

Superstitions

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For katemonkey. Lilah Morgan, Susan Ivanova and a prophecy. Not that it really matters, but this is set in the same universe as *Out of the Darkness* and *The King of Downbelow*.

Featured fandoms: Angel the Series, Babylon 5

Featured pairings: Ivanova/Lilah

A.S.S Story codes: ff

Story rating: PG

Space was, as usual, dark. Well, mostly dark. There were millions upon millions of little bright points, and the occasional spacecraft passing within visual range of Command and Control with their external floodlights turned on.

Neither of those were enough to lighten Susan Ivanova's mood. Four years on this station, and she still couldn't deal with the constant darkness. She did her best not to show it, but most of the C&C staff had long since learned not to bother her in the mornings. Or when she'd had a bad day. Which, given the wars and all, was most days.

Sometimes, Susan suspected she wasn't the best of commanding officers.

The comm system blirped at her. For a few moments, she considered not answering. She was sitting comfortably leaned back in the chair by her console, staring into space, and answering the call would almost certainly force her to stop doing at least one of those things. But, sense of duty won the battle with laziness just as it always did, and she hit the "Accept" button with the heel of her shoe.

"Ivanova here," she said. "Please don't tell me it's another disaster."

"No, ma'am," Lou Welch's voice said. "I'm down at immigration, and there's someone here who insists that she wants to see you personally as soon as possible."

"Who is she?"

"Nobody I know, ma'am," Lou said. "A lawyer by the name of Lilah Morgan. From a company called Wolfram and Hart."

She tore her gaze from empty space and fixed it on the monitor with Lou's face on it.

"A *lawyer*?" she said. "And how is that *not* a disaster?"

Lou sighed. "Will you see her or should I throw her in the brig on general principles?"

"All right, all right," Susan said. "Tell her I'll meet her in the Zocalo when my shift is over."

"Yes, ma'am," he said. The monitor flipped back to the usual Babcom logo.

Lawyers, Susan thought. First thing in the morning, too. As omens went, it was probably better than a horde of Shadow warships shimmering into existence around the station.

But not by much.

Susan headed straight for the Zocalo after her shift was over. She didn't bother to stop by her quarters to change into something other than her uniform or let her hair out of its braid, partly because she didn't want to pander to the lawyer and partly because keeping it would make her easier to find. She sat down at the bar and ordered a coffee.

"Commander Ivanova?" someone said next to her. She looked up. The woman standing there was tall, thin and dark-haired. She was dressed in an expensive-looking business suit. Her face was somewhat angular, and she looked sharp in several senses of the word.

"That's me," Susan said. "I guess you're the lawyer."

The lawyer sat down on the stool next to Susan's. Somehow, she managed to look elegant while doing it.

"*The lawyer*," she quoted. "I'm afraid that's giving me a little too much credit. I'm just one lawyer of many."

She offered Susan her hand. "Lilah Morgan," she said. "Junior Partner at Wolfram and Hart."

Susan ignored her hand. "And what does Wolfram and Hart want with me?" she asked.

Lilah smiled at her. Susan's implied insult didn't seem to faze her in the slight-

est.

"You have something," she said, "that a client of ours wants to rent."

Susan stared at her. "Are you sure you have the right person?" she asked.

"Yes," Lilah said. "Susan Ivanova, daughter of Sofie, granddaughter of Irina. That's you, isn't it?"

Susan frowned. "Yes," she said. "But what...?"

"You know," Lilah interrupted, "I'm a bit worn out after the trip here. What do you say to discussing it over dinner tonight, so I get a chance to get a room and freshen up a little. Fresh Aire, at seven?"

Susan must have looked doubtful, because Lilah carried on.

"Come on," she said. "At worst, you get a free dinner. Expense account, you know. A break from the routine that's *not* a disaster."

She had a point.

"All right," Susan said. "Fresh Aire, at seven."

"Good," Lilah said. She got up from her barstool.

"Miss Morgan?" Susan said. Lilah stopped and looked at her.

"What do you get out of it?" Susan asked. "At worst?"

Lilah smiled. "Call me Lilah," she said, "Please. And at worst I get a trip to Babylon 5 and a dinner with an attractive woman."

She leaned forward and put her hand on top of Susan's.

"And maybe," she said. "Maybe I'll get lucky."

Susan stared after her as she walked away.

All afternoon, she was been unable to stop thinking about the lawyer and their dinner date. Which annoyed her, because she'd found the woman quite arrogant and generally unlikeable. So why the hell couldn't she stop trying to figure out how to make the best possible impression on her?

It certainly didn't help that her libido kept interrupting with messages like "Who cares what she said, did you *see* those *legs*?!"

In the end, she'd dug out a pair of painted-on tight black leather pants, a loose blouse so thin it was *almost* translucent and the highest-heeled pumps she owned. No underwear, since that'd be much too visible under the clothes. Looking at herself in the mirror, she considered taking a purse to keep a PPG in. Because if either John or Michael saw her like this, she'd have to shoot them or she'd *never* hear the end of it.

Out of petty malice, she made sure to arrive twenty minutes late.

When she got to the restaurant, the Maitre'd showed her to a table without even asking if she had a reservation. Of course he knew who she was, everyone on the station did, but it annoyed her that he knew who she was there to see. Her mood didn't improve much when she saw Lilah sitting at the best and most visible table the restaurant had, calmly sipping a cocktail and watching the view of the station's huge inner chamber.

