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**Chapter Thirty-Three: 5am (pps263-271)**

*Toni follows the snowplough*

NG/AB:

Police would not initially follow the snowplough. They would set up static patrols at key road junctions. They would also alert neighbouring police forces. Even though the gang have switched vehicles, a car with four people in it would be unusual enough to attract attention. The registration could quickly be checked to show whether the car was either stolen or rented.

The police would not do more without further intelligence. Information would be their top priority at this stage—especially with firearms involved. They would try to find out where the gang were and what they were doing. They might send the snowplough with officers dressed as road clearers for a look.

NN: It's hard to understand just why Frank is being *so* obstructionist. Yes, he has bad blood with Toni, but he can't be that thick, not with a major biohazard attack. Besides, Odette told Toni that Frank had just been reamed out by her boss at the Yard. If nothing else, isn't he afraid of the personal consequences to him if he's uncooperative and things go bad? (A much serious situation than the Farmer Kirk case) His bloody-mindedness just doesn't seem that credible, given all the circumstances. And since Toni knows about the reaming, why doesn't she remind him of that if she has to -- remind him that she knows the Yard's been on his back, so that even if he's loath to cooperate with her, and even if the consequences of this disaster haven't somehow sunk in, he should at least consider he could be committing professional suicide?

# 5 a.m.

The snowplough was a Mercedes lorry with a blade hooked to its front attachment plate. It had "Harbourmouth Plant Hire" on its side and flashing orange lights on its roof, but to Toni it looked like a winged chariot from heaven.

The blade was angled to push the snow to the left-hand side of the road. The plough quickly cleared the drive from the gatehouse to the main entrance of the Kremlin, its blade lifting automatically to clear speed bumps. By the time it stopped outside the main entrance, Toni had her coat on, ready to go. At last they could get after the thieves and try to recapture the virus sample before it killed anyone.

The plough was followed by three police cars and an ambulance. The convoy pulled up outside the main entrance, and the ambulance crew entered first. They took Susan out on a stretcher, although she said she could walk. Don refused to go. "If a Scotsman went to hospital every time he got a kick in the head, the doctors couldn't cope," he said.

Frank came in looking spruce. He was wearing a suit with a white shirt and a tie. He had even found time to shave, probably in the car. Toni saw with dismay that he was spoiling for a fight. No doubt he felt resentful that he had been forced, by his superiors, to do what Toni wanted, against his better judgment. She told herself to be patient and reasonable with him and avoid a showdown.

*How does she see this?*

Frank was followed by two detectives carrying what looked like instrument cases—a crime scene team, Toni presumed.

Frank nodded to Toni and shook hands with Carl Osborne, but spoke to Steve Tremlett. “You’re the guard supervisor?” he said without preamble.

“Yes. Steve Tremlett. You’re Frank Hackett, I’ve met you before.”

“And you were here during the robbery.”

“Yes.”

“I gather four guards were assaulted.”

“Me and three others, yes.”

What was Frank doing, Toni wondered impatiently? Why was he asking trivial questions when they needed to get going right away?

Frank said: “Did all the assaults take place in the same location?”

“No,” Steve replied. “Susan was attacked in the corridor. I was tripped up in about the same place. Don and Stu were held at gunpoint and tied up in the control room.”

“Show me both places, please.”

Toni was astonished. She had expected the police to move on immediately, going after the virus. She could not believe that Frank wanted to dither here while the thieves were making their escape. She said: “We need to get after these people, Frank. Why don’t you leave a team here to do this and get back on the road with the snowplough?”

“Don’t tell me how to do the job,” he replied. He gave her a brief look of gratification, clearly pleased that she had given him an opportunity to put her down. She groaned inwardly. This was not the time to rerun their marital conflicts.

Frank turned back to Steve and said: “Lead the way.”

Toni suppressed a curse and followed along.

So did Osborne.

The detectives put crime scene tape across the corridor where Steve had been tripped up and where Susan had been coshed. Then they went to the control room, where Stu was watching the monitors. Frank asked Stu to leave, then put tape across the doorway.

