

Spoiler Alert: Both of these scenes were cut during the POV changes. Realistically part of the problem is that they are both “talking scenes” and slow down the “action” in a part where there is very little action anyway. A few of the more important lines were sent to Abby’s chapter in the bakery or Cole’s chapter at the family dinner.

Harden considered reiterating Helen’s warning about the danger of spending too much credits prior to going through customs as he and Abby walked towards a store filled with girls and boys her own age. He knew unless he was going to follow her into the store, she could—and would—do whatever she wanted. After all, it was her paycheck and she needed quite a number of things.

Once she disappeared across the street, he imagined himself walking into the train station, taking the rail to the aero-spaceport and leaving her behind. He’d need to have to have a reason Abby decided to stay on Argent.

If caught in the lie, Helen and Dad would be angry. It was likely Helen would fly down to Argent and find the girl herself. He might even lose his command. Or worse, lose Helen.

Or course, if he was not caught, Helen would shut herself in her billet for a few days as she did when her adoption request was denied. The whole ship would turn towards her grief, plus he would need to find a replacement for the girl. That seemed more of a hassle than keeping her.

He turned into the bakery covered in signs that said “3 cookies for 1 credit!” “Fresh Baked Pasties!” and most importantly “Smokers Welcome!”

A bell rang as Harden walked inside. Cinnamon and apples wafted towards him following the steps of a rather round woman with jiggling brown bosoms.

“Hiya. Need a break from shopping?”

“I need a smoke and whatever it is your making. Smells good.”

“Apple fritters. Your daughter will be back?”

He answered truthfully, “I’m her captain, not her father. An apple fritter, a cup of coffee, and a three pack of the local.” He slipped into a booth next to the large window. The gentle sunshine warm on his arms.

The woman raised an eyebrow as she slid a three pack of cigarettes towards him. “You take all your crew shopping, daddy?”

“I’m no one’s daddy. I had to do paperwork. She doesn’t have her license yet and is just running her errand along with me,” Harden said while wondering why he was explaining himself to a stranger.

The woman asked if he would like to join her in the kitchen.

Harden was pretty sure it would have ended up being a paid transaction. Argent was a service-based economy, and the fleet provided a demand for all types of services. He had been around too long to be shocked, but still felt himself blushing as he answered truthfully again, “I-I have a companion.”

As she served him a hot cup of coffee and an apple fritter straight from her fryer, she asked, “The girl who isn’t your daughter?” Though her words might be taken as disapproving, Harden guessed by the woman’s tone, she probably didn’t care one way or the other.

“No, I have a woman-friend,” Remembering his photo array, he opened it to one of himself, Brian, Helen and Julia. “That’s my sister and her husband, that

lady—she’s my woman-friend, we were in the oxygen garden at Outpost 2. She loves flowers,” he said quickly.

No one else was in the bakery; the woman slipped into the booth across from him. He offered her a cigarette. She accepted and leaned down for him to light it for her. As he assumed she would, she glanced down at the rest of the photo array. Originally a gift from Helen, it helped him make light conversation with people who knew nothing of engineering and the laws of physics. He never left the ship without it.

The baker said, “That’s sweet that you make a distinction. So few do, especially now, those Earth kids have arrived. Those poor Earth babies will do anything for a half credit, then cry to their gods.” Smiling at the next photo, she said, “The boy looks a bit like you...and the woman is lovely.”

“My younger brother. He’s just as tall as me now... and a doctor. That fluff ball on his shoulder is her cat, but she’s my ship’s engineer.”

“She likes women?”

“No, she just needs more than I—or any one man—could give her.”

The woman laughed brightly. After looking at a few more photos, she said that he had a lovely family. She stood up and pulled a photo of a man and six boys from the register.

“Three sets of twins,” she said softly. “The eldest two work with their father on a transport. I worry about them, but they are on a fairly close timeline to Argent. The middle boys are already talking about heading out with him on his next run...”

Then the bell rang and she stood up to sell cigarettes to a few teenagers who walked in. They did not stay.

When she returned, she changed the subject to Earth boys who worked at the mines. Apparently they left garbage everywhere and didn't know how to use a toilet correctly. Eventually the conversation turned back to Abby, Harden slipped in some her cover story.

“Abby's mother was a friend of my sister's who worked on a long range transport, but the kid wanted to work on an explorer so her mom sent her to us.”

“You said, was?”

“The Vos.”

The woman's face went slack and she patted his hand. “Oh that poor baby girl. When she gets back, you tell her she can have whatever she wants from the kitchen.” Then she took a drag on her cigarette.

Seeing Abby come out of a store and get ready to cross the street, he ordered another apple fritter and a carton of milk for her. He insisted on paying even though the woman said insisted he didn't. “You act like her father, you sure you're not?” she said as she set them on the table.

“Pretty sure,” Harden replied.

