Leo, Biscuit, and the Island of Whispering Giants

Mom and Dad

For Leo on your seventh birthday.

Keep your brave heart,
your pocketful of biscuits,
and never stop asking why.

— Mom and Dad

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CHAPTER 1

Footprints in the Sand

Leo gripped his yellow notebook with white knuckles. He pushed his round black glasses up the bridge of his nose with an index finger, staring at the instrument panel. The brass magnetic compass was not pointing north. It was not

pointing south, either. It was whirling in dizzy circles like a runaway metal top, buzzing like an angry bee trapped in a glass jar.

Beside him, Mateo Ramos wrestled the twin control yokes with his thick, grease-stained forearms.

Leo

"Hold on to your socks, Professor!" Mateo shouted over the dry hack of the left engine. The pilot's red neck bandanna flapped wildly against his collar. "This thermal pocket dropped out of nowhere!"

Biscuit did not care about thermals. Biscuit cared about gravity, and gravity was misbehaving. The golden retriever puppy shoved his honey-colored head between Leo's knees, trembling until his brass collar tag clicked a frantic rhythm against the seatbelt buckle.

"Good boy, Biscuit," Leo whispered, stroking one velvety ear. "Wait—Mateo, if the air pressure is dropping, why is the altimeter climbing?"

Mateo Ramos

"Instruments are chewing on static, Cap!" Mateo hauled back on the yoke. "We’re going down for a splash!"

The bright yellow seaplane plunged through a wall of slate-gray clouds. Below them, a ring of jagged black cliffs tore through the mist, cradling a secret lagoon of glowing turquoise water. The plane's belly hit the surf with a tremendous *CHH-HK-WHEEESH!*

Twin rooster tails of white foam shot fifty feet into the air. Leo braced his red high-tops against the bulkhead as the pontoons hissed across the shallow surf. The metal groaned, dragging violently through obsidian-black sand until the machine lurched forward and shuddered to a complete stop.

Mateo clicked off the ignition switches. Silence rushed in, broken only by the tick-tick-tick of hot manifolds cooling in the sea breeze.

"Ho-ho!" Mateo chuckled, blowing out a lungful of air that made his gray-flecked handlebar mustache flutter. He reached inside his jacket, tapped the laminated four-leaf clover in his

logbook, and unbuckled. "That was entirely too much excitement for a Tuesday."

Leo unlatched his harness, letting Biscuit scramble out from under the dashboard with a grateful snort. They followed Mateo down the pontoon ladder onto the wet shore.

Mateo crouched near the right pontoon, groaning as he fingered a jagged hairline crack across the aluminum propeller housing. "Sheared the shear-pin, and the radio is dead as driftwood. Not a peep from the mainland."

Leo hardly heard the bad news. He adjusted his glasses again, staring past the plane toward a wall of impossibly tall, jade-green jungle. Warm vapor rolled off the leaves in heavy, fragrant waves.

"Mateo?" Leo pointed his yellow pencil at the tree line. "Why does the fog smell like crushed cinnamon and warm greenhouse moss instead of salt water?"

Mateo tugged at his red bandanna, squinting into the gloom. "Tropical flora, I reckon. Stay close to the hull, Cap. I need to pull the cowling."

Leo didn't mean to wander. It was just that questions had a way of pulling him by his cargo shorts.

A few yards down the beach, a black volcanic tidal pool caught the fading twilight. Leo knelt beside it, his red sneakers sinking an inch into the spongy, pitch-dark sand.

Ripp-le.

The water in the pool shivered. Leo tilted his head. Four seconds passed.

Ripp-le.

Perfect concentric circles raced outward from the center, bouncing against the rim of lava rock.

Leo tapped the metal spiral of his notebook against his chin. "Wait—if there's no wind, then why is the puddle dancing?"

An engine could vibrate stone, sure. But Mateo was fifty yards behind him, banging a blunt wrench against cold metal with dull, hollow clangs. This pulse came from deep inside the earth, regular and heavy, like a gigantic heartbeat. Leo opened his notebook and rapidly scribbled: *Puddle pulses every 4 seconds. No engine noise. Sub-surface thrum?*

Behind him, Biscuit let out a sharp double-sneeze. Prehistoric yellow pollen dusted the puppy’s black nose. His oversized paws skittered over obsidian pebbles, tail suddenly stiff as an antenna.

"Biscuit, heel," Leo whispered.

The dog did not heel. Biscuit's black nostrils flared as he drank in a smell that was entirely new to canine science. It smelled like overripe honeydew melon, sun-baked river clay, and hot leather.

With a squeak of puppy joy, Biscuit bolted toward the tree line.

"Biscuit, no! Drop it!" Leo scrambled to his feet, lunging after the flash of turquoise nylon. "You don't even know what it is!"

The puppy vanished under a canopy of twelve-foot fiddlehead ferns. Their coiled tips hung down like giant emerald violin scrolls, dripping sticky sap into the mulch. Leo crashed through after him, branches whipping his striped shirt. His dad's voice chimed in his memory—*Leo, you exhaust people with all those questions, just stay put*—but Leo’s brain shouted back the family rule: *Never stop asking why!*

Leo burst through the thicket into a small, shadowed clearing.

