

Irontron

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IRONTRON

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"So fair art the roses that cling to the curls of your hair, I know no other fragrance so sweet."

Eves Song

The rain was pouring like there was no tomorrow. I sat in the corner café, a little place located right at the edge of a building. It was late, most people had gone home to their families. I was sitting in a booth to the side, waiting for someone. The waitress, a rather pleasant woman in her late thirties came over to me and asked me if I needed anything, she was getting ready to get off her shift. For a brief moment, I wondered what it must be like, working all those long hours on your feet the whole time. Dealing with all sorts of customers, the hard to get along with types, the undecided types, and then there was me. I was a regular. I glanced over at Frank, behind the counter, cleaning up from a long day. Maybe it wasn't so bad, they all had jobs. Hell. That was a miracle in these trying economic times. Long lines to find work. All the while, the rich kept on putting their feet to the little people's necks. Yeah. You heard me right. The little people. And I don't mean just the abstract poor, you have with you always, or so the Holy Bible says. I mean, just your average folk. Crap! What in the hell had happened to this country? This used to be the greatest country in the world. Making all sort of things and stuff going on. Now what? We ship our job overseas, all the while, the countries that we ship our jobs to, practice protectionism, keeping their good jobs in their own countries. Were we really that stupid, or, did our politicians have their heads so far up the powers that be ass, that it didn't matter anymore? A man walked by the window, sandwiched in a sign that read: Take Back Your Country Before It Is Too Late. Maybe it was already too late, I remember thinking to myself. Then she walked in. She was different. Long black hair, all flowing, even in the dampness due to the weather. Nice figure, a little bit more in the bottom end, just like I liked it. Her big brown eyes surveyed the room, then landed on me. For just a brief moment, I felt uncomfortable. I got like that when a pretty woman caught my attention, but, I shook it off just as easily. She was well dressed, the woman had money, even in these times. Her voice was like maple sirup, smooth and sweet, just enough Southern Accent to make her sound sexy and alluring.

"Iâm Joey." She smiled and then took a seat.

"I usually don't meet people like this." I remember blurting out. What was wrong with me?

"Your online site said that you work the cases that no one else cares about?" She was fixing her gloves in front of her, while Frank came over with a fresh pot of coffee. We both filled up. Then: "I need help..." Joey was tall and gorgeous. She must have been all of six feet, or maybe just a little under. Still, that didn't stop her from being beautiful, and she was gorgeous.

"You sounded like you were in a bind over the phone." I told her. I didn't have an actual office, so my web site was really super nice looking, very impressive. I spent the money on that, it attracted business, and I usually met people in places like Frank's, my clients seemed to like it that way.

She pushed a photo of a man to me. I looked at it and then held out my handheld and snapped a picture. She said: "This is my father. He's gone missing."

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"What about the police?" She shook head and I understood what she meant. I didn't care for the police either. "Any enemies?"

"We all have enemies, mister..."

"Call me Razor."

"Got a first name?"

"Just Razor."

"Okay. For now. Can you help?"

"Was he into something? You know, the type of things that can get a man or woman, well, that can get you taken out?" I tried to be delicate, but, delicate wasn't my type. Not that I am brutish or anything, I have manners, my Grandma saw to that.

"My father is a minister. A man of God. That is why it is specially pressing. The whole congregation doesn't know what to make of it."

"So. The cops are involved?"

"Razor. The police are the suspects..."

I just stared at her for a long moment. "The police?"

"I think they killed my father."

I wasn't like some fools, pretending that the police or for that matter, any other official, wasn't a person first, and whatever they were about, second. "What was the relationship between your father and the police?"

"I believe that they were watching my father. He had lots of people that he'd minister unto. Some told him things. In this case, one in particular, confessed something to my dad. Something that I'm sure got him killed."

"So. When you said that your father was missing, you meant, your father is dead?"

