

*(NOTE: This is a snippet of a short story stalking my subconscious. If it takes root, I'll turn this teaser into rose.)*

The Player: Equus Fatale

by

Patricia A. Jackson

SUMMERLIN, NEVADA

The dusk was fading. Night, with its midnight veils of shadow, fell across the deserts of Summerlin, Nevada. Dressed in those shadows, Dr. Virginia Lee peered through the scope of her AWM sniper rifle. As the light failed, she was forced to resort to the night vision. The natural colors of the world vanished, replaced by degrees of black and green. This made her reason for being here, in this place at this moment, ever more difficult. Every instinct called for flight, but if she ran, the consequences would be catastrophic.

She was the last thread in the tapestry of the life that belonged to Alex Kane. She was both the last thread and the blade sent to make the final cut. Her sense of guilt and betrayal was overwhelming. It was fortunate that the shoulder of the dune bore the weight of the AWM in her arms, as she was not certain that she could have borne the weight of it at that moment. Her fingers trembled. A mentor once complimented her on the skill of those fingers. Gifted he said of her prowess as a surgeon. Dr. Virginia Lee. She was a physician of the healing arts as well as a disciple of death, despite being bound to the Hippocratic Oath.

Movement near the entrance of the storage facility caught her attention. Alex Kane came into crosshairs. He was drunk. No, not drunk, he was injured. Medical expertise brought an instant diagnosis, cracked possibly broken ribs. Lacerations and bruising on his face confirmed it. He favored his right side, both with his arm, a slight hunch in his shoulders, and by the way he walked. And that was not all that was broken.

His face was the face of a man lost to despair. Ginny had seen it a thousand times in the face of fallen soldiers. The 1000 yard stare, they called. She had seen that look on Alex's face before as well.

But this was worse. Through the scope, she saw the letter in his hand. Adjusting the magnification of her scope, she read his name, written neatly by her surgeon's hands, on the envelope. It was that letter: a Dear John letter of toxic virulency.

Alex Kane was wounded, both physically and emotionally. An easy target. The conditions were perfect for a kill shot. A single shot to the left temple, highlighted by the street lamp near the gate or a shot to the chest, imploding his heart in midbeat. Either way, he would be dead before he hit the ground. Released. In his current condition, as she saw him, it would have been a mercy.

Alex staggered against the rear of a black Dodge Charger. He fumbled in a pocket for the keys, seemingly unable to fish them from his pocket.

"Banshee One, sitrep. Have you acquired the target?"

"Affirmative." Ginny struggled to inject the menace in her voice, barely hiding the emotion threatening to close her throat.

"You have the green light to take the shot. Copy? You have the green light to take the shot. Over."

Ginny defiantly ducked her head, leaning her left cheek against the stock of the rifle. She closed her eyes, lost in an unwelcomed surge of memory.

"Has anyone ever called you Ginny? You look like a Ginny." Alex's voice rose from a not-so-distant past even as she fought to suppress it. She remembered his hands at her cheek, thumb massaging the corner of her mouth, his palm warm and comforting.

"Banshee One, have you acquired the target?" There was silence. "Virginia?"

"I have acquired the target."

"You have the green light—"

"Negative. I don't have a shot."

"Repeat that, Banshee One."

"I have acquired the target." Ginny untangled herself from the stock of the sniper rifle and cradled her head in her arms. "But I do not have a shot."