

Machines

Hamburg in the shadows

Von Alaiya

XVIII – Plans

Somehow the elf just did not want to go to sleep. Maybe that was why she normally did try to avoid such encounters with elves.

"Don't these feel, well, off?", he asked touching her left arm. As it was with elves it was hard to tell his age. He did not look any older than thirty but she knew he could as well be fifty years old. He had short, dark hair and even darker eyes and was – like elves tended to be – generally rather good looking.

She rolled her eyes though he was unable to see it as she had turned her back to him. People said elves were terrible sweet talkers – and somehow he was, too, otherwise they would not have ended up in bed – but this was just rude. "One gets used to it", she grunted.

The elf – what was his name again? Something French... Pierre? – seemed to sense he had annoyed her. "I did not want to be insensitive."

"Well, you were", she muttered, while thinking: "Please, go to sleep." If she wanted to talk with somebody she would go over to the hospital and have a chit-chat with Heidenstein. Of course she could just stand up and go but that normally entailed even more talking.

"I am sorry", he replied. "It is just, I've rarely gotten the chance to speak with somebody, who had both arms removed. Voluntarily I assume?"

"You are not making it better", she muttered and sat up. If he was not going to sleep, she would just go like this.

The elf gripped her wrist. "Hey, hey, I am sorry. I am sorry", he whispered sitting up too. "I am just curious. Can you blame me?"

"I'm rather sure I can", she replied and got ready to get up.

"Hey, please, stay for a while", he said and laid an arm around her. "I promise, I'll shut up." He started to kiss her neck.

Pakhet sighed still with a bit of annoyance. She had to wonder whether this guy wanted to prove something or whether he was just lonely. Maybe both. She was still tempted to just stand up and leave, but after a few moments she decided against it and turned around to kiss him. "Whatever", she whispered. "Just shut up. For real."

And at least he actually did what he was told. He was silent – well, at least he did not talk anymore, when she fucked him for the third time that night. Still she hoped that this would be enough to put him to sleep afterwards. While she enjoyed and needed the sex she could have done without the entire social encounter. Maybe she could be nicer, sure, maybe she could be more patient, but it seemed to be unnecessary. At

least most of these men knew it would be just for a few hours so why waste any breath on unnecessary conversations with somebody they would not meet again?

Of course she could have circumvented all of this by just engaging the services of a call-boy, but for once that somehow went against her pride – not to speak of it being a waste of money. Even being the way she was – athletic and certainly not “well rounded” – it never had been hard for her to find a willing participant. On the contrary: In certain bars at certain hours it seemed to be ridiculously easy.

“Mary?”, the elf asked once they were lying next to each other again.

She rolled her eyes. Did he still want to talk? “Hmm”, she made to signal that she was listening.

“What was your last name again?”

Okay, he was lonely – and could not take a hint. And there people said elves were not lonely as they were sweet talkers and were easily the centre of attention. Well, some people were lonely even surrounded by people. “I don't have one.” She hoped that would make things clear.

It seemed that way. “Oh.”

She gave the hope that he would fall asleep up. Drek. “Look, Pierre.” Apparently she had gotten the name right as he did not say anything to it. “I'll go now. I'll have to work tomorrow, so...” She sat up.

When he did not reply she got up and collected her clothes from the floor to put them back on.

Finally, when she put back on the blouse she had worn, the elf spoke again. “So, I guess asking your number is out of the question.”

“It is”, she replied and picked up her purse. “I'm sorry.” She shot him a short smile. “This was nice. Just... Don't think too much of it.”

He tried a smile, too, and managed after a moment. “Okay.”

Pakhet went over to the door. “Well, I'll be going.” She opened the door and looked at the elf one last time. “Bye.”

Once she was outside the room with the door closed behind her she took a deep breath. She hated awkwardness and this had been very awkward. Normally she tried to avoid this situation – as normally she would just reject a guy if she had the feeling he was lonely. But the elf, Pierre, had hidden it well it enough... Or maybe she had not been attentive enough.

She had not wanted to hurt anyone, but sometimes things like this happened. Well, there was nothing to do about it and as they had only spent a few hours she was sure he would get over it.

