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Subject: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 17:55:23 GMT

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November is cold in the Northern Hemisphere, but in the Southern, the Tracys are heading toward summer. The new people are settling in, and much needed help behind the scenes may soon be on the way. One of the first recruits leaves, his life changed forever, while his replacement stands waiting on the horizon. Rebuilding on one front has begun, and on another is nearly complete. It is a time for family to gather and celebrate. But the cold winds that blow over the North at this time will also blow over the Tracys as they continue the work of International Rescue.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 20:39:33 GMT

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Thursday, November 1, 2068, 9:30 a.m., Tracy Island

"Well, Jeff," Emily said as she joined her son in the lounge. "What do you need?"

"Need?" Jeff said, standing and motioning his mother to a seat behind his desk. He stood behind her and to one side. "Nothing, really. Just your approval on a couple of items."

Emily sat down and peered at the center screen. "Oh, my!" she said, pleased. "They've been working so hard!"

"Yes, they have, haven't they?" he said, smiling. "These are real-time photos; it's after three back in Kansas... yesterday."

"It... It'll look just like the old one did," she said, her voice wistful. Glancing up, she asked, "What will they do about the barn?"

"They started construction on the barn yesterday." Jeff pulled up another window, using the second screen. "The house isn't exactly the same as it was. It'll have more square footage and a couple of extra bedrooms and baths for when more than one or two of us go out to visit. There'll be a new fence surrounding the property, and a state of the art security system, too."

"A fence? What kind of fence?"

The third screen was activated. "This kind." There was a view from the house out to the street. Between the camera and the street lay a white fence, not of wooden pickets, but of wrought iron bars topped with fancy -- and sharp looking -- fleur de lis. "This is what runs across the front and sides, and surrounds the graveyard. The fence along the back is wide pickets, with gates for any equipment to move through." He shrugged. "The major equipment barns are further out, of course, and have had repairs made and upgrades to security. But they didn't get hit quite as hard as the house and tractor barn."

"We never needed anything like that before, Jeff Tracy," Emily said, giving him a raised eyebrow

and a haughty look.

"We weren't as visible then as we are now, Mother." Jeff shook his head slightly. "My original thought was a solid brick wall."

"Hmph." Emily folded her arms. "Lesser of two evils, I suppose." She settled back in her seat. "So, what do you have to have my opinion about?"

"Siding, and trim colors." Jeff pulled up another window, letting it fill the screen to his mother's left. It held a still picture of the house, with computer-added white siding, and two palettes of colors to one side of the picture. "Did you want to continue with the blue? Or go with something else?"

"Hm." She took the stylus, and began clicking on the colors. He watched as the colors his mother chose appeared on the house, either in the siding itself or in the shutters and trim. She hummed with each choice. She chuckled out loud as she painted the house with pink. "Lady Penelope," she muttered. Jeff smiled.

She kept coming back to yellow, with a dark green trim, and a very similar blue to what the house had already been painted, with white trim. Then she sighed, and turned to Jeff. "It wouldn't be the same without the blue."

"Then..." Jeff leaned over and clicked a couple of buttons. "... blue it shall be."

Mother and son shared a smile. Then Emily's face took on a thoughtful look. "What did the builders do with that old oak?"

"Ah, that was the other thing that needed your input." Jeff pulled up a window in the center screen. "What do you say to a fireplace mantel and a really big, custom-made kitchen table with chairs?"

"Is there that much wood?" She sounded surprised.

"Yes, there is, and good quality, too. I've got an artisan lined up to do whatever you like with it." He drew her attention to the artisan's website, and before long, they were in animated conversation about the possibilities.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 20:39:59 GMT

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Thursday, November 1, 2068, around 2:30 p.m., Tracy Island

"Okay, let's call it a day," Scott told Cassie as the flight scenario came to an end with the plane in one piece. The landing had been far from perfect. She had come in too fast; the landing was bumpy and the plane wasn't on the right runway. Still, it was her best performance so far and there was a noticeable improvement since they'd had their conversation a couple weeks back.

He waited for Cassie to come out of the simulator. "Not a bad lesson today," he told her as she

joined him.

"Well, I'm still alive so I guess that's something," she replied, not thrilled with her performance today but even she could see she was at least making improvement now.

"I'll take you up for real next week. Let you get some experience at the controls of an actual plane, though I'll handle take-off and landing. I don't think you're ready for that yet."

"I won't argue about that," Cassie told him as the two started to leave the room. "Oh, about the training on Mobile Control we discussed last week, I'd like for you to do it."

"Are you sure?"

Cassie nodded. She had gone back and forth on the decision a few times but was confident this was the right choice.

"Okay. I'll figure out some times for the sessions and let you know when they are."

The two walked on in silence. When they reached the point where they would go their separate ways Cassie spoke up again.

"Scott, I was wondering if we could play pool again sometime. I know I'm no competition for you, but I did have fun the last time."

"I did too," he admitted. The lack of pressure to win, like he often felt when playing against his brothers, had been nice. It was nice to just enjoy the game for a change, he thought. "And what do you mean no competition? You did win that one game."

"Yeah, right. You sinking the eight ball because you were goofing around hardly counts as a win. Especially since the only ball of mine not on the table was the one you knocked in," the black-haired woman replied, smiling.

Scott laughed. "What about next Monday? Say after dinner?"

"Works for me."

"Okay. I'll talk to you later then," Scott told her, giving her a wave as he headed toward the villa.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 20:40:27 GMT

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Jenny walked slowly down the garden, pausing every now and then to sniff at a flower. She came to the garden shed and opened the door.

"Hiss! Hissy! Oh, there you are. Aren't you beautiful," she murmured. A pair of eyes regarded her from behind a plant in a large cage at the back of the shed, and then a carpet python raised its

head and glided forward to meet her.

"Hello, sweet. I'm sorry I've been neglecting you lately, but I've had so many other things to think about. I might be getting a job soon. I'm just waiting to hear back. How would you like another move? Mmm?"

"I hope I won't have to leave you behind," Jenny continued. "If I do, I'll make sure you'll get a good home. My brother-in-law, Murphy, he'd like you. Mind you, I don't think Wendy will appreciate it."

She picked up a garden trowel lying on the ground and put it back in its place.

"Jenny! Mum? Anyone home?" Jenny recognised her sister Wendy's voice.

"Yeah, I'm home," Jenny yelled back. "Mum's not, she's out playing bowls."

"Where are you?"

"By the garden shed. In you go, Hiss." Jenny gently replaced the snake and shut the shed door. She turned to see her sister making her way along the path.

"Is that snake shut up?" Wendy asked rather nervously.

"Oh, yeah, don't worry. What's up?"

"Well... we thought you and Mum should be the first to know." Wendy took a deep breath and looked Jenny in the eye. "We're expecting a baby. Actually, we've known that for some time."

Jenny gasped in surprise. "Whew! Man! Wow! When's it due?"

Wendy grinned. "April next year."

"Oh, flip. Mum'll be over the moon. What are you hoping for, boy or girl?"

"Don't care, really. We'd love it all the same."

"Of course. Oh, man! I'll be an aunt!" Jenny squealed.

"Aunt Jenny. And Mum will be a grandmother." Wendy suppressed a giggle. "What'll she say when we tell her?"

"She'd say 'So when is Jenny going to get married?' and I'll say 'I can't imagine!'."

"Speaking of that, before you came along, there was a guy who was paying Mum a bit of attention. He's overseas at the moment, but he was giving her flowers and chocolates and things."

"Ooh. Well, in case I get this job I'm going for, will you keep me posted?"

"Sure will. What's this job you're after?"

"A sous chef for Tracy Industries. I'd like to get the job. I'll have to relocate though, if I get it."

"Oh. Well, let me know where you'll be moving to. Is your email address still the same?"

"Yes, jennyfinch at yahoo dot com . Don't bother ringing me on my mobile phone; I'm always forgetting it."

Wendy smiled. "Just like me. Well, I'm planning on having a look at baby things this morning. Like to come?"

Jenny opened her eyes. "It's not due for ages! And what if you have a miscarriage?"

"Don't talk about that! Well, we could get a book on baby names."

"You're on. Just let me get my handbag."

They walked back down the garden path, discussing their favourite names.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 20:40:58 GMT

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Thursday, November 1, 2068, 4:45 p.m., Thunderbird Three's silo

Alan leaned his head back in the pilot's seat and stretched his arms out over his head with a loud groan. "Oh, God, it feels good to be back on Earth."

"How would you know?" Virgil asked, amused. "You haven't left Three yet."

Alan glared at his brother, who laughed. He shook his head. "You're awfully chipper. You must not have had too much to drink last night."

"I had enough for a buzz, but not enough to get plastered," Virgil replied, checking the silo's status. He and Alan couldn't really leave the silo until the exhaust and heat from their landing dissipated and it was safe to disembark. "Now, Callie... that was a different story. I don't know if she missed what Elise told her about the punch or what. What I do know is that Scott reported she was feeling no pain last night, and Mom said she was feeling plenty this morning. So was Mom, for that matter." He paused, shaking his head. "That's why I got tapped as co-pilot today. By the time we knew Callie wouldn't be space-worthy, Scott was already into his training session with Cassie."

"Y'know, I thought she didn't drink," Alan commented. He was writing up his flight log. "That's probably why she got drunk; she's not used to it."

"Yeah, that's likely. She'll know better next time... if there is a next time."

Alan got up and stretched again. "Gonna help me with post-flights?"

Virgil made a face, and sighed. "I guess I should. Fair warning, though: it's been a long time since I've done this for Three. Don't be surprised if I forget something."

They began taking read-outs from the various panels and gauges, then Alan asked, almost casually, "So, how was Nikki last night?"

"Gorgeous in that flamenco costume," Virgil replied, matching Alan's tone. "She looked like she was having a fine time."

He swore he could hear a slight "hrmph" coming from Alan's direction. "Who was she having that fine time with?"

A grin crossed Virgil's face, but he was turned away from his brother, so Alan couldn't see. "Oh, everybody, I think. Gordon, Brains, Dom, Will..." He sounded as if he was thinking hard. "Scott, John, Brandon, Luke..." He paused to let the names sink in, then went on. "Tyler and Alex... Josh... Rommel." The grin grew wider. "She had a fine time with just... everybody."

Alan glanced at his brother, who turned to him with an innocent smile. Frowning, he snorted and rolled his eyes. "Yeah, right." There was a pause. "I notice you weren't on that list."

Virgil raised an eyebrow, and his voice turned speculative. "Welllllll, that's because I was having a fine time with someone else."

"I see." There was a pause, then Alan continued, sounding brisk and business-like. "Well, I'm back now, and I intend to show Nikki a better time than she had last night."

"Hey, if she likes you, then go for it." Virgil glanced over at Alan, catching his brother's eye. "Just don't make the same mistake you made with Tin-Tin, okay?"

Alan didn't reply, just looked thoughtful as he went back to his work.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 20:42:24 GMT

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\*\*\*\*\*Thursday, November 1, 2068, around 5:30 p.m., Tracy Island\*\*\*\*\*

Callie entered her apartment after working the afternoon in the lab. Her day didn't start well, due to the condition she found herself in when she awoke.

\*\*\*\*\*Flashback to 8 a.m.\*\*\*\*\*

After a very long night, she awakened to the sunlight in her face, a very thirsty feeling, slight nausea, and a pounding headache. "Oh, God, my head..." She found herself on the couch instead of in her bed. Also, she noticed she was still in most of her costume, except for her jacket, which

lay on the floor.

When she stood up, she felt her head hurting even worse than before. "Damn it...why did I drink so much last night?"

Before she could think, she heard the buzz of her door. "Oh, um, just a minute!" She stumbled to her door and pressed her intercom button. "Who-who is it?"

"It's Nikki."

"Uh, um, hold on!" She quickly pressed the button and let the door open. "Uh... hi."

The nurse noticed how she was dressed. "Callie, you're still in your--"

"Yes, I know. I fell asleep on the couch last night." She held her head. "I still don't feel good."

Nikki escorted her back to her couch. "Easy. You definitely have the signs of the classic hangover."

Nodding slowly, Callie curled herself up onto the couch. "I drank too much of that spiked punch."

"Oh, dear, I guess the alcohol got to you, didn't it?"

"Yeah, but it sure tasted good." With a sigh, Callie added, "I don't know if I'm going to be able to do any type of work today with this blasted hangover."

Nikki shook her head. "You're probably not going to be space-worthy, since you're practically still buzzed."

"I swear I will never drink again, not after last night's fiasco."

"Why don't you go see Doctor Tracy? Maybe she's got something to help your symptoms."

"I just hope I won't look too bad."

Nikki rolled her eyes. "It would help if you'd get out of your costume first."

"Yeah, I really don't want to go to the lab looking like a pirate, since Halloween is officially over."

After Nikki left, Callie changed out of her costume and into a comfortable pair of khaki slacks and light-blue shirt.

With barely an appetite and after consuming only a cup of coffee and some dry toast, she took the walk to the sick bay.

\*\*\*\*\*1:15 p.m.\*\*\*\*\*

After Dianne gave her some medicine to counteract the hangover, Callie went back to her

apartment and got some more sleep. Feeling better following a light lunch, she made her way to the lab, as Jeff was walking out. "Oh, hello, sir."

Jeff said, "Ah, Callie. How are you feeling?"

"Much better thanks to Doc's medicine." She sighed. "I got distracted by the guys' cat calls, so I didn't know that sign for the spiked punch was real and not a prop. As a result of my getting drunk, I couldn't go with John to Five this morning. I'm sorry, sir."

Jeff smiled lightly. "I would give you a dressing down, but since you weren't the only person who had too much to drink last night, I'll let it go this time. Besides, you probably learned your lesson in a hurry."

"Oh, did I ever," she said with her face blushing. "I will avoid drinking when it's so close to changeover day from now on."

"Good. I assume you've never been drunk like this before?"

"No, sir."

With a chuckle, Jeff said, "Well, it was very good punch. So, what are you planning to do this afternoon?"

"I've been trying to work on various chemical compositions, especially trying to counteract that fuel from three months ago in that Malaysian plane crash. I still haven't had any luck yet, but I'll keep at it."

"Very well. I'd better get back to my desk, so I'll let you get to finding that counteragent." He left for the lounge while she walked into the lab.

\*\*\*\*\*4:30 p.m.\*\*\*\*\*

Callie worked straight through the afternoon, the brunt of her headache practically gone at this point. However, something else started bothering her to the point where she overpoured just a little dicetylene into her beaker. "Ugh!" she said as she quickly grabbed some wipes to clean up the mess. "Damn," she whispered.

Brains and Tin-Tin noticed what happened. "Are you all right?" Tin-Tin asked.

"Yeah, I'm fine. I just lost my concentration. I'll be more careful."

With a sigh, Brains said, "Listen, you've done a lot with us today, but something tells me you need a little more time to recover. How about you go home early, and we'll see you tomorrow?"

Callie blushed. "Okay. Maybe you're right." She sighed.

Tin-Tin said, "Don't worry, Callie. Get some rest, and I'm sure you'll be able to put in a full day tomorrow."



"Thanks. I'll see you guys tomorrow." Callie removed her lab coat and hung it back in the closet. Afterward, she left the lab and headed back to her apartment.

\*\*\*\*\*Present time\*\*\*\*\*

After cooking herself an easy meal of mac and cheese, she sat down and started eating it, but with a forkful halfway in her mouth, she suddenly remembered the entire incident with Luke from the night before. When she recalled what she had done with Luke, she became more embarrassed. "I can't believe I was insane enough to...try to hit on Luke! I lost my inhibitions because of the punch! What am I gonna do now? I can't face him..." She lost her appetite and placed her dinner into the refrigerator. Slowly sitting on the sofa, she still thought about the nearly steamy encounter with Luke. "I've got to do something. I need to apologize to him as soon as possible. I just need to find him, that's all."

Curling up, she began thinking on how she could tell him she was sorry for her actions.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 20:45:24 GMT

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Thursday, November 1, 2068, 8:55 p.m., Christchurch, New Zealand

"You should have seen Dom!" Cherie exclaimed. "He was dressed as Dorothy, from the Wizard of Oz movie!"

"Sounds like you had a great bun-fight," Aroha said, sipping her drink. "Would be nice to go to a big do like that sometime."

Cherie's excitement deflated a little. Her friends had been quiet that evening at the ice cream shop. In fact, they hadn't really asked her to come with them, but when she asked if they were going, Anneliese had shrugged and said, "Yeah. We're going." Cherie had never even thought twice about not being part of the group, so she'd tagged along. But now she was feeling as if she weren't wanted. A slight frown creased the space between her eyebrows as she looked from friend to friend.

"Hey, is there something the matter?" she asked. "Everyone seems so... glum."

The friends glanced at each other, and Jen held a hand out, giving a half shrug. Finally, she spoke up, not looking Cherie in the eye. "We were, uh, we were wondering when you were going to tell us who you really are."

Cherie's frown deepened. "What do you mean, who I really am?" She glanced around the table. "I'm Cherie."

"But Cherie who?" Tim asked, giving her a keen look. "You never told us your last name. You can never stay past a certain time, even if we offer you a lift home. We asked Mr. Jernigan to give us

your last name, and he kinda hemmed and hawed and wouldn't tell us."

Anneliese took up the explanation. "You talk about big parties and your brothers and all these strange people and how you went to the States for a weekend... as if they're nothing. I mean, some of us would have to save up forever to go to the States, and it would be a huge big thing."

"Not only that," Manjari said, lowering her voice. "I've noticed that everywhere you go," she made a motion with her head toward Airini, who sat in a corner, reading, "she goes."

Cherie sighed. She rubbed one arm with the opposite hand, and bit her lower lip. Then she took a deep breath, and leaned in. "You want to know who I am?" she said softly, so softly that the others had to lean in to hear. "You have to promise not to tell anyone."

"Why?" Jen asked, a half-sneer on her face. "Are you some kind of celebrity or something?"

"Something like that. But I won't tell you unless you promise to keep this between us." Cherie glanced at each friend, and one by one, they nodded or made some indication that they agreed. "Okay."

She ducked into her art bag, and pulled out her wallet. "Since I'm sure you won't believe me without proof..." Opening the wallet, she looked at the pictures, then selected one. Pushing it over to the center of the table, she said, in a low, hushed voice, "I'm Cherie Tracy, and this is my dad."

It was a picture of a silver-haired man in a tuxedo, standing next to a woman in a wedding dress. Cherie was in the picture, as were two younger boys, one with rusty red hair, and the other blond. "That was my mom and dad's wedding day."

"And this is supposed to convince us of... what?" Jen asked, her tone sarcastic.

"Wait a minute," Tim said, looking at the picture carefully. "My brother fancies space stuff and has a big poster with the space pioneers on the wall in our room." He tapped the picture carefully. "This bloke is on that poster. Younger looking, sure, but he's on it. Jeff Tracy."

"Get off the grass!" Aroha said, waving a dismissive hand. "That Jeff Tracy bloke's a million-billionaire. She's giving you a load of codswollop!"

"I'm not," Cherie hissed. "I'm telling the truth. He's my adoptive father. You can see it for yourself."

The girls glanced at Tim, who held the picture thoughtfully. He shrugged. "If he's your dad, then why not say so?"

"What do you think?" Cherie said, still keeping her voice down. "My dad's a rich man. People know I'm here, they could try something. Maybe kidnapping." She shot a glance at Airini. "She's... she's my bodyguard." She licked her lips a little and said, even softer, "Besides, I wanted to make friends who didn't care who my dad was. Who liked me just for me."

Anneliese's face took on a troubled look at the last statement. "I... I guess I'd want that, too."

"So, these are your brothers?" Aroha asked, sounding skeptical.

"Those are my younger brothers," Cherie said. "My biological brothers. I have adoptive brothers, too, but they're way older than me."

Aroha nodded slowly. "I was wondering 'cause you always talk about them giving you a lift and all." She took the picture from Tim. "These two aren't old enough to drive."

"Do you have a picture of your older brothers?" Manjari asked, curious.

Cherie shook her head. "No, I don't." This wasn't exactly true; she did have one, but with this group being the core of Virgil's fan club, she knew she couldn't show them that picture. She held out a hand, and Manjari gave the picture back. "Please, guys, don't tell anyone about this. My dad... he's really paranoid about security."

"We'll keep it quiet," Anneliese promised. She gave each of the others a hard look. Jen rolled her eyes and shook her head, but Anneliese wouldn't give in. "Won't we, Jen?"

"I think she's spinning a yarn, and if she isn't, she's skiting," Jen said, loud enough to be heard.

"Strewth!" Aroha gave Jen a hard nudge. "You don't have to be stropopy about it." Turning to Cherie, she said, "We'll be quiet, and make sure this one is, too."

Cherie looked at her ice cream sundae, and sighed. "I'd probably better go." Pulling out her phone, she fast dialed a number. As she did, Airini got up and sauntered out.

"Gords? I'm ready." Cherie tucked her picture back into the wallet, and the wallet back into her art bag. She picked up the remains of her treat. She said to the group, "I'll see you next week." Shouldering the art bag, she made her way to the door, and out onto the sidewalk. Airini was there, waiting.

The sports car pulled up, and Cherie opened the door. "Here," she said, handing her treat to Gordon, who sat behind the wheel. Sliding in, she closed the door behind her.

"Gee, thanks!" he replied, a touch of sarcasm in his voice. Then he noticed Cherie's demeanor, and his attitude changed. "I'm sorry, Cherry. You okay?"

"Not really." She sighed. "I think I just blew it."

In the doorway, Tim looked out in the night, watching as the sports car pulled out and disappeared into traffic. He made a mental note of the car's make and model, determined to find out if Cherie was really telling the truth or not.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 20:46:00 GMT

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Mid-afternoon, Friday, November 2; the Pod Storage Bay.

"So you see, Brains, we could attach a track to the ceiling of the pods. It could allow the platforms to move forward and back, as well as side to side. Even if it couldn't hold the larger equipment, we could put enough up there to clear space down here. And have more room for the field crew members to move around."

Brains and Will were standing in the entrance of one of the pods. Brains was nodding as Will spoke, and looking at the young man's sketches that were uploaded to his data padd. "You're right. I believe we have motors strong enough to move what we'd put up there safely, and quickly enough to make using the platforms feasible. Or we can order them."

He made some notes in his padd while Will waited, then said, "I think, though, that we should install them in one or two pods first, to see how they work out. Then, if they do as well as I expect, we'll get more materials and do the other pods. We may have to try something different in the pod holding Thunderbird Four, but that can wait for now."

Brains and Will exited the pod and the engineer looked up at the redhead. "Well done; it was a good idea. We need them, and I can't be the one to come up with them all the time." He grinned, and Will chuckled. Then Brains looked toward where Thunderbird Two was housed and said, "Have you seen the cockpits of any of the Thunderbirds?"

"Not yet."

"Well, now's as good a time as any. Follow me."

He took Will into Virgil's favorite craft and let him into the control area. Will's face took on a look of awe as he examined the controls in front of the pilot's seat. He whistled. "Now this is somethin'. I recognize several things, but what's that?" He pointed.

"That's the camera detector. If it senses any cameras -- still or otherwise -- in use, it signals the pilot who switches on the fogger, here." He indicated the control.

"Why doesn't it automatically do that? I think it would be a lot better. Or even automatically switch on when the craft is a certain distance from the rescue site. That way, you can be sure."

Brains looked at the mechanic approvingly. "Where were you when I was inventing this? You are coming up with some very good ideas."

Will laughed. "I was probably somewhere in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean on the McCain, workin' on the fighter jets with my crew."

"That's probably right. Tell me, what rank did you have when you left?"

"Lieutenant Commander. Why?"

"Just curious. Do you ever miss it?"

"I did, sometimes. But working here is something like being there, except for not having a crew to boss around."

As they turned to leave, Will gave one more admiring look around, then followed Brains out.

"Did you say you served aboard the McCain?" the engineer asked.

"Yes, I did. Why? Did you know someone else who served aboard her?"

"Not exactly. But I seem to remember hearing that Scott was aboard her for some exercises. Did you ever meet him?"

"No, but I did work on his jet."

"Really? What can you tell me about it?"

"Well. . ."

If anyone had been around listening at the time, the voices would have faded as the two men moved on.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 20:48:44 GMT

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Friday, November 2, 3:30 p.m., Tracy Island

He was short, fat, and dapper-looking in his waistcoat and jacket, though by the time they'd arrived at the Villa, he was looking rather red in the face. He was appreciative when Kyrano brought lemonade and iced tea to the lounge, but was rather non-plussed to see the retainer sit down beside Mrs. Tracy.

"Both Kyrano and my mother are in charge of the kitchen," Mr. Tracy said amiably. "I value both of them highly, and it is their opinion that will carry the most weight."

The would-be sous chef was suddenly seized by a feeling of foreboding. He had thought he would only be dealing with Mr. Tracy, who -- as a man -- would likely know little about the world of haute cuisine. Instead, he found himself faced with a set-in-her-ways old biddy who just happened to be his future employer's mother, and a servant who might easily be pushed aside.

"Kyrano here was head chef of the Hilton de la Défense in Paris before coming on staff here," Mr. Tracy was saying.

Now Mrs. Tracy appeared to hide something of the shark behind her gentle smile. And the Asian man's face became coolly inscrutable. He gulped, and fought to conceal his nervousness.

The interview proceeded, and his feeling of anxiety began to fade away. They discussed terms

and he played up his experience as much as he dared. After all, this was a mere sous chef position, and he wouldn't have pursued it if he hadn't heard a rumor that the successful candidate would be working for the family, not the company.

He let them know the hours he was willing to work, and which days, and about his yearly excursion to Mardi Gras. They didn't discuss salary; he wanted the conversation to turn that way, but Mr. Tracy was not to be baited. The Asian man asked a few quiet questions, while Mrs. Tracy's were sharper and more to the point.

"Well," Mr. Tracy was saying, smiling. "Before we go any further, Kyrano and Mother would like you to see our facilities."

"Of course." He rose and shook the billionaire's hand.

"This way," the Asian man (what was his name?) guided him from the room. They went down a flight of stairs and to the right.

"This is the dining room," the Asian said, sweeping his arm to indicate the huge table and hefty sideboards. "The family eats here, and occasionally some of the other staff will join us." The Asian made eye contact, and said, his statement more like a question, "I hope you are well versed in vegetarian cuisine -- one of our nurses is vegan."

He smiled and bobbed his head, assuring the Asian he was fully conversant in vegetarian cooking. They passed through the swinging doors and stepped into the kitchen. There was the smell of fresh coffee, and a thirty-something man was pouring himself a cup. The man looked up, startled, a cookie stuck in his mouth.

"Scott!" Mrs. Tracy scolded, scowling at the young man. "What are doing with that cookie?"

The young man -- Scott -- pulled the cookie from his mouth, having taken a sizable bite from it. He chewed, swallowed, and took a sip of coffee. "I'm hungry, Grandma. You know we growing boys need a snack now and then." The young man grinned and winked at Mrs. Tracy.

"Growing boy, my foot!" She stuck a finger in the young man's face (despite the fact that he seemed to tower over her) and shook it. "The only way you're growing is around the belly!" She gave that belly -- what little of it there was -- a poke with her finger.

Scott put up a hand in surrender. "Okay, okay. I'll take my coffee and the remains of my cookie elsewhere."

The Asian man stopped Scott long enough to introduce him properly. Scott said the usual pleasantries, and gave him a firm handshake, then retreated with his snack. Mrs. Tracy guided him over to a work island in the middle of the room. There were small bowls, large bowls and other tools of the trade laid out. The Asian pulled a half-dozen eggs from one of the huge, stainless steel refrigerators.

"Here is where we test your skill," he said as he set the bowls down. "Please, prepare an omelet."

He swallowed, nervous. He had heard of such tests before and how they had involved the most simple but elegant of entrées. And he was at a disadvantage here, too; he hated getting up in the morning, and so had insisted on the luncheon and dinner shifts wherever he had worked. But... it would not look good to refuse.

He began to mix and to stir, turning on the stove, and putting butter in the shallow omelet pan. He was keenly aware of the Asian's eyes on him, and of Mrs. Tracy's, watching his every move. He took every care in its preparation, adding cheese and ham and peppers. It browned a little too much, he thought, but he had no choice but to present it to his examiners.

The Asian tasted, looking pensive. Mrs. Tracy took a small portion, and sampled it, a thoughtful frown on her face. They exchanged a glance, then the Asian smiled.

"Please help yourself to a soft drink or coffee, and return to the dining room. Mrs. Tracy and I must confer."

There wasn't much he could do. He poured himself a cup of coffee, fixed it to his liking, and returned to the dining room. He pulled out the chair at the head of the table, imagining that it must be Mr. Tracy's special place to sit. He tried to imagine himself at the head of the table, with the gleaming china and the sparkling crystal.

An older silver-haired woman came in, breaking his reverie. She smiled at him and inclined her head as she passed by. Before she could enter the kitchen, he called out. "Um, madam?"

She stopped, hand poised to push open the door. "Yes?"

"They... they are in conference."

She smiled again. "I know." Then she pushed the door open and disappeared within.

He sipped his coffee and examined the quiet room from where he sat. The drapes were open, and he saw three children, a girl and two boys, head past, dressed for a swim. He wondered what it would be like to live there. Did they have raucous parties? Were his sons the riotous playboys that so many gossip magazines had declared they were? He would like that; he was always at his best when it came to parties... and partying.

The door opened behind him and he turned to see the Asian and Mrs. Tracy come out. They were followed by the silver-haired woman. The Asian stopped to introduce her, and she smiled, shook his hand, and went on her way.

"Let us return to the lounge."

He rose and followed Mrs. Tracy up the stairs again. He was surprised to see an elevator open, when they reached the top of the stairs, and a young, blond man step out. He wondered why they didn't use the lift; it was so much less stressful than climbing stairs!

The young man proceeded to give Mrs. Tracy a kiss on the cheek. "What's for dinner, Grandma?"



"Veal parmigiana, Alan. Just for you."

The young man glanced at him, a small look of concern on his face. Then he smiled. "I love it when you make my favorites, Grandma."

They entered through the room with the bookshelves, and the young man -- Alan -- opened the grillwork door for them. Mr. Tracy was behind his desk, and stood as they came in.

"Ah, good. You're here." He shot a glance at Alan. "Are you ready?"

Alan nodded. "Everything is fueled up and ready to go. Nikki's pulling the plane out of the hangar."

"Excellent." Mr. Tracy came out from behind his desk. "It was good to have you here, sir, and thank you for your interest in the position." He glanced at the Asian and Mrs. Tracy. "Of course, you're the first of several candidates, and we want to be thoroughly sure of whoever we are hiring." He gestured to the young man. "Alan here will fly you to Christchurch, where there is a hotel room waiting for you." He smiled a little. "No cost to you, of course."

"Of course," he murmured as he took Mr. Tracy's proffered hand. "Thank you for your hospitality."

"You're welcome."

"Thank you for coming," the Asian said, bowing. "We will be in touch."

"Yes, thank you," he said, bowing in return, though he wasn't sure quite why. Mrs. Tracy smiled, and shook his hand, then he found himself outside, escorted by Alan back down to the small cart.

"Hope you enjoyed your visit," Alan said, smiling.

He murmured some inane pleasantries, and stifled a sigh. He knew that when he next heard from the Tracys, it would be a polite rejection letter. No matter. He was being treated to an overnight visit in Christchurch, and he would make sure that Mr. Tracy footed as large a bill as he could manage.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 20:50:27 GMT

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Early evening, around 7:00 pm....

Luke read over the report he was currently typing up, making a correction here and there. He held a pen clamped between his teeth, a bad habit he'd had since high school. Frowning at what he had written, he consulted his notes, then corrected things on the computer. Finally he gave it a last read through and hit the print button. He also threw in a disc and burned a copy on that as well.

He leaned back in his chair, stretching his arms over his head. He glanced over at Rommel, who



was sprawled in front of the door. "Hey, mutt, what do you say we go for a walk before watching the game?" Luke had taped the previous night's hockey game between the Avalanche and the Sabres, and was looking forward to watching it.

Rommel got up, tail wagging as he watched his master pull on his sneakers. "All right, let's go." Luke snapped his fingers and started towards the door. He paused as his computer beeped, indicating a new email. "Hold on a sec, just let me see what this is." He sat back down and opened his mail. "Hey, it's from Roger. It's late at home, wonder what's up..." He sat back and read what his brother had to say.

Hey, Sasquatch,

How's things? Haven't heard from you for a while and wondered if you'd run off with some stud from Malibu. I mean, now that you're a Cali beach bum, you mustn't have a lot of time for us way up here in snow country.

Anyway, as you probably know, hunting season has started. Sarah is old enough to go to hunting camp this year, and has been pestering me about it. Can you get some time off and we'll grab Dad and head up to the cabin for a few days? I haven't seen you since July and it would be good to catch up. And, Mom's starting to miss you. I know, hard to believe since I'm her favorite, but it's true. Besides, I'm not going to be trapped in the woods with a 13-year old all by myself.

Give me a buzz and let me know what works for you. Things are pretty slow around the office at the moment, so my schedule's pretty open. Stay out of trouble. Or better yet, go find some.

Rog

Luke chuckled to himself as he started his reply.

Hey yourself, shorty,

Great to hear from you. Things have been hectic here, with juggling the studs and all.

You have snow already? Man, one thing about this job, I do miss the seasons. But, I'll just have to suffer and deal with the sunshine.

I just finished up a big project, so I'll talk to my boss about getting some time off. Maybe around the 9th? A nice trip home is just what I need at this point. Do me a favor, check the store and see if you can pick me up a pair of Bauer's or CCM's, size 7 women's. Not sure what that would be for men's. Just make sure they're hockey skates. No frilly figure things. Black too, no pink or blue.

Gotta run, I'll let you know about coming home as soon as I can.

Luke

P.S. Mom's favorite? You? Man, I'm away for a while and you start suffering delusions of grandeur.

Luke hit the "send" button and turned back to his dog. "Whadda you say, Rom, want to head home for a visit? Have Grammy spoil you?" The word "Grammy" had Rommel's tail thumping and Luke laughed. "C'mon, let's go for that walk." Together they headed out the door.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 20:51:58 GMT

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Cassie was walking across the balcony toward Luke's apartment when she noticed him and Rommel walk out.

"Hey, Luke! Looks like I caught you at a bad time."

"Hey, Cassie! We were just going to take a walk," Luke replied, gesturing toward Rommel with one hand. "You want to join us? Or I can skip the walk."

"A walk actually sounds like a good idea. My apartment was getting too quiet," she commented reaching out a hand to scratch Rommel behind the ears. "Oh, I should probably give you these before we go though," Cassie said, remembering the envelope she was carrying.

"What's in it?" Luke asked, taking the envelope Cassie held out to him.

"Pictures from the party that I thought you might like."

Luke opened the envelope and took out two pictures. The first one was of Luke, Elise, and Rommel in their costumes. The second was of all the recruits, though Rommel no longer had his costume on.

"These are great! Thanks! I'd like to see the others sometime."

"Well, I've got them all transferred to my laptop, but that's about as far as I've gotten. I'm hoping to find time this weekend to go through and do any touch ups and delete those that are beyond help or just didn't come out the way I wanted."

"Maybe, I'll try stopping by sometime next week then," he told her. "Let me just put these inside real quick."

Luke ducked back into the apartment while Cassie kept petting Rommel. The Shepherd closed his eyes, enjoying the attention.

It wasn't long before Luke had rejoined them on the balcony. The two friends headed toward the steps on the side of the Cliff House, Rom walking between the two of them. They conversed about trivial things for awhile, such as training and things that had happened throughout the day.

When the conversation hit a lull, Luke decided to try broaching a more serious topic.

"Have you decided what to do about Alex?"

Cassie sighed. She glanced out over the horizon for a moment before looking back at her friend.

"Yes and no," she replied. At Luke's confused look she continued. "I managed to schedule a time to talk to Dr. Lindon, my therapist back in New York, via IM earlier today. We talked about Alex and what you said to me on Sunday. She warned me not to go rushing back just because things weren't working out how I thought they would. The two of us decided that for now the best course of action is to take a wait and see approach. I plan on talking to Alex via email for awhile and see where things go."

"And if the two of you work things out?" He asked, looking to see where Rommel had gotten to. He spotted the dog up ahead of them, sniffing the ground.

"I don't know. Guess I cross that bridge when I get there. One thing I do know, things would need to change for me to go back. Alex controlled my life too much when we were together. That isn't what a marriage should be. It should be a partnership between two people. For the first time in my life, I've got control of my life and though I may not be doing such a stellar job, at least I know I've only got myself to blame."

"You're being too hard on yourself."

"Maybe," she said slowly. After a short pause, she continued. "You were right though, Luke. I was throwing so much of myself into my work that I haven't taken the time to try fitting in with everyone. It was easier to do that than to open up and let people get to know me. There's a certain amount of a detachment to a work relationship that you can hide behind. Less chance of getting hurt. That's not what I want, though. Sure, I want to be a part of the IR team, but I also want to feel like part of the community here on the island."

"I'm glad to hear you say that. I was also glad to see a little of the Cassie I know surfacing at the party."

"Then are you up for helping me with a project?"

"What is it?"

"I was going to hold a tea ceremony. Tin-Tin has expressed an interest in experiencing one and Virgil has shown an interest in the Japanese culture. Some of the others may be interested too. I'd need someone to be the Shokyaku, or guest of honor, and seeing as no one has actually been to a tea ceremony except for me, that maybe you could fill that role. I can explain things to you in more detail later but basically the other guests would look to you for what to do."

"I'm not wearing one of those dress things."

"It's not a dress and I'm not asking you to wear one!"

"Then I'd be happy to help you out. When were you planning on doing it?"

"The last day of the month. It's a Friday and that will give me plenty of time to prepare. It's been a

while since I've hosted or attended one myself."

"Who are you inviting?"

"Well, John will be up on Thunderbird 5, but I was figuring that I would just send an invitation to everybody here on the island. I don't really know everyone well enough to be able to decide who might be interested and who wouldn't."

"Sounds reasonable."

"Would you be willing to help me get the invitations ready?"

Luke nodded. "When do you want to do it?"

"Well, I wanted to type up something about the tea ceremony to put in the invitations as well as doing some calligraphy on the front of the invitations."

"Well, I certainly can't help you with that. I can write legibly enough but I can't do anything fancy."

Cassie laughed. "I wasn't going to ask you to. If you could help me fill out the inside with the needed information though, it would be helpful. Maybe Sunday afternoon if you don't have any plans. I'll cook you lunch and then we can work on them afterward."

"Sunday will work."

"Thanks, Luke!" Cassie said, throwing her arms around him to give him a hug.

"No problem, Cass," he told her returning the hug. As they broke away he noticed the fading light. "Maybe we should start heading back. I was planning on watching the Avalanche and Sabers game I taped. Care to join me."

Cassie shrugged. "It's been awhile since I've actually watched ice hockey but why not. It's not like I have a hot date or anything," she said, as the two headed back to the Cliff House.

"Well, there are plenty of single guys here," Luke said teasingly.

"Hey, if you don't want me to set you up don't go getting any ideas!"

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 20:52:50 GMT

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Friday, November 2, 9 p.m., Christchurch, New Zealand

"Well?"

Anneliese's face stared back out at Tim through his computer screen, and not only hers, but

Manjari's and Aroha's faces were present during this computer conference. Jen had declined to participate, saying that she'd made up her mind about "snotty paheka Cherie" and didn't want to know anything more about her.

"Found it." He pressed a few keys, and sent the addresses of what he'd found to his friends.

"Take a shufti at this."

It hadn't been difficult to find information on Jeff Tracy; he was a space hero, after all, and a big businessman. What was difficult to find was information on the man's private life, and in particular, his second marriage. It had been mentioned as a footnote sort of thing in the biographies Tim had found, but few if any pictures of the man as he was today existed. However, Tim was nothing if not persistent, and finally he found a few official pictures of the man, and one or two on his recent marriage.

"That's them, all right," Manjari said, shaking her head. "Same people as in Cherie's picture."

"But she could have... I dunno... taken this picture from the article and manipulated it or some such," Aroha said, her tone doubtful.

"Read the article," Tim said. "Her name is mentioned. She was in the wedding party."

"And if she was going to manipulate the picture, why put her little brothers in it?" Manjari said, making a face. She had three little brothers, and found them all to be pests. She noticed that Anneliese was quiet. "What's wrong, Liese?"

The girl was frowning. "Mrs. Tracy... she looks familiar. I'm wracking my brains but I can't figure out where I've seen her before."

"Maybe you've just seen someone who looks like her," Tim said, trying to sound encouraging.

"They say everyone has a double."

"Maybe."

"I notice that there are no pictures of the older brothers," Aroha sounded triumphant. "Even though they're listed in the article."

"I thought that was a bit dodgy myself," Tim said. "Especially since a couple of them are famous."

"Really?" Anneliese's eyes widened a bit. "Which ones?"

"Let's see: John is an astronomer bloke; he's written a few books and found some nebula somewhere. And Gordon has an Olympic gold medal and world record in swimming." He looked at one of the other articles he'd pulled up. "Oh, and Alan's a race car driver." Glancing up at his friends, he asked, "Want me to send the addys to you?"

"Sure." "Yeah." "Please."

He sent the articles to his friends, then sat back. "So, now that we've sussed this out, what do we want to do?"

The girls were silent for a bit. Then Anneliese spoke up. "I, for one, think she needs some mates. I mean, looking at the articles, she lives on a blooming island! And she's the only girl there. I bet she started the art class to meet some new people as much as for learning art."

Manjari nodded. "You ain't wrong, Liese. I'm willing to give her a chance." She paused, then asked, "How about you, bugalugs?"

Aroha frowned. "I don't wanna be a wet blanket, but I agree with Jen. I think she's skiting and snotty, even if what she says is true." She looked behind her. "And I have to go. Tata!"

Her picture disappeared, which left only Tim to be heard from. "What about it, mate?" Liese asked.

Tim looked thoughtful. "She's quite nice, I guess. I'll not be stroppy." He straightened up. "Just don't expect me to piss around with that bloody fan club of yours."

"Naff off!" Manjari said, good-naturedly. "We wouldn't have you!"

The trio laughed, and began talking about other, more interesting, matters.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 20:53:26 GMT

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Friday, Nov. 2nd, Tracy Island

As she finished the hem she was working on, Tin-Tin paused in her work. She stretched her arms over her head, trying to get rid of some of the kinks that had developed from bending over the sewing machine.

Tin-Tin glanced toward the clock on the wall, which read nine-thirty. A perfect time for a night stroll along the beach. There was something peaceful about seeing the moonlight dance upon the waves. The young woman got to her feet. She quickly got a flashlight and then headed out of her room.

Perhaps I can get Brains to join me, she thought, as she reached the scientist's room. Stopping outside the door she knocked. It wasn't long before the door opened.

"Hi, Tin-Tin! Can I do something for you?"

"I was going to take a stroll on the beach and was wondering if you would like to join me?"

"Walk on the Beach? At this hour?"

"Why not? It's perfect. No sun to glare off the sand, and it's a nice evening out."

Brains hesitated. Taking a stroll on the beach at night had never occurred to him before. Still, Tin-Tin seemed excited about it and the chance to spend some time with her would be nice.

"Let me just wrap up what I'm working on and I'd be happy to join you," Brains told her. "Come on in," he said, stepping aside so that Tin-Tin could step into his room. "Why don't you have a seat," he told her, waving a hand toward the couch. "I'll just be a moment."

Tin-Tin sat down on the couch while Brains walked over to his computer. Lena immediately hopped up next to Tin-Tin wanting attention. Reaching out, she stroked the kitten as she waited for Brains.

Meanwhile, Brains made sure his work was saved and then put the computer into hibernation, hoping to return to it after the walk. As the computer blinked off, he turned around.

"I'm ready. Let's go for that stroll."

Walking side-by-side, the two of them left the room. They walked down the hallway in silence, making their way to the main door of the villa.

The evening was warm with a slight breeze blowing. The couple headed down the path toward the beach chatting amicably about their day. It wasn't long before they were on the beach, the crashing waves the only other sound other than their voices.

As he listened to Tin-Tin talking about something funny that had happened, he reached out and took a hold of her hand. She didn't pull her hand away as the two of them continued down the beach, hand in hand.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 20:54:39 GMT

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Saturday, November 3rd, Mid-morning...

Jeff bent over his desk, doing his least favorite job, paperwork. But there were times it couldn't be avoided. And this was one of them. He finished typing up his notes on the last interviewee, and sent it on to his human resources department. He had just started in on the latest expense report when he heard someone clearing their throat. Looking up, he spied Luke standing in the doorway.

"Mr. Tracy? Could I talk to you for a few minutes?"

Jeff smiled. "Sure, Luke, come in." He waited until the young man had sat down in front of him. "What can I do for you?"

Luke handed him a file and a disc. "My report on the New England plant, sir. I don't think Burlington, Vermont is the way to go. The spotted owl is finally making a viable comeback up there, and the environmentalists tend to go overboard at any new industry trying to move into the area."

"You wouldn't happen to agree with said environmentalists, now would you?"

Luke chuckled. "There are environmentalists and there are enviro-terrorists. But don't get me started on that. I did a little research and I think Toronto is the best bet for what you're looking to do. There's an abandoned manufacturing plant right on Lake Ontario that could easily be converted. Plus, it's an already established structure so you won't have to jump through as many hoops to get the building permits. It's zoned manufacturing and right on the lake, so shipping won't be a problem either. And by using this factory, you don't have to build another, thereby lessening the environmental impact."

Jeff nodded thoughtfully, his eyes skimming the report. "Hmmm....you've done your homework here. Nice job."

"Thank-you, sir."

"In fact," Jeff closed the folder. "I'd like you to go to the Los Angeles office and give this to the Board in person."

Luke paled. "You...what?"

"Remember, the main reason Tracy Industries hired you is for just this. You'll just have to present this report, answer a few questions from the Board, things like that. Since you seem to have gathered detailed information about the property in question, I don't see the need to send you to Toronto for further study."

Luke nodded. "All right, Mr. Tracy. But I have to tell you, I hate public speaking."

Jeff laughed. "Don't we all. Now was there anything else?"

"Well, actually, yes." Luke sighed. "We're big outdoorsmen in my family, and it's currently hunting season back home in Montana. My niece is finally old enough for hunting camp and my brother emailed me last night, asking if I could get some time off so we could all go together. It's sort of a family tradition. I told him I'd have to check with you first."

Jeff frowned thoughtfully. "I don't see a problem. When were you planning on going?"

"Around the ninth of this month, sir."

His employer pulled a calendar up on the screen. "I think that would work fine. You could spend time with your family, then report to the LA office later in the week, around the fifteenth. Will that give you enough time?"

"Yes, it should. Thank-you, sir."

"You're welcome, Luke."

"Mr. Tracy, there is one other thing." Luke took a deep breath. "I'm used to attending church



services pretty regularly. I haven't been since I got here and...well, I'm missing it. I made a few inquiries and there's a Catholic church in Christchurch that holds Mass every Sunday at ten. Scott said I was progressing well in the simulator and that it would be a good idea for me to get some actual flight time in. I thought maybe I could kill two birds with one stone and fly with someone to the mainland every couple of Sundays."

"That would be fine. I'm sure any of the boys would be glad to take you." He looked thoughtfully at Luke. "You're not a prisoner here, Luke. You're free to ask for whatever it is you need. It's your home, after all. Granted, I may not be able to give in to every request, but I'll try my best."

Luke smiled in relief. "Yes, sir."

"And stop with all the 'sir-ring'. I've been out of the military for quite some time now."

"Yes, si-- Mr. Tracy." Luke grinned. "I guess I'd better go get in touch with my family. Let them know I'm coming home." He started towards the door, then paused. "Where will I be staying in LA? A hotel?"

Jeff shook his head. "No. We have a house that we use for occasions like this. There are enough furnishings in it to look completely lived in. You're not the first agent to use it. Will you be taking Rommel with you?"

Luke nodded. "My mother would kill me if I left him behind. And I've found out that he can fly commercially if he's working." He blushed slightly. "I just need to make him wear his vest and say we're on our way somewhere. I hate to do it but it really cuts down the red tape."

"Right. We'll work out the logistics of getting you to the States later on. Enjoy the rest of your day, Luke."

"I will. You too." With a wave, Luke left.

Jeff sighed and turned back to his paperwork. "If only I could..."

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 20:55:20 GMT

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Virgil, Cherie and Cassie sat at one end of the dining room table. In front of Virgil was a data pad which he was using to make up the contract for the mural project. The three had been ironing out details for almost the last half hour. Ideally, it should have been done sooner but with everything that had been going on they hadn't found the time. Now he looked over it, trying to decide if anything had been missed.

They had worked out the payment, agreeing on a fee for work done of the mural. In addition, Cassie was paying for any materials that might be needed. Virgil would help Cherie pick up the necessary supplies once the sketches and plans had been made and she was ready to start on the mural itself. A tentative schedule had been mapped out, giving Cherie deadlines to shoot for.

"I think the only thing left to figure out is exactly how we're going to go about doing the mural," Virgil said looking up from the data pad. "The most obvious method would be to do it right on the wall but that has some drawbacks, like Cherie actually needing to be in your apartment to do it."

Cassie nodded. "And if the apartment ever ended up getting repainted for some reason, the mural would have to be painted over."

"Right. That would leave painting the mural on a canvas and then hanging the canvas."

Cherie thought about the sketches she had been working on, and the mental image she had of how they would all go together in the big project. "The canvas would be on the big side, wouldn't it?" she ventured.

"Yeah, it would. Which means we would need to figure out a place for you to work on it and then how to move and hang it when you've completed it."

The three of them sat in silence for a few moments, thinking about the problem. The canvas solved the drawbacks of painting directly on the wall. If only they could figure out a way to solve the current issue. Cassie knew enough about canvases to know that breaking it into smaller pieces wasn't as straightforward as it sounded. The frame needed for the canvas would make the parts of the canvas obvious whether the frame was on the outside or underneath the canvas. Of course, sometimes that was the effect the artist was looking for. She remembered seeing works of art in the museums in New York like that - part of the whole picture had been painted on a smaller squares and then the squares hung to form the intended image.

Would something like that work in this instance? Cassie wondered?

Cassie spoke up, voicing her thought. She could see the two artists thinking about the concept. She knew they would know better than she whether the concept could be applied in this instance.

"You know that might work," Virgil said finally. "It's going to give the image as a whole a kind of broken effect though, but if you don't mind that, it would solve the size issue."

Cassie shook her head as Virgil continued. "Breaking it up would make it easy to find a place to work on it, move it and you could also take it with you if you were to ever leave." He looked to his sister. "It does mean more effort on the planning side of things. Think you're up for it?"

Cherie had been considering the concept in silence herself. She knew Virgil would give her any help she needed and if it was planned well enough, the execution shouldn't be much harder than if she were to do the mural as a whole.

"Yeah. I'm for doing it that way."

"Okay, that's settled then. That will affect the schedule some though," Virgil said, picking up the pad so the necessary changes could be made to the contract.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 20:56:16 GMT

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She wasn't much to look at, rather mousy, and most of her features could be considered "average". Only her eyes, with their keen gaze, could be considered more than ordinary. She took in everything, filing it away. Yes, she was here for the interview with Tracy, but it was part of a larger scheme for her true employers.

Everyone she came in contact with treated her graciously, and when she was introduced to both Kyrano and Mrs. Tracy, she filed their faces and names away for later retrieval. She answered their questions, trying not to seem too eager, trying not to seem too formal, trying not to seem uninterested. The balance was hard to maintain, and she noticed that Mrs. Tracy, in particular, was frowning slightly and often.

Finally, they escorted her downstairs to see the facilities. She passed through the study, making a quick note of its location and furnishings. Going downstairs, she noticed the lift that they passed, and heard a snippet of a Spanish lesson being held in a room opposite the study. Classroom, she thought.

Passing through the dining room, she noticed the style of furnishings and the set up of the room. All of it tucked away in her head, just as if she were taking photographs. She'd been asked to bring a hidden camera, but she declined. If she was caught with it, her chances of getting the job -- and a long term position from which to watch the Tracys and report on them -- would be totally blown. No, her real employers would have to make do with her eidetic memory, and her communiqués.

The kitchen offered more fodder for her thoughts. No one was there when she entered, tagging along at Kyrano's heels, but one of the sons came in. Gordon, was what the old lady called him. He asked what was for dinner, and she'd replied they were having steamed mahi-mahi and rice pilaf. He'd asked, jokingly, if it were fresh-caught. She'd replied, no, it was frozen. He replied that everyone would eat it then, knowing he hadn't caught it. It seemed to be some sort of inside joke.