She leaned forward, I could get a whiff of her expensive perfume. "A lot of money was involved."

"Really? How much are we talking about?"

"A few hundred million." Her big eyes studied mine.

"Is your dad a person of interest in that?" I didn't mean to offend her.

"My parents are normal people. I'm adopted. Is that going to be a problem?"

I quickly shook my head. "It helps if I know what I'm doing. I had to ask, I hope I didn't offend you?"

She smiled. "Not at all. Better that you ask up front, than to do what a lot of people do. You can read it in their faces." She pushed over an envelop. I opened it and it had a lot of cash in it. Something that I hadn't seen

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in a long time. Most people paid with flash cards and such. "Is there a problem?"

"No. Iâ€™m just not used to getting paid like that? Any reason that you want to use cash?"

"I want to keep this between us."

"There is something else that you are not telling me?"

She nodded. "Come with me." And on that note, we left Franks, out into the wet night. We caught an aircab that took us to the nicer part of town. For a preacher, they lived well. When we got inside, I was convinced that they lived too well. The place was really nice. Super nice actually. Lots of expensive furniture and items on tables and shelves and nooks. You know, the usual rich peopleâ€™s tokens that tell whoever is in the room, that these are people of means.

"Wow. You all live well." I blurted out.

She tossed her damp things on a sofa and motioned me to follow her. We went into the back part of the house, down some stairs and finally, there it was. She had some guy, tied to a chair, with a hood over his head. She said, "You might need to get his attention. I havenâ€™t been able to do much with him for the last two days."

"Youâ€™ve had this guy in you basement for the last two days?"

She smiled at me. "Not as fragile as I look, huh?"

I didnâ€™t know whether to be frightened of her or impressed. "Who is he?"

"More to the point. What is he?" She pulled the hood off and, I was expecting a human, but it was an alien under the hood.

"What the freak? I donâ€™t understand? What the hell is this alien doing in your basement?"

"He was one of two. They tried to threaten me. Wanted to know where all the money was. They said that theyâ€™d kill my father. I fought with them, shot one of them but it got away. This one wasnâ€™t so lucky." She picked up something sharp and hard and taunted it.

"The body looks human, but the face is from another world."

"Heâ€™s an Alterianmuxer."

"Never heard of them."

"They are one of the old races, first discovered by deep space mission Columbus. You know, when a great great great distant relative of the original Columbusâ€™ Captained the mission to the first star system that we discovered to have intelligent life on it." She went over and took a seat then lit up a non-lethal cigarette.

"Why did you threaten this woman?" I asked the creature.

It just laughed. "Does it look like I threatened her? Iâ€™m the one tied up in the chair in this crazy bitchâ€™s basement."

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Hmm. I had to admit that he had a point. What proof did I have that Joey was on the level? "Joey? The other one. You said that you wounded it?"

"I shot it. Too bad I didn't kill it."

I turned back to the hostage. "What do you need with several million globals?"

Finally the creature said. "Look. Someone in her father's congregation isn't what they appear to be. They are alien like me. They stole a lot of money from one of us. And. We just want it back."

"But her father didn't steal it right? I mean, he's a man of God for Christ's sake."

"We are not particularly religious. Least. Not of any Earth religion. You people don't have a clue."

At that point, I wanted to hit the bastard with something hard too. But. I didn't. It looked like Joey had done just enough to him. Any more and it might die on us. "Is her father dead?"

"Yes." Blurted out the creature.

"What the freak! Why in God's name would you kill the guy? He's not part of whatever you people or things, whatever you prefer to be called, is into."

"Because he knew too much. Truth be told, the two of you know too much."

"What is that suppose to mean?" asked Joey.

"Yeah?" I reflected.

"It means that the two of you will be next." He or it, began to laugh some more.

I pulled out my gun and shot it point blank. I hindsight, I probably shouldn't have done that. But. I didn't like being threatened. I looked over at Joey, thinking that I might have shocked her. She sat there calmly, smoking her artificial cigarette.

