

A RAINY NIGHT IN COMMERCE CITY

A bonus short story for
Rescue From Planet Pleasure



old it right there. That's close enough."

The voice was gruff, menacing. I stopped.

The goons stayed in the shadows as they moved toward me. Contacts dimmed my night vision, and these two remained silhouettes blending into the black-on-black mosaic of Dumpsters and brick walls. Random lights from security and street lamps reflected across the wet pavement between us.

"I'm here to see Aztec Joe," I said.

One of them cleared his throat and spit.

"He's expecting me."

"Of course he's expecting you, fuckhead. Otherwise we would've capped your punk ass the second you stepped out of your car."

I didn't want to take their shit but I had business with Aztec Joe, aka José Acosta, which meant getting past these two jerkoffs. I tapped the chest pocket of my jacket. "I have the deposit."

"Deposit?" The taller of the two asked. "AJ said you were supposed to bring all the *feria*."

"I brought what I could." I knew better than to bring the entire wad to this meeting. That way they had an incentive not to pull a double-cross. If things went south, then I'd do the double-cross.

“Hold on,” the shorter one said. He slipped a cell phone from his coat. The phone’s screen flashed on. His face looked like a canned ham gone bad. “Felix is here but says he doesn’t have all the money.” The goon nodded and grunted, “Uh-huh. Uh-huh.” His beady eyes narrowed on me and he said, “The boss is pissed, *güey*. You wanna play games, how about we break your legs and then you can explain why you’re jerking us around?”

I stood my ground. If I showed any weakness to these douchebags, then they’d slap me around to get their jollies. Or at least try to. “If AJ—”

“That’s Aztec Joe to you, motherfucker,” the tall guy barked.

“If Aztec Joe doesn’t want to do a deal, then I’m outta here.”

“Who said anything about not doing the deal?” Ham Face argued. “How much did you bring?”

“Two Gs.” I tapped my jacket again.

“Cash?”

“No. Coupons.”

“When this is done, wise-ass,” Tall Guy grouched, “I’m going kick your smelly *nalgas* from here to Arvada and back.”

An interesting proposition, one he’d regret trying.

Ham Face finished talking with AJ and stashed his phone. He beckoned me to the other end of the alley. “This way.”

Tall Guy kept his back to the wall as I passed. As we stepped out of the alley and into a small parking lot, a halogen streetlamp turned the night mist into a piss-yellow stain. With the light falling on them, Ham Face and Tall Guy looked exactly as I imaged. Muscle-head *cholos*, shaved scalps, tattooed necks, baggy jeans. Their open denim coats were flipped back to display the semi-autos shoved into their waistbands.

Ham Face directed me to a metal door at the center of a cinderblock wall. A video camera under the eave watched us. The door opened abruptly. A third *cholo* waited inside. Tall Guy shoved me over the threshold. “Chui, search him.”

“Hands up,” Chui ordered.

I did as I was told.

Tall Guy and Ham Face crowded into the narrow hall. Ham Face pulled his gun and held it loosely in front of him.

Chui patted me down. When he touched the pad of hundreds inside my jacket, he began to reach for them.

I clamped my hand over the jacket zipper. My sudden move startled them, and they braced for action.

“That belongs to your boss,” I explained.

Chui’s eyes crinkled. “Okay. You get your way for now. I’ll kick your ass later.”

“Get in line.”

He ordered me to empty my pockets and give my wallet, keys, and cell phone to Tall Guy. Chui next groped around my waist. With a triumphant flourish, he snagged the outline of a revolver tucked into the small of my back. He fished out the gun and examined it. “What kind of a piece of shit is this?”

That POS was a .22 caliber Rohm, the cheapest pistol I could find because I didn’t want to risk losing a good handgun. The forty bucks I paid for the Rohm was too much, proof that even German engineers can turn out crap.

Chui handed the revolver to Tall Guy, who emptied the cylinder into his other hand. He cupped the load of tiny .22 cartridges. “What the hell were you going to do with these? Tickle me?” He stashed the cartridges and gun in a trouser pocket.

Chui stared straight into my eyes and grabbed my junk. I pretended like I didn’t notice.

“Hey Chui,” Ham Face said, “if you find something you like, ask him if you can eat it.”

