

# Keepin' it in the Family

by Mandy Hall

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## January 1992. Somewhere in Europe.

Hunt Stockwell looked at the passengers disembarking from the helicopter. He rubbed the glass of the window, it was steaming up with condensation. He again wondered why the crash meeting had to be called. There would have to be an extremely good reason, every one of these meetings risked the chance of the organisation's security being blown wide open. He shivered as the wind battered the window again. At least in Washington, when it turned cold it snowed.

A man entered the room. Stockwell remained looking out of the window. The man coughed quietly, "General, the meeting is about to start, if you would follow me." Stockwell wheeled around and followed the man out of the room.

He entered what obviously used to be a ballroom but was now turned into a state of the art conference center. As he proceeded to his place at the right hand of the chair, he nodded to various members of the organisation. He was interested to see that one place was empty, he smiled, he had seen the intelligence reports before he had left on this 'holiday.'

The chair waited until Hunt had settled himself before starting. "Gentlemen, I have called you here today to discuss a grave problem affecting our security. The background details are in the file in front of you. I would like you to read the first two pages before we discuss this any further."

Hunt did as the others and opened up the file. He scanned the first page and was shocked to read that somehow an investigative journalist had stumbled on a business link of Chao's. Unfortunately this hadn't been picked up by any of Chao's people until she had burrowed quite deep into his organisation. Hunt shook his head over this lack of care by Chao. He looked at the date of the report, three weeks ago, why the sudden urgency now? He flicked through the rest of the file, it was mainly background on the reporter. Surprisingly, she was quite old, middle aged in fact. Hunt noticed she had had postings in Vietnam and most of the other dirty little wars that had ravaged the planet since then.

He looked at her photograph no he didn't know her. There was a series of clippings and pieces and some recent photographs obviously took over the recent holiday season. There was a series taken in a snowy wood, there was the journalist and then a man. One showed a teenage boy running through the wood, pursued by a young woman, early to mid twenties. The photographer had obviously been taken with this one as there were several close ups of her. Stockwell laughed to himself as one showed her being pelted with snowballs by the rest of the family. Another one showed her looking pensive as she prepared to aim a snowball. Stockwell looked at this picture more closely, as there was something about her, her pose or something in her face that reminded him of somebody, who he didn't know. He shook the feeling off, it wasn't relevant to the problem at hand.

He heard a faint snicker from beside him and a muttered, "Well, I'll be!" He sneaked a glance at the Irishman beside him. He recognised him but didn't know his name, Stockwell wasn't sure which faction of the war he was involved in. He knew that somewhere down the table there was a representative of the other side.

The Irishman turned round and explained, "I didn't realise this woman was the wife of Lord Napier. He was a prominent journalist for years, he is a professor at Oxford University now. He was on our list, still is probably. Interesting family history. From what I hear about the daughter, she will be doubtless joining both of our lists

soon." Stockwell's interest was raised especially as he looked over at the other Irishman there and saw that he was thinking the same thing as his 'colleague.'

The chair coughed, "Gentlemen. As you can see from the date on that report it is over three weeks old. We felt that we had the situation under control. I have to call this meeting because further information has come to light and we need to discuss it." The chair buzzed and a door opened. A nervous man walked forward. The chair continued, "This man is Gerald, some of you may have had dealings with him." Some round the table nodded, they knew Chao's Chief of Staff. He supervised the payment and delivery arrangements for Chao's exports, which were the basis of a lot of their funding for their various enterprises.

Gerald looked at the chair and when the chair slowly nodded, he spoke. "General Chao sends his apologies but certain events at home have delayed him. We have monitored this situation. We have traced what information this journalist has managed to obtain and unfortunately is still managing to obtain." A dismayed buzz ran through the room. Gerald swallowed uneasily, "It would seem that she has managed to obtain details of the structure of the organisation, names, events, funding details."

"How was that possible?" One of the African representatives asked.

Gerald shrugged his shoulders, finding that out was one of the problems that had kept Chao in Vietnam.

The Chair turned to Stockwell and asked, "Hunt, I was wondering if you could take care of this matter for me."

Stockwell opened his mouth but before he could say anything, the Irishman next to him spoke up with a sneer in his voice. "Stockwell couldn't keep hold of his pets for longer than three years. What makes you think he can sort this problem out? I would like to volunteer my organisation for this job." He smiled coldly.

Destruction of this family would kill two birds from one stone. The happy, snowballing daughter had pulled several British operatives out of tight spots with her flying abilities and his contacts were telling him that she was being groomed for an army intelligence role. She had been sent on all the standard SAS courses and even some of the advanced ones. Yes it would be good to get rid of this potential irritant. He looked to his colleague for support who nodded.

Stockwell coloured at the insult. He swallowed and spoke to protect his position, "They still do jobs for me. Just because they live in LA and not Washington doesn't mean that they are not mine still. I just keep them on a long leash that's all."

He knew that was only half the truth. Their last proper job had gone very wrong, they had walked into a trap and had barely escaped with their lives. Santana had died after they had got back to the States. The next day, they had disappeared for more than a year. Then suddenly, he heard that Murdock had turned up at the VA again. He had gone to see him. Murdock was cautious but acted as go-between the two parties. Stockwell had agreed to let them live in LA if they did the occasional job for him. They went back to their old freelance ways in between times.

"Humph. If you keep them on a leash, why did my production plant get blown up last year?" Stockwell looked up at Senor Callabres, a Colombian drug lord. A supportive murmur ran through the room.

The Chair held up his hand, "Gentlemen, gentlemen. This is diverting us from the main thrust of this meeting. We have to decide what to do. If not Stockwell, then who?"

Callabres looked at his South American colleagues and spoke, "Why not Chao, it's his leak. Let him do the plumbing."

The Chair nodded and looked at the rest of the board for confirmation. "Alright." He turned to Gerald. "Tell your employer that he is responsible for the problem and its solution. We will be having the routine annual meeting in late April. Tell him we will expect to see him there with a report on the successful conclusion." Gerald nodded slowly and walked out of the room.

The Chair buzzed again and guards with trays of food and drink entered. The meeting broke up and became a social gathering. Stockwell was warming himself by the fire, he decide to keep himself away from the South Americans for the time being. The two Irishmen came up to him. He ignored them for a while. They were involved in a dirty, pointless, little war. He sighed, when was war anything but dirty and pointless? He knew they were waiting to speak to him.

He kept his back to them and poked the fire. "Yes, do you want something?"

"We need a hand with somebody, sir."

Stockwell smiled into the flames. He decided to be cool. "Oh? You're asking for my help when I can't even keep control of my 'pets'? I am sure Colonel Smith if he heard that comment wouldn't be purring."

The older of the men said, "It's just a simple job, sir." Stockwell's hand tightened on the poker. The man followed up with, "The family history is rather complicated. We are interested in the daughter. Stephen Napier adopted her in the States when she was two, when Theresa Palmer married him. We are tracking her, sir. We know that the Army is slowly constructing an elite intelligence squad. We feel that she will be one of it's members when she gets back from the States a year in April. We would like the full information on her background just in case."

Stockwell nodded; at least it wasn't urgent. "Have you got a file on her?" The Irishmen nodded and they both presented brown files to him.

Stockwell looked at his watch, he would read them on the plane back to the states. His helicopter should be arriving any minute now.

Two hours later, he was heading back over the Atlantic. Carla had brought him a drink and a pile of files to go through. He quickly flipped through the Irish files. He noted the rapid promotion. He raised his eyebrows at the scores she got on her SAS courses and other survival courses that she had gone through. Her flying ability was very high too. He looked at the picture again, she was in her uniform. The eyes steadily stared out at Stockwell. He shifted in his seat as he again wondered why she seemed so familiar. He eventually put the files down, it wasn't urgent, and the matter could wait. He turned to the large pile of intelligence files he had to sort through.

### **March. Oxfordshire, England.**

Theresa flicked her long brown hair out from her eyes again. She had decided to pack up this suitcase tonight, she had a funny feeling that time was running out. She had virtually everything for her story, which meant she was in the utmost danger. She was unafraid for herself but worried about those close to her. She set her mouth in a thin line and shook her head to clear itself of those worries.

The last envelope was sealed and put it in its place. She looked at the name on the envelope and wondered whether she should have made contact. No, that wouldn't solve anything only make matters at this time more complicated for everybody.

"Theresa, the casserole will be ready in about five minutes." The voice of her husband boomed from downstairs.

"Ok, Stephen. Just finishing up here. I'll be down."

Theresa placed the envelope into the old suitcase. She smiled as she closed the lid on the old battered case. It had been with her virtually everywhere since she had bought it in 'Nam as a replacement for one that had fallen apart as soon as she had arrived. She locked it. She put the key in another envelope and put that in her desk drawer.

As she closed the drawer her eyes were drawn up to the pictures that crowded her desk. Her graduation, her family back in the states, various friends, Jane's godmother, however this wasn't a recent pose as the rest were, it showed the two of them much younger and far less careworn, considering the circumstances, lounging in chairs in a far eastern bar. Her husband and her children, her eldest resplendent in her army uniform and proudly showing off her new insignia as a Captain, her youngest at his graduation. Each had followed the paths that their inheritance had laid out for them.

She went downstairs to her quiet, intelligent and rich husband of twenty years. She smiled as she distantly heard Stephen and their son Paul chatting about some book they had read. Their son Paul had just got back from a holiday in Italy. He looked happy, he had spent hours wandering around the art galleries of Florence and Rome. Despite having been out of university for nearly a year he still couldn't decide what to do. Theresa sighed, maybe he had gone up too early, he had graduated when most of his age group were just starting their first year. She hoped he would be a writer, like his father. He had the talent. He wanted to experience life for now.

Unlike his older sister, Theresa thought. She had wanted to go into the army since she was little. As soon as she could, she applied to join, not even wanting to go to Oxford or Cambridge on an army scholarship. Luckily, the Army was starting to experiment with the roles of females and she had exploited this to the full, shooting up the promotion ladder. She had even landed a prestige exchange to California for a year. Theresa smiled at the weather outside of the window it was pouring. It was probably snowing in Northumberland, that'll teach her to be smarter than anyone else.

As she listened to the chatter of the dinner table and the rain on the window. She remembered a different time when it was raining.

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Her boss in the bureau had managed to persuade the army that they needed a journalist to observe some exercises that was going to take place up country. She had volunteered for it and surprisingly been picked. She joined the briefing where her presence was greeted by a mixture of annoyance, disdain, and interest. The newly promoted colonel in charge of the briefing was uncomfortable with being landed with this distraction as he called it. He nevertheless introduced her to the group of men and officers after the briefing. He began to find her attractive. Maybe she might be pleasant company. Before they left in the morning, he made sure that certain items were packed securely away in the bottom of the quartermaster's pack.