Finally she uttered. "Nice shot."

Oh man! What in the hell had I just walked into? Here I was, thinking that my client had some old family member, missing. You know. An old person, suddenly decides to wander on off. Easy case. But this. This was way beyond my pay grade. I handed her the money back.

"What's this?" Her big brown eyes flashed at me.

"This is way beyond anything that I want to be involved in. I mean, aliens in the basement, they probably really did kill you father. And all that money. They are serious about getting their hands on it. Who is this alien is disguise that told your father about the money in the first place?" It was then that she just got up and walked over to me. Then, she kissed me on the mouth.

She said. "If you walk out on me now. I'll probably end up like my father." She was good. In a bad kind of way. She definitely was contrary to any preacher's daughter I'd ever heard of. There was nothing repressive or even slightly coy about her. She put the money back in my pocket. "Now. What do we do with the body?"

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Not that I was good at that kind of thing, but, we managed to get rid of the alien's body. It was all I could do just to get away from Joey. Not that she wasn't a very attractive woman. Not that I didn't get a rise when I was around her. But. For a preacher's daughter, she could get me killed. I never knew that the daughters of ministers were so spicy. I always had that sullen kind of image of them. But. If Joey was any indication of being under the microscope for too long, then, I knew I couldn't survive her. I told her some story and managed to get away from her for about three days. It was great. No alien monsters. No crazy minister's daughters. Nothing to worry about except how I was going to spend the rather large amount of money Joey had paid me. If you think I was worried over not continuing with her, you'd be wrong. As far as I was concerned, when I shot that alien, I earned every amount of it. I only wish it could have been that easy. I was out on my back porch, drinking a beer, when I got a whiff of something I'd hoped I'd never smell again. I looked around, and sure enough, there she was. Well dressed as usual, wearing a smile and something alluring.

"How in the hell?" I just blurted out.

"Oh. You are not that hard to find, Razor. You have lots of friends that don't mind helping out a pretty girl, when she comes asking for you." She went over and took a seat next to me. I just looked at her for a long moment, in which time, she helped herself to one of my beers and sat back and relaxed.. "I can see why you come out here. It really is quite beautiful and relaxing. We should come back here after things are all over."

"We? There is no we, Joey. As far as I'm concerned, I did my part. The alien that threatened to kill you, is dead. You are safe. I don't really know if your father is alive or dead. That all depends on if you believed the dead alien. Frankly, I have my doubts."

"But you shot him. So. You saved me from a horrible person, monster, thing." Her voice sounded so lyrical and sweet.

No. I wasn't going to let this woman, this stranger, get me more involved in whatever it was that she was really involved in. "Joey, you are a sweet and lovely woman. Under normal conditions, I'd be pinching myself, just to know that you are talking to me, but, having gotten to know you, just a little. Well. Well, you are dangerous to be around."

She winked at me. "I like you too."

"Joey. I'm serious."

"Oh. Have another beer. You are so tightly wound. I'm afraid that you might give yourself some kind of nervous breakdown."

"What? People don't get nervous breakdowns anymore. That was back in the day. A good century ago."

"Oh. Well, you know what I mean. Tell you what. You finish helping me and I'll make it worth your while." Her eyes told me volumes.

"I. Er. Worth my while? What is that suppose to mean?"

"Oh. You know that you want to be with me. I could see it when you first set eyes on me back at the café, how you looked at me, then glanced away for a moment, all, before getting your nerve back, to gaze at me. I like you too. Don't worry, sometime between getting everything all worked out and solved, you and I are going to end up in bed. I promise." And she shot me a promising smile, then continued to sip her beer.

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We took my old aircar and headed to an address that she wanted me to look into. I still wasn't onboard with helping her anymore. But, I reasoned because of the large sum of money she had paid me, I could go with her and see if her father showed up. The aircar I had was an older model. Not the new ones with all the gizmos and gadgets. But, for what I had paid for it, it flew well and was very reliable.

