

7. Old & New Friends



“One thing I don’t appreciate, is bumping my nose on this ute every time I step out of my door,” Boss said.

“I like to park it right outside my hutch,” Dan said. “In case anyone takes it in their head to steal it.”

“We have a watch-dog *and* a watch-wizard,” Tim said. “I know, hard to keep my face straight.”

“And that place, right where you are parked, will be where we decided to set up our al fresco dine-in kitchen,” Wendy said.

“Okay, okay,” Dan placated everybody with his hands calming the waters. “I know when I’m outvoted.”

“Are we going for café-style seating?” Drew said. “Or will we get in a picnic bench set?”

“I think probably we’ll bring whatever we can find,” Dan said. “Ready for take-off?”

Tim looked out of his rear window and laughed. He slammed out of the cabin and raced up to the roof garden. “Didn’t hear you arrive,” he called down.



“A whole lot of sleepy heads,” the crane’s operator said, coffee in hand.

Tim introduced the couple. “Jackie and Jed Crane-driver.”

“We were welcomed by the watch-man and watch-dog,” Jackie said. “Silent the both of them so we knew we were expected.”

Boss frowned then grinned. “I’m happy it was friends arriving we slept through. How come so silent?”

“We have EV, Janus truck technology,” Jed said. “They offered us the chance to test an engine for them. We coasted in as quiet as a whale underwater.”

Jackie grinned looking at everything. “Like we came home, Jed.” She dug him in his ribs.

Bosley went in to his explaining spiel. “Your work on site, any materials you want to donate to the site and the use of your equipment, are your investments to join us.”

“We’ll need that in writing,” Jed said. “What happens if we decide to leave?”

“Good question nobody has asked yet,” Drew said. “You naturally will take your equipment and any materials not yet used, away with you,” he said, looking around at everyone for agreement.

Seems fair,” Wendy said while the rest nodded, agreeing.

“But the fruit of your work stays here,” Drew added.

Dan smirked.

“What about if what we build is with materials that we brought ourselves?” Jed said.

Dan folded his arms. He thought he might’ve wanted to say something there, but what was the use, the fella wasn’t intending to stay. You could hear it in his words, and his voice.

Boss started in, ignoring everything the fella said. “We decided to build cabins to start, a house for anyone that wants it when we’re more comfortable.”

“We’ve been collecting materials forever,” Jackie said. “I’m going to *love* putting them together.”



Jed looked around. “I’m looking for a place where to park our rig and for me to see it from my bed,” he said. “There are bound to be a few ferals way out here.”

"That's my worry too. For my ute," Dan said. "I figure even a wizard has to sleep sometimes."

"You haven't spread the build onto the light grey slab?" Jed said to no one in particular.

What is it with this guy, Dan thought.

"It's thicker than the ones we're on," Boss said. "Warped. Stuff is continually springing loose. It's okay for temporary storage. You could want to park there?"

"I'll take you up on that, as well," Dan said. "Though it will be a tight fit." He backed his ute in beside the crane and the rest of the machinery.



Jackie stood on her cabin's roof. "I love the colours. I love the ladder. I love the swing-away wall. The door. Everything about it."

"But *how* will we get it up onto the first floor?" Trish said. "You know we had a flood go over the site, don't you?"



Jed laughed. “We came with a crane, remember?” he said. “You all drag this structure to the edge of the slab, and I set up my machine for the heavy lifting.”

Jackie climbed down and swung up into the crane’s control cab.

Beep. Beep. Beep.

Jackie moved the controls to inch out the extendable crane boom. The grab-plate swung from the hook, with Jed and Drew adjusting it by gentle pushing and pulling, to hang directly over the cabin.

“Good to go,” Jed said finally.

Wendy called Jackie by walkie-talkie. “Good to go, Jed says. Over.”

