
Subject: Re: Learning The Ropes

Posted by [Tikatu](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 00:35:41 GMT

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Wednesday, March 7, 2068, 3:30 p.m. Mt. Sinai Hospital, New York City

Ned Cook took a deep breath and headed into the stairwell, followed closely by Joe, camera hidden in a backpack slung over one shoulder. Joe had again used his connections with his brother-in-law, Pete, and he and Ned were admitted, this time with the camera. Their stated purpose was to attend the daily press briefing on Jeff Tracy; a briefing whose audience had gotten smaller and smaller as the man's recovery had gone on and his newsworthiness had faded. But their real purpose was to get a word or two with the man himself if they could. Hence, the little used stairwell that would take them to the floor where the secure wing was situated.

"Do you really think he'll talk to us, Ned?" Joe asked as they climbed the zigzagging flights higher and higher.

"I dunno, Joe. I hope so. This may be my last chance to get an exclusive. Rumor has it that he's going to be released soon," Ned replied, determination in his voice.

At last they reached the upper floor, and rested for a few moments to catch their breath. Cautiously, Joe opened the door and peered out into the corridor. No one was close to them, and he stepped out into the hall, motioning Ned to follow.

"How are we going to get past the security?" he asked his companion as they walked slowly down the hall. Ned shook his head, and as he did, he caught something in the corner of his eye that made him look again, then smile. He took Joe's arm and pulled him right into a room, closing the door behind them.

Joe looked around him, and then gave Ned a strange glare. "What are we doing here? This is just the break room."

"Yeah, but there have got to be some lockers or stashes of scrubs or something here, don't you think?" Ned asked, looking around. "Yes! In here!"

Joe followed him into an adjoining room where there were lockers and showers and, most importantly, a hamper of used scrubs. Ned started pawing through it, pulling out relatively clean looking shirts and pants and trying to find something that looked like it would fit him. He tossed a green top to Joe. "Here, try this on. We'll need to be incognito if we're going to get past the security."

Joe shook his head and started to pull on the shirt, wrinkling his nose as it passed over his head. "Phew! This guy sure needs a better deodorant!" Ned barked a short laugh as he dressed himself in the dirty laundry, wadding up his own outer clothing and stuffing it into an empty locker. Joe's things were added, and they looked each other up and down.

The cameraman shook his head. "It'll never work, Ned. You can't change your face. Everyone will still recognize you."

"I have an idea about that, too. C'mon, I need to find a sterile mask."

They walked into the hall, Ned with a bit more confidence and Joe treading cautiously behind him. Just short of the nurses' station, they found a crash cart that had just been used. Ned looked it over carefully and found what he was looking for: a paper mask to cover his lower face. He snatched it, and he and Joe proceeded along.

Ned turned his head away from the nurses at the station, talking with Joe about the latest basketball scores in a heavy Bronx accent. Once past the station, he nonchalantly pulled the mask over his face, and they approached the one burly guard who stood at the entry to the wing they wanted. Ned held up a hand as if in recognition of the guard, who glared at them but made no move toward them. Grinning behind the mask, knowing that in just a few steps he'd be near his goal, Ned opened the double doors to the secure wing and stepped through.

That's when all hell broke loose.

A klaxon went off and lights began to flash. The guard was instantly alert and after Ned and Joe. He managed to catch up with Joe and grab him by an arm, stopping the photographer in his tracks. From the other end of the hall, another guard, just as burly, came steaming like a freight train. Ned kept his eyes on the room numbers, searching for the one he knew Jeff Tracy was in. And that's how he was taken by surprise when the second guard stepped into his path and they forcibly collided. Ned, being the lighter of the two, was knocked backwards and quickly grabbed by the guard.

More security forces converged on the scene, and Ned began to shout, "You can't keep us out! We're with the press! The public has a right to know about Jeff Tracy!"

As the guards were preparing to drag them away, a light went on over the door to one of the rooms, and a nurse hurried down the hall to tend to her patient. She ducked in, then almost as quickly popped out and ran down to the departing knot of security men. She spoke to the one who had been standing guard at the door.

"Mr. Tracy wants to see him."

Ned's eyes flew open with excitement. "Tracy wants to see me! Let me go! Let my cameraman go!"

The nurse stood in front of him, frowning. "He wants to see you, and only you but with an... escort."

"Okay, okay. I can deal with that. What are we waiting for? Joe, I'm going to talk to Tracy, see if he'll let you in for a proper interview," Ned said over his shoulder as his "escort" of two guards marched him down the hall. Joe shook his head. He had a bad feeling about this request of Tracy's.

The nurse preceded them down the hall, and knocked on the door to Jeff Tracy's room. She entered, and a moment later, opened the door to admit the reporter and the guards who flanked

him.

"Mr. Tracy, I'm Ned Cook, and may I say that it's an honor to meet you!" Ned began eagerly as he approached the man in the bed, holding out his hand. "Do you mind if my cameraman comes in so I can interview you properly?"

There was no response other than an icy, blue-eyed stare. Ned shifted nervously. He had heard a lot of things about the sheer presence of Jefferson Tracy, the forceful personality that had gone to the moon and come back to make himself one of the richest men in the world. That personality was still forceful, even in a hospital bed with one arm and one leg in casts, and Ned began to realize just why Jefferson Tracy was someone to be reckoned with.

Jeff glared at the dark-haired man, dressed in stolen scrubs, who now fidgeted slightly before him. He sat silent, impassive, letting the reporter stew for long moments. Then he spoke, his tones clipped and angry.

"Mr. Cook, what you've been doing to get your so-called story has been reprehensible. You tried to interview my wife when she was in no emotional condition to answer questions. You tried to interview my pilot when she was in no physical condition to be interviewed. You dared to approach my young children when they were alone and vulnerable. And now you try to invade my own privacy and security just to get your exclusive!"

Jeff jabbed an emphatic finger in Ned's direction. "I am going to tell you once and for all, Mr. Cook. Mind. Your. Own. Business. Leave my family alone. If you do not, you and your network will both be sued for harassment!"

He waved a hand at the guards. "Get him out of here."

"Wait! What about the interview?" Ned persisted, even as he was hustled from the room. "You can't do this to me! I'm Ned Cook! I'm a star! The public has a right to know!"

The door was closed behind them, and Ned and Joe were unceremoniously hustled from the secure wing and taken down to the security chief's office, where the police waited for them.

They were arrested and hauled off to jail, still in their stolen scrubs, for violating hospital regulations and penetrating the secure wing without permission. Joe kept mum about Pete's involvement; he had no desire to have his brother-in-law lose his job. As soon as Ned and Joe were off his hands, the head of security was in Jeff's room, apologizing profusely for the intrusion. Jeff waved him away, saying that it wasn't his fault and that his security measures were effective.

"Your men caught them virtually at the threshold, sir. They did good work."

The head of security thanked Jeff, and left having felt like he had dodged a very big bullet. As he left, Dianne walked in, her face full of puzzlement.

"What's going on? There are police cruisers downstairs and though there are reporters and photographers, for once they ignored me. Not that I'm complaining or anything...."

Jeff sat back wearily, reaching out his hand to her and as she took it, he began to tell her about the intrusion.

Post by Tikatu on 14/09/2004