"If we find your father at this address, are you going to be able to get the two of you back to safety?" I asked her.

"That is why I have you, Razor. I'm not sure what I'll find there. I paid some money for the address. That is all I know." She gazed out the window as the land beneath passed on by. "Just how high up are we?"

"Not very high. Aircar traffic isn't licensed to fly any higher than the tallest building or tree in the area. So, if we were flying over just flat land, which we are not, then I'd probably fly at a few hundred feet. Why? Don't you have a license?"

"No. I'll have to get you to teach me sometime."

"Hmm? How did your family get so rich from religion?"

"Have you ever seen those tele-ministers? All over the net and audioimage? Well, my dad is one of them. If he is still alive."

Now it all made sense. Joey's father was a high profile minister. Selling religion on the screen, all the while, living the dream. Man, I was in the wrong line of business. "What does your mother do?"

"My mother? She drinks too much and travels all the time. I grew up not knowing when I'd catch a glimpse of her. She was always coming in and going out, for long periods of time."

"But your father?"

"Oh. He was different. He'd take me on crusades and stuff. We'd go places and he'd preach the Word. It was fun. I'd meet all sorts of people."

"So. Where is your mother now?"

"Some place in Africa, I suppose. The last time I heard from her."

"Does she think your father is dead? Does she know about the money?"

"I told her that dad was in trouble. She didn't give a crap, so long as her funds keep on coming in. And they will. Dead or alive, my father made sure that we both were well taken care of, as far as money goes. But..."

"You still needed parents. I get it. All the money in the world can't make up for love. I'm sorry to hear that."

"Oh. Don't be. I've found someone to love."

"Really? Who is the lucky guy?"

"I'm seated next to him. Flying in his crappy old aircar." She smiled warmly at me.

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There was something, so enduring about Joey. She was special. I liked her. She scared me, but, I still couldn't help but like her. And I mean a lot. "It is going to take awhile for us to get there."

"Why? Can't this thing fly any faster?"

"Actually, it is flying as fast as it can go."

"Oh. You have got to be kidding me? I thought you were flying this slow for the scenic route."

The address led us to this quaint Mexican villa. Joey and I walked through the area, just looking around. There didn't seem to be a lot to the place. I asked a few locals if they'd seen anything. Anything that was out of the normal for that area. Funny how a person can be hiding in plain sight, right in the open. But. In this case. No such luck. But. There was this one talkative little old woman. And for the right price, she didn't mind sharing what she knew.

Senora Gomez pointed towards a rather large compound. "They had a man there for awhile"

I looked over at the area. "Have you seen anything lately?"

She shook her head. "They took the man sometime ago."

Joey interjected. "Was he a minister? A man of the cloth?"

The old woman paused for a moment. "There was this sick child. They brought the man over to have him pray for the child. The child got better."

Joey went on. "So. The man that was the prisoner, he was a minister. You saw him?"

"We all did."

"When you say, we all did, what do you mean by that?" I asked her, all the while keeping an eye on who was keeping an eye on us.

"The man. The Padre, he walked freely about the villa. He was no prisoner." The old woman told us.

Joey frowned. "Are you sure? Was he here with other people or just by himself?"

The old woman explained. "There was this woman, she seemed to control everything. But. The Padre had freedom to go and come as he chose. Up to a point anyway."

"What do you mean by that?" I asked.

"He couldn't make any calls. He tried to get to a phone. But. The guards, they did not allow him. So. In that way. He was a prisoner."

I showed the old woman a picture I had taken of Joey's father, on my handheld. The old woman indicated that, that was indeed the man she was talking about. Joey and I roamed about the place for awhile longer and finally, decided to go to a local café for something to eat. The food was really good. Not like that gavacho crap that passes for Mexican food. This was the real deal and it was great.