Biscuit sat dead still. His tail had stopped entirely, hovering mid-wag.

Five feet away, the giant fronds parted with a wet, heavy rustle.

A dome of jade-green scales poked through the leaves. It was waist-high, round, and topped by a thick, bony snout boss that looked like a knobby wooden stump. Two luminous amber eyes blinked in the dusk, looking directly down at Leo's bright red sneakers.

CHAPTER 2

A New Friend with Horns

The jade-green calf wiggled his back legs in a funny little shuffle. His stubby tail twitched, carving arcs through the damp fern mulch like an armored bull getting ready for

the ring. Rain began to patter against the broad leaves overhead with fat, rhythmic drops. *Plip, plip, plash.*

Leo held his breath, his knuckles frozen against his pencil.

The creature gave a sharp snort, lowered his knobby snout boss, and charged straight for Leo's knees.

Biscuit moved first. The puppy launched his honey-gold body sideways with a yip, his front paws tangling clumsily in a twist of wet creeper vines. A chipped blue metal snack tin slipped from the puppy's jaws. It struck a mossy basalt rock with a bright *CLANG!* The lid popped loose. Five star-shaped peanut-butter biscuits tumbled across the green moss like scattered gold coins.

The scaly calf hit the brakes. His thick hind claws skidded through the obsidian mud, throwing dark spray across Leo's khaki shorts. Nostrils as wide as teacups flared, puffing out a cloud of sweet cinnamon vapor.

The little dinosaur looked down at the star biscuits. He sniffed once, twice, three times.

CRUNCH.

A pair of star-shaped treats vanished behind a sharp, parrot-like beak with a joyful snap. Two greedy gulps later, the calf was licking the wet moss clean with a broad purple tongue. He gave Biscuit's wet black nose an inquisitive snuffle, completely forgetting that he had just attempted to bowl over a human boy.

Sprout

Leo slowly sank to his knees in the cool fern mulch. "He likes peanut butter," Leo breathed. He uncapped his pencil with his teeth. "You're round, bumpy, and green. Like a little vegetable. Like Sprout."

Sprout let out a high-pitched flute chirp and took a step closer. Leo rapidly sketched the thick, flat dome sitting above the animal's eyes, adding notes along the yellow margins: *Pachyrhinosaurus lakustai juvenile? No nasal horn. Flat bony battering ram instead.*

Hesitantly, Leo reached his hand out, palm flat. His fingers brushed the cool, jade-green pebbled hide along Sprout's flank.

A low, rumbling hum instantly pulsed through the scales. It was not a growl, but a rhythmic purr so deep and electric that it buzzed right through the damp moss and vibrated the rubber soles of Leo’s red high-top sneakers. Biscuit gave an approving tail thump against the earth, resting his golden chin on Sprout’s scaly back leg.

KABOOM!

A jagged purple crack of lightning ripped open the dusk sky. Distant thunder rolled through the basalt cliffs with a roar that rattled the treetops.

Sprout’s luminous amber eyes bugged wide. The baby dinosaur scrambled backward, panicked by the noise, and dropped his blunt head again. Before Leo could pull his knees out of the path, Sprout lunged forward for comfort, slamming his bony nose squarely into Leo’s chest like a hard-headed scaly goat.

Leo tipped backward with an undignified squawk, landing flat on his back in a cushion of springy, wet moss. Sprout followed him down, burying his snout directly under Leo's armpit. As the juvenile squirmed, the fern leaves parted to reveal his blunt neck frill. Clamped tightly onto the rear spine of the frill was a synthetic orange rubber field tag, marked with stamped black lettering.

Mateo stood by the yellow seaplane's pontoon, holding an eighteen-inch steel crescent wrench like a baseball bat. His jaw hung slack.

"Ho-ho," the pilot muttered softly, his dark eyes wide as dinner plates. "Cap... tell me that thing doesn't bite through aluminum."

Sprout waddled out of the dark jungle path at Leo’s heels, casually bumping his snout against Biscuit’s floppy golden

ears. Biscuit sneezed twice, happily wagging his tail as he accepted a friendly headbutt from the scaly calf.

"He doesn't eat metal," Leo said, jogging over to the beached hull. "He eats peanut butter. And he's totally lost, Mateo. Look at his neck."

Leo pointed to the bright orange tag. Mateo crouched, his grease-smudged knuckles resting on his denim knees. With two careful fingers, he tilted the rubberized label toward the yellow beam of his inspection lantern.

"Outpost Delta," Mateo read slowly, frowning through his thick handlebar mustache. "Specimen 14. Containment Priority."

"Wait—if that's true, then why would someone put a tag on a wild creature?" Leo asked, his words tumbling out fast and hot. He pushed his glasses up his nose. "And who is at Outpost Delta? Are they keeping them in cages? Why would anyone lock him behind steel doors?"

Before Mateo could answer, a deep, mournful trumpeting call drifted down from the mist-shrouded volcanic peaks. The ground beneath them gave a sudden, terrifying heave. The black tidal pool sloshed over its rocky lip, sending a cold sheet of saltwater straight across the toes of Mateo's scuffed boots.

Sprout let out a squeaking trumpet in reply, trembling from his knobby frill down to his stubby tail.