Then Kyrano put her to the test: prepare an omelet. There were several different ingredients available, but she decided to go the minimalist route. Eggs, a bit of milk, a touch of salt and pepper. Keep watching it so it doesn't burn. The pans were nice; they made flipping it easy. Top of the line cookware. Would be a pleasure doing this job if she got it. And getting paid twice would be a bonus.

They tasted it, and nodded. Both approved of her choices and liked her technique.

"Now," the old lady said, smiling. "For another test."

She pulled out a tray covered with a cloth, and uncovered it. On it was flour, shortening, seasonings, and in a big bowl, some fresh apples. "Please, make an apple pie."

"Apple pie."

Damn. Why a bloody apple pie? Why not something less... American? But these people are

Yanks, aren't they? She stifled a sigh, and began.

Whoever said things were easy as pie had obviously never made one. Rolling out the crust had to be the hardest part of the whole thing. And both of them were there, watching, evaluating her. Finally, the bloody thing was in the oven, and she could go sit in the dining room as it baked. They'd made her a cuppa -- good tea, too, the best kind. She almost wanted the job now that she thought she'd made a bloody mess of the whole thing.

An older woman, plump, silver-haired, came through the dining room. She smiled, asked if things were all right, then headed for the kitchen. The timer went off, and she got up, taking her cuppa with her as she pulled the pie from the oven.

"It will take time to cool," Kyrano told her. "Why don't you wait on the patio and enjoy the sun as it does?"

Another cuppa fixed, and she was led to the patio, where she could watch people swimming in the pool. She took out a small cigar and had a smoke; she'd been able to douse the craving before, but here, outside... wouldn't hurt, would it?

As she lit up, a dark-haired boy came by, dressed for the pool. He stopped to look at her, and frowned, but didn't say anything before running off. She groaned internally. Trust a sprog to be a nosey parker. Her smoking would be common knowledge before long. And, it seemed, no one here indulged.

Eventually, Kyrano came out and told her that the pie was cool enough to eat. By the time she arrived back in the kitchen, three pieces were gone, and had been consumed by Kyrano, the old lady, and the plump lady, who was introduced to her as Lisa. She tried a piece herself; it wasn't bad, but her pastry left much to be desired, and she knew it.

It seemed that they'd discussed her good points and bad points before bringing her back inside, and when she was guided back upstairs to see Mr. Tracy, he smiled and told her she was heading back to Christchurch. The son she'd seen in the kitchen, Gordon, had been deputized to fly her there, with someone named Alan as his co-pilot. They were eager to go, so she shook hands with Mr. Tracy and the others, murmured something inane and harmless, and got in the cart to head back down to the air strip. She sat in the passenger cabin for the half hour trip, and took a cab to the hotel she'd been told was expecting her.

Once ensconced in her room, she pulled her hair from its confines and brushed it out well. Then she put on some make-up, and made a call on her satellite phone. The call took a few moments to place; the other party was on the other side of the world, after all.

He picked up and she smiled at him. "Hello, Giles?"

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 20:56:56 GMT

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Saturday, 3rd November, 8:30pm

Nikki paused the football match she was watching and made her way to the kitchen to check on the meal she was cooking. Because she never missed a televised game when she was living in England, she begged her brother to record the matches and send them to her via the computer.

Nikki first checked on the rice before checking what was in the oven. "Mmm, coming along nicely. Right, the oven can turn off now along with the vegetables and the table is already set. I'll turn off the rice once I change and look decent." As Nikki made her way to her bedroom, she froze at the sound of the door chime. She looked at her watch. "It's too early for Alan. I wonder who it is?"

Opening the door, Nikki looked surprised at who was standing in front of her. "Alan."

"Hey, Nikki. So I didn't know what you were cooking and couldn't decide on red or white wine, so I brought both."

"You're early. And I look scruffy."

Alan laughed. "You look fine to me."

"Ripped jeans and a top with Jerk sauce on it."

"Jerk sauce?"

"You'll see. Come in, make yourself comfortable and I'll go and get changed."

"Ok," Alan said as he closed the apartment door. "You know I didn't notice the sauce on your top."

"Yeah right," Nikki called out.

Alan glanced at the computer screen before walking over to the kitchen, "Smells good," he called out.

"Thanks. But if you take a peek at what's cooking, you won't get any at all."

"I wasn't even thinking of looking." Alan looked at the TV again. "You were watching a soccer game."

"No I was watching a football match," Nikki joked, knowing full well what Alan meant.

Alan smiled. "Who's playing and which team are you supporting? It only says Che1 and Man Utd 1."

"It's Chelsea against Manchester United and I support Chelsea."

"Hmmm, one all at the moment. I bet Manchester will win it."

"Ha ha, very funny. Do you actually want to get some dinner tonight?"

It wasn't long before Nikki came out of her room dressed in a pair of black trousers and a pink off the shoulder peasant top. She clapped her hands together. "Right, despite what you said about my football team, I decided I will give you dinner. How does a Caribbean meal sound to you?"

"It sounds good. I'll help you dish."

"Oh no you don't. You're a guest here."

"Ok, but don't say that I didn't offer to help." Alan sat down at the table while Nikki dished up dinner. "Now you mentioned something about Jerk sauce earlier. What is it?"

"It's a marinade really, consisting of herbs, spices and peppers. I didn't put a lot on though, because I didn't know what your limit on spicy food would be." Nikki placed a plate in front of Alan. "Here you go. Jerk Chicken, rice and peas and a medley of vegetables."

"You sound like a waitress from a restaurant."

"Does that mean I'll get a tip at the end of the evening?" Nikki asked as she sat down opposite Alan.

"Thinking about it." Alan replied.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 20:57:36 GMT

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After the meal and cleaning up, which Alan insisted on helping with, both Alan and Nikki relaxed in the living room. Nikki transferred the game from the computer to the television and both of them watched the match for about five minutes, until conversation and joking around took over.

Nikki laughed. She paused when Alan gave her look, but proceeded to laugh again, "I'm sorry Alan, it's just that...I can't believe you broke every window of your university with a single rocket. That must've been some record."

"Well, everyone at Colorado University definitely knew my name after that incident." He looked at Nikki and smiled. "I guess it is a bit funny."

"See."

"So come on."

"Come on what?"

"It's your turn."

"Trust me; I don't have a story that can top that. I didn't cause mass destruction during my school

or uni days."

"Ok, well, I'm sure there was something you must have done in your life. Unless you led a perfect life."

"I didn't lead a perfect life." Nikki cringed. "Ok, I didn't cause mass destruction but I did cause a mass panic in school."

"Panic? What happened? Skipped out of school and made everyone think that you were missing?" Alan joked.

"No. More like set off the fire alarm, by accident, got the whole school evacuated thinking it was a fire. Bright side, we got to see fire engines."

"How do you set off an alarm by accident?"

"First of all, I was only eight years old and didn't mean to do it. Anyway a mate of mine was showing off his karate skills. So I tried it and ended up kicking the alarm."

Alan laughed. "Excluded from school."

"Suspended for two days and grounded for a week. Let's just say that my mum was not overly impressed. She had to take me to her workplace during my suspension. My dad saw the funny side to it after about an hour or so."

"Your punishment doesn't sound too bad."

"To an eight-year-old being grounded is."

"And suspension?"

"Two days off school. Need I say more?"

"You were right you know; your story was good but doesn't top mine."

"I told you."

It was quiet for a while before Alan spoke up, "You know, we should do this again. But next time, I'll cook."

"You can cook?"

"Yeah."

Nikki looked skeptical.

"Ok, maybe I need help in some areas but I can cook."

"Ok, ok. I'll take your word for it. So what are you going to make?"

"You'll have to wait and see." Alan looked at his watch. "I didn't realise it was that late. I better get going."

"Or they'll send out a search party?" Nikki got up with Alan and walked towards the door with him.

"I doubt it." Alan stopped at the door and turned to Nikki. "Thanks for dinner. It was great. Not too spicy."

Nikki smiled. "I'm glad you liked it. I'll happily give you the recipe."

"I get the feeling that it won't taste the same if I tried to make it." Alan laughed along with Nikki. "Well, goodnight."

"Goodnight Alan."

Putting his hand on one cheek, Alan leant down and kissed the other cheek. Nikki closed her eyes at his touch. She wished she had the courage to just come out with it and tell Alan how she felt. She opened her eyes as Alan pulled away slightly, with his hand still on her cheek.

Feeling that there was nothing to lose, Nikki decided to speak up. "Alan, there's something that I..."

"Shh." Alan's thumb traced over Nikki's lips before he moved closer and kissed her softly.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 20:57:58 GMT

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Sunday, November 4; 11:30 AM; Tracy Island (7:30 PM the previous evening in Silver Spring)

Brains sat down at his computer, and turned it on. He brought up a file and once again (probably for the fifth time) checked to verify that everything he wanted to send Lena was there. He started to reach for his phone when Tin-Tin walked in.

"Brains, it's Sunday, and it's beautiful outside. You're not going to spend the day working in the lab. I insist you take the day to rest and recharge."

He turned to reply, but instead his eyes lit up when he saw her in a swimsuit and robe. "How can I resist you when you look like that?"

She blushed and said, "Oh, Brains!" Quickly regaining her composure, she added, "But I'm serious. I know you have a lot on your plate, but you know you'd work more efficiently and quickly if you took some time off each week. And it's much too nice a day to spend it inside."

He grinned at her. "Actually, Tin-Tin, I was only going to be here for a short time. Will came up



with an idea for our camera detection and fogger system. I'm sending the specs to Lena to see if she thinks it's feasible, and, if so, to work on it. I was just about to call her when you walked in."

"You were? In that case, I'm staying. I'd love to say hello to her, myself."

He reached over to dial Lena's number once more as he said, "Pull up a chair, then. Afterward, we'll head out to the pool."

Tin-Tin did as he suggested and sat next to him just as Lena answered. She had activated the video portion, after noting the caller's name.

"Hello, Brains. And Tin-Tin, too? Does dis mean dat you have some special news for me?"

Once again Tin-Tin blushed as Brains grinned and said, "If you mean what I think you do, not yet. You do know that Kyrano and Lisa are getting married, right?"

"Oh yes; Tin-Tin emailed me de news some time ago. Have dey set a date yet?"

"They're getting married here on December 28. That way Lisa's family can have their Christmas, fly out here, and have a few days to visit. They'll be able to adjust to their own time zones before their work and school week begins again. Plus, it'll be summertime here, so they can get away from the cold weather for a bit."

"Now dat'll be a nice change. And it'll give me time to send my gift. You give dem my best, honey."

"I will, Lena."

"And de rest of de residents on your island? How are dey?"

"All fine. We have a few new recruits, and working on getting more. We had them all with us for a Halloween party on Wednesday, and had a wonderful time," Tin-Tin replied. She then proceeded to tell Lena about the costumes and things that occurred. Lena laughed at hearing about Gordon's costume, and expressed her sympathy at Callie's plight. Finally, the catching up was done.

"Now, Brains. What's de real reason you called?"

He chuckled. Lena had come to know him pretty quickly. "I have a project for you. I'll be sending you a file with all the specs, but I wanted to tell you about it, instead of just emailing you."

"Sounds intriguing. Tell away."

"We have a camera detection system and fogger on some of our Thunderbirds. When we're at a rescue, if someone tries to take pictures or video of our vehicles or equipment, it sends a signal and the pilot broadcasts a warning after switching on the fogger. Our new mechanic, Will, suggested that it should turn on automatically when we're a certain distance from the rescue site, and the range might be increased."

"Dat sounds like a good idea to me. I presume de file is ready to be sent to me."

"It is."

"Well, I'm online, so go ahead."

Brains hit the "Send" button and said, "On the way, Lena. How've you been, by the way? Any trouble with your shoulder or concussion?"

"Not a bit, for which I'm very glad. I'm back to full time at work, and haven't had any side effects."

"And your family?"

"All well. De grandbabies and great-grandbabies are growing like weeds." She chuckled as she opened the file. "We're going to have Tanksgiving at Matthew's house; he has de largest TV I've ever seen; de men -- and some of de women -- are trilled dat dey can watch de football games on it."

"Sounds like he's going to have a house full."

"More dan you know; some of de in-laws will be dere, too. I haven't tried to count dem up; dat's going to be Amelia's job." Her face became more intent as she looked at the specs. "At first glance, I believe dat it's feasible to do what your mechanic suggests. I'll have to look it over some more, dough, before I'm sure. I'll get back to you in a few days, Brains."

"No hurry, Lena. I'll look forward to hearing from you, though."

"All right. Give my love to everyone, you two."

"We will," Tin-Tin answered. "And ours to you and your family."

Lena's smile was the last thing they saw as the connection terminated.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 20:59:03 GMT

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Sunday, November 4, noon; Tracy Island

Brandon was calculating the time difference between the island and San Diego for the fourth time when his phone rang. He saw who was calling, and answered, saying, "Hi, Sis. I was gonna call you, but it's too early. I'm glad you emailed me. . ."

"Brandon."

"... reminding me that Daylight Savings Time started this morning. I've been..."

"Brandon!"

"...calculating over and over to make sure I get it right. But you beat me to the punch. Didn't you..."

"Brandon!"

"What?" He suddenly realized that Shannon sounded upset. "What's wrong?"

"It's Mom. I had to go to the store. I wasn't gone for more than half an hour, but Dad fell, attempting to stand on his own. She tried to help him up, but she's so frail."

He heard the catch in her voice. "She's not..." He couldn't go on.

"No. She's alive. But she's in the hospital again. She had a heart attack, then, in the ambulance, she also had a stroke. It wasn't a severe one, thank God. The doctors say she'll recover, but not fully."

He couldn't say a word. He knew what was coming next, but he couldn't bring himself to say what he knew his sister wanted to hear. But as the silence lengthened, he finally found himself able to speak. "How's Dad?"

"He's at home with a nurse there. He's really broken up about this, and feeling guilty for allowing her to try to help him. Brandon..."

"I know, Sis. It'll be all right."

"Brandon, please. I need you. We need you. Here."

"I know. I just kept hoping... Well, there's no point indulging in wishful thinking. I guess this time it's gonna have to be permanent."

"I'm sorry, bro. I know how much you love your job. But I can't handle this myself any longer. Please come home."

He sighed. "I'll have to talk to my supervisor, first. There's a lot to arrange. I'll call you back in the afternoon on your cell phone, and let you know the what, when, and how."

There was a long pause. "Okay, Brandon. Somehow, I was wishing you could instantly come, that you'd be here in five minutes. But that can't happen, even if you could leave this minute."

"I'm sorry you have to bear all this alone right now. But I'll come home as soon as possible. Hang in there, Sis."

"I will, but the sooner you get here, the better."

"I'll talk to you later. Bye."

"Bye, Brandon."

He hung up, then sat with his head in his hands for several minutes. Damn! Just when everything's going okay, this happens. Why me? Why them? It's not fair!

Finally he called the Villa, and asked Jeff if he could come over and talk to him right away. He got an affirmative answer, and left his apartment, taking the monorail to the main house. When he got there, Kyrano was waiting for him. "Mr. Tracy is waiting for you in the lounge. Dr. Tracy is with him."

"Thank you, Kyrano." Brandon headed quickly up to the familiar room. As he walked in, Jeff looked up at him.

"Hello, Brandon. What can I do for you?" The smile on his face faded when he saw the expression on Brandon's. "What's the matter?"

"My sister, Shannon, called me. My mother's back in the hospital. She had a heart attack, trying to help my dad when he fell. On the way to the hospital, she also had a stroke."

"Oh no!" Brandon turned to see Dianne get up from where she was sitting and walk over to him. She put a hand on his arm. "How serious is it?"

"It wasn't a severe stroke. My sister says she was told Mom'll recover, but not fully." He paused, hating what he had to say next. "She also said she needs me to come home. Permanently." He sighed. "So I'm -- reluctantly -- tendering my resignation, effective immediately."

"I'm sorry to hear that. But, of course, your family needs you there. Please sit down." As Brandon obeyed, Jeff turned to his computer and Dianne moved around the desk to see what he was doing. A few minutes later, they looked at each other. Dianne smiled and nodded at her husband, then went back over to where Brandon was sitting.

"Brandon, I accept your resignation, on one condition. I want you to return to your old job at Tracy Industries. Do you think that will be acceptable to your family?"

The look on the young man's face went from sadness, to stunned, to joy. "If I can't work here any more, that's the only other thing I'd want to do, sir. I don't deserve it, though."

"Let me be the judge of that, young man. You'll do what you were doing before you joined International Rescue. In addition, should we come up with a new model of any kind of aquatic vehicle in the future that we can use in rescues, you'll be the one to test it, since you'd already know what we'd be looking for."

Brandon stood up and walked to the desk, hand held out to Jeff. "Thank you, sir. I accept."

Jeff shook his hand, then said, "Well then, what's needed is to get you packed and home again. Do you think you could be ready by tomorrow morning? I suspect your sister wants you there yesterday."

"Oh yeah. Too bad I couldn't transport myself there, like they did in those old Star Trek shows and movies." He grinned slightly.

There were chuckles from the others, then Jeff said, "Okay. I'll have a flight plan filed. And I think I'll have Alan go with you. You'll stop in Honolulu to refuel, then fly straight to San Diego. I'll let you know about times later, so you can tell your sister."

"Thank you, again. I'd better get back to my apartment and start packing my things."

"I'll talk to Kyrano and have him scrounge up some boxes for you. We'll bring them over later."

"Thank you, Doc. I'll appreciate that." Brandon headed out of the lounge and back to the monorail.

As he walked into the common area, Callie stepped out of the elevator. "Hi, Brandon. What's up?"

His face saddened. "I have to leave, Callie."

"Leave? Where are you going?"

"Home. I got a call from Shannon. My mom's had a heart attack and a stroke."

"Oh, that's terrible. Is she going to be okay?"

"They say she'll recover, but not fully. I have to go help."

"How long do you think you'll be gone?"

Brandon grew sadder. "Permanently, I'm sad to say. And I'm going to miss you all."

"Oh no! We'll miss you too. When are you leaving?"

"Tomorrow."

"Tomorrow!? Can you be all packed and ready by then?"

"If I have to stay up all night, I will be."

"No; you won't have to do that. I'm gonna go back into my apartment and make a couple of calls. Then I'll come help you. And I think I won't be the only one."

Gratitude swept through Brandon, and he reached out and hugged Callie. "You're a good friend. Thank you."

She returned the hug, then disengaged and gave him a gentle push toward the elevator. "Go on, now. I'll join you, soon."

She headed back into her apartment, and he headed up to his. Another chapter in his life was ending, and a new one was about to begin.

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"That was delicious, Cass!" Luke said, as Cassie picked up his empty plate.

"Thanks," she replied, heading to the sink with the plates and silverware they had used. She rinsed things off in the sink and placed them on the counter to be washed later. "Do you want some more ice tea?"

"No, thanks."

Cassie grabbed the dish rag from the sink, and walked back to the table.

"Is the stuff to do the invitations somewhere that I can get it?" Luke asked, as Cassie wiped down the table.

"Everything is in that pile there on my desk," Cassie replied, nodding in that direction. "Thanks," she told him, as her friend got up and went to retrieve the things.

Luke found the pile she was talking about and picked it up. "Hey, Cass, I've got a favor to ask you," he said as he headed back to the table.

"What is it?"

"Well, Elise's birthday is on Tuesday and I was wondering if you would bake a cake for me to give her. You know how limited my cooking skills are."

"Sure, not a problem. What flavor - chocolate?"

"Well, if it was for me, of course," Luke replied, grinning. There was a short pause. "You know, I'm not sure what Elise's favorite flavor is. "

"Well, I've seen her eat chocolate so maybe we should just play it safe. I'll bake it tomorrow."

"Thanks!" Luke said, reaching the table and placing the things down.

Luke sat back down and it wasn't long before Cassie joined him. Cassie had slid her chair over closer to Luke. She picked up one of the invitations she had made out of pale blue card stock. She had put the same Japanese characters on it as were on the tea cups.

"This is what I came up with for the outside. What I need help with is printing the information on the inside."

"These are really good, Cass."

"I was also going to put one of these in each one," she said picking up a small piece of paper off the top of a pile. "It explains a little bit about the Japanese Tea Ceremony."

Luke skimmed it over. It was basically a quick overview of the history behind the ceremony as well as etiquette for such an event. Luke found it very informative.

"This will give everyone a good idea about what to expect and give them an idea if they'll enjoy it or not."

"That's what I was going for," Cassie replied.

"However, it says that guests can take cues from the Shokyaku, but what exactly should the Shokyaku do?"

"Don't worry, I'll fill you in later," Cassie told him, patting his shoulder.

"You better."

Cassie pulled out the piece of paper where she had written out the information for the inside of the invitations on, and placed it on the table between the two of them. They each took one of the invitations, and started printing the information onto it.

Cassie was just about to start on a second one when her cell phone rang. Standing up, she walked into the living area, where the phone was sitting on the end table. She picked it up and saw Callie's name on the screen.

"Hey, Callie! What's up?" she asked, answering the phone. She listened as Callie told her about what was going on with Brandon.

"So, I was thinking," Callie continued, "that a group of us could get together and help him pack up tonight."

Cassie was surprised to hear that Brandon was leaving and felt bad for the aquanaut. She had an idea of what he was feeling and knew how hollow words of sympathy would sound. Showing support by helping him get ready to leave would mean more than anything that could be said.

"Count me in," Cassie told her.

"Okay, thanks. I'm going to call some of the others and let them know what's going on. How about we all meet at Brandon's in about a half hour."

"I'll be there. Luke is here with me, so I'll fill him in."

"Okay, and thanks Cassie."

Cassie ended the call and then turned to Luke who was looking at her curiously. Sitting back at the table she started telling him what she had just learned.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Sunday, Nov 4th, 12:30, Tracy Island( 1:30 p.m. previous day, Hawaii)

"That was so neat!"

"I loved seeing the coral reef. I'm so glad you convinced me to go scuba diving, Phil," Sara commented, her voice conveying her excitement.

"I'm glad you went! I definitely wanted to share this experience with you," Phil replied, putting his arm across his new bride's shoulders.

Behind the wheel of the boat, Vince Crenshaw listened idly to the talk going on around him. This group wasn't much different than the other groups he had taken out in the last three years of running Blue Waters Dive shop. For the most part, everyone enjoyed the dive trips, even those who hadn't been scuba diving before, like Sara. Like all the groups who had a lot of beginners, Vincent had gotten to know a little bit about the five people on his boat, having taught them the basics in a couple of sessions leading up to this trip. Phil and his friend Derek had both been diving previously but the three women had not.

Vince remembered the excitement of his first dive, though it had been a long time ago. Despite the overcast day, at sixteen he couldn't think that anything could look any more amazing than that underwater world he had discovered. It had been with the scuba class he had joined at the Y, and he and his friends in the class had talked about the trip for the next couple of weeks. It was at that point that he had fallen in love with the ocean. Nowadays, dives all seemed routine, though when he went with his son, he did enjoy the time it gave the two of them together.

I wonder where I lost that excitement, Vince thought as he slowed the boat down, the dock now in sight.

Vince docked the boat and assisted his customers off, thanking each of them for coming. As they headed up the dock and toward the parking lot, Vince started gathering the shop gear that had been used. He did so at a faster pace than usual, wanting to leave for the Veterans Memorial Aquatic Center in Waipahu. With any luck, he'd be able to catch his son's last race for the day.

"Hey, Vince. Just leave the stuff. I'll get it," Jim told his boss, making his way down the dock. "Get going, so you can catch the end of the swim meet."

"The shop?"

"Adam's watching the shop and we can manage closing. Now scram."

Vince didn't need to be told again. He knew his employees were capable of handling the shop. Though with the shop closed tomorrow he would be able to attend the second day of the meet, he still wanted to try and catch one of his son's races today.

"I'm going! Thanks, Jim," Vince said, climbing off the boat and heading quickly up the dock, passing Jim on the way.



\*\*\*

The main pool of the Aquatic Center was packed when Vincent walked in. As no one was in the pool, Vince figured they were between races. He glanced around for his wife and in-laws. It didn't take him long to spot them as Lea had already spotted him and was waving from where she sat on her mother's lap. Waving back, Vince headed in their direction.

"You made it in time for Aaron's last race," Lana told him as he approached. "It'll be after this race."

"Great," Vince replied. He leaned down and gave his wife a kiss and then picked up Lea, who was reaching out to him. "How's your brother doing?"

"He's won twice!" Lea replied, excitedly.

"Have a seat, Vince," Anela said, having slid over on the bench to the spot behind her daughter's wheelchair, giving her son-in-law some room to sit down.

"Thanks, Ma," Vince commented, sitting down. Lea settled in her father's lap as the swimmers began taking their places for the start of the race.

After the 15-16 year old division swam the 200 meter backstroke, it was time for the Open division swimmers. The crowd cheered as the swimmers approached the starting end of the pool. Vince spotted his son in lane six.

"Go, Aaron," Vince yelled.

Hearing his name, Aaron glanced over to where he had spotted his family earlier. He was happy to see that his father had been able to join them. Aaron gave a quick thumbs up before jumping into the pool.

Moments later the gun went off, signaling the start of the race. Like most of the crowd, Vince and his family were cheering. Aaron took the early lead, though several others were easily keeping pace with him. As the swimmers took the final turn, Aaron starting pulling out in front of the others.

Lea had abandoned her father's lap. She was standing in front of him, hopping up and down while cheering for her brother.

Aaron easily won the race. The surprise came with the next announcement.

"Ladies and gentleman, we have a new record! Aaron Kanekalau-Crenshaw has beaten the Hawaiian Swimming record for the 200 meter Backstroke with a time of 2:06.22!"  
[/size][color]

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Sunday, November 4, 2068, 7:45 p.m., Tracy Island.

The noise at the dinner table subsided when Jeff tapped his glass with a spoon. All of the recruits were there, necessitating a second table, where the children and the elder folk sat.

He stood. "Thank you all for coming and having dinner with us this evening. I know it's not our usual big spread, but it was short notice, and Kyrano did a stellar job in preparing enough food for us all."

There was a murmuring of assent from those around the table, and several raised their glasses to salute Kyrano.

"We're gathered together for a sad occasion. Tonight, we say goodbye to one of our own. Brandon is leaving our crew tomorrow morning and returning home. For good."

Now the some of the murmurs were confused and concerned, and Tyler asked outright, "Why? Why are you going home?"

Brandon coughed a little, clearing his throat. "I... I got a call from my sister today. My mom -- she's had both a heart attack and a stroke." There were sounds of surprise and consternation from family members around the table. He continued. "She's in the hospital, but it's going to take a long while for her to recover from this. My sister -- she's been pulling the freight, but this is beyond her. I need to be home to help out. I want to be home to help. So, I'm leaving tomorrow morning, bright and early. I'm going back to San Diego, and my old job."

He glanced around the room. "You've all been great to me, teaching me, working with me -- a man couldn't find a better family, or a better organization to serve. But my own family needs me more now. Sure, I could be out there saving the world, but what is that if I can't save my own folks?" He turned his gaze to Jeff. "Thanks, Mr. Tracy, for giving me this chance. It meant so much to me."

He turned to Scott. "Scott? Thanks, man, for teaching me how to fly. I never would have done it if not for you pounding it into my head."

His eyes focused on Gordon next. "Gords, you rock! That little sub of yours -- I am so jealous of you, because Four is yours. I borrowed her for a while, but her heart belongs to you. I'm only sad that I didn't get to see the hydrofoil built, but I understand that, sometimes, priorities change. Just like they're changing with me now."

"Callie, you've been a great friend. You all have been. No one could find better friends than I found here." Smiling, with a touch of sadness in the smile, he looked around the rest of the room. "I consider it an honor to have known you and served with you all."

Gordon rose to his feet, and raised his glass. "To Brandon, a better hand at scuttling a Cunard and cutting out a P and O, never shipped a hand spike."

There were groans around the table, and Alan even went so far as to throw a balled up linen napkin at his brother. Gordon grinned, then sobered. "Seriously now, to Brandon. A good friend, a fine sailor, a better submariner, and a man who embodies the spirit of International Rescue."

Glasses were raised around the room. "Hear, Hear!"

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:00:52 GMT

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Sunday, November 4, 2068, 8:30 p.m., Tracy Island

Brandon stacked some of his books on the coffee table. Callie was still working with him; Dom had been there and gone, needing to put a fractious Joshua to bed, and Nikki was going to see if she could scrounge some boxes from her room. Elise and Cassie were down in the laundry; to his chagrin, Brandon had let his laundry go a little too long.

"We need more boxes," Callie said, passing her hand back through her hair.

"Maybe Luke has a few," Brandon suggested. "Why don't I go ask him?"

"Uh, yeah. Sure." Callie sounded less than enthused. Even the mention of his name brought the memory of Halloween night, and made her squirm internally. In fact, when Luke came down to offer his help, she made an excuse to leave, and didn't return until after dinner was over.

There was the sound of the door buzzer, going off in the cadence known as "shave and a haircut, two bits".

"I'll get that," Callie said, hurrying over to the elevator door. She knew that Luke, being right next door, wouldn't take the elevator up.

She pushed the button to open the door and found both Will and Gordon standing there, a stack of boxes next to them. "Hey, Callie!" Gordon said. "We come bringing gifts."

"Oh, great! Just what we needed!" She reached out to take some of the boxes, but Gordon and Will were there before her, and toted them inside.

"Hey, guys!" Brandon smiled widely. "You came just in the nick of time."

Will looked around the room. "Looks like you got a lot done. I'd have been back up sooner, but Gordon asked me to give him a hand hauling the boxes up."

"Not that they weigh too much or anything," Gordon exclaimed. "They're just awkward to handle when they're empty and stacked."

"So, what do we need to pack next?" Will asked.

"Books," Brandon said, taking a box for himself. "There shouldn't be too much else after that; bedding, clothes and kitchen stuff, mostly."

"Tell you what," Gordon said. "I'll start in the kitchen; I'm good at packing things so they don't break."

"I bet you are!" Callie said. "With your practical jokes and all."

Gordon grinned. "Nothing spoils a joke faster than an element that breaks before its time." With that, he took two boxes into the kitchen.

"I'll start folding and packing the bedding," Callie said, disappearing into the bedroom.

"Looks to me like you'll be done well before midnight," Will said as he sealed the box of books he'd been packing.

"Yeah." Brandon sighed. He glanced around the room. "Plenty of time to spare."

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:01:16 GMT

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Monday, November 5th, just after 8 a.m., TI . . .

Checking to make sure she had everything, Cassie picked up the containers and the two bags and headed for the patio doors. She balanced everything in one hand long enough to unlock and open the door. Outside the sun was shining and a gentle breeze blew across the patio. It didn't take her long to walk the short distance to Brandon's apartment.

"Come on in," Brandon told her upon sliding the door to his apartment open.

"As promised, one omelet breakfast," she commented, stepping inside. Even though she had helped with the packing the night before, the bare apartment seemed strange.

The two of them made their way over to the table. Along with the omelets, Cassie had brought orange juice and blueberry muffins as well as the dishes and utensils they needed.

The meal was a quiet one. Brandon wasn't much in the mood for idle conversation and Cassie wasn't sure what to say. Most of the things that came to mind seemed inadequate given the situation.

"This is really good," Brandon commented, after swallowing his first bit of the blueberry muffin. "Did you make these yourself?"

"Yes and I'm glad you like them because I brought some for you to take with you," she replied, indicating the second bag she had brought with her. "There's something else in there for you too."

Curious, Brandon pulled the bag closer to him. He looked inside and saw an object wrapped in tissue paper. Pulling it out he unwrapped it.

"Though you might like something to remember us all by," Cassie said softly. She had printed out a five by seven of the photo of the recruits at the party. As she hadn't had time to get a new frame, she had taken one of her pictures out of its frame and put this one in.

"Thank-you. You didn't have to go to the trouble though."

"It wasn't any trouble. Besides, it's the least I could do after the scuba lessons you gave me."

"I was just doing my job."

"You did more than that. You made it fun and your enthusiasm for it was contagious. I know I'm definitely not going to forget my first dive."

"I wish I could be here to finish your training. I guess Gordon will take over now."

Cassie nodded. She had figured the same thing though nothing official had been said yet.

"It won't be the same though," she told him.

"Make sure you write and tell me how it goes."

"I will."

Cassie glanced toward the clock. It was ten after nine. Brandon followed her gaze.

"Callie should be here soon. She's going to help me take things down to the airstrip."

"Then I should probably start cleaning this stuff up."

"I'll help."

"Nonsense. The only thing you need to worry about is finding a place for those muffins and the picture. I'll clean up."

"Yes, ma'am," Brandon said lightly, holding his arms out for a hug. Cassie took the few steps necessary to give him one. "Thanks for everything. I wish we would have had more time to get to know each other."

"Me too," Cassie replied, as she pulled away.

As Cassie started gathering her things to take home with her, Brandon headed toward his belongings piled near the door.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:01:36 GMT

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Brandon brought the last box over to the door, then took one look around his apartment, checking for anything he might have forgotten. He felt miserable, wanting to stay, yet knowing he had to leave. I've been here less than a year, yet it's felt more like my home than any place I've lived in, except when I was a kid.

He punched the button for the elevator, and the doors immediately opened. Callie was there with a cart on which to load his things. She smiled and said, "We might as well do it more easily, and not waste time. Not that we want to get rid of you or anything."

He smiled wanly at her, and they got his things loaded quickly, then headed down to the ground level. Then they headed off to the air strip, where the jet waited to take him not back to my old life, not exactly. When they got there, he was surprised to see how many people were waiting to say goodbye to him. The ladies were first, hugging him and whispering things to him like, "Don't forget us.", "We'll never forget you.", "I'll miss the SCUBA lessons.", and, from Callie, "Keep in touch. We're only an email, IM, or a phone call away."

The male recruits interspersed themselves with the Tracy brothers and shook his hand and/or gave him clouts on the shoulder, along with more words of encouragement. Even Kyrano was there, giving Brandon messages from Lisa and Emily, who were "otherwise occupied and regretted being unable to tell you themselves."

Then Jeff and Dianne said goodbye, the doctor giving him a hug. Jeff shook his hand and said, "You have a week to get settled, then you can return to work. I'm sure you haven't forgotten where it is, have you?" He grinned.

"No sir. And thank you again."

"If you need longer, let them know -- in advance," Jeff continued.

"And I know the doctors at that hospital are good ones, but if you want a second, or even a third opinion..." Dianne added with a twinkle in her eye.

"I'll know who to call. And I will. I'll keep in touch, I promise," Brandon said earnestly.

"C'mon, Brandon. Everything's loaded up, and we'd better be going."

"Okay, Gordon." Brandon turned and headed over to the plane. He climbed in and stopped at the entrance. He turned, looked back at everyone one last time, then waved and disappeared inside.

A few minutes later the jet was airborne, and International Rescue was minus a second aquanaut.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:01:56 GMT

Monday, November 5th, Tracy Island, 11 am

Cassie sat patiently across the desk from Jeff as he skimmed through a new Emergency Procedures Policy for the Kabul, Afghanistan plant. During her review of the information sent to her, she had noticed contradictions in the current policy. Though not the only one, the conflicts in the existing procedures were the most extensive there. Cassie felt the correcting and updating the current policy would not be time effective and had set about fleshing out a new set of guidelines for the plant.

"Looks like you put a lot of work into it. I remember from the report you submitted on Friday that Kabul was last in emergency drill response times. Do you think the conflict in the policy has something to do with that?" Jeff asked, looking up from the proposal and gazing across the desk at Cassie.

"From the information I've been given, I believe it is. Employees seem confused when asked questions about the procedure. Doing some research, I found out that the fire protocols for Afghanistan were changed about a year and a half ago. That seems to coincide with the conflicts getting introduced into the policy as well as a decline in the results from drills. I think whoever was in charge of updating the document did so in a hurry."

Jeff glanced at his notes he had made on Cassie's previous reports. "I notice you've been making some changes to other policies. Why create a brand new procedure for Kabul?"

"I think it's necessary in this situation. The edits would be so numerous that there is a chance they would only cause more confusion. By presenting a whole new procedure you're basically telling the employees to disregard all previous policies and learn the new one. Yes, it'll take some effort on the employees part to learn the new procedure but any confusion that exists can be cleared up in the training process."

Jeff nodded, and placed the data pad on his desk. "I can look it over more thoroughly on my own time. I'll get back to you with any questions or clarifications that I may need."

"Okay, sir."

"You mentioned there was something else you wanted to discuss," Jeff said, breaking the silence that had fallen between them.

"There was. With your permission, I'd like to visit some of the Tracy Industry plants and observe a drill for myself. I was thinking maybe three of the sites with the lower times: Kabul, for one. I might see something that is getting missed or can't be relayed in the reports. I'd also like to visit some of the higher ranked sites. Something that is working there might also be able to be implemented at another site."

"You mentioned Kabul already. I'm assuming you'd like to visit there after the new policy gets put into effect?"

"Yes, sir."



"Which other places did you want to pay a visit to?"

Cassie looked down at her note card that she had written her information on. "Well, Havana and Dakar are two of the other plants on the low end while Tokyo and Christchurch are two of the higher ranked sites. I was also thinking Sydney, Australia as its one of your office only sites."

Jeff nodded. "Sounds reasonable. Getting you to Christchurch shouldn't be a problem. I can have one the boys fly you to the mainland. We should be able to arrange business trips so you can visit the other plants, too. If we arrange one per month it shouldn't leave us short with IR if a rescue were to come up while you were away. Any preference in the order of the visits?"

"Not really. I did have a thought about arranging the visit to the Tokyo plant, though it also involves a personal request," Cassie said, hesitantly. She felt awkward about requesting time off having just started but she had promised her mother she would see what she could do.

Sensing her uneasiness, Jeff smiled. "I'm always willing to listen to anything my employees have to say, work related or personal. The worst I can tell you is no, right?" he said trying to lighten the mood.

Cassie smiled slightly at Jeff's attempt to lighten the atmosphere. With a little more confidence, she started to present her request. "My grandmother has been ill. My parents went over there recently and between my mother and her siblings they finally got my grandmother to get checked out at a hospital in Tokyo. Turns out she has pneumonia. She's still in the hospital but she's doing much better. The Japanese have a holiday known as Labor Thanksgiving Day that falls at the end of November. My grandmother has asked my brothers and me to join the rest of the family in Japan for the celebration this year."

"When exactly is this holiday?"

"November twenty-third. I was thinking that maybe I could combine the trip to the Tokyo plant along with a visit home. My Mom's family lives in Kozushima, which is a small island off shore from Tokyo. Once I got to Tokyo, I could meet my family. The holiday would fall on a Friday so if I flew in middle of the week I could pay a visit to the office, then spend a few days with my family before coming home."

"I think that can be arranged," Jeff said jotting down the dates so he could finalize the arrangements. "I definitely don't want to be the one keeping your grandmother from seeing her granddaughter," he said with a smile, thinking about his own mother and what his kids meant to her.

"I really appreciate it, Mr. Tracy," Cassie replied, relaxing some.

"I'll work out the arrangements, and let you know the details but you can tell your family that you can join them for the holiday. Is there anything else you can think of that we need to discuss?"

"Not that I can think of."

"Okay. Keep up the good work, Cassie," Jeff told her, as he shook her hand.

Cassie said a quick good-bye and then left the lounge.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:02:12 GMT

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Monday, November 25, 2 p.m., Tracy Island

Jenny looked all around her as she rode up the steep switchback trail at Alan's side. She was surprised to be picked up at the airport by a private jet, and even more surprised to find that her final interview would be with Jeff Tracy, the former astronaut. There was a knot in her stomach, and it seemed to pull tighter as they got closer to the top of the cliff. Finally, they reached the end of the switchback, and she risked a glance back down the way they'd come. The height to which they'd climbed made her happy she was securely belted in.

"And here we are!" Alan's cheery voice announced. "Looks like Dad and Grandma are waiting to meet you. I'll just pull up to the steps and you can get out."

He did just that, and Jenny tried to exit the little cart gracefully, smoothing her blue skirt as she did so. Mr. Tracy stepped down to greet her, offering her a firm handshake.

"Thank you for coming, Miss Finch. I'm Jeff Tracy, and this is my mother, Emily."

"Hello, Mr Tracy, it's a pleasure to meet you." Jenny grasped his hand warmly, inwardly hoping that she looked her best. She turned to Emily Tracy with a bright smile, hoping to dispel her sense of unreality. Meeting the Tracys had been the last thing she expected and her stomach fluttered nervously.

"Welcome to Tracy Island, my dear." Emily was her most cordial self. "Please, come inside. The heat is very intense today, and we have some refreshments in the lounge." With that she turned and led the way to the curving staircase that went from the patio surrounding the very inviting-looking pool to a cool, airy lounge.

Jenny silently let out a breath and followed gratefully, beginning to take note of her surroundings. It was certainly very impressive. She desperately hoped her chef skills were good enough for them. Evidently the job was fairly important. She took a deep breath to steady herself and tried to concentrate on remembering all she knew about making a good impression.

"Please sit down." Mr. Tracy indicated a seat. His mother sat to his right, and an Asian man came up quietly, carrying a tray of lemonade and iced tea. He put it down on the table, served each person their choice of drink, then took up a seat at Mr. Tracy's left.

"Miss Finch, this is Kyrano, our majo domo. He and my mother are both integral to the kitchen here, and that's why they're both here as part of the interview."

"Welcome, Miss Finch." Kyrano gave a small bow. "Thank you for coming." He glanced at Jeff. "Shall we proceed?"

Mr. Tracy took a swallow of his lemonade, and smiled at Jenny. "So, Miss Finch, I see you've been working for the Australian government, as an aid worker. What made you leave that position?"

"I took the job in order to help the victims of the tsunami this year. I left because I spent more time negotiating with government officials and making empty promises to those I was trying to help, and that frustrated me. I'm no diplomat, sir. I'm afraid I got rather impatient at times with the delays."

"Hm." Jeff looked at the data pad he had before him. "I see that your education has been in cooking. I'm puzzled as to why you would take on an aid position when your skills and - I assume - talents, lie so clearly in other directions?"

"I wanted to try something different, and to help people." Jenny took a deep breath, something she felt she'd be doing all day. "I saw there was a need for aid workers and went for a job. And I got one." She swallowed, wondering what he thought of her answer, but she quickly turned her attention back and concentrated on what Mr Tracy was saying.

"Is that why you've held so many positions over the past two years?" he asked. "I see you worked three years as a cook for a children's home, then a year with the Red Cross, six months as a hotel supervisor, five months for Australian Missing Persons, and less than a year with this last position." He paused, looking at her frankly. "I can see by your choice of employers that you want to help people, but you don't seem to have much loyalty to those organizations that employ you, or to those you volunteer for, either." He sat back. "How do I know that, should you be offered this position, you won't decide six months down the road that it's not for you?"

"Because I intend to settle down. Now I just want a job where I can use my skills and bring satisfaction to others." She hoped she sounded convincing, and tried to look calm and confident as she looked steadily at her interviewer.

Grandma frowned. She had seen Jenny's resume, and she thought Jenny seemed flighty, ready to run off in search of the next great thing. Settling down seems out of character for this girl, but stranger things have happened. Jeff, too, looked less than convinced, but Kyrano spoke up.

"Perhaps it is time to show Miss Finch our facilities."

"Do you think so?" Jeff asked, sounding uncertain.

"Yes. I do."

"Well, then. Miss Finch, Kyrano and my mother will show you our kitchen and dining room facilities." And put you to the test as well.

"If you would please follow me?" Kyrano rose, and Emily stood as well. Together, they led Jenny from the room, leaving a bemused Jeff behind.

Jenny felt her answer had not impressed anyone, and it was with a sinking feeling that she followed Kyrano and Mrs. Tracy to the kitchen.

Kyrano led the way through the dining room, hoping to impress on this young woman both the scope of their work and the standards she would be held to. Then he led her, with Emily following, into the kitchen proper.

"As you can see, Miss Finch, we have all the most up-to-date appliances. Everything here is to make cooking for the Tracy family as pleasant and easy for us as possible. However, there is a standard we must maintain." He went to the cryofridge and pulled out a bowl of eggs. "Let us start with something simple. Please, make us an omelet."

Jenny silently let out the breath she had been unconsciously holding, and stepped forward, feeling confident. Omelets were easy, and she swiftly reviewed all her skills as she reached for the eggs, a growing sense of relief filled her. She may not have been great during the questioning, but she had a feeling that she would do well in this test.

The interview by scuppy3 and Tikatu

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:02:35 GMT

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Monday, November 5th, about 5pm, Tracy Island (Previous day, Hawaii, around 6 pm)

The Crenshaw's were gathered in the lobby of the Veterans Memorial Aquatic Center waiting for Aaron to join them. The meet had gone well. The Ewa Beach Swim team had scored the most points out of the teams there and Aaron's worst finish had been a fourth place in the 100m breaststroke. The relay teams from Ewa Beach had even set new 4 X 200m freestyle relays in both the 15-16 yr old division as well as the open division, in which Aaron had swum anchor.

"Hey, everyone!" Aaron said, greeting his family as he made his way through the crowd to them. His gym bag was slung over his left shoulder, and he was wearing his team's warm-up outfit.

"Nice job today, son," Vince said, letting his hand come to rest on Aaron's shoulder.

"Thanks. Glad you were there to see it," Aaron replied. Having his Dad at most of his swim meets and surfing competitions was one advantage to his father no longer being in the military. "The team is going to go out for pizza. Is it okay if I join them?"

Vince looked to his wife, who nodded her consent. "I don't see why not. Have fun!"

"Can I come?" Lea asked, bouncing up and down slightly.

"Not this time, Poppet," Vince said looking down to his daughter, figuring his son would want enjoy this time with his friends, not keep tabs on his baby sister.

Lea's enthusiasm disappeared as she puffed her bottom lip out. Both Lana and Vince worried about how their daughter was going to react to Aaron leaving for college next spring or fall, depending on where he got in.

Aaron shot his Dad a grateful look even as he knelt down in front of his sister. "You and I can go spend some time on the beach together tomorrow afternoon, okay."

"Can we build a sand castle?" she asked, her pout fading a little bit.

"If that's what you want to do."

"Okay," Lea said, though her voice didn't carry too much enthusiasm. Aaron knew that would change tomorrow though when they left the house.

He ruffled her hair a little, and stood up.

"Have fun," Lana told her son. "Be home by ten and if you're going to be late..."

"I'll give you a call," Aaron finished for her, familiar with the drill. Lana smiled.

Aaron gave his mother and grandmother a hug and then turned to go find his swim team. Picking up Lea, Vince lead the others toward the main entrance of the aquatic center.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:02:49 GMT

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Monday, November 5, 8 p.m. Tracy Island

"So, which one? Or do we look further?"

Jeff sat in the study with Emily, Lisa and Kyrano, going over the three interviewees they'd had. None of them had truly struck a chord with the trio, and Jeff was trying to draw them out on who, if anyone, would be chosen.

"The first man... I don't know," Emily said, shaking her head. "He seemed awfully picky about his hours, and days."

"Don't forget his salary," Jeff said sourly. "He kept trying to bring the conversation around, but I wasn't going there." He picked up a data pad. "He also left us with a sizable hotel bill, complete with several room service meals and lots of liquor."

"I do not think he would have the flexibility that we would require," Kyrano said. "His eye is to the prestige, and the money."

"He doesn't even make a good omelet," Lisa said, as if that were the deciding factor.

"All right. He gets a rejection letter. What about the first of the women?" Jeff asked.

Kyrano frowned. "Her omelet was good; simple is always the best way to go, and her technique was excellent. But... there was something about her -- as if she were trying not to seem too eager for the position, and working too hard to create that impression."

"I was under the impression that she was more interested in the facilities than in the position," Emily said. "But I understand what you mean. She acted in a very calculating fashion." She paused. "Not to mention that her pastry was tough, and her filling too spiced."

"Tyler told me she is a smoker," Lisa said. "He wasn't impressed."

There was laughter around the table. "Well, then Tyler's vote carries the day," Jeff said, chuckling. "I'll have Human Resources tell her thanks, but no thanks." He picked up the final data pad. "Now, about this Finch girl. I don't like her bouncing from job to job, nor the fact that so much of her experience is in areas other than cooking."

"But, Jeff, she does have experience in hotel management and in cleaning," Emily reminded him. "That was something we were looking for." She paused. "I did think she was rather flighty though."

"Her omelet was very passable, and her pastry flaky and light, so her culinary skills have not suffered in her search for 'the perfect job'." Kyrano held out his hand, and Jeff passed the data pad to him. "It is commendable that she wants to help people."

Lisa frowned, thoughtful. "We did say we needed someone flexible, and it seems that this Jenny Finch is that if nothing else. And, I think she is also teachable, which was another of our criteria. It was clear to me that the other two were not." She sighed, and looked toward Jeff. "Isn't there a way to make her stick? Perhaps with a contract for a certain number of years?"

"I had planned on that in any case, Lisa," Jeff said. "A contract for three years, with heavy financial and legal penalties for breaking the contract -- without a good reason, that is." He shook his head. "I hope to God that we don't get another situation like Heather's or Brandon's, but these things do happen. I'd consider that a valid reason to break the contract, but not just because she got an itch to do something else."

"If I may, I suggest that Miss Finch not be told about IR right away," Kyrano said, handing the data pad back to Jeff. "She wants to 'help people'. What better way than to work with International Rescue? I feel that such an opportunity would outweigh any other considerations for this particular young lady, and I do not want her to accept the position with that as a reason."

"That was my thought, too, Kyrano. We'll tell her, eventually, but not at first." Jeff lined up all the edges and corners of the pile of data pads. "Hopefully she won't do what Dianne did, or have the same reaction as Kat when we do tell her." He glanced around the table, making eye contact with each person. "So, you're sure you want to hire this Jenny Finch? We could look further, you know."

The trio exchanged looks, and nods, and finally, Kyrano spoke up. "She is not perfect, but who

would be? She has a soupçon of each attribute we desired; I think we can train her in the way we would like her to go."

"All right then, if you're sure..." Again, Jeff looked around, and this time, got firm nods as his gaze met each of those around the table. "I'll have Human Resources bring her in for a final, terms-setting interview. If she signs the contract, then you'll have a new helper in the kitchen."

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:03:29 GMT

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Monday, Nov. 5th, 9 p.m., Tracy Island (Sunday, November 4th, 10 p.m, Hawaii)

The Crenshaw house was quiet. Aaron was in his room working on schoolwork, listening to music via his headphones. Vince had stayed in the room long enough to answer a couple questions about his latest Calculus assignment before saying good night. Lea had long ago been read her bedtime story and was tucked into bed. Vince and Lana had both retreated to the home office and were working on separate tasks.

Lana was finishing autographing copies of her latest book, *Coping At Home*. It was the first book to be published since her accident. Part of its promotion, were that all copies pre-ordered by Oct 23rd were being sent to the buyer autographed. Lana had long ago lost count of how many books she had already signed. The books in front of her, thirty in all, were the last batch of those. Her publicist, Jean Harper, would be by in the morning to pick them up so they could be shipped. There had also been several book signings scheduled, two of which were on Tuesday when the book was to be released.

Vince was at his desk, balancing the books for the dive shop from the week before. He liked to get it done before going in on Monday morning so he didn't have to do it at the shop. It seemed as if his week started out better if he started the day out knowing things were in order.

Finishing the task, Vince sent the document to the printer so he would have a copy to file. He stretched his arms over his head, getting rid of the kinks. He then glanced across the room at his wife.

"How is it going?" he asked, seeing her set one book aside.

Lana added the signed book to a pile on her right before replying. "Five more to sign, and then they'll be ready for Jean to pick up in the morning."

"Can we discuss something while you finish up?"

"Sure, Honey," she replied as she reached for another book. The authoress flipped the cover open and glanced over at her husband. She noticed the serious expression he wore. "Is something wrong?"

"Not wrong, really. It's just that, well how would you feel about selling the dive shop."



"Selling? But I thought the shop was doing better than ever?"

"It is, which means I could get a good deal for it."

"And what do you want to do instead?" Lana asked, as she set aside the book she had opened. She knew her husband well enough that he wouldn't be talking about selling, if he hadn't thought things through.

"I'm not completely sure. I just know I'm not happy with what I'm doing. I used to love diving and being out on the water. Now, I've taken so many groups out diving or on an air tour that it's just routine. That spark of wonder is no longer there. I need a change."

"Do you want to go back to the service?" Lana asked, turning her chair so she could face him. The last few books sat abandoned on the desk top.

"I did consider it actually, but I think I've gotten so used to civilian life that going back would be hard. Not to mention it would take me away from you and the kids too much. I want something that I can come home every evening to my kids. Watch Lea grow up. I missed too much of Aaron's childhood. Having this time with him these last few years showed me that." Vince paused before speaking again. "I was actually contemplating looking for a job with a research institute actually. Put to use that oceanography degree I've got."

