

---

Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 01:31:31 GMT

[View Forum Message](#) <> [Reply to Message](#)

---

Monday, December 31, 2068, 11:30 p.m., Foxleyheath, England (12:30 p.m., Tuesday, January 1, 2069, Tracy Island)

"So, how are you feeling, Penelope?" Dianne sat next to Penny, and they both waited for Parker to come by and bring them each a drink. Penelope was wearing the same style of François Lemaire gown that Heather Kennedy had worn at Virgil's party, but in a rich sapphire blue. She looked a bit pale to Dianne's practiced eye and had tired easily.

"I am much, much better, Dianne. Thank you for asking." Penny gave her a winsome smile. "I am only sorry that the flu kept me from spending my birthday on the island, and attending Kyrano and your mother's wedding, as we had planned."

Dianne nodded. "We'll just have to have you come out to the island next month, and have a belated birthday celebration then. Maybe after the newlyweds return."

"I would enjoy that very much," Penny replied. "I have a gift for them, which I should like to deliver in person. And a touch of tropical sun would do wonders for me, I am sure."

Dianne agreed readily. "Perhaps it would."

Both women watched as Cherie and Jeff waltzed by, talking quietly with each other. "Cherie is growing into a sweet young lady," Penelope commented.

"I hope her temper is as sweet on the way home," Dianne said with a sigh. "The boys are tucked away in bed already; this type of party would bore them to whining... or mischief. Cherie's old enough to enjoy it, but she does need her sleep."

Parker arrived, two flutes of champagne balanced on a silver tray. He handed a glass to each lady. "Beggin' yer pardon, milady, but Ay believe we 'ave a gate-crasher."

"Do tell, Parker," Penelope said. "Do you recognize him or her?"

"Yus, milady. H'It's that Hightower bloke, the blond one."

Penelope sat up straighter, and began to look out over the crowd. "Giles?"

The butler smiled. "Yus, milady. That's the one." He glanced over his right shoulder. "'E's been circling h'around Missus Tracy and her Grace, but Ay don't think she 'as noticed 'im yet."

"And she would." Dianne laid a hand on Penny's arm. "She was with Tin-Tin in Kabul, and knows who he is."

"Yes, I remember." Penelope thought for a moment, then said, "Parker, bring our unwanted guest here, to me. I wish to speak to him."

As Parker went off to do his employer's bidding, Dianne asked, "Why do you think he's here? What could he possibly gain by crashing your party?"

"I can think of several things," Penny said, her tone dry. "As I learned from that little incident with Mr. Grafton, one can never tell what an uninvited guest's motives may be." She paused, then added, "I did humiliate him in public some months ago; he may have retaliation in mind. And there is what he did to Tin-Tin... and the virus he had planted in Lena Matumbo's computer. It seems he has set his cap on Tracy Industries. We must not allow him a foothold." She put her flute of champagne aside, and murmured to Dianne. "It would be prudent that you withdraw before he arrives, Dianne. I have no desire that he meet any other members of the Tracy clan than he already has."

"I agree," Dianne said. "I'll find Jeff, and tell him what's happening." She rose and sashayed off into the crowd, looking for her husband, just as Parker came up, herding a dapper-looking Giles Hightower.

"Ah, Lady Penelope," he said, glancing at Dianne's retreating back before turning back to Penny. "So nice to see you again. Who is your fascinating companion? It is terribly rude of you not to introduce us."

"Mr. Hightower, it is terribly rude of you to intrude on my gala." Penelope's eyes were half-lidded, giving her a haughty, disinterested look, but the tone of her voice was steely. "I detest unwelcome, uninvited guests."

"Ah, ah, ah, Lady Penelope." Giles held up a finger, a smile spreading across his face. "I was indeed invited. I am accompanying Lady Divinity Aldridge-Kitchener. I am her plus one."

Penny cast her mind back through the list of guests who had responded to her invitation. She had invited Lady Divinity -- an old school chum from her days at Rowden -- but she did not remember the name that worthy had put down as her escort for the evening. She was irked at herself for her lack of recollection, but she knew she still had the right to toss the bounder. She picked up her champagne glass and took a tiny sip before looking at Giles again.

"You may consider yourself 'invited', Mr. Hightower, but I consider you unwelcome." She turned to her butler. "Parker, please introduce Mr. Hightower to the rest of our security team, then escort him from the premises. I have full faith that, should he cause any commotion, you are more than capable of dealing with him."

"Yus, milady. Thank you, milady." Parker glanced toward a younger, well-built man in an impeccable tuxedo, and gave him a barely perceptible nod. The young man came forward, as did another, similarly built and clad gentleman that Parker subtly summoned. "Naow, Mr. 'Ightower. Let's go fer a little walk, shall we?"

"Well, I see that I shan't be ringing in the New Year with the rest of you," Giles said, sighing. He paused, then lowered his voice to a menacing tone, and gave his hostess a cool, venomous look. "You haven't seen the last of me, Lady Penelope. We will meet again... and soon."

She waved her hand, and the three men herded him out of the room. When he was gone, Penny let out a long soft breath, but did not relax. A large, warm hand fell on her shoulder and she started a little. Glancing up, she found Jeff at her side, with Dianne just behind him, her arm around Cherie.

"I hear you've had an unwanted visitor," Jeff said, his tone both troubled and solicitous.

"Yes, I have, Jeff, but Parker is dealing with him." She glanced at the ornate clock on the mantle. "Not long to go until the new year."

Jeff followed her gaze. "Just enough time for a dance with my hostess, and one more with my wife." He offered his hand. "Would you do me the honor?"

Penelope placed her hand in his. "Of course. I should be delighted." She turned to Dianne. "You don't mind, do you?"

"Not at all. Cherie and I will just get ourselves some more refreshment, and I'll check on Emily. Have fun!"

With that, Jeff pulled Penelope into his arms, and they swept out onto the dance floor.

Party at Penelope's part two