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B E B O K I A
The Hidden Planet

A Leisurely Hike

Everything happened in slow motion. The blue eyed beast gently laid his victim aside before giving us his full attention. We watched, frozen with horror, while they slowly circled us. I managed to turn my head to look at Pax. I wanted him to give me a sign of hope: a wink, a crooked smile, a nod. I needed to know that he had a plan but all I saw was a blank stare. He didn't even look back at me. Fear, horror, terror... none of these words is fit to describe the pending doom that I felt. When I was just about to give up all hope, I felt my babies kick for the first time. It was like magic. I knew I had to do something. Just for moment I stepped out of my body, out of our predicament, and outside my realm of fear. As my brain processed solutions, I noticed that the animals behaved strangely. They were ignoring me completely and focused their attention just on Pax. With their backs turned to me, they growled fiercely showing their teeth. I was proud of Pax. He didn't move or react to their threats. He contained his composure which, in this situation, is incredibly difficult.

My eyes kept watching while I searched for a solution. I'm almost there. The answer is just a few centimeters from my grasp. The blue eyed animal has thrown itself on top of Pax and pinned him to the floor. Pax is fighting, pushing away the sharp, drooling teeth with all his might. The animal with the orange eyes sat down to watch as if it were some sort of entertainment.

I'm still reaching for the answer. It's touching my fingertips. One more stretch... got it! I screamed 'hiveluck' as loud as I could. The answer was so simple yet genius. My yelling for help startled the animals. The blue eyed beast let Pax go and his friend stood up and backed away from me.

Cal and Panda ran to our rescue. When they arrived at the scene, Pax was still lying on the floor. Panda fearlessly walked past the creatures and tended to his minor wounds. "Mandar, Feng..." Cal called to the beasts and they obediently went to him. I could tell from his tone that he reprimanded them. They both hung their heads but Cal lovingly stroked their fur. He then made a clicking sound with his lips that sent the creatures running back into the forest. I found it strange that they left their dead prey behind.

Cal looked at us with a cynical smile. He tried to contain his laughter but wasn't successful. It wasn't an evil laugh; it was more playful and teasing. He walked over to where the dead animal laid, picked it up, and said "Dinner".

Cal wasn't joking about dinner. That poor animal was on the dinner table that night. Pax and I assumed that Mandar and Feng were his pets. They seemed to share a symbiotic relationship.

The few passing days were less adventurous. Although we didn't see Mandar and Feng we knew by the meat on the table that they were there. It was apparent that they delivered meat to our Earthian host but I wondered why. What did Cal and Panda give them in return or why were the animals indebted to them?

Our grasp of their language has grown almost to the point of fluency. It wasn't difficult to learn because the two languages are very similar in structure and often shared many words.

Now that we had a few days of peace it was time to think about Nadja and our façade for being here. We were supposed to gather as much information about Earth as possible. To prevent suspicion, I needed to contact Soren.

"What are you thinking?" Pax asked, breaking my train of thought.

"We need to get back to the shuttle."

"Why?"

"We have to send something back to Bebokia. They must be wondering about us. Tayna gave us that transport box for a reason."

"I see. I didn't want to think about them again... at least not this soon. How do you think we should proceed?"

I thought about Pax's question as I gazed out the guest room window. How should we proceed? There was so much going on inside my head that it was hard to prioritize my thoughts. Panda is a warm person. I had no doubt that she would let us stay as long as we wanted but her husband was of big concern. Cal is Panda's perfect opposite. He's cold and ominously quiet.

We needed to get the transport box without arousing suspicion, especially from Cal. I slowly broke out of my gaze once I reached a solution.

“We’ll just have to go and get what we need. I don’t think that a leisurely walk through the forest is too conspicuous.”

“Right, we’ll just have to excuse ourselves.” Pax said finishing Everly’s thought.

Late morning on a beautiful clear day; perfect for taking a stroll through the forest. Everly could see Cal from the guest room window chopping wood with a large machete. Panda was in the next room quietly knitting something with pastel colored yarn. She casually walked over to where Panda sat and began speaking to her in fluent Earthian. “Today’s a beautiful day. Pax and I were thinking of taking a walk through the forest. Would that be alright with you?”

“Absolutely” said Panda with her trademark warm smile. “Are you planning a short walk or a longer hike?”

“A longer hike. I’ll give you and Cal a few hours of alone time.”

“Okay, then you’ll need to pack some food and drink. I’ll help you with that.” She put her knitting aside and took Everly to the kitchen. As they packed a few things for the hike Panda warned her to be back before dark.

“There are wild animals in the forest that hunt at night but during sunlight hours is safe.”

“Then we’ll be back before sun down.”

When they were finished in the kitchen, Everly thanked Panda for all her help and soon she and Pax were on their way. As they were walking toward the forest they passed Cal along the way.