"If that's what you think will make you happy, then go for it."

"What if it means relocating?"

"I was a military wife for how long? The prospect of moving doesn't bother me as long as we're together."

"Are you sure? I mean you just got back into writing five months ago. I don't want to disrupt that."

"I can write anywhere and any promotion trips I do will always involve travel, though Jean doesn't think that a real extensive book tour is going to be necessary, as we first thought. Seems despite my three year absence, my fans are still anticipating my next novel," Lana told him. She had been shocked when Jean had given her the pre-order numbers when she dropped the last batch of books by the day before.

"That's great. I know how much you enjoy writing."

"Exactly, and I'd like you to find something that makes you just as happy."

"What about the kids?"

"What about them? Aaron has been through moves before. He'll adjust, not to mention he'll be leaving for college within the year. As for Lea, we wanted to start getting her involved in some kind of group activity soon. Moving before she got involved in something would be better."



"You've got a point there," Vince said thoughtfully. "It won't hurt to at least see what's out there."

"Exactly! There's no need to stay with something you're not happy with. You've always looked after me and the kids. Do something for yourself for a change."

"I knew there was a reason I married you," Vince said, as he stood up. He crossed over to his wife and leaned down for a kiss.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:03:51 GMT

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Tuesday, November 6th, Tracy Island, afternoon . . .

"Have a good evening, Cherie!" Cassie called, as the girl headed across the Cliff House patio to the other lounge.

"You too, Miss Cassie."

Cassie had waited for Cherie to come by with the afternoon's mail delivery, so that she could give her the Tea Ceremony invitations for the Tracys and the others up at the Villa. The invitations for the recruits she had placed in the mailboxes herself. She now had one other task she needed to do before heading home.

Walking to the patio entrance of Elise's apartment, Cassie knocked. It wasn't long before Elise appeared and opened the door.

"Hi, Cassie! Come on in."

"I only stopped by for a minute. I know you have that dinner with Virgil tonight," Cassie said with a bit of a smile. Elise had mentioned it to her when Cassie had asked the blonde how she was celebrating her birthday. "I just wanted to drop in and give you this," Cassie told her, holding out a small, gift-wrapped box. "Happy Birthday, Elise!"

"You didn't have to get me anything," the blonde replied, a huge grin on her face. She took the box from Cassie. "I'm glad that you did, though."

Elise tore the gift wrapping off the present, revealing a dark-blue velvet box. She flipped it open. Inside was a pin, in the shape of three fall leaves. The one leaf was red, another orange, and the third golden. The three leaves overlapped in the center of the arrangement a diamond shaped citrine, the November birth stone, was set.

"Oh wow! It's lovely! Thank you!"

"You're welcome. I was hoping you would like it."

"I do!" Elise exclaimed, then gave Cassie a hug.

"I guess I'll be leaving. Hope you enjoy the rest of your birthday," Cassie told her, as she took a step toward the door.

"Thank-you. Thanks for stopping by and for the gift."

"You're welcome," Cassie told her as she left the apartment, leaving Elise to get ready for her birthday dinner.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:04:23 GMT

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Will sat on the bed of his extra bedroom, a box of greeting cards in his lap - another thing his mother had included, along with a list of family birthdays, addresses, etc. He was looking for a birthday card for Elise. I wonder if there's a site that has everyone's birthday, so we could know when one is coming up. I'll have to ask around.

While he'd been working, Virgil had come in to talk to Scott for a few minutes. Will had overheard part of the conversation - it was hard not to - and learned about today being her birthday. He figured that some, if not all, of the others would be giving her something, and felt he should, too.

He finally found a card that he felt would be right for Elise, Not that I really know her. It's hard to get to know a bunch of people well in just a - how long have I been here? He stopped what he was doing and thought for a minute. It's been a month. Exactly one month today. It doesn't seem like I've been here that long, though. And yet, in a way, it does. I've slipped into a routine very easily, much more so than when I worked for Dad.

He laid the card and envelope on the bed and put the box away, then walked out into the living room. "I just wish I knew what to give her. I have no idea what she likes," he said to himself. He sat down on the sofa and began to think.

About ten minutes later, he suddenly remembered a story he'd read - or had he been told about it? - where a poor family tried to celebrate Christmas. The mother was ill, the father was trying to work to make ends meet, and the two children - a boy and his older sister - were helping the best they could. The kids had put their heads together, and came up with a way to have a tree, and decorations, that didn't cost them anything. But there were no presents to wrap, no gifts to give. Then one of them - the sister, I think - had an idea. They'd make promises, write them on slips of paper, and hang them on the tree. They were simple things, like I promise to get good grades in school, I promise to help with the dishes every night, and so on.

"Now that's an idea. I could write up a promise, and slip it into the card," he told himself. It took a little more time to come up with something, but since he knew that he was the tallest person on the island, he could use that to his advantage. He found paper and a pen and wrote, Any time you want your upper cabinets cleaned out, I'm your man to help remove whatever you store there, and put it all back.

He slipped the paper into the card, which he'd already signed, and put them into the envelope, then wrote Elise's name on it. He took the elevator down to the ground floor and made his way to the other lounge. He walked over to the mailboxes, pausing to admire his and Luke's workmanship on them once again, then slipped the envelope into Elise's slot, and left.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:04:42 GMT

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Luke paused in front of Elise's door and adjusted the box in his hands. He glanced down at his dog, who held a gift bag in his teeth. "Ready, Rommel?" He pressed the chime and a few moments later, Elise answered the door.

"Hey there! Come on in." She led them inside.

Luke placed the box on the table, then turned and winked at her. "Close your eyes."

"What? Why?"

"Just do it." He waited until she wasn't looking then turned. A minute later he took her hand. "OK, open. Happy Birthday, Elise."

She opened her eyes and gasped. "Oh, Luke, you didn't have to do that."

On the table lay a small birthday cake. It was covered in chocolate frosting and decorated with pink roses. Luke had lit half a dozen candles and stood next to it, smiling. "It wouldn't be a birthday without cake. Make a wish."

Elise closed her eyes, then opened them and blew out the candles. "There. Now I wait and see what happens."

"What did you wish for?"

"You know I can't tell you!" She looked down at the cake again and her eyes got misty. "I haven't had a birthday cake in years."

"Aw, don't cry. I can't handle women in tears." Luke took her into his arms and held her tight.

She smiled up at him. "God, what a mess I am." She took a napkin and dabbed at her eyes. "Did you make this yourself?"

Luke shook his head. "Way beyond my cooking capabilities. Cassie made it with pointers from me. This however..." He snapped his fingers and Rommel trotted forward, the bag still in his teeth. "Here you go. Your real present is still in Montana. I'll bring it when me when I get back."

Elise raised an eyebrow. "Are you going to tell me what it is?"

"Nope. Open this one."

They sat down on the couch and Elise carefully took out a small object wrapped in tissue paper. She unwrapped it and gasped. "Luke! It's beautiful!" She carefully turned the small mermaid statue over in her hands. "You made this?"

He shrugged self-consciously. "Yeah. It just reminded me of you somehow."

"I can't believe the detail." She peered down at the tiny figure, spying sea shells, kelp, even a starfish carved into the statue's base. She smiled up at him. "Thank-you, so much."

He held up his hands. "Don't get all weepy on me again."

She laughed as she placed the figure down on the table. "I won't. I don't want to ruin my make-up!"

Now Luke chuckled. "All ready for the big date?"

She nodded. "I've made a salad and you brought dessert. Virgil told me not to fuss, that he'd handle dinner."

"Then I'd better get out of your way. The mutt and I are going for a quick run." He turned and hugged her again. "Happy Birthday, honey." At the door Luke paused and turned. "Don't stay up too late." With a wink and a wave, he and Rommel left her to finish getting ready.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:05:07 GMT

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Scott shifted the boxes and gift bags in his arms as he stepped out of the elevator. "Why are you guys eating in? Why not go out for Elise's birthday?" he asked as he accompanied his brother to the monorail.

Virgil, walking in front of him, glanced back. "We went out a few weeks ago. Besides, this was Elise's idea," he responded. He shifted the large basket in his arms. "She wanted something simple so I told her I'd bring dinner."

"And she gets to be dessert? Very romantic," Scott quipped and grinned as he saw the flush appear on Virgil's face. They got on the train, and were soon speeding towards the Cliff House.

They paused in front of Elise's door, and Virgil rang the chime. A moment later, Elise answered. "Hello! I was wondering when you were going to make it." She stepped aside to let him pass.

"I would have been here sooner, but I got cornered," Virgil told her.

Scott followed him in and placed his parcels on the table. "By the folks who wish you Happy Birthday, by the way."

Elise's eyes widened in surprise. "What's this? I thought you were just bringing dinner?"

"You can't have a birthday without presents," Scott told her. He grinned and handed her a large flat box. "Happy Birthday!"

She frowned. "Do I want to open this?"

"Just get it over with so he can leave," Virgil muttered, heading towards the kitchen with his basket.

Elise opened the box and laughed. "Where did you get this?" she asked, holding up the white Frisbee emblazoned with the "International Rescue" logo.

Scott grinned. "There's a whole bunch of stuff out there. Want me to get you a real, authentic copy of their uniform?"

"Thanks, but I've already got one." She laughed again. "Thank-you, Scott."

"You're welcome." He pulled her into a hug, resting his cheek on top of her head.

"Ahem." The both looked up to see Virgil glowering in the doorway.

Scott chuckled. "I'd better go." He placed a soft kiss on her cheek. "Happy Birthday," he said again then waved and went out the door.

Elise turned to Virgil, one eyebrow arched upwards. "Don't you have a present for me?" she teased.

"I don't know. You seemed pretty content smooching with my brother." His tone was gruff, but there was a twinkle in his eyes.

"Well then, I guess I'll have to eat all the chocolate cake myself." She turned away from him, heading towards the presents on the table.

Suddenly Virgil had his hands around her waist, twisting her around. He smiled down at her. "You'd pick cake over me?"

"It's not just cake. It's chocolate."

"Brat," he said as he pressed his lips to hers.

A few minutes later, they pulled apart. "Well, that was nice," Elise said her cheeks flushed.

"Nice? That's all you can say?"

She smiled. "We'll see after I eat dinner. What did you bring?"

Virgil took her hand and led her into the kitchen. "Nothing fancy, like you said. C'mon, let's set the table. I'm starving."

A short time later, they were enjoying their meal. Elise took another bite of Seafood Newburg and sighed in contentment. "This and mushroom caps for appetizers, then lobster for dinner? You call that nothing fancy?"

He smiled back. "Nope. Fancy was that place we went to a few weeks ago."

"This is true."

Henry wandered into the room, the smell of the fish attracting him. He spied Virgil and arched his back, hissing. Virgil glared back. "He hates me."

Elise snapped her fingers and the kitten trotted over to her, giving Virgil a wide berth. "No; he doesn't he just doesn't like strangers." She pulled a small piece of lobster off and held it down to him. The kitten gobbled it up and mewed for more. She laughed and obliged.

"You're not feeding that cat all your lobster," Virgil stated firmly.

"No, I'm not." She gave Henry one last pat. "You know, you really shouldn't be jealous of a kitten."

"Who says I'm jealous?"

She merely smiled and pulled another piece of meat from the shell. She dipped it in the bowl of melted butter and leaned close. "Is this better?" she said softly, placing the lobster gently in Virgil's mouth.

Virgil's eyes went dark with emotion. "Much." They continued their meal, each feeding the other until the lobster was gone.

"Do you want cake now?"

Virgil nodded. "Sure, let me get it. It's your birthday. Go get comfortable, I'll be right back."

Elise took her wine glass and sat down on the couch. A moment later, Henry hopped up into her lap. She sat there staring out at the sea, idly stroking the kitten, waiting for Virgil. She didn't have to wait long.

Virgil returned with the cake, complete with half a dozen lit candles. He placed it on the coffee table and sat down next to her. "Go ahead, make a wish."

She closed her eyes and thought a moment, then blew them all out. Opening her eyes again, she smiled. "Guess I get my wish. Which is to hurry up and cut that! It's been driving me crazy since Luke delivered it this afternoon!"

Virgil's hand froze in mid-cut. "Luke made this?" he asked, trying to keep the irritation out of his voice.

She giggled. "Are you kidding me? He had Cassie make it and brought it down." She stuck her finger in the frosting. "Mmmm, this is delicious."

"Yeah, it is." Virgil settled back on the couch, listening to Elise, but not really hearing her. Luke, always Luke. Would she rather be with him or me? We should talk about this, but now's not the time. "So, would you like your present now?"

Elise frowned in puzzlement. "There's more? I mean, you made dinner, I thought that was it?"

"Nope." He pulled a narrow flat box out of his pocket. "Happy Birthday, Elise."

She carefully ripped the paper to find a velvet box nestled inside. She opened it and gasped. "Oh, Virgil..." She looked up, her green eyes filled with tears.

"Do you like it?"

"Like it, I love it!" She started down at the necklace. It was a deep green emerald pendant, surrounded by tiny diamonds and hung from a delicate gold chain. The emerald caught and held the light, making it match her eyes. "Help me?" She turned so Virgil could fasten the clasp.

"There," he said, placing a soft kiss on her neck. "All set."

She melted into his arms. When they broke apart, some time later, both were breathless. "We could...you know...move this to somewhere more...comfortable," she said, not taking her eyes of his.

Virgil felt his heart, pounding in his chest. "Elise, much as I would love to do that...This might not be the right place."

She smiled. "That's true. I mean, if we were to...you know, well, I wouldn't want you to leave. And that would make things difficult to explain to your family."

He nodded and kissed her hands. "We're both adults and should be able to do...what we want, but..."

"But circumstances being what they are," she smiled up at him. "We'll wait."

Virgil got up and paced the room, coming to a stop in front of the doors overlooking the ocean. "Elise, I have feelings for you. Strong ones. I've never felt this away about anyone before. If I didn't feel that way, well..." he turned to look at her. "Let's just say we'd already be in your bedroom."

She walked over to stand next to him, taking his hand in hers. "I have feelings for you too, Virgil," she said, kissing him softly.

"Then why don't we wait until a more...opportune moment." His fingers brushed her cheeks. "We'll take our time." He bent and kissed her temples. "Savor the moment." He moved to her lips.

"Virgil..."

He pulled her close into his arms, and together they watched the sun set across the sea.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:05:22 GMT

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Wednesday, November 7th, mid-morning...

Gordon whistled as he walked down the hallway towards his father's office. The door was open so he strolled in. "Morning, Dad. Morning, Mom."

Dianne looked up from her newspaper and smiled. "Hello, Gordon."

"What's up, son?" Jeff asked, glancing up from his computer.

Gordon sat down on the couch. "Nothing much. I gave Four a look over this morning. There are a few new upgrades Brains has been working on and I'd like to take her out later, maybe this afternoon for a quick dive."

"I remember Brains telling me about that," Jeff nodded thoughtfully. "Good plan. And I'll want a full written report when you're done."

"FAB," Gordon saluted smartly.

"Of course, wanting to play in your sub has nothing to do with it," Dianne drawled.

Gordon grinned. "Of course not!" He paused a moment. "Dad? I need to ask you a favor."

His son sounded so serious that Jeff looked up. "What is it, Gordon?"

"Well, I got an email last night. Some of my former WASP crew are all on leave from their various projects. They're meeting in Honolulu for an impromptu reunion. They'd like me to come. I know it's short notice, so I'll understand if I can't go."

Jeff frowned. "First Luke, then Cassie, now you. What is this, a mass exodus?" Gordon merely shrugged. "When is this happening?"

"This weekend. I thought maybe I could take Luke as far as Hawaii then he could catch a flight to Montana from there. We're all meeting up on Saturday and I'd be home Monday."

Dianne watched her husband as he thought. Finally Jeff nodded. "I don't see a problem."

Gordon jumped to his feet. "Great! Thanks, Dad!"



Jeff pointed to his son. "Just stay out of trouble, do you hear me?" he said sternly.

"Me? Get into trouble?" He batted his eyes innocently. "Gotta go and email the guys back, then get to Four. Thanks again!" With a jaunty wave, Gordon dashed from the room.

Dianne waited until he was gone before turning to her husband. "I'll bet you a dollar that boy gets into some sort of mischief."

Jeff shook his head and turned back to his work. "No bet. You'd win too easily."

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:05:35 GMT

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Tuesday, November 6, 9:15 p.m., London, England (Wednesday, November 7, 10:15 a.m., Tracy Island)

Giles sighed. "Thank you, Antonia. I will pass the word along." He folded his satellite phone, and placed it on his night stand. Then he ran a comb through his hair, and headed downstairs.

In the lounge, Jacques was reading the Daily Mail, the scotch he was nursing on the small table at his elbow. Dez sat in an equally overstuffed leather chair directly across from Jacques. She had her feet up, a mini-player in her lap and ear buds in her ears. She glanced up as Giles came in, scowled, and edged the screen away from him. He shook his head slightly; his sister's tastes in entertainment were more than risqué, and though he occasionally found her choices interesting, Jacques did not. She was feeling particularly bold if she was watching that while in the same room as their straight-laced older brother.

He went over to the sideboard and poured himself a brandy. While he did, Jacques spoke up without lowering his paper.

"So, what kept you?"

Giles breathed in the bouquet of the brandy, swirling it around in the snifter before taking a sip. "I received a message from Antonia, the woman we sent out to infiltrate Tracy Industries. She received a rejection letter today. By old-fashioned surface mail, in fact."

Dez swore. "I had hopes that she would be able to get in."

"I did as well," Giles said as he took a seat on the long divan, picking up the book he had left on the end table. "Especially when I found that they weren't hiring for the company, but for Tracy's household."

Jacques put down his paper. "You didn't tell us that, Giles."

"I didn't know until just now," Giles returned mildly. "They kept that little tidbit quite tightly under wraps." He took another sip. "The good news is that she was taken to Tracy's home, and will write

up a report on what she saw there."

"As if that will help us," Dez said, snorting. She turned her attention back to her entertainment.

"It might help, should they decide to look farther afield," Jacques said, his tone thoughtful. "We would have specifics on what they were looking for and how they were making their selection." He nodded at Giles. "Be sure I receive a copy of the report. We may have the opportunity to try someone else."

Giles nodded, and opened his book. Dez sighed, and turned off the player, taking out the ear buds and closing the player's lid. She rose and stretched languorously. "The night is still young, and I think I will go to town and enjoy myself."

"Say hello to Enid for me," Giles said without looking up, a slight smile on his lips.

Dez gave him a dirty look as she stalked from the room.

"Really, Giles," Jacques said from behind his paper again. "Poaching is so gauche... and dangerous where our sister is concerned."

"Dangerous for who?" Giles asked. "Me or her paramours?"

Jacques looked over his paper and caught Giles's gaze. He raised an eyebrow. "Both," he said. "But then, that's your look-out, isn't it?"

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:05:48 GMT

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Wednesday, November 7th, 12 pm Tracy Island(1 pm, previous day, Hawaii)

Saltwater Café was a small, family-owned diner not far from Vince's dive shop. It was to here that Adam and Vince headed after turning the shop over to Aaron.

"Hey Vince!" Sally, one of the regular waitresses said, as they walked into the diner. "How many?"

"Three Sally," Vince replied. "Jim will be joining us shortly."

"Okay. Right this way," Sally told them, leading them to a back corner booth away from the rest of the customers. She knew that when Vince showed up with his employees, it was usually a business lunch and she tried to give them some privacy if the diner wasn't crowded.

Adam and Vince made small talk while waiting. Sally had dropped off their normal drinks. It wasn't long before Jim had joined them.

"So what's up, Boss?" Jim asked after all three of them had given Sally their orders.

"I want to discuss something with you guys, as it's going to affect you guys, too," Vince said, looking at Jim first and then Adam. "I've been thinking lately that it might be time for a career change for me."

"Career change, as in not as involved with the shop?" Jim asked. His boss tended to be an hands on shop owner, unlike some of the other people he had worked with over the years. It wasn't too often that Vince didn't spend at least a little time at the shop whenever it was open.

Vince shook his head. "Change as in finding something entirely else to do and selling the shop."

The conversation at the table hit a lull. Jim and Adam looked from their boss, to each other, and then at their boss again.

"Sell the shop, why?" Adam asked, the surprise evident in his voice. "Business is going better than when you hired me."

Jim, who had been with Vince since he opened the shop, wasn't as surprised. He had noticed that his boss didn't have the same enthusiasm at work as he did when they started the shop. Still, he hadn't expected to hear the news this fast.

"It doesn't has to do with how business is going and it doesn't have to do with you guys. It's me. I just haven't been happy at work. Things have gotten too routine for me. Even getting out on the sky tours and dive trips doesn't seem to break up the monotony."

"Maybe you just need to take a vacation," Adam suggested. "Other than taking a day here and there to travel for one of your son's swim meets or surfing competitions, I don't think you've taken a vacation since I started."

"I think it would only postpone things. Sure, a vacation might recharge me for awhile but it would be a fix to the symptoms not the problem."

The talk ceased as Sally came back with their orders. The waitress put their plates in front of each of them. After asking them if they needed anything else, she headed off to another table.

"Then let's change things up some," Jim said, picking up the conversation again now that they were alone. "We only do air tours of Oahu right now. We could expand that to include tours of the neighboring islands. Instead of just doing diving, we can also add snorkeling to it. Get some of the younger kids involved in things. You've got kids, Vince. You know how much they can spice things up."

Vince smiled, knowing the Jim was thinking of his own two little boys. Jake and Jeremiah were twins and at four years old, quite a handful. Adding Lea into the mix always kept the parents running.

"Or we could even add something entirely new," Adam said, picking up on Jim's train of thought. "We're heading into the months where the humpback whales will be down this way. I bet we could get some business with whale-watching tours. Or, what about offering kayaking trips? I've got experience kayaking and could actually help out with those." As he only had basic scuba diving

certification and no pilot's license, his duties were limited to manning the store and helping with equipment.

"I appreciate both of your ideas," Vince told his employees. "I still think it would only delay the inevitable. I think a complete change of direction is what I need right now. I don't plan on putting the shop up for sale until I find something. Even then my hope is to find someone interested in keeping it running as a dive shop."

"But you can't guarantee that," Jim commented.

"Right, which is why I wanted to let you guys know what is going on. I want to make sure that there is plenty of time to decide what you want to do."

"How soon do you think you'll put the shop on the market?" Jim asked.

"I can't be sure," Vince told him. "I plan on starting the job search as soon as possible, but I don't know how long it will take me to find something. I'll definitely let you know when I do, though. You guys are free to look for other opportunities whenever you want. I realize the uncertainty might not be something you want to deal with. If you need time off for a interview or a recommendation, I'll do what I can."

"I think I might start looking myself," Adam admitted. "If I don't have a definite source of income I may not be able to pay tuition."

"I understand," Vince said, not surprised to hear Adam say that.

Vince had hired Adam about a year ago after his last full-time employee had quit. He was working his way through college and Vince knew his budget was tight.

"I'm not sure what I'm going to do," Jim commented. "Guess for now, I'll see how things go."

"I'll make sure I keep you both updated on developments. While I want to do what is best for me and my family, I also want to make this transition as easy as possible. You're both good, hard workers and I appreciate everything you do."

The three continued to discuss the situation and other shop related business as they finished their lunch. When they were done, Vince paid the bill, leaving Sally a generous tip, and then they headed out of the diner.

"Four o'clock for the lesson, right, Boss?" Adam asked as they stepped out of the sidewalk. He had been working on getting his instructor certification so that he could help out with the dive trips.

"That's right. I'll see you then, Adam," Vince replied.

As Adam walked to where he had parked his moped, Vince and Jim headed for their own vehicles, both driving to Blue Waters Dive Shop.

Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:05:59 GMT

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Wednesday, November 7th, 1:30 pm Tracy Island(2:30 pm, previous day, Hawaii)

The table had been set up in the front of Shelton Books, in the Honolulu Mall. Lana sat behind it, Jean sitting on her left, signing the copies of her book that customers had just recently bought. As this was the hometown crowd, all parties had anticipated a big turnout. Shelton Books had stocked *Coping at Home* well and put extra employees on. A few of the store employees were keeping busy with controlling the line, which stretched down the side of the store toward the back. From her vantage point, Lana couldn't see the end of the line.

Lana closed the cover of the book in front of her, and thanking the customer for coming, handed it back. With a smile on her face, she greeted the next customer. Between the book signing this morning and the current one, she couldn't remember when she had smiled so much. Jean and she had flown to Hilo on the Big Island for the first event and then, after having lunch there, had flown back to Oahu to come here.

The next person in line stepped up to the table. A girl, about nineteen, handed over her copy of the book.

"Could you make it out to Patricia, please? It's a Christmas present for my mom."

"I'd be happy to," Lana told her, opening the cover of the book. She wrote her standard message in the book and closed the cover. "There you go. Thank-you for coming," the authoress said, handing the book back to the girl.

"Thanks," she said, taking the book and heading out of the store with it.

"Gee, seems like quite awhile since we were that young, doesn't it?" the next customer said as he stepped up to the table.

Lana looked up to see who it was. She instantly recognized her old high school friend, Steve Martin. She hadn't seen him since their ten year high school reunion.

"Steve! It's nice to see you again! I thought you were living in Chicago."

"I do. I'm here visiting my parents. They told me about the book signing and I thought I'd stop by and get an autographed copy of your book for my wife's birthday. She loves your books, though I didn't realize until I saw you here that you were Chase Rivers," he told her, handing over the book he had bought.

Lana took the book from him and opened the cover. "Yeah, well, I started using the pen name to keep my writing secret from my father and it just stuck."

"Are you in Honolulu by yourself or did Vince and the kids come with you?"

"We're actually living on Oahu now, back in Ewa Beach. Vince runs a dive shop. If you're not

doing anything tonight, come by for dinner at six."

"I'll do that. Where are you living?"

"The brick house next to my parent's house, actually," she told him, handing back the book.

"Great, I'll see you tonight then," Steve said, taking the book back. "Don't tell Vince I'm coming. I want it to be a surprise."

"You got it," Lana told him, as he walked away. The impromptu reunion having boosted her mood a little, she greeted her next fan with a more genuine smile.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:06:43 GMT

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Wednesday, November 7; approximately 5 PM; Brains' lab

Tin-Tin gazed at the information on her computer screen, but her mind wasn't on what she was seeing. A vague thought had been percolating in the back her mind for the past three days, and only now was surfacing. Mulling it over, she decided that the idea was a good one. She began turning toward the other person in the room.

"Brains, I have an idea." "Tin-Tin, I have an idea."

He was facing her.

They both smiled, and he said, "Ladies first."

Her smile got a bit wider, then she grew more serious and said, "Ever since we talked to Lena, I've been thinking. . ."

"...that she should come to Tracy Island. . ."

"...for the wedding." She paused and looked at him, realization suddenly dawning. "You too?"

He grinned. "Sure. Why not? In fact, I think we should go see your father and Lisa and suggest that they invite her."

"I agree. The worst they could say is 'no'. Since you seem to be finished for the day, also, why don't we go see them now?"

"Just what I was thinking." They both turned back to their terminals, to save and shut down for the day. Then he stood up and held out his hand. "Shall we?"

"We shall." Smiling mischievously, she took his hand and stood up. They headed to the monorail,

and the Villa.

When they arrived, they found both Kyrano and Lisa in the kitchen, along with Emily, who looked up as they entered and smiled at them. "It's not often you two arrive together, and both before dinner. It won't be long before it's ready."

"Actually, we came to suggest something to my father and Lisa," Tin-Tin replied.

"Really?" Lisa put down the dishes she'd just gotten out and walked over to them, joined almost immediately by her fiancé. "And what would that be?"

"We'd like to suggest one more guest for your wedding," Brains said.

"Who?"

Brains and Tin-Tin looked at each other, then back at the couple and said, "Lena."

Kyrano and Lisa looked questioningly at each other for a moment, then she smiled and nodded. He turned back to his daughter and said, "We think that's a wonderful idea. I am somewhat ashamed that I didn't think of her before now."

"I'll see to it that an invitation is sent to her right away," Lisa added. "It'll be so nice to see her again."

"That's a wonderful idea!" exclaimed Emily. "If she accepts -- and I have no reason to think that she won't -- she can stay in the guest room here, while the others will be in the Round House. I'm so glad you two thought of it."

"So are we," Tin-Tin replied. As she and Brains turned to go, she added, "We'll see you at dinner."

As they walked out the door, the others heard Brains say, "We'll be able to introduce her to her namesake. What did she say when you told her that we'd named a kitten after her?"

"Me? I thought you told her!"

The rest of the conversation was lost as the door closed behind them.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:07:02 GMT

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\*\*\*\*\*Wednesday, November 7, Tracy Island, Common Room, around 6:20 p.m.\*\*\*\*\*

Waiting for her laundry to finish drying, Callie turned on the professional wrestling to keep herself entertained. "Come on, come on! Slam him to pieces!" she yelled. "Put him into the headlock!"

Luke carried his own laundry towards the laundry room when he heard her screams. What's



gotten into her? he thought. He looked through the door of the common room and saw her watching wrestling. I never knew she was into pro wrestling. I guess it's her way of relieving stress. He continued on his way to the laundry room.

About ten minutes later, her watch alarm sounded. "That's it, the last of the laundry's done." She stepped out of the common room to pick up her clothes.

When she got there, she was about to get to the dryer when she accidentally bumped Luke, who himself was loading laundry into the washer. "Oh, uh, hi, Luke," she said, her face suddenly blushing cherry red. "Sorry about that." She rushed over to the dryer to pull out her dark clothes.

He noticed she was mismatching socks, trying to fold a crimson red sock with a white sock. He also saw her folding her Alabama sweatshirt inside out. "Callie, are you getting ready for an Alabama game tonight?"

She looked down and realized it. "Oh, man, what's the matter with me tonight? Thanks." She fixed her clothes and finally finished gathering them in her basket.

Unfortunately, on the way out, she bumped her arm against the door side. "Ow."

"You okay?" he asked with some concern.

"Oh, yeah, yeah, I'm fine. Nothing serious." Her face turned another shade of red. "I'll...seeyoulater." She walked out the door and headed for her apartment as quickly as possible.

Luke shook his head. "Man, I have no idea how she works sometimes."

As soon as she reached her apartment, she quickly entered with her load of clothes and dropped them on her bed. She sunk into her sofa and held her face. Oh, brother, I would bump into Luke of all people. He's probably thinking how crazy I am, especially after I hit on him like that...

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:08:03 GMT

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Dominic sat down at the video phone, cracked his knuckles, and dialled in a number. He breathed in and out slowly as he waited for the call to connect. He glanced over his shoulder briefly to check that Joshua's night-light was still on. It was, and he smiled. Finally the call connected, and Dominic smiled wider.

"Hi, Dad," he said, his tongue stumbling slightly over the second word.

Matthew Hawkins grinned tiredly, showing his yellowed teeth.

"Hello Dominic," he said.

"How are you?" Dom asked as his voice recovered.



Matthew shifted in his seat and leaned in closer to the camera.

"I'm getting on all right, son," he said.

Dominic gulped as he took in his father's appearance. His face was lined deeply in places it had never been before. His skin was greyish, and he looked haggard and drawn. Dom felt his heart contort as emotions twisted into a gnarled ball inside him.

"How are you? How's my grandson?"

"I'm grand, grand," Dom said. "I'm working away as always. Joshua's good. Getting bigger every day."

Matthew closed his eyes and smiled again.

"Thank you for the picture of the little guy," he said. "It's sitting right on top of the piano."

"It's a good one."

The two men looked at each other in silence for a short while.

"How are you doing without Elizabeth?" Dom asked at length.

Matthew closed his eyes and appeared to briefly grit his teeth.

"She's setting the lawyers on me, but fortunately I have some of the best in the business on my side. She's trying to sway the rest of the kids against me. I haven't heard from Tom in over a month. Arthur and Victoria have brains in their heads, thank God, and aren't taking sides. Paisley won't speak to her mother at all."

"Are you okay?" Dom asked.

Matthew remained silent for a while, before shaking his head.

"I miss her. I can't deny it. But...she's not the woman I thought she was, even after all these years."

"I'm... I'm sorry about the situation. I know how hard it can be."

"Thank you, son. I appreciate it."

The two men continued talking for over an hour, before they finally said good bye. Dominic walked to Joshua's bedroom and gently stroked the child's cheek, smiling, before eventually retiring to bed.

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Thursday, November 8, 10:30 AM

Work was progressing on Thunderbird Seven's cab, and Will thought the light at the end of the tunnel could be seen. He'd worked on it with some of the others for a few hours, then took a power nap when they went to get some parts out of storage. He was still beat; the previous day had been a long one.

When he woke, the others hadn't returned yet. He moved toward Seven, then turned when he heard a sound, to see a bleary eyed Luke walking toward him. "Man, you look as tired as I feel, Morel. Are you okay?"

"Will, next time you're extra tired, close your doors and windows before you hit the sack, okay? You even kept Rom awake."

"Was that you, Abbott?" They turned to see Gordon walking in, followed by Scott. They both had the parts they'd gone for. "I thought someone was using power tools over at Cliff House and couldn't figure out why."

"Right, Gordon. As if anything short of a clap of thunder inside your room could wake you." He turned back to Luke. "Sorry about that. It was so busy yesterday, I didn't get my usual power naps."

"Okay. Since I'm heading home for a vacation tomorrow, I need some sleep. And so does Rom."

"You're leaving tomorrow? That sure came up fast. I guess I've been so busy, I forgot when you were going," Will replied.

He moved toward the other redhead, and took a couple of items from him. "And for your information, I don't snore that loud under any circumstances."

"Don't be too sure about that," said Scott, as he handed a box to Luke. "I've heard you sawing logs down here a couple of times. I even felt the vibrations."

"Yeah, sure you did," Will replied sarcastically. "Hey, I never had anyone complain when I was in the Navy. And I got tired plenty of times there, too."

"That's because all the Navy boys snore loud. I remember when I was on the McCain for a couple of weeks during a combined services training exercise. The pilots found it very hard to get a good night's sleep. We finally figured that it wasn't the ship's engines that made the most noise." Scott grinned.

As if they could hear us over the sound of their own snoring, Will thought to himself. He turned once again to Luke, winked, and said, "We Navy men say that the main difference between a fighter pilot and his jet was that the jet quit whining when the engines were shut down." He then glanced at Gordon, who had let out a guffaw. Finally he looked at Scott.

"Well, you don't want to hear what we fighter pilots said about you sailors."

"I think I just did," Will responded with a grin. "But we'd better get back to work. The sooner we get this thing back in service completely, the better."

The four of them headed back over to the medical vehicle.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:08:35 GMT

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Thursday November 8th, 11:30 a.m. Tracy Island ( 12:30 p.m., Hawaii, previous day)

Aaron pulled the car up to the curb at the drop-off and pick-up area of the Honolulu International Airport. He put the vehicle in park and got out. Walking around to the back of the car, he opened the trunk and pulled out the wheelchair.

Lana had already opened the passenger side door. Aaron unfolded the wheel chair next to the car in the correct position for his mother to transfer from the car to the chair. Though he stood by in case she needed help, Lana expertly made the transfer. While she finished settling herself in the chair, Aaron went back to the trunk to get his mother's luggage.

Aaron handed the garment bag to his mom. She folded the bag on her lap while Aaron headed over to the sky cap for the airline that his mom was flying. After checking her suitcase, he went back to where she was waiting beside the car.

Lana started going over some instructions for Aaron while she was going to be gone. It wasn't long before her son interrupted her.

"Mom, relax, we'll be fine while you're away. You've left us so many lists, that even if we do forget something, it won't take long to find instructions listed somewhere. Dad and I are quite capable of looking after ourselves, Lea and the house for five days."

Lana smiled. Her husband had told her basically the same thing before he had left for work this morning.

"You're right," she consented. Still, the idea of leaving her family alone even for just five days made her nervous. Lana had become accustomed to taking care of them and making everything run smoothly. Not to mention, this was the first time she would be leaving Lea for an extended period of time. Even knowing the little girl would be well cared for between Vince, Aaron and her own parents, didn't take all the nervousness away. "It's just five days after all."

"Right. Have fun, and make all those people who read that sap you write, happy."

"Yeah, well, wait until you meet a girl, then you won't think it's just sap," Lana told him, used to her son's comments about her books.

"Don't count on it. Aaron leaned over to give her a hug. "Enjoy your trip," he told her before straightening up.

"Thanks," Lana said, as Aaron took a step back. With a quick final wave, she turned her chair toward the airport and started propelling it in that direction. She had agreed to meet Jean inside at the gate for their flight to Miami, Florida.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:09:40 GMT

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Thursday, November 8, 2068, 11:30 p.m., Tracy Island

"Need a thumbprint on this one, Mr. Tracy." Juan held out the special delivery envelope with its thumb scanner lock.

"Who is it for? I can get them down here..." Jeff flipped open his phone; he couldn't use the wristcomm in front of the mail carriers. It might get back to someone in the media, who would tie its use to that of IR.

"No need, Mr. Tracy. It's for you."

Jeff took the plastic carrier, and slipped his thumb onto the tiny scanner. There was a soft beep, the scan pad turned green, and the package unlocked. Juan removed the contents and handed them to him. "I think that's it for today, sir."

"Thank you, Juan." Jeff sounded distracted as he looked over the thick envelope. "Have a good flight."

"See you again on Saturday!" Juan responded as he climbed back into his plane.

Kyrano kept his eyes on the switchback trail up to the Villa, but Jeff spent the time immersed in the fascinating letter he'd just received. About halfway up, he huffed and shook his head. "I can't believe it."

"Something wrong, Mr. Tracy?" the retainer asked.

Jeff started, as if surprised by Kyrano's voice. "No, Kyrano. Nothing's wrong. It's just... this! I can't believe it."

They pulled the small cart up to the Villa, where Lisa waited to help carry in any large packages. Jeff got out, looked at the letter in his hand again, and went bounding up the stairs to the lounge. Passing through the study, he opened the door to the classroom. "Dianne!"

Dianne looked up from where she was helping Alex with his history lesson. "Yes, love?"

"You have to see this." He waved the letter at her.

"Keep working on that timeline," she told her son, then crossed the room to join her husband.  
"What is it, dear?"

"Just look." He handed her the letter.

She skimmed it, and drew in a sharp breath. "Oh my!" She gave it another quick read, then asked,  
"Are you going to do it?"

"I don't know!" Jeff asked, drawing her with him to the lounge. "Do you think I should?"

"You're still fit, and have no chronic health problems -- though they might take that accident back in February into consideration. You were pretty beat up from that. It might make a difference to the flight doctors." She shook her head, and handed the letter back to him. "You won't know until you talk to them."

"I'm going to talk to John first; see how much he knows about this!" Jeff settled down behind his desk, and dialed a number from the vidphone. Ever since Anna had suggested using the vidphone to communicate with whoever was in Thunderbird Five, the phone calls had been more numerous and Alan had felt more in the loop during his last month. Now John was finding the same thing happening.

"Hello, John," Jeff said. "How are things up there?" The greeting was a bit of a code phrase; it let whoever was up there know that it was okay to pick up as he (or she) was, using the video portion without hesitation. No outsiders were around.

"Just fine, Dad," John said, grinning. "Hey, Mom!"

Dianne smiled at him. "Hello, John."

"Son, I just got a letter from the WSA..." Jeff began.

"Ah! So they finally got in touch with you!" John's grin grew wider, and more mischievous. "I was wondering when you'd hear from them."

"You knew about this?" Jeff asked, surprised. "And you didn't say anything?"

"Yes, I knew about the possibility that they might go ahead with their plans, but I didn't know for sure until I'd gotten a call from Svetlana. She asked if I thought you might be interested. I told her, 'Hell, yes!'" John leaned in a little further. "Are you going to do it? Because I wouldn't want to go to the moon without you."

Jeff shook his head. The letter was an invitation from the WSA to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the first moon landing by dedicating a new moon base, and they wanted as many of the 21st century moon pioneers to be involved. The letter said that they particularly wanted Jeff, as the first man to step foot on the moon since the first moon expeditions, and also John, representing a second generation of space exploration.

"I'm just stunned that they want an old man like me," Jeff said. "I'm not even sure I'm fit enough to go. Dianne thinks that my accident might make a difference in whether or not they'll greenlight me. Besides..." He made a motion toward his desk. "I have different responsibilities now. The moon isn't as dangerous a place it was when I went, but it's still a risk..."

"It won't hurt to tell them yes, Dad," John said. "And you do have some time; you can use it to work out and bring yourself up to snuff." He smiled softly. "This would be such a great opportunity for both of us."

"What do you think, love?" Jeff asked, turning to Dianne.

"I already told you what I think, Jeff," Dianne reminded him. "You should talk to Svetlana and find out if you're fit enough to go." Svetlana Gagarin was a descendant of Yuri Gagarin, one of the earliest cosmonauts, and current head of the World Space Agency. "If you're strong enough, then you should take advantage of the opportunity." She paused, and sighed. "It's not that I don't think of the risks involved, it's just that... there are some things worth taking those risks for. This is one of them."

Jeff nodded, then took in a deep breath, and let it out slowly. "All right. I'm going to discuss this with your brothers first, John. I don't want them blindsided by this and I do want their opinions. Then I'll make my final decision."

"Good enough, Dad," John replied, nodding. He glanced at the clock on his computer. "Isn't it about time for lunch?"

"Yes, it is," Dianne said, glancing at her watch. She looked at Jeff. "Maybe we could discuss it then?"

"Sounds like a good idea. And after lunch, I'll talk with Gordon about hiring Brandon's replacement."

"Have you heard anything from him, Dad?"

"Not yet," Jeff said, shaking his head again. "He's on family leave for at least another week so he can get settled in and see to his parents. Then he should be back to work at his old job."

"I sure am going to miss him," John said. "He was a good teammate. I hope whoever we get next will be just as good."

"Me, too, son. Me too." Jeff smiled. "I'm going to let you go, John. Take care and I'll talk to you later."

"Keep me up to date on this new project, okay, Dad? And tell Tyler I'll call him later."

"Will do, John. Stay safe up there. Goodbye for now."

"Goodbye, John," Dianne echoed just before the call ended.

The couple held each other's gaze for a few moments, then Jeff stood and put his arms around his wife. "Are you really sure you're okay with this, Di? The risks are still pretty great."

"Jeff, you'd always regret that you'd missed an opportunity if you don't at least try for this," Dianne said. She laid a soft kiss on his lips. "And I'd feel the same way."

He tightened his embrace, and she responded; they held each other tightly for a few long moments. Then he eased up, and gave her a deep kiss. "I love you, Dianne."

"And I love you, Jeff Tracy." She returned the kiss with one just as deep, and just as passionate.

The sound of fake retching greeted their ears and they broke off, glancing over to the study where their youngest sons stood, at the grillwork door. Alex was doing a good impression of someone with food poisoning.

"Grandma sent us to remind you that lunch was ready," Tyler said, rolling his eyes at his older brother's performance.

"You can go tell her we're coming," Dianne said. "Just take Mr. Shigellosis along with you... before I get my hands on him."

Grinning, Alex got off the floor and fled the study, not wanting to be caught by his parents. But Tyler lingered, waiting for Jeff and Dianne.

"Wasn't that what we got when we had that bad fish?" he asked, his face puzzled.

"Yes, it was." Dianne replied as she intertwined her fingers with Jeff's and they headed, hand-in-hand for the door.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:10:00 GMT

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Thursday, November 8, 1:45 p.m., Tracy Island

"Let me read this again, and see if it sounds right," Jeff said, adjusting his reading glasses.

"Sure, Dad." Gordon was fidgeting a bit; he was supposed to be down in the vehicle repair bay, helping Brains and Will with Seven's cab. It had been difficult at first; his memories of the old cabin were still lingering. But it was therapeutic in a way now. He knew he was building something that would make sure that what happened before wouldn't happen again, and that made him feel good.

"Wanted: Marine specialist. Experience in piloting and navigating above-sea and/or sub-aqua craft, especially hydrofoils, required. Diving master and diving instructor certification a must. Prefer military training and experience, but will consider civilian training as well." Jeff read through



it quickly, tweaking a word or two as he did.

Gordon shook his head. "I dunno, Dad. It still sounds so... like us, if you know what I mean. After that business with the EMT letter that Dom got, you know that the World Gov is looking for us. This would be a huge red flag, in my opinion."

"So, what do you think we should do? Do you have any other ideas?" Jeff sounded frustrated.

Gordon came behind the desk and nudged his father. "Let me at it." Jeff rose, shaking his head, while Gordon cracked his knuckles and sat up straight.

Ten minutes later, Gordon called to his father, who had been standing by the windows, looking out over the pool. "I think I have it."

Jeff strode over, while Gordon read his version aloud. "Wanted: Experienced helmsman for marine product testing. Multi-year experience needed in piloting hydrofoils and other marine craft. Current SCUBA dive instructor certification required; dive master certification a plus. Must be fluent in English, and willing to relocate." He glanced up at his father, who had joined him at the computer. "How does that sound?"

Jeff reached out. "Let's reword this last bit a little: 'English fluency necessary; ability to speak other languages a plus. Flexibility and willingness to relocate a must.'." He glanced at Gordon. "I'll agree it sounds less... military, and the business about the 'product testing' may put off any suspicions." He shook his head. "But I really want someone with military experience."

"Dad, can't we put a bug in the ear of whoever will be handling this in Human Resources?" Gordon asked. "They can fast track anyone with the military background and save the civilians for later."

"You're right; they can." Jeff now nudged Gordon out of his seat. "I'm tempted to have this go out of San Diego, seeing as that's where our main marine facility is, but I think Honolulu is better." He sighed. "Besides, this will be going out through the in-house listings, and I don't want to rub it in Brandon's face if I can help it. A change of venue might help ease things there."

"How do you think he'll explain his return to his old job?" Gordon asked, folding his arms.

"How would you? He was needed back home to care for his parents, and transferred back." Jeff was tweaking up the ad a touch more. "It's not hard to understand."

"No, I suppose not."

"There!" Jeff stopped typing with a flourish. "Now let's see what we've got."

"Wanted: Experienced helmsman for marine product testing. Multi-year experience needed in piloting hydrofoils and other marine craft. Current SCUBA dive instructor certification required; other undersea diving experience a plus. English fluency necessary; ability to speak other languages an asset. Flexibility and willingness to relocate a must. Contact Human Resources, Tracy Industries, Honolulu, HI, USA." Gordon finished reading and nodded. "Looks good."



"And I'll give our agent in Human Resources a heads up on the military experience preference." Jeff tapped a few keys. "There. Sent. I know Human Resources will spiffy it up a bit; they usually do."

"I always wondered how we were managing to get the word out about IR's needs," Gordon said, grinning. "So, we have an agent in Human Resources?"

"More than one, actually," Jeff replied. "I knew the day would come when we'd have to expand -- and I put these folks in place to help me evaluate possible operatives." He shook his head. "I just didn't think we'd need them as quickly as we did."

"You thought we could go longer with just us?" Gordon was frowning, and he folded his arms.

"I hoped we could, son." Jeff took in a deep breath through his nose, letting it out in a sigh. "But... the time came sooner rather than later. And a good thing, too. It didn't take losing one of you to make me realize it."

Gordon echoed his father's sigh, only louder. "Yeah, you're right. We had a few close calls, but..." He shifted his stance, dropping his arms, and with them, his melancholy air. He put a hand on Jeff's shoulder. "Thanks, Dad, for not waiting too long."

"Well, the old man knows what he's doing once in a while," Jeff said with a wry smile. "Now, you'd better get back down to the repair bay. Dianne's been itching to get into the simulator and you've got to get the bugs out of the software before she can."

"F-A-B!" Gordon gave his father a jaunty salute as he headed back across the room. "Let me know when we get our first candidates!"

"I will, Gordon, I will!"

Gordon disappeared through the study, and Jeff could hear the door to the hallway swish open and shut. Then Jeff got up and stretched, sauntering over to the windows again. The day was bright, and he knew that the children would soon be out of classes. "Maybe I have time for a swim today," he murmured.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front  
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:10:13 GMT  
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Thursday, November 8th, around 5 p.m.

Trying to keep her eye on the Frisbee, Cassie reached out and tried to grab it. Instead, the plastic disc went through her fingers and landed in the sand behind her. With a sigh, Cassie turned and retrieved it. Picking the Frisbee up, she turned and tossed it to Elise. The blonde effortlessly snatched it out of the air.

"You make that look so easy!"

"It's called years of practice," Elise told her as she sent the Frisbee back to her dark-haired companion.

The two women tossed the Frisbee back and forth a few more times.

"I've about had it," Cassie said, as she walked over to retrieve the Frisbee from the sand again. "Ready to call it an afternoon?"

"Sure," Elise replied.

"Got any plans for dinner this evening?"

"No. Why?"

"How about joining me? It'll be nice to not eat alone for a change," Cassie said as she walked back in Elise's direction.

"Sounds great!"

The two women retrieved their sandals and water bottles from where they left them. After slipping their sandals back on, they started toward the cliff house. Reaching the patio, they ducked into the lounge to check the mailboxes.

"Yes, it came!" Cassie exclaimed, taking out a box. Leaving the other things in the box for now, she opened the package.

"What is it?" Elise asked, curious.

"A book I ordered, *Coping at Home*. It was released in the States on Tuesday. It's a new book by my favorite author, Chase Rivers. She hasn't released a book in more than three years so I've really been anticipating this one."

"She writes historical romantic fiction, doesn't she? I read one or two of her earlier books - *A Civil War Rose* was the name of one of them."

"That was her first book. Have you read the sequel, *Rose Petals Among Ashes*?" Cassie asked. Elise shook her head in response and Cassie continued. "I've got a copy of it if you want to borrow it."

"That would be great!" Elise said, as Cassie grabbed the other things in her mailbox. "I need a new book to read. So what's that one about?" she asked as they headed to the elevator to head up to Cassie's apartment."

"It's set during the WWII era. The main character, Erin Simmons, is eighteen and lives with her father and younger sister. When the war breaks out, both her father and her fiancée join the army. That leaves her at home to look after her younger sister."

"Sounds interesting," Elise commented. "Can I borrow it when you're done?"

"Sure," Cassie replied as the elevator came to a stop on the top floor. The doors opened and Cassie led the way into her apartment. She placed her mail on the table as she headed for the kitchen to get dinner started.

"What are you in the mood for?" Cassie asked her guest, following the question with a few choices.

Elise picked one. The two women continued to talk about books as Cassie prepared dinner.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:10:29 GMT

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Cassie had enjoyed her dinner with Elise. The pool game had been mentioned and Cassie had invited Elise to join them, but the blonde had declined, saying she wanted to dive into the borrowed book. So, while Elise left for her own apartment, Cassie had headed up to the Villa. Now, she stood by the wall in the game room, watching Scott take his turn. He had two striped balls left on the table compared to Cassie's four. Even with his help, Cassie wasn't having much luck getting the solid balls to go into the pockets. Right now though, the solid balls were in the way of Scott having a clear shot of the striped balls.

Not seeing any decent shot, Scott just tapped the cue ball softly. The white ball rolled a little ways and then came to a stop without touching anything. With the intentional foul, it was now Cassie's turn.

Stepping up to the table, Cassie surveyed the layout. Giving that she had more balls on the table it also meant that she had more options. Choosing a shot, she called it and then started to line it up. Scott gave her a minor correction on the angle with which she was hitting the cue ball. Cassie made the correction and lined up the shot again. Taking aim, she struck the cue ball with the stick. Instead of going the intended direction though the cue ball shot off at an unexpected angle. It missed the ball she had been aiming for and glanced off another one.

"You're jerking your hand slightly just before you strike the cue ball," Scott told her, walking toward the pool table. After a quick survey of the table he motioned her in his direction. "Here, take a shot at the four ball," he told her and then explained to her how to hit it with the cue ball in order for it to go into the far side pocket. "You want to make sure you keep the motion smooth through out the entire shot."

Cassie made another attempt. Again the cue ball didn't go the direction she had attended it.

"You're still jarring the cue stick slightly right before it makes contact with the cue ball," he told her, resetting the shot. "Let me show you," he told her stepping up behind her and reaching around her, placing his hands on top of hers so he could guide them. "You want a smooth motion even through the follow through," he told her.

"Now don't those two look cozy, Alan."

Gordon's comment startled both Scott and Cassie. The cue stick hit the cue ball sending the white ball slightly into the air. Its odd momentum carried it to the side of the table and over the edge.

"He was just helping me with my shooting technique," Cassie said, feeling her cheeks grow warm, even as she hopped no one else noticed.

"Oh, is that all," Alan teased.