The exercises went downhill from there on. It rained and rained. The colonel tried it on with her. Theresa had expected that. She managed to push his advances away. She remembered thinking as she observed the ineptness and inadequacies of the fabled US army machine in action, that the US had better get out of Vietnam as soon as possible. The highlight of the trip was the helicopter pilot that came to pick them up.

Obviously, from the reaction of the colonel they knew each other of old.

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As Theresa came back to reality, she knew she hadn't really been surprised when she found out what happened to them later on.

She jumped as she realised Stephen was speaking to her. Stephen sighed; she had that 'Vietnam look' on her face again. A time before he knew them both. A time that pulled on her every now and then, especially after looking through that brown suitcase of hers. He repeated his question. "What time do you have to be off in the morning?"

"Harry wants to meet me at about 8am at Claridges, so maybe sixish."

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Outside, unobserved by anyone in the house, a figure slipped in between the cars parked on the drive. He selected the one he had been told to modify. He knelt down by a wheel and made certain adjustments. He knew from experience that unless the police knew exactly what they were looking for, they would never find the evidence. It would be a simple accident. The job done, he walked out into the road, waiting to be picked up. A car drove up and he jumped in. He made a phone call.

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In London, an elegant man put down the phone. He reached for the private line and dialled a number. He gauged that his boss would be just about getting up.

The phone was answered, "Yes." Chao was not at his most communicative when woken up.

"Sir, your instructions have been carried out."

"When?"

"Tomorrow, we know she has an early breakfast meeting with her editor in London."

"Good. Now about those papers."

"Yes sir, I have teams ready to stand by to go in."

"Fool! To do that now would only bring up some very awkward questions. No one knows what she is working on so to do anything like that straightaway would be foolhardy. Once she is dead, we can afford to wait." Chao paused, trying to calm himself down. He dropped the matter for the time being and continued, "Actually I am glad you rang because I have some business matters to discuss with you."

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### **California, four weeks later...**

Jane closed the screen door behind her and stretched in the warm Californian sun shining on the house. The house was old and rambling. Her 'aunt' had built an extra room or two so that she could use it for the base of her business. That was why Jane had come outside, a client had called.

Jane thought one could get used to the sunshine; it would be good to be on exercise over here. That was another advantage of being here, no more dismal wet camps stuck out in the middle of nowhere. As she walked around the porch her mind went back to the last camp she had been on just four weeks ago.

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Jane could tell from her sleeping bag that the weather hadn't changed overnight. It would still be cold, sleety, and foggy. Northumberland in April!

She decided for the hundredth time this winter that capturing the Brigadier and his staff so soon into the Dartmoor exercise had not been a good idea. Jane had thought at the time that it was the perfect thing to do. Her and her team had just finished an arduous three-month SAS course and their leave had been delayed so that they could take part in the exercises. Jane was not amused as she was itching to get on leave and back to her proper army role. So when she saw the hole in the Brigadier's plans she decided to cut the planned five-day exercise down to two days. She discussed it with her team and they agreed. She rang a friend who lent her the equipment she needed.

The Brigadier had not been amused at all especially as he had organised the whole thing to show off to some visiting American army staff how good his unit was at counter insurgency measures. Ever since then she had

been sent on one survival course after another, luckily this was the last before she went on leave and then went to America. She was thankful that the exchange had been set up and confirmed before Dartmoor and the Brigadier wasn't able to affect that.

A voice from outside the tent interrupted her thoughts. "Captain, there is an urgent radio message for you."

Jane struggled out of her sleeping bag. As she walked across the camp to the radio vehicle she smiled at the thought of the planned holiday the whole family were going to take in California before the start of the exchange. She smiled again at the thought of seeing Auntie Mo, her godmother again. She hadn't seen her for so long. Probably just before she started her training, nearly seven years ago.

She took the headphones. "Captain Napier, this is Major Curtis. I'm afraid I have got some bad news for you..."

Jane couldn't remember how she got back to London.

Stephen and Paul were distraught, Jane was in a state of disbelief. The police said it was a tragic accident, the car must have swerved to avoid an animal on the country road and that Theresa must have lost control and the car ended up in a ditch. All that Jane knew for certain was that her mother was dead.

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She waited until her aunt had come off the phone. The hug that they shared was long and sincere. The last few days for Jane had relieved her stress and grief, at last she had been able to share her feelings with someone who understood them. Stephen and Paul had needed so much support that she didn't want to burden them with her grief.

Mo looked at the young woman in front of her. She knew how much the last four weeks had taken out of her. She was glad that she had been able to allow her the opportunity of releasing the feelings. She was so unlike her mother it was scary, Theresa had been expressive, never one to hide her feelings. Jane hid those feelings, she preferred doing to saying. Mo was scared sometimes at the emotions she could tell were boiling just below the surface. She laughed gently to herself, must be a military trait, she could think of a fair few people who were like that.

Jane smiled at her; "I'll pack the car up."

Mo nodded. It was a fair drive back to LA. She watched the twenty four year old bounce across the ground carrying her small grip. Mo laughed as she heard Jane whistle a short nonsense song as she walked over to where she had parked her car. Mo had been relieved that she had only been slightly more eccentric than usual. Mo thought that eccentricity was one trait that her Stephen had managed to instil in her. At least Jane was rooted in this century or maybe the next, but not the last like Stephen and Paul.

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Jane shook her head to clear it as she went to the car. Jane grimaced as she fought back the tears as she remembered how much her mum had been looking forward to this trip. How much she had talked of Mo and their long friendship that last time they met in London for dinner. A tear rolled down Jane's face, she wiped it away.

She opened the boot, no trunk, she thought, better get used to the language. She smiled at the thought of the accent she would take back to Britain at the end of the year long exchange.

As she loaded her grip bag into the trunk her eyes caught sight of a battered old suitcase. Damn! How she could she have forgotten all about it? Damn! Damn!

She ran back to the house with it. "Auntie Mo?"

The other woman looked up. "Yes?"

"Well when we sorted mum's stuff out; you know after the accident." Jane hesitated and then went on. "We found this suitcase with papers and envelopes in. Dad didn't want to keep it." Mo snorted under her breath. That was one thing Stephen had always failed to control, his jealousy of Vietnam, and its place in Theresa and Jane's life. "Mum, mum always used to say that there were a lot of memories in the case..." She tailed off. She knew the reason why her father didn't want to keep the case. She had always known. At that last dinner, she thought her mother was about to say something but she never did.

Mo looked at Jane for a moment before answering, she understood the unspoken question that had just been asked. Besides she wanted to know herself, it was something that been puzzling her for twenty-four years or so.

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Mo remembered Jane's christening in early 1969. Disapproving ranks of Theresa's family attended. Mo knew that they hadn't wanted Theresa to keep the child and most wholeheartedly disapproved of the birth certificate. Mo knew that one of the names on it had already been doctored by command of the family. What had shocked them most of all though was the absence of any name in the space for the father name's. Mo had gently pumped Theresa both before and after the birth. She had smiled and shook her head at the questions. Mo guessed he must be a soldier, perhaps he was married, dead, or one of the missing or imprisoned.

At the gathering afterwards, Theresa introduced her to an English colleague who just 'happened' to be in San Francisco. Mo smiled and thought he would be good for her.

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"Sure Jane. Tell you what, leave it here with me. You're going to get your orientation and orders tomorrow aren't you?" Jane nodded. "Well try and organise some weekend leave soon. Maybe I could come down to LA for a change."

Jane hugged her auntie Mo tightly and said, "Thanks. I'll call with some information in the next few days. I've really enjoyed staying here. Hope I haven't disrupted you too much."

"No, not too much." Mo smiled, she knew who it had disrupted but it served him right. For a change, he'd got a taste of his own medicine. She stood watching Jane go over to her car.

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Jane got in the car, right side, this time. She cringed at the memory of the car rental depot at the airport. The man had escorted her over to the car, and she took the keys and got in. She just hoped her embarrassment hadn't shown beneath her tan. She could hear the comments in her mind that would have been made in the office when the man had got back in. 'Typical limey. Didn't know which side of the car to get into. She probably won't know how to operate the gas pumps either!'

Jane drove off in a cloud of dust.

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Mo stayed on the porch leaning against the door thinking of a phone call that had took place in early 1968. A calculating smile came to her face, if only she knew who Theresa had been dating that weekend.

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"Mo?"

Mo had been asleep when she was called to the phone to get some urgent personal news so she mumbled into the receiver, "Hmmm?"

"Its Theresa, wake up" the voice sounded unnaturally cheerful.

"Theresa! What's the time and what's up?" Mo woke up. Her friend had been rather depressed lately, something to do with a problem over one of her articles that she had just written about some exercises.

"I've been transferred to London, just a minute." Mo heard the rumble of a man's voice in the background; she really woke up then. Theresa giggled loudly, "Sorry about that, I've got 6 hours and then I'm on a plane."

"So soon?" Mo queried, then curiosity getting the better of her said, "and who is that I can hear in the background?" Mo's heart sinking as she thought about her friend leaving for the other side of the world.

"Oh a friend." Theresa coyly answered and loudly giggled yet again at something the man had said in the background "If you are good to me, I might just introduce him to you sometime." The rumble in the background sounded again "Look Mo, I've got to go, there is a lot of packing and other things to do. I'll write with the address and I'll try and get back to the States for your next leave over there, all right?"

Mo could hear, as the phone went down, the smoothness in the man's voice. This guy has got to be someone very special. Theresa sounds as though she is in love.

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Mo shook her head to clear it of the unanswered questions, sighing; she picked up the suitcase and went into the house.

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Jane got back to her rented apartment on the outskirts of L.A. early that evening. She flipped the mailbox, just to get used to the action. She remembered with fondness returning home from 'trips away' to find the front door almost impossible to open because of the mail that had accumulated. She sighed, that was another world away. She had looked forward so much to this exchange and now she wished she was back in England helping Stephen and Paul recover.

A message was left on her answering machine so she played it.

"Captain Napier, this is Sergeant Cook - we spoke last week." Indeed we did, sergeant, indeed we did, Jane thought, remembering a sergeant whose military precision and polish would have competed with any of the regimental sergeant majors she had known. "Your orders have changed; you are now to report to the LA South Base at 0700 hours tomorrow. When you arrive you will be directed to General Jones office and a word of advice Captain; don't be late."

Jane looked at the map she was holding and groaned; LA South was almost a 1 1/2 hour drive away. Oh well, an early night was in prospect.

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The next morning, Jane, immaculately turned out in her uniform, pulled up at the gates of the base. She smiled to the corporal on the gates and handed her papers in.

Whilst idly looking about, she groaned as she read the sign: MILITARY POLICE HEADQUARTERS. As with most serving soldiers she had a healthy respect for the MP's but that didn't mean she wanted to become one. She drove through the base following the directions given to her by the corporal. She wondered what the



smirk had meant under the salute given as she drove away. She found Brig. Jones office at 06:55 - well at least she was 5 minutes early. As she waited in the general office - she could hear raised voices - not a good sign, she thought.

