

There is No Sun In Eldeaux

“You cannot find it
Lost in the starlight,
Gone of Jupiter Hill
You must know,
There is No Sun in Eldeaux”
- Elizabeth Eloi

Chapter 1

The ticking of the clock drove James near insane. It was an old thing, a relic of his father's father. It was kept well but the strain of time was obvious on it. The glass cover was clouded, the wood cracked, and the hands crooked. James should've learned to drown it out by now, and for the most part he did, it only ever disturbed James when it pierced his thoughts. And disturbing James in his time of contemplation was never a perfect thing.

The man had a lot on his mind as he leaned back and sighed. From the table a cigarette called to him and so he answered with a toke. A puff of smoke joined the hazy, dimly lit room as he clutched his cigarette tightly before resigning to put it out. He had seven minutes before he had to go to work.

He was a musician, a trumpeter and member of the Nova Quintet. Something he also inherited from his father and his father's father. James looked around his terre with a slight frown. His trumpet was tucked away neatly on a shelf, the only thing neat about his house. The rest was cluttered and ashy. The building proper wasn't looking well either. The terre he lived in was splintering and rusting.

Minutes passed without James moving, his breath slow and non-existent. Then the clock came back to pierce his thoughts just when it was time to go.

He got up, checked his dress in the mirror and went on his way. He was a well put together man. His skin was darker and smooth, just masking signs of bad health. He was tall, built up, but without much fat on him. He didn't have much of an appetite, smoking helped with that, but the man did spend most of his time at a speakeasy. Still, he was thin. He wore a simple black suit for it looked nice on him, but he just needed to look nice *enough*, anything more would be too much. Both for him and his audience.

James got into his Auto and drove it through the Eldeaux Expressway, the route that came with quite a nice view of the city it was named after. Once one of the most proud and exciting places you could find, Eldeaux, or the Legacy City as it used to be called, was dying. Its people grew poor and the politicians corrupt. The old and new money died out. James could only remember a glimpse of when the city was as golden as it was said to be. Most of his early memories, however, came from the early decline.

The expressway was tall and cut above through some of the more dense parts of the city. At a certain point the city became too big for itself and forced some odd city planning. James found himself driving near two rows of highrise apartments. The type that used to be idolized. The type that people once longed to live in, that reflected status, success, and wealth. But these buildings next to James reflected the decay of the city.

James' exit, Argent Avenue, was short after. He took it to the Mercury Club. It was where he performed. The Mercury Club had been around for years. It was on an oddly shaped property, nestled in between bodegas and apartments, but its location brought popularity.

James got out of this Auto and walked to the entrance of the speakeasy, already smelling the smoke and scotch inside. As he opened the heavy doors in front of him, he was greeted by a man named Samuel.

"James." Samuel nodded with a slight uptick in his voice. His enthusiasm, as always, was quelled.

In turn, James responded softly, saying, "It's nice to see you." James' eyes danced around for a second, looking past Samuel and into the velvet colored interior of the Mercury Club. "Hey, have you seen Amelie?" he asked. He could not seem to find the woman who was so often easy to spot.

"She's not here yet. I'm not even sure if she's coming, but Marcel is here. He actually wanted to speak to you."

"If she is, tell her to find me. I'll talk with Marcel."

With that, James made his way to the bar. Marcel would likely be at one of the reserved tables, but James figured he could wait. He got himself a cigar and gazed around the speakeasy. The Mercury Club feigned elegance. The velvet furniture and art deco fixings called back to the regal aspects of the Legacy City. Yet it wasn't nice. For some, it was nostalgic but for most it seemed like an imitation. Yet there was no issue with that. When you can't afford anything more, cheapness is acceptable. And to the frequenters of the Mercury Club, the aesthetic was comforting, as were the people. That's what the Mercury Club was about -- comfort.

With his cigar, James finally went to approach Marcel. At a cursory glance you could tell Marcel lacked physical grace. He was shorter and scruffier with an uneven, reddish beard and pockmarks. Yet grace was unnecessary to him. He was not a socialite, he was not a dancer. He was an orchestrator.

"James!" Marcel cheered, his voice with an Olu flair that elongated the 'a' sound. "Glad to see you, friend. I have news. And an offer that goes along with it. Jenny Darwin is inviting us washers to a gala of something. They want a local performer."

"Hold. What does a politician, especially Miss Darwin, want to do with us here in the wash? Our support means nothing. I know what she preaches but she doesn't mean a lick of it."

"James, that might be so, but the money in it's good. I know you need it. What else might you do, turn to bootlegging like your Pop? Think about it. Recognition too. You and the Quintet shouldn't be defined by the Mercury Club."

