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Subject: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 01:08:22 GMT

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A new year - 2069 - is about to begin. The past year has seen many challenges and changes for the Tracy family and International Rescue; the new year promises many more. An entire family moving onto the island, new equipment being created, new relationships beginning to flourish, and milestones are reached and celebrated.

Yet, there are also trials ahead. The confrontation with the World Government back in November will cause friction between IR and that entity. The terrorist organization they came in contact with is not yet dissolved, and may embroil IR in their schemes, whether by plan or not. The Hightowers have their eye on International Rescue's technology, and the Hood is still at large. Any or all of these may challenge the Tracys in this new year.

Still, a new year begets new beginnings, and all looks hopeful for the Tracys as the clock strikes midnight, and 2069 is ushered in.

Posted by Tikatu

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 01:12:50 GMT

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December 31, 2068 around 10:15 p.m., Tracy Island

This is definitely the warmest New Year's Eve I've ever experienced, Cassie thought as she quickly walked across the third floor of the balcony. The stars sparkled in the clear night sky and a cool breeze blew through the hair that she hadn't bothered to do anything with.

Reaching the steps by Will's apartment, she hurried down them. Soon she was standing outside the sliding doors of Dom's apartment. Shifting the container she was holding to one hand, she knocked on the door. It wasn't long before Dom opened it.

"There you are!" he exclaimed. He stepped aside, making a motion with his hand for Cassie to enter. "We were starting to wonder if we needed to come looking for you."

"Sorry. I was working on a letter that I needed to get done," Cassie commented as she stepped inside.

Brains and Tin-Tin were seated on the sofa. They both looked away from the program they were watching on the TV and toward the new arrival. Will put his glass down on a coaster on the coffee table and came over.

"Here let me take that from you," he offered, reaching out for the container of stuffed mushrooms she had brought with her. Cassie gratefully handed it over. "I'll take it to the kitchen," Will



continued. "Jenny's kind of taken over in there with setting things up despite Dom's protests."

"If you don't mind my asking, why was getting the letter done now so important?" Brains asked, as Will headed toward the kitchen.

"Well, it's a New Year's tradition I have. I write a letter to myself every New Year's Eve, then New Year's Day I read the previous year's letter. It's interesting to see how things change," Cassie told him, as Dom slid the door shut behind her.

"I may have to try that myself," Tin-Tin commented.

"Have a seat," Dom told his newest guest. "Tin-Tin has insisted that we watch the concert from Cathedral Square in Christchurch."

"I can't miss a chance to see Cliff Richard, Jr. and the Shadows play!" Tin-Tin insisted.

"They sound pretty good," Cassie commented, remembering the group from their scavenger hunt on Halloween. Though she had meant to, she hadn't gotten around to checking the group out.

"Want some punch or soda?" Dom asked.

"Punch would be fine, thank-you," Cassie replied walking further into the apartment. Instead of sitting, she placed the bag she was still carrying on the coffee table. "I brought a couple of things to make this seem more like a New Year's Eve celebration," she said, reaching into the bag. She took out a stack of party hats with Happy New Year on them. Colorful streamers were coming out of the top of them.

Cassie took one off the top and passed the stack to Tin-Tin. She placed the hat on her head, then turned back to the bag as Dom and Will rejoined them. Tin-Tin was now sporting a hat too. Taking a second one off the stack, she passed the rest of them to Dom, who had placed the punch he had brought out on a coaster near Cassie.

"I was hoping no one would think of hats," Will commented as he picked his glass up.

Despite Brains protests, Tin-Tin placed a hat with blue streamers on his head.

"And you can't celebrate New Year's without confetti," Cassie said, bringing out a container of multicolored pieces of paper. Noticing Dom's stricken look, she continued. "Don't worry, I'll stop by tomorrow and vacuum what confetti we don't get cleaned up tonight, seeing as I brought it."

"What, no noisemakers?" Will asked, he had a hat in his free hand but had yet to don it.

"As there is a sleeping child in the apartment, no, I didn't bring any noise makers."

"Good. Keep in mind if anyone wakes the wee one up, you're entertaining him."

There was laughter around the room.



"I've got everything set up in here if anyone is ready to eat," Jenny said, coming around the corner.

There was a chorus of consents and thanks from the others gathered.

"Here, Jenny! Have a hat," Cassie said, picking up one of the few hats remaining and crossing over to her as the others started to move toward the kitchen.

"Are you going to put that on, or just carry it around?" Dom asked Will, indicating the hat he was still holding.

With a shrug, Will placed the cheap party hat on his head.

Holding a plateful of chocolate-coated strawberries, Jenny chuckled while Cassie stuck the hat on her head. As Cassie plucked a strawberry from the plate, the hat slid to one side, hanging over one ear.

"Hold still for a moment; I'll get it on," Cassie said. She popped the strawberry in her mouth and reached out to right the hat.

New Year's Eve on Tracy Island Part 1 . . . written by starrynebula. Thanks to scuppy3 for help with Jenny!

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 01:14:07 GMT  
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"Y'know, when I was living with my family, we'd have to go somewhere to celebrate New Year's Eve," Will said, as he glanced away from the television. "Living in the Mountain time zone, we'd see taped celebrations or, in the case of New Year's, see it a couple of hours early, due to the time difference. There were no live broadcasts of celebrations in our zone."

He looked around at the others. "While I lived in San Francisco, I went out with friends, either to a hotel bash or a party at someone's house. And once, when Stanford was playing in the Rose Bowl - how they made it, I don't know - a friend and I went down to Pasadena for the game. She even got passes to the parade.

"Now that was somethin' to see," he continued, shaking his head at the memories. "I'd heard from a lot of people that you had to see the parade in person to really get the full impact, but never quite believed that. I thought that watching it on a big screen TV in the comfort of your home, whether or not you had a hangover from the night before," he grinned sheepishly here, "would be more than enough. Boy! I was sure wrong! Those floats are even more spectacular. And the game was exciting. It was close, but Stanford actually won!"

"Who were they playing?" asked Tin-Tin.



Will stared at her blankly for a minute, then laughed. "I actually don't remember. Can you believe that?"

As the others laughed, he grabbed a strawberry and stuffed it in his mouth.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 01:15:21 GMT  
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New Year's Eve on Tracy Island - part 2

The sounds of the party were muted as Dominic pushed the door to Joshua's room closed. Cassie had arrived and the celebrations were now in full swing. Dom touched the party hat he was now wearing and smiled gently. He had left Jenny to her own devices in the kitchen -- for the duration of the party it has become HER kitchen, and he wasn't going to fight it.

He crossed the small room and sat down on the edge of Joshua's brand new bed. The child had been absolutely delighted when, as part of his birthday surprise, Dominic had redecorated the child's room and bought him his first ever 'big-boy' bed. Dom reached out to brush some of Joshua's lengthening hair out of his eyes and smiled wider. He was going to have to ask Lisa to sort it out.

Dom reached up and pulled at the back of his own long mop. He hadn't had a haircut in quite some time, and now it was long enough to sit on his shoulders. Joshua mumbled something incoherent and clenched one hand. Dominic shook his head. I can't believe my little boy is three already! The time's gone by so fast... He remembered the look of absolute delight on Josh's face as he unwrapped his Christmas present: his first ever tricycle, bright blue and shining in the sunlight. Riding it was a challenge at first, but it wasn't long before the child was zooming around the apartment with ease -- and knocking things over. Note to self: further child-proof living room, Dom thought.

Dom stood and smoothed the covers down, before turning to leave. He couldn't help but feel a pang as he rejoined the small group in the living room and became very aware that someone was missing. Someone who it turned out Dom cared for much more than he thought was possible. Happy New Year, Luke, he thought, before dropping down onto the sofa and reaching for his soda.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 01:16:14 GMT

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December 31, 2068, aboard Thunderbird Five, 11:30 p.m. Tracy Island Time

Callie wasn't upset about staying on the space station through New Year's and a couple of days afterward. She remembered Dianne telling her about Jeff's birthday being the day after New Year's, so she easily accepted being there a little longer than usual.

Noting the time, she grabbed a data pad and started writing down her resolutions for 2069. It was a tradition she started as a child, deciding what she wanted to do the next year. Growing up, she knew there were a few resolutions she couldn't really keep, such as go into space at age 10. As she got older, she started making more realistic resolutions, and most of them worked out.

Writing her list down, she spoke out loud. "Let's see...remain happy and healthy, remain close to my family--hmm, I'd better call them when it's midnight in Opp. I'll calculate that later." After doing some more thinking, she said, "Ah, I know one major goal I want to reach: find a counteragent to that doggone chemical compound from the plane crash last July. I've struggled with it for months, but sometime in 2069 I will get the answer." She underlined it twice to indicate it was one of her bigger resolutions.

After completing her list, she went looking on the Internet to make sure she timed her phone call to her parents later in the day. "Okay, I'll call them at around 4:55 tomorrow afternoon to wish 'em a Happy New Year."

Just then, she heard the radio going off. "Thunderbird Five from Base, Thunderbird Five from Base."

Callie pressed the button to activate the video. "Thunderbird Five here, reading you strength five." She smiled as she saw Dom and Cassie's faces on the screen.

New Year's Eve from waaaay up there...

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 01:20:46 GMT  
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Tracy Island, 11:30 PM

Everyone was sitting on the balcony, laughing and relaxed, filled with the different snack foods each one had contributed to the party. Suddenly Tin-Tin sat up straight. "We've forgotten someone!"

"Who? What do you mean?" asked Brains.

"Callie! She's alone up in Five." His assistant turned to him. "Is there any way you can transfer the



feed from Five to here, Brains? I think we should call her and have her toast in the new year with us." She glanced at her watch. "We don't have much time. Can you do it?"

It's a good thing I can, Brains thought. Her eyes are so beautiful, I'd hate to see them filled with disappointment. "Dom, I presume you have a laptop. Would you bring it out here, please? That way, we'll have a screen large enough for all of us to see her and vice versa." As the nurse hurried inside to get the required item, the engineer continued. "That's a marvelous idea you had, Tin-Tin."

"I'm sorry I didn't think of it," added Will, as Cassie and Jenny both nodded their heads in agreement.

A minute or two later, Dom returned with the laptop. He set it in front of Brains, who proceeded to open it and entered a command. He apparently got the response he wanted, because he started working quickly, and only five minutes later, he had the connection set up. "Okay, who wants to place the call?"

"It's Dom's computer," said Jenny. "Let him do it."

"Good idea." Brains passed the computer over to Dom and said, "I've got it all set to make the call. Just hit enter, and give her a shout out."

"Wait a minute," said Will. "We should have our drinks first."

He and Jenny hurried inside and a few minutes later came out with a bottle of sparkling apple cider - non-alcoholic - and glasses. He held the bottle out, offering it to each of the others to open, but no one accepted.

"Okay," he said. "But don't expect the cork to go flying."

A deft twist, and a few moves to get the cork out, and he began pouring the drink. He turned to Dom with a grin. "Now you can make the call."

Dom grinned back at him and hit the button. "Thunderbird Five from Base. Thunderbird Five from Base."

A moment later, Callie's face was on the screen. Cassie had moved around to watch.

"Thunderbird Five here, reading you strength five."

"Hey, Callie. Got time to ring the new year in with us?"

"Dom! That is so thoughtful of you!"

"Well, actually it was Tin-Tin's idea, but we all agreed that you shouldn't usher it in alone."

By this time, the others had crowded around and behind Dom and Cassie. "Got anything at hand you can toast the new year with, Callie?" said Tin-Tin.



"No, I don't. Oh, wait a minute; I'll be right back."

She disappeared from the screen, but wasn't gone too long. When she returned, she had a glass filled with a bubbling liquid. "Martinelli's sparkling apple cider. I don't know who packed it for me, but I appreciate it. And I almost forgot about it. I can drink some when I call my folks to wish them a Happy New Year."

Brains smiled at her comment. "What do you know about that?" he said with an air of innocence. "We have the same thing down here."

Callie gave him a skeptical look, then chuckled. "Isn't that quite a coincidence?"

They chatted for a few more minutes, then they heard the countdown coming from the television.

...Five... Four... Three... Two... One!

"HAPPY NEW YEAR!"

The team members on the island tipped their glasses toward the screen - Callie did the same at her end - and clinked them with each other's. Then they all drank.

"Thanks, guys. You all made ringing in the new year just that much more special. I really appreciate it."

"You're more than welcome, Callie. Happy New Year," said Brains, and the rest of them echoed his last three words.

"Happy New Year to all of you, too. Thunderbird Five out." As her face faded from view, she tipped her glass toward the screen one more time.

When the transmission terminated, she stood up and walked to the window. Looking into space, she could see the blue waters and lands of the planet below. "Happy New Year, Earth."

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 01:21:57 GMT

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Monday, December 31, 2068, 11:20 p.m., Foxleyheath, England (12:20 p.m., Tuesday, January 1, 2069, Tracy Island)

"May I cut in?"

Virgil looked over at his brother, then back at his dancing partner. Dressed in her red dress, with the cloisonné barrette in her upswept hair, Elise smiled up at Virgil, then at Scott. She hadn't worn the emerald necklace; it would have clashed with her frock.



"I don't mind," she said, signaling to Virgil that it was okay. "Exchanging one handsome Tracy brother for another is never a hardship..."

Virgil snorted, but obligingly stepped back to let Scott take his place. Scott and Elise swirled off into the throng of dancers, leaving Virgil to sigh, and head off in search of a drink.

"So, how do you like this shindig?" Scott asked as he guided his new dancing partner.

"Well, it's on par with Virgil's birthday party." Elise had a small, thoughtful frown on her face. "But it's more... formal. Less friendly. No karaoke." She swept the room with her eyes. "All these lords and ladies... I've been introduced to them and I still can't tell the difference between a viscount and a duchess!"

Scott laughed. "Well, considering that one is usually a male and the other a female..."

"Okay, I used a poor analogy," Elise admitted. "But trying to keep them all straight is mind-boggling."

"You don't have to keep them all straight, just a select few." He nodded in the direction of a tall, aristocratic man with swept-back gray hair. "Like Lord Silton over there. He's a good friend of the family and of the family business."

The way Scott said it made Elise give the aristocrat another look. "Is he the same kind of friend that Penelope is?" She shook her head. "I'm saying it badly..."

"No, I understand. And no, not same kind of friend. He's a bit more aloof, less personally involved. Very much into new technology. Remind me to tell you sometime about Dr. Borrander and our trip to Anderbad. Or ask Penelope. She was in the thick of that one."

They continued dancing for a bit until the small orchestra ended their piece, at which time they stopped and applauded. Virgil sauntered up, straightening his tie as he did so. "Dad told me that Grandma's looking for you, Scott."

"She is?" Scott craned his neck to try and spot where his grandmother was sitting. "Did she tell you why?"

"Well, she was chatting with the Duchess of Royston..."

"Oh, God, no." Scott looked genuinely horrified. "Why me? I thought it was John's turn this year!"

"John is nowhere to be found at the moment," Virgil said, a grin spreading across his face. "And Alan won't leave Nikki's side, for obvious reasons."

Elise suddenly felt sad. Since coming to Tracy Island, she and Nikki had become very close friends. Now, having seen the scope of International Rescue's medical component, Nikki had decided to go back to university and pursue her dream of becoming a doctor, with plans to return to IR when she had finished her studies. Jeff had given her his blessing, and financial support,



and she was in England to visit with family before starting at the University of Auckland in March.

"How about Gordon? Can't he...?" Scott was sounding desperate now.

Virgil shook his head. "He did it last year. And you know very well why I can't."

Scott shook his head and sighed. "The things I do for... the family business."

Virgil snorted, then craned his neck to look over at the musicians. "Better hurry," he told his brother. "The music is about to start again."

Scott blew out a frustrated breath, but hurried off in the direction Virgil had come from. Virgil snickered, and Elise frowned at him. "What's this all about?"

The music began again, and Virgil asked, "May I have this dance?"

"Only if you tell me what's going on."

"All right." Virgil put an arm around Elise's waist and they began to dance.

"Well?" Elise pinned her partner with a stern look.

"Okay." Virgil paused for a moment to gather his thoughts. "Deborah, Duchess of Royston, is an old friend of Penny's... old in more ways than one. Even though she's of advancing years, she's no sedate old lady. She loves to gamble, drink, smoke, and be seen with handsome young men."

"Really?" Elise's thoughtful comment showed that she was developing a picture of the Duchess. "Tell me more."

"Well, a couple of years ago, she was in some dire financial straights. She'd been cheated at the gaming tables, and was about to sell her estate to pay her gambling debts. Penny found out, and asked Father if he could help."

A frown creased Elise's brow. "Help out? With a loan?"

Virgil shook his head. "No, not that. You see, the Duchess had an original Braquasso painting--'A Portrait of a Gazelle'. It's worth a fortune. Dad got the idea that he could work out a deal with his friend, Wilbur Dandridge. He's head of Gazelle Automations and he has this thing about gazelles. He's just crazy over them."

"So, your dad arranged for the duchess to sell her painting?" Elise asked.

Virgil twirled her away from him, then brought her back to his arms. "Not quite. She didn't want to sell it, but agreed to rent it to Dandridge. She brought it to New York herself." He pulled her a little closer, and murmured in her ear. "And that's when things got interesting."

Elise smiled, and murmured back, "Define interesting."



A throaty chuckle rose up, and Virgil's warm breath tickled her ear as he continued his story. "Well, there were some crooks who decided they'd like a piece of the action. So, they kidnapped the duchess when she arrived in New York. Then they posed as her agents, hoping to get the money out of Dandridge. Dandridge is a sharp guy; he knew something was wrong, and pulled a gun on them."

Elise chuckled, shaking slightly in Virgil's arms. "Your father knows the most interesting people."

Her comment made him laugh aloud, and drew many curious looks from the neighboring couples. "He does at that."

When he'd calmed, Elise asked, "So, what happened next?"

"Well," he said in a normal tone. "The crooks had left the duchess in some old farmhouse somewhere, and somehow, International Rescue got involved. I'm not sure of the details; I hear them third-hand from Dad. But Dandridge got the painting, and she not only got the fees for renting it, but a magazine paid her for her life story. Last I'd heard, she was flush again, and winning at the casinos."

"Ah, I see." Elise drew closer so her mouth was right next to Virgil's ear. "I suppose that the Thunderbird Two pilot was the one to rescue her?"

"I suppose so," Virgil murmured, smiling.

to be continued...

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 01:31:31 GMT

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Monday, December 31, 2068, 11:30 p.m., Foxleyheath, England (12:30 p.m., Tuesday, January 1, 2069, Tracy Island)

"So, how are you feeling, Penelope?" Dianne sat next to Penny, and they both waited for Parker to come by and bring them each a drink. Penelope was wearing the same style of François Lemaire gown that Heather Kennedy had worn at Virgil's party, but in a rich sapphire blue. She looked a bit pale to Dianne's practiced eye and had tired easily.

"I am much, much better, Dianne. Thank you for asking." Penny gave her a winsome smile. "I am only sorry that the flu kept me from spending my birthday on the island, and attending Kyrano and your mother's wedding, as we had planned."

Dianne nodded. "We'll just have to have you come out to the island next month, and have a belated birthday celebration then. Maybe after the newlyweds return."



"I would enjoy that very much," Penny replied. "I have a gift for them, which I should like to deliver in person. And a touch of tropical sun would do wonders for me, I am sure."

Dianne agreed readily. "Perhaps it would."

Both women watched as Cherie and Jeff waltzed by, talking quietly with each other. "Cherie is growing into a sweet young lady," Penelope commented.

"I hope her temper is as sweet on the way home," Dianne said with a sigh. "The boys are tucked away in bed already; this type of party would bore them to whining... or mischief. Cherie's old enough to enjoy it, but she does need her sleep."

Parker arrived, two flutes of champagne balanced on a silver tray. He handed a glass to each lady. "Beggin' yer pardon, milady, but Ay believe we 'ave a gate-crasher."

"Do tell, Parker," Penelope said. "Do you recognize him or her?"

"Yus, milady. H'lt's that Hightower bloke, the blond one."

Penelope sat up straighter, and began to look out over the crowd. "Giles?"

The butler smiled. "Yus, milady. That's the one." He glanced over his right shoulder. "'E's been circling h'around Missus Tracy and her Grace, but Ay don't think she 'as noticed 'im yet."

"And she would." Dianne laid a hand on Penny's arm. "She was with Tin-Tin in Kabul, and knows who he is."

"Yes, I remember." Penelope thought for a moment, then said, "Parker, bring our unwanted guest here, to me. I wish to speak to him."

As Parker went off to do his employer's bidding, Dianne asked, "Why do you think he's here? What could he possibly gain by crashing your party?"

"I can think of several things," Penny said, her tone dry. "As I learned from that little incident with Mr. Grafton, one can never tell what an uninvited guest's motives may be." She paused, then added, "I did humiliate him in public some months ago; he may have retaliation in mind. And there is what he did to Tin-Tin... and the virus he had planted in Lena Matumbo's computer. It seems he has set his cap on Tracy Industries. We must not allow him a foothold." She put her flute of champagne aside, and murmured to Dianne. "It would be prudent that you withdraw before he arrives, Dianne. I have no desire that he meet any other members of the Tracy clan than he already has."

"I agree," Dianne said. "I'll find Jeff, and tell him what's happening." She rose and sashayed off into the crowd, looking for her husband, just as Parker came up, herding a dapper-looking Giles Hightower.

"Ah, Lady Penelope," he said, glancing at Dianne's retreating back before turning back to Penny. "So nice to see you again. Who is your fascinating companion? It is terribly rude of you not to



introduce us."

"Mr. Hightower, it is terribly rude of you to intrude on my gala." Penelope's eyes were half-lidded, giving her a haughty, disinterested look, but the tone of her voice was steely. "I detest unwelcome, uninvited guests."

"Ah, ah, ah, Lady Penelope." Giles held up a finger, a smile spreading across his face. "I was indeed invited. I am accompanying Lady Divinity Aldridge-Kitchener. I am her plus one."

Penny cast her mind back through the list of guests who had responded to her invitation. She had invited Lady Divinity -- an old school chum from her days at Rowden -- but she did not remember the name that worthy had put down as her escort for the evening. She was irked at herself for her lack of recollection, but she knew she still had the right to toss the bounder. She picked up her champagne glass and took a tiny sip before looking at Giles again.

"You may consider yourself 'invited', Mr. Hightower, but I consider you unwelcome." She turned to her butler. "Parker, please introduce Mr. Hightower to the rest of our security team, then escort him from the premises. I have full faith that, should he cause any commotion, you are more than capable of dealing with him."

"Yus, milady. Thank you, milady." Parker glanced toward a younger, well-built man in an impeccable tuxedo, and gave him a barely perceptible nod. The young man came forward, as did another, similarly built and clad gentleman that Parker subtly summoned. "Naow, Mr. 'Ightower. Let's go fer a little walk, shall we?"

"Well, I see that I shan't be ringing in the New Year with the rest of you," Giles said, sighing. He paused, then lowered his voice to a menacing tone, and gave his hostess a cool, venomous look. "You haven't seen the last of me, Lady Penelope. We will meet again... and soon."

She waved her hand, and the three men herded him out of the room. When he was gone, Penny let out a long soft breath, but did not relax. A large, warm hand fell on her shoulder and she started a little. Glancing up, she found Jeff at her side, with Dianne just behind him, her arm around Cherie.

"I hear you've had an unwanted visitor," Jeff said, his tone both troubled and solicitous.

"Yes, I have, Jeff, but Parker is dealing with him." She glanced at the ornate clock on the mantle. "Not long to go until the new year."

Jeff followed her gaze. "Just enough time for a dance with my hostess, and one more with my wife." He offered his hand. "Would you do me the honor?"

Penelope placed her hand in his. "Of course. I should be delighted." She turned to Dianne. "You don't mind, do you?"

"Not at all. Cherie and I will just get ourselves some more refreshment, and I'll check on Emily. Have fun!"



With that, Jeff pulled Penelope into his arms, and they swept out onto the dance floor.

Party at Penelope's part two

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

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

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

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

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

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

"Dirty old lady?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

"So, this is where you went, John," Alan said, putting an arm around Nikki. "When you disappeared, Virgil went looking for Scott."

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

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

"Last year was my turn," Alan groused.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

"Dad and Mom are." Alan told her.

"Is Brains here?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Having shown Nikki her ring -- an oval cut emerald, surrounded by eight small diamonds in a gold



setting -- Kat joined her fiancé, taking his arm almost possessively. She held out her left hand. "Isn't it lovely? I am so very, very happy."

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

Thomas glanced over at his fiancée, who was looking more at John than she was at him. "Yes. I'm very fortunate." He reached over and drew Kat's face toward him, startling her as he kissed her softly on the lips.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Party at Penelope's part 3

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 01:36:50 GMT  
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Monday, December 31, 2068, 11:57 p.m., Foxleyheath, England (12:57 p.m., Tuesday, January 1, 2069, Tracy Island)

"Where's Virgil?" Jeff asked as he accepted a flute of champagne from a server.

"He's coming." John peered over the heads of their fellow party-goers.

"Here we are." Virgil, one hand grasping Elise's, pressed through the crowd. "Is everyone here?"

Emily glanced over the small group. "Looks like it."

Cherie was about to reach for a champagne glass, when Scott frowned and took the one she was reaching for. "Parker is supposed to come with something non-alcoholic for you." He glanced around, then nodded, drawing his sister's attention to his left. "And here he is."



"My h'apologies, Miss Cherie." The butler-cum-chauffeur bowed to the girl. "Ay was h'unavoidedly detained."

"That's okay, Parker," Cherie smiled, a tired expression. She took the proffered glass with a sigh. "Maybe some day I'll be able to have some of the real stuff."

Jeff felt someone tug his sleeve, and turned. "Tyler? Alex? What are you two doing up?"

"You should be in bed," Dianne said, smoothing her hand over Tyler's stiff hair, which stuck up in all directions. Her efforts were in vain; the unruly patches immediately bounced back into position.

"We couldn't sleep," Tyler whined.

Alex nodded, leaning up against Jeff. "It was too noisy." He yawned. "We came down to see if it was the new year yet."

"Not yet." Jeff looked at his watch. "Just one more minute." He put arm around Alex's shoulder "You can stay up long enough to ring in the new year, then back to bed you go."

"And Cherie will go up with you," Dianne added, giving her daughter a significant look. Cherie made a sour face and folded her arms belligerently; her mother shook her head slightly in response.

Parker, who had disappeared when the boys arrived, came hurrying back, two more glasses in hand. "Ay thought Master Alex and Master Tyler should have summat wiv which t' toast the new year."

Dianne smiled, taking one of the glasses and handing it to Tyler. "Thank you, Parker. That was very thoughtful of you."

Parker smiled, and touched an imaginary cap brim with a finger. "You are very welcome, mum. An' a happy New Year to you all."

At that moment, Lady Penelope took the microphone. "We are fast approaching midnight," she said. "A mere ten... nine... eight..."

The crowd picked up the countdown, and by the count of five, the Tracys had joined in, lifting their glasses.

"Five... four... three... two... one... Happy New Year!"

Suddenly the air was full of song and streamers and confetti and balloons. Jeff kissed his wife, murmuring, "Happy New Year, love" in her ear. Elise and Nikki joined in singing, "Auld Lang Syne", and after a moment, Dianne and Jeff, then the boys were singing, too... Gordon, his arms around John and Scott, swaying back and forth. Neither of his brothers budged, and Scott rolled his eyes. As the song ended, the Tracys touched glasses all around, then downed their drinks.



"I'll take the kids back upstairs," Dianne said, almost hollering in Jeff's ear over the fresh din of the party.

"We'll go together," Jeff insisted. His arm still around Alex, he apprised Scott of their destination. "Keep an eye on things here, son."

"F... Will do, Dad," Scott replied, nodding and taking Jeff and Alex's glasses, putting them down on a side table. He gave Cherie a kiss on her forehead, subtly taking her glass. "Happy New Year, Sis. Goodnight."

Another dance tune had sprung up as Jeff and Dianne gathered up the younger ones and headed out of the ballroom. Virgil whispered in Elise's ear, and she giggled, then nodded. They stepped out onto the dance floor again.

John turned to his grandmother. "May I have this dance, ma'am?"

Emily smiled widely. "I was hoping one of you boys would ask your old grandma for another dance."

"Well, I guess I'm the lucky grandson, then." He offered his arm. She took it, and they joined the throng.

Scott turned to find Alan and Nikki had slipped off somewhere without a word. Gordon, however, nudged him.

"I'm going to get a drink. Want anything?"

Scott shook his head. "No thanks." He peered out over the crowd. "Gonna cut in on someone. Be back soon."

