

Washington D.C.; Friday, April 27, 2068; 5:45 PM (9:45 AM April 28 on Tracy Island)

Lena left her office and headed outside to go to the Foggy Bottom Metro station. She had decided to take the train to work that day and was glad not to have to drive home. She figured that at this time, most of the riders would already have left, and she would be able to get a seat -- at least she hoped so. She was halfway to her destination, when she heard an unfamiliar voice call her name.

"Mrs. Matumbo."

She stopped and saw a pale, thin man in a limousine, beckoning her over. She didn't move, but said, "Who are you, and what do you want?"

"I am a friend of your brother-in-law, James. I'd like to talk to you. I have an offer to make, one I believe you might find to your advantage. Look, I can take you wherever you wish to go."

"I don't tink so. Being a friend of James doesn't recommend you to me. He isn't de type to have friends I can trust. So I wouldn't be interested in your offer." She turned to walk away.

Giles grew frustrated. He remembered his conversation with his sister a few days before.

"You imbecile! First we get nothing from the virus you sent to that silly little friend of yours and now this! It's been nearly two weeks since James Matumbo visited that woman and there have been no results! That man either planted the virus wrong or he doesn't know his sister-in-law as well as he thinks he does!"

"He had to have planted it correctly, Des. There's no way he could have made a mistake. And it wouldn't have mattered then if she had trusted him or not. It was in her computer."

"Then she has a virus protection program that can stop even my latest upgrades. We want her, so you'd better get her!"

Wincing inwardly at the memory he got out and hurried over to her. He took her by the arm. "I'm sorry, but I don't take no for an answer. You aren't in the vicinity of Tracy Industries, now. Who around you at this point would come to your protection, especially if I told them you were an employee of my family who had been stealing from us?"

Her chin came up at that, and she looked at him coldly. "Dere may be a few people who might buy your story at face value, but not many. And from dat little speech, I gatter you are a Hightower."

He looked at her in surprise. "Your brother-in-law underestimates you. But my chauffeur here," and he indicated the black man who had gotten out and now stood by the open rear door, "would agree with me. Look, Mrs. Matumbo, I don't want to cause a scene. Just get into the car. I

promise solemnly that neither of us will hurt you."

She looked at him with thinly disguised contempt, but felt she had no choice. She yielded to his gentle but insistent tugging and walked to the limo and got in. He followed her in and the chauffeur closed the door, then walking quickly around the car, got behind the wheel and soon smoothly merged in with the traffic.

Giles turned to Lena. "Now, Mrs. Matumbo, I understand you are very good at what you do, and what you do is work with and on computers. I also hear that you like a challenge."

"Dat would depend on what de challenge is."

"True. Well, you would be making upgrades to many programs, possibly creating your own, some to -- ah -- merge with others, modifying still others (which I understand you are already good at) and so on. The pay is very good, the benefits are excellent, and there's no telling how far you would go."

"You put dat in a good light, making it sound like a wonderful opportunity. . ."

"It is."

"But what you really mean is dat I would be upgrading viruses created by someone else, hacking into de computers of otter businesses and modifying stolen information to sell to someone else witout dose businesses being able to make a valid accusation."

"Why, Mrs. Matumbo! You make it sound so -- sleazy! And all I'm saying is that you'd have a greater chance to use your creativity."

Lena looked away from him, muttering something in her native Swahili. She happened to glance at the rear view mirror and saw the chauffeur's eyes widen. So he understands me, she thought. Interesting. I might be able to use dat to my advantage.

"I've heard your offer, and it isn't anyting I'd be interested in accepting. Now would you please pull over and let me out?"

He leaned toward her instead, and turned her head so that she had to look straight at him. "I told you before, I don't take 'no' for an answer. I suggest you give it serious consideration. My -- associates -- might not take your refusal well. I'd hate to see anything happen to you or someone you know because of it."

She pulled away angrily. "How dare you threaten me? Do you tink I would whimper and cry and immediately agree to your -- offer? I tell you now, if anyting bad happens to anyone I know, I will hold you and your 'associates' personally responsible, and I will retaliate. Make no mistake, I have de resources to do so."

"Are you threatening me now?" he said in surprise and anger.

"No. It's a promise. So I suggest you make it your business to see dat notting goes wrong for

anyone in my circle of family, friends or co-workers."

She then said something else in Swahili, and the chauffeur immediately pulled over. They were just outside the Dupont Circle station, and she got out before Giles could stop her. She turned and said, "Don't forget what I told you. Dis has been an interesting meeting, but I don't ever want to see or hear from you again. Good bye." She shut the door firmly and walked away into the station.

Giles looked at the back of the chauffeur's head. "What the hell did you pull over for? You let her get away!"

The African man looked impassively into the rear view mirror at Giles. "That woman is the daughter of warriors," he said. "You don't mess with them."

From Hobbeth 8/4/2005

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