

Thursday, January 3, 2069, 2:00 p.m., Tracy Island

"And here we go!" Gordon announced as he brought a serving cart full of food into the family's home theater.

"Ahhh, thank you for helping me with the snacks, Gordon." Emily reached up and patted her grandson's cheek.

"Only reason he helped is because he's eying Mom's double chocolate brownies," Virgil said as he adjusted the sound levels on the theater's wide screen televid.

"I know, Virgil," Emily replied, giving him a wink. "But everyone needs a little bribe now and then."

"Tyler, don't you think Patches would be better off in your room?" Dianne's gentle question made the youngest child look up from his play. The kitten, whose body was lengthening by the day, and who was shaking his kittenish looks for more cat-like ones, was flattened against the floor, intently watching a dot of red light. Tyler slowly moved the dot around, and the kitten's eyes followed it. Another ripple of haunch muscles, and Patches leapt for his prey... which danced quickly out of the way.

"But we're having so much fun!" Tyler protested, his eyes focused on the kitten's next move.

"Yes, but he'll be a distraction," Dianne reminded the boy. "Especially if he gets into the snacks, like last time."

With a sigh, Tyler pocketed the laser pointer. "Okay. I'll put him in our room." He picked the kitten up, supporting the hind legs with one hand while holding his pet close with his other. "Don't start without me!"

His mother smiled. "We won't. Promise."

"Here, Mom." Alex carefully carried a plate of treats and a glass of soft drink to his mother.

"Thank you, Alex," she replied as she took them, smiling at him.

"Can I get my treats now?" he asked.

Dianne nodded, and Alex trundled off to supply himself with snacks. Cherie came in and plopped herself into a chair in the back row. Dianne turned and gave her a smile. "Feeling better?"

"Yeah, I guess." The girl sighed heavily. "I hate this time of the month."

"I don't know of a woman who doesn't, sweetie," Emily said sympathetically. She carried a plate of food and sat down next to her granddaughter. "Better get something to eat. Take something

chocolate; that always helps."

"Okay." Cherie got up slowly and padded over to raid the brownie plate. Tyler returned and filled up a plate for himself, then sat down next to his mother.

"All right, everyone!" Virgil clapped his hands for attention. "The Tournament of Roses Parade is about to commence. Make yourselves comfortable because we won't be pausing this for bathroom runs, et cetera. The parade lasts over two and a half hours; I'll call an intermission at the hour-fifteen minute mark, or as close to that as we can get. Then you can get up for more food, drink, potty, whatever. Does everyone understand?"

There were general calls of agreement, then Virgil started the recording, and grabbed a drink before settling down himself.

The first few moments were of the anchors, Blake Stevens and Mia Miner, covering the event giving a bit of history, and telling the audience about the theme, Heroes: Past and Present.

"Wonder who the Grand Marshal will be," Emily said to Gordon, who sat on her left.

"Not sure," Gordon murmured back, "but Tin-Tin sure had a big grin on her face when I asked." He harrumphed a bit. "Wouldn't tell me, either."

The Tournament of Roses president passed by, riding in an open, horse-drawn carriage that was decorated with roses. The floats started to appear, and the children oohed and aahed over the bright colors. The first of the marching bands came by, dressed in crisp white uniforms.

"What is that they're playing?" Grandma asked, a puzzled frown on her face.

Virgil shrugged. "I don't know, Grandma. I'm not familiar with Barry Gray." He sipped his drink. "It's a nice march though."

"Kinda reminds me of some of the music I heard at WASP," Gordon added.

The first equestrian group passed by, dressed in Western finery. Metal accents glistened in the sunlight, and the men took off their pinch-front hats to wave them at the crowd. Cherie sat forward, excited. "Look at those gorgeous palominos!"

"Glad to see you're still into horses, Cherry," Dianne said, a knowing smile spreading across her lips.

"I've never not been into them." Cherie sounded irritated. Dianne rolled her eyes.

Pasadena's mayor followed the palaminos, riding in an open, flower-draped hovercar. More floats went by, and more bands, and more equestrian teams. Cherie and Virgil put their heads together over the float designs, while Gordon played "Name That Tune" with the others. Blake and Mia took turns describing the floats, and mentioning which ones had won awards.

"Hey!" Alex whispered. "Here comes the Grand Marshal."

"Look at that beautiful car," Virgil murmured. "Such a classic."