Outside the hotel she went around the building as she had parked the Jackrabbit in the garage behind the hotel. She hated it to move through this kinds of alleyways at night without at least a bulletproof vest. Well, at least she wore trousers this day, which were more suitable for fighting. Of course she had no reason to suspect somebody tried to attack her purposefully. But there was all sort of scum in this city: Rapists, thieves, random loonies who just liked to kill, some gangs and of course just all those street kids that did not know better then pickpocketing. Surely she was rather confident that she would be able to take any normal attacker head on but she just hated to be without any proper armour.

Hence she felt actually somewhat relieved when she was back in her car without any incident. Before starting the car she took out her commlink to see whether she had missed any important calls or messages. And sure enough she found a message from Heidenstein she apparently had received not quite two hours ago.

It read: "Slap has the information. We meet tomorrow afternoon, 16:00 at the street clinic."

This was actually faster than she had expected but even better. If they went through with it she might soon be able to get some proper upgrades to herself. Because no matter what she did, no matter how much she trained there were physical limits on how much she could improve that way.

She started the car, still keeping that thought in mind. Those limits were the reason she had gotten the cyber-arms almost eight years ago. She sighed. Some times she tried to remember how it had felt having arms of flesh and blood and then found that she could not.

The next day Pakhet drove over to the hospital a bit early. She had not been there for a few days – basically not since she had removed Heidenstein's stitches four days ago. Somehow she had the feeling that she needed some time alone.

The guards let her into the street clinic and she found Heidenstein – not much to her surprise – in his office, working apparently.

"Hey, Doc", she said and sat down on the stretcher next to his desk.

"You are early", he commented.

"Of course I am", she replied cheekily. "How is your back feeling?"

Heidenstein shrugged and turned towards her. "Better. A lot better. The back is still a bit stiff, but it doesn't really hurt anymore." He smiled.

"Good", she said. "I was worried."

"I would not have noticed", he replied.

Okay, another awkward moment. She changed topics: "Well, do you know anything about what Slap found out?"

"I know it is an Omnitech hospital. He said something about a better facility, mostly for execs. And I hope that he considered, that it is a new hospital."

"Omnitech, eh?" Pakhet raised an eyebrow and gave her theory, that it had been Omnitech that had ruined Anderson's company a plus one.

"At least he said so", Heidenstein replied and looked at her inquiringly. "Why?"

She shrugged. "Nothing." Still she was not sure whether she wanted to talk to him about his identity, but she did not really want to confront him. She was worried though that she would not be the only one realizing this, as Slap might come to the same conclusion as her. She still did not trust Slap or anyone of the others. Why would she? This was why she was worried, as she was afraid that Heidenstein was actually trusting them. "Well, let's see what Slap brings us in, then."

"Yes", he replied before going back to work.

So he was silent for a few minutes, but then he looked up again. "By the way, Pakhet..." Now it was him who hesitated. "There was something I wanted to talk with you about."

"About the entire medicine thing?", she asked as she had still not given him an answer.

"Actually: No." Another moment of hesitation. "I have thought about what you asked me about. Your, well, 'upgrades'."

She did not say anything just looked at him.

"Well, you do know that... Having all sorts of changes to your body, it changes you. Some people get sick because of that, well, psychologically. So I am worried that if you get some bioware installed, that it might... Change you."

Pakhet had heard about this before, but she never had given it too much thought. Was he going to revoke his offer? "So?", she asked.

"The thing is that, well, if you listen to what the mages say, it is especially stuff like your arms that will make you.... Less you", he further explained still clearly hesitant.

"What are you saying?", she asked, when he made another pause.

"I am saying, that it might be better... Well, if I install some bioware in you it might be better if I clone your arms, make your arms flesh again. There might even be a way for you to naturally grew them back. Though that might be a little more complicated."

Pakhet did not reply. When she had agreed to get the cyber-arms she had known it would be permanent. Of course it had been strange at first, but she had gotten used to it. The arms had made her stronger, had made her a better fighter and the cyber-guns were a nice add-on considering that it meant she was never without a weapon. All of this helped her to function on a run. And yet, once more she tried to remember what it had felt like to have real arms and failed.

"What do you say?", Heidenstein asked after almost half a minute of silence.

"I need the arms to fight", she replied.

He shook his head. "I could make your whole body as strong as the arms. Including your flesh arms."

Pakhet hesitated. "What about the cyber-guns?"

"Well, there are ways to install them into flesh, too. Though I've heard that it feels unpleasant at least", Heidenstein said.

