

Saturday, March 17, 2068, 2:30 p.m. Afghanistan time, somewhere over Asia

Emily sat back in the copilot's seat. She was relieved to be finally on her way home.

The day had gone well. Things went smoothly at the manufacturing plant. The colorfastness testing showed that both the navy dye and the light blue would do well in Tin-Tin's fabric. The reds didn't do as well in colorfastness, and the orange was dicey, all of which concerned Tin-Tin, but most of the other colors were fine. Tin-Tin confirmed the order of fabric, made the arrangements for some of it to go elsewhere for dyeing, and selected the colors that would be dyed there in Kabul. Mr. al Kadar was very gratified.

"We'll just have to find a substitute fabric or maybe a different dye for Dianne and Dominic's uniforms, that's all. And possibly Gordon's as well," Emily had told the engineer, who had nodded. She knew that the girl was tired and disappointed. Disappointed, that was, until lunch time.

They were eating a quiet last meal in the hotel's restaurant when a messenger came to their table. "Ms. Kyrano? Ms. Tin-Tin Kyrano?"

"I'm Ms. Kyrano," Tin-Tin said. The messenger smiled, then presented Tin-Tin with a lovely bouquet of flowers. She gasped, her disappointment swallowed up in her delight at the blossoms. Calla lilies, pink tea roses, pink carnations, and white chrysanthemums filled her arms, and she took a deep sniff of the roses.

"Oh, how beautiful!" she cried. "Who sent them?"

The messenger reached into a pocket and, with a flourish, presented her with a card. She opened it, and blushed. Emily's sharp eyes did not miss the flush of the girl's cheeks and could guess from whom the flowers had come. As she identified the flowers and wracked her brains for the meanings of each, she was surprised at how chaste the sentiments were that the flowers represented.

Pink carnations mean "I'll never forget you," and the calla lilies, mean "majestic beauty". The pink tea roses mean "I'll always remember," while the white chrysanthemums mean "truth". Hmm. There's more to this Giles Tallman than meets the eye. Perhaps I've misjudged him.

Tin-Tin tucked the card in her purse. He had written on it, "Until we meet again." And he had included his cell phone number and an email address.

The bouquet now sat on one of the seats in the passenger area of the Ladybird, wrapped in wet paper to keep them fresh. The scent of the lilies and the roses filled the cabin. Emily glanced at Tin-Tin, who seemed to be wrapped in her own world.

"Earth to Tin-Tin," Emily said quietly. Tin-Tin turned her gaze to Grandma Tracy and she smiled.

"I'm sorry I haven't been chatting much, Grandma. I'm just glad to be on my way home." Tin-Tin sighed contentedly. "It turned out to be a productive trip, didn't it?"

"Yes, it did, child," Grandma agreed. In more than one way for you, I suppose, she thought with an inward sigh.

Back in Kabul, the man with the dusty truck also sighed, but with relief. His charges had gotten off safely and he hadn't had to intervene. He didn't know who the blond Brit had been, but he would describe the man for his superior in London. Right now, he sent off an email to the Pink Lady: "Our pigeons are flown and on their way home."

The wiry little man who had been washing windows at night, also watched as Ladybird took to the sky. He made a phone call to that effect and got a curt reply for his pains.

In his hotel room, Giles Tallman, aka Hightower, hung up the phone after getting news of his subject's departure. He turned to the dark-haired woman who awaited him, her naked form half covered by the sheets. He smiled at her.

"Ms. Kyrano is on her way home. You did a wonderful job for us here, Fatma, my love. We don't forget our friends."

"I am very pleased with the bonus you have given me, sir. Working for your firm is proving to be very fulfilling. In more ways than one," she replied, reaching over for a glass of champagne on the nightstand behind her. Giles watched with interest what the movement did to her trim figure. She handed a glass to him, and then reached back for another. They clinked their glasses and drank the wine, then Giles lazily ran a hand down her face and neck and further down, eliciting a low moan from his partner.

"Now, Fatma, my beauty. Where were we?"

Post by Tikatu on 24/11/2004

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