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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 20:45:24 GMT

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Thursday, November 1, 2068, 8:55 p.m., Christchurch, New Zealand

"You should have seen Dom!" Cherie exclaimed. "He was dressed as Dorothy, from the Wizard of Oz movie!"

"Sounds like you had a great bun-fight," Aroha said, sipping her drink. "Would be nice to go to a big do like that sometime."

Cherie's excitement deflated a little. Her friends had been quiet that evening at the ice cream shop. In fact, they hadn't really asked her to come with them, but when she asked if they were going, Anneliese had shrugged and said, "Yeah. We're going." Cherie had never even thought twice about not being part of the group, so she'd tagged along. But now she was feeling as if she weren't wanted. A slight frown creased the space between her eyebrows as she looked from friend to friend.

"Hey, is there something the matter?" she asked. "Everyone seems so... glum."

The friends glanced at each other, and Jen held a hand out, giving a half shrug. Finally, she spoke up, not looking Cherie in the eye. "We were, uh, we were wondering when you were going to tell us who you really are."

Cherie's frown deepened. "What do you mean, who I really am?" She glanced around the table. "I'm Cherie."

"But Cherie who?" Tim asked, giving her a keen look. "You never told us your last name. You can never stay past a certain time, even if we offer you a lift home. We asked Mr. Jernigan to give us your last name, and he kinda hemmed and hawed and wouldn't tell us."

Anneliese took up the explanation. "You talk about big parties and your brothers and all these strange people and how you went to the States for a weekend... as if they're nothing. I mean, some of us would have to save up forever to go to the States, and it would be a huge big thing."

"Not only that," Manjari said, lowering her voice. "I've noticed that everywhere you go," she made a motion with her head toward Airini, who sat in a corner, reading, "she goes."

Cherie sighed. She rubbed one arm with the opposite hand, and bit her lower lip. Then she took a deep breath, and leaned in. "You want to know who I am?" she said softly, so softly that the others had to lean in to hear. "You have to promise not to tell anyone."

"Why?" Jen asked, a half-sneer on her face. "Are you some kind of celebrity or something?"

"Something like that. But I won't tell you unless you promise to keep this between us." Cherie glanced at each friend, and one by one, they nodded or made some indication that they agreed. "Okay."

She ducked into her art bag, and pulled out her wallet. "Since I'm sure you won't believe me without proof..." Opening the wallet, she looked at the pictures, then selected one. Pushing it over to the center of the table, she said, in a low, hushed voice, "I'm Cherie Tracy, and this is my dad."

It was a picture of a silver-haired man in a tuxedo, standing next to a woman in a wedding dress. Cherie was in the picture, as were two younger boys, one with rusty red hair, and the other blond. "That was my mom and dad's wedding day."

"And this is supposed to convince us of... what?" Jen asked, her tone sarcastic.

"Wait a minute," Tim said, looking at the picture carefully. "My brother fancies space stuff and has a big poster with the space pioneers on the wall in our room." He tapped the picture carefully. "This bloke is on that poster. Younger looking, sure, but he's on it. Jeff Tracy."

"Get off the grass!" Aroha said, waving a dismissive hand. "That Jeff Tracy bloke's a million-billionaire. She's giving you a load of codswollop!"

"I'm not," Cherie hissed. "I'm telling the truth. He's my adoptive father. You can see it for yourself."

The girls glanced at Tim, who held the picture thoughtfully. He shrugged. "If he's your dad, then why not say so?"

"What do you think?" Cherie said, still keeping her voice down. "My dad's a rich man. People know I'm here, they could try something. Maybe kidnapping." She shot a glance at Airini. "She's... she's my bodyguard." She licked her lips a little and said, even softer, "Besides, I wanted to make friends who didn't care who my dad was. Who liked me just for me."

Anneliese's face took on a troubled look at the last statement. "I... I guess I'd want that, too."

"So, these are your brothers?" Aroha asked, sounding skeptical.

"Those are my younger brothers," Cherie said. "My biological brothers. I have adoptive brothers, too, but they're way older than me."

Aroha nodded slowly. "I was wondering 'cause you always talk about them giving you a lift and all." She took the picture from Tim. "These two aren't old enough to drive."

"Do you have a picture of your older brothers?" Manjari asked, curious.

Cherie shook her head. "No, I don't." This wasn't exactly true; she did have one, but with this group being the core of Virgil's fan club, she knew she couldn't show them that picture. She held out a hand, and Manjari gave the picture back. "Please, guys, don't tell anyone about this. My dad... he's really paranoid about security."

"We'll keep it quiet," Anneliese promised. She gave each of the others a hard look. Jen rolled her eyes and shook her head, but Anneliese wouldn't give in. "Won't we, Jen?"

"I think she's spinning a yarn, and if she isn't, she's skiting," Jen said, loud enough to be heard.

"Strewth!" Aroha gave Jen a hard nudge. "You don't have to be stroppy about it." Turning to Cherie, she said, "We'll be quiet, and make sure this one is, too."

Cherie looked at her ice cream sundae, and sighed. "I'd probably better go." Pulling out her phone, she fast dialed a number. As she did, Airini got up and sauntered out.

"Gords? I'm ready." Cherie tucked her picture back into the wallet, and the wallet back into her art bag. She picked up the remains of her treat. She said to the group, "I'll see you next week." Shouldering the art bag, she made her way to the door, and out onto the sidewalk. Airini was there, waiting.

The sports car pulled up, and Cherie opened the door. "Here," she said, handing her treat to Gordon, who sat behind the wheel. Sliding in, she closed the door behind her.

"Gee, thanks!" he replied, a touch of sarcasm in his voice. Then he noticed Cherie's demeanor, and his attitude changed. "I'm sorry, Cherry. You okay?"

"Not really." She sighed. "I think I just blew it."

In the doorway, Tim looked out in the night, watching as the sports car pulled out and disappeared into traffic. He made a mental note of the car's make and model, determined to find out if Cherie was really telling the truth or not.

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