
Subject: Re: Learning The Ropes
Posted by [Tikatu](#) on Sun, 22 Jul 2012 03:24:15 GMT
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Wednesday, February 19, 2068, 11:30 a.m., on the FireFlash enroute to London

Penelope sat back and put down the fashion magazine that was failing to hold her interest. Her beautiful face was pensive as she remembered saying goodbye to Jeff and Dianne just a little while ago. Jeff was still groggy from the surgery anesthesia, so she just planted a kiss on his cheek and gave him an encouraging smile. Dianne walked down to the hospital entrance with her.

"I really appreciate you coming and being such a support to the family right now, Penelope," she said. "We've needed it sorely."

"As I have said before, Dianne, I was glad to give it. I would stay on longer, but Parker tells me that there's work to be done at home. So I must go." Penelope embraced the older woman. "Please, do let me know if there are any changes for the worse. And keep me up-to-date on his condition as he gets better." She wagged her finger at Dianne. "I want to be there for his homecoming party!"

Dianne laughed. "I wouldn't have it any other way." Now it was her turn to embrace the aristocrat. "You take care of yourself, too, Penny. Let us know that you got home safe and sound."

"I will."

Penelope slipped gracefully into the back of the limousine parked at the curb and within moments it had whisked her away to the airport where her flight waited.

Now she thought about Jeff, and Dianne, and the true turning point in her relationship with both: the day she truly let Jeff go.

Penelope was once again on Tracy Island, unexpected and unannounced, but this time she was walking the beach with her rival. Jeff was in New York and Penelope had timed her arrival so the two women could discuss the object of their affections without said object becoming involved. Dianne's children ran ahead of them, flying kites in the breeze coming from the sea. Penelope smiled to see such innocence. She turned to Dianne.

"I wanted to talk to you about Jeff."

Dianne smiled wryly. "I figured."

"I'll be blunt, Doctor. Are you in love with him?"

"I can be equally blunt, milady. Yes, I am."

"Does Jeff know?"

"Yes, he does."

So, there it was, out in the open. Penelope sighed. She could see that letting go was going to be her undoing.

Dianne stopped walking and turned to confront the aristocrat. "Look, no matter what Mrs. Tracy tells you, I didn't come here looking for a rich husband. I'm no gold-digger."

"Then why did you come here?"

Dianne was silent for a moment. She looked down at the sand, and when she lifted her head to meet Penny's gaze, the Brit was surprised to see tears in her eyes.

Dianne sighed. "I came... I came here to escape my ghosts."

"What do you mean?"

Dianne turned to start walking again, and Penelope did the same. "I don't know how much you know about me, but I am a widow. My husband died over five years ago in a terrorist bombing. And even though I'd been through grief counseling, even though I thought I'd finished with grieving for him, I was still holding on. The grief was still there, just buried. I wasn't moving on with my life, with my children's lives. I was shackled by the memories. Life was dull and gray and I still felt like I was going through the motions of living. So when this job was offered to me, I took it."

She slowly moved her eyes over the sea, the beach, and the palm trees. "He's not here. My Rick is not here. Not like he was back in the States, in our little house. I feel... free now. Of course, I still miss him. But not the way I did. I feel alive again."

She shot a slightly embarrassed look over at Penelope. "As crazy as it sounds, that's why I came here. For a fresh start. Romance was the farthest thing from my mind." Her voice lowered. "But now..."

Penelope felt that something of import was behind Dianne's last statement.

"But now?"

Dianne sighed again. "Jeff and I have had an...encounter. A...physical encounter. Neither of us meant for it to happen, and neither of us were prepared for the... intensity of it either. But when it was all said and done, Jeff admitted that he had feelings for me. And that he wanted to pursue a relationship."

Penelope gasped, an unexpected breath that she turned into a sigh. "What kind of feelings does he have for you? If I may be so bold as to ask?"

"He's... uncertain about the depths of his feelings right now. He said he cares for me and about me and that I... got under his skin. That what I said and thought mattered to him. He asked me to be patient with him so he could learn to love again."

Tears sprang to Penelope's eyes: this had been what she had hoped for from Jeff for herself. And now, here he was, choosing another. If I let him go, he will not return to me. But, then, what choice do I have?

She swallowed and brought herself under control, then stopped and took her rival by the forearm, locking gazes with her.

"Dianne, I want you to know that I... I will not stand in your way with Jeff. I love him, have loved him for over two years now and because I love him, I want him to be happy. Please, make him happy."

Dianne closed her eyes and tears spilled down her cheeks. She took a deep breath and then opened her eyes again.

"Ah will. To the best of mah ability."

Suddenly, Penelope found herself in Dianne's strong embrace, and her rival was whispering, "Thank you" in her ear. She could control herself no more. There on the beach, in the arms of a woman she wanted to hate, Penelope vented her grief to the person who best understood her feelings for the man, Jeff Tracy.

They were rivals no more.

Penelope's eyes were moist when she came back to the here and now. It had been the right thing to do, letting Jeff go. He was happy: happy with Dianne, happy with his expanded family, happier in ways that Penelope could never have foreseen and could never have given him. And Dianne? She had become a friend, a good friend. She had never thrown Penelope's sacrifice back in her face; in fact, she had made it a point to show how much she appreciated it.

Penelope smiled. She was glad to have been there to support them both. Keziah had been right. Jeff had come back to her, not as she had envisioned, as a lover, but as an even stronger friend. And he had not come back alone, but had brought Dianne with him.

Post by Tikatu on 13/07/2004