"Don't you two have somewhere else to be?" Scott asked, as he retrieved the cue ball off the floor. Placing it on the table he looked in his brother's direction. Both of them were wearing grins.

"No, not really," Gordon said with a shrug.

"Hey, I know, why don't the four of us play a game?" Alan suggested.

"Yeah, what three on one, so you actually have a chance to win?" Scott replied, only half joking.

"I was thinking more like you and Cassie against Gordon and me," Alan told him.

"Yeah, Cassie should be enough of a handicap for you to even the odds up," Gordon commented without really thinking.

"Hey!" Cassie said, putting the cue stick on the pool table and resting her hands on her hips.

"Sorry. That didn't come out right," Gordon said sheepishly.

"So how about it?" Alan asked.

Scott looked over at Cassie. He had a feeling that Gordon's comment had made her determined to not only take the challenge but to win, too. Her nod gave him the answer he expected.

"You're on," Scott told his brothers. "One of you can even break," he told them putting the balls that had been pocketed back onto the table.

Gordon grabbed the triangular rack and started gathering the billiard balls.

"So, looks like I'm your chauffeur for your visit to the Christchurch branch of Tracy Island on Tuesday," Alan commented, while Gordon got ready.

"I'm looking forward to it. I've been an employee of Tracy Industries for a month now, and except for the initial interview, haven't set foot in any of the facilities," Cassie replied.

The balls set correctly within the frame, Gordon removed the rack. Picking out a cue stick, he rubbed the top with the blue chalk and walked to the opposite end of the table. With a crack, the cue ball hit the other balls sending them scattering. The three ball rolled into the side pocket.

"If you don't mind, I thought we could get dinner on the mainland and do some shopping after you're done at the plant," Alan said to Cassie, as he approached the table to make the next shot.

"That's fine with me," Cassie replied, as Alan lined up the shot.

"One ball in the far right pocket," he said, calling his shot. The room fell quiet as Alan took the shot. The cue ball rolled toward the yellow ball, glancing the side of it. The one rolled toward the called pocket, only to stop inches in front of it.

Alan groaned, and Scott motioned to Cassie to go first. Alan's failed shot had left her with two relatively easy shots. The cue ball was lined up well to put the ten ball in the corner pocket at the opposite end of the table from the one, or she could try to sink the one ball herself. As the three had already been pocketed, Cassie decided to go for the one.

She called the shot and lined it up. The cue ball rolled down the table, knocking the one ball into the pocket and then bounced off the cushion at the far end.

"Looks like we're solids and you guys are stripes," Scott said as he stepped up to the table for his shot. "Seven in the side pocket," he said, calling the next shot.

The game continued. The talking and joking dying down as the game got more intense. Finally, the only solid ball on the table was the eight, while one striped ball remained. The black ball was the only thing standing in the way of victory for Scott and Cassie.

"At least we'll get another chance," Gordon said jokingly to Alan.

"I heard that," the dark haired woman told him as she surveyed the table.

Determined to sink the ball, Cassie called her shot. She took her time lining it up and took a deep breath, letting it out slowly. With a crack, the cue stick hit the white ball, which knocked the eight toward the corner pocket. The room was quiet as the ball rolled slowly toward the hole and then dropped in.

"Yes!" Cassie said, excitedly. She turned around and gave Scott a quick hug before turning to her two opponents. "Good, game."

"Yeah, it was close."

"We want a rematch sometime," Alan said.

"Anytime, little brother, anytime," Scott told him.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:10:47 GMT

Thursday, November 8, Christchurch, NZ.

Cherie wasn't even sure that she wanted to go to art class after the previous week's events. But Virgil had gently suggested that she shouldn't give up -- and Scott had reminded her that, as Tracys, they never gave up! Her mother had hugged her tightly and kissed her on the forehead, then offered to be her pilot. On the way to Christchurch, Cherie had eyed Anna and wondered if she should bring the situation up to the counselor. She decided to see how things went and then she'd talk to Anna.

Airini was waiting, as usual, when Dianne dropped her off. As usual, she preceded Cherie into the building and into the classroom. Anneliese glanced up when Cherie walked in, then went back to setting up her drawing board. Cherie wasn't sure if she should say anything, but figured she should be at least a little bit friendly, so she murmured a quiet, "Hi," to Anneliese.

The other girl glanced her way, not really looking at her, and replied, "Hello."

Fortunately, Mr. Jernigan had them busy that night, working with mixing paints to match small swatches that he had passed out. Cherie, who had already done some of this work with Virgil, found it easy, except for the pale green, which she couldn't seem to blend quite to her liking. The teacher came around to give advice, and suggested a touch more yellow. "Just a drop or two should do it," he said.

Cherie nodded, and did as the teacher had told her. It got the color closer to the swatch, and one more drop made the match near-perfect.

Mr. Jernigan smiled. "Nicely done, Cherie. You have a good eye for color."

Cherie blushed slightly, and smiled back. "Thank you."

"Mr. Jernigan?" Aroha raised her hand, waving it a little. "Am I doing this right?"

"Let me see."

The teacher moved away, and Jen, who sat on the other side of Cherie from Anneliese, said in a quiet, sing-song, sarcastic voice, "'You have a good eye for color, Cherie.' 'You draw divinely, Cherie.' Crikey dick! Must be nice to have a da who'll pay the teacher to spew that load of codswollop to you, eh?"

Cherie's jaw clenched; she swallowed hard, but kept her eyes on her work. Anneliese glanced at her, and at Jen, then went back to what she was doing.

When class was over, Cherie packed up her things in silence. Jen was busy chattering to the girl on the other side of her, talking loudly about going on to the ice cream shop after class. "You coming, Liese?" she asked.

"Wasn't planning on it. Mum wants me home early tonight." Anneliese didn't look at Jen, but put her supplies away quickly.

"Tim? Aroha? Manjari? Coming for ice cream?" Jen called to the others in the group.

Manjari exchanged glances with Aroha, and shrugged. "Not me; I'm knackered," Manjari said.

"I'm coming." Tim's declaration was firm. He glanced over at Cherie, and gave her a sharp nod, which confused her.

"I guess I will, too," Aroha said, slinging her art bag over her shoulder.

"I'm sure Cherie doesn't want to come." Jen turned to Cherie with a sickeningly sweet smile and a faux-cultured accent. "She wouldn't want us bludging off her." Her smile widened and she strutted from the room as if she were a stereotypical society grande dame, waving her hand just so. "Cheerio, dahlings!" Her neighbor, who was walking with her, giggled at her antics. Aroha hurried to catch up with the pair, while Manjari rolled her eyes and followed at a more leisurely pace. Tim stopped to speak with Anneliese, murmuring in her ear. He glanced at Cherie, gave her another brisk nod, then caught up with Manjari.

"He'll rark her up if she gets snarky, or goes off whinging about you." Anneliese still avoided Cherie's gaze.

"Thanks." Cherie pulled her bag over her shoulder.

"And... I..." Anneliese glanced up at Cherie, a troubled look on her face. Then she shook her head. "Never mind. See you next week."

"Right."

Airini was waiting outside the classroom door for her, and fell into step with her as they headed out to the parking lot. The body guard went first, and checked the parking lot. Dianne, who had been sitting in the car with Chase Rivers's new book, spotted her, and pulled out of her spot to meet both young women near the door. Airini didn't leave until her charge was safely inside the car with the door locked.

"So," Dianne asked, a few minutes after they pulled out into traffic. "How did things go?"

The girl sighed heavily, and shook her head.

"That bad, huh?" Dianne said, her voice sympathetic.

"Yeah," Cherie said with another heavy sigh.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:11:24 GMT

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Tracy Island, November 9th, around 2 PM...



Luke handed a bag up to Gordon, who stowed it in the back of the plane. "One more, then I'm done," he called out. He hefted up a large rectangular crate.

Gordon raised an eyebrow in question. "Do I want to know what this is?"

Luke chuckled. "My hunting rifles. Hard to go to camp without them. I checked with the airline and they said I could transport them as long as they were locked and crated and I carried no ammo. Plus me having worked for the Forest Service helped speed the background check. Apparently I'm not much of a security risk."

"Ah, if they only knew," Gordon teased.

"All set, Gordon?" Jeff called out as he walked towards them, Dianne, Scott and Virgil at his side.

"Yep. Thanks again for letting me take off, Dad. The gang was pretty excited when I called the other night."

Jeff smiled. "Not a problem, son. Have fun." He turned to Luke. "You have a good time with your family, too. And good luck in the office."

"Thanks, sir...I mean, Mr. Tracy. Though the possibility of facing down a grizzly is more relaxing than that presentation I have to give," Luke responded.

They all laughed. Dianne stepped forward and hugged Gordon. "Have a safe flight. We'll see you soon."

"Bring us back some elk," Scott said, slapping Luke's shoulder.

"I'll do my best," he told them.

"Try not to get arrested," Virgil said with a grin to his brother.

Gordon batted his eyes innocently. "Who, me?" With a jaunty wave, he stepped into the plane. Luke whistled to Rommel, who came running and they too boarded.

Everyone stepped back and watched as the jet taxied down the runway and took off. As soon as it had left the ground, Dianne and Jeff started back, hand in hand, towards the Villa.

Scott waited until the plane was a mere speck in the sky before turning to his brother, a sly grin on his face. "Virgil, how'd you like to give me a hand with something?"

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:11:37 GMT

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Bozeman, Montana, Friday November, 9th, a little after 5:00 AM...

The plane landed on the runway with a soft bump, and began taxiing towards the terminal. Luke waited until it had stopped and let all the other passengers off before getting up. He groaned and stretched his arms over his head. "Well, boy, we're here." Rommel sat up, his tail thumping against his master's leg. Luke scratched the dog's head and glanced at his watch. "Man, I hate the date line. We're here before we left!"

They had traveled with Gordon as far as Honolulu where Luke and Rommel had then transferred to a commercial flight to Los Angeles and then on to Montana. The plane wasn't as comfortable and roomy as the Tracy's private jet, but traveling with the dog had some advantages. Luke was able to get a front row seat so he could at least stretch his long legs.

He grabbed his backpack from the overhead bin, thanked the flight crew, and together he and Rommel made their way off the plane, into the airport.

"Luke! Over here, son!" He turned and spied his father waving at him. Rom's ears shot up and he let out a low "woof" as they walked over.

"Dad!" Luke said, pulling his father into a hug. "It's great to see you!"

"You too, son," Richard told him. He eyed his son critically. "Nice tan you've got going there."

Luke laughed. "I've been working in Hawaii for the last few weeks. Hard not to get tan. And thanks for picking me up so early. The time change kills me." He yawned.

Richard draped his arm around his son's shoulders. "Not a problem. Let's get your stuff."

Forty-five minutes later, Luke and his father had gathered all the luggage and were walking out to the car. As they hit the outside, Luke let out a gasp. "Damn, it's cold! I'm not used to this anymore!" he said, pulling up the zipper on his coat. They quickly got into Roger's jeep, Rommel hopping into the back seat. Roger cranked the heat and within minutes, warmth spread throughout the vehicle. Luke closed his eyes and sighed in relief.

"You've gotten spoiled, son," Roger told him.

"Yeah, I have," Luke replied. He yawned again. "Sorry, Dad, I can't keep my eyes open. It's been a long day."

"And it's only six in the morning!"

Luke groaned. "Don't remind me. My internal clock is way off."

"We'll be home soon. Your brother isn't coming until this afternoon, so there'll be plenty of time for you to catch a nap. If you can get away from your mother, that is."

He laughed. "She excited to see me or Rom?"

"I don't think you want me to answer that question."

They continued driving, chatting comfortably, heading towards home.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:11:54 GMT

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Saturday, November 10th, 9:30 a.m. Tracy Island( Friday November 9th, 10:30 a.m., Oahu, Hawaii)

Vince scanned the tag on the teddy bear, which had on a T-shirt with the shop's logo on it, and then handed it to the little girl standing next to her father. The curly haired brunette smiled back at him as Vince went back to ringing up the customer's purchases. It wasn't long before he had completed the transaction and was handing over the receipt.

"I'll see you tomorrow morning then," Vince told Mr. Johnson, who had just booked a sight seeing tour for the following morning.

The Johnson's would join another group of five on the flight. Vince didn't know much about the group other than that it was a group of former and current WASP officers getting together.

"We're looking forward to it," Mr. Johnson told him, taking his daughter's hand and heading toward the door. His wife and son were already waiting outside.

Jim opened the door to the dive shop as the father and daughter reached it. He stood aside, allowing them to exit before coming into the shop. He looked around the shop for Aaron. The teenager was in the back of the shop restocking.

"Hey, Aaron, can you give me a help unloading the boat?" Jim called, having just come back from taking out a group of teenagers from a nearby aquatic center.

"Yeah, sure. Just let me put this stuff back in the storeroom," Aaron said, placing the dive mask that he had in his hand on the shelf. He then picked up the box and headed toward the store.

As Aaron disappeared into the store room, Jim walked up to the counter. "So, find anything that interests you for your new career?"

"I sent in applications to both The Bedford Institute of Oceanography and the Maui Aquarium and Research Institute."

"So I guess you're not too particular on location then?"

"Lana and I talked about it, and as long as we can settle as a family near where I work, the location isn't the most important thing."

"Well then in that case, I saw an ad that might interest you," Jim told him, coming behind the counter and walking to the computer. Vince joined him, curious. It didn't take long before Jim had

brought up what he wanted to show his boss. "I was looking to see what places were hiring in Hawaii and I came across this. I obviously don't have the necessary requirements but you do and product testing would definitely be a change from this place."

"That it would," Vince said as he read over the want ad for Tracy Industries. It definitely looked like a job to at least check out. "Thanks, I think I'll send them my resume and see what happens."

"You're looking for a job, Dad?"

Vince and Jim turned to see Aaron standing near by. Jim shot Vince an apologetic look, realizing that his boss hadn't broken the news to his son yet.

"Yes."

"Are we going to move?" Aaron asked, not giving his Dad a chance to elaborate on his first answer.

"I'm not sure, but chances are we will," Vince told him, not about to sugar coat anything. "Look, we'll discuss this at home tonight. Why don't you go start unloading the boat."

"Yes, sir," Aaron replied, the look on his face saying that he wasn't happy with the situation.

"Sorry about that," Jim said, as Aaron left the shop.

"Don't worry about it. I had to break the news to him sometime, though this wasn't the ideal way. It'll work out," Vince said looking at the door his son had walked through. He turned back to his friend. "So, you're looking at ads. Find anything of interest?"

Jim smiled as he walked out from behind the counter. "Don't worry, I'm not going anywhere anytime soon. Just weighing my options. I mean what if you sell this place to someone I can't stand. Was actually hoping I might be able to put in an offer for the place myself but after talking with my accountant that just isn't an option quite yet."

Vince nodded. Jim had mentioned plenty of times about wanting to own his own drive shop someday and Vince knew he had been saving money toward it.

"I should go and give Aaron a hand," Jim said, heading for the door. The wind chime above the door making noise again as he opened the door.

Alone in the shop, Vince turned back to the computer and reread the ad for Tracy Industries again. It wouldn't hurt to at least check the position out, he thought. With nothing else pressing to do, Vince sat down on the stool and brought up his resume. He was wondering why knowing other languages would be an asset if he was only testing products, though it didn't concern him. If his ability to speak a couple other languages put him above other candidates than that would be a good thing.

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[size=2]Saturday November 10th, Honolulu Hawaii, around 11 am...

Gordon walked through the hotel lobby, heading for the pool. He stepped out onto the patio and smiled, then tossed his towel on a nearby chair. Walking over to the diving board, he gathered himself and dove off. He surfaced midway down the pool and swam cleanly through the water.

"Yo, Tracy!"

Gordon paused, mid-stride, and looked around.

"Over here!!"

He spied a tall blond waving to him from the opposite end of the patio. He hoisted himself out of the water and hurried over.

"Mike!!!" He grabbed his friend in a bear hug.

"Dude! I'm not in dressed for the water!" The young WASP officer, Mike Perkins, grinned.

"You won't melt. How've you been?"

"Pretty good. How about you? Still hanging out on that island of yours?"

"Yeah. This is just a vacation," Gordon said, grabbing his towel and drying off. "Where are the rest of the guys?"

"Inside at the restaurant. They sent me out to get you," Mike replied.

"You mean Pat sent you!" Both men laughed and went out one of the gates that led to the hotel bar.

Mike led Gordon to a table near the back. "I found him. In the pool. Big surprise there!"

"Ha-ha." Gordon stepped forward. "Cap! Good to see you!" he said to a tall, dark haired man.

Captain Patrick Murphy stepped forward and shook Gordon's hand before hugging him. He was only a couple of years older than the others, and over the course of serving together, had grown close to this group of young men, often spending his leave time with them. "How are you, Lieutenant?"

"Not too bad, sir. Keeping out of trouble anyway." He glanced at the others gathered around the table. "Which is more than I can say for this motley crew."

"Hey, you're included right there with us! Glad you could make it, Gordon." Another former ship-mate, Ernie Dunning, took over Pat's place. "Still swimming, huh? Aiming for another

Olympics?"

Gordon chuckled and shook his head. "Not at the moment. I've got enough going on in my life for the time being."

Lieutenant Jerry Yankowski raised his beer glass. "I hear ya. Living on your own island must be really rough!"

They all broke out laughing and gathered around the table. "Man, it's been too long," Gordon mused as he looked over his friends. "What, a year or so since the last time we all got together?"

"Yeah, I think so," Mike said. "Though Cap'n here couldn't make it the last time."

Pat raised an eyebrow at his friend. "Some of us do have to work, you know."

"Or pretend to, anyway," Mike quipped back.

Gordon waved a waitress over and ordered fruit drinks and appetizers for everyone. "So, what do you guys want to do while we're here? Not just bar cruise, I hope."

Ernie shook his head. "Nah, we're not cadets anymore; let's really do something."

"What about an island tour? There's a place across from Pearl that does air tours. They run a SCUBA shop too, so we could see if there's any dive boats open," Jerry said.

The others nodded. "Works for me," Gordon said. "Are you all staying on base?"

"Well, Jer and I are," Ernie told them. "The Cap here and Mikey managed to get full off-base passes."

"I had my people call his people," Mike said with a grin.

"The only people you have tend to run when they see you," Jerry threw back and they all laughed again.

"What that really means is that Mike and I are free to stay on base or choose other accommodations," Pat told him.

"Well, you're welcome to crash here with me. Plenty of room. I rented a car for the weekend, too," Gordon said.

"Great idea, Tracy!" Mike threw his arm around his friend's shoulders. "We can head over to the beach and--"

"I don't think I want to hear this," Ernie muttered.

"You'd better stay with them, Cap," Jerry said, turning to Pat. "Someone has to keep them out of the brig."

"Ernie, you wound me." Mike pressed one hand to his chest, the other to his forehead.

"I'd like to," Ernie retorted.

"So, we'll meet at the dive shop tomorrow?" Gordon asked. "Around nine-ish?"

Jerry nodded. "Sounds good. I'll call and set us up on a tour. It's called 'Blue Waters Dive Shop' over on Ewa Beach. You can't miss it."

"Great." They all looked up as the waitress brought their drinks and food. After she left, Gordon raised his glass and took a sip, then leaned back with a wide grin. "So, fellas, tell me what you've been up to."

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:12:54 GMT

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5 p.m. Hawaii, 4 p.m TI . . .

Vince stood off to the side in the hangar at the private air field not far outside of Ewa Beach. He was supervising the work Aaron was doing on the engine of the floatplane. Though he had been more hands on in the beginning of the project, now that the bulk of the work was done, he was allowing Aaron to do the actual work and giving his son more guidance than anything else. This was after all Aaron's plane and he didn't want to completely take over the project.

"That should do it," Aaron said, putting the tools he been using back into the toolbox.

"Go ahead and see if she starts," Vince told him, picking up the toolbox and moving further away from the plane.

Aaron climbed up into the cockpit of the plane. A few moments later the plane's engine came to life. Vince knew the grin on his face was as big as his son's. Aaron shut the engine down again and climbed from the cockpit.

"I'll get Jack to look it over for us, but we should be able to take her up for her first flight sometime next week," Vince told his son, clapping him on the shoulder.

"Yeah, first and maybe last," Aaron said, his smile fading.

"Now what's that supposed to mean."

"Well, what if you get a job somewhere where we can't take the plane. There wasn't much point is restoring it in that case."

"No matter what, we've got the time we shared restoring this plane together for our efforts. That's something isn't it?"



"Yeah," Aaron said. "It's just... I don't know, I guess with you not in the service any more I thought we wouldn't have to move again." Aaron paused, thinking of how to phrase what he was feeling inside. "And I know I probably shouldn't care too much, as I'll be going away to college in less than a year but well, this place feels like home. Going away scares me some and knowing I had our home here to come back to makes that idea a little less frightening. I was also hoping that Lea wouldn't have to go through all the moves that I did growing up."

Vince sighed as he led his son toward the hangar's open door. Vince sat down on the edge of the cement outside the hangar, motioning for his son to sit down beside him.

"I know that moving around while you were growing up couldn't have been easy. It wasn't for me. The things that I took most comfort in though was knowing that wherever we were living at least we were together. I hated the times when my Dad wasn't stationed at a base and I know you did too when I was away. I still have every letter you ever wrote me."

Aaron smiled and looked down at the ground, slightly embarrassed. He had written his Dad quite a few letters even when he was little and 'I miss you Daddy' was about the only thing he could write.

"I've enjoyed being around more these past three years."

"Then why change jobs? Keep running the shop!"

"I need a change, son. Someday I'm sure you'll understand this better but for now let me put it to you simply. I'm not happy with where I'm at with my career right now. I need something more. Your mother and I have discussed this. We know it isn't great timing for you, that you'll miss the friends you made here but there is also Lea to consider. She's at the age where we'd like to get her involved in activities with kids her own age. Your mother and I feel that it would be better to relocate before doing that then to get her involved in activities and then turn around and uproot her."

"What about my birthday party?" Aaron asked. His eighteenth birthday was in February and plans for a luau to celebrate had already been started. Aaron's swim team as well as a couple of other friends were on the guest list as well as some family and friends.

"You can still have it. Your grandparents are looking forward to it. I can't promise I'll be able to get time off, though I will try, but there is no reason your mother, sister and you can't come back."

Aaron sighed. He still didn't like the idea of moving. Still, if his Dad wasn't happy at the shop then maybe it would be better for the family.

"I guess the important thing is for us to be together," Aaron finally said, sullenly. Depending on when they moved, he'd miss several surf competitions. Then there was the swim team. They were doing well this season. He'd miss being a part of their success. And last but not least, he was going to miss his friends. Sure, they would all be going their separate ways come June but he hadn't expected to be saying good-bye before then.

Maybe, they'll let me stay with Grandma and Grandpa, Aaron thought. He dismissed the idea immediately. As much as he loved his grandparents he knew he'd miss his parents and Lea more.

"Look, Aaron, I can understand you being upset about this but I need you to try and make the best of it. Hopefully, they'll be another swim team you can join and if it's at all possible, we'll make arrangements to move your plane to wherever we settle. Who knows, we may not even leave Hawaii," Vince said, thinking of the application he had put in at the institute in Maui.

The teen nodded. "I'll try," Aaron told his father. "We might want to finish up here and head home before Grandma comes looking for us. You know she hates it when people are late for dinner," he added not wanting to discuss the topic further right then.

"You're right," Vince said, thinking of his fiery mother-in-law.

Father and son got to their feet and headed into the hangar to secure things before leaving.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:13:27 GMT

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Saturday, November 10th, 4:30 p.m., Tracy Island, (8:30 p.m., Colorado, US previous day)

Outside the rain was pouring down from the storm that was blowing across the island. Hiding from the rain, Scott had retreated to his room to check out some of the web sites he regularly frequented. He wasn't on long when an alert told him that one of his contacts had signed in. Looking down to the corner he saw the alert saying that FlyingAce35 had signed on.

It's been awhile since I've talked with Bill, Scott thought. The last email he had gotten from his old friend had been when Bill had been promoted to Major. Scott had sent a quick congratulation email then and had intended to write a longer response later but had never gotten around to it.

There are a few other people I should probably get around to sending an email to, he thought, getting ready to send a message to Bill. Before he got a chance though, another box popped up on the screen.

FlyingAce35: Hey there! Is the old man keeping you too busy to even drop your friends a line?

Scott smiled as he typed his reply.

Birdman: You could say that. Tracy Industries doesn't exactly run itself, you know. What about you?

FlyingAce35: I've been busy myself. Missy finally got over you and got herself married to a lawyer in NYC.

Birdman: Hey, your sister dumped me, remember!

FlyingAce35: I know. I just like giving you a hard time.

FlyingAce35: Of course being the big brother, I had to take Dad's place and give her away.

Birdman: I'm glad she found someone who makes her happy. Tell her congratulations for me.

FlyingAce35: Will do. Hey, have you heard from Ted lately?

Birdman: No. Why?

FlyingAce35: Just wondering. He sent me an email about two weeks ago. He got married himself. Went to Las Vegas and eloped to get out of having the big Catholic wedding his mom would have wanted.

Birdman. That's great! I didn't think he'd ever find a woman crazy enough to marry him.

FlyingAce35: Me either, actually. So, it looks like you're the last single man of our old group. Any special girl in your life?

Birdman: No.

The answer was a simple thing but the feelings behind it weren't as simple. This wasn't the first time he had thought about the topic, but hearing about other people he had known getting married made him aware of how long it had been since he had even been out on an actual date.

Birdman: I'm starting to think maybe I'm destined to be single my whole life.

FlyingAce35: I'm sure you'll meet someone eventually.

Birdman: I guess.

Scott definitely didn't want to continue the current line of conversation so, he decided to switch topics.

Birdman: So are you still stationed at Hanscom?

FlyingAce35: Actually, no. I'm out west now. I got an instructor position at the Academy.

Birdman: Well, there's a nice cushy assignment.

FlyingAce35: Cushy!? You do remember what we were like when we were that age, don't you?

Scott smiled. Bill, Ted and himself had gotten involved in quite a few "extra curricular" activities when they had been at school together.

FlyingAce35: Jen's happy about my current assignment. Especially as she's expecting our third child in January!

Birdman: Really? That's great! Congratulations.

FlyingAce35: Thanks! It's going to be a little girl this time!

Birdman: She's going to be spoiled. Got a name picked out yet?

FlyingAce35: No. Jen and I are still trying to agree on one we both like.

Jokingly, Scott threw out some names that he knew his friend would reject. The conversation then moved on to other things as the two friends continued to catch up with each other. Scott wasn't sure how much time had passed when he heard a knock on his door.

"Come in," he called out, turning to look toward the door to see Cherie there.

"Grandma sent me to get you for dinner," the girl said.

Scott looked toward his clock, finding it hard to believe it was that late. Sure enough, he had lost track of time while chatting with his Bill.

"Okay. Tell them I'll be down in a few minutes," Scott told her.

Cherie nodded, leaving the room. Scott turned back to his computer to end the conversation. After promises from both of them to stay in touch better, they said good-bye. Scott closed the IM box and then shut down the computer before standing up to join his family for the evening meal.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:14:02 GMT

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Sunday, November 11th, morning, Tracy Island( Saturday, November 10th, morning, Oahu, Hawaii)

Gordon eased the rental car into a parking spot underneath a sign reading "Blue Waters Dive Shop".

"About time we get here. Tracy, you drive like an old woman," Mike quipped from the backseat.

"Yeah? Well, at least I don't dress like one," Gordon shot back with a grin.

"Don't you two start, you hear me?" Pat ordered as he got out of the car.

"Aww, somebody's grumpy," Mike said, stepping out and looking around. "Man, Jerry was right. This place is sweet!"

Gordon walked to the front of the car and followed his friend's gaze. The shop was moderately sized, the front being made up of two large windows filled with diving and snorkeling equipment.

The cement walls were painted an azure blue, the same color as the water off the dock. There was a large mural on one side, consisting of various ocean life, whales, dolphins, and fish. Virgil would appreciate that, Gordon thought to himself.

They spied a man, with curly dark hair, waving from near the windows. "There's Jerry. He and Ernie beat us here," Pat said, quickly walking towards the shop.

Mike nudged Gordon. "I say we throw him off the dock."

Gordon laughed. "He's just being a good captain. C'mon." They all made their way to the shop and stepped inside.

There were several other customers in the store. A man in his early twenties was helping two middle-aged men out by the display of wetsuits. A teenager was standing behind the register, ringing up some purchases. A blond-haired guy was talking to a gentleman and his wife, two kids close by.

At the sound of the door chime, the blond looked toward the group that just walked in. The Blue Waters logo was emblazoned on his polo shirt.

"Hello, may I help you?"

Jerry stepped a little bit in front of the others. "Yeah, my name is Jerry Yankowski. I set up an air tour for my friends and I earlier this week."

"Of course. We've been waiting on you guys, actually. I'm Vince Crenshaw, owner and tour guide for this morning. This is Mr. and Mrs. Johnson. They'll be joining us for the tour today."

"Great," Jerry replied. "Are we ready to go, or do we have time to look around for a bit?"

"Why don't you take a few moments to look around, while I go pull the van around to the front. I'll drive everyone down to the plane. If you'll excuse me," Vince replied, nodding to both Jerry and Mr. Johnson. He headed toward the rear exit of the shop, calling out to Jim that he was leaving as he did so.

Gordon meandered over to the rack containing the diving masks. He eyed the price tag on one and nodded thoughtfully.

"See something you like, rich-boy?" Ernie teased.

Gordon grinned up at the blond. "As a matter of fact I do. I left my mask at home and need a new one. The prices are pretty good."

Jerry walked over to them. "It's more than pretty good; this is top of the line stuff."

"I can see that." Gordon looked up and scanned the shop. The equipment was displayed neatly and aesthetically, giving the shop an efficient yet friendly atmosphere. "You know, if you guys were serious about going for a dive, this is the place to get gear."

"Guy probably has some good spots earmarked, too," Pat added. "Want me to ask?"

"No, I'll do it," Gordon replied.

"Then you're paying!" Mike called out as the others chuckled.

Gordon didn't answer, but walked over to the counter and waited for the owner to return.

Having finished with the customer he had been helping, Aaron turned to the copper-haired man standing nearby. There was something familiar about him, but the teen couldn't quite put his finger on it.

"First time on Oahu?" Aaron asked. Making small talk with the customers had been one of the first lessons he had learned when he started helping out at the shop.

Gordon smiled. "No, I used to be stationed here during my WASP days." He glanced around here. "Nice place you have here."

"Thanks! My Dad will be happy to hear that; he's the shop owner," Aaron told him. "You used to serve in WASP? That's cool. Dad used to be Navy and I'm hoping to join the Air Force myself."

Gordon shook his head good naturedly. "You own a dive shop like this and you want to go Air Force? Kids nowadays..."

"Hey, stop heckling the help!" Mike walked over to lean on the counter. "Well, can they help us out?"

"Haven't asked yet. We were wondering if you had any equipment available for this afternoon, and could give us some good places to go. We're thinking of SCUBA, but snorkeling would be fine too," Gordon said.

"And he'd like to take that mask," Mike added, pointing. Gordon nudged him in the ribs.

"That's a good dive mask. Own one myself," Aaron replied. He turned around and logged onto the computer. "The SCUBA equipment shouldn't be a problem. I'll have to check if there is a boat available, as we only have three," he told him. "Would you need a guide or would you want to take the boat out on your own?"

Gordon looked over at his friends. "We could take it ourselves. That shouldn't be a problem."

Pat joined them at the counter. "No, not at all."

"OK, renting a boat and equipment, if you have it available."

Aaron turned from the computer. "We've got a boat available at two thirty, is that okay?"

Gordon looked over at his former captain. Pat nodded his assent and Gordon handed Aaron his

credit card. "We'll take it," he said as Aaron took the credit card from him.

"I'll also need to see SCUBA certification from everyone in the group," he said almost apologetically, feeling weird requesting the proof from WASP officers. "Standard procedure," Aaron added as the wind chime rang gently. Aaron looked up to see his father walk back inside.

"Is everyone ready?" Vince asked addressing those who were going on the air tour.

"We will be in a second," Pat answered for his group, as he and his friends got out their certification cards. "We're just arranging to rent some equipment to do some diving this afternoon."

"Great. I'll get the others settled then and come join us as soon as you're through. Van's right out front."

Vince left the shop with the Johnsons as Aaron started checking out the certification cards. Ernie placed the mask Gordon was looking at on the counter as he handed the teenager his certification. When he was done, Aaron rang up the transaction on the register and swiped the credit card he had been given. As he looked at the name, the realization hit him.

"You're Gordon Tracy! You won Olympic gold in both the freestyle and butterfly! I'm a huge fan of yours!" Aaron shook his head. "Man, my friends on the swim team will die when they hear I got to meet you!"

Gordon blushed bright red and stammered something as Mike draped his arm over his shoulders. "See, Gordo, you're still famous!"

"Great. Terrific. Can we go now?" Uncomfortable, Gordon turned and headed outside.

Mike grinned at Aaron. "He's a bit shy. Thanks," he said as he took Gordon's credit card and followed his friends out.

Vince was standing by the open door of the van as the group walked out of the store. Gordon and his buddies climbed in, joining the Johnsons who were already occupying one seat of the van. The little boy was crying as they took their seats. Ernie, who was sitting in front of the boy, made a funny face and the boy's cries started dying down. Pat opened the front door and climbed in next to him, Mike and Jerry settling themselves in the way back.

His customers in the van, Vince shut the door and walked around to the driver's side. He climbed in behind the wheel and started heading for the dock where the plane was moored. He began to tell his customers a little about the plane they were going up in.

"Your son mentioned you were in the Navy. Are you sure you know how to fly a plane, what with the water being more your domain?" Gordon, sitting in the front, joked. His good humor was back now that he was out of the shop and away from Aaron's idolization.

Vince smiled slightly, not really amused. The guy didn't seem to take much seriously but as he was a paying customer, Vince wasn't about to criticize him.



"I was actually a Navy fighter pilot for two years before I was able to switch over to submarines," he replied.

"Really?" Gordon said, impressed. "My oldest brother was a pilot in the Air Force. He flew fighters, too. What made you decide to switch to subs?"

"Honestly, subs were my first choice but the Navy had more of a need for fighter pilots when I graduated. As I was flying planes in high school and they've always been a hobby of mine, that was my second choice. When the opportunity came up to switch over, I took it."

"That's cool," Gordon said. "We all served together on a sub, too. And in a bathyscaphe, doing some marine farming. Later, I did some work with hydrofoils." He shivered despite the warm air.

Pat placed a hand on his shoulder. "Easy, Gordo," he said quietly.

Gordon merely smiled, and turned his attention back out the front window as Vince began to speak again.

"I'll give you all more detail about the sights you'll be seeing while on our flight," Vince said, speaking to the entire group. The two kids were now both looking out the windows not paying attention to the shop owner at all. "We'll be taking off from Mamala Bay. We'll head south-east first, giving you a chance to see Pearl Harbor from the air. Our path will take us across the Kaiwi Channel and over the island of Molokai."

"A bit of trivia for you, Hawaii is the only state in the US not to have a straight line in its border, as it's made up of several islands. This tour won't take you over the southern islands though Lani and Maui will be seen when we fly over Molokai."

Vince parked the van in a parking spot near the dock, where several seaplanes were moored. As he lead the group down to the dock where his plane was, he continued. "Next, we'll head back north, over Oahu. I'll point out some of this island's more spectacular sights, which you may want to check out from the ground if you have the time. To our north-west are the islands of Kauai and Nihau which we'll fly over before landing. Any questions before we get on board?" he asked, glancing around the group. He saw several head go back and forth. When no one spoke up he added, "Then let's get started!"

They all boarded the plane, and a few minutes later the plane was moving across the surface of the water before soaring into the sky.

Gordon Goes Sightseeing by Lillehafrue and Icarus1982

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:14:26 GMT

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Sunday, November 11th, about 1:30, Tracy Island( Saturday, November 10th, about 2:30, Oahu,

Hawaii)

Vince had pulled the shop's gator around to the front of the store. He was currently loading the tanks of air for the group of WASP officers' dive. The former naval officer had just placed the tenth tank of the gator when his cell phone vibrated. Taking it from its clip, he looked at the screen and smiled.

"Hey, honey. How's LA?" he asked, answering the phone. Lana had been calling daily just to check up on things and talk to her family. Their conversation last night after she had talked to the kids had been a long one, as Vince had filled her in on his conversation with Aaron.

"Rainy," came the reply. "We're going to get soaked going from the hotel to the book store."

"Sorry to hear that," he told her. The two chatted for about five more minutes before saying good-bye after confirming her arrival time for the next day. All of them were looking forward to having her home.

As he put the cell phone back on the clip, he noticed two familiar cars pulling into the parking lot. It appeared as if Pat and his group had returned.

"Welcome back," the shop owner called out as the group got out of their cars. "Did you enjoy lunch?" Vince had recommended that they go get something to eat at the Saltwater Cafe.

Gordon nodded. "Fantastic. Thanks for sending us there. Hope we're not late," he said, glancing at his watch. "We swung by the hotel and base to grab our equipment." He nodded at Mike and Ernie who were pulling a couple of large duffel bags out of the trunks of the cars. "Where do you want us?"

"Glad you enjoyed it," Vince replied. "Just load the gear on the gator and I'll get it down to the boat for you. I've got two tanks ready for each of you, just in case. You didn't specify if you were planning one dive or two."

"We hadn't really thought about it." Gordon looked up at his friends, who shrugged. "I guess we'll play it by ear." He grabbed a bag from Pat and they loaded them in the back of the small tractor.

"Are we all set?" Mike asked.

"Can we change into trunks on the boat, or should we do it here?" Pat asked Vince.

"Well, there is a place on the boat you could change or you could change here. Depending on what dive site you go to, really. There are areas out there that the water is choppy and you'd be best having everything ready to go before you leave dock. Any of you know the area well?"

Jerry nodded. "I've lived on the islands for the past ten years. Done a fair amount of diving."

"And with our jobs, we'd rather have something a little challenging, right guys?" Mike said to the rest of his friends. They nodded.

"Something challenging, but where we can see something too. Besides just fish," Gordon added.

"Oahu has quite a few old shipwrecks and a few plane wrecks that are interesting to dive to. To the West there is the Mahi shipwreck. Along the south shore you have the Yo-257 and Sea Tiger wrecks. A little further east there is the Kahala Barge, though you need to watch the currents in that area," Vince told them. He paused debating on whether to mention the other popular wreck. Though he had taken several groups of advanced divers there, he didn't feel comfortable suggesting it to a group going out by themselves. The last group who had gone on their own had required assistance when one of the divers had gotten separated from the others trying to return to the boat after the dive. He sighed. These were WASP officers after all. "I don't usually suggest this to groups going out by themselves, but there is the Corsair Plane wreck. Definitely an advanced dive and surface conditions are not the best. I usually prefer to supervise groups going out to the site."

Jerry nodded. "I've heard of it. Sounds like that's what we're looking for."

Gordon's eyes lit up. "Then what are we waiting for!" The five men went inside and changed, pulling their dive suits over their swim trunks. Pat was finished first and while he waited for the others, headed back out front, where the shop owner was making sure gear was secure on the Gator.

"I can tell you kind of reluctantly suggested Corsair to us."

Vince turned from his task to look at the WASP captain. "I've had some bad experiences out there, that's all. I'm sure you are all quite capable divers but things happen. You may want to keep an eye on that red-haired fellow in your group. Doesn't seem to take much seriously from what I've seen and conditions can be rough out there."

Pat smiled. Gordon could come off that way, though the captain knew he could also be quite serious when the situation required it. "He'll be okay. If it'll ease your mind you can tag along with us, if you're not busy."

"My group for later this afternoon cancelled, actually," Vince told him. "If you really don't mind, perhaps I will join you." That settled, Vince headed inside to make arrangements. It wasn't long before they were heading down to the boat and were soon skipping across the waves.

On the way to the site, the men joked good-naturedly with each other, swapping stories of their time together in WASP, and telling Gordon about the latest talk on base.

Vincent raised an eyebrow in surprise. "I thought you were all stationed together?"

Mike shook his head. "Gordo here decided to leave us for...golden pastures!"

Gordon elbowed his friend in the ribs. "Jerk. You know that's not true."

"Oh, so you're denying it?" Mike teased.

"Well, there was also that little incident with the hydrofoil," Jerry piped up.

"Right, we can't forget that," Ernie added with a grin.

"You know, I just might feed you guys to the sharks when we get downstairs," Gordon told them sternly.

The men laughed and continued on with their light-hearted teasing, Gordon giving back as good as he got.

Vince watched them thoughtfully, having turned the seat next to Pat, who was driving, around to face the back of the boat. He was trying to put his finger on why the Gordon fellow seemed so familiar. It had been bothering him most of the day. Suddenly it dawned on him. "Wait a second," Vince said, as it finally clicked. "You're that Olympian swimmer that my son is so enthralled with. I was trying to figure out why you seemed familiar and it's because I've seen that poster Aaron has of you winning the Olympic gold medal for the past six years or so."

Gordon groaned and blushed as the others burst out laughing. He smiled thinly. "Yeah, that would be me."

Vince looked around trying to figure out why the others were laughing.

"Your son already made the connection this morning," Ernie said, getting control of his laughter.

"Yeah, and Gordon here high-tailed it out before he could ask for an autograph," Jerry added.

"Knowing Aaron he probably would have gotten around to it before long, too," Vince commented. "You're probably lucky he was up at Pipeline for a surfing competition when you came back."

Vince looked over his shoulder to see where they were at. Seeing as they were approaching the area of the Corsair, Vince decided it was time to give the guys a little bit of information about the site.

"We'll be at our destination soon," Vince told them. "As you can see, surface conditions are rough out here and almost always are. Currents on the surface can be tricky so be careful. One thing I want to stress, hang onto your fins until you are on the boat. You don't want to toss them on board and then find yourself separated from the boat and need them."

Vince then started telling them about the location they were headed to. "The Corsair has been here since 1946. Story has it, the pilot ran out of fuel on a training mission and had to abandon the aircraft. Amazingly, the plane settled intact 107 feet below the surface," Vince told him. Gordon and his pals had grown quiet and were all listening to the shop owner. Vince explained what they could expect to see and then started going over more safety instructions as Pat slowed the boat near the mooring above the wreck.

He watched as the men checked their own equipment, then each others'. Gordon walked to the edge of the boat and sat down, grinning up at his friends. "All right, gang. Let's dive."

Gordon Goes Diving by Lillehafrue and Icarus1982

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Subject: Re: Cold Front  
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:14:49 GMT  
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Sunday, November 10, 2068, 4 p.m. Tracy Island. (10 p.m. the previous day, Boston)

The phone in the study rang, and Kyrano, who was sifting through the magazines and culling the older issues, moved to answer it.

"Hello. Tracy residence."

The viewscreen flipped on, and a man in his forties looked back at Kyrano. "Hello... uh, it's Mr. Kyrano, right?"

The retainer smiled. "Yes, Mr. Parkhurst. I am Kyrano."

"Jared," the man hastened to say. "Call me Jared, please." He paused. "After all, we're going to be, uh, related soon."

"This is true, Jared. And you may call me Kyrano, for now. I look forward to seeing you and your family again."

"I look forward to it, too. My kids are excited about coming to the island for the wedding." He paused again, clearly a little nervous to be speaking to his future step-father. "Are my mother and my sister around?"

"Yes, they are. Please hold for a moment."

"Sure."

Kyrano pressed the "Hold" button, replacing Jared's image with a sign that said, "Caller on hold". He pressed the button for Jeff and Dianne's quarters, where both women and Cherie were watching a previously recorded skating exhibition. "There is a call from Boston for both of you."

"Thanks, Kyrano," Dianne said. She muted the televid, making Cherie frown, and pulled a chair over to the built in desk, where the vidphone was. Lisa settled herself in the chair that was already at the desk, while Dianne sat in the one she'd brought. "You can transfer the call now."

The vidphone snapped on, revealing Jared's pensive face. It brightened when he saw his sister before him, and cleared further as his mother leaned in to say, "Hello, Jared! It's been a while since we've heard from you!"

"Hi, Mom! Hi, Di! How are things in the tropics?"

"Tropical," Dianne said with a grin. "Rain yesterday, rain today, likely rain tomorrow... it's spring and heading into summer!"

"How's Boston?" Lisa asked.

"We had our first snow yesterday. Only a couple of inches but the kids were so excited! Weatherman says we should get a little more on Monday night."

The conversation went on like this for a little, with the women asking after Patricia and Jared's twins, and Jared asking after Dianne's kids, Jeff, and any of the other Tracys he could think of. Finally, Jared cleared this throat.

"I didn't just call to chew the fat with you both, though that certainly has been great. I called because..." Jared looked very uncomfortable. "Because Dad called me."

Lisa drew in a sharp breath, and Dianne began to scowl. "So, what did he have to say for himself?" she asked, her tone sharp.

Jared took in a deep breath. "He wants to visit me and the family. To make amends, he says. He told me he's in Alcoholics Anonymous and is on step... I don't remember the step."

"Step nine," Dianne replied quickly. "Step nine is to make amends -- unless it would hurt the people you're trying to make amends to."

"Yeah, step nine." Jared cocked his head to one side, a questioning expression on his face. "How do you know...?"

"Doctor, remember?" Dianne's scowl turned to a wry expression. "I became familiar with AA's tenets so I could recommend it if I thought someone needed it." She paused, and sighed. "So, he's on step nine. What are you going to do?"

Jared shrugged. "I'm not sure yet. He's supposed to be going to Dougie's for Thanksgiving, and suggested he come visit me for Christmas. I told him it wasn't a good time." Now Jared's shoulders slumped. "I'm sorry, Ma. I kinda let the cat out of the bag about the wedding."

Dianne groaned, covering her eyes with a splayed hand. Lisa sighed and shook her head. "You didn't tell him more than that, did you, Jared?"

"No. I didn't." Jared shook his head. "He asked how to get in touch with you and I told him straight out that you had asked the family not to give out any addresses or phone numbers."

"That's a relief." Lisa sat back a little. "Please remind Tricia and the boys of that."

"I will," Jared said.

"Hope Dougie doesn't tell him during Thanksgiving," Dianne muttered. "I know Angie wouldn't."

There was a pause in the conversation, then Jared swallowed and asked, "Ma, wouldn't it be best if you let him make amends? I mean, he doesn't have to know where you live or anything, but next time you're in the States..."

Lisa shook her head. "No, Jared. It might sound like I'm being stubborn, but I'm just not ready." She wrapped her arms around herself. "Last time I saw him, he'd followed me into a store when I had Dianne's kids with me. He caught me off-guard and I felt... I felt powerless, like I did when we were married. I swear I will never feel that way again, Jared. Not with him. Never again."

They could see Jared's fingers as he brought his palms up. "Okay, Ma. I see your point." He turned to his sister. "What about you, Di? Will you let him make amends to you?"

"Truthfully, Jared, I don't think there is anything he could do to make amends for what he did to me," Dianne stated. "How do you say, 'I'm sorry' to someone you beat up like that? How do you say it as if you mean it? Sure, it was a long time ago, and I healed from it, but it haunted me for years afterward." She shook her head slightly. "I could never trust that anything he said or did was sincere. Especially now."

"What do you mean, 'especially now'?" Jared asked.

"Now that I'm married to Jeff." Dianne's response was prompt. "Jeff did a background check on him; he's in quite a bit of debt because his wife likes to gamble. I could never trust that he wasn't trying to get close to me so he could touch Jeff for funds."

"I see." Jared's tone had a touch of disapproval to it. "Well, I'd better get going. It's getting late here."

"If you do see him, let me know how it goes." Lisa's request was soft. "I did love him, once. I'd like to know if he is sincere. And if you want him in your life, Jared, that's... that's okay. It's your choice."

"Thanks, Ma. Talk to you two again, soon. Give my love to the family."

"And give Tricia and the twins love from us," Dianne said, her tone softer. "Bye, Jared."

"Bye."

The vidphone clicked off, and Dianne pressed a button to end the call from their phone. She turned to her mother, and sighed.

"Why did he have to come back now?"

"I don't know, Di," Lisa replied, putting a hand on her daughter's shoulder. "But I'm not going to let him ruin the rest of my life."

Dianne reached out, and the two women embraced. "I'm so glad, Ma," Dianne whispered. "I'm so glad."

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Subject: Re: Cold Front  
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:15:03 GMT  
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Tracy Island, Cliff House; 5 PM Sunday, November 11

"Damn!"

Will was in his bedroom. He'd just come in from a swim and was going to take a shower, get into some pajamas and settle back with a movie. He went to his dresser to get some clean ones. . .

. . . and found none. He checked his other drawers, and saw he was out of underwear, socks, and other essentials. Even his work clothes were soiled.

"I hate doing laundry!" He sighed. "Well, there's nothing to do but take my clothes downstairs and get them washed. Man, I don't even have something to wear while I'm doing that. I guess I'll have to keep my swim shorts on. At least I have a terrycloth top."

Gathering all the dirty clothes he could find into a basket -- and there was a large pile of them when he'd finished -- he headed to the elevator and to the common room. Once there, he went into the laundry area and began putting his clothes in.

"Good thing there's more than one washing machine." He looked around. "And dryer. Maybe this won't take too long."

He finished and added the detergent and softener, then started the machines. Sighing again, he went over to a chair, sprawling into it. He leaned back and watched the clothes going round and round in the front loader washers. Not the greatest show, but at least there aren't any commercials. He grinned to himself.

The next thing he knew, someone was shaking him awake. "Hey, Will," he heard Nikki's voice say. "Your laundry's done. Mind transferring it to the dryer? I need to do some of my own."

"Sorry. I'll take care of it right away." He stood up and went over to the machines. Pulling his things out, he transferred them quickly to two dryers and got them started. Nikki looked curiously at the amount of laundry he had, then questioningly at him as she began loading one of the machines with her own.

He grinned sheepishly at her.

"I hate doing laundry."

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Subject: Re: Cold Front  
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:15:20 GMT  
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Sunday, November 11, 5:30 pm TI, (11:30 pm, previous day NYC)

Cassie was in her apartment playing her guitar. She had a new music book she had received in the last mail delivery open on the music stand in front of her. The book had some of the latest country songs in it.

Over the notes coming from the guitar, the dark-haired woman heard her satellite phone ring. Stopping in mid chorus, she placed her guitar up against the wall and stood up. Crossing the living area, she picked the phone up off of the table and glanced at the screen.

"Hey, Mark! What's up?" she said, answering the call.

"Not much. Just wanted to check in on my favorite sister! I was hoping you'd still be awake."

"Yeah, I'm wide awake. I guess I worked the evening shift too long to be able to turn in early."

"I know what you mean. So how's everything with you? The job working out okay?"

"I'm doing good. Making some new friends here. As for the job, its keeping me busy but that's okay. I've got a business trip planned actually."

"Yeah, where are they sending you?"

"The Tracy Industries facilities in Christchurch, NZ. Hoping to see the city a little bit while I'm there," Cassie told him as she settled herself on the couch.

"So, you're finally getting a chance to travel. That's great! Hey, speaking of traveling, were you able to get some time off to make the trip to Japan with the rest of us?"

"Yes, I was able to get a few days off though it is part business trip for me. I'll be making a visit to the Tokyo facilities on Thursday while I'm there. That will leave me all day Friday and Saturday with the family though before I fly out on Sunday."

"Great! Can't wait to see you. Seems like you've been gone longer than a month and a half."

"Then that means you're coming too, I take it," Cassie said. It was something she had been wondering about. Given the strained relationship between Mark and their parents she had been wondering if they would even extend the invitation to him and if they did if Mark would want to go.

"Yeah. I kind of want to see Grandma, Grandpa, Saicho and the others. Figured I can endure the coolness from the folks for their sakes."

"Do they know?"

"Yeah. I told Saicho and he told his parents as well as Grandma and Grandpa. They're a little bit more open-minded than Mom and Dad on the whole subject. It was actually Grandpa who called to invite me for the holiday. From talking with Jordan, seems like our folks called everyone except me."

"Don't let them get to you. It's not worth it. With any luck they'll come around eventually."

"For the first time, I actually think you may be right. Jordan did after all, with a little nudge from you I hear."

Cassie smiled as she replied. "Yeah, well someone has to be the peacemaker in the family. How are the two of you getting along?"

"Pretty well actually. We're flying over to Japan together. We should get there on Thursday evening."

"Good. I should be done with work by that time," Cassie told him.

The two siblings continued to talk for awhile more. Finally, Mark said good-bye so that he could climb into bed. After disconnecting the call, Cassie returned to her abandoned guitar and the song she was practicing.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:15:38 GMT

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Monday, November 12, 10:00 a.m., Tracy Island

"Damn!" Dianne slammed her fists down on the console before her.