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Inside the office, Decker was getting increasingly angry. Not only had they taken Crane off him for three months to attend some promotion course, but also here was Peter trying to land him with a limey woman as a replacement. "It just won't do, sir. She is just not acceptable."

"Look Rod, we have no-one else available. She has an excellent record. I even saw her in operation last year, when I was over there. She's good. I know from her principal role she doesn't look like a regular soldier but she's gone through their Special Forces training." He chuckled as he remembered the expression of his British opposite number as she and her team had casually walked into the base camp, bringing a number of the 'defenders' with them as 'prisoners'. "Why don't you just give her a try? It will only be for three months. Look, it will go down well on your record. This exchange business is pretty high profile with the brass in Washington. If it works, it might get you a promotion board."

Decker sighed, he knew he didn't have any choice. "Let me have a look at her file." The brigadier smiled and passed the file over. He buzzed the outer office.

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A buzzer went and the clerk signed that she could go in. Jane nervously straightened her uniform and went in. Jane saw that the second person was a colonel. Jane stood to attention and barked out " Captain Napier 4th Royal Guards reporting, General." and snapped a crisp military salute.

The two officers snapped a salute back. Brigadier Jones introduced himself and went on. "Welcome to the United States, Captain. I believe you have a connection with the country?"

Jane replied, smiling cautiously, "Yes sir my mother is American sir and I hold dual nationality."

"Very good, very good; may I introduce Colonel Roderick Decker." The brigadier motioned over to the Colonel standing by the window. "Err," he hesitated. Decker curtly nodded to Jane and returned to reading the file he was holding. "For the duration for the first three months of your exchange you have been allocated to Col. Decker's staff." Jane's heart fell as the Brigadier continued, "his current Executive Officer Captain Crane has been sent on a promotion course. With your experience in ahem 'unusual operations' we thought you could possibly be of use." Jane's interest was piqued, military police and unusual operations don't usually go together.

Whilst the Brigadier was making the introductions, Decker was assessing his new, very temporary, executive officer. She was not what he had expected her to be. Her tanned face showed that she had been in the open a lot recently. The eyes that shone out belied wisdom greater than her age, which was very young for her rank. Her smile reminded him of somebody, who he couldn't place. Time to test her out.

"Captain Napier" Decker interrupted, "To operate with me, my men have to be unusually fit and fearless," Sounds better and better, thought Jane. " I see you've had a varied career since you joined up. You've picked up a variety of skills very quickly." He perused the file a bit longer and passed the comment, "A little unorthodox, but interesting."

Jane could hear the unspoken addition to the comment, 'for a woman.' She just continued to stand at attention, not rising to the bait.

Decker looked down at the recent entries in the record, more than one survival course during the winter, sounds as though she got on the wrong side of someone. Decker turned to the Brigadier. "Well, the unit has a training day today, I'll see after that," turning to Jane, "come with me," and marched out of the office.

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Jane kept up with the colonel as he marched over the parade ground in double quick time. She half smiled at the stiffening back as he realised his tactic wasn't working. When they got to the base of their operations for the day, she was handed a set of fatigues and boots and told by Decker to meet them outside in five minutes. Jane smiled at the departing back, he obviously thought she was out here to play for a year. She was going to enjoy today, it had been ages since she had been out on an assault course.

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Decker viewed the men on the assault course and weapons range, he was interested to see that the new captain had proved his thoughts wrong and her brilliant, if a little unorthodox, record right. He looked over to her; she was chatting with one of the senior sergeants about something. She smiled at something in the conversation. Damn, he thought, who does that smile remind me of? She took her cap off and shook her head and brayed like a donkey, the sergeant laughed loudly at what was obviously the punchline to a joke. Decker shook the memory away. "Captain Napier." he called out to her.

She ran up and saluted "Sir."

"Ok, you are in." He was gratified by the expectant smile. "Take this file home; read and digest and meet me at the Westwood V.A hospital tomorrow morning 0900 sharp." He deliberately didn't give any directions to the hospital, just to see how she managed in a strange city.

He didn't notice her walking along back to the barracks, her nose already deep in the file.

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The next morning, Decker met up with Jane in the car park of the hospital. Decker noted that she had thought to acquire some more fatigues and looked suitably US military. He nodded to her in greeting and said, "How did you get here?"

"Oh, I walked here. Such a beautiful day, and it was only 2 miles, so I thought why not walk? Anyway, the car would have had to remain here, wouldn't it?"

Decker shook his head at the crazy English, always walking everywhere. "Did you read the file?"

Jane smiled. "It was very interesting; I assume we are here to talk to Captain Murdock?"

"Yes, just to let you know what we are dealing with here." He stalked in, somewhat annoyed by the fact she had seemed to read his mind so easily. "You will find Captain Murdock is a strange fellow, but I don't really believe he is insane at all," Decker grunted as he walked down the corridor to Murdock's room.

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As they opened the door, they were greeted by the sight of a yellow bird dancing round the room in tune to a children's song belting out from the television. Decker took a step backwards and harrumphed under his breath. "Why did he always have to call when Murdock was going through a phase?"

Jane stood her ground, watching the dance with interest. She had always enjoyed Sesame Street. She stole a look at the colonel and estimated how high his blood pressure would go before he had a stroke. She made a decision, wandered over to the television, and turned it off. A wail came up from the man in the costume. She grabbed hold of a wing and pulled the man over to the bed and made him sit down.

She sat down beside him and in her most patient voice, she asked, "Big Bird, do you mind if Mr. Snuffleupagus and I ask you a few questions?" Jane ignored the harrumph from the colonel. She heard a few

mutterings from inside the costume and queried, "What was that, Captain?"

Murdock shrugged his head through the back of the costume, making the beak fall forward. He was a bit annoyed. "He's not Snuffleupagus. Snuffleupagus is Big Bird's best friend. He's Oscar the Grouch but worse." Jane had to move across to the wall near the door to cover up her snigger.

Murdock sighed theatrically and then looked up at Decker. He snarled, "Whatcha doing here, Colonel? Come to beat up on me again?" He turned his attention to the young captain who was leaning, looking amused, against the wall. He looked at her with interest; she had an English accent but was dressed in US fatigues. He decided to test her out, "Who are you, lady? The gangster's moll?"

The young captain opened her mouth to speak again but was beaten to it by Decker.

Decker opened his mouth in a wolflike grin. "Just coming to check how much you are fooling the doctors still. Any unauthorised absences lately? Well, we mustn't waste time here, got criminals to catch." Decker stamped out of the door; as usual, he couldn't cope with Murdock and the little act he put on.

Jane followed after grinning at Murdock and how he had made the colonel uncomfortable. Murdock couldn't help but grin back. He felt as though he had shared an unspoken private joke at the expense of Decker with her. He could hear her voice carry as they went down the corridor.

She had changed her accent again to an almost parody of Decker's military bark, "Sir. See what you mean about Captain Murdock, sir." Murdock chuckled out loud as he caught her last question; indeed, it was almost as if her voice had got deliberately louder, "How many years did you say that you had been chasing the Team, sir?" He couldn't hear Decker's reply very clearly but guessed he wasn't pleased.

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Murdock sat down on his bed, the video forgotten. He was taken back more than two decades, back to Vietnam, back to before he had the Team.

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Murdock remembered picking Decker and his men after some exercises early in his first tour. Decker jumped in the helicopter and grunted at Murdock by way of a greeting.

After Decker, an attractive brunette climbed in. 'Oh, oh,' thought Murdock, 'this was the journalist that the other pilots were talking about.' She smiled at Murdock as she settled down near the cockpit end of the helicopter. Even before the craft had lifted off, she was busy writing her copy down in a notebook. Before lift-off, Murdock decided to do a quick inspection of the passenger cabin, leaving the pre-flight check to his co-pilot. "Exercises went well, sir?" he asked of Decker, knowing that he annoyed Decker because of his sometimes too 'unconventional nature.'

"Yes," was all he got in reply.

Turning to go back to the cockpit, Murdock reached into his jacket and took a small box out of a pocket. He turned to the journalist who was now watching him closely. "Do you want to see Fluffy, my Vietnamese lesser spotted invisible caterpillar? They are really rare." Decker grunted and muttered something under his breath.

The journalist smiled and said, "Well, hi, Fluffy, nice to meet you. My name's Theresa. Do you want to see what I'm writing about the colonel here?"

Murdock and Decker leaned over to see if they could see but she closed the notebook and said, "Sorry, folks." She smiled. "Newspaper policy - they say no disclosure before publication keeps sales up, you see."

Murdock heard the colonel coughing and squirming behind him and laughed as he returned to the cockpit.

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He shook his head and smiled; he hadn't thought about the incident in years. Why did he now? A moment later, he felt the cold, wet nose of Billy shove into his palm, and the feeling passed.

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Back at Decker's LA headquarters, they were listening to the daily intelligence reports on the movements of the A-Team.

"So you are sure that Peck, Smith and Baracus are holing up in this neighbourhood?" Decker pressed his intelligence team. Somehow, the encounter with Murdock this morning hadn't gone too well, and he felt that he needed to show this thoughtful captain how he really operated. The intelligence team continued to present the information that they had collated.

Jane sat quietly by his side, absorbing the information and trying to make sense of the map. She was tracing the probable escape routes out of the area and wondered where the holes were that they should block up. She also thought how good it would be if Decker operated in three dimensions against these people.

She was disturbed from her reverie by Decker addressing her. "Well, Captain, this afternoon you'll find out what a squad of my best men can do. We've really got the Team trapped now."

She started to reply, "Colonel, don't you think that..." but when she saw the expression on Decker's face, she realised it wasn't the thing he expected his XO to do, so she smartly said, "Yes, sir."

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Later the same day, Face, Hannibal, and BA were preparing a barbecue at the latest beach house scammed by Face.

"Face, why didn't you invite Murdock?" Hannibal looked up; it was unusual for Murdock not to be around.

Face coloured and shivered at the same time. He knew Murdock had found the Big Bird Costume that he had bought for a birthday eight years ago. Just seeing Murdock bring out the costume had brought back memories that he didn't particularly want to revisit. He also knew that BA had taken him some of the Big Bird Music tapes that they used down at his children's center.

He didn't bother to answer Hannibal and leant back, soaking up some of the last rays of the day. He decided to put his foot down for once. He was able to cope with most of the phases that Murdock went through from time to time, but this was one was just too much.

Hannibal noted Face's reluctance and queried, "Is he that crazy?" Face painfully nodded. He didn't particularly want to admit to a phobia of Big Bird. If that happened, he knew he would be getting constant reminders of it for the next six months.

