

Monday, March 19, 2068, 9:30 p.m. local time, New York City.

Jeff approached Dianne from behind. She sat out on the small patio of the penthouse, wrapped in a thick sweater against the chill of the March evening. Her wireless headphones were in her ears and her music player lay on the small table at her elbow. She didn't turn as he asked her, "What are you listening to?"

"The Toccata and Fugue in D Minor, by Bach," she said with a slight smile.

"That's an appropriately moody piece," he commented. She nodded slightly, then turned to him, sighing.

"Ah'm sorry Ah've been such a bear lately," she began. Jeff put his right hand along her cheek, positioning his thumb over her lips.

"Nothing to be sorry about, love. You've been under a good deal of stress and this is a sad time for you. Just like a certain week in September will be for me. We'll get through them both... together. Just don't shut me out, okay? We both do better when we've got the other to lean on."

She nodded, putting her hand over his. He withdrew his from her face, and clasped her hand, intertwining their fingers as her gaze shifted back to the Manhattan skyline.

"How did shopping go today? I noticed that there were far fewer packages than usually arrive after one of your forays into the fashion district," he asked, a gently joking tone to his voice. She smiled again, wider this time.

"It went well, especially considering Alex was with us. You know how he is about clothes shopping. We got what we went for. An appropriate dress for me, something almost matching for Cherie, somber pants, vests, and shirts for the boys. Tyler wanted a bright bowtie and I let him get one, but not for Thursday. I am glad we went shoe shopping; the boys have outgrown both their dress shoes and their sneakers."

"Did you have any trouble with the press?"

"No. Bernie was amazing at keeping us safe while we shopped. Things went so well that Ma even has a chance to get something for herself. Ah wonder what Dougie will think when he sees it?"

"Don't worry about your brother. I've helped him and his family out plenty, now it's his turn to use wisely the help I've given him. Jared's a different case; he's worked hard and kept himself out of financial trouble. Setting up college funds for his kids was no trouble. But Douglas was given the same opportunity and turned it down, preferring to be bailed out of debt instead." Jeff squeezed her hand. "Enough about your brothers. I got an email today from Andrew. He and Maggie are coming to hear you speak."

She smiled again, then her smile faded and she looked down. "Charles and Martine will be there, too. Ah hope Ah do well."

"You will, love, you will."

There was a moment of silence between them, and then Jeff gave her hand a little tug. "Come on, Di. It's time we got some sleep. I've got an appointment with Mt. Sinai in the morning and I hope it goes as well or better than your shopping trip went. Maybe tomorrow night I can put myself to bed without your help."

"Ah hope so, Jeff. It would mean closure, of a sort, to this difficult time." Dianne reached over and turned off her music player and removed the earphones, slipping them into their little case, picking up both player and earphones. Jeff backed up so she could rise, and they walked back inside hand in hand.

Post by Tikatu on 28/11/2004

---