

This story is about a repairman on Mars.

[Repairman arc] [3] [9611]

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“Bullshit”

I said.

“Crap.”

I could feel my voice was getting louder.

“You’ve got to be kidding me!”

There was a mining laser turret in front of me. It was attached on a half truck. Standing before the god damned truck, I cast my eyes downward as if wanting to avoid looking at it.

“I fucking hate this job!” Having said so, I pulled off his thick yellow work gloves and threw them down to the sandy floor.

Panting heavily, a moment passed and I calmed down. I looked back at the turret and sighed deeply.

“Time to fix it again...”

How many times I had fixed that stupid thing, I couldn’t even recall. I would fix it and it would come back broken in a few days.

“The never-ending battle with sand”, repairmen on Mars said from time to time. The best way to combat sand was having less moving parts in a machine but, due to the nature of mining, that was a wishful thinking.

My name is Tommy and I am a repairman in Kamtaka, Mars.

Mars is a dull place, not because of the stupid sand but because of lack of entertainment. Mars does not have their own media and imports from other sources, usually Venus.

I was born and grew up on Mars, so I never felt and agreed with the general preconception that Mars was a dull place because of the never-ending sand storms. Those preconceptions came generally from Earthians who grew up with the greens.

Well, duh, I grew up with sand and I find Earth dull, not because of the greens but because of the Bau. Pretty much everyone on Mars loathed the Bau for a reason or another. I myself came from a long faded lineage of a Dietrich outsider. My father hated the Bau. My grandfather hated the Bau. And even my great grandfather hated'em. Therefore, naturally, I hated them. I just hated them.

All Martians hated the Bau.

If there was one positive aspect from hating the Bau, it was unity. Because we all hated the Bau, we were very well unified when it came to politics. In fact, we let the Dietrich deal with the politics and we lived our lives merrily. As long as no Bau was on Mars, we were all happy.

Now, about the turret, this stupid turret haunted me for too long.

Listen, I am a repairman and I do not mind repairing stuff, but I do fucking mind when I have to repair the same god damned stuff over, over, over, and over, over, and over.

And that mining turret was such a case. It all began when I was transferred to a mining division. It was an order from higher-up and I had no choice but to move. Since my wage was going up, I didn't really mind the move, either, at that time at least.

As soon as I was assigned to the new place, I was immediately asked to repair a mining laser turret which I did not mind at that time. It was a very old mining laser turret. It was so old that it was out of fashion. I mean, the turret was integrated into a half truck. I never saw such a design in my whole life. I was told that it was at least few hundred years old and I believed them.

Repairing it was relatively easy. It broke down because of two main reasons.

The first was that the whole thing was breaking down. Its main frames were coming loose and sands were getting inside, shorting out stuff.

Another was that parts weren't available and I had to improvise parts that weren't meant for it. Because parts weren't the perfect match, the machine broke down quickly. I repaired it over a night and away it went only to come back to my repair garage in few days.

All repairmen on Mars worked in their own garages at their leisure unless the work order required more than one repairman or what needed to be repaired was too big for a garage, in which case a community hanger was used.

When it came back to me for the second time, I didn't mind. My job was to repair stuff, so I didn't mind. It came back to me for the third time after few days again. I didn't mind.

When it came back to me for twenty second time, I started to mind. I asked my supervisor to retire the machine. I honestly thought the machine cost way more

than its value. But he told me that no machine would be retired unless it was deemed completely broken.

The thing was that nothing was “completely broken” in hands of repairmen like myself and the others. As long as we had necessary materials, we were capable of fixing almost everything and materials weren’t an issue since Mars government provided them for us, meaning I was rather forced to repair the damn turret.

I repaired it anyway and went to Sand Giant bar to soak my throat as well as cooling down my anger and frustration.

Sand Giant bar was the most famous bar on Mars. It was run by a famous ex-mercenary also or so I was told. It was the most popular mainly because it was one of the first bars to open and it was located on surface. While it was arguably easier to navigate underground, for some reason, Martians felt obligated to confront the sand storm from time to time especially when in mood for drinks.

Speaking of being easier to navigate underground, some people compare Martians with ants because almost all Martians live underground. We live underground not because we want to but we need to. The ever-present sand storm makes live on surface unnecessarily hard.

