

Chapter 7

OK, this is officially boring, thought O'Neill, as Paul Robbins explained the workings of the water intake system. Let's see. So far we've seen the outflow from the sewage plant into the river, the sewage plant itself, the forgadsakes water tower, the pumping system, the purification plant, and now this. All described in boring detail. Robbins seemed to be enjoying himself. At least, white teeth were frequently visible behind his deep brown face.

And on it went. O'Neill was beginning to regret coming here. Who knew Burkemeier would be so vindictive. It wasn't like he dumped her. No, like every other woman he'd known since joining the SGC, she had left him. Well, all the women except –

Years of dozing (without seeming to doze) through boring briefings had given O'Neill a rare talent. The small part of his brain that was paying attention said "you want to listen to this part, Jack." Something else in his brain pressed a rewind switch, and then hit the play button. The rest of O'Neill went from reflective to active mode in about one-half second.

"Rapids? Did you say rapids?"

"Yes, General. The intake for this is just below a long stretch of rapids. The salmon are climbing them right now. I frequently fish there. Catch and release, of course."

"Of course. Tell me, Doctor ... Robbins, do you think you might be doing some fishing today?"

"Actually, sir, I was planning to go this afternoon. Assuming you want to go along, I can have the cafeteria make you up a lunch."

"What about my gear? It's on the shuttle."

"I believe Dr. Burkemeier arranged for that to be transferred to the locker room, sir. Just around the corner, here."

Apparently Burkemeier didn't hate him too much. "Call me Jack, uh"

"Paul, Jack."

"This could be the start of a beautiful friendship, Paul." O'Neill held out his hand. "That is, if there's beer in that cooler."

The river turned out to be wide and running fast, and filled with salmon. Big ones, too. With no major predators for thousands of years, salmon had the run of the ocean, and fed well. Saturn must have transported eggs from Earth and released the fish upstream. Other forms of earth life abounded. A pine forest was on both sides of the river. That didn't grow here. Though

O'Neill had seen extensive terraforming on many Goa'uld worlds, the work here was far beyond what he'd seen elsewhere. It looked like Saturn had wanted to make this his home base, and that he'd been keen on a natural look. *I'd like to have met the snake. He seems different from most of the Goa'uld. Of course, once I'd met him, I would probably have had to kill him.*

No big predators, though, on land or sea. No lions, no tigers, and not even any bears. Either Saturn wanted to make sure that he stayed at the top of the food chain, or the revolt hadn't left enough time to grow enough prey to support big mammals. In which case they hadn't been brought in or they'd died out.

They hadn't arrived until after noon, but the days were growing longer as spring progressed so they had plenty of time to fish. Catch, release, catch, release, and have a few beers as the day progressed. Well, maybe more than a few beers.

To the west, storm clouds appeared. Somewhere out there was getting a really big soaking. Funny, thought Robbins, I shouldn't be able to see lightning from this far away, and it doesn't usually last that long. But for a few seconds something bright had appeared between him and the clouds.

Oh well, we'd better be getting home, anyway. The storm looks like it's too far away to bother us, but it's going to be getting dark soon, and if Jack has any more beer I wouldn't trust him to walk back to the Humvee anyway. Robbins turned back to O'Neill. Better walk *way* around to the General's left. The casts had been getting more and more erratic, in direct proportion to the amount of beer consumed.

"Jack, we'd better be getting back! It's getting late!"

"Just one more! I'm one behind you, give me one more chance to catch up!"

"OK, but then we've got to go. Besides, we're out of beer!"

O'Neill started his backswing. This one was rather more enthusiastic than it needed to be. Turning to watch (and dodge, if necessary) Robbins saw something move out of the corner of his eye. Then he heard someone shout "Hey!", O'Neill finished his backswing, and all hell broke loose.

The pain was intense. Stumbling in the water, tangled up with another body, Starbuck couldn't think of anything except the pain in her cheek. She put her hand to her face. Something was caught there. It felt hard, and was apparently caught in the skin. Several curses came to mind, but she just couldn't get them out.

Being pushed face-first into cold water sobered O'Neill immediately. His first impulse was to get out of the water, but training took over. An elbow smashed into the ribs of whoever was on this back. He heard a sound like "oof" and then a moan of pain. He turned around, drove a fist into the stomach. Another moan of pain, then the figure on top of him went limp.

Robbin's first reaction was to reach for O'Neill, but then he saw something fall out of the attacker's hand and land in the water. *Gun!* Training took over. O'Neill could take care of the attacker for a moment, having the gun would make it easier to subdue him. He dived for the weapon.