From outside, Steve said: "All four of us were tied up and taken inside the BSL4 laboratory."

"That's where I found them," Toni added. She looked at her watch. "But that was five hours ago—and the perpetrators could be getting farther away every minute. Can't we speed this up?"

"We'll take a look inside the lab," Frank replied.

"Not today, you won't," Toni said. "But you can see the location on monitor nineteen."

"We have to go in. It's a crime scene."

"And it's a laboratory. If you want to go inside, you'll have to do biohazard training."

"Like hell I will. Take me to the lab."

Toni realised she had inadvertently done what she had vowed, a few minutes ago, to avoid: she had gone head to head with Frank. But she had not imagined he would be so stupid as to think he could enter a biocontainment zone. She tried to sidestep the issue. "I'll take you to the door," she said. She led the way, walking quickly.

They all went to the entrance to BSL4. Frank looked at the card reader, then said to Steve: "I'm ordering you to give me your pass. If you refuse, I'll arrest you for obstruction of justice."

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IT 7 lines up: 'It's a system we installed to prevent foolish people getting in'  
Wouldn't Frank be unable to resist reacting with a jibe to this from Toni by saying something like 'Well, didn't do much to stop the thieves then, did it?' After all, Toni's system has failed. Or mention that thieves must have been clever, or something.

Steve said: "I don't have a pass. Security guards aren't allowed in."

Frank turned to Toni. "Do you have a pass?"

"Yes."

"Give it to me."

Toni said: "Frank, be reasonable. If there was a way to let you in I'd do it. I want to catch these thieves as badly as you do—worse, probably. But you can't go in there. Why is this so difficult for you to understand? In that laboratory are lethal viruses for which there is no cure. If a lion's cage was a crime scene, would you go in?"

"You don't change, do you, Toni? You keep telling me what to do, even though I'm in charge."

"You're not in charge of biosecurity here. I can't give you permission to enter the lab—I'd be endangering public safety."

"Give me your pass."

Toni handed it over. Frank swiped it through the card reader. The door did not open.

He pointed to the small screen. "What's that?"

"A fingerprint reader. The pass won't work without the correct fingerprint. It's a system we installed to prevent foolish people getting in with stolen cards."

"I could break in."

"If you try to force your way in, I'll have to prevent you, to protect the public."

He laughed. "You'll prevent me?"

"If I can." Toni wanted to scream with frustration, but she forced herself to speak reasonably. "Frank, this is stupid. You're not going to break in, you haven't brought the tools. Why are we arguing like this when the thieves are getting away?"

~~He pointed a finger at her. "When this is over, you're going to be charged with obstructing the course of justice."~~

~~"If we don't recapture the virus pretty quickly, when this is over we could all be dead."~~

A uniformed policeman appeared with snow on his boots. "I've talked to the guards in the gatehouse, sir," he said to Frank. "They're sure the Hibernian Telecom van turned right when it left here."

Frank looked sceptical. "I can't imagine they're heading for the north of Scotland," he said. Apparently forgetting the argument about entering BSL4, he strode along the corridor. The others followed. "They must have been intending to cut across country to the motorway and turn south," Frank continued.

In the Great Hall were two men in yellow high-visibility jackets and rubber boots—the snowplough operators, Toni presumed. They were smoking. Where was their sense of urgency?

Frank addressed them. "We'll go north half a mile then take the first turning."

Toni knew that was wrong. She was reluctant to confront him again, but she couldn't let the snowplough head off in the wrong direction. He would be furious, but she had no option. She said: "The thieves didn't go that way."

Frank ignored her. "That will take us to the motorway by the shortest route."

Toni said again: "The thieves didn't go that way."

The snowplough drivers watched the exchange with interest, looking from Frank to Toni and back again like spectators at a tennis match.

Frank reddened. He said to Toni: "No one asked your opinion."

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IT last line: I think it's 'Smart Aleck'

"They didn't take that route," she persisted. "They continued north, at least at first."

