
Subject: Re: Winds of Change
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From: susanmartha Sent: 3/18/2007 7:51 PM

Tracy Island, August 17th, Dinner

"Isn't Mrs. Hanson joining us for dinner tonight?" Gordon looked around the table. It was full, except for one place next to Tyler. The place was set but the chair was empty.

Kyrano set his platter down in front of Jeff. "She said she would be here when I asked her at lunch. In fact, I told her I was fixing salmon. She had told me it was one of her favorite dishes."

"She was out by the pool earlier. We were talking then she walked off toward the beach. Perhaps she just lost track of time." Penelope sipped her wine.

When she hadn't returned by dessert, Jeff began to worry. "Gordon. Why don't you check her room? See if she is taking a nap or something. We can send a tray over."

Gordon nodded and left the table. He returned a half an hour later. "She's not there. She's also not on any of the beaches I could see. And she's not with any of the recruits either. None of them have seen her since this afternoon." He hesitated for a second. "Dad, the tide is just starting to come in. It's going to be a high one, so she shouldn't stay out there too long. She doesn't know the beaches and could get trapped."

"She was going to help Alex and me play with the kittens tonight. She said we need to be around them a lot so they get used to people." Tyler sounded upset.

"Well then, Tyler, you and Alex will have to help me play with them. I'm still trying to make friends with Momma. Kyrano, was there any salmon left over?" Emily Tracy stood up and moved toward the kitchen.

"Yes, Mrs. Tracy. I put some aside for her. Durian wanted it all and complained mightily when I would not give it to him."

"A cat is always hungry when there is fish to be had. Come along, boys." Emily led them out to the kitchen.

"Dianne, you need to go back to the sick room. In fact, you should have gone back a while ago." Drew stood up and went to take the wheelchair. "You are looking tired."

"In a moment. Jeff, Drew, Anna has a heart problem. It is minor, and it shouldn't be giving her any trouble, but I'm beginning to worry. She's not the type to have forgotten a promise to Tyler."

"Jeff." Penny's eyes were troubled. "Ms. Hanson and I exchanged a few heated words while we were by the pool. She was fairly upset when she marched off."

"What did you say?" asked Jeff.

"I made a comment about her unexplained time off twenty years ago. She went white, stood up, and made a cutting remark. She told me I should read the papers. Then she marched off."

Drew swore. "Maggie, get your jacket. Find an extra one for Anna. Jeff, she's probably all right, but we should find her. It is getting dark and she doesn't know her way around."

"You know something you're not telling us."

"I didn't just recommend Anna to you because I'd met her once. She's actually fairly well-known in her field. She's written several papers. One of them gave a short biography."

"I will come also." Penny stood up.

"No. Right now, you would only make things worse. If you really want to know about the 'unexplained' time off, I suggest you read the Christchurch newspapers for the period just before then. She was using her maiden name professionally at the time. I'm not sure what it was."

"You're sure she went toward the beach?" Jeff asked.

"Yes, although I'm not sure she went all the way down."

"Ok. Scott, Virgil, get the hover bikes and check the trails that branch off from the beach trail. Gordon, Maggie, take one of the beach buggies and search toward the pier. Drew and I will look in the other direction. If you find her, give us a call."

"She should be fine," Drew added. "But she may not realize how much time has passed. She may also still be upset. Don't worry about it. Just tell her we were worried and she needs to come back. Tell her Tyler missed her."

A chorus of "FABs" came from around the room. Coats were grabbed and people headed out various doors. Jeff went over and kissed Dianne. "Back to bed for you, dear."

"I want to stay up until she's found." Dianne had a stubborn look on her face.

"You can stay up as late as you like as long as it's in the sick room," Drew replied. "We may be rather late, though. I don't think she's in any trouble, but I don't want her spending the night outside. And what happened isn't my story to tell. Although she will probably tell you if you ask." Drew leaned over and kissed her cheek.

Lisa and Tin-Tin helped Brains wheel Dianne down to the sick room and put her to bed. Tin-Tin stayed to keep her company while Lisa went to start getting the boys ready for their bed. Penny went over to the computer on Jeff's desk. She found the website of Christchurch's newspaper and started reading the headlines from 22 years ago. Every so often she would skim an article but didn't find anything. Finally she saw a story from about two weeks before Anna's leave started. Four paragraphs down, she came across the name Anna Peterson. Her face went pale as she read the story.

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Drew and Jeff found her about a mile up the beach. She was sitting on the sand with her arms wrapped around her knees, watching the waves. Jeff stopped the cart and called the other searchers. Drew got out, grabbed a blanket he'd put in the cart, and sat down beside her.

"Here," he said, handing her the blanket. "I thought you might get cold."