"His mother," Leo said, his voice tightening with fierce certainty. "She's calling for him from the high basin. If the storm hits, the river will flood the canyon trail."

Mateo stood up, adjusting his red neck bandanna with a sharp jerk. He pulled a brass pocket barometer from his leather aviator jacket and tapped the glass dial. "The needle is in a nose-dive, Cap. Hurricane Mara is going to shred this coast in five hours flat. Our job is to board up inside the cabin, ride out the blow, and pray the tide doesn't float us away."

"We can't leave him, Mateo! The water will drown the lower gorge!" Leo stepped between the pilot and the yellow plane, gripping his notebook to his chest. "Never stop asking why! Why did the plane land here? Why did Biscuit find him? We have to lead him home before the rain blocks the trail!"

Mateo looked from the boy’s burning brown eyes down to the trembling baby dinosaur huddled against the puppy. He let out a long, heavy breath that puffed his cheeks.

"You're going to give me gray hair, Professor," Mateo groaned. He turned back to the seaplane, reaching into the cargo hatch to haul out an orange emergency flare pack and a

heavy brass flashlight. "Five hours. We get him to the mouth of Whispering Fern Canyon, and not a single yard farther. Deal?"

"Deal," Leo said.

They turned toward the jade-green dark. A loud, metallic *CLACK-SNAP!* echoed from the canyon mouth, followed by the vicious hiss of tensioned steel. Deep within the dark treeline, something heavy and sharp had just slammed shut along the path.

CHAPTER 3

The Singing Canyon

The black gorge swallowed the lantern light in greedy gulps. Overhead, interlocking basalt columns rose like the fluted pillars of an enormous cathedral, glistening slick and black under the steady, warm downpour. Leo tucked his

chin to protect his yellow notebook, his red high-tops squelching through thick obsidian mire.

A hollow, fluting chord drifted through the dark. It warbled, rose in pitch, and settled into a haunting harmony that vibrated the stones underfoot.

"Look!" Leo whispered, halting beside a porous volcanic pillar.

Geothermal steam hissed from natural vents in the honeycombed pumice rock. The rising vapor turned the towering formation into a mammoth set of pipes, singing in the rising gale. Leo quickly poked two fingers into a thumb-sized aperture, then touched a wider fissure nearby.

"Wait—if that's true, then why does the small hole whistle so sharp?" Leo tapped the wire binding against his wet chin, his pencil flying across the soggy paper. "The small opening pinches the steam. High frequency. The wide cavity rumbles low. Mateo, the dinosaurs aren't just crying out into empty air—they're answering the rocks!"

"Fascinating lecture, Professor, but we are walking on borrowed time," Mateo grunted. The pilot swung the heavy brass flashlight in wide yellow arcs, peering through the slate-gray curtain of rain. "Water's creeping up from the gorge floor. Keep moving."

Biscuit trotted ahead, nose skimming the mud, his golden tail cutting steady circles. Sprout shuffled right behind him, purring like an idling tractor as he pressed his green snout against Biscuit's flank.

Click.

The sound was tiny, sharp, and entirely artificial.

Mateo froze mid-step, his boot snagged on a taut monofilament wire stretched between two basalt boulders.

Above their heads, a metal horn bolted to the stone erupted with an ear-splitting electronic screech. The acoustic siren pulsed at deafening volume, designed with brutal precision to scatter megafauna.

Sprout shrieked. The baby Pachyrhinosaurus clamped his stubby front legs over his ear openings, tossing his head in raw panic. Blinded by fear, the calf scrambled sideways. His blunt claws lost purchase on the slick basalt shelf. Pebbles

cascaded into the abyss where the canyon river churned into frothing, white-water rapids thirty feet below.

Sprout slid backward over the rim.

Biscuit moved without thinking. The honey-gold retriever lunged straight through the mud spray, jaws snapping forward to catch the thick rubberized loop of Sprout’s orange field tag. The impact yanked Biscuit off his paws. The puppy dug his front claws into the crumbling bank, his teeth locked on the orange tag, throat vibrating with frantic, muffled barks as he anchored the dangling dinosaur.

"Hold on, Biscuit!" Leo shouted. He dropped his notebook, scooped up a jagged basalt stone with both hands, and hurled his whole weight against the shrieking speaker box.

CRACK!

Sparks flared blue in the dark. Wires shredded, and the agonizing electronic wail died instantly.

Leo dropped to his knees, grabbing Sprout’s scaly left forelimb while Mateo lunged forward to seize the calf's bony frill. With a roaring heave, pilot and boy hauled the green juvenile back onto solid stone. Biscuit tumbled into the ferns, coughing up muddy rain with a violent double-sneeze.

A sickening crunch echoed beneath them. The vibrations from the struggle sheared through the cracked rock shelf. A slab of basalt calved away, carrying Mateo’s legs downward into the slumping mud.

"Look out!" Leo cried, catching Mateo's jacket sleeve.

The pilot twisted violently, shoving Leo and Sprout back toward the cliff wall as the ledge gave way. Mateo slammed hard against the solid stone shelf below, catching himself on his elbows. His left boot was pinned sideways beneath a fallen volcanic block, his breath hissing out between clenched teeth.

