

21. The Crane Conversion

Jed swaggered toward the hardware terrace where everybody gathered ready to welcome him. *Yeah right, as if.*

Wendy picked up her mug and strolled out to meet him.



“What? I’m not even allowed a sit down and a chin wag?” he said.

“After we do business,” Wendy said. “You’re dropping off the crane assembly, right?”

Drew put it more plainly. “Jackie sold the crane assembly to Bosley’s Builders by way of Boz himself, I understand. And Boz paid her?”

“She used that money to pay me off for the apartment,” Wendy said. “And to pay for her license to run a childcare facility.”

Jed opened his mouth to have his say but Tim rolled right over him. “So, we’re paying you for transporting the crane assembly to us here. Why don’t you park your rig at the bottom of the slope so we can start to separate the two? While we do that, Drew will fix you up and probably shout you a coffee.”

“You’ll need my help with the crane,” Jed said. *I don’t trust them with my truck for a start.*

Jed parked the rig *just-so* then stood around waiting to see what he could see.

Gary and Tim undid the bolts fastening the crane assembly to the truck-bed while Jed watched them.

Trish and Bee located a pair of 2 x 15 plates in one of Tim's storage containers. They dragged them free one by one with the chains Trish used for the same job on the canteen.



They fastened the chains to the ends of a beam and they slid it toward where the truck was parked side-on to the bottom of the slope.

All four helped to wedge the plates under the crane-assembly, Jed still just watching.

“Wait!” Gary said. “Before we start to move the crane, we could park the dolly under the beams halfway the slope.”



“I see your plan,” Trish said. “Then we just slide the contraption till it’s above the dolly ...”

Bee and Trish positioned the dolly just so, then all four handled the crane assembly over the make-do bridge.

“Hardest part is going to be lining up the axle and its socket,” Tim said. “You will all need to push while I hold up the axle.”



“Gotcha,” Gary said. “Your wizard-friend is here to help too,” he added nervously with Nin Wizard hovering behind him.

“Nin, good to get your help,” Tim said.

Nin hopped excitedly and laid his hands on the crane’s cabin. The whole assembly rose a handspan. An easy matter then to push it gently to its position above the dolly.



Nin slowly withdrew his hands and the crane, equally slowly, settled on the dolly, while Gary and Tim dragged aside the beams very fast.

Thu-u-ud.

Jed jumped down from the truck bed and went to join Drew on the hardware terrace. Wendy fetched three coffees and sat down with them.

“How much fuel did you use,” Drew said. “And how much will you need to return to your base?”

“Good thing you asked that,” Jed said. “The tide being on the rise, it was much more of a grind than normal.”

“You could’ve come earlier,” Drew said. “I don’t know what you think you’ll do hanging about till the tide turns?”

Jed scoffed. “I *planned* to help you separate the crane. But seeing you’ve got that geriatric wizard helping, I’ll be gone as soon as I’m down here....”

“Fine,” Wendy said. “You want to take a load of rubbish for ballast? Because without the weight of the crane you might float? Tip the rubbish onto the garbage dump as you gain the road.”

“Only if you’ll pay me,” Jed said.

“Okay,” Drew said. “We pay the garbage scow a week’s worth of meals for two. You got an icebox with you?”

“You’re going to pay me fourteen meals for taking your rubbish away?” His voice rose without him having to try. “You really are a bunch of cheapskates! Glad I’m cutting my ties finally.”

“The only thing that’s changed here while you’ve been gone is that the sea is getting closer,”

Drew said, passing Jed an envelope. "Payment for the delivery."

Wendy rose as if she was going to say that his welcome was worn out. "Forget the ballast then," she said. "Perhaps Robbie will tow you back, he's due for his return trip any minute."

"I was thinking of collecting a few odds and ends from the cabin," Jed said.

"I'll walk you," Wendy said like she didn't trust him.



"Started to take it apart before I even knew I was leaving for good?" he said bitterly.

"We took the roof off because it leaked," Trish said. "Had a canvas over it that we took off to air the place. Since the weather has cleared. Mildew everywhere."

He got a couple of Joey's toys, to help him stay in good with his son at least, and skedaddled out of there.



He glanced into the rear vision. *Blow me down if the whole crew isn't standing there waving
bye bye Jed.*