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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 01:21:57 GMT

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Monday, December 31, 2068, 11:20 p.m., Foxleyheath, England (12:20 p.m., Tuesday, January 1, 2069, Tracy Island)

"May I cut in?"

Virgil looked over at his brother, then back at his dancing partner. Dressed in her red dress, with the cloisonné barrette in her upswept hair, Elise smiled up at Virgil, then at Scott. She hadn't worn the emerald necklace; it would have clashed with her frock.

"I don't mind," she said, signaling to Virgil that it was okay. "Exchanging one handsome Tracy brother for another is never a hardship..."

Virgil snorted, but obligingly stepped back to let Scott take his place. Scott and Elise swirled off into the throng of dancers, leaving Virgil to sigh, and head off in search of a drink.

"So, how do you like this shindig?" Scott asked as he guided his new dancing partner.

"Well, it's on par with Virgil's birthday party." Elise had a small, thoughtful frown on her face. "But it's more... formal. Less friendly. No karaoke." She swept the room with her eyes. "All these lords and ladies... I've been introduced to them and I still can't tell the difference between a viscount and a duchess!"

Scott laughed. "Well, considering that one is usually a male and the other a female..."

"Okay, I used a poor analogy," Elise admitted. "But trying to keep them all straight is mind-boggling."

"You don't have to keep them all straight, just a select few." He nodded in the direction of a tall, aristocratic man with swept-back gray hair. "Like Lord Silton over there. He's a good friend of the family and of the family business."

The way Scott said it made Elise give the aristocrat another look. "Is he the same kind of friend that Penelope is?" She shook her head. "I'm saying it badly..."

"No, I understand. And no, not same kind of friend. He's a bit more aloof, less personally involved. Very much into new technology. Remind me to tell you sometime about Dr. Borrender and our trip to Anderbad. Or ask Penelope. She was in the thick of that one."

They continued dancing for a bit until the small orchestra ended their piece, at which time they stopped and applauded. Virgil sauntered up, straightening his tie as he did so. "Dad told me that Grandma's looking for you, Scott."

"She is?" Scott craned his neck to try and spot where his grandmother was sitting. "Did she tell you why?"

"Well, she was chatting with the Duchess of Royston..."

"Oh, God, no." Scott looked genuinely horrified. "Why me? I thought it was John's turn this year!"

"John is nowhere to be found at the moment," Virgil said, a grin spreading across his face. "And Alan won't leave Nikki's side, for obvious reasons."

Elise suddenly felt sad. Since coming to Tracy Island, she and Nikki had become very close friends. Now, having seen the scope of International Rescue's medical component, Nikki had decided to go back to university and pursue her dream of becoming a doctor, with plans to return to IR when she had finished her studies. Jeff had given her his blessing, and financial support, and she was in England to visit with family before starting at the University of Auckland in March.

"How about Gordon? Can't he...?" Scott was sounding desperate now.

Virgil shook his head. "He did it last year. And you know very well why I can't."

Scott shook his head and sighed. "The things I do for... the family business."

Virgil snorted, then craned his neck to look over at the musicians. "Better hurry," he told his brother. "The music is about to start again."

Scott blew out a frustrated breath, but hurried off in the direction Virgil had come from. Virgil snickered, and Elise frowned at him. "What's this all about?"

The music began again, and Virgil asked, "May I have this dance?"

"Only if you tell me what's going on."

"All right." Virgil put an arm around Elise's waist and they began to dance.

"Well?" Elise pinned her partner with a stern look.

"Okay." Virgil paused for a moment to gather his thoughts. "Deborah, Duchess of Royston, is an old friend of Penny's... old in more ways than one. Even though she's of advancing years, she's no sedate old lady. She loves to gamble, drink, smoke, and be seen with handsome young men."

"Really?" Elise's thoughtful comment showed that she was developing a picture of the Duchess. "Tell me more."

"Well, a couple of years ago, she was in some dire financial straits. She'd been cheated at the gaming tables, and was about to sell her estate to pay her gambling debts. Penny found out, and asked Father if he could help."

A frown creased Elise's brow. "Help out? With a loan?"

Virgil shook his head. "No, not that. You see, the Duchess had an original Braquasso painting--'A

Portrait of a Gazelle'. It's worth a fortune. Dad got the idea that he could work out a deal with his friend, Wilbur Dandridge. He's head of Gazelle Automations and he has this thing about gazelles. He's just crazy over them."

"So, your dad arranged for the duchess to sell her painting?" Elise asked.

Virgil twirled her away from him, then brought her back to his arms. "Not quite. She didn't want to sell it, but agreed to rent it to Dandridge. She brought it to New York herself." He pulled her a little closer, and murmured in her ear. "And that's when things got interesting."

Elise smiled, and murmured back, "Define interesting."

A throaty chuckle rose up, and Virgil's warm breath tickled her ear as he continued his story. "Well, there were some crooks who decided they'd like a piece of the action. So, they kidnapped the duchess when she arrived in New York. Then they posed as her agents, hoping to get the money out of Dandridge. Dandridge is a sharp guy; he knew something was wrong, and pulled a gun on them."

Elise chuckled, shaking slightly in Virgil's arms. "Your father knows the most interesting people."

Her comment made him laugh aloud, and drew many curious looks from the neighboring couples. "He does at that."

When he'd calmed, Elise asked, "So, what happened next?"

"Well," he said in a normal tone. "The crooks had left the duchess in some old farmhouse somewhere, and somehow, International Rescue got involved. I'm not sure of the details; I hear them third-hand from Dad. But Dandridge got the painting, and she not only got the fees for renting it, but a magazine paid her for her life story. Last I'd heard, she was flush again, and winning at the casinos."

"Ah, I see." Elise drew closer so her mouth was right next to Virgil's ear. "I suppose that the Thunderbird Two pilot was the one to rescue her?"

"I suppose so," Virgil murmured, smiling.

to be continued...