"Best place for the crazy man if he's crazy," BA muttered as he watched the barbecue light.

Hannibal decided that he'd had enough of people avoiding each other. Maggie had been hard to pin down over the last week or so. "Face, phone him. That's an order. A team that plays together stays together."

"Oh, Hannibal, you are just in a bad mood, 'cause Maggie wouldn't let you go down at the weekend, What was that about a 'friend' she had to stay?" Face countered.

Hannibal bit right through the cigar that was hanging out of his mouth; it dropped to the ground. He groaned and looked at Face. He ordered him, "Lieutenant, PHONE MURDOCK."

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Face wandered over to the phone, not expecting to get much sense out of the man, but he did miss his friend. "Murdock."

"Yeah, Face."

"Do you want to come to this barbecue we've got planned this evening?"

"A barbecue! Great! As long as I can use Brown sauce instead of that common American red stuff." Murdock suddenly switched into a rather upper class English accent, "Oh, by the way, ran into an old and a new friend today. Well, actually they ran into me."

"Who Decker & Crane?"

"Oh no, nobody as common as Crane. Decker had somebody new in tow and guess what?"

Face sighed, "No, what?"

Murdock smiled down the phone. "She's female!" Not that he thought Face would be particularly interested in this one, not his type.

Face turned Murdock back to the subject of the barbecue. "Can you manage to get out yourself? If Decker's been sneaking around, we'd better be subtle. Meet you at the back entrance in forty-five minutes. You can tell us all about her when you get here." Face replaced the phone and looked at it thoughtfully.

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"What did he say, Face?" Hannibal peered through the smoke of a newly lit cigar at the thoughtful lieutenant.

"Decker was round at the VA this am with some female officer in tow."

"Oh, he has got desperate. Where's Crane? Maybe they've given him a promotions course at last." Hannibal laughed.

"Murdock didn't say. I told him we would pick him up in forty five minutes." Face looked at BA. " Shall we go? Traffic is heavy at this time of the day."

"Is the crazy man crazy or just slightly crazy?" BA wanted to know before he got into the van.

"Oh, just ever so slightly crazy. "

"That's all right, man."

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Hannibal waved them off and went to phone Maggie to see if they could have a better discussion than the one late last week. "Hi, Maggie, it's me."

"Oh, hi John." She sounded as if she was expecting someone else.

"I thought maybe I could come down this weekend. We haven't got anything on, and I could do with some country air."

"That might be difficult. I promised a friend that we would perhaps meet up this weekend. I'm still waiting to hear; can I take a rain check?" Maggie sounded distant and someplace else.

Hannibal sighed, "Ok. As long as you don't wait too long to cash it in."

"Ok, speak to you soon. Bye." Hannibal was left looking at the receiver, which he replaced with care and then went to energetically poke the barbecue. He wondered what the problem was with Maggie all of a sudden. For four weeks, she had been depressed and certainly the last week or so evasive and distant.

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Maggie sighed as she put the receiver down. She hated doing that, but Jane came first at the moment. Maggie knew how wrecked she was from her mother's death and the questions that would abound when that suitcase was opened up. Maggie was glad that Jane had left it with her unopened; she obviously hadn't looked into it before she had left it with her.

\* \* \*

Maggie had not been shocked at the news of Theresa's death; it had been foreshadowed with a letter she had received from Theresa about a week before. The letter had come out of the blue. Although she had known Theresa well for many years and talked regularly on the phone, Theresa hardly ever wrote. Maggie supposed this was to do with the fact that Theresa was a writer and journalist and never wanted to take her work back to her house in the country. Maggie smiled at the fact that Theresa had settled in England. When she had first met her in 'Nam as a journalist with minor wounds from a narrow escape from a patrol she was covering, she never stopped complaining about the wet weather.

Anyhow, the letter hinted at some problem to do with her work and told Maggie to look after Jane. She said that Jane had always been aware that Stephen, now Lord Napier, was not her blood father and what her original birth certificate had said. Theresa still did not tell Maggie who Jane's father was but mentioned the existence of an old suitcase that was packed with various documents, and she was sure Maggie would know how to deal with it when the time came. A small key was taped to the bottom of the letter, with a note written underneath:

*\*Take care of me. I am the key to the future and the past. Make sure that the knowledge I protect is used well.\**

\* \* \* \* \*

Maggie itched to get inside the case, not just to find out the information but to relive some good 'Nam memories. That friendship had been good then and over the years since. Maggie smiled at the sound of frustration in Hannibal's voice; she was enjoying disrupting his plans for a change.

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The Colonel and the Captain looked down at the beach house from a vantage point on top of the cliff; it was now late afternoon and the shadows were falling. Jane could see some movement on the patio and the appetising smell of a barbecue floated in the air. She sniffed appreciatively. It was ages since lunch. She saw the team's transport, a black van, parked on the drive by the side of the house.

"Right we should get moving" Decker moved to return to his men

"Erm Colonel, don't you think" Jane tailed off she could hear the reply already, having heard it too many times in the recent past

"Think what Captain?"

Jane swallowed, 'how many months do I have to work with this guy, three? Oh right its not worth the hassle getting into a tactical argument on your second day; the last time you did that you ended up getting put on that survival course in Norway.' "Nothing Colonel" and gave a swift salute having already noted Decker fell for the bull.

"Captain, you go with Sergeant Jones here and cover the McKenzie Road with unit 3 as backup." Having dismissed Jane, Decker turned to the rest of his men and started to fill them in on his plan. At least it will be interesting to see what happens, Jane thought as she got into the car to move up to the backup position.

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Back at the Barbecue, Murdock was explaining the morning's events in an upper class English voice. "Well darlings Colonel Decker came along and he had a female officer with him. Oh, she was such a darling, so well behaved. She even laughed at Decker behind his back! It was strange though. " Murdock looked reflectively into his drink. He counted the bubbles coming to the surface.

"Like what Murdock?" prompted Hannibal. He was intrigued at the change of personnel.

"Well she's not like Crane. She's more attractive for a start." BA snorted at this comment. " And she knew about Big Bird and his friends." Face coughed and twisted uneasily in his seat.

Hannibal objected, "Anyone and everyone is more attractive than Crane, Murdock."

Hannibal chuckled as Murdock opened his mouth to pass some comment back and then thought better of it. Hannibal found it surprising though that Decker had accepted a female onto his staff. He knew that his attitude back in 'Nam wasn't enlightened even for the age. Perhaps that was more to do with a little brush with a certain female journalist than anything else was. He laughed out loud at the memory. They all turned to look at him.

"This could be an interesting situation to watch. I bet Decker loves having a female officer assigned to his staff. I remember his reaction to that reporter; Theresa or was it Terri? Oh dang, I forgot her last name! He had to take her out on some exercises in 'Nam. She was so mad when the newspaper wouldn't let her publish her article; something about it being too unpatriotic!" Hannibal chortled at the memory. "She didn't mind giving it to me though. We only met the once." Face snorted at the wistful tone in Hannibal's voice, he could imagine what sort of meeting that probably ended up being for Hannibal to remember her.

"Anyway Billy liked her and he doesn't usually like military" Murdock said lamely. His thoughts weren't on the conversation anymore, he remembered TP very well.

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The helicopter had landed back at Da Nang. Murdock slid out of the cockpit expecting the troops and Decker and the journalist to have disappeared already. Unlike cab drivers they never got a tip or rarely a thank you.

He wandered around the Huey checking the fuselage for any damage. It was just one of the routine checks that he performed after every flight. He stopped as he got to the tail rotor. He heard voices. The Colonel and the journalist were having a discussion. Murdock thought at first it was friendly but as he listened it he realised it was getting nasty.

"Can I take you to dinner?"

"Not until the article is published, my editor wouldn't like it."

"How would he know? Anyway when will you have the article ready for?"

"Oh, maybe a few days but as I said before it's newspaper policy not to show articles before they are

published. Anyway, why are you worrying about it? Frightened of what it might say?"

He heard Decker take a deep breath in and a step sounded on the tarmac. Murdock could tell by the vibration on the fuselage, someone was leaning against it. He knew Decker tended to have a short fuse so he stepped round the tail and smiled at the pair of them.

Decker swung round one-eighty degrees and stalked off into the distance. Murdock went up to the journalist and helped her to pick up her bag.

She looked up and smiled and said "Thanks. That man is the biggest bully I've ever met. Which way is it to the Officer's Lounge?"

"I'm going over there now. I'll carry your bag if you like."

"Thanks, but I can manage. You can call me call Theresa or TP if you want."

"Captain Murdock." He held out his hand that she took. "My friends call me HM."

Oh, and what do your enemies call you?" They both laughed.

Murdock introduced her to some of his pilot colleagues who were hanging around the lounge. Not surprisingly, she knew some of them from interviews in the past. Eventually the transport came that was take her back to a hotel off base.

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Murdock smiled at the memory. BA growling "Howda know that fool? Billy's invisible." brought him back to reality

"Well he didn't growl at her and he growled at Decker but I kept him under control."

"What's the point of having an invisible guard dog fool?"

Before anyone could answer this question the alarm in the van that had been primed to activate on the interception of Military radio signals rang out. The studied indolence of a few moments before disappeared as the team swung into the well-rehearsed evacuation plan. The team had by now long perfected the routine of loading the van with the few items that had been stored in the house. Within a few minutes the van was reversing out of the drive.

Hannibal shouted to BA over the noise of the revving engine "Take Mackenzie; following Decker's usual pattern that will be least defended route."

BA nodded and swung the van round and screeched off down Mackenzie with the MP cars in quick pursuit.

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Listening to the radio traffic and the noise of the approaching cars, Jane tensed knowing the chase was coming towards her. Decker's screamed orders over the radio were to try and shoot the tyres of the van out. She frowned at that suggestion, having seen the men on the firing range she wasn't sure if that was such a good idea. She thought back to the file that she had quickly read and digested last night. She smiled; despite all that he was accused and convicted of, Smith always came across as believing in fair play and has having some manners. An idea popped into her head. She examined it briefly and decided why not? It would appear that Decker did everything logically, and it wouldn't be the first time she'd put on report for doing something crazy...

She divided the men into two groups and re-arranged the cars so that they narrowed the road, allowing only



just enough space for the van to get through. She took a deep breath in, and stepped out into the middle of the road. She barked "Desist firing until my command."

The men looked at each other and shrugged their shoulders. They didn't think her plan was going to work but she was the superior officer on the ground. "Sir."

She walked out into the centre of the road in front of the men and looked in deep concentration at the approaching van.

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BA said "Hannibal who's that fool ahead?"

Hannibal looked ahead and grinned at the figure in the road "I think we are going to have a close encounter with Murdock's new girl."

Murdock leaned forward; he had been trying to convince Face that this new officer was really attractive. "See Face, there she is straight ahead. She can't wait to get acquainted with us."