As we ate, Joey said. "So. He was here."



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"Yes. But. The circumstances are all wrong. He was allowed to roam around and pray for people. Basically, do what he was ordained to do. Be a preacher and a minister of God."

Joey nodded. "It would be hard to keep my dad from preaching and ministering. That is what he does. He thinks about God all the time. Prays all the time, too."

"He sounds like a good man, Joey. If he is alive, we will find him." What had happened? I was talking like I was in this for the long haul.

"Joey smiled and reached over and touched my hand. "I knew you were a good man. My instincts were right." For a brief moment, she sounded like a minister's daughter. Was the tough girl and social misfit, just an act?

"I don't think, whoever has him, has the money, yet."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because he is still alive. If they had what they wanted, they'd have killed him by now."

"But. He is no longer here?"

"They are keeping him on the move. So. No one can easily find him. These are professionals. But. The aliens, they are not stupid. It is reasonable to believe that they will take him to another country, as well. They first took him to Mexico. But. From here, they can take him anywhere on Earth."

"Do you think they will leave the Earth? After all, they are aliens from another planet."

"No. The money is here, on Earth. They'll move him about, just to confuse things, but, they need him close by."

"Why would aliens from another planet give a crap about Earth money?" Joey asked.

"They are not working alone. The woman that the old lady spoke of. She has to be from Earth. Humans and aliens are involved. And greed is universal." I explained to her.

I used a few of my connections to expand on Joey's lead. Turned out that a trail went from Mexico to Kenya. I did my best to explain the danger of looking into this thing, but, as usual, she wouldn't listen. I didn't know if she was just hardheaded, stubborn, or proud, but she insisted on going to Kenya with me. A few days later, I was ready to go, There was a ring at my door, when I opened it, there was Joey, dressed for the trip and wearing a big grin on her pretty face.

"There is no way I can talk you out of this trip?" I just wanted to make sure she understood the risk.

Joey took me by the hand and playfully led me outside. There in my driveway, was a brand new aircar. I stood there for a moment, then looked over at her. She finally said. "There is no way I'm going to travel over the ocean in that beat up old aircar of yours. I bought this one for you. Had it specially delivered a moment ago. Do you like it?" She tossed me the keys.

"Joey, you didn't have to go and do something like this. You don't have to continue to buy my friendship. You've paid me enough. I'm in this for the long of it."

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Joey just went on. "Oh, stop it and get your things. Mine are already in the aircar. This is going to be fun."

The new aircar was a supersonic model. We reached Mach 2 over the Atlantic and arrived on the African continent about four or five hours later, after leaving the East Coast of the States. There was some serious considerations that I wanted Joey to be aware of. One, was that eventually, we might not like the answers that we got. But. She seemed to be up to the challenge and so we forged on ahead. There was a resurgence of importance in Africa. It all got started, when aliens from other planets, finally began to actually, and officially, though, there was nothing that the world governments could further do, to hide the fact, that Earth was and had been visited by aliens from other worlds. Aliens, let their presence be known in a big way. It was called the Great Coming Out. The shocker to most Anglo based governments, was that the aliens were of dark skin. Most of them, anyway. In order to have peaceful relations with these advanced beings, we, meaning the world governments, stopped undermining the African nations, as they had been doing for so long. Suddenly in a few decades, Africa had been put on the fast track to becoming a wealthy and well to do continent. Yes. It was all for show, you know, the White world saying, see, we are not prejudice, just look at the world's second largest continent, how well it is doing. Well. The aliens were not stupid. They'd had reconnaissance, on Earth for longer than anyone could have imagined. But. For the sake of the Great Coming Out, things were swept under the rug and allowed to move forward. So. In a word. Africa was no longer the richest poor continent in the world, it had managed to come out of its Dark Ages and enter the modern world, in record time. And all because the White countries, that were oppressing and corrupting it, finally saw that it was to their advantage, to let the nations of Africa come of age, in the New Age. We found a friend in Kenya and were put up for a few days.