Kamtaka, the capital of Mars, is a small town on surface but it is huge underground. After all, the city is home to hundreds of millions. Kamtaka downtown is underground. Shops are underground. Everything is underground.

The structure of Kamtaka is that it has an empty shaft that acts as a central transit way and the city was built around the pillar. The central shaft is reserved for government and industry buildings. Other smaller shafts exist for residential purposes. All other shafts are connected to the central pillar and we get around with shuttles.

In that sense, Martians are indeed like ants although we certainly do not eat insect larvae for protein.

Time was 4AM but the bar was crowded when I entered. Failing to find an empty table or stool, I had to drink standing which some of people were doing already. Most of us favored beer over anything.

On Mars, night was much hotter than day, so cold beer was the sweetest thing anyone could ask for. Night was hotter because Mars sand would absorb heat from sun and release the heat at night. Reaching 80 Celsius at night was common but that was only surface temperature. I mean nobody would be outside if it was that hot. Once just above the surface, the temperature was 40 Celsius, give or take few degrees.

I noticed few familiar faces but didn't bother greeting them and they didn't bother greeting me. No point in social contacts unless necessary.

I was happily drinking my beer when I was notified that I had a call. I had replaced my left eye with an implant that acted as a computer screen. Some people did not like the idea of giving up perfectly healthy eyes for an implant but I wasn't one of those. The eye implant was really useful.

Anyway, I exited the bar because it was a call from my mom. As soon as I exited the bar, a blast of sand blew into my face and some got into my mouth.

"Argh." I spat few times to get the sand out. "Damn, sand."

A call from my mom meant it could get ugly. I touched a spot under my right ear to answer the call.

"Hey, mom," I answered her casually in a friendly manner. "What's up?"

It may have been 4AM, but she probably knew I'd up at this hour anyway. After all, my mom was nocturnal and so was I.

As soon as I answered her, she started to talk me into an arrange marriage. She told me that she had found a nice girl for me and wanted me to see her.

“Listen, mom, I told you. I am not interested. Why do you keep doing this?” My voice raised slightly.

She told me that I needed to carry on the family blood line. I wasn't going to argue with carrying on the blood line after all my mom was quite fond of our family tree being a part of the Dietrich outsider but with a very little chance of becoming an insider, I saw no point in her argument.

“Ma, listen.” But she would continue nagging at me. “Listen, ma-” She kept cutting me off. Sighing, I had no choice but to just listen to mother.

I was only 34 years old. There was no reason for me to settle down yet although ... my life wouldn't change much even if I did get married.

And then mom told me something I could hardly refuse.

“Say what, ma?”

She just told me that she was willing to buy me a shuttle.

“Are you serious?”

Of course, the catch was that I needed to meet this woman. She told me that I had to be serious in this meeting and she'd buy me a shuttle. I had been saving up for my own shuttle for tens of years. You can't mod rented shuttles and that irked me a lot.

“So, you are really serious.”

I had to consider her offer but then I had to meet this woman. I could reject her anyway and take the shuttle but I wasn't dealing with some stranger here. It was my mother. If I decided to agree to her deal, I had to be serious about the meeting as well.

"Can this wait though, ma? I need some time to think."

But mom wanted an answer right away so that she could go ahead with the meeting. I gave it a quick thought and decided to take this chance.

"Ok, fine, ma. You win. I will go along with your sinister plan."

The shuttle was too big to pass it. But it felt awkward. An arranged meeting with a woman, yes, it sounded and felt awkward. However, I heard my parents got married through an arranged marriage as well, so it wasn't all that surprising that she came up with the idea.

I came back to my garage shortly after because I no longer felt like drinking anymore. My heart was racing slightly and I felt awkward.

"I feel ... excited?" I talked to myself in the garage.

That itself was fine. The problem was I wasn't sure what I was excited about. Was it the shuttle or was it the arranged meeting? I wasn't sure and that troubled me.

I had a short list of work orders but could not get anything done. I just could not concentrate properly and then an emergency work order came in and it was the turret.

"What the fuck? I repaired it like hours ago!" I yelled at the guy who was bringing the truck into my garage.