Mateo groaned, his face pale under the lantern light. Rain cascaded from the brim of his soaked cap as he unwrapped the red bandanna from his throat. With trembling hands, the pilot bound the crimson cotton tightly around his rapidly swelling left ankle.

"Nothing broken," Mateo grunted through his handlebar mustache, testing his weight against the rock wall and immediately wincing in sharp pain. "Just sprained to kingdom come. But I can't climb that ridge, Cap."

Leo wiped water from his round glasses, peering up the trail. Deep, ridged grooves cut straight through the ferns ahead. "Tire tracks. Heavy-tread tires, three on each side. A giant rover went up this incline toward the ridge."

"Outpost Delta," Mateo said, leaning his heavy shoulder against the basalt wall. A gust of gale-force wind whistled down the canyon, bending the giant tree ferns nearly double. "Whoever built those siren traps is holed up in a reinforced bunker. We have to turn back, Leo. The plane cabin is anchored."

"We can't," Leo said softly. He pointed down the way they had come.

Brown, churning floodwaters had already swallowed the lower path, drowning the steam pipes in frothing rapids. The way to the beach was completely submerged.

Mateo stared at the rushing river, his shoulders sinking. He reached into his wet aviator jacket and pulled out a worn pilot's logbook. From between the pages, he drew a small, laminated four-leaf clover. He pressed the smooth plastic square firmly into Leo’s palm.

"My lucky charm," Mateo said, his warm baritone dropping low against the howl of the storm. "I don't need luck right

now, Professor. You do. Trust that brain of yours. It sees what everyone else walks right past."

Leo clutched the green clover, looking from Mateo to the trembling baby dinosaur huddled close beside Biscuit. "Wait—if that's true, then why hasn't the scientist called for help? If he has concrete walls and heavy vehicles, why set wire traps instead of guiding the herds to higher ground?"

Before Mateo could speak, the dark canyon exploded with blinding, arctic-white glare.

Twin halogen floodlights blazed from atop the rocky ridge, pinning Leo, Biscuit, and Sprout against the wet basalt face. The deep, guttural thrum of a heavy diesel engine shook the canyon floor as a massive six-wheeled rover rolled out of the dripping black treeline, cutting off their escape.

CHAPTER 4

Inside Outpost Delta

The rover's hydraulic cab hissed open like an angry snake. A tall, wiry man stepped down onto the rain-slicked ramp, his mud-streaked olive jacket bristling with brass zippers and dangling carabiners.

Dr. Julian Vance

"Ahem, precisely as I calculated," Dr. Julian Vance said, his voice clipped and dry as toast. He did not look at Leo's face. Instead, his wire-rimmed spectacles remained fixed on the little dinosaur. "Specimen Fourteen. Unharmed, despite egregious civilian interference."

Vance raised a pair of pneumatic pole-clamps. With a sharp mechanical hiss, the padded jaws snapped shut around Sprout’s shoulders, pinning the youngster against the ridged ramp. Sprout wailed, a high-pitched flute note that made Biscuit’s ears flatten straight back against his skull. The puppy let out a fierce, rumbling growl, planting four muddy paws between the scientist and the calf.

"Biscuit, stay!" Leo warned, his heart thumping hard against his ribs. He pushed forward, water streaming down his glasses. "Don't hurt him! He’s trying to reach his herd in the basin!"

Vance ignored the plea entirely. Moving with clinical, icy speed, he reached into his tactical vest and produced a thick collar lined with blue LEDs. *CLACK-WHIRR.* The magnetic snare snapped around Sprout's neck frill, locking onto a subterranean floor tether with a heavy thump. Sprout strained forward, his blunt claws skidding uselessly on the grated steel.

Leo threw his arms wide, planting himself squarely across the threshold of the subterranean hatch. "Why are you putting him in a cage? Nature made those horns and frills to survive storms! His family has lived here for millions of years without steel boxes!"

Dr. Vance checked the face of his heavy digital barometer watch. He tapped the crystal face twice. "Seven millibars dropped in ten minutes. Hurricane Mara is a Category Four anomaly, young man, not a gentle spring shower." Vance stepped forward, towering over Leo with a gaze that held zero warmth. "Ten years ago, on an atoll three hundred miles south, I trusted 'millions of years.' I watched a single flash flood wash forty rare shearwater nests into the open sea. Wiped out. Every last chick, gone because I trusted nature’s mercy."

His jaw tightened. Vance clicked his silver pen into his breast pocket with a sharp snap. "Nature possesses no wisdom. It possesses only chaos. In this concrete facility, Specimen Fourteen will survive under controlled atmospheric pressure. You, however, are a reckless nuisance."

Vance reached past Leo's shoulder, his leather glove striking a bright red console.

Pneumatic pistons fired with a deafening *CHUNG-SHHH!*

The floor beneath Sprout tilted downward, lowering the braying calf into the shadows of Sub-Level 2 on a cargo lift. At the exact same second, Vance shoved Leo and Biscuit backward through an interior sliding door.

"Hey! Let us out!" Leo cried, banging his palms against the glass.

CLANK. Heavy magnetic latches sealed the observation lounge shut. Vance didn't even look back as he marched away, his boots clicking rhythmically down the metal hall. The boy and the golden puppy were locked inside the high observation bay, while deep below the floorboards, Sprout’s terrified chirps grew faint and hollow.