"Okay." Gordon looked in the direction that Scott had and saw who he was talking about. "It's your funeral. I'll be sure to send flowers."

"Won't need 'em," Scott said absently before striding off. He came up to a couple, and smiling, asked, "May I cut in?"

Penelope looked from her current partner, Sir William Frazer, to Scott, and smiled. "I don't mind, if you don't, Sir William."

The older man - head of the British Security Service - harrumphed. "Of course not, Lady Penelope." He bowed to Scott, and gave him Penny's hand.

"Thank you, sir." Scott returned the bow, slipped an arm around Penny's waist, and they took up the rhythm of the music.

"Thank you, Scott," Penny said in a low voice. "The man is brilliant, but he does tread on one's toes."



Scott laughed. "Like a certain duchess does?"

"Oh dear." Penelope's look was sympathetic. "Were you the sacrificial lamb this year?"

He snorted. "'Fraid so. John disappeared on us, and Alan was otherwise occupied. Grandma wouldn't ask Gordon to do it twice a row, which left only me."

"I am sorry, Scott. But Deborah is such a good friend..."

Scott waved a hand. "Don't worry about it, Penny. All in a day's work and that sort of thing. And at least I won't have to do it next year. Grandma will see to that."

They fell silent for a moment, letting the music take them across the floor. Finally, Penny gave Scott a soft smile. "There is something I should tell you, Scott."

"What's that, milady?" he asked, his tone light and his interest piqued.

She reached up on tiptoe to murmur in his ear. "Happy New Year."

Scott grinned at her. "And a very Happy New Year to you, too, Lady Penelope."

Party at Penelope's is done. Hope you had fun!

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 01:40:31 GMT

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January 1st, 10:45 pm Tracy Island (December 31st, 2069, 11:45pm, Oahu, HI)

Lana came to a stop at the low bar separating the dining room from the living room. Vince was right behind her with the drinks she had been preparing for Aaron and his friends. Her husband placed the tray with the glasses on it on the bar amongst the half-eaten party food Lana had prepared.

"Hey guys, here's the sparkling cider to bring the new year in with," Vince called out to the teenagers gathered in the living room.

Giving the upcoming move, the living room was void of furniture save the entertainment center. Makani and his wife had bought the house, and as they had their own furniture, what Vince and Lana weren't taking with them had been donated to a family from their church who had just recently suffered a house fire. Though a special was on the TV, no one was paying too much attention to it at the time. Vince wasn't sure what the kids were doing, but there was a lot of talking and laughing going on.

Vince picked up the two glasses of wine off the tray, and handed one to Lana. He took a sip from



his own as the teenagers converged on the bar.

"You put it in wine glasses, cool!" Erica exclaimed. The girl was one of four girls at the party and one of Aaron's surfing buddies. The other three girls were all from Aaron's swim team.

The girls' presence was the main reason Vince and Lana had been against letting this be a sleep over. After a lot of phone calls with the other teens' parents they had finally conceded, seeing as Aaron would be leaving at the end of the week and this was the last chance he would have to spend time with some of them. The cot Vince was planning on sleeping on that night was sitting against the one wall, however.

After the teens had got their glasses of sparkling cider and were settled back in front of the TV, Vince sat down on the stool next to his wife. He grabbed a Lau lau from a plate and took a bite of it. He glanced over at Lana to see her looking over a list.

"What's that?"

"Things I need to get done before we leave on Saturday," she replied.

"Put it away. We're supposed to be celebrating!"

Lana sighed. It was late and New Year's Eve. Her husband had a point; she should enjoy the holiday. Despite the late night, she had plans for an early start to the day tomorrow. She put the clipboard down on the counter and then picked up her wine glass, taking a sip.

"I just hope I can get everything done in time."

Vince looked at his wife closely. She had been working hard ever since Christmas had passed to get things ready for the move. Maybe this hadn't been such a great idea. Perhaps he shouldn't have asked his family to pick up and move half way around the world with him. To leave behind family and friends. A house that they had started to call home.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" he asked her, dropping his voice, though he doubted the teenagers were paying any attention. "If you're having second thoughts perhaps..."

Lana shook her head and seeing the gesture, Vince fell silent. She thought back to the conversation she'd had with Dianne when her husband had taken her to Tracy Island the first weekend in December.

\*\*\*Flashback\*\*\*

It had been Saturday evening, the Tracys had been gracious hosts and Lana found herself enjoying spending time with the family. Dianne had asked her to join her down at the pool as her two youngest wanted to go swimming. Not having anything else to do, she had consented.

Now, Lana took a sip of her lemonade, and then placed the glass down on the table. Dianne sat across from her, watching Alex and Tyler play in the pool. Lana let her gaze go to the two boys, too.



She's raised her children here on the island and all three of them seem to have adjusted okay. Maybe raising Lea here wouldn't be so bad, Lana thought.

"I was wondering if you would mind answering a question for me?" She said, getting up the courage to broach the subject that had been on her mind for a while now. "How did you make the decision to raise your kids here on the island?"

Dianne put down her glass of sweet tea and gave Lana a small, crooked smile. "It wasn't easy in some ways. I was taking them away from their cousins and grandmother and all that they'd known. But in other ways, it was an easy choice to make, because I was taking them away from a lot of pain and misery, too. Moving here gave us a fresh start, away from the ghosts of the past."

She shook her head. "My kids gave up a lot to move here, as I was reminded several times this past year." Tilting her head to one side, she asked, "Are you concerned about that? About what your kids will lose by moving here?"

Lana nodded trying to organize her thoughts a bit before speaking. "Aaron's been through moves before. I know he'll adjust to leaving his friends behind. He probably won't like it, but he'll make the most of it," Lana said thinking of her eldest and how much of a help he had been over the last few years. "With him, it's his swimming that I'm most concerned about. I mean, I know your husband said we could send the kids to the mainland for activities if we chose to and we could probably find a coach but it would mean a trip to the mainland at a minimum of four days a week."

"Then there's Lea. She's been kind of sheltered so far and hasn't had much contact with other children. Moving here continues that. I guess I'm worried about her developing proper social skills."

"Ah, I see." Dianne nodded, looking thoughtful. "She does need to have interaction with children her own age. My boys..." She waved a hand in the direction of the pool. "Even though there's only a few years between her and Tyler, that few years might as well be a decade at this point."

She paused, gathering her thoughts. "Just recently, we started taking Cherie to an art class in Christchurch. It's only an hour's flight round-trip, and has been really good for her socially. We're looking into doing something similar for the boys, just for fun."

She gave Lana a warm smile. "I'm sure there are programs available for preschoolers and kindergartners that you could take advantage of. Flying you there and back is really not a problem; we have many available pilots."

Lana nodded. She hadn't missed Dianne's reference to an art class. That was what Vince and herself had been thinking of getting Lea involved in.

"Aaron has a private pilot's license too. He has plans to get the multi-engine rating in a couple of weeks, so if there was an available plane he might be able to take us sometimes too," Lana commented. At least until he goes off to the Academy, she added silently. Lana sighed. Speaking of Aaron, there was still a question of his swimming.

"Moving here looks like it will mean Aaron giving up competitive swimming. If it wasn't that he has



his eyes set on World's next spring, I wouldn't be so concerned about it."

Dianne sipped her tea, looking thoughtful. As something occurred to her, she smiled, an eyebrow raised. "How would you feel about having an Olympic gold medalist as your son's coach?"

\*Flash back written in collaboration with Tikatu

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 01:41:14 GMT

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Lana coughed on the lemonade she had just taken a sip of. Recovering, she looked across the table at Dianne. "What do you mean?" she asked, trying to keep the excitement out of her voice.

"Well, my son, Gordon, currently holds the world record in freestyle--he won Olympic medals for both that and the butterfly strokes." She paused. "He's still a fast swimmer, especially in freestyle, though he no longer competes--for more reasons than just staying incognito. I think he'd like the challenge of training another swimmer to his level or beyond."

She glanced up at the balcony, where Gordon and John could be seen, both wearing swimsuits, with towels around their necks. "We could ask."

"If he would be willing that would be a relief for me. Aaron's already qualified to go to the trials to determine the World Team. It would be a shame if he couldn't go." Lana made a mental note to talk to Gordon before they left this weekend. "What about IR? I mean, what have you told the younger kids? How did you tell them? Vince has already cleared telling Aaron the truth about the move before we leave Hawaii if he takes the position. Neither of us are sure about Lea though."

Dianne laughed. "In Tyler's case, he knew before I did! He saw Thunderbird One launch one night, but put it down to a dream." She sipped her tea again, and put the glass down, turning it around and around on the table top. "Once I knew about IR, I insisted that my kids be told. It wasn't fair that they not know, and it took a lot of pressure off of Jeff and the boys."

"Trying to hide something this big from people who live here 24/7 is extremely difficult. Hell, even trying to hide it from frequent visitors is hard. My mother found out on her own, and didn't tell anyone, which was an accomplishment on her part."

She picked up the glass again, and drained it. "My kids have been able to keep the secret, even when they've gone visiting family without us. We've impressed them with the importance of it. Other than my mother, none of my other family members know, and that's due a lot to the kids."

"Still, it's a lot to ask of a five year old," Lana commented, still unsure. She nervously started tapping her polished nails on the table top. "What if she accidentally let something slip?"



"Hmm." Dianne paused for a long moment, looking very thoughtful. Finally, she said, "You're right, it is a lot to ask of a little one. But anyone could accidentally let something slip, really." She caught Lana's gaze. "How much exposure to IR's activities has Lea had up until now? Has your family made a big deal of what we do when it ends up in the news?"

Lana ducked her head, a little embarrassed with what she was about to say. "Honestly, I'm not even sure she knows what IR is. Sure, a news story with them has gotten mentioned here and there around her, but current events aren't a topic we discuss in depth unless it directly affects Hawaii. Guess it's the native Hawaiian coming out in us."

"Then, perhaps, it would be best to just tell her that this is 'Daddy's new job'," Dianne suggested. "If it's put to her as something not terribly interesting or special, she's probably less likely to say anything... at least, until she understands that it's important not to say anything." She smiled. "Perhaps the 'native Hawaiian' background will help us out here."

Lana smiled, glad her hostess hadn't taken offense to her and her family's lack of interest in their organization.

"Lea's more of her father's daughter, so I wouldn't hold your breath on that."

Lana picked up her lemonade and took another sip of it. She wasn't use to opening up this much to someone she had just met, but given the situation, it wasn't something she could discuss much with those close to her.

"I know Vince will only do this if I'm okay with it. He tends to put us before himself. Always has; I guess that's probably one of the reasons I fell for him," Lana said, finally deciding to say what was really on her mind. "If it wasn't for my accident, I know he'd still be with the Navy. As much as he's trying to act nonchalant about this position, I know he really wants it." Lana fell silent, not sure how to continue.

Dianne winced at the last statement. "Yes, I can understand that. When we brought Jenny on board, we didn't tell her at first because we felt she'd really want the position because she'd be helping, you know," she crooked her fingers to indicated quote marks, "International Rescue. We know that what we do is looked at as glamorous, and exciting. Vince doesn't strike me as the kind of person who would look at it that way, but as a challenge, yes. He seems that way to me. But there's also a lot of danger, and sometimes even monotony involved." She chuckled. "You should see the boys when we have a long spate without any rescues. They can really get on each other's nerves."

She paused. "It's good that your husband is looking toward his family's well-being first. Tell me, if you said you didn't want him to take the job, what would he do?"

Lana didn't have to think twice about that question. She knew what Vince would do. "He'd turn down the offer."

"And how do you think he'd react to doing that?"



It was another easy question for her. Something Vince had said in a therapy session during her recovery came back to her. The therapist had asked him how he felt about resigning his commission.

"I'm going to miss the Navy," Vince had said. "I enjoy what I do. Enjoy being in a position to help others. To be a part of some cutting edge technology. To be a part of something that makes a difference. However, my family is more important to me. They've supported me in what I wanted to do over the years despite sacrifice. Now, I guess its time for me to make a sacrifice."

"He'd view it as a sacrifice that he needs to make for us," Lana said. Suddenly all the doubts she had over the decision melted away. Yes, there were still things that needed to be worked out, but she knew they could do that by sticking together. He had made a sacrifice for them three and a half years ago and left a career he loved to be able to support and take care of his family. "He's been putting us in front of his wants for the last three and a half years. Maybe now its time we returned the favor." Lana slowly looked around the area, taking in her surroundings. "I think we could be happy here. I think its about time for me to do something for the man I love."

\*\*\* End Flashback \*\*\*

"Sure, I'm getting a bit panicked with all that needs to be done," Lana told him, pulling herself away from the memory. "But second thoughts, no. I told you before, if this is what you want to do, then the kids and I are behind you one hundred percent. We'll be together and that's what's important."

Vince reached over and put his arm around her shoulders. He felt relieved by her answer, knowing he was asking a lot of his family.

"Have you told Aaron about you know what, yet?" Lana asked.

As she had told Dianne, Aaron would be told the truth about the move before they got to the island. They had chosen to hold off trying to explain things to Lea until after the move. For now, she knew what they had told the rest of their families and friends, they were moving to New Zealand to be close to Vince's new job with Tracy Industries.

"Not yet. Going to do it when we take that night dive tomorrow evening. Along with breaking the news about his new coach to him."

Lana smiled. She was happy when Gordon had agreed to coach Aaron. It meant her son wouldn't need to sacrifice his dream because of the move.

"He's going to be ecstatic!"

Neither one of them had a chance to say anything else, as an enthusiastic count down began in the living room. The adults joined in with the teenagers.

"Five... four... three... two... one, Happy New Year's!"

As the fireworks on the television special started, noise makers sounded in the Crenshaw's living



room.

I sure hope they don't wake up, Lea Lana thought even as she took another sip of her wine. It was a new year, and the beginning of a new adventure for her family and herself.

\*Flashback written in collaboration with Tikatu

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 01:43:19 GMT  
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January 1, 2069, noon; Rockville, Maryland (5 AM on Jan 2 on Tracy Island)

"Mom, Nyanya, Leslie! Hurry up! The parade's about to start!"

"We're coming, Naomi. Not so loud. Siti's sleeping."

"Sorry, Leslie.

Half the family was at Joy and Tom's home. She had had given her husband a big screen television, similar to Matthew and Amelia's, for Christmas, and they both wanted to watch the parade and Rose Bowl game (at least) on it. Lena, and Leslie, with E.J. and Siti had joined them the night before to ring in the new year, and spend the night. Matthew and his family, including grandchildren, would join them later for football game watching.

Joy, Lena, and Leslie walked into the living room, one bearing a huge pizza, another with drinks in bottles and pitchers on a tray, and the third with glasses. "Now this should satisfy you all for a while, but just in case, there's a smaller pizza in the oven," Joy said, as she set the drinks on the large coffee table, and placed a mat for the pie. "But only the two. Any more will be baked once Matthew and the rest of the family show up."

Lena sat down in an armchair beside which she had placed her laptop. Kevin had suggested to her that she could pull up the order in which the bands and floats, etc. would come. She opened the computer and pulled up the website she'd found earlier that would tell them what they wanted to know.

"What's the theme for this year's parade, Nyanya?"

"Let's see. Ah, Heroes, Past and Present."

"Cool! Does it also say who's the Grand Marshall?" asked Naomi.

"I'm looking. Ah, here it is: Andrew Carmichael, representing Doctors Witout Borders. Well, now.



Isn't dat interesting."

"What, Mom?"

"Doctor Carmichael is Dianne Tracy's uncle. I wonder if she and her motter know about dis. She didn't say anything to me when we last talked."

"You'll have to call her later."

"Well, much later. She told me dat de family will be spending New Year's Eve, and de first in England, at Lady Penelope's estate. I don't know when dey'll be able to see it. I have de feeling dey won't see it live."

"Too bad, though, they couldn't have someone from International Rescue in the parade."

"I imagine deir security is too tight to allow dem to be part of de parade."

"Oh, look," Kevin exclaimed. "Here comes the first float."

They turned their attention to the television, Tom, E.J. and Joy all commenting on how great the floats looked on the new television. Floats representing organizations from different countries passed, along with high school bands, and the usual horse troops. Then:

"Look at that!" "Oh wow!" "Cool!"

"And it's an award winner, too!"

Now I'll definitely have to call Dianne!

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 01:46:43 GMT  
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Wednesday, January 2, 2069, 3:12 p.m., Tracy Island

"So, do you think Dad liked the gift?" Scott turned to his copilot, John.

John snorted. "I think Mom liked the idea of it more."

The huge brunch, eaten at Penelope's hours before flying out, had included a celebration of Jeff's birthday. They'd never done it that way before; usually they'd waited a day or so after returning home, allowing for jet lag to dissipate and for the space-bound brother to come back from the station to join in the party. With Callie in space this year, both John and Alan had been able to be there. The gifts sent by the recruits who were so inclined to give them hadn't taken up much space in the general luggage, and the gifts that most of the family gave took up no space at all.



"Do you think they'll be able to finish the renovations to the A-frame before Mom and Dad's trip at the end of the month?"

"They'd better," Scott growled. "We're paying top dollar for the best work. But don't worry. I've got someone lined up at each location who will inspect things before we complete payment."

The Tracy sons had put their heads together and come up with a novel gift for their father... and by extension, their stepmother. The A-frame in New Hampshire, it had been discovered, had no indoor hot tub, and neither did the Wyoming ranch. The Kansas farmhouse wouldn't have had one either, if Virgil hadn't noticed the deficiency while looking over the plans. He'd consulted with his grandmother, who had balked at the idea at first, but then relented. Virgil had then taken the time to research the matter at the other two U.S. vacation homes, and had presented his idea to his brothers as a possible gift. After some discussion, they'd opted to give the gift for Jeff's birthday. Most of them had already chosen Christmas gifts, and Virgil himself wanted to paint a portrait of the couple for their anniversary.

"Well, this is certainly a different gift!" Jeff had exclaimed as he opened a hand-drawn card. Color sketches of the Jacuzzi unit and the three properties adorned the inside. "Won't want to throw this away," he'd quipped. "The artwork is worth keeping."

Virgil had grinned. "Thanks, Dad."

"Ah, there's the island," John said. He pressed a button on the controls. "Tracy One to Tracy Island, requesting permission to land."

Brains's voice came back. "Tracy Island to Tracy One. Permission given. Welcome home, everyone."

xxxx

"Finally home!" Alex stretched as high as he could. "That feels good!"

"Yeah." Alan yawned. "The last leg of the journey is always longest."

"Come help unload the luggage," Jeff called. Both sons obediently joined their father.

"Did you remember to ask Tin-Tin to record the parade, Dianne?" Emily asked as the two women tidied up inside the cabin.

"Yes, I remembered." She gave her mother-in-law a smile. "I'm sure there won't be a repeat of the Thanksgiving parade."

Emily snorted a laugh. "Poor Virgil. Seeing his baby made into a balloon and floating down Central Park South... he was outraged!"

Dianne grinned. "I don't know if he was more outraged that they'd made the balloon, or that they'd put the wings on wrong."



"There was more wrong with it than just the wings, Mom." Virgil had come aboard to empty the jet's small refrigerator. "The color was off, the stripes in the wrong places..." He shook his head. "They should have asked permission!"

"And just how were they going to do that?" Emily challenged. "We are supposed to be a secret organization."

Dianne patted her stepson's arm. "I think it's an honor that they chose your 'Bird, Virgil. Scott was upset that they didn't choose One."

Emily chuckled, then put the blanket she'd been folding into the cart that stood outside the jet. The luggage was already on its way up, following Jeff and the youngest kids. She turned to Dianne. "Have you heard from Kyrano or your mother?"

Dianne shook her head. "Nope. And I don't expect to. They're likely having the time of their lives."

"I hope they are enjoying each other," Emily said, her tone a little wistful.

Virgil touched his grandmother on the shoulder. "Missing Gramps?"

She put a hand on his. "I always miss my Grant, Virgil. Just sometimes a little more than others." She smiled at him. "It's all right, Virgil. I'm very happy for Kyrano and Lisa." Giving him a wink, she added, "Who knows? I might still find someone..."

Virgil's eyes widened, and he shook his head. The two women exchanged knowing glances and laughed.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 01:49:25 GMT  
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Wednesday, January 2nd, 8 pm Tracy Island (Tuesday, January 1st, 9 pm , offshore of Oahu, HI)

Vince broke the surface right behind Aaron and not far from their anchored boat. Aside from the breeze that was blowing, they had gotten lucky with the weather. It had been perfect for a night dive. Above them, the moon shone its light down on the waters of the Pacific ocean.

The former Navy SEAL took the regulator out of his mouth before starting to swim toward the boat. Aaron was already climbing the ladder when his father reached the side of their vessel. As he waited for his son to finish getting on board, Vince removed the fins from his feet, slipping them onto his arm. Once Aaron was on board, Vince climbed the ladder himself.

"That was so cool, Dad!" Aaron exclaimed as his father climbed on board the boat. Though he had dived the Corsair plane wreck before, he had never done so at night. This dive was the last one they would be taking together before the move, and Aaron had been able to choose.



"Glad you enjoyed yourself," Vince said, climbing onboard. "Why don't you go below and change into dry clothes while I start stowing gear?"

With a quick consent, Aaron headed belowdeck. Vince started taking care of their diving gear, get it stored on the boat for the ride in. When Aaron had changed into regular clothes and was back on deck, Vince headed below.

I should probably tell him before we start heading back in, Vince thought as he pulled a polo shirt on over his head. Hanging the wet dive suit on a hook next to Aaron's, he headed back above deck.

"I'll go pull anchor," Aaron said, as he saw his dad.

"Hold off on that, son. There's something we need to discuss before we head back in," Vince told him. He gestured toward the bench seats along the starboard side of the vessel.

Aaron sat down, wondering what was going on. What's so important that he needs to discuss it now, in the middle of the ocean? he asked himself, while waiting for his father to begin.

"When you attended the summer seminar at the Air Force Academy did they talk to you about classified information and how important it is not to discuss those things with those who don't have the right clearance?" Vince asked, trying to impress upon his son the how important it was to keep what he was about to tell him quiet.

Aaron nodded, still not at all sure what his father was getting at.

"Well, what I'm about to tell you should be considered classified information. Beyond your mother and eventually your sister, no one else in the family is to know about what I'm about to tell you."

"You've got my word, Dad. Not a word to anyone," Aaron said, feeling a bit nervous. Part of him wasn't sure he wanted to know. Another part was honored that whatever it was, his father trusted him enough to tell him.

Vince took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "Well, for starters, we're not exactly moving to Christchurch, New Zealand."

"But you and Mom spent the weekend..."

Aaron let his words trail off as he noticed his father shaking his head.

"We flew to Christchurch and one of the Tracys picked us up. I didn't want your grandparents questioning anything. They're supposed to think we're moving to Christchurch, just like you've told your friends."

"Then where did you and Mom go?"

"To the private island the Tracys live on. It's about a half hour away from the mainland by plane."



We're going to be moving there ourselves."

Aaron got quickly to his feet. "You're dragging me away from my friends to live in the middle of nowhere!" He had come to terms having to leave his friends and family here in Hawaii and starting over. It wasn't the first time he had done so. He had left friends and his other grandparents behind when they had moved to Oahu, just like all the other times his father's naval career had taken them somewhere. He had figured he'd keep in touch with his old friends and make some new ones in Christchurch. Living on a private island is going to make it hard to make new friends.

"It's not the middle of nowhere," Vince told him, remaining calm. "There are people living there other than the Tracys."

"But I bet none of them are my age."

"No, they aren't," Vince conceded. "That doesn't mean you can't get involved with something on the mainland to meet new people. We plan on enrolling Lea into an art class. I'm sure you can find something you'd have fun doing."

"Except I won't be able to join a swim team," Aaron commented, realizing that making the trip to the mainland every day would be impractical. Maybe it's not too late to stay here with Grandma and Grandpa.

"There's a pool on the island that you can use to train," Vince told him.

"Dad, you know I can't realistically train on my own and still be competitive at the trials in March."

"Which is why your mother and I have arranged for a private coach."

"A private coach?" Aaron asked skeptically, before Vince could say anything else. "What's he going to do, fly out to the island every day?"

"Well, no. Your coach sort of already lives there," Vince told him. "Gordon Tracy has agreed to be your coach."

Aaron silently sat back down on the seat, trying to decide if he had heard his father right. Never in his wildest dreams had he thought his idol would be his coach. It was too good to be true.

"For now, I don't want you telling anyone," Vince continued. "It's bound to get out come the time of the trials but until then, it's best if we avoid the media circus it's bound to create. We'll figure out how to deal with those issues come March."

"Okay," Aaron said, trying to hide his disappointment. It would have been fun seeing the faces of his friends when they found out he was going to be coached by an Olympic gold medalist. The teenager paused for a moment. As great as this news was, he had a feeling it wasn't why his father had made the comment about the information being classified. There has to be something more; why would Mr. Tracy want Dad on the island if he's supposed to be working for Tracy Industries. Somehow I doubt there's a branch of the company there. That would kind of defeat the purpose of the family living on a private island. "Why are we going to be living with them instead of



on the mainland, though? I thought you were hired for the marine research and development team?"

"I was, sort of. The position is just a cover. I'll be working with the facility in Christchurch to keep the cover, but Mr. Tracy really hired me for another position. It's very important that this information does not get out, for our safety and the safety of others." He paused, letting that point sink in. As he went to continue, he realized that telling Aaron seemed easier than when he had tried to break the news to Lana. "The Tracys run International Rescue," Vince told him. Ignoring his son's open-mouthed gape, he continued. "Those involved with the organization live on the island."

There was a moment of silence where the only thing that could be heard was the sound of the waves hitting the side of the boat. It wasn't long before that silence was broken.

"You're going to work for International Rescue!" Aaron exclaimed, getting over his initial shock. "That is so cool!"

"Cool or not, it's also a huge responsibility, just like knowing who is behind the organization is a huge responsibility."

"You have my word, Dad. Not a word to anyone," he replied seriously, though the smile was still on his face.

"Good. Then what do you say we head on in? Your mother is going to be looking for us shortly," Vince said, patting his son on the shoulder as he stood up.

"Yes, sir," Aaron replied. Maybe this move won't be so bad, the teenager thought as he got to his feet.

While Vince headed for the driver's seat, Aaron went to pull the anchor.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 01:52:03 GMT  
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Thursday, January 3, 2069, 2:00 p.m., Tracy Island

"And here we go!" Gordon announced as he brought a serving cart full of food into the family's home theater.

"Ahhh, thank you for helping me with the snacks, Gordon." Emily reached up and patted her grandson's cheek.

"Only reason he helped is because he's eying Mom's double chocolate brownies," Virgil said as he adjusted the sound levels on the theater's wide screen televid.



"I know, Virgil," Emily replied, giving him a wink. "But everyone needs a little bribe now and then."

"Tyler, don't you think Patches would be better off in your room?" Dianne's gentle question made the youngest child look up from his play. The kitten, whose body was lengthening by the day, and who was shaking his kittenish looks for more cat-like ones, was flattened against the floor, intently watching a dot of red light. Tyler slowly moved the dot around, and the kitten's eyes followed it. Another ripple of haunch muscles, and Patches leapt for his prey... which danced quickly out of the way.

"But we're having so much fun!" Tyler protested, his eyes focused on the kitten's next move.

"Yes, but he'll be a distraction," Dianne reminded the boy. "Especially if he gets into the snacks, like last time."

With a sigh, Tyler pocketed the laser pointer. "Okay. I'll put him in our room." He picked the kitten up, supporting the hind legs with one hand while holding his pet close with his other. "Don't start without me!"

His mother smiled. "We won't. Promise."

"Here, Mom." Alex carefully carried a plate of treats and a glass of soft drink to his mother.

"Thank you, Alex," she replied as she took them, smiling at him.

"Can I get my treats now?" he asked.

Dianne nodded, and Alex trundled off to supply himself with snacks. Cherie came in and plopped herself into a chair in the back row. Dianne turned and gave her a smile. "Feeling better?"

"Yeah, I guess." The girl sighed heavily. "I hate this time of the month."

"I don't know of a woman who doesn't, sweetie," Emily said sympathetically. She carried a plate of food and sat down next to her granddaughter. "Better get something to eat. Take something chocolate; that always helps."

"Okay." Cherie got up slowly and padded over to raid the brownie plate. Tyler returned and filled up a plate for himself, then sat down next to his mother.

"All right, everyone!" Virgil clapped his hands for attention. "The Tournament of Roses Parade is about to commence. Make yourselves comfortable because we won't be pausing this for bathroom runs, et cetera. The parade lasts over two and a half hours; I'll call an intermission at the hour-fifteen minute mark, or as close to that as we can get. Then you can get up for more food, drink, potty, whatever. Does everyone understand?"

