**SUV: Sport Utilitarian Vehicle**

[*Need to get Mendoza’s ‘voice’ right – ie, not RSS being snarky. Try for more like Rebus.*]

The population of Las Vegas, New Mexico had doubled to over thirty thousand in the three years since Plex Auto-Motive had established their global HQ in the town, and Detective Joshua Mendoza reckoned that around a quarter of them had turned out to hear Senator Jackson speak. Mendoza guessed it counted as an exciting event to the local hicks.

Who was he kidding with this cynical bullshit? He was LV born and raised himself and had spent the last twenty five years (Christ, was it really that long?) rising – if that was the right word – to the level of Detective in the town’s two man police department. It had been a pretty easy life – at least until Plex A-M had arrived – and that was just how Mendoza had liked it. Just the usual Saturday night drunks and domestics, and farmers out in the sticks complaining that their broken, neglected fencing had been damaged by “vandals” and trying to get compensation.

Plex A-M had not brought Las Vegas the hoped-for revival in manufacturing jobs. The company liked to advertise that its cars were “100% American made”, and Mendoza could see a huge animated billboard saying as much, beaming its patriotic message over a whole block on the northern side of Lincoln Park. It was true enough, as long as you did not care too much that no American worker – apart from a few geeks at their keyboards – was involved anywhere in the entirely automated facility. Even the geeks had increasingly started to be replaced by AIs. Mendoza found it hard to feel any sympathy: they had brought that one on themselves.

The jobs that the company had brought to the town were mostly minimum-wage-plus-insurance: loading and unloading; caretaking; security and low level admin. The sorts of jobs that were either hard to automate or just not cost-effective to do so. People were glad to have them. The rest of the town seemed to be there to cater to the needs and desires of Plex A-M coders and executives in both the formal and not-so-formal service economies. The latter kept Mendoza busy. He reckoned he was owed a few favors for discreetly extracting company execs after a good night out turned a bit too good. It kept him in a job.

He moved past the children’s playground and towards the old bandstand near the 8th Street side of the park. It was a cloudless December day, around fifty five degrees. Not warm – Mendoza was wearing his coat. Some of the more optimistic locals looked like they were trying to make a day of it and had started a barbeque.

“The LIBERTY Bill is an un-American abomination. You all know that I am a great believer in civility in public life, but I have had to struggle with myself to retain respect for [Congressmen] Lowe and Ingram for introducing it.”

Mendoza was not in the park to listen to Senator Jackson’s speech. He was there to keep an eye on the crowd, but he was as interested as anyone else there to hear what the Senator had to say. As he approached the stage he caught his first glimpse of the woman whose amplified, emotive tones he had just been hearing.

Senator Gabrielle Jackson (Republican, New Mexico) was a tall woman in her mid-fifties with deep black skin. Her shoulder length hair was streaked with gray. Her eyes seemed to simultaneously express both good humor and intense seriousness. It occurred to Mendoza that she could be described as ‘motherly’ – as long as you meant the sort of mother who you would not ever dare to cross.

[*Interleave Sen. Jackson’s speech with Mendoza’s observations – crowd, park, weather etc.*]