Wind shrieked outside like a runaway locomotive, hurling sheets of gray rain against the reinforced observation windows. Biscuit paced the perimeter, nose working furiously along the rubber door gaskets.

CLATTER-BAM!

A square ceiling panel popped open above the supply locker. Two steel-toed work boots dropped through the gap, followed by a shower of drywall dust and a jangling utility belt.

"Right then, let's look at the plumbing," a melodic voice muttered.

A woman in a sleeveless yellow safety vest dropped lightly to the floorboards, her fiery red braid dusting her shoulder. She pushed a pair of dark welding goggles up into her tangled hair, revealing a face peppered with copper freckles and sharp green eyes.

"Who are you?" Leo asked, backing away as Biscuit gave a curious, inquiring snort.

Tara O'Connell

"Tara O'Connell. Chief engineer around this tin can," she said, pulling a heavy ratchet wrench from her hip and clicking it like a metronome. *Click-clack. Click-clack.* "And you're the kid who walked through the gorge during a tropical cyclone. Vance thinks you're a menace. Personally, I think you're the only person on this island with your head screwed on straight."

"He locked Sprout down in the dark!" Leo pointed at the floor grates. "Sprout will drown if the water gets into the foundations!"

Tara stopped clicking her wrench. Her mouth pressed into a grim, thin line. "You're closer to the truth than you know,

kiddo. Vance lost his nerve. He routed every volt of backup geothermal power directly into the magnetic vault clamps to keep those cages sealed. Do you know what that means?"

Leo adjusted his round black glasses, piecing the flow of current together in his head. "Wait. If the emergency generator is feeding the cage locks... where are the drainage pumps getting their power?"

"They aren't," Tara said flatly. "The storm run-off pumps in Whispering Fern Canyon just tripped offline. The lower gorge is filling like a giant bathtub. In twenty minutes, the lower holding pen will be underwater, and the master console won't unlock because Vance burned out the manual bypass."

BOOOOOOM.

The entire concrete complex bucked sideways. Metal groaned. Water sloshed violently out of Biscuit’s stainless-steel dish, splashing across Leo’s canvas shoes. The golden puppy let out a yelp, scrambling beneath a metal desk with his front paws over his snout.

A jagged fork of lightning ripped through the sky outside, turning the slate-gray dark into a blinding photographic flash.

Beyond the three-inch-thick acrylic window, standing dead center in the perimeter floodlights, was an absolute mountain

of muscle and bone. Five tons of jade-green, pebbled hide glistened in the deluge. An enormous horned frill flared over shoulders the size of a minivan, dripping with crushed foliage. Her amber eyes burned with primal fury.

THUD!

The mother Pachyrhinosaurus drove her blunt nasal boss into the perimeter barrier again, bowing the structural steel girders like willow branches.

"She’s destroying the outpost!" Tara shouted over the rising alarms.

"She isn't attacking us because she's mean!" Leo yelled, pressing his palms against the vibrating window glass. "Listen to the air! She’s attacking because she hears Sprout crying through the ventilation vents!"

Biscuit lifted his honey-gold head from beneath the desk, letting out a sharp double-sneeze.

"The vents work like the porous rocks in the canyon," Leo blurted, his mind spinning with sudden connections. "If we build an acoustic whistle—one that matches the natural steam frequency of the basalt pipes—we can talk to her! We can guide her to the emergency gate, and the frequency will trip the station's acoustic safety release!"

Tara stared at him, then snapped her heavy welding goggles down over her eyes with a grin. "Pipe resonance to trip the fire baffles? Kid, that is completely crazy, delightfully unhinged, and mechanically brilliant."

A sickening metallic groan reverberated through the bunker walls as the mother dinosaur's horn impacted the reinforced steel blast door.

CHAPTER 5

Rising Tides Below

Tara shoved open the heavy service hatch behind the lockers, waving Leo and Biscuit into the engineering workshop. Overhead fluorescent tubes buzzed like trapped hornets. With a violent *POP*, the ceiling strip exploded into

bright blue sparks. Darkness fell instantly, swallowed a heartbeat later by the dull, pulsing glow of amber emergency beacons. Wall-mounted sirens howled, spinning harsh orange triangles across racks of oily wrenches and copper spools.

KABOOM!

A tremendous lightning strike hit the exterior geothermal tower directly above them. The concrete floor shuddered so violently that Biscuit lost all four brakes, his paws skittering wildly across greasy linoleum until he dove beneath a low steel workbench. His tail whipped frantically against the metal legs—*clang-clang-clang*—and in his panic, his hind foot kicked a round brass object.

"My valve!" Tara shouted, lunging forward.

The brass fuel valve ricocheted across the floor grates and bounced into the dark, filthy crevice behind a heavy hydraulic compressor. Biscuit shoved his snout deep beneath his paws, trembling from his golden ears to his tucked tail. Outside, thunder roared like a tumbling mountain.

"We need that part to tune the air chamber," Tara said, tugging on the immovable steel compressor. "I can't squeeze my arm back there!"

