

Wednesday, February 29, 2068, 3:30 p.m., Tracy Island

Elise Collins looked around carefully as Virgil helped her out of the jet. The sun was bright and she squinted.

"Welcome to Tracy Island, Elise," Virgil said with a grin. "Hope it's everything you imagined."

"I'll let you know," Elise said as she stepped gingerly down to the tarmac. Gordon groggily climbed out after her.

The day of her discharge, Gordon and Scott had whisked her away to the Tracy Industries building in a limousine. They walked her through the building's ground floor then out the back door and into a cab that stood waiting at the curb.

"Hey, Bernie," Scott said, giving the cabbie a grin.

"Hey, Scott, Gordon. Nice t' make yer acquaintance, Miz Collins," Bernie said in a definite Bronx accent. He took off from the curb.

"Where are we going?" Elise asked.

"Your place. You can put together a suitcase and oversee the packing of your belongings." Scott had told her. "Then we'll take you back and put you up at the penthouse overnight."

"Yeah, then off to Tracy Island you go!" Gordon said as he sat back, hands behind his head.

"My belongings? Who said anything about my moving to your blasted island? I thought I'd just be there until I recovered from my injuries!" Elise protested.

"Nobody said anything about your moving out there, Elise. But while you're gone, your household things are better off in storage, right? That way, no one would have a chance to steal them. And when you got back, we could find you something a bit different in the way of an apartment. Some place with good security," Scott reasoned. Elise missed the wink that passed between the two brothers.

Elise sighed, exasperated. "Well, okay. What you say sounds reasonable. I'll go along with it... for now."

Bernie the cabbie had already been given the address and he pulled into the side street around the corner from the building. Scott, who had already scoped the place out, brought Elise and Gordon to a little used back door, where the super was already waiting for them.

"Thanks, Mrs. Alagbadah. We appreciate your help," Scott said as he peeled off a hundred dollar bill and handed it to the super. She refused to take it.

"The reporters, they are here day and night ringing the bell. Waking the other tenants. No offense, Ms. Collins, but glad I will be to see you safe... elsewhere." The plump dark woman patted Elise on the shoulder. "You can use the back entrance to come and go as you pack things up. The moving crew showed me their identification and are already here working. God speed, Ms. Collins and I hope you feel better soonest. Oh, and Misters Tracy? I hope your father recuperates."

"Thanks, ma'am," Gordon said with a smile. "He's awake and doing better. We've even managed to tear Mom away from him for a while."

"Which is a miracle in itself," Scott muttered. "C'mon, Elise. Show us your apartment."

She lead them upstairs to her dwelling and suddenly was struck by how shabby it all must seem to them, these young men brought up to wealth and luxury. ~Just a little second story walk-up in Greenwich Village, she thought, cringing. ~They're used to penthouses and tropical islands. This is going to be so... so tacky to them. Even to Scott, who I know has seen the seedy side of life. It's been so long and... well, how well do I know him anymore?

But surprisingly, Gordon looked around the place, nodding, while Scott made himself at home on her sleeper-sofa.

"Your place is nice. Well laid out," Gordon commented. He sidestepped one of the five moving men who were busy looking around, planning out where to start.

"Ms. Collins, we'd like to start with the kitchen and work our way out, doing the living room last," their supervisor said. "We'll pack up everything for you. You won't have to lift a finger. Leave it all to us."

"O-Okay," Elise said hesitantly, looking over at Scott, who merely smiled at her. "Go ahead. I don't have a lot of choice in the matter it seems."

"If you would pack up your clothes and other personal items, we'd be obliged."

"Okay. I can do that."

Scott got up. "Where are your suitcases?"

"In the closet."

Scott made a beeline for the bedroom while Gordon went and emptied all of Elise's trashcans. She looked at him quizzically. Gordon grinned.

"I know these guys. They'll pack up a trash can full of trash if you don't empty it for them!" The way his eyebrows wagged up and down made her laugh, even though laughing was still painful.

