

The Delivery

The adrenaline rush of Everly's recent adventure had subsided and now she was face to face with the cutest pair of knitted baby shoes that she had ever seen. The seemingly innocent gift was actually a threat and if she were not already numb from the tree hanging, booming thunder, fiery lightning, and the ominous presence of Mandar, she would have surely panicked. She wondered how much Panda and Cal already knew but she was not intent on worrying, at least not now -- she was too tired for that. After placing the pretty baby booties on her bedside table, she curled up underneath the sheets and let herself drift away into a world of deep sleep.

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"Everly. . . Everly, wake up. It's almost noon." Pax gently shook her shoulder. She mumbled something and turned to face him with her eyes still closed.

"When did you find time to knit baby?" Pax asked after noticing them on her night stand. Everly's eyes immediately shot open. She turned her head and looked at the table. Sure enough, they were still there.

"I was hoping it was a dream" she said a bit disappointed.

"No, we were really in the middle of the forest hanging upside down from trees."

"No, no, not that. I mean the baby shoes. They're a gift from Panda. I found them last night waiting for me on the bed."

Pax was so shocked that it took him a while to speak.

"How does she know?" He thought a moment more before reassuring Everly by saying,

"Panda is nice. I don't think we need to worry."

"It's either time we leave or tell them who we really are."

"Leave and go where?" asked Pax.

"Exactly."

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Panda didn't notice Everly watching her while she skillfully prepared a rabbit for the evening dinner. As she glided the big, sharp knife over the rabbit, its fur slipped off effortlessly.

Everly almost lost the courage to approach her thinking, 'what if she freaks out. That's an awfully big knife'. She turned away but quickly changed her mind and turned back. Waiting was the worst. She didn't want the task looming over her head when she could do it now.

'Panda is nice' she whispered to herself.

"What's for dinner?" was her opening line.

Panda looked happy to see her. "Well good morning or should I say good afternoon." Panda joked. "Rabbit stew. How did you sleep?"

“I had a restful sleep. Thank you. And also thank you for the gift. The little shoes are lovely.”

“I’m glad you like them. When are you due?”

“How did you know?”

“Well, either you’re a bit fat around the middle or you’re carrying and you’re too athletic to be fat around the middle. I’m a nurse. I notice these things.”

“I’m not sure when I’m due. I think soon though. I’m having twins.”

“If you don’t know when you’re due then how do you know you’re having twins?”

“I’m not from around here, that’s a little hard to explain. Pax and I are from a planet called Bebokia and we’re here to escape our Empress who has become... corrupt.”

Panda was quiet for a second and concentrated on chopping meat for dinner. Everly wasn’t sure if she should better make a quick exit or not. She nervously stood where she was and waited patiently for an answer.

“A different plant you say?” Panda finally replied with a lot of sarcasm in her voice. She was clearly humored by the idea.

“You don’t believe me?” It never occurred to Everly that her story would sound so farfetched to an Earthian. She felt a bit silly for trying so hard to hide that fact in first place.

“I’ve heard a lot of strange stories in my time, but that one is unheard of.” Panda was doing her best to be polite.

“I can prove it.”

“How?”

“I’ll let you examine me. You did say that you’re a nurse by profession?”

“That’s right.” Panda took a moment to think things over. She really had nothing to lose, so why not humor the alien.

“All right.”

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The examination took place on the same kitchen table where Panda had made dinner. It was thoroughly disinfected and the whole kitchen now had that hospital smell. Everly was stripped down to her underwear and was waiting patiently for Panda to return. She sat on top of the table swinging her feet with her hands on her barely there tummy. She being examined by an Earthian was an odd situation but she had the utmost confidence that she could easily prove her Bebokian origin.

After what seemed like an eternity of waiting, Panda walked in the kitchen carrying a heavy, triangular, black suitcase. She placed it on a chair next to the table where Everly was sitting and ran her eyes across her new patient. Perfectly smooth, glowing human skin . . . but oddly so. But why was it odd? Panda, herself, did not know. It was a feeling in her gut and a little voice that whispered in her ear ‘something’s not right’. Being a woman of science, her head refused to believe in such a preposterous idea as aliens without solid evidence.

“You are certainly a vision” Panda said to Everly.

“I don’t understand.”

“I mean you are a beauty.”

“Oh, thank you.” Panda’s compliment somehow made Everly uncomfortable.

“I’m going to begin by listening to your heart. Don’t be alarmed, this tool will not hurt you.” Panda pulled out a long, tube-like instrument out of her bag. She inserted one end in her ear and the other end on Everly’s chest.