Leo dropped onto his knees in the damp fern mulch tracked in from the storm. Biscuit's liquid-amber eyes peered out from the shadows, huge and glossy with terror. Every booming rumble from above made the puppy squeeze tighter against the wall.

Leo reached into his deep cargo pocket. He pulled out the blue tin and lifted the very last star-shaped dog treat. It smelled of roasted wheat and salted bacon.

"Hey, pal," Leo whispered, his voice gentle beneath the howling siren. "Storm outside, safe inside. Tail up, ears out, nose on the job."

He held out the crumbly star. Biscuit's black nostrils twitched. The puppy gave a muffled sniff, crept forward by two cautious inches, and crunched the treat in one breathless gulp. His wet black nose tracked the delicious salt right toward the dusty baseboard. *Achoo!* Biscuit sneezed hard into the cobwebs, pawed frantically at the narrow slot, and bumped the heavy brass valve right into the amber light with a wet nudging snort.

"Good dog, Biscuit!" Leo scooped up the fitting.

"Hand it here!" Tara clamped the valve onto a cylindrical section of porous gray pumice Leo had carried from the

canyon. She pulled an orange emergency flare cap from her tool-belt, shoving it into the base to form an adjustable acoustic baffle. She pulled her welding goggles over her eyes, ignited a portable micro-torch, and ran a bright blue flame around the brass collar. *Hiss-crack-fizz.* Solder set instantly against the volcanic stone.

"Try the pitch," Tara urged, passing the warm contraption over.

Leo set the pumice tube to his lips and blew hard.

HOOOOOOM-WHRRRR.

The sound wasn't a screech; it was a deep, resonant organ note that vibrated straight through Leo’s teeth, splitting into a buzzing double harmonic. Biscuit tilted his head a full ninety degrees, his ears perking upright. The tone felt ancient and heavy, humming with the exact pitch of the canyon vents.

"It works," Leo whispered, eyes wide behind his lenses.

Squelch-slosh.

A cold, muddy sheet of brown water pushed under the workshop's exterior fire doors, soaking into Leo’s canvas shoes. The drainage pipes had finally given up.

Murky water rose past Leo's knees as they splashed into the stairwell leading down toward Sub-Level 2. The air down here smelled of rust, river mud, and ozone. Biscuit paddled bravely ahead, his chin tilted high above the brown swirl, his brass bone tag jingling against his collar with every frantic kick.

Around the corner, a tall figure stood frozen at the flooded vault threshold. Dr. Vance was frantically swiping a gray plastic keycard through a wall scanner, his hands shaking so violently he dropped it into the soup.

Splash.

"It... it won't engage," Vance stammered, his neat goatee dripping wet and his wire-rimmed spectacles fogged solid. He stared at the dead panel. "The geothermal backup surged. It melted the lithium banks. The floodgates jammed, and the computer is completely dead! My vault... it’s filling like a sunken tank!"

"Because you shut off the river pumps to feed your electric cages!" Tara snapped, wading past him through the waist-high current. "Where are the manual hydraulic releases?"

"They burned out!" Vance choked, leaning against the damp concrete. "There are no physical overrides for the main blast barrier. It requires an acoustic pulse from the seismic emergency array, but the main transmitter drowned three minutes ago!"

The water surged higher, cold and relentless, swirling around Leo’s chest. He held his soaked yellow notebook in one hand above his head to save his penciled frequency charts. "The whistle," Leo said, his voice ringing firm across the concrete corridor. "The seismic array uses mechanical diaphragms in the door frame to catch sound waves from landslides!"

Leo tapped the brass valve on the pumice horn, tightening the flare cap by two careful notches until it lined up with the canyon geyser measurements in his notes. He lifted the stone whistle to his lips and blew with every ounce of air in his lungs.

BRAAAAWWW-UMMMMM.

The note rolled through the flooded hallway like a living creature. It struck the steel walls, rattling the metal conduits overhead. Biscuit let out a triumphant bark, paddling in tight circles. Deep within the door frame, brass acoustic diaphragms shivered against their springs.

Click. Clack-whirr-CHUNK.

The massive hydraulic vault door shuddered, parted down the center, and swung open with a grinding groan.

Inside the dark pen, water rushed inward like a tidal wave. Sprout was squealing in absolute terror, thrashing against the deluge. The calf's blunt horns broke the brown surface as he fought to keep his snout in the air. He paddled wildly, eyes rolling back, but he could not swim away.

The thick titanium magnetic collar around his neck remained locked tight to an iron ring on the drowned concrete floor, and the water was already licking at the calf's chin.

CHAPTER 6

The Song of the Earth

Sprout trumpeted in terrified, high-pitched squeaks as the swirling brown water reached his mouth. His blunt snout tipped toward the ceiling, blowing panicked bubbles into the foam.

Dr. Vance lunged through the murky surge, gripping Leo’s soaked shoulder with heavy leather gloves. "The upper rafters are buckling!" the scientist yelled, his spectacles askew and his voice cracking. "We have to retreat! The whole substation is about to cave!"

Leo wrenched himself free, his canvas sneakers digging against the slippery concrete floor. "Wait—if this collar is made of titanium and magnetite, why does it have an emergency manual purge slot on the side?"