There were general calls of agreement, then Virgil started the recording, and grabbed a drink before settling down himself.

The first few moments were of the anchors, Blake Stevens and Mia Miner, covering the event



giving a bit of history, and telling the audience about the theme, Heroes: Past and Present.

"Wonder who the Grand Marshal will be," Emily said to Gordon, who sat on her left.

"Not sure," Gordon murmured back, "but Tin-Tin sure had a big grin on her face when I asked." He harrumphed a bit. "Wouldn't tell me, either."

The Tournament of Roses president passed by, riding in an open, horse-drawn carriage that was decorated with roses. The floats started to appear, and the children oohed and aahed over the bright colors. The first of the marching bands came by, dressed in crisp white uniforms.

"What is that they're playing?" Grandma asked, a puzzled frown on her face.

Virgil shrugged. "I don't know, Grandma. I'm not familiar with Barry Gray." He sipped his drink. "It's a nice march though."

"Kinda reminds me of some of the music I heard at WASP," Gordon added.

The first equestrian group passed by, dressed in Western finery. Metal accents glistened in the sunlight, and the men took off their pinch-front hats to wave them at the crowd. Cherie sat forward, excited. "Look at those gorgeous palominos!"

"Glad to see you're still into horses, Cherry," Dianne said, a knowing smile spreading across her lips.

"I've never not been into them." Cherie sounded irritated. Dianne rolled her eyes.

Pasadena's mayor followed the palaminos, riding in an open, flower-draped hovercar. More floats went by, and more bands, and more equestrian teams. Cherie and Virgil put their heads together over the float designs, while Gordon played "Name That Tune" with the others. Blake and Mia took turns describing the floats, and mentioning which ones had won awards.

"Hey!" Alex whispered. "Here comes the Grand Marshal."

"Look at that beautiful car," Virgil murmured. "Such a classic."

Dianne's eyes widened and her jaw dropped as the camera zoomed in and Mia said, "And this year's Grand Marshall is Dr. Andrew Carmichael, from Mercy General Hospital in Los Angeles. The lovely lady riding with him is his wife, Margaret."

"Uncle Drew!" Gordon cried out, laughing. "That old son-of-a-gun!"

"Shh!" Dianne said, waving a hand to shush him. "I want to hear this!"

Blake was replying to something his partner had said. "...The parade committee had chosen Doctors Without Borders for the outstanding job they did during the tsunami last April, but it was the stellar work Dr. Carmichael did helping International Rescue's medical personnel that made the decision to honor him personally an inevitable one."



Dianne shook her head. "I'm gonna kill Uncle Drew for not mentioning this," she muttered. "And maybe even Aunt Maggie..."

"You know they would have wanted it to be a surprise," Emily told her.

"And it sure is one!" Virgil said, a wide grin plastered across his face. "We need to haul Dad down here and let him see it!"

"He'd appreciate that classic Thunderbird, that's for sure!" Gordon quipped. "They don't make convertibles like that anymore. Too bad it's not yellow."

"Or green!" Virgil added. "Figures they'd choose a red one for the parade."

Dianne shook her head at the close-up of her uncle, smiling widely and waving to the crowds. "I wonder if Ma knew about this. And I wonder if this is what Lena meant when she called."

"Oh?" Emily glanced over at her daughter-in-law.

"Yeah. Lena called yesterday, just to say hello, and while we were talking, she asked if I'd seen the Tournament of Roses parade. When I told her I hadn't, but that I was intending to, she sort of smiled and said that I really should watch it soon."

"Well, now you can call her back and talk about the surprise," Emily said, smiling knowingly.

Dianne returned the smile, and both women turned their attention back to the recording.

They were almost to the halfway point of the recording. Gordon wolf-whistled at the Queen and her court as they went by.

Another marching band, and another equestrian group, then another float came into view. "And here's the winner of this year's Theme Trophy. This is a special one, isn't it, Blake?" Mia asked.

"Yes, it sure is, Mia, especially with the upcoming moon mission," Blake declared. "This float is called, 'One Giant Step'."

He began to describe the float, telling the audience all about the plants and flowers used. The float was in two parts, and depicted someone in a spacesuit, walking on a slightly curved dome representing the moon. The first figure had planted an American flag on the surface. Around the edges of the dome was the name, "Neil Armstrong, July 20, 1969" and at the front of the were the words, "Apollo 11". The second dome was set higher than the first, and though the scene was similar, there were important differences. The spacesuit was a newer model; the flag represented the World Space Agency. The mission was the "F.L.O. Explorer"; the date was "September 11, 2039", and the name...

"Hey! Isn't that Dad's mission?" Virgil exclaimed.

"Oh, yeah! You're right!" Gordon reached forward, grabbed his brother's shoulder and shook it a



little. Virgil returned the gesture with a wide grin. "Now Dad really has to see this!"

Alex's eyes widened. "Wow! Dad walked on the moon! So cool!"

"Didn't you know that already?" Cherie asked, sounding petulant.

"Well... yeah," Alex returned. "But... not like this! I mean, it's one thing to know it in your head..." He waved his arms, trying to figure out how to put what he wanted to say.

"And another thing altogether to see it." Emily turned to Alex. "Is that what you wanted to say?"

"Yeah, Grandma. That's exactly it!"

Dianne put her hand on Tyler's shoulder as the boy sat on the floor near her feet. "What do you think of the float, Ty?"

"Dad's name is on it. So it's cool," he said with a nod. "And Dad's cool." He looked over his shoulder at his mother. "But I knew that already."

The others chuckled, and Gordon leaned over to hold out his hand. "I wanna shake your hand, m'boy. You are a true Tracy son!"

Virgil paused the recording, and turned up the lights. "Time for a quick intermission, then we'll watch the second half."

"Good." Cherie said. She stood up, and a distressed look crossed her face. She hurried from the room with a quick, determined walk.

Emily shook her head. "And to think she has another forty years or more of this to go."

"Too true." Dianne looked at her watch. "Wish I had time to call Lena. That's two surprises now I can talk with her about."

"Well, there probably won't be a third surprise." Emily stretched and yawned a little. "I'll be right back. Time to use the toilet myself."

tbc

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 01:53:49 GMT  
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Thursday, January 3, 2069, 3:40 p.m., Tracy Island

The family was back in the theater, munching snacks, and making comments on the floats, bands,



and horse riders who went by.

"Aren't they playing 'Dangerous Game'?" Gordon asked, frowning.

"I think so," Virgil replied. "Sure sounds different when a marching band is playing it."

"And when it's outside in the bright sun." Gordon slurped noisily on his straw. "You kinda expect it to be sung in some dark little bistro by a sexy woman..."

"That's enough, Gordon," Emily said sharply.

"Yes, Grandma."

"Oh, that one's gorgeous," Cherie said, her tone one of awe.

"This float, 'The Dream Lives On', is the Animation Trophy winner this year," Steve informed the audience.

The float was white, with a wall made of five interlocking rings colored blue, yellow, black, green, and red, running down the middle. An animatronic figure stood...or rather, ran in place...on a separate upper section, dressed in white track shorts and shirt, holding a "torch". The flame of the torch was alive with dancing, fire-colored petals. Several real, live people stood on the lower platform, each wearing a different uniform, and hanging from ribbons around their necks, Olympic gold medals, usually more than one. The people, whose ages ran from fresh-faced young teens to silver-haired elders, waved at the crowds as they passed.

"How do they keep the flowers on that animatronic character?" Dianne asked.

"And where did they find the materials to get that skin tone down so well?" Virgil shook his head. "With paint, yeah. With flowers and other natural materials... I couldn't do it."

Alex tapped Gordon on the shoulder. "Do you know anyone who is on the float, Gordon?"

Gordon peered at the figures as the camera panned across. "Yeah! See that old guy there? The one with all the medals? That's Michael Phelps. He's in his 80s now, I think. It was his world record in the butterfly that I broke at the Olympics."

"Whoa," Alex said, his eyes big.

The float moved on, and another band came into view. By this time Tyler was getting bored. He flopped down on the floor with a dramatic huff of breath. "This is getting boring."

Suddenly, the volume of the crowd grew and the announcers got very excited.

"And here it comes!" Mia exclaimed. "The float that everyone has been talking about!"

"It was set apart from the other floats, and kept under tight guard while being covered with flowers," Blake explained. "And the judges who saw it were asked to keep from describing it until



the parade day. Even under those circumstances, it was awarded the Judges' Special Trophy for outstanding showmanship and dramatic impact. Created and built by the city of Wichita, Kansas, 'Our Heroes Forever'."

The float slid into view, and Dianne cried, "Oh my God!"

"Wow!" Tyler's eyes were big as saucers; his boredom forgotten.

Alex's mouth dropped open. "I can't believe it!"

"It's amazing!" Cherie said, her eyes widened in delight. "The colors! How'd they do that!"

"Hey!" Virgil said with a laugh. "This is better than that balloon at Thanksgiving!"

"Nope," said Gordon, shaking his head. "This is a one-time thing, Virge. That balloon of Two will show up year after year."

Emily chuckled. "Dianne, I think this is what Lena was really talking about when she said you should watch."

Dianne took a deep breath, then swallowed. Blake and Mia were still describing the float, a near life-sized version of Thunderbird Seven, sitting, slightly raised, over a blanket of soft green grass that was being blown to all sides by something underneath the Thunderbird replica. Sitting or standing all around the float were people, little kids in wheelchairs or with crutches by their sides. Boys and men in Scout uniforms. And at the front, Michael Hart, Carol and Peter Valerian, Lynne Feller, and Mayor Tom Riverton were sitting or standing and waving. As the camera panned across each one, Blake announced their names, adding, "All of the float riders were involved in a Special Olympics Challenge day when a tornado hit the high school that was sponsoring the event. From the smallest participant to their parents, from the Boy Scouts to the mayor of Murray Gill, they...along with the city of Wichita...wanted to thank their heroes, International Rescue. And they chose this way to do it."

The camera returned from panning down the float, and rested for a moment on Peter Valerian. His mother nudged him and pointed. He turned toward the camera and said, very clearly, "Hope you like the float, International Rescue!"

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 01:55:00 GMT

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Thursday, January 3rd, 2069, evening, Tracy Island

Cassie kept her eye on the piece of debris that had washed up on the beach that they'd picked for the finish line. She could hear Scott's running footsteps right behind her. As she sprinted past the



piece of wood, she came to a stop, trying to catch her breath.

"That wasn't fair," Scott protested coming to a stop beside her. "You never actually said the word 'go'".

Cassie grinned. "I said I could beat you. I didn't say I could do it fairly."

"Yeah, well next race, I'm going to start it," he told her. He glanced down at his watch. "I should probably head up to the house so I can shower before dinner. I'll see you tomorrow morning for our flight lesson."

"Okay, see you," Cassie told him. As Scott headed up toward the villa, Cassie turned and headed back the way they had come. She planned on saying hello to Dom, whom she had spotted as she ran by him a little ways back.

From their little spot on the beach, Dominic waved as Cassie jogged towards them. He had watched as she'd sprinted off earlier and couldn't help but guffaw when Scott's bemused "Hey!" had echoed across the sand. Cassie grinned as she reached the pair sitting on the sand. Joshua stopped in the middle of destroying a sandcastle and waved.

"Hi Auntie Cass!" he said.

Dominic stood and dusted some sand from his shorts. "Hey Cassie," he said. "Enjoy your race?"

"I enjoyed beating Scott, that's for sure!" she said.

Joshua resumed jumping up and down on his castle and began waving his arms in the air. Cassie couldn't help but chuckle. Dominic folded his arms and cocked his head to one side.

"It's nice to see you enjoying yourself again," he said. "You didn't seem to be having the best of times over Christmas."

"The holiday was hard, that's for sure," Cassie commented, sobering a bit. The smile was soon back on her face though, as Joshua held up a sand mold and a shovel in her direction. Taking the little one's hint she accepted the items and settled herself on the sand. "I would've preferred to have spent Christmas Day by myself, but between Elise and Scott, I sort of got dragged to the dinner," she commented, shoveling sand into the plastic mold.

"If I remember right, you didn't stay long," Dom commented, sitting back down.

"Didn't want my mood to bring anyone else down."

"I can imagine that it would be hard," Dom said. He grabbed a handful of sand and let it trickle back down through his fingers. "The first Christmas after my mother passed away was very difficult. I can't imagine how--" He trailed off, not wanting to finish the sentence for several reasons.

Cassie took the spade she was offered and Joshua beamed as she helped him dig a little hole.



"You know, there's no chance you'll ever be allowed to brood on this island. Not with this crew!"

"I wasn't brooding," Cassie said.

"Okay, poor choice of words," Dom answered, giving her round eyes in apology.

She chuckled. "You're forgiven," she told him.

The two of them had shared several more awkward encounters since Dom's birthday. Cassie had come to accept that it was bound to happen from time to time given the circumstances, and had learned to talk to Dom instead of avoiding him like she had the first time. Not to mention, she hadn't missed his attempts to be sensitive to her feelings and she really appreciated that.

Dominic smiled. "Well, I think I'm beginning to feel the munchies coming on," he said. "Want to join me for a cuppa?"

Cassie thought for a moment, then nodded.

"Sure."

Dom stood first, and held out a hand to help her onto her feet. She took it, and then held her own hand out to Joshua.

"Come on, Josh," she said.

"I don't want to!"

"Joshua," Dominic warned.

The little boy pouted, but Cassie avoided the impending tantrum by swinging Joshua up in her arms. Dominic collected the sandcastle things, and the little group headed back to the Cliff House.

beach time by starrynebula

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 01:55:29 GMT

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Thursday, January 3, 2069, 9:30 p.m., Tracy Island

Jeff leaned forward in his chair and pulled his glasses back down over his eyes. He tapped his fingers on the desk as he gripped the data padd in the other hand, and then he began to read over the lines of Lady Penelope's report again.



Izarra Soto Fernandez... sixteen years active service with Nacional de Inteligencia... impeccable record... a more than adequate replacement for Cora Bell...

Jeff breathed out heavily as he remembered receiving Cora Bell's resignation letter. The ex-agent had retired early from her job as a school teacher, and had decided to leave International Rescue as well. It was a significant loss.

This new woman seemed promising -- more than promising. It wasn't often that IR could gain such an experienced spy on their side. Though that, of course, had its downside. A spy would pose a greater risk of being a double-agent, but Jeff trusted Lady Penelope's sleuthing and judgement. After a few more minutes of thought, he turned to the videophone and brought up Penny's number, and waited.

\*\*\*

Thursday, January 3, 2069, 8:30 a.m., Foxleyheath

Penelope's manicured fingers reached delicately for the comm. button and she pursed her glossed lips as she waited for the vidphone screen to activate.

"Lady Penelope speaking," she said.

"Penny. If you're sure about Ms Soto Fernandez, then I'm sure, too. You've never steered me wrong before."

Penelope smiled gently.

"Indeed, Jeff. I shall set things to motion today."

Penelope signed off and brought her hand up to ring for Parker. The brocade rope pulled down gently, and as expected, Parker was immediately at the door.

"Yus, milady?" he asked.

"Parker, we shall be bringing our trip to Bongo-Bongo forward by a week. Make arrangements for us to fly out tomorrow morning."

"Yus, milady," Parker said, before bowing and retreating from the room.

Penelope brought one long fingernail to her lips briefly, before smiling, and sipping her tea.

a new agent by ArtisticRainey

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings



Thursday, January 3, 2069, 9 a.m., England (10 p.m., same day, Tracy Island)

"I still don't understand." Sandra said, frowning. "Why Auckland? Why bloody New Zealand?"

Nikki sighed. She'd already explained herself once. "I told you, Mum, the courses start in March instead of the autumn. I don't want to hang about just waiting for uni to start here, nor do I want to work a job here, and not have the time to put into my course." She held up her hands. "This way I start uni right away. Also, the University of Auckland is willing to take some of my nursing course and experience toward my degree." Smiling slightly, she added, "I won't be starting as a fresher again."

"But what about your job with the Tracys?" Sandra asked. "Don't tell me that the life of the idle rich didn't agree with you."

Nikki's brows knitted together as she frowned. "That's unfair, Mum, and you know it. It's because of the Tracys that I'm going to pursue my dream. Dr. Tracy was over the moon when I suggested I return to uni and study to be a doctor." She didn't dare tell her mother that a good part of her reason was the opportunity to spell Dianne in Thunderbird Seven. "I've been promised a position when I finish." She shook her head. "I thought you might be happy for me."

Sandra's shoulders sagged. "I... I am happy for you, luv, it's just that..." She shook her head. "I've missed you."

"I've missed you, too." Nikki put a hand out to touch her mother's shoulder. "I just... I can't stay in England. My friends are all moving on in their lives, and there's a big wide world out there for me to discover." She paused. "And more importantly, I've been given a rare opportunity." She turned her hands upward and made fists, shaking them both for emphasis. "I want to grab onto it with both hands and make the most of it."

There was silence between the two women for a moment, then Sandra sighed and asked, "How long will you be... visiting?"

"A fortnight. I need to find a flat in Auckland, and move my things there. Get everything properly sorted. Prolly need to find a part-time job, too...which may mean sitting my nursing exams again." Nikki made a face. "The Tracys are paying for my fees and everything, but I think I shouldn't just fanny about on my off-hours."

"And you'll be returning to America when you're finished?"

Nikki nodded. "That's the intent."

Sandra sighed again, then opened her arms. Nikki went to her, and the two women embraced. "I always thought you might marry and have a family, and that I would be part of that. But it's more important to me that you are happy."

"I am, Mum." Nikki whispered in her mother's ear. She thought of Alan, and smiled slightly. "And



who knows? Marriage and children might come along, too. Just not yet."

They broke the embrace, and Sandra wiped at one eye. "Well, while I have you here, I should feed you properly. None of that American cereal. How does a good fry-up sound?"

Nikki smiled. It was good to be home.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 02:01:17 GMT  
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Friday, January 4, 2069, 11:45 a.m., Thunderbird Three (same time and date on Tracy Island)

"So..." Alan began, tweaking the controls of Thunderbird Three, on course for the monthly rendezvous with Thunderbird Five. He glanced quickly at his brother. "The party. How did it feel to see Kat again?"

John returned the glance, one blond eyebrow raised. "I'll tell you if you tell me about Nikki."

Alan snorted and shook his head. "Not much to tell. She's going to medical school to become a doctor."

"I'm sure there's more than that." John stretched his arms far above his head, interlacing his fingers and turning his palms to the ceiling. With a slight grunt, he brought his arms back down, then rolled his shoulders. "I mean, she could have gone back to England to study." He gave his brother a sideways glance. "But she decided on Auckland... which is close enough to the island that you can see her on weekends."

"True," Alan admitted. "But she didn't choose it because of me. She wanted to get started, and college classes there start in March. She would have had to wait a lot longer if she'd gone back to England."

"Still, she could have waited, couldn't she? Stay on the island and work with us until classes started there..." John let his statement trail off, hoping it would nudge his brother into admitting something.

There was a long silence between them, then Alan sighed. "Okay, okay. Our relationship had something to do with Nikki's choice. But..." He held up a finger in his grinning brother's face. "It was a secondary consideration. I thought she should stick around then go back to England, or even to the States, for the fall semester. She was the one who thought Auckland would be a good compromise."

John held up his hands. "Fair enough. Gotta love a woman who's that motivated."

"Yes. Very true." Alan tweaked another control. "Your turn. How about Kat?"



The older man shrugged. "It was a little weird to see her again. We hadn't communicated since she resigned, and I had no idea she'd be at the party. But, she seems happy with this Bentley-Edwards guy, so I'm happy for her."

Alan kept looking steadily at his brother, until John, piqued, said, "What? Don't you believe me?"

"I dunno," Alan replied. "You seemed so certain about her for a while there."

John huffed out a breath. "I guess... maybe I was for a little bit. But I talked with Anna about it, and I think I was more interested in the idea of having someone special." He shook his head. "Anna helped me see a lot of things clearly in regards to Kat. And one of those things was that I wanted friendship from her, not romance. If we'd gone further... it wouldn't have worked. So as a friend, I wish her all the happiness in the world."

"So, you're not jealous or anything?"

It was John's turn to snort a little laugh. "Y'know, I can truthfully say that I'm not jealous. If anything, I'm relieved." He paused, looking thoughtful. "If this guy can give her what she wants, then more power to him."

"Good." And with that, Alan went silent. John didn't know why, though he had his suspicions.

He was about to say something when Alan toggled the communications switch. "Thunderbird Five from Thunderbird Three. On final approach."

Callie's smiling face appeared in their view screen. "Thunderbird Five here. Glad to see you, Alan. You too, John. Airlock is ready, and so am I!"

"F-A-B, Callie. Commencing docking sequence."

As they began to dock with Thunderbird Five, John made a mental note to call Alan in a few days and find out just why his brother had shut down so completely. I think I should mention it to Scott, too. I could use his advice.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 02:02:39 GMT

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Friday, January 4, 2069 Tracy Island, a little after noon( Thursday, January 3, NYC, a little after 6 p.m.)

Cassie was cutting up some cucumbers for her salad when her phone rang. Putting the knife down on the cutting board, she crossed to the kitchen table where she had put the phone upon entering the apartment. Picking up the device, she saw Jordan's name on the screen.



"Hey, Jordan. What's up?"

"Hi, sis. Other than enjoying a rare day off, not much. Taking Bridget out to dinner tonight, or I would have waited a little longer to call you. Didn't catch you at a bad time, did I?"

"No. I've got time to talk," Cassie replied.

"Great. Oh, by the way, be look out for a package. Mark, Byron and I finally got around to sorting through the stuff we put in storage. The china set Mom wanted you to have got shipped this morning."

Their parents had broken the news to all of them during their visit to Japan that they weren't intending to return to the United States. With Phillip retired and all the kids grown there were no ties keeping them there and with her own parents health failing, Keiko had wanted to return to her childhood village. The Kishis were now residing in Kozushima. As they were still living in NYC, the task of clearing out and selling the home the kids had all grown up in had fallen to Mark, Jordan and Byron. Keiko and Phillip had requested certain things be shipped to them as well as wanting each of the kids to have certain things. The rest of the stuff was to be sold. Even over a month later, Cassie was still trying to get used to the idea of her parents no longer living in NYC.

"Okay, I'll let you know when it gets here. Hopefully, everything is still in one piece."

"Bridget and Jennifer packaged everything, so we should be good."

"Smart move."

"You guys keep it up and I might be the only one left living in the city," Jordan told her. "First you, now Mom and Dad. Byron and Jennifer are talking about looking for a place outside of the city too. It's making me appreciate that time we had in Japan, the more I think about it."

"Yeah, I think this past Thanksgiving is my favorite one," Cassie commented, thinking about her trip.

\*\*\*Flashback\*\*\*

Cassie had arrived in Japan the day before what would have been Thanksgiving in the States. Sachio and his family had met her in the baggage claim area.

"Konnichiwa, Cassie-chan! O genki desu ka?" Sachio said, as he approached her.

"Hai, genki desu," Cassie replied, without missing a beat. She gave her cousin a quick hug and then took a step back. "Anata, wa?"

"I'm fine," Sachio replied, switching to his cousin's native language. "I see you've kept up on your Japanese."

"Of course."



Kao and Kai had joined them. Sachio introduced his wife and son to Cassie. Though they had spoken on the phone before, this was the first time they had all met face to face.

"Dad and Mom are looking forward to seeing you. We figured you could stay with them tonight, seeing as you need to be in the city for your business meeting tomorrow. Dad will fly you, Mark and Jordan out to Kozushima tomorrow evening."

"That sounds good," Cassie replied.

Sachio and Cassie headed over to the baggage claim area. Their reunion had thinned the crowd around the conveyor belt a little, and Sachio was able to step up to the machine. With Cassie's input, Sachio was able to snag Cassie's two bags when they came around.

"How long are you planning to stay?" Sachio asked jokingly, as the group made their way toward the exit of the airport.

"I did some early Christmas shopping so I don't have to mail things later," Cassie told him, even as she continued to listen to Kai's narrative of school. The young boy was very talkative and was happy to have a new audience to tell his stories too.

"Very forward thinking," Kao commented, whose grasp of the English language was limited.

After a visit to the Tokoyo branch of Tracy Industries, Cassie had joined her family in Kozushima village. She had enjoyed seeing everyone that evening and was especially looking forward to the following day's celebration.

Labour Thanksgiving Day had started out with Cassie's grandmother cooking a traditional Japanese breakfast.

"I'm cooking Tamagoyaki for breakfast," Nako, replied from the stove as Cassie had entered the kitchen that morning. The elderly lady was very thin from her recent illness and still tired easily. However, she insisted on doing the cooking in the house. Keiko, however, had insisted on doing the other household chores until her mother was feeling stronger. "If you're not up to it, there are cereals on the table."

"Tamagoyaki sounds good," Cassie replied. It had been awhile since she had traditional Japanese food. Alex hadn't cared for it and though Cassie had cooked it a few times while living with her brother, she hadn't since moving to Tracy Island. Something I need to change, she thought, as she found an empty seat between Mark and Allie. Her nieces, she noticed, were both eating cereal.

"Late night get to you?" Mark asked her, as he placed his spoon back into the bowl of Miso soup. The two of them had stayed up past midnight catching up.

"You could say that."

It wasn't long before Jordan joined them in the kitchen. Over breakfast, the group discussed their



plans for the day.

"You're not coming to the mainland with us, Mom?" Jordan asked when Keiko mentioned that she and her mother would have dinner ready for them when they arrived.

"No. Your grandmother isn't quite up to that yet. We'll stay here and enjoy the time together."

"And seeing as you all are missing out on your Thanksgiving holiday, your mother is going to teach me how to make a traditional American Thanksgiving dinner. Seems appropriate as you're all sharing our holiday with us."

"Sounds great. Anything is better than the hospital's version of Thanksgiving dinner," Jordan, who had worked every Thanksgiving since he was a med student, commented.

10 am

Cassie and her family headed down to the docks. Quite a few people were walking in that direction. This was the eleventh year that Tokyo was holding a Labor Festival, similar to the one that Nagano had hosted for years. The ferry's from Kozushima and the surrounding islands were crowded the entire day. Looking around at the people heading toward the docks, Cassie was glad that her family wasn't trying to catch a ferry to the mainland.

Reaching the docks, the group headed toward the fishing vessel, Rising Sun. The Rising Sun was owned and operated by Keiko's younger brother, Hikaru. His son-in-law currently helped him run the ship. Not having a son himself, Hikaru was elated when his nephew, Riku, had showed an interest in fishing. At fifteen, Riku's participation was limited, but Hikaru was hoping to turn the ship over to him when he was older.

Hikaru and his family were already on board, as were Byron and his family.

"She might not be as classy as the ferries but this sure beats the hassle of trying to get a place on one of them," Hikaru commented when everyone was on board.

It wasn't long before the Rising Sun was leaving the docks behind and making its way toward the mainland. Cassie was positive the fish smell was following her as they disembarked the ship in Tokyo Harbor to join Sato, his wife Chisami, Sachio, Kao, and Kai.

"I made this for you," Kai, told Mark, handing him a drawing.

"Thank-you," Mark said trying to hide his confusion from the boy.

"It's tradition for school kids to draw pictures and present them as gifts to police officers, as a thank-you for the job they do all year long," Sachio, explained, clearing things up for his cousin.

Mark nodded, touched that his second cousin had thought of him.

"There's time to visit the Asakusa Shrine before the parade, if you're all interested," Sachio said,



looking around at Mark, Cassie and Jordan who had decided to spend the day together. "We usually go there every year. Besides giving us a chance to reflect on peace and human rights, which is part of what this holiday is about, Kai here likes to see the decorative displays of produce that they put up at the shrine in honor of the harvest."

The three of them agreed. After a quick discussion with the rest of the group, they all agreed on a meeting place to watch the parade from. Allie and Katie begged and were given permission to go with their aunt and uncles, and then Sachio led the group toward the nearest subway station, to head up to the Asakusa Shrine.

Kozushima, 6pm

The dining room in the Fujimura house was crowded. Three extra folding tables had been set up to seat everyone. There wasn't much room to maneuver but given the cool weather outside, there hadn't been any other options as they all wanted to share the dinner together.

The food was passed around, and plates were filled. When everyone had their food, Phillip Sr. got to his feet.

"Well, I'm sure you are all hungry just like I am, so I'll keep this short," Phillip began.

"This will be a first then," Byron commented, having experienced many long holiday dinner speeches by his father.

