

First Impressions

I let the memory fade away as I finished my breakfast and put out the fire. I throw on my shirt, jump into my pants, and fall into my boots before walking out the door. Before the avem could start to crow, I pushed off the dock and was rowing my boat as the first rays of sunlight begin to glisten off the water.

The oars of my boat carve into the green water that surrounds my village. I inhale the salty breeze as I drew closer to my father's secret fishing spot. The secret spot my father swore by wasn't all that secret. It was within sight of the village, and the only thing secret about it was the name, no one knew what to call it. And after the passing of my father, we thought it best that it remained the way he knew it, a secret.

I drag my boat ashore, scraping it against the rocks and shells that litter the land, and rest it underneath the one tree that never sheds its white leaves. I grab my gear from the boat and make my way to the water's edge. After a couple casts, the only thing I had caught was the attention of the bugs that swarmed by my head. Frustrated, I wished for the ability to hear the fish tell me where they wanted their last meal, as my father claimed they did for him. And then I heard it. Between breaths of gurgled water, a faint "Over here." I looked around in disbelief, refusing to believe I just heard a fish speak. "Great! Perfect timing for me to lose my mind," I say to myself. The same voice struggled to interrupt my thought, "Please. Over here." Having nothing to lose, I cast my lure at the source of the voice and watched the ripple expand. Instead of disappearing under the waves as one would expect, I watched as the lure was picked up and tugged on by a blue arm. Without knowing what else to do, I slowly began to reel it in. "Well... at least I'm not going crazy."

Barely floating at the end of my line was a creature I had never seen before. I waded into the water to get a better look at my discovery. Wet blond hair draped over its face as it lay on its back struggling to remain afloat. Blue fabric covered it from head to toe, adorned with scorch marks and torn holes. A symbol of red, white, and blue hung on its left arm, and the letters N.A.S.A. patched onto the chest. I dragged it ashore. It repositioned itself and spoke in a gravelly voice, "Wa-ter."

I handed it my canteen and watched as its contents were drained in a matter of seconds.

"Thank you. I thought I was a dead man."

That answers one of my questions, I thought to myself, at least I know the creature is male.

"What are you? And where are your other two arms?" I spoke as I found the courage to talk.

"I'm a human," he replied, "and my name is Caelum. We only have two arms; not very practical I know, but I usually manage. Do you have a name?"

"Baru" is all I managed to say as the fear was starting to win the fight over my curiosity.

"Well Baru, I am grateful you were here. But to be honest I need more help."

“What do you need?”

“I need to send a message to my crew. Can you help me?”

A heavy sigh escaped my mouth as I knew I was getting myself into trouble, but I had made up my mind; “I’ll help. But I can’t help if you’re dead. Get some rest. When you wake I will help you reach your friends.”

Caelum flashed a quick smile, “Thank you Baru”, and promptly fell asleep before I could get the fire started.

The bright moons illuminated the area around our makeshift camp by the time Caelum finally woke up. I brought him some more water that I had boiled, and some fruit from the trees nearby. Halfway through his meal I asked, “How did you end up here?”

Instead he asked, “What do you call this planet?”

“Vanqor” I said.

“Well the magnetic fields on this planet are much stronger than anticipated, it must have made my ships navigation system malfunction.” He told me how his ship had crashed, explaining his injuries and misfortune until my timely arrival. Despite my notable fear of the situation, I couldn’t help but sympathize for Caelum, alone on an unfamiliar planet, he must be terrified.

Still curious I asked, “And why are you here?”

Without stopping to swallow, he told me he was here searching for someone else from Earth, his brother that went missing over a decade ago. I let that sink in. Could there really be another alien here that nobody knows about? Caelum reached into a pocket on his chest and retrieved a picture showing a man wearing the same blue jumpsuit as him. “His name is Connor, have you seen him?”

I looked at the picture and stumbled away. I tried to speak, but I could find no words to say. The man in the picture was undoubtedly my father, who has been dead almost a year now. What was Caelum doing with a picture of him?

Clearly my facial expressions did the talking for me, “So you have seen him! Well where is he?

Stuttering, I managed to say, “He. He’s dead.”

The excitement that was on Caelum’s face quickly disappeared, “Oh. Well that’s too bad. Connor was a good man.”

I cleared my throat as I stared into the red flames.

“I agree”, I said, “and an even better father.”

A loud and piercing sound broke my fixation on the fire as I covered my ears. I looked up to see Caelum holding a device in his hand. He clicked a button and the sound stopped and the pain receded.

“Incredible” he said.

Defensive and agitated, “Incredible? What’s incredible is that I can still hear after that. What was that for?”

