, his mouth wide open.

"It's from him." Said Roland. "The parcel is from Samuel."

"How do you know it's from him."

"It says so Bradford. A label on the back, A present from Samuel, it says."

Jeez, it might just be a bomb. No, as he thought it over, he realised that Samuel would want to see him die, jam the knife into his heart personally.

"There's a school opposite the outside rec Roland. Bring the parcel inside and leave it by the garage door. I'll open it when I get back."

He could feel the tension coming down the phone and Bobby was still looking stunned.

"How can you be sure Bradford. It might go off." Said Roland.

"It is not a fucking Bomb, trust me. I'm on the way in. Do not leave it outside. Do not let anyone destroy it with a controlled explosion. Are my orders clear ?"

Fuck ! It was going to be one of those days. Then again, it was always one of those days.

"Yes Bradford. I'll get Schneider to move it."

"Good, I'll be there soon."

He disconnected the call and dug around in his inside pocket. When he'd bought the last squibs, it had taken a loan to afford them and help from his sister. She'd never known what the money was for of course. Now he could afford to count out three thousand dollars and simply place the bundle on the table.

"As you can tell Bobby, things are a bit hectic." He said. "I need six squibs, take it or leave it."

"Yeah fine."

The arms dealer still seemed a little stunned. He went to a locker style cabinet and came back with six squibs, or MCA Corp 12.2 Anti-Personnel weapons, to give them their proper name. He placed the devices on the table.

"Power packs charged up and good for twenty years, or more." Said Bobby.

"Ok, I'll trust you. Got a bag."

Bradford was about to leave, the six high tech weapons in a plain cloth bag with 'Yes I Recycle,' on it. He remembered that Bobby had a side line.

"Do you still do data terminals and screens ?" He asked.

Bobby's eyes lit up, he was obviously proud of being the top fence for such items in San Pablo. All brand new and boxed of course. No guarantee or serial numbers, but Bobby's prices couldn't be beaten.

"Yes, just got a new shipment in. Full 3d projection, Reelizm sound system and no data jack chip."

Data jacking was the latest grubby trick by marketing types. Set a few cookery shows on your favourites and you were likely to get a call from a sales guy, who knew your full taste in recipes.

Holidays, cars, clothes, they were all into it. Bobby removed the chips so that the terminals couldn't be traced, but losing data jack was a huge bonus.

"Where were they made ?" Asked Bradford.

"San Sebastian of course. I only buy data tech made there. Everywhere else makes crap."

He was right. San Sebastian was the nearest of the new nations, another island group. Island were all that remained, unless you counted the lifeless husk of Asia. San Sebastian created the best tech on the globe now, everyone knew it.

“Sounds good. How much?”

“Do you need it delivered and set up?”

“No, just have one of your guys bring it out to the dark saloon in your parking area. I’ll link it and set it up myself.”

Bobby was giving his serious look again, he was like an addict, hooked on going through his haggling pitch.

“No time for this Bobby, give me a price?”

“I wasn’t thinking of money as such.” Said Bobby. “There is a way you could do both of us a favour.”

The arms dealer dug through a drawer and brought out a handful of paperwork for various traffic and vehicle offences. There were so many that he had to bend down and look for the last few, which had become caught on the drawer. Bradford quickly flicked through them, some were outstanding for over a year and the enforcement agents would be looking for someone to arrest.

“Phewww there’s a lot of money here, a lot of serious fines.” Said Bradford.

Bobby was holding his hand out, waiting for it to be shaken.

“Promise me you can make them go away Bradford and you can have the whole data system for nothing.”

Bradford really did need to get moving, he was still nervous that Roland might have the mystery parcel blown apart or immersed in water, or something else stupid. There were a lot of fines in the pile though, thousands upon thousands of dollars worth.

“Games Bobby.”

“Huh?”

“I want the full games add on. Plus cinema sound and three sets of headphones, good ones.”

“Yeah, all of it, everything. I’ll even throw in a few of this year’s top movies, all on data cubes.”

“Ok Bobby, you have a deal. It might take a couple of days, but you can forget about anyone from fines enforcement knocking on your door at four am.”

