The Tree Farm

Scriptor Paul Hathcoat

Chapter 6 ~ Reason For Waiting

"Eleni, we're waiting for you."

"I'm coming." Eleni turns out the light in the print lab and clomps upstairs. "Did you boys have a nice talk?" she cheerfully asks.

"We talked," Magnus sighs.

"I'm so glad you two are getting along. Magnus, I made something for you." Eleni takes his hand and leads us into the family room, where Father is still chatting up Sara.

"Know that I care," Father says.

"Care about what, Daddy?" Eleni barges in on the conversation.

"I care about finding Sara a good home," Father casts a loving eye her way.

"Didn't you tell her she could sleepover?" Eleni accuses.

"I did," Father says.

"He did," Sara confirms.

"Sisies, why don't you stay?"

"You know. My situation," Sara explains.

"Oh, I know." Eleni realizes that she knows and covers her mouth.

"Situation?" Father puzzles.

"Daddy," Eleni complains.

"Okay, girl stuff, none of my business." Father submits without an argument. "Girls, grab your goodie bags and load up. Robert, you know what to do."

I do. I ride shotgun and keep an eye open for trouble. Eleni, Sara, and Magnus sit silently in the back. The girls look drawn and drained. I'd given them a lot to think about. Distant

in his thoughts, Magnus holds Eleni's hand and stares out the window. I'd given him a lot to think about.

"Stand old Navy and never yield, rip, rip, rip the Zumans off the field…" Father is chipper and alert and is singing an old fight song. He's happy, he's going hunting.

We drop Magnus off first. Father pulls up to the dock and leaves the rotor running.

"Corporal, we thoroughly enjoyed your company. I'll see you back on the Bonefish," Father says.

"Thank you for dinner, Captain. Goodbye, Miss Sara. Goodbye, Miss Eleni."

"Wait, I'll walk you to the airlock," Eleni says.

"Five minutes. I'm on a tight schedule," Father reminds.

Eleni walks Magnus to the airlock, kisses him on the cheek, and gives him her crystal cameo for good luck. Magnus turns and rejoins his squad. Eleni rushes back to the T-Bird, visibly upset, straps in, and without fanfare, we speed away.

"Don't be sad," I soothe. "Father will take good care of him."

"I may never see him or Daddy again," she whimpers.

"You'll see them again," I reassure. When, if, and where, I have no idea.

"Eleni, I have a good feeling, don't worry," Sara comforts.

The Tree Farm

Scriptor Paul Hathcoat

Next, we drop Sara off. Entering the VSQ's massive airtight garage, Father slows to inspect a sexy, silver-white, heavy troop transport docked at pier one.

"She's beautiful." I admire the craft.

"She's armed with a light lance, carries twin four-man shuttles, and will accommodate sixty thaumium marines," Father brags. He pauses another moment to admire her and silently moves on to auxiliary access pier three.

Maktu and Ajax, fully armed and outfitted in black-thaumium ballistic battle armor, stand by ready to assist.

Father drops his blast goggles but leaves the rotor running. "Good morning, men, as you were," Father greets and releases the giants, Maktu and Ajax, Thaumium gods of war.

"Good morning, Captain," Maktu cheerfully responds. He's happy to greet his Master.

"Mornin, Skipper." Ajax makes eye contact with his captain, then casts a longing gaze at the white bag Eleni is cradling in her lap.

"What's shaking, men?" Father asks.

Maktu checks his timepiece, "Transfer to the Vagan, on your command." He nods in favor of Father's beautiful Venus-class troop transport.

The Tree Farm

Scriptor Paul Hathcoat

"Excellent, we're on time," Father says. "Well, I believe Eleni and Sara have a little something for you, boys."

"Good morning, ladies," Maktu greets the girls with a stylish salute.

Ajax smiles. "Cookies?"

"We baked a quadruple batch," Eleni smiles and hands the heavy, nut-oil-stained sack to Ajax.