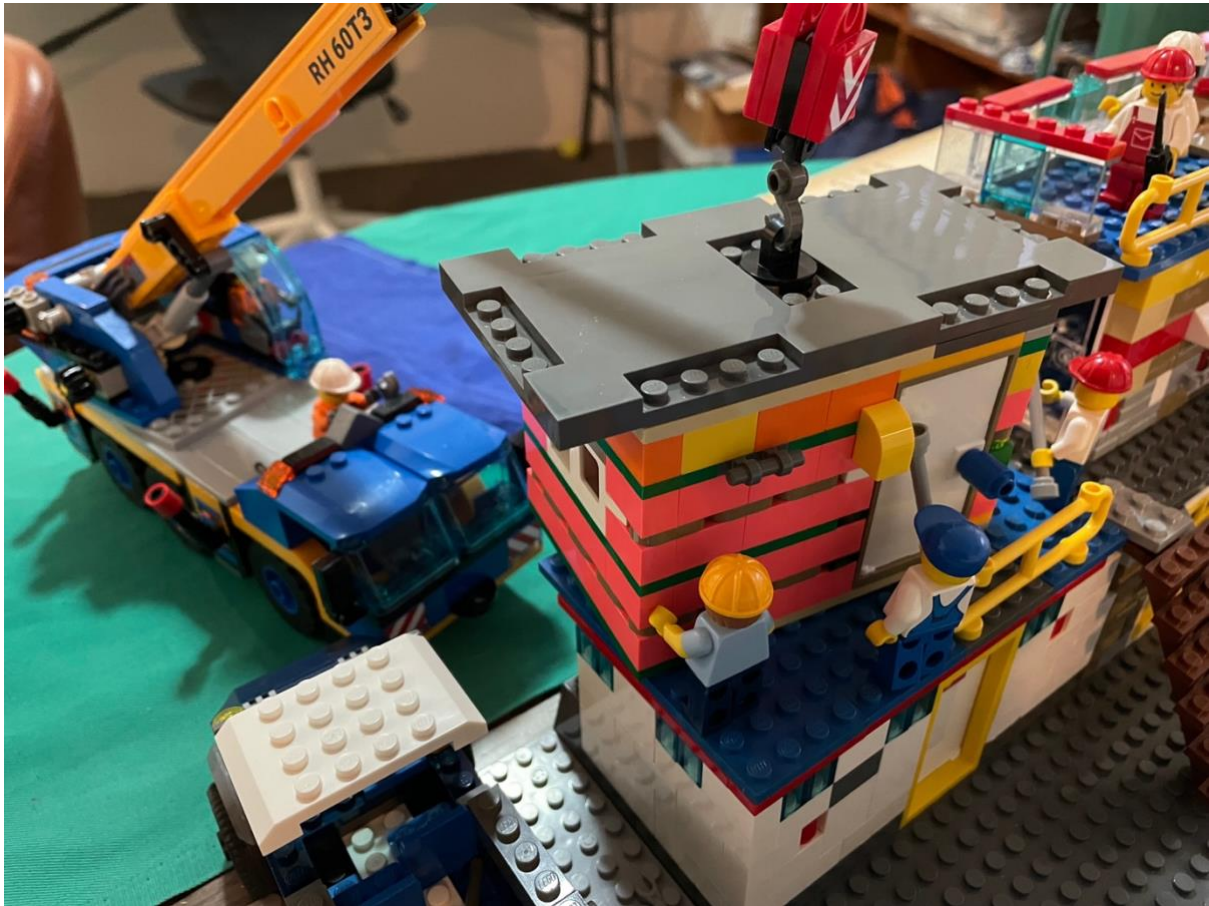
Jackie lowered the grab-plate until it caught on the cabin’s roof pins.



With much creaking and straining, and sliding out of gear at least twice, the crane boom rose and lifted the cabin.

Jed, pretending not to hear the sprockets squealing, drove nearer the back wall of the cabins.

Tim, Boss and Dan teetered on the edges of the shower block roof, pushing and pulling where they could, to settle the cabin on its connectors.



Trish and Wendy looked at it all happening from the roof garden.

“Let’s talk between us about where will we encourage the hardware store to settle? The rest of them so busy all the time,” Wendy said, dead-pan expression on her face.

“I think opposite us? We can start a little neighborhood,” Trish said equally serious.

Wendy laughed. “I knew you’d have a good idea. Let’s just assume that that is what we’re working toward, and work towards it in the face of any resistance there will be.”

“I heard Drew say that the store’s materials will be helicoptered in, in the next few days,” Trish said.

Ruff ran barking toward the back of the site. “Arf! Arf! Arf!”

Drew followed Ruff, laid his hand on the dog’s head. “Easy!” he said. “Down, boy!”

“You see what I’m seeing?” Tim said.



“Bunch of buffles packed with goods and riders?” Drew said.

“Buffles?” Tim said.

“Cross between water buffaloes and cattle. That girl, the one at the end, is friends with Boss. I think he probably chatted on and on about the mud we’re floating on, the flood we had, and the degradation of the land-spit we’re on. To impress her, maybe.”

That same girl called out. “Hey, Drew. Don’t mind us. We’ve come for the land rehab job. Catch you later!”