

"Come on Harry, we got enough. We've been scooping Fed Ex drop offs for pretty near two hours." The young man glanced at the heap of packages they had purloined. Jesper liked that word. They may steal, but that word made it sound like they were stealing with class. He looked sullenly through the window. "Besides", he shivered, "it's practically freezing out there."

Harry smirked and stomped his foot. "Yeah! Now the real reason comes out to the surface. Little Jesper doesn't want to get his feet cold." He laughed and hooted. "I told you that when you come up with the moneymaking idea, then you can drive. Until then, you're the go-getter and I'm the one who gets to play Richard Petty."

Jesper snorted, "Richard Petty, at least pretend to be a genuine driver over there, making your vroom-vroom sounds when you step on the gas." Now Jesper laughed, "Someone like Jimmie Johnson!"

"Hey now, I give you that Johnson drives better than me..." The older man scratched his chin, "when I'm having a bad day anyway, but don't you go disrespecting The King of NASCAR." He pointed at the younger man, "And afore you go spouting off about 5 straight years, winning the whole thing remember, I don't care. No one's close to King Richard."

Jesper stared at the finger for a second and nodded. "Well, if only Dale Earnhardt had seen a few more summers."

They looked at each other and in chorus said, "God rest his soul."

Harry looked back at the mound of packages behind him. "OK Jesper, I guess we can knock off for today. Only one more day before the holiday. To bad Amazon doesn't deliver on Christmas eve or we could do the next two days."

They drove past the 1st Baptist Church and there was navy and silver state trooper charger sitting in the parking lot. The trooper inside it was staring a hole though their beat up Amazon van. Jesper had found the van a couple of counties away wrecked in a junkyard. Just a little cosmetic damage. Jesper and Harry had fixed it up. Didn't hurt none that Harry had stolen the fender off a similar van to replace the torn up one.

"I don't know Harry." Jesper said, "That statie was staring at us pretty hard just now. That's the third time we rolled by him today. I'll admit that I'm a little spooked."

"Oh Jesper, you shouldn't worry so much." Harry spit out the

window as he eyed the rear-view mirror. "Then again, ain't no sense in taking chances. We'll go behind the college and lie low in the parking lot."

Jesper exhaled like he'd been holding his breath, which he guessed he had without knowing it. "Now that's an idea I like. Bound to be some school van or big vehicle we can park next to, so we blend in."

Sure enough, there was a large lawn care van in the back parking lot. Harry eased their van into the spot next to it and turned the engine off. "Well, we're blended, boy." He snickered, "Better wrap up over there cause I'm not gonna hug you for no body heat and it'll be getting cold in here in the next little bit."

Jesper glared at the older man, but he pulled his coat tighter. Already the windows had fogged up. Jesper reached up and drew a stock car on the window with his finger. He smiled a little as he wrote the number 48 on the door. The cap Harry threw at him hit him right in the temple.

"Jimmie Johnson, Bah." Harry shook his head and grabbed his cap back and pulled it low over his eyes.

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Doctor Lambert shook his head hard, as if the man on the other end of the phone could hear him doing it. "I don't care about your schedule. It is too dangerous to ship through the mail." Then Lambert nodded his head violently. "Yes, Colonel, I know who keeps the lights on around here, but we are dealing with something unique. It needs to be in a shock-absorbing, military grade transport. I will not ship it like a box of cookies." Lambert cracked his hand on the side of the table and tucked it under his arm. "Ow! No, I'm not screaming at you for no reason. I talk with my hands sometimes, things get in their way. Just listen with your ears!" But it was the doctor that listened for a long minute. He let his head droop towards his chest. "Yes Colonel, I understand how many others would love the access I have to such things as..." He stomped his foot at being cut off mid-sentence but kept quiet. "I know you say that the government ships these special items through Fed Ex or Amazon often. I get you're only an hour away but..." cut off again, he stood resignedly. "Yes, I am concerned about its safe handling..." His hand clutched his neck as he looked up. "Enough! I understand, I will prepare it to go, but I don't like it!" Lambert paused again listening. "Yes Colonel, maybe I will accompany it." The professor hung up the phone and stormed back into his

laboratory.

