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**Chapter Twenty-Seven: 2:45am (pps222-227)**

*Toni in BSL4*

KF: Toni guesses, from the comment about a rendezvous reported by Steve, that a terrorist attack is planned some time today. She sees the perfume bottle being filled on video and realises what the murder weapon is. She reports this to Odette, who congratulates her on great police work. From here on, a big national (& international?) police response. But it is somehow misdirected by Frank?

SE: Reference to Hazardous Materials Safe – consider “the Vault”.

NG/AB:

As soon as it became known that firearms had been used, the situation would change. Unarmed officers would be told to watch for the getaway vehicle but *not* to attempt to stop it. Instead, keep it under observation from a safe distance.

Stirling police do not have 24-hour armed response capability. (Glasgow has an armed response vehicle with the guns in the back.) Firearms-trained officers would have to be called in, taken to the armory, equipped, briefed. This would take at least 1-2 hours.

Road clearing is the responsibility of local councils and the Highways Department. They would normally cooperate with police requests, but it is not guaranteed and might depend who answered the phone.

For example, if the police received a phone call from a stranded motorist with a medical emergency, they would have to try to get to the car.

# 2:45 a.m.

Toni stood in the BSL4 lab, fully outfitted in protective spacesuit, gloves and boots. Steve and the security guards had told her everything that had happened, up to the moment that two of the gang had emerged from the lab, passed out through the air lock and disappeared from sight. It was clear that <sup>this</sup> the laboratory had been their objective. Checking the monitors again, Toni had observed that everything seemed normal in the lab: the animals were in their cages, and there was no apparent damage to premises or equipment. But they had to have done something in there. And the only way to find out was to go in.

While Steve gave first aid to Susan and Don, Toni had gone carefully through the biohazard procedure, taking off all her clothing and jewellery, putting on throwaway underwear, donning the helmet and the suit. Now she stood in the laboratory, looking around, mystified. Everything <sup>seemed</sup> was in order.

Then she saw it. On the floor, in front of the hazardous materials safe: a heavy-duty padlock, its hasp cleanly sliced through.

She opened the refrigerator door. They must have taken something from here—but what? Most likely it would be samples of Stanley's antiviral drug, worth a fortune to a rival company. She opened the log book that lay on a shelf and checked the number of doses of the drug that should be in the safe.

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SE: "Plague" is a bacterial agent – *Yersinia Pestis*. Consider using "massive outbreak".

None were missing.

The second shelf looked somewhat bare. She checked the log again. The shelf should have held twelve boxes of Madoba-2 virus.

They were all gone.

The gang had stolen enough of the virus to start a plague.

This was worse than losing the antidote. Toni had not merely failed to protect her

employer's property. She had failed to protect the outside world from a fatal virus.

But maybe she had not failed, not quite, not yet. The gang could not travel any faster than anyone else. They would not be far away. Perhaps they could be stopped.

She closed the refrigerator and left the lab. Burning with impatience, she stood in the shower while her suit was washed with water, then detergent, then more water. As soon as the shower stopped, she stepped into the next room and tore off the suit and the underwear. She showered again, remembering to blow her nose and cough and spit. Hardly troubling to dry herself, she threw on the tan jeans and green sweater she had been wearing all night. Then she left the lab and went to reception.

Steve Tremlett was behind the desk. Susan, the guard who had been coshed, was lying on a couch normally used by waiting visitors. She needed to see a doctor. Don, who had been less seriously hurt, sat beside her, talking to Toni's mother. "That nice boy Steven made me a cup of tea," Mother said to Toni. The puppy sat at her feet. She fed it a piece of biscuit.

"Thanks, Steve," Toni said.

"He'd make a nice boyfriend for you."

"He's married, mother."

"That doesn't seem to make much difference, nowadays."

*suggest ahead of an emotional reaction the logical one.*

*suggest a vision of horrendous catastrophe.*

"It does to me." She turned to Steve. "Where's Carl?"

"Men's room."

"And Stu?"

"Control room, watching the monitors."

"Good."

"What did they do in the lab?"

"Stole some materials."

"Dangerous?"

Toni nodded. She picked up the phone on the desk and dialled regional police headquarters.

Sergeant Dawes was still on duty. Toni identified herself. "That car you promised still hasn't got here," she said.

"They turned back," he said.

"They what? You're not serious. I have injured people here!"

"Have you looked at the roads? There are abandoned cars everywhere. They knew they would only get stuck in the snow. They turned back."