Chui snorted and let go. “Fuck you guys.” He ran his creepy hands down my legs to my ankles. “You got anything else?”

“If you didn’t find anything, then I guess not.”

He bolted upright and slapped my face. “You wanna talk smack like a bitch, I’ll treat you like a bitch.”

My cheek stung. “Your boss is waiting.”

He slapped me again, jangling my nerves. “Finished mouthing off, *puto?*”

I kept my trap shut.

They led me down the hall and to the left up a stairway. On the second floor we proceeded down another hall. Chui knocked on the door to announce our arrival and then let us through.

Aztec Joe sat behind a huge metal desk. The single bulb directly above provided a harsh glare. He looked just like the photos his

cousin showed me. A bony aspect framed with stringy hair. Sleeve tattoos on both arms. He appeared young, late twenties except for the bags under his eyes.

A ginormous Taurus Raging Bull revolver rested by his elbow, no doubt the gun was a .454 Casull. Unless he was worried about marauding T. Rexes or land-based orcas, that cannon was a major case of compensating.

Tall Guy ushered me to a chair and I took the seat. He dropped the Rohm and my other belongings on the desk. "This was all he was carrying."

AJ gave the little revolver a dismissive glance, then sneered.

Chui backed out of the room, leaving Ham Face and Tall Guy.

"We have private business," I said.

"You have nothing to worry about," AJ replied. "If I tell my men not to hear anything, they don't hear anything."

These assholes behind me complicated the situation, but not by much. I was hoping to spare them but if AJ forced the issue, that was fine by me. "Your call," I said.

AJ anchored his elbows on the desk and leaned toward me. "The money first. Then we talk."

Slowly, I unzipped my jacket, removed the envelope, and dropped it on the desk. AJ collected the envelope and counted the bills inside. Satisfied, he dropped the envelope into a drawer.

"Talk," he said.

"Actually, I'm not here to score meth."

"The fuck you want, then?"

"Delia Gonzales sent me."

The goons behind me rustled. AJ pruned his lips.

I said, "But before we do anything else, you owe her ten grand for what you ripped off."

AJ's face clouded with rage. His eyes flicked past me to Tall Guy and Ham Face. He scowled, then nodded. Pistol hammers clicked back.

"There's more," I added. "Leave her brother alone."

AJ blinked, furrowed and unfurrowed his brow like he was hallucinating. "What the hell?"

"Consider it a warning."

AJ picked up the Casull and cranked the hammer. “You’re warning me?”

Tall Guy and Ham Face shuffled sideways out of danger.

“Don’t you know who I am?” He pointed the barrel at my face, and the muzzle appeared huge enough to swallow my head.

“Of course I do,” I answered. “I smelled your cheap-ass cologne from the highway.”

AJ’s mouth twisted in disbelief. “What the fuck is with you? I’m a second from blowing your head apart.” He levered over the desk to bring the business end of that hand howitzer closer to me. “The only reason I don’t kill you now is that I want to hear you beg to live.”

“If it comes to that. But first I need the money you owe Delia, and then I need assurances that you’ll leave David alone.”

AJ chuckled. “Can you believe the *buevos* on this *cabrón*?” He returned to his seat but kept the revolver aimed at me. “Well, balls that big should be easy to hit from any distance.”

I laughed. I’m sure AJ had plenty of money stashed in that desk so dead or alive, he would square this debt to Delia.

“What’s my cousin to you?”

Merely the sister of a favorite chalice, a woman who lets me feed off her. I told AJ, “Friend of a friend I owe a favor to.”

“Well that favor is going to kill you.” He adjusted his grip on the Casull. “Before I make you yesterday’s news, I want to know who the hell Delia sent to crawl up my ass.”

“You know my name. Felix Gomez.”

“But what are you? You’re not a dealer. You’re no fucking narc.”

Three idiot humans with guns against one undead bloodsucker. It wasn’t even a fair fight.

I bent my head forward to remove my contacts, then sat straight. “I am”—my fangs and talons snapped to combat length—“a vampire.”



I drove my Cadillac to I-70. An envelope heavy with fifties and hundreds sagged inside my jacket pocket. Fourteen thousand. Ten for what I promised Delia, and four for my troubles. Not bad for a