There was kind laughter throughout the room. Phillip waited for it to die down before continuing.

"I just want to say how thankful I am that we can all be together here, to enjoy this meal together. This is the first time that we've all been together and I think it's quite appropriate that it happened on this day. There have been a lot of changes this year, but we've gotten each other through them. It's good to know that no matter what happens you can count on family."

The ironies of her father's words were not lost on Cassie. She wondered how he could say what he did about counting on family when he had practically disowned one of his sons. Not wanting to ruin the occasion or start anything, she kept the thoughts to herself.

"A tradition for my wife, kids, and I has always been to go around the table and say something we were thankful for before we eat. Given the number of people here, I propose we do that while we all begin our dinner."

There were agreements all around. As Phillip sat down, on his left Keiko got things started, saying that she was thankful to have been able to prepare the meal for everyone with the help of her mother. As they all ate, they continued to go around the tables, everyone giving thanks for something.

\*\*\*End Flashback\*\*\*

Thanksgiving, seemed like ages ago, Cassie thought, feeling a slight wave of homesickness wash



over her. As much as she had enjoyed seeing her family though, what meant more, was that her four brothers had left Japan on better terms than when they had arrived. Now if Mom and Dad would come around . . .

"When do you think you'll make it back out east?"

"Not sure," Cassie replied, her brother's question bringing her back to the present. She returned to preparing her salad as she continued her answer. "Work's been keeping me kind of busy. You know how that is."

"Don't I ever. If Bridget wasn't a nurse and actually saw me at the hospital, I'm not sure she would believe me when I tell her I can't do something because I'm working."

"You know, if you want this relationship to work, you're going to have to quit working so much," Cassie told her brother.

"Yeah, I know. That's why I'm taking her out to dinner. Hopefully one of the latest candidates for the empty ER spot will work out and I won't have to pull so much overtime."

As they continued talking, Cassie finished preparing her salad. Her lunch was finished by the time Jordan said he had to start getting ready for his date. Ending the call she put her phone down, and then sat down to enjoy her salad.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 02:03:30 GMT  
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Friday, January 4, 2069 Tracy Island (early evening)

Jenny sank into a chair and stared dumbly at her computer.

"Help me out here, Hiss. Should I send an email to Mum? Play a game? Or get out that embroidery kit I started three years ago and haven't finished?"

Hiss merely curled himself around a plant. Jenny sighed, and turned her computer on.

"An email from Wendy. I hope she and the baby are fine."

Dear Jen, it said

Got your email. Glad you like your job, though better you than me. I never did like housekeeping.

I'm sending you pics of what the baby should look like at this age. Do you think I should find out whether it's a boy or a girl?



Now, seriously, Jen, do you remember Bob Stuart? I mentioned to you some time ago that he's after Mum. Well, between you and me, he's got competition. There's this other guy, Darren, who's a pensioner, but he's pretty good looking still, and he took Mum out to dinner last night. He's a decent sort of bloke, with a wacky sense of humour, the sort of guy who'd tell a funny story if he was being led to the stake. So much nicer than Bob. I always thought Bob smiled way too much. Anyway, Mum hasn't been looking so good in ages.

What do you think of Mum remarrying? Of course, I don't think she would anytime soon, but there's a possibility. She hasn't even complained about you not having any boyfriends! BTW, I've heard the Tracy sons are pretty handsome. Aren't they about your age?

Murph's home and yelling for his dinner, so I gotta go.

Love, Wendy

Jenny examined the pictures for a while, then clicked on 'Reply'.

Wendy, love,

I hope this Darren is better than the other guy. He seemed a bit of a creep to me. But don't get your hopes up. I reckon Mum's not in a big hurry to get hitched. She still mopes over Dad every now and then.

Wow, the baby looks so tiny! It's amazing how fast they grow. Do you need any baby clothes? I have some spare time in the evenings, and I'd be happy to knit a jumper or some booties. If I were you, I wouldn't try to find out its sex yet. I reckon it spoils the fun. But go ahead if you want to; it's your life.

Love, Jenny

P.S. Just because Mum's not worrying about me having boyfriends doesn't mean you should!

She leaned back in her chair, clicked 'Send', and began browsing for baby knitting patterns.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 02:04:22 GMT  
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Saturday, January 5, 2 PM; Tracy Island

Will headed down to the rifle range. He hadn't fired a gun of any kind in years, and it had been suggested to him -- by Scott -- that he should at least refresh himself on the basics. He'd checked out the gun range already, and a few people, both Tracys and non, said that it had some pretty cool targets. So he decided to check it out. He also had been told -- again by Scott -- that the eldest Tracy son and Elise were having a friendly competition today, with Gordon as the one



controlling when and where the targets would appear and move.

He approached the range with caution, moving along the small shed where they kept the supplies for the range, and saw the two taking their stances to begin. Alan, Virgil and Cassie were also there, "for moral support".

Gordon noticed a movement out of the corner of his eye, and glanced over to see the only other red-headed person on the island moving his way. An idea popped into his head, and he acted on it immediately.

"Fire at Will!"

"NO!"

The others turned just in time to see Will duck behind the shed. Gordon began laughing, and said, "Man, I haven't seen anyone move that fast in ages." He waited a few seconds, then said, "Where'd he go?"

He had his answer a moment later, as he felt himself grabbed from behind and lifted off the ground. "Now you can fire at Will," the mechanic said, amusement in his voice.

"Hey, let me go! Put me down! I was only joking. C'mon, man!" He tried to twist out of Will's grasp, unsuccessfully.

Alan and Virgil were in stitches, and the others were showing their amusement as well. Will let go and Gordon turned around to see the taller redhead grinning at him. "Gotcha!"

"Looks like the joke's on you, Gordon," said Scott. "Better watch out. You ought to realize by now that there are more people to retaliate when you play a joke on them."

"And it obviously looks like someone will," added Cassie.

"I'll keep that in mind," was the chagrined reply as Gordon looked up at Will. "Especially if the butt of my joke is taller than I am."

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 02:05:21 GMT

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Saturday, January 6th, 2069, 6 pm Tracy Island (7 pm, Previous day, Oahu, HW)

Vince pulled his car into a parking spot in front of Blue Waters Dive Shop. He hadn't been to the dive shop all week as he had been busy with preparations for their trip tomorrow. He couldn't remember when the last time was that he had been away from the store for that long. And who knows when I'll see it again after today, Vince thought, as he got from the car and headed toward



the building.

As was typical for a Friday, the shop was busy. Over the last couple of months Vince had helped Jim get kayak tours up and running. The program had been an instant hit, and Adam was enjoying having an increased role at the shop. They had also been working on the transition of the ownership of Blue Waters. Jim had officially become his partner right before Christmas, and had taken over day-to-day operations. The plan was that he would buy part of Vince's share each year, and eventually become sole owner.

Vince stood aside as a family came out of the store, then headed inside. Adam waved to him from near the wet suit displays where he was helping a customer. Vince waved back at him.

"Hey, Vince. Come to make one last inspection before you leave?" Eddie Crammer joked.

"More like I just wanted to say good-bye," Vince told him. "I know the shop is in good hands."

After getting the job with Tracy Industries, Vince had contacted Eddie and offered him a position; there would need to be another full-time employee on board when he left for New Zealand. Eddie had expressed interest and once his tour of duty at Ingleside was up, he had come out to Oahu for an interview. Like himself, Eddie had both a Master SCUBA diver and Instructor Trainer Certifications and a pilot's license, which meant that he could take over most of Vince's duties with the shop. By mid-December he had settled his family on Oahu and was learning the ropes.

"Jim's out back prepping tanks," Eddie told him, pointing toward the back door.

"Thanks," Vince replied.

As a customer stepped up to the counter, Vince made his way to the back door. He was sure Jim wouldn't mind an extra hand prepping the tanks, then he hoped the two of them could go out for one last meal together. Jim and his family had planned on coming and seeing the Crenshaws off in the morning. However, a last minute dive trip had come up, changing those plans. Vince knew this would be the last time he and his friend would see each other for the foreseeable future.

"Hey Vince," Jim called, seeing his friend come out. He put the tank he had just finished filling onto the truck and reached for an empty one. "Come to check up on us one last time?" he commented with a smile.

"No. Just stopping in to say good-bye. Any plans for tonight?"

"Not really. Why?"

"Was wondering if you wanted to go grab a bite to eat tonight."

"Would love to."

"Want a hand with the tanks?"

"You know I never pass up free help."



Without another word, Vince grabbed one of the empty tanks and the two friends got back to filling them.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 02:07:07 GMT

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Saturday, January 6, 2069, 8:30 p.m., Tracy Island.

"Nine ball in the corner pocket."

John leaned on his pool cue as Scott lined up his shot. A gentle tap, and the white ball rolled serenely across the felt, nudging the hovering nine ball into the pocket without following it in.

"Nice shot," John commented.

"Thanks." Scott picked up the long necked bottle and took a few gulps before returning it to its mini-cooler. John took a swig of his own beer, and watched Scott prowl around the edges of the table. He put his bottle down and sighed.

"Scott?"

The elder brother didn't look up. "Yeah, John?"

"I had an... odd conversation with Alan on the way up to Five yesterday."

Scott spared his brother a quick, eyebrows-raised glance. "Define 'odd'."

John pursed his lips, thinking about the best way to follow his instructions. "Well... we were talking about women...Nikki and Kat in particular..."

"Kat?" Now Scott gave John a longer look, and a thoughtful frown. "What does Kat have anything to do with anything?" He glanced back down at the table, and crouched to peer over the edge. "I thought she was long gone."

"She was." John took another swig, then added, "She is. It's just that she was at Lady P's party and we met her there. Me and Gords and Alan and Nikki. She was there with her fiancé."

"Fiancé, huh?" Scott got to his feet to try another spot. "Bet you felt relieved about that."

"Psht!" John half-snorted, half-hissed, annoyed. "If she's happy with the guy, and he can give her what she wants, more power to them." He picked up the beer again. "He wanted me to talk about Kat, but I said I would only if he talked about Nikki first."



"What did he have to say about Nikki?" Scott had made a decision. "Two ball in the corner pocket."

John stood by, quietly draining his beer while Scott took his shot. The white ball hit the blue solid square on, but not at the angle Scott had hoped for. It bounced off the edge of the pocket and rolled down the table's shorter edge.

"Damn." Scott made a motion with one hand. "Your turn."

John smiled, and took up his cue. He paced around the table, looking for his next victim.

Scott drank his beer and watched his blond brother duck down to assess the shots open to him, shake his head, then heave a heavy sigh.

"It's a long shot, but... twelve ball in the side pocket."

Scott said nothing as John positioned his cue, sliding through his long fingers one or two times for good measure. A sharp rap and the white ball slammed into the bumper, careening off the side, hitting the two ball with some force. The two ball, thus impelled, bumped sharply into the twelve ball at such an angle that the stationary ball all but jumped up and into the indicated pocket. Scott let out a low whistle.

"Never play pool against an astronomer," John said, his tone and smile smug.

"I'll have to remember that," Scott said dryly. He watched John search for his next play, repeating, "So, what about Nikki?"

"Well, we discussed why Nikki was going to Auckland instead of back to England." The taller brother sighted along his pool cue, then shook his head. "And he admitted that their relationship had factored into Nikki's choice. A 'secondary consideration', he called it."

Scott shrugged. "So? Wouldn't you want your girlfriend close to home?"

"Yeah, I suppose I would," John admitted. He straightened from his crouch, and leaned across the table, the cue supported firmly by his fingers. "Two ball in the corner pocket."

The cue ball was tapped precisely, driven at a smart clip along the green. It struck the blue ball on one edge, pushing that sphere toward the corner where it teetered, hovering on the pocket's brink.

"C'mon, c'mon, go in!" John muttered. The ball seemed to contemplate its position for another fraction of a second, then dropped obligingly into the abyss. "Whew!"

As John took another turn around the table, Scott went over to the small wet bar and pulled a fresh beer from the fridge. "You haven't finished defining 'odd' for me."

"Oh, right." The younger man leaned his cue against the table, and joined his brother.. "Another one for me, too, please?" He took a seat as Scott handed him another bottle, and leaned his elbows on the bar's surface. "So, we talked about Nikki first, then turned to Kat. He asked me if I



was jealous, and I told him, quite truthfully, that I wasn't." He shrugged. "Then he just said, 'Good', and shut up."

"So?" Scott swigged his beer, letting out an audible, "Ahh!" when he'd finished swallowing. "What's so odd about that?"

"It wasn't so much what he said as how he said it, Scott." John turned his bottle around and around on the polished wood, watching the condensation make a fat, wet ring. "I dunno. I might be reading more into it than is there, but I think somehow that he's jealous. Whether he's still jealous of Brains for hooking up with Tin-Tin, or of just not having Nikki around all the time, or that I've been able to put Kat out of my life... I don't know. But it's the impression I got."

Scott was quiet for a minute, then blew out a frustrated breath. "I'm not saying your impression is wrong or anything, John. You're probably better than I am with reading between the lines of what someone says, and we all know the kid has a jealous streak a mile wide." He ran a hand through his dark hair. "Listen. I'll give him a call later this weekend, just to talk. Bring up Nikki in passing; see what he has to say to me." Smiling, he added, "It's a damned good thing Lena worked up that program and Anna reminded us that we could actually call whoever is on Five."

"Made a lot of difference to me on Thanksgiving," John admitted. He picked up his beer, and held it out, offering a toast. "Thanks for listening, Scott."

Scott touched his bottle to John's. "No problem." With a nod toward the table, he asked, "Ready to finish the game?"

"Sure! Why quit when I'm ahead?" John grinned, and slipped off the bar stool.

Scott came out from behind the bar and picked up his cue. "Right, John. I'll have you know I have not yet begun to fight."

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 02:08:02 GMT  
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Saturday, January 5th, 8:45 pm Tracy Island

"Hey, Gordon," Alan said, as he answered the incoming call from his brother. "Wasn't expecting to hear from you so soon."

"Yeah, well, I figured I'd see how you were settling in there."

"About the same as always," the younger Tracy replied.

"Hear from Nikki yet?"



"No. I'm sure she'll write or call soon though. I can imagine she's quite busy with a lot of things right now. How did your day go?"

"I've had better days," Gordon replied, then proceeded to tell his younger brother about the failed joke. As he expected, Alan got quite a laugh out of it.

"Things sure stay interesting down there," Alan commented, after he had stopped laughing. "Wonder how our new arrivals are going to fit in. The Crenshaws arrive tomorrow, don't they?"

"Yeah," Gordon replied. "Their flight lands in Christchurch at noon tomorrow. Dad's sending me to go pick them up."

"You going alone?"

"Yeah. Why?"

"Well, after what I saw when we picked Vince up for his interview, I thought Dad might send someone else along with you," Alan told his brother, keeping his voice light. "Kind of as a buffer."

"There's no need for a buffer! Vince and I are cool, now."

It was something that he was grateful about, too. Working with someone was much easier when you got along with them. While he and Vince hadn't gotten off to the best of starts, Gordon was glad that had changed.

\*\*\*Flashback\*\*\*

"Nice little sub you got here," Vince commented, as he came out of Thunderbird 4.

"Yeah, I'm pretty proud of her," Gordon replied, grinning. He had spent the last half hour showing Vince around some of the underground facilities. "She might be small, but she's a stout little vessel. There's something else I want to show you," Gordon said, as he started walking away from Thunderbird 4.

Vince followed him. They hadn't gone that far when the former SEAL decided to broach a topic he had wanted to bring up all morning.

"I think I owe you an apology. I haven't exactly been the most gracious of guests these last couple of days."

"It's okay," Gordon answered. "I'm sure I didn't make the best of impressions on you in Hawaii. Still, I've got a certain public persona to uphold, if you know what I mean."

"Yeah, I'm sure it can't be easy dealing with the media everywhere you go. Still, the rescue yesterday and just spending time with you and your family, makes me see I misjudged you. Guess what I'm trying to say is that, if I do decide to take this position, then it'll be an honor to work with you."



"Thanks. That means a lot to me," Gordon replied.

They were quiet as the two men made their way to where the new hydrofoil was under construction. "Remember I asked you how you felt about testing out a hydrofoil in the interview?" Gordon asked as he approached the next addition to the Thunderbird fleet. Beside him, Vince nodded in reply. "Well, this is why. She's taking a little longer to complete than anticipated but hopefully nothing else will get in the way."

"Definitely wouldn't mind test driving her," Vince commented as he walked slowly around the partially completed hydrofoil.

\*\*\* End Flashback \*\*\*

"Actually looking forward to telling him a certain project has been completed," Gordon said.

"That's right. The test run is set for Monday afternoon, right?" Alan asked. Gordon answered an affirmative. "You be careful," he said, trying not to sound overly concerned.

"I will, Alan," Gordon replied. Not wanting to go into the same lengthy discussion he had already had with his father, stepmother, and Scott on the subject, he decided put an end to the conversation. "I should probably make sure I get a good night's rest, with the flight tomorrow. I'll talk to you later."

"Okay. Goodnight, Gordon."

With that, Gordon ended the call. Instead of heading to bed though, he headed for the sliding door leading onto the balcony.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 02:10:14 GMT  
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Sunday, January 6th, around noon, Christchurch, NZ

As the last of the other passengers left the first-class section of the plane, Vince stood up and stepped out into the aisle. Aaron, who was sitting by the window, maneuvered past a sleeping Lea to join him in the aisle. The two of them retrieved their onboard baggage from the overhead compartment while they waited for the flight attendant to bring Lana's chair to them.

"Should I wake her up?" Aaron asked, indicating his sister as he put both his and her duffel bags over one shoulder.

Vince shook his head. "Let her sleep. I'll get her once we get your mother settled."

The five year old had not taken well to her first plane trip in over three years, and had spent the



first half of the trip crying. Vince was sure he wasn't the only one who had been grateful when the girl had fallen asleep.

The flight attendant showed up with the wheelchair that had been stored back in Oahu. She placed it in the aisle next to Lana's seat.

"Anything else I can do to assist you?" the flight attendant asked.

"No, we're fine thank-you," Vince replied.

After Lana had transferred from her seat in the middle row to the wheelchair, she took the carry-on she and Vince had brought onboard. Vince unbuckled his sleeping daughter and picked her up. Lea stirred slightly, but stayed asleep, her head resting on her father's shoulder. Vince led the way down the aisle to the exit.

The Crenshaw family made their way into the airport. There were still a few passengers hanging around the gate area, talking amongst one another and trying to figure out which direction to head. It didn't take Vince long to spot Gordon Tracy though. Spotting Vince and Lana, Gordon headed in their direction.

"Welcome back," Gordon said, with a smile. He shook hands with Vince as he continued. "Hope your flight here was okay."

"Except for a screaming five year old, it was fine, thank-you," Lana replied, pointing a finger at her still sleeping daughter.

"Here let me take one of those for you," Gordon said, reaching out for one of the two bags, Aaron was carrying. Aaron gratefully handed Lea's bag over to him. "Are you hungry? I know a restaurant here that has good food. We can grab something to eat while they're transferring the rest of your luggage."

Vince glanced at Lana, who nodded. "Lunch sounds like a good idea. Lead the way."

As Gordon led them toward the restaurant he addressed his new swimming student. "Hope you're a morning person, Aaron. The early mornings are usually the best time to avoid the others using the pool, though there are a few on the island that seem to enjoy an early morning swim from time to time."

"Whatever time you think is best, sir."

"Well for starters, let's drop the sir," Gordon said, with a grin. "You make me feel old. You can call me Gordon. I figured we can start Tuesday morning. Give you a chance to settle in. How's six o'clock sound?"

"That's fine, s . . . Gordon," Aaron replied, catching himself. I still can't believe that Gordon Tracy is going to be my coach! Guess it will sink in Tuesday.

The group reached the restaurant and were shown to a table. Vince finally woke up Lea. Never



one to take to strangers quickly, she eyed Gordon warily as Vince settled her in the chair between Lana and himself. It wasn't long before Gordon had her laughing.

"I've never seen her warm up to someone so quickly," Lana commented, as she glanced through the menu.

"What can I say? I have a way with kids," Gordon replied.

The waitress appeared and took their drink orders. As she left to get their drinks, the group opened their menus and began to look over the selections.

The Crenshaws Move to Tracy Island part 1

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 02:15:11 GMT

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Tracy Island

As he came off the jet, Vince noticed that both Jeff and Scott had made their way down to the landing strip to greet them. With Lana by his side, he walked over to where they were standing. With Lea piggyback, Aaron followed his father.

"Welcome back," Jeff said as the Crenshaws approached him. He shook hands with Vince. "It's good to finally have you on board. I'm sure Gordon's already told you about Thunderbird Eight's completion." Jeff knew his copper-haired son was excited about the hydrofoil being ready for a test run.

"I'm excited to be here, sir," Vince replied. "Gordon told me about the hydrofoil and the test run during our flight here."

"Vince said he'd like to come out on the test run with me," Gordon told his father as he joined the group, carrying a couple of the Crenshaws' bags.

"Hope he didn't twist your arm. You can have a few days to settle in, if you want," Jeff told his newest recruit.

"No arm twisting necessary. Been looking forward to seeing how that hydrofoil runs since I saw her as a work in progress last month."

"That's fine then. The test run is scheduled for two o'clock tomorrow afternoon," Jeff informed him. He then handed him two boxes he was holding as Gordon and Scott headed to the plane to begin unloading. "Here are the communicators for you and Lana. We use them for a lot of our



communication with each other here on the island. I had Brains modify Lana's to also have an emergency alert in it, as you had discussed with Dianne while you were out here. Gordon or Scott can show you how to work them when they've finished helping take the luggage up."

"Thank-you, Mr. Tracy. We really appreciate it," Vince said, as he handed both boxes to Lana for now.

"Safety is our top priority in everything we do. The renovations to the apartment are complete as well as an updated fire escape on the Cliff House. We put all of the things that were shipped here in the two bedroom apartment, along with the paint you had ordered. If you need help moving anything let someone know and we'll give you a hand," Jeff told him. He paused briefly as Vince acknowledged the information he was giving. "I'll send you an email to set up a meeting to get the usual job formalities out of the way, and any other information you're going to need. Any questions?"

Vince looked at his wife, who shook her head and then answered the question. "Not right now, Mr. Tracy. I think we're all just looking forward to getting settled in."

"Well, I'll let you get to it. Feel free to contact my wife, one of the older boys, or myself if you think of anything."

Once all the luggage the Crenshaws had brought on the plane with them was loaded on a cart, Gordon led the way to the Cliff House. It wasn't long before the group was on the Cliff House patio. Gordon took the newest residents of Tracy Island up to their floor, while Scott waited on the ground floor with the luggage. The eldest Tracy would bring the belongings up afterwards.

When Scott finally joined the group with the luggage, Gordon was already going over the communicators with Lana and Vince. Scott could faintly hear the sounds of the kid's voices coming from one of the bedrooms.

Probably won't be long before they'll want to start exploring the island, too, Scott thought as he walked over to stand beside Gordon.

The Crenshaws move to Tracy Island part 2

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 02:15:53 GMT

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Walking into the living room of his apartment from the balcony, Aaron made his way over to the entertainment center. He placed the box of video games he was carrying on the floor in front of it, next to his tv.



This is so cool that I have my own apartment, Aaron thought as he looked around the place once again. Too bad I can't tell my friends back home.

"Here's some linen for you to keep over here," Vince said, walking into the apartment with another box. He went into the bathroom and set the box on the floor, then rejoined his son in the living room. "Before we start bringing over the pieces of your desk, where are you putting it?"

"Over there," Aaron said, pointing to the area near one of the doors leading to the balcony. He had contemplated putting it in the bedroom but had decided against it. He wasn't going to have to resort to hiding in his room when he wanted to escape his family here.

"Let's start bringing it over then."

Father and son headed back over to the two bedroom apartment that the rest of the family would be staying in. The apartment was still crowded with boxes and crates. The luggage that had been brought was all in the appropriate rooms. Lana was in the kitchen area trying to put that in order. For now Lea was quietly playing with her blocks along the far wall, where Lana could keep an eye on her daughter while working.

All the desks had been packed together. Scott and Gordon had helped Vince separate the four of them while Aaron had started moving some of his other stuff over to the other apartment. The two of them had then offered to put together the bed Vince and Lana had brought with them. The two beds the apartment had originally been furnished with had been removed and stored before the new occupants arrival.

Vince and Aaron headed to the pile with the pieces of Aaron's desk, and picked up the top piece.

"There are going to be some ground rules, while you're living here," Vince told his son as the two of them took the piece of furniture over to the other apartment. "First of all, having your own apartment is a privilege. You abuse it, and other arrangements can and will be made. That means you'll be expected to keep it tidy. I will be making inspections," Vince said as they walked back into the building. "Your Mom and I both reserve the right to make unannounced visits; we'll knock before entering the bedroom just like at home."

They placed the piece of wood on the floor and headed back for the next piece.

"Understood," Aaron replied.

"You're welcome to join us for meals at any time or just to visit. You will be required to at least join us for dinner."

"Bet that was Mom's stipulation," Aaron commented as they picked up another of the big pieces.

"I heard that," Lana called back from the kitchen. "And yes, it was."

"Next, you are expected to tell someone when you'll be going somewhere on the island so we know where you are," Vince told his son as they started their second trip. "Under no circumstances do I want you swimming or surfing in the ocean without another adult with you."



"That's not fair! I didn't have to have an adult with me at home!"

"But, you were with your friends back in Hawaii," Vince countered calmly. He had been expecting a protest on this stipulation. "If something happened, one of them would be able to help you or get help, not to mention the lifeguards on the beach. You don't have the safety net here. I'm serious about this, Aaron. Do not go in the ocean by yourself. Gordon surfs as do his brothers. I'm sure they won't mind you tagging along and I can always come down with you in the evenings and bring Lea down to the beach."

"Yes ,sir," the teen said, seeing that arguing with his father wasn't going to get him anywhere.

As they finished their task, Vince went over a few more rules with his son.

The Crenshaws move to Tracy Island part 3

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 02:18:10 GMT

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Lea was seated Indian-style in the middle of the apartment's living area. Her cries of "It's not fair" filled the air. Aaron looked from his crying sister to his father, looking for guidance. He had not expected that his simple goodnight to his sister after dinner would set off this tantrum.

Vince mouthed the word "Go" to his son, and nodded toward the door. Aaron did so, and then slipped out the nearest door onto the balcony. Ignoring his daughter's current tantrum, Vince turned to his wife. "Do you need help cleaning up?"

"No, I can manage."

The family had just finished eating dinner. Cassie had stopped by during the afternoon and dropped off a tuna casserole, which was greatly appreciated by Lana. Though the apartment had been stocked with some simple foodstuffs from a list she had provided, trying to get their first meal together after the excitement of the day wasn't exactly high on Lana's list of things she wanted to do. Nor did she really feel like making the trip up to the villa to join the Tracys for dinner on their first night here. The casserole had provided the perfect solution.

Vince nodded. While Lana set herself to the task of cleaning up the dinner dishes and storing the leftovers, Vince looked around the apartment. Some order had been restored to the living quarters but there was still a lot to accomplish. He tried to figure out what he should try to accomplish first. The corner of Lea's favorite blanket that she still slept with, reminded Vince of one task that needed to be completed tonight - putting together his daughter's bed.

Still tuning out Lea's tantrum, he walked over to the entertainment system and picked up the



manila envelope which held all the instruction manuals. Taking them out, he started going through them, looking for the one to the canopy bed.

By the time Vince had located the set of instructions that he needed, Lea's tantrum had just about subsided. The little girl was quiet other than an occasional snuffle. Folding the instructions in half, he stuffed it in his pocket.

"Hey, Poppet, why don't you play with your blocks?" Vince said to his daughter, retrieving the container of blocks and heading over to where she was sitting.

Vince spent a few minutes with his daughter, helping her get started on her creation and then headed into the bedroom to begin work on the bed. He had put together the frame when he heard a knock on the door.

"I'll get it, honey," he called out to his wife, wanting a break from his project.

Walking out of the room, he spotted a dark hair man and a little boy standing outside the glass door of the living room. He was sure he had met the man before but couldn't place him. I need to get curtains up over the French doors soon, he thought as he opened the door. "Hello."

"Hi. I'm Dom. I live in the apartment at the other end of the building," the Irishman told him. "This is my son, Josh."

"Hello, Josh," Vince said, smiling down at the small boy.

"Hi!"

"Just thought I'd stop by and see if you needed any help getting settled in," Dom offered.

"Well, I'm attempting to put my daughter's bed together. An extra pair of hands would be welcomed, especially as there is a canopy."

"I'm your guy," Dom replied.

