

## ***Bambi and The Chopper: Episode 5***

### **The Professor's Plan.**

by Martin Flett

The Starsky is dead. Not literally, obviously, but it is empty. 12.30pm – they've been open thirty minutes and there has been no sign of the usual lunch-ers, businessmen-drinkers, or hair-of-the-dog-merchants. The Barman is worried.

The back door opens allowing a cool breeze in, slowly followed by two figures staggering a little: Bambi and The Chopper. They'd spent the night in the beer garden tree house going over recent events and the wooden floor had done nothing to aid a recovery.

The Barman keeps his head down as they approach.

'Hey man, we should talk to Cruz, get the meat,' Bambi says to Chopper.

'Yeah, good plan. But I gotta have some real meat first! Two bacon sarnies please!'

The Barman nods without looking up and shuffles to the kitchen.

Bambi looks sombre, 'Maybe we should take this seriously, dude. I mean, people have died. Hell, we could've died. That helicopter was armed to the teeth! These guys mean business.'

'I know, I know, but what can we do?' Chopper replies.

'I dunno, but we should talk to the Prof, he seemed pretty involved.'

'Yeah, but he was a mess last night. He really didn't handle it well: was blaming himself the whole way back.'

The Barman arrives with the bacon sandwiches, puts them in front of the two men, and walks away without a word or even a glance.

'Okay, here's what we should do,' Bambi continues, 'we should get these down us, then go see Cruz, and then check on the Prof. '

'It's the start of a plan at least,' says Chopper, as he bites into his bacon.

Ten minutes later, Bambi and The Chopper are on their way to the butcher's shop. When they arrive, they find Cruz out the back, as usual, sorting the meat for the day's business.

'Hey, ma dudes! I got da meat!' Cruz cries as soon as Bambi and The Chopper appear.

'Hey Cruz, glad to hear it, it's what we came for,' Chopper says. 'What do you have for us?' He hands Cruz an 8oz steak they'd picked up on the way there.

'I got da meat!' Cruz says excitedly, again. 'I heard the Puppet's sister got done in. Accident. But the Puppet's no happy about it. He on the war path.'

Bambi and The Chopper exchange worried looks.

'You don't know anything 'bout it, right guys?' Cruz enquires.

Bambi thinks quickly, 'Err ... well ... it wasn't us, at least we can say that.'

'Good, 'cause he's on the lookout in town. Everyone's keeping their head low. There's a big meeting tonight, I heard, but I'm not sure where – the story keeps changing. Best watch it.'

'Sure thing, man,' Bambi says. 'We'll watch our backs.'

Cruz's meat had been enlightening, if troublesome: The Prof could be in serious trouble if word gets out it was him. Maybe this is why he was so distraught – he knew his days might be numbered. Sticking to the plan, Bambi and The Chopper are heading straight to The Prof's house.

The Prof's house is quiet: the curtains are drawn, the lights are off. Bambi and the Chopper walk through the gate, which creaks and then snaps shut in a gust of wind that seems to come from nowhere on the otherwise still, sweltering day.

'You been here before?' The Chopper asks Bambi.

'Once, a year or so ago, but it wasn't like this.' Bambi gestures at the overgrown lawn and weed-covered flowerbed. 'The Prof always kept things neat and tidy but, from the looks of this, he's let it go to ruin for some time.'

Uneasily, Bambi and The Chopper approach the front door. The Chopper knocks. His fist on the wood echoes throughout the house, and there's almost certainly the sound of someone cursing from within.

Bambi calls out, 'Hey! Prof! It's us! Come let us in, dude. We need to talk.'

The Chopper looks across at Bambi as they wait. Nothing happens for about thirty seconds but then there's the sound of at least five bolts being undone before the door opens to reveal a dishevelled looking Professor.

'Quick, get in here,' he says, ushering his friends in and slamming the door, bolting it as fast as he can.

Bambi opens his mouth to speak but The Prof cuts in.

'I know why you're here,' he says. 'But don't worry, I'm working on something. I know I should've been in touch, and I know I probably should've skipped town, but you know what it's like: this is my home, my town. Where would I go? No, there's only one option.'

Without explaining further, The Prof turns and shuffles down the hallway and through a door on the left.

'You coming, or what?' he asks.

Bambi and The Chopper follow The Prof through the door and down a dimly lit staircase, realising they're about to see The Prof's juicer where it's kept in the cellar to make the illegal fruit juice he peddles. Even in the midst of everything else, there's a sense of excitement between the two men: this is a privilege afforded to very few – if any.

But, as they enter the cellar, the sight is not all they expected.

Sure enough, in the centre of the room is a table holding the juicer. It has been heavily customised, most noticeably with a large funnel at the top to allow greater quantities of fruit to be added. Following the flow of fruit from one end to the other, Bambi notices a disconnected pipe, which presumably ordinarily carries juice to barrels across the room. Meanwhile, The Chopper has noticed that the area that ordinarily would hold the barrels of juice is now filled with containers

marked 'Danger: explosive'. There are crates of fruit against the opposite wall, but that is the only thing that appears to be normal about the scene.

Bambi and The Chopper exchange glances, meaning they don't like what they see.

'I know it all looks a bit ... crazy,' The Prof says, 'but what choice do I have? I need to do something, to defend myself. How long do you really think it's going to take that Puppet-Master to extract my whereabouts from someone in this town? Hell, he's almost as efficient as my juicer!' He nearly manages a laugh at his own joke.