Mrs. Inka beamed at the two of us. "Oh, my. How you have grown, my dear." She gave Joey a big hug. "I haven't seen you in years. When was it? Back when your mother was last out this way? And who is this handsome young man you have with you? Hmm. You should keep this one." She whispered to Joey.

Joey was at home with Mrs. Inka's family. They all treated us so nicely. We finally got around to the business that brought us across the world. They were both saddened and shocked to hear that Joey's father had been kidnaped. But. Everyone held out hope that the Lord Jesus Christ would bring him back, safely. It was a good feeling to be surrounded by people of faith. So often in my line of work, you find yourself, oppressed with the faithless. This was refreshing.

I found Joey going through some old things that her mother had left behind, from way back in the day. Joey was sitting by an open window, looking at an old photo album. I joined her and we looked through the things together. There was old clothing and lots of things from when she was a little girl. From what I could gather, Joey's mother was part of the African Awakening, brought on by the Great Coming Out, when the aliens from other worlds, decided that just communicating with world leaders, wasn't working for them anymore. So long as they were just doing that, the nations leaders and government, could cover up the fact that there was indeed very intelligent life on other worlds in our galaxy alone. God only knew about what was in other distant galaxies. We came across a picture of Joey and her mother and her dad, back in happier days. In the background, I noticed an alien, standing off to the side.

"Who is that?" I asked her.

Joey studied the picture for a moment, then said: "I'm not sure. This was taken so long ago. I don't remember."

"Do you remember the photo being taken?"

"Vaguely. Why?"

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"Because that alien is of the same type you had in you basement."

We asked questions around the village and then went into the ultra modern urban area. The place was busy with all sorts of business. Gone was the dark and sad images of children starving, people fighting, all the while, the White men and women, corrupted and pillaged the nation. The entire continent had managed in a few decades, to overcome the stigma of being the laughing stock of all the rest of the world. Finally, the Black leaders of the area, had learned, that while divide and conquer, was an old White man's trick, it would work every time, so long as there was no sense of national unity and pride. In order for the countries of Africa to succeed, they all had to work together, act as one, gone was the ignorance that lasted so long, the suffering of a people, the foolishness, which led one tribe to selingl another tribe into slavery. The foolishness of the bad karma that transpired after all of that. God had given the area, the Dark Continent another chance at greatness. And perhaps, this time, the sins of the past, would not be repeated. One could only hope.

We must have talked to dozens of people, looking into the connection, of the alien in the picture, and the possible connection of Joey's father's disappearance. Finally, someone gave us a solid lead. We took the aircar and went to the location. It was an open undeveloped area. Kind of rare these days, actually, because of all of the business interest and whatnot. A young boy met us and lead us to a spot in the grass. There, by a large tree, was a grave. Joey saw it, and then, began to cry. "Father..." she muttered, then fell to her knees. I held onto her the best that I could, but, she was unconsolable. The child handed me a package and then ran on off. We were there in the field for a long time. She was just remembering the days past, the living years, when her and her father, did all sorts of charity events together. Eventually, I opened the package. It was from her father. In it was a 3D recording that he left her. He explained how much he loved her and how proud he was of her, that she had grown up to be such a wonder and fine and caring young woman. There was also, some account information. Now. This was what the aliens must have been looking for. He had left her all the money. It was hers. The money was gotten by hook and crook, but, because the people who had the money in the first place, were crooks, I didn't see any point of causing Joey any more grief than what she was going through. On the way back to the small village, we got to talking: "I think I'm going to open few businesses in the village. Let Inka run them, her and her family."

I told her. "That would be a nice thing to do. I think your father would be proud of you for that. He seemed to know that he had a good daughter, in you."