Vince stepped aside to let his guests to enter. Before anyone else had a chance to see anything, Josh spotted Lea and her blocks. Hurrying over to her, the little boy knocked over the castle she had been working on with a sound of glee. Vince closed his eyes, expecting another tantrum from his daughter.

"Daddy!" Lea called out, but didn't start crying for which Vince was grateful.

"Joshua! That was bold," Dom scolded, walking over to the two kids. "Now tell her you're sorry," he instructed his son.

Josh looked from the pile of blocks to his father. He then looked at Lea. "Sorry."

Lea smiled again, happy with the apology. "Want to help me rebuild it?" Lea asked holding out a block to Josh.



Josh looked from the block to his father. "Go ahead," Dom told his son. Josh smiled and took the block from Lea.

"Put it here," Lea instructed, pointing to a spot on top of some of the blocks that hadn't been knocked over.

"Wouldn't it be nice if all problems were solved that easily," Lana commented, having stopped her work in the kitchen.

After Dom and Lana exchanged greetings and making sure the two kids were happily playing, Vince led Dom into the bedroom and the two men got to work on finishing the bed.

The Crenshaws move to the island . . . the end

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 02:19:39 GMT  
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Monday, January 7th, shortly after lunch . . .

Jeff carefully throttled the speedboat as he maneuvered it into place. He followed Cassie's gaze to settle on the shining form of Thunderbird Eight bobbing on the water. The knowledge that his son was inside the hydrofoil craft made his heart give the slightest hitch. I don't think I'll ever fully come to terms with Gordon's accident, he thought, careful not to push the thoughts aside as he had once done. He allowed the feeling to wash over him, and it ebbed as though the salty waves of the Pacific swept up and took it away.

"Speedboat One and Thunderbird Five from Thunderbird Eight," Gordon's voice came over the comm. system.

"Receiving you strength five, Thunderbird Eight," Cassie said.

"Same here, Thunderbird Eight," Alan's voice sounded.

"We're ready to commence testing," Gordon said.

"FAB, Thunderbird Eight," Jeff said, nodding to Cassie. "Standing by."

"Area is clear of all air and sea craft. You're clear to begin test," Alan said.

"FAB," said Gordon.



Inside the hydrofoil, Gordon gave Vince a wink.

"Ready?"

"As I'll ever be," Vince replied from his seat beside Gordon.

"Here we go," Gordon commented, as he pushed the throttle forward slowly. The craft came to life, picking up speed.

Onboard the speedboat, Scott watched as the latest addition to the Thunderbird fleet came to life. The big brother in him would have preferred to be the one testing the new hydrofoil. The rational part in him told him that it wasn't his place. Thunderbird Eight, like Four, was Gordon's craft, not his. Gordon never would have stood for someone else testing her.

I can't protect them from everything, Scott reminded himself.

"Speedboat One, we are at one quarter speed and running smoothly," came Vince's voice over the radio. The excitement in his voice was obvious.

"Copy that," Jeff replied.

At that speed, the vessel would not yet be foilborne. The speed needed for the hydrofoils to lift it out of the water would soon be reached though.

"Increasing speed," Gordon informed them.

"Keep in mind this is a field test. No hot-dogging out there," Jeff reminded his son.

"FAB," came Gordon's response.

Thunderbird Eight quickly accelerated, and inside the craft Gordon gave Vince a grin. "Let's do this thing," he said.

Vince grinned back, and the two men configured the controls for the lift. The upwards force created by the foil began to lift the craft out of the water. They felt the turbulence drag decrease substantially and Gordon couldn't help but give a cheer.

"We are foilborne!"

His face twitched briefly as memories sparked in his mind. The crash, the pain, the darkness; but also the recovery. He curled his lips back into a grin.

"Thunderbird Eight, status update," Jeff's voice called.

"Speedboat One, we're recording surface speed of 30 knots. Permission to increase speed?"

There was a short pause.



"Permission granted. Increase speed to approximately 40 knots, but no more."

"FAB. Increasing speed now," said Gordon. He turned to Vince. "Would you like to do the honours?"

"All right!" Vince said. "Throttling up now."

Thunderbird Eight shot across the surface of the water as the speed increased, and the two pilots grinned at each other.

"40 knots," Vince said. "And she's purring like a kitten." Forgot what a rush it is being behind the wheel of a hydrofoil

"Thunderbird Eight from Speedboat One. I think we can call this a successful test run," Jeff informed them. "Why don't you throttle down and head back to dock?"

"FAB," Gordon replied, unable to keep the disappointment out of his voice. Now that he was out in the hydrofoil, he didn't want to end the run but he knew better than to argue with his father.

Beside him, Vince was just as disappointed at seeing the test run come to an end. However, he knew his boss was right to call an end to it. The first time out was never the time to push a new vehicle to its limits.

Slowing Thunderbird Eight down, Gordon steered her in a smooth arc to head back to Tracy Island.

TB8 Test Run by ArtisticRainey and icarus1982[/color]

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 02:22:09 GMT

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The quiet of the apartment was getting to her, so Cassie stepped out onto her balcony. The light was fading as she looked out over the scene before her. It had been an exhausting day, what with the TB8 test run and her other responsibilities. She had been looking forward to coming back to her apartment, showering, and just relaxing the rest of the evening. The first two had worked fine. The relaxing bit just didn't seem to be coming.

Turning away from the balcony, her eyes fell on Luke's dark apartment. I really miss having him around, but at least his recovery is going well, Cassie thought.

Without really thinking about where she was going, she started walking. Before long she found herself outside Dom's apartment. Seeing lights within, she knocked. After a short pause, Dominic opened the door and grinned at her.

"Hey, Cass!" he said. "What's up?"



In the background she could hear the distinctive sounds of a children's program on the televiewer and Joshua's giggling.

"I was out for a walk and decided to drop by," she said.

"Well, come on in!" Dominic said as he stepped aside. "I'll stick the kettle on."

Cassie smiled and walked into the apartment. The first thing Dom offered was always a cup of tea. She slipped down onto the couch and leaned back into the thick cushions. Dominic padded over to the kitchenette.

"How are you today?" she asked, glancing over her shoulder.

Dom flicked the kettle on.

"I'm doin' grand, thanks," he said. "I'm workin' a lot more in the infirmary cuz Nikki's gone."

The shadow that passed over Dominic face could not be missed, and Cassie frowned.

"You miss her, don't you?" she asked.

Dominic leaned his weight on the counter and sighed.

"Aye. She was one of m' best friends here. We joined together right at the start. God, that was nearly a year ago. I'm gonna miss her."

"She'll come back when she's finished," Cassie said.

Dominic nodded, but then the brightness came back to his face, and Cassie knew that meant that he was done talking about it.

"Aye, and when she does I'll be at the bottom of the peckin' order!"

Cassie chuckled and shook her head. The kettle clicked off and Dominic set about making the tea. Joshua was drawn away from the televiewer by the sound of her laughter and he beamed at her.

"Auntie Cass!" Joshua said. He bounded over and launched himself onto the couch to envelop her in a hug. Cassie hugged the little boy back. The melancholy mood she was in when she had headed over here had quickly disappeared.

"Tea is ready."

With Joshua in her arms, Cassie got to her feet. She crossed over to the table and sat down, as Dom placed a cup of tea in front of her. Josh settled in her lap as Dom handed his son a cup of juice and then sat down himself.

The two of them continued to chat over their cups of tea; Josh added childish interjections here



and there. After finishing his juice though, he got bored with the adult conversation and returned to the televiewer.

After chatting about island life for awhile, Cassie changed the conversation to things a little further away. "Have you heard from your father recently?" Cassie inquired.

Dominic nodded and drained his cup. He stood and walked to the kitchen sink.

"Yes, I got an email from him yesterday. The divorce is proceeding swiftly. Elizabeth isn't getting half as much as she wanted."

"That's your stepmother, right?" Cassie asked.

"I'd never call her as much, but technically yes." Dom rinsed out his tea cup and walked to the sofa. He sat down, crossing his legs. "It's causing huge problems for the whole family. Tom -- that's my youngest half-brother, the journalist -- isn't speaking to my father or myself any more. Neither are Paisley and Victoria -- though they never spoke to me. Very much so mummy's girls -- when Elizabeth decided she didn't like me, they did too. Arthur never treated me badly, though. Art's a great guy. He's the oldest of Dad and Elizabeth's kids. He always went out of his way to welcome me -- even when I was getting on like an arse."

Cassie couldn't help but chuckle at the comment.

"How's your dad's health?"

"It's improving, thankfully," Dominic said.

The little tell on his face told Cassie that the Irishman was surprised at the words coming out of his mouth. Their relationship really is on the mend, she thought. Dominic continued.

"He's lost a whopping sixty pounds and he's quit smoking. Knocked the drink on the head, too, for the most part. He says that he has too much to live for now." Dominic gulped. "Wants to see his grandson graduate from college. He's already started up a trust fund for Joshua's education." Dom shook his head and couldn't help but smile as Joshua squealed at the TV. "But anyway, enough of me blabbering on. How are you?"

"All things considered, pretty well," Cassie said, her words not sounding as convincing to herself as she would have liked. A glance at Dom told her that he wasn't convinced either. She sighed. "I really should be grateful. My grandmother is doing well. Mom and Dad are talking about finding their own place near my grandparents. My brothers are doing well and actually getting along better amongst themselves. I've got a roof over my head, a good job, and some great new friends. I should be happy, right?"

The sounds of the televiewer were momentarily the only ones in the apartment. Dom hesitated saying anything, waiting to see if his friend would continue. "But," he prompted when she didn't after a few moments.

Cassie got to her feet. She walked slowly over to the sofa. She had never actually talked to Dom



much about her ex-husband but she really did need to talk to someone about her current situation with him. She pondered if she should bring the situation up or let it go, as she sat down on the opposite end of the couch from him. "Feel free to tell me to mind my own business, but were you and Josh's mother ever married?"

"For about six months. We got married for the wrong reasons and when she realized that, she split. I think I cared more about her than she ever did for me though," Dom replied. He thought he had an idea of where Cassie was going with the conversation. "This have anything to do with your ex-husband?"

He saw her nod slightly as she stared at the televiewer. Dom had the distinct impression that she wasn't really seeing what was on the screen though.

"I've been talking to Alex via email for awhile now. He says he's been going to therapy and that he's changed. I got an email from him on New Year's Eve asking me to give 'us' another try."

"An email? I think at least a phone call would have been more appropriate for that."

"Yeah, well, I never actually gave him my new number," Cassie admitted with a sheepish smile. Dom gave a barely audible 'ah' from his spot on the sofa. "I haven't even responded to the email yet because I can't figure out what to say. I thought that getting away from the problems we had and putting all of that behind me would be easy. I'm finding out that thirteen years isn't so easy to walk away from."

Dom let out a low whistle. That was a long relationship. "I can only imagine how hard it would be to walk away from that. The question I think you really need to answer for yourself, is if you can be happy with him again."

Cassie nodded and looked toward him. "I think I could be, if I knew he had really changed. If he was really willing to let me live my life and not try controlling me. As much as I loved my son, I'm not the type of person who could be stay-at-home mom. He never quite understood that. He claims he won't bother me about not working if I come back. I just wish I knew how I could be sure."

"He's assuming you'll come back to New York City then?"

Cassie nodded.

"Well, there's your answer then," Dom said, receiving him a perplexed look from his guest. "If he really cares about you and wants the two of you to be together again, then he'd be willing to move for you. Tell him your position with Tracy Industries means a lot to you and ask if he would be willing to consider moving to 'Wichita' with you instead. If he says yes, then you go from there; if he says no, then he's not really backing up his claims that he's changed."

Cassie pondered Dom's suggestion. He might be onto something there. Why should it be assumed that I should move back to the city if we get back together?

"Look, I'm no expert on relationships," Dom said, shrugging his shoulders. "Mags... -- oh, that's my



ex-wife -- well, she only agreed to marry me because she was terrified of her parents' reactions to her having a baby out of wedlock. We rushed into the marriage and it all fell apart. Other than that, I've never actually had a 'relationship', so don't take my words a gospel. But," he said, placing his hands on his knees, "I figure that if the guy really cares, he'll drop everything to make things work and to stay with you."

A pained look crossed his face. A lightbulb clicked on in Cassie's head.

"Like you did with Josh's mom."

Dom nodded slowly.

"Yeah. But, if he's not willing to do that and expects you to bend to his will, then he hasn't changed. And then you'll definitely know where you stand."

"Yeah... "

The two sat in contemplative silence for a few moments, before the quiet was destroyed by a certain small blond-haired terror launching himself onto the couch between them with a giggle.

Cassie visits Dom: ArtisticRainey and starrynebula

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 02:24:31 GMT  
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Bozeman, Montana, 3:30 pm (11:30 am January 9th Tracy Island)...

Luke stared morosely into the flames crackling in the fireplace. He sat in his parent's living room, his feet propped up on a hassock, his head resting on one hand. Rommel was sprawled on a rug in front of the fireplace, fast asleep. Outside, snow fell heavily, quickly piling up on the windowsill.

The dog's ears twitched and he suddenly sat up. A moment later, the door opened and Luke's father called out: "Anybody home?"

Luke didn't reply, but Rom got to his feet and started towards the door. He paused to look back at his master. Luke sighed and nodded and the dog trotted off. He came back in a few minutes later, followed by Richard.

"How are you feeling today, son?" his father asked.

Luke didn't look up. "Fine."

Richard raised an eyebrow. "Just fine?"



Before he could reply, Melisa walked into the room and gave her husband a kiss. "You're home early. How are the roads?"

"Getting bad. They're predicting over three feet which is why I closed the store." Richard settled himself down on the couch. He glanced over at Luke, then raised an eyebrow at his wife.

She shook her head. "I'll go get you some coffee. Luke, honey, would you like some?"

"No thanks."

Melisa shot one last look at her husband then left, Rommel following behind her.

Richard leaned forward, stretching his hands out towards the fire. "I'll just warm up a bit, then go take care of the stock. This keeps up, we'll be snowed in for a couple of days."

"Great."

"How are you really feeling?"

"Just peachy. I love lying around the house doing nothing all day."

"Son, give it time. You're still healing," Richard told him.

Luke finally looked up, his grey eyes blazing. "I'm tired of sitting around, Dad. I've been stuck inside for two months now. I have a job and a life that I want to get back to," he snapped as he got to his feet. "I can't even go out and shovel with you! Hell, I get winded walking to the barn and back! I tried feeding the horses today and could barely lift the bale to toss it in the stall!"

His father frowned. "You're not supposed to be lifting anything that heavy yet. Those ribs aren't completely healed, bone regeneration drugs or not. And I won't even mention the tissue damage."

"Don't start, Dad. I know what I'm capable of doing." He threw himself down in the chair again. "I'm sick of being useless."

"You're not useless." Richard held up a hand as Luke started to protest. "And before you start again you need to remember that this was no picnic for us either." His tone softened. "We almost lost you, son."

Luke sighed. "I know, Dad. And I'm sorry. I'm just so tired of being stuck inside doing nothing. You and Mom spent enough time at my bedside. Roger, and Eve too. I want to get out there, shovel snow, go skiing, just have my life back!"

"I know you do." Richard shook his head. "What about your friends? Irwin and Jessie, or even Elise, and the Irishman who came to visit? And that little firefighter girl, Cassie? When is the last time you talked to any of them? Why don't you give them a call, see if they can come by again."

Luke's mind wandered over to the news earlier that week. International Rescue had been called



out to aid during an earthquake in the Middle East. "I have a feeling they're all pretty busy at the moment," he replied.

"You don't know that. Give them a call. Now, I'd better get out there and start shoveling." His father stood and stretched. He started towards the door, then paused and looked back at his son. "Tell you what, let me move the heavy stuff, and you can drive the plow. There's no reason why you can't do that."

Luke's head snapped up, then his face fell. "Mom'll never let me out of the house. She keeps forgetting that I'm thirty-two."

"She'll get over it." He smiled. "C'mon, you aren't afraid, are you?"

"Of Mom? You bet I am." Luke smiled. "But if I tell her it was your idea..."

Richard chuckled. "Thanks, kid. Give me about an hour to take care of the animals, then bundle up. If we don't keep up with the snow, we'll be stuck here until June." He headed towards the hall. "While you're waiting, give those friends a call. I'm sure they'd love to hear from you."

Luke waited a few minutes, listening to his father talk to his mother, then head out to the barn. He grabbed his laptop off the coffee table and turned it on, quickly pulling up his email.

Dear Dom,

You're not going to believe the snow storm I'm stuck in the middle of. Tell Josh I'll have a bunch of new pictures to send him in the morning...

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 02:25:18 GMT

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Tuesday, January 8, 2069, 3:30 p.m. Tracy Island

Dianne was in the midst of updating the medical records on most of the Crenshaw family. Lana had brought her children to the infirmary for physical examinations so Dianne would have a baseline to work from. Vince, however, was conspicuous by his absence.

I hope Lana can get her husband to come see me voluntarily and I don't have to pull rank on him, Dianne thought as she worked on Lea's small file. Looks like this little one is ready for school. I wonder if Lana wants her to go to school on the mainland or to join our little satellite-schooled group. She'll have to make the decision quickly; New Zealand schools will be restarting after the summer break very soon.

A small box popped up in the corner of her screen, and she gave it a quick glance. The email address made her look again. She frowned, saved Lea's file, and went after the email. Why would our pharmacy supplier be emailing me? I don't have any current orders outstanding...



Opening the email, she scanned it quickly, and let out a girlish squeal. "Sally!"

Dear Dr. Tracy,

God, that sounds so formal. I'm using the company email system to send this because, as usual, I've lost your email address. Figures that I move all the way to New Zealand only to find that my old friend is a customer at my new job. How's that for serendipity?

Well, as you've probably guessed, I got tired of trying to decipher the handwriting of the local doctors in Chicago...not to mention the last three winters that had me dreaming of Greenville! There was nothing holding me to the Windy City; in fact, you could say that those winds had conspired to blow me away. So I went looking for something new and different, and happened on this job here in Christchurch, which is about as new and different as you can get! I've spent the past couple of months getting settled in and taking a course to update me on some of the brand names used here in Kiwi country.

Then I start my new job and lo! My good friend's name is listed in the company files as a client! I had already figured that you didn't really live in Kansas; you've always been pretty cagey about that and I respected it. But now I have you in my sights, girlfriend, and if we don't get together for a drink sometime soon, I'm gonna hire a plane and go looking for you!

So, if you've got a more personal email address, send it to me so we can keep in touch! I'm enclosing my own email address, physical address and phone number. Let's get together soon; I really miss talking to you!

Joke of the day:

Did you hear about the two blondes who froze to death at a drive-in movie?

They went to see "Closed for the Winter".

Tag! You're it!

Sally

Dianne laughed. "I can't believe it. Sally Addams. I never thought she'd leave the States! Wait until I tell Ma about this!" She opened up her email address book and typed in Sally's contact information. "I'll have to introduce her to Jeff. And the kids! She hasn't seen them for a couple of years now!" She shook her head, smiling.

She read over her friend's email once more, then reluctantly closed it and resumed her work with a sigh. "I'll call tonight and we can catch up. And next time Anna needs a lift home, I'm flying!"

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 02:28:54 GMT



Tuesday, January 8, 2069, after dinner, Tracy Island

After cleaning up from dinner, the Crenshaws decided to enjoy a quiet evening together. They were nowhere close to being settled in, but Vince and Lana didn't see the need to rush it. What with getting ready to move and the move itself, all of them had been busy the last few weeks. Vince figured they all deserved an evening to relax.

Vince was playing a game of war with his two kids. Though Lana had chosen not to join in on the card game, she had settled herself at the table with them. She was working on cross stitching a flowered pattern onto the quilt she had bought. She wasn't sure what she was going to do with it when she was finished but figured something would come up.

"So how did your day go?" Lana asked.

"Kind of slow," Vince asked as he flipped a two of spades over. The card was easily beat by both Aaron's four of clubs and Lea's eight of spades. "Mostly trying to get administrative things out of the way."

"Did you find time to schedule an appointment to see Dianne?"

"Not yet. Did Dr. Tracy say something to you?"

Lana and the kids went to the Villa that morning to have their physicals and make sure that all of their medical records were up-to-date.

"She just mentioned that you hadn't talked to her about setting up a time. Wanted me to remind you."

"I'll get in touch with her tomorrow morning," Vince said, as he gathered the three cards lying on the table and added them to his win pile. He glanced over at his wife to see her looking at him skeptically. "What? I will. Might as well get the unpleasant task over with."

"It's just a routine check-up. Of course the last time you actually went to one of those was when you were in the service," Lana commented, thinking of all the crazy excuses her husband had come up with every time she tried to schedule a check-up for him.

"Anyway, the physical is one of the last things, besides the training, that I need to take care of." Vince flipped another card over, losing the battle once again. "Now if I can come up with a code name . . ."

"How about Aquaman?" Aaron suggested with a grin as he gathered the three cards on the table.

"I don't think so."

"Daddy, what's a codename?"

"Well, it's sort of like a nickname. Like I always call you Poppet instead of Lea. When I'm out doing



my new job, my co-workers and I are going to be using nickname for each other instead our real names."

"Can I pick your nickname, Daddy?" Lea asked, looking up at her father expectantly. She flipped a card over to go with the two that Aaron and Vince had already placed on the table. Having turned over a queen, she gathered the nine and eight that were with it. "Please. You gave me a nickname."

"Okay, Poppet. What should my codename be?" Vince asked his daughter. I just hope I don't live to regret this, he thought, not at all sure what his five-year-old was going to come up with.

Lea flipped another card over. The ace of hearts came up. As Vince and Aaron flipped over their cards, Lea put her hand on her chin, looking thoughtful. Beside her, Lana smiled at the serious look on her daughter's face.

Lea gathered the three cards, her eyes falling on the ace which was on top.

"I know!" she exclaimed. "Your name can be Ace!"

Beside his sister, Aaron laughed. "Well, at least she didn't suggest Queen," he quipped.

"Or Joker," Lana added, smiling herself.

Aaron laughed again at his mother's suggestion.

"What's so funny?" Lea asked, looking confused and a little hurt. "Don't you like it?" she asked, looking up at her father.

"I think Ace is a great codename, Poppet," he said.

"Are you going to use it?" Lea asked, a smile coming to her face again.

"Yes, I will," Vince assured her. "How about we finish this game?"

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 02:32:42 GMT  
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Tuesday, January 8, 10:20 p.m., Tracy Island.

Scott, dressed in shorts and a t-shirt, plugged his earphone into his ear, and pulled out his phone's keypad. Ever since John had mentioned Alan's shutting down during their conversation, Scott had found the incident bothered him more and more. He was used to his youngest brother's moods...even now, it was hard to stop thinking of Alan as the youngest--his occasional sulkiness



and flashes of temper. He also knew that, like their father, Alan tended to keep his pain inside. So, with a sigh, Scott dialed his brother's satellite phone.

Three rings later, and a puzzled-sounding Alan answered. "Scott? Why are you calling so late? Is everything okay?"

Scott grimaced. Might have known the kid would think something's wrong. I barely call him at all, never mind after 10 p.m. "Everything's okay, Al. Everyone's fine."

"Oh." There was a pause on the other end. "Then why are you calling?"

"I'm taking advantage of the ability to call. It's about time I did, don't you think?" Scott stretched and settled back in his chair. "It hasn't been that long since this was set up, and you've been home most of the time in between."

Obviously, this hadn't occurred to Alan. "Ah, okay. So, what's up?"

Scott snorted. "The sky, the clouds, Dad's... no, Dad's blood pressure isn't up. Everything's cool down here. Thunderbird Eight had a shakedown cruise and our latest recruit and his family seem to be settling in okay. There's a party brewing for Lady P, and I think Dad wants to meet with his latest agent candidate then, too."

"A new agent?" Alan sounded intrigued. "I hadn't heard about this."

"Neither had I until the other day when he was giving Jenny some instructions about the guest room. With Lady P and Parker staying out in the Round House these days, the guest room doesn't get used so much. He wanted her to clean it up and make it ready for the party."

"Yeah, you're right." There was another pause. "So, did you ask him who it was?"

"Of course." Scott grinned, pleased with himself.

"And?"

"And what?"

"Who is it? Is it someone we know?"

Scott contemplated drawing the tension out, teasing his brother with the lack of information. He decided that Alan needed a bit of teasing.

"It's someone we all know. You'll never guess who."

"Ned Cook?"

Scott snorted a derisive laugh. "Like Dad would ask a member of the mass media to be an agent."

He swore he could hear Alan thinking. "Okay, then. How about..." The pause was long and



dramatic. "...the Duchess of Royston!"

This time Scott laughed out loud. "Not a bad idea! Then Virgil would have to take his turn dancing with her. But she gets soused... a lot. I don't think she could be counted on to keep a secret."

"I agree." Alan chuckled. "Okay. Here's one: Wilbur Dandridge."

"Hm." Scott was thoughtful. "He'd be a good one, I think, being in Chicago and all. Dad thinks pretty highly of him. But, nope. Not him."

"Okay, okay. I give up. Who is it?"

"You're not going to believe it." Scott grinned.

"Just tell me, Scott." Alan was beginning to sound peeved, and Scott didn't want him to be that way.

"Okay. The newest agent that Dad's looking at is... drum roll please... our dentist."

There was silence on the other end for a long, long moment. "Our... dentist? You mean, Dr. McCann?"

"Nope, not him. Our new dentist. Dr. Izarra Soto Fernandez."

"Huh." Alan sounded unsure. "I've never met her."

"I have," Scott said firmly. "I took the kids to her office for their yearly cleanings."

"So, was she impressive? She must have been for Dad to try and recruit her."

Scott paused while trying to think of what to say. "She came across as a competent enough dentist. She kept the Spud calm while she cleaned his teeth, and that's saying something. But she's..." He tried to think of a word to describe her. "... on the petite side."

"Petite."

"Yeah. Petite. As in as short as or shorter than Kat."

Alan's low whistle sounded in Scott's ear. "Wow. Wonder what made Dad recruit her as an agent."

"I don't know," Scott grumbled. He got up to pace around. "He didn't see fit to tell me. Just that Penny recommended her. So she'll be here at the party and Dad will talk to her about coming on board."

"Wish I could be a fly on the wall for that conversation!"

"Me, too!"



There was a long moment of quiet between them, and Scott decided to shift gears. "So, have you heard from Nikki lately?"

"I got an email the other day," Alan told him, his tone sounding blasé. "She's having a good time catching up with her old friends."

"That's good to hear," Scott replied. "Any idea on when she'll be back this way?"

"She's going to Auckland from London to look for an apartment, then will come back to the island to pack everything up."

"Yes, but when? Will you be here when she gets here?"

"I dunno. I guess so. She hasn't said." Alan paused, and when he spoke again, his voice was suspicious. "Why are you asking all this anyway? It's not like you've showed an interest before."

"Well, I am interested now," Scott drawled. "You and Nikki seemed to be hitting it off well, like Virge is with Elise. It's about time."

" 'Seemed'? We were... we are hitting it off well," Alan said, his tone sullen. "It's just..."

"Just what? That she's moving away and you won't be in each other's pockets all the time?" Scott's voice was just short of sarcastic. "I mean, that's what you're used to, isn't it? A girlfriend who is always there, always available. Just like what you had with Tin-Tin."

"Tin-Tin has nothing to do with this."

"She has everything to do with this. You pushed her away with that 'my life's too dangerous' crap, then when she went elsewhere, you didn't like it."

Alan made a noise as if to protest, but Scott wouldn't let him. "Oh, I heard about that, Alan. Why didn't you pull that 'my life is too dangerous' line with Nikki, huh? Why?"

"Because she would have called for the crap it was, that's why."

This brought Scott up short, and he sat down suddenly. Alan being truthful about himself? That's a new one on me!

"I'm going to miss her, Scott. And I'm afraid that the distance will..." Alan took a deep breath. "I don't want to lose her, Scott. That's all."

"You're not very far away, you know." Scott's voice was softer; he was trying to be encouraging.

"Yeah, I know that in my head. Trying to convince the rest of me is kinda hard right now. Maybe you're right. Maybe I am too used to having a girlfriend so close by that I can see her anytime."

"Have you talked to her about it?"



"Why do you think she's in Auckland... besides the fact that they start classes at a different time of year than schools in the Northern Hemisphere? It's not just because she's eager to get started. She could have gone to Australia or somewhere else, but she decided to stick close to... home. Close to me."

Scott smiled, and the smile sounded in his voice. "Then I'd say that the only thing standing in the way of your pursuing your relationship is you. You want this to succeed, right?"

"Of course I do."