"Thank you, Miss Eleni," Ajax gratefully accepts the gift, looks inside, inhales the aroma of spice, and licks his lips.

"You're welcome." Eleni delights. "Sara helped me, thank her too."

"Thank you, Miss Sara. Delicious," Ajax adds, sputtering cookie crumbs.

"Maktu, what cabin do you have Sara bunking in?" Father officially inquires.

"Seventy-six, skip-deck-C with a seventeen-year-old Ebo-Six orphan girl named Motta. Her security checks and decontamination came in clean. Copies are on file, Sir," Maktu reports.

Father speed reads the file and smiles. "Sara, is Motta the friend you wanted to talk to?"

"Yes, Captain."

The Tree Farm

Scriptor Paul Hathcoat

"Is she the reason you're unsure you can stay with us?" Father questions with warm concern.

"Yes, Captain. I don't want Motta to be alone. She still has nightmares."

"That's very considerate. Why didn't Motta come with you tonight? She was invited, and you're both out of quarantine. Eleni, didn't you invite her?" Father probes.

"I invited her, Daddy, she didn't want to come."

"I tried to talk her into coming, Captain Wog," Sara says.

"Did she give a reason?"

"She doesn't speak Atlantian, and she feels ugly and ashamed," Sara explains.

Father reflects. "That's no excuse. I speak some Ebonian. Lovely species, I married an Ebo-Eight girl, you know. Eleni's sweet mother speaks it around the house. I hope to spend some time with her on my way back from Caesuria."

"I'm helping Sara teach Motta, Atlantian, Daddy."

"Robert?" Father seeks a formal statement.

"Okay, I'll help tame her," I sigh and reluctantly volunteer. One more manly responsibility.

"That's the spirit, my son, my son." Father beams with pride and, without hesitation, says, "I'm going to help her too.

Sara, my invitation includes Miss Motta. I wish I had time to meet her."

"Thank you, Captain Wog!" Sara jumps for joy, "She'll be so excited."

"Captain Wog is much too formal for family. Call me Skipper if it pleases you."

"Thanks, Skipper," Sara Smiles.

"Hey, wait a minute, Smiley. Before you hop out, I've got something for you." Father pulls a thick wad of gold one-hundreds from his pocket and starts divvying them out to Sara one by one. "This is for school, clothes, books, and supplies." Father continues counting, "And this is for Motta's school, clothes, books, and supplies."

Sara looks surprised. "I don't know what to say."

"Say you will study hard and spend wisely. I want good grades, wait, here's some for fun." Father places the remaining gold-C's neatly on the stack. "That's for you and Motta to spend however you like. Buy something pretty at the bazaar. See a play, take in a concert. Go out to eat. There are some excellent restaurants on the Plaza."

"Thank you for your kindness, Skipper," Sara hugs him, buries her head in his chest, and starts to cry. "Please be careful," she begs.

"Sara." Eleni touches her shoulder.

"I'm okay," Sara sniffs and looks up to Father.

Father gently kisses her crown, and Sara releases him.

"I'm not afraid anymore," Sara manages a smile.

"I know. You're a brave girl. Run along now, sweetheart, get some rest. Everything will be alright. I'll be back soon," Father reassures and gently points her to the airlock hatch.

"Robert, I believe you." Sara waves a friendly goodbye, and with a Squatchian Bible and goodie bag in hand, she bolts for the airlock and is gone in a wisp.

"Sergeants, it's late, I need to get these kids home. I'll see you boys back on the Bonefish," Father states in clear and no uncertain terms.

"Yes, Sir," Maktu rumbles and crisply salutes.

"Um-hum," Ajax happily mumbles with a mouth full of crumbles and a cookie salute.

Satisfied, Father revs his rotor, turns the T-Bird around, and heads home.

"Why's she crying?" I wonder aloud. "I thought she'd be happy."

"She's crying because Daddy cares. Don't you, Daddy?"

"I love that little gingersnap, she's got spunk," Father confesses. "She reminds me of someone I once knew."

