

BLUEBIRD

by Stanley Lieber

Purple tape, gilded pillow.

"You're cranky," Piotr observed.

This guy.

"I think we know who needs a nap," I snapped, weakly, shuffling my legs above the pillow.

In this case he was right. I hadn't slept for days. In fact, nearly a week. And my legs were cramping. But I wouldn't let slip an opening. Not to him. Not ever.

"Anyway," I said, "Fitness reports."

Piotr relaxed his trigger finger, snatched the cassette. Unfolding my legs, I discarded the useless pillow.

"Right."

Tense moments iterated. Nobody liked paperwork. Eyeing me, carefully. On my feet, I waved through the requisite gestures. Did Piotr smile?

And so: Job to do. Behind the green door punctuality reigned. This business with BLUEBIRD had lagged for years. Years that couldn't be reclaimed. Well, here we were. Piotr had put on his face and I had put on my gloves. We made our way from the staging area to the operating platform.

Switched on.

The site lay essentially unprotected. Piotr dominated with his usual wit and charm. Even though I knew what was coming I was still taken aback by the smoothness, the professional sheen of his delivery. As expected, the program terminated abruptly as it had begun.

Piotr smashed the flickering blue light upon exfil.

Extravagant!