Face moaned, "Murdock, no offence to your sense of taste in women, but I don't want to be associated with anyone who looks good in fatigues." He leaned forward though, to watch the fun unfold.

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Jane looked at the approaching van and then the men nervously lined up on each side of the road. She smiled, she could also hear the radio blaring out details of the chase, she could also make out the squad cars that were well behind the van. She stood firm in the middle of the road.

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Inside the van, both BA and Face were getting nervous. BA looked at Hannibal and said "What am I suppose' to do Hannibal? Run the crazy down? This person is almost as crazy as the fool back there."

Face joined in, "Yeah, Hannibal. Don't you think we ought to" He never finished the sentence.

Hannibal interrupted his panicked men. He took a long glance through the windscreen and chuckled. He turned to BA, "Keep on going BA, Decker's coming up on our rear." BA threw a worried glance at Hannibal but obeyed the order.

Hannibal smiled as Murdock started singing 'Mad dogs and Englishmen'. For once BA didn't complain; he was too busy concentrating on the road.

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Decker had his binoculars out as his driver edged a little closer to the van. He assessed the situation and didn't quite believe what he saw. The van was going at full speed towards an improvised roadblock. In the middle of which was standing his temporary executive officer looking wistfully unconcerned about the vehicle that looked set to mow her down. He quickly got on the radio and was glad when Sergeant Jones answered promptly. He issued a set of instructions. He looked at the van and thought it might just work after all, we're catching, which must mean the van is slowing.

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Jane looked at the van and half smiled to herself as she estimated that the van's speed was slowing.

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BA had unconsciously started to bring his foot off the gas. Hannibal noticed the Speedo start to drop and shouted at him, "BA get that foot back down."

"But Hannibal, I don't want to be responsible for knockin' the crazy fool down."

"You won't, trust me. She'll either move or be moved. I am sure Decker won't want to lose her so soon." BA reluctantly put his foot back down on the gas. Murdock was still singing. Face had gone silent.

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Sergeant Jones had slipped from his position and moved his way round the cars. He gauged the distance of the van and knew that the Captain's attention was totally on the van. Jane had seen the sergeant move and wondered at it, but knew that if she switched her attention to him she might miss what the van was doing. When you're playing at these speeds, microseconds were vital.

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BA had begun to ease off the gas again, this time Hannibal didn't say a word. His face was draining, as it didn't appear that she was going to move. BA's foot hovered over the brake pedal; Face and Murdock just looked at each other.

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Jane smiled as she saw the van start to slow down. The next thing she knew she was on the ground being squashed by Sergeant Jones. She heard the roar of the van as it accelerated past them and the smash of glass and squeals of brakes as the pursuing cars hit the roadblock.

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The men in the van had laughed as they saw a blur of olive jump in front of the van and push the Captain out of the way. BA gladly accelerated past the pair on the ground. He shouted out of his window "Don't bluff me like that again sucka!"

Hannibal ordered, "Stop the van, BA. Face, can you give us an assessment of the situation for us?"

Face took his rifle that he had been clutching throughout the chase. He ducked out of the side door and put down some covering fire. He glanced over to where the captain had been thrown and laughed as he saw her on her feet and standing stiffly to attention. As he closed the door, he told Hannibal, "Decker's more concerned in giving a lecture out than chasing us, Hannibal."

The van started to drive slowly away. They knew from experience that Decker would take time to regroup.

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Decker was livid. Not only had she deliberately disobeyed his orders but put another, almost successful plan in their place. He smiled thinly as he saw her limp back to the car. "Do you need a medic to look at that leg, Captain?"

She turned her eyes on him and shook her head, "No, sir. It's only bruised and scraped a little. I'll survive." She got in the car and sat down with relief. She heard Decker get in beside her. She decided to apologise, "Sorry, sir. It was a stupid, crazy idea. It's just that I was worried about civilian damage and casualties if we opened fire in a street like this, sir."

"It was a good idea. Might have worked if we'd had things a bit more organised. Maybe next time." The car started the drive back to Decker's headquarters in LA. Decker looked at the resting officer by him. She

fascinated him. He decided to inquire a little further. "Your mother's American then. Whereabouts does she come from?"

Jane leaned back, "My mother was American, sir. She died 4 weeks ago, a car accident. She came from San Francisco." She heard the sharp intake of breath and continued, "When people ask about her, sir, I often speak of her as if she is still alive, understandable, I suppose." She looked out of the window for a few minutes and then asked, "Where will the Team head next, sir? Do we go after them now or wait until morning?"

Decker shook his head and laughed, "If I knew that, I would have caught them years ago." He looked keenly at his companion. She had a knowing smile on her face. "Any ideas, Captain?"

"What about paying another visit to the VA?"

"Why? There was no indication that Murdock was involved. There never is any strong indication, just a series of coincidences."

"Just a thought, sir. He might give us a clue about where they will bolt to."

"Hmmm." Decker was unimpressed. "How will you get in? The staff will probably stop you. That Richter can be 'difficult' if he chooses to." Decker thought about it for a moment or two and then declared, "No, we'll get back and check the intelligence reports. The LAPD might have traced where they went."

Jane sighed and looked at her watch. She could tell it was going to be a late finish. The car was silent for a moment or two, and then Jane broke the silence again. She turned to Decker, "Sir, why do you believe Captain Murdock is fooling his doctors? I mean he acted pretty crazy this morning...."

Decker grunted and smiled wryly, "Just call it intuition. I've been in a few situations with him and, when he wants to be, he acts sane enough." Decker paused. "He came out of Vietnam with a few problems, mainly from the camps and the strain of seeing his unit betray their country and the cause they fought for."

Decker trailed off, reflecting on the evidence presented at the trial, what, seven years ago? He still wondered where that murder charge had come from. He smiled wryly. He remembered the restful time that he had had for the three years after the Team's 'execution,' despite the odd rumour of their resurrection that had reached him. That was shattered the day he arrived to see an old friend who had been admitted for an operation. He had unconsciously parked up in the parking facility of the mental health wing and had arrived in time to see a black van pass him. His friend was forgotten as he checked with the admissions department of the hospital to find an old patient had returned.

He continued, "I think the captain, if he didn't have his history, would be counted as being merely eccentric." Jane nodded in understanding. She smiled to herself. Murdock wouldn't be considered crazy in Stephen's family, rather the reverse.

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Hannibal decided to hole up overnight in the warehouse. Face needed some time to organise alternative accommodation. He also knew BA needed some time to recover from the near miss. He had not spoken since his parting comments out of the window. He saw Face had taken Murdock under his wing, which was good, because he didn't think BA would have any sort of fuse on him tonight. He went over to where his sergeant was sitting staring at a glass of milk. He sat down beside him.

Eventually, BA looked at him and said, "Hannibal, she is one crazy fool. I thought Murdock was mad, but that was crazy." He returned to staring at his milk.

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Face wondered whether to discuss with Hannibal about taking HM back to the VA, just in case he wound up

BA any more. However, Murdock was behaving himself, for the moment, anyway. He took a long look at the Captain, who had decided to amuse himself, by looking through an old comic he had left at some point in the past. Face couldn't put his finger on it, but there was something about Murdock today.

Murdock seemed to sense Face's inspection. He looked up into the deep blue eyes and yawned, "Time for bed, I think. Come on, Billy." Murdock got up and pulled out the sleeping bags from a cupboard. He also took out four pillows and laid three on top of the remaining sleeping bags. He took his jacket and baseball cap off. He slipped his pants, shirt and socks off, and slipped in the bag. Hannibal had come over to check he was all right. Usually, Murdock was the last to go to bed.

Murdock looked at Hannibal and said, "I'll take the last watch." He snuggled down and was promptly asleep.

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Hannibal looked at Face, "Is he all right?"

Face didn't know quite how to answer. "I think so." He paused as he saw a faint smile cross the face of the sleeping man. "At least it seems to have knocked him out of his phase. How's BA? Do you think we ought to slip him something so that he can sleep, rest up for tomorrow? I've got a feeling Decker is not going to let us alone."

Hannibal nodded, "Good idea, Face. We'll split the watch into three. I'll take first after I've sorted BA out and then you second and sleeping beauty here can take third. Ok? Oh, and whilst you're on watch, work out where our next sleeping quarters are going to be."

Face passed him some more milk and a small packet of powder. Face then stretched out and fell asleep as quickly as Murdock had. Hannibal thought as he looked at the two of them asleep, curled up like two little schoolboys who wouldn't think of doing anything wrong at all. Murdock, he noticed, was clutching a Captain Marvel comic. Hannibal slid it from his grasp and looked at the date; it was old, 1968. He hadn't realised Murdock kept them from that long ago. He smiled at the note that was written across the top, 'Found this among my stuff when I got back to base, thought I'd better send it back. TP.' Probably from one of his fellow comic fans amongst the pilots. He laid it on the desk and turned to his big problem. He was still staring mournfully at his milk.

"Here, drink this, BA, some nice cold milk for you." Hannibal gave him the dosed glass.

Luckily for Hannibal, BA just dropped onto the table when he had drunk his milk. So all Hannibal had to do was slide him from the chair onto the floor and put a pillow under his head. He managed to unzip the bag and lay it over BA like a quilt. Hannibal settled in the office, thinking about where Face would get their accommodation next. He sighed. It would be easier if there was a job in the offing, even one from Stockwell, but there wasn't.

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In a house situated behind quietly understated high-tech security in Burbank, a meeting was taking place. An assistant was telling his employer some bad news. "Sir, London has reported that they are having problems in locating the papers." He paused as he looked at the fax. "They've checked in two of the locations but nothing has turned up. The third is being checked tomorrow." He looked up at the man in front of him.

"Fools! Did they have anything else to say?" The fact that the papers hadn't turned up yet was a double-edged sword. She obviously hadn't left them in a bank vault; they would have turned up by now. He needed them though; he had given his word to his business partners, and there was a meeting due in the next two weeks.

"Oh, yes, sir. Something interesting."

"Well, out with it." The man sighed; if only he had brought his headquarters staff out with him.

"Her daughter is in the army. Apparently, she has come out to California on some yearlong exchange. Arrived some time in the last ten days, sir. There's an address here, sir. Do you want us to search it as well?"

"No, the burglaries would be connected almost certainly then. Just gather some information on her; check her movements. Keep her tailed; make sure she is in reach if we need to move on her." The man looked at his watch and sighed. He was due to leave for Columbia in two hours; there was so much to sort out. He just wished that there hadn't been so many problems in Vietnam and Burma; then he wouldn't be in this mess. He would have noticed the journalist's moves that much earlier. He didn't notice the assistant move to carry out his orders.

