

Petre Motiu

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Shaken, Not Stirred.

Persuasive saxophones cooed from Bellisaria's earpiece as she traveled down another aged prefab corridor familiar to the Terran space port. However, it did nothing to assuage the grief from her last job. It was a wound that would heal over time like everything else though... It had to. The revelation of finding the personal secrets of another and well known family was quite the load on her conscience.

She reflexively polarized her lenses to conceal her now haunted complexion. Her brow now taugth with thoughts, planning scenarios, and replaying events from her last mission in her mind's eye. Having a conscience governed by stringent morals and a scant amount of civility was ever present, but mildly tormenting her. But she couldn't afford to fall apart now from her own nagging. She did what she'd done so many times before, and done very well: she took her feelings and what she'd persuaded herself was her normal humanity, and sealed them far away from her rational mind.

"This would be something to record for later." She murmured.

Out of the blue, a memory broke her train of heavy thoughts. It was from her grandmother giving her an old Russian saying that still rang true to Bell: You cannot hope to straighten the minds of crooked people in the world. They only energy you have to make that possible, is to straighten yourself. Bell was half minded on this. One side of her thought it was

ridiculous to consider; that the whole 'verse can be united for the common good. But like many societies: they do inevitably spoil with corruption. As a result it was easier to concede to good old fashion advice.

With, this Bell nodded to herself and felt more relaxed. She instinctively rubbed the back of her left ear and selected "Count Your Blessings by Hint" on her mobiglasses as a cause for celebration from heavy thoughts. A slight smile touched her lips as she ventured to look up at the docked ships to occupy her as she passed them by. However one named fashion on the hull of a Freelancer caught her eye. Her brow slightly furrowed in concentration and walked up to get a closer look past the glare of the windows.

"The name of that ship is the Bucephalus" a voice called from behind her. Bell turned around to find the individual wearing a police officer's uniform and a name tag of Frank. Bell managed a polite smile to greet him.

"An interesting name for that ship, isn't it?" He continued.

"Yes, a very peculiar one too." She agreed.

"What do you mean?" He asked.

"Well, it's just that I recognize the name. I'm drawing a blank on where I heard it from... Could you tell me who pilots this ship?" She asked.

"Sorry Miss, I can't do that. That's a breach of spaceport security protocol." Holding up a hand of authority.

"I see." Bowing her head.

The security officer was right, Bell had to respect some laws in the ‘verse, even in a line of work which consisted of walking on and crossing of said lines when need be. But her curiosity was still nagging at her to find out who was the pilot.

*A bribe might work*, she thought.

“Well, how about some monetary persuasion to change your mind?” She coaxed.

The officer now weighed his options and agreed to the proposition. Bell pulled out her mobiglas to join it with the Foreman’s transferring 100 UEC’s. The officer then walked up to the kiosk and punched in the security code to receive the flight information from the ship’s computer. Bell was standing a few feet behind him patiently waiting.

“Now don’t get any funny ideas with that info, or its my ass in a sling. Anyway, say’s here it’s registered to a Deckard Knyghte, miss.” He replied.

Bell’s brow raised in realization and partial excitement as a flush of memories refreshed her mind. She somewhat smiled at the prospect of catching up with a longtime friend and mentor. She’d been so busy making a name for herself the past few years, not a lot of time was left for socializing. The question now was his current whereabouts.

“Did you see which direction he was headed?” she asked.

“I believe he went off in that direction.” pointed the officer.

Bell thanked the officer and started walking, but was held fast by a hand placed on her upper left arm.

“Promise me that you won't sell this info to anyone?” the officer asked sharply yet politely.

“Relax, this one is a dear friend and mentor of mine. I just want to catch up with him.

You have my word that what you have shared with me will not be used the wrong way, okay?”

Bell gently peeling off the officers hand from her upper left arm.

The officer gave her a slight hard stare to suss out her reasoning and relaxed nodding.

“Okay, well, you have a pleasant day then.” the officer concluded.

“Thanks, I’ll try.” Bell smirked.

She returned her purposed pace on past duty free stores and other shops scanning for Deckard’s face. She made a mental note to maybe pick up a gift for Ursula.

Bell finally walked up to the entrance of the Arccorp bar with a slightly more excited demeanor due to her remembering Deckard’s preference in places and stepped down into the establishment. As soon as the door slid open, a wave of cigarette smoke hit her like a Bengal class hull plate. She desperately tried to calm her protesting lungs and stifle tears of irritation, but gave into fits of coughing laced with Russian curses. The attention turned heads and hushed jeers and chuckles in her direction.

One, however, did not. His head was hidden under a wide brimmed leather hat and both hands occupied with a scotch and a cigar. He gave a sideways glance under the shade of his hat to the source of the noise. An amused huff followed after a few seconds of examining the patron in bronchial distress.

