



Three Sisters



By Ardath Rekha

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Synopsis: Once upon a time, there were three sisters, professional mercenaries by trade. And once upon a time, there was a man named Richard B. Riddick. And every time he crossed paths with one of the sisters, something would go really, really wrong...

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Prologue

Little Sister

She'd been very lucky to arrive when she did. Another few hours and Eve would have been dead.

Armed to the teeth and laden down with emergency supplies, she'd ventured into the bowels of Crematoria, now mostly in ruins, and had found her oldest sister unconscious, barely breathing. Once she had Eve stabilized, she'd gone in search of Toombs and found him caged but otherwise unharmed. Together they'd brought Eve out, boarding her small runner and making their evac.

In the weeks that followed, she'd tried repeatedly to break into Necromonger communication channels, while Eve healed and Toombs paced and cursed and muttered about money he should have taken. She barely paid him any attention. There were only three things she cared about. One was in stable condition in the infirmary; she needed to find out what had happened to the other two.

Bits and pieces began to come into her grasp, slowly forming a picture for her. Kyra had been taken by the Necromongers on Crematoria. Riddick had gone after her.

She continued to pry, needing to know more about what had happened. Finally the systems opened for her completely.

The Lord Marshal of the Necromongers was dead; long live the new Lord Marshal... Richard B. Riddick.

Fuck.

He'd gone to the Basilica in pursuit of, so said the reports, "the girl he loved," only to discover that she'd already been converted to the Necromonger Way.

Fuck... Fuck!

He'd taken on the Lord Marshal, and a battle had resulted. The girl – Kyra by name – had joined in... and been killed.

Fuck, fuck, FUCK!

She sat back from the panel, now completely obscured by the tears in her eyes. When she had enough control over herself, she made herself go tell Eve what she'd learned. The two of them cried together for several hours, and then drank each other under the table as a kind of screwed-up self-therapy.

It was over. The Three Sisters were no more. Now there were only two. And Riddick had vanished into the heart of something too dangerous and horrible to challenge. He was lost as well.

For some reason, though, she couldn't leave it alone.

Delving deeper into the mysteries of the Necromonger Way, as they recorded themselves, she found that she had the tail of some kind of important puzzle. Necromongers claimed that they were immortal. Followers of the Way had a place in the Underverse, another universe below this one... and even if their bodies died in this universe, they continued to live on in that one... and *could be brought back*.

Was it possible?

Kyra had died... but she'd died as a Necromonger. If this Underverse thing really existed, and she really was there... could she be brought back?

And what would it take?

She dug further.

Only the Lord Marshal could open the gateway. Only the Lord Marshal could let the living, of this universe, through into that one... and only the Lord Marshal could bring a denizen of the Underverse back out.

Riddick.

Riddick could still rescue Kyra.

She changed the ship's course, ignoring both Toombs' and Eve's protests. This time she was going to make sure that things went the way they were supposed to. Nobody was going to make her hide in the shadows anymore. She was needed on the front lines and the hell with anybody who didn't think so. After all, she was almost eighteen, and she'd been a professional merc and the third of the Three Sisters team since she was *twelve*. She'd earned her stripes.

And she wasn't at all afraid to stare down Richard B. Riddick. She'd have done it from the start if she'd had her way; maybe Kyra would have been alive now if they'd let her.

As the Basilica loomed over the ship in the viewscreen, she sent the message. An envoy was here to see the Lord Marshal, about something he held dear. She suited up as she waited for the answer. Overt

weaponry for the guards to take from her, covert weapons they'd never manage to find on her. Just in case Riddick wasn't happy to see her. Just in case he wasn't happy about what she'd done.

"Logan's Luck, you have permission to dock. The Lord Marshal will see you in his audience hall. An escort will be waiting to take you to him."

"Thank you," she said into the comm, as she finished locking-and-loading, and turned the navigation system over to the Basilica's auto-dock.

"One more thing, Unbeliever," the voice on the other end said. *"The Lord Marshal says that if this is a waste of his time, he's going to... 'ghost your ass.'"*

"It won't be. I'm on my way."

She turned off the comm and headed for the ramp. Toombs didn't try to stop her, just giving her a weary shake of his head. She was rather surprised that he didn't want to face off with Riddick, too, but his issues weren't hers, so that was his call.

Without a further word, Jacqueline Logan opened the ramp and strode down it, on her way to meet an old friend who might be *very* surprised to see her alive and well. She was going to make him rescue her older sister... again.

