

Thursday, March 15, 2068, 9:30 a.m., Tracy Island

Dianne picked up the letter and read it again. Do I really want to do this? There was so much hurt, so much anger and even hatred. Things are finally cooling down after so long; the mail screening service says they haven't seen one of those awful letters for a while now. She shivered as she remembered the threats and the hate mail that came her way in the wake of the bombing.

She looked at the letter again. What time is it in Greenville, anyway? Four thirty yesterday I think. Reaching out, she dialed the phone number on the stationery. Maybe this will be a final healing.

The phone rang twice and was picked up by a smart looking secretary.

"You've reached Martin and Freeds. Good afternoon, how may I direct your call?"

"Ah'd like t' speak to Mr. Boyd Martin. Is he available?"

The secretary unconsciously wrinkled her nose a bit at Dianne's drawl. Dianne had to wonder if the woman knew that she had that unbecoming tic.

"Who is calling, please?"

"Dr. Dianne Tracy."

"One moment, please."

Despite her attempts to appear cool, the secretary's eyes widened a bit at the Tracy name. Dianne had gotten quite a bit of press on her marriage to Jeff, exposure that she had hoped wouldn't impair her functions as an IR operative. So far, so good, she thought. No one has connected IR's 'Doc' with Dr. Dianne Tracy. In the meantime, my married name seems to carry a little bit of clout, even now.

The muzak that had filled her ear while she was on hold ceased, and Boyd Martin's silver hair and pudgy face filled her screen.

"Good day, Dr. Tracy. I'm gratified to hear from you. I wasn't sure I would with your husband's accident and all. How is he doing, if you don't mind me asking?"

"Hello, Mr. Martin. He's doing well, especially since he's back home. Thank you for askin'. Ah'm calling about this... invitation you sent, t' speak at the memorial service. Ah'm sorry for not getting back t' you sooner; Ah didn't even see the letter 'til we'd arrived back home." She looked down at the letter again and back up at Mr. Martin. "Is it too late t'... accept the invitation?"

Boyd Martin looked as if he'd been stung, then he smiled. "Oh, no, Dr. Tracy. It's not too late. We were about to ask someone else to speak if we hadn't heard from you by the end of the week,

but... no, it's not too late at all. Thank you for accepting our invitation."

"Thank you for inviting me," Dianne returned. She frowned a bit. "Ah am curious, howevuh, as t' why yoah committee chose me. In years previous, y'all'd rathuh Ah an' mah children stayed home altogethuh."

The man on the other end of the vidcall sighed heavily. "I know, Dr. Tracy, and I apologize for that attitude. I don't know if you've heard, but... La Fontaine has been convicted. And both Homeland Security and the FBI have officially closed the case. They issued a statement saying that La Fontaine worked alone."

Dianne swallowed hard at the name La Fontaine. Charles La Fontaine had been a close co-worker of her first husband, Rick, and had even dined with them from time to time. To discover, months after the bombing, that La Fontaine, presumed dead, was hiding with the members of a confirmed terrorist cell in Los Angeles, had been a hard blow for Dianne and her children. But his capture was the one thing that had cheered her as well. She knew that eventually the whole story of the bombing would come out, and her Richard, suspected and reviled, would have his name officially cleared. Now it had happened.

"Thank you for thet news, Mistuh Martin. Ah hadn't heard with all the anxiety surroundin' mah husband aftuh the crash. Ah feel like mah Richard has finally been vindicated."

"He has, Dr. Tracy. Most decidedly so. And as a gesture towards healing, the memorial committee unanimously decided to ask you to speak." Boyd lowered his gaze for a moment, then looked up. "We'd also like permission for something else."

"For whut, Mistuh Martin?" Dianne asked, a hint of suspicion in her voice.

"To move the memorial to your husband...."

"What? Why d'you want to do that?" Dianne cried. "Aftuh all the hassle we went through t' get it anywhere on the grounds at all... now y'want t' move it?!"

"Dr. Tracy! Hear me out, please!" Boyd called out loudly. When Dianne subsided, still glowering, he put a finger under his collar to loosen it. "We want to move the memorial to its proper place, Dr. Tracy. To ground zero, where your husband was standing when that bomb went off. And we wish to dedicate it to his memory, something we never did for fear of stirring up more... unrest." He paused for a moment. "Please, Dr. Tracy. I know we can't make up for what you and your family went through while the whole investigation dragged on and on. But please let us make what overtures we can to apologize for, if not actively participating in your pain, turning a blind eye to what was going on." His voice took on a note of pleading. "Please... let us make what amends we can."

Dianne took a couple of deep breaths to calm and compose herself. "Ah will nevuh unnerstan' why mah Richard was suspected in the fust place. Nor will Ah evuh unnerstan' why people hated me and mine so much. We didn't deserve the hate mail and the threats. But we endured. Mistuh Martin, if'n 'twill make you feel bettuh, please, go ahead. You have mah permission t' move the memorial. You can clean it off while yoah at it; Ah'm sure it's been defaced agin. Ah look forward

to see it finally in its rightful place."

She swallowed and brought her voice, which had been rising in volume, back down to a normal level. "Ah won't apologize for gettin' hot, Mistuh Martin. This has been a long time comin'. Now, when d'you want me there?"

"If you could be here next Wednesday for a run-through of the program, we'd greatly appreciate it," Boyd Martin replied. "The run-through would be at 10 a.m. I will email you with the particulars."

"Ah will be there," Dianne told him. Her voice was steady now, but she knew it wouldn't be for much longer. "Could someone please make sure that there will be a chair for mah husband?"

"Yes, Dr. Tracy. I'll make sure of it myself." He scribbled down a note. "Will you need anything else?"

"Nothin' Ah can think of," she replied. Except a whole mess of courage.

"Then we'll see you Wednesday at ten," Boyd Martin said, a tone of relief in his voice. "Goodbye, Dr. Tracy."

"Goodnight, Mr. Martin." She deactivated the call. Looking at the now-silent vidphone, she felt her tears, held back by sheer determination to not cry in front of the man she faced, slide down her cheeks. And in the privacy of her suite, she cried, shedding tears of sorrow, anger, and relief that a painful chapter of her life was about to come to a close.

Post by Tikatu on 09/11/2004
