

“Nothing Good in Goodbye”

by Katie Zajdel
thumper@coronasquadron.com
<http://www.coronasquadron.com>

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The strange thing was that only five years ago as a brash, headstrong cadet, he would have sold his soul to be where he was right then. All he'd ever wanted was to go out in a Z-95 or any other starfighter and see lots of action. Find out how many kill markers and medals he could earn. The fact that he was leaving with the rest of his squadmates on an extended tour of duty to do exactly that should have made him ecstatic.

But not anymore. Things had changed. Deep down he was still excited about the prospect, but all of that was buried deep underneath something more immediate that was making him absolutely miserable.

Carrying his young daughter in one arm, Flight Ensign Quentell Mackin hovered near the wall inside the large room, unwilling to leave the periphery and go deeper into the crowd of his squadmates lest they see the twisting emotions he couldn't keep off his face. Part of him argued that they were all too busy saying goodbye to their own families to care that he was a total wreck, but the stubborn remnants of his ego didn't want to risk it.

Beside him, his wife Calla didn't seem to know what to do with herself. She fidgeted and finally asked, “This is as far as we go?”

“This is as far as we go,” Quen reluctantly confirmed in a soft voice. The doorway on the far side of the room led to the interior of one of the base's hangars, where he and the rest of Bluehill Squadron would board a shuttle and leave. The civilian family members seeing them off weren't allowed past that doorway's threshold.

Sobs from other squadmates' families were plainly audible over the muted conversations in the room, and Quen hated listening to them. The more he heard them, the less he trusted himself to keep it together.

He stood there silently with Calla and tenderly stroked his daughter's hair with one hand. From her high vantage point in his arms, Aurora looked around the room, obviously unsettled by the heightened emotions of the people all around her. The toddler wrapped her arms around Quen and nestled her head in the side of his neck. He wished he could take her back outside, away from all this, and never put her through it again.

Much too soon, the squadron CO gave a short whistle from the front of the room. “Let's goen, everyone,” Commander Toloss said, his words heavy with the weight of that command. The slender Gungan walked to the far doorway and waited beside it.

It was the moment Quen had utterly dreaded since he'd first heard that his squadron was being secretly loaned by his homeworld's military to the young Rebel Alliance for half a year. He didn't even understand why they were going; all he knew was that the Empire was crushing any Rebels they managed to find. Coming home was far from a foregone conclusion, and he ached just thinking about the prospect.

Quen took a deep breath and turned to Calla, but all the words he'd wanted to say and had

so carefully rehearsed in the last few days fled him. Tears brimmed his eyes, and seeing the same tears and pure fright in Calla's eyes left him unable to speak.

He stepped forward and threw his free arm around her, hugging her as tightly as he could. She returned the hug even more strongly. Quen squeezed his eyes shut and felt some tears escape.

"I love you," Quen choked out in a whisper.

"I love you too," Calla managed in return.

Quen finally forced himself to let go, then he wiped his wet cheeks and turned his head to look at Aurora. "Daddy loves you, sweetheart." He gently cupped her head with his free hand and drew her closer to plant a kiss on her cheek. "Be good for Mommy, and I'll see you when I get home."

He carefully handed Aurora to Calla, and letting go of her was the hardest thing he'd ever done in his life. Aurora squirmed, agitated. Quen leaned in for one final kiss from Calla.

"Be safe," Calla softly pleaded when they separated.

"I will," he promised.

Choruses of tearful goodbyes echoed through the room as the other Bluehill starfighter pilots pulled away from their families and friends to leave. Quen gave Calla the best smile he could manage, more for her sake than his, took another deep breath, and made himself turn away from his wife and daughter, possibly for the last time.

He didn't trust himself to look back as he followed his squadmates past Commander Toloss and through the door into the hangar.

The End

Revision A

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