"The field protocol!" Vance sputtered, wiping dirty water from his goatee. "The key broke off in the silt when the generator exploded. It’s impossible to locate blind!"

Leo did not turn back. Biscuit paddled right beside him, paddling hard like a miniature honey-colored tugboat. The golden retriever plunged his entire head beneath the muddy churn, kicking his hind legs with wild, ungraceful determination. Under the black water, his velvety ears floated like kelp. Biscuit’s jaws snapped through floating debris, feeling blindly along the iron drain grate. *Clink.* His teeth clamped tight on a heavy brass cylinder wedged against the iron bars.

With a triumphant, wet snort, the puppy broke the surface, spraying river foam everywhere. He paddled to Leo’s chest and spit the brass purge pin directly into the boy's open palm.

"Good boy!" Leo gasped, water swirling up to his collarbones.

He took a deep breath, dropped under the churning water, and felt the side of Sprout’s neck. His fingers found the rectangular purge slot in the titanium band. He jammed the brass pin straight into the magnetite release chamber. It stuck fast, jammed by volcanic grit. Leo reached down, grabbed a jagged chunk of black basalt from the floor, and swung it hard against the pin.

CLANG!

A sharp magnetic pop shivered through the water. The heavy latch sprang apart, the blue LED light died, and the collar slid free. Sprout surged upward, his jade-green pebbled flanks bumping Leo toward the surface. Leo broke into the air, wrapping both arms around the calf's wet neck as Sprout burbled with frantic flute-like chirps.

Above them, the bunker groaned like an iron giant tearing apart. *KRA-BOOOOM!* The reinforced outer wall sheared completely off, collapsing into a mountain of concrete chunks and spraying blinding rain across the flooded vault.

Cold hurricane rain whipped across the shattered hangar floor, tearing steel roof panels into the screaming night sky. Through the gaping breach where the blast wall had stood, a colossal shadow rose against the lightning.

The five-ton mother Pachyrhinosaurus stepped over the tumbled girders, her massive frill studded with defensive bone horns. Her eyes rolled with primal fury, searching the wreckage. She spotted Dr. Vance scrambling through the rubble. With a deafening roar that vibrated the concrete under Leo's shoes, the giant lowered her massive, armor-plated nasal

boss, aiming directly to crush the terrified scientist against a shattered electrical conduit.

Vance collapsed backward against the twisted steel, throwing his leather-gloved hands across his face in frozen terror.

Leo scrambled past the broken doorway, stepping straight into the glaring beam of the amber emergency floodlight. Rain hammered his face, but he stood tall, planted on both feet. He brought the acoustic pumice whistle to his lips and blew with every ounce of breath in his chest.

HOOOOOOM-WHRRRRR.

The deep infrasound resonance rolled out across the storm. It was not a shriek of human metal, but the ancient song of Isla Caldera itself, vibrating in harmony with the volcanic bedrock beneath the island. The sound purred through the stone floor, humming through Leo's bones.

Sprout scrambled up from behind him, wiggling his back legs before trotting right through the beam of light. The calf piped a clear, joyful flute-squeak into the howling gale.

The enormous mother froze in her tracks, her giant forelegs skidding across the wet rubble inches from Vance's boots. Her amber eyes widened. She lowered her massive head to the pavement, snuffling the wet air before gently pressing her

broad snout against her calf's soft frill. A low, thunderous purr rumbled from her chest, so deep and warm that it vibrated the rain droplets straight off Leo's fringe.

Beside the ruined generator, Tara pushed her welding goggles into her red hair, letting out a wild laugh into the storm. Vance slowly lowered his hands, trembling from head to toe as the giant mother ignored him completely, crooning softly over her baby.

Suddenly, a brilliant crimson flare hissed high through the torrential black sky above the canyon rim. Mateo's signal burned bright against the clouds, showing them the narrow, rising trail that led away from the drowning valley.

CHAPTER 7

Return to the Basalt Basin

Red light hissed against the churning clouds overhead, painting the high rim in brilliant ruby ribbons. Mateo leaned out over the rocky crest, waving the emergency torch in wide, sweeping arcs. "Way to go, Cap!" his voice boomed

above the dying wind, rich and steady. "Keep 'em moving! The ridge path holds!"

Leo marched at the front of the strange parade, his sneakers sloshing through the volcanic mud. Behind him, the massive mother walked with deliberate, heavy thuds, her nostrils puffing warm plumes into the chilly air. Sprout trotted right beside her flank, his little jade-green tail swishing with boundless energy. More horned shapes emerged from the foggy tree ferns—three full-grown Pachyrhinosaurus adults, snuffling the mist and falling into line behind their leader.

The rising path squeezed tight against the mountain wall. Around a sharp bend, the track ended at a jagged chasm. Far below, the roaring flash flood tore through the canyon floor, white foam churning over broken boulders. A single ancient sequoia trunk spanned the black gap. Under the weight of rushing rainwater, the mossy timber groaned. It listed three inches to the left, shedding thick bark into the drop. The mother dinosaur halted, planting her massive forefeet into the clay. She snorted a warning blast, refusing to let her calf step onto the shuddering wood.

"The center of gravity is all wrong!" Leo called out, his thumb running over the penciled diagrams in his soggy pad. "The bark is too slick, and the base isn't anchored!"