"Oh. Thanks." She took the blanket and looked at it for a minute. Then she looked around her. "It's dark. I hadn't noticed." She wrapped the blanket around her shoulders.

Jeff came over and sat on her other side. They sat in silence for a while then Anna gave a shudder and pulled the blanket closer.

"Are you all right now?" Jeff asked.

"Yes. I will be. I guess I missed dinner." She made no move to get up.

"More importantly, you missed playing with the kittens with Tyler. He was getting worried."

"Oh dear. I better go talk to him." She started to get up but Jeff put a hand on her arm.

"He's just getting into bed. The official story is that you went for a walk on the beach, went farther than you thought, and you couldn't get back before dark. This has the advantage of being mostly true. I talked to him and told him we'd found you. He's should be in bed and asleep by the time we get back. You can grovel tomorrow." She smiled briefly at that then settled back into silence. After a moment, Jeff continued. "Penny sends her apologies. She said she looked at the papers and, quote, is appalled at her behavior, end quote."

"It wasn't entirely her fault. We were both being rude and losing our tempers. She couldn't have had any idea her comment would affect me like that. Still, I think I better avoid her for a couple of days. I'm going to be sensitive for a while. Maybe I should go visit the kittens. A purr fest might be just what I need."

"As long as you're sure you won't take out your anger on them," Drew cautioned.

Again, the brief smile. "I spent a half hour throwing rocks at the cliff back there. I broke a few, too. I think I've got most of the anger out of my system for now. I'm sorry, Mr. Tracy. I haven't reacted like this in over ten years."

Jeff looked at her. "If you don't want to answer this, you don't have to. I won't ask again. But what were you reacting to?"

Anna was quiet for a long while. Just when Jeff was ready to suggest they go back to the house, she answered. "I started out as a social worker. Helping people on public assistance, checking handicap claims, helping make insurance claims, that sort of thing. I found I was really good at talking to the people, but was getting frustrated. Sometimes it seemed nothing ever changed.

"I was assigned to help a battered wife. She was filing for divorce. She had left him a year ago and was currently six months pregnant by someone else. I was helping her get through the court system and arranging for transitional housing. She was living in the domestic violence shelter.

"The day of the divorce hearing, two volunteers from the shelter brought her to the courthouse. The primary social worker met them there. They went upstairs to the courtroom. Her husband was waiting outside the courtroom door. I was running late and was just getting out of the elevator.

"I never found out how her husband got the gun through security. But she belonged to him and he wasn't going to let her get away. He put the first bullet through her head. He put the next one through her abdomen, killing her unborn child. He then shot the two volunteers who had 'helped steal his wife from him'. The social worker tried to grab the gun but he shot her before she could reach him. He saw me on the steps and was just pointing the gun at me when a police officer who was in the courthouse to testify in another case shot him.

"I knew all the victims. The social worker had been a colleague for 5 years. I knew both volunteers; one of them was from my church. I'd helped to persuade the wife to leave. And I'd helped her pick out a name for the baby.

"I didn't have a breakdown, but I couldn't return to work. I started seeing a counselor. But she specialized in grief therapy. I knew both trauma counselors personally and didn't like either one.

"You know, the best drug and alcohol counselors are people who've been through it themselves. That's one of the reasons AA works. They know what it's like and can understand, but you can't B.S. them. I started doing research into trauma to try and help myself. I joined survivors of violence support group. I watched what the leader was doing. I took over when she went on vacation. And I found out I was good at it, and liked it. So I went back to school and got my second Master's degree.

"My husband and I talked about moving somewhere else and starting over. I was having problems with the notoriety. But my main support system was here. I'd always used my maiden name professionally. There had been a problem changing the name on my original degree. So all the news stories said 'Anna Peterson'. I went back to college as 'Anna Hanson'. My supervisors knew; it wasn't a secret exactly, but the press never found out -- or at least they never mentioned it. Except for one article in 'The Journal of Modern Psychology' that had a short biography. Not many people read medical journals for fun.

"I think it was the unexpectedness of Penelope's comments that upset me so much. She really didn't say anything that far out of line. I got out of the line of fire and did what I needed to do to take care of myself. I just didn't realize I had been gone so long. And I'm sorry if I upset you."

"We were more worried than upset. I'm going to have to figure out what to tell everyone, though. Ready to go back?" Jeff stood up and offered her his hand.

"The truth usually works. Tell them Lady Penelope said something that upset me and I went for a walk to calm down. I lost track of time. I should probably tell Dianne the full story. Do you think hearing this will upset her more than wondering?"

"Let me worry about Dianne. I'll give her the 'official' version and tell her there was more to it than that but you aren't up to telling the story twice," Drew replied, standing up. "She'll accept that from me, for now. You can tell her what you want later when you're both stronger. Come on. Let's get you someplace warmer."