She was still unsure what she should answer to this. To her the cyber-arms had become a part of herself and yet a part of her was tempted to say yes. It would make her more human – but did she want that? She remembered how Robert was still cringing whenever he felt the cold touch of her hands. "Let me think about this, for a while."

"Okay. Just let me say: It would make me feel more comfortable when installing the bioware", Heidenstein said while carefully watching her.

She nodded. What else was she to do?

Some part of her felt angry with Heidenstein. What did it concern him whether she was herself, whether she was human or not? Okay, it was somewhat understandable that he as a doctor cared about whether it would harm her or not – but apart from that? And yet, it was a strange thought to think that her hands could be normal, warm again.

They heard the loud howling of a motor outside which came to a sudden stop.

"I think that is Dacart", Heidenstein said with a sigh.

Of course it had to be Dacart, because who else from the others would drive such a loud vehicle? "I'll take a look", she said honestly curious what kind of car the adept had brought. Last time she had asked he had had no vehicle on his own – because it had blown up in a certain explosion.

So she and Heidenstein, who followed her, went up the stairs and to the parking lot of the hospital, where right next to her Jackrabbit a rather big Toyota pick-up truck was parked.

Of course Dacart needed such a big car. Because anything that was subtle just would not fit him, right?

"Hey Doc! Hey Pakhet!", Dacart shouted happily and went over to them. "So, what is it you want us to do, Doc?" he did not even try to lower his voice making Pakhet rather glad that the parking lot was mostly empty.

She looked over at Heidenstein with a gaze that basically said: "Sure you want to take him along?"

Heidenstein caught her gaze and just shrugged. "What do you say, we go inside first."

Eh?"

"Okay!", Dacart replied grinning.

Rather forcefully Pakhet manoeuvred Dacart through the back door of the hospital and down to the street clinic.

"Nobody else is here yet?", Dacart asked rather disappointed when Heidenstein brought him to what was probably supposed to be a conference room for the doctors, but that was now mostly empty except for the large table still standing inside it.

"You are five minutes early", Pakhet said. "Do you think the others would be that punctual?"

"Well, you are", Dacart replied.

"That's besides the point."

"Apart from that, how are you feeling, Dacart?", Heidenstein said and looked at the adept searchingly.

"Fine. Of course", Dacart replied. "No biggie, doc. That little scratch was nothing. Besides: Did you get hurt? You move funny."

That of course was true and Pakhet could see it, too, though she was somewhat used to it after having been around Heidenstein while he was still healing. Yet his movements still seemed a bit stiff at times even now.

"I am completely fine", the doc replied.

The next one to arrive was chrome-head who was on time almost on the second. Like the first time they had met he was wearing a rather formal suite fit even with a good hat. "Good afternoon", he said when one of the guards escorted him to the conference room. He looked at Pakhet and Dacart. "You two are already here. Good." But he made it sound as if he was surprised because of it.

"Apparently we are", Pakhet replied dryly.

"That leaves only two missing", Heidenstein muttered.

"Two?", Pakhet asked and raised an eyebrow. Because in her count she was only missing Kah Pak.

The doc nodded. "I also asked Murphy to come. You know, the young elf who was at Schmidt's. He is an infiltration specialist which could be useful."

Pakhet hesitated for a moment – as the elf really had seemed rather young. But then again he was apparently a shadowrunner and it was not her call to make.

"So we wait until the two of them show up?", Slap asked.

"I would say so. There is no reason to go over those things twice or thrice", Heidenstein answered.

Pakhet shrugged and for the lack of chairs sat down on the table to wait for the others arrival. Admittedly she was not entirely surprised that the young elf – Murphy – showed up before Kah Pak, who just seemed to have rather bad luck in general, so she would not be surprised to find that he had been stuck in traffic or something like this. Like Slap the young elf was escorted by one of the guards, who brought him in and then left without saying a word. The elf shot them a smile – not the same kind of grin Dacart was wearing on his face most of the time but that kind of a winning smile that made Pakhet somewhat feel uneasy. "So, here I am, Doc. What's up?"

"As I said: I want your help on a run", Heidenstein said. "But we'll wait for Kah Pak to arrive, before we talk about it."

"Okay", the elven boy replied. "Should I call you Mr. Johnson, then? Or maybe Schmidt?"

"No. Doctor Heidenstein – or 'Doc'" – he shot Pakhet a look – "is still fine."

