

Thursday, April 26, 2068 10 a.m., Tracy Island.

Christopher walked the short distance to the dining room, one hand in his pocket. He had an empty bucket, and a chamois leather so he could clean the windows there. As soon as he entered the area, he heard voices in the kitchen. He stopped in mid-step.

"Well, Dad, did Uncle Drew say he'd join up?" John asked, fixing himself a cup of coffee.

Jeff sighed. "Yes, John, he did. He and Maggie are both going to be agents."

"You could have knocked me over with a feather when he came up to me at Samoa and made that comment about me 'not looking like a Maverick'," John remarked. "Why did Mom tell him about us?"

Jeff sipped his coffee. "She has her reasons, John. Mostly having to do with her own physical well-being."

"Did you straighten everything out in your 'discussion'?" John queried. "And is that why Christopher's disciplinary term got cut short?"

"Yes, it is. Seemed only fair." Jeff stabbed at his son with a finger. "But you are not to tell anyone, son. Not about any of it. I'll tell the family in my own good time."

Christopher's jaw clenched as he heard the words. ~So she breaks the rules as well and doesn't get so much as a slap on the wrist? he thought ~And my disciplinary term got cut short because it "seemed only fair"? His temper rose, but he fought to keep it down. He turned on his heel and left the area.

As he left, he hit the edge of the bucket against the old table standing there. The bucket made a clanging noise. He went directly to the monorail terminal and back to the Cliff House.

"Did you hear something? Is someone in the dining room?" Jeff asked.

John peered out, but couldn't see the bucket, which had rolled under the table. "I don't see anyone, Dad."

Christopher got back to his room, and got all his suitcases out from the cupboards. He started shoveling all the clothes into them. He threw one of the cases against the wall, stopping to try and calm down. Asterix just lay on his cushion and gave him an uninterested look.

Sitting down next to his cat, he said, "Asterix mate, looks like your life of luxury may soon be coming to an end." Getting up, he went over to his phone, and dialed Mr Tracy's number.

Jeff had just settled back down at his desk with his coffee when the vidphone rang. He frowned

when he saw the number and recognized it as one that had been assigned to the Cliff House. He pressed a button and the face of a scowling Christopher appeared. "Mr. Jordan," he said amiably. "What can I do for you?"

"I'd like to talk to you, Mr Tracy." Christopher inwardly screamed at the calm, collected face looking at him. "Regarding the shortening of my disciplinary term."

Jeff frowned a bit. "What about it?"

"I'd think it would be best if I discuss it in person."

Christopher disconnected the line. He went to his bathroom and smartened himself up. Putting on a fresh shirt and his RAF jacket, he put his tie on also. He checked his appearance and then went to the monorail. Getting on, he was breathing deeply to keep himself calm. He walked from the monorail to Mr Tracy's office.

"Mr Tracy," he said as he stood in front of the older man's desk.

Jeff stood and came out from behind his desk. "Mr. Jordan... Christopher... what do you want to discuss? Do you think your treatment has been unfair?" He leaned up against his desk, his hands on the top at the front.

"No." Christopher looked at Jeff. "I only think it is unfair that when your wife does exactly the same thing as I did, she doesn't get the same punishment as me."

Jeff's slight frown turned into a scowl. "Where did you hear this, Mr. Jordan?" he asked.

"I just happened to hear you and John talking earlier." Christopher smiled thinly. "didn't you hear the bucket?"

"That was you?" Jeff huffed out an exasperated breath. "Look here, Mr. Jordan. Dianne is Chief Medical Officer of International Rescue, not some trainee with an eye for a pretty face. She made a judgment call on letting a member of her own family in on the secret of International Rescue. A family member, I might add, who I have known and trusted for years. There is no comparison between her situation and yours!"

"Of course it's the same!" Christopher snapped. "It's security! You were giving me all that talk when you chewed me out before, and it doesn't apply to your family? That's hypocritical!"

Jeff stood up abruptly and stepped forward. His face grew red and he spoke in a low, dangerous voice. "If my wife had been stupid enough to talk to a television reporter, she would have merited the same treatment. So would any of my sons. But telling a trusted member of the family is not the same as blabbing it all over the BBC! And you're damned lucky that, as a result of my wife's so-called 'security breach', I took stock of my treatment of you and lessened your disciplinary period!"

"Don't give me that!" Christopher snarled back. "It's one rule for your family, and another for us! I cocked up big time, and I'm not ashamed to admit it, and I'm doing my punishment! What would

happen if Gordon blabbed? Or Kat? Who would you punish? And who would you let off with a 'dear dear don't do that again?' He crossed his arms, daring Jeff to continue.

Jeff stood still, glaring at the pilot. Then he raised his arm and activated his telecomm. "Jeff to John."

John's face appeared on the tiny screen. He did a double take at his father's red, angry face, but said, "Yes, Dad?"

"Please come to the lounge immediately."

"Right away." John's picture winked out.

Jeff turned his hard eyes back to Christopher again, who stood there defiantly. "Obviously, you aren't listening to me. If either of them spoke to a reporter, they would be punished, and fairly. But I think that this has gone too far."

"Really?" Christopher looked at Jeff. "You need to take a long hard look at things. When I was in RAF, we were treated the same, even the officers. If they made a mistake, they were punished as well. You can't have favourites, Mr Tracy, and I don't think that your wife's case is any different to mine at all. Who knows who it could have been?"

"My wife's case is different because she made no mistake," Jeff countered. He raised his eyes as John came into the room. The younger man looked from Christopher to his father and back again, noting the angry postures. "John?"

"Yes, Father?"

"Prep Tracy One for a flight to Christchurch. Mr. Jordan is leaving our employ, effective immediately. He can catch a commercial flight from New Zealand." Jeff ignored John's gasp of surprise and held out his hand. "Your telecomm."

"Don't worry." Christopher tossed the telecomm on the desk. "I was packing anyway." He turned and walked out of the office.

Jeff watched him go, still glaring. John watched, too, and then turned to his father. "What was that all about?"

"I'll tell you later, John," Jeff growled as he settled back behind his desk.

the beginning to an end, by The Wrong Trousers and Tikatu 7/30/2005