He shook hands and wandered back out to the car park, waiting for Bobby’s guys to bring out the data hook up tech. It had been a good deal, six squibs at a decent price and Camila’s data equipment for free. Once, when he’d been an ordinary cop. He’d have needed to make a dozen calls and spent a few hundred on bribes. Now he could give everything to Roland and the fines would vanish. Roland would complain of course, but he’d still get rid of the fines.

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“I don’t understand.” Said Roland. “How could he know our address?”

They were in the garage, some distance from a cardboard box about two feet square.

“Everyone knows where we are Roland.” Said Bradford. “I’m surprised the local Catholic Church doesn’t send us Christmas cards.”

He walked towards the box, Schneider following him. A harmless looking box, with a courier sticker on the front. It had been put up against the rear shutters of the garage and then most of the staff had left the building. They’d prodded Samuel in one of his bases and he was prodding back, it was only to be expected.

“It’s not that heavy.” Said Schneider. “Of course, it might be a gamma device.”

“Thanks Schneider, I really needed that.”

He walked right up to the box, Schneider still with him. He knelt down and read the label on the side of the box.

'Sorry I missed you today.

A present I know you'll appreciate.

Samuel.'

Bradford picked up the box and it was heavy enough to contain a squib with a trembler device, or any one of a dozen other nasty explosive weapons. Bradford put it back down.

"Got a knife?" He asked Schneider.

Silly question, he'd probably have at least six on him. Schneider removed a double edged blade from the top of his boot and handed it to Bradford.

"Why was the scan inconclusive Roland?"

No answer. He turned and saw Roland, or at least his head. His PA was hiding behind an APC a good fifteen yards away, peering round the side of the vehicle.

"For God's sake Roland, it's not a bomb!" Bradford Shouted. "Why was the scan inconclusive?"

"The contents are wrapped in aluminium foil."

"So, our state of the art scanners are useless against cooking foil?"

Roland just shrugged and nodded at him. Useless crap had cost a fortune, they'd have been better off with sniffer dogs, everyone knew that.

"Let's do this." He said to Schneider.

Schneider knelt opposite him and Bradford was glad of the company. He used the knife to cut through the tape on the top of the box and eased the lid open.

"Do you have a first name Schneider?"

"Anson, it's Anson."

"Well Anson, keep everything crossed."

Bradford sliced through the kitchen foil, there seemed to be about a dozen layers of the stuff.

Underneath was a pair of trainers, with a card shoved inside the right one. They were a size 43 wide fit, his shoe size. They looked good too, top of the range, with the curly J on them. The best trainers Jimmy's sold, the trainers he would have chosen for himself.

"I might just have to marry Samuel." He muttered.

Schneider chuckled and dug into the box, making sure that it held no surprises.

"What was in there?" Shouted Roland.

"Trainers, he sent me an expensive pair of Jimmy's trainers."

The card was in the same hand that had written the label on the outside.

'I'll try to be home next time S.'

Home! How safe was his, it wouldn't be hard to follow him home from PD489, especially when he was tired after a long day. Bradford decided to up his security and Camila's. He'd fit something a bit more pro-active than a few alarm bells. Roland had realised the bomb wasn't a bomb and had walked over to him.

"I'll get those checked over." He said.

Bradford let him have the box and the card, but he held onto the trainers.

"These are my size." He said. "I'm keeping them. I have to see my doctor now, get my soft bits looked at. Get everyone back in the building and arrange raids on the other sub bases in central."

He was walking away, still admiring the well-made pair of trainers.

"And involve the other squads in the raids." He added. "They'll like that. I'll be going straight home after getting my balls fixed. And get my bike brought inside, I'll be using a car for a few days."

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He found it odd, being naked on the treatment chair at LabSinc4. He'd been naked there before, but there had never been three women examining his testicles before.

"There is massive bruising Bradford, what sort of weapon was used?"

He knew it was bad, he'd gone into the toilet and looked. Everything from his belly button to his knees, seemed to be a shade of blue or purple.

"Just a knee, but he knew what he was doing." He answered.

"He certainly did. Does your throat still hurt?"

He couldn't see Gillian, she was looking at a screen behind him. The nurses looked concerned though. They kept looking at his groin and exchanging looks.

"No, though it still hurts if I need to shout."

"Then don't shout. Is he still alive, the subversive who did this to you?"