“Bellisaria Romanov, or should I say, the Marxist. How come you aren’t wearing any red?” Deckard remarked aloud with a smirk.

Bell looked up to Deckard and gave an amused huff.

“Really? I thought the hair gave it away.” She said with a smile.

Her witty defense awarded her a slight smile from him. Bell seated herself next to him. Soon after, the barkeep walked over to Bell to offer a cocktail menu. Bell reviewed the contents of the menu, she slightly furrowed her brow. Deckard doffed his wide brimmed hat and placed it on the countertop.

“Got anything that doesn’t have alcohol with it?” she inquired.

The barkeep cocked an eyebrow at her in surprise. He reached for another drink menu to show to her. Deckard gave a sideways glance at Bell. She caught the look of his face and rolled her eyes. She knew the choice she was making. Others want to relax in a... inebriated fashion, and she understood that. It was just an avenue that she didn’t really feel comfortable going down.

“I’ll just order water,” Bell sounding defeated.

“Sorry, Stan. This one’s still got her training wheels on.” Deckard resigned, shrugging. While the drink was served to Bell, Deckard took the last pull of his scotch and stared at it. Bell noticed the musing and chimed, “Hey, you want another one?”

“Nah, that’s okay. I actually have a job comin’ up for me pretty soon. It’ll score me a pretty penny, so there’s nothin’ ta worry about. Besides, I don’t have the dough.” Deckard padding his jacket.

“Alright then.”

“So, how’s work on your end?”

“Hunting for terrible people has its moments. I actually just got out of a job ... spun out of control though. As a result, I am looking for some gainful employment.”

Deckard looked at Bell. He could tell that the vagueness hid the story.

Bell's eyes trailed off looking over advertisement signs and parts of old transport ships held up in decoration. Deckard decided to be tactful just to move on from the rut in the conversation.

"You okay, Bell?" Deckard asked. "You don't look too happy." He continued.

"This is Russian elation," Bell said. "You should see me when I'm miserable." She said flatly.

Deckard made a noise in his throat that might have been a laugh.

"I bet it's a story for another time then."

"Yes, definitely for another time."

Bell looked down at the water glass she ordered. Slight worry worked itself onto her face due to thinking about her failure on her last job. How she was deceived and used. Deckard broke her musing by nudging her shoulder.

"So how's your ship doing?" he asked.

"Oh, the Armistice? She's doing great! I just had to replace some components in the K&W mass driver cannon. The magnetic coils got fried from too much use." She explained exuberantly.

"Hmmp. Not exactly parts that you could pick up at a second hand store. I guess that's what to expect since you treat your ship like a game show flo pet." Deckard remarked sarcastically.

"Well at least she gets the job done with style and finesse; unlike that crumpled beer can you drive that's parked out there." As she folded her arms and flared her nostrils.

"Hey! Those scrapes are something to be proud of." squinting his right eye in defense.

“Yeah, yeah. I get it. Being a survivor and all.” She jeered dismissively waving away his defense.

“Well at least I don’t look like a trussed up Russian doll with all those designer clothes.” He pointed with a smirk.

“Argh! My clothes are fine! I’m just wearing a blouse. There’s nothing wrong with that. You on the other hand have an addiction to hand me downs.”

“Tch, whatever.” Deckard retorted with an annoyed frown. He took his mobiglas out of his jacket and noted the time for his meeting.

“Got somewhere to go?”

“In a bit. Apparently, MS is getting back on the saddle again.” Deckard stated.

“Oh? I didn’t know that.” Bell expressing genuine naiveté.

Bell fished for her mobiglas out of her pocket and scrolled through her recent mail. Bell starred at the fifteen unread messages all from Ursula. Bell covered her face with her palm.

“Apparently I do now...” she mused again, looking between her fingers.

Another amused huff followed from both of them.

“Annoying isn’t it? How much Ursula sends to her ‘ducklings’.” Deckard quipped.

“You know, I didn’t want to say anything. But, I at least agree with you on that one.” She giggled.

“Shall we get moving?” she asked backing away from the bar stool.

“I think that’d be best” he replied sliding of and placed his wide brim hat.

“Thanks for the scotch Stan!” Deckard waved as he walked out with Bell following behind hands in her pockets as they strolled out of the bar.

Lexicon:

UEC- United Empire Credit.

MS- Midnight Squadron (Private Military Corporation)

VTOL- Vertical Take Off & Landing

Author's note: Hey there reader! I hope you had a wonderful time reading this piece as much as I had fun writing it! I want to definitely point out something, however. When characters listen to music in the story, it is in fact music from this reality. Without further ado, enjoy!