"Sorry, pal, don't shoot the messenger," The guy told me. "I just deliver work orders." His shuttle carefully unloaded the truck into my garage with robot arms.

As soon as it was unloaded, I literally jumped onto it and kicked its mainframe panel off and sand poured out. The delivery dude saw it.

“Woah, that’s a lot of sand. No wonder it broke down,” He said.

I pointed at the sand and raised my voice. “This is why this machine needs to be retired. This thing has too many loose parts for sands can get in!”

He shrugged at me. “Why are you telling me that? Talk to your supervisor or something. I am outta here.”

I growled. Of course, I did talk to my supervisor. He said no. What else could I do?

To repair it would be easy but time consuming. First of all, I had to vacuum all sand out of the machine and had to check for any gaps where sands might get in. Seal the gaps and replace shorted out electronic circuits and boot it up again.

By time I was done, it was 9 AM. I sealed the gaps but I knew it wouldn’t work for so long. A mining laser created a lot of vibrations and for an old machine like this one, tightening gaps wouldn’t last long because its hull frames had deformed here and there and, if I had to fix the hull frames, they might as well retire the machine.

While I was taking a shower, mom called again.

“Ma, I am in a shower. Call you ba-”

But she cut me off anyway and told me to just listen. She had already set up everything and I was to meet this woman next day 1AM in her garage.

“Her garage? Is she an engineer also?”

Why they chose a garage to meet of all places was beyond me, but I wasn’t going to start another argument. Mom told me to dress up and behave before hanging up. I had no suit to dress up though. All I had was my oil soaked engineer uniforms and some casual clothes I used when I went out for drinks.

I told her that I had no decent suit and she told me she'd send a suit in few hours. It looked like she was really going for this scheme of hers.

Meanwhile, I was on a comm. with my supervisor about the ancient relic.

“Boss, the mining truck is just too old. I believe I did submit you a full report on its condition. The hull frames are coming loose and some frames have deformed which is why it cannot keep sand out and keeps breaking.”

He was just listening to me silently and I continued.

“I am not going to take it apart and repair the hull frames. We may not even have the parts and this is a job that will take days of not weeks. So, what do you say, boss? Please retire the machine.”

I waited for a response but there was none.

“Boss? You there?”

No response.

“Hello?”

He cut me off. The guy cut me off. Fuck, damn it.

I was really pissed how he cut me off but I had other matters to deal with. I had to finish up my work order and get ready to meet this girl tomorrow.

Thanks to the damned mining truck, I was able to get my mind off the arranged meeting and get back to work. After taking care of my current work order, I took a nap for few hours and woke up at 10PM. It was just few hours away.

A package was waiting for me in my garage and it was from mom. As I unpacked, my eyes filled with doubts.

“Please...”

The box had a suit, yes. I did ask for a suit.

“For the love of God...”

I should have known. I should have predicted this. I mean mom was a woman who would wear her pants backwards from time to time without even realizing it until pointed out.

There was a faded yellow suit in the box. Yellow, yes, oh yellow.

“Who in the world wears a yellow suit even?! Why does she even have this? Don’t tell me she purchased this?!” I exclaimed to myself in the garage. I was shell-shocked.

I called mom right away and she told me that it was my dad’s suit. Apparently, it was what he wore when he met mom for the first time. I hung up because I felt arguing with her would be pointless after all she was a woman that fell for a man in a yellow suit. What more needed to be said?

I rushed to downtown with my rented shuttle. I felt foolish for taking this meeting serious but a shuttle wasn’t cheap. It cost minimum a million credit and mom was willing to give one to me, so I felt obligated to do what was best.

Getting to downtown was easy. It was as easy as take my shuttle off my garage and fly through the nearest shaft tunnel to reach the main central transit way. I quickly went to a wardrobe store and got me a black suit that cost me 4,000c. It was my first time ever to have spent that much money on a suit.

I went home and tried it on; I didn’t look too bad in it. I looked at time and it was ticking at 10:11PM.

Looking at myself in a mirror, I started to talk to myself.

“Okay, okay, dude... You don’t want this but you want the shuttle. Let’s just get it over with.”

I cleared my throat and tried more masculine voice.

“Oh, hell, forget it.”