"That's not fair Marcel"

"Nah you listen to me. I'm not looking to start an argument here but I know what's going on. You do too. Yeah she thinks she's above us. Hell in every regard she is. But you need to use her."

"You want me to go perform on Jupiter Hill, for the sake of Jenny Darwin, in order to support the washers? I'm not biting that."

"Doesn't matter. It pays well. You're going. How else are you gonna find a way to keep afloat? You really want to become Luis and bootleg? What happens to Elise then?"

James' hand shook. Marcel's mentions of his father always frustrated him. His points were never fair, but they were valid. They kept him on track.

"I know you're a better man than him", Marcel said, sensing his anger. "This isn't to upset you. I know you have a lot going on. But swallow your pride. You aren't a savior."

James let out his breath, a momentary chuckle coming with it. "I suppose you're right. What are you thinking? She has pockets. A few hundred Centenaries?"

"More".

That response elicited James' first smile of the day. "You talk to the quintet about this yet?" He asked as he stood up.

"Little bit. You already know it's up to you. They aren't hurting as bad as you".

"You can be good to me, Marcel. Send me the details but I'm going to find Willie. Got a few things about tonight's performance to work out.

James worked his way out of the booth and went backstage. Willie was there, sitting down and slapping his double bass. At that moment, he was alone with his music. Willie looked young, thin, and a little out of place.

His family immigrated to Eldeaux a generation ago from Gair. His parents took to the new culture quickly, as was easy in those days. Yet Willie did not grow up in the same Eldeaux his family enjoyed. Music served to him as a reminder of what his family sought and what might be once more.

James moved past Willie and collected a book from a desk drawer. *Sweetly, Elizabeth* it was titled. It was a collection of Jazz Standards with some accompanying poems and lyrics to be set over the instrumental.

James sat down by Willie and showed him the cover. It was Elizabeth Eloi lounging in front of a blue background. In stylized, golden ink was the title *Sweetly, Elizabeth*. "I can see why this got you into Jazz", James said. "Meaningful. When she was shot I think that's when the last light in Eldeaux went out. She did a lot of good. Could have done more. Rose from the Wash back when that was still possible. Now our champions are Jenny Darwin."

"Marcel talked to you, didn't he?" Willie stopped with his bass.

"It won't hurt anything but pride. So I might as well."

"Hey look, I still got some of my folk's dough so I was thinking you could take a bigger cut. No pity here. Just fair."

"My share should be enough. Miss Jupiter Hill has pockets and I know you don't like taking your folk's money. We have a show tonight, we'll focus on that then see what to do. Probably need to fix myself up a new suit too."

"Ah, you look fine, James. Plus there's a lot of washer's who'll be there. Dressing to impress has a different meaning for us."

Willie's final thoughts were met with a moment of silence. It was broken when the backstage door opened. Amelie walked from it. Willie stood up and nodded at her, James removed his hat, and in turn she smiled.

"How are you?" James asked, standing from his stool and setting *Sweetly Elizabeth* upon it.

"The day's been treating me well" she responded. "And I'd ask you the same but I'm worried the answer would be the same as the past weeks."

"Well hey now, it isn't as if my complaints aren't valid."

"Just because they are does not mean I like hearing them, James. You could have much more if you were to reach for it."

"Hard to reach for much when you're hog tied and thrown into a back alley."

"Maybe so. But you know we are here to undo your binds," she said without humor. Amelie had a way of speaking rather formally. It came out in her tone too. She was well traveled and well educated in her youth and as such she spoke in a slightly dramatic fashion. "Are you prepared for the show? Samuel told me he is expecting a great one. I'd be wary to disappoint"

"Willie and I were just getting warmed up. Howard, Roy, Frank, they should be here soon too. Showtimes in what, two hours?"

"Two hours, yeah," Willie spoke up. "Frank radioed in like 30 minutes ago that he was leaving. Should be here any minute now."

"Well then. Marcel told me you accepted the gig. I was hoping so. It did hinge on you, after all. I'll give you the details later and leave you to prepare. Enjoy." With that, Amelie exited the backstage area.

"She's a little odd, ain't she?" Willie said.

"There's worse ways to be. Good manager though, we both know that. Has upper class connections while still being faithful to the wash. It makes for good business at least," James said. He respected her even if her air could be much.

Willie went back to his bass while James read some poems in *Sweetly Elizabeth*. It inspired him. Put him in a mood to perform, to be expressive. The man's dream was to perform at the Wash Room. The speakeasy in which the term 'washer' came from and where Mrs. Elizabeth Eloi started her career. Yet it was every musician's dream and James never managed to fight his way into a gig.

