





AN ARRIVAL SHORT STORY

TREE

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Cadeau – An Arrival Short Story - Tree

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Planet Cadeau 5 days AA

Standing before him was the ugliest, most malformed tree Marquis Wayman Louie had ever seen. He brushed a long lock of blond hair back from his brow as he wiped at the perspiration beading along the edge of his face.

Of course this eyesore stands right here in the middle of the meadow where I intend to build our first settlement. The thick stubby black trunk has barely any branches which are nearly barren of leaves. At this time of year it should be lush with leaves and fruit. The rest of the native deciduous trees at the edge of the forest are bursting with life. The only thing this looks good for is fire wood.

At the edge of the meadow to the East, or at least what they decided to call the East since the sun rose from that direction, was a small river peeking out from a tree line that hugged the bank. North as far as they could see was open meadow. South of the landing site it was clear almost to the edge of the horizon where just the tops of trees could be seen. On the West was a dense forest where beyond the beginning lines of deciduous woods, most of the trees looked similar to pines.

I wish I could confirm if any of the other spaceships landed safely. We're all spread out across the continent.

On the first day, a week ago now, he had climbed out of his ship to see two other smoke trails. They were too far away to check on at this time. Protocol was clear that each ship was first to establish the basic necessities for survival of its occupants here on their new home-world, Cadeau.

Wayman, and the twenty thousand inhabitants of his ship, had spent the last 8 years traveling from Earth to

Cadeau with numerous colony ships led by billionaire Dieudonné Marix, the man who would be king of their new lands. The short, muscular marquis was normally quite agile, but at present he was still getting his land legs back, and found his gait had a bit of swagger to it as he walked about surveying the region around the landing area.

Nice weather so far. Maybe we've landed in summer. If so, that will give us a few months to get at least one major central structure built to support several smaller living domiciles. This will ease the stress of many of the colonists still being cooped up inside the ship. The agriculture engineers assessed that the seeds we've brought from Earth will most likely grow in Cadeau's soil, even if it might change the flavor or texture of some foods. Water, open land to farm and build, and forest to hunt and gather in while we await our first crops. What more can we ask for on an alien planet?

Lost in his thoughts for the future Louie hadn't heard Zan speaking.

"My Lord?" His tall, lithe foreman had been trying to get his attention for some time now he realized.

"Yes, my apologies, Zan, I was deep in thought. What were you asking?"

"Can you step back My Lord so we can start cutting this grotesque mess down?"

Louie turned to walk back to his tent, hearing the rush of the ax as it sliced through the air when the man took his first swing.

Tinkt. It sounded like the ax had hit solid rock.

"Yeooow!"

Louie turned to see the man standing, shaking his arms with the ax at his feet.

"What was that?"

"The tree, My Lord. It isn't normal. I hit it as hard

as I have any other tree I've cut since landing. Some bark came away, but my ax bounced right off."

Rubbing his right shoulder and elbow, Zan's deeply tanned face grimaced.

"Certainly wasn't expecting that!" He shook his head frowning with a loud sigh.

Louie walked over to the tree and pulled out his sturdy survival knife he kept on his hip since the landing. Nine inches long, with part of the back side serrated, it could double as a short saw if need be. He took the tip and slowly worked it in between the bark, peeled away a piece and tossed it aside.

Tap, tap, tap. He hit the tip of the knife on the inner portion of the tree.

It feels like metal on fossilized wood.

Louie stepped back and shook his head as he thumped the length of his knife against his thigh.

"This isn't the first strange thing we have encountered on this alien planet and it won't be the last. But I'm not letting this sliver in my eye remain right where I plan to place our town square. Figure out how to get rid of it. Uproot it if you must!"

~

As Louie strode away, Zan, annoyed at the order he just received, put the challenge to thought. He stared at the tree for some time, scanning it, and walked the circumference many times. Running his large hands through his wavy, short, dark hair, his mind finally set on a solution. Thumping his palm against the tree he thought, *Burn it!*

From a nearby storage chest he grabbed a

blowtorch. He lit it and held it to the side of the tree for some time, but the bark only began to singe.

It doesn't burn!

In his frustration he sat down on the storage chest. Noticing Louie's discarded chunk of bark by his foot, he kicked it.

