Friday Snippet: Green Magic I

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Unbelievably, it's already Friday again. So here's my Snippet.

Here's the setup. Elli, having broken into a secure enemy installation, has rescued Tom from the cage. The two are working their way down a corridor in the dark when two maintenance guys enter the corridor behind them and get a lightbulb and a ladder from a supply closet.

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The duct was big, and at floor level, and in the unlit corridor—*still* unlit thanks to a government-issue EMP pistol with which the had earlier turned out lights and shut down alarms—she and Tom remained hidden from the men walking behind.
But she heard the men setting up the ladder, and one man climbing it.

With her goggles on infrared, she could see the duct she needed. It wasn't that far, but she and Tom were moving too slowly.

She didn't dare say anything to Tom; the men were being quiet and she didn't dare push her shield that hard. But she squeezed Tom's hand and pulled him forward. He broke into a limping trot, and kept up with her.

Behind her, glass scraped on the ceiling and screws clattered against it as the man on the ladder removed the light cover.

More scraping as he pulled out the old light bulb.

That old light bulb would have been fine—her EMP blast would hold for about half an hour, and at the end of that time, the light would have come back on by itself.

She was about to the end of her half hour, she knew. So the odds were good that when the man put the new bulb in the socket, it would work.

She reached the duct and carefully removed the already-unscrewed cover.

She heard the new bulb scraping into the socket.

She dropped to hands and knees and climbed in, and Tom O’Riley, using strength and grace she suspected he could ill afford, slipped in behind her, turned and grabbed the cover, and pulled it into place.

She lifted her mask, reached around him, and popped chewing gum she’d had in her mouth onto the top of the grille. With luck, that would keep it in place if someone jarred the floor while running past.

"Nice," he whispered.

"Thanks."

Through the grille’s slits, light suddenly poured into the vent, and Elli’s heart gave a double-thud. That had been too close.

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