

"Mister Zulashey will see you now." She smiles, and she's beautiful.

I don't want to get sucked in. Frank Zulashey's test-tube-secretaries are barely even human, everybody on Earth knows that. They're gorgeous, friendly flesh-machines; supermodel computers manufactured without the ability to be anything but aggressively pleasant. I want to be able to ignore their charms—all specifically engineered to put potential business partners off-guard—but I find myself thanking Ms. Capek profusely and feeling worryingly disarmed by the building's cheery atmosphere as I walk into Frank's office.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Zula-" before I even finish his name, he interrupts me with a "call me Frank" and a "sit down, do you want a drink?" He's trying to take the upper hand. I'm not sure if the obvious attempt at dominance really is that obvious, or if the obviousness of the power move is a calculated bluff to knock me off balance.

My synthetic eyes would normally tell me by throwing out a million pinpoint lasers, analysing his skin's electrodermal activity, but he seems to have some surgery or modification that's completely removed his ability to sweat. Wait, no. My left eye magnifies his face by 500x and... god! There doesn't appear to be a single pore. His perfect skin is an artificial polymer, a total dermal replacement. I didn't even know that was possible!

"So what are you here for?" His voice is as smooth as his skin. Complete tonal consistency. He must have replaced his vocal cords with a VoiceBox, a speaker array for complete and perfect modular speech. No vocal fluctuations at all.

"Well, I don't want to ask for too much, but I'm from the Children of Luna society. We're a nonpartisan charity dedicated to caring for Lunar children who've lost parents in the Moon's recent skirmishes with Earth. As I understand it, you're a great philanthropist, sir. A true humanitarian. And so we were wondering if you would be willing to make a modest donation to the cause." Ok. Good. That sounded confident. Believable. Maybe he bought it.

He looks at me a little too long "I've not heard of your charity before, Mister..."

"Kindred. Arthur Kindred."

"Well, Mister Kindred... Arthur. I'm definitely interested. I've long worried about the Moon's displaced children." If he has figured it out, he's not letting on.

"Great. Would you like to see some of our materials?" He responds in the affirmative and I reach into my suitcase for a folded pamphlet—within its pages are dozens of razor thin sensors; the moment he takes it, I'll know his heart rate and be able to gauge whether or not he's actually buying this.

I lean across the table and hand him the pamphlet. My cochlear implants are assailed by a deep whooshing sound. A constant liquid rushing. No heartbeat. No throbbing. My god, he's replaced his heart. It's a pump. A constant, steady pump. Blood filtered through in one perpetual vascular stream.

I look around the room while Frank Zulashey reads over the documentation, desperate to distract myself. There's a huge window to my left and I can see Mt. Fuji, tall and magnificent—how it was before the second Sino/Japanese nuclear exchange reduced it to rubble. We're half a mile underground, all the windows down here are holograms.

Frank hands back my phony charity's documentation. I hear my own heartbeat beating a thousand beats a second in my implants as I take it from him. He stares me in the eyes for a moment. Then he shrugs and smiles.

"Alright," he says, "you've got your donation."

Unbelievable. I actually did it. I conned Frank Zulashey, Earth's richest man! I start packing my things into my briefcase while thanking him profusely. He reaches out his hand and I shake it. He's cold. The little subdermal sensors in my fingertips take his temperature. By rights he should be dead. Incredible. Frank is more machine than man.

As we shake hands he tells me to come back if the kids ever need more money. Could today get any better?

I stand up and walk toward the door. As I put my hand on the doorknob I hear the rustle of Frank's crisp suit as he leans forward in his chair. That chair probably cost more than my house.

"Oh, Arthur?" His VoiceBox is modulated to an unsettling condescension. I freeze with my hand on the doorknob, the door slightly ajar. Maybe I should make a break for it. There are probably two corpo-security officers standing there with guns pointed at my head--they've probably been in here the whole time, chameleoned against the wall. God, I wish we had camo mods on the Moon. I can't run, there are probably more outside. I swallow my fear and turn around, smiling.

No cops. No guns. Frank's just sitting there, hands on his desk, fingers interlaced.

"I would have donated to the cause if you came in here honestly," he says.

My blood turns to ice. He knew the whole time. He knew and he didn't care. The richest man on Earth's a Lunar sympathiser!

"Long live Free Luna, Mister Kindred," he says.

"Long live Free Luna, Frank," I say back.