“We’re just going for a walk” Pax explained. Cal nodded his head coldly and went back to chopping wood.

“He gives me the creeps” Pax said to Everly once they were out of hearing distance.

“Yeah, me too.”

It was cold but not the kind of cold that chilled to the bone. Most of the snow had melted so there was no crunching sound under their feet. The forest looked different but they

both knew exactly what direction to walk. The shuttle was parked in a clearing near the middle of the forest. It was a long ways but they had time before the sun finished it's journey to the other side of the horizon.

"This forest is really beautiful when you're not afraid of freezing to death" Pax joked.

"Yeah, or being eaten by wild animals" Everly answered back. The couple walked in silence and enjoyed the scenery for quite some time until Everly made an abrupt comment.

"I think he knows."

"You think who knows what?"

"I think that Soren knows or at least has a hunch that I'm pregnant."

"Maybe he does know that you're pregnant but he couldn't possibly know about the twins."

"What if he asked the Prophet?"

"Even if he did know, he's loyal to you. He dislikes Naja so he wouldn't tell her."

"Let's hope you're right."

"What do you think Naja would do if she found out?"

"No, I don't want to think about that. I know her, I've heard her story. I know why there's a flingtus needle hanging on her office wall. She will stop at nothing to protect what's hers".

"Then I withdraw the question" Pax answered with a quivering voice.

They were halfway to their destination when they decided to stop for lunch. They found a nice dry spot to sit where there was no ice or snow. The dirt was hard and cold but Everly spread a small blanket over the area so they could sit comfortably. Since they were dressed properly the cold ground wasn't too much of a nuisance. Once they had started to eat Pax made an observation.

"Where did those clouds come from all of a sudden?"

Everly looked up, "I hope it doesn't rain before we get back."

"That would be just our luck, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, it would but we have good luck too. We were lucky enough to find Panda and Cal."

“Okay, I agree that it was good luck finding Panda but I’m not so sure about Cal.”

“Do you think Cal is a bad person?”

“I wish I knew the answer to that question. It’s the uncertainty of his character that’s creating the formidable tension among us.”

“That is so true. I’m going to guess that Cal is a good guy but only because I can’t imagine that someone as pure as Panda would be intimate with a bad person.”

“Good point but until I know for sure, Cal will still scare the spots off my spine.”

The couple finished eating and moved on. They walked a little faster because the cloudy sky predicted rain. Soon, they arrived at the clearing where the invisible shuttle was parked. Pax took a moment to find the remote and like magic the shuttle appeared in front of them.

“It’s almost like going home” Everly said.

“Yes, it is” Pax agreed.

The transport box was sitting on top of the console, exactly where they had left it. Pax put a pre-written note and a small object inside the box, closed the door and pressed the button on top.

“We walked such a long way to do a one minute task” Pax said.

“It had to be done. We don’t want Naja to get suspicious. She would send assassins to look for us.”

“Assassins? Do you think she would go that far?”

“I don’t think it, I know it.”

Pax and Everly completed $\frac{1}{4}$ of the journey back before Everly felt the first raindrop on her forehead.

“Oh fuke” she whispered.

“Well, that’s just our luck. It’s raining” said Pax.

“We can go back to the shuttle and take shelter there or continue. What do you think?”

Everly asked.

“Let’s continue. Right now it’s just drizzling, maybe we can get back before it starts to pour down.”

They kept walking but at a faster pace. Soon the skies darkened even more and they a flash of light in the distance before them. A few seconds later, they heard a loud boom.

“Do you have any idea what that was?” Pax asked a little frightened.

“None at all” Everly answered with widened eyes.

Although it rained on occasion in Bebokia, thunder and lightning was unheard of. Pax and Everly were experiencing something entirely new so it was natural that they were afraid. They ran as fast as they could. The cold rain started to pour down. Their clothes quickly soaked and there was water in their shoes. Their hair was dripping wet and clung to their face and forehead. They had no time to think about how cold they were. They just wanted to get back to the cabin as fast as they could so they kept running. Everly, in her condition, was a bit faster than Pax. He saw her step into a trap that left her hanging upside down on a sturdy tree branch. He summoned all his energy and ran even faster to get her down but he too stepped into a trap and found himself hanging upside down in a tree next to her.

“Oh fuke!” he screamed.

“My thoughts exactly” Everly yelled back from her tree.

“You wouldn’t happen to have a reachable knife on you?”

“If I did, I wouldn’t still be hanging here, Pax.”

“Fuke!”

“You already said that.”

“I’m going to try to swing myself up and untie my feet.”

“Hurry, I’m starting to drown.”

The rain kept pouring down and because they were hanging upside down, water fell into their nose making it very difficult to breathe.

Pax swung himself up to get a hold onto the rope that held his feet. He made it halfway up, his hands reaching out desperately to the rope but lost energy and fell right back down. He made several attempts but failed each time.