He found the packing tape. He walked back to the box and stared at the glass container inside. "Bah! What foolery. Shipping top secret 'Eyes only' things like an Amazon return so they'll blend in." Lambert held the flaps together and started pulling the packing tape gun towards him. The roll ran out just as he got it over the near edge. "Out of tape." He grumbled, tried to even the tape, the top of the cardboard still pulled up. "Well, that will have to do." He picked up the box and started toward the back of the school.

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Jesper didn't remember falling asleep, but he had. He knew he had because Harry shaking him awake. "What? Did you say you see the cop, Harry?"

"No, I did not."What I said was, Jesper, do you see that?"

Jesper followed Harry's arm and finger, pointing out the front window. There was a guy standing over a box at the door to the building, looking at it. "Is that guy gonna take that box?" Jesper sat straight up in the seat. "HEY! Is he stealing our gimmick?" The hat thudded on the side of his head again.

"No, you dim wit he just sat the box down. We're gonna steal it. Just as soon as he walks his butt back into that building."

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The door opened, "Doctor Lambert?"

He looked to the door at his lab assistant. "Yes Dominic, what is it?"

"I'm glad I caught you. I thought you'd left without starting the night lock down protocol."

Yes, Lambert thought. I can't go out to pee or smoke without locking everyone into the lab, but we can ship what might be the greatest scientific find ever in the back of a truck. "Ah, yes. I left my keys in my office. We'll get them, then I'll let you out the front." The two men re-entered the building.

Harry waited about 10 seconds and started the van. He pulled right up to the door. "Ok Jesper, do your thing."

"But Harry, what about that state boy? Besides, that's a pretty enormous package." He looked into the back of the van again. "I don't know if that'll fit."

"Boy, get out and put that package in the van. The longer you wait, the bigger chance some cop will drive by."

That made sense to Jesper. He jumped out and threw the back door open. He grabbed the box. It was pretty large, but somehow not really heavy. He didn't have any trouble getting it to the van, but try as he might, he couldn't get it to fit into the back. The siren startled the already jumpy Jesper, and he let the box go. Gravity did not let go and pulled the box down to the ground, busting it open. Jesper threw his hands up and looked at the box, seeing a thick-looking substance slowly leaking out from the lid.

"You know," the state policeman walked toward Jesper with his gun drawn. "It just so happens that I attended college here. Lots of time making out with girls in this parking lot, too." He looked at the van, not taking the weapon off Jesper. "Anyone else in the van?"

Before Jesper could answer, the policeman had finally walked close enough that his left boot landed on the substance. Jesper watched with fascination as the cop's foot almost instantly shot out from under him. His head hit the ground with a sickening crack. The trooper mouthed something like "Two four eight" and was motionless.

Harry jumped out of the van. "What the hell Jesper! Now every cop in the state will be after us."

"I didn't touch him. He stepped in that... goo!" He pointed toward the spilled liquid. "I swear Harry, his feet just flew out from under him."

"Well, we can't leave him in the parking lot." Harry fireman carried the downed cop to the patrol car. Turned off the lights and started back toward the van. Jesper moved closer to the box as the door to the building opened.

"What is going on?" Doctor Lambert ran to the box. "Oh! It's spilling out!" He looked at Jesper, "Quickly, Amazon guy, help me." When Jesper didn't start immediately over Lambert's face turned purple. "Now! It's spilling!"

The man's tone conquered Jesper's confusion over the situation. He grabbed the box and held it as Lambert got the container out and scooped as much of the stuff as he could back into it with the lid. Jesper nodded in appreciation as the guy got almost all of it.

"What happened? Did you just drop such a thing on the ground?"

"Oh, no, sir." Harry walked around the side of the van looking at Jesper. "A thief tried to take it when we were picking it up, but we chased him away."

He stood up with the jar. "Oh, so you are not regular Fed Ex drivers?" Jesper and Harry both stiffened a little at that comment, but the man continued. "Colonel Basken sent professionals after all. Good! But if we are under attack, we must move now. This is too valuable. I going with you."

