

Zero-G Raffe

Domonik drummed his fingers on the table staring at the hourglass on the screen flip over and over, waiting for the page to load. He took a sip of his earl grey tea stared out the window at the overcast sky. They should have connected his call by now. What was taking so long?

“Dad, can giraffes go to the moon?”

“What?” Dominik replied, looking up from his laptop.

His daughter looked at him from the leather sofa in the adjacent room.

“Giraffes, can they live on the moon?” she asked again.

“No Tilly they can’t live on the moon.” He chuckled.

“Why not” asked Tilly.

“I don’t think they’d like it up there.”

“Why not”

“Well, there’s no air up there. They wouldn’t be able to breath.”

“Then how come the man on the TV can live on the moon.”

“Which man?” Dominik asked getting up from his chair.

“The one walking funny.” Tilly replied

He walked over and sat down on the sofa next to her.

“See.” Tilly said pointing at the figure on the TV.

“That’s Neil Armstrong”

“Why does he get to live on the moon?”

“Tilly, he doesn’t live there.”

“Yes, he does, see he’s climbing down the ladder of his little moon house. She said pointing back to the TV. “Do all moon houses have legs?”

“Tilly that’s not a ‘moon house.’ That’s the Lunar Lander. Its part of his spaceship.”

“Oh.” Tilly replied, “Then why can he breathe on the moon, but giraffes can’t.”

“Well, he’s got that helmet and spacesuit on, which has air that he can breathe.” Her dad explained.

“Why don’t they make giraffe spacesuits?” Tilly asked.

Dominik couldn’t help but laugh. Tilly didn’t understand what was so funny about her serious questions.

“Well Teacup, those people had to build the spaceship and the spacesuits to fit people. They probably don’t know how to build suits or ships to fit giraffe sizes.”

“But I wanted to bring Tabasco with me when I go to space.” Tilly said holding up her spotted stuffed friend.

“I think Tabasco needs a helmet first.”

Her dad walked back over to the kitchen and searched through one of the cupboards. He returned and handed her a small, round plastic jar.

Tilly took the gift and tried to squeeze Tabasco's head into the jar's opening. After a minute or two, she finally managed to get the 'helmet' to fit, albeit by scrunching Tabasco's nose. The giraffe seemed happy otherwise.

Domonik was pleased Tilly loved that toy so much. Domonik had bought it for her last year after his shift at the zoo. This year's gift was much better though. He had named the newest giraffe calf after her and was planning to introduce the two Tillys to each other sometime this week.

The thunder outside interrupted Dominick's train of thought.

"Have you heard from mom yet?" Tilly asked

"No not yet" Domonik said with a slight sigh, staring back at the computer screen.

"She was supposed to have called by now." Tilly said

"Yes, but it's a long connection for her work to make all the way to us." Domonik stated

"Do they have the right number for us?"

"That's not how video calls work Teacup."

"Do you think her bosses forgot this time?" Tilly said, a gloomy tone in her voice.

Domonik knew what she was talking about. When her mother's higherups neglected to connect her calls to his computer for an entire month, thus missing Tilly's birthday last year.

"No, I don't think they will forget this time." Domonik said reassuringly.

"Why does mom have to work so much?" Tilly asked, "She didn't even get to come home for Christmas last year."

“I know its hard Teacup, but you have to understand her job requires her to make these trips to support many different projects. Your mother and her work are especially important.”

“More important than me?” Tilly asked. Tears formed in the corner of her eyes.

Domonik knew it had been difficult for Tilly, especially the last couple of years, when her mothers’ trips became more frequent.

He knelt and hugged his daughter. “No. You are more important to her than anything. Your mothers job helps many people all over the world make their ideas work together. She is helping people make improvements in science, medicine, even farming. She can be a bit scatter-brained, and her bosses don’t make it any easier, but it doesn’t mean she doesn’t love you.” Domonik said.

“I know.” Tilly cried into her father’s shoulder. “I just miss her.”

“Me too.” Domonik sighed.

Domonik stayed there for a moment just hugging his daughter.