“It’s cold” responded Everly.

“It’ll soon warm up.” Panda listened to the rhythm and counted the number of beats.

“Very healthy heart.” She moved the instrument to Everly’s tummy and after listening in several different locations her only response was a wrinkled forehead.

“Everything Okay?” Everly asked a bit nervous.

“Sounds normal.”

When Panda moved the tool to Everly’s back, in order to listen to her lungs, she saw a design of very intricate, bluish, spots spread along her spine.

“Very lovely tattoos” Panda commented.

“You mean my age marks? They’re not tattoos. All Bebokians have them. Every year we get a new spot.”

Panda gently touched the marks with her fingers.

“I wish I could believe you.”

“Why can’t you believe me? You’ve been so nice to me and Pax, why would I lie to you?”

“I don’t know”. Without explaining herself, Panda started to undress. Everly started to say something but changed her mind. She was perplexed and uncomfortable but decided just to wait and see what Panda had in mind.

Soon, Panda was standing before her wearing nothing but her underwear. It wasn’t until she turned around that it became clear to Everly why she undressed.

“I got them when I was fifteen.” Panda said explaining herself.

“They’re beautiful” responded Everly to the pattern of bluish geometric shapes which went down Panda’s spine.

“When I was a girl it was the “in” thing to do.”

“These are tattoos?” asked Everly. They looked so much like her own spots that she could hardly believe they were not real.

“Yes, they are made of ink.”

Everly shook her head with understanding. Now it was profoundly clear why Panda could not believe her. The women stood looking past each other in thought. Everly was wondering how to prove that she really was from another planet while Panda wondered what to make of the situation.

Cal and Pax broke their gaze of deliberation by noisily walking into the kitchen with armfuls of firewood. Their eyes widened as they saw the two ladies half naked and, forgetting their manners, they stared with male curiosity.

Pax found Panda robust yet delicate. She was a small giant, compared to his Everly, with deep succulent curves and smooth long legs that seemed never ending. Her skin had an uninterrupted tan that made her look even more rugged and warrior-like which was an abrupt contrast to her soft brown eyes and gentle face.

Cal had never seen such a petite and delicate creature as Everly. She was like a beautiful flower with soft curves, flawless glowing skin and bashful turquoise eyes. Her legs were considerably shorter than that of his Panda but was gorgeously formed and provided sturdy support for her fairy-like body. Despite her angelic appearance, Cal picked up on an invisible

vibe which radiated from her. It was not exactly threatening, but notified him she was not the innocent that she appeared to be.

The two gentlemen, now realizing that they were being impolite, blushed with embarrassment and quickly walked out of the cabin with firewood still in hand. Once they were outside, they both awkwardly continued chopping wood and were extra careful to avoid eye contact with each other.

The women weren't in the slightest bit embarrassed. Their minds recovered from the evanescent distraction and were back in full thinking mode. Everly got dressed and was pacing about. Panda, once again fully clothed, repacked her medical tool bag and walked it to its place of storage. When she returned, she found Everly still pacing.

"How did you get here?" Panda asked. Everly was deep within her own mind but stopped.

"I'm sorry, did you something?"

"If you're from another planet, how did you get here?"

Everly took a moment to answer. 'Now why didn't I think of that', she thought to herself.

"No, I'm not going to tell you... but I will show you."

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The women hurried past Cal and Pax on their way out, not taking the time necessary to explain where they were going. A very large pile of firewood was piled up at the side of the cabin, but they continued to chop more. When they saw the ladies scurrying toward the forest, the natural force of inquisitiveness ended their awkward restriction on eye contact.

"The women are shastoik today" said Pax. He was looking directly at Cal and noticed for the first time a crack in his impenetrable icy wall. His usual cold eyes were softened and there was a hint of a smile on his lips.

"Yeah, shastoik" Cal answered with his signature monotone pitch.

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The women walked at a fast pace through the forest with Everly leading the way. She was anxious to prove to Panda that she was telling the truth. Half way to their point of destination, they met Mandar and Feng playing hide and seek. Everly was startled when Feng, out of nowhere, appeared before her. She was unaware that they were masters of disguise. She knew, however, that if Feng was standing before her, Mandar could not be far away. The animals ended their play and escorted the ladies to the clearing in the middle of the forest.

"We're here" said Everly. Panda was confused.

"There's nothing here" she said. Everly took the remote for her backback, pointed it in the direction of the shuttle and turned the cloaking device off. Panda was awed as the shuttle materialized before her. Mandar and Feng, alarmed by the sudden appearance of the space craft, went into defensive mode. They placed themselves in front of the women and growled at the strange object.