Metal treads rattled over the gravel. Dr. Vance steered his heavy six-wheeled rover right up to the chasm's lip, the diesel engine rumbling like a mechanical beast. Instead of reaching for tranquilizer darts or steel cages, Vance jumped out into the muddy drizzle. He unspooled a thick titanium tow winch from the front bumper, his leather gloves dripping wet.

"Tara! Secure the deadman pin to that basalt pillar!" Vance shouted, his voice stripped of its crisp lecture tone.

"On it!" Tara slid her goggles over her eyes, dragging the braided steel cable across the slick rock. She looped the high-strength line three times around the fallen trunk, clamping the heavy shackle into the bedrock fissure. *Clack-clack-clack.* Her ratchet wrench sang in the misty air, locking the steel cable taut. The teetering redwood trunk snapped rigid, pulled flush against the solid cliff face.

Leo stepped toward the edge. He gave the pumice horn a quick, gentle puff, sounding a tiny bird-like chirp that cut through the wind. Then he tapped his yellow notebook lightly against Sprout's bumpy nose. "Come on, Sprout. It will hold you. One foot at a time."

Sprout gave a funny rear-leg wiggle, cocked his head, and ventured forward. His wide, padded feet gripped the anchored bark. He didn't slip once. In three confident bounds, the calf

reached the opposite bank, letting out a cheerful squeak. The mother followed, her enormous bulk testing the timber, but Tara's titanium cable held fast without a single tremor.

One by one, the rest of the herd crossed into the highland entrance. Beyond the pass opened the Basalt Nesting Basin. Sheltered by towering volcanic walls, warm geothermal steam curled from glowing mineral vents, filling the air with the cozy scent of baked earth and dried ferns. The mother settled into a wide hollow of warm ash, nudging Sprout down between her massive front legs. Sprout purred, a vibration that buzzed right through the stones, safe from the storm raging far below.

Golden morning light washed across the emerald shallows, turning the quiet lagoon into a mirror of polished glass. The hurricane clouds had vanished, leaving only soft mist clinging to the volcanic peaks. On the warm black sand, Mateo wiped grease from his forehead with his red bandanna, while Tara tightened the final bolt on a gleaming titanium propeller housing. The new components, scavenged straight from Vance's rover reserves, fit the bush plane perfectly.

Dr. Vance walked across the beach, his olive jacket buttoned neatly, though mud still caked his tall field boots. He cleared his throat, but the sharp chill was gone from his eyes.

He reached into his breast pocket and handed Leo a crisp, laminated card stamped with the expedition’s official seal.

"For keen observational biology under extreme field conditions," Vance said softly, adjusting his wire spectacles. "I spent twenty years cataloging specimens by numbers and walls. But it seems... watching, listening, and asking why does far more to protect them."

Leo smiled, slipping the certificate neatly between the damp pages of his notebook.

A familiar jade snout nudged firmly against Leo's knee. Sprout stood on the wet sand, blinking his enormous amber eyes in the sunshine. Biscuit gave an eager canine snort, trotted forward, and delivered a sloppy, joyful lick across Sprout's leathery cheek. Sprout didn't startle; he merely leaned into the golden puppy's greeting, his blunt nasal boss resting peacefully across Leo’s khaki shorts. Leo buried his fingers into the warm, pebbled scales behind the baby's frill, listening to that steady, deep purr one last time.

"Look after your mom, little guy," Leo whispered.

Mateo climbed into the pilot seat and called out, "Engines are primed, Cap! Time to head for home!"

Biscuit scrambled up the pontoon ladder, spinning twice on the rear bench before pressing his damp nose against the cockpit window. Leo buckled his lap belt, the engine coughing to life with a healthy, rhythmic roar. The yellow seaplane skimmed across the mirror-bright turquoise lagoon, sending twin arcs of diamond spray into the morning sky before lifting smoothly into the air.

Down below, Sprout and his mother stood together on the black sand, small and majestic against the jade jungle. Leo opened his notebook to a crisp, unwritten page, tapped his pencil against his chin, and grinned out at the wide ocean horizon. "Wait—if there are horned dinosaurs here, what's on the next island?"

Acknowledgments

To our wonderful real-life Leo: thank you for lending your endless curiosity, infectious laughter, and relentless habit of asking 'why' to this wild prehistoric adventure. You tackle every day with the boundless bravery of an intrepid explorer. To our goofy, tail-wagging Biscuit, thank you for donating your nose for crumbs, your clumsy paws, and your unconditional loyalty to the page—you truly are the world's best co-pilot. Crafting this tropical rescue for you was the greatest joy of our year. May you always look at the horizon with wonder, listen closely to the whispering world around you, and know that wherever your questions lead, we will always be right beside you.

Mom and Dad

Leo, Biscuit, and the Island of Whispering Giants

Author: **Mom and Dad**

Written especially for Leo on his 7th birthday

October 2026

When seven-year-old Leo and his snack-loving puppy Biscuit crash-land on a secret prehistoric island, an approaching hurricane threatens a lost baby dinosaur. To reunite the calf with its mother before the storm hits, Leo must outwit a barricaded research outpost and unlock the island's deepest secret.