And *this* time, she was going to make sure he did it *right*.

1.

Deception Unravels

Riddick stared at the girl before him. His usually deliberate taciturnity had given away to shocked silence. And for a long moment, the girl simply stared back at him.

I must have been more addled by the Quasi-Dead than I thought, he told himself, looking her over.

She was the same height as Kyra. Like the other young woman, she had the same willowy build, but with somewhat less muscle. The dark hair that fell around her shoulders was straighter, and there was something more refined and less feral about the way she carried herself. But the resemblance was there. He'd bought Kyra's story because the resemblance was there.

Faced with the real Jack, though, he wondered how he'd missed all of the differences.

He'd somehow forgotten that Jack's face was more of an oval, with a pixie-pointed chin rather than the smaller, cleft chin Kyra had sported. Where Kyra's nose had been snub, Jack's was long and aristocratic. Other, subtler hints tugged at him and made him feel like he'd been blind and stupid before.

This was Jack. This, the mystery envoy whose arrival had dragged him out of bed, was the Jack he'd gone seeking in Crematoria. This young woman with the direct gaze and relaxed combat stance was the girl he'd been mistakenly mourning for *weeks*.

What the fuck is going on here?

The soft rustle of the hastily-assembled court intruded upon his awareness. Most of the Lords had somehow heard about the envoy's arrival and had turned out, wanting to see exactly what would happen, no doubt. He was suddenly pretty curious, himself, but the urge to get her alone and demand answers – to questions too private for this expectant room – was overwhelming, too.

He hated figuring out all of this political shit. Was he supposed to speak first? Seemed like she was waiting for him to.

"I thought you were dead," he growled with more anger than he expected, and watched her delicate, arched brows flinch.

The rest of her expression remained calm, as did her voice when she answered him. "Did you think that before or after my sister was killed?"

Sister. So that's it.

"Kyra was your sister?" Now things were getting clearer. The puzzlingly almost-familiar mannerisms, the moments when the other girl had seemed so very Jack-like that dissolved into confusing, uncharacteristic behavior, the weird sense that something was there and yet was profoundly missing as well.

Jack nodded, still watching him with that strange, closed expression. Would she be more open, he suddenly wondered, if he wasn't occupying the throne of the Lord Marshal? Or was it the death of her sister standing between them? Speaking of which...

"Mind telling me why she was pretending to be you?"

"So you'd spring her from Crematoria." Jack's voice was carefully neutral. Was he imagining an undercurrent of annoyance, not aimed at him but at something else?

Still, he had the sudden, enraged urge to grab her, shake her, and slam her against the wall. Did she have any idea how much believing she was dead had torn at him? It was bad enough that she apparently had access to some chink in his armor, but she'd *used* it against him.

He really needed to talk to her alone.

Turning his glance meaningfully on Vaako, he made his will known. "I want this room empty except for me and her."

Vaako nodded, making a perfunctory bow. After a moment's murmuring, the crowd began to disperse. Riddick kept his eyes locked on Jack, who was watching him, still and poised, until they were finally alone.

He took a step toward her; she took half a step back.

"Afraid of me now, Jack?" He couldn't help the urge to taunt her. After the shit she'd put him through, he really wanted to shake her up. Why the fuck had she done that to him? Why had she let him believe?

"Not exactly expecting a hug or anything," she replied, wariness in her face and stance.

"Maybe you'd have gotten one if you'd still been at the Holy Man's house when I got there."

Maybe he was imagining it, but he could have sworn that guilt and longing flickered over her elegant, expressive features. "I hadn't been there for years, Riddick."

"Yeah, he told me you ran away." He'd tried to demand answers from her imposter – her sister – too. "Why? You were safe there."

Jack shrugged. "I went home."

"You were a runaway."

"No, Riddick," she told him, shaking her head. She walked over to the dais, circling him, and sat down on the steps. "I wasn't a runaway. I was a plant."

For a moment the absurd image hit him, of a child version of Jack wearing a bizarre plant outfit, like the kids in vid commercials about school plays. "You were a *what*?"

"I was on the *Hunter-Gratzner* to help my sisters steal you from Johns."

This was the second time, in under ten minutes, that he'd been shocked speechless. How did this slip of a girl keep doing that to him?

"You... and your sisters..." Mentally he made a note to ask her about that plural. "...were gonna steal me from Johns?"