"Yes, he's with interrogation. He might end up chemically lobotomised, but they rarely kill anyone." Something was sprayed onto his balls and even the light spray made him wince.

"I'm applying a local anaesthetic, you need some repair work Bradford. We need more subversives for our immune system trials. If you won't be needing him?"

Bradford knew exactly why she needed more subs, though he wasn't ready to confront her. Even if she had the nurses leave the room, he knew everything was recorded. He'd carry on playing the fool, for a while longer. He felt a needle enter his scrotum and was glad they'd used the spray first.

"Interrogation will be finished with him in a day or so and then he's yours. There are a few raids going on tonight and there are likely to be a some prisoners taken. If you like, I can send a few your way."

"Thank you Bradford, that would be most appreciated."

He felt something entering his body, the sensation wasn't pleasant.

"You have a couple of clots that can be broken up." Said Gillian. "That will avoid complications at a later date and help you heal. I can do a few other things to make you more comfortable."

Being naked in front of women didn't worry him. It was all so..... clinical.

"Thanks, though next time you need to buy me dinner first."

She laughed and put a hand on his shoulder.

"This might sting a bit."

It did, it stung a hell of a lot.

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He'd felt much more comfortable and he'd installed Camila's data system as soon as he'd returned home. An hour playing a videogame with the kids and he'd felt human again. He'd even felt well enough to add a little something to her alarm system and his own. A little surprise for anyone trying to force an entry. For once it looked like he might get a solid eight hours sleep. There was new graffiti opposite his bedroom window.

'Don't believe the Water Company – they're liars!'

In a city where the news was all funded by advertising, often the graffiti was the only reliable source of honest news. He had no idea what the water company had been doing, he'd just boil his drinking water for a few weeks. His head hit the pillow and he was asleep.

"Bradford, are you still up?"

He had almost ignored his phone ringing, but he was glad he hadn't. He rolled over in bed, propping himself up to use the phone comfortably.

"Amoe. Glad you called, it's been a hell of a day."

“Sorry, I can see you’re in bed.”

He had to tell her, he just hoped she wouldn’t laugh.

“I had a bit of an accident today. The bike went out from under me and I collided with the fuel pod. Nothing serious, but I might have a squeaky voice for a while.”

She was actually blushing and looking concerned. He noticed a car seat behind her and wondered where she was at one in the morning.

“Where are you Amoe ? Is everything ok ?”

“I’m outside, in your car park. I can go, if you’re sleeping..... I just thought.... But it will wait.”

“No, come up. I’ll put a gown on, we can have coffee.”

“Are you sure ?”

“Yes.”

He showed her in and she walked straight into the bedroom and took off her dress. Nothing was said, she continued to undress and Bradford prayed that his recently repaired body was up to the task. He threw his gown on a chair and removed his shorts, hearing her gasp.

“It’s just bruising.” He said. “The doctor said there’s no serious damage.”

He gave her what he hoped was a reassuring grin.

“I’ll heal.” He said.

“Oh Bradford, you poor thing. Lie down !”

She continued undressing her bra next and then her panties. He lay on the bed admiring her, loving the shape of her breasts and the way her skin seemed to glow in the light from the hallway.

“Lay back.” She told him.

Her mouth went to the most injured part of his body and it was wonderful. A doctor and two nurses staring at him had been awful, but this..... This was truly awesome.

“Better ?” She asked.

“Oh yes.”

She was gentle without being too timid. She licked his balls and then took each one in her mouth, using her hot breath to arouse and sooth, at the same time. His dick hurt as the blood rushed to it, but it was a nice kind of hurt. He was beginning to feel healed.

“Oh Amoe.”

He almost told her he loved her, but the timing was wrong. It was impossible not to love a woman who was doing such wonderful things to your dick. Her fingers now, gently rubbing up and down as her tongue still worked on his balls. He was pleased when he realised he could still get a hard and throbbing erection, even if everything seemed to sting.

“You’re ready.” She said.

Amoe straddled him, lowering herself over him. Bradford smelt the perfume of roused female and that too added to the hardness of his dick. He felt exultant as he entered her, his erection filling her, causing her to shudder. He held her thighs and thrust up as she thrust down and now it was Amoe’s turn to moan and gasp.

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