"Okay, Doc", Murphy replied and did it as Pakhet sitting down on the table.

Weird kid.

After a moment of silence it was Dacart, who spoke: "By the way, Doc. I've got a question! You see, I've got the Krim Cannon from that one run... Problem is: It's troll sized and a bit too big for me... You are able to rebuild it, right?"

"Oh please don't do that", Pakhet muttered under her breath – because Dacart and that weapon smelled like the perfect mixture for disaster.

Heidenstein seemed to think the same way, as he hesitated for quite some while before he answered: "Well, we'll see. Maybe."

"Yay", the adept made.

It was another ten minutes before Kah Pak finally arrived. And just as Pakhet had thought, he quickly excused himself: "I am sorry, I am late. My cab got stuck in the traffic." Because of course it did.

"So, Doc, what are we here for?", Murphy asked enthusiastically.

Heidenstein took a deep breath, before starting to explain: "Well, to make it short: The owner of this hospital is a bit short on equipment due to some problems that occurred. He asked me whether I could, well, steal some equipment he could use. Especially laboratories for bioware and cyberware. But also some other equipment. The benefit for me would be, that I could then use those laboratories, too, to create ware for you."

"That does sound like a neat deal", Dacart commented.

"Indeed. Hence I asked Slap to find out a hospital that would fit certain prerequisites. As it needed to be equipped with those laboratories – and, well, I would prefer to not steal from a hospital that is currently in use as it would mean endangering those in treatment. That said, I would leave it to Slap to explain what he has found." He nodded at Slap to gesture him that he could start.

Slap nodded back before sending a message around that had different files attached to it. "Well, I've found a hospital in Pinneberg. Headed by Universal Omnitech. It is apparently a hospital for their execs that want some upgrades. While it is mostly for cosmetic changes they do have laboratories for different ware included. They are going to open up in one week and from what I've found at least the laboratories are already in use. But their security seems still pretty low – especially at night. It seems that they try to make it look as if the entire thing is still empty. Also there are still some minor work done in the building – mostly electrical fixes and such."

"So we could go in under the cover of doing such repairs", Kah Pak asked.

"I'd think so", Slap answered. "But I don't think we can steal anything then. Too many people and by day there are two times the guards."

"I don't like it", Heidenstein said. "I wanted a hospital that is not yet used."

"There are no patients yet", Slap replied blankly. "And it is an Universal Omnitech hospital." There was clearly a "just like you asked" sounding from this sentence.

"I heard that", the doc said. "But it is in Pinneberg. Do you know what the HanSec response time is there?"

"About two to three minutes!", Dacart exclaimed like a schoolboy.

"So we just have to be careful that we don't trigger any alarms", Murphy said.

"Shouldn't be that hard, right?" He grinned.

Pakhet looked at the doc. She could understand very well, why he did not like it, as she did not quite like it either. Then again: No matter what the doc said, she knew very well that it would be hard or even impossible to find a hospital with the laboratories they needed that was not yet in use. Even when they would look for one that was not especially an Universal Omnitech hospital.

"What about going there under the disguise of being electricians to get a feeling for the situation", Kah Pak suggested. "And then we make a decision."

"Oh, that sounds nice", Murphy replied. "I still have all the stuff for playing electrician, including a SIN."

Everyone was looking at Heidenstein, who clearly still did not quite like the idea, but had also no good argument about rejecting it – because it was certainly not more dangerous than the other stuff they had already done. "Okay", he finally agreed.

"Murphy, Kah Pak and I go inside as electricians. Does that work for you?" He looked at the two elves.

"It would, but..." Kah Pak hesitated. "Well, I don't have a fake SIN, not to speak of a fitting SIN."

"I could get you one, but you know that it costs", Slap said.

The shaman hesitated.

"What about I pay for the SIN?", Heidenstein said. "Kah Pak, if I pay for the SIN, would it be a fitting reward if you kept it in the end?"

Kah Pak thought about this for a few seconds. "Yes, that sounds fair."

"What about me?", Dacart asked.

Pakhet looked at him. "You would find a way to blow the hospital up. Sorry, buddy, but I just cannot see you infiltrating a hospital." Then she turned to Heidenstein. "I'll come along, too, though I don't think I can get inside with these." She showed the cyber-pistols. "There is just no good reason for an electrician to have those. But I can be your driver and security, just in case things go south."