"Then make it so. Visiting isn't the only way to keep a relationship going, y'know."

"Says the man with no girlfriend." Alan was back to being snarky and sullen. "Listen, it's late. I've got some diagnostics to run and I want to get some sleep. I'll talk to you later, Scott. Goodnight."

Stunned by Alan's quick dismissal, Scott barely had time to utter, "Goodnight" before the call terminated. He sat there shaking his head. His brother's last sentence rang in his ears. Brows narrowing in a scowl, he went in search of the gym where he intended to imagine that the heavy bag was his sarcastic younger brother.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 02:35:47 GMT

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Wednesday morning, January 9th, Tracy Island

Elise hummed to herself as she pulled her hair into a thick pony tail. She was giving the Tracy jets a good once over today. There had been making quite a few more flights then normal lately, and she and Scott wanted to make sure things were in perfect working order. She paused at the door, then turned and gave Henry a pat. The half-grown kitten purred and arched his back. "Be a good boy. I'll be home soon." She exited her apartment and after thinking a moment, headed towards the community mailbox.

Since Virgil had sent her that note, months ago, the others had followed suit, each sending notes and little gifts. They had even done a "Secret Santa" during the holidays. Elise smiled, fondly remembering Cassie's homemade brownies. She quickened her step.

Sure enough, there was a note in her box. She recognized Virgil's handwriting on the envelope and smiling to herself, opened it.

Dear Miss Collins,

I trust you enjoyed yourself at the recent New Year's Eve party. I must say you looked lovely.

I am writing today to invite you to another such gala. Our hostess from New Year's, Lady Penelope, has recently had a birthday. Due to circumstances, we were not able to celebrate at the



time and would like to give her a small party here on Tracy Island. It will be held at the Villa, on January the twelfth. I would be honored if you would consent to be my escort. I will be in touch with you shortly to finalize details.

Yours, Virgil Tracy

Elise giggled at Virgil's formal tone. She glanced at the other boxes and noticed that they too contained a similar envelope. Still smiling, she tucked the note into her pocket and boarded the monorail, already thinking of her reply.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 02:36:47 GMT  
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Wednesday, January 9, 2:20 p.m., Tracy Island

"Okay now, Alex. Hold the racket like this..."

Scott put a hand over his younger brother's, subtly shifting its position. Alex frowned; the grip didn't feel natural to him. He held the grip though, as Scott backed off.

"Now I'll lob the ball your way, and you hit it." Softly pitching the tennis ball towards his brother, he watched as the boy tapped it a little with the edge of his racket. Scott sighed.

They were on their first tennis lesson. It had taken a while to get around to this sport as Gordon had been the primary physical education coach, and tennis was not one of his favorite games. He tended to choose what he liked to do. Tin-Tin or Alan would have been better teachers, but Tin-Tin was wrapped up in bringing the new dicetyline cannon online, and Alan... Scott scowled, unaware of his facial expression as he went to fetch the ball. When he returned, Alex had a hurt look on his face.

"What did I do wrong?" the boy asked.

Scott suddenly realized his mistake and, taking a deep breath, smiled at his younger brother. "Nothing, Alex. Really. I was just thinking of something else, that's all. Let's try it again, okay? This time, you want to hit the ball with the sweet spot, not the edge." He heard a clatter to one side, and glanced that way. "You'd better be watching, Spud. You're next." Tyler reached over to grab his racket, then settled back down to watch, pouting.

This time Scott lobbed the ball a little higher and faster than before. Alex swung the racket and made contact in the proper place. The ball bounced just before reaching Scott.

"That was better, Alex!" Scott said. "Now, try to hit it harder."

He pitched the ball again, and this time, Alex's arm pulled back and he hit the ball just as



instructed. It headed back along its original trajectory too fast for an astonished Scott to move out of the way, and it smacked into him several inches south of the solar plexus. He let out a groan and dropped to his knees.

"Scott!" Cherie dropped her racket and ran to her older brother. "Are you all right?"

Alex joined her, his face full of apprehension. "I'm sorry, Scott! I didn't mean to! I'm so sorry!"

Tyler, on the other hand, sat on the sidelines and laughed, hugging himself with his skinny arms.

"I... I'm okay," Scott ground out, grimacing. He staggered to his feet, leaning on Cherie to stand upright. "It's okay, Alex. I know it was an accident." He groaned again. "Teaches me to look at this as an actual athletic event, and take the usual precautions." He shot a glare at the still giggling Tyler. "We'll come back to this a little later today, I think, and when we do, Tyler's first."

"We can't come back this afternoon," Cherie explained. "Miss Cassie invited me to a tea ceremony; it's at five."

Scott sighed. "All right. Tomorrow then." He waved his students away. "Go do something active!"

"Last one in the pool is a rotten egg!" Tyler exclaimed. He dropped his racket and turned to run.

"Spud!" Scott's shout stopped him in his tracks. "You'll be the last one because you get to pick up all the balls and rackets and put them away properly."

"Aww, Scott!" the boy whined.

Scott grinned, and motioned to the equipment. "Maybe next time you'll think twice before you laugh at the teacher!"

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 02:37:54 GMT

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Wednesday, January 9th, just before 5 pm

Cassie deftly swept her hair up, and with a few hair pins had it neatly in place. Checking her appearance in the mirror one last time, she smoothed her kimono, and then headed for the kitchen. The plan was to do a simple tea ceremony tonight. Instead of the full-course meal and tea ceremony she had done back in November, this evening she was planning on serving miso soup followed by the tea ceremony.

Walking by the coffee table, Cassie picked up the vase that held the flower arrangement she had made for the ceremony. In keeping with tradition the arrangement consisted of one Mount Cook Lily and several sprigs of Toetoe. As she set the vase in the center of the kitchen table, she



checked the timer on the stove. There was still about a minute left on it. The shiitake mushrooms were just about done soaking and then she could finish preparing the soup. While she waited she retrieved four of her tea cups from the cupboard, sitting them on the counter before going back to her soup preparations.

The soup was just about done when the door chime sounded. That's probably Cherie, Cassie thought, leaving the stove and heading for the door. The girl had enjoyed herself at the first Tea Ceremony, though she admitted not caring much for the green tea that was served, so Cassie had invited her again. This time though, Cherie was to be the Shokyaku, or guest of honor.

"Hi, Cherie," Cassie greeted her, pairing the greeting with a traditional bow.

"Hi, Ms. Cassie," Cherie replied, also bowing to her hostess. Cherie then stepped into the apartment as Cassie motioned for her to do so. The girl immediately slipped off her shoes, remembering the etiquette from the previous event she had attended. Al hope I remember what I'm suppose to do."

"You'll do fine. We can run through the sequence again if you'd like, though. We should have enough time before John and Anna arrive."

As Cassie finished preparations, the two of them went through the ceremony and what was expected of Cherie at each step. Everything was in order when the door chime rang. Anna was greeted in the same fashion as Cherie had been. It wasn't long before John had joined them.

Cassie had chosen to forgo the tradition of sitting on the floor around a low table on this occasion. Instead, she seated her guests around the kitchen table, Cherie directly to her right. She served the miso soup. Following the soup, the tea ceremony itself began. As she had done back in November, Cassie took a few moments to give a little background on the ceremony and explain to John and Anna the basic sequence of the ceremony.

During her speech, Cassie had retrieved a bowl from the counter. She now placed the bowl between her seat and Cherie. The girl took a sweet from the bowl and placed it on the kaishi, which Cassie had provided for each of her guests. After the serving of the sweets, Cassie began the ritual cleaning of the utensils. Once that task was completed, she reached for one of the tea bowls and began to make the first cup.

Cassie first scooped some of the green tea powder out of the tea caddy. She then gently place the scoop down on the table and then added hot water to the tea cup. Picking up the tea whisk, she began to stir the tea using the movements her grandmother had taught her years ago. When it was finished Cassie placed the cup in front of Cherie with the characters of the cup facing the girl. Cherie picked up the cup and then rotated it ninety degrees before taking a sip.

"How is the tea?" Cassie asked her guest, using the approximate translation of the traditional question. For the benefit of her guests, she had taken the traditional exchange between host and Shokyaku into English. She felt that what she had come up with captured the spirit of the ceremony while allowing her guests to follow what was going on.

"It is excellent," Cherie replied, before she took another sip.



Cassie began preparing the second cup of tea, which she passed across the table to Anna. Anna took the cup and rotated it like she had seen Cherie do before taking a sip.

"The tea was very delicious," Cherie commented after Anna's first sip. Having finished her own tea, she turned the cup so the characters were facing inward and placed it on the table. "What is the name of the tea?" She asked.

Cassie answered that question as she prepared the third and final cup of tea for John. Cherie continued to ask the traditional questions, such as where the tea was from, about the sweets and the flower arrangement in the center of the table. Once John had finished his tea and placed the cup in front of him with the characters facing the center, Cherie asked to see the utensils used to make the tea.

"Has this been in your family long?" Anna asked Cassie as she examined the tea caddy.

"Only for a couple of generations. My grandmother got them on her eighteenth birthday."

"They're beautiful and it looks like you care for them well," Anna replied, as she carefully passed the item over to John.

John carefully took the tea caddy from Anna. "The characters on the cups, they mean harmony, respect, purity, and tranquility right?"

Cassie nodded. "My grandfather felt that those four characters captured the essence of the tea ceremony, so he put them on the cups."

"Your grandfather made these, then?" Anna asked having picked up her tea cup again, and turned it around to see the characters.

"Yes. My grandfather loved pottery. Still does in fact."

The conversation continued until Cassie had everything back in front of her. The four of them stood, as the tea ceremony was over.

"I enjoyed myself this evening," Anna told her hostess. "Thank-you for inviting me."

"It was my pleasure," Cassie replied.

She exchanged good-byes with all three of them, and taking a moment to tell Cherie that she had done a good job. As they headed into the lift, Cassie bowed to each of them, as was tradition. As the door closed behind them, Cassie turned and headed for the table and started cleaning up.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings



Wednesday, January 9, 2069, 11:30 a.m., the Serengeti, Tanzania. (8:30 p.m., same day, Tracy Island)

Kyrano squatted by the end of the infinity edge pool, where his bride, Lisa, leaned on her forearms, gazing out at the dry landscape beyond.

"A last swim, my dear?" he asked, smiling softly.

She sighed, a deep and satisfied sound. "Yes," she replied, not looking up at him. "This has been wonderful."

He lowered himself to the edge, dangling his bare feet in the quiet waters. "It has been a memorable time, dear one. I am very glad I have been able to share it with you."

She looked up at him then, smiling, and reached a hand toward him. "When do we leave?"

"Soon, dear one. We should ready ourselves for the trip to Paris."

She sighed again, and turned around, swimming with a slow stroke back to the stairs at the opposite end of the pool. Kyrano levered himself to his feet, and paced her back, picking up a thick white towel on the way and handing it to her as she rose, dripping. He took another and dried his legs.

Lisa wrapped her towel around her waist. "I will miss this place."

"Perhaps we shall visit again," Kyrano said, trying to lift her spirits.

"Perhaps."

They made their way back to their private cottage. The Singita Sasakwa Lodge was a small place, but very elegant. It was near the Grumeti River in Tanzania, in the Serengeti National Park. They had spent five days there, enjoying the solitude and viewing the myriad of wildlife that lived in the vicinity. They'd been pampered by all the staff, who found their newlywed status a matter of gentle amusement. Kyrano grumbled a bit about the food, but admitted that the cuisine was, on the whole, up to his exacting standards.

"Jeff wouldn't send us somewhere where it wasn't," Lisa had told him.

They had spent time horseback riding or bouncing around in an old-fashioned safari truck. (Better for viewing the animals than the hovercraft used elsewhere, they'd been told. The trucks didn't throw up as much sand and dust.) They visited the spa, and relaxed in the one bedroom cottage which held all the amenities they could have wished for.

Before Tanzania, they had visited the American Southwest, exploring such sites as the Grand Canyon, and doing a few things they both never thought they would ever do in their lifetimes. Lisa quipped that they were still in places where the weather was generally hot; the only difference was



that now it was, for the most part, dry. Kyrano responded by saying it was good for old bones like theirs.

"Do you think Dianne and Jeff will like this carving?" Lisa asked a few moments later. She had changed her clothes and wrung out her bathing suit as best she could. In the heat of their veranda, it would dry enough to be packed with their other clothes. She held a carving of a wildebeest, made of Queen's ebony, its dark brown wood with the black striations gleaming dully in the light.

"Yes, I believe they shall." Kyrano rose from the comfortable chair where he sat and took it from her hand. "It will go well with the Dianne's elephants."

"I wish I could think of something more... personal to give them as souvenirs." Lisa retrieved the statue, and wrapped it up, cushioning it from damage.

Kyrano nodded sagely. "It is difficult to know what to get the man...and woman...who have everything."

There was a knock at their door. Lisa opened it to let in the two staff members, who smiled widely at the newlyweds.

"We bring you lunch," said one, his bright teeth gleaming against his dark skin. "A last meal before you leave us, yes?"

"Yes, thank you." Kyrano had unobtrusively slipped something into his ear. It was a translation device, one that he was beta testing for Brains. It keyed into Thunderbird Five's language database, and was not only translating from the Swahili that most Tanzanians spoke, it was also recording the local dialects to enhance the accuracy of the filters. So, though he and Lisa couldn't actually speak to their hosts, they could listen and understand. It had already helped them in bargaining for some of their souvenirs.

Their meal spread out on the veranda tables, Kyrano and Lisa sat down to enjoy it. The staff members withdrew, and it was quiet once again. Only the sounds of the African birds broke the quiet.

"I wish we could stay longer in Paris," Lisa said wistfully.

"We will return there, you and I," Kyrano replied firmly. "However, I did want to introduce you to my first wife's family. My... Elias Manabo is failing. His daughter, Tamea, wrote to tell me so. I had promised to introduce you." He stopped, and when he continued, his voice was lower. "They have not been a large part of my life, but they are family still."

Lisa reached out a hand to touch his. "I understand, Tuan. I really do."

Kyrano covered her hand with his free one. "I know, dear heart. I know."



Thursday, January 10, 2069, 6:10 a.m., Tracy Island

"Hey, Dad, you did pretty well there," John remarked between gulps of air. He pulled his sweat-soaked Harvard t-shirt over his head, and used it to mop his brow. "Kept up with me at every step. Who knew the old man had it in him?"

Jeff nodded, breathing heavily. His ancient and well-worn Air Force shirt was dark with sweat, but he took time to catch his breath before he spoke.

"I'm too winded to come up with a snarky retort to that," he finally huffed out. "But thank you for the backhanded compliment."

John grinned. He opened the small cooler that waited at their end of the trail leading from this section of the beach to the Villa. He tossed a bottle of cold water from the cooler to his father, who caught it handily, then took one for himself. Settling his shirt around his shoulders, he grabbed the cooler's strap, and walked over to the trail. Jeff opened his water bottle, took a couple of swigs, and joined his son.

"Looks like you'll be in tip-top form for the moon mission," John said, opening his own bottle, the cooler settled on one shoulder, padded from skin contact by the wadded up shirt.

"I certainly hope so," Jeff said as they began walking up the trail. "With everything that's gone on in the past year, keeping in shape hasn't exactly been a top priority. Getting into the kind of shape that's needed in for this mission? It's a good thing Dianne's been pushing me."

"She's really gung ho about you going, isn't she?"

Jeff snorted. "Yes, but only because she knows I'd kick myself if I didn't do this. I can tell she's a bit nervous about it, though. She keeps trying to read the specs of the shuttle we're taking, and asking Brains to translate the schematics for her. She wants to know where every emergency exit is."

"Hm." John frowned, clearly thoughtful. "I didn't think she'd be worried. It's not as if we don't go into space all the time." He barked a short laugh. "I'm assuming she's worried about me, too... though it's not like I don't go into space every three months and spend a month up there by myself. She never seems concerned about that."

"Yes, she is worried about you, too, John, but about me more. Like you said, you go into space all the time, and you're flying...and staying...in vessels constructed by someone she trusts, out of materials she knows from personal experience are virtually indestructible. I don't." Jeff took another swig of water. "She doesn't trust the WSA like she trusts Brains. She's also not happy that I'm going to have to spend a month at Kennedy Space Center preparing for the launch, then the time we're up there, and quarantine when we get back."

"But she still wants you to do it?"



"Yup. Gotta love a woman like that."

They were quiet as they continued to climb, finishing their water before they reached the Round House. Then John broke the silence.

"What do the sprouts think of all this?"

Jeff shook his head. "I'm not sure. We haven't really talked to them about it much. They don't seem concerned; they probably equate it to one of our space missions or a trip to Thunderbird Five and back." He grimaced. "That's where being part of this operation has a downside. Even something as dangerous as a space launch becomes routine. I think that's why the destruction of Thunderbird Seven was such a shock to us all. We'd become complacent, thinking it was routine, when what we do is anything but."

John nodded his head slowly. "Yeah." He turned to his father. "I think you have something there."

They continued walking, past the Round House and up towards the Villa. The island was still relatively quiet, with only the birds creating their morning cacaphony. Sunlight shone far out to sea, as the sun rose behind the island's central peak. The air was still relatively cool in the shadow cast by said eminence, but the day was brightening every moment, and the temperature would soon climb with it. Jeff sighed.

"I guess Dianne and I will have to talk with them about it and explain a few home truths. God knows I don't want to scare them, but they have to know the risks." He shook his head. "Not yet though. When the time comes." His face lit up with a slow grin. "Who knows? I might not even pass the physical." With a huff, he added, "Though not for lack of trying."

John laughed, and nudged his father with his upper arm and elbow. "C'mon, Dad. You did fine today."

"Maybe today, I did fine," Jeff said, making a face. "But tomorrow I run with Scott. Compared to him, you're sadly out of shape yourself."

"Oh, you think so?" John stuck his empty water bottle in the cooler, and dropped it. He slung the shirt from his shoulder, whipped it around his head three times, then began to run. "Last one to the breakfast table is a rotten egg!"

Jeff just shook his head. He grabbed the cooler and slung it over one shoulder, then set off at a leisurely pace in John's wake. Sometimes, it wasn't so bad being the rotten egg.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 02:42:47 GMT

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Thursday, January 10, just before 11 am

Scenario Complete.

Vince saw those words on the screen before him and let out a sigh of relief. He let go of the simulator controls. The years away from flying jets had certainly made him rusty but he figured he hadn't done too bad. At least between looking over the manual he had been given and Scott's instructions at the beginning of the session, he had been able to remember where most of the controls and readouts were.

At least I survived the simulations today Vince thought as he reached up to unbuckle the safety restraints. He hadn't fared so well with piloting Thunderbird 4, which he had managed to sink. Despite his protests that he had only served aboard a submarine before and not piloted one, the former SEAL was pretty sure he was going to get razzed by Gordon for some time to come.

Vince climbed out of the simulator. Not far away, he saw Scott standing looking in his direction, with a neutral expression.

At least he don't look grumpy, Vince thought. He had learned quickly at the Naval academy that when an instructor or superior officer had a scowl, it was never a good thing.

"So, what's the verdict?" Vince asked as he reached Thunderbird One's main pilot.

"Not bad for your first attempt," Scott told him before going into detail the mistakes that Vince had made and how to correct them. "We'll run the silo landing scenario when we meet again on Monday and see how you do with that."

"Sounds like a plan."

The two men headed out of the simulator room.

"So how are you settling in so far?" Scott asked.

"With training or into the apartment?"

"Both," Scott said with a grin.

"Well, let's just say the apartment is nowhere near being ready for company yet, though I have gotten a start on painting our bedroom walls," Vince told him. The paint for the bedroom had been picked out before they had moved. "Lana's still busy trying to decide what to do with the walls as she refuses to leave them plain white. Not to mention we're letting Lea pick out colors for her own room. I'm afraid to see what she finally decides on."

They stopped walking as they reached the point where they would go separate ways.

"She's five, right?" Scott asked trying to remember the girl's age. Vince nodded. "That could definitely be dangerous. How about training? We're not throwing things at you too fast are we?"



"No, training I can handle much better than interior decorating. Once I get the physical over with this afternoon, the administrative stuff will be out of the way and I can concentrate on the training."

"You came up with a code name then?" Scott asked, curious as to what it was.

"Yeah. I'm going with Ace."

"Feeling a bit confident are we?" Scott said jokingly.

"Not a bit," Vince told him. "It's not something I would have picked for myself but another dangerous thing to do is to let a five year old pick your code name."

Scott laughed as Vince told him about the card game that had led to his new alias. "Letting brothers choose them for you isn't much safer," Scott informed him when he was finished. At Vince's questioning look he continued. "Both Virgil and I were having a hard time coming up with our code names, and I made the mistake of suggesting we picked each other's. The idea was that we could change them after a month, however we both forgot about it."

It was Vince's turn to laugh.

"You didn't happen to let her choose you uniform color, did you?" Scott asked.

"Are you kidding? I'd be wearing pink."

"I think pink is taken, actually." Scott told him. "I guess I'll catch up with you later."

As Scott headed in the direction of the Villa, Vince headed for his apartment.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 02:44:32 GMT

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Vince struggled with the hospital gown, trying to get it to feel like it covered everything in the back. I hate these things. You would think someone would have found a way to improve them over the years, he thought as he tied the strings into a bow to secure it. They probably haven't changed because it's a source of amusement for doctors.

Figuring it was the best he was going to manage, Vince finally walked out from behind the privacy screen. He found Dianne waiting for him.

She patted the scanner. "Up here, please, so we can get started." Vince stifled a sigh, and levered himself up onto the scanner bed.



Dianne began her examination with listening to Vince's chest and checking his vital signs. She reported her findings to Dom, who held a data pad containing Vince's medical records.

"I see it's been a long while since you had a thorough physical," she commented dryly.

"Yeah, my wife has pointed that out to me on occasion, too," Vince replied. He had expected her to comment on that particular point and not be happy about it.

"Well, we're going to do more than examine you today, Vince," Dianne said as she probed his neck with warm, practiced fingers. "Part of the routine is fitting you with a locator chip, so think about where you want it implanted."

Vince nodded, having been told of the locator chip and its purpose by Jeff. "Just put it wherever is the most common place for it," he told her. "You know, those chips wouldn't be bad idea for kids. It would be much easier to keep tabs on them."

"I agree, but we have to wait until the children have grown enough that the chip doesn't shift position or become imbedded somewhere it shouldn't," Dianne explained. She turned to Dom and asked for the data pad. "Let's see how your immunizations are, and if you need any."

"Ah, another one of my favorite parts of a doctor's visit," Vince commented. He couldn't remember which shots he had been given during his years in the service. Basically, if the base doctor had said it was required for his assignment, then he had taken their word for it. He hadn't put in all the time and effort into his training to be kept back by some technicality.

Dianne chuckled as she scanned the list. "Looks like you need a boosters to your tetanus, and your anti-malarial. Since we never quite know where we're going to go, we need to be prepared for anything. Dom, would you prepare the hyposprays for me?"

"Sure, Doc," the nurse said cheerfully. He left the room.

Patting the end of the scanner bed, Dianne had Vince lie down, and covered him with a sheet. "I'm going to start a whole body scan. Just lie still until it's finished. I'll be watching the scan from over there." She indicated the small station in the corner.

Vince nodded, hoping the scan would go fast. In his head, he thought about the other things that he needed to get done. All of them probably more productive than this, he thought.

Dom came back into the room, carrying a tray, and spoke quietly with the doctor. She nodded, and the nurse put the tray on a rolling stainless steel table. Vince could only see this out of the corner of one eye, as he was heeding Dianne's admonition to lie still.

It seemed like it took forever, but after about 20 minutes, the machine's subtle hum and vibration faded, and Dianne stood. "You can sit up now, Vince. The scan looks good. Everything in the right place and that broken wrist healed nicely." Doctor and nurse met by the scanner bed, and Dom offered a hand to help Vince sit up.

Vince took a hold of the proffered hand and moved to a sitting position, readjusting the hospital



gown as he did so. "So does that mean that after you stick me with a few things, I can change back into normal clothes."

"Yup. But first the sticking." She grinned, trying to look malevolent. "I think we'll numb up the site where the locator chip goes first. That requires an actual needle." She pulled a syringe from the tray and gave him a calculating look. "Are you sure you don't have a place in mind? I mean... if I have to go by the most popular of spots, that's going to be the gluteus maximus."

"Hmm, maybe that isn't the best idea," Vince said, hoping his face wasn't showing the embarrassment he was feeling. "Where did you put yours?"

"On the outside of my ankle," she told him. "Listen, the makers suggest that the muscle just below the collarbone is an excellent place. Does that sound feasible?"

"That will work," Vince told her. And a whole lot less embarrassing, he added silently.

"Okay." Dianne used the thin needle to numb up the area where Vince's chip was going to go. Then she pressed one hypospray to his neck, near the carotid artery, and the other on his shoulder, telling him which vaccination was which, and explaining any possible side effects.

"Can you feel this?" she asked as she pinched a bit of skin where she'd numbed the area. When he said no, she tapped her wristwatch. "Infirmary to Thunderbird Five. Come in Five."

Alan's picture showed in the small screen. "What can I do for you, Doctor?"

"Formal today, aren't we, Alan?" Dianne retorted. "I need a check on this locator chip." She ran off the numbers. "Are you receiving it?"

"Receiving it five by five," he replied. "Who is this for? And what is their color?"

"For Vince Crenshaw," she told him, then turned to Vince. "Do you have a uniform color chosen?"

"Sienna," Vince replied, having paid a visit to Tin-Tin the day before.

"Got that, Alan?"

"Got it."

"Ready, Vince?" Dianne looked at her patient as she swabbed the area again with alcohol. "Now, don't faint on me, okay?"

Vince raised an eyebrow as the doctor slipped the sharp, thicker needle into his numbed skin. The procedure was done in a second, then Dom stepped up to pat away a little bit of blood, and apply a bandage.

"Alan? It's in."

"Still reading five by five." Alan said. "It may take a bit on the dot though. Sienna's kind of between



orange and brown, right? I don't want it to be too close to either Gordon's or Brains's colors."

"Maybe darken up Brandon's?" Dom suggested. "Seein' as he's no longer with us..."

"Um, excuse me," Vince said, getting both Dianne's and Dom's attention. The doctor and nurse turned to look at him. "I'm sure this talk about shades of color is all very important, but is there any chance I can change back into some normal clothing soon?" He asked, looking toward Dianne.

She chuckled again. "Unless you have questions for me. Otherwise, you can get dressed and go."

"No questions, Doc," Vince said as he carefully maneuvered himself off the bed. Trying not to look to desperate, he walked briskly across the room and the relative safety of the privacy screen, more than eager to shed the gown and get back into his comfortable slacks and polo shirt.

Dianne lifted her arm once again. "Alan, I think we're done here."

"F-A-B," Alan replied. "Thunderbird Five out."

Dom and Dianne set about cleaning things up.

Vince's Physcial by Tikatu and icarus1982

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 02:45:51 GMT

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Cassie stepped off the monorail and into the Villa. She had been a little surprised by Dr. Tracy's summons to meet with her. The only thing the older woman would tell her was that she had something to discuss with her.

Reaching the med bay she went inside. Not seeing anyone, she made her way to Dr. Tracy's office and knocked on the door. Upon the command to, "come in", Cassie opened the door.

"You wanted to see me?" she asked, as she stepped into the office.

"Ah, Cassie." Dianne smiled as she indicated a chair. "Thanks for coming."

Once Cassie had settled herself, Dianne pulled out a data pad. "I asked you to come because I have a proposition for you." She glanced at the pad, moving her finger down its length. "As you may have heard, Nikki's going to medical school, studying to be a doctor."

Cassie nodded. "Yes, I have. I didn't really know Nikki that well, but I'm sure she's going to do well



at medical school," she replied, still not sure where the doctor was heading with this line of conversation. What does Nikki going to medical school have to do with me?

"Yes, I know she'll do great there. But it leaves me short a nurse." Dianne looked up at Cassie again. "I was wondering if you'd be willing to help out in the infirmary. You have the paramedic skills, and though they're not exactly the same as a nurse's, there's a good deal of overlap. You're qualified to deal with the normal, everyday stuff we get, as well as some of the more life-threatening things. You've been doing a great job with triage lately and, well, we could use another set of hands here on the island, too."

Cassie hoped she hid the surprise she felt from Dianne. Being asked to help out in the infirmary was the last thing she had expected. Most of the doctors in the city wouldn't even consider asking a paramedic for help, Cassie thought, thinking of all the condescending attitudes she had encountered, from the doctors who considered 'street medicine' beneath them.