Virgil poked his head into the simulator, which had been set up with the new Thunderbird Seven controls. "That didn't go well, did it?"

Dianne shook her head, scowling. "No, it did not. The controls are so touchy! I move my hand the least little bit -- or have it moved for me..." Her scowl deepened as she looked at her stepson. "...and Seven is just jerked away from where I want it to go."

"You have to learn to work with these controls under any circumstances," Virgil cautioned. "That means in high winds, on bumpy terrain... you know that most rescues are under the worst conditions possible."

Dianne held his gaze for a few moments, then snorted. She released her straps and stood up to stretch. "I need a break."

Virgil stepped out of her way. "Not too long. Ten minutes."

She nodded. "I'll be back soon."

Leaving the simulator, she caught the waiting monorail car and rode it down to the lab. The lights on the side of the doors were green, so she let herself in.

"Hello, Dianne," Brains said, looking up from the electronic drawing table. "What brings you here?"

"Taking a break from training." Dianne sighed. She moved over to the window that overlooked the repair bay and folded her arms.

Brains went back to what he was doing, adding some dimensions to the plans of the long-overdue Thunderbird Eight. He looked up again when she said quietly, "They're painting her."

He smiled, and joined her at the window. "Yes. They're on the first coat of white. Three coats, the decals, lights and sealer, then we calibrate all the systems inside. I estimate it should be done by the end of the week."

Dianne shot him a look. "So soon?"

He nodded wordlessly, and she let out a deep sigh. "Well, then, I have a lot more work to do in the simulator." Running a hand through her hair, she gave him a small smile. "I'd better get back to it."

"Good idea."

Going back to his drawing table, he nevertheless watched from the corner of his eye when she left. When she was gone, he turned his attention back to his task.

Dianne took the monorail car back to the simulator, where Virgil waited. He glanced pointedly at his watch.

"Sorry if I'm late," she said as she stepped back into the cockpit and began fastening herself in again. "Did you know that they've started painting her?"

"Yes. I'm supposed to help out after the simulator sessions are over." He prepared to enter the programming and viewing booth. "Are you ready?"

Dianne nodded. "Yeah, I guess so. Let's try it again." She paused as she grasped the padded, rubberized handles. "Whose bright idea was this joystick business anyway?"

"I believe it was Dad's." Virgil's voice came over the intercom.

She huffed, and smiled slightly, a wry expression, muttering under her breath. "Well, Mr. Tracy, this had better work, or you'll be sleeping on the couch tonight."

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:16:32 GMT

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Sunday around 3:00 pm, Montana, (Monday 11 am, Tracy Island) somewhere along the Absaroka Range...

"I can't believe she got one before I did."

Luke grinned up at his older brother. "You're just jealous."

"You bet I am," Roger replied, grinning back. "Means we're still stuck out here while she and Dad are back at the cabin!" He gestured to the snow-covered woods surrounding them.

"Maybe if your aim was better, your daughter wouldn't have gotten the first deer of the season," Luke teased.

His brother glared. "My aim is just fine."

"Whatever you say, old man." The two brothers continued through the woods, softly throwing jabs at each other. They both paused as they heard gunshots in the distance. Luke shook his head. "Remember when we were kids and we'd be out here for days without seeing anyone?"

Roger nodded. "When the government opened up the land a few years ago, the tourists really started piling in."

Luke sighed. "I know." The wind picked up momentarily and he pulled his neon orange cap down further over his ears. "There's nothing this way, not even tracks. Let's head over towards the hills. We might find something over near the rocks, there's more browse there." They moved out.

Nearly an hour later, the terrain had changed from pine trees to tall brush and shrubs surrounding a large outcropping of rock. Another shot rang out, this time closer. "Damn, they're going to spook everything. Where are they?" Roger asked, his eyes scanning the area.

"No idea," Luke replied, following his gaze, but not seeing anyone. Then his attention was caught. "Rog, here." He squatted down and pointed. "Fresh tracks. And he's big from the size of the prints." He looked up and grinned wolfishly. "Bigger than Sarah's."

Roger nodded. "Let's get him." The two hunters started out, pausing occasionally as they heard muffled voices in the distance behind them. Finally Roger stopped near the rock face and shook his head. "Tracks disappeared here in the gravel. And I'd bet that with all the noise that group behind us is making, we're out of luck for today."

Another shot rang out. "Yeah, I think you're right." Luke sighed. "This sucks. I only have another day here before we head in so I can spend some time with Mom before going back to LA."

"Yeah? Got somebody lined up that you're missing?" Roger asked with a smirk.

"Don't I wish." They turned and started skirting the rocks. "There is someone I might bring home for Christmas though."

"Oh?"

"Yeah, she doesn't have any family so rather than spend the holiday alone, I thought I'd drag her along with me."

Roger looked at his younger brother in surprise. "She? You switching teams on us there, bud?"

"Ha-ha." He shrugged. "She might not come though. She's kinda dating a guy in the...office and who knows, she might decide to do Christmas with him."

"Her loss. Especially if Mom makes meat pie."

Luke grinned. "That's one of the only times I'll eat red meat! What do you think--" His sentence was cut off as the sharp "crack" of a rifle went off, even closer this time. He heard a ping as something ricocheted off the rocks then felt a burning sensation in his back and chest. He staggered forward, suddenly finding it hard to breathe.

Roger glared across the forest. "Idiots. They're going to get someone killed." He turned to his brother, frowning at the expression on Luke's face. "Hey, you OK?"

Luke didn't answer, but stumbled to his knees.

"Luke!" Roger flew to his side, throwing his arm around his brother's shoulders. "What is it? What's wrong?" Something warm and sticky seeped onto his hand and he pulled back to find it covered in his brother's blood. "Oh God!" He peered down at the hole in the back of Luke's jacket, then carefully lowered him to the ground. Looking over his brother, he didn't find an exit wound. Roger quickly pulled out his cell phone and began dialing. "Luke, you stay with me, do you hear me? Hello? Yes, I need a med-evac immediately; my brother's been shot!" He rattled off their GPS co-ordinates.

Luke was feeling numb. Strangely, there was no pain, only a sense of weightlessness. His brother's voice was becoming a pleasant buzz in the background. He closed his eyes.

"No! Luke! God, I think I'm losing him! Luke! LUKE!!"

The voice disappeared and Luke let himself fall into the beckoning darkness.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:16:56 GMT

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Monday, November 12th, Tracy Island, before dinner . . .

The sun had finally found its way to peek out from among the clouds. The sunshine made a nice contrast to the rain that had plagued the island for the last couple of days. As a result of those two things though, raindrops sparkled on the petals and leaves as Tin-Tin and Brains strolled leisurely through Kyrano's garden. The two had spent most of the day indoors working, and after a little bit of convincing, Tin-Tin had managed to convince the scientist to take a walk with her before dinner.

"The rain sure has a way of making everything seem so fresh and clean after it has passed through," Tin-Tin said, letting her thoughts break the silence of the garden. "Like the water is washing things away and given the whole world a clean slate to work with."

Brains took in the young Malaysian's words and thought them over. It was a way of looking at the rain that he had never considered before. She's opening my eyes to a whole lot of things here lately, though, the scientist thought with a smile.

"I never thought of that before, but I think I see what you mean," he told her, as he held his arm out to her. The young woman beside him quickly slipped her own arm through his and the couple continued their stroll through the flowers.

"I've been meaning to ask you, are you going to attend Cassie's tea ceremony at the end of the month?" Tin-Tin asked after they had walked a few more paces.

"To tell you the truth, I haven't really considered it," Brains admitted. He had opened the invitation, looked it over, and then put it aside, intending to make a decision at a later date. That was almost a week ago and quite honestly he had forgotten about it. "The RSVP date is next Tuesday, isn't it?"

"Yes. I already told her I was going to come. I've enjoyed the times I've had tea with her and she's told me about the tea ceremony but I'm looking forward to actually participating in one. It would be more enjoyable if you came with me."

"I'm not really sure it's my type of thing," Brains told her. "I'd probably feel out of place there."

The black-haired girl nodded, having expected an answer along those lines. She briefly considered trying to convince him otherwise but decided against it. Even if the attempt was successful, if he didn't enjoy the evening, she would feel bad about talking him into going.

"I'll be looking forward to hearing your account of the evening though," the scientist told her.

Tin-Tin smiled. "I'll be sure I can remember the details." There was a slight pause in the conversation before she continued. "I was considering getting a kimono for the event. I thought it would be nice to dress for the occasion however, even the cheaper garments are still costly. I can't justify spending so much for a article of clothing I will probably only wear once. I was also looking at patterns, thinking I'd make my own, and there is no way I could complete one by the end of the month."

"How much do they run?"

Brains was surprised by the price that Tin-Tin told him. Still, an idea was forming in his head. For now though, he wasn't going to say anything about it. If he couldn't pull it off, he would prefer that Tin-Tin knew nothing about it.

The talk continued as the young couple continued their walk through the garden.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:18:59 GMT



Tracy Island, Tuesday November 13th, around noon...

Gordon smiled as he saw Tracy Island come into view. "JT-1 to Tracy Island. Requesting landing instructions."

A moment later his father's voice answered. "Tracy Island here. You're good to go. Welcome home, Gordon."

Gordon banked the jet, lining it up with the runway. A few minutes later, he was taxiing down the pavement. He brought the jet to a stop in the hangar and ran his post-flight check, then grabbing his bag, hurried out the door.

He made his way to the Villa and into his father's office. "Dad!"

Jeff looked up from his desk and smiled warmly. "Gordon, how was your trip?"

"Fantastic. It was great to see the guys again."

"Glad you had a good time." He glanced up at the clock. "And you're back just in time for lunch."

Gordon grinned. "Why do you think I planned it this way? I'm going to go put my stuff away. I'll see you in a few minutes." He made his way to his room. Once inside, he tossed his duffel bag on his bed and idly flipped on the light of his aquarium before going into the bathroom. In the doorway, he froze and turned slowly.

"What the hell?!" he exclaimed, rushing over to his tank. Instead of it being filled with his brightly colored fish and corals, it contained what looked like goldfish crackers floating in blue jello. He snarled and marched out the door.

He stalked into the kitchen, his expression mutinous. His grandmother looked up from the stove. "Gordon! You're back!"

Scott smiled from where he was sitting at the table. "Hey there, bro. How was your flight?"

"My flight was fine," Gordon growled.

Virgil waved from the counter. "Then why the grumpy face?"

Gordon ignored the question. "Who touched my fish?" he demanded.

"What fish, dear?" Emily replied.

"My aquarium. Someone messed with my fish." He glared at his brothers.

"No idea what you're talking about, Gords," Scott said as he picked up a morsel from the plate in front of him. "Sit down here with me and tell us all about it." He waited until Gordon was sitting across from him, then smiled. "Sushi?" He nudged the plate towards his brother.

"No," said Gordon, sulkily.

"More for me then," Scott said, popping another piece into his mouth. "Mmmm. Who'd ever thought clownfish could taste so good."

Gordon shook his head. "You can't make sushi out of clownfish. You... HEY!"

Scott smiled. "Yes?"

"My fish! You're eating my fish!!!"

"Oh, is that what this is?" Scott batted his eyes innocently.

Gordon snarled and leapt up, his fists clenched. "I'll kill you."

Jeff walked in at that moment. Spying his middle son, he frowned. "What is going on here?"

"Scott ate my fish!" Gordon shouted.

His elder brother shrugged. "Grandma probably has more. I don't know what he's getting so worked up about."

Over at the counter, Virgil choked back a laugh.

Gordon whirled. "You're in on it, too?!" he demanded.

Virgil sauntered over to stand next to Scott. "In on what, Gordon?"

"Someone want to explain this?" Jeff asked sitting down. "Scott, is that sushi?"

"It certainly is. Want some?" Scott pushed the plate over to his father.

"THAT IS NOT SUSHI! THOSE ARE MY FISH!!!" Gordon exploded.

Emily got another platter out of the refrigerator and set it on the table. "There's plenty, dear. Eat up." She patted Gordon on the shoulder.

Scott leaned forward, fearlessly meeting his brother's angry glare. "You want them back, you take down the pictures."

Gordon took a step back. "What pictures?"

"You know what pictures." His gaze didn't waver. "And I want all the copies, too."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Gordon said warily.

"I think you do."

Gordon was silent for a moment. "Wait a second, this is because of that? You already got me back with those crazy swimsuits."

Scott shook his head. "I had nothing to do with that. I merely helped Anna acquire them. That was all her doing. I want the pictures."

Gordon turned to his father. "Dad? Don't you have something to say about this?"

Jeff shrugged. "I think Scott summed it up rather nicely. I'd give him those pictures if I were you."

Gordon scowled. "Fine. Consider it done. Where'd you put my fish?"

Scott leaned back and shook his head. "Uh-uh. You think I'm that stupid? Pictures first, then you get your guppies back."

Gordon turned and marched out of the room, muttering under his breath. Virgil clapped his brother on the shoulder. "Nicely done, Scott. Man, did you see the expression on his face?"

"It's a sight I won't soon forget. They're right when they say revenge is a dish best served cold. And this sushi is cold!" They burst out laughing.

"Is this over now?" Jeff asked with a smile.

"It will be as soon as I check the website," Scott replied.

"Good." Jeff buried his nose in the newspaper.

Scott got to his feet. "C'mon, Virg, let's go make sure the little weasel makes good on his promise. See you later, Dad."

Emily watched them leave, shaking her head. "Those boys of yours make me glad I only had you!"

Jeff chuckled as he put down his paper. "Aw, Mom, I was a saint of a child."

His mother arched her eyebrow up. "Saint? Are we talking about the same boy who helped kidnap and paint the opposing school's mascot donkey blue?"

Jeff laughed. "That was a good time! And it wasn't a donkey, it was a mule." He shook his head. "But the boys don't need to hear about that," he warned her. "No use giving them any ideas."

Emily smiled, her expression eerily familiar to Scott's. "Then you'd best get up and help me with the dishes."

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Tuesday, November 13th, 1:00 p.m. Tracy Island ( Monday, November 12th, 2 p.m., Oahu, Hawaii)

Jim Mahina was sitting behind the counter of Blue Waters Dive Shop with the radio playing in the background. It was a typical Monday for the shop - slow. The last customers he had seen were the Noe twins, who were regular customers. The two brothers often stopped by to rent a boat and get air for their dive trips.

The phone rang. Jim turned the radio off and then picked up the phone. "Blue Waters Dive Shop. Jim speaking. How may I help you?"

"Hello. I'm looking for a Vincent Crenshaw," the voice on the other end said. Jim hadn't missed the slight pause before the name and figured that the man had consulted something.

"He's out of the shop right now, though he should be back shortly," Jim replied, glancing at the clock. The local schools were off for teacher conferences and Vince had taken the opportunity to schedule a dive for his dive class from the Ewa Beach YMCA. It was the class's second trip, and they had been excited. His boss had said to expect them back sometime between two and two-thirty. "Can I take a message?"

"Yes. This is Sam Kent, Human Resources director for Tracy Industries. Can you have him call me back in reference to the application that he sent in."

While Mr. Kent was giving Jim the phone number, the shop worker heard voices from outside. Looking out the window, he saw the six teenagers from Vince's class making their way up from the dock.

"Excuse me, sir," Jim said interrupting the man on the phone. "Vince has just got back. If you'll hold on for a minute I can have him on the phone."

"That's fine. Thank-you."

Jim put the phone on hold and picked up the two way radio off of the counter. "Hey, Vince, you read me?" Jim asked, hoping his boss had the radio turned on again. The two-ways only worked in the area around the shop but all of them almost always carried them when they were on duty.

"Yeah, Jim. I read you. What's up?"

"You've got a phone call here at the shop. It's from Tracy Industries."

"Okay. I'll pick it up on the phone in the boathouse. Keep an eye on the kids, will you?"

"You got it, Boss," Jim said, clipping the radio to his belt and heading outside to deal with the returning dive class. The teens all had shop equipment which would need taken care of. Vince required the kids in his class to do the after use maintenance on the equipment as part of their education.

Down by the water, Vince placed the gear he was carrying on the dock and headed for the boathouse. He made his way to the desk and picked up the phone to answer the call on hold. "Blue Waters Dive Shop. Vincent Crenshaw speaking."

"Good afternoon, Mr. Crenshaw. I'm glad I caught you. I'm Sam Kent, Human Resources Director for Tracy Industries in Honolulu. I'm calling about the resume you sent in for the Marine Specialist position. From your resume it looks like you have all the qualifications that we're looking for. I'd like for you to come in for a preliminary interview if you're still interested in the position."

"Yeah, I'm still interested. When do you want me to come in for the interview?"

"Well, we'd like to fill the position as soon as possible so preferably sometime this week if you can make it?"

"I'd be free anytime Wednesday," Vince told him, as the shop was closed on Wednesday. There just wasn't enough business to justify keeping the shop open on that day though he and Jim did take groups out on dive trips from time to time. Nothing was scheduled for this Wednesday though.

"Great. How about ten a.m., then?"

"That's fine."

"Great. I look forward to meeting you. Good-bye."

"Good-bye Mr. Kent," Vince said before hanging up the phone. He quickly made a note of the appointment on the calendar on his cell phone before leaving the boathouse to catch up with his class.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:19:25 GMT

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Tuesday, November 13, Christchurch, NZ, a little after 3 p.m.

"If there is anything else I can help you with in the future, feel free to get in touch with me," Aidan Lester, the head of security for Tracy Industries Marine and Research Facility of Christchurch, told Cassie as the two walked from his office to the elevator.

"I will. I appreciate your time and cooperation today," Cassie told him.

Aidan Lester had given her a complete tour of the facility, which included the docking facilities where the craft currently being worked on were located, pointing out where fire extinguishers, maps showing the nearest exit, and other safety features were located. A surprise evacuation drill had also been conducted and had given Cassie the chance to time the process herself as well as observe the emergency plan in use. With the exception of a few minor deficiencies, the drill had

gone smoothly. The former NY firefighter had written down some of her observations as well as making note of several things that could possibly work in other facilities.

"Glad to be of service, Ms. Kishi," the security man replied as the two of them stepped onto the elevator.

The two continued the conversation as the elevator made its way to the ground floor. It wasn't long before the car came to a stop and, with a ding, the doors slid open. Both Cassie and Aidan stepped off the elevator into the lobby of the building. Cassie spotted Alan waiting for her in one of the chairs near the entrance.

With a final good-bye, Aidan retreated back to the elevator while Cassie made her way across the lobby to where Alan was seated. Having seen her approach, Alan got to his feet.

"Well, you're still smiling so I guess that means you didn't work too hard," Alan said, as she reached him.

"No. This part of the job is a lot less stressful than what I'm used to doing."

The two of them made their way out of Tracy Industries and into the parking lot. Once outside, Alan headed in the direction he had parked the car.

"So, what did you decide to do today while you were waiting?" Cassie asked. On their flight from the island this morning Alan had been debating about a few possibilities of how to spend his time.

"I decided to go mountain biking in Bottle Lake Forest. It was nice to get out and be able to feel the wind on my face and stuff. Not to mention the scenery is enjoyable."

"I'll have to take your word for it. The only time I've been to Christchurch before this was with your mother when we got the things I needed for my apartment. Sightseeing was limited."

"Well, we can change that. I'll show you some of the sights of the city before we head over to the mall. I was thinking we could find a place to eat over in New Brighton. Thought you might like seeing the pier over there. We can do our shopping afterwards. Those shoes going to be comfortable to walk in the rest of the day?" he asked, looking down at the black pumps Cassie wore with the slacks, blouse, and blazer she had worn.

"No, but I've got loafers to change into in the car."

The two continued idle chat as they walked across the parking lot. It didn't take them long before they had reached the car. The talk continued as Alan pulled the car onto the Christchurch streets. Driving toward the center of the city, Alan found a place to park the car so they could walk around for awhile, Cassie taking some pictures. They visited the Botanical Gardens for a little while before heading back to the car. Cassie now had a mental list of things she wanted to come back and do in some spare time.

Visit to Christchurch pt. 1

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Tuesday, November 13, 4 p.m., Tracy Island.

Cherie scowled, muttering a quiet, "Damn." She scribbled over the pad she had in her hand, and threw the pencil down, breaking it in half.

"Language, young lady."

The teenager started, and glanced up to find her mother behind her. Dianne had come up quietly, intending on a swim and had been heading for the lounge next to her daughter when Cherie had her little fit.

"Sorry, Mom."

Cherie's tone told Dianne that the girl wasn't terribly sorry. She held out her hand for the pad, and with a heavy sigh, her daughter offered it.

"Hm." Dianne looked from the pad to the high board, which was what the girl had been trying to sketch. "Looks okay to me. What do you think is wrong with it?"

Putting her hand out, Cherie wordlessly asked for the pad back. Dianne gave it to her, and the girl looked at the ruined picture. "I dunno. I thought my shading was off..."

"I don't see it, but I'm no artist." Dianne dropped her towel onto the lounge.

Cherie shrugged. "I've ruined it anyway." She sighed. "Now I have to come up with something else for art class."

The older woman thought about this for a moment, then reached out a hand. "C'mon. Time for a mother-daughter conference."

Cherie looked at the outstretched hand, then at her mother's face. "Where are we going?"

"To the beach. For a little talk -- away from bothersome brothers."

The girl shrugged again, and took her mother's hand. Dianne helped her lever herself out of the lounge, and the two of them walked off toward the trail leading down to the beach.

They walked in silence for a while, the only sounds the scuffing of their feet and the gulls wheeling overhead. When they got down to a point where they were level with the Cliff House, a shout and a wave turned their attention to the patio. Dom was there, Joshua sitting high on his shoulders. He was encouraging his son to call and wave, and the boy did, shouting, "Serry! Serry!"

"Hi, Josh! Hi, Dom!" Cherie shouted back, a smile coming to her face. The two continued to wave at each other until the women got to a point below the Cliff House where they couldn't see the patio anymore.



At last, they reached the bottom, and turned to the right, away from the airstrip. The sand was soft and white and still moist from days of rain. Cherie tucked her hands into the pockets of her jean shorts as they walked.

"Now, tell me," Dianne began, "what's going on with art class?"

Cherie shrugged. "Not much. It's been made perfectly clear to me that I'm no longer welcome."

"In the class itself?" Dianne probed. "Or with the little group of kids who you thought you were becoming friends with?"

The girl sighed. "With the group. I... I don't know if I want to go back, Mom. I mean, I don't think there's anything Mr. Jernigan can teach me that Virgil doesn't know..."

"I'm sure there are things that the teacher can show you that Virgil hasn't. But the purpose of you going to this class was to make friends," Dianne reminded her. "There are other kids in the class, aren't there?"

"Yeah." Cherie sighed again. "But... I don't feel like starting over. Plus they've all heard Jen making fun of me."

Dianne put an arm around her daughter's shoulders. "You have to remember that you're the outsider there, as far as not being native to the town or even the country. That will make it harder to connect with these kids."

The girl sniffled. "I thought I had connected with them. Then they found out that I was a Tracy... and it all went down the tubes from there." She glanced up at her mother, her eyes moist. "Is that what it's going to be like for the rest of my life?"

Blowing out a breath, Dianne shook her head slightly. "No, it isn't. You'll likely find that lots of people want to be your friend -- because you're a Tracy, and rich, and have a powerful father. It's not going to be easy to separate out those who want to be friends because of who you are from those who are friendly because of who your family is." She paused, then asked, "Do you think these kids are like that?"

Cherie shook her head. "I don't think so. It's more like they're jealous of me -- well, at least Jen is. Probably Aroha, too. I'm not so sure about Anneliese or Manjari... and I can't figure out Tim at all." She gave her mother a small wry smile. "Here I have seven brothers, and I can't figure out one teenaged guy."

Dianne chuckled. "Well, the fact that none of your brothers are teenagers might account for it."

They both laughed a little, then Dianne continued. "I think, love, that you have to focus on the ones that still seem friendly. Ignore the girls who are being snarky and reach out to the ones who aren't. And while you're at it, see who else in the class might be good to know. This is already a tight-knit little group; there are likely others outside of it who could use a friend."

The girl's shoulders drooped, and she sighed again. "It's so hard!"

"Making and keeping friends is always hard, Cherie, at any age. This whole situation is reminding me that I have a few people to nudge and say hello to, too." Dianne smiled. "And as Tracys, we never..."

"Never give up." Cherie finished her mother's sentence. "I already got that lecture from Scott."

"Then put it into practice. And try to enjoy the class for the class's sake, too. I'm sure there are things you'll learn that Virgil hasn't had time to teach you."

Cherie nodded. "Okay. I'll keep going."

There was a pause, and Dianne looked up at the sky. "We should head back. I would like to get in a bit of a swim before dinner."

The girl agreed, and they turned to retrace their steps. "So," Dianne ventured. "How is that mural project going?"

Cherie brightened. "I think it's going well. I need to talk to Ms. Cassie about it soon, though, and show her what I have."

"So, tell me about it," Dianne suggested as they walked back, her arm around Cherie's shoulder, drawing her close.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:19:58 GMT

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Tuesday, November 13, Christchurch, NZ

Cassie stood with her arms leaning on the railing of the New Brighton Pier, gazing out over the water. Some surfers were using the last moments of the fading light to get a few more rides in.

After grabbing dinner, Alan and Cassie had come over to the pier. Cassie had taken pictures of the library and the clock tower and had continued snapping various pictures as they had made their way down the wooden walkway. Alan had wandered down to the end to see what the fishermen were catching. Instead of going with him, Cassie had opted to wait for him at a midpoint on the pier.

Hearing footsteps approaching, Cassie took her gaze away from the ocean. She saw the blonde Tracy walking back down the pier. The dark haired woman moved from her leaning position. She retrieved the couple of bags from the ground containing purchases she had made in one of the shops near the restaurant.

"They catching anything down there?"

"Nah, not really," Alan replied as he reached her. As they started walking back toward shore, Alan glanced over at the surfers in the water. "Been awhile since I've come to the mainland to surf. I think I'll see if I can't get Gordon to come with me some weekend. You ever tried surfing?"

"No and I don't think I want to," Cassie told him, looking toward the surfers. "Not sure it's my type of sport."

"You don't know what you're missing. If you want, I was thinking we could split up at the mall, seeing as you have some idea of what you're looking for and I just plan on browsing. We can pick a time and place to meet."

"That's fine."

"I still can't believe you're doing your Christmas shopping this early."

"Yeah, well, as I'm going to be seeing everyone over Thanksgiving, I figure it'll be easier giving the presents to people to take back with them than to try and mail everything later."

"Yeah, but how are you going to keep people from finding out what you got them ahead of time?"

"I've got that figured out. I plan on giving the presents for everyone in New York to Mark and give Mark's gift to Jordan. I'll give Lisa the gifts for her family and give Phillip hers. Get the picture?"

"Yeah. Sounds like too much planning. Think I'd just rather mail everything if I had to make that choice."

Cassie just shrugged. Not only would this method save her from having to mail things but it also saved from having to wrap everything herself. She had always hated wrapping gifts.

The two of them reached the car. They got in and were soon headed for the mall.

Visit to Chrischurch end

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:20:15 GMT

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Tuesday, November 13 mid-morning/noon, Tracy Island

Oh, man! Oh, wow!

For goodness' sake, Jenny, she said to herself, calm down. You're only working as a housekeeper and doing the cooking.

But I'm helping International Rescue!

She peered out of the window at the sea far below, each moment bringing her closer to the island where she was to work.  
She'd got the job!

I can't believe it. When I applied for that job, I never expected this!

Her mind flew back to the incident a few days ago.

\*\*\*\*\*Flashback\*\*\*\*\*

Mr Tracy had called her to his offices in Sydney. He was unable to meet her in person, so Kyrano had met her instead. In a private office he informed her that Mr Tracy was offering the job of housekeeper/chef to her, and showed her the contract. She read it carefully. The terms stated that if she took the job, she could not leave it for a year. That was fine - or maybe not. What about Wendy and her baby?

But then, this was a job she felt she'd enjoy. She doubted it would be very stressful, (although she sensed that Emily Tracy didn't entirely approve of her) and she'd be working in such a lovely location, it seemed a pity to pass up such a chance. Quite probably she'd never have an opportunity like this again. She reached for a pen.

"Um, there's something I have to ask about first," she said, remembering Hiss and laying down the pen. "I own a carpet python. Would he be able to come with me, or not?"

Kyrano looked surprised. "Well, I am not exactly sure what Mr Tracy would say to that. There are people on the island who are frightened of snakes. I shall call him and find out what he thinks. He intended to speak to you anyway."

He picked up a vidphone and dialled a number. Jenny held her breath anxiously as she waited.

"Mr Tracy? This is Kyrano."

"Ah, Kyrano. Is Miss Finch there also?"

"Yes, I am with her now. She tells me that she owns a carpet python, and would like to bring it with her to the island, if you permit her to do so."

Mr Tracy's voice could be heard clearly in the room. "Well, there are people on the island who are afraid of snakes. But if she kept it in a safe place where it couldn't get out, I don't see any problem."

Jenny looked relieved. Kyrano gestured her to come closer.

"There is also something else which I need to speak to you about," Jeff Tracy continued. "I must insist you never to tell anyone about what I am going to tell you, for privacy and security reasons. Is that clear?"

Kyrano was looking very serious, and Mr Tracy's voice was quite stern.

Oh dear, I hope this is all right, she thought, as she answered, "Yes."

Mr Tracy's face peered at her from the vidphone. Apparently satisfied about something, he announced, "My family is International Rescue."

Jenny froze, stunned, her mouth slightly open.

"I hope you understand the implications of this knowledge."

"Yes, sir," Jenny answered soberly, recalling how much the media and others would pay for information like this. "I'd never betray you, sir," she added fervently.

Jeff Tracy smiled slightly. "I hope not. Well, then. Welcome to the island."

"Thank you, sir," she answered, reaching for the pen again.

Kyrano spoke a little while longer, then turned his phone off.

Jenny rose, extending the signed contract, suddenly aware that her palms were sweating.

"Here's the contract, Mr Kyrano. I've signed it."

Kyrano smiled slowly. "Thank you. And welcome, Miss Finch."

\*\*\*\*\*End of flashback\*\*\*\*\*

"Nearly there, ma'am," a voice came through on the intercomm.

Jenny straightened herself and glanced at Hiss in his travelling container. She'd bought him a new container for living in, where the temperature and humidity were regulated. A big cooler filled with frozen mice and rats stood in the far corner, enough to last a couple of months.

"We're nearly there, Hiss," she whispered, "nearly there."

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:20:41 GMT

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Tuesday, November 13, late afternoon/early evening

Two boyish faces peered around the kitchen door while Jenny, Emily, Kyrano and Lisa prepared dinner.

"You can come in, you two," Emily said, chopping parsley vigorously, "but only if you've done your homework."

"We've finished it, Grandma," the elder boy replied, watching Jenny as she fed onion into a chopper.

"Jenny, these are my grandsons Alex and Tyler," Lisa informed her. "Alex, Tyler, this is Jenny."

Jenny turned off the chopper and greeted the boys enthusiastically.

"Do you really have a snake?" Tyler asked excitedly.

"I do," Jenny confirmed, smiling.

"What species is it?" Alex asked.

"Southwestern carpet python. He's called Hiss."

"Could we see him some time?"

"Yes, but not now. I have to help make your dinner. You do want dinner, don't you?" She turned the chopper on again, a twinkle in her eye.

"Of course we do! Will there be plenty?"

"There will be quite enough, Master Tyler," Emily answered, in stern tones, but with a smile lurking in her face. "You know there's always plenty."

Lisa filled a bowl with bread crumbs.

"What is for dinner?" Alex asked curiously.

"Never you mind," Lisa answered mysteriously. "Why don't you two go play foosball until dinnertime?"

Jenny continued chopping, deep in thought. She was delighted with her apartment in the Round House. It had an excellent view of the ocean and she was feeling as though she had stepped into paradise. She imagined her apartment with pretty floral curtains, a matching sofa, and a nice homey rug on the floor. Add a few framed pictures, some little antique ornaments, and she would have the home of her dreams.

She had only arrived that morning. It seemed as though she had been here longer than that. And she had been promised a tour of the villa and island tomorrow. Maybe she would meet some of the International Rescue workers. She'd hardly seen anyone that day, even Jeff, who had met her when she arrived, but had work to do and couldn't stay around. Maybe one day she might even see the Thunderbirds!

"Jenny? Pass the onion over here, will you?" Lisa asked, breaking her out of her reverie.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:20:55 GMT

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Tuesday, November 13, after dinner

She had gone back to the kitchen ostensibly to get herself a cup of tea, but she wanted to have a good look around without Mrs Tracy somewhere nearby. She inspected all the cupboards, noting the contents for future reference. Really, the kitchen was in excellent condition, and she hadn't seen such a well organized area since her first waitress job.

Suddenly she was aware that she wasn't alone, and she spun around. Alex and Tyler were standing in the doorway watching her eagerly.

"Hello," Jenny greeted them.

"Hello. We wanted to know whether we could see the python," Alex answered.

She glanced around the kitchen. "Well, it looks as though I've nothing to do right now, so I might as well show you. Come and meet Hiss, then."

She led the way to her apartment, listening in amusement as the boys started arguing about snakes. She was quite surprised at the range of Alex's knowledge. Obviously there was little he didn't know about animals. He would probably become a fine wildlife carer when he grew older.

"Here we are," she announced finally, opening her door.

Hiss's new enclosure had been set up in a corner of the room. He was curled up on the floor of it, sleeping. The boys walked closer to have a good look.

"He's beautiful!" Alex whispered, eyeing the snake rapturously. "This colouring is quite rare, you know. It's olive green, isn't it?"

"Yes," Jenny answered, leaning against the dresser to watch.

Tyler looked up eagerly. "Could we hold him?"

"Not today, because he's tired out, and not without your mother's permission. She might not like it."

"Ok," Tyler answered.

"What does he eat?" Alex asked.

"Mice and rats, mostly. I only have to feed him once a fortnight. I keep them frozen and thaw them when needed."

"When was he last fed?"



"Two days ago."

"Could I help you feed him some time?"

"I don't see why not, if your parents don't mind."

"How old is he?"

Jenny leaned her head against the wall and thought. "About two years, I think. I've had him for nearly that long."

Tyler asked, "How did you get him?"

"I bought him from a pet shop."

"Are there many snakes around where you used to live?"

"Plenty! The most poisonous is the tiger snake, though. There's even a rare black snake that only lives in the area. It's endangered."

"Wow! Have you ever seen one?"

"No. There's a story in my area, though, about a farmer who jumped over a fence one day into a paddock full of high, thick grass. A great big tiger snake reared up and looked him in the eye, in the eye, mind you. He was a big guy, about six foot tall, and this dirty great big tiger was as tall as him!"

"Whoa!"

"Not to mention that the snake must have been about three times as long as that to be able to rear so high. Anyway, his son came up behind the snake and knocked it down."

"Did you ever see the snake?"

"No. It was told to me by a friend who'd heard it from her cousin. So I don't know whether it's true or not. But there are plenty of rumours of really big snakes around the area."

"Have you ever seen a crocodile?"

Jenny shivered involuntarily. "Yes, at a zoo, and I wouldn't like to meet one in the bush!"

"Neither would I," Tyler agreed.

Just then there was a knock on the door.

"Come in," Jenny called.

A girl of about fourteen entered. "Hi, you must be Jenny. I'm Cherie Tracy. Are Alex and Tyler

here? Mom says they should be getting ready for bed."

There were simultaneous groans from the direction of Hiss's enclosure and Jenny repressed a grin.

"Hi, Cherie; nice to meet you. Well, boys, you'll have to come back tomorrow, won't you?"

"Will we get to hold Hiss then?"

"Ask your mother," Jenny replied, ushering the Tracy children out with a smile.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:21:28 GMT

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Wednesday, November 14, 8:30 p.m., Tracy Island

"...Happy birthday, dear Bra-ains! Happy birthday to you!"

The song ended in a cacophony of sounds, as Brains blew out the candles. Gordon lifted his voice into a near wolf-howl on the final syllable. Alan joined him, adding a drum roll on the table with his hands. Virgil, who had been trying to "conduct" the impromptu chorus, brought his hands down emphatically, and in the microsecond of silence that followed, Josh could be heard to say, "Happy burfday!" Then the group collapsed into laughter. Jenny and Kyrano took the cake away to be sliced.

"Speech!" Scott started the cry, which was quickly taken up by Will and Elise, then Nikki, Cassie and Callie added their voices. Soon nearly everyone was calling for Brains to say something, until finally he stood at his seat and put up his hands for quiet.

"Knowing this family as I do, I prepared a little something for this eventuality." Brains smiled and took out a small data pad. "The man of science may be a poor philosopher, but he's usually a pretty dry speaker if left to his own devices."

Callie, Tin-Tin and Jeff all chuckled at Brains's appropriation of Einstein's quote. Brains continued. "In all my years -- though they are admittedly fewer than some of us can claim..." There were laughs and groans from some of the diners, and a couple of sharp expressions of "Ha!" from the head of the table. "...I have never met another group of people who love to celebrate birthdays like my family does -- because you, the Tracys, are my family." He swept a hand to include all the recruits present. "And you, my new teammates, are my friends."

There were a few soft smiles and nods of agreement around the table as Brains paused. "I can't express how much I appreciate these celebrations because for many years of my life, such were few and far between. To know that I am important enough for you to throw a party just for me... it still boggles my mind sometimes." He smiled. "And you all know that my mind is not easy to boggle."

"It doesn't Scrabble well either!" came a comment from somewhere in the group, setting off a small burst of laughter. Jeff gave his wife a nudge, and a raised eyebrow; she smirked back at him.

"Too true, too true -- words are not my forté. I'll take numbers any day..."

"Forty-two!" "One hundred and twenty-seven!" "Nineteen-ninety-nine!" A few other numbers were shouted out, to accompanying laughter, until Brains put his hands up again.

"Now you've managed to totally derail my little speech -- which may be a good thing, as I see a few of you are waiting eagerly for cake, and I have presents to open."

"Gotta love them presents!" Gordon chimed in, waggling his eyebrows. Elise socked him lightly on the shoulder; he frowned and rubbed his arm in an exaggerated fashion.

"So, thank you all for celebrating the day with me. I couldn't have asked for better."

Those around the table burst into applause as Brains sat down, his face flushed. Then Jeff stood, and took up a wine glass, holding it out. The others around the table, including the children, whose glasses were filled with sparkling grape juice, followed suit.

"To Brains." Jeff's smile was wide as he made the toast. "An intellect unequaled, a passion to create, a heart undaunted -- we are blessed to have you on our side, and to count you as one of our family." He dipped the stemware a touch. "Happy birthday and may you have many, many more."

The others echoed, "To Brains!" or "Happy Birthday!", clinking glasses together and drinking their wine.

Jenny came up, smiling. "First piece to the birthday boy!" she said as she put a huge piece before him.

He glanced up and returned the smile. "Thank you, Jenny."

"Cake!" Joshua cried, clapping his hands.

"You'll get yours, wee man," Dom said, wiping his son's hands. "Though I'll wager more will get on you than in."

"That's what makes cake so fun at this age," Emily said. "It's squishy and it's sweet -- the perfect food!"

As Jenny served a piece of cake to Jeff, he put up a hand to keep her for a moment. "Everyone, this is our new support crew member, Jenny Finch." There were a few calls of, "Hello, Jenny," and "Welcome, Jenny!" which made her blush a little. Jeff glanced up at her, and nodded, indicating that she could continue serving. "She'll be helping out in the kitchen and with housekeeping. I'll leave it up to you to introduce yourselves; we'll be here all night if I have to."

"So, who has the first present for Brains?" Scott asked, grinning.

"Mine!" Gordon said emphatically. He handed over a thick, square package. "Just what you need, Brains, to help you out with Braman."

Brains gave Gordon a dubious look, then tore the paper off. That was followed by second layer of paper, then a third.

"Gordon!" Tin-Tin said reproachfully.

The redhead just grinned at her and shrugged.

Brains peered at the black and yellow cover then gave Gordon a look of surprise. "Computer Programming.... for Dummies?"

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:26:19 GMT

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Wednesday, November 14, Following the celebration, Tracy Island

"So, what movie do you want to watch?" Scott asked, as he proceeded Virgil into his room. The two brothers had decided to spend some time relaxing together as it had been awhile since they'd had the opportunity to do so.

"Do you even need to ask that question?" Virgil asked, as the two of them shared the same favorite movie.

"Just making sure," his brother replied as he headed toward the entertainment center to retrieve the movie.

Virgil made his way over to the couch and sat down. As he did so, he noticed the invitation to the tea ceremony sitting on the coffee table. The reply card was sticking part way out of the invitation.

"I see you haven't sent your reply back to Cassie yet. Are you planning on going?" Virgil asked, curious.

"I don't know yet," Scott replied, putting the vid disc in the player. "It would probably be the polite thing to do, but I'm not sure its how I want to spend my Friday evening."

"You should go. It's a chance to experience an important tradition from another culture."

"I guess that means you're going, then?" Scott asked as he sat down next to his younger brother.

"Yes. Looking forward to it," the younger Tracy replied. He paused and then continued. "You know, it wouldn't hurt for you to try something new for a change."

"I try new things!"

"Name the last new thing you tried," Virgil told him. He waited a few moments for Scott to name something. When an answer wasn't forthcoming, the younger brother continued. "Trying something new would be good for you and who knows, you might even enjoy yourself."

"I don't know..."

"Oh, come on. Hey, if you go, then I'll sneak to the kitchen and sneak out apple pie for us the next time Grandma bakes one."

"I don't know. That will take you all of what - five minutes? Doesn't seem like a fair exchange for having to sit through a couple hours of Japanese ceremony."

"Okay, then. I'll do that and help you with maintenance on Thunderbird 1 following the next rescue."

Scott looked down at the invitation still sitting on the coffee table. Cassie would appreciate it if I showed up, he thought. And who knows, I might even enjoy myself. Even if I don't, having Virgil's help with the maintenance would be a nice change.

"You're on," Scott said, reaching out and picking up the invitation and a nearby pen. He checked the appropriate spot on the reply card. "I'll see that Cassie gets it tomorrow. Now, are we going to watch this movie?"

Instead of replying, Virgil reached out and retrieved the remote from the coffee table. He pressed play and the two brothers settled back to enjoy the movie.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:28:54 GMT

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"Tin-Tin, this is a very funny book. I wonder where Gordon found it."

"Trust him to give you a book called Computer Programming for Dummies," she replied. "And watch out," she added, grabbing his arm just before he walked into the wall. "Don't forget, the hallway turns before we get to your room."

"Thanks, Tin-Tin. This is just too fascinating. I wonder how long ago this was written." He turned to the front pages, searching for the copyright years.

"Brains. We're here."

"Oh." He looked up. "So we are." He opened the door and walked inside. She followed him, more of his birthday gifts in her arms.

"Where do you want me to put these?"

"Here, on the table," he replied as he placed those he'd been carrying, including the book, on it. He turned to take the rest of them from her, but she was already laying them beside the others.

Then she turned to him and said shyly, "I still haven't given you my gift."

"You haven't? I thought. . ."

"Shh," she interrupted, moving closer and placing her hands on either side of his face. Gently she moved his glasses up to the top of his head, then pulled his face toward hers.

He had barely enough time to realize what was about to happen when her lips touched his. He was still for about a second, then he reacted. Returning her kiss, he put his arms around her, pulling her closer to him. She put her arms around his neck, and the kiss deepened.

It seemed like an eternity had passed before they parted. Tin-Tin's eyes were wider than he'd ever seen them, with surprise and... passion? Could she really feel that much for me? As she pulled away, he let his arms fall to his sides, although he found himself shaking, and breathing somewhat heavily. "Wow."

She backed away, said, "Happy birthday, Brains," then turned and rushed out the door. The moment she disappeared, his paralysis left him, and he hurried after her.

He reached the end of the hallway where it turned, and saw her about to enter her room. "Tin-Tin?"

She stopped and slowly turned her head to look at him.

"Thank you." He smiled.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:29:18 GMT

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Thursday, November 15, just before 10 a.m. Oahu, HI(9 a.m. Tracy Island)

Vincent Crenshaw stepped off the elevator on the second floor of the Tracy Industries building in Honolulu. Following the receptionist's instructions, he turned left, checking the door plates for the Human Resources office. It didn't take him long to reach it. Opening the door, he stepped inside and held the door for a gentleman on his way out.

"Vince, is that you?" the gentleman exclaimed as he drew near.

Vince took a good look at the man, trying to place him. It didn't take him long. "Eddie! This is the last place I thought I would run into you. I thought you were still stationed at Ingleside?"

Vince took a few more steps further inside the office and let the door shut behind him.

"I am, at least until the end of this month. I've decided to retire when my current contract is up. I got a pass to come on this job interview, which I assume is the reason you're here."

"Yeah," Vince said with a shrug. "I've decided it's time for another career change."

"Seems like no matter where life takes us, I'm destined to be competing against you. How are Lana and the kids?"

"Doing well. Lana's started writing again. Aaron's waiting to hear about acceptance to the Air Force Academy."

"Couldn't convince him to go Navy, huh?" Eddie commented, giving his old buddy a wink.

"Didn't even try. I want him to do what he wants to do, not just follow in my footsteps."

"Well, I don't want to make you late for your interview. Stay in touch, man."

"I will. It was good to see you," Vince replied, shaking hands with Eddie.

As his friend left the office, Vince walked up to the secretary and let her know who he was. She told him to have a seat. It wasn't long before she was telling him that Mr. Kent was ready to see him. He stood up and headed to the door she indicated.

"Come in," came the reply to his knock. Vince turned the knob and walked into the office. The man behind the desk stood up as he entered. "Mr. Crenshaw, good morning! I'm Sam Kent," he said, holding out his hand.

"Glad to meet you," Vince replied, shaking Mr. Kent's outstretched hand.

"Please, have a seat and let's get started," Sam said, indicating the chair across the desk from him. He sat down and glanced down at the file before him before looking back up. "Your resume says your current place of employment is Blue Waters Dive Shop. What kind of activities do your responsibilities there currently involve?"

"I've owned the shop for a little over three years now. Besides selling and renting dive equipment, we also take group outs on dive trips and air tours. As a certified dive instructor, I handle the classes we do for beginners as well as take some of the groups out," Vince told him, shifting his weight in the chair a little as he tried to get comfortable. "I also take some of the groups up for the air tours."

"How long have you been a dive instructor?" Sam asked, looking up from the file on his desk.

"I've been a dive instructor for about eight years. I received my instruction as part of my training in the Navy SEAL training."

Sam nodded, writing notes on the pad of paper sitting on the desk. As Vince had mentioned his training with the SEALs, the HR director chose to ask the question he had about that training now.



"What other skills did you have instruction for during the Professional Development Phase of SEAL Platoon Training?"

Vince paused a moment, thinking about what courses he had taken during that part of his training. "Along with Diving Supervisor, I participated in Leadership School, Advanced Weapons Training, Advanced Climbing/Rope Skills, Advanced Special Operations and Sniper Training."

Sam made a note of the specific training areas, knowing the information would be of interest to Mr. Tracy should Vincent Crenshaw make it to the second interview. Taking another glance at his list of questions, the interviewer looked back to Vince. "What specific marine vehicles have you had experience with?"

Again, Vince thought back to his Navy days, trying to recall what vehicles he had operated in his almost eleven years of service. The interview continued. Vince found some of the questions harder to answer than others but none of the questions were unexpected. Then came a question that caught him a bit off guard.

"If you were an animal, what animal would you be and why?"

Getting over his surprise, the dive shop owner thought the question over. "I guess if I were an animal I'd like to be a dolphin. They're intelligent, friendly, very loyal and protective of members of their pod. They aren't aggressive but can hold their own in a fight if they have to."

"That's an answer I have heard before," Mr. Kent said, making his notes. The interviewer looked up from the paper and across the desk to Vince. "Well, Mr. Crenshaw, that's all the questions I have for today. Is there anything you would like to ask?"

"Well, the ad mentioned relocating. Exactly where would I be relocating to?"

"Well, Tracy Industries has several marine facilities, like our facility here in Honolulu. If you were to take this position, you would be working from our facility in Christchurch, NZ. Being in a different country isn't a problem, is it?"

"No. My wife and I just want a place where the whole family can be nearby," Vince replied. He and Lana had a conversation about relocating before sending in an application for a research position in Australia.

"That's good to know," the interviewer replied.

Vince asked a couple more questions pertaining to health insurance and other benefits related to taking a position with Tracy Industries. Afterwards, Mr. Kent thanked him for coming and the two shook hands before Vince left.

That went pretty well, Vince thought as he made his way to his car.

Confident that he had made a good impression, he started his drive back around Pearl, to spend the rest of his day off with his family.

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Tracy Island, 10:00 am, (2:00 pm previous day, Billings, Montana)...

Scott read the report in front of him and paused to enter some data into the computer. He sat at his father's desk, doing paperwork. Hmmm, productivity is up at the Kabul and Istanbul plants, but down in Seoul. We should send someone to look things over. He made a mental note to speak to his father, and moved onto the next task.

The ringing of the phone startled him and he looked at it in surprise. Checking the caller ID, he smiled and answered. "Hey, Luke. How're things in the States?"

"Hello?"

Scott frowned. That wasn't Luke's voice. "Who is this?"

"My name is Roger Morel. I'm Luke Morel's brother. I found this number in his cell phone."

"This is Scott Tracy. Can I help you with something?" He shuffled his papers into a pile.

There was a brief pause. "I'm calling for Luke. There's been an accident."

Scott turned his entire attention to the phone. "What kind of accident?"

"He...my brother was shot."

"Shot?! What happened? Is he all right?"

"We're not sure yet. He's back in surgery." Roger sighed. "We were out hunting and Luke got hit by a stray shot. There were a group of drunks out fooling around. They were just firing at random." He took a shuddering breath. "Luke was hit in the back. We had to have him med-evaced out by helicopter."

"Where is he now?" Scott asked, grabbing a pen and paper.

"St. Vincent's Healthcare Trauma Center in Billings."

"How is he?" Scott asked, dreading the answer.

"Stable, for the moment, though he hasn't regained consciousness. Luckily the bullet ricocheted off some rocks before hitting him. It went through his back, puncturing his right lung, bounced off his sternum and lodged near his heart."

"My God!"

"They had to crack his chest to remove it. He's back in the operating room now, having the lung repaired. When he gets out, he'll be on a breathing tube and they don't expect him to wake for at

least another day or so." Roger's voice cracked.

"Is there anything you or your family need?" Scott asked, scribbling down the information.

"I don't think so. We're just waiting. And praying," Roger replied.

"We'll be doing the same. What about the men who shot him?"

"They're in custody. The sheriff's department picked them up a couple of hours later. They didn't even realize what they had done." Roger sounded bitter. "They ran tests on their guns and confirmed the rifle that shot Luke."

Scott swore to himself. "Please, do not hesitate to call us with any change in Luke's condition. Any time of the day or night. We'll be sending someone shortly," Scott told him.

"Thank-you, Mr. Tracy, but that's not necessary."

"It's Scott, and I know it's not. But we're doing it anyway. Are you sure you don't need anything?" Scott asked again.

"No, we're just waiting. The rest is up to Luke."

"He's a strong man, he'll pull through this." Scott tried to sound convincing.

"I hope so. I'd better get back to my family."

"Take care of yourself, Roger. And take care of Luke, too." Scott signed off. He ran his hand over his face, then got up and went in search of his father.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:30:11 GMT

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The Cliff House, shortly before noon...

Virgil stepped off the monorail and walked over to Elise's door. Taking a deep breath, he pressed the buzzer, then stuffed his hands in his pockets and waited. A few moments later, the door opened and Elise stood smiling at him. "Hi, Virgil! This is a surprise. I was just making some lunch before heading back to work. Come on in." She led him inside.

Henry sat on the couch in a patch of sunlight. The kitten merely glanced up at him before turning to wash his tail. Virgil rolled his eyes before turning. "Elise?"

She was back at the counter, putting together a sandwich. "Want me to make you one?" she asked, not looking up but pulling out a few more slices of bread. "I'm hoping I can get some time in on the new Thunderbird Seven. That joystick control is tricky at first, but once you get the hang of it, it's not too bad." She turned and put two plates on the table. "Here you go. What would you

like to drink?"

He shook his head. "Nothing, I'm fine. Elise, I need to talk to you."

She motioned for him to sit down. "Then sit and eat. We can talk at the same time." She finally looked up and noticed his serious expression. "Virgil, what's wrong?"

He took a deep breath. "It's Luke. His brother called a little while ago and told us he'd been in a hunting accident."

Elise gripped the top of the chair. "What kind of accident?" Her voice warbled.

