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Subject: Re: Winds of Change  
Posted by [Tikatu](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 19:02:29 GMT  
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From: Tikatu Sent: 4/4/2007 5:24 PM

Monday, August 20, 2068, Noon, Wellington, NZ

Dianne looked around the restaurant, frowning. "I wonder where Jeff is?" She turned to Gordon. "Didn't he say he'd meet us for lunch?"

Gordon shook his head. "You mean he didn't tell you? He's got some errands to run, said he wanted to look into getting a safe for Mrs. Hanson's suite. He told me he'd be back in time for dinner."

"Oh." Dianne looked disappointed. "I was hoping he'd be here for the afternoon session."

"I'm sure he'll be here in time for dinner, Dianne," Nikki said, smiling. "He said he would be, and he's a man of his word."

Gordon grinned. "Right! Let's flag down the waiter; I'm starved!"

"I'm not," Dianne replied with a little grunt, rubbing her abdomen. "I'm just sore."

xxxx

same day, 10 a.m., Sydney, Australia (noon, NZ)

Jeff hummed as he got out of the company car near the exclusive jeweler's establishment. He'd made the appointment the day after he'd found his wife's rings. The velvet box resided in his trouser pocket and he closed his hand around it, absently running a thumb over the surface. This was the same place he'd gone to when he'd had the rings designed and made, and to him, it was only fitting that he return there now.

The elegantly dressed receptionist looked up as he walked in. "Mr. Tracy! A pleasure to see you again," she said, her accent sounding far more of London than of Sydney. "Please, sit down and allow me to tell Mr. Symmes that you are here."

"Thank you, Alicia." Jeff sat down in one of the well-upholstered chairs. The small waiting room had the look of a posh, period drawing room; in fact, Jeff had no trouble imagining the furniture in Lady Penelope's home. There was a middle-aged red-haired woman sitting across from him; she gave him an annoyed look with an arched eyebrow. Jeff wondered if perhaps she was also waiting for the jewelry designer. He glanced over at Alicia, who was speaking on the vidphone. She nodded, said something, and put down the receiver. Then she glanced his way, and smiled.

"Mr. Symmes will see you now, Mr. Tracy. Please follow me."

Jeff rose but had only taken a few steps when someone cleared their throat. Loudly.

"Excuse me, miss." The emphasis on that last word was dripping with sarcasm. "I believe I was here first."

Alicia stopped in her tracks and turned back. Her voice was cool but unruffled as she told the other client, "Indeed you were, Mrs. Chauvelin, but Mr. Tracy has an appointment." The slight stress on the last word was meant to put the other woman in her place. Alicia inclined her head. "Mr. Tracy?"

Jeff nodded, and followed the receptionist.

"My apologies, Mr. Tracy," Alicia said as she opened a door and motioned him inside.

"None needed," he replied amiably. "I hope she doesn't give Mr. Symmes too much grief."

Alicia smiled, a slightly pained expression, then Jeff went through the door.

"Hey, Mr. Tracy!" Julian Symmes stood from behind one of his work benches and offered his hand to Jeff. "Good to see you again."

"Good to see you, too, Mr. Sym..."

"Ah-ah!" Julian waved a finger in the air. "For you, it's Julian."

"Julian, then," Jeff replied.

The artisan rubbed his fingers together. "So, what's this I hear about my creation? Something's wrong?"

"No, not really," Jeff said, extricating the box from his pocket. "It's just that my wife was in a car accident..."

"An accident?" Julian sounded both surprised and concerned. "Is she all right?"

Jeff nodded. "Well, she was hurt, but is recovering very nicely." He handed over the box. "I wanted to make sure that all the gems were safe and sound before returning the rings to her. She was fortunate they were able to remove the rings without cutting them off," he said, rubbing his own, empty ring finger with his thumb. "But there still may have been some damage..."

"Of course, of course!" Julian exclaimed. "I'll look it over right away. Was there anything else?"

Jeff smiled, a sort of "aw, shucks" expression on his face. He rubbed the back of his neck. "Well, yes. I finally decided on an inscription."

Julian chuckled. "Finally? It's been, what? Two years now?"

"Yes, about that... since the engagement, anyway. Nearly two years since the wedding, too." Jeff sobered. "It took this... accident for me to realize how much she means to me." He shrugged.

"There's no way I can put it all on that ring, but I can say something meaningful."

"I understand." The designer handed him a data pad. "What would you like me to inscribe?" Jeff took the pad, and wrote a very brief statement, then handed it back. Julian smiled, and nodded. "You need this while you're here in Sydney?"

"Yes, definitely. She has no idea that I'm here, and I promised to be back to Wellington in time for dinner." Jeff paused. "She's started physical therapy today."

Julian paused, his loupe in one eye. "That bad?" When Jeff nodded, the jeweler sat down behind the bench, fixing his spotlight to his head, the bulb not yet lit. "Well, then. I'll make sure you can get back to Mrs. Tracy by dinnertime... in New Zealand." He turned and picked up the vidphone. "Alicia, cancel my appointments until three, or redistribute them to James and Gabrielle. Who? Mrs. Chauvelin? Tell her she'll have to settle for Jamie or Gabby, or come back tomorrow. Right. If she gives you trouble, tell Shang. He'll take care of it."

He glanced up at Jeff. "Where's your car?"

"Around the corner," Jeff said, frowning.

"You might want to go out the back. Mrs. Chauvelin is given to histrionics."

Jeff laughed. "I can handle it. I have a teenaged daughter."

"If you're sure..." Julian settled down and turned on his light.

"I'm sure. When should I come back?"

"Two o'clock. I'll have this completely done by then."

"Thanks. I'll see you then." With a wave, Jeff opened the door he'd come through. There was the faint sound of a raised voice. He turned back and saw the craftsman already at work on Dianne's engagement ring. Then he squared his shoulders, and headed out.

xxxx

same day, 3 p.m., Wellington, NZ (1 p.m., Sydney)

"That was a rough session," Nikki said, shaking her head. She sat on the divan in the suite's sitting room with a cup of hot tea. "I didn't realize how much muscle was involved."

"Yeah, it was sort of like John's leg when Mom first came on board," Gordon said. He was in one of the plush armchairs, the remote control in his hand. "That was a nasty situation, too. You see, though, why the massage is so important."

"Yes, I understand." She made a wry face. "In fact, I understood before we came here. I did have a unit on PT when I was at uni, you know."

Gordon opened his mouth, reconsidered what he was about to say, then went, "Ah!" He nodded, then turned back to the televid. "Let's see if there's something worth watching here."  
"What would you consider worth watching?"

A surfing contest flashed by and Gordon changed the channel back so he could watch it. "Here, this'll do. Would you like to double up?" He offered the remote to Nikki.

"Hm." She considered his offer for a minute; to double up would mean a split screen, and both of them watching their choice on it. She shook her head. "No, I like sports. But you'll have to explain this one to me; I'm a virgin when it comes to surfing."

"A virgin, huh?" Gordon eyed her speculatively. "Maybe I need to do something about that."

"You dare," was her saucy reply. She nodded toward the screen. "Explain it to me, but keep it down so we don't wake Dianne."

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