"I'd be glad to help any way I can," Cassie replied. "Though you do have quite a bit of equipment here that I wouldn't know how to work. I'm kind of used to making do with the basics."

Dianne nodded. "We can work out a training schedule to get you familiar with the equipment. And there are things I wouldn't expect of you, like assisting during a surgery... but you'd be a big help otherwise. What do you say?"

"I say, when do I start?"

The doctor laughed, and looked at her watch. "I have some time right now to introduce you to the infirmary, if you're free."

As her training sessions were over for the day, Cassie nodded. "That's fine with me." She still had some prep work to get done before her business trip the following week, but that could easily be done later.

Both women got to their feet, and Dianne led the way out of her office to begin the training.

Written by: Tikatu and starrynebula

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 02:46:41 GMT  
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[face=Arial]\*\*\*\*\*Thursday, January 10, 2069, Tracy Island, approximately 4 p.m.\*\*\*\*\*

Reenergized by lunch three hours earlier, Callie was working hard in the lab. She shook her head again. "Still not quite there yet," she said to herself. "I know that answer's somewhere in the formula."



Ever since the Malaysian plane crash back in July, she had struggled for months in finding an antidote for the experimental jet fuel. Her goal was to find a way to stop the fuel from affecting the surrounding environment.

She easily succeeded in isolating all the fuel's components, but it was getting to the solution that had proven difficult.

Her last attempt at the antidote ended up with a spill-over similar to pouring a can of soda too quickly into a glass. After writing down her mistakes on the data pad, she looked over those errors and gasped. "Wait a minute. I think I know what the answer is."

Quickly turning back to her table, she tried something else. She poured enough of one ingredient into a beaker and placed it onto the Bunsen burner. She carefully added the remaining components to her latest formula. Five minutes later, she grabbed the beaker with the tongs and allowed it to cool. Taking an eyedropper, she took a sample of her possible antidote and put a couple of drops into the sample of the jet fuel.

Next, she took the sample and placed it under the microscope. Looking through the magnifier, she noticed the jet fuel breaking down the way she had hoped. "That's it...that's it! I finally got it! At last, I finally got it!"

She took a few steps back to make sure she was clear of all the chemicals on the lab table, and then she started going into a dance of pure joy. "I got it," she sang happily. "I got it, I got it, I can't believe I got it!"

She continued dancing around like an excited fan at a rock concert...until she saw Brains and Tin-Tin. "Oh, um...hi, guys."

Brains smiled. "Hi, Callie. You're sure excited about something."

"Oh, yes, I am. I finally found the antidote to the jet fuel. Of course we'll still have to do field tests and other--"

"Easy, Callie, calm down," said Tin-Tin. "Why don't you show us your discovery?"

For the next few minutes, Callie showed them all the experiments she had worked on, along with the sample she had just completed under the microscope. "What do you both think?"

Tin-Tin nodded. "We need to show this to Mr. Tracy after dinner. He would definitely want to know."

"I agree," added Brains. "The sooner we tell him, the sooner we can really start working on making more of the antidote."

"Especially if the jet fuel becomes more commonly used," Callie said. "Whew, I've been working on this for most of the day today."

Brains patted Callie's shoulder. "Then take a breather. The antidote won't disappear anytime



soon."

She nodded and joined them in stepping out of the lab. Well, I can cross off finding the antidote off my resolution list, she thought to herself. And it took just 10 days into the new year.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 02:50:38 GMT  
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Friday, January 11th, early morning

Gordon watched as his new student cut swiftly through the water. There isn't much to correct on his backstroke, Gordon thought as Aaron reached the far end of the pool and performed the flip to turn around. The turns need some work, however, and he's surfacing too quickly after the turn, Gordon made a mental note to spend some time just working on that the next morning.

As Aaron reached the end of the pool, Gordon hit the button on the stop watch he was holding. The aquanaut looked down at the time; 1:58:63. It was the first time Gordon had actually timed laps. The kid really does have a decent shot of making the World Team, Gordon thought as he made his way over to where Aaron was pulling himself out of the pool.

"So, what was the time, Coach?" Aaron asked, as he grabbed his towel off a near-by lounge chair.

Gordon told him the time. The copper-haired Tracy didn't miss the smile that came to the teenager's face, although he simply nodded at the news. "You're losing time on the turn though. I'll give you some pointers tomorrow morning and we'll try to improve them. I also want you to work on staying underwater longer after the turn. You've got 15 meters until you need to surface and I'm sure you've been told that underwater speed is faster than the surface time due to resistance." Gordon noticed Aaron nod in confirmation. "You use the 15 meters well at the start but following the turn you're on the surface before you reach 10 meters. That's something else we'll work on tomorrow."

Aaron nodded again as he finished towel drying his hair and then wrapped the towel around his shoulders.

"So, how do you like the island so far?"

Aaron shrugged. "It's okay, I guess. Having my own apartment is nice. I'm enjoying not having Lea getting into everything. I miss my friends back home, though. I love Lea, but hanging out with a five year old just isn't the same as hanging with kids my age."

"I know what you mean," Gordon commented with a laugh.

"I also can't surf as much as I did at home, though my mom is probably happy about that as I've caught up in my school work. I got behind in while we were getting ready to move."



"You're doing an internet program then?"

"Yeah," the teenager replied, nodding. "I started it during what would have been my freshman year. Mom keeps tabs on how I'm doing and makes sure I stay on track though she leaves me alone unless I ask for help."

"That shows a lot of discipline," Gordon commented, as he placed the stop watch on the table. "What's the problem with the surfing time? I know we might not get the great surf Hawaii does, but it's still decent."

"One of Dad's rules. He doesn't want me in the ocean unless I'm with an adult. He's been busy this week, though he did spend some time on the beach with Lea yesterday evening, so I got a chance to surf."

"It's a good idea not to go surfing alone," Gordon said, feeling the need to back Vince up a little. "I usually surf with one of my brothers. I'll let you know whenever I plan on surfing and you can tag along."

"Thanks!"

"Not a problem. You should also look into getting involved with something on the mainland. It'll give you a chance to hang out with some kids your own age."

"Now you sound like my parents."

"Hey, just trying to help," Gordon said, putting up his hands in surrender. An idea was starting to form, but he knew he had to talk to Vince before mentioning anything to Aaron. There was no point in getting the teenager's hopes up and then his father vetoing the idea.

"I know," Aaron commented. "Guess I'll head back to my apartment and get breakfast before doing some school work. See ya tomorrow, Coach."

Gordon gave a half-wave as the teenager headed toward the Cliff House. He then stripped off the t-shirt and shorts he had put on over his swimsuit and dove into the pool. He wanted to get his own workout in before breakfast.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 02:51:29 GMT  
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Friday, January 11th, around 11:30 am

"That's everything you need to know," Gordon said, as he handed the handgun over to Vince. The



older man accepted the gun from him.

"Thanks for taking the time to do this," Vince told him.

Given his background with firearms, it had been agreed that Vince didn't need any official training in this area. The former Navy SEAL wanted to get familiar with IR's handguns as soon as possible though and had asked Gordon to give him a hand.

"Not a problem. I'm interested in seeing just how good a shot you are."

"I'll try not to disappoint you," Vince told him, picking up some ear and eye protection and heading toward the firing line. He donned the ear muffs and goggles before taking his place on the line. Gordon, also wearing ear protection, found a safe place to watch as Vince took his aim at the target.

After firing four shots, Vince stopped, wanting to see where the bullets had landed on the target. He worked the controls to bring the target close to the firing line.

"Not bad for your first time," Gordon said, as he examined the target. The bullet holes were right on the line of the bull-eye's target..

"Thanks," Vince replied as he sent the target back out again. He moved it back further than he had the first time. With a quick glance over his shoulder to make sure that Gordon had moved to a safe distance again Vince took his stance at the firing line. Concentrating only on the distant target, Vince finished off the round that was in the gun.

Gordon let out a whistle as he saw the target Vince had brought in once again. "Nice shot," he commented. All the bullets had landed in the center bull's eye. "You and I need to have a competition sometime," he commented, knowing that going up against the former Navy SEAL would be quite a challenge.

"Anytime," Vince told him, as the two left the firing line. "Want to join us for lunch?" he asked as Gordon led him through the proper cleaning of the guns.

"Your wife won't mind a surprise guest?"

"No. Believe me it won't be the first time I've surprised her with a guest for a meal. Just be warned; the apartment still isn't in tip top shape."

"Wouldn't expect it to be," Gordon replied.

Once the gun was properly cleaned and stored the two men headed toward the Cliff House. Gordon had gotten a hold of John and asked him to let everyone know not to expect him for lunch.

"I had an interesting conversation with your son this morning after our lesson," Gordon said as the two walked. "Sounds like he's going a bit stir crazy and missing his friends."



Vince nodded thoughtfully. He had noticed it himself but wasn't sure what to do about it. He hadn't mentioned it to Lana, not wanting to worry her. "I know. He's not happy with me about the surfing rule either."

"Yeah, he mentioned that."

"Well, you can't be both friend and responsible parent all the time," Vince said. "I'd rather he be a little upset with me and safe than something happening. I've tried to get him to look into something to get involved in on the mainland and he keeps putting me off. Lana says he just needs time to adjust." He shook his head. "I'm sorry, you probably don't want to hear me ranting."

"I'm the one that brought up the topic," Gordon told him. "Though I definitely can't give you parenting advice. However, I did want to run an idea by you. Tyler and Alex gave me a gift certificate for a Dolphin Cruise that leaves from Akora as a Christmas gift. I have a feeling our parents helped them out a bit on financing but I'm really looking forward to going. I was going to wait until Alan was back down on the island and drag him along so I had someone to go with, but if you're okay with Aaron spending some time off island with me, I'd like to invite him along. I think he'd really enjoy it and getting off the island might do him some good."

"If Aaron wants to go with you, I'd be more than happy to pay for him to go," Vince said. "Sure you want to spend time with a teenager though?"

The two had reached the Cliff House and Gordon pushed the button for the lift.

"He's not that much younger than me," Gordon said. "Besides, part of being a good coach is watching out for your athlete's mental well-being along with their physical training." The lift had arrived and the door opened. Gordon stepped onto it, followed by Vince.

"Looks like we didn't do too bad a job at picking our son a good swim coach then," Vince replied as the lift began to rise on its way to the second floor.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 02:52:35 GMT

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Lady Penelope's plane had long since touched down on Tracy Island. In one of the guest suites, Izarra Soto Fernandez touched up her eye shadow and ran a well-manicured finger over the crow's feet around her eyes. I am not getting any younger, she thought, but my Sébastien would have wanted me to continue my work. I owe it to his memory. It was true that her late husband had introduced her to the world of spying. It was also true that she wanted to live up to the potential he saw in her.

There was a chime at the door and Izarra walked across the room. She opened the door to see Parker standing there, his hands clasped gently in front of him.



"Good afternoon, madam," he said. "'Er Ladyship 'as sent me to h'accompany you to the interview."

"Thank you," Izarra said. "I believe I am ready."

They made their way from the Villa guest room to the study. Parker showed her in before excusing himself. Izarra found herself faced with one of the richest men in the world, and one of the most demure ladies of England.

"Good afternoon," Jeff Tracy said, extending a hand in greeting. Izarra shook it confidently. Penelope held out her smaller, softer hand. Izarra shook that too. Jeff smiled. "Thank you for coming. Please, take a seat."

The trio sat down, Jeff and Penelope behind Jeff's lavish desk. Izarra settled herself as comfortably and correctly as she could. Her heart began to beat a little faster.

"Okay. We've brought you here today on Lady Penelope's recommendation as an experienced intelligence operative. Can you tell me about your previous experience in this field?"

The interview continued for around a half hour. Izarra spoke enthusiastically about her previous work with both the French and Spanish secret services, both in the field and behind a desk doing background checks. Penelope nodded as she recounted the time when they had both been involved in cracking a drug smuggling ring. It seemed like yesterday to Izarra as she felt the familiar fire burn within her. Yes, I need this. I want this job.

At length Jeff tapped his pad and it powered down. He cast a sidelong glance at Lady Penelope. Izarra's brows drew together slightly as Penny nodded almost imperceptibly, before she gave Izarra a smile and a nod.

"Ms Soto Fernandez, we believe that you are an ideal candidate for our... organisation."

Izarra raised one eyebrow and sat forward a little, her pulse quickening.

"Oh?" she asked. "What type of organisation is it that you are involved in? I must admit that I assumed it was within Tracy Industries."

"It will be as part of one of Jeff Tracy's more philanthropic endeavours. You shall be working for me as part of a network of agents all around the world, who work for International Rescue."

Izarra felt as though her mind had gone blank, and she reached forward to lay her hands on the desk. She looked Jeff and then Penny squarely in the eyes.

"International Rescue?" she asked. "You are International Rescue?"

"Yes, we are," Jeff said. "We have agents in almost every country in the world. We want you to become our new agent in New Zealand, working under the auspices of myself and Lady Penelope. It will be your job to investigate any leads or perform any operations needed by International Rescue in New Zealand -- under total secrecy. We would like to use your skills to aid



in exploring potential threats to International Rescue both within your particular area and around the world."

Izarra retracted her hands and folded them in her lap.

"This was not what I was expecting," she said. "I mean you no offense, but this seems... unlikely to say the least. How do I know that what you are telling me is the truth?"

"I assure you, this is the truth. However, proof can be supplied," Jeff said.

He stood up and motioned for Izarra to do the same. Izzie followed as Jeff and Penelope walked out of the study and through the lounge. They brought her into a small monorail car. Izarra remained tight-lipped as the car began to move off. After a short journey, Jeff slowed the car down and fixed Izarra with a firm stare.

"This is your proof," he said.

The monorail car slipped through into a large chamber, and it took Izarra's brain several moments to comprehend what she was seeing. The car was travelling through a huge hanger, in the centre of which was one of the most enormous contraptions she had ever seen. Her jaw dropped.

"This is Thunderbird Three," Jeff said. "It's our space ship, used for rescues outside the earth's atmosphere."

"I... my God. It is true," Izarra breathed. "I... I can barely believe it."

"With your proof, what do you think now of our offer?" Lady Penelope asked.

"Without question," Izarra said, "I accept."

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 03:04:08 GMT

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After grabbing a bite to eat, Cassie decided to work on putting music to some lyrics she had written. It had been a long time since she had written any songs and she missed it. She had made her New Year's resolution be to attempt to write music for a poem she had written in her free time.

This was her second try. After a short time of working in her apartment, she had left the confines of the indoors, to find a quiet place to work outside. Her wanderings had led her down to the pool. To her surprise the area was empty, probably due partly to the cloudy skies that had moved in over the late afternoon hours. Taking advantage of this, she settled herself in a chair.



Putting the clipboard with the sheet music on a table, Cassie began working. It wasn't ideal conditions but she had gotten used to that when she took her guitar to the fire house. It didn't take her long to realize that the fresh air wasn't helping the creative juices like she had hoped. After playing a few lines over a couple of times she stopped. It just didn't sound right. Laying the guitar down in her lap she picked up the clipboard and looked at the music she had wrote trying to figure out how to change it.

"Hey, Cass! What are you up to?"

Cassie looked up to see Scott walking over to where she was sitting. The fact that he was wearing a t-shirt, shorts and sandals told her he hadn't come down to the pool area for a swim.

"Attempting to work on a song. Thought a change of scenery might help."

"Is it working?"

She shook her head. "I haven't tried writing music in so long I guess I'm kind of rusty. At this point I'm not sure if its my writing or my playing that's the problem." Giving a sigh, she put the clipboard down. "Maybe I should just give up."

"Well, Virgil's the song writer in the family, but I do play guitar. Maybe having someone else play what you wrote would give you a new perspective on it."

Cassie thought over his offer. Besides Alex and her music teachers, she had never let anyone read a composition while she was working in it. Still, it might just work.

"Okay," she acquiesced.

Scott pulled another chair closer and sat down. Cassie handed her guitar over to him. Scott accepted the instrument with a smile.

Man, he has a great smile! Cassie thought as she picked up the clipboard. Where did that come from. Scott is just a friend. Besides, you're still trying to sort through things with Alex, she chided herself.

Trying to put the thought out of her mind, she slid the clipboard over a little bit so that Scott could see it easier. While Scott played, Cassie simply listened to the music. They worked for awhile, Cassie making changes and Scott replaying a section of the composition over until she liked the way it sounded.

"I think I'm going to call it a day," Cassie said, after awhile, happy with the progress that had been made. "Thanks for your help," she commented as she reached out to take her guitar back. Once again, she saw him smile and wondered why she had never taken notice of it before.

"Anytime," Scott, replied as they both stood. "Does the song have words?"

"Yeah."



"Perhaps, I can hear the words with the song when you get it finished?"

Cassie nodded, though she suddenly felt butterflies in her stomach. It's not like you haven't played your own music for people before, she thought, wondering why the thought of playing the song for Scott was making her nervous.

After saying farewells, the two split. Scott heading up to the Villa and Cassie heading to the Cliff House.

A special thanks to ArtisticRainey for her helpful input while I was writing this

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 03:04:46 GMT

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Emily Tracy was sitting comfortably in a chair listening to Virgil play the piano. Movement at the doorway made her look up. Seeing Scott enter the lounge, she gave her eldest grandson a smile. Scott crossed the lounge to an empty chair near his grandmother. At the piano, Virgil glanced briefly at his elder brother but continued the piece.

A few moments later, the last notes of the piece faded away.

"That was beautiful, Virgil," Emily said, breaking the silence that had fallen over the room.

"Thank you, Grandma," Virgil replied, looking at her over top of his piano. He then switched his gaze over to his brother. "Looks like that walk put you in a better mood."

"I actually didn't go for a walk. Ran into Cassie down by the pool."

"So you've been down there for the last hour?" Virgil inquired.

"Yeah. She was working on writing a song, so I gave her hand by playing what she had written," Scott commented. And probably enjoyed myself more than I would have on a walk.

"I didn't realize she wrote songs," Virgil commented.

"Me either," Scott replied. There are probably a lot of things I don't know about her. Most of our conversations over the past month have mostly been limited to things going on here and current events. He made a mental note to change that they next time they got together.

"I'm sure there are things that we don't know about all of the recruits," Emily commented. She looked over at her eldest grandson. "Though I have to say, you're the last one I expected to see



Cassie spending time with. There was a time when I didn't think the two of you would ever see eye to eye."

Scott looked away from his grandmother only to see Virgil nodding in agreement. "I wouldn't have put my money on Scott and Cassie spending free time together back then either."

Seeing he was outnumbered, Scott chose not to comment. Guess it just goes to show first impressions aren't everything.

"Any other requests?" Virgil asked, taking his older brother's silence as a cue to change the subject.

Scott shook his head and Virgil looked to his grandmother. "Just make it something upbeat," the Tracy matriarch requested.

Virgil thought for a moment and then started playing jazz piece. Recognizing it as one of his favorites, Scott glanced over at his brother who gave him a smile. Leaning back in his chair, Scott listened to the music, his right foot gently tapping in time with the music.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 03:05:26 GMT  
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Friday, January 11, 12:15 p.m., Paris (12:15 a.m., next day, Tracy Island)

"Here we are," Kyrano said simply, offering his hand to Lisa. She took it, and eased out of the car. The driver shut the door behind her, and Kyrano gave him rapid instructions in French. The driver responded, making Lisa wish she spoke the language. As they approached the house, her arm tucked securely in her husband's, she could hear the car pull away.

"He will come back in an hour, unless we call earlier," Kyrano explained.

"Tell me again about your wi... about Samani's father." Lisa sighed a little at her own slip, but Kyrano patted her hand and smiled.

"Has it not yet sunk in that we are husband and wife, dear heart?"

Lisa smiled back, a shy and rueful expression. "It still seems like a dream, Tuan. It has been a long time since I've been someone's wife."

"You will grow accustomed to it, tercinta, and one day you will find that you feel as if it has always been so." Kyrano paused, and inhaled deeply. "Samani's father, yes. I met Monsieur Manabo... perhaps I should give him his full title, which is Doctor Elias Manabo, when in England. I worked for the Royal Gardens at Kew then, and he had come to see how we utilized insects...particularly butterflies...as pollinators. Butterflies are his specialty, you see. Both of his daughters are named for different species of butterfly."



"I didn't know that."

"Indeed. Samani was named for the vanessa samani, which is native to Malaysia. I cannot recall where Tamea's name came from. We should ask him." They had come to the lobby of the building, and pressed a button for the Manabo apartment. The buzzer went off immediately, telling them they were expected.

"Bonjour, Tuan." Tamea waited outside the door to the appartement. Kyrano was surprised to see how weary and how much older she looked from his last visit.

"Bonjour, Tamea," he responded. Turning to Lisa, he added, "Je te present ma femme. Elle s'appelle Lisa. Lisa, this is Tamea."

Tamea inclined her head and offered her hand. "Bonjour, Lisa. Bienvenue."

Lisa took Tamea's hand, and shook it gently. "Merci, Tamea." Lisa was now the one with the translator in her ear, as the only French she knew was what she had picked up from Dianne and from Kyrano himself.

Tamea opened the door, and beckoned the others to come inside. "My father has been waiting for you, Tuan," was what Lisa heard from the translator device. "He has been asking for you all morning."

Kyrano smiled sadly as he and Lisa followed Tamea inside.

Elias was settled in a hospital chair, his legs covered by a blanket. He looked twenty years older than he had at Kyrano's last visit, but he smiled when Lisa was introduced, and took her plump hand in both of his bony ones.

"Pardonnez-moi, madame. My English is, how you say, a little rusty," Elias said.

"That's all right, Monsieur. My French is almost non-existent," she replied, smiling.

"Sit down, s'il vous plait, and let us talk." He indicated the chair next to his. "Over tea, peut-être?"

"I will help Tamea with the tea," Kyrano said. Lisa gave him a nod, and he went off to the kitchen.

"How is he?" Kyrano asked in French as he began to help Tamea gather the tea things. As was usual with him, his "helping" turned into a subtle take over of the duties, giving Tamea room to speak.

"This is one of his better days," Tamea replied, her voice weary. "The doctors say he will be gone before spring."

"Then what will you do?" Kyrano asked as he took the whistling kettle from the stove.

"I don't know," Tamea replied, sighing. "I will have nothing left here. He has been everything to me



since Maman died... and since Samani..." She looked at Kyrano, giving him a sad, but piercing gaze. "He was so proud of her, you know, and of what she accomplished. All I wanted to do was find a husband and raise a family, as Maman did, but Samani followed in his footsteps as an academic, a researcher. Then you came along with your love of nature and..." She shook her head. "I never did find a husband, or raise a family. And when he dies..." A tear rolled down her cheek. "I am too old to do anything now."

Tamea's words troubled Kyrano deeply. He put a hand on her shoulder, and remarked, hesitantly, "You never know when love will find you, Tamea. I am proof of that. You are a good woman, and still have much to offer."

"I... I wish I could believe that." She wiped her eyes, and asked in a soft tone, "Is the tea ready?"

"It is."

"Then we should bring it out. I do want to talk with your Lisa."

She reached for the tray, and Kyrano held himself back, squelching his natural instinct to serve. She needs to be useful, even in this small way, he told himself. Instead, he went ahead, and set up the small table, putting an extra chair next to Elias's.

"Your Lisa has been showing me les photos de votre mariage," Elias said as Kyrano and Tamea joined them. "It must be nice to have so many new grandchildren. And your Tin-Tin is so lovely. I wish I could see her myself."

Kyrano smiled, the germ of an idea planted in his mind. But it will wait until we get home. For now, enjoy Paris, and this last, bitter-sweet visit.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 03:07:16 GMT  
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12 January 2069, 7.00pm, Tracy Island

Jenny ran a cloth over one of the tables that had been set out in the Villa lounge. The lights glinted off the sparkling cocktail glasses and champagne flutes. Jenny stood back and surveyed her work. She had laid the tables with beautiful soft pink tablecloths and had folded white napkins into concertinas, gathered at the bottom with glinting silver napkin rings. Nearby the bar was filled with what seemed like every spirit and liquor known to man, and Lady Penelope had brought several bottles of 2062 Moet et Chandon champagne.

The Tracy brothers had strung beautiful pink and silver decorations along the walls and across the ceiling. Pink and white carnations were placed in vases around the room, flown in especially with



Parker and Penny from England. Lady Penelope doesn't do anything by halves.

Jenny counted up the party-goers in her head and smiled. There were a lot of guests. There are a lot of people living here, she thought. She was looking forward to getting to know everyone a little more, and maybe even dance with a few eligible bachelors. I'm really getting to enjoy living here. She folded her cloth and placed it in her apron pocket. Time to go check in with Emily and then get ready. It's going to be fun!

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 03:07:49 GMT

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Around 7:15 pm, Cliff House

"Are you done yet, Mommy?" Lea asked as she stood in front of her mom, shifting her weight from side to side every so often.

Lana smiled as she pulled the brush through her daughter's hair. The little girl was excited about actually being allowed to go to a 'big person' party as she referred to it. The fact that she wasn't staying still was making doing her hair harder than usually.

"Almost, sweetie," Lana replied, putting the brush down in her lap and picking up the light blue bow clip that matched her daughter's dress. She clipped the bow and let go of Lea's hair. "There you go."

"How do I look, Daddy," Lea immediately asked, taking a few steps forward and twirling around.

Vince, who was tying his tie, smiled. "You look lovely, Poppet!"

Before anyone could say anything else, they heard the balcony door to the living area open up. All three of them looked in that direction to see Aaron walk into the apartment. He had on dress pants and shirt with the suit jacket and tie draped over one arm and dress shoes and socks in the other hand.

"Do I really have to go to this thing?" he asked, dropping the shoes on the floor.

"Yes," Vince replied. "It'll be a good chance for all of us to get to know our neighbors here on the island."

"I'd rather stay home and read a book or something. It's going to be so boring."

"Well, if you think you'll be bored you can keep an eye on Lea for us," Lana suggested as she started heading toward her bedroom to put on the jewelry.

"Oh, joy," Aaron said as he put his suit jacket on the back of the couch and began to try putting on his tie.



After watching Aaron fail in the attempt, Vince crossed over to his son.

"Look, Aaron, at least make an attempt at enjoying yourself this evening," Vince told his son taking the tie from him and beginning to put it on correctly. "Make an appearance, hang out for an hour, and then if you want you can leave, okay."

"Ok. Do I really have to watch Lea?"

"No, your mother was only kidding about that although if you come home early we may send her back with you," Vince told him, finishing the job. "There you go."

"Thanks, Dad."

"Now get your shoes on so you're ready to go. Semi-formal does mean shoes are required," Vince told him and then headed for the bedroom to see if Lana needed any help with her jewelry.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 03:09:02 GMT  
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Saturday, January 12, 7:15 p.m., Tracy Island

"Argh!"

"What's the problem, love?" Jeff asked from the master bath, where he was knotting his tie. When Dianne didn't answer right away, he glanced out the door. The number of dresses draped across the bed had grown exponentially since he'd walked into the bathroom, and as he watched, another was tossed on top of the pile. He shook his head slightly, ran a comb through his already sleek hair, and headed into the bedroom to see if he could help.

"I have nothing to wear!" Dianne said, her voice muffled by the clothes in her closet.

Jeff eyed the pile on the bed and his eyebrow rose. "You'd look great in any of these, Dianne."

His wife sighed, an exasperated tone, and came out of the closet, dresses in each hand. She held one up critically, then shook her head and threw it across the bed with the others. Before she could do the same with the second dress, Jeff closed in and took hold of her wrist.

"What's wrong with this one?" he asked. "Doesn't it fit anymore?"

Dianne fixed a baleful eye on her husband. "It's not a matter of fit," she snapped. "It's a matter of style, and of season." She swept her hand out, indicating all the rejected dresses. "None of these dresses are in the current style, and half of them aren't appropriate for the summer."



Jeff glanced over at the pile again. "Okay. I get not wanting to wear a winter dress in the summer, love. I really do. But since when did style become important to you? You've always worn just what you liked, without caring who created it or when it was... the latest..." He couldn't find the the word he wanted, and settled for, "... when it was trendy."

"I know, I know." His wife's frustration was evident. "It's just... this is Penny's party, and though she's too much of a lady to say anything about what I wear, she might have opinions nonetheless. Also, she's mentioned that Izarra is very up on the latest fashions. I want to make a good impression!"

"Ah, okay. I see now." He let go of her wrist. "Put that one away, and I'll help you pick out something."

"But Jeff..."

He leaned forward to kiss her on the forehead. "If I pick out the dress, and anyone says anything, you can tell them that it's one of my favorites. That way, I'll be the bad guy."

Dianne chuckled, and leaned in to put her head on Jeff's shoulder. "I love you, you know."

