

Jungleland by M.T. Bass

EXCERPT

I slid back the canopy. The woman wriggled out from around the mechanic's blocking move and headed towards me.

Sparks shrugged his shoulders at my hand motion query. He folded his arms over his chest to watch the show.

The woman didn't even walk around the wing but stooped to cut underneath to take a more direct line towards me. She disappeared under the leading edge and appeared at the aileron, then followed the trailing edge back to the fuselage, looking for the handhold to get herself up on the wing.

I turned in the cockpit and watched her step up onto the wing and climb the incline up to me. I started to slide myself up to get out, getting my butt up on the back of the seat, but she got to me and blocked my way out.

"Just who do you think you are, mister?" she barked with the authoritative voice of a medical professional at the very top of the heap. I had heard that tone in my brother's voice more than a few times.

I just pulled off my helmet but left my mirrored Ray-Bans on. From safely behind the lenses, I carefully surveyed her gorgeously animated face—even in anger, her lips wrinkled in a bit of a smile as if this was half-show, half-genuine indignation. Her red hair was neatly pulled back in a ponytail, showing a freckled, fair complexion that had not yet been weathered and tanned by the sun, so she was new in country. Most of us outsiders knew each other well, but I didn't recognize who this was. I had heard about a new doctor at the mission, though never imagined it might have been female.

"You're not from around here, are you?" I asked.

"What?"

"I mean originally—not born and raised."

She scowled and punched my arm with her fist...hard.

"Ow!" I guessed she had at least one brother.

"Was that you—of course it was. Who else would it have been?"

I unscrewed the plugs from my ears, and the volume level on her voice got louder. Over her shoulder, I saw Sparks shake his head and smile.

"Listen, mister—"

"Whoa, whoa, whoa there," I finally interrupted, holding up my hand, palm out like a cop stopping traffic.

She stopped talking and stared hard at me. She punched my arm again...