

(Every character depicted in the story below is a consenting legal adult over the age of 18)

A/N: Mr. Haaaands.

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Once upon a time, his name was Wade Bleecker and he was a well-known, high ranking, extremely successful corpo for Petrochem. Unfortunately, it didn't matter how successful or well-known you were. It didn't matter how many friends you had if they weren't in the right places when a 'shake-up' among upper management came along.

Fortunately for him, he had just enough social capital to see the assassination attempt coming, surviving by the skin of his teeth. Unfortunately, afterwards there was a bounty put on Wade Bleecker's head... which meant it was time for Wade Bleecker to disappear.

He hadn't been Wade for quite a few years now, having changed his name, his face, and even his vocation. These days the general public knew him as 'Mr. Hands', the only prominent and successful Fixer in all of Pacifica currently. He'd developed a reputation as Night City's most mysterious Fixer, with no known home base and no idea what he looked like given his signature was to hide everything but his hands in shadow.

This was the way he liked it. It kept him safe, but more importantly it kept his wife and daughter safe. And ultimately, what was all this for if not for them? He'd already spent so much of his life in service to a corporation that had turned around and tossed him aside the moment it became inconvenient. Now... now he was a family man.

All of this was to say, Mr. Hands was used to knowing what was going on. If not in every corner of Night City, then he at least liked to know what was happening in Pacifica. It was his 'backyard' so to speak, after all. And as much as certain entities might disagree, he considered Dogtown to be part of that backyard.

The Combat Zone might be autonomous and under paramilitary control, but it was still a Pacifica Sub-District and that made the business within it Mr. Hands' business.

Which was why he'd relocated himself to the Heavy Hearts club in the middle of Dogtown the instant that news of Space Force One's crash reached his ears. The mess that such a thing would cause was... well, there were bound to be consequences for all involved, but there were also crystal clear opportunities for those looking to take advantage of them.

Or rather, there should have been. He had to admit, things were... stranger in the Combat Zone than he would have expected. It had been less than a week since Space Force One's crash, a week since everything had gone rather pear-shaped... and yet, he had less information on the whole situation than he would have preferred.

From his temporary office in the VIP section of Heavy Hearts, he should have been able to easily get his finger on the pulse of Dogtown. He should have already been making moves. But just when he thought he knew something, it was like the ground turned to quicksand beneath his feet, everything turning unstable and uncertain.

He didn't get to where he was today, clawing back every ounce of power and wealth and influence he now had, by being reckless. And yet... he was loath to let opportunities pass him by as he'd been doing for this past week.

That's why when one of his systems pings a familiar face stepping into the club's ground floor, Mr. Hands sits up and takes notice. Eyes narrowing, he immediately places a call to a man he's only ever spoken to one time so far... when said man had manipulated him into paying ten thousand eddies for the head of Hands' predecessor.

The call goes through in moments and Mr. Hands leans back in the shadows while placing his laced hands out in the forefront of the shot.

"V. Seeing you in Dogtown of all places is... a pleasant surprise."

That's a half-truth if anything. The fact that V had managed to make it all the way to Heavy Hearts without pinging on his radar before now was... concerning. Especially given everything he'd been hearing about the other man for months now.

"I must admit, I was disappointed when you didn't contact me at any point during that situation with Pacifica's Voodoo Boys."

V just smiles, tilting his head to the side.

"Apologies if Maman Brigitte was a customer... but truth be told, I saw no need for a Fixer at the time. It wasn't a gig or anything like that... the Voodoo Boys made things personal."

Making a non-committal noise in the back of his throat, Hands nods.

"I suppose that's understandable. But what brings you to Dogtown now? The place is a hot spot after what happened earlier this week."

Silent for a moment, the mercenary ultimately looks... right up at one of Heavy Hearts' security cameras. A security camera that Mr. Hands is piggybacking off of to get an extra angle on the younger man. He looks... right into Mr. Hands' eyes in a way that makes the Fixer tense up, albeit in a way that should have been imperceptible on the call.

"Invite me up, Hands. We have business to discuss... and I assure you, you're going to want to hear me out."

Invite him up. V should have had no idea that he was upstairs. Or indeed, any idea that he was in Dogtown whatsoever. And yet... it would seem he'd been had. Eyes narrowing, he considers ending the call and evacuating immediately... but his instincts are telling him to stay and feel things out. He is, at his core, a businessman after all. Calculating and coolheaded, always.

Could this be a trap? Certainly, but he needed something at this point. The past few days had not been very illuminating.

“Very well, V. Come on up... and this better be good. The code is-”

“No need, I remember.”

He what? Hands watches with narrowed eyes as V makes a beeline for the club’s elevator. Without missing a beat, the mercenary puts in a code... the correct code. A moment later he’s stepping into the elevator and on his way up to Hands’ floor.

Too late to run now. Too late to escape. But the Fixer still makes sure he has a number of firearms close on hand... even if everything he knows about V tells him that it wouldn’t make much of a difference.

That night with Dexter DeShawn might have been their first interaction, but V had all but dared him to look him up... so of course, Mr. Hands had. And he’d kept an eye on the younger man too from then on out, watching V race all over Night City, making a name for himself in record time.

The mercenary’s story before Konpeki Plaza was nothing to write home about in Mr. Hands’ expert opinion. Just another green, run of the mill edgerunner in a city full of them. The kind of merc who got chewed up and spit out by Night City hundreds of times every year.

But then Konpeki Plaza happened and V didn’t just fight his way through an entire tower of Arasaka Soldiers or escape Adam fucking Smasher by the skin of his teeth. He’d then gone on to ice Dexter DeShawn for ten thousand eddies.