"I know."

They kissed, a lingering caress, then Dianne went to the closet to hang up the dress she still held. Jeff began sorting through the pile, handing her the ones that were obviously not for the season, and running a critical eye over the others.

"This one." He had chosen a one shoulder dress in a pale lavender. It had a full, knee-length skirt with a handkerchief hemline and a fitted bodice. "This should swirl nicely on the dance floor," he remarked.

Dianne smiled and took it from his hand. "I approve," she murmured. A wide, slow smile crossed her face, and she moved closer to him, speaking quietly into his ear. "Now that you've picked out the dress, you can help me with something else."

"Oh?" Jeff's eyebrow rose. "And what's that?"

Her smile turned to a cat-like expression. "You can help me pick out my shoes."

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 03:09:59 GMT  
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12 January 2069, 7.30pm, Tracy Island



Izarra smoothed down the front of her dress as she sat down at the dressing table. Her fingers, their nails painted to a shining gloss, ghosted over the teal and black jacquard fabric of her Nafisa Dafina cocktail frock. She looked at the dress in the mirror, its three quarter length sleeves crinkling gently at her elbows. Nafisa Dafina was a Somalian designer who had worked closely with Izarra's husband on fabric prints up until his death. Her dress designs were amongst Izarra's favourites.

Izzie opened her little make-up case and made a few finishing touches to her face. I am still in shock, I believe, she thought as she smoothed a patch of her foundation. International Rescue! It was the last thing I ever expected to hear. But, it is also the best thing I could have heard. To think that I will be able to aid this organisation in some way is such a privilege. She touched up her eye shadow and clicked her case shut again.

She stood up and stepped into her very high heeled shoes, gaining four inches in height. Ah, that's better, she thought. With one last look in the mirror, she walked out of the room with a grin.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 03:10:40 GMT  
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12 January 2069, 7.45pm, Tracy Island

Dominic straightened Joshua's little bow tie as the monorail car came to a stop.

"Best behaviour, Jak?"

Joshua tapped his little black shoes on the car floor and grinned.

"Best behavior, Daddy!"

"Promise?"

"Pwomise!"

"All right then."

Dominic took Joshua's hand and led him to the lounge. There weren't many people present just yet, but Dom glanced at his watch. There's time yet. As they reached the lounge, he waved to John and Gordon, who were standing just across the room with the lady he recognised as the new agent.

"Gowdon!"

Joshua bounded across to the brothers and Dominic strolled after him.



"Evening, gents," he said.

Gordon grabbed Joshua and tossed him in the air, and John gestured to the woman.

"Izarra Soto Fernandez, meet Dominic Kelly, our resident nurse. Dominic, meet Izarra, our new agent for New Zealand -- and also our family dentist."

"Nice to meet ya," Dominic said, reaching out to shake Izarra's hand.

"The pleasure is mine," she said. "Are all the men here so guapo?" Izarra asked John.

"Eh?" Dominic cocked an eyebrow.

"Handsome," John explained.

Dominic grinned.

"Ah, cheers!" he said.

The little group continued to chat as the rest of the guests gathered to await Penelope's arrival.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 03:11:59 GMT  
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Ching, ching, ching, ching...

The gathered party-goers all looked up as Jeff lowered the spoon from his champagne flute. The room fell silent apart from the quiet background music. Jeff cleared his throat.

"Good evening, everyone," he said. "Tonight we're belatedly celebrating the birthday of the lovely Lady Penelope Creighton-Ward."

There was a gentle peal of applause and smiles all around. Penelope, inclined her head at Jeff's compliment.

"So, if everyone would raise their glasses please," he said, nodding to Jenny who had been making sure everyone was topped up with their tippie before filling her own glass, "and join in a toast to a most excellent agent and a most beloved friend. To Lady Penelope," he finished.

"To Lady Penelope!" the rest of the room chorused.

Champagne flutes and glasses clinked together and Penelope smiled gracefully.



"Thank you very much, everyone; you are too kind. I do hope you all will enjoy yourselves. I know that I shall with your wonderful company."

There was another round of applause, before the music was turned up a little, and the party officially began.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 03:12:54 GMT  
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Jeff finished his champagne and handed his flute to his wife. "You don't mind if I dance with the birthday girl first, do you?"

"No, of course not," Dianne said, sipping her own champagne. "We'll have plenty of time later."

Jeff smiled, and kissed her on the cheek. "I'll be back."

Penelope was just accepting a second glass of champagne from Parker when Jeff found her.

"May I have this dance, milady?" he asked, bowing slightly.

Penny smiled, a bright twinkle in her eye. "Of course, Jeff. I would never turn down a chance to dance with you." She handed her glass to Parker, and stepped into Jeff's arms.

"I hope you enjoy yourself tonight," Jeff said as they swayed to the music.

"I'm sure I shall. It is a marked contrast to my usual birthday celebrations. They so often felt as if they were an afterthought in the excitement of holiday preparations." Penny sighed slightly. "Having one's birthday on Christmas Eve does tend to lessen the impact of the day in the minds of others." She glanced over to her left, and nodded in that direction. "I am sure you are aware of that since young Tyler and I share the same natal day."

Jeff smiled. "I've been aware of it for longer than that, Penny. Gordon's birthday on Valentine's Day was often a challenge, too; at least, while Lucy was alive... and now again with Dianne."

"But you have successfully celebrated both." Her tone shaded it as a question rather than a statement.

"Yes, we have. We've tried to make each birthday celebration as special as the person we're celebrating."

She smiled then, her cheeks coloring beneath her make up. "And I thank you for that."

They were quiet for a while, letting the music guide their steps. When the tune came to an end,



Jeff leaned in and kissed Penelope on the cheek. "Happy birthday, Penny."

She looked downward, swallowing hard. "Thank you again, Jeff. For everything."

He was about to answer, when there was a slight tap on his shoulder. "Can I have this next dance with the birthday girl?" John asked.

"Of course, John," Penny said. Jeff could have sworn that tears had sparkled in her eyes the moment before, but now there was no sign of them. "I would be delighted to dance with you."

"She's all yours, son," Jeff said, drawing back.

"Don't I wish!" John replied with a grin as he took Penelope's hands. The music began again, and John swept her off into the small knot of dancing couples.

Jeff let a long breath out through his nose as he watched them for a moment. Then he went off in search of his wife. He felt a strong need to hold her in his arms, and dance with her, cheek to cheek.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 03:13:27 GMT

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About 8:20pm . . .

"So are you enjoying yourself, John?" Scott asked as he walked up his brother. John had been entertaining Alex and Tyler but the two younger boys had now disappeared somewhere.

"Yes I am. Its nice change to actually be here in person instead of being up on Thunderbird 5. I feel bad for Alan though as I know exactly what he's going through up there."

Scott nodded. "I saw Gordon with the video camera again so our little brother won't miss out entirely."

Not to mention, with Nikki gone Alan might be happy for the excuse not to be here.

John nodded.

"Hi you two, smile!"

The two brothers looked in the direction of Tin-Tin's voice to see her standing in front of them with her camera. Brains was standing nearby. Throwing an arm around each other's shoulders the two smiled as the Malaysian woman snapped the picture.

"Thank you," Tin-Tin told them as she lowered the camera.

Scott and John both replied that it was no problem.



"Do you mind if I ask Tin-Tin to dance?" Scott asked, directing the question to Brains.

"She is free to dance with whomever she likes," the scientist replied easily.

Scott turned his attention back Tin-Tin. "In that case, may I have this dance?" he asked her, holding out a hand to him.

"Yes, you may," Tin-Tin replied.

Scott lead his partner to the center of the room to join the few other couples already dancing to the music.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 03:16:35 GMT

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8:30 p.m.

Callie was contentedly happy to be at the party with everyone else, and she was having a good time.

Parker saw her approaching the bar. "Good evening, Miss Callie. What would you like t' drink?"

"Do you have anything...non-alcoholic?"

"H'Of course. Would yeh like a virgin fruit punch?"

With a smile on her face, she said, "I'll accept that."

"H'It will be done shortly."

Gordon walked up to her with his video camera. "Hey, Callie, looks like you've ordered up."

"Yeah. I took a virgin fruit punch."

Just as Parker was about to give her the glass, Gordon said, "You know that punch has been spiked, right?"

"What?" she gasped.

Parker cleared up the matter. "Relax, miss. The punch is not at h'all what yeh might call spiked." Shaking his head, he added, "That Mister Gordon. Yeh can never quite tell h'if 'e's tellin' you the truth."



Callie grabbed the glass and glared at Gordon. "You know that wasn't funny."

Gordon quickly put the camera down on the counter. "Okay, okay, Callie, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have done that."

With a speculative look, she huffed, "Well, this is a party, and we should be enjoying ourselves." Then she smiled and said, "I'll forgive ya."

Gordon sighed in relief. "Whew, thanks. Anyway, how's the party been?"

"Pretty good. It's been fun mingling with everybody."

"So, now that you've discovered the antidote to the jet fuel, what's next for you?"

"Actually, I was seriously going to talk to you about that. I'd like to do some training on Thunderbird Four."

"Really?" Gordon was pleasantly surprised. "What made you come to this decision?"

"Being an astronaut's great and all, but I like the idea of cross-training. I've been wanting to learn something completely new for myself and see what it's like."

"I understand. Astronauts and aquanauts have a lot more in common than most people realize. I know when you're training in the space suit, you have to go underwater for that zero-gravity simulation."

"Right." Taking a sip from her punch, she added, "I personally would like to one day be able to handle all of the Thunderbirds, but only in a back-up role. I don't want to take the jobs of the main pilots."

"A Jack--er, Jill-of-all-Trades." He smiled at the idea. "I like that. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if several people could be qualified to handle them all."

Callie nodded. "When do you think I can start?"

"Let me check my schedule first, and I'll let you know as soon as I can." Grabbing his camera again, he said, "If you don't mind now, I've got to finish filming the party."

"Sure thing. And thanks."

"You're welcome."

Gordon went back to filming the events of the party while Callie continued enjoying her alcohol-free fruit punch.



With his drink in one hand and a glass of punch in the other, Scott walked across the lounge and stepped out onto the balcony. He crossed over to where Cassie was leaning against the rail, a slight breeze blowing the long jacket of the pants suit she wore.

"Hi, Scott," she replied, seeing him approach.

"Hi. I brought you a glass of punch," he said, holding it out.

"Thanks," she said, taking the proffered glass.

"If you'd like something stronger, I can go get it for you, but I don't recall ever seeing you drink alcohol."

"The punch is fine," Cassie replied, before putting her lips to the glass and taking a sip before continuing. "With the exception of a sip of champagne for the toast at my wedding, I haven't drunk alcohol in years."

"Any particular reason?" Scott asked, as he leaned against the balcony railing.

"Bad experience in high school."

"Get in trouble for drinking at a party or something?"

"Well, I was drinking at a party but as far as I know neither of my parents know about it," Cassie told him. "One of the guys on the football team had thrown a party for his team and the cheerleaders. I'm not sure who brought the beer and I can't remember who got me drinking it, but when it came time to leave, the friends I had come with and myself were pretty wasted. My brother, Philip, was at NYU at the time, so I called him to come pick me up and stayed at his apartment for the night."

"So your brother covered for you instead of telling your parents."

"I may have been better off facing my parents. Philip volunteered at a soup kitchen and guess who he woke up at five the following morning to help out." Cassie took a sip of the punch in your hand. "I guess his method worked though," she continued. "I never did drink at a party again, though I can't say the same for some of my friends on the squad."

"So you were a cheerleader in high school? I didn't peg you as the type."

"Why? Because I'm not blonde?"

"No. You just don't seem like the type that would like wearing the cheerleading uniforms."

"I viewed them as a necessary evil."



Scott laughed at her comment. "Did you participate in any other sports?"

She shook her head. "Not in high school. I did swimming in junior high but wasn't really all that good. I gave it up and joined chorus and yearbook in high school. Giving up swimming allowed me to also participate on the dance team, which basically consisted of people on the cheerleading squads. So what about you? Play any sports in school? Tennis maybe?"

Something about the way she asked the last question made Scott look over at her. Cassie was wearing a knowing smile, which made him think she had heard about the incident while he was teaching the kids tennis.

"Did someone say something to you?"

"Things get around," she replied. "Seriously though, did you play any sports in school?"

"Yes I did and I did play tennis actually. I also played basketball and did little league over the summer."

"Must have kept you busy," Cassie commented, before taking another sip of the punch in her hand.

"Are you kidding?" They heard Virgil say, and looked up to see him walking toward them. "Scott is the reason the rest of us are all over achievers ourselves," the younger Tracy added, as he came up beside Scott and rested his hand on his brother's shoulder. "Along with his sports he also managed to find time to do student council and become senior class president. Unfortunately for me, his arch rival was the star quarterback, and decided to give me a hard time just for being Scott's brother."

"The only competition that existed between the two of us was in that guy's head," Scott replied glancing over at his brother. "What was his name anyway?"

"Edward Turner the third," Virgil replied and then looked away from his brother and back at Cassie. "Thankfully for me, I only had to deal with him my freshman year. I think I would've gotten more grief the following year after Scott was voted Prom King over him if he hadn't graduated."

Cassie smiled. Looking at Scott, she could see he was a bit uncomfortable from his brother's comments. She had a feeling the Thunderbird 1 pilot wouldn't have mentioned being Prom King himself.

"Don't you have somewhere else to be?" Scott asked, taking a sip of his drink. "Where's your date anyways?"

"Vince asked her to dance."

"Dancing sounds like a good idea," Scott commented, seeing a way to get away from Virgil. He turned to Cassie. "Would you care to dance?" he asked, holding out a hand to her.



"Sure," Cassie said, placing her hand in Scott's. "I'll talk to you later, Virgil," she said, as Scott led her toward the lounge.

They deposited their glasses on a service cart and then joined the other dancers.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 03:18:44 GMT

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As one song ended and another began a few of the dancers switched partners or went to get something to drink or eat. Scott and Cassie stayed where they were though. Glancing off to the side, Cassie saw Virgil and Elise now dancing together.

"May I cut in?"

Dom's accented question brought Cassie attention back to her own dance partner. She saw that the dark-haired nurse was now standing next to them as she and Scott stopped dancing. Scott glanced at Dom and then at Cassie and simply nodded, taking a step back.

As Cassie and Dom started dancing, Scott watched them for a moment. In reality he had wanted to tell Dom that he couldn't cut in. I don't know why though? It's not like I've got a monopoly on Cassie's time. She's perfectly free to dance with anyone she wants to.

With a slight shake of his head, Scott walked away from the two now dancing.

"Did I interrupt something?" Dom asked with a quick glance at the retreating Scott before turning his attention back to Cassie.

"No. Why?"

"Just wondering," Dom commented. As Cassie didn't seem at all upset about him cutting in, he decided to let it go. Maybe I'm reading more into the situation than there really is?

"Where did Joshua get too?"

"He's dancing himself believe it or not. Right over there," Dom told her, pointing off to his right.

Cassie turned her head to look in the direction he was pointing. It didn't take her long to spot Joshua and Lea dancing near the one side of the room. Lana was nearby keeping an eye on the two little ones.

"That's adorable!"

"Yeah. You should have been there when she asked him to dance. She was so polite about it. I



have a feeling someone had coached her."

"It's good that they seem to be getting along," Cassie commented. "So, what have you been up to this evening?"

As they continued their dance, Dom told her about his evening so far.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 03:19:51 GMT

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"So, are you enjoying yourself, Cherry?" John smiled down at his sister as they danced. He could feel the non-committal single shoulder shrug. "I guess that means, 'no'?"

"Well, sorta." The teen let out a deep sigh. "The food's great, as usual, and the music is okay. But it's just not as fun as the New Year's Eve party. Or even the Halloween party. Or Virgil's birthday."

"Don't tell me you're getting to be a jaded society party girl!" John said with a chuckle. "You're far too young for that!"

Cherie rolled her eyes. "Of course, I'm not."

"Then why isn't this one as fun?"

"I dunno." Again, she gave him a half-hearted shrug. "I guess because there's nothing to do but dance and eat. Or, if you're a grown up, dance, eat and drink."

"That's just about all we did at the New Year's Eve party," John countered.

"Yeah, but there were lots of cool people there. Lots of guys to dance with. I listened to Grandma Emily talking with that Duchess. She was a hoot!" Cherie glanced up at her brother, a quizzical look on her face. "Did you know that Kat was there?"

"I know." John's face held a tint of something Cherie couldn't place. "She came to speak to me. Even introduced her fiancé."

"She's engaged?" She shook her head. "That was pretty quick."

John gave her a keen glance. "Quick? What do you mean by that?"

"I dunno." Cherie looked away, and gave another now-annoying half-shrug. "I kinda thought she'd be pining away after you longer than that."

He snorted and shook his head. "I don't know where you got that idea."



"It's just the way she seemed to be."

There was a pause, then John changed the subject. "Well, there are still interesting people to talk to. Have you talked to Ms. Soto-Fernandez?"

Cherie made a face. "Our dentist? I mean, I know she's going to be an agent and all that, but she's a... a dentist. How is that interesting?"

John's eyebrow went up, and he smiled, a mysterious expression. "I don't know, Cherie, but I've heard some pretty interesting things about this dentist of ours. She's known Lady Penelope for a while now. I understand they both used to be in the same line of work."

The girl looked confused. "You mean modeling? Our dentist used to be a model?"

This time, John laughed aloud. "If you think that Lady Penelope used to be a model, you'd better go talk to her and get the straight story. Modeling is what she does now... but only on occasion."

The music ended, and John asked, "I'm thirsty. How about you?"

"I guess," was her non-committal answer.

"Then I'll get us both some punch, and you can go talk to Lady P. Ask her what she used to do." He motioned off to one of the center tables, where her Ladyship sat with Emily and Izarra.

"I'd like the punch, but..." Cherie eyed the older women warily.

"Double dog dare you."

She rolled her eyes again. "Oh, all right," she said, her tone one of resigned petulance.

"I'll bring the punch to the table," he said, grinning. "I wouldn't miss this for the world."

He stalked off to the punch bowl, glancing back only once to see Cherie approach Penelope's table.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 03:21:27 GMT  
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"And here's a wall flower," Gordon commented, as he zoomed in on John sitting alone at a table. "What's wrong, can't convince anyone to dance with you?"

"I'm taking a break. Is that allowed?" John responded.

"I suppose so. Got anything to say to our wayward brother."



"Hi Alan," John said, looking into the camera. "Sorry you're missing the fun but I'm glad to be enjoying the evening myself. I'll dance with Lady Penelope once for you."

"Yeah, because she's the only one you can convince to dance with you," Gordon quipped.

"If all you're going to do is give me a hard time, take your camera elsewhere, will you?"

"I think I will. I've wasted enough time on you, as it is."

With that said, Gordon left John at the table and wandered around the room some more. Eventually the camera came to rest on a very bored looking Aaron. Shutting the camera off, Gordon walked over to him.

"Hey Aaron. You don't look like you're having very much fun," Gordon commented.

Aaron had tagged along with him a bit at the beginning of the party as Gordon had recorded people arriving for the party. The copper-haired Tracy had taken the time to introduce his student to the people he hadn't met yet, including the younger Tracy kids.

"Hey, Coach. I'm kind of just hanging around until my father has decided I made enough of an appearance."

"You might enjoy yourself more if you do something more than just hold up the wall. Ask someone to dance. You can dance, right?"

"Of course I know how to dance," Aaron said defensively.

Gordon looked around the room looking for his sister. He knew she would enjoy being asked to dance with someone other than her brothers and probably wouldn't turn the teenager down. He finally spotted her talking with Scott.

"Why don't you go ask Cherie to dance?" Gordon suggested nodding his head in his sister's direction.

"I don't know."

"Oh, go on. She doesn't bite. Or are you scared to ask a girl to dance?"

"I'm not scared!" Aaron said standing up straight.

"Then go ask her," Gordon said, nodding again in Cherie's direction.

"I will," the teenage replied.

With that said, Aaron started off across the lounge. Gordon switched the camera back on, and started recording again.

"And here's Tracy Island's newest teenager off to ask Cherie to dance," Gordon narrated as he



followed Aaron across the room. He watched the scene unfold on the screen.

Both Cherie and Scott glanced at Aaron as he came up to them. Scott nodded and grinned, and left the two teenagers alone. Though Aaron's back was to him, Gordon was still able to see his sister's face as he talked to her. Cherie had what he considered was a rather coy look on her face as she spoke with Aaron, but he knew she had said yes as soon as he saw her bashful smile. "And what do you know folks, she said yes to him," he said, as he taped Aaron leading Cherie into the middle of the room with the other couples.

Gordon taped the two of them dancing for a little bit and then started panning through some of the other couples.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 03:22:59 GMT  
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"Lady Penelope is a very lovely woman. She seems so. . . I'm not sure what the right word is. But I bet the story of how she came to meet the Tracys and became involved with International Rescue would be. . . interesting, to say the least," Will commented as he watched her walk away to join another group.

"You're right there," Vince replied.

They watched the retreating form of the guest of honor for a few moments longer, then returned to the conversation they were having before she'd joined them.

"Y'know, I still find it hard to believe that we attended the Naval Academy at the same time, yet never ran into each other," Will said.

"Well, with a graduating class of over 800, I suppose neither of us could have gotten to meet all of our classmates. Although I think I saw you at some of our home football games. With your height and that hair, you'd be hard to miss."

"Yeah, I suppose. Did you have any problems adjusting?"

"Not really. My Dad was career Navy and he ran a strict ship, if you know what I mean. You?"

"Well, as tall as I am -- which you noticed -- it took me a week or so to remember not to sit up in bed, or stand straight up from my desk. I must've hit my head on the ceiling and the bottom of the bed half a dozen times at the beginning of each term." Will raised one hand to rub the top of his head.

Vince grinned, and was about to speak when Lea ran up to him, tears streaming down her face. "Daddy, I wanna go."



He bent down and picked her up. "What's the matter, Poppet?"

"They said I can't dance with them, 'cause I'm too little."

"Who did, sweetie?"

But she'd started crying harder, and couldn't answer, instead putting her head on her father's shoulder. Vince started to look for his wife. This problem was a little out of his experience.

"You can't leave just yet, Lea. I haven't had a chance to dance with you yet," said Will.

She raised her head and looked at him, with the tears still running down her face. She hiccuped and sniffed. "Wh-what?"

He smiled at her. "Well, I like to dance with all the prettiest girls in the room, and you're the one without a partner at the moment. Besides, I'm the tallest person here. So we can prove to whomever said that to you that they're wrong." He paused, listening. "And I think I'm hearing the perfect music for us to dance to."

He held out his arms to the little girl, looking at Vince for permission. The other man smiled and nodded as his daughter reached out to the redhead, who gathered her close to him. She was all smiles as Will wiped the tears from her cheeks and headed toward the area where a few other couples were already dancing. He whispered in her ear, and she giggled and put one hand in his.

Then he began a slow foxtrot, while quietly singing the words to the old, old song that was being played: Our Love is Here to Stay.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 03:23:40 GMT

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"Mmm." Dianne sighed into Jeff's ear. "Now I have you just where I want you."

"Oh?" Jeff's tone was amused. "What exactly does that mean?"

"That my dance card is filled for the rest of the night with only one name." Her breath tickled his ear as she spoke. "Yours."

"Does that mean I'm not allowed to let anyone cut in on us?" She could feel the muscles of his face contract against her temple as he smiled.

"Damn straight." Her expletive made him pull back so he could look at her. She smiled up at him, her eyes half-lidded. "You've already been the perfect host."

"By dancing with Penny and Izarra..."



"Yes. And you've been the loving father."

He smiled now, beginning to catch her drift. "Yes, I danced with Cherie."

"Then the dutiful son."

He nodded. "Mother and I danced, yes."

"So, now it's time to be the attentive husband... for the rest of the night."

"But..."

She cocked one eyebrow at his sputtered protest. "But?"

"I haven't danced with Elise."

Rolling her eyes, she nodded in the direction of another dancing couple. "Do you really think Virgil would let you cut in? If those two danced any closer, they'd be back to back."

He chuckled, then added, "I haven't danced with Callie, either. Nor Cassie."

Giving him an exasperated look, she asked, "Do you really want to?"

Drawing her closer, he kissed her hair. "Not particularly... though it would be the polite thing to do."

"Let our sons be polite for a change," she told him. "We're making up for lost time. I want to dance all the dances I missed back at Virgil's birthday party."

"Well," Jeff murmured, "when you put it that way, Mrs. Tracy. I am your obedient servant."

"I prefer you as an attentive husband, Mr. Tracy," she replied. "Now, and later on tonight."

He smiled again, his deep dimples and smile lines creasing his face. "I think I can work with that."

---

Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 03:27:02 GMT

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Virgil held Elise close as they swayed to the music. He smiled briefly at his parents as they passed.

"They look happy, don't they?"



"Hmmm?" Virgil looked down to see Elise smiling up at him.

"Your folks. They seem to be enjoying themselves tonight. It's nice to see."

"It is." He pulled her close as he felt her shiver. "Cold?"

"A bit," Elise responded.

"Well, we can't have that." He pulled his jacket off and draped it over her shoulders. "Better?"

"Much. Thank-you." She breathed in the scent of his cologne and smiled. "Would you care to walk me back to my apartment?" she asked, her green eyes twinkling.

He laughed and took her hand. "Of course, my lady." With a nod to his parents, he and Elise walked towards the monorail. To their surprise, it was empty.

"Where is everyone?" Elise asked.

Virgil shook his head. "Either headed back early or staying late, I guess." They talked quietly as the train headed towards the Cliff House. Once it had stopped, he again took her hand and led her to the door of her apartment.

She opened it and looked up. "Would you like to come in?"

He raised one eyebrow. "Will Henry let me?"

Elise merely shook her head and led him inside. The kitten came bounding in from the other room, meowing happily. He then spied Virgil and he froze, back arched and hissing. "That cat hates me," Virgil stated.

Elise crouched down and the kitten leapt into her arms. "No, he doesn't. Henry doesn't hate anyone, do you, baby?" She nuzzled the kitten as he purred and rubbed against her chin.

"I think I should be jealous," Virgil quipped with a grin.

Elise stuck her tongue out at him as she put Henry down. "Can I get you something to drink?" she asked as she shrugged out of his jacket and hung it over a chair.

He shook his head and sat down on the couch. "No thanks. Why don't you join me over here?" She came over and sat down next to him. He put his arm around her shoulders and drew her in close, pressing his lips to hers. "I've wanted to do that all evening." They sat there, quietly, exchanging kisses and talking softly. "What are your plans for tomorrow?" Virgil asked sometime later.

Elise shook her head. "Nothing much, just some household chores. Why?"

"I was thinking. Maybe we could go for a walk, have a picnic. Alex was talking to Jenny tonight



about going for a hike later this week. It reminded me of this terrific waterfall I've wanted to show you. We could go."

"You, me and Alex?" Elise teased.

"Brat," he replied, kissing the tip of her nose. He moved down to her lips again, his arms caressing hers. She wrapped herself around him, pulling him closer.

When he pulled back, he ran his fingers down her cheeks. "You looked beautiful tonight."

She blushed. "You don't look too bad yourself." She ran her fingers over his chest, pausing to unbutton his shirt. Leaning forward, she placed a soft kiss on his chest. "Mmmm....I love your cologne." Her hands wandered around his back, lightly caressing his skin as her lips moved upwards to his neck.

Virgil leaned his head back and let out a soft moan. "Elise..." She grew bolder, pulling the shirt completely off and leaning in closer. She captured his lips as his hands gripped her tightly.

Finally, they broke apart. "Virgil?" Elise asked, her voice a little breathless. "Wouldn't it make more sense if you just stayed here tonight? We could get an earlier start tomorrow." She looked up at him, her green eyes bright.

Virgil could feel his heart pounding in his chest. "Yes, I think that would be a great idea."

"Then we'd best turn in. We'll be getting up early in the morning." She began to turn off the lights. As she pulled the curtains over the French doors, Virgil came up behind her, wrapping his arms around her waist and turning her to face him. He bent and kissed her passionately, easing her dress straps off her shoulders. Now it was her turn to shudder as he trailed his mouth along her neck. He nudged the straps further, causing the dress to slip off and pool at her feet.

They stood embracing in the moonlight until Elise pulled back and took his hand. With her eyes glowing, she led him into the bedroom.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 03:28:04 GMT  
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Sunday, January 13th, 8:15 am, Elise's apartment....

Elise hummed softly as she turned the bacon on stove. Henry rubbed up against her legs, purring. "Aww, Henry, you'll get some as soon as it's cooked." She bent down and patted the kitