

Wednesday, May 2, 2068, 3:15 p.m., Tracy Island.

"Mom?" Alex called as he poked his head into the infirmary. "Hey, Ty."

"Hi, Alex. She's in the office," Tyler said. He was sitting up in bed, playing a vid game on the single televid in the sick room.

"Okay, thanks." The older boy made his way into the office. "Mom? When is Tyler getting out of here?"

"Hello, Alex," his mother said distractedly, as she updated the sickroom inventory. Then his question registered. "I'm sorry, honey. Ty should be released tomorrow. Just waiting to see how he does with solid food tonight, that's all."

"Oh, good," the boy said. "I've kinda missed him." He looked down and scuffed his sandal on the floor. "I've kinda missed you, too, with you being down here so much and all."

Dianne stopped what she was doing and turned to face her son. "C'mere," she said opening her arms wide. "I'm sorry I haven't been around much for you. Believe me, when you've taken sick, I've been down here just as much for you."

Alex stepped over to her and accepted her embrace. "Yeah, I know. And Dad's been trying to fill in. But he's got a merger or something coming along...."

"Yes, I know," Dianne said emphatically.

"Well, anyway, I came down here to tell you that my banjo catfish doesn't look too good," he explained. "I don't know what to do."

"Honey, you're going to have to ask Gordon about it, or maybe Brains. You know I don't know how to fix a banjo catfish."

"I know. But you usually tell me what to do to make the water better," Alex said.

"Have you done the usual chemical checks and balances?" she asked.

"Yeah, but he's still not looking good."

She gave her son a sympathetic gaze. "I'm afraid you may lose him, hon. And I'm not talking about losing sight of him in the tank either."

"I know," the boy admitted. "If I do, can we go to Wellington and get a replacement? Maybe one of those panda corys?"

"We'll see," Dianne answered. "But any trip to Wellington would have to be either with one of your brothers or after your father and I return from my birthday celebration."

"I don't see why you and Dad have to go off together without us," Alex pouted. "We'd like to see the new place, too."

"You have school," his mother reminded him. "Besides, your Dad and I need to get away for a bit, just the two of us. We'll bring you to New Hampshire sometime during the school break, okay?"

"I guess so," Alex said with a sigh. "I guess I'd better go find Gordon."

"After you have the fish doctor look at the banjo, why don't you come back down and play a game with Tyler. You've barely been down to see him since he's been sick," Dianne suggested.

"Okay. I will. See you later, Mom," the boy said as he turned and left the office.

It took a few minutes to sink in, but Dianne looked up from her inventory, realizing that she hadn't heard the sick room door open and close. She poked her head into the infirmary section and saw Alex and Tyler sitting side by side on the bed, playing the video game.

"I thought you were going to find Gordon," she said as she came over to watch.

"Yeah, but I figured; hey, my brother's more important than a fish," Alex explained, not looking over at her.

Dianne smiled and ruffled his hair, then went back to work.

From Tikatu 8/14/2005 2:58 PM