Jack nodded. "I was onboard as a passenger. After everybody went into cryo, Paris had programmed my tube to release me. I went to the nav computers and programmed in new coordinates so that the *Hunter-Gratzner* would divert, and meet up with my sisters' ship in week 23 of transit—"

"Paris?" The story was getting crazier by the moment. "Paris P. *Ogilvie*?"

A smile twitched over the girl's lips. "Antiquities dealer, entrepreneur. Or, more accurately, bootlegger and smuggler. We were picking him and his cargo up, too, so that he wouldn't get nabbed by customs. Between our cut of his take, and your bounty, that trip was gonna set us up for years."

She really *had* gone merc! She'd been a merc before he'd even *met* her! When Kyra had told him the story about signing up when she was only twelve, he'd wanted to laugh in her face; no merc crew ever hired a kid that young. But Jack was telling the same story.

"Who the fuck is 'us,' Jack?"

She tilted her head at him. "You ever hear of the Three Sisters?"

That stopped him cold. He had. He'd heard about them for *years*.

They'd been gaining a reputation as one of the most competent teams in the business. Supposedly they were a family operation, a trio of sisters whose parents had been killed in the Wailing Wars. The oldest was supposed to be a veteran of those wars, hard as nails and beautiful in an earthy sort of way. The middle sister had a reputation for extraordinary beauty and sensuality, coupled with a powerful contempt of men. Supposedly she could take down a man twice her size single-handedly. The youngest, the stories went, was just a kid, but with more intelligence and guts than people twice her age. It was said that her most powerful weapon was her helpless waif act, which had lured entirely too many marks back into a prison cell. Big Sister, Middle Sister, Little Sister. Those were the code names that they went by, and only a few tantalizing hints had ever surfaced about what their real names might be. Their security was impressive and—

"You? You're 'Little Sister?'"

Jack nodded again. "And Kyra's – she *was* 'Middle Sister.'"

"And Big Sister? Where's she?"

"Back on the ship. She still hasn't finished healing up from Crematoria."

The third face swam into his mind's eye, and he knew he was right. She'd hovered over him on Toombs's ship, seemingly fascinated by him. He'd been tempted to indulge her interest; it had been a while since he'd been with a woman, after all.

"Eve Logan."

Jack nodded once more.

Riddick remembered hearing whispers about the Sisters even before Johns had nabbed him and started their journey back to Slam. She really *had* been a merc before he'd met her. The one everybody had said was probably the most dangerous of the three, just because she was so deceptively innocent-seeming.

"You were gonna steal me from Johns, and turn me in for the bounty." He didn't know whether to laugh or strangle her.

"That was the plan," Jack answered, apparently unashamed. "You saw how well it actually worked out."

"So, what happened, you woke up on New Mecca planning to nab me, found out I was gone, and rejoined your sisters and started looking for me again?" The urge to strangle was beginning to win.

Jack rolled her eyes. “No, asshole. I woke up on New Mecca planning to get in touch with my sisters, tell them how you’d saved my ass about a dozen times over, and see if we could set you up with new credentials. But, as you mentioned, you were already gone. So I waited for them to come get me, and they did. Your bounty was off-limits after that.”

“So why was Big Sister riding with Toombs?”

Jack drew one leg up, hugging her knee. He’d seen her strike variations of that pose throughout their brief time together, and it brought back the other memories he had of her, the glowing-eyed girl who had captivated him—

Who’d been running a scam on me the whole time, he reminded himself. Still, the urge to strangle was abruptly gone.

“Two years ago,” she told him, “we had a job that went bad. Really bad. We ended up in a gun battle, and an innocent bystander got killed. The bullet traced back to Kyra’s gun and there was surveillance footage of her firing it. Most of the time, things like that get pinned on the criminals, you know? Deaths during the commission of a felony are considered murders perpetrated by the felon in the eyes of the law, and we were duly appointed marshals at the time of the shootout. But his dad was some powerful Senator, and he decided he wanted the person who actually shot his son to pay. So they came after Kyra.”

Riddick watched the play of expressions on Jack’s face as she talked. Either she was the best actress he’d ever encountered in his life, or she was letting him see some very real, and personal pain.

“We’d already collected our share of the bounty and had left when they issued the warrant,” she continued. “We couldn’t believe it when we heard... and our lawyers couldn’t make it go away. We went to meet a client, and instead it turned out that it was another team there to bust her and take her in. The trial was a joke... Senator Orviso just wanted to bury her. And he did. Sent her to Crematoria. We didn’t know what to do. Nobody would help us. So I got the idea we’d find you and hire you to break her out for us.”