"I suppose you reached that conclusion by feminine intuition?"

The uniformed constable giggled.

Why do you lead with your chin? Toni thought. She said calmly: "The getaway vehicle is in the car park of the Dew Drop Inn, a motel on this road about five miles north."

Frank turned redder, embarrassed now that she knew something he did not. "And how did you acquire this information?"

"Detective work. I phoned around. Better than intuition." You asked for that, she thought.

The uniformed policeman laughed again, then smothered it when Frank glared at him.

Toni added: "The thieves might be at the motel, but more likely they switched cars there and drove on."

Frank suppressed his fury. "That's our next stop," he said to the drivers. "Let's get going."

Toni's mother was asleep in a chair in the Great Hall. Toni touched her shoulder to wake her. "Get your coat on, Mother," Toni said. "We've got to go."

Mother opened her eyes. "Hello, Frank!" she said, instantly alert. "This is a surprise. Are you and Toni getting back together?"

Frank looked embarrassed. "Not today," he said.

"Shame."

Toni said to Frank: "I want to come with you."

"And bring your mother?"

Toni gritted her teeth. "Don't be a smart alec. Bear in mind, you wouldn't yet know

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IT two lines up: 'on routine matters' better, or delete the phrase and just have 'waste precious time and miss important connections'

that this crime had been committed if I hadn't come here to check on things—with my mother.”

“Well, I'm not taking her or you with me on a police operation.”

“Frank, I'm involved, I need to go along.”

“Forget it.”

“I might even help you. I'm a good detective, no one ever denied that.”

“You're no longer a police officer.”

“I do things you don't think of, follow lines of inquiry you've overlooked.”

“I don't rate you.”

“How can you say that? You didn't find the getaway vehicle—I did.”

“I'm not taking you.”

“Then let me follow you. I don't have my car, but I can borrow Steve's, if you'll just use the plough to clear a path to the car park here, so I can get it on the road.”

“We don't have time for that. The thieves are getting away, as you keep telling me.”

“Frank, you have to take me.”

“Why is this so difficult for you to understand?” he said, sarcastically quoting her words to him. “I don't want you. Full stop.”

Toni said no more. She knew Frank: in this mood he could not be persuaded, only coerced. But she had to go with the snowplough. She could not wait here, not knowing what was happening. And she needed to stay on Frank's tail, making sure he did everything possible to catch the fugitives. He was methodical but unimaginative. On his own he would, waste precious time on routine and miss important connections. He was the kind of person who would miss the plane because he took so long to label his luggage correctly.

Anyway, she had one more card up her sleeve.

The snowplough drivers returned to their vehicle. As Frank was leaving, Carl Osborne waylaid him. They talked quietly together, Carl pointing at his Jaguar, still stuck in the snow half way up the drive. Frank nodded, then went out.

Toni spoke to Carl. "You're going with them."

He looked smug. "It's a free country," he said. "I'm going to follow the snowplough."

"Your car is stuck."

"They're going to move the snow in front of it."

That was what Toni had guessed. "Take me with you."

"Sorry. Frank specifically asked me not to."

Toni nodded. "Let me know if you change your mind," she said calmly.

Carl looked puzzled, but said no more. He put his coat on.

Steve Tremlett opened his mouth to speak, but Toni discreetly flapped her hand at him in a "Keep quiet" gesture.

Carl went to the door.

Toni said: "Don't forget the puppy."

He picked up the dog and went out to his car.

Toni watched as the convoy moved off. The snowplough shifted the pile of snow from in front of Carl's Jaguar, then continued up the slope to the gatehouse, clearing the driveway as it went. The police cars followed.

Carl sat in his car for a moment, then got out again and returned to the Great Hall.

"Where are my keys?" he said angrily.

Toni smiled sweetly. "Have you changed your mind about taking me?"

Steve jingled the bunch of keys in his pocket.

Carl made a sour face. "Get in the damn car," he said.

Nice