

The Inventor's Children

by ReadWorks

"Wait, what? When is the presentation? How much are we missing?" Cara's father was having another loud argument over his cell phone at the breakfast table.

Cara and her brother, Zeke, shared knowing looks across their bowls of oatmeal. It was the first day of summer vacation, and their father had promised to take the day off work. They were supposed to go to Six Flags, the nearby amusement park, and dinner at Giordino's, their favorite pizza place. Both Cara and Zeke had taken their father's enthusiastic plans for the family day with a grain of salt, especially since every year for the last three years family day had been cancelled at the last minute.

Zeke leaned over as their father left the dining room to continue the phone conversation with his colleague. "I didn't even think we'd make it to breakfast, honestly," he said. "This is better than last year, when he cancelled the night before. We're making progress." Cara rolled her eyes and responded, "I guess. If you can call canceling the entire day progress. I mean, I get it, though; you know how important his work is."

Their father was a physicist in charge of one of the biggest laboratories in the country. The lab specialized in military defense, and a lot of the projects their father worked on were top secret. Anytime something went wrong, he had to be there to fix it and make sure everything got back on track. His job meant that he was absent a lot, but by this point Cara was used to it. "I think it's time we roll out the back-up plan," she said. "What do you want to do? I vote for an afternoon movie and ice cream."

Zeke smiled at her with a wicked glint in his eyes, "Oh, I have something else in mind, a fantastic idea." Cara felt her stomach grow queasy. Zeke's idea of fun was usually something that was against the rules. There was the time he tried to bungee jump off the roof using tied-together jump ropes, and broke both of his arms. Or the time that he almost burned down the house while trying to make his own fireworks. Zeke was covered in scars from injuries he had gotten while trying out his "fantastic ideas."

Just then their father returned to the dining room. "Kids," he said. "I'm sorry, but I have bad news."

"Let me take a wild guess. An emergency at the lab and you need to head there right away?" said Zeke. His voice was full of resentment. Their father's brow furrowed, and he looked upset.

"Well, yes... I'm so sorry," he replied.

Cara gave Zeke a swift kick under the table. The last thing their stressed-out, overworked father needed was a guilt trip. "Don't worry, Dad," she said. "We can go to the amusement park another time. Really, we have the whole summer in front of us."

"Yeah? That'd be great. I really want to take you both there. The roller coasters are perfect examples of some of the basic concepts of mechanical physics in action, and it'd be fun to combine the rides with some informal science discussions," their dad enthused.

Zeke opened his mouth and Cara kicked him again, before he could deliver another wisecrack. Somehow Cara didn't imagine that science lectures were what Zeke wanted to hear at the

amusement park.

"I'll leave you two some money," said their father. "Order some pizza and head to the pool, enjoy the day, and we'll have a nice dinner this evening. I'll make sure to be home promptly at 6 p.m."

"Promise?" asked Cara.

"Promise," said their father. "No matter what." He grabbed his briefcase off the table and was out the door, racing off to the lab to solve another dilemma.

"All right," Cara turned to her brother. "Spill. What's your big master plan for the day?"

Zeke's eyes lit up with anticipation. "Today," he said, drawing out each word for added effect, "we go into... Dad's private lab."

Behind the house, their father had converted the garage into a two-story building where he tinkered with his own personal experiments. Neither Cara nor Zeke had ever been inside. Some of the stuff inside was dangerous, their father had told them. All of it was off limits.

"Zeke..." Cara chastised. "We can't jeopardize his work like that. Besides," she added pragmatically, "the door is locked. We can't get in unless you've gained lock-picking skills in the last few days."

"Cara, Cara, Cara," Zeke said her name in a way that suggested he was disappointed in her lack of vision. "First of all, yes, I am good at lock-picking. That's how I've been reading your diary for the past five months and I know that you'll help me so that I don't tell Dad you have a boyfriend."

"Really, Zeke? Blackmail?" Cara sighed. "Okay, but the lock on that door is going to be a lot tougher than the dinky plastic one on my journal."

"It's not a lock at all," said Zeke. "It's a twelve-digit password, and I think I know what it is."

Zeke got up and headed for the door. He paused to turn back to Cara, "Well, are you coming or not?"

Cara sighed. Zeke was going to break into the lab whether she helped or not. She might as well go along to make sure he didn't break anything too important or blow up the whole neighborhood.

Zeke was already punching in the numbers when Cara caught up to him. The door to the lab was steel and heavy; there was no way they could possibly break in if Zeke didn't have the code. The door let out an angry buzz. Cara peered over Zeke's shoulder and saw the message "Code Error."

"Umm, Zeke?" said Cara. "Don't these systems usually alert the police if you enter the wrong code too many times?"

"Yeah," said Zeke as he punched in more numbers. "But you get three tries. At least, that's what it always looks like in the movies. Anyways, the second try just worked, so it looks like you don't need to worry. It was our birthdays. Dad says that he always thinks of us, even when he's at work, and I guess he was telling the truth."

The door swung open onto a lab that gleamed with white counters and complicated machines. In the center of the room was the most beautiful car either of them had ever seen. It looked like a sports car, but sleeker and with metal wheels.

"Wow," said Cara. "It's gorgeous."

Zeke had already hopped into the driver's seat. "Come on, Cara, let's take it for a spin!"

"Zeke, you don't even have a license," Cara responded. She hopped into the passenger's seat. Instead of a normal dashboard, the inside of the car was covered in knobs, buttons, and gauges. Zeke reached out and pressed five of them in a row.

"Let's see what this can do!" he yelled.

Suddenly the car started vibrating. Cara watched as the room around her appeared to melt, the colors dripping into one another. Zeke reached out and grabbed her hand; this was more than even he had imagined. When the car stopped vibrating, they were no longer in their father's private lab. Where there had been counters and machines, there were now trees and a river.