“Hey, I think I know what we need.”

“Cake?” Tilly asked with a small smile, meaning that her mood was improving already.

“Nice try but no. I *do* think we need to get Tabasco into the rest of his spacesuit.”

Domonik opened the junk drawer in the kitchen and rummaged around, pulling out an orange sweatband and a rocket ship pin. He stuck the pin over the sweatband’s sports logo and handed Tilly the items. He dug further and found an empty travel-size shampoo bottle, and two hair ties

Domonik slid the sweatband up the giraffe's legs and over its back, the elastic of the sweat band compressing the giraffe's torso. Domonik then affixed the shampoo bottle to the giraffes back with the hair ties, before handing his daughter back his creation.

It was an odd outfit. Nothing you would see on the runway, but it satisfied his six-year-old's imagination, nonetheless.

"He looks so great now!" Tilly declared. "Thanks dad. I'm going to find him a spaceship. "

"You're welcome!" Domonik called out as she ran past him up the stairs.

Looking outside Domonik saw that the storm had cleared up and he could see the sun begin to set.

Suddenly his laptop began ringing. Domonik ran back over to his chair and hit enter. The screen changed to that of a blonde woman. Her hair swaying beside her.

"Hello Amelia." Domonik smiled.

"Hello sweetheart." Amelia replied, "I have missed you."

"I have missed you more." Domonik said

"Sorry I'm late. We tried calling earlier but couldn't get through. Houston said there was some large storm cell over Portland, and we couldn't get a solid signal."

"That's alright. The storm seems to have moved on." Domonik stated. "How is work going?"

"I have been terribly busy the past week. The gravity generators we installed last month required more power than I anticipated, so we have been running them only where it is

necessary on the station such as hydroponics. Fortunately, that new reactor the Swedes developed arrived two days ago, so we have been integrating it into our systems. On top of that I had to help fix the piping in the hydroponics bay, so we wouldn't lose our latest yield." Amelia listed. "How's life at the zoo."

"Not quite as busy." Domonik said. "Tilly 2, the new giraffe calf is doing well. I have been checking in on her. Hopefully, Tilly can meet her hoofed twin sometime this week. Other than that, I helped deliver two zebra foals, helped renovate the platypus enclosure, and witnessed Dave get bit by a spider monkey. He's fine, but he's off for the next week."

"Hopefully, Dave gets better soon. I bet Tilly is excited to meet her hoofed counterpart." Amelia said, the video image of her stuttering a bit. "How is she?"

"She's missed you very much." Domonik said. "Tilly!" he called out. "Your mother's call connected!"

"Coming!" she called from up stairs.

Tilly came running down the stairs, with Tabasco nestled into a shoebox decorated with stickers of stars and planets. "Hi Mom!" she said excitedly.

"Hi honey." Amelia waved "How are you?"

"I am good. Tilly responded, "How is space?"

"Space is... floaty, but good." Amelia replied, "What do you have there?"

"Tabasco is an astronaut, so I made him a spaceship. Now he is just like Nelly Armband and the Looney Lander."

Both Domonik and Amelia laughed.

“Its Neil *Armstrong* and the *Lunar* Lander dearie.” Amelia corrected. “I didn’t know they made spacesuits for astronauts?”

“Dad said they didn’t but then he made one.” Tilly said holding out the giraffe.

“It’s a marvel of engineering” Amelia said jokingly.

“Well, I think its quite fashionable.” Domonik cut in.

“When are you coming home mom?” Tilly asked

Amelia hesitated for a second. “I will need to be up here another month, but I should be able to be home just before Christmas this time.” Amelia said nervously.

“YAY!” Tilly cheered “Moms going to be home for Christmas!”

“Yes, and I do have a surprise for you Tilly.” Amelia said reaching for something off screen.”

Suddenly a small plastic giraffe slowly pirouetted into view of the camera, “I have an astronaut giraffe too.” Amelia smiled. “Happy birthday sweetheart.”

Tilly was beaming.

Domonik couldn’t help but smile. Tilly really was so much like her mother.