

Sunday, April 7, 2069 (Palm Sunday) late afternoon, Tracy Island

Jeff shielded his eyes from the sun's glare, gazing out over the whitecaps to watch Drew's plane approach. Dianne sat in a dune buggy, waiting with Gordon at the edge of the runway. Every so often, she glanced up to the switchback drive, casting a critical eye on the work team as they filled in the cut dug out by the cyclone's lashing winds. The boulder and debris had been cleared away from where they'd fallen and the macadam runway had been patched and smoothed. However, to make the trail repairs, Brains had to order a special bonding ingredient to add to the concrete mixed up on site. It had arrived the previous day and between the cahelium rebar, pumice-infused cement, and flexible metal lathe, the trail would soon be back in use. Until then, the dune buggies would be the choice of transport while the Parkhurst cousins visited.

Drew's jet touched down smoothly, jets screaming as he applied reverse thrust. It came to a halt in the shadow of the main cliff, just before the hangar door. Jeff took his place beside Dianne while Gordon eased out around them, heading down the runway toward the jet.

By the time Jeff and Dianne joined him, the steps had been lowered and Jared's twins had tumbled out, followed at a more sedate pace by Stephanie and Maggie. Gordon greeted the two boys with enthusiasm before giving Stephanie a quick hug. Dianne hurried up to greet Maggie, who hooked a thumb over one shoulder.

"Fair warning," she said as she parted from Dianne's heartfelt embrace. "He's grumpy. Verrrrry grumpy."

Before Dianne could ask why, Jeff pulled the pilot's door open, offering a hand to Drew. Drew looked at it with a sour face.

"Never again."

"Well, it's good to see you, too." Jeff let his hand drop. "What happened?"

Drew hopped down from his seat, leaving his tablet behind. He pointed very emphatically at Dianne. "Don't ask me to take Jared's two hellions anywhere near a theme park ever again! You couldn't pay me enough repeat that experience!"

"Why? What happened?"

"There were only two of us and three of them!" Drew slammed the pilot's door shut, making Jeff wince. "Stephanie wasn't so bad; she was only interested in a few of the rides and preferred shopping with Maggie. The twins, on the other hand, could not wait patiently in line for anything!" He shook his head as he turned toward the dune buggies. "Not to mention that J.J. ate too much junk food and got horribly sick on Space Mountain, of all places!"

Dianne shook her head, blowing a long breath. "Wow. That must have been awful!"

"It was!"

Jeff put a hand on Drew's shoulder. "I'm sorry to have put you through that, Drew. We won't ask it of you again."

"Thank you for taking them on," Dianne added. "We really appreciate it."

Being double-teamed by a pair of appropriately remorseful and thankful Tracys drained the pique from Drew. "Hmph," he huffed, a still-peevish expression on his face. "Thank you and you're welcome." Stopping at the dune buggy, he glanced at it as if seeing it for the first time. "Why--?"

"That." Jeff pointed up to where Scott, Virgil, and Will were working.

Drew followed his finger and let out a low whistle. "Now I understand why you needed a delay." He turned to Dianne. "When did that happen?"

"The storm. We're still making repairs." She gestured toward the airstrip. "I bet you didn't even notice the missing palm trees."

"I did!" Stephanie grinned from where she stood, waiting to climb into the dune buggy. "I asked Gordon about them and he said something stupid about a cyclone picking them up like in the Wizard of Oz."

Dianne turned toward the girl and motioned for her to climb into a back seat. "Well, he's right--sort of. To be accurate, a typhoon, a hurricane, and a cyclone are all the same thing. Just different names in different places, depending on where the storm originates." Dianne kept talking as she took the seat in front of Stephanie. Jeff took the driver's side and Drew settled in behind him. "In the Atlantic and the northeast Pacific, the term is 'hurricane'. Down in the South Pacific and the Indian Ocean, the proper term is 'cyclone' and in the northwest Pacific, it's typhoon." She held on as Jeff put the dune buggy in gear and headed along the beach for a bit, following in the tracks Gordon--carrying Maggie and the twins--had already made.

"Oh! I thought he was talking about a tornado. I mean, that's what took Dorothy to Oz, isn't it?" Stephanie grabbed onto a roll bar as they took a sharp turn and began to climb. "Aren't tornadoes also called cyclones?"

"I think Gordon likes his wordplay a bit much sometimes," Jeff called back. "People used to call tornadoes 'cyclones'--after all, the word's origin means 'revolve' or 'whirl'--but that hasn't been scientifically accurate for a long time." He pressed down on the accelerator to keep them bumping up the relatively clear hill to the Round House. "Plus, a long-standing nickname for Australia is--"

"Oz!" Stephanie slapped her own forehead. "Duh!" She shook her head. "How do you put up with Gordon, Aunt Dianne? Uncle Jeff?"

Jeff chuckled. "Practice, Stephanie. Lots and lots of practice!"