Jesper looked at Harry and could see the wheels turning in his head for just a second, then Harry nodded. "Sure, hop in."

With some jockeying, they got the box and extra passenger into the van. After the guy had given Harry the address, Jesper could contain himself no longer. "What is that gooey stuff, mister?"

"Mister?" the man looked momentarily confused. "Oh, you mean me." He laughed. "I am Doctor Eugene Lambert. Doctor of Organic Chemistry specializing in tribology."

Jesper and Harry both scratched their heads. "What the heck is triviaology?" Jesper asked.

Lambert laughed, "No dear boy, not triviaology, but tribology." He half turned toward Jesper and rubbed one palm over the top of the other. "In a nutshell, it's the study of friction and how different materials interact with different surfaces. My palms get warm because friction of skin against skin resists the movement, creating heat."

A light came on in Jesper's eyes. "Oh, like when a piston is driving up and down in the chamber. It needs oil to help keep the friction away."

Auden nodded and frowned slightly. "Well, the oil doesn't keep it away, although it should act as a barrier, reducing the force needed to drive the pistons up and down. In theory, produce more energy or power for the motor."

The glow on Jesper's face was unmistakable. "So when that

trooper slipped--"

Harry's fit of fake coughing that cut Jesper's sentence off was both loud and believable. "You mean the troop headed thief that tried to steal the stuff slipped?"

Jesper's eyes got wide as he realized what he'd said. "Yeah, that's what I mean. The thief slipped after stepping into the goo, or not goo the super oil, because it formed a barrier like motor oil?"

Doctor Auden smiled. "Yes, however, this is a special lubricant. It is a frictionless liquid and quite possibly the most dangerous thing on the planet. As far as we know, it doesn't bond with anything."

Jesper looked a little crestfallen and fell silent. So much for stealing the stuff and selling it to Jimmie Johnson. If it won't work on metal, the pitons in the race car would overheat and melt. But Jesper suddenly had another idea.

"What if I spill it on my truck bed.

Lambert's eyes narrowed in thought. "If force were applied to the cargo..."

"Say the cargo is an elephant. Would this still work?"

"Yes, even an elephant, in the back of your truck coated with the super lubricant would slide right out. It would, in fact, continue in that direction until it hit an obstacle. Depending on the relative slope at the beginning that could be miles."

Jesper peppered Doctor Lambert with questions about substance. Doctor Lambert answered them, thinking he was playing "Military playing dumb."

"So could I use it to make a pit stop faster?"

Lambert scratched his chin, "Ah pit stop?"

"Oh sorry Doc. Like in NASCAR when they change tires and fuel up."

"Oh, well I guess theoretically but it wouldn't work. The car would be uncontrollable. It would keep moving until..."

"Yeah...until something stopped it." Jesper said. "I got that. What about farming? Could I slide a whole barn across a field?"

Lambert blinked, " Yes. Though why you'd want to do that..."

"Fun." Jesper said simply.

Lambert studied him a moment, then nodded as if impressed by his stoic military humor.

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The trooper came to in his car. After a moment or two of disorientation, he grabbed the radio. He called it in.  
"Station."

"This is station." the radio crackled, "Go ahead."

"This is trooper Blankenship. I followed up on the 10-37 suspicious vehicle report at the college. I had a visual on a suspect while he was attempting to place a box into the back of an Amazon van." His hand went to his head and came back tacky with blood.

"Are suspects still in the vicinity?"

"Negative." He rubbed the blood off his fingers as he glared at them. "By the time I arrived, the suspect was gone. Continuing surveillance of the area. Blankenship out."

"Roger that. Station out."

He started the cruiser. He figured they had at least a 25 minute head start. "Lucky I saw the label. They're going to deliver that package to 248 Washington Commons over in Langley. At least that was the address on the package." The cruiser shot out of the parking lot.

Blankenship had pulled up the address on his computer as he drove. "Scott import/export," He snorted, "Yeah, that sounds real, not. Well, I don't care if the whole damn government is involved. I'm going to find out what's happening." He hit the lights and siren and pushed the speedometer into triple digits.

