

Thunderbird Two Hangar, April 30th.

For the second time that morning Elise landed in the pilot's seat in a fit of giggles. The first time had been more from experiencing the unexpected, and now it was because she found the whole episode hysterical. Virgil shook his head, laughing along with her.

"Ohmigod, this is soooo much better than a ride at Disney World, Virgil!"

"Yeah, and I don't charge as much for the ride!" he answered humorously.

The training session that morning had begun with Elise learning how to 'ride the chute' from the lounge down to Thunderbird Two's cockpit. Being tipped upside down threw her initially, but once she'd landed feet first into the pilot's seat with Virgil already there waiting for her, she'd collapsed into giggles.

"Believe me, Elise, the novelty wears off eventually."

She looked at him and suddenly asked, "Have you ever gotten stuck? You know, like halfway down the chute?"

He thought for a moment and replied that he couldn't remember any time he'd gotten stuck, but did tell her that once or twice Brains had while testing it. They both laughed, picturing the engineer stuck on the chute.

After that, she settled into the command seat and went through the pre-flight check procedures and pod selection format. Elise had graduated from the simulator training and was now learning how to handle the actual craft. Virgil had been impressed at how quickly she'd familiarized herself with the controls and at how comfortable she was with them.

"Pod selection complete." Her fingers quickly programmed information into the telemetry computer which, through sophisticated technology, transferred piloting commands from the simplified control cabin interface to the aircraft's complicated flight systems. She pushed a button on the console and the huge green transporter slowly descended over the pod. The clicking sounds heard in the cockpit indicated the pods electromagnetic docking clamps had activated and the pod was in place.

"Pod secure," Elise announced as she powered up the engines. "Proceeding with taxi to take off ramp position."

"FAB," Virgil answered.

Thunderbird Two steadily made her way to the launch ramp. Elise put on the brakes and waited for the ramp to rise. She quickly glanced over at Virgil who smiled and winked. "You're doing great!"

She let the breath out she'd been holding. The ramp rose and remained in take off position for a few minutes.

"Good work, Elise. Now let's see how you are at backing up!" Virgil grinned.

Once the ramp was lowered, she reversed the engines and slowly backed up the runway and into the hangar. Powering down the engines and raising the telescopic legs, Elise raised the main fuselage clear of the pod and shut down Thunderbird Two. She looked at Virgil. "Well? Do I pass?"

"A little slow reversing, but that takes practice. Yes, you passed."

She beamed a smile back at him and added, "You're definitely easier to please than Scott!"

Virgil laughed and replied, "Now don't go telling everyone I'm easy! I'd hate for my reputation to be ruined."

"It'll be our secret," she playfully answered. "Talking of Scott, how much of this whole Christopher thing did he know about before CJ left?"

"I don't know, Elise. I know Christopher was angry about the punishment for the security breach, but as to why he left and the details of it... well, I guess Dad's the one that's going to have to tell the rest of the team. I don't think Scott knew any more than the rest of us on the day that CJ left."

"It was quite a shock, that's for sure," Elise said as her thoughts drifted back to that day...

She and Callie had been out on the patio when Christopher, Scott, and a large amount of luggage emerged from common room hallway.

"What's going on?" Elise had asked.

Christopher told them he was leaving for good and hugged them as he said his farewells. Scott said nothing but continued on walking Christopher and his luggage to the freight elevator.

Elise had tracked down Dom and Nikki and, together with Callie and Kat, they'd assembled at the hangar with various other Tracy family members and Kyran. Elise remembered more fond farewells and watched as John and Christopher boarded Tracy One and took off.

The second they were airborne, she marched over to Scott. "What the hell's going on here?" she demanded. "Are you going to just stand there and let him go?"

Scott took a deep breath and looked her in the eye. "I don't have a choice, Elise. It's out of my control."

He'd started to walk away, but she put out her hand to stop him. "Wait just a sec. You're telling me that the back-up pilot for TB1 just quit? Just like that?" she snapped her fingers for emphasis.

"No, I'm saying that I don't have all the details and it was a command decision." Scott tried not to sound snippy, but he was not at all happy at being put on the spot when his father should be the one explaining what had happened.

"Fine. I guess we'd all better watch our backs then, in case one of us is the next one put on a plane off this island."

Scott knew by the look on her face that she hadn't believed him about what he knew. He needed to talk to his father, the sooner the better, and so left the hangar before anyone else could corner him.

Elise wasn't satisfied with Scott's answers and, although she'd tried, she hadn't been able to get 2 seconds alone with him since then to ask him again.

"Hellooo? You in there?"

Elise snapped back to the present at the sound of Virgil's voice. "What? Oh! Yeah, I'm ready to go." She stood and the two of them made their way back to the lounge.

From FrankieCTB2 8/13/2005

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