At first, Hands had assumed that V was planning to use the money he all but swindled from him and run. Ten thousand eddies wasn’t a princely sum, but it also wasn’t chump change. V could have used it to flee Night City and run away to NUSA, putting as much physical space between him and Arasaka as humanly possible.

... He hadn't. Instead, he'd stuck around Night City and started doing jobs for every other Fixer in the city aside from Hands. The stories he'd heard spoke of an unnatural competence too, the kind that didn't quite make sense given his career up to Konpeki.

All of this was to say... he knew he was no match for V in a one on one situation. If this were a trap, then his only option might be to go nuclear... in this case the bomb planted in his desk would take out both of them along with the entire VIP floor, making sure that nothing could be traced back to his wife and child.

He hopes he won't have to use it, but as V steps into the office carrying a bowling ball bag of all things, Mr. Hands won't deny feeling more trepidatious than he has in a long time...

"Nice to see you in the flesh, Hands. Apologies for the spook routine, but I wanted to make sure you'd take me seriously."

Eyes narrowing, the Pacifica Fixer clasps his hands together in front of him, even as V approaches the desk.

"You don't have to worry about that V. I'm taking you very seriously."

In response, V smiles crookedly.

"Don't worry. Ain't got no plans to kill you, choom. In fact, I'm here to give you the best damn gift you could ask for."

He places the bowling ball bag on the desk between them at that and gestures as if asking for permission. Wordlessly, Hands gestures back, giving permission. Then, he has to school his reaction as V unzips the bag and pulls it apart far enough to show what's nestled in the space where the bowling ball is supposed to normally go.

Kurt Hansen's decapitated head stares back at him for a moment as Mr. Hands in turn stares at it. The leader of Barghest, the defacto ruler of Dogtown... dead.

After a beat, V pulls the bowling ball bag back closed and zips it back up before taking it off the desk and setting it down next to the chair he rather unceremoniously drops into.

“So... yeah. Hansen’s dead.”

Mr. Hands is not one prone to... lapses. He prides himself on his composure, on his poise. Even in the face of adversity, he always tries to keep a cool head. And yet...

“What the fuck, V?”

V blinks and then lets out a startled laugh.

“Didn’t know you could curse Hands. Guess you really didn’t know that he was dead yet, did you?”

... No, he didn’t. And that was a fucking problem. The whole point of relocating to Heavy Hearts during this time of upheaval and mayhem surrounding the attack on Space Force One was to be so close to the action that positively nothing could get by him.

And yet... President Rosalind Myers been extracted from Dogtown so quickly and cleanly that Hands had been questioning if she’d ever been on Space Force One in the first place. And now this. Kurt Hansen was dead and Hands hadn’t heard a whisper of it.

In fact...

“... Exactly how long have you been in Dogtown V?”

Looking a little amused, V leans back in his chair, lacing his hands on his abdomen.

“Since the day of Space Force One’s crash.”

That long... and Hands hadn't known. Nostrils flaring, eyes narrowing, he tries not to grit his teeth too much.

"You were the one who smuggled Myers out of the Combat Zone and made sure she got back to NUSA then."

V inclines his head, acknowledging the point wordlessly. From there, it's not difficult to put even more of the pieces together.

"Myers hired you to kill Hansen. Or rather, you convinced Myers to hire you to kill Hansen."

V's smile turns into a full blown grin at that.

"This is why you're my favorite Fixer, Mr. Hands."

He can't help but raise an eyebrow at that. Favorite? They've barely interacted... in fact, they've done a single gig together. Still...

"You mentioned business, V. I assume it has to do with the fact that nobody in Dogtown knows Hansen is dead?"

V inclines his head again in easy agreement.

"That's right. As far as Barghest knows, Kurt Hansen is still alive. In fact, you could look into it yourself and come away reasonably thinking that I've just had a fake head made to fool you into thinking I assassinated him. Except... I also have all of the security codes and complete access to the Black Sapphire and all of Barghest's systems. Even their bank accounts."

V is insinuating that he switched Hansen for a body double without anyone knowing better.

“You’re saying you have a metanthropic technology specialist currently parading around as Hansen? Someone with a Behavioral Imprint-synced Faceplate installed?”

Chuckling, V shakes his head.

“Why, Mr. Hands... it’s like you don’t know me at all. I don’t ‘have’ one... you’re looking at him.”

His jaw clenches as V’s face ripples and Kurt Hansen is grinning back at him a moment later. Hands has had the... misfortune of meeting Hansen face to face only once, though the other man didn’t know who he really was, just that he was important. He has to admit though; V manages to simulate Hansen’s identity quite... well.

However...

“I see now why you came to me. You obviously don’t intend to live as Kurt Hansen for the rest of your days. Which means you need to kill him off more publicly... and replace him with someone else that will take over Barghest in the resulting power vacuum.”

Deactivating the Faceplate and returning to his normal features, V just smiles and nods.

“Quick as ever, Mr. Hands. The Black Sapphire is nice and all, but I’m not planning on slipping into another man’s life permanently. Especially not Kurt Hansen of all people. That said, I know a Fixer like you always has... ideas. I’m sure when you relocated here to Dogtown after the crash, you were hoping an opportunity like this one would land in your lap. I’m here to offer you a partnership... and a say in Barghest’s future once Hansen has publicly and officially shuffled off the mortal coil.”

It was both better and worse than he’d hoped for. Hands’ preference would have been to hold all the cards and use someone like V as a scalpel. Partnerships were... less than ideal. And yet, sitting across from the nonchalant mercenary

who had walked into this room with the head of the most powerful man in Dogtown in a bowling bag... well, compromises sometimes had to be made, didn't they?

And to be fair, Hands already had ideas for who he would want to lead Dogtown if the best came to pass and Hansen died. The only question was, did his original ideas work in this new world he found himself in?

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A/N: Remember to go back and VOTE!