
Subject: Re: Winds of Change
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From: Tikatu Sent: 3/28/2007 8:51 PM

Sunday, August 19, 2068, 1:30 p.m. Tracy Island

With the basket hanging off of Heather's right arm, she envisioned herself as Little Red Riding Hood. The basket came with two compartments. The bottom compartment was built for putting silverware, dishes, and cups for two. Dianne's plate of cookies went there. A flat divider covered the first plate, while the boys' cookies sat on top of it, making it look like she had only one plate.

One plate for 'Grandma' and the second for the 'wolves'. The best scenario I could hope for is to have an empty lounge. All I'd have to do is leave the first batch on a table and duck out to the sickroom, provided she's there. She might have gone back to her bedroom, but I'll try the sickroom first. That would be the easiest. If there is even one man in Jeff's office--just one--then I offer the cookies as a gift, drop the plate on the table, and politely ask how Dianne is, guiding the conversation to find out what her location is. There is just one hang up with all this, Heather thought to herself. Rum and vanilla flavoring makes for an irresistible smell. I'll have to work fast either way it goes.

Slipping into the elevator, she could smell the odor of the cookies pooling in the elevator. Hopefully, I won't meet anyone taking the monorail to the Villa. When the door of the elevator opened, she was pleased to discover that the monorail was empty. Wincing slightly as she stepped into the car, she quickly found a seat upfront. Her left foot rubbed against her right. Her feet still suffered the aches and pains of walking and dancing the night away at Virgil's birthday party.

Serves me right dancin' in brand new heels fo' the first time! My feet hurt, my legs hurt--and I'm almost to the Villa. First step--make a beeline for the lounge the moment the doors open. So long as I don't see Gordon or the Tracy kids I should be home free!

The monorail car came to a stop and the door slid open for her. She took the elevator to the Villa, the smell of the fresh baked goods filling the compartment. A quick duck into the sickroom, then on upstairs if necessary.

There was no one in the sickroom, at least, no one Heather could see. Both of the beds were made up and unused. Onward and upward then.

Now this is a real mission impossible. Faint voices could be heard as she entered the hallway that would take her past the lower bedrooms, and to the lift and stairs to the upper level.

Running International Rescue as well as his own high tech business, Jeff must run to his master bedroom often for peace and quiet. I can sure relate to that. Maybe I'm just imaginin' things, but it just seems like Mother never stops. One phone call and all I can think about is how far away I kin git! Maybe when Jeff isn't busy, I'll ask him if he's got an island fo' sale.

Scott sat in his customary easy chair with a magazine called the Air and Space Aeronautics. He knew the the jet aircraft he'd designed, the X-Star III, would be featured in it. Heather had meticulously inspected and tested the military aircraft to a fault and had given it her own personal rating according to author.

I'll have to let Heather know about the article and tell her she's been mentioned in it. That would make her day. I know it did--mmmmmm! His thoughts were interrupted as a rich, sweet smell wafted into the lounge, growing stronger by the moment. Looking around, he became aware that someone was coming, but couldn't hear their footsteps.

"Hi, Scott," Heather greeted him, looking around carefully.

"Hey, Heather." Scott couldn't help noticing the basket that she carried. He got up from his seat and wandered over, magazine in hand. "Did you happen to see this issue of Air and Space Aeronautics? There's an article on the X-Star III. They even mention your name."

Shaking her head, Heather forgot the basket on her arm and glanced at the magazine eagerly. "No I haven't. May I borrow it after you're done? Or would Jeff mind if I hung around after I see Dianne? I'd love to read that. Look at that ancient B-52 on the cover. I can't get over how that thing could fly during World War Two. Just looking at it makes me wonder how they even got it off the ground."

"Oh, sure. No problem. You can look at it now, if you like." Scott peered at the basket, not quite daring to lift the lid. "Something smells great!" He glanced up at her and gave her a charming smile. "Been doing some baking?"

"Yes, I have. I came bearing gifts." Lifting the lid off the basket, she revealed the plate of cookies that held the first batch. "This is for everyone in the lounge--"

"That's great," he said. "What are they?"

"Chocolate chip cookies with a touch of rum," answered Heather with an innocent smile. I wonder if I dare consider him 'the wolf'? She almost chuckled at the thought.

"Sounds delicious!" Scott started to reach in and, remembering his manners, asked, "May I?"

