

Father/Daughter

After departing from Jet Set, she glides over the ocean and eventually lands in one of the designated spots.

She leaves her vessel behind and, having shifted her appearance to be more suitable for her environment, she starts walking towards the all-too-familiar little beach house she's come to love so much. She breathes in, the warm humid air and scent of the sea filling her lungs.

Her now pale blonde hair is done up in her signature braid crown with small floral embellishments. She wears a striped white and green shirt tied in front with sage-colored jean Shorts.

Unlike with her more unique forms, no one really takes notice of her as she walks along the boardwalk, gazing out across the horizon. She decides to stop in a few of the little shops, purchasing an assortment of items; most of them for him and a few for her.

“Some things you can't find anywhere else.”

After she's finished shopping, she finally arrives at the beach house, bags in hand. Her now blue eyes light up seeing all of the flowers she made spread around the house in full bloom, waving in the sweet-smelling breeze. She catches sight of him out on the terrace, reading a book, surrounded by pink flowers. She waves at him, wading through the shallow, crystal-clear water to reach him.

Hearing the subtle changes in the rhythm of the water, he looks up from his book and leans over to look at Juno. A tired smile crosses his face.

“I was beginning to think you'd forgotten about me.”

“I could never.”

Smiling, she climbs up to meet him. When she steps onto the terrace, she sets her bags on the floor near the glass door. He stands and immediately hugs her, holding onto her for support.

“You look nice today, Juno. I can't remember the last time I saw you with blonde hair. And blue eyes as well.”

“I thought it was befitting. Would you prefer I revert back?”

“No need. I'll always know it's you. What brings you out here? Last I heard you had started a new career of sorts. Jet Set Agency, am I correct?”

“Yes, that's right. Before we talk business, why don't I make us some tea?”

“I'd like that.”

As Juno goes back inside the house, he looks down at the bags next to the door, trying to glimpse what's inside. His vision isn't as great as it used to be, even with his glasses.

“Stopped at the boardwalk shops on the way here again, did you now?”

“Yes, I did. I picked up a few things for you.”

“I appreciate it. Did you—”

She returns a moment later with two cups, one for him and one for herself. A faint steam rises from both of them.

“Yes. Earl Grey; your favorite.”

He reaches out both hands to collect the mug from her. Somehow they still tremble, even all this time later.

“Thank you.”

The two of them sit together on the terrace, breathing in the various sweet smells around them and taking light sips of their tea. The light of the sun reflects in their eyes as they gaze

longingly at the meeting place of sea and sky.

“What are you reading?”

“Ah, just a novel an old friend of mine gave me as a gift several years ago. Maybe you've heard of it? Here. Take a look.”

She carefully lifts the book out of his hands and, making sure to keep his current page, looks at the cover. “Slaughterhouse-Five” is emblazoned on the cover.

She remembers this one. Her blue eyes shift back to her natural purple scanning over the cover for a minute.

“Why are you reading this?”

“Sometimes, I reflect on the past too much. Reading novels like these—which really are quite brilliant—and then looking at our galaxy now... I suppose realizing the profound changes that have occurred since then bring me a sense of comfort. It's a bit hard to explain. Forgive me.”

She shakes her head and gently sets the book back in his lap again.

“No. I understand perfectly.”

“...is that why you came back?”

She hesitates. And moments later, she nods.

“I started work at the Jet Set Agency to try and make up for everything I did before. Not to escape my past, but to recover from it.”

She pauses.

“...but I lied to her.”

“Who?”

“Nova. She's the boss. Or leader, or... whatever you want to call her. She... recruited me. She asked me a strange question, the day we met.”

“And what was that?”

“She asked if I had a ‘catch.’ Or I suppose it was Nightshade who asked first.”

She pauses again.

“...What else could I have said?”

“I don't blame you. If that's what you think. You lost a lot of people. And a lot of power too. I wouldn't have elaborated on anything either. I hate to say it, but you are still broken, Juno. As am I. I suspect we both will be for the rest of our lives.”

He looks at her and smiles.

“...but that doesn't mean we can never heal.”

He gently takes Juno's hand in his as he speaks.

“I'm guessing you were overwhelmed there.”

She wraps her fingers around his and nods.

“It's okay to be. I have many hopes for you, Juno. Now that we are here, forever separated from that nightmarish life. I want you to remember how to love others. I want you to trust people again. And most of all, I want to see you happy. Or at least, as happy as you can be given the circumstances. I know I haven't exactly been the best role model in your life. I have tried, Juno. I really have tried to be a better person, and...”

He looks away again and swallows down the lump in his throat.

“...a better father to you.”

As he says this, she looks directly at him. He has changed so much in the past several

years. His pale platinum blonde hair is a bit shorter and messier now and has taken on a more silver color. His scruff is lighter too. His face is etched with dozens of little lines. The shiny nose ring he once wore is gone. What she notices the most though are his eyes. His faded green eyes are misty with emotion. One could easily note the lack of proper sleep by the dark circles under his eyes too. When did he become so... weary?

He returns her gaze and continues.

“I don't say this often enough, but... I love you, Juno. And I am sorry for everything. I never should have put you in harm's way, even with everything humanity faced.”

“...is that truly what you've thought all these years?”

“Hm?”

“...I don't resent you. I never have. I wanted to protect you. I wanted to protect everyone from... *Her*. I did what I did to myself for that reason alone. I had to save humanity, even if I did not live to see their relief. You could not have persuaded me to stray from my mission.”

“Maybe. But I could have done more to support you and rescue—”

She winces.

“...I-I'm sorry. I won't mention anything more. Maybe it's best if we finish dwelling on the past for today.”

He places a hand on her back and runs it gently up and down between her shoulderblades.

“I have to go back soon. I cannot stay here long.”

“I know. Will you at least watch the sunset with me again? Just spend one night here?”

“Of course.”

He finishes his tea. Juno does the same. When she takes the mugs inside to wash them, he

looks down at his body. Still broken, even with all of the medical advancements. He's sure he could easily restore his body to working condition. Not that he desperately needs it. He's not helpless anymore. He puts a bookmark in his book and sets it on the little table next to him. Somehow, he likes being retired.

When she reemerges, the sun is beginning to sink under the border between sea and sky. She sits beside her father and, once more taking his hand in hers, watches the sunset. She quietly hums a song that her mother sang to her on her homeworld. How strange, music, the way a simple melody can dredge up so many memories. And create new ones too.

When night finally claims the sky, Juno helps her father to bed. He's managed just fine without her, but he appreciates her presence. He's longed for true company for a while now. She carefully covers his body with the blankets and closes the windows and curtains so that it's nice and dark in the house. Juno knows she is welcome here anytime. After all, the spare bed is hers. As she starts to fall asleep, she makes a brief plan. She'll make breakfast for them in the morning and then she'll return to Jet Set later in the afternoon, refreshed and renewed.