“Shhhh... everything’s fine” Panda said as she calmed Mandar and Feng by stroking their fur. Everly was impressed by their protective action but wouldn’t dare to pet them.

“Come on in” she said leading Panda inside the shuttle. “You’re more than welcome to look around.”

Everly sat down and relaxed. The shuttle reminded her of life back on Bebokia. The things she missed most about home were the mundane feelings of old habits, familiar places, and ordinary knowledge. The involuntary ignorance of being new to Earthian culture was draining.

Panda was fascinated by everything in the shuttle. She walked around with her hands behind her back, for fear of breaking something, with a look of total astonishment on her face. “Now I know what was so odd about you during your examination” she said to Everly.

“What was that?”

“Your skin is too perfect – no scars, no freckles, no moles or blemishes of any kind. That’s not human.”

“We scare, but only when a cut runs so deep that it goes completely underneath the skin. I’ve never thought about it, but it’s true. Other than our age spots, Bebokians have no freckles, moles, or blemishes.”

“I’m sorry that I didn’t believe you.”

“It’s done, the problem is solved, and everything is oovestic.”

Panda continued her tour of the shuttle. “So this thing can really fly?” she asked.

“Yes, it does”. Everly was amused by the question.

“What’s this blinking light do?” asked Panda pointed to something.

Everly couldn’t see it from where she was sitting so she had to leave her cozy seat to investigate. The transport box was half hidden behind a console.

“The blinking light means that I have a message.” She was excited to hear from home. She had been so distracted by past events that she had completely forgotten it. She opened the little door, retrieved and read the note. The smile on her face completely vanished.

“What’s the matter?” asked Panda. Everly handed her the note. Panda looked at the message and realized that she could not decipher the language.

“Sorry, I don’t understand Bebokian.”

“It says, Naja has contacted the high guards. Be careful.”

“Bad news?”

“Very bad news.” Everly was so upset that she felt physically sick. Then she felt a sudden pain that forced her hand to her tummy.”

“Oh fuke! You’re going into labor.” Panda said panicking. “I don’t have my medical bag.” She helped Everly back to her seat. “I’ll go back for my bag and you stay here.”

“I don’t think I’m going anywhere” Everly joked.

“Manda, Feng, stay with Everly” Panda commanded the animals before she ran off.

Everly wished that Panda had taken the wolves with her. She was nervous when Feng walked into the shuttle and started snooping around, but was afraid when Manda decided to join her. Another sudden contraction forced her to yell out in pain. To her surprise both animals walked over to her and brushed their fur on her hand. Manda then went to her backpack which was lying on the floor, opened it with his teeth, pulled out the water bottle and brought it to her. Everly was shocked. ‘Were these the same animals that chased her and Pax through the woods not so long ago’, she wondered. She took the water bottle and carefully stroked his fur.

“Thank you”.

The next thing they did completely amazed her. They danced in the middle of the shuttle by walking clockwise in a circle, then counter clockwise, bowed to each other and started all over again. It was like they were attempting to distract her from the pain. Their level of intelligence blew her away and the distraction worked. Panda was back with Cal, Pax, and her medical bag before she was missed. The men and wolves waited outside while Panda helped Everly give birth.

Pax immediately went into the shuttle when he heard a baby cry. Cal politely stood at the shuttle door trying not to see anything that he wasn’t supposed to.

“You have a beautiful baby girl” Panda announced. She wrapped up the baby and gave it to her mother.

“Wait, we’re not done yet. I’m having twins.”

“You only have one child” Panda explained.

“What have you done to my other baby?” Everly said frantically.

“Everly, there was only one heartbeat in your tummy when I examined you. You only have one baby.”

“But the Prophet...”

“What exactly did the Prophet say to you?” asked Pax holding the baby’s hand.

“Two hearts beat within you” Everly answered.

“Everly, the Prophet meant your heart plus the baby’s heart”. Pax brushed her hair out of her eyes and wiped her tears away with his hand.

She was calmed and kissed her child for the first time. She emptied her mind and enjoyed the magical moment.

“Do you already have a name?” asked Panda

“I haven’t given that much thought” Everly answered.

“What about Plume?” suggested Cal. “Because she’s so beautiful and is as light as a feather.” It was a rare thing when Cal spoke more than two words, so he had everyone’s attention.

“Plume... that’s very lovely. If papa doesn’t have any objections” said Everly looking at Pax.

“Then it’s settled. Her name is Plume” said Pax.