"What happened?" Zeke asked Cara.

Cara didn't respond but pointed across the river. There, calmly grazing, was a *Triceratops*.

dilemma di · lem · ma

Advanced Definition

noun

1. a problem situation that requires a choice between equally undesirable solutions or that resists satisfactory solution.

Parents found themselves in a dilemma having to choose between sending their children away for safety from the bombs or keeping their families together while risking their lives.

2. (informal) any difficult and perplexing situation; predicament.

We were in a real dilemma after our wallets were stolen during our vacation.

Spanish cognate

dilema: The Spanish word *dilema* means dilemma.

These are some examples of how the word or forms of the word are used:

1. This is a **dilemma** that every film editor faces. Their work, while crucial to the success of a film, is rarely celebrated.
2. The Congo war creates an obvious **dilemma** for consumers who need handheld devices but don't want to fund the militias who are brutalizing Congo's people.

jeopardize jeep · ard · ize

Advanced Definition

transitive verb

1. to cause to be in danger or at risk; imperil.

If you fail chemistry this year, you will jeopardize your chances of getting into medical school.

This scandal is jeopardizing her position in the company.

These are some examples of how the word or forms of the word are used:

1. "We can't **jeopardize** his work like that. Besides," she added pragmatically, "the door is locked."
2. Boris Makarenko, the head of a political think tank in Moscow, believes that the protests will not bring down Putin or **jeopardize** his 2012 election. But Putin needs to address the needs of the Russian people, says Makarenko.
3. "Nyiragongo could, and most likely will, erupt again that way someday, **jeopardizing** the lives of everyone in Goma," Sims told Current Science. The scientific expedition to Nyiragongo was conducted to gather clues about when the next outburst might occur.

resentment

 re · sent · ment

Advanced Definition

noun

1. a bitterness, displeasure, or indignation resulting from perceived injury or wrong.

He felt he was more qualified for the job than the other applicants and was filled with resentment when he didn't get it.

Spanish cognate

resentimiento: The Spanish word *resentimiento* means resentment.

These are some examples of how the word or forms of the word are used:

1. His voice was full of **resentment**. Their father's brow furrowed, and he looked upset.
2. The goal of equality and freedom together with the widespread **resentment** of the British after the Seven Years' War was a catalyst for many Frenchmen to join the colonists' cause.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What had Cara and Zeke's father promised to do?

- A. He had promised to take Cara and Zeke to the pool.
- B. He had promised to take the day off work.
- C. He had promised to take Cara and Zeke to the zoo.
- D. He had promised to take Cara and Zeke out for ice cream.

2. What is the problem that prevents Cara and Zeke's father from spending the day with them?

- A. There is an emergency at the lab where he works, and he has to go there right away.
- B. He gets stuck in a time-traveling machine that takes him back to the time of the dinosaurs.
- C. He gets sick at breakfast and has to go to the hospital right away.
- D. He gets into an argument on his cell phone during breakfast and becomes too upset to take his kids out to Six Flags.

3. Refer to this excerpt from the story for Questions 3 and 4.

Just then their father returned to the dining room. 'Kids,' he said. 'I'm sorry, but I have bad news.'

'Let me take a wild guess. An emergency at the lab and you need to head there right away?' said Zeke. His voice was full of resentment. Their father's brow furrowed, and he looked upset. 'Well, yes... I'm so sorry,' he replied.

Cara gave Zeke a swift kick under the table. The last thing their stressed-out, overworked father needed was a guilt trip. 'Don't worry, Dad,' she said. 'We can go to the amusement park another time. Really, we have the whole summer in front of us.'

Based on this information, what can you conclude about how Zeke feels in this part of the story?

- A. Zeke feels hurt and annoyed.
- B. Zeke feels concerned and fearful.
- C. Zeke feels kind and sympathetic.
- D. Zeke feels calm and content.

4. Based on this information, what can you conclude about Cara's attitude toward her father?

- A. Cara's attitude toward her father is casual and indifferent.
- B. Cara's attitude toward her father is understanding and sympathetic.
- C. Cara's attitude toward her father is harsh and resentful.
- D. Cara's attitude toward her father is joyful and enthusiastic.

5. What is the main idea of this story?

- A. Cara and Zeke's father leaves the dining room to continue a phone conversation with a colleague.
- B. Cara and Zeke's father is a physicist in charge of one of the biggest laboratories in the country.
- C. Two kids sneak into their father's lab after he cancels his plans with them.
- D. Two kids are looking forward to visiting an amusement park and going out for pizza.

6. Read these sentences from the text.

All right,' Cara turned to her brother. 'Spill. What's your big master plan for the day?'

Zeke's eyes lit up with anticipation. 'Today,' he said, drawing out each word for added effect, 'we go into... Dad's private lab.'

What does Cara probably mean when she says, "Spill"?

- A. "Tell me."
- B. "There's a puddle on the floor."
- C. "Whatever."
- D. "Something is leaking."

7. Read these sentences from the text.

Behind the house, their father had converted the garage into a two-story building where he tinkered with his own personal experiments. Neither Cara nor Zeke had ever been inside. Some of the stuff inside was dangerous, their father had told them. All of it was off limits.

What does the pronoun "it" in the last sentence refer to?

- A. "the stuff"
- B. "dangerous"
- C. "their father"
- D. "the house"

8. In their father's lab, Cara and Zeke climb into a car with many knobs, buttons, and gauges. What happens to the car after Zeke presses five of the knobs, buttons, and gauges?

9. After the car stops vibrating, Cara and Zeke are no longer in their father's lab. Describe their new surroundings. Include at least three details from the text.

10. Where might the car have taken Cara and Zeke? Support your answer with evidence from the text.