“I can’t anymore. I’m too tired” he yelled to Everly.

“So, this is how we die, hanging upside down from a tree. No, I’ll try to untie us.”

She swung herself up and although her hands were closer to the rope than Pax had gotten, her reach fell short by a few centimeters.

Pax had regained his strength and made several other attempts. He and Everly swung themselves upward as often as they could. In the meantime, cold rain poured down on them. Lightning lit the dark sky and thunder crashed all around them. Their fear pushed them harder to rescue themselves.

After an eternity of swinging they both took a break. It was tiresome dangling upside down for so long. Neither of them spoke. They were too busy with their own private thoughts.

Everly had gone to her safe place. She took herself back to when she was a little girl.

“Daddy, Seeru said that monsters live under my bed. I can’t sleep because then they’ll eat me” sobbed six year old Everly. She ran to her father and jumped in his lap.

“My Petal, your older sister is just trying to scare you.” He held her in her arms until she stopped crying.

“Are you ready to go back to bed?”

“Only if you scare the monsters away.”

“I’ll show you that there are no monsters.”

He took Everly by the hand and walked her back to her room. Seeru was already asleep.

“You see, Seeru is sleeping. If there were really monsters under your bed, she would be afraid too because you both sleep in the same room.”

Everly looked at her father with innocent eyes. “Daddy, you’re the smartest daddy in the whole universe.” She gave her father a big hug and held on tight. Nothing could hurt her while she was in her father’s arms.

Pax’s eyes were fixed on the flashes of lightning that appeared at regular intervals through the grey darkness. They were immensely beautiful as they zigzagged down from the sky. Thunder followed each one and the noise was frightful. How truly odd nature was, Pax thought – beauty followed by the beast.

His mind drifted to a comfortable place. He thought of his trade and was back to cutting and polishing precious stones. The cutting of the stones sounded almost like the frightful thunder but once they were nice and polished they share a similar beauty to that of the flashes of light. The beauty of nature astounded him.

His eyes followed another flash of light and in a short distance he saw white fur and soft blue eyes. Mandar? Impossible, surely his own eyes had deceived him. A few seconds later, another flash of light illuminated the sky and he saw Manda again but the magnificent beast was now closer.

“Everly!” Pax shouted. The sudden burst of her husband’s voice jolted her from her safe place.

“What is it?” Everly shouted back.

“We must try to untie ourselves and fast. Mandar is on coming toward us!”

Everly looked for him through the grey but could not find him. She waited for the next lightning rod and then quickly scanned the area with her eyes. Pax was right. She saw Mandar’s cold, blue eyes in the near distance.

The both swung themselves upward to reach the rope that held their feet but no matter how hard they tried, they always fell short. After Pax’s 11th attempt, he couldn’t anymore so he let himself fall. He hung there helpless in the dark grey with broken spirit. He was cold, wet and his body ached not only from swinging but also from being tied upside down to a tree. The noise of the thunder no longer frightened him. A flash of light showed him that Mandar was now standing a few inches away from him. “Not again” Pax thought. An odd peace suddenly fell over him. His heart rate did not increase, his breathing remained steady, and he was ready for whatever the future held for him. He closed his eyes and relaxed his body; fighting would be useless in his position. He felt Mandar’s breath on his face and could smell the animal’s beastly odor.

“Just do it” he said softly to Mandar with his eyes still closed. Pax was expecting to feel a sharp pain in his neck from Mandar’s deadly bite but instead he heard a “schwing” sound before falling head first to the ground.

When he looked up from the muddy ground he saw Cal standing over him with a large machete in his hand. Panda was standing next to him along with Mandar and Feng.

“Are you alright?” asked Panda warmly.

“I’m fine. Where’s Everly?”

“I’m right here” Everly said. She was already cut down from her tree and was standing quietly behind him.

“Let’s hurry home and get out of this storm” said Panda.

Everyone agreed that was a great idea.

Pax and Everly were grateful to finally be back at the cabin. They took off their wet clothes, dried their hair, and enjoyed a warm dinner before retiring to their rooms. Everly was looking forward to falling into a deep sleep. When she opened her room door, she immediately noticed a small white box lying on her bed. She carefully opened it and was shocked to see a pair of perfectly knitted baby booties inside.

GLOSSARY

amushtar – congratulations

bamek – Bebokian currency

binaborx – giggling deer-like creature

flingtus – a cactus that can throw its needles

fuke – Bebokian curse word

growkish – nasty or unpleasant

halistag – Bebokian horse

Morstarga – hostile alien planet

nevotar – good luck

nissyput – weakling or coward

oovestic – great or cool

pamooky – silly

protovisor – the advisor's understudy

shastoik – crazy

smarzicon – precious Bebokian gem used in jewelry

Ya kuzadem pon – I love you

Ya kuzadem pon wah – I love you too

zorpkusfly – Bebokian flying insect that has healing powers.