The sadder part was that I had to remind myself the difference between men and women. In my whole life, I saw women as just humans. Not once had I seen women as sexual mates.

At this point, I realized why I’ve been feeling weird. For the first time in 34 years of my life, I had to act a man instead of an engineer.

The truth was that I didn’t want a woman. I wanted my own shuttle that I could modify hell out of it and then go to Mars orbit and spend days in space.

It may be a small dream but that was my goal in my life. That was why I didn’t resist taking higher-wage career. Unfortunately though, I seemed to be stuck with an ancient relic that I had to repair constantly.

I took the suit off and laid on my bed. I looked around. My place was a one-room apartment that was void of life. Blend was probably a better way to put it. I spent most of time in my garage that I barely came home. I usually slept in my garage.

On my bed, I had a thought; my goal would eventually be achieved in my life time. It was only a matter of time. Then perhaps mom was right that I should try to continue the bloodline.

At the same time, I felt something was amiss. If dad pushed for this deal, I would understand. But why mom would? She had no connection to the Dietrich bloodline. In other words, she was a complete stranger when it came to the Dietrich clan. Why would she do this?

I can understand if her reason was just wanting to see grand kids, but she told me it was to continue the bloodline so that I or my child could become Dietrich insiders in the future. Again, she had nothing to do with the Dietrich. And being Dietrich insider was near impossible. That was because, in order to become an insider, I would have to marry an insider. The thing was that there were only two insiders left in the clan and I sure hell don't think Roon Dietrich would marry some no-name guy like myself. Another possible way was to achieve something great for the Dietrich clan.

Again, I am just a repairman. Unless I somehow repair Mars to be like Earth, I don't think I'd earn the right.

I had a lot of thoughts going through my mind and, when I saw time again, it was nearly 12AM. I got up, took a shower and put on the suit again. Checking myself in a mirror for the last time, I got into my shuttle and left my one-room apartment which was located deep underground. It was one of the cheapest apartments available that was on bottom of the shaft.

Reaching the garage was as easy as setting an auto pilot to an address mom gave me. I parked my shuttle in a lot and approached a door to the garage. Clearing my throat, I pressed on a comm. panel. And then an annoyed voice sounded from it.

“Who is it?!”

“I uh...” I wasn't sure how I should have introduced myself and my hesitation to speak fast enough annoyed her even more.

“Go away, I am busy!”

I cleared my throat again and tried again. “I am here to see you. I know I am a little early but I am supposed to meet you on 1AM.”

The comm. panel went silent for a while and then I heard a thud. “I, I will be there!”

It took her 5 minutes, but she did open the door. She was in an oil-soaked engineer uniform. She sighed deeply as she confronted me. “I can’t believe dad is making me go through this...” She mumbled and I heard it rather clearly. “I guess you are Tommy? Come on in.”

Inside of her garage was identical to mine. She was apparently working on something in there. I had a hunch that she did not want to do this, either.

“Your dad put you through this, huh,” I told her casually. It certainly made me feel at ease that we both had something in common. In fact, it turned out we had lots in common.

She was a repairman, just like me. And she wasn’t interested in a marriage, either, just like me. And she was also a distant Dietrich outsider. Her name was Sian, 36 years old.

She scratched her head in frustration in response. “I told him I wouldn’t go through this but apparently my dad and your mom went ahead anyway.”

I felt foolish for putting on a suit and all. I could have just come here in my engineer suit.

“Yeah, well, I feel for you. I guess... I will just leave.”

Indeed, there was nothing that needed to be done. Neither of us was interested.

“... Yeah, thanks,” She told me with a faint grin.

As I turned around to leave, I noticed the thing she was working on. I saw it when I entered here but I was too nervous to recognize what it was. Now that I was no

longer nervous, I was able to see what it was; it was a bare skeleton frame of a shuttle.

“You are constructing a shuttle?” I approached it and inspected it. It was well crafted. She must have been working on this for a long time. It was just basically a skeleton of a shuttle. There was no electronics yet on it.

“Ah, yes, it’d take me tens of years to purchase my own shuttle, so I figured I might as well try to make one on my own.” She laughed weakly and added, “Although I see why people purchase shuttles rather than trying to make it on their own. It has taken me two years just for that bare hull frame.”

