

Thursday, March 15, 2068, 11:30 a.m., local time, Kabul, Afghanistan

Tin-Tin was getting antsy. Mr. al Kadar was taking them systematically over the entire plant, pointing out every little detail of the operations. She had to admit that she was impressed by the quality of the equipment they had available, but she was anxious to get down to work on finding the root of the problem with her fabric blend. And so far, there had been no mention of her particular problem. She hoped that after Mr. Tallman had been shown the plant, they could break for lunch and then Tin-Tin could get down to brass tacks.

Giles pretended to be interested in the manufacturing plant and its equipment, but he was much more interested in watching the two women, especially Ms. Kyrano. He could see her growing agitation, her itchiness to get down to business. He surreptitiously watched Emily, too, trying to discern her real purpose in following the young woman around. She couldn't be an intelligence agent... or could she? Her stated purpose of chaperoning the younger woman just didn't ring true to him. But he couldn't figure out any other reason for her presence.

Emily was bored. She had been interested in the plant and the equipment at first and had approved of Tin-Tin's choice of manufacturer for her new fabric. But after having been shown the sanitary facilities (of which there seemed to be many), the offices of every junior executive (and been introduced formally to each and every one), and even the heating and cooling controls, her feet hurt and her head swam with all the unfamiliar terms and names. She wanted nothing more than to return to the hotel, put up her feet, and have a nice lunch. And she didn't trust this Mr. Tallman, either. She caught him gazing at Tin-Tin when he thought she wasn't looking, and she knew he most certainly wasn't as interested in the equipment and facilities as he was in Tin-Tin. She had also felt his eyes on her from time to time, and wondered just what he thought of a young woman having a chaperone in this day and age.

Finally, they had returned to the foyer from whence they had started the long tour.

"And here we are, back at our beginning," Fudail said with a toothy grin. "Have you any questions?"

"Yes, Mr. al Kadar. As you know, I am here to discover why my new fabric formula is not working. When can I speak with your engineers and begin the process of finding out what is going wrong?" Tin-Tin asked bluntly.

Fudail looked at his watch. "I understand your concern about your creation, Ms. Kyrano. We are now at the lunch break and our workers will go home for their meal and afternoon rest. They will return at two. Perhaps if you could return then as well? I will have our head engineer ready to assist you at that time."

Tin-Tin sighed. "Of course, Mr. al Kadar. I will make arrangements to return then."

"If I may make a suggestion," Giles said with a charming smile. "Why don't we three share a taxi

back to the city and have luncheon together? I am very fascinated with your project and would like to hear more about it."

Emily sent a warning glance to Tin-Tin. The Malaysian girl smiled apologetically.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Tallman. Perhaps some other time. My employer is very anxious that this project remains under wraps for the time being. For security reasons. I hope you understand."

Giles smiled again, and Emily noticed that the smile didn't extend to his eyes. "Of course, Ms. Kyrano. I understand your employer's concern. Perhaps some other time, for purely social purposes. Where could I reach you?"

Tin-Tin glanced quickly over at Emily, who shook her head just the tiniest bit. "I hope to be leaving by tomorrow, Mr. Tallman. I'm afraid I won't have time to have dinner with you."

"Ah!" Giles exclaimed, still smiling, but not quite as eagerly as before. "Well, then. It has been a pleasure meeting you, Ms. Kyrano, Emily. Mr. al Kadar, I will be in touch." He shook hands with each of them, and left the plant. Emily's eyes followed him as he was picked up by a car and driver, not a taxi.

"I shall summon a taxi for you, ladies, and I shall expect you back at two this afternoon, if that is suitable," Fudail told them.

"Thank you, sir. That will be fine," Tin-Tin replied. She and Emily stood quietly waiting for the cab, not wanting to talk about what they had seen and heard until they were in private. Emily turned over the encounter with Giles in her mind and she frowned.

There's just something about that boy that I don't like. I can't put my finger on it, but I'd better keep him away from Tin-Tin!

Post by Tikatu on 12/11/2004

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