"I love her too, Daddy. Can we adopt her?" Eleni asks.

"You read my mind, Sweetheart. Robert, what say you?"

"I've loved her since the beginning of time. Our spirits are one."

"I'll take that as a yes. Well then, it's settled, but the final decision is Sara's. I'll sign her guardian agreement and post it to the Overlook mailbox."

"Daddy, what about Motta? She won't be any trouble. I promise to help feed and care for her. I love her. She's so cute, can we keep her too, please?" Eleni begs.

"Robert?" Father asks.

"Sara said she's good people, and that's good enough for me, no questions asked."

"I'll sign her guardian agreement, but the final decision is Motta's," Father says. "Make sure she understands."

"Yippee, two new sissies!" Eleni squeals.

"Not in my ear!" Stupid girl.

"Kids, settle down. I have a few last instructions: Eleni, if you need money for an emergency, take it from the household account and record the transaction. I want receipts."

"In duplicate, Daddy," Eleni signs her palm with a finger stroke.

The Tree Farm

Scriptor Paul Hathcoat

"Emergency expenses do not include interplanetary airfare and resort accommodations. I won't have you kids gallivanting around the galaxy wasting good money on gas. You're not to leave this planet."

"Daddy, I don't want to go anywhere."

"I know you don't, sweetheart. I'm talking to your brother, Robert, never again, and one last warning."

"Wad, I do?"

"Nothing, yet," Father checks his timepiece, "but you will. I'll be gone at least six metric months, depending on how long Eleni's mother can put up with me, and while I'm away, I want your best efforts."

"Yes, Father."

"No arguing. No yelling. No fighting and absolutely no biting or scratching," Father lectures.

"I don't bite," I protest. "It spreads viruses."

"I'm not talking to you; I'm talking to your sister."

Using my highly attuned peripheral vision, I detect Eleni sneering behind Father's back. I know a sneer when I see one. She bites and scratches. I'll bet she spits, too. She looks like a spitter.

The Tree Farm

Scriptor Paul Hathcoat

"Work out your differences peacefully, or so help me, Goddess, I will separate you two when I get back," Father swears.

"Daddy, don't worry, we'll be fine, won't we, Robert?"

I shrug.

"Robert, won't we?"

"Just don't bite me. Or scratch me."

"Robert, do not provoke your sister to anger," Father sternly reprimands. "Eleni, don't be mad at your little brother. He thinks he's funny."

Snarling disdain means I'm not joking, don't bite me.

"Son, say you're sorry to your sister and tell her what you told me in the study.

"Don't look at me in that tone of voice. Talk to your sister," Father instructs.

"Which one? The count is up to five that I know of."

"Tell Eleni you're sorry," Father insists. "Tell her now."

"Eleni, I was joking. I didn't mean anything bad about you being a vicious biter. Honest, Ima, sorry. Forgive me." I hit her with pleading puppy eyes.

"I forgive you, Robert."

"Son, now tell Eleni what you said to Magnus and me," Father coaxes.

"What did you say?" Eleni asks.

"I told Father and Mag that you're the best big sister I've ever had."

"Tell her what else you said. Not talking now? I'll tell her." Father chokes with pride and emotion. "Your brother swore to..."

"Wait, Father, I'll tell her. It's my story, and it all began after dinner. While you girls were doinking around in the galley, baking cookies, and talking about girl stuff, Father, Mag, and I were in the study talking about important stuff. During the long course of our manly conversation, Father and Mag expressed some silly concern over your safety."

"What was your oath?" Eleni interrupts my heartwarming story.

"I told them to fear not. The King of the Titans will defend his beloved sister with his life." I give Eleni the tidings of comfort and joy. It exudes positive, manly strength. That should keep her quiet for a while.

"Robert, I don't know what to say." Eleni is driven to tears.

"Father, we'll get along just fine. We love and understand one another. Don't we, honey-bee?" I smile.

"Yes, Robert," Eleni sobs.

The Tree Farm

Scriptor Paul Hathcoat