“This is a sonic identifier,” Caelum explained, “Different frequencies can only be heard by certain species. This particular one was for humans. And you just heard it. So, I say again, Incredible.”

I clear my throat and shift uneasily, “Your device must be broken. Because I’m not human.”

“Perhaps,” he said, “or perhaps the reason you know Connor was a good father, is because he is yours.”

Lost for words once again, I returned my stare to the burning timber.

Taking command of the conversation, Caelum asked, “If you don’t want to talk about it, that’s fine. But I do need to fix my transponder still, can you help?”

Regretting my decision to help my alleged uncle, I did say I would. “What do you need?”

“I need something that can fix the electrical circuits, they got fried after the crash. Do you know of anything?”

I thought of it for a while, until it dawned on me that the solution was actually right below us. I plunged all four of my hands into the soft dirt besides the tree and began digging.

“What are you doing? I asked for help not a sandcastle!”

“That’s what I’m doing. Now shut up.”

Finally, I found what I was looking for, the roots of the bijalee tree. I broke off several of the roots that glowed with the faint blue hue, receiving small static shocks as I did. I brought my findings back to Caelum who was now back on his feet around the fire.

“What is this?” he asked.

“Bijalee roots. My father said they contain static electricity.”

“Connor was always into his plants” he released a quick laugh. “Figures he would teach you too. Thank you Baru, this should do the trick.”

I helped him strip down the roots until they were the proper size to fit into the transponder. Making small talk as we worked.

“Didn’t you find it odd that your father only had two arms?”

“Of course. But he said he lost them while fighting the beast of the village. My father was not a liar.”

“No, he wasn’t. Connor was always honest, but I believe he had to lie to protect you. Surely an alien would not be welcomed.”

“My father wasn’t an alien.”

“Sure he was. The same way I am to you, and you are to me. But that doesn’t change the fact that despite our differences, we are actually family.”

My hands stopped their fidgeting and hung by my side. Family. I haven’t had a family since my father passed. Even in the village I felt alone. The shortest and skinniest, I was looked at as something different, an outsider. I always thought it was because my father questioned the ruling of our chief, he would constantly challenge the idea of one person in charge. But could the looks really be because my father was from a different planet? I thought of how my father was always adamant on it being the two of us, relying on each other and nobody else. Perhaps he was afraid of the villagers finding out.

My thoughts were cut off by an electric zap and a howl of excitement from Caelum.

“What happened?”

Grinning from ear to ear he said, “It’s working.”

I watched the lights flash but saw and heard nothing. “Are you sure?”

“I think so, but we will only know if they come and get me. Until then, might as well catch up with my nephew.”

I said nothing, just sat back by the fire and watched the embers float into the air. When I looked up my eyes caught Caelum’s, who’s eyes only searched the sky, darting from star to star, but not satisfied with what he saw.

Eventually he asked, “Do you like to fish?”

“I do. It reminds me of my father,” I looked over at the fishing pole I had brought with me, “That’s his pole over there.”

He laughed again, “I’m the one who taught him how to fish actually. It wasn’t long before he was better than me. Did he still claim the fish told him where they wanted their last meal?”

My eyes opened as wide as the moons above our heads. I had my doubts, but surely he couldn’t be making that up. Caelum was my father’s brother. My uncle. I returned the laugh, “Yes! That’s what I was trying to hear when you called for help earlier.”

“Well I suppose I should be grateful you weren’t spear fishing!”

We both laughed. It hadn’t occurred to me that this is the first time since my father’s death that I had just sat down and laughed. I missed this. We stayed awake and talked for hours, trading stories about my father and the differences between Vanqor and Earth. Both of us fascinated by the other. At some point I closed my eyes and fell asleep.

I couldn’t have slept long, but I awoke feeling rested. I looked over at Caelum who was still fixated on the sky. I opened my mouth to suggest us trying something else, but before I could, the sky erupted in a flash of white, and a noise so loud it made the sonic identifier sound like the

hum of an insects wings. When I could see again, a large metallic bubble the color of bone sat at the edge of the forest. Steam was released as a ramp fell to the ground. Out stepped three identically dressed people wearing the same blue jumpsuit.

Caelum turned to me and said, “Baru, I cannot thank you enough. Before I go, if there is anything I can do for you, let me know and it shall get done.”

I thought back on my empty home in the village. What once was my favorite place, now held no meaning to me. The painful reminder of my father and how lonely I am is all that called that place home now. Without hesitation, I blurted out, “Take me with you.”

With a smile staining his face he said, “I was hoping you would say that.”

We walked up the ramp. I turned one last time to see the world I knew and the life I lived, for the last time. The door shut, and they told me it’s time for takeoff. “Come Baru, I think you’ll like Earth.”