

Jacques gave a bark of laughter. "Now why would we do a thing like that, Mrs. Matumbo? Our methods have proved to be very profitable. I think you're very naïve, to think that we would accede to your demands."

"I knew you wouldn't. But you asked, so I told you."

Desdemona sat down in the chair next to Lena's. "Jacques, I have an idea. Why don't I take Mrs. Matumbo to the compound, where the two of us can have a nice talk?" She began stroking Lena's arm. "I've never had the opportunity to use my particular persuasive abilities on an older woman before," she purred. "It could be very informative, in more ways than one."

"I don't think that's a very good idea, sister dear." Everyone looked around to see Giles walking into the office. "Mrs. Matumbo, it's nice to see you again. But please don't think I had anything to do with your being brought here. I warned them, but they don't listen to me."

"Giles, what are you doing here?" his sister asked him sharply.

"The last time I checked, I was still a part of this family. I do have a right to be here, you know."

"Well, go away. You had your chance, and now it's my turn." She continued stroking Lena, who had stiffened in shock, and continued. "I'm sure I can convince -- Ow!"

Lena had grabbed Desdemona's thumb and bent it backwards. The younger woman's wrist followed, then her forearm. She screamed in pain, but couldn't do a thing about it.

"You touch me like dat again," Lena said in a low angry voice, "and I'll 'persuade' you right into a hospital bed."

Jacques appeared to be even more amused than before. "It seems your persuasive techniques don't work on everyone, Dez. Mrs. Matumbo, please let my sister go. Otherwise, I'll have to let my associates here stop you, and you won't like it."

Lena glanced around, then looked contemptuously at Desdemona. "I meant what I said. And I always keep my word. Remember dat." She let go of the other woman's hand.

Jacques continued. "Your idea of taking her to the compound is a good one, Dez, but not for the procedure you suggest. Giles, I want you to go with them. Make sure they don't kill each other. I'll be along later." He paused. "It will be a while before you can leave, however. The car you need to use was taken for servicing and won't be back for another two hours."

He sat in thought for several minutes, while Desdemona rubbed her arm and Giles went over to the sofa and sat down. The bodyguards watched impassively. Lena was outwardly calm, but inside was wondering if anyone could get there in time to help her.

"All right. Giles, why don't you and Mrs. Matumbo go to the lounge, while Dez and I have a chat? I imagine she hasn't had anything to eat for some time and must be starving. I know I can trust you to treat her well. And maybe she'll see us in a better light." At her look, he added, "I promise you, there won't be anything in the food or drink to drug you. And I keep my word."

Giles stood up and walked over to the chairs. "That sounds like an excellent idea. I could use a little something, myself. Mrs. Matumbo, would you please join me?" He held out his arm.

Lena looked up at him, then stood up and took it. "You won't persuade me, you know," she said, looking back at Jacques.

"Oh, I hope we will, madam. Otherwise, no one will ever see you again," he replied.

Her chin went up a fraction; she turned and left the room with Giles.

From: Hobbeth Sent: 11/2/2005

---