When he got up and turned around, he saw O'Neill holding on to an unconscious woman. In what looked to be a flight suit, though it wasn't anything issued by any military service Robbins was familiar with, Earth or otherwise. Dangling from her lip was a hook, connected to the line from O'Neill's rod.

"Well, I think this takes the prize for the biggest fish," said O'Neill. "Help me get her to the Humvee, then we can try to get this thing out. There's a med kit there, we can clean up the wound a bit. And I think that's an MP vehicle, so there are some handcuffs if we need them."

They laid the catch out on the back seat of the vehicle. As Robbins searched for the med kit she began to stir. She tried to rise up, but O'Neill held her down.

"Get you're frakkin' hands off me!" Starbuck yelled, then moaned as pain shot through her lip.

The language was the Goa'uld modified dialect of Ancient, that spoken by most races out here. O'Neill had been speaking it for nearly a decade. He couldn't place the accent, though. He also didn't know what "frakkin'" meant, but he could make a good guess. He replied in the same language.

"Easy. You've got something stuck in your mouth. We're going to have to take it out."

The language sounded strange to Starbuck. She understood some of the words, but the pronunciation wasn't right. The colonies had been in constant communication with each other for millennia, and had been out of touch with other humans since the settlement of Kobol. The idea of another language, or even word shifts, was alien to her. Having something dangling from her mouth didn't help. "Let me go!" she screamed, and again fell back in pain.

"I'm going to have to take the hook out," O'Neill tried again. Not a lot

of comprehension. Well, she was in pain. And possibly her race had been out of contact long enough that her dialect had shifted from standard. He tried again, with what he would have called pigeon, but was really just trying to say a few words loudly and slowly.

“Here,” he said, pulling another hook from the tackle box. “Hook.” He showed it to the woman. “See the barb.” He ran his finger over the point, then the barb. “Stuck in mouth.” He mimed the hook catching in his mouth. “We have to push it through.” Hmm. How to do this? He stuck the hook in the fabric of the driver’s seat-back. Then he pushed it through. “Then cut it.” He found the metal cutters he carried to cut hooks away from fish. He cut the barb off the hook. “Then take out the hook.” Robbins winced. O’Neill looked down at Starbuck. “Hurts like hell.”

Starbuck made out most of the words, and figured the rest out from the man’s (Cylon’s?) actions. She fingered the inside of her lip. Something sharp was embedded in the skin. Yes, it was going to hurt. She nodded at her captor.

“OK. Robbins, you’d better hold her down, just in case.” Robbins came over and held her down by the shoulders, but looked away. O’Neill gripped Starbuck’s jaw. “I know, you’d like to grit your teeth, but if you do I can’t really get at the barb, so you’re just going to have to keep your mouth open.” As he was speaking, he pushed the hook through, as fast as he could. Once he saw the barb, he maneuvered the cutters up against the inside of the lip, grabbed the barb with his other hand (it wouldn’t do to have her swallow it), cut, and drew out the hook. Starbuck grunted and grabbed her jaw.

“Easy, we’ve got to put something on that. Robbins, find hand me the alcohol.” Robbins handed him the bottle. “Now, this might sting a little.” He poured alcohol on the lip, inside and out.

That was a bit of an understatement, thought Robbins. He found sterile gauze in the kit, opened the package, and handed a strip to the woman. He mimed putting it around his lip.

Starbuck complied. Lords, that hurt. Keeping pressure on both inside and outside of her lip, she struggled to sit up. “Who are you?” she demanded, words slurred by her thumb in her mouth.

“We’re fishers of men, apparently,” said O’Neill. Robbins groaned. Starbuck obviously didn’t comprehend. O’Neill sighed. He knew so little of the Bible, and the bits he did know just weren’t appreciated.

Try again. “I’m Jack O’Neill. This is Paul Robbins. Of the Tau’ri.” That should impress. Even among the races that knew nothing of recent events,

the Tau'ri were legends.

Starbuck had no idea what he was talking about. However, she did know that she'd been captured by (what was probably) the enemy. Military training took over. Colonials hadn't fought each other for centuries, but the protocol remained. "Thrace. Karen. Lieutenant, Colonial Fleet. 674503219."

O'Neill sighed. Though he had no idea what the Colonial Fleet was, he knew when someone thought she was a POW. Well, it might be easier to take her in that way. "Robbins, hand me the cuffs." The plastic tie variety, it turned out. Good, we can just cut her free when we get back to base. He motioned to Thrace(?) to put her hands behind her back. She did so, and he cuffed them together. Not too tight, but regulation. It wouldn't do for her to get free and club him while they were driving.

"Watch her, Robbins." O'Neill climbed into the driver's seat, turned the key in the ignition, and drove down the path back to the base.