

# GOOD FOR SOMETHING

*Complete control.*

BY DEBORAH WALKER

Raoul reached in his pocket and touched the cold copper of the Loonie coin. It would be safer in his wallet, or safer still back on Earth with the rest of his collection. But he needed to touch it. The Loonie bought him luck. He always carried it when he was acquiring. The Loonie had been his first coin. It was right he should have it when he obtained his last.

A woman smiled at him. She was probably a distraction for a pickpocket. When he'd arrived at High Jova, they'd warned him that the orbital teemed with thieves. Why would else would an attractive woman smile at him? Then he remembered he was wearing nano-skin. He looked 60 years younger. Young, handsome, just like he'd looked when he'd first met Sven.

But he walked on scowling, hand tight around the Loonie.

The Loonie. A hard-times coin, issued when the First Lunar Bank went bust in 2101. It was the unofficial currency of the lunar depression. Electronic credit was fine, convenient. But there would always be times when people needed money; needed hard, cold cash.

The Loonie was his first coin, acquired by accident half a century ago and it had sparked a desire in Raoul, the start of a life time's obsession with collecting coins from every off-world habitation. He thought of his home on Earth, where his collection rotated elegantly in the display field. Coins were history in a way that electronic credit could never be. Not only social-economic history, but the personal history of what Raoul had done to acquire a particular coin. Sven didn't understand that.

Raoul left the bustle of the market sector and turned into the quiet corridor of the living quarters. In his wallet was the card-key that the Slider had assured him would get him into Ben Dell's quarters. She'd sneered, but she'd taken his money. It would get him in. A Slider's word was as cold and certain as vacuum.

Dell owned the largest coin



collection in private hands. But unlike Raoul, Dell bought coins indiscriminately. It was unfortunate then, that the elusive Titan Good For coin had found itself into Dell's hands.

The Titan Good For had been issued to workers building the first Titan orbital in 2128, before the disastrous core meltdown. A Titan Good For coin had been exchanged for one meal in the workers' canteen. It had been thought for many centuries that these coins had been lost in the destruction of the station. Raoul had a fine Titan Two coin, those were two a penny. But when he heard that Dell had retrieved a Titan Good For from a derelict escape pod, he knew that he had to have it. With a Titan Good For, Raoul would have a complete set of all coins issued in off-world habitations during the twenty-second century.

Which was why Raoul was on High Jova, wearing nano-skin, carrying Dell's card-key in his wallet. He'd tried to make Sven understand.

"If I complete the collection, I'll have done something with my life."

"We've been married for fifty years. We have two children. We have seven grand kids. You've done something."

"I know. But this is something special."

"It's a hobby."

"It's not just a hobby."

"Don't go to High Jova, Raoul. Don't throw your life away."

Dell had been so unreasonable. Raoul had approached him, through a number of intermediaries, offering a fair price, then a ridiculous price. Then he'd liquidated all his assets and offered an extortionate, exorbitant price, even though Sven had begged him not to. To Dell had rejected all offers. In the end, Raoul had made a personal appeal to Señor Dell, collector to collector. But Dell had refused out of spite. Dell wasn't interested in twenty-second-century off-world coins. He didn't even have the semi-rare Mars Mark. He just wanted to stop Raoul achieving his dreams. Sven told him that he was crazy.

Raoul had tried to explain. He really shouldn't have told Sven what he was planning to do.

Sven had given him an ultimatum. "Don't do this. Let it go. Otherwise..."

Otherwise?

Sven had left him. After 60 years. He didn't understand.

Raoul was very close to Dell's quarter, his heart beating wildly. He was about to risk everything. If Sven could feel what he felt, maybe he'd understand. Essentially Raoul was doing this for Sven. With the Titan Good For, his collection would be complete. Complete. Then Raoul would be able to fix everything, remind Sven of the man he'd been 60 years ago, of the love they'd had, the life time they'd shared, the future they could have together. But he had to have the Titan Good For. History had to be complete. It all had to make sense.

Raoul reached the door. He took the card-key from the wallet. The Titan Good For would be inside, and maybe Señor Dell would be inside, too. Raoul carefully drew the gun out of his bag. The Sliders had supplied that, too.

Sven didn't understand. Coins were history, and history had to be complete. It all had to make sense. One last time, Raoul touched the Loonie in his pocket. Hard times. A collection had to be complete to make sense. A life had to make sense. A life had to be complete. A life had to be good for something. ■

**Deborah** agrees with Ralph Waldo Emerson: money often costs too much.

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