
Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 01:35:27 GMT

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Monday, December 31, 2068, 11:35 p.m., Foxleyheath, England (12:35 p.m., Tuesday, January 1, 2069, Tracy Island)

"Whew! Things were getting a bit warm in there." Gordon breathed deeply of the cold air. He turned to John, who had followed him out onto the balcony. "Hey, I thought you weren't coming."

"I wasn't, until I saw Grandma talking to the Duchess of Royston." John put his hands on the heavy stone balustrade.

"Say no more," Gordon said, making a face. "She is such a... a..."

"Dirty old lady?"

"I wouldn't go that far, but yeah, that pretty much describes it." Gordon frowned, looking at his brother's face, half-lit by the glow of the interior lights. "Huh. Grandma seems to attract that kind of women for friends, doesn't she? I wonder why."

John shook his head. "I have no idea. Maybe she's secretly one of them?"

Gordon appeared to be thinking it over. "You may be onto something there. She sure had a lot of fun looking through that calendar I was in."

"And she wasn't just excited about your pictures, but with all the other guys who posed for it. Just wait until those months come up. You'll be in for more teasing then." John took a deep breath, letting it out in a contented sigh. "I'll admit that it's great to be here, celebrating with the rest of the family for a change." He looked skyward at the stars twinkling in the cloud-studded sky above. "It's been a long time since I was able to do this. I wonder what Callie's doing tonight."

"We can call her later and wish her a happy New Year, right?"

John nodded, then glanced around. There were a few other out on the terrace, mostly people smoking, for Lady Penelope had banned tobacco inside the ballroom. He moved closer to Gordon, so that anyone else nearby would have less of a chance to overhear. "I think Lena's modifications included Penny and the other agents," he said quietly. "So calling Callie on Five won't be a problem."

Gordon nodded. "Then we'll make that a priority once the New Year begins."

"Yeah. Though it'll be early afternoon her time...."

His statement trailed off as the French doors opened, and two familiar silhouettes stepped out into the chilly air.

"So, this is where you went, John," Alan said, putting an arm around Nikki. "When you

disappeared, Virgil went looking for Scott."

"Poor Scott!" Nikki clutched her wrap around her a little tighter. "Having to dance with that old duchess." She shook her head. "She'll probably step all over his toes."

"Oh, she will, and he knows it!" Gordon said, grinning. "This isn't the first time she's danced with him."

"Last year was my turn," Alan groused.

"And I've done it twice," Gordon said. He hooked a thumb over at John. "He's gotten out of it because of his... job."

Nikki looked from one young man to the others. "I noticed that you didn't mention Virgil."

"True. Virgil has a permanent pass on dancing with her Grace." Alan leaned over and whispered in Nikki's ear. "He rescued her once."

Her eyes widened. "Ah, I see." She nodded slowly. "Good reason, but not fair on the rest of you."

Gordon opened his mouth to reply, but anything he might have said was cut off as the French doors opened again.

"Ay believe 'e went out 'ere, miss."

"Oh. Thank you, Parker." A petite woman, silhouetted in the room's glow stepped through the door, followed by an unfamiliar shadow. Gordon and John exchanged glances as the woman called, "John? Are you here?"

"Kat?" It wasn't John who replied, but Nikki. "Is that you?"

"Nikki?" Once she was fully into the gloom of the terrace, Kat was more easily seen, as was her escort, a young man who gazed around with a hint of suspicion.

"Kat!" Nikki surged forward, her arms open. "It is you! It's so good to see you!"

The two women embraced. "Oh, Nikki! I had no idea you were here!" Kat pulled back and looked her friend up and down. "You look lovely! Such a pretty frock!"

"I see you're wearing your red dress," Nikki said, smiling widely.

"Still looks good on you, too," Gordon said, stepping forward with a grin.

"Gordon!" Kat cried, opening her arms for a hug. Gordon complied, heartily, and when they'd parted, Kat looked around. She spied Alan, holding back, standing behind Nikki.

"Oh, Alan! It's good to see you!"

"Hey, Kat!" Alan hesitated for a moment as Kat offered him an embrace, then muttered, "Oh, okay," giving her a slight squeeze. Nikki claimed his arm as soon as Kat stepped away.

"It's so good to see you all. Who else is here?"

"Dad and Mom are." Alan told her.

"Is Brains here?"

Gordon shook his head. "No. He and Tin-Tin stayed home this year. But Scott, Virgil, and Elise are around here somewhere."

"Brains and Tin-Tin stayed home? How disappointing. I so wanted Brains to meet Thomas. But Elise is here? How wonderful! I will have to find her, too. Is John here? I had heard that he was and I was looking for him particularly." Kat glanced around, and John took that as his cue to step out of the shadows he'd retreated to.

