

Tuesday, March 20, 2068, 11:30 a.m., Mt. Sinai Hospital, NYC

Ned Cook sat impatiently in the media room at Mt. Sinai. He had tracked Jeff Tracy to the hospital that morning, bright and early, but when he entered, he had been spotted and shuffled off to the media room. He had been cooling his heels there ever since, eating donuts and drinking some surprisingly good coffee. Other reporters, having gotten wind of Tracy's return to the hospital, had filtered in, taking their places in the seats and chatting. One of them, Jo Ann Moss, a reporter for the newspaper owned by NTSB's parent company, came over to talk to him.

"So, any ideas on why Tracy's back here?" she asked.

"Ideas? Yeah. Lots of them. He arrived Friday evening and has been in his penthouse all weekend. He brought some woman with him, name of Lena Matumbo. I tried to get some information from her, but she gave me the cold shoulder." Ned's ego was still stinging over Mrs. Matumbo's sharp words. "I've had some of my best informants watching to see him come out, and there was nothing until today."

"That's what you think," Jo Ann said smugly. "His wife was out and about shopping with her mother and the children. But no one could get close. Their driver is good, very good, at keeping them out of the public eye as much as possible."

"His wife? The kids? I'd love to interview them," Ned said, sipping his coffee and looking peeved.

"Well, it's too bad you don't report in South Carolina, then," Jo Ann added, a small smile on her lips. "I bet the local yokels get a word from the lady on Thursday."

Ned looked at her sharply. "Thursday? Why Thursday? And she's going south?"

Jo Ann gave him a incredulous look. "You mean you don't know?"

"What am I supposed to know?" Ned growled.

"Thursday is the fifth anniversary of the bombing of the Federal building in Greenville, South Carolina. Where Mrs. Tracy comes from. Her first husband died in that bombing! She's been asked to speak this year, probably because Homeland Security and the FBI have closed their investigation."

"Really? I wonder if I can get a flight down there...." Ned's musings were interrupted by the appearance of the hospital's media representative. The shapely dark-skinned woman looked out over the crowd.

"All right, people, let's make this brief. You've probably heard that Mr. Jefferson Tracy has returned to Mt. Sinai this morning. He was here for a consultation with his osteopathic surgeon, Dr. Richard Nighthorse. As a result of this consultation, Mr. Tracy's arm cast and most of his leg

cast were removed. His foot remains immobilized pending further healing."

A reporter raised their hand. "So, the rumors that Mr. Tracy has had a relapse are false?"

"Yes. Mr. Tracy's condition is improving on a daily basis. He has not had a relapse. In fact, we would like to announce that the Tracy family, in gratitude for Mt. Sinai's handling of Mr. Tracy after his accident, has made a sizeable donation both to our children's oncology ward and our Intensive Care Unit."

"How much of a donation?" someone asked.

The press secretary smiled. "Tracy Industries will confirm this, of course. But the final figure is ten million dollars to each. Twenty million dollars total."

A series of ooh's and whistles went around the room. Ned raised his hand. "Any way we can get a word from Dr. Nighthorse? Or from Mr. Tracy himself?"

The media representative's eyes narrowed at Ned Cook. She had not forgotten his last escapade. "No, Mr. Cook. Dr. Nighthorse has moved on to other patients. And Mr. Tracy has already left."

"Gone? Already?" another reporter asked.

"Yes. Now if there are no more questions, this concludes this press briefing." There didn't seem to be any more questions, so she gathered up her papers and left the room.

"Hmm. Wonder if I can get a flight to South Carolina?" Ned repeated.

Jo Ann turned to him. "I wouldn't even ask if I were you, Ned. I understand that you're persona non grata with the Tracys right now. And the locals wouldn't appreciate your butting in. The national office probably won't give you clearance anyway."

Ned let out a deep breath. "You're probably right. Still, it galls me that the yokels down in South Carolina might get something from the family that I can't."

"Play it cool, Ned," Jo Ann advised. "Apologize for your behavior and let them alone for a while. Then approach them later. Maybe you'll catch old man Tracy in a good mood or something."

"Maybe," was all that Ned Cook would say.

Post by Tikatu on 28/11/2004
