

Virgil made a mental note to thank his space-bound, mind reading brother when he came back dirtside. A break would give everyone a few minutes to get it together.

John looked at Callie. "Want anything in particular?"

"A glass of skim milk. It always helps soothe my nerves."

Christopher looked around, a dazed look on his face. Picking up his drawing, he walked away and sat down in a corner.

Scott stood and stretched, and leaned his head over towards Virgil. "I don't know about you, but I'm wiped. But it's really important that we get this out in the open, or we'll be dealing with the aftermath twice as long."

Virgil looked thoughtful for a few moments, then replied, "You know, we're all so tired, there are going to be things said that wouldn't ordinarily. We may have to deal with them, even into the days to come."

Dianne was about to get up when she felt warm hands on her shoulders. She turned her head to see Lisa behind her. Her mother's hands massaged her neck and shoulders, relaxing her. "How's Jeff?" she asked.

"Cherry send him off to bed around eight," Lisa informed her. She leaned in closer and confided, "He yawned." Dianne chuckled. "I'll warn you, though. He insisted on sleeping in your suite," Lisa said quietly. Dianne's chuckle turned into a groan.

"It's gonna be a bear t' get him out of bed later this mornin'," she said with a sigh.

Callie breathed deeply as John returned with a big glass of skim milk. "Thanks, John."

"You're welcome." He helped himself to his glass of water.

Christopher looked up. "I want to get this all over and done with."

"We will, Christopher," Scott assured him. "But it's a good idea to let people get their thoughts together and maybe steel themselves for this. It won't be pretty."

"I can't believe that you are being calm!" Christopher cried as he returned to the table.

All too soon, the ten minutes were up and everyone reassembled in the dining room. None looked like the break had done much good, but they all looked resolute, as though they wanted to get this over with.

"Who is going to start?" Christopher asked, cradling a fresh cup of tea in his shaking hands.

Why don't we let the ladies go first?" Scott suggested. "Callie? Do you want to begin?"

"Okay, Scott. Even though I wasn't down there at the actual rescue scene, some of the events did shake me up. Hearing 'black tag' just... made me shiver. I never thought I'd have to deal with that again in my lifetime."

After explaining to the others of her childhood experience, she continued. "I admit that being the interpreter was a bit more challenging than I thought, but at least I was able to translate as quickly as I could. What worries me now is how I'll be able to handle the situation when I'm back on Earth helping with the rescues in person. What if I panic?"

Nikki spoke next. "I've been in situations as bad as this before. Being a trauma nurse makes you a bit more... dispassionate about such things. But I felt frustrated at times. Even with Callie's and John's help, it was difficult to communicate with the patients. The language barrier made it difficult to find out what was really wrong, or to comfort them.

"Plus, when patients usually came into the hospital from such an event, they had already had some treatment in the field. For the first time, I was the one treating them in the field. It was different... and sometimes overwhelming. There were only three of us, and so many to treat."

Kat took a deep breath, wanting to spill it all out at once, yet not really wanting to say anything at all. "I guess I never knew what real fear was until I climbed into that bus. All those little faces, wide-eyed and so scared. I felt helpless, I wasn't prepared for this."

"If it wasn't for John and Callie, I wouldn't have known what to do or say to those poor children," added Kat. She blinked away the tears that were threatening to spill. "And so many to comfort. Those kids had no one. No parents, no Grandmas... no one! They all needed to be hugged and loved and told how brave they were. I just wish I could have done more." Kat's tears had overflowed and she couldn't stop them. "I wanted to just hold them all, hold them and never let anything hurt them again! They were so frightened." She sniffled.

Heads turned to Dianne.

"Ah'll put in mah two bits when y'all have talked," Dianne said, her drawl heavy. "Mebbe Christopher should go next."

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