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Jane sighed as she was dropped off at her apartment block. It was 1 AM, and she had to be back on duty by 6 AM. She wearily climbed up the steps to the door. She didn't notice the van that was parked across the road. The occupants took plenty of photographs. She looked in the mailbox as she walked through the lobby. Empty again. She made her way to her apartment and collapsed on the bed. She roused herself and set her alarm for 5 AM and dropped off to sleep.

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Face had woken Murdock up at the changeover in watches. There had been no problem on his shift, and he had thought about what house he could scam next. Murdock nodded silently, not wanting to wake the two other sleepers. He looked at the time to go until morning, 4 hours until he could safely wake the others. He sat at the desk in the office after patrolling to make sure the entryway was secure. Billy curled up beside him. He found the magazine that he had been reading when he went to bed and read that for a while. He wondered whether he should go back to the VA tomorrow and then thought no; he had so much fun yesterday. He had a strange feeling that the fun was only just beginning.

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When Jane reported for duty, she found Decker already at the operations desk. He waved Jane over to the coffee machine and ignored her for a while. Jane sipped the hot coffee and picked up the core ATeam file that listed all the sightings. The section pertaining to LA was missing; presumably, that was what was in Decker's pile of papers. She flicked through the California sightings.

She looked through them and began to see a pattern in them. She wasn't sure what it was, but there was one. A lot of the sightings were along a section of road to the Northwest of LA. She went up to the giant map of California that covered a wall and worked on locating where they were heading when they went up there. Perhaps they had a base up there. She quickly located the general area on the map; map reading was a particular skill of hers. As she followed the road, she thought that the route looked familiar. She realised it was. She had followed exactly the same route a few days earlier. Coincidence. She continued to follow the route. She ended up just before a certain small town. She checked the files again. There were absolutely no sightings past the town. She was suddenly interrupted from her musings when Decker came up behind her.

"Captain. Making sure you know the layout of the land, good. I've checked with the VA, and Murdock didn't stay there last night. I've sent a car to monitor the comings and goings. Shall we go for breakfast?"

Jane, her mind frantic with the implications of her discovery, nodded. She followed Decker out of the room. She decided she was only here for three months. If Decker hadn't figured it out yet and if he didn't ask, she wouldn't volunteer the information. Her mind turned to what Decker would get up to today. And then she remembered she had promised to phone Mo tonight. "Sir, any chance of leave this weekend?"

Decker commented without turning round, "No. We're first on call this weekend. Why? Got a date?"

"Oh, no, sir. A family matter, sir. It doesn't matter; it'll wait." She would have to phone Mo tonight. Maybe she

would know if there had been any rumours in the district about a hideaway for the team.

Just then, a sergeant shouted down the corridor from behind them, "Sir, sir, a sighting sir. "

Decker wheeled and shouted, "Where? Who?"

"Denny's by the waterfront, warehouse district. LAPD spotted them, apparently four people."

Decker balled his fist and said, "Great! Got you now."

They were in a car speeding down to the locality within a minute.

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The team had been roused early by Murdock singing English folk songs. Luckily, BA was too hungry to concentrate on other distractions. Face suggested they go down to the waterfront; there was a Denny's down there that opened early. Hannibal quickly agreed.

They checked the area and decided it was safe. They hadn't been tailed or spotted anything out of the ordinary. They didn't spot the LAPD car that gone past and spotted the van.

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Decker for once decided on the cautious approach and parked the squad cars a block away. A small party of four made their way up to the corner of the building. They could see the van parked in a position especially chosen for a getaway. Decker chewed on his lip. They needed to know what was going on in the restaurant. He turned to his executive officer and whispered an order to her, "Napier, check the van out. Then check the restaurant. I'll send Jones in after you." He paused and queried, "You are armed? I mean, these people can be quite aggressive if disturbed."

Jane nodded absently. Her hand went to the revolver at her side. She was already thinking about her route through the car park. She licked her lips. Second day here, and she was having so much fun! She waited for the colonel's signal and then set off.

She sidled up to the van and quickly looked through the window. A thought came in to her head, I wonder? She banished the thought for the time being and stuck to her task. She signalled the sergeant to come up behind her. Once he was there, she scuttled across the car park and briefly glimpsed in the window of the restaurant. The four of them were there, drinking coffee and nearly finished, as far as she could tell. One of them got up, Smith. She ducked down and scuttled back across to the van. She told the sergeant to report back to Decker and said, "I'm going to try and disable the van. That should delay them a little while. Tell the colonel to hurry. They're nearly finished. By the way, tell him the restaurant is empty apart from staff."

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Hannibal wanted to have a cigar, but as always, the place was non-smoking. He got up and wandered out of the restaurant by a side door and looked out onto the water. As he lit up, he shook his head at the thought of the close shave they had had yesterday. Where in hell did she get that craziness? He was jerked out of his reverie as he saw a movement by the van. Someone dressed in olive. He couldn't see the entrance of the parking area, but he hadn't heard any cars or movements of men, so he guessed it would just be the one person. As he removed his gun from its holster, he laid bets with himself as to who it would be.

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Jane was nervous, as the van was reverse parked, the hood in full view of the restaurant. She smiled; what she had to do would take 30 seconds once she had popped it. She knew her way about engines. She wiped her sweaty palms down her jacket, took out her penknife, and slid it under the hood. It popped open with barely a

click. She lifted it up part of the way and quickly peered in. She instantly saw what she wanted and grabbed it. She withdrew a handkerchief from her pocket and, after checking it for cleanliness, wrapped the sensitive part in it and secured it. She put the hood down again. With a quick look to the restaurant, she walked round the back of the van, sighing in relief. The sigh was quickly stopped by the sound of a safety catch of a gun being released from behind her back. She stopped.

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A deep voice came, "Wise move. Hands up. Face the doors." Jane obeyed the orders. She smiled to herself; at least the van was disabled. They wouldn't be able to go anywhere, and she knew reinforcements were on the way.

Hannibal was suspicious at the relaxed way in which the captain was reacting. If this had been Decker or Crane, they would have been spitting blood by now. He gently pushed her up against the van and spread her legs. She spread her arms out in response. Hannibal hoped the guys wouldn't be too long. He saw the bulge at her waist and reached under her jacket and removed her revolver.

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Inside the restaurant, the three were waiting to pay. BA looked out and saw the hood go down and the figure saunter round the back of the van. "MA VAN!" he shouted and ran out.

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Face and Murdock ran after him, both on the look out for Decker and his men. They got to the van where they found Hannibal at the back of the van with a faintly familiar figure assuming a position against it.

"Face, search her. Murdock, get in the van. Keep an eye out for Decker. BA, check the van over. I seem to remember her putting the hood down."

BA was already in the engine. At first, he couldn't see anything disturbed, and then he saw it, a small but vital piece of the engine gone. "Hannibal, she's only gone and got the ignition module. The van won't go if it's not there."

Face snickered at the blush that was coming over the captain's face as he searched her. He checked her boots and trouser legs. He found a small penknife that was covered in oil, which he slipped into his pocket. Murdock was right. She was attractive in an understated way. He started chuckling as he noticed the bitten nails and the traces of oil on her hands. He knew BA was going to be mad. This would make one of his spats with Murdock look like a walk in the park. He continued chuckling as she shifted embarrassed under his examination. He caught sight of the brown eyes and wondered where he had seen them before. He finished his superficial search for weapons.

He stepped back and nodded to Hannibal, "She's clean, well apart from her hands."

Hannibal nodded and kept the gun trained on her.

Jane remained in position. Face went up to the front of the van, covering BA as he looked around for the cap. It wasn't on the ground. Face looked up and saw a small squad of MPs walk up to the entrance of the parking lot. He shouted to Hannibal, "Decker's here."

Hannibal nudged the captain, "Ok, Captain, come with me. Hands up high now please." Jane obeyed.

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Decker was feeling quite confident when he rounded the corner. He then saw his captain wander round the front of the van, with her hands up. He stood there unsure what to do. He then smiled as he realised that there

must be a problem with the van as the hood was up. She must have managed to disable it. He had all day to wait, and reinforcements were on their way. He indicated to his men to take up their positions. He stood there with his arms crossed. He could hear but not make out the frantic muttering that was going on.

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"BA, what's the problem exactly?" Hannibal asked, worrying at the patient form of Decker.

"The ignition module's gone. I can't run the engine without it. It's not on the ground. She must have thrown it in the water." BA turned to the confident captain who by now had folded her arms. She grinned broadly at him. She ignored the revolver in Hannibal's hand.

Hannibal queried anxiously, "Can't you just hot wire the engine, BA, bypass it or something." His face fell when BA shook his head. BA returned his attention to the still grinning captain. He didn't see anything amusing in the situation. In fact, the more she grinned, the angrier he got.

Face looked at the glances being traded between the pair of them and was struck by a strong sense of *deja vu*. He started to move, somehow sensing what BA's next move would be, but wasn't quick enough. BA grabbed the captain and pushed her none too gently against the van. He didn't care that she was female; she had done something to his van.

"Where is it, sucka?"

"Where's what?" She continued grinning at BA. Her arms were trying in the meantime to break the grip that BA had on her shoulders to no avail.

Face switched his attention back to watching Decker. He moved back up to the front of the van.

"BA, how big is this thing?" Hannibal asked BA, keeping a careful eye on Decker, who hadn't moved.

"Oh, about 2 x 3."

"So," Hannibal paused for effect. He smiled at the captain, who had begun to squirm as she guessed that Hannibal had guessed. "Something that could be hidden quite easily on someone?"

BA suddenly guessed what he was saying and nodded eagerly. Face relaxed, as it seemed Decker wasn't going to do anything just yet, so he wandered back from the front of the van and caught the end of the conversation. He leaned against the van, interested in what was going to happen.

Hannibal looked at the captain, who was tensing up now. Her brown eyes looked steadily at him. He made a decision. "Lady, want to tell me where it's hidden?"

A long moment passed, "Where what is hidden? I'm not a mechanic, you know, just a secretary." Somehow, Hannibal knew this wasn't the voice she spoke in normally. A laugh from the van confirmed it.

"Murdock throw out the handcuffs and some of that rope." The requested articles were quickly thrown out. Jane attempted to twist away from BA's grasp, but he was holding her too tightly. Face decided to tie the legs up first. He only just avoided several kicks to his head and face. Getting the handcuffs on required Hannibal putting the gun to her head to stop her struggling. Face somehow knew though that she knew Hannibal would never pull the trigger.

Hannibal looked at the captain and ordered, "BA, put her in the van. Face, you and Murdock ask her politely again, and if she refuses, search her until you find the damn thing." Hannibal moved to the front of the van to keep an eye on Decker. BA picked her up and roughly set her down in the van. Jane smiled to herself as she realised her cap had not moved.



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Decker became a little concerned when he saw his captain disappear. But he held his men back; he was waiting for reinforcements. His force was stretched if the team decided to make a move on foot.