Dianne's eyes widened and her jaw dropped as the camera zoomed in and Mia said, "And this year's Grand Marshall is Dr. Andrew Carmichael, from Mercy General Hospital in Los Angeles. The lovely lady riding with him is his wife, Margaret."

"Uncle Drew!" Gordon cried out, laughing. "That old son-of-a-gun!"

"Shh!" Dianne said, waving a hand to shush him. "I want to hear this!"

Blake was replying to something his partner had said. "...The parade committee had chosen Doctors Without Borders for the outstanding job they did during the tsunami last April, but it was the stellar work Dr. Carmichael did helping International Rescue's medical personnel that made the decision to honor him personally an inevitable one."

Dianne shook her head. "I'm gonna kill Uncle Drew for not mentioning this," she muttered. "And maybe even Aunt Maggie..."

"You know they would have wanted it to be a surprise," Emily told her.

"And it sure is one!" Virgil said, a wide grin plastered across his face. "We need to haul Dad down here and let him see it!"

"He'd appreciate that classic Thunderbird, that's for sure!" Gordon quipped. "They don't make convertibles like that anymore. Too bad it's not yellow."

"Or green!" Virgil added. "Figures they'd choose a red one for the parade."

Dianne shook her head at the close-up of her uncle, smiling widely and waving to the crowds. "I wonder if Ma knew about this. And I wonder if this is what Lena meant when she called."

"Oh?" Emily glanced over at her daughter-in-law.

"Yeah. Lena called yesterday, just to say hello, and while we were talking, she asked if I'd seen the Tournament of Roses parade. When I told her I hadn't, but that I was intending to, she sort of smiled and said that I really should watch it soon."

"Well, now you can call her back and talk about the surprise," Emily said, smiling knowingly.

Dianne returned the smile, and both women turned their attention back to the recording.

They were almost to the halfway point of the recording. Gordon wolf-whistled at the Queen and her court as they went by.

Another marching band, and another equestrian group, then another float came into view. "And here's the winner of this year's Theme Trophy. This is a special one, isn't it, Blake?" Mia asked.

"Yes, it sure is, Mia, especially with the upcoming moon mission," Blake declared. "This float is called, 'One Giant Step'."

He began to describe the float, telling the audience all about the plants and flowers used. The float was in two parts, and depicted someone in a spacesuit, walking on a slightly curved dome representing the moon. The first figure had planted an American flag on the surface. Around the edges of the dome was the name, "Neil Armstrong, July 20, 1969" and at the front of the were the words, "Apollo 11". The second dome was set higher than the first, and though the scene was similar, there were important differences. The spacesuit was a newer model; the flag represented the World Space Agency. The mission was the "F.L.O. Explorer"; the date was "September 11, 2039", and the name...

"Hey! Isn't that Dad's mission?" Virgil exclaimed.

"Oh, yeah! You're right!" Gordon reached forward, grabbed his brother's shoulder and shook it a little. Virgil returned the gesture with a wide grin. "Now Dad really has to see this!"

Alex's eyes widened. "Wow! Dad walked on the moon! So cool!"

"Didn't you know that already?" Cherie asked, sounding petulant.

"Well... yeah," Alex returned. "But... not like this! I mean, it's one thing to know it in your head..." He waved his arms, trying to figure out how to put what he wanted to say.

"And another thing altogether to see it." Emily turned to Alex. "Is that what you wanted to say?"

"Yeah, Grandma. That's exactly it!"

Dianne put her hand on Tyler's shoulder as the boy sat on the floor near her feet. "What do you think of the float, Ty?"

"Dad's name is on it. So it's cool," he said with a nod. "And Dad's cool." He looked over his shoulder at his mother. "But I knew that already."

The others chuckled, and Gordon leaned over to hold out his hand. "I wanna shake your hand, m'boy. You are a true Tracy son!"

Virgil paused the recording, and turned up the lights. "Time for a quick intermission, then we'll watch the second half."

"Good." Cherie said. She stood up, and a distressed look crossed her face. She hurried from the room with a quick, determined walk.

Emily shook her head. "And to think she has another forty years or more of this to go."

"Too true." Dianne looked at her watch. "Wish I had time to call Lena. That's two surprises now I can talk with her about."

"Well, there probably won't be a third surprise." Emily stretched and yawned a little. "I'll be right back. Time to use the toilet myself."

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