He hadn’t even noticed that he was moving, but suddenly he was sitting down next to Jack, leaning in close. He wanted to sample the pain she was showing, smell it, maybe taste it, and decide for himself if it was real. She glanced up at him but didn’t seem at all afraid anymore, continuing with her story.

“I got in touch with Imam, but as soon as he realized who and what I was... I guess he decided I was gonna turn you in for the reward if he told me where to find you. He wouldn’t talk. So we headed for New Mecca. We...” Shame flickered through her eyes. “We were gonna *make* him talk. But when we got there a few months ago... that woman Aereon had already showed up. He’d told her where to find you and she’d sent a merc team of her own after you.”

Riddick nodded, remembering Toombs’ first ham-handed ambush attempt. “So?”

“Well, we waited around, and I talked to Imam. He seemed pretty sure that we’d never get you to walk into a prison voluntarily unless you thought *I* was the one in there.”

Yeah, Riddick thought, he probably wouldn’t have gone after Kyra, reward or not, if he’d known that she wasn’t Jack. Probably wouldn’t have been so determined to keep her safe, either. “So you got him to lie for you?”

“Eve did. I was still pretty dead-set on the idea that if I asked you to help, you would. They all disagreed. Aereon and Imam were all about how you needed to save New Mecca first, and all, but they admitted that if they thought you wouldn’t rescue one strange girl, the odds of getting you to rescue a planet weren’t really *that* good. So they agreed to go along with the story about how I’d been sent to prison. Then we heard back from Toombs that you’d massacred his men and were on your way to us.”

Riddick winced a little, remembering the anger he’d felt towards the Holy Man over the idea that he’d been sold out... but the other thought that had floated into his mind. Would Jack still be with him? He’d hoped to see this face when he got there. Suddenly he wondered if, had she been there and asked him to rescue her sister, he might have done it.

The thought tugged at part of him, the same part that kept reacting to those large eyes of hers with nostalgia and strange yearning.

“What happened then?”

“Well, Eve hooked up with Toombs and joined his team, and I got sent back to our ship. And then the Necromongers attacked ahead of schedule and everything looked fucked up, until I suddenly heard from Eve that they had you and were heading for Crematoria. I followed.”

“And?”

“And Eve talked Toombs into going back to break you and Kyra out of the prison. When his ship took off, it was supposed to send mine a coded message letting me know what happened. But it took off and

didn't send any of them, so I knew something had gone wrong. I went down, got into the prison – you left it a real mess, you know – and found them. If I'd been much later, Eve would have been dead, too." There was a hint of an indictment against him in her voice there. She blamed him for her sister's injuries.

And probably blames me for Kyra's death, too, with a lot better reason. He took a deep breath and made himself say the words part of his mind was insisting needed to be said. "I'm sorry, Jack."

Then the next thought hit him.

"Is Toombs with you?"

She chuckled, shrugging. "He's back on the ship. I think he's got a thing for Eve. Not sure if I was reading that right or not, but I made a few offhand remarks about places I could drop him off and he didn't take me up on any of them."

Either that, or Toombs was the one really running the show. "And you're not here to try to take me in, collect my bounty?"

Jack gave him a look that made him wonder where he'd misplaced all of his IQ points. "Are you kidding? You're the *Lord Marshal* of the *Necromongers*. Way to get dead fast, pulling a stunt like that, even if I wanted to."

"So why *are* you here, Jack?" That was what still eluded him.

She sighed. "Kyra."

Damn. He should have seen that coming. "The Necromongers gave her a formal funeral the day after she died, Jack. At this point I don't even have her body."

"I don't want her body. I want *her*."

"You wanna explain that, Little Sister?"

And odd smile quirked across Jack's lips. Possibly it wasn't sane. "I'm doing what I should have done the first time, Riddick. I'm asking you to break her out of her prison." She raised her hand to forestall his next confused words. "Not Crematoria, this time. I want you to bring her out of the Underverse."

Well, fuck me. Was that even possible?

But he knew it was already too late, and he was already screwed. Because even if it wasn't possible, there was one person in the universe who had it in her to make him do the *impossible*, and that was the innocent-looking merc girl before him.

Now he was just going to have to figure out *how*.