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Jane wasn't worried as she was put in the van. She knew she wouldn't be hurt, and the blonde guy, what was his name, Peck, didn't look too bad. She didn't usually go for older men, but she wouldn't refuse a date with this guy. Pity he was a wanted man. Murdock wasn't a threat either; for some reason, she knew they were friends. She sat with her back against the far wall of the van. She looked at the two men who both silently stared back. She smiled.

Murdock looked at Face, who shrugged, embarrassed.

Face didn't really know what to do; he had done plenty of intimate searches on men but never a woman. He looked at her. Her smile was catching. She was growing on him rapidly, but still she was army, British admittedly, but still army.

Murdock sensed Face's reluctance and knew it was pointless asking the captain. He saw that someone had managed to sew a name badge on her fatigues. It read J M M H Napier. He looked at Face, who still seemed struck by embarrassment.

A voice from outside called. "Captains, Lieutenant, I'm still waiting."

Murdock sprang into action. He reached for Napier's boots. He got the response he wanted in that she tried to pull her knees up. Face grabbed her legs as he guessed what Murdock wanted to do. Murdock unlaced both boots. The complicated knots didn't faze him in the slightest. He pulled the boots off. The two of them smiled as the feet tensed. They looked at Napier, who had gone bright red.

Jane was thinking, 'I don't believe this! I've been through the SAS course and passed out top of the class. I've even taken the advanced course and topped that. I'm stuck in a van with two men who I know, well probably know, won't hurt me. They've taken my boots off, and I'm trembling, 'cause they are going to tickle my feet.' She curled her toes in. 'I will be strong.'

Murdock saw the expression on her face and started tickling. Face joined in. It only took a few seconds before she was screaming, "Stop, stop, stop!" Face thought it lucky that she was cuffed and had her legs tied together; otherwise, she would really be thrashing around

"Where've you put it then?" Murdock pressed.

"Not telling," came the swift answer as soon as they had ceased tickling her. A smug smile came back onto her face.

Murdock thought that trying all the ticklish places on her body would take time. Face looked as though he might enjoy the process though. But he was sure that the stand-off outside wouldn't last very long. He thought of a technique he had once used to great effect in a totally different situation. Luckily, her jacket was still open from Face's earlier search for weapons. His fingers worked his way up her ribs. She became very tense and squirmy, not laughing. Face joined in on the other side. Jane started to gasp for her breath as she tried to keep her cries under control.

Face asked this time, "Want to tell?"

She couldn't speak; she was too overcome. She decided that discretion was the better part of valour and nodded.

Face continued, not out of necessity, but because he was enjoying it, whilst Murdock asked, "Where?" Her eyes went wide. Her mouth opened and closed noiselessly several times. Murdock sighed, "Face, stop that, for the moment anyway." Face dropped his hand reluctantly.

"Under my hat." The eyes flickered down. Murdock reached up underneath her uniform cap and found the missing part. Face took it outside.

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Hannibal watched as Face brought the part out. He groused, "Thought it was going to take you all morning. What took you so long?"

Face coloured. He joked, "She knows how to take torture, Hannibal!" Face looked across at the gathering troops. "How are we going to get out?" Face saw that all the exits were blocked by now.

Hannibal smiled, "We've got our ticket in the van."

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Decker tensed when he heard the noise from the van. Typical, Smith torturing a woman. He knew that the soldiers around him had tensed as well. He saw the hood of the van go down. Damn! He'd got whatever part she'd pinched. She must be really hurt to give it up. Oh well, just another charge to add to the sheet.

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Hannibal climbed into the van. He smiled at the two captains. Murdock was sat on a seat lazily holding a gun, pretending to guard the now quiet Jane. Her handcuffed hands were clutching her knees. She looked warily up at Hannibal, who just smiled at her. He noticed the boots that were lying by Murdock's feet. He chuckled. Jane blushed. Hannibal sighed. He hadn't had this much fun for ages. He knelt down by Jane and asked, "What is Decker's frequency?"

Jane shook her head. Hannibal sighed and shouted, "BA, we need you in here." The answering shout came from inside the engine. Hannibal coolly watched as the captain shrunk and brought her knees up closer to her chin. He heard Murdock chuckle.

The van interior darkened as BA came in through the side door. "Hannibal, ma van's back to normal, no thanks to her."

Hannibal nodded and turned to Jane, explaining, "Captain, BA's a little upset here with you. You upset him yesterday with that little bluff of yours, but you've upset him even more this morning. Sooo unless you tell me the frequency..." He left the threat unspoken.

Jane sighed theatrically and said in a little weak voice which didn't fool anybody, "104." Hannibal slapped the captain on her bruised leg. She winced slightly. It wasn't caught by anyone but Murdock.

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Hannibal started to issue orders, "BA, make sure this rust bucket starts. Face, get in here" When his second climbed in the back, he continued, "Face, move her out of the line of fire. Murdock, blindfold her. If she starts to give you any grief, gag her." The two men hastened to obey. Hannibal climbed into the passenger seat and adjusted the radio.

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Outside, Decker tensed when he saw BA put the hood down. He noticed the movements of the other members of the team. He was called to the radio by a white-faced sergeant. He took the microphone. "Decker." He

thought it must be headquarters.

"Hi, Rod. How are you this fine morning?"

"Smith. What have you done with my officer?"

"Nothing. She's just a little tied up at the moment. We've got a problem here, Rod."

"Oh, and what's that?"

"Well, we want to get out and about, to go about our unlawful business. But there seems to be bit of a traffic jam ahead of us."

Decker thought rapidly, "Let me speak to the captain."

Hannibal swivelled round in his seat and passed the microphone back. It just about reached. "Say something to the colonel, Captain." Murdock held the microphone up to her mouth.

"Hello, Colonel. Sorry about this mess. My personal recommendation would be to shoot the van up now, before they get moving." Before Decker could respond to her, Murdock switched the microphone off and passed it back to Hannibal.

There was no response from Decker. Hannibal switched the microphone on again. "I wouldn't follow that piece of advice. I think the brass would be pretty upset if they lost this officer, don't you?"

Hannibal laughed as he heard a small commotion in the back. He looked in the mirror and saw Murdock stuff a handkerchief into her mouth. He hoped it was clean.

A sigh came over the radio. Decker had made his decision. "What are your terms?"

"Let us through, no tailing and we'll let her go in about four hours. We'll contact you on this frequency."

There was a small pause, "Ok. Give me some time to move my men back."

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Within about five minutes, the van was on the move. Murdock had removed the gag. Jane relaxed down into her seat. After a while, she realised that the compass in her head was giving her the direction of where they were going. Nobody in the van spoke. She let a small smile reach her lips. With any luck, they would be taking her to the bolthole they used last night.

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Murdock wondered at the relaxation that had come over Jane and the faint smile that was playing on her lips. She couldn't see out of the blindfold. It was thick and on tight. Face caught Murdock's concern and observed Jane as well.

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Jane concentrated on each turn and the time between each turn. She repeated them to herself wordlessly so that she would remember them. She felt someone sit next to her.

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"Hi." It was Murdock.

"Hi, Murdock."

"What should we call you, Napier or?"

"You can call me whatever you want. My first name is Jane."

"Oh." Murdock was intrigued by the run of initials on her name tag. He asked, "You seem to have a lot of initials there. What do they all stand for? Were your parents indecisive?"

Jane flushed, "Erm, my mother comes from a family that like the names handed down. My last names are Margaret, Hannah."

"Oh." Murdock was really interested now. He wondered what the first M stood for. "And the M?"

He watched as Jane went even redder and she tried to turn away. She mumbled something under her breath and turned her head away. At this action, Murdock decided not to push the subject, as it looked as though she was very embarrassed by it. It wasn't important anyway, and he understood about having unwanted names foisted on you by well-meaning parents.

Murdock carried on chattering aimlessly for a few minutes. Whilst he was watching, Jane start to whisper to herself again. He eventually said, "I don't think you met Billy yesterday when you called."

"Billy?"

"Yeah, he's my dog. Strange really, no one else but me can see him."

"Ah, I wondered what that was lying on my feet." Jane reached down and stroked Billy's head with her handcuffed hands.

She concentrated again on the direction of the van.

Murdock saw the wordless sounds she was making and figured them out. South 2 minutes, northwest 3 minutes. He asked a question to confirm his sudden feeling of disquiet.

"Erm, Jane. What sort of speciality are you in when you are not playing MPs with Decker?"

"That obvious, huh? I'm a helicopter pilot." She continued in a wistful voice, not seeing Murdock signal Face for a hypodermic. "I can fly anything with a rotor. I fly fixed wing, too, but they're not as much fun."

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Face looked on in panic as he filled the syringe up. Murdock must have a reason.

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Jane continued concentrating on the road. All of a sudden, she felt Murdock grab her arm. She felt her jacket being pulled back and her shirt sleeve pushed up her arm. "Hey, what are you doing?" She tried to squirm away, but another pair of arms held her still. She felt a needle enter her skin, and then it all went black.

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Murdock passed the empty syringe to Face and then arranged Jane so she was lying flat across two seats.

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Hannibal heard the commotion and turned round, "What's going on, guys? Another tickling session?" He paled as he saw the comatose figure.

Murdock explained, "Sorry, Colonel, but I believe she has a highly trained sense of direction. She's a pilot. She was tracking the moves of the van. I had to do something. This seemed the best way."

Hannibal nodded. That would have been embarrassing, to have led Decker straight back to the warehouse. "How long is she going to be asleep, Face?"

"About six to seven hours, Hannibal."

"Ok, let's take her back to the warehouse and keep her there for a few hours."

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The rest of the journey didn't take long, and they were soon safely in the warehouse. BA carried her from the van. Hannibal went to open up a sleeping bag onto which BA laid her down. As she lay there her hat fell off and her brown hair fell back. Three of the men there felt she looked familiar.

Hannibal said, "Ok, guys. She's caused us enough trouble and embarrassment. Let's turn the tables for once." Face shifted. The tone in Hannibal's voice was mischievous. He stole a glance at Murdock, who grinned nervously back. Hannibal continued, "Face, Murdock, strip her."

"What?" Both men replied.

"Well it's not comfortable sleeping in fatigues, is it? So strip her down to her underwear." He looked at Face's reddening face. "It's not as if you've never done anything like this before!" He paused and grinned, "We have to convince Decker we've taken every aspect of her care in hand. Besides, those fatigues have got oil on them."

Face started to protest again, but Hannibal was adamant. "Do it. BA and I will discuss future strategy." With that, he took BA off to the office area.

Murdock was already working on the shirt. Face sighed in relief, as she had a T-shirt on underneath it. They both agreed to stop there. They unlocked the handcuffs to take the shirt off and decided to leave them off. They untied the rope around her ankles and took her trousers off. Her lower left leg was full of scratches and bruises, obviously from the earlier incident. One of the scratches on her knee had opened up. Murdock applied some antiseptic to it and put a plaster on it. When they were done, Face zipped the bag up.