"He was shot by another group of hunters. They were drunk and fooling around. He's in surgery. The bullet went through his chest and got lodged near his heart. That's really all we know right now. Mom said she'd see if she could find out more information." He paused. "Dad's getting everyone together at the house to tell them. I wanted you to know to kind of ease the shock a bit."

Elise turned and walked to stare out the French doors, her arms wrapped around herself. Virgil walked over and placed his hands on her shoulders. "Elise?"

"I want to go see him."

"Honey..."

She turned to face him, her green eyes bright with tears. "I want to go, Virgil. I have to."

He bit back what he wanted to say. "Elise, I know Dad'll probably send someone, but..."

The tears trickled down her cheeks and she began to shake. "He's one of my best friends. My family! I can't lose him! I have to go!" She broke down and he took her into his arms.

"Shhh....it'll be OK," he said, stroking her hair. Somehow, I'll make it OK...

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:30:34 GMT

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Cliff House, a little after noon

Will walked into his apartment to get a bite to eat before heading over to the boat pen to give the Lucille a "once over" (and secretly to check out Gordon's new catamaran). He went to lay some "mail" he'd found in his box on one of the shelves that he had persuaded Luke to help him make. We sure had a good time building things together. I wonder what we could make next.

He then noticed a card that he'd gotten several days previously, still sitting there. Oh rats! The invitation. I need to let Cassie know I'm coming.

He hadn't planned on going, but when he let it slip to his mother that he'd gotten the "invite" during his last weekly call, she asked him if he'd accepted. When he told her that he wasn't planning on going, she nearly came through the telephone.

"William Abbott. You're passing up a rare opportunity here."

"Mom, I just don't think it's my cup of tea, no pun intended."

"How do you know, unless you try it? You have a chance to broaden your horizons, and you're passing it up?"

"My horizons are broad enough, Mom."

"No one's horizons are broad enough, young man. You know what your father always says."

"Yeah, Mom. 'If you stop learning, you're probably already dead'." He paused, looking at her on the screen of the vid-phone. He recognized the look on her face. She wasn't going to give up until he agreed to go. "Okay, Mom. I'll accept the invitation."

"And do it sooner rather than later, Will." Her face lit up, which made her older son feel good. "That's my boy."

He hadn't sent the RSVP and now he realized he'd better get it done, before I forget again. He picked it up and took it into the kitchen with him. Making himself a sandwich and getting a beer out of the fridge, he took food, drink, and invitation to the table. He marked his acceptance, and put it into the envelope provided. Then he quickly consumed his meal, cleaned up after himself and headed out the door.

A moment later, he was back in his apartment; he'd forgotten the acceptance. Mom, he thought, I'd better really enjoy myself at this shindig, or you're gonna owe me big time.

With that thought, he headed down to put his RSVP in her box, and get back to work.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:31:19 GMT

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Cliff House, Lunch time ...

Cassie sat at her table, a salad in front of her and flight manual open on the table beside the bowl. She was supposed to have a lesson with Scott after lunch and she was using the lunch break to review some material. Though she had been behind the controls of the plane once up in the air, this was going to be the first time that she would handle take off and landing too.

Cassie stabbed a slice of cucumber, piece of tomato, and some lettuce with her fork, as she reviewed takeoff procedures. The sound of the buzzer interrupted her.

I wonder who that could be, Cassie thought, putting her fork down and getting to her feet. She walked the short distance to the door and opened it.

"Dr. Tracy!" Cassie exclaimed, when she saw who had rang the buzzer. The only person that would have been more of a surprise to find on her doorstep was Mr. Tracy himself. "Come in," she said, quickly getting over her surprise.

Cassie stepped aside, and Dianne stepped into the apartment.

"Cassie, there's something that I need to tell you," Dianne said, wanting to get right to the point. "Perhaps we should sit down."

Cassie simply nodded, unsure of what kind of news Dr. Tracy was bringing her. Whatever it was, she knew it couldn't be good, just from the older woman's expression.

Cassie led the way into the living room area, and the two women sat on the sofa. Cassie sat silently, waiting for Dianne to tell her why she had come to the Cliff House.

Dianne took a deep breath before speaking. "Cassie, we received a phone call from Luke's brother, Roger, this morning. There was a hunting accident and Luke's at St. Vincent's Healthcare Trauma Center in Billings, Montana."

"No," Cassie whispered in disbelief. Part of her didn't want to believe it but the rational part knew that Dr. Tracy had no reason to lie to her.

Cassie stood up and started walking toward the kitchen area. "What's his condition?"

As Dianne filled her in on the details, Cassie paused in front of the pictures she had hung on the wall across from the elevator. Her eyes fell on the picture taken out in California. Luke was smiling back at her just as he had been the last time they had talked the morning before he left to see his family.

He was really looking forward to seeing his family, she thought. And I was looking forward to hearing his hunting stories when he got back. Now that may...

She let the thought trail off, not able to even think about not seeing her best friend again.

"When we hear more, I'll let you know," Dianne said softly.

Cassie turned to find Dianne looking at her with an expression of concern and sympathy. "I'd appreciate that," she replied, her voice steadier than she had expected it.

"Is there anything I can do?"

Cassie shook her head. "I think I just need some time alone right now. I don't think I'm up for my training sessions this afternoon. I know I wouldn't be able to concentrate."

"I understand. The training can be rescheduled. I know this is quite a shock to you. For all of us really," Dianne said, getting to her feet. She walked over to where Cassie was standing and gave the younger woman a hug. "Luke's strong. He'll pull through."

Cassie couldn't find the words to respond. As Dianne stepped back, all the dark-haired woman could do was nod.

Without another word, Dianne left herself out. Alone now, Cassie walked back to the sofa. She just felt numb. Felt as though she should be crying but the tears refused to come. Picking up one of the throw pillows as she sat down on the sofa, hugging the pillow close.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:31:41 GMT

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Thursday, November 15, 2068, 12:45 p.m., Tracy Island

"Dad?"

Jeff, who looked preoccupied, glanced up. "Yes, Alex?"

"Where's Mom?"

"Here I am," Dianne said as she hurried into the dining room. Virgil followed close on her heels. She frowned a bit as she saw the empty plates. "You didn't have to wait on lunch for me and Virgil."

Jeff took her hand and kissed it as she sat down. "I wanted you here before we told everyone what happened."

"Did something important happen, Dad?" Alan asked, a perplexed look on his face.

"Whatever it is, it sounds serious." Gordon sat forward so he could see his father.

"It is." Jeff motioned toward his oldest son. "Scott, tell them about the call."

Scott put down his water and took a deep breath. "A couple of hours ago I got a call from Roger Morel, Luke Morel's brother. There... was an accident while they were out hunting. Luke was shot..."

There were gasps around the table. "Shot!" Emily exclaimed, a wide-eyed look of horror on her face. "How is he?"

"He's alive," Jeff said, putting up his hands for quiet. "According to what we've been able to learn, he's in surgery to repair his lung."

"The bullet ricocheted around a bit, landing near his heart," Dianne took up the explanation. "Even

nowadays, getting a bullet out of such a sensitive area is still a very tricky thing. He'll have a lengthy hospital stay and it will take time to recover."

"But he's not dead?" Tyler's voice quavered a little.

Dianne gave him a soft smile. "No, Ty, he's not dead. He's going to live. But he won't be back for a while."

"What will happen to Rom?" Alex asked, his face showing his distress.

Jeff and Dianne both exchanged glances with Scott, who shrugged. "I don't know, Alex. I suppose Luke's family will take care of Rommel."

"We'll ask next time we call," Dianne assured her son.

"Hey, Virge?" Alan asked, as the food began to be passed around. "Where were you? You're not usually late for lunch."

Suddenly put on the spot, Virgil started. "Oh, ah," he stammered. "I... I was over at Elise's. She and Luke were close... she thinks of him as family. I thought she should know... privately."

Scott raised an eyebrow at this, but gave Alan a quick dig in the ribs before the younger man could say anything stupid. Alan glared back, but kept his mouth shut.

"Do the other recruits know?" Anna asked.

"Cassie does," Dianne said, taking a sip of her iced tea. "She and Luke were such good friends, we thought it would be wise to give her the news personally."

"I'm going to call a quick meeting with the rest once lunch is through." Jeff took a bite of chicken from his salad and chewed. When he'd swallowed the bite, he sighed. "You may want to be on hand for that, Anna; let people know you're available."

"I will," Anna said, nodding.

Tin-Tin, looking troubled, suddenly asked, "Should someone tell Lena? After all, he helped her out during that plane crash..."

"Of course, we should," Emily said briskly.

"Would you please do that for me, Tin-Tin?" Jeff asked.

"Yes, Mr. Tracy," Tin-Tin replied. "Of course. Right after lunch."

"Or as soon as the time zones are favorable," Brains added.

Jenny, who was taking an empty bread tray back to the kitchen, stopped Lisa as the older woman was on her way out to the dining room. "Excuse me for asking, but who is Luke?"



Lisa smiled softly. "Luke is one of our newer recruits. He was a forest ranger before he joined us, and has a rescue dog named Rommel. Very nice young man."

"Oh," Jenny said, nodding. "Thanks for telling me."

The rest of the meal was quiet, and Jeff was again preoccupied, thinking of how to break the news to the rest of the team. He finally had it in his head when he glanced down the table and remembered that one son was missing. Sighing, he shook his head.

"Scott, when lunch is over, will you please tell John about Luke. He should know sooner, not later."

"Sure, Dad, I'll call him and let him know."

Jeff gave Scott a half-smile and blew out a breath. "Well, I'd better call that meeting." He glanced at each of his older sons. "Scott, Virgil, Gordon, Alan?" When he had their attention, he continued. "This will be a blow to the team. Use your best judgment in dealing with any fallout when it comes to training sessions or craft maintenance." He paused. "However, the recommissioning of Thunderbird Seven will proceed as scheduled tomorrow, so keep that in mind." He caught Anna's eye. "Half an hour from now, on the Cliff House patio. Dianne can guide you there."

He stood, and after giving Dianne and Emily each a kiss on the cheek, left the room, ascending to the lounge. Sighing deeply, he put his headset in, and dialed an all-call on the wristcomm frequency. "To all new team members, please meet me on the Cliff House patio in twenty-five minutes. There's something important we need to discuss."

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:32:44 GMT

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1:15 p.m., Cliff House

Jeff leaned on the railing of the Cliff House patio, staring off to sea as the denizens of the Cliff House made their way to the meeting. Anna and Dianne sat at one of the patio tables, talking quietly.

"Nice view," Anna said. "But quite a drop. I bet no one plays Frisbee up here."

Dianne snorted. "The kids tried. They learned pretty quickly how hard it was to fetch their toys." She looked up at the sound of a door opening. "Here they come."

Dianne smiled slightly at each as they came out of the common areas, noting how hesitant they were. Callie came from her apartment, but Elise's curtains were drawn.

"Can you check on Elise when we're through here?" Dianne asked.

Anna nodded. "I was planning on it."

When Dom made his appearance, Josh in his arms, Dianne stood and joined her husband at the railing. "They're all here," she said softly, touching him on the shoulder.

He started a bit, then gave her a nod and a grim smile before turning and walking back to the groups of patio tables. Dianne resumed her seat, sitting up straight and looking attentive.

Jeff cleared his throat. "I called you together because something tragic has happened to one of our number." He paused and swallowed. "This morning we heard from Luke's brother. Luke was the victim of a hunting accident..."

There was a concert of gasps and murmurs of "oh no!" Dom's face paled significantly, and he sat down heavily in a nearby chair. Nikki reached for him, putting a hand on his arm and squeezing it tightly, tears filling her eyes. Callie put her face in her hands and began to sob.

Jeff put up his hands. "It's not as bad as it sounds; he's not dead. When we got the call, he was in surgery." He glanced over at Dianne. "I believe it was to repair his lung..."

"That's right." Dianne's tone was both professional and compassionate. "The bullet pierced his back, punctured his right lung, and lodged near his heart. They took the bullet out right away, and now they're taking care of his lung."

It was a grim-faced Will who asked, "What exactly happened, and when?"

"From what I understand," Jeff replied, "some drunks were out firing off at random. They didn't know they'd hit anything. They're under arrest now. I'm not sure what charges will be filed, but we'll be offering the Morels the best legal team possible to see that justice is served." He paused. "As to when, I believe it was Monday, our time. That would be Sunday in Montana."

"So he's been in the hospital since then?" Will pressed.

"Yes." Dianne answered this time. "They pulled him from the mountains via LifeFlight med-evac." She sighed. "They worked on the heart first, stabilized him, and are now working on the lung."

"Where are Cassie and Elise?" Nikki asked, looking around. "Shouldn't they know? They're very close to Luke."

"They already do, Nikki," Dianne said. "We approached them first because, as you said, they're especially close to Luke. I'm sorry if that bothers any of you."

There was an uncomfortable silence, then Dom asked suddenly, "What are his chances? Did the bullet damage his heart?"

"From the information I got, no, the heart wasn't damaged." Dianne turned to him. "His chances are excellent, but I'm sure you realize this will be a long haul to recovery."

"Will he be coming back?" Callie looked up, her face streaked with tears.

"We certainly hope so," Jeff told her. "He's been an asset to the team, and we'll miss him." He paused, looking from face to face. "Are there any questions?"

"Will there be anyone going out to be with him?" Dom asked, sounding calmer. Josh was clamoring to get down from his father's lap, and Dianne opened her arms, coaxing him to come to her.

"We're working on that," Jeff said. "We'll let you know when plans are finalized. It won't be easy to coordinate this; Luke is supposed to be working out of the Los Angeles office and his family will be expecting someone to come from there, I think."

"Will we be able to send him greetings? Cards and such?" Nikki asked.

"You should be able to order cards online and have them sent. Gifts, too, and emails, if you like. We'll get the information on what room he's in and pass it on to you all when we do," Dianne assured them. "You're all his co-workers; his family doesn't need to know where you're working from."

Jeff glanced at Anna. "We still have duties to perform, but if you're feeling particularly overwhelmed, we can be flexible. Anna, of course, is available if anyone needs to talk. Keep in mind, please, that the recommissioning of Thunderbird Seven will proceed as scheduled." He glanced around. "Are there any other questions?"

"Why did this have to happen to him?" Callie asked, her voice catching.

"I wish I knew, Callie." Jeff's tone was sad. "I wish I knew."

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:33:05 GMT

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Tyler threw another rock into the surf. He had been throwing things for the past fifteen minutes; now there was only one stone left from the pile that had been at his feet. He wasn't sure if it made him feel better or not. He picked up the last rock and threw.

"I always prefer to throw my rocks at a wall or cliff. I think I like the sound they make. And sometimes they make part of the cliff break off." Tyler jumped and turned around to see Anna standing behind him. "Do you want me to find you some more rocks?"

"No, I think I'm done. I better get back to the house." Tyler kept his head down and kicked the sand as he walked.

Anna fell in beside him. They walked in silence down the beach toward the path to the house. After a couple of minutes, Anna spoke. "Scary, isn't it? Waiting while people you love are in danger or hurt."

Tyler grunted a noncommittal reply.

Anna was quiet for a minute then went on. "And what happened to Luke was completely unexpected. It should never have happened to anybody, much less a nice person like Luke."

This time Tyler didn't even grunt a reply.

"Not like on a rescue when you're always scared about something happening to someone. You expect to be scared during a rescue. I know it scares your dad. And it scares Scott even more."

Tyler looked at her. "Why would Scott be scared? He's out there with them."

"And he's giving them orders. If someone is hurt because of what he told them to do, he'll feel it was his fault. It won't be, and he knows that, but he'll still feel that way. He's terrified that someday he might have to tell his dad and his grandma that one of his brothers had been hurt."

Tyler stopped and turned toward her. "Then why does he go? Why does he go out to help people he doesn't know? Why doesn't he let someone besides us do it?"

"Because it has to be done and he is the best one to do it. He would feel bad if one of his people was hurt. But he'd feel worse if someone died that he could have saved, and he didn't try. He remembers how he felt when his mom died and he doesn't want anyone else to feel that pain." Anna sat down on a log. "If you could stop someone else from watching their mom get hurt the way your mom was, would you do it?"

Tyler scuffed his feet in the sand. "Yeah. But..." He looked down at his feet.

"But?"

Tyler's voice was almost inaudible. "What if Luke dies? Or my mom? Or Dad?"

"Then they die. And we miss them, horribly. And we cry and mourn them. Then we do what they died doing -- we keep on helping people. Because that was what we would want them to do if we had died."

"Luke wasn't even on a rescue when he was hurt."

"I know. He was doing something he loved to do. My dad was asleep when he died."

They both were silent for a while. Anna sat watching the waves roll in. Tyler kicked the sand for a while then came over and sat next to Anna on the log. Then he burst out again. "But why Luke? Why does God let things like this happen to people like Luke.? Or..." He grew quiet again.

"Or?" prompted Anna.

"Or my dad. My real dad. Or Mom." He looked up at her. "Weren't they good enough?"

"I don't know why. It doesn't seem fair to me either. It's one of the things I'm planning on asking

God when I meet him. Until then I just have to trust. But I still get angry at him sometimes." She paused for a minute then, looking at the ocean, added, "It's ok to be angry about this. It's even ok to be angry at God. I was very angry at him for a while. I suspect God gets pretty upset about some things that happen too."

They sat in silence for another few minutes.

Finally Anna broke the silence. "I love watching waves. When I'm upset or angry I go throw things. I have a bunch of chipped plates and old bottles in my garage I can throw against the wall and break. Or I go hit the bed with a foam covered baseball bat. Or throw rocks at cliffs, like I did the night Lady Penelope and I had a fight. But when I need to think or calm down, I go watch waves on the beach. It's soothing. They're always there, always moving and yet staying the same. I love storm watching, too. All that power."

"I like to watch storms. Alex and I look out our window and see how high the waves come and how far the trees bend down."

They both sat, comfortable with the silence. Gordon found them like that about fifteen minutes later. "There you are. Dad sent me to find you. Dinner's almost ready."

Anna leaned forward and tried to lever herself up. The log wasn't high enough for her to simply stand up like it was a chair. Gordon, seeing her problem, held out his hand. Anna grabbed it and finished pulling herself up.

"Thanks."

Gordon bowed. "Anything for a beautiful lady."

"Oh are there any beautiful ladies around here? I don't see them."

"Next time I'll bring a mirror. Come on, Spud." And they walked in companionable silence up to the villa.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:33:23 GMT

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1:30 PM; The Villa (8:30 PM the previous day in Silver Spring)

Tin-Tin thought about calling Lena from the lab, but decided it would be better to contact her in private. She went to her room and calculated the time difference. "Oh, good. It's only 8:30 PM yesterday there." She placed the call, and waited.

It wasn't long until Lena answered. Her smiling face appeared on the vid-screen. "Hello, Tin-Tin. Dis is a pleasant surprise." She looked more intently at Tin-Tin. "Or maybe it isn't. What's wrong, honey?"

"Lena, it's bad news about Luke Morel, the man who helped rescue you when the jet you were in crashed."

"I remember him very well. And dat Jeff hired him. Dere haven't been any rescues recently, so he can't have been hurt in one. What's happened?"

"He'd gone home for a visit and went hunting with his brother. He was accidentally shot by one of a group of drunken men. It was a ricochet that hit him in the back, piercing a lung and ending up near his heart. The last we heard, the bullet had been removed, and they are performing surgery on the lung now."

There was a gasp, then a pause. Tin-Tin saw the distress on the older woman's face, and said quickly, "We understand that he will survive, but will have to take a long time to heal and get his strength back."

"Dat's good to know," Lena replied. "Do you know what hospital he's in? I want to at least send him a card."

"Neither Mr. nor Dr. Tracy said, so I'm not sure. Somewhere in Montana, I believe. I'll get that and email it to you along with an update on his condition once we have more information. But I felt you should be told."

"I hope dey caught de ones who did dat, and trow dem into jail."

"We heard that they had caught the men, but not if any charges had been filed."

"Well some should be. De nerve of dose men."

"I know, Lena. I believe we all feel that way. But our priority right now is Luke and his well being."

Lena looked at her young friend and smiled slightly. "I should be saying dat to you. You are right about dat. And please do send de info to me as soon as possible."

"I promise. I'll be in touch very soon."

"If you aren't, you'll hear from me."

Tin-Tin smiled at her as the call was terminated.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:33:48 GMT

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\*\*\*\*\*November 15, 2068; aboard Thunderbird Five, approximately 5:40 p.m.\*\*\*\*\*

John took his freshly made dinner from the galley and made his way to the table in the lounge. As he set the food down, he shook his head. "Man, I hope Luke is going to be okay. I'm glad they got

the guys who shot him." Just as he was about to take in his first bite, though, he suddenly heard a meowing noise in the intercom.

Knowing the noise came from his quarters, he realized he had forgotten to feed his cat. He ran into his room and saw the little one at the intercom button. "Well, hello, Skitty. I guess you're trying to tell me something, huh?"

He gently grabbed Skitty and placed him back on the bed. "Stay here. I'll get your food for you." Standing up, he went back to the galley and started looking through the pantry for Skitty's cat food. When he found it, he returned to his room and gave Skitty a bowl of his cat food. "Here's your food, buddy."

As he walked out of the room, he said, "I wish I could let you run around the place, but Callie's allergies would act up with your dander everywhere, but at least you get a good view."

Returning to the lounge, he grabbed his dinner packet and placed it in the microwave oven. After setting the oven to reheat, he started thinking back to when he was able to get Skitty on board the space station.

\*\*\*\*\*Flashback, November 1, Thunderbird Three silo, 6:30 a.m.\*\*\*\*\*

John had brought the kitty kennel, which contained his little friend, some food and water, and a small litter box. "Okay, Skitty. I'm gonna have to leave you here because Dad'll throw a fit if he knew I was bringing you along. As soon as we're on Five, I'll get you out, I promise."

Skitty meowed with displeasure.

John said, "You'll have food and water in your kennel, don't worry. The trip won't last that long. In fact, you'll be aboard the space station by around 11." He put Skitty, with the cat food and water, into a special holding area where he would take them out without arousing suspicion. "See you later, Skitty." After scratching its head, he returned to his quarters to eat breakfast.

About an hour later, John went to check on Skitty to make sure the kitten was all right. "You sure ate your food fast. Good thing I packed the cat food bag and plenty of water bottles. He let Skitty run around and stretch for a few minutes. When Skitty tired himself out, John took the kitten and put him back in his cage. "Sleep well for now. Here's the litter box if you need it. I just hope you don't smell up the hull."

At 8:20, John was ready to leave, but wondered what happened to Callie. "It's not like her to be late," he said with some concern.

Jeff shook his head. "I've tried to contact her apartment four times already, and she hasn't answered. I'll have to get Scott to go with you, John. I suspect she won't be space-worthy after last night's party."

"Oh, that's right. She had too much to drink. I guess we don't have a choice."

By 8:45, John and Scott boarded Thunderbird Three and were on the way to the space station.



Skitty slept soundly in the kennel through the entire trip.

Alan noticed how late Thunderbird Three had been on its arrival and greeted his two brothers when they came through the door "Hi, guys. You're a little late. Where's Callie?"

John sighed. "She couldn't come. I think that spiked punch got to her last night."

"If I know her," Scott said, "she's probably being hard on herself right now. Dad won't have to punish her."

Alan shook his head. "Yeah, we have a good idea how she feels, but I think she'll get herself together." Changing subjects, he said, "Come on, we've got supplies to get on board the station. The sooner we get them aboard, the sooner I can go home."

After they unloaded most of the packages, John looked at his watch. "Hey, can you guys prep lunch while I check the instrument readings on Three?"

While Scott and Alan fixed some lunch, John seized the opportunity to get Skitty into the space station by wrapping the cage in a thermal blanket. "There. I'll have you inside in no time." He could see his brothers working on lunch, so he quickly ran by the kitchen and got Skitty into his quarters. After putting the cage down, John said, "Okay. As soon as they leave, I'll let you out."

Within an hour, Alan and Scott left for Earth in Thunderbird Three, which finally allowed John to let his little kitten be free. "At last, Skitty. You can come out now." He opened the cage, which allowed the tiny kitty to run around and stretch his legs.

John smiled, knowing he successfully got his cat safely into Thunderbird Five.

\*\*\*\*\*End Flashback\*\*\*\*\*

When John finished his meal, he went back to his quarters and noticed Skitty had already gone to sleep. "You lazy kitty," he whispered. "I'll let you sleep there for a bit, but I want my bed back in a couple of hours." He left Skitty to his own dream world as he went back to the controls to check for any calls.

\*\*\*\*\*Special thanks to Tikatue and Hobbeth for their kitty expertise.\*\*\*\*\*

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:34:07 GMT

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Thursday, November 15, 8:35 p.m., Christchurch, NZ

Cherie was packing up her art supplies when Anneliese and Manjari came up to her.

"Um, we're going to the ice cream shop tonight." Anneliese sounded a bit hesitant. "Do you want to come?"



Cherie thought for a moment, then shook her head. "Not tonight, thanks. I wouldn't be very good company."

"Maybe we could cheer you up!" Manjari suggested, smiling, trying to look encouraging.

"I don't know," Cherie said, sighing. "You see, someone I know was shot early this week and is in the hospital..."

Anneliese's eyes grew wide. "Oh, no!" she said with a gasp. "Did he cark it?"

Cherie looked puzzled as she tried to decipher the question, then shook her head. "No, he's not dead. But he's going to be in the hospital for a long while. Months and months, my mom says. And it's all such a shock, y'know?"

"I guess it would be," Manjari said, her face sober. She brightened. "Still, an ice cream and a fizzy always cheer me up."

"Thanks." Cherie smiled, a slight, difficult expression. "I really don't feel up to it right now. How about next week?"

Manjari and Anneliese exchanged glances; the first shrugged and the second nodded. "Okay, then. Next week," Anneliese said. "And we'll hold you to it!"

Cherie nodded, biting her lower lip. Then a thought struck her. "Wait a minute." She pulled out a small pad of paper, and wrote a number on it. "This is my cell number," she explained shyly. She handed a copy to Anneliese, then one to Manjari. "Maybe we could chat during the week?"

The girls looked down at the pieces of paper, surprised. "Yeah, I could ring you up," Anneliese said. "When?"

"After three is good," Cherie said, her tone sounding more eager. "My schoolwork will be done by then." She paused, then added, "We're in the same time zone, too."

Manjari frowned a little. "What do timezones have to do with it, eh?"

"All my other friends are in different ones, so I usually have to calculate when I can call." Cherie sounded more cheerful now. "It'll be nice to have friends who I can call and they'll be on the same time and day I'll be on."

"Are you sure you don't want to go to the ice cream shop?" Anneliese asked. "You sound like a box of budgies now."

"So, are we going?" Tim said as he came up suddenly on the group. "I thought about going with Aroha and Jen, just to shut them up, but they brassed me off last week, and told me to bugger off this week." He glanced from girl to girl. "Well?"

They all three looked at Cherie, who sighed slightly and smiled. "Okay. I'll come."

"Good on ya, mate!" Manjari said, grinning.

"Just let me tell my brother..." Cherie opened her phone and placed the call.

"Which brother this week, eh?" Tim asked. Anneliese frowned, and nudged him.

Cherie looked up mid-sentence and said, "Alan. Why?"

Tim nodded sagely. "The racer. I'd like to meet him sometime."

His comment made her pause and draw in a sharp breath. Then she resumed her conversation. "I'll see you at nine-thirty, then. Bye"

Straightening, she shut her phone and tucked it into her bag. With an almost grim smile, she said, "Well, let's go. I'd like to hear what else you've learned about my family."

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:34:52 GMT

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Friday, November 16th, after breakfast, Tracy Island

Cassie headed down to the hangar for her rescheduled flight lesson, thankful that she felt better. The tears had finally come last night as she'd waited for sleep to claim her. As a result, she had awakened this morning with a headache and a groggy feeling. Resisting the urge to just ignore her alarm clock, she had climbed out of bed. The shower had helped to wake her up and the ibuprofen had started to work on her headache.

Scott was already waiting for her as she walked in.

"Good morning," he greeted her. "Are you ready to get started?" he asked after she had greeted him.

Cassie nodded. Scott hung back so he could observe as Cassie began pre-flight checks. It didn't take long for him to realize the young woman didn't seem to have her whole concentration on the task at hand. After pointing out that she had skipped something, he decided to speak up. His father's words about dealing with any fallout came to mind as he spoke up.

"I know you know all this stuff; so what's wrong?"

Hopefully talking things out will help ground her and I won't need to cancel this lesson, Scott thought. He knew that continuing with training and maintaining other day-to-day activities was important for all of them and they never knew when a call might come in.

Cassie sighed. "I guess my mind is partly somewhere else," she replied without turning to face her instructor.

"Montana?"

Cassie nodded. "And New York City."

"Have you talked to anyone? Called home maybe?"

Not wanting to continue the conversation with her back toward him, Cassie turned before answering. "Elise and Callie stopped by to see how I was doing last night. As for calling home ..." Cassie paused, trying to decide how to phrase what she wanted to say. "The only person I really want to talk to is my younger brother, Mark, but I don't feel I can. I'm afraid that if I call him, I might let something slip that would threaten IR security."

"I'm not sure I understand," Scott said, frowning slightly.

"Well, I only know about Luke's accident because I'm here. His family wouldn't know how to contact me even if it occurred to them to do so. I'm afraid that if Mark starts asking me for details, I'll slip and tell him something that I shouldn't. I need time to think things through before I talk to him."

"Do you really think that's an issue? I'm sure your brother would just want to console you and make sure you're okay."

"You don't know my brother," she said with a shake of her head. "He can be way overprotective. He insisted on driving with me to the airport because he didn't trust the cabbie, Bernie, that Tracy Industries arranged to take me to the airport."

Scott smiled. "Yeah, well, Bernie's a character."

"Not to mention, his theory was that you guys were trying to kidnap me because of all the secrecy involving my travel plans. I can usually overlook it. Mark loves me and he means well, and I can be overprotective of him at times, too. Still, I can see him asking me when I found out, if I was going to go see Luke, and he'd probably want to come out and be with me."

With the plane behind her and Scott in front of her, Cassie suddenly started to feel trapped. She took some steps away from the plane as she continued, putting some more space between herself and Scott. "I can't deal with that right now, nor can I trust myself not to say something I shouldn't."

"It's a tough situation to be in," Scott said sympathetically, not sure if he should follow her or give her some space. Before he could figure out what to say next, Cassie spoke again.

"Part of me wants to fly to Montana to see him, but I feel as if I might be intruding on family time if I do that. Then there's a part of me that doesn't want to go. Doesn't want to see him like that. I bet that sounds strange. All the stuff I've seen on the streets as a paramedic and..."

Cassie's voice trailed off, her voice breaking. Reaching up, she wiped a few tears away.

Getting over his hesitation, Scott closed the distance between them. Stopping just behind Cassie, he gently rested a hand on her shoulder. Luke's your friend. No one wants to see someone they care about hurt."

He paused, waiting for a reaction from Cassie. She reached up to wipe away a few more tears. When she didn't say anything else, Scott continued.

"I know this can't be easy for you, but you're not alone here. We all need to help each other through this, but we also can't forget our responsibilities. Hard as it is, we need to go on with our day-to-day duties. We're here for you, Cassie, but we also need you here with us. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

"That you'd like me to pull myself together and do my job," Cassie replied, looking back over her shoulder at him. A half smile came to her face, softening the words.

"Well, yeah, though I'll understand if you want to reschedule this lesson again."

Cassie took a deep breath, and then turned to face Scott. "No, you're right. I've got a responsibility to IR and the last thing Luke would want is for me to be moping around here."

"Ready to get back to work then?" Scott asked, nodding toward the plane.

"Yeah."

The two of them started back toward the plane. "If you really want to send a card to Luke, you could. If we make it look like its coming from LA, his family will just think you're a concerned co-worker sending get well wishes."

For the first time in the last twenty-four hours, things started to look a little brighter. "I didn't think of that," Cassie replied, as they came to a stop beside the plane. "Thanks, Scott," she said, giving him a hug.

Scott awkwardly patted her back. "Yeah, um, you're welcome," he managed to say, as Cassie took a step back. "Let's get to work."

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Subject: Re: Cold Front  
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:35:15 GMT  
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Friday, November 16th, 10 a.m., Tracy Island

Jeff looked up as Gordon stepped into the lounge, quietly closing the grillwork door behind him.

"You wanted to see me, Dad?"

Jeff waved him over to the desk. "I have some resumes for you to look at. Human Resources

forwarded them; they're for filling Brandon's place."

"Not wasting time are they?" Gordon commented as he walked over toward the desk. He sat down in a chair across the desk from his father and took the data pads that Jeff was holding out to him.

"No, they aren't -- because we aren't," Jeff commented. "We need someone very soon so we can get them into training."

"Anyone in particular stand out to you, Dad?" Gordon asked as he started looking over the one on the top.

Jeff handed him a pad that he'd kept in reserve. "I think we should start here, with Vincent Crenshaw."

"Crenshaw?" Gordon said slowly, as he set the first few pads onto the desk and took the latest one from his father.

Why does that name sound familiar? he thought to himself. He looked down at the information in front of him.

"He's got the military experience we need," Jeff explained as Gordon read. "And, it seems, he has the diving and navigating experience as well. You'd be a better judge of that, of course."

Gordon frowned a little as he began to scan down the information, then his face cleared and he broke into a smile. "You'll never believe this, Dad, but I met this guy while I was off last weekend. He owned the dive shop where we rented our boat and equipment."

Jeff leaned back in his chair, looking thoughtful. "What was your impression of him?"

"Very professional. The shop he runs is well organized and seems to be fairly busy. Jerry says it is one of the top ranked dive shops in Hawaii," Gordon told his father. "As for the diving and navigating experience, he'd definitely has that. He ended up joining us for the dive trip and he really knows his stuff."

Gordon smiled as he remembered when Pat had repeated Vince's comment about needing to keep an eye on him while they were out on the water. "To tell you the truth, he made a better impression on me than I probably did on him."

Jeff raised one bushy eyebrow. "Now why am I not surprised at that?"

Gordon grinned at his father's comment, as he looked back down at the resume he still held in his hand. Some of the information it contained the aquanaut was already aware of.

"Wow, I knew the guy served in the Navy but I didn't realize he was a Navy SEAL," Gordon said, impressed. "That would explain the professionalism and serious attitude."

"I agree with you there. I think he'll be a real go-getter from the start. And the fact that he has

flown fighter jets gives him another edge in my eyes."

"What's that?" Gordon asked, looking up.

"We've been having a hard time with flight hours on Scott, and to a lesser extent, Elise. Someone who has flown fighters is someone we could cross-train on Thunderbird One."

Gordon nodded. The thought hadn't occurred to him but his father had a valid point. Not all rescues were going to require Thunderbird 4 or even utilize any diving skills. Someone who they could use in another capacity would be beneficial.

"There is one thing that needs to be considered," Gordon said. "He is married and has at least one kid. His son was helping out in the shop when we were there. Other than Dom, none of our recruits have had any immediate family. Assuming he would be interested in taking the position, there are bound to be things that come up that we haven't had to deal with before."

"Hm. You have a point there, Gordon." Jeff stroked his chin a little. "The people we have had come in who had children were single parents. I think this will require some thought, and perhaps a bit more digging into his background so we can be prepared at our interview." He put out a hand for the pad, and Gordon returned it to him. "If it's just one child, there shouldn't be a problem - we have a two-bedroom apartment left. But if there's more than one..." He shrugged. "We might be taking on another building project sooner than we expected."

He motioned to the other pads that Gordon held. "You take a look through those and see if there's anyone else who might fulfill the qualifications. I'll make arrangements for Mr. Crenshaw to pay us a visit."

"Yes, sir." As Jeff turned his attention to his computer, Gordon returned to the data pads. There were four other applicants that HR in Honolulu had sent to them. All of them, except for one, had some kind of military experience. There was a guy who was planning on retiring from the Navy at the end of the month. His experience was limited to submarines. There was a former Coast Guard officer and a former member of the Royal Navy. The fourth candidate was a civilian worker at Pearl Harbor who did underwater ship inspection and maintenance. "If Mr. Crenshaw doesn't work out, I think Ms. Susan LaSalle would be worth looking into more," Gordon said, referring to the former Coast Guard officer.

"Okay, son. I'll put her next on the list to contact should Crenshaw not work out." Jeff put on his glasses. "You prioritize the rest, and we'll send them on to Human Resources."

"Yes, sir," Gordon replied. He had already been mentally thinking on the order so it didn't take him long to put them in the order he wanted, with the civilian worker on the bottom and LaSalle's resume on the top. He sat the stack on the desk and pushed it toward his father's side. "If you're thinking about cross-training, I assume you'll include Scott during the interview, then?"

Jeff looked up and nodded. "Yes, I think he should be... if the two of you can actually stand to be in the same room as each other -- especially after Scott's revenge for those pictures." He grinned. "I should have asked Scott for a picture of your tank."

"I'm sure he got some," Gordon said, his tone wry. "Who'd a thought he could come up with something like that." He shook his head, as if in disbelief, then straightened. "You won't have any problem from me, Dad. I guess I had it coming," he admitted. That doesn't mean I don't plan on coming up with another prank, though. He shifted in his chair a bit. I just don't want to have to pass over a good candidate for Thunderbird 4 just because Scott doesn't think they're good enough to fly his precious Thunderbird.

"Good to know," Jeff replied, nodding. "Now, if you'll excuse me..."

Gordon took the hint, and gave his dad a jaunty salute. "Yes, sir!" He grinned. "I can hardly wait to see Vincent Crenshaw's face when he realizes that I'm the one interviewing him!"

Deciding on Vince by Tikatu and Icarus1982

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:35:27 GMT

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November 15, 4:30 PM; outside Freedom Hall at the King Center in Atlanta (10:30 AM the next day on Tracy Island)

Lena stood beside the reflecting pool gazing into the water, thinking about what she'd seen and learned that afternoon. What dey teach us in schools, even now, doesn't begin to show de reality, she thought. Of course we know who he was, and about his "I Have a Dream" speech, and about his assassination, but dere's so much more to know. I'm glad Joy asked me to come here.

When she had told the Atlanta I&M manager, Carl Harris, that she wanted to take some time off to visit the site, he offered to be her guide. "I go there at least twice a year, and come away inspired every time. I'd be delighted to take you. And Thursday is a good day to go; it's not so crowded. No school kids, either; their field trips are usually on Wednesdays or Fridays."

"And de only meeting on Tuesday is in de morning."

He grinned. "That, too."

So after a morning of meetings and observations, they went to lunch, then on to the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site. They visited the King Birth Home, Ebenezer Baptist Church (where both Kings, Jr. and Sr. preached), and the Gandhi Promenade. Their final visit was the International Civil Rights Walk of Fame, which had the footprints of inductees, those who contributed to the struggle for equality. She slowly strolled along, occasionally taking pictures, looking at names she had been too young to know, but knew from her history classes: Ralph Abernathy, Sr., Medgar Evers, Jimmy Carter, Rosa Parks, Henry Aaron, Harry Belafonte, Tony Bennett, and so on. She marveled at the number of non-blacks who had been included.

Then she stopped dead. Directly in front of her were the footsteps of a man, and the name was Jefferson Tracy. She looked over at Carl, and asked, "Did you know about dis?" as she pointed.



As he looked where she indicated, a stunned expression came over his face. "My God, no! I've seen that name a dozen times, at least, but never connected it with our CEO until now. I've always heard him called Jeff Tracy."

Lena chuckled. "I've met him and his family. Believe me, when you hear his motter call him 'Jefferson' in dat certain tone of voice, you don't forget. But I can see why you didn't realize it was de head of de corporation."

Carl shook his head. "Well, I'll be da..." He looked up at her, embarrassed. "Sorry, Lena."

"Dat's okay."

Shortly after that, they were at the gravesite of the famous man. Carl was still there, and she had moved off, waiting by the pool.

She didn't wait long. A few minutes later, he joined her. "I know you want to spend a little time in the gift shops, so we'd better get inside. They close at 5."

"Den let's get going. If I don't go home wit some tings for Joy and de twins, at least, I'll never hear de end of it."

They turned and headed into Freedom Hall.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:37:32 GMT

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Friday, November 16, 1:30 p.m., Tracy Island.

Jeff glanced around the pod vehicle repair bay. He'd only been to one recommissioning event; when the Ares V cargo launch vehicle had been refitted and returned to service. It was, in fact, the vehicle that took him and his crewmates to the moon, allowing him to be part of history as the first man to set foot on the moon in the 21st century. The ceremony had been formal, moving, and exciting.

Today is not quite the same, he mused. Of the people ranged around the edges of the bay, about half were in uniform, as he was. The other half had arrived dressed as they were. There were no flashes of light from journalists' cameras; there would be no press releases proclaiming what was about to happen. And there will be no lengthy speeches, either. I'll see to that.

When everyone had gathered, he stepped forward and cleared this throat.

"When I brought a doctor into our confidence..."

A fully-uniformed Dianne, who was standing behind him by Thunderbird Seven, made a quiet throat-clearing noise herself and raised one brow, causing Jeff to pause and smile slightly.



"Yes. When I brought a doctor into our confidence, I had no idea how she would work her way onto our team. No idea that I'd soon be commissioning a vessel that would bring medical help to rescue victims all over the world. When the vessel was completed and sent out, I had no idea of the impact it would have, of the connection it would make to the people of the world."

He glanced back at the gleaming white hovercraft for a moment. "It was only when that vehicle was damaged, and the personnel who manned it were injured, did I have an inkling of what had been wrought when Thunderbird Seven was created."

Jeff turned this head the other way, smiling at Dianne, Dom, and Nikki. "After that horrible day, I thought long and hard about Thunderbird Seven and its fate. Thought long and hard in the hospital, thought long and hard when we returned home. What should I do about this? Should I scrap Seven entirely? Drop the medical portion of what we do? Could I go through this again? Could I ask my wife, our nurses, to risk their lives like this again?"

He pulled a piece of paper from a jacket pocket. "I guess the decision to repair Thunderbird Seven came when I was reading through some of the many notes that were left at the hospital for us. This one in particular struck home, and I'd like to read it for you."

Clearing his throat again, he slipped on his glasses and began to read. "'Dear International Rescue. It is said that the measure or a man (or woman) is what it takes to stop him (or her). Now, I reckon a tornado's a pretty big thing to stop a person. But I also reckon it's not big enough to stop you. So, don't give up. Never, ever give up. Pick up the pieces, put them back together, and keep going. What you're doing is bigger than you know. Regards, Georgia T.'." He sighed, reaching up to remove the glasses. "The part about picking up the pieces and putting them back together was what hit home to me. I'm not sure why, but it felt like a sign - a sign that we really wouldn't be healed until Thunderbird Seven was back, doing the job it's supposed to do."

Jeff smiled a little. "So, here we are. The new improved Thunderbird Seven. Ready for service. Recommissioned to return to duty." He turned to the three people standing by the cab. "Who will put her to bed in the pod?"

Three voices raised. "I will." "I can." "I'd like to." A chuckle ran through the crowd as the doctor and the nurses glanced at each other, arms crossed, each looking slightly stubborn and belligerent. Then Dianne called, "I think we need an executive decision here, Commander."

The commander shook his head. "Not this time. You three wrestle it out."

With a sigh, Dianne turned to her co-workers. "Only one fair way to do this. Paper, rock, scissors."

"I can go with that," Nikki said, a grin spreading over her face.

"Sounds all right to me," Dom added.

"Okay then; on three." They each put a hand behind their backs, and Dianne counted, "One... two... three!"

Two hands came out with V-shaped first and middle fingers, while the other came out with a fist. Dianne groaned, Nikki made a loud, "Tch!" noise, but Dom grinned.

"Rock breaks scissors. I'll pilot."

"Best two out of three?" Dianne ventured, a comment that made some of the crowd chortle.

"Why, Dr. Tracy," Dom said, an innocent tone to his voice. "I had no idea you were a sore loser!"

"He won fair and square, Doc," Jeff said. "Now, get in there and put this baby to bed!"

"Sir, yes sir!" Dianne shouted, saluting sharply. The crowd laughed again, then Dianne turned to follow Dom and Nikki into Thunderbird Seven's rebuilt cab.

The lights atop it began to flash, and the uniquely familiar sound of the siren sounded out. It reverberated off the concrete walls, causing some of those present to cover their ears. Slowly, the Thunderbird rose on its hoverjets, and made its way into the access tunnel leading down to the aircraft hangar. It turned right as it reached the main floor, floated down past Thunderbird Two, and into the pod vehicle hangar. The crowd followed at a safe distance, some stopping at the wide entrance between chambers. Stopping in front of pod 7, the hovercraft turned 90 degrees. The door to the empty pod slowly dropped; power increased on the hoverjets, bringing the craft to the level of the pod's interior floor. Then the sirens stopped, and Thunderbird Seven backed into the pod, accompanied by a loud, warning beeping. Those who had followed it all the way to the pod saw it lower to the floor. A series of clamps unfolded from the edges of the underside, slotting into pre-cut holes. Then the engines cut off with a soft whine, and seconds later, the door opened. Dom left first, a wide grin on his face. The assembled group cheered, clapped and whistled.

"So, how is it?" Brains asked, an anxious tone in his voice.

"Flies like a dream, Brains. Like a dream."

Jeff stepped forward. "Then I hereby declare Thunderbird Seven officially recommissioned and back to full-time service."

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:37:44 GMT

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Friday, November 16, 4:00 p.m., Tracy Island

As the lift doors opened, Cassie stepped out onto the second floor of the Round House. Following the directions Cherie had given her, she turned left. She passed the first door, and came to a stop at the second. Reaching out, she hit the buzzer for the door.

"Come in," came Cherie's reply from inside the room.

Cassie walked into the room. Cherie was at a table set off to the one side of the room. Cassie looked around the room as she made her way in that direction. A couple of easels were set up off to one side, neither currently having anything on them. A storage unit was against the one wall. Next to it, the dark-haired woman noticed a blank canvas.

"Hi, Ms. Cassie," Cherie said, looking up from whatever she had been working on.

"Hi, Cherie. So, what did you come up with so far?" Cassie replied, as she reached Cherie's side.

"Well, I've picked out the pictures I plan on working from. I wanted to run them by you and make sure you like the view of each the objects that will be in the mural before I actually start working on the sketches. Thanks for getting the picture of your fire station for me."

"Not a problem. I wasn't sure how much luck you would have had finding a picture to work from on your own," Cassie replied. As it was, the former FDNY member had asked Janet to take a picture of the fire station and email it to her. "Let's see what you have."

Cherie showed Cassie the pictures she had chosen of the Queensboro Bridge, Belvedere Castle, and the Empire State Building. Cassie found herself liking all of the young artist's choices.

"I couldn't decide which view of the Stature of Liberty I liked better," Cherie said, placing two photos side by side. "I thought I'd just let you choose."

Cassie looked at the two photos. After a moment to consider the choice, she pointed to the one she liked better. Cherie nodded and added the picture to the pile with the other three as well as the photo of Cassie's former fire station she was working from. The second photo she set off to the side.

"Before you came in, I was working on coming up with a layout for the mural," Cherie said. She started placing the pictures down on the table in the layout she had liked best. When she was done, the photo of the fire station was in the center, with the other four objects placed as if they would form a square around the center photo if connected with lines.

Cassie looked down at the layout. The placement of the fire station in the center, gave Cassie the feeling as though that was the center of her world. While that would have been correct, not long ago, things had changed. She'd never forget her time at the 66; that was part of her past. She felt the same way about what the Queensboro Bridge, Belvedere Castle, and the Empire State Building. They all represented the past to her. The fifth object, the Statue of Liberty, didn't.

Liberty. In a way that's what I gained by setting out on my own, Cassie thought.

"I think I'd prefer the Statue of Liberty and the fire station got switched," Cassie told Cherie. The teenager picked up the photos and swapped them. "Yeah, I like that better."

"Okay, Ms. Cassie," Cherie said, making note of the arrangement on a padd.

Cherie showed Cassie a sketch of the 66th precinct she had started, as well as the size of the canvas squares that would make up the mural before Cassie left the Round House and headed

back to her apartment.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:38:58 GMT

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Dominic was limbering up in the gym when the first of his students arrived. He had his leg stretched up vertically and was holding it to the side of his head, one arm outstretched for balance. As Alan and Gordon entered, they winced simultaneously.

"A man should not be able to do that," Alan said.

"I've never been more thankful for baggy shorts," Gordon added.

Dominic laughed as he gracefully returned his leg to the floor.

"I'm not one for leotards," he said, before walking the short distance to his yoga mat. "Okay, guys, if you want to grab a mat from this pile and find a space facing me and get ready while we wait for the others, that'd be great."

It wasn't long before Tin-Tin, Cassie and Will had all arrived, and had also taken their places facing their yoga trainer.

"Okay everyone, thanks very much for coming," Dominic said. "We're just going to take it easy for our first class and learn a little about breathing."

"Breathing? I'm pretty sure I know how to do that already," Gordon said with a wink.

"If you didn't by this stage I'd be worried," Will retorted.

The small group chuckled, and Dominic shook his head.

"We're going to learn about deep breathing," he said. "It's something that you need to do during every yoga pose to help you concentrate, and to help centre your balance. Yoga doesn't necessarily require strength, but knowledge of your centre of balance. First off though, we'll warm up a little. As with any exercise it's important to warm up before doing anything strenuous."

They went through a variety of stretches and twists to limber themselves up, before they got down to the business of yoga.

"Now," Dom said. "I'll be performing the poses first so you know what to do, but you'll have to think of me as your mirror image. Deep breathing is easy, so feel free to do it along with me first time around. What I want you to do is to stand with your legs spread a little and your arms loose and relaxed by your sides. Then, bring your hands up to rest on your stomach, forming a triangle around your belly button with your thumbs and forefingers, like this."

He showed them the position, and everyone did it themselves.

"Now, breathe in deeply, trying to relax your diaphragm and relaxing your stomach muscles. Hold the breath until I tell you to breathe out. Then repeat again."

Dominic showed them how, and they all repeated it several times together.

"That's very relaxing," Cassie said. "I feel my muscles all loosening up."

"It is useful," Dom said. "If you do some deep breathing before you go to bed it can help you sleep."

"Excellent," Tin-Tin said. "It'll be especially useful if we've been on a stressful rescue."

"I do it every night," Dom said.

The small group practised a little more, laughing and joking as they did.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:39:23 GMT

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Saturday, November 17, 3:30pm TI (previous day, 4:30, Oahu, HW)

Vince stepped into the house and immediately caught a whiff of dinner. Just from the smell he could tell what Lana had decided to make for their evening meal; beef stroganoff and garlic bread. As she tended not to eat red meat, he also knew there would be a salad. He was looking forward to spending some time with his family before heading to the YMCA for the SCUBA course he was teaching.

Other than the sounds of the native Hawaiian music that Lana had on, the house was quiet. Either the kids weren't home, or they had found something quiet to occupy themselves with. Taking his business case off his left shoulder, he placed it on the floor underneath the coat rack. He then headed to the kitchen. He wanted to tell his wife about the last minute trip first thing.

Lana was at the counter, cutting up green peppers for the salad. She looked over her shoulder as Vince entered.

"Aloha, Honey! How was work?"

"Fine," he told her walking over to her and leaning down for a kiss. Before straightening up, he plucked a piece of pepper from the cutting board.

"Can't you wait for dinner!" Lana scolded good-naturedly, swatting at his hand.

"No," Vince replied before popping the green vegetable into his mouth. He walked over to the

refrigerator and grabbed a glass from the cabinet next to it. "I heard back from Mr. Kent over at Tracy Industries," he said as he poured himself a glass of cranberry juice.

"Oh, what did he have to say?" Lana asked, not looking up from the peppers she had returned to cutting.

"I've been asked back for an interview with Mr. Tracy himself," Vince told her, sitting on the low counter nearby.

"That's great!"

"This weekend."

"What?" Lana said, surprised. She put the knife down and turned her chair to face her husband. "That's awfully quick isn't?"

Vince nodded. "I'm surprised myself, but Mr. Kent says that they want to get the position filled as quickly as possible, and wanted to set the interview up as soon as possible. The plan is for me to leave from Honolulu International tomorrow afternoon at three, so I don't have to cancel the class's fourth dive. I'll be away for a few days. If you'd rather I didn't..."

"No, you should go," Lana said quickly, not letting him finish the thought. "The kids and I will be fine for that long. What about the shop?"

"Jim already said he would take over for the next few days. Which brings me to another issue I wanted to discuss with you. You know Jim's been wanting to start a dive shop of his own someday. Well, I was thinking that instead of selling the shop outright, I become partners with Jim. I've talked to both my lawyer and realtor, and they say that coming up with a deal where Jim buys part of the business and then over the years slowly buys me out, wouldn't be that hard. I wanted to run it by you before I spring the idea on, Jim, though as I'll probably need some help from you dealing with the shop from time to time."