"Certainly. Here ya go." She handed him a cookie. "By the way, is Dr. Dianne out of the sickroom yet? I thought I'd go see her and see how she's doing."

Scott took a cookie, reveling in the fact that it was still warm. He took a bite. "Mmmm. That is GOOD." He glanced at Heather again. "Mom? You want to know where Mom is? Well, she is out of the sickroom; Drew released her the other day, but I don't know where she is right now." He took another bite, thought a minute, then added, "Gordon might know. Let me ask him."

He walked over to the balcony doors, cookie still in hand, and went outside. Gordon was down at the pool, doing the daily balance testing, and Scott waved to him. "C'mere, Gords! Got a question for you!"

Dressed in his swim trunks, Gordon heard Scott's call and saw him holding something in one hand. Scott bit into whatever it was, waving his other hand.

"Just a second! I'll be up in a flash!" he yelled back.

Gordon entered the lounge where Heather caught his physique. I must say he looks better in swim trunks than a tux!

"Hey, what smells so good?" he asked. He peered at the plate. "Cookies? For me?"

"Answer the question and you get a cookie," Scott said, raising an eyebrow.

"What's the question? I know! The answer is: forty-two!"

Scott rolled his eyes. "The question is: do you know where Mom is right now? Heather would like to know."

"Oh, hey there, Heather!" Gordon said brightly. "Didn't notice you there. Did you happen to make these cookies?"

"Yes, I did. I was getting moody sitting around and decided to make like a mad scientist in the kitchen. So take one and tell me what you think." Heather sighed inwardly wondering how patient she'd have to be for the answer to her question. I'm really having to go all out to find out where the good doctor is. For Pete's sake guys, I didn't think it would be this hard to bait the question with cookies.

"Hm." Gordon took a cookie, and looked thoughtful as he bit into it. Then his eyes widened with delight. "Mmmmm!" He took another bite. "Ooh. This is so good!"

"Yeah, yeah, the cookies are great. But do you know where Mom is?" Scott asked.

His mouth occupied with cookie, Gordon shook his head. "Nmph." He put up a finger, finished chewing, then said, "Pardon me. No, I don't. But Alan might."

"Where's Alan?"

"He said something about needing some caffeine. Probably down in the kitchen, making coffee."

Scott went to the Villa intercom and called to the kitchen. "Hey, Alan! You down there?"

"Yeah, Scott, I'm here." Alan poured a cup of coffee into his favorite mug. "Why? Do you need me for something?"

"Yeah. Wait right there." Scott came across the room and offered his arm to Heather. "Let's go down and ask Alan. I could use a cup of coffee right now."

"So could I," Gordon said, thinking of another cookie with the coffee.

Heather sighed inwardly. When I said it would be a 'mission impossible', I didn't think it would be this bad! Come on, guys! Somebody's got to know! Continuing her patient look with all the innocence she could muster, Heather admitted, "Boy I could sure use a cup right now."

"Well, then, let's go." Scott said, smiling and opening the door for her.

The trio traipsed downstairs, Scott being very careful with Heather so that none of the cookies fell off the plate. They met Alan, who was coming from the dining room, mug in hand. "Hey, what's going on?" he asked. His face brightened when he saw the plate. "Cookies? May I have one?"

"Hi, Alan!" Heather said. At Scott's baleful expression, she added, "Okay, Scott. It's nice to share." She turned back to Alan. "Now, do you know where Dr. Dianne is? I wanted to go see how she was doing," she asked with the patience of St. Theresa.

Munching on a cookie, Alan thought a moment. In mid-munch, he said, "I haven't seen her since lunch. Other than that--oh man these rate--other than that, I don't know. Maybe the squirts do. They're in the game room."

I'm going to scream! thought Heather.

"Okay. That's just over here... have you seen our game room yet, Heather?" Scott asked, guiding her to the door just down the hall.

The door slid open to reveal the well-stocked room... and two little boys intent on playing a game of foosball. Intent, that is, until Alex looked up and cried, "Cookies!" He abandoned the game and hurried over. "Can I have one? They smell so good!"

Tyler, not to be undone, came up behind his brother saying, "What about me? Can I have a cookie?"

"Yes, you can have a cookie, both of you, but first: do you know where Mom is?" Scott asked.

"I dunno," Alex replied, shaking his head.

Of all the men I've ever known, this bunch could strain even St. Peter! Heather mused.