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At the same time, in a mansion in Burbank, Gerald was worried. The general was going to be upset by the three pieces of information that he had to tell him. He picked up the secure satellite phone to call Columbia. He watched some of the men pack up the many documents that were in the office into small document cases. The first consignment had already been moved to the backup location. The phone was answered.

"It's Gerald here. I need to speak to the general immediately." There was a small delay as the general was found.

"Yes, what is it Gerald?" The general knew that for his assistant to ring him here meant bad news.

"Got bad news for you, I'm afraid." He paused. The phone had gone deathly quiet, quietness that usually boded ill for someone. Gerald only hoped it wouldn't be he. He continued, forcing himself to be calm.

"London has reported back. The third location didn't yield any results. Over here, we have watchers outside the gates. Our contacts within the FBI have heard that a positive ID was made on you at the airport when you came in. I've also had a communication from your partners. They want a meeting this weekend."

He could hear the general breathing deeply on the other end of the phone. After a short while, the general started to speak again. "I trust that you've already instigated evacuation procedures. Search the apartment. If there is nothing there, take the daughter. We'll meet up with you at the backup location. Try and see if you can get anything out of her. The faster we can get this sorted, the quicker I can leave after the meeting on Saturday."

Gerald wasn't surprised to hear the phone click off.

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Face and Murdock stood up and wandered over to the office. Hannibal and BA were sitting relaxed, BA had a glass of milk, and Hannibal was waiting for a pot of coffee to brew. All four looked at each other. Murdock began humming one of those English folk tunes again. BA growled, he had woken just after 5 AM to the same tune. Murdock ignored him. Face went over to the coffee-pot and poured two cups of coffee for him and Hannibal. The scene continued for a few minutes.

Face broke the partial silence first, "What do we do now, Hannibal? Decker is going to be so chewed, more so than normal."

Hannibal and BA smirked. "We've decided to give him bigger fish to fry." Face was confused. Murdock was by now deeply involved in a comic and had ceased to take part in the conversation.

"How and who?"

"Who would the US Government and military like to get its hands on apart from us?"

"Don't know." Light eventually dawned. "Chao?" Face shivered. "He's abroad, isn't he? Detained in Vietnam?" After his last escape from a US prison for drug offences, Chao had been detained in Vietnam.

Hannibal smiled, "Yes. But by the time Decker has chased round the city a couple of times and the diplomatic service has managed to confirm Chao is still in prison, he'll have cooled off. I'm going to go and make the call now. BA, you can drive. See you later."

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Face sighed. He just hoped that this wouldn't work out like Hannibal's plans usually did. He shivered just thinking about getting involved with Chao again, even if it was to lay a smoke trail. Murdock had continued reading his comic, occasionally reaching down to stroke Billy. He wandered out into the main area and observed the sleeping captain, who had by now curled up and was almost buried in the sleeping bag. He started making phone calls to various contacts about future accommodation.

After an hour, Hannibal came back. He was puffing a big cigar. "It's sorted. I've even arranged where we will drop off the captain." BA sniggered as Hannibal finished.

"Where?"

"Amy's office. Amy agreed to it. We'll drop her off at midday, just in time for the later editions of the papers. I've also called Maggie, and she's agreed to put us up for a few days. I think it would be wise to get some country air." Hannibal looked at Face, who looked less than delighted by this news. "What's the matter, Face?"

"Oh, Hannibal, I've got a date tomorrow. I had to break it the last time," Face whined.

"Face, you said it yourself. Decker is going to be chewed at us. We should let him cool down." Hannibal joked, "Maybe by the time we get back, Murdock will have a new roomie. Either Decker will have been committed or the captain here. Anyway, it's lovely up there at this time of year." Face sat down in a chair and

huffed for a bit. "Ok, we'll have to take Murdock though as well."

"Of course."

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The rest of the morning passed quickly. At 11.30, BA loaded the sleeping bag and its occupant into the van. She never stirred. Murdock and Face followed. Hannibal climbed in the passenger seat. "Sergeant, first stop the LA times. Then Bad Rock."

Amy met them at the rear service door to the building and showed them to the small room that passed for the paper's sickroom. There was a small bed in the room. BA placed Jane on it, still wrapped up in the sleeping bag. Amy smiled as a photographer took several pictures of the sleeping captain. She was already imagining the headlines. Amy gave each of the guys a hug. She didn't get to see much of them these days. She waited for thirty minutes after they had left and then rang Decker. As she waited for the MPs to turn up to retrieve their lost property, she watched the sleeping woman, who seemed familiar somehow.

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Jane heard a voice in the distance. "Captain, Captain, are you awake yet?"

She struggled to open her eyes. The light hit her, and she blinked. She felt woozy headed. She groaned as she remembered what had happened. "Ugh, what time is it?"

"14:00 hrs. I need you up and running now, Captain. Are you fit?"

"Yes sir, think so, sir." She looked blearily at Decker

"Good, a new set of fatigues is by the bed. I need you at a meeting in five minutes, conference room, second floor. I'll get some food brought up there for you. Five minutes, Captain."

She managed to focus on Decker leaving the room. She realised she was in a sleeping bag and didn't have anything on apart from her T-shirt and underwear. She unzipped the bag and swung her legs round. She was glad that her dizziness was clearing fast. She wondered what the meeting was all about.

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Decker was just starting to greet his visitors from the FBI when Jane walked in. She looked perfectly turned out. He signalled her to come over. "Captain Napier, this is Fred McDougall, chief of the FBI in LA. We've been asked to help him in a little operation." Jane simply smiled and nodded, wanting to sink into the background on this operation. Her head still felt as if it was flying. Decker asked the bureau chief, "Do you want to start the briefing?"

Jane perked up when she heard that the FBI and the Military police had both had tip offs about a known Vietnamese drug dealer by the name of Chao. Both of these were to the effect that Chao was somewhere in the greater LA area. The tip off that the MP's had received had only just come in today and was less specific than the one that the FBI had received. The FBI had also obtained security pictures from LAX, one of which contained a picture of Chao which matched his last description. The FBI had found an address when they had raided a known business associate of his. This had been watched for the last few days. The plan was for the MPs to back the main FBI strike squad up as they raided the house later that day. Jane drifted off during the remainder of the briefing. The name Chao rang a very large bell somewhere, but her mind was still slow from the sedative, so she couldn't figure out why.

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The Team had a relaxed journey up to Maggie's. Maggie, who seemed glad to see them, greeted them as BA parked up. Indeed she was; it was not often that she saw them without somebody needing stitching up or operating on. Hannibal took Maggie off to her bedroom for a more personal greeting. Face helped BA unpack the van and Murdock just languished in front of the TV. BA and Face decided to let him stay there until he came out of whatever phase he was in. Face wondered though about the sudden zoning in and out he was doing. He shrugged his shoulders as he took the bags to their bedrooms. He'd work himself out of it sooner or later.

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Murdock was worried. Since yesterday's first encounter with the captain nearly two days ago, he had had constant chills up and down his spine. At first, he had wondered why, and then as his mind started to think about the reason, he tried to shut down his thoughts. He didn't want to think about the reason; the implications were just too big for him to handle. He smiled to himself. It was probably these new drugs that Dr. Richter was trying on him. He was too clear in his thoughts. Obviously, his brain was just working overtime. Maybe a few days up here with the guys and a few cartoons would restore him back to his normal self and he'd forget all about the captain.

He jumped as a voice interrupted his thoughts. "Murdock, give me a hand with dinner, will you?" Maggie had observed HM lying withdrawn on the sofa and was sure no one else had.

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She was glad when he got up and followed her into the kitchen. He was soon laughing and giggling. Maggie laughed at his imitation of an English accent. She was reminded of a conversation that Jane had with her last week when she had cheered up enough to tell a tale about being made to go one of the University balls as Paul's guest. She had cheerfully imitated the voice of a 'hooray henry', as she called him, who had tried to entice her to leave her brother's side.

Murdock continued his imitation throughout dinner, until BA growled, "Fool, I don't want to hear no more silly accents, especially that one. I heard enough of it this morning."

Maggie half-jokingly said, "Oh? Had a quick trip to London?" For some reason, she started to feel uneasy, and her suspicions were soon confirmed.

Face laughed, "No. Decker's got someone new with him. Don't know where Crane's gone, but he's got this English officer in tow." Maggie stopped eating. She took a quick drink of water to cover her confusion. It must be a coincidence. Jane had said that her provisional orders had been to report to one of the army bases somewhere in the desert. She didn't quite know what her role was going to be, but it definitely didn't involve the MPs or the 'Plods,' as Jane called them. Maggie shook her head. She focused back on the conversation.

Murdock laughed, "Come on, Faceman, tell her the true story."

Maggie tried to look at Face with interest. Her dinner was starting to feel like lead in her stomach. She thought back to the conversation in the kitchen. Murdock was an excellent mimic, she knew. She took another drink of water as her mouth went suddenly dry.

Face blushed. "She's female. Given us some trouble. Well, actually, mainly BA. Don't know what she's doing with Decker though. Didn't she tell you Murdock that she was a pilot or something?"

Hannibal joined in the teasing of BA. "A pilot! That explains it then." He looked over at Maggie, his eyes expecting to meet an amused expression. The worried one he did see confused him.

"What do you mean by that, sucka?" BA roared.



Face chuckled, "Well, the only people that you seem to hate on sight are pilots."

BA growled half-heartedly, "Well, they all remind me of the fool here, especially this one!"

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Three of the people on the table roared with laughter. BA just growled again. Maggie smiled behind gritted teeth. Oh Lord! It had to be Jane. Shit! It was too much of a coincidence, female, pilot, and English and had just appeared. Maggie tried to concentrate on her food but could tell that Hannibal had picked up on something. Maggie started to think about how to broach the subject. She hoped Jane would get a chance to call her tonight.

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BA added in a growl that marked his 'annoyance' with the new XO, "Hannibal, she's the spawn of the devil, and the next time I see her, I'll tell her so!" At this latest comment, both Maggie and Murdock started coughing, and both dropped cutlery. They both bent down to pick their particular piece up. Murdock smiled as their eyes met under the table.

A phone call came into his mind from that weekend.

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It was just after Theresa had been onto her bureau chief to try and persuade them not to send her away. When that failed, she insisted she phoned her friend Mo, who was an army doctor up country, to say goodbye. Murdock remembered tickling her throughout the conversation to hurry it up. After all, she only had six hours before the plane that would take her back to San Francisco was due to leave.

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They both emerged from under the table in time to hear Hannibal comment, "Spawn of the Devil, BA?" He shook his head. "Don't think so. After all, surely you would reserve that for only children of the captain here, wouldn't you?"