Just as well she hadn't brought the PPG. She'd never have got away with shooting *all* the guests.

Lilah stood up when Susan approached the table.

"Commander Ivanova," she said. "I trust that whatever emergency delayed you has been taken care of?"

All of a sudden, Susan felt ashamed. "Yes," she said. "And please, if I am to call you Lilah you have to call me Susan."

"Susan," Lilah said, and she made the word sound like a caress. "Would you like a drink?"

Would she ever. Lilah had not only freshened up, she'd changed into an elegant dress made out of a fabric that looked opalescent black, if such a thing was pos-

sible. It ended halfway down her thighs, and it left her shoulders bare.

Here's voting for her getting every bit as lucky as she wants to, Susan's libido said with great emphasis. Woo-hoo.

"So," Susan said when they'd sat down and she'd ordered a Bloody Mary. "Have you been a lawyer long?"

"Oh yes," Lilah said. "Feels like centuries."

There was an odd flippancy to the way she said it. Susan got a strong feeling that further questions in that vein would not be very welcome. Before she could think of something else to say, a waiter appeared and they spent some time ordering their food.

"Business now or later?" Lilah said when the waiter had left.

"Might as well get it over with now," Susan said.

"My feelings exactly," Lilah said. "The basics of it is that a client of ours, who I'm not at liberty to name, is interested in renting your soul."

Susan blinked. "What?" she said.

"You know, you soul. Spirit thing that God breathed into Adam. You are still a somewhat practicing Jew, aren't you?"

"Well, yes, but..."

"Then you should know about souls, shouldn't you?"

"Yes," Susan said. "Of course I know what a soul is. But I never heard of anyone *renting* one before."

"Oh, it's very unusual, you're quite right there. Outright selling is much more common. But apparently they only need it for a short time, and they thought it might be easier to convince you to rent than to sell. More wine?"

Susan held out her glass in silence. This was nuts.

"How do I know they'll return it when they're done?" she asked. How do I know that it's gone while they have it? she thought. Is it a sin to rent out your soul? I don't remember there being anything in the Torah against it.

"It'll be in the contract, of course. The usual signed-in-blood sort of thing. They get your soul for twenty-four hours during the next Brakiri Day of the Dead. No more, no less."

She wondered if the lawyer was joking with her. But she had come all the way to Babylon 5 from Earth, which seemed much too expensive for even a very elaborate joke.

"Can I think about it?" she asked.

"Of course," Lilah said. "I hardly expect you to make up your mind right away. Take your time, dear."

For the rest of the meal, Lilah did most of the talking. She told the most fantastically entertaining stories, and with the most amazing variety. Susan enjoyed listening to her a lot, although after a while she started believing that Lilah wasn't being exactly truthful when she claimed that she'd experienced them all herself. There just wasn't room enough in one person's life for that many different things. But she didn't mind. She was having fun. She was eating good food and drinking good wine. She got to ogle a beautiful woman as much as she liked. She'd had *much* worse days.

"I've been sitting here watching your gardens," Lilah said when the meal was drawing towards its natural end. "Would it be possible to take a walk in them, do you think?"

"Yes, of course," Susan said. "I run this place, I can walk wherever I like."

Lilah paid the bill, and they made their way down to the hedge maze that was the closest garden to the Fresh Aire. Usually it wasn't Susan's favourite green place on the station, but right now its hidden corners seemed heavy with potential.

"Nice," Lilah said. "Reminds me a little of Versailles."

"I think that was on the architect's mind," Susan said. "But I couldn't tell you for sure. Ask anything about the station's armaments, though, and I'm your girl. As long as it's not classified. Which most of it is, so, really, I can't tell you anything about that either."

She was babbling. The combination of the lawyer's presence and all the wine she'd had with the dinner loosened her tongue. She hoped that Lilah didn't mind.

As if to answer her question, Lilah got up close behind her and put her arms around Susan's waist.

"Is this place as private as it looks?" she whispered, and the way her warm breath caressed Susan's ear made her knees go weak.

"Yes," she said. "Did you have anything in particular in mind?"

She reached behind and placed her hands on the backs of Lilah's thighs.

"Oh yes," Lilah said. "But I think we have some business to finish before we get... distracted."

"Um," Susan said. "Sure." That wasn't at all what she'd been hoping for.

"So, yes or no?"

"What do they want with my soul anyway?"

"Oh, just some silly old superstition," Lilah said. "We have a lot of clients like that. A prophecy about the descendant of a certain someone, or something like that. It all comes to nothing in the end."

She could feel Lilah's breasts push against her back, with her nipples as harder little points in the middle of them.

"You haven't said what they're offering to pay," she said.

She could *feel* Lilah's smile. As well as her teeth gently nibbling on her earlobe. Susan groaned.

"Well," Lilah breathed into her ear. "What do you want?"

Space was, as usual, dark. Susan sat in her chair, looking out at all the millions and millions of bright little points against the deep black background. She'd been a little late for her morning watch, and she'd arrived with her hair let out and a hickey on her neck. Which got nothing more than knowing nods behind her back, since the rumour about her date had spread through the station at roughly the speed of light.

"Dark, dark, dark," Lieutenant Corwin said. "Nothing but dark all the way from here to, well, everywhere else."

Ivanova turned to him and smiled, a smile that made him feel about half a foot tall.

"Yes," she said. "Lovely, isn't it?"