

Tracy Island, Thursday May 3, 9:30pm.

"Do you think our daughter enjoyed her birthday celebration this evening?" Jeff asked his wife as he slipped an arm around her waist, gently pulling her to his side.

Turning her face upwards to meet his gaze, Dianne answered, "Absolutely! She adores her older brothers and her new friends on the team. But most of all she adores you." Jeff smiled softly and kissed Dianne tenderly.

"And how did you enjoy yours?" he asked, reluctantly pulling his lips from hers.

"Ah'll enjoy it more when you and I are alone in New Hampshire." She replied, her eyes twinkling. Jeff smiled knowingly. "I suppose we had better start packing for the trip in the morning or we'll never make it to the ranch!" Dianne reluctantly eased herself away from Jeff and started to walk away. She'd only gone a few steps, then turned back with a questioning look at her husband. "Are you not coming?"

Jeff walked to her and sighed. Taking her upper arms in his hands and gently rubbing them he spoke. "Honey, I need to debrief the team about Christopher leaving. I've put it off too long as it is and, now that the team is all here, I think I need to do this before we leave tomorrow."

Dianne sighed, fully understanding his job as Commander of the team, yet begrudging what he had to do because she wanted her husband to herself for a couple of hours tonight. "Ah understand, Just try not t'be too long," she replied with a twinkle in her eye as she caressed his face with her palm. He turned his face to kiss it and promised her he wouldn't be long.

As Scott got up to get himself another helping of cake, he noticed Tin-Tin walking out of the lounge and then caught the exchange between his father and Dianne. He smiled, walking towards them.

"Goodnight, Scott." Dianne smiled as she also left the room.
"Guess the party's over then?"

"Yep," replied his father noticing how large the slice of cake was Scott was helping himself to.
"Son, where do you put it all?" Scott looked up innocently as he shoveled a bite into his mouth.

Jeff rolled his eyes and then became serious. "Scott, I want to have a short briefing with everyone in here in about 5 minutes."

"Christopher, right?" the son asked, reading his father's thoughts. Jeff nodded. Scott didn't need any more words.
Instead, he finished the cake and started rounding everyone up.

The team members sat around the lounge in various places waiting for their commander to begin.

Jeff stood behind his desk, drew in a breath as he looked around, and began. "First, please forgive my short notice for this briefing, but in light of my travel plans over the next few days I wanted you all to be clear about the reasons for Mr. Jordan's departure from International Rescue." The room was silent; all eyes and ears were on the Commander.

"I'm fully aware of how things may look at the moment, but let me make this one point clear before I continue. International Rescue has zero tolerance for security breaches! One slip could mean the end of this organization and the end of saving people's lives." Jeff looked around as he spoke. Not even his own sons dared say a word. They knew better. "Am I making myself clear?"

"Yes, Sir!" came unified reply.

Jeff paused before continuing, choosing his words carefully. "Recently, two team members, under two completely different sets of circumstances, risked the security of IR. Both were addressed and handled as I saw fit. Unfortunately, Mr. Jordan did not agree with some of our policies and my handling of each situation. As a result, he and I both thought it best if his continuation with IR be terminated."

"So it was mutual?" Scott was the first to speak up.

"Yes, Scott, it was. Mr. Jordan had apparently been re-thinking his position with us for a while and didn't think he could continue to be an asset to the team." Jeff noted how some of the new members glanced at each other.

"So where does that leave us for a second pilot on TB One?" This question came from Brandon.

"At this point we will need to cross-train some of you while we look for another pilot candidate."

At those words, Elise, who happened to be sitting next to Virgil and within earshot of Scott, groaned softly. Scott had been right with his earlier prediction to himself that trouble with blonde hair was coming his way.

Virgil spoke up next. "So who do we start training on One first?"

"Virgil, we have 3 active pilots right now, you and Scott and Elise..."

~Oh no, here it comes~ Elise groaned inwardly this time.

"What about Alan?" Nikki asked.

"Alan is capable of handling One, but only as a last resort. His main duties and responsibilities are with Three and manning the space station in rotation with John and Callie. Tin-Tin and Brains are certainly qualified, but I need them here or in Thunderbird Two."

Dom was the next to speak up "Sir, I'm a qualified pilot, not on large aircraft mind you but I'm willing to be of assistance."

"Thank you Dom, I appreciate that and will keep it in consideration, but your first priority is on

Thunderbird 7 as part of our essential medical team; but in the event that push comes to shove, I may need you." Dom nodded his understanding.

"At this time I want Elise to start training on One as well as continuing with Virgil on Thunderbird Two. " Jeff looked in the direction of his 3 pilots.

The chestnut haired one was looking at the other two. Elise muttered, "Oh joy," rather dejectedly. Virgil fought to hide a smile. Scott wasn't exactly jumping with excitement either.

"Think you can handle that, Elise?" Jeff asked.

"Yes, sir," was her short, confident reply.

"Scott? Any problems that you can see with that?" Jeff dared his eldest to speak now or forever hold his peace.

"No, Sir!" came the practiced reply of a military man.

The commander smiled knowingly. "Are there any other questions?"

Various headshakes and mumbles of 'no' assured Jeff that the briefing was at an end. "Obviously, we will eventually be training some of you to be back up on One, as Elise can't be in two places at once, but for now I appreciate your attention and questions and concerns. Scott will be in charge while I'm gone. Thank you for your attention, and I'm glad everyone enjoyed the evening. Now, if you'll please excuse me, I have some packing to do. " With that Jeff headed off in the direction his wife had gone earlier, intending to keep his promise to her.

As the team dispersed, Elise turned and glared at Virgil. "What are you smirking at?" she all but demanded.

He looked almost too happy as he replied, "I was just thinking that now Scott gets to teach you how he flies his Thunderbird 'straight to hell'!"

Elise winced as Virgil's statement reminded her of where she'd told Scott he could fly to when she'd found out she wasn't going back to New York. "Funny, very funny!"

Scott watched the exchange with amusement. "If you two children are done squabbling, I guess we'd better figure out a schedule for training. Don't want to tire out the little puppy on her first day!" Scott grinned, turning on the famous Tracy smile.

Elise turned her icy glare from Virgil to Scott. Then shaking her head to herself, she announced she was going to bed and left.

Both brothers watched her go and, the second she was out of earshot, Virgil threw down the gauntlet. "Fifty bucks says you can't get through the first day without wanting to kill her!"

Scott, never one to back down from anything his brothers threw at him, replied, "Make it a hundred Bro, and you're on!"

Jeff had retired to the suite he and Dianne shared to find she'd already packed all but a few things. Slipping his arms around her from behind, he hugged her closely.

"Ah take it that ahll went well?"

"Yes, actually it did."

Later, as Dianne lay sleeping in his arms, he was satisfied that he'd done the right thing by having the briefing now instead of waiting. Kissing her cheek gently, he drifted off to sleep.

From: FrankieCTB2 Sent: 8/20/2005
