

Thursday, March 22, 1 p.m., local time, Lisa Parkhurst's house, Greenville, SC

"Lisa, let me get in there and do the dishes," Maggie Carmichael offered, tying the strings of an apron around her trim waist.

"No, no, Maggie! You're a guest!" Lisa cried. Maggie, however, pushed past her sister-in-law and made her way to the sink.

"Nonsense! I'm family!" she said firmly. Lisa sighed, then smiled.

"Thanks, Mags. I really appreciate it."

Maggie grinned at her and began to fill the sink with hot soapy water. Gordon took that moment to sneak in and try to snatch a cookie from the plate that was waiting to be put on the buffet table.

"Gordon Tracy! If you come in here one more time, I'm going to put you to work peeling spuds!" Lisa warned, shaking a spatula at him. He grinned and winked at her, then sidled up to Maggie.

"How y'doin' Aunt Maggie? Hey, I can call you that for real now, can't I?"

"Yes, you can, Gordon," Maggie said. She shoved a dish towel into his hands. "Here. Make yourself useful."

"I was making myself useful. I was keeping Alex from killing one or both of the twins," Gordon complained. Lisa, hearing this, turned to her daughter-in-law, Angela.

"Angie, call Alex inside, please? He likes to help cook and it will keep him away from Jared and Patricia's two terrors."

"Sure, Lisa." Angie wiped her hands on a dish towel and went to the back door to call Alex in from the yard.

"Tyler gets along okay with those two; he's more their age. But for some reason they've never gelled with Alex," Lisa said with a sigh. She wished Kyrano were there, and not for the first time. Turning from the preparation table to the sink, she asked, "Gordon, where are Cherie and Stephanie?"

Gordon shrugged. "Haven't a clue, Grandma. Haven't seen them. Who knows where adolescent girls go when they're together?"

"Hmm. I could use their help to set up...." Just at that moment, Cherie, dressed in jeans and a sweatshirt, came inside with her nearest-in-age cousin, Stephanie. The girls were talking animatedly. They were followed closely by Alex.

"Ah, just the people I wanted to see," Lisa said cheerfully. Cherie looked up and rolled her eyes, sighing a long-suffering sigh. "Girls, go wash your hands and start putting piles of plates and utensils on the buffet table. Alex, wash your hands, too, and come back in here. I need you to fetch and carry as I make the mashed potatoes."

Stephanie made a face, brushing her long dark hair out of her eyes. "Do we have to?"

Angie looked up at her daughter with a frown. "You heard your Grandma. Hop to it!"

"I'll be right there, Grandma," Alex said eagerly. He nipped into the washroom next to the kitchen and gave his hands a good scrub, while his sister and cousin waited impatiently for him to finish. He presented himself to Lisa with a smile. "What do you need, Grandma?"

"Get the butter out of the refrigerator," Lisa said.

"And while you're at it, son, hand me a can of Cheerwine, please," said a deep voice. Lisa looked up to see Jeff standing on his crutches near the refrigerator.

"Jefferson, I thought I told you to take care of your wife today," Lisa said with a hint of crossness in her voice.

"I am, Lisa. She wanted something to drink," Jeff replied mildly.

"Oh," she said, mollified. "Well then. Carry on. But next time, send someone able-bodied to fetch it. Like Drew."

"Yes, ma'am," Jeff said with a grin, giving his mother-in-law a salute before hobbling back into the family room. As he left, he heard Alex say to all the kitchen occupants, "You should have seen the snake I found....!"

Jeff maneuvered himself onto the couch next to Dianne, and handed her the can of soda. She looked much more relaxed and comfortable in jeans and a lightweight cream sweater, with her feet in slippers and her hair slightly mussed. She had been chatting with her sister-in-law, Patricia, Jared's wife, who had come down from Boston with the family to be there for the memorial. Andrew was talking with Charles Koch, Rick's father, while Rick's mother, Martine, sat napping in an easy chair. Dianne's youngest brother, Douglas, had parked his bulk into the best recliner and was channel surfing, trying to find some racing to watch.

Suddenly, Dianne bolted from her seat. "Gimme that remote!" she cried, yanking the device from her brother's hand.

"Hey!" Douglas protested as his sister clicked back several channels to a certain program. Andrew, Jeff, Jared, and Douglas all groaned when a lithe young man, dressed in an elaborate costume, began to glide across an ice rink.

"Not skating!" Jeff moaned. "Anything but that!"

Dianne ignored her husband's complaints and shouted at the top of her lungs, "HEY MA! THE

FINALS ARE ON!"

Lisa's voice echoed from the kitchen. "WHICH ONES?"

Dianne watched and listened for a moment, then shouted back, "MEN'S SHORT PROGRAM!"

"RECORD IT FOR ME!"

Dianne got up and slipped a disk into the recorder that was built into the plasma screen TV. Then she sat back with a smug smile and began to watch her favorite sport.

Jeff turned to Andrew and said, "You never warned me about this, Andy."

Drew Carmichael shrugged then said facetiously, "I would have, if you had told me you were going to marry the girl." They both shook their heads and chuckled.

A cry came from the dining room as Lisa called out, "Okay everybody! Time to eat!"

The people in the family room rose and made their way to the dining room, where a buffet was spread out. Everybody, that is, except Dianne. Jeff turned back to look at her.

"I'll send Cherie in with a plate for you, Di," he said with a smile.

Dianne glanced away from the screen and returned his smile. "Thanks, love. I appreciate it."

Jeff shook his head again, smiling. It had been a rough week, but she had come through it with flying colors and now, after all was said and done, it was good to see her happy at last.

Post by Tikatu on 30/11/2004
