

Saturday, May 5, 2068, 3:30 p.m., Tracy ranch, Wyoming

"Hey, John!" Ellen said, spurring her horse up to trot next to John's mount. "How much longer?"

John sighed internally. Tall, gangly Ellen had attached herself to John over the past few hours and he was beginning to believe he should have taken the other option he had been offered. His father had approached him earlier and asked him if he wanted to take the girls on horseback up the tougher, more scenic horseback trail or drive them to the mall in Cody for dinner. He'd chosen the ride, mostly because he hadn't had much chance to ride himself, just a quick excursion with his younger brothers earlier the day before. And he did like to ride. He wished they got out to the ranch more often. ~Maybe I'll ask to have my birthday here with some of my friends, he thought. ~It would be beautiful in October. And no bugs.

"Another twenty minutes, Ellen," John replied, giving her a smile. "But you know you're supposed to ride single file up this trail, so you'd better drop back into place now."

"Okay, John. Thanks!" she said, letting her mount drop behind his... right behind his. He could almost feel her eyes watching his every move. ~I can see now what Scott was talking about. Next year, Virgil gets to do this!

Lisa gazed fondly at the white-blond who was leading them up the scenic path. She understood perfectly what was going on with the girls and how John felt, too. ~My boys went through this, and so did Dianne once upon a time. It brings back so many memories, good ones, of my kids as they were growing up. She shifted her gaze to her granddaughter, whose dark blonde hair shone in the sunlight. ~And now I get to see my grandchildren, especially Cherry, mature into such wonderful people. She shifted in the saddle. ~Oooch. I am going to be stiff come morning. This horseback riding is all right, but only on special occasions! I hope this scenic view is worth it!

Twenty minutes later, they had come to a ridge that looked out over the valley where the Tracy ranch sat. The girls oohed and aahed over the view, and Lisa walked over to John. "Thanks for being our escort up here, John. The view is almost worth the aches I'm going to feel tomorrow."

"Almost, Grandma P?"

"Almost. I'll have to have your mother work her massage magic on me tonight when she and your father get back from the shopping trip." She stood closer to him and murmured. "Don't let those girls get to you. It's only once a year. And their crushes are fleeting things."

"Thank heavens," John sighed. "Still, next year, Virgil is doing this!"

Lisa laughed and put an arm around him to hug him. He reciprocated, kissing her lightly on the cheek. "It's nice to have another grandma again," he said with a smile.

"And I'm happy to have so many handsome, well-trained grandsons," she replied. "Now if you

could only train your youngest brothers to behave... especially while Jeff and Dianne are gone this week."

"We're working on it, Grandma P. We're working on it."

From: Tikatu Sent: 8/31/2005

---