Bambi and The Chopper remain stoney-faced.

'The only downside is the loss of my machine,' The Prof continues, gazing at the juicer with dismay. 'Still, needs must,' and he picks up a nearby melon and proceeds to slice it in two.

'Listen, man,' Bambi begins. 'We've gotta get you out of here. Look at you: you're like some mad-scientist or something cooped up down here. What do you hope to achieve? You can't fight this alone.'

The Prof stops what he's doing (scooping out the seeds and core of the melon in front of him) and takes a deep breath. 'Listen, I know what I'm doing, I've got it all figured out. Now, if you're not gonna help me, you might as well split. Things could get dangerous in a minute.' He glances sideways at the 'explosive' containers.

Bambi looks at Chopper who offers a shrug.

'Very well,' Bambi says, 'I can see you're busy. We'll get outta here. Just ... don't do anything stupid, okay?'

The Prof mumbles something that sounds like 'Wait and see' and throws the front door key towards Bambi. 'Just drop it through the letterbox when you're out.'

That's it: the duo are dismissed.

'What now?' Chopper asks Bambi, once they're outside. 'It's past 6; if Cruz was right about something going down at Sha-dez tonight, we ought to check it out. Plus, I'm famished. There's Golden Ali's down there, isn't there? That new curry place? We should check it out.'

Bambi agrees that this is a good plan, 'Yeah, that's probably for the best. But, how are we gonna get in Sha-dez, dude? That place is like a fortress, and we're the least likely people to find a way past the security!'

'One thing at once, my friend.: first, food.'

An hour later and Bambi and The Chopper are leaving Golden Ali's, full of food and fearful.

'You sure about this, man?' Bambi asks his partner. 'Ali's was empty, and there's not a soul out here. Maybe we should bail on Sha-dez.'

The Chopper looks at Bambi and says nothing. He knows it's too important to forget about, so he keeps walking.

Bambi eventually follows.

'Okay, man,' he says, 'let's do this. But if they start shooting, I'm hiding behind you.'

The door to Sha-dez is guarded by two men with long coats.

'They could be hiding anything under those,' Bambi whispers to Chopper.

The Chopper ignores him and, keeping to the shadows on the opposite side of the road, they make their way to see if there's another entrance.

There's a side street to the right of Sha-dez, and an alleyway just off it that seems to be a promising route. As they approach, The Chopper points ahead where there appears to be a fire exit for the building.

Bambi opens his mouth to ask whether they should knock or blunder straight in but he's cut short: the door swings open.

Fortunately, Bambi and The Chopper are shielded from view by the door itself and have time to duck behind some boxes.

A man appears in the doorway and yells back into the building, 'Hey, it okay if I get some air, dude? It's freaking cooking in there!'

Without waiting for a response The Figure walks out onto the platform at the top of the fire escape. Bambi and The Chopper remain hidden, barely daring to breathe, exchanging worried glances. As they crouch there, another man joins The Figure outside. This second man is instantly recognisable: the Puppet-Master. Bambi and The Chopper keep perfectly still, knowing one move, one sound, could be the end of them.

'Hey,' the Puppet-Master says to The Figure, 'you staying for the meet tonight?' We got some stuff to sort out. That Professor dude needs to be dealt with.'

'I'm not sure, man,' The Figure replies, 'I heard some stuff today, something that made me wonder if we shouldn't just let him be for a bit. He seems a little ... off-the-wall, ya know?'

'What you hear, dude?' The tone in Puppet's voice suggests it's not really a question, but a demand.

'Nothing big, don't worry. Just some stuff my contact heard, that's all.'

'And who's your contact?'

'That kid, ya know, the one with the meat.'

Stunned, Bambi and The Chopper almost give the game away, shooting looks at one another, nearly toppling the boxes. Fortunately, The Figure coughs at that precise moment, disguising the movement.

The Chopper mouths at Bambi, 'Cruz?'

'Oh yeah,' the Puppet-Master continues, 'you mean Cruz. He's a good kid. I slip him a couple of steaks once a week for the latest news he has around town. What he tell you?'

The Figure leans in, 'He said something about a shipment of explosives, delivered to the address of that Professor guy. And he said he heard the Prof saying something about hitting The Starsky tonight. The kid thought we were meeting there tonight. I corrected him, but I dunno why he thought that in the first place.'

'Because that's what I told him,' the Puppet-Master chimes in. 'Good job the kid gave that Prof *my* meat before you screwed things up or it might've been your meat I was giving him next time, if you follow my meaning. I'm way ahead of you, man: I knew the Prof was cooking something up, so I threw him a red herring, ya know? I figured, if he is coming after us, may as well use it to our advantage and take out that Starsky-dive while we're safe here. '

There's no time to lose. Forgetting their safety for a brief moment, Bambi and The Chopper dive out from the boxes, scattering them across the alley, and sprint out into the street. The Figure and Puppet are yelling for them to stop, but the boxes have obscured their view – and path – and Bambi and The Chopper are away up town.

'Cruz! That two-faced brat! He's stitched us up!' Bambi cries as they run.

'No time for that, man. We gotta get to The Starsky. I dunno, but it seems too much of a coincidence with those explosives we saw at The Prof's.'

'Yeah, you're right. I don't wanna see our place in bits. And, in any case, even if there's nothing, we've not even had a pint yet!'

*To be continued...*