If the bark will singe, why won't it burn? Maybe...?

Zan lit the blowtorch again and picked up the piece of bark. Within moments the bark began to burn with a thick smoke.

So, it will burn if not connected to the whole of the tree. Good to know, I guess. Now to come up with a new idea! He groaned. *I really hope to avoid uprooting this thing.*

In the next few hours he found his saws left no visible change to the inner tree and dulled after a few strokes. Nor did building a bonfire around it work, as it only singed the outer bark. Trying to use a team of horses to pull it out with rope was to no avail as well. Exhausted he returned to the ship and reported his failed attempts to his marquis.

Louie's gracious response didn't surprise his foreman. "Tomorrow will bring fresh ideas Zan. Get some food and rest and tackle it again in the morning."

The next day Zan resolved to dig around the base of the tree to weaken its hold. He didn't want to disappoint the marquis again.

Hopefully the horses can accomplish the task of uprooting it.

Unfortunately several days passed with a team of men digging the tree's thick trunk that extended far below the surface wider than the rest of the tree. They found many thick roots spreading out in all directions ten meters at times.

Marquis Louie came out to survey the progress.

"Zan, the tree is still here?" A hint of impatience edged his voice, although he knew full well the issues Zan had encountered.

"Unfortunately it is. At this point the men have spread out to dig around all the thick roots. I could use some more help to speed it up."

With his own edge of irritation Zan kicked at a root nearby his foot. As he looked up he smiled and offered his shovel to his lord, who didn't acknowledge the offer directly.

"How many more men do you need Zan? Another dozen?"

Zan nodded, "A dozen should be enough, My Lord."

The marquis chuckled, "By the time this is out of here I think we will have a hole dug deep enough for a good cellar."

"Big enough for the winter stores of our whole community." Zan replied smiling.

Toward the end of the week, with many thick and deep roots exposed, Zan decided to make another attempt with the horses. As the sun began to drop from view, his men tied the last ropes to the tree. At his signal, the horse master snapped his whip.

Twenty horses in two lines of ten gave a start and jumped forward. Zan could hear the slow creaking of the tree. It began to tip. A sudden fierce wind rushed around the tree, grabbing at their clothing and whipping the horses' manes into a frenzy.

Zan noticed but ignored an ominous dark cloud that developed overhead. Several minutes of the horses straining against their yokes finally rewarded them as the tree came free and toppled.

Flash! Crack! Ba-boom! The horses neighed loudly and stomped trying to free themselves from their restraints.

Did lightning strike the base of the tree, or did it come from the base of the tree? What in the world is going on? Zan asked himself as he looked around in amazement at the events unfolding around him.

Then he remembered and shook his head, chuckling, *We're not on our world anymore!*

~

Planet Ancient

Ancient Epälevä was flying home over a dry, sandy and rock-covered landscape when he was startled by a sudden flash of blinding light with a thunderous sound immediately following. On planet Ancient lightning and thunder were uncommon. Even so, this experience would have been foreign to anyone on Cadeau or Earth since it was from below ground, not from the sky.

A pulsing light appeared near the ground, and as he flew lower to investigate he noticed swirling eddies of sand around a tear in the atmosphere.

Wasn't a life tree here? Epälevä, an elder ancient, had never seen anything like it before. *Life trees never die. What is going on?*

His powerful six-winged torso flew around the tear. The greying tips of his varied brown feathers stirred at the slow beat of his wings.

From all directions it's as if I'm peering through a window to the linked world. I never imagined so much color! Plants cover the whole ground! What are those strange two and four legged, wingless creatures? Hhumm. The four legged creatures are pulling on lines

that must have been connected to the tree, since the lines run right into the tear. Yes! From this angle I can see they are dragging the Life Tree.

He rode the air currents several times around the tear before he settled his massive muscular legs and claw tipped feet in a crouch onto a large stone where he could monitor the four legged creatures. With much straining, the beasts finally began to move. Then another bright flash and a deafening sound came that knocked him back and temporarily blinded him. When he could see and hear again, the tear was gone. All that remained where the Ancient Life Tree had stood was a giant hole with numerous small tunnels where the roots had been.

This is an epic disaster!