We Thought She Was Tough

“We thought she was tough.”

I listened to Randy make excuses as I allowed myself to sink further into the soft suede interior of his old Cadillac I had been dropped into just moments before. I struggled with quaking hands to bring a pristine chromed lighter to the tip of my cigarette. A moment before giving up I felt Sinclair’s hand ease over the top of mine and take the lighter from me. He took the chrome piece and summoned a small flame to ignite a point of light sifting through my gaze. Sinclair eased back into his seat and his brow furrowed as he stared at me.

“Don’t look at me like that.” I demanded.

“Like what?”

“Like I’m already dead.”

His scowl deepened and he turned away to stare out the shaded window without uttering another word. I could see his eyes tracing the neon billboards along the skyway as the modified 1957 Eldorado sliced through rain and traffic with equal grace. Randy’s whining intonations filtered back from the front seat once more as my attention shifted back to the moment.

“…And they shot my fucking car! Do you know how much this thing is worth!? I’m gonna tear them a new one for this shit, I’m telling you. I’m gonna rip…”

“Would you just shut the fuck up?” Sinclair exploded from his stupor in the far corner of the spacious back seats. “It’s a fucking car, Sia is bleeding out over here and all you care about is your goddam car!”

“Where do you think we’re going idiot, she will be fine once we get her back to the doc.”

“That may not quite be the case.” Hume, the team’s combat frame swiveled his optical mounts towards Sinclair and Sia before continuing in his mechanical monotone. “Even with medical support, Agent Dune has only a 10.3% chance of survival given current biometric data and relevant statistics.”

Sinclair stared aghast at Hume, Hume met his gaze with his own, mechanical and cold.

“HA!” A sharp, pained laugh escaped my lips before I curled back into myself, holding the bloody mess at my midsection.

“With proper harvesting, the residual energy from her implants and neurostimulants can be repurposed for further use by the company.”

“Wh..wh,wh..WHAT THE FUCK!?” Randy screamed from the front seat. “That’s our fucking friend you lifeless pile of scrap, not your company property!”

My obscured thoughts could just barely make out Randy’s complaints as I drifted in and out of consciousness. Sinclair had jumped from his seat and was crouched protectively in front of me as the mechanical man opened a sealed compartment around his waist and withdrew a small, wicked looking scalpel.

“Section 2A - Appendix 3, In the case of agent expiry while in the employ of or in conjunction with Manticore Corporations LLC, responsibility for said agent’s bodily function is immediately assumed by any licensed Manticore Corporations LLC command.”

“Like hell!” Randy unleashed a guttural yell as he whipped a blast pistol from the glove compartment and unleashed a massive wave of photons into the combat frame’s midsection. While the initial blast landed center mass the plasma did not sear through the torso like it would with an organic target and instead erupted into a corona of energy that sheared off the passenger side of the vehicle and sent the combat frame careening into oncoming traffic. The driver half of the car thankfully held its integrity as it slammed into the left-hand barrier and slid to a skidding halt thirty meters down the road. Sinclair was on his feet immediately and reached back into the smoldering vehicle to find me. As his arm closed around my wrist he heaved my limp body to rest against the cold concrete barrier. Sinclair was just turning back to find Randy as he put a comforting hand on his shoulder from behind.

“Is she…?”

Sinclair crouched down and placed two fingers on the base of Sia’s neck, “she’s still alive!”

“And her neurochip is still on?”

“Yes, yes, she’s still in there, but we need to get her out of here now.”

I wanted to say something, react or acknowledge them but my cybernetics were failing, I couldn’t move as I stared blankly at Sinclair as he bustled about in front of me.

“Attention criminals, step away from Agent Dune and put your hands in the air immediately. Failure to comply will result in immediate termination.”

The combat frame Hume stood menacingly in the middle of an apocalyptic landscape. Burning cars from the initial accident lay strewn about and he casually kicked one out of his way as he lurched closer to the wounded companions. One leg seemed to be dragging and jerky, while both his main ocular receivers had been blown out. His vision would be limited but far from inept. Randy leapt into action first, slinging plasma from his blast pistol across the scorched asphalt. With time to react, the combat frame summoned a ray field on his right forearm to absorb the plasma impacts before returning fire with a ballistic launcher from above his left shoulder. Randy flung himself behind a burning wreck as shrapnel tore through the air above him.

With Hume’s attention firmly situated on Randy, Sinclair was using the free moment to work a new energy pack into his plasma blade when I placed a weak hand on his wrist.

“Please, run” I begged as the barest breath of air formed words from my mouth.

Sinclair’s gaze looked down at mine, I could see pain there. “Not today, sis.”

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She couldn’t hear him. Sinclair eased himself to one knee and slid his hand behind Sia’s head. He grabbed a firm hold of the neurochip at the base of her skull and yanked hard. With a final blue flash, her eyes went grey.

Bringing his attention back to the fight Sinclair could see Hume hammering away at a cracked ray bubble with a full arsenal of weaponry before he finally shattered the field and sent Randy sprawling. Sinclair launched himself into an all-out sprint, but he was too slow. Before he could reach the two combatants Hume had Randy by the neck, one quick jerk and Randy’s lifeless body was tossed back to the ground. The mechanical Hume stood staring down at the lifeless corpse as Sinclair slammed into him from behind. Without hesitating, Sinclair slammed a chip into the base of the machine’s head before being launched back into the asphalt by a swinging arm. Sinclair had just enough time to acknowledge what he had just done before a mechanical arm converted into a blast cannon filled his vision. Brilliant orange light crackled through the interior of the barrel. He could feel the heat on his face like the sun on the beach. Sinclair summoned one last smile before he felt nothing at all.

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I woke with a start, feeling decidedly, weird. Unable to place the source of my uneasiness I creaked my way from the bed found myself on and jerked over to the sink and mirror just a yard away. I looked into the mirror and screamed.