"Me neither," Tyler said. "But maybe Cherie does. She and Virgil are in the theater. I'll go get her." He dashed off to the door at the far end of the room. There was a loud, offended shriek, then Cherie emerged, chasing Tyler. Virgil hurried after her, but both stopped as they saw the small group gathered around Heather.

"Hey, Sis," Scott said with a smile. He held up one of the treats. "Wanna cookie?"

"I suppose so," Cherie huffed ungraciously.

"Hey, I'll take one," Virgil said with a smile.

"Do either of you happen to know where Mom is?" Gordon asked.

"Not me," Virgil said as he took a cookie.

Scott felt Heather dropping her head on his shoulder. "This is getting--I can't think of a good word for it," she remarked.

Cherie sighed, an exasperated huff. "She's up in her suite, catching up on her ice skating recordings."

"Yes! Finally!" Heather replied. "Enjoy the cookies!" Good thing I made such a large batch. Grief! They watched as the redhead hurried up the stairs with basket swinging on one arm. Time I made a very hasty retreat!

"What was that all about?" Virgil asked as they all watched her rush out of the room.

Alan shrugged. "I dunno." They went back to eating the cookies.

Finding Dianne's suite, Heather touched the annunciator. "Dianne, this is Heather. May I come in?"

Dianne paused the program she was watching. "Heather?" she said to herself. "Just a minute!" she called, heaving herself to her feet and picking up her cane. She was determined to get as much exercise as possible, and hobbled over to the door to unlock and open it herself. "Heather! What a nice surprise!" she said with a smile. "Come in!"

Heather walked in with her basket, being mindful of Dianne's injuries. "You might want to lock that door again. I'll explain as soon as you sit down. I'm on a secret mission and it's imperative that no one knows why I'm here. It cost me a great deal of patience getting this far."

Dianne locked the door with an amused look on her face and hobbled back to her chair. Facing Heather with the air of a wise queen, she waved a hand at the seat opposite to where she sat. "Okay, I'll play along. What does this secret mission entail? Sounds interesting!" she asked, curious as to why Heather brought a basket within the confines of the room. A wonderful aroma came seeping out of the basket.

Heather replied, "I have gone through a great deal to bring you these." She opened the basket and the aroma came out full force.

"Ooh, what is that?" Dianne asked, her eyes wide as she peered into the basket. "It smells delicious!"

Heather pulled up the divider in the basket that revealed the the hidden space underneath. The prairie gal lifted out a full batch of cookies. "My own concoction. Chocolate chip cookies with a touch of rum. It draws mouths to the plate like bumble bees to Hibiscus flowers."

"Oooh." Dianne picked up one of the cookies, then looked down at the plate. "Are these all... for me?"

"Every last one of them. I got these in here by making two big batches. I hid your plate in the

bottom of the basket and then put the second batch on top. That way, when the boys saw the cookies, I could sneak away, making sure you had the first plate entirely your own."

Dianne laughed. "And how many cookies did you have to give out before you got an answer?"

"Good jumping fireflies!" Heather answered with a deep sigh. "First I went to Scott. Scott called to Gordon. Gordon suggested Alan would know. Virgil was next, and he suggested the kids might know. No, wait. Not Virgil. Alan suggested the kids. Finally, Cherie gave me your location. I should have asked for a latitude/longitude reading!"

"Ah yes. Rule of thumb: always go to the girl first," Dianne said wisely. "Baked goods tend to cloud men's minds." She bit into the cookie. "Oh, that is sooo good." She sighed heavily with satisfaction. Cocking her head to one side, she asked, "Hey, are you into figure skating?"

"Oh yes, I am. When I was living in Virginia, I took lessons. Dad got me a pair of professional skates. Unfortunately, I grew out of them, and went on to other sports," Heather said. "I enjoy watching."

"Well then, why don't we enjoy these cookies and this recording of the European women's program together?"

"I'd love to, and thank you. You know, I haven't had any yet. I figured being a mother you didn't get too many cookies, because of the kids. That's why I made sure they were kept busy so I could bring these to you. They are all for you and you won't have to share. You'll have to swear Jeff to secrecy or there'll be trouble with a capital T and you won't get any rest."

"Thank you so much!" Dianne said with a grin. "You're right. I don't often get many whole plates of cookies all to myself. In fact," she dropped her voice to a conspiratorial whisper, "I'd be surprised if Jeff gets any of these at all!"

--Mission Impossible by AmandaTracy and Tikatu