He didn't mind too much, however. The Mercury Club was as fine a place as any. He knew it well and loved performing there. He did hope he would move on from it being one of his only options, but if that did happen he knew he would return.

After James finished reading the poem “The Train to Tears”, Frank arrived. He nodded at his two partners without a word and looked at himself in the Mirror. He adjusted his old, black tie and took a deep breath. He grabbed a stool and positioned himself next to the two. By now, both James and Willie were paying their attention to their bandmate who took another deep breath.

“You read the paper?” Frank asked after a moment. “I was around the Trigger Hop last night. Heard the gunfire. Heard people start to run out. Got in my auto quick, I tell ya.”

“Another shooting?” Willie asked. “Didn’t have time to grab a paper today. But that’s at least 15 shot this week, yeah? Regardless, Frank, you okay?”

“22 now according to the Paper. 4 people were shot last night alone. Two killed in an Auto Bending, two killed at Trigger Hop. But I’ll manage. Nothing I haven’t heard before, was just hoping to avoid it for a while.” Frank’s voice was deep and quiet as he spoke. He didn’t much like guns anymore.

“I hear you.” James placed a hand on Frank’s shoulder. “The symphony of gunfire is a terrible song.” He said, quoting the poet Nomar Domingues. “Just glad you’re okay. I didn’t pick up the paper either but from yesterday’s printing it seems like most homicides are up near Memorial Street. Surprised the city isn’t doing more to protect their rich darlings.”

“There’s talk of curfews at least. I doubt they’ll go into effect but they’re doing something. More than they would for us. Either way, the fat cats know they aren’t invincible anymore. Whether that’s good or bad we’ll see. But no matter what, they themselves didn’t do anything. They, themselves, didn’t deserve death. Just because you contribute to a society does not mean you’re at fault. ‘Least that’s how I see it.”

That was the common sentiment throughout Eldeaux. Even in the wash, folk didn’t blame the rich for being rich. They didn’t blame most of them, at least. They blamed the type who used their wealth to hurt and exploit. They hated the Jupiter Hill type. They hated Elijah Greenwood.

Elijah H. Greenwood turned his family’s wealth into an auto empire. It was not a noble process, however. The working conditions in those factories were nothing short of abhorrent. And the retaliations for striking were somehow worse. Eventually he resigned and his nephew Ralph took up the mantle. But Elijah lived on Jupiter Hill. And all his neighbors were as terrible and corrupt as him.

The member of the quintet with the most license to hate the man was Roy. He once worked at a Greenwood manufacturing plant and had a deep hatred for the company. He was the next to arrive. He entered backstage and exclaimed, “Guess we’re performing for Jenny Fuckin’ Darwin. Ain’t we?” Yet he wasn’t angry. More Amused.

“Apparently!” James seemed a little more energized by the drummer’s presence and shook his head.

“She really wants us? How the hell did she even hear about us?”

“I heard she goes east of the Expressway sometimes. Doubt she’s heard us play, but maybe she talked to some folk,” Willie added.

“You know, I can’t wait to go there. You know who I bet will be there? Ralphie boy! I heard from some boys down at the plant that Ms. Darwin herself was down there. Something’s going on.” This got a response from all but James

“Hold on, hold on” Frank spoke up. “Ms. Darwin’s involved with the Greenwoods? What, she getting campaign funds from them?”

“Oh, I bet she is!” Willie answered. “Probably going to say she was gathering support from the workers. Trying to understand their needs. Nah, nah, we know exactly why she was there!”

While the group was talking, the door opened for their final member: Howard. He was a bigger man but one who always looked nice. He was hard to not notice, so as soon as he entered

Willie cried out to him. “Howie! Roy heard that Ms. Darwin was at the Greenwood’s Plant. Ms. Darwin! Now that’s something, ain’t it? What was that about her being a champion of the people?”

Howard’s face was already occupied by a slight grin that grew bigger as Willie went on. When he stopped, Howard busted out laughing. “Oh god! Well, we don’t know why she was there,” he paused to laugh, “maybe Ms. Darwin needed some car repair [replace with better joke]!”

“Maybe, but I heard she was schmoozing with Ralph!” Roy said, his smile twisting. “I swear, she better not have invited him to her little event. I might get kicked out before we have time to perform!”

“Gentleman!” James raised his voice. “We’re getting paid. Getting paid good money. Where would that money come from if it wasn’t for Jenny whoring herself out?”