"Like I don't already," Lana commented, returning to making her salad. She had helped out with inventory and balancing the books over the years when things at the shop got too busy, usually during the summer months. "I think you becoming partners with Jim is a great solution. We could set the extra money aside for Lea's schooling."

Before Vince could reply, Aaron's voice interrupted the conversation.

"Mom, Dad, look what Lea did to my surfboard," they heard their eldest call. Moments later Aaron appeared in the doorway of the kitchen, surfboard in hand. Vince and Lana immediately saw what the issue was. The normally blue surfboard was now multicolored. Suns with smiley faces had been painted on the board in yellow, red, and green. "She ruined it."

"No, I didn't. I made it look pretty," Lea said, having followed her brother to the kitchen.

"I don't want it to look pretty," Aaron told her, glaring down at her.

Seeing the angry look on her brother's face, Lea's smile faded.

"Poppet, what did I tell you about those paints when I bought them for you," Vince said calmly, successfully hiding his amusement over the painted surfboard.

"That they should only be used on paper."

"Exactly. Now, what do you say to your brother?"

"I'm sorry," Lea said, looking up at her older brother.

"She still ruined my surfboard. Aren't you going to punish her?" Aaron said, ignoring his sister's apology. He was still too angry to forgive her.

"Whether I punish her or not is none of your concern," Vince told his son, even though he had planned on giving Lea a time out as well as have a talk with her about respecting other people's property. Looking away from his son, he looked down at the little girl. "Lea, go have a seat in the time-out chair."

The blonde didn't say anything as she turned and headed toward the dining room, tears in her eyes. She had just wanted to brighten up the surfboard, not make her brother mad at her.

"Aaron, you should be more understanding of you sister's feelings," Lana said, speaking for the first time since the kids had come into the room.

"Mom, she ruined my surfboard."

"It's not ruined. It's not like she broke it or something."

"If I show up on the beach with this," the teen said, holding the painted surfboard up in front of him, "I'm going to be laughed right off the beach."

"You still should've accepted her apology. She didn't think she was doing anything wrong."

"She paints on my surfboard and I get the lecture. Man it sucks having a little sister."

"Aaron," Vince said, a warning tone to his voice.

"Well, she keeps going into my room. She won't leave my things alone."

"I seem to remember another little kid who use to touch things that belonged to others. A set of golf clubs come to mind."

Aaron looked sheepishly at the ground. He hadn't been much older than Lea when he had decided he wanted to play golf like his dad. He had taken a couple of his father's golf clubs out in the back yard to teach himself. The golf ball never had gone very far, but the clubs had been badly bent.



"Point taken. I'll go talk to her," Aaron said with a sigh. "But what about my surfboard?"

"I'll pay to have it repainted next week," Vince told his son. "Leave it in the living room."

"Thanks, Dad," Aaron said, turning to leave the room.

As soon as his son was out of sight, Vince gave up trying to keep a straight face. "Can't blame him for not wanting to be seen with that surfboard," he commented, with a smile.

Lana chuckled as she went back to salad preparation. "You know, art classes may be a good way to channel her creative energy."

"You're right, but they'll have to wait. No point in starting something while I'm looking for a job." Vince said. He downed the rest of his juice and placed the empty glass in the sink. "I think I'll go have a talk with our little creative genius about appropriate surfaces to paint on."

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:39:36 GMT

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Saturday, November 17, 2068, 5 p.m., Tracy Island

Cherie was busy at her computer when her satellite phone rang. She was building a collage from the images Cassie had chosen; she would later split the collage up into pieces the separate canvases that would make up the mural, and work from that.

She reached into the outer pocket of her art bag for the phone. The ringtone was unfamiliar, one of the default tones that she hadn't taken the time to change. She glanced at the screen which said, "Wilton, A".

"Anneliese!" she cried, grinning. She saved her work, put her wireless earphone in, and answered the call, allowing for the video feed. "Hey! Anneliese!"

Anneliese looked a bit startled, then smiled. "Hullo, Cherie!"

"I'm so glad you called!" Cherie said, eager. "I need a break from this project I'm working on."

"Is it something for school?" Anneliese asked.

"Nah. Just something one of our... uh..." Cherie thought hard about how to describe Cassie and her position. "Neighbors. Yeah, something one of our neighbors asked me to do."

"Neighbors?" Anneliese frowned a little. "I thought you lived on a private island..."

Cherie winced. "Well, yeah, we do. But there are some people who work for my dad's company that also live here." She shrugged. "I mean, they're not like servants or anything, working for the family, and they live on another part of the island. So they're neighbors... sort of."



"Do you have servants?" Anneliese's eyes were wide.

Cherie squirmed a bit. "Well, I suppose they're technically servants. But they're more like part of the family. Though we just got someone new to help in the kitchen." She paused. "In fact, one of them is going to be family because he's marrying my Nana."

"Your nan lives there, too? But not your grandpa?" Anneliese looked a bit confused.

"It's kinda hard to explain," Cherie began. "My mom's mom is divorced; my dad's mom is a widow, and both of them live here. My mom's mom is the one getting married. My mom's dad... well, he sorta dropped out of the family until recently. My biological dad's parents live in Florida. I send them cards and letters and visit them for a couple of weeks every year."

"Ah, now I see." Anneliese's face had cleared and she nodded. "My mum's divorced, too, and that means I don't see much of my nana and nandy on my da's side. He's remarried, and though I suppose that makes my stepmum's folks my grans, too, I've never met them." She paused, then asked, "What do you mean about your 'biological' da? How'd he let you get adopted by your new da?"

Looking down, Cherie composed herself. "My biological dad is dead."

Anneliese looked aghast. "I... I'm sorry, Cherie! I didn't know..."

"Hey, hey, it's okay. I didn't expect you to know." Cherie sighed heavily. "I miss him, sometimes, and it still hurts when I think about him. But if he hadn't died, we probably wouldn't have even come here, and my mom definitely wouldn't have married my new dad." She gave her friend a small smile. "Then you and I would never have met."

"You ain't wrong," Anneliese said with a nod. "Sometimes I think what it might be like if my mum had carked it in that chlorine spill and I didn't." She shuddered. "I'd have to go live with my da and his wife... and all their little brats."

"Sounds awful!" Cherie commiserated. "I mean, my little brothers can be brats sometimes, but at least they're my real brothers, not step-brothers or something." She thought a moment. "I suppose that my older brothers would have been step-brothers if Dad hadn't adopted me." Shaking her head, she asked, "Do you have any brothers or sisters? Living with you?"

"I have an older brother, but he's a scarfie." At Cherie's blank look, Anneliese elaborated. "He's at uni, down in Dunedin. University of Otago. Mum wanted him to go to the Christchurch branch, but he didn't want to live at home. He comes home weekends, anyway. Brings his dirty trousers and jerseys for her to wash, then pisses around with his mates. He's always strapped for cash." She shrugged. "During the week, it's just Mum and me." Smiling, she added, "Sometimes we get brassed off at each other, but I like having her to myself."

"That must be cool, really," Cherie said, smiling back. "It's not easy being part of a big family, but I am the only girl..."

The two girls laughed, and their conversation moved on to other matters. Before they knew it, an hour had passed.

"Oh, here comes my mum." Anneliese glanced over her shoulder. "She's brought home take-aways for tea. I'd better go. It was nice talking with you, Cherie."

"Good to talk to you, too, Anneliese. I'll see you on Thursday if I don't talk to you before then."

"Right. Well, cheers!"

"Take care! Goodbye!"

The call ended, and Cherie sighed with contentment. Putting her phone down, she rose and stretched, then headed out toward the dining room. "Time to see what we're having for 'tea'."

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:39:47 GMT

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Ewa Beach YMCA - outside pool - just before 8pm, Oahu, HW

Vince followed Monica Makahi, the last student to get her equipment, through the hallway of the YMCA and outside to the pool. For tonight the kids only had the wet suit, fins, mask and snorkel as they wouldn't be in the water that much.

The rest of his class was already outside, waiting. Hoku Akana, one of the center's lifeguards, was perched up on a chair, keeping an eye on them. Vince immediately did a quick head count to make sure everyone had come outside. The count told him that all five of his students and Aaron were present. His son had tagged along tonight to help out, and was currently talking to his best friend, Keanu Hananoki, whom Aaron had convinced to take the course.

Vince walked to the shallow end of the pool and stood with his back to the pool. He called for his class to gather. It didn't take long for them to make their way over. The students gathered in front of their instructor, all eager to begin class. Aaron was busy getting into his gear, as he was going to demonstrate everything his father was going over tonight.

"Well, this is your second to last class. As I promised at the beginning of this course, when you were done you would have both your Open Water Diver certification as well as introducing you to Night Diving. Upon completion of your fourth dive tomorrow morning, you will be one dive away from completing the Open Water part of the course." Vince paused as a chorus of cheers passed through the class. "So, tonight I've decided that we will start learning about night diving. All of the training will be done here at the pool."

"This part of the course was added as a preview to what you will be learning if you choose to take the Advanced Scuba course, which will begin in January. This is not a certification course, and none of you should be attempting an actual night dive until you have some more experience."

Vince paused letting his words sink in as he made eye contact with each of the teens before continuing. He instructed the students to have a seat on the ground before he started talking about the differences between diving during the day and diving at night.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:39:59 GMT

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\*\*\*\*\*Sunday, November 18, Thunderbird Five, 3:45 a.m. (9:45 a.m. Saturday, Nov. 17 in Cambridge, Massachusetts)\*\*\*\*\*

John had awakened to his alarm clock 15 minutes earlier and was already getting his breakfast together. One of his favorite days had arrived: "The Game," the annual get-together of the Harvard Crimson and Yale Bulldogs football teams. For him, it was the one time he could get on Scott's case if his brother's college team from Yale lost. He hoped the 185th meeting between the two schools would be as exciting as in years past.

This morning, though, his excitement was slightly subdued because of Luke's accident. However, he knew that Luke would've wanted him to enjoy the game, no matter the situation.

Just a few minutes before 4 a.m., he went to the main console and set the communications to send any call with key emergency words straight onto the screen in the lounge. He went to the lounge, turned on the TV, and tuned into the sports channel showing his game.

Throughout the length of the football game, Yale had tried hard to keep up with Harvard, but every time the Bulldogs would get closer, Harvard would score touchdowns.

Every time Harvard scored, John would yell, "Yeah! Go Crimson!" At one point he was so excited he nearly fell out of his seat.

By the time the fourth quarter came along, it was already 6:30. Harvard was well ahead of Yale by the score of 42-17. John smiled while he shook his head. "Unless Yale can do something, I'll get to rib poor Scott today."

Sure enough, Harvard held its ground and scored 14 more points before the game was over. "Yeah, that's it," he said excitedly. "Harvard's won it. Oh, I can't wait to give the news to Scott." He then realized something. "I didn't make a bet with him this year. Well, it's not like I can make him do anything from here anyway, so I'll just tell him Yale lost."

He turned off the TV and went back to his quarters, where Skitty was wide awake. "Good morning, buddy. Ready for some breakfast?"

After hearing the kitten's mew, he smiled and grabbed some cat food for him. When Skitty got his food, John went to the kitchen and grabbed a breakfast pack to heat up. "Well, my game's done, and I've got a long day ahead of me." He needed the energy to keep up with the calls coming in, him always on alert to any call that could possibly require International Rescue's services.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:40:23 GMT

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\*\*\*\*\*Sunday, November 18, Tracy Island, 9:55 a.m. (1:55 p.m. the previous day in Tuscaloosa, Alabama)\*\*\*\*\*

In her apartment Callie had already finished breakfast and was ready for her annual tradition known as the Iron Bowl. On this day, the Alabama Crimson Tide and the Auburn Tigers would battle on the football field for one simple thing: bragging rights for the next year in her home state of Alabama.

She was excited in preparing for it, but it was tempered by the news about Luke. However, she decided not to think about it because at the moment, this game was all that mattered.

Already dressed in her crimson-colored t-shirt and white capris, she turned on her TV and turned on the sports channel. "Oh, I am so ready for this game." Looking at the little "sports ticker" at the bottom of the screen, she saw the Harvard-Yale score. "All right, looks like the other Crimson team won earlier. Knowing John's for Harvard, he probably celebrated already. I hope it'll be two-for-two on the crimson color."

At 10:15, the game kicked off with Callie yelling, "ROLL TIDE!"

Unfortunately, the Auburn Tigers quickly returned the kick-off for a touchdown. "What happened to the defense? They should've stopped that guy!"

Alabama quickly responded with a touchdown of their own, putting the game into a tie. "That's more like it," she said with that hint of determination in her voice. "Auburn didn't have a good record this year, but they've obviously prepped for the game."

During the first two quarters of the game, Alabama's quarterback gave up three interceptions, but Auburn fumbled the ball twice. Both teams had penalties for various infractions, mostly false starts and going offside. Alabama did manage to get a couple of touchdowns and a field goal.

When the game stopped for halftime, she went to the kitchen to cut an apple and an orange into individual slices to keep herself sustained for the rest of the game.

Returning to the living room, she found the second half of the game was about to get under way. It got off to a very fast start with Alabama scoring a couple of minutes after Auburn kicked it off to them. Auburn, though, got ahead to 26 with a couple of touchdowns (but missed a couple of extra point chances) and two field goals.

Throughout the rest of the game, there were continuous errors by both teams, with more fumbles, interceptions, and penalties. One fumble by Auburn gave Alabama a safety for two points, which put both teams into a tie.

The game reached the incredible climax when Auburn was nearing the Alabama end zone with less than ten seconds left in the game. "Come on, come on," she said, folding her hands tightly in prayer. "Hold that line. Don't let 'em score..."

However, Auburn was able on the second try to break through Alabama's defense and score the winning touchdown.

"Nooooooo!" she yelled. "Oh, man, I was sure we had the win!"

Suddenly, there was a knock on the glass door. Callie called out, "Who is it?"

"It's Elise. Is everything all right?"

Callie opened the blind and saw her. She slid the door open and said, "I'm fine. I'm just a little peeved because Alabama just lost the game with Auburn. It was so close, too."

"What was the final score?"

"Auburn won it 32-26. The game was great, but I wish my team won."

"Oh, well, you can't win 'em all." Elise smiled.

"Yeah, and it's already after 1:00. I'd better get something to eat before I get a little too hungry."

"All right, I'll see you later."

"Thanks for checking," Callie said with a smile. After she closed the door, she made herself a sandwich. Even though her team did lose, at least she knew they fought well. "I guess Auburn's fans get to do the trash talking for the next year, but we'll get 'em back."

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:40:48 GMT

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Sunday, November 18th, 2 p.m. (Previous day 3 p.m. Oahu, HI)

"I'll only be gone a few days, Poppet," Vince told his daughter, as he picked her up and gave her a hug.

"I'll miss you, Daddy," she replied, throwing her arms around his neck.

"Me too."

Vince put Lea down. After giving Lana a kiss, he picked his duffel bag up and placed the strap over one shoulder. As he turned to address his wife again, he saw that Lea had climbed up in her mother's lap.

"Tell Aaron I'll call later to see how the swim meet went and to find out what that letter's about," he told her, referring to the letter from the Air Force Academy that had come that morning.

"I will. I sure hope that letter contains good news."

"So do I," Vince replied, glancing out the front window. A taxi was just pulling up in front of the house. "Well, there's my ride. I better be going."

"Good luck, Honey," Lana told him.

"Thanks!"

Vince blew a kiss in Lea's and Lana's direction and reached for the door knob. Lea blew a kiss back to her father as he headed outside to the waiting taxi. "Honolulu International Airport," he told the driver, as he climb into the back seat of the taxi.

The ride around Pearl Harbor to the airport was a quiet one. Vince watched the scenery pass by outside his window as he thought about the upcoming interview. He hadn't been given many details. All he had been told was that he was to have an interview with Jeff Tracy and that his flight would leave from Honolulu at 2 p.m. on Saturday. He didn't even know what airline he was flying on, let alone his destination.

About a half hour later, the taxi pulled to a stop at the drop-off area of the airport. After paying the cabbie, Vince grabbed his bag and climbed out of the cab. With the strap of the duffel bag over one shoulder, he made his way into the airport and to the ticket counter. The line wasn't long and soon he was giving his name to the lady at the desk.

"Crenshaw, Vincent," she said, repeating his name as she looked for the reservation. "There you are. You can catch your plane at gate 78. It should be arriving on time." The receptionist reached over to the printer to grab the card that had printed out. "Here's a pass to show at the security gate," she said handing the card to him.

Vince to the card. "What about a ticket?"

"You're on a private flight," the receptionist said.

Vince thanked the lady and then stepped aside to let the next customer step up to the desk. Private flight. I haven't had to deal with this much secrecy since I left the Navy, he thought, as he headed for the security gate.

Reaching gate 78, Vince took a seat in one of the many empty chairs. Glancing at his watch he saw that it was five to two. He still had a few minutes until the plane taking him to his interview was suppose to arrive. Taking the newest catalog for diving equipment out of his duffel bag, he leaned back and started looking through it.

He had only looked at a couple of pages when he heard footsteps. He looked up to see two young men walking into the area. The one in the lead had blonde hair. Vince recognized the copper-haired guy who was following the blonde immediately - Gordon Tracy. Vince was surprised to see the young man again, and he couldn't exactly say he was thrilled about it either. It's a small world, he thought, as he got to his feet.

"Mr. Crenshaw?" Alan asked. When Vince nodded, he continued. "Alan Tracy," he said, holding out his hand. "This is my brother, Gordon."

"We've met," Vince replied, as he shook hands with Alan.

"Hey, Vince!" Gordon replied, holding out his hand to Vince. "Bet I was the last person you expected to see today!"

"You could say that," Vince replied as he shook the younger man's hand.

"Is that all you're bringing?" Alan asked, nodding to the duffel bag still sitting on a chair.

"Yeah. I was told it was just going to be a couple of days that I would be away. I learned to travel light during my years in the service."

"Then why don't you come on board," Alan said, nodding toward the door he and Gordon had just come through.

Vince retrieved his duffel bag. Alan gestured for him to go first. As the older man walked toward the door, Alan grabbed Gordon's arm to hold him back a little.

"Well, you sure made an impression on him," Alan said sarcastically, in a low voice. "What did you do, hit on his daughter or something?"

"What daughter? Nah, I was just being my usual charming self."

"Great, that worked well."

"Ha, ha," Gordon told his younger brother and then followed to catch up to their passenger.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:41:03 GMT

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Sunday, November 18th, 7:30 pm

After calling home, Vince left the guest room and turned right. Gordon had said the lounge was at the end of the hall, and to meet them there for the interview. As he hadn't had a chance to call before dinner, Vince had wanted to call before the interview. He was anxious to know how Aaron had done at the meet and what news he had received from the Air Force Academy.

Aaron had been ecstatic when Lana had given him the phone. His swim team had taken first at the meet and the teen had set a record for the 200 Individual Medley. The good news had continued when Vince had asked about the letter. Aaron had been accepted to the Air Force Academy! After promising that they would celebrate when he got home, Vince said good-bye to his family, both Lana and Aaron wishing him luck in his interview.



Reaching the entrance on the lounge, Vince knocked.

"Come in," came Mr. Tracy's reply.

Vince walked into the lounge. Mr. Tracy, Gordon, and Scott were seated in chairs.

"Mr. Crenshaw -- Vince - please have a seat," Jeff said, gesturing to a chair. "I understand you've already spent some time with Gordon here."

"Yes, sir," Vince replied, taking the seat Jeff had indicated. "He was at my shop just last weekend."

"Yes, and I had a great dive, too." Gordon said with a wink. He turned to Scott. "Scott's no mariner, but he's listening in on this today."

"I might have a few questions of my own," Scott said, smiling slightly. "Dad?"

"Right." Jeff picked up his data pad. "Your credentials are very impressive, Vince. What makes you want to move from working for yourself to working for someone else?"

"Well, I'm just starting to feel like the shop is too routine for me and I want to find something that poses more of a personal challenge. I opened the shop because, at the time, I needed a way to support my family that gave me the freedom to control my own schedule. Starting my own business seemed to be the most logical way to go."

Jeff made a "hmm" noise, nodding slightly as he made a note on his data pad. Gordon spoke up. "Why Tracy Industries? Why a job that might mean you'd uproot your family?"

Vince shifted his weight a little in the chair. "When I started this job search, I wasn't sure what kind of a change I was looking for. All I was sure of was that I wanted a job that would put more of the skills I had trained for to use. A friend of mine pointed out your ad for marine product testing. The prospect of being a part of bringing new technology to the world appeals to me."

He paused momentarily before answering the second part of Gordon's question, trying to decide best on how to answer it. "As for the potential of uprooting my family, my wife and I have discussed it. A move isn't something my family is unaccustomed to. We both really just want me to be in a position where the family can be together."

He noticed Jeff nodding slightly, and continued. "We also feel that if we're going to relocate, that this is good timing when my youngest is involved. She's five and at the age where we'd like to get her involved in an activity with kids her own age. Before we do that, we want to be settled so that she isn't making friends she needs to leave behind." He paused again, a wide, proud smile crossing his face. "My oldest will be leaving for the Air Force Academy come June. We realize a move is going to be hard on him, but given the situation, my wife and I feel that we need to think more of Lea right now."

Both Jeff and Scott perked up. "Air Force Academy?" Scott said, a grin spreading across his face. "Congratulations."



"Couldn't get him to go Navy or WASP?" Gordon asked, grinning, too.

"Thank-you," Vince commented, addressing Scott. From his reaction, Vince was guessing that he was the older brother Gordon had mentioned who had served in the Air Force. He glanced at Gordon as he continued. "I honestly didn't try. He's always been fascinated in aircraft. I'm just proud he wants to follow in my footsteps and serve our country. Navy, Air Force or Army, all soldiers have the same purpose - to serve and protect."

"Agreed there," Jeff said, nodding. He glanced at the pad again.

"Your application said that you were a Navy pilot," Scott suddenly asked. "What did you fly? Did you see any action?"

"I served as a fighter pilot for two years after I graduated from Annapolis. Most of my experience came in the F-14 Beta Tomcat and was limited to security patrols. I did participate in Operation Red Flag during my second year."

"Red Flag, huh? I was an 'enemy' fighter when I was involved." Scott nodded. "The Tomcat's a good jet."

"Did you see any action as a SEAL?" Gordon asked. "I noticed you had a lot of weapons training."

"I served in the Cuba-Haiti Crisis in '63. My platoon was involved in repelling the invading Cuban forces."

"That was a rough patch, there," Jeff said. He gave his sons each a quick glance, one that said, without words, "No more shop talk."

Then he turned back to the pad. "I see here that you received an honorable discharge due to hardship. Could you tell us a little about that?"

Vince hesitated, trying to figure out how to answer that question. His wife's accident wasn't something he liked discussing, especially not with strangers.

"My wife was injured in a water-skiing accident in '65 while I was on leave. As much as I hated leaving the service at the time, my family needed me more." I hope that's enough information for him, Vince thought, fighting the urge to look away from Mr. Tracy and his sons.

The Tracys exchanged glances, and Gordon hesitantly said, "Must have been a pretty bad injury if you felt you had to leave the service. How bad was it?"

"She suffered a spinal injury and lost the use of her legs," Vince replied, fighting to keep his voice steady.

Jeff nodded, murmuring a sympathetic "mmm". "That is bad." He glanced at Gordon. "We had a similar situation involving Gordon while he was in WASP." He straightened and gave a "Humph. Well. Let's move on."

Another glance at the pad, and Jeff came up with another question. "If you had a choice of any sailing vessel to command, what would it be?"

"Well, I've had a chance to be behind the controls of many different watercraft between my time in the Navy and personal experience, most of which I listed in my resume. I'd have to say though, that I always enjoyed my experience on the subs the best," Vince replied, a smile coming to his face. "Something about being able to survive under water and be a part of that world always appealed to me. When I first joined the Navy, one of my goals was to be a submarine commander. My career took a little different turn than what I expected, but I don't regret any of the choices I made."

"How do you feel about hydrofoils?" Gordon asked. Scott gave him a quick look, but there was no wavering in Gordon's voice.

"Well, as you probably know, the US Navy started using hydrofoils in the special forces operations in '58. I had several experiences with the Zeus class hydrofoils while serving. Haven't been behind the wheel of one since I left the service."

Gordon nodded. "We've been designing a new prototype hydrofoil - wanted to see how you would feel about testing one out."

The Tracys had a few more questions, which Vince fielded thoughtfully. Jeff drew the interview to a close with the words, "I think we have what we need. Scott, Gordon, any other questions?"

When his sons replied in the negative, Jeff rose. Scott, Gordon and Vince rose with him, and Jeff shook Vince's hand. "Thank you for your interest in the position. Please avail yourself of our facilities during your stay with us."

"Thank you for your time, sir. Right now I think the only thing I want to test out is that bed in the guest room. It's been quite a long day for me."

After shaking hands with Gordon and Scott, Vince turned and left the lounge. Reaching the guest bedroom, he went inside.

I'm not sure how that went, Vince thought, as he started getting ready for bed. He couldn't quite get a read on Jeff Tracy and he hadn't missed the looks that had passed between the three Tracy's throughout the interview. Guess I'll have to wait and see if they offer me the position or not.

Vince's Interview by Tikatu and Icarus1982

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:41:16 GMT

As the door closed behind Vince, Jeff got to his feet.

"Well, boys what do you think?" he asked, walking toward his desk.

"I think Vince is a good choice," Gordon said, as his father sat down behind the desk. Since picking Vince up in Honolulu, their guest had been politely civil to him. It gave Gordon the feeling that he wasn't high on the former SEAL's list of well-liked people. Still, he got the impression that Vince was professional enough to be able to work with him despite any personal feelings. Besides, hopefully once he gets to know the real me, I'll be able to change that opinion, he thought. "He's got the qualifications we need and from what I understand of SEAL training, you don't make it through without being a team player."

Jeff nodded. His second youngest son made a valid point. Working as a team was one thing military training taught you, no matter which branch.

"Scott?" he asked, looking toward his oldest son.

"I agree with, Gordon. I think Vince will fit in well with the team. Having flown Red Flag, I think he'll do okay with cross-training on Thunderbird 1. As you know, Dad, the Air Force tries to make those training exercise as realistic as possible."

Jeff nodded as he considered his son's words.

"I think we need to keep in mind other things though before we decide to offer Vince the position, though," Scott said, continuing. "His family definitely adds some complications. Is he going to want to relocate his entire family here to the island? Will his wife agree to it and how complete was her recovery?"

"We're hiring Vince for IR, not his wife," Gordon replied. "It's obvious that no matter how complete her recovery is, they've adapted. Don't see why that should affect whether we should offer the position to him or not."

"I just meant that we need to keep it in mind because it could mean we need to make modifications to accommodate her if she's still in a wheelchair or something," Scott said in a defensive tone. He looked in his brother's direction as he continued. "Not to mention, even the two bedroom apartments is going to be cramped with four people sharing it. We may have to consider other housing options for them if we bring Vince on board."

Before Gordon had a chance to reply, Jeff spoke up.

"Scott has some valid points. There will definitely be new issues we need to address if we bring Vince onboard. However, I don't think they should affect our decision at this point as they're all things we can address if he does take the position. Right now we need to decide if we want to offer him the position or not. Gordon?"

"I still think he's the best choice of the applicants we were sent, Dad."

Jeff nodded. He turned his attention from Gordon to Scott. "Scott?"

"He seems to be just as qualified as the other recruits we've brought on board," Scott replied.

"Okay then. Gordon, you and I can tell him about IR tomorrow after breakfast. We'll see then if he's still willing to take the position after he knows what its really about. Could be he turns us down and the other concerns become moot. If he's still interested, we can deal with the other issues at that time. Anything else?"

Scott and Gordon both shook their heads in reply.

"Then we're through for the night," Jeff told them.

The two younger men stood up and with a goodnight to their father, left the lounge. After making a few notes on the data padd in his hands, Jeff stood up from his desk. Heading out into the hallway, he went in search of his wife.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:41:35 GMT

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Sunday, November 18, 2068, 8:25 p.m., outside of Reykjavik, Iceland (Monday, November 19, 9:25 a.m., Tracy Island)

Jacques sipped his après-ski whiskey as he sat by the fireplace, warming himself on both the outside and the inside. He'd just come in from his final downhill run of the day. He wasn't usually one for vigorous outdoor activity, preferring golf and other, less strenuous sports, but for some reason, skiing was an exception. He had never figured out why he liked it. Was it the bracing air? The exhilaration of racing down the hillside at breakneck speed? Was it all of these and more? He wasn't sure, but he did enjoy it -- all the more since neither of his younger siblings shared his appreciation.

It was the beginning of the ski season in Iceland. There had been quite a bit of snow already, turning what were usually fast, hard-packed runs into softer, grainy powder. Since it was also the beginning of the workweek, Bláfjöll Ski Resort was quiet, with only a handful of patrons. In Jacques's eyes, this translated into better service for those who currently resided there; the staff had fewer guests to tend to, and he liked prompt, courteous indulgence. It also meant fewer people to contend with on the slopes and lifts. Looking out the windows to the treeless slopes, he counted only one or two people taking advantage of the night-skiing

Two men walked by, talking in low tones. Jacques was slightly acquainted with one; he had come to Stellar Innovations once or twice, looking for specific technologies -- which the cartel was happy to provide. The other, he knew by name and reputation -- both of which were fearsome. They were meeting with three or four others, men and women who dealt in the shadows and had a very specific political agenda. Jacques had heard rumors about their current endeavors, no more than whispers, really, yet reliable nonetheless. He expected to be approached by one or more of them

in the near future, for business reasons... but not now. He was on holiday, and the only business he looked to was his own good pleasure.

"Sir? Would you like a refill?"

Jacques looked up at the waiter who hovered nearby. He waved his hand. "Yes. Another whiskey." After that, I'll take the car into Reykjavik for dinner and whatever else the city has to offer.

"Very good, sir. Right away...." The waiter's voice trailed off as he glanced out the wide windows. Jacques followed his gaze. His eyes grew wide and his mouth went dry.

Tumbling down the slope was a wave of snow. The crest covered everything in its path; it swallowed whole the few skiers who tried to run before it. It loomed larger and larger until Jacques breathed, "Oh my God. It's going to bury us..."

The waiter's scream brought him out of his amazed stupor and with a burst of adrenaline, he jumped up, running for the other side of the building. He flattened himself against an inner wall, cringing in anticipation of the glass breaking and wood splintering in the room he had just left.

But the windows were made of sterner stuff; they did not break. Instead, they were forced wholesale from their frames by the weight and pressure of the snow. The whole building shuddered and shifted. Wood cracked and popped. Patrons and staff screamed and wailed. Then, there was a long moment of dark and silence.

The silence was broken by the murmurs and cries of those in the lodge. The manager hurried from his office, flashlight in hand, to view the damage, giving sharp orders to the staff and brief moments of comfort to the patrons along the way. The building groaned under the weight that pressed against it. Several staff members were sent to different parts of the building, to reconnoiter and to bring their guests to a central location. The desk clerk was given the task of counting heads and confirming who was within the building.

Once he had confirmed his presence, Jacques went to the front doors to see if he could leave. His eyebrows climbed to his hairline as he saw the wall of white that confronted him.

"Yes, sir," the manager said, coming to stand beside Jacques. "I fear we are truly buried."

"Well?" Jacques demanded. "What are you going to do about this?"

The manager pulled himself to his full height. "When I have confirmation of how many people are still inside, I will attempt to call emergency services. It may be a futile gesture; my satellite phone may have difficulty piercing the snow. But I will try."

"Bloody right you will," Jacques said, his eyes narrowing. "And you had best get through or you'll hear from my solicitors."

The manager raised one eyebrow, but said nothing. He was rescued by the desk clerk and two of the reconnaissance team, all talking at once. Silencing them, he drew them into his office, and

shut the door firmly.

"Now, what do you have to say for yourselves?" he asked, settling in behind his desk. He indicated that the clerk should speak first.

She took a deep breath to steady herself. "We are missing five guests and two staff. At least three of the guests were seen on the slopes before this happened. I am not certain where the staff are." She put a piece of paper on his desk. "The names are highlighted."

"Very good." The manager turned to the others. "Report."

One, a young man in his twenties, spoke up. "I went to the upper storage level. The roof is caved in but the floor below it seems to be holding for the moment. The roof access points are totally blocked."

With a nod, the manager turned to his other staff member, an older man. "All of the windows show a wall of snow. I opened one to see if I could clear an opening to the outside." He shook his head. "There is just too much of it. We will not be able to dig ourselves free."

The manager had already picked up his satellite phone. "I am calling the local rescue teams. They should be able to get us out." He nodded toward the door. "Go. Do what you can to calm our guests. Have the rest of the staff gather blankets and torches, and keep everyone in a central location. Do not tell the guests the extent to which we are buried. I will be with you shortly."

After sending his people out of the office, the manager said a short prayer and called for help.

xxxx

"What do you mean you cannot come right away?" The manager was nearly hysterical now. His call had gone through, and he had been told to wait on the line for a response. He waited for a good twenty minutes until someone came back on the line. "Why must we wait for the World Government to send agents? Why?"

There was another long period of listening. "And what about the rest of us? There are twenty-five people here in the lodge right now, plus another five that are dying -- if not already dead -- on the slopes! Are we to be sacrificed just so these terrorists can be caught?"

He shook his head violently. "I do not agree!" He paused, then added, "Yes, yes, I know that we cannot let terrorists operate with impunity. No, no, I am not siding with them. I am siding with the people who are the innocents in this! Who are only here for skiing. Who had nothing to do with that sabotage! Please, you must help us. For them..."

He pulled the phone from his ear and swore. Taking a deep breath, he squared his shoulders. "So. The World Government has ordered our rescue be delayed until they can get their agents on the site." He continued to mutter as he moved to the radio set he and his staff used to communicate throughout the resort. "They probably don't even know for sure that those terrorists are guests here!" He switched it on, thankful that the unit was battery-powered. "Well, there is one organization I can turn to that will come... I hope." Putting the earpiece in place, he touched it.

"Calling International Rescue. Calling International Rescue... please hear me!"

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:41:57 GMT

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Monday, November 19, 8:30 a.m., Bláfjöll Ski Resort, 9:30 a.m., Tracy Island

"International Rescue! International Rescue! We need your help!"

"This is International Rescue," a calm clear voice replied after a few moments. "Who are you and what is your problem?"

Ragnar took a deep breath to steady himself. "Are you affiliated with the World Government?"

The voice answered "No," sounding rather surprised.

"I am Ragnar Andresson, manager of the Bláfjöll Ski Resort, in Iceland. About half an hour ago an avalanche covered the building where all the guests are housed. We called for local help from Reykjavik, and have received a reply saying that the World Government ordered them to stand down until further notice. They say it will probably be several hours before they will come."

"I see. Is there anyone injured?"

"Not that we know of, but there are seven missing. And we can't possibly hold out long enough! The oxygen supply will surely be gone by then. Can you help us?"

Up in Thunderbird Five, John Tracy glanced quickly at a computer screen as he prepared to open contact with Base. "Approximately how many people are trapped with you?"

"Uh... twenty-five, plus the missing people."

"Right. Now, you said Bláfjöll Ski Resort. Please give me the coordinates."

Ragnar related the coordinates, which John checked on the computers.

"Thank you, Mr Andresson. Please stay near your transmitter, someone will be in contact with you soon." He cut out and opened transmissions with Tracy Island.

"Base from Thunderbird Five. Come in, Base."

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:42:21 GMT

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On Tracy Island ...

"Thank-you," Vince said as Jenny finished filling his coffee cup.

"You're welcome, Mr. Crenshaw," she replied as she turned and headed back to the kitchen.

Most of the villa residents had already left the table to get started on their tasks for the day. At the far end of the table, Emily, Lisa and Kyrano were talking quietly. Across from Vince, Gordon had remained seated.

Vince picked up his coffee cup, and took a sip of hot liquid. Mr. Tracy had said he wanted to discuss some business after breakfast. The former navy officer was trying to wait patiently for the Tracy patriarch to bring the subject up.

"Well, Vince, my sons and I talked things over after the interview last evening," Jeff finally said, sending a quick glance at Gordon before focusing his attention back on Vince. "We'd like to offer you the position, but first, there is something more to the job than what we've let on so far."

Vince sat up a little straighter in the chair, his curiosity piqued. He remained quiet though as Mr. Tracy continued.

"However, before I tell you what that is, I need your word that - whether you take the position or not - you keep what I'm about to tell you a secret."

"Of course, sir," Vince replied without hesitation, figuring he was about to hear about some business secret that Mr. Tracy didn't want Tracy Industries' competitors to know about.

Just as he was about to continue, Jeff's wristcomm beeped.

"Yes?"

"Dad, I need to have a word with you privately," Scott said, his voice coming over the watch. "It's an urgent 'business' decision."

As Scott had headed up to the lounge after breakfast, Jeff quickly caught onto what his eldest meant by 'business'. Evidently, something had come up that needed International Rescue's attention.

"One moment, Scott," Jeff said. He looked over at Vince. "If you'll excuse me, this will only take a moment."

Vince simply nodded as Jeff got to his feet. As he left the dining room, the elder Tracy heard Gordon start a conversation with their guest.

"Go ahead, Scott," Jeff said as he reached the corridor.

"Dad, John received a distress call from the manager of the Bláfjöll Ski Resort," Scott informed him and then proceeded to give his father the other details. "As we're under Operation Cover Up

with our guest here, I wasn't sure what you wanted us to tell the manager," he finished up.

Jeff considered the situation. With the World Government putting a halt to local rescue operations, International Rescue was these people's only hope.

We were going to tell Vince about IR anyway. What better way for him to get an idea of what he'd be getting into than to see us in action? Jeff mused.

"Scott, tell John to let the manager know we will be responding," Jeff said, coming to a decision.

"What about Mr. Crenshaw?"

"I plan on letting him observe the rescue," Jeff told his son. "Give me a moment before you sound the alert down here to prepare him a little," he said, not wanting to alarm their guest with the alarm going off out of the blue.

"Yes, sir."

The conversation ended, Jeff turned and headed back into the dining room.

"There's been a slight change of plans," Jeff said as he approached the table. "As I was saying, there is more to the position than what we've told you so far. The research and development position with Tracy Industries is really a cover for our other business." Jeff didn't miss the confusion and bit of curiosity which showed on Vince's face. He took a deep breath and let it out slowly. Somehow, revealing IR to strangers hadn't gotten any easier. "My family and I run International Rescue and we've been recruiting others to help us with that task."

Did I just hear him right? Vince asked himself. Part of him didn't want to believe what was being said. But who would try to make this up? International Rescue! I've heard the rich can be a little eccentric but really...

"Gordon and I were going to show you around the underground facilities here on the island, but a situation has come up that requires our attention," Jeff informed him. "It looks like you'll get to see us in action. If you'll follow me, please."

Gordon was already on his feet and heading out of the dining room. Speechless, Vince got to his feet too. Still trying to digest the information he had just been told, he followed Mr. Tracy from the room as an alarm started sounding throughout the villa.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:42:39 GMT

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The sound of the grillwork door opening made Scott look in that direction to see his stepmother walk through. Having been in the schoolroom when the alarm went off, she was the first to arrive in the lounge.

"We got a call from a ski resort in Iceland," Scott told her, anticipating Dianne's question before she had a chance to ask it. "An avalanche has buried the lodge."

Before either of them had an opportunity to say anything, others started coming into the lounge. Scott stood up from the desk as Jeff entered behind Gordon. Vince came in behind the two of them. He did a double take as he noticed the portraits on the wall had changed. Though they still showed the same five people, the attire had changed from everyday clothes to a type of uniform.

"John's trying to find more information about the area the ski resort is in," Scott informed his father as Jeff sat down behind the desk.

Vince, meanwhile, was still trying to get past his disbelief at the whole situation. This was definitely not what he had expected when he had come on this interview. Looking for a place where he would be out of the way, the former Navy man headed over to the doors leading out onto the balcony.

"Any new information?"

"Not yet," Scott replied.

To give the others time to arrive, Jeff gave Scott his orders. With a quick acknowledgment, Scott headed toward the sconces. As he disappeared into the wall, Brains and Tin-Tin came into the lounge.

From his position, Vince blinked, eyes focused on the wall where the eldest Tracy son had vanished. I didn't just see that, he thought.

"That's what I've got so far," John said, finishing up a short report on the current conditions in the area of the ski resort. "I'm going to try to find some aerial shots of the resort. It'll give the team an idea of where everything should be."

"Good thinking," Jeff told him, as he did a quick head count. Everyone had arrived. "I'm going to bring everyone up to speed now."

"FAB."

"Thunderbird One, requesting launch clearance," Scott said over the radio.

After a quick glance at a screen, Jeff gave his eldest son permission to launch. "If you look behind you, Vince, you'll be able to see the launch," he told the potential recruit.

Vince turned to look out the window. I don't see where they could possibly launch anything from, he thought as he looked out over the pool area. It was then that he noticed a section of the pool start to move. I've seen a lot of things during my years in the service but this tops everything, he thought, as he watched the blue jet blast into the sky.

Vince watched Thunderbird One until it was out of sight, before turning his attention back to what was going on in the lounge. He listened silently as Jeff explained the situation to the people who

had gathered.

"There are innocent people at the ski resort, and I'm not about to let the World Government intimidate us and stop us from rescuing them. I've already told Scott this, and now I'm telling all of you, any contact you have with the World Government personnel should be patched through base, so that I can listen in, and recorded. It looks like the politics of this mission may get sticky, but our first priority is rescuing the people trapped by the avalanche."

There were murmurs of consent throughout the room.

"Virgil, you'll pilot Two. With people known to have been outside when the avalanche occurred, I want all medical personnel on the scene. Cassie, you might be pulled between the rescue personnel and the medical personnel if the need arises."

"Yes, sir," Cassie replied, with a nod. She had been in similar situations before. When she had worked with FDNY she had been asked to help out the paramedics while out with her squad, and vice versa.

"Alan, Gordon, Elise, Callie and Brains, I want you to join them, too. Take Seven, the Excavator, the Mole, and the Firefly," Jeff told them thinking of the bigger equipment first. He paused momentarily trying to think of what else the team would need. "Also take the hover bikes and hand shovels. Oh, and make sure you have the floodlights as it's night time there."

"Mr. Tracy, I suggest we take the Laser Truck too," Brains suggested, speaking up. "Depending on what the situation is, we may need it."

Jeff considered the scientist's addition to the equipment list. "Very well. Take the Laser Truck, too," he told them, preferring to be overprepared than to find they needed something they had left behind once on site.

Vince watched the movement in the room, as people left behind went into action. He noticed one gentleman hand a little boy off to the elder Mrs. Tracy before leaving with the others. He noticed Virgil wasn't with that group, but he also wasn't in the lounge anymore.

I wonder how he left, he mused, remembering Scott's earlier vanishing act.

Tin-Tin approached Vince.

"Why don't you have a seat, Mr. Crenshaw?" the Malaysian said, indicating one of the chairs. "Until the team gets on the scene, the information we get here at base is limited."

Vince nodded and headed toward the chairs Tin-Tin had indicated. He sat down, and the young woman took a seat next to him. Dozens of questions had popped in his mind. As Mr. Tracy seemed to be busy at the desk, he turned to the dark-haired woman beside him. "Perhaps you could answer a few questions for me?"

"I'll be glad to. I'm sure what you've just witnessed was quite a bit to take in."

"That's for sure," Vince commented.

He took a moment to organize his thoughts, and then asked his first question. As Jeff gave Thunderbird Two clearance to launch, Tin-Tin patiently began to answer the potential new recruit's questions as best she could.

Note: Thanks to Icarus1982 for writing most of the parts involving Vince!

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Subject: Re: Cold Front  
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:42:53 GMT  
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"WGSD to International Rescue vessel currently en route to Iceland. You are ordered to return to your base. I repeat, return to your base immediately. Acknowledge."

WGSD? Scott thought, startled by the incoming transmission. I guess the WG is the World Government, but SD? I can think of a few things that could stand for. I suppose I'd better respond.

He opened the link. "This is International Rescue, Thunderbird One. Please identify yourself."

"This is the WG..." There was a pause, then, "This is the World Government, Security Division. We order you to turn back."

Oh you do, do you? "No can do, WGSD. We are on a..."

"We are fully aware of your mission and destination. You are ordered not to approach the ski resort in Iceland."

"There are people there who need help."

"We are aware of that. Some of those people are upper echelon members of a terrorist organization, the one responsible for the sabotage of a jet carrying pandas from Beijing to Santiago, Chile. If memory serves me correctly, I believe your organization rescued those pandas as well as all passengers and crew aboard the jet."

"You're correct." Scott paused. Wait a minute! He said... "But you said 'some of those people'. We were advised that your timetable for rescue was too long, and most, if not all, would be dead from asphyxiation." Immediately after his statement, he muted his end of the call, and opened a separate channel to his father, quickly apprising him of the situation.

"That is regrettable, but necessary," replied the WG agent. "This is our first opportunity to take down high ranking members of that group, and we don't intend to blow it, or let anyone blow it for us."

Jeff heard most of the agent's reply and told his son not to turn back. "I want to hear the rest of this."

Scot complied, then switched the mute off. "Your price is too high. There are approximately thirty people there, staff and guests. Of that number, there couldn't be more than six members of that group you want to catch, if that many."

"That's beside the point. If they are captured or killed, their organization would be dealt a crippling blow." There was another pause. "You have not complied with our order."

"With all due respect," which isn't much "you have no authority to order International Rescue to do anything. If you want those people, I suggest you get off your butts and have your agents there to take them into custody once we've dug them out. There are too many others at the lodge for us to even think of considering compliance."

"They aren't important."

"Really? Tell that to their families and friends. Thunderbird One out."

He terminated the transmission before the agent could reply, then said, "Well?"

"You said exactly what I would have, Scott," replied Jeff. "I presume the conversation was recorded."

"It was."

"Good. Continue on your present course and advise me when you have landed. I have a communication or two of my own to make."

"FAB."

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:43:10 GMT

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Will was restless.

Once he'd finished helping the others load the pod, he sped up to his apartment to watch Thunderbird Two launch. He'd only gotten to see it once since he arrived on the island, and it fascinated him. He wanted to see it again. But once it was out of sight, he didn't know what to do with himself. He paced his apartment, thinking.

I wish I could talk to someone about how I feel. I wish I was with them; Brains did say I probably would occasionally have to go on rescues. But that's not what I came here to do. I'm part of the support team. Still...

He mentally went through the names of people he felt comfortable with. Most of them are en route to Iceland. Mr. Tracy is otherwise occupied; I can't interrupt him. And Luke... He shook his head. I sure hope he's going to recover completely and return someday.

He decided to head down to the repair bay. He knew that there would probably be plenty of work to do once the rescue team returned. He wanted to be sure he'd have everything ready to get started as soon as they did.

But once he arrived in the bay, he realized that there was nothing he could do to prepare; everything was in place, ready to be used. He sighed. "Damn! I need something to do; I can't just sit around, waiting."

Once again, he started pacing. Finally he remembered that after being called back from heading to the boat pen, he hadn't returned there, once he and the others had heard the news about Luke. He stopped, thinking. I can check out Gordon's new catamaran and maybe give one of the smaller craft a once-over.

Then, having made his decision, he checked to make sure he had his wristcomm on, and headed out.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:43:28 GMT

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Onboard Thunderbird 2, Cassie looked around at her teammates. A couple of different conversations were going on, as the crew tried to pass the time it would take to reach the ski resort. Elise had settled into the copilot's seat up front. Dianne was looking at a padd she had in front of her. Cassie didn't know what information was on it, but from what she knew about the older woman, she figured it had something to do with their upcoming mission. Dom and Callie were quietly talking but as they were across the craft, she couldn't make out what the conversation was about. Gordon, on the other hand, was talking loud enough to Alan that anyone on TB2 that wanted to listen to him would have no problem. Giving the lighthearted nature of the conversation, Cassie figured that was his intent.

Not much different from the last rescue, the former firefighter thought, thinking back to her first rescue with IR, which had occurred near the beginning of the month. Even on the way to the site, everyone has their normal actions that they fall into, just like when I was with FDNY.

That realization had a calming effect on her. It was a reminder that she wasn't totally in unfamiliar territory. Though an avalanche is definitely something I've never dealt with before.

Along with the length of the trip, being unoccupied during it was something unfamiliar, too. Cassie was realizing just how much driving the engine had helped keep her mind from wandering to other things.

"You doing okay?" Brains asked. The scientist's question brought Cassie out of her thoughts.

"Yeah. Just thinking about things," Cassie replied, glancing over at him in the seat beside her.

"Feeling nervous?"



"A little, though not as much as the first time."

Brains nodded. As neither of them could think of anything else to say, they fell silent. Hearing her name mentioned, Cassie tuned into what Gordon was saying. The two youngest Tracy boys were currently telling Nikki about the pool game they had challenged Scott and Cassie to a little over a week ago.

Cassie leaned back in her seat, deciding to use the flight to Iceland as a chance to relax before the rescue. Once they got to the rescue site, they would all be busy.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:43:40 GMT

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At the ski patrol headquarters at the foot of the Jon Oddur and Jon Bjarni runs, Pala Tomasson, evening supervisor for the Bláfjöll Ski Resort Ski Patrol, ended a conversation with resort manager. The fact that the main lodge was buried was not good news. However, Tomasson and her fellow ski patrol members couldn't do anything to help them at this point. Their concern right now were the people that had been on the slopes when the avalanche had occurred.

Three of the five lift operators had responded to her call for their status. They were fine and one of the missing guests was accounted for at one station. However, the lift operators for two lifts on the slope where the avalanche had occurred had not responded. Tomasson had to assume that they were buried. That meant at least two employees who were on duty there were trapped. Those two, along with her two patrol members who weren't responding and the four other missing guests, put the count of missing people at eight.

"We're ready," Gunnar Magnusson, a member of the ski patrol, said, bringing his supervisor out of her thoughts.

Pala turned from the notes she had been taking to see Gunnar standing with three other members of the ski patrol. Karl Kotlum, one of the lift operators, was with them. Giving the situation, they could use the extra help, so when Karl had volunteered to lend a hand with the search, Pala hadn't turned him down.

"Good," Pala replied. "I want everyone to stay in contact. We don't need to lose anyone else. Mr. Andresson informs me that International Rescue is on their way but it'll take time for them to get here."

"What about local rescue teams?" Gunnar asked.

"The World Government called them off. Until IR gets here, we're on our own."

Several of the ski patrol members cursed softly.

"Pala, I got a hold of Jokul and Leifur. They're on their way to give any assistance they can," Katla

said, from the doorway. The lift operator had been trying to call in members of the ski patrol who had been off.

"Good," the supervisor responded. She turned back to her search group. She assigned them areas to cover and sent them off.

Now there wasn't much more she could do right now other than wait.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:43:56 GMT

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Onboard Thunderbird 5 . . .

"There we go," John said out loud as he was finally able to bring up a recent aerial shot of the ski resort. The picture was still a little over a year old, but it was the most recent shot he had located. A chat with Mr. Andresson will tell me if there has been any recent renovations.

"International Rescue to Bláfjöll Ski Resort."

John waited a few moments for a reply. When one didn't come, he tried the resort again.

"International Rescue this is Bláfjöll Ski Resort," the manager replied finally. "Please don't tell me your organization isn't coming after all." The desperation in the man's voice was evident.

"Relax. Our ships are both en route," John assured the man. "Is everything okay down there? It took awhile for you to respond."

"The situation is about the same here at the lodge. My staff is trying to keep our guests calm. I was talking to the ski patrol supervisor. We were exchanging information."

Ski patrol. He didn't mention them before. Wonder if they were in his original count? Only one way to find out.

"Were the members of the ski patrol in the original count of people at the resort you gave me?" John asked.

John listened to the manager's answer making notes. After a few more questions, John had a better idea of what Scott and the others were heading into. He was also able to determine that no new structures had been added to the resort in the past two years, so the picture he had found would give them an accurate layout of the resort. Ending his conversation with the resort manager, the space monitor's next task was to update his elder brother of the situation at the resort.

"Thunderbird One from Thunderbird Five."

"Thunderbird One here."

"I was able to locate an aerial shot of the resort. You'll have a layout of the grounds when you get there."

"That's good to know," Scott replied, even though he knew that pinpointing things underneath the snow wasn't going to be easy even with the map.