"Ah yes, here is the building. Pull up to the rear entrance, please."

Harry nodded, "Sure thing, doc." He laughed nervously, "Sure

is a big parking lot."

Those were the first words anyone had said in the van since the physics lesson earlier. They had ridden in silence the rest of the way. Harry had followed the directions to this place to the letter. Jesper had worked with the man long enough to know that meant he wanted to get both the packaged goo and doctor Lambert out of his van as soon as possible. Jesper had other ideas.

"Here we are. Hey doc, let me help you. I'll get your box for ya."

"Oh thank you, but that is unnecessary."

"Oh, but I insist. It ain't no trouble at all. Just another service we provide. Just like Amazon."

Harry coughed. "That's because we are Amazon, you nitwit." Then turning to doctor Lambert he continued, "We just came over from UPS little while ago."

Lambert looked confused for a second, "You really are Amazon? Are you making a joke?" He stiffened in his seat. "Are you contractors for Colonel Basken or not?"

"Well, of course we are." Harry and Jesper said almost in unison.

Jesper felt his face flush as he swallowed. "We just like to stay in character in case we get captured." He could see the wheels moving in Lambert's mind. "Surely the Colonel has been over..." He hesitated, searching for the word. "Protickles." Jesper was proud of himself for remembering. "We're just following protickles."

Lambert laughed and relaxed visibly, "Of course, as a scientist, I know there are many protocols, or protickles, as you say."

Jesper nodded. "We've never done a job like this and not helped get stuff from the back. Besides, doc it could be dangerous. No telling what other top secret thing could fall out of the back next time." Jesper had a flash of inspiration and leaned toward the doctor and said conspiratorially, "Things you may not be supposed to see."

Lambert rubbed his chin and looked at Jesper. "Well, I suppose that may be true. Alright but please hurry."



Jesper practically hooted as he jumped out of the van.

The Colonel's aide escorted Doctor Lambert into the room and sat the box on the desk.

"Here it is Colonel." Lambert said, "I don't know why it had to be brought tonight."

Colonel Albert Basken looked up from his desk at them. "Well, thanks Doctor. So glad you to see you. I see you decided to come along with it?"

Lambert wrinkled his brow. "Good thing I did because of the attempt to steal it, of course."

Basken stood up abruptly. "What attempt?"

"Well, I would have figured the men you sent would have reported it."

Basken looked ashen. "Doctor, I didn't send any men. I called Amazon. What men are you talking about?"

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"Jesper, what the heck was that customer service bit?"

Jesper smiled at Harry. "You like that?" He patted his chest. "I had to get the box without the doc around so I could switch the contents."

Harry smacked his forehead. "Now why would you wanna do that, Jesper?"

Jesper answered the question, but heard the faint sound of sirens. "That trooper! He must be ok."

Harry started the van. "Well, he could've been OK about an hour later. This van needs hidden fast!"

"I got an idea, Harry." Jesper opened the door and headed toward the back.

Colonel Basken and Doctor Lambert both jumped toward the box at the same time. The Colonel was quicker and ripped the mostly loose tape off the top. He and the doctor looked in the box and saw...

"I don't suppose that you used a Wisconsin Cheeseman summer sausage and cheese sampler as diversionary packaging, did you, doctor?"

"No Colonel, I didn't. No! They were the thieves. They lied!"

Basken smirked, "Well doctor," He patted Lambert's arm. "That's what thieves do."

"But they are getting away!"

The Colonel's aide had made his way to the window. He was peering through the blinds when he said, "Oh, I don't think they are, doctor." He shook his head. "But I'll be honest and say I don't know why."

The doctor and the Colonel ran to the window and looked. There, the white van sat. Its tires moving at incredible speed since there was no friction to stop them. Doctor Auden laughed.

"Don't you gentlemen see? They must have poured the substance onto their tires, thinking it would make them go faster. Not realizing that for movement, you need some friction."

"Well," Colonel Basken hid a smile as he watched the rear wheels flying, van not moving anywhere, "Jail is the only place those two are going."

The trooper pulled in behind them.

Williams