

The Player

By Jason Sellers

“Mind if I sit?” I look up and see an old man dressed in a black suit with a black tie. He’s wearing dark glasses and pointing at the swivel seat attached to the table in front of me.

“I don’t see why not.” I smile groggily. He brought me back to the world after getting lost in my thoughts about her.

“Thanks son.”

We’re sitting at a chess table in a park. There’s a small pond in the middle surrounded by a walking path and some benches. On the outskirts there’s a few swings and such for the local youth, and then there’s the chess tables where we sit. I look over at him. “You come from a funeral old man?”

“I’m going to one.” The old man shakes himself off and takes a seat. He looks around at the empty park and then points at a spot on my jacket. I notice a scar on his hand. “What’s that mean?”

Looking down and I see him pointing, amidst the various stains and tears, at a patch with a stretched-out snake with the words “Solid Venom” written below in gold. “It’s an army patch. My group’s name was ‘Solid Venom’. The snake was our logo.”

The old man leans back and smiles. “You were in the military? When’d you get out?”

“A few years ago.” I mutter finally looking at him. “What about you? Did you serve?”

“No but I damn sure have a great respect for those who did. What’s it been like since you been home? I hear a lot of boys struggle with coming back.”

“Yeah, it’s been hard.”

The old man laughs, “That’s it? It’s been hard?”

“That’s it.” I say. It’s still not as hard as dealing with what I did...

The old man smiles and points at the table littered with chess pieces. “Care to play?”

“Gladly. I had started to up hope on someone coming to play with.”

My eyes dart to his hand as he reaches into his pocket and pulls out a small wooden box. “For good luck.” His luck shines through as he proves a more adept opponent than I am used to.

“How’d you wind up with that scar?”

“It’s no fun to just tell someone the origin. How do you think I got it?” I can’t tell if he’s trying to distract me from the game or what.

“Alright, I’m gonna say you got it in a fight.”

“What kind?”

“Umm in a underground club.” He laughs.

“That’s too hard to believe. What about a bar? The best fights happen in a bar.”

“I don’t mind that. Ok so you’re in a bar...and then...the guy next to you spills his drink and cuts you.” He sits back and looks at me before making his next move. His stare makes me heart start beating but he smiles.

“That’s a pretty drastic leap. I spill a drink and wind up with this? Lets build the story a little more. Was I there with anyone?”

“Sure, lets say you were there with...your wife?”

“I’ve never been married.”

“Girlfriend?”

“I’m 65. I don’t take my dates to bars.” He starts closing in on my queen.

“Alright, how about a kid?”

“That would work.” I start countering with my knight to save my piece.

“Ok so you’re there with your daughter when the wrong guy flirts with her.”

“Would you flirt with a girl in front of her father?”

“How would you know I was her father?”

“Good point.” I capture his last bishop. “What if you were in the bathroom?” He raises his eyes in interest. “While in the bathroom someone propositions you.” He rolls his eyes. “Ok, what if a fight broke out in the bar?” He nods.

“Now there’s an idea.”

“Ok so a fight breaks out, while you’re in the bathroom. Then you come out at the wrong time, someone slices towards the door, you go into block his hand, and boom! Scar.” I take his queen feeling nervously confident.

“Checkmate.” I look down and see that with a knight and a simple pawn, he has me.

“Good game. You wanna play ano-”

“Your story is pretty close. I know I gave you some prompts in the beginning but I’m surprised you actually gave it the real ending.” I start reaching for my pocket when he pulls a cocked snub nosed .38 and holds it just far enough back that I couldn’t grab it without catching a bullet. “Hands on the table son.” With no other choice my fingers slowly spread on the table.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Yeah, you do. You spilt your drink on someone and instead of just owning the mistake, you hit the closest guy next to you. That set off a chain of rough looking mother fuckers getting ready to throw down. You panicked, grabbed your gun, started firing, and ran.”

“None of them got hurt!” My hands start clenching into fists when he smacks me across the face with his pistol.

“No, none of them did, but she did, and now she’s dead.” He slides the box towards me. “Open it and take a look.” I open it up as he stands up. Inside is a picture of him with his arm around her. He puts the barrel to my forehead. They’re both smiling.