"I've also have an updated headcount for the resort. The manager hadn't included his lift operators or ski patrol in his original count of the number of staff on hand. Seems they only had five lifts running at the time. The ski patrol supervisor reports that the two main lift operators are not responding. Chances are they were buried in the avalanche, too. One of the missing guests is reported to be at one of the unaffected lift stations. That leaves four guests unaccounted for. Along with the two lift operators, two ski patrol members are MIA. With the two missing staff members from the lodge, that leaves six staff unaccounted for and four guests. The ski patrol is beginning a search of the slopes for people who were caught up in the avalanche."

"Copy that, Thunderbird Five," Scott replied. It was a relief to know that a search had been started. Chances were that IR would not be able to reach the area in time to help possible survivors on the slopes. Time was limited for anyone who had been caught up in the avalanche itself. "Where is the ski patrol supervisor located?"

"Ski patrol headquarters is located in the lift station at the bottom of the run off to the east of the lodge. They are unaffected by the avalanche."

"Can you try to patch me through to them?" Scott asked, wanting to talk to the supervisor himself.

"Stand by, and I'll give it a try," John replied. He closed the connection with his brother and contacted the ski resort once again.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:44:13 GMT

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9.35pm local time...

Scott's brow furrowed as his eyes roved over the scans of the ski resort area. He quickly identified the best places to land the Thunderbird craft and relayed the appropriate co-ordinates to Virgil in Thunderbird Two. He then turned his deft hands to the controls and brought his own craft in to land. The great silver rocket landed gently on the snow, its landing jets causing some it is to melt instantly and flow off down the small incline. Hmm. I hope we don't cause too much more of that, he thought. We don't want to start a flood as well.

He called up the aerial shot once more and made a few quick calculations of distance in his head. All right, he thought. As soon as Virgil and the crew arrive we'll get straight to action. I know he'll fly as fast as possible, but I wish he could get here sooner...

Scott unbuckled himself from the pilot's chair and collected his few belongings before heading

quickly to the hatch and out into the snowy weather to liaise further with the staff.

xxxx

11.17pm local time...

"Mobile Control from Thunderbird Two."

"Mobile Control here. What's the story, Thunderbird Two?"

"ETA two and one half minutes," Virgil said as he brought the huge green craft around on final approach. "Will land at the co-ordinates and immediately deploy equipment."

"Is everyone clear on their assignments?"

"Briefed and double briefed, Mobile Control," Virgil replied, before adding, "and raring to go."

"FAB. Get those lights up ASAP. We can't see a damn thing here. And be careful with your VTOLs. Turn them off as soon as you can; we don't want to melt too much snow or start another avalanche."

"FAB. Thunderbird Two out."

Virgil glanced at the radar screen and nodded as the great craft reached the landing co-ordinates. He looked over his shoulder briefly.

"I'm going to shut the jets when we're about half a meter above ground, so there might be a slight bump."

"Nothing different than usual, then," Gordon said, winking at Alan.

"I'll throw you out at about ten meters if you aren't careful," Virgil joked.

The laughter in the cabin broke the rising tension, and the crew braced themselves for the impact.

"Cutting engines," Virgil said.

Several hands gripped tighter on the seats as Thunderbird Two dropped the last half a meter. They shook slightly at the force, but it was forgotten in an instant as the crew unbuckled themselves and waited for the go-ahead. Virgil stood up and clapped his hands.

"All right people, first we get the flood lights up and then we get to work rescuing the trapped. Doc, Angel and Tynan, go straight down to Thunderbird Seven and get ready there. The rest of us will get the lights."

"FAB," Dianne said, and immediately she and her crew departed for the pod.

"Okay, let's get to it," Gordon said, and led the way to the equipment.

It wasn't long before the dark Iceland night was illuminated by the brightness of International Rescue's presence, and the hard work could begin.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:45:12 GMT

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Dominic buckled himself in as Dianne carefully manoeuvred Thunderbird Seven out of the pod. He watched as the bright spotlights lit up the entire area so much that TB7's headlights didn't make any difference. He sighed quietly and stared forwards, bracing himself for what might come. Pneumonia, frostbite, asphyxia, broken bones... Nothing as bad as what they had experienced before on rescues.

I wish Luke were here, he thought. I'm sure Rom would come in useful, too. Though I remember that lecture Luke gave me over beer one night. 'He's a search and rescue dog, not an avalanche dog. Man, you don't know anything, do you, Kelly?' Dom felt a tiny smile flicker on his lips. I hope he's okay. I can't believe he got shot. Shot. I also can't believe how bad I took the news. It was almost as bad as when Mags told me she was leaving me. That...grief. I've never had that with anyone before. I know we didn't know each other for very long, but I felt almost like he was my best friend...or something more? Dom shook himself from his thoughts. It really was not the time for them. Instead, he turned to Nikki and nodded.

"Ready, Angel?" he asked, forcing a smile onto his face.

"As always, Tynan," she replied, a little confusion in her eyes.

Dominic shook his head almost imperceptibly.

"Glad to hear it, guys," Dianne said, missing the exchange of glances due to piloting the craft. "It's going to be a long one."

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:45:31 GMT

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The familiar rumble of engines sounded, directing Scott's attention toward the spot where Thunderbird Two was parked. He frowned when he saw the headlights of the Mole as it left the pod.

He glanced at Alan, who had come up beside him, the idling hulk of the Firefly brightly lit by the floodlights they had set up.

---

"Why the hell did the Commander tell you to bring the Mole?" he asked. "He should know that thing will have no traction in the snow. And there's no way to get it to ground level from the trolley."

Alan shrugged. "I dunno. Maybe he thought we'd have to go in under the building." He made a swooping gesture with his gloved hands.

Scott thought about this for a moment, then shook his head. "I don't think that's an option in this case." He sighed. "It's probably better if Van Gogh leaves it here and helps out with something else. I'll brief everyone as soon as..."

He was interrupted by the skiing form of Pala Tomasson, who came to a stop a few yards away. Scott went out to meet her.

"What's the situation on the slopes?" he asked.

"Not good. We have located three of the missing guests from their avalanche locators and are digging them out, but it will take too long to get them off the mountain..." She glanced over at Thunderbird Seven. "Unless perhaps..."

"Unless perhaps Thunderbird Seven here can go to them," Dianne said, finishing the other woman's thought. She glanced at Scott. "We're the best ones to go. Seven is both fast and quiet."

"I can give you the frequency the avalanche beepers use, and tell you which victims have already been dug out," Pala offered.

Scott returned to the Penelar tent where Mobile Control was set up, indicating that Pala should follow. "Give the coordinates to me and I'll relay them. I'm going to need a general idea of where things are at the lodge." He turned to Dianne. "Better get going, Doc."

"F-A-B." Dianne sketched a sloppy salute and headed into Seven's cab. The hovercraft lifted off the ground a moment later, scattering snow with a hiss.

Alan gave Scott a wave and headed back to the Firefly. Once inside the warmed tent, Scott called each of the pod vehicles outside. "Firefly, Excavator, Laser Truck, and Mole from Mobile Control." When he had acknowledgments from everyone, he brought up the aerial pictures that John took and displayed them on one of Mobile Control's screens. The other vehicles each received a transmission of the same picture, and he changed his mode of communication to an all-call. "Here's an overview of the resort." He used a stylus to indicate a rather largish lump down the hill from where they were. "I'm guessing this is the lodge?" The stylus marks showed up in the transmitted data.

Pala nodded. "Yes, that is the lodge."

"Where would the parking lot be?"

She took the stylus from him and circled an area directly next to the large lump. "Many of the

skiers do not stay at the lodge itself, but come for a day. This is where they would park. There should be few cars here; most of the night skiers would stay at the lodge." She circled another spot, perpendicular to the first. "This looks like the front of the lodge and is where the lodge guests would park. They would be as close to the building as they could."

"That will make things difficult," Scott said.

"Especially if you want to use the Firefly as a snowplow," Alan said, his voice sounding out over Mobile Control's speakers

"The imager will give us a better idea of where the cars are," Brains said, adding his opinion to the impromptu conference call. "I should think we might be able to plow between the cars and the buildings."

"If we can't," Scott said, his face grim, "we plow the cars out of the way."

There was a moment of silence, then Pala spoke up. "There is one more lot, here." She circled a spot on the other side of her first, between where they were and the lump of the lodge. "Some of the staff, especially the lodge staff, park their vehicles here. So do those who ski cross-country. They then take the lift to this level."

Another voice cut into the transmission. "Mobile Control from Thunderbird Seven." It was Nikki's voice that called. "We need those coordinates."

Scott touched his earpiece. "F-A-B, Thunderbird Seven." He touched it again, and handed the main microphone to Pala. "Here's the ski patrol, with the coordinates."

As Pala spoke into the mike, Scott continued speaking to his people. "Einstein, we're going to need some images of the lodge here on the ground. Take the Laser Truck down and get them for us, and transmit them to the Firefly, Excavator, and Mobile Control. Indy, you take the Firefly and see what you can do to plow an area clear for the Excavator behind the lodge. When you're done with that, do what you can to get the Laser Truck in close at the front. Cousteau, take the Excavator and get to those doors. Indy, make sure Jade is on standby for whichever team gets through first; she can help triage any casualties."

"What do you want me to do, Maverick?" Virgil asked, his tone impatient.

"The Mole can't function in the snow, Van Gogh. So I want you and Frankie to grab a couple of hover jets and see what you can do to help the ski patrol on the slopes. I'll let you know if I have any other ideas."

Virgil huffed out a breath that sounded loud in Scott's ear. "If the Mole can't function in snow, then why did the Commander tell us to take it?"

"Maybe he thought we'd have to go under the building," Gordon said. Scott could almost see him making a swooping motion with his gloved hands.

"Maybe we should do that," Virgil countered.



Brains spoke up. "Not a good idea. We couldn't get it up close enough for the guests to access the Mole's chassis without taking the building apart, and we'd have to make more than one trip to get all the guests out. Going in at ground level is a better idea."

Scott stopped the discussion before it went any further. "You have your orders. Get moving."

Pala jumped a little at the sound of so many engines revving up. One by one, the pod vehicles headed downhill, following the tow lift lines toward the lodge. Only the Mole's engine moved back toward the pod, making deeper impressions in the snow as the caterpillar tracks reversed direction.

Scott gave Pala a grim smile. "Now things get interesting."

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:45:46 GMT

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"I demand to be in the first group to leave this place!"

"Mr. Hightower, you are not injured in any physical way. Those who need medical attention will be taken out first. They are our prime concern. Once they are out, you will, of course, be free to leave."

Once Ragnar Andresson had been assured that International Rescue was on the way, he'd had his personnel bring all the blankets they could lay their hands on into the lounge, to be handed out to everyone. Some of them had already moved as much of the furniture as possible into what appeared to be the safest part of the room, well away from the windows. Others had brought the guests to the area, settling those who were injured on the sofas and in chairs, then the rest of the guests carefully joined them.

There were a few grumbles when the staff finally joined the guests, but they were stopped quickly when Ragnar told the grumblers that they were free to sit elsewhere - if they didn't mind hypothermia. "Now, I suggest that everyone stay close together to conserve body heat, and try to relax as much as possible, so we don't use the oxygen up too fast," he added.

That's when Jacques made his statement. The manager's response did not endear him to the man. Nor did another remark made a moment later, as he started to speak again.

"Mr. Hightower, you might as well quit while you're behind. You may be richer than some of us, but you aren't better than any of us, and you certainly don't deserve any more privileges."

He glanced over to the speaker, to see that it was a woman in her late twenties, who was gazing at him with disapproval. "Young woman, it is none of your concern. My business is with..."

"We are all in this together, if you hadn't noticed. And what appears to be for once in your life, it isn't about you and only you. I heard what you said to the manager earlier. That comment about

him hearing from your solicitors was probably the single most stupid comment I've heard in a long time. If he couldn't get through to anyone, how would you be able to contact them? And what difference would it make anyway? We'd all be dead."

"Fortunately, I was able to get through," interposed the manager, "and we won't die, thanks to International Rescue. Now I suggest we all stop talking, conserve oxygen, and wait."

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:45:57 GMT

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With Alan behind the controls and Cassie beside him, the Firefly made its way down the mountain toward the lodge. Brains had taking the Laser Truck ahead of the rest of the vehicles to get the survey of the area with the imager done.

"Firefly from Laser Truck," came Brain's voice over the radio.

"Firefly here. Go ahead," Cassie replied.

"I'm transmitting information from the scans. It appears as if there will be room to get the Firefly to the lodge without needing to move any cars out of the way."

"FAB," Cassie responding. It wasn't long before the information gathered by the imager appeared on the screen in the Firefly. "Transmission received. I see the area you're talking about. We're continuing our approach to the lodge. Firefly out."

Using the information provided from the scans, Cassie gave directions to Alan. Eventually, Alan reached the back of the buried lodge. Brains had followed the Firefly and was sending the group updated scans now that they were closer to the lodge. Alan began to clear away enough snow for the Excavator to start their part of the excavation process.

"Excavator from Firefly," Alan said, opening a link.

"I copy you. Go ahead," came Gordon's response over the radio.

"We've done what we can here. It's your turn," Alan replied.

"Copy that. We're ready. Excavator out."

"Mobile Control from Indy."

"Go ahead, Indy," came Scott's prompt response.

"We're done in the back and the Excavator is ready to take over. I'm now heading the Firefly around front. "

"Copy that. Jade still with you?"

"Still here, Maverick," Cassie replied. At her feet sat the medical bag she and Dianne had put together back on the island. It contained most of the same things that the bags the FDNY paramedics used plus some things they hadn't had access to. "I'll keep relaying directions to Indy until we're almost inside the lodge and then join whichever group has gain entry."

"Understood. Mobile Control out."

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:46:06 GMT

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"Ms. Tomasson?"

The ski patrol supervisor, who had started to leave, but stopped at the entrance, turned to Scott and said, "Call me Pala. It'll save time."

Amusement flickered briefly in his eyes, then he focused on the reason he spoke to her. "I'm worried that, although we'll try to do our job quietly, we might set off another avalanche. How likely is that possibility, and would it hit in this area if one did start?"

"That is a good question, and one I was thinking about earlier. Unfortunately with the lights at the ski runs out, we can't go up and check, especially since the lifts are also out. But, from looking at pictures, charts and maps, plus personal experience, I would say that the odds are good that there wouldn't be one.

"Actually, I suspect that what happened is this: the snow -- which, incidentally wasn't supposed to hit this area, according to the weather forecasters -- got too heavy for one of the snow ledges near the top of the runs. It cracked the ice, allowing the snow to head downhill. The contours of the run and the mountain caused it to hit another ledge, causing it to break and hit a third, then a fourth and a fifth. Of course it grew, and eventually picked up speed. The rest, you know."

"Why didn't you break up the ledges before now?"

"We couldn't at the time they were located. We were planning to do just that tomorrow. And, as I mentioned earlier, we weren't expecting to get this much snow. We were told it would head north before it got near us, that the most we could expect were a few flurries. Shows how much those damned forecasters know," she added scornfully. Then she glanced outside, cocking a weather eye up at the sky. "Fortunately, it's tapering off. And though there are a few other ledges up there, they are in different areas and any of them breaking off won't hit more than one other one, and go in other directions that won't be dangerous to anyone at this point."

"That's good to know. Thanks for the information."

She smiled and nodded, then left as he turned back to Mobile Control.

---

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"We have everything ready? Dom? Nikki?" Dianne asked.

"We're nearing the first set of coordinates," Nikki responded from her place in the control cabin.

"I've got my snow gear on." Dom gave Dianne a quizzical look. "First day jitters, Doc?"

Dianne chuckled and smiled. "I guess you could say that." She glanced around the cabin -- so familiar, yet somehow, new as well. "It feels good to be really back in the saddle."

"It does at that, Doc. It does at that," Dom said, a grin lighting up his face.

"We've reached the first coordinates, and I'm told we have a live one," Nikki said, her voice coming from the control cabin. "I'm keying on the outside lights."

"Keep us afloat and steady, Angel. We'll be back in a flash." Dianne pressed a button and half of the double doors slid aside. Dom jumped out into the night, making the shielding that kept heat inside the treatment cabin flare with a blue shimmer. The wide base of his snow boots kept him from falling more than six inches into the snow. He turned and reached up for the antigravity stretcher. Dianne handed it through the field, settled her medical pack more comfortably on her shoulders, and took the plunge.

xxxx

"Van Gogh to Mobile Control." Virgil checked the controls on his hover bike, and threw a grin at Elise, who was pulling hers to the pod's entrance.

"Mobile Control here, Van Gogh. What's your status?"

Virgil adjusted his earpiece, fitting it more snugly in place and covering it with the thin, insulated flap of his winter hat. "We're ready to set out. Do you have coordinates for us?"

"Here are the coordinates of one of the victims. The Ski Patrol is heading there now, but they could use your help."

"F-A-B. We're on our way. Van Gogh, out."

"Virgil?" Now it was Elise's voice that rang in his ear. "I'm having a little trouble adjusting my visor to night vision..."

He waved her up to his side, and he gently took the visor from her face. The snow was still swirling down, and in the lights of Thunderbird Two's underbelly, he watched a few flakes attach themselves to her eyelashes. It held him mesmerized for a moment, until Elise reached out a hand and, her tone concerned, said, "Virgil? Are you all right?"

He cleared his throat. "Yeah. I'm fine. Let me see here..." He fiddled with the adjustment buttons,

peering through the visor to see the telltales that indicated which setting it was on. When the appropriate tiny blue light came on, he smiled and handed them back. "Is this okay?"

She slid them on over her eyes, reconnecting them to the earpiece. "Perfect. Thanks."

"You're welcome. Let's go."

They started off across the snow, pacing each other as they headed up the slope toward their destination. He glanced at the pack strapped behind her. "You have the thermic lances?"

"Yes, though I've never used them before."

"Hm. Training on some of our smaller devices might be in order after this." He looked thoughtful for a moment, then said, "You've use the thermal imager before. Why don't you use that, while I use the lances?"

"Sounds good."

Virgil nodded, then turned his attention to the snowy slopes ahead. They passed Thunderbird Seven, where Dom and Dianne were lifting their patient into the treatment cabin. And while one part of his mind was concerned with what they would do when they arrived at their destination, another, quiet part was storing up the image of the snow-brushed lashes and the green eyes they shaded for a later, more suitable time.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:46:38 GMT

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Bundled in his winter coat, gloves, hat and scarf, Ragnar Andresson left his office once again. He had used the radio there to check on the rescue progress outside. The report of at least one survivor up on the slopes had lifted his spirits some. However, his relief at that news and being told that the excavation of the lodge had begun was tempered by the reality of the cold and the dwindling supply of oxygen. The manager could only hope it would last long enough for the International Rescue agents outside to dig their way into the lodge.

Reaching the lounge, Ragnar saw that not much had changed. The guests and staff were still huddled in the same places they'd been when he had left the room. Though still sulking, Mr. Hightower was seated on the edge of the group, the look on his face saying he still didn't like the position he was in.

I have a feeling we'll be hearing about how unpleasant his stay was once this is all over, Ragnar thought to himself, walking toward the group. He had dealt with some unpleasant customers since taking over as manager of the resort, but after his earlier display, Mr. Hightower was definitely at the top of that list.

His footsteps echoed on the floor as he made his way across the lounge. Other than a few crying kids and their mothers' soft words of comfort, the room was silent. Reaching the group huddled

together in the center of the room, Ragnar took a few moments to check on some of the guests.

"Sir, any word about those who were on the slope?" asked a woman rocking her five-year-old daughter who she held in her arms. The little girl had suffered an asthma attack earlier, but seemed to be doing better.

Ragnar tried to recall the woman's name but it wouldn't come. He did remember that her husband had been one of the skiers possibly caught up in the avalanche.

"They've found some survivors but there is no word on who they are. I wish I could tell you more."

"Eric will be fine. He's been skiing for years," the woman said, trying to make the words sound confident.

"I'm sure you're right," Mr. Andresson told her, resting a hand briefly on her shoulder. He wished he could give her more reassurance than that but he also didn't want to give her false hopes. Just as with them, time was something that those on the slopes only had a limited amount of.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:46:50 GMT

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Gordon drove the Excavator while Callie looked over the image of the area. "We should be approaching the back of the lodge any second now," she said.

"F-A-B. I'm ready to start making this snow disappear. Too bad we can't just snap our fingers."

"You'd have to take your glove off to do that," she retorted, "and your fingers would freeze together."

"True, but it'd make our job here a whole lot easier."

"I know, but we've got the next best thing right now." After another minute, she nodded. "Okay, we're in position. Prepare for snow removal."

"All right." Gordon activated the maw, which quickly started removing the snow the back. "Snow's a lot faster to get rid of than debris."

"That's for sure. Good news is the sensors don't show any obstacles that could cause problems."

"Yeah, the last thing we need is to hit something that could cause the maw to be completely ineffective. Besides, Cassie's probably getting impatient to do something. The sooner we get done, the quicker she can get inside and check on the injured."

"F-A-B." Checking the monitors, she observed the distance from the back entrance. "We're within ten feet right now. We should stop within about three feet, right?"

"Check. Just a little more time, and we'll dig the rest of the way. That won't take long."

Callie smiled as she kept her eye on the monitor. Soon, the monitors showed they reached their goal. "Okay, Gordon, you can stop now. We're three feet away from the door."

"Then let's get out there and start digging. With the falling temperatures, we'll need the special shovels."

"Special shovels?" she asked curiously.

"Yeah. Brains developed shovels that can cut through snow like it was heated. We'll get through the snow in about 20 minutes."

"That's...awesome," she gasped. "They feel so light, too." She noticed the heat packs in the locker. "Gordon, want some for your hands?"

"You bet. Grab some for yourself, too. Think you can handle this kind of cold?"

"I survived a couple of Russian winters in the WSA. Let's get going."

They got outside and started digging through.

"A diameter of about four feet should be enough, don't you think?" she asked.

"I agree. That should be enough room to move people in and out of the lodge."

The pair started digging, and the shovels did exactly the task they were supposed to do.

Callie smiled. "We're at the door."

"Great! Contact Scott and let him know we can get inside now."

Pressing a button, she spoke into the microphone. "Mobile Control from Excavator."

Scott heard her confident voice. "Go ahead, Excavator. What's your status?"

"Our part of the mission's completed. The back entrance is safe for us to enter."

"F-A-B, Excavator. I'll let Jade know right away, since she and Indy are just about done in the Firefly. Come on back to Mobile Control and be ready to help out in other areas."

"On our way, Mobile Control. Out." She turned to Gordon. "Let's get out of here."

"All right. I'm just glad we didn't hit any sports cars. Can you imagine someone telling his insurance agent, 'My car was destroyed by International Rescue's Excavator'?"

"I don't think that agent would believe a word. He'd have to face much higher premiums."



The pair shared a laugh as the Excavator moved away from the area.[/size]

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:47:02 GMT

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[i]

On Tracy Island . . .

"Jade from Mobile Control."

"I read you Mobile Control. Go ahead."

"The back of the lodge is cleared. You can begin the triage in the lodge."

As he had since the rescue began, Vince listened to the radio conversations among the International Rescue members. Though he had heard about many of rescues they had performed over the year, had even watched part of Ned Cook's program on them, this was definitely the most detail he had ever gotten about their activities.

It's definitely more nerve wracking to sit here and listen to things unfold than any of the missions I went on while in the Navy, Vince thought. He found him looking at Jeff Tracy, sitting behind his desk, and wondered if the older gentleman felt the same way.

Footsteps made him look toward the grillwork door, to see Kyrano walk into the lounge.

"I just wanted to let you all know that we are just about done preparing lunch. I will bring it up to you as soon as it's ready, Mr. Tracy."

"Thank-you, Kyrano," Jeff replied, most of his attention still on the information he was receiving from Iceland.

Kyrano turned his attention to his daughter and their guest. "Will the two of you be coming downstairs or should I bring you something, too?"

Tin-Tin glanced over at Vince. "It's up to you."

Vince thought it over a moment. He could definitely use an excuse to stretch his legs. Not to mention he had some questions he'd like to ask, but at the same time he didn't want to disturb Mr. Tracy.

"I think I'd prefer to eat downstairs."

Tin-Tin nodded as she got to her feet. Following her lead, Vince stood up. The two of them followed Kyrano out of the lounge and downstairs.

Jeff had taken the time to explain things a little more while the team had been en route to Iceland.

He had explained to Vince that the job with Tracy Industries was a cover for a position with International Rescue. More specifically, he'd be the team's second aquanaut, and be trained on Thunderbird 4 as well as receiving training to be a back-up pilot for Thunderbird 1.

That news had surprised him just as much as finding out the Tracy family was behind International Rescue. He had gone job hunting looking for something more interesting than running a dive shop. He had definitely found something. The question was: could he realistically consider taking the offer with his family to think about?

"Would you mind answering some questions during lunch?" he asked Tin-Tin as the two made their way down the stairs.

"Of course not," Tin-Tin replied, not at all surprised by the request.

The three reached the dining room. Vince and Tin-Tin found seats at the table with the remaining members of the Tracy family as Kyrano headed for the kitchen.

I chose not to rejoin the Navy because I didn't want my career responsibilities to take me away from seeing Lea grow up, Vince thought as Jenny started bringing the food out from the kitchen. I need to be sure joining IR won't lead to the same thing.

Vince waited until they had started to eat before asking Tin-Tin the questions that had currently come to mind, among them being how much time was put into training, and on an average how many rescues they received.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:48:04 GMT

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"Thunderbird Seven from Mobile Control."

Nikki, who was monitoring their two patients, answered Scott's call. "Thunderbird Seven here. How can we help, Maverick?"

"The Excavator team has reached the lodge, and Jade is standing by to start triage. But she shouldn't be alone. Can you spare someone to work with her?"

Nikki muted her mike and shot a glance toward the surgical bay. "Did you hear that, Doc?"

"Yes, I heard." Dianne looked up at Dom, who was washing his hands. "Tynan looks like he could use a change of scenery." Dom gave her a questioning look, but Dianne continued. "Tell Maverick we'll have Van Gogh give him a lift down when he and Frankie arrive with their last find." She paused, then added, "We'll be down as soon as we have this group stabilized."

"F-A-B." Nikki touched her earpiece again. "Mobile Control from Angel. Dom will join Jade for

triage duties. He'll hitch a ride with Van Gogh when he and Frankie return from the slopes."

"F-A-B. Mobile Control out." Scott made a mental note of the personnel changes. Then he tweaked his broadcast to let Virgil know of the new orders.

As soon as Scott had signed out, another voice was heard. "Thunderbird Seven from Van Gogh. We've got another live one for you."

"We're ready for them," Nikki replied as she moved over to the door. With the touch of a button, the door slid aside, showing the floodlighted figures of Virgil and Elise. Virgil was already off his hoverbike, and helping to uncouple the anti-gravity stretcher from Elise's vehicle. After they brought their first victim down the mountain and Elise saw the nurses wrestle him onto the stretcher, she'd gotten the bright idea of coupling a stretcher to the back of a hoverbike. A quick consult with Brains to see if there was anything to hinder the use, and an equally quick scavenge through the medical supplies to find something sturdy enough for a link, and they were good to go. It meant a slightly slower ride, and that they rode their bikes single file, but it speeded up the turnaround time immensely.

"I've got this one," Nikki said as she jumped out into the snow. "You'd best grab a medikit, Tynan."

"I got the heads up from Mobile Control." Virgil got back on his bike as Dom jumped down, medikit slung across his back. "Frankie, maybe you should take a break and warm up."

"A good idea." Dianne came to the doorway after having settled her last surgical patient into a monitor bed. "Warm up and wait for your partner. No one is to go it alone."

"F-A-B, Doc." Elise said with a jaunty salute. She glanced around. "Where should I put the hover bike?"

"Just leave it beside the cockpit," Dianne counseled. "I don't think it would be stolen. If we have to move Seven up slope or down then you can hop back on and come with us."

"We're off!" called Virgil, giving the medical crew a salute. As he sped off, they could hear a surprised and delighted, "Whoop!" from Dom, who sat behind him.

"Well, add another speed demon to the family roster," Dianne muttered as she guided the stretcher into the surgical cabin. Nikki snorted a laugh, and showed Elise to the cockpit.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:48:38 GMT

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Brains had the Laser truck's beam set on the broadest width, but even with that, he knew it would still take time to make a tunnel through the last few feet. He had set it to hollow out the snow two feet in, and moved it in a circle, to widen the tunnel as well as broaden it. Fortunately, instead of

simply melting the snow, he was able to heat it to a steam. He didn't need water running toward him, and possibly causing the Laser Truck to lose traction. The steam did melt some of the snow, but not enough to do what he'd feared.

It was half an hour before his sensors told him that he was within an inch of the door. The tunnel was six feet high and three feet wide. That's enough to walk through, only slightly bent over for anyone. And the medical team will be able to bring the antigravity stretchers in and out with little trouble. "Mobile Control from Laser Truck."

"Go ahead, Einstein."

"The tunnel is complete to an inch from the door. And -- wait a minute," He looked into the tunnel one more time. "Correction. The door is exposed. My last pass must have melted the snow enough to be able to get it open with minimal trouble.

"F-A-B, Einstein. We're waiting for Tynan to arrive and..." Scott was interrupted by the sound of vehicles approaching the area. "Well, well. It looks like the World Government was able to send its security agents in time after all. Go ahead and take the Laser Truck back to the pod, so we can start the next phase of the rescue."

F-A-B, Maverick. On my way."

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:48:58 GMT

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"Hey, Grandma?"

"Yes, Alex?"

"Where did they go this time?"

Vince looked up the steps to where Emily Tracy was herding the youngest children into a side room. It suddenly struck him that these children weren't questioning whether or not their siblings (and parent, since Dr. Tracy had gone) were on a rescue; they just took it in stride. Would Lea? he asked himself. Not for the first time he thought about how different his children's early years had been. He and Lana had gotten married when Aaron was about Lea's age. Before that, he had only seen his son when his career had allowed him to. He wasn't even sure Lea really even remembered her father being in the military.

"They're in Iceland right now, Alex."

"Is it snowing there?" Tyler wanted to know.

"Yes, I believe it is. Why don't we check the weather stations...?" The conversation was cut off by a door sliding shut.

Vince turned to Tin-Tin. "How do they deal with all this?"

Tin-Tin paused on the step. "The children? It depends."

"Depends on what?"

A thoughtful frown creased her brow as she searched for what to say. "Well... it can be very stressful. There have been times during this past year where they've nearly lost one of their parents, and then there was the recent tsunami..."

He started. "That tsunami hit here, too?"

"Yes, it did, but we were lucky. It wasn't as bad as it was elsewhere." Tin-Tin resumed climbing the steps and Vince followed her. "As I said, it can be stressful on the children. I think Tyler in particular has been affected by all the rescues and the touch-and-go situations with his parents. We try hard to make things as normal as possible for them, but it's not easy. That's why we have Mrs. Hanson."

"Mrs. Hanson?" Vince remembered being introduced to the middle-aged lady who had lunched with them. She had been talking a lot to the children, he recalled.

"Yes. She's our counselor. She comes out one day a week to see and talk to whomever needs her services." Tin-Tin pressed a button to open the door to the study. "This life isn't difficult on just the children, but also on the adults, as well."

Vince hesitated inside the study door. "I have another question," he said quietly, "and I'd rather ask it here so I don't disturb Mr. Tracy. Do the children have the opportunity to socialize with others of their own age?"

Tin-Tin stopped, looking thoughtful. "Well, Tyler and Alex have had each other to play with, but recently Cherie has been taking weekly art classes in Christchurch. It's a half-hour flight from here. She seems to be enjoying herself, and I understand she's made some new friends." She smiled a little. "I think I'm next on the roster to take her to class. I'll get in some shopping while she's there."

"But the boys... they don't go off-island for classes or social activities?"

"Not at the moment." She hesitated. "You might want to ask Mr. Tracy during a break in the rescue, or after it's over; he'd know if they have any plans for the boys along those lines."

Vince nodded slowly. "I'll ask when things settle down. Thank you."

They passed through the study and back into the lounge. Jeff looked up briefly and smiled, a tight expression. Vince noticed the tray of half-eaten food on the desk.

"How is it going?" Tin-Tin asked, as she sat down on the sofa again.

"As well as can be expected," Jeff said. "They're cutting into the lodge from the back with

oxyhydrite cutters, and Brains has just cleared the front doors with the Laser Truck. Miraculously, they've found some survivors on the slopes. I guess the skiers were well-prepared with breathing gear and location beepers."

"That is a miracle," Tin-Tin said, nodding. "Most skiers wouldn't think of being prepared for avalanches."

"I would guess that the unusual amount of powder they had prompted some extra caution."

Jeff turned back to the portraits, and once again, Vince found himself feeling a little superfluous.

"Base from Thunderbird Five." John appeared in his portrait, a data pad in hand. "I've picked up some comm signals from the World Government agents. They're on their way out of Reykjavik; ETA to Bláfjöll, 15 minutes."

"Any news on whether or not they're going to impede our progress?" Jeff asked, his eyes narrowing.

"None, Dad. They're keeping comm contact to a minimum for the time being. I'll stay on it, though."

"F-A-B, John. Keep me posted. Base out."

Vince cleared his throat, and Jeff turned his attention to his potential team member. "Yes, Vince?"

"Excuse me for asking, but I'm very curious. What exactly does 'F-A-B' stand for?"

Jeff and Tin-Tin exchanged amused glances. "Well, Vince," Jeff began. "It's like this..."

questions, with help from Icarus1982 on Vince's dialog

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:49:36 GMT

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Dominic watched as the stretcher rose up into the air. Immediately he took one end and Cassie took the other, and they began transporting another patient to Thunderbird Seven.

"It's cold as a witch's elbow here," Dominic said.

"You're not wrong," Cassie replied. Then she added, grinning, "Though it's nothing compared to a New York City winter."

"Never been," Dom said. "So for all I know you're right."

Cassie chuckled.

"At least we're not trying to do this in the middle of a blizzard."

They traversed the snow with relative ease, their specialist boots aiding tremendously in the descent. Callie and Gordon passed them as they headed back up the slope. Dominic nodded, and Cassie gave a very brief wave so as not to unbalance the stretcher.

The team made it down the hill in record time, and Dominic stopped briefly to catch his breath as Nikki accepted the patient from them. Cassie slapped him on the back and folded the stretcher back up.

"Let's get back up," she said.

"You're the boss," Dominic said with a wink.

Together, they began their ascent again.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:49:49 GMT

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Like trying to find a needle in a haystack.

Elise wasn't sure what had made her think of the old saying, but it sure fit the current situation. Even with the aid of the avalanche beepers, locating the victims hadn't been easy. They still had two people unaccounted for - a member of the ski patrol and the fourth guest. So far, there had been only one fatality - one of the ski lift operators.

"Frankie and Van Gogh from Mobile Control."

"Frankie here. Go ahead Maverick."

"Ski Patrol has located another victim and are requesting help on digging them out. I'm sending you the coordinates."

"FAB," Elise replied. Soon the coordinates appeared on the visor. Elise glanced over at Virgil who, was beside her. He nodded, indicating that he had received the information also. Elise adjusted the course of the hover bike, heading in the direction of the latest victim's coordinates.

Before long, the two IR agents could see two ski patrol members busy shoveling snow in the distance. They took the hover bikes as close as they dared. Virgil and Elise both grabbed a shovel off the back of the hover bikes and hurried over.

"How close are you?" Virgil asked as they reached them.

"Not sure," Leifur replied without looking up, as he tossed another shovelful of snow off to the side.



Elise had taken the thermal imager out of her pack. She switched it on and began scanning the area the ski patrol members were working on. "There are about four more inches of snow covering the victim," she told them.

"Hold up with the shovel," Virgil instructed. The two ski patrol members paused in their work and looked in his direction. "We've got equipment that will melt the snow. Less chance of causing an injury by accidentally hitting them with the shovel," he explained even as Elise handed him a thermal lance from her pack.

Leifur and Jokul took a step back giving Virgil some room to work. Both men were breathing heavily as they watched Virgil go to work. The blowing wind was the only noise that could be heard, as the thermal lance began to melt the snow. Eventually, the orange of a ski patrol jacket could be spotted. The second missing member had been located.

Virgil continued to melt the snow away, exposing more of the victim. When the head and shoulders of his co-worker were exposed, Jokul moved in closer. Kneeling down next to the hole that had been dug, he took off his right glove. Reaching down, he felt for a pulse but couldn't find one.

Jokul looked up at his friend and co-worker, and slowly shook his head. Blinking away tears, the younger ski patrol member looked away.

"I'm sorry," Virgil said, not sure what else to say as Jokul stood up.

Jokul nodded. "We need to finish up here. We've got one last victim trapped somewhere on this mountain," he replied, refusing to let himself think about the loss of his co-worker. There would be time to grieve later.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:50:29 GMT

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"Mobile Control, from Thunderbird Seven. We have the missing skiers and staff, and are heading to the lodge. ETA is five minutes."

"F-A-B, Thunderbird Seven. Tynan and Jade are triaging those inside."

"F-A-B. Thunderbird Seven to Tynan. What's your status?"

"We're very lucky here, Doc. A couple of concussions, a few fractures or broken bones. Mostly a bunch of very cold people, but they've huddled together and used blankets to keep warm as possible, so it looks like hypothermia and frostbite have been kept to a minimum. We'll be ready when you arrive to transfer the injured to Seven."

When Scott -- who was listening in -- heard that Seven was on the way down, he stepped outside to see it heading toward the lodge. Then he heard the sound of more vehicles heading in their

general direction. Looking around, he spotted a large van and two cars. "Heads up, everyone. It looks like the World Government agents are about to arrive." He notified Jeff as the vehicles pulled in.

An agent got out of the car almost before it came to a stop and walked quickly over to Scott. "Are you in charge here?"

"I am."

"You should be placed under arrest, for..."

"Cassidy!"

The agent looked around. He saw his partner standing in front of the car they were in.

"Agent Soong, this man disobeyed a direct order. We..."

"Agent Cassidy, International Rescue doesn't answer to us, as they reminded us earlier. We have no jurisdiction over them. Besides, what do you think our superiors would do to you if I let you arrest him and it was in the news tomorrow? How would you like to see the headline that said, 'World Government Agents Arrest International Rescue Field Commander'? I know I wouldn't."

Agent Cassidy looked back at Scott. "You're damned lucky I'm not in charge. You'd be in handcuffs by now."

"And you'd be reassigned to some remote post the next day, Agent. I suggest that you head back to your partner and do what you came here to do. I believe you have other people to take into custody. They're still inside the lodge."

As the agent walked back to his partner, Scott noticed several other men heading toward both the front and back doors, determination showing on every face.

I sure hope they know which men inside are the ones they want. I'd hate to find out they took everyone into custody.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:51:06 GMT

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"Thunderbird Seven from Mobile Control. What's your status?"

Dianne, who was setting a young man's broken ankle, nodded at Nikki. "Answer him for me, would you?"

"Sure, Doc." Nikki tapped her earpiece. "Angel here. We have three of the missing guests, one lift operator, and one ski patrol member surviving. The last guest is still missing, and one of the lift operators and a patrol member are... dead." She glanced at the young man, who was looking at

her intently. I hope he doesn't speak much English. "Doc is setting a broken ankle; we have two more people with broken bones to be set and at least two people with concussions from among the lodge guests."

"That leaves the one skier and two lodge staff members unaccounted for." Scott glanced over at Mr. Andresson, who handed him a list. Scott compared it to the list of names he had of survivors. "Any chance that final skier might survive?"

Nikki glanced over at Dianne, who shook her head. "Doc says no."

Dianne finished her work, smiling at her patient and patting him on the shoulder. "Angel? Would you take Rolfe here to the main cabin and find him a spot?"

"F-A-B, Doc." Nikki helped the young man to stand, and supported him as they left the surgical area.

Dianne shucked her gloves and tapped her earpiece. "Doc here, Maverick. Van Gogh and Frankie are still on the slopes, but the patrol members figure it's more recovery than rescue now."

"Understood, Doc, and thanks. Mobile Control out."

Dianne stepped out into the medical cabin to claim her next patient, an older woman whose arm was splinted and immobilized. "Let's take a look at that, shall we?" she said with a smile. Her words were translated into Norwegian, and the confused look on the woman's face melted. She nodded, and Dianne guided her back into the surgical cabin.

"Hoy, Angel!" Dom brought a woman and her little girl up the ramp. "This wee one had an asthma attack..."

He got no further than that. The woman, who had been scanning the cabin, gave a cry. "Eric!"

She rushed over to one of the beds and grabbed the hand of the man lying there. He stirred, and gave her a weary smile. The little girl followed, calling, "Papa!"

The nurses exchanged glances. "Well, that was unexpected," Dom said, a soft smile on his lips.

"Those are the ones we live for," Nikki murmured.

"Angel?" Dianne called. "I need you in here."

Nikki shrugged and went off to help. Dom smiled again, and shuffled back down the ramp.

xxxx

"So, where do you think these two lodge workers might be?" Scott asked.

Mr. Andresson looked uncomfortable. "I have consulted with the rest of the staff and discovered that these two were... intimate with each other. During their work breaks. It is assumed that they

had gone to..." His words trailed off.

One of Scott's eyebrows rose. "Intimate, huh? Does anyone on the staff know just where these two lovebirds usually had their trysts?"

"There is a storage building, right there." Mr. Andresson pointed at a spot on the map. "We keep spare mattresses and roll-away beds there." He let out a frustrated breath, and shook his head. "It was difficult to get this information from my staff. I hope they are still alive... so I can fire them."

Scott resisted the urge to snort. "I hope they're alive, too. I'll send one of my people out with a thermal imager, then we can decide which is the best way of digging them out... if it's realistic and feasible. The building may have collapsed..." He stopped when he saw the stricken look on Mr. Andresson's face. "We'll get right on it." Changing frequencies, he called, "Firefly from Mobile Control; come in, Firefly."

xxxx

Alan had scooped Callie up as his partner on this new errand. "We're going to plow our way over to this storage building and see if there's anyone alive in there."

"I'll turn on the imager..." Callie said, reaching for a control. She scanned the control panel, and glanced over at Alan. "There's no built in thermal imager?"

Shaking his head, Alan smiled at her. "Nope. This baby usually works in high temperature situations. Finding the heat signature of a human in that kind of heat is nigh on impossible. However..." He reached behind him and pulled out a box. "We do have one of the portable ones. How about you climb on top and use it when we get to our destination?"

"Hmm." Callie considered the prospect for the moment. "Gonna be kinda slippery, but... okay. I'm game."

They rumbled along, pushing the snow to one side. The blade had been temporarily angled with this in mind, but it didn't have the scooping edge of a regular snowplow, and as a result, large clumps of snow would fall over the top of the blade. It didn't matter much; the Firefly's caterpillar tracks kept them moving. But Callie and Alan both took turns trying to figure out when the building snow wall would crest and fall.

Finally, they reached the storage building. "Time to get out," Alan said as he opened the hatch and unbuckled his safety harness.

"You're getting out, too?"

"Yup. I need to shine a light on this building and see if the roof has collapsed or anything. While I'm doing that, you can use the imager and get a reading."

"F-A-B."

Callie found her footing only a little bit slippery; the snow boots she wore made it easy to balance

on the top of the Firefly's roof, just behind the warning klaxon. Alan was a little further back, perched atop the X-shaped hose gantry. He shone one of the high powered floodlights on the building, as Callie scanned slowly with the thermal imager.

"Mobile Control from Firefly," Alan said as he moved the light slowly across.

"Mobile Control here; go ahead." Scott's voice sounded in Alan's earpiece.

"We're at the storage building. The roof looks intact... no sign of collapse." He glanced over at Callie. "Anything?"

"Not yet..." She continued to scan along the building. "Wait... I think... yes! I have two hits, very close together. Not as strong as they should be, but indications are that they're still alive."

"Ursa says there are two people alive inside," Alan told Scott. "How do you want to handle this?"

Back at Mobile Control, Scott rubbed his chin, not speaking. Finally, he said, "What I want you to do is clear as much snow from around the building as you can. I'm sending Einstein out with the Laser Truck; it will probably be faster than the Excavator." He glanced at Mr. Andresson. "He'll bring a schematic of the building with him, and I'll send Jade out, too, for triage."

"F-A-B. Firefly out." Alan motioned to Callie to climb back inside. When he'd joined her in the cockpit, he explained the plan. "So, let's get this place cleared out so we can pull those two out of there."

As Alan put the Firefly into gear again, Callie sighed thoughtfully. "Wonder what those two were doing out here in the storage area?"

Alan shrugged. "Probably pulling out something needed in the lodge or something like that."

She nodded. "You're probably right. Still, it's a miracle they're alive in there."

"So, let's tell them the miracle is on its way." Alan reached to sound off the klaxon, but Callie grabbed his hand. When he frowned at her, she pointed a thumb to the mountain.

"Avalanche, remember?"

Alan had the good grace to look sheepish.

xxxx

The injuries from within the lodge itself had almost been dealt with when there was a message from the search team. "Thunderbird Seven from Frankie."

"Seven here," Dianne said as she tucked a blanket around one of her patients. "Go ahead."

Elise's tone was sober. "We've found the last skier. We're bringing her down now."

"What condition is she in?" The doctor already knew from Elise's tone, but wanted to make sure.

"We'll meet you at the morgue," was the reply.

Dianne sighed, and headed to the cockpit. "F-A-B. I'll be there in a minute."

She crooked a finger at Dom, and indicated that Nikki should take the monitoring station. Dom followed her into the cabin, where she grabbed her jacket, hat and warm gloves.

"The morgue?" Dom asked as he donned his own cold-weather gear again.

"Yes. They found the last skier." Dianne sighed, then climbed down from the cockpit. The light from the hoverbikes was visible as they made their way down the mountain, the anti-grav stretcher in tow.

"Open it up for me, Dom?" Dianne asked. Dom nodded, and shuffled off through the snow.

Elise passed Dianne by, riding slowly towards the lighted area where Dom stood waiting. Virgil came to a stop by his stepmother.

"We're lucky we found her at all," he said, his breath misting before his face. "Her avalanche beacon was very faint... perhaps if we'd detected it first..."

She put a hand on his shoulder. "Must have been like finding a needle in a haystack up there. I'm sure her family will be glad to know she was found."

"Yeah." Virgil sighed. "I'm sure they will be." He handed over a ski pass. "You'll want to let Scott know."

"I will." Dianne smoothed her hand across Virgil's windburned cheek and kissed him there. "Go get some rest and warm up. You and Elise have put in yeoman's work tonight."

Virgil indicated that Dianne should get on the hoverbike and he drove her the length of Thunderbird Seven. "Let's do this," she said to Dom, who had already disentangled the stretcher from Elise's hoverbike. They brought the stretcher up to the level of the open morgue slot, and moved the body-bagged figure over and in. Then Dom brought down the sliding door and locked it.

"C'mon, Elise." Virgil motioned to his partner. "We're just about through here, and I need to get Thunderbird Two warmed up."

"F-A-B," Elise said, her voice weary.

Together, they floated off on their hoverbikes. Dianne and Dom watched them go, then Dianne sighed and tapped her earpiece.

"Mobile Control from Thunderbird Seven. The last skier is accounted for."

"F-A-B, Thunderbird Seven. We have two more possible patients for you. I'll give you the coordinates so you can bring Seven to them."

Dianne stepped through the cockpit door, followed closely by Dom. "F-A-B, Mobile Control. We're on it."

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:51:47 GMT

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"Excuse me, but one of the people we came for isn't with the others. We've been told he is probably among the injured, in your medical vehicle."

Scott looked up at the agent who had entered the tent. He was the one Cassidy had referred to as Soong. "And you are telling me this because...?"

"We want to send one of our agents along, just in case. If he's faking, he could attempt to take control of your vehicle. If not, we still..."

"Sir? Agent Cassidy is heading toward the medical vehicle. He decided he should be the one to 'accompany' the terrorist leader."

Soong groaned. "Why me? Why did they have to assign him to me?" he muttered. "Thank you, agent. I'll handle it." He turned back to Scott. "I'm sorry. This was supposed to be a simple arrest and transport job."

Scott couldn't help it. He started to laugh. "I think you may get an agent back with an attitude adjustment. You don't know our medical personnel."

xxxx

Gun drawn, Cassidy entered Thunderbird Seven. Dianne straightened up and looked around at him. "Who are you?"

"I am Agent Cassidy from the WGSD. You are harboring a criminal. I've come to locate and arrest him."

"What do you mean I'm harboring a criminal? The only people in this vehicle are the injured and my staff -- and yourself, of course."

"Are you the doctor here?"

"Ah am." The man's attitude and tone of voice were getting to her.

"I'm here to arrest one of your patients. I'll show his picture to you and you can point him out to me. If you don't cooperate, I'll have to take you into custody."



Ah'd like to see him try!

"What do you mean by bargin' in heah!? Get out of mah vehicle this instant! Ah will not have you disturbin' mah patients!"

"One of your patients is a terrorist, lady. I'm not leaving. You will be allowed to take him along with the others to a hospital, but I'm going with you." He held a tablet out to her, showing her the wanted man's picture. "Isn't it possible he's faking a concussion, to get away?"

"Ah'd know it if he tried." She glanced at the picture. "Ah recognize him. He's in that bed, there. But..."

Cassidy moved over to the bed. "Then I'll be right here, guarding him until we reach the hospital and another agent can relieve me."

"No. You'll have to sit in one of..."

"No, ma'am. I'm staying right where I am."

"Sit down! I will not have another patient on mah hands simply because he was bein'..." She fought to find a more appropriate word than the one she was thinking of. "... stubborn!"

"Now listen here!"

"No, you listen. You are heah undah mah suff'rance, suh. So park it, and zip it. And put that firearm away."

The two of them glared at each other for a full minute, while Nikki and Dom watched, trying hard to keep from laughing. Finally the agent holstered his gun, moved over to the nearest chair and sat down. He glanced up at Dianne briefly, then fixed his gaze on his "prisoner".

"Tynan," Dianne said, satisfied, "would you please strap the patient down? He's been going in and out of consciousness. I don't believe he'll try to get up, but it's better to be safe."

"Right away, Doc."

xxxx

"How dare you arrest me! Don't you know who I am?"

"You were with the men we know to be terrorist organization leaders. You claimed to be friendly with them. Therefore you are suspected to be in league with them."

"Nonsense! I am Jacques Hightower, president of Stellar Innovations. I am friendly with people from all over the world. It's for my business only. I am not a terrorist."

The voices carried some distance and Scott's head snapped up when he heard the name. He quickly stepped outside to see four people in handcuffs being escorted toward the van. Within

moments it became clear which one was Hightower.

"I'll have your badge for this! You'll be hearing from my solicitors. I am not accustomed to being treated like this. Do you hear me? If you don't release me this instant, you'll regret this day for the rest of your life."

"I hear you, sir. In fact, everyone in the area can hear you. Keep shouting like that and you could start another avalanche." They reached the van. "Now step up and watch your head."

As Scott watched Jacques enter the van, his shoulders shook slightly. I can't wait to tell Lena about this. She'll love it. He looked around and saw a few of the others watching, too. Better get back to work -- and I'd better tell Dad about this.

He went back into the tent and opened communications. "Base from Mobile Control."

"Base here. What's your status, Maverick?"

"Boss, you're not going to believe this..."

Thanks to Tikatu for Doc's reactions.

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:52:17 GMT

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Dominic pulled off one of his gloves and stretched his fingers out, working away mild stiffness and feeling cool air circulate around his digits. He glanced around the now-empty bays in Thunderbird Seven. There were small blood spatters in places, and used swabs and bandages on the floor, but overall there wasn't too much damage. Dom rubbed his face and dropped his chin to his chest. He sighed.

"Tired, Dom?"

Dianne came up to Dominic's side and placed a hand on his shoulder. Dominic opened his mouth, but closed it again. A lump had formed in his throat.

"It's just..."

Dianne patted his shoulder and squeezed.

"We'll talk when we get back."

Dom tried to say something more, but dropped his head again. His heart...hurt.

"C'mon," Dianne said, and headed for the cockpit.

\*\*\*

"Calling International Rescue!"

John's head snapped around to the control panel.

"Uh oh," he said.

"Calling International Rescue!"

"International Rescue here, receiving you strength five."

"International Rescue! Thank God! We need your help!"

John pushed his earbud a little further into his hear and frowned. This isn't good. The crew will already be tired...

"Who am I speaking to?" he asked.

"This is Viktorya Tarasov from the Mirny zinc mine! There has been an earthquake in our vicinity that has affected our ventilation and transport, and there are men trapped! We need your help!"

John's brow furrowed and he reached for the comm. panel. Thunderbirds are go...again!

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Subject: Re: Cold Front

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Wed, 25 Jul 2012 21:53:11 GMT

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Thus ends Chapter 13: Cold Front

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