"I'm here, Kat." He smiled at her, a warm, brotherly smile. "It's nice to see you again."

"And to see you, too, John." Kat's voice grew softer, and she hesitated, trying to decide whether or not to offer him an embrace. At last, she opened her arms, and awkwardly hugged him.

When they parted, she stepped back to the young man who had followed her out. "Everyone, I have some wonderful news. I would like to introduce my fiancé, Thomas Bentley-Edwards."

"Fiancé?" Nikki stepped forward to hug Kat again. "Congratulations! Can I see your ring?"

Kat laughed. "Let me introduce everyone first, then I'll show you." She drew Thomas forward with her as she said, "Thomas, these are my good friends. This is Nikki Jackson, behind her is Alan Tracy. This is Gordon Tracy, and finally, John Tracy. They are all brothers, as I'm sure you've guessed."

Thomas shook hands with each of them, smiling and murmuring pleasantries as he did so. When he got to John, his smile changed, became tighter. He looked as if he were sizing up the competition. "I'm glad to finally meet you, John. Kat has told me so much about you."

"Nice to meet you, too." John shook Thomas's hand, then dipped his head, and sheepishly rubbed the back of his neck. "Well, Kat and I were good friends when she worked for us. I'm glad to see her so happy."

Having shown Nikki her ring -- an oval cut emerald, surrounded by eight small diamonds in a gold setting -- Kat joined her fiancé, taking his arm almost possessively. She held out her left hand. "Isn't it lovely? I am so very, very happy."

John looked at the ring and nodded. "It's a beautiful ring, Kat. And I wish you and Thomas all the best. You're a pretty lucky guy, Thomas. Kat's a special girl."

Thomas glanced over at his fiancée, who was looking more at John than she was at him. "Yes.

I'm very fortunate." He reached over and drew Kat's face toward him, startling her as he kissed her softly on the lips.

There was a second or two of awkward silence, then Thomas broke it. "So, it was nice to meet you all." He turned to Kat. "Wasn't there someone else you wanted to speak with?"

Still dazed, Kat nodded. "Uh... yes. Yes, there was. Elise. And Virgil."

"You should have no trouble finding, Elise. She's wearing her red frock, the one from Virgil's party."

Kat smiled. "Thank you, Nikki." She glanced around at the group. "Will you be staying long in England? Perhaps we could have tea sometime... I should love to catch up with you all." Her gaze ended up at John again.

Alan spoke up. "I'm afraid we're not here for long. Just long enough to sleep off any hangovers and celebrate Dad's birthday."

"Or celebrate Dad's birthday, and sleep off the hangover," Gordon quipped.

Nikki shook her head and sighed. "You two..." She turned her attention back to Kat. "I'm staying behind, Kat," she said, giving Alan a swift glance. "Visiting family. Ring me, and we'll make arrangements."

"Yes, that would be brilliant." Kat's smile had returned full-force, and she seemed to be in control of things again. "Well, a happy New Year to you all. Come, Thomas. Let's find Elise before midnight, shall we?"

The affianced couple sauntered back into the ballroom. Gordon glanced at his watch. "Not long until midnight," he said. "Maybe we should go back in and find the rest of the family."

"I think you're right," John said, stepping forward.

"You two go ahead," Alan told his brothers. "We'll catch up."

Gordon nodded; he and John reentered the ballroom. "Well, how about that? Kat went and got engaged." He glanced up at John. "How does that make you feel?"

"Truthfully, Gords, I'm relieved." John replied, shaking his head. "And happy for her. She's got what she wanted now. I hope he treats her right."

Back on the terrace, Alan took Nikki's hand. "I wish you were going back with us," he said, a concerned look on his face.

"I told you, Alan. I want to visit family before starting uni again." Nikki's grasp on her wrap tightened. "Besides, you'll be going up... upstairs when you get back home. We wouldn't see each other for a month. It doesn't make much sense for me to return to the island when I can stay here." She released his hand and drew a warm finger across his lips. "I'll see you again soon."

Auckland isn't that far away."

He let out a small sigh. "I know. It just feels like we've gotten this relationship off the ground... and now we're in a holding pattern."

Nikki chuckled. "Do you Tracys always use aeronautical terms to describe your relationships?"

Her question brought a chuckle from Alan. "I don't know. Who else has used them?"

She shook her head. "Don't worry about it, Alan. I'm just winding you up."

"I thought as much." He shivered a bit. "I think we'd better go back inside and find the rest of the family." Glancing at her, he added, "If I'm just getting cold, you must be freezing." He slipped out of his jacket, and draped it around her shoulders. "C'mon, let's get warmed up. We might even have time for a last dance."

Slipping an arm around her, he guided her back inside.

Party at Penelope's part 3