*First let's feel her frustration, her urge to scream.*  
 "There was no point in berating the man," Toni said: "The thieves stole a considerable quantity of a very dangerous virus, the same one that killed Mark Ross. This is a biohazard emergency." *Wouldn't she spell out what this means?*

"Biohazard," he said, obviously writing it down.

"The perpetrators are three men—two white and one black—and a woman, white, and they're driving a van marked 'Hibernian Telecom'. They posed as a repair crew."

"Can you give me descriptions?"

"I'll get the guard supervisor to call you in a minute—he saw them, I didn't. But they're armed."

"What sort of weapons?"

Toni turned to Steve, who was a gun buff. "Did you get a good look at their firearms?"

He nodded. "Nine millimetre Browning automatic pistols, all three of them—the kind that take a thirteen-round magazine. They looked like ex-army stock to me."

Toni repeated the description. "But the important thing is that they can't be far away, and that van is easy to identify. If we move quickly, we can catch them."

"And how do you propose that we move quickly, in this weather—by magic?"

"Obviously you need a snowplough."

"And where would I get such a thing?"

"I don't know, but there must be one in Scotland, we have to clear the motorways most winters."

"Clearing snow from roads is not a police function, it's a local authority responsibility."

*Some inner fury before she gives up.*  
Toni decided to give up on Sergeant Dawes. He was out of his depth. "Is Frank Hackett there?"

"He's not available to take calls."

"Well, if you won't wake him up, I will." Toni broke the connection and dialled Frank's home number. *How would she know this?*  
He was on call, he had to pick up the phone. When he answered, she said: "Oxenford Medical has been robbed of a quantity of Madoba-2, the virus that killed Mark Ross."

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IT Bottom line. Why 'Scottish' thieves specifically? Just 'thieves' would be better, I think.

“Shit,” he said sleepily. “How did you let that happen?”

It was the question she was asking herself, but she resented it when it came from him.

“If you’re so smart, figure out how to catch the thieves before they get too far away.”

“Didn’t we send a car out to you an hour or so ago?”

“It never got here. Your tough coppers saw the snow and got scared, so they turned back.”

“What else can we do?”

“You can commandeer a snowplough and start looking for the getaway vehicle.”

There was a long pause. “No,” he said at last.

Toni could have screamed. Frank enjoyed using his authority negatively. It made him feel powerful. He especially liked defying her—she had always been too assertive for his taste. How had she lived with him for so long? She curbed the retort that was on the tip of her tongue. “What’s your thinking, Frank?”

*But let us hear it even if she doesn't speak it.*

“I’m not going to commandeer a snowplough. I don’t think much would be achieved.

I’ll put out an alert for the van, and I presume you can provide descriptions of the suspects?”

“Yes, but—“

“If we can’t move, the gang can’t either. As soon as the weather eases up, we’ll start looking for them.”

“What if they switch cars? They might have an off-road jeep parked somewhere.”

“They still won’t get far.”

“They might have a helicopter.”

“Toni, curb your imagination. There are no thieves in Scotland with helicopters.”

These were not Scottish thieves running off with banknotes or jewellery—but Frank

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IT 1.11 How about ‘ and I think we need to grab a snowplough so that we can catch up with the getaway van’ – it’s more colloquial, I think.

JT/KF: After Frank hangs up on her, Toni thinks that she can use the Johnny Kirk secret to coerce Frank—but first she will try Odette.

had never really understood biohazards. "Frank, use *your* imagination. These people want to start a plague. It could kill hundreds, thousands, millions of people. Don't take risks!"

Let's have her curse  
 "You're not a cop any more. This is my decision." He hung up.

Toni curse with frustration Why would nobody help her? She had one more call she could try. She scrolled through her phone's memory and found the home number of Odette Cressy, her friend at Scotland Yard. "This is Toni Gallo," she said. "I'm sorry to wake you."

Odette spoke to someone else. "Sorry, sweetheart, it's work."

Toni was surprised. Odette was single. "I didn't think you'd be with someone."

"It's only Santa," Odette said. "What's happening?"

Toni told her. "The police here say they can't do anything until the weather clears, and I think we need to commandeer a snowplough and go after the getaway van."

"That's what I'd do, but I don't think I can force them. Scotland Yard helps local police forces, it doesn't boss them around."

"Can't you start a fire?"

"I could call the Yard, just to let them know there's a biohazard emergency in the Harbourmouth region. They might tell the Home Office, who might phone the Scottish Office, who might put a bomb under your local bobbies."

"It's worth a try."

"Okay."

"Thanks. I'm sorry to have called so late. Give my apologies to Santa." Toni hung up.

She turned around. Carl Osborne stood immediately behind her, making notes.