I was deeply intrigued by the bare frame. I inspected it carefully and added my own opinions.

“By the look of it, you are constructing a shuttle with four passengers?”

“Yeah.”

Four passenger shuttle was the most common type. Therefore, some parts for it were very inexpensive, especially plating pieces were very affordable.

We began to discuss the shuttle. Sharing the same hobby and interest enabled to us talk a lot. We conversed for hours. I lost track of time until I realized I had a call waiting for me. It was 6AM.

“Oh, shoot, look at the time. I’ve got to go.”

“Oh, yeah, I’ve got a work order to fulfill also...”

It came out casually from me. “Alright, talk to you later.” And after having said so, I left her garage and got into my shuttle. It was then I realized I didn’t end the relationship. Sighing, I answered mom’s call while I set the shuttle on an autopilot to home to get changed.

“Hey, mom. Yes, I met her.”

She wasted no time and asked me how she was.

“Not too bad, I guess.”

She wasn't bad looking. Granted, she was covered in sweat and oil when I got there, but that's the life of being a repairman. She was in shape and we shared a lot in common. I felt we could be friends. Anything more than that, I wasn't sure.

But then mom wasn't interested in all that crap as she pushed on for an answer whether I wanted to marry her or not.

“Oh, for fuck's sake, mom. I just met the girl for the first time. How can you expect me to give you that answer right away?”

She simply wanted a grandchild, or a grandson to be more precise. Or so she claimed. Who knows what evil things were going through her mind.

“Listen, ma, I gotta go to work. Talk to you later.”

Of course, she didn't listen to me and continued to nag me.

“I said, see you later, ma!” And I hung up. She needed to give me a break really. Anyway, I had a job to do. I was certain that there would be a work order when I get to my garage. I got home, changed back to my engineer suit and rushed to my garage.

For past few days, my life was back to normal. I did my daily work orders and slept in my garage. But there was a slight change. I thought about making my own shuttle. I did spend some time doing some basic research and it would take enormous efforts to produce one shuttle all alone.

And, just as I expected, it came back. The damn mining truck came back again.

“Bullshit”

I said.

“Crap.”

I could feel my voice was getting louder.

“You’ve got to be kidding me! I fucking hate this job!” Having said so, I pulled off his thick yellow work gloves and threw them down to the sandy floor.

Panting heavily, a moment passed and I calmed down. I looked back at the turret and sighed deeply.

“Time to fix it again...”

And I repaired it again. How it broke down was obvious to me. As the mining laser was used, the gaps widened due to its rapid and heavy vibrations and sand got in. There was no simple way to permanently fix this. Regardless, I repaired it anyway and sent it back. I expected it to be back in few days if not few hours at the worst case.

Having finished today’s work order, I figured I’d visit Sian to check on how the shuttle was going. Mom would be jumping with joy if she found out that I was visiting her but my purpose of the visit wasn’t what she wanted anyway.

When I visited her garage, she was actually doing her work order.

“Hey, Tommy,” She casually greeted me.

She was tinkering with few mining drones that broke down during a scouting mission. She had four drones on a metal work table.

“Let me help you with that,” I told her.

“Whoa? No, you don’t really need to...”

But I helped her out anyway.

And that's how it all began. We eventually became good friends and decided to go ahead with the marriage. It wasn't because there was love between us but it was because the marriage would benefit each other and please our parents.

It was a platonic marriage. It wasn't sexless because we occasionally slept together but neither of us moved into another's place and we lived our own lives. But the marriage did solve two issues for me.

The first was that we decided to work on the shuttle together. Thus, I no longer had to save up to buy a shuttle. The second was that I purchased the problematic mining truck with my own money I saved up and then I retired the damn truck and recycled its parts for the shuttle. The joy when I purchased the fucking truck was so grand that I had tears in my mind.

Damned truck 23 – 1 me. You know, I got to score one back at least. That has to count for something. Err..., whatever.

Even with the marriage, one problem persisted; my mom started to demand children. Yes, children, not a child but children. And it seemed Sian was being pressured by her father as well.

Children will eventually arrive, I suppose. And it wouldn't be so bad to take them to space for the view, either.

Hmm, perhaps, I have a new goal now.

Fin