When we got back, there was an unexpected visitor. Her mother. It turned out that her mother was behind the whole mess. In the end, her father had found out that she had been cheating on him. He cut her off from most of the family wealth. They had divorced without telling Joey. It seemed that her father was going to tell her, around the time that he went missing. Her mother, had gotten caught up with the wrong crowd. Not all of her dealings and goings on, were on the up and up. It all began to make sense to me. The woman that seemed like the boss, in Mexico, that was her mother. This news broke Joey's heart more than discovering that her father was indeed dead. To have been killed by his own wife, one time removed, as she might be, was still hard to handle.

Joey's mother said, as she pointed a gun at us. "I knew if I just gave the two of you some slack, you'd lead me to the money."

"Not going to do you much good in jail, mother!" came Joy's response.

I tried to cool things down. This woman had her husband killed. No telling what she might do, just to get her hands on that account information. "Look. If you walk away right now, you might just get away with everything."

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The woman wasn't buying it. "Oh really? How about, I kill you and not have to worry about any of it?" She pointed the gun at me. I rather that action as opposed to at Joey.

Joey was broken up, just sobbing. "Why did you do it, mother. Dad was a good man."

"He was too good. I couldn't stand him half the time. All that moralizing and preaching about God and whatnot. Who cares anymore? Since the aliens have made themselves known, religion has taken a backseat to progress." Joey's mother expounded.

"Hmm. Believing in Jesus Christ is more profound and advanced than science ever will be. Haven't you heard of all the miracles that he did? Without science and trickery? Now that is real progress, and it all happened thousands of years ago. Which makes it even more impressive." I interjected, trying to keep the heat on me and not on my client.

"Who is this clown? You always manage to get yourself attached to holy-rollers and such, child? What in the hell is wrong with you?" Her mother flared.

Joey responded. "He is a good man, more like father was. Oh, he's a bit rough at the edges, but, I like him all the more for it. Inside, he has a good heart, in the right place. Believes in what is important. That is all that matters. I'll pray for your soul, mother."

"My soul? Child, you have nothing to show for all the praying that you and your father did, for all those years, that you were growing up." The other woman went on.

"That is not true. Dad was a good minister, even in these, God forsaken days, he preached the Word of God. He did it, because he believed, not for the money, though, he did get quite wealthy, but, that must have been his lot in life. He'd have done it, for free, if it all came down to it. Why wasn't that what the family had, enough for you?" Joey asked.

"Look, you'll never understand, so why bother? The point is that I want the account information." And with that, she extended her hand and fired a shot. It was the action I was hoping wouldn't happen. Just as the woman aimed at Joey, I stepped in front of the gun. I got shot, but it gave everyone else, precious time. Friends and neighbors of Inka's rushed in, and subdued Joey's mother. Joey fell apart at the sight of me lying on the ground, bleeding out. I lost consciousness at some point. When I awoke, I was in the hospital. They managed to get me the help I needed in time. Joey and Mrs. Inka were in the room.

"Look. He's opened up his eyes." Mrs. Inka pointed out. "I'll leave you two alone for a moment."

"Well. What was that all about? Going and getting yourself all shot up and stuff?" Joey was acting like a tough girl, but, her expression showed her real feelings. She leaned over and kissed me. "Thank you..."

"For what? Getting shot? All in the line of work." I pretended that it was nothing. Actually, it really hurt.

"Don't you ever do that again?" Joey whispered. "I couldn't stand it. I already lost my father. I don't want to lose you, too."

"Well. Your life might just get a little duller. Taking care of all those charities that you were talking about doing. No need for a flatfoot like myself."

"Who is going to keep me safe, from all those money grabbing aliens and humans? Who is going to hold my hand when I get frightened?" She smiled.

## Irontron

"Er. Iâ ll be around. Looking over you from time to time. You can could on it." I assured her.

"Marry me." She blurted out."

"What?" I reacted and must have pulled something, because it stung.

"Stop being an ass and marry me." And with that, she kissed me some more.

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