

Tuesday, March 20, 2068, 4:15 p.m., local time, Greenville, SC

"That should do it," Lisa Parkhurst said as she maneuvered her full grocery cart to the checkout line. It seemed like forever since she had been home and she needed to restock her pantry. Not only that, but she expected to cook a big meal for the family on Thursday, to be eaten after the memorial service, and she wanted to have a variety of foods available. Her daughter-in-law, Angela, would be cooking some of the meal at her home and bringing it along but with Dianne, Andrew, and her oldest son, Jared, and their respective families in town, the guest list had just multiplied exponentially. She knew that Jeff could and would take them all out to dinner at some fancy restaurant and pay the tab without a blink if she wanted him to, but that's not how she was raised, nor was it the way she had raised her children. Family came together at home as often as possible.

Dianne followed her mother to the checkout line. Gordon was still meandering through the store, marveling at the new things on the grocer's shelves and the differences in brand names and in what was considered gourmet from what he knew. He had asked Dianne point-blank if she had ever eaten pig's feet, to which she answered "No, and I don't intend to, so don't even think of buying any!" For all she knew, this prankster stepson of hers was coming up with some devious plot involving the pig's feet that were so neatly packaged in the meat section of the store.

Alex, who hated clothes shopping but loved food shopping, started to help unload the overflowing basket, and Dianne moved into position to help him. She removed the groceries from the cart while he scanned each item and passed it on to Lisa for bagging. Dianne was leaning down into the basket to get a last few things when someone tapped her on the back.

"Dianne? Is that you?"

Dianne came up out of the basket and looked at the woman who stood in line behind her.

"Pauline!" she cried happily. The two women embraced.

"It's so good to see you!" Dianne exclaimed. Pauline, a woman about Dianne's age with straight salt and pepper hair, looked over at Alex.

"Is that Alex? He's grown so much since I saw him last!" Pauline observed.

"Hi, Mrs. Harding," Alex responded, giving her a little wave.

"Oh, and there you are, Lisa!" Dianne's old friend called.

"Why, hello there, Pauline!" Lisa called back with a grin. "It's seems like forever, doesn't it?"

"It sure does. When can I call for an appointment?"

"Try tomorrow morning, Pauline."

"I will!" Pauline turned her attention back to Dianne. "So, you're here for the memorial?"

"Yes, I am," Dianne told her. "They've asked me to speak."

"That's a switch!" Pauline commented. "But a nice change if it continues. How's your husband? I heard about that helijet going down."

"He's doing much better, Pauline. As a matter of fact, he got his arm cast off and most of his leg cast just today. His foot still has some healing to do, though," Dianne explained.

"Well, that's encouraging!" Pauline frowned a bit. "Did they ever figure out what he was doing up there with that pilot? I've heard the most outrageous rumors!"

"You have? You'll have to tell them to me sometime," Dianne replied, her heart twisting as she thought about what those rumors might entail. She leaned close to her friend. "Between you, me, and the grocery cart, he was up there to buy me a gift."

"Really? That's marvelous," Pauline said, her tone indicating that she didn't quite believe Dianne's explanation. Just then a tenor voice cut in.

"Why, Mom! Who is this lovely lady?" Gordon came up behind them, pressing a box of crackers and a bottle of soda into Alex's hands.

Dianne rolled her eyes and shook her head, while Pauline laughed. "Pauline, meet my number four stepson, Gordon Tracy. Gordon, this is my good friend, Pauline Harding."

"A pleasure to meet you, ma'am," Gordon said, putting on his most charming smile as he shook Pauline's hand.

"My, my, my," Pauline said, looking at him with an amused smile. "Aren't you the charmer? If your father is half as charming as you are, young man, it's no wonder why Dianne fell for him!"

"Try twice as charming," Dianne riposted. "Now, Gordon. Do you have everything you want?"

"All except those pig's feet...."

Pauline laughed. Dianne took him by the shoulders and pushed him off in Lisa's direction. "Go help your grandmother take the groceries out!"

"A pleasure to meet you, Mrs. Harding," Gordon called back, as Lisa put him into service as official cart pusher. Pauline began to unload her own groceries.

"It's so good to see you again, Dianne. I won't be at the memorial service; work, you know. But you'll be in my thoughts."

Dianne embraced her friend again. "I know, and I appreciate it. Maybe I'll see you later and we

can really talk."

"Maybe. In any case, don't be a stranger."

"I'll try not to. Talk to you again, soon."

Dianne left the grocery store, walking some distance behind her family. She sighed, a mixture of pleasure and of melancholy.

It's so easy to forget about one's friends and the world around you when you live in an island paradise. I have to make more of an effort to keep in touch.

Post by Tikatu on 28/11/2004