The woman's bright laugh was back.

The bell rang as Abby bounded it with a large bag. With the hope that she hadn't spent anymore than necessary, Harden pushed an apple fritter and a carton of fresh milk towards her. “Get full. We won't eat again until 21:00, maybe even 22:00.” He took a drag on his cigarette. “I can't believe you roped me into a family dinner. Normally, I get out of these things.”

“I’d of said...”

“Don’t worry about it, kiddo.”

Abby asked him nearly a dozen unimportant questions until the baker came back and slipped a cookie on her plate. “I love when fleet kids come in. You’re so much more polite than the local riffraff and you won’t believe how bratty those Earth kids can be.”

Abby glanced over at him, but only replied, “Thank you, ma’am.”

The woman touched her chin. “Your mother was on the *Vos*?”

Abby met her eyes. “Yes, ma’am.”

“Poor baby. Try that. New recipe.” Then she squeezed the girl’s shoulder.

Except for a little extra paperwork, Harden’s plan had gone off without a hitch. It was pretty easy to convince a baker of Abby’s pretend parentage, but he knew that convincing the *Discovery*’s crew would be much more difficult.

Harden wished he had told Helen to allow him fly over, as he sat down in the shuttle. The food would be good and the wines were always exquisite, but getting dressed up was such a hassle. He was always glad to see Dad and Saul, but not the assholes on Julia’s team. Preferring if she would come over for a private dinner, he began thinking of ways to tempt her away from the *Discovery*. A night in a moonside low-gravity hotel with a very large bathtub? Still he knew he had to go as he said he would. Perhaps afterwards, assuming Abby didn’t screw this up and get them all arrested, he would talk Julia into going moonside with him.

The girl almost sat down next to Diane, but he grabbed Abby's wrist and pulled her down into the seat next to him. He couldn't have her cosseted when he needed to make sure that she was ready. She buckled her harness and he rechecked it, before he felt the slight jolt as Helen piloted the shuttle away from the *Revelation's* shuttle deck. Feeling the velocity push him into his seat, he focused on the girl.

Abby wore a pink shirt she had purchased along with a skirt that he was pretty sure used to be Diane's, in a strange mix of casual and formal that only a teenager could pull off. Her legs were bare and her long black hair was straight down her back. She kept fiddling with the little silver cherry blossom around her neck. He didn't recognize it and assumed she must have bought it on Argent. Harden wasn't a great judge of jewelry, but the necklace looked like the kind of cheap thing that a teenage girl would buy herself and wear. He had to admit if he did not know her background, he would not have guessed Abby was just another fleet brat on the way to a family dinner that she probably would have bailed on if she had the choice.

"Do you not like it?" she whispered.

"Like what?"

"My outfit. Helen said..."

"Whatever Helen said is right. Remember to embrace Dad. He might kiss your brow, don't pull back."

"Yeah. I won't forget. Why don't you?"

"Do what?"

"Hug your dad."

He frowned at her.

“You didn’t at the bank,” she said quickly and looked down.

“The *Discovery* is a touchy crew; so they will probably hug you too, kiss your brow or cheek. You must never pull back—not even from the men you don’t know. Do you understand?”

She nodded.

“Now this is really important: who are you?”

“Abby Lee,” Abby began fidgeting with the edge of her shirt. “Are you sure this is okay?”

“For fuckssake, yes. Who is your mother?”

“Donna Lee.”

“And you miss her?”

From behind him, Diane poked him in the ribs and whispered, “Stop badgering her.”

“I do miss my mom,” Abby said, “I don’t have to pretend that part of it. I miss ‘em all.”

For a moment, Harden thought perhaps he should put his arm around the girl’s narrow shoulders, but he didn’t know if Abby wanted to be touched by a male. He ignored the inclination. “Watch your accent.”

“I miss them all,” she repeated in perfect Kiposi English. Then she looked down at her bare knees. “Maybe...”

Mark said, “If not in his coveralls, Harden always wears the same thing and Helen picked that out for him. Don’t worry. You look really cute.”

Abby blushed happily and looked up at him through her thick lashes. “I won’t mess up.”

Either not seeing her crush or simply not acknowledging it, Mark only replied, “If Harden really thought you’d mess up, he wouldn’t chance taking you.” Then his brother threw him a knowing glance. “He’s always short-tempered after he smokes. His body remembers the drug and wants more of it. It’d be better for him if he just quit.”

Abby said nothing.

At least Harden could trust her not to tell Mark he had been smoking “I expect for you to remain sober tonight.”

She simply nodded and closed her eyes for a moment as Helen landed the shuttle on to the *Discovery*. With the knowledge that his crew’s reputation and freedom was resting on the performance of an eighteen year old, he decided he should have left her on Argent or at least on the *Revelation*, but it was too late now.

Written by Elizabeth Guizzetti, 2011