PAUL OF TERAURA

Book One of the Teraura Saga

FREE SAMPLE

Chapter 1 — The Choosing

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Free sample — Paul of Teraura by Dima Grossman

Chapter 1 — The Choosing

The world had a way of making everything look temporary.

The houses stood against the wind as though they had been placed there by someone who intended to return and finish the work later. Beyond them stretched the company roads, the black ribs of unfinished structures, and the forests that climbed toward the eastern hills. Farther still lay the sea, cold and grey beneath a sky that rarely seemed to belong to anyone.

On Teraura, the company kept records of everything.

It recorded the timber that could be harvested, the ground beneath which fuel might be found, the coastal shelves where construction could proceed, and the children who had no parents to claim them.

The company had its reasons. Everything had to be accounted for. Every resource had its place, every place its number, and every number its purpose.

But a child was not a resource, however carefully the company entered his name.

Paul would learn this much later.

At four years old, he knew nothing about records, inventories, or the distant offices where decisions were made. He knew only the warmth of a room, the smell of freshly cut wood, and a woman's voice singing somewhere nearby.

He remembered the room in fragments.

A window clouded by cold. A table with a scratch across its surface. The movement of light on the floor. A man's hands turning a small wooden animal beneath a lamp.

Whether these were truly his first memories, or whether he had heard them described so often that they had become memories, he could never be certain.

His parents told him the story of his choosing many times.

Anna had been sitting at a table with a list of children before her. Thomas stood near the window, looking out at the weather. They had discussed the decision for several days, although neither could remember afterward what they had said.

Then Anna placed her finger on a name.

Paul.

She read it aloud.

After a moment, she read it again.

The third time, she looked up at Thomas.

"I think it's him," she said.

Thomas came to the table. He studied the name, then looked at his wife.

"Then it's him," he answered.

It was not a ceremony. No official appeared to congratulate them. There was no music, no announcement, no gathering of people to witness the beginning of a family.

There was only a name on a page and two people who had decided that a child they had never met should have a home.

Years later, Paul would ask Anna why she had chosen him.

She would smile and tell him that she had read his name three times.

"And that was enough?"

"It was enough for me."

"But how did you know?"

Anna would look at him for a moment, as though searching for an answer that would make sense to a child.

"I didn't know everything, Paul. Nobody does. Sometimes you simply have to begin."

Thomas was less inclined to explain such things. He believed that a promise became real through what a person did afterward. He could spend an entire evening carving an animal for Paul without saying more than a dozen words, yet the little figure would appear on the windowsill the following morning, polished smooth and shaped with a tenderness that Thomas would never have admitted to possessing.

First came the hare.

Then the bear.

After that, the fox and the owl.

Paul arranged them along the windowsill and imagined that they were watching over the house. The hare was quick and nervous, the bear strong and patient, the fox clever, and the owl wise enough to see what others missed.

Thomas never corrected his interpretations.

He only smiled and returned to his work.

Anna had another way of making the house feel like home. She sang.

Her songs were not always complete. Sometimes she remembered only a few lines, and sometimes she changed the words to suit whatever she was doing. But one song returned so often that Paul came to associate it with the road, with departures, and with the strange idea that people could travel through a great darkness and still find one another.

"The road, my Paul, has led me to you," she sang.

He did not understand what the words meant.

Not then.

Outside, the company continued its work. Machines moved along the roads. Construction crews travelled toward the coast. Notices appeared on boards, bearing dates and instructions written in the impersonal language of administration.

The company named stars by number, according to their position and usefulness. It named work sites by grids and sectors. It could look upon an entire world and describe it in terms of what might be extracted, measured, or built.

Paul, however, had begun to name the stars differently.

He called one Lantern.

Another he named Herd, because the smaller lights beside it seemed to follow it across the sky.

And one distant ember, barely visible on certain nights, he called Chara—the ember that doesn't go out.

Nobody had taught him to do this. The names simply came to him, and once he had spoken them, the stars seemed to belong a little more to him.

Perhaps this was the first thing Paul ever did that was entirely his own.

He could not have explained it. He could not have known that, one day, the difference between a number and a name would matter more than he could imagine.

For now, he was a child in a house at the edge of a vast and unfamiliar world.

He had a mother who sang, a father who carved animals, and a windowsill full of silent wooden creatures.

He had stars with names no company had given them.

And he had a home.

Beyond the window, the forest stood beneath the evening sky, dark and immense, stretching eastward toward the remote country where the roads grew thin and the settlements became few.

One day, Paul would go there.

One day, he would discover that the world was much larger, stranger, and more dangerous than the stories told inside his house.

But that was still ahead of him.

For the moment, the road had brought him home.

And the story had begun.

THE STORY CONTINUES

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