

# Forever the Day

By J. Davidson Hero

She was the only one they were able to save. Dewey watched her for a moment, trying to understand what she must be going through. The little girl stood in a white jumpsuit. She was looking at a monitor in the corner of the room. The room was fluorescent; the furnishings sparse.

“Come here dear. I have a surprise for you,” Dewey said. The little girl ran across the room and stood in front of the wide window filled with an endless array of stars in the black field of the cosmos. Dewey carefully placed the small artificial evergreen tree with tripod on the floor before her. It was hardly taller than she was.

“Is that a Christmas tree?” she asked. Her face lit up with excitement at the prospect of something new.

“It is. I found it in storage, along with some ornaments. Here you go,” Dewey said handing her an antique ornament from a box he was also carrying, “place this on the tree.” She took the ornament in her hand. It was blown glass, nearly translucent with a pink tinge to it, delicate, and even cracked in one spot. She held the tiny metal hook in her tiny fingers, but hesitated. She looked from the hook to the tree and back. Dewey nearly laughed. He had to remind himself, she had never done this before. He took the ornament back and demonstrated how to place it on the tree.

“There... like that.”

She smiled and a warmth seemed to fill Dewey’s chest. She reached into the box and pulled out another. It was a small wooden soldier, hand-carved. It had a little helmet, painted silver, and a wooden sword at its side, also painted silver. The rest was painted red except for the face which was the color of wood. The painted expression on its face was grim, but chivalrous. The girl cupped her hands and held the little soldier for several minutes; she studied it with intensity, trying to memorize all its details.

“Here, I found this too,” he said. The overhead speaker crackled and an old recording started playing. It was tinny as if converted from an old record.

*“O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree,  
Your branches green delight us.”*

She stood quietly examining the little soldier, her breathing shallow and calm. Dewey suddenly felt sad and empty.

*“They're green when summer days are bright;  
They're green when winter snow is white.”*

“Mr. Dewey, what are summer days and winter snow?”

“That is hard to explain dear. They are far off, but someday maybe you will know them.”

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The old lady sat with her back to the window, forever tired of the endless parade of stars. Her fingers had become stiff and contorted. She seldom tried to move out of her chair.

In the room she looked at the old Christmas tree Dewey had gotten out of archive for her every year since she was four. He would be there soon to perform the traditional decorating. It was such a simple tradition, but it was one of the few memories she really treasured.

The door slid open, and Dewey came in. His joints creaked as he moved; time was taking its toll.

“I'm here to decorate the tree. Should I start the music?”

She had the box of ornaments on her lap and carefully took one and handed it to Dewey. He meticulously searched the branches of the tree for the perfect place to put it, a branch it maybe hadn't been on in years past. He turned to her for the next ornament.

She held the little wooden soldier in her hand. She stared at it intently and Dewey remembered their first Christmas together.

“You know, this was always my favorite,” she said, “it always reminded me of you.” She held the little wooden soldier up and twirled it slowly with her fingers.

Dewey felt the need to blush. Why was she being so sentimental lately?

“You all take such very good care of me. What will you do with yourselves when I'm gone?” She was smiling but that didn't mask the pity in her eyes.

“We shall find... something to do with ourselves.” Dewey felt choked up a moment. He couldn't fathom it. Even though he knew it was coming; the day when she would be gone. His insides hurt.

“You know I love you, Mr. Dewey.”

He thought about how much she had not experienced... only videos, books, and recordings... only this small room and a few stray corridors... only a bland diet grown in tanks. Perhaps they should have left her... frozen with her family, in an icy grave.

“Please, let’s hang the ornaments. It’s Christmas and it’s supposed to be a happy time.”

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Dewey didn’t know how long he had stood there. The tiny soldier was still in his hand. Forever there was an endless field of stars, moving slower and slower by the window all the time. They would slow forever until every last light in the ship had lost its last bit of heat. Protocol called for preservation now. No nonessential functions. But the Dewey Archival Unit had some latitude. He listened and it still played.

*“Your boughs so green in summertime  
Stay bravely green in wintertime  
Oh Christmas tree, Oh Christmas tree  
Forever true your color”*