Scott had opened up one of the suitcases on her bed when she came in. He had started to take the clothes out of her closet, hangers and all, and lay them down on the bed. She began to open drawers and put the contents into the suitcase.

"You said you managed to get your stepmom to leave the hospital, to leave your dad. Who's watching him if not her?"

Scott hauled out another double armload of skirts and blouses. "My brothers, John and Virgil, with a little backup from our grandmother. Virgil and Gordon will be taking you to the island tomorrow. I've got to hang around and hold down the fort at corporate. We're hoping to have Dad home within a week or two. Depends on how things go with the other surgeries." He rolled his eyes. "Mom will be back there within twenty-four hours, I bet. But she promised to go to the penthouse and get some decent sleep. Besides, my little brothers and sister missed her."

"Last I knew you only had the four brothers and no sister. When did the other siblings come about?" she asked as she continued to fill her suitcase.

"When Dad remarried. Mom was a widow with three kids. He adopted them after they married. Wanted to be a real father to them and not just a stepfather."

Elise smiled. "That's sweet. And from what I've seen of your dad, very much in character." She sighed and shook her head. "I'm just glad he's going to make it."

"Sure looks that way," Scott agreed. "Oh, by the way, I checked with that realtor. Dad's purchase agreement had transmitted after all. He bought the cottage."

"Ohhh! Your stepmom is going to love the place!" Elise proceeded to tell Scott all about it. Then a thought struck her. "I hope he takes her there and it's not a sad reminder of this damned crash."

Scott stopped what he was doing and turned Elise around, putting his hands on her shoulders. "He'll take her there. Not because of the place, but because he loves her. It may be a while before he's up to it, but believe me, he'll take her there." Elise nodded and gave Scott a small smile. Then they both got back to packing.

The night at the penthouse was interesting. Dr. Tracy was nowhere to be seen until the next morning. But Elise made the acquaintance of the younger Tracys: Cherie, Alex, and Tyler. They all treated her with great respect because, as Tyler put it, "You saved our Dad's life." After breakfast, Dianne came to see Elise and gave her a last physical check before sending her off with Gordon and Virgil to the hangar.

"You enjoy yourself when you get there and don't worry about a thing. We've made all the arrangements," Dianne assured her as they got into the elevator. Elise nodded and the doors closed.

Elise was glad to meet Scott's next-in-line brother, Virgil.

"He told me a lot about you, when we were in the Air Force together, and some of the scrapes you all got into as kids. He said Alan was the worst of the lot of you, though. Where is he, by the way? I didn't get to see him. Or John for that matter."

"He swapped places with me this morning at the hospital," Virgil explained. "Just hope Grandma

doesn't throw him out on his ear, that's all. He's been whining and complaining that he's not had enough time with Father."

"Sounds like the way Scott described him," Elise said with a chuckle. Virgil and Gordon laughed right along with her.

Gordon took the controls on the flight from New York to LA, where they refueled and Elise got out to stretch her legs and take some medication. Virgil took the pilot's seat for the rest of the journey while Gordon napped. Elise napped, too; her painkillers made her slightly sleepy.

And now she was there, on the island, headed up to the house on the rise in a hovercart driven by an older Asian man named Kyrano. Some people who were on the patio of a large building jutting out of the cliff where the airstrip ended leaned over and waved at the Tracys, who waved right back.

"Our new recruits," Virgil said. Elise nodded, though she didn't understand.

A plump woman who introduced herself as Dr. Tracy's mother, Lisa, escorted her through the cool corridors of the house.

"Here you are, dear: our guest suite. Just make yourself at home and let me know if you need anything," Lisa said with a smile. Then she left Elise alone, to gaze dazedly out of the window at the sea, and sun, thinking about how alien it all was to her and would she ever feel comfortable knowing that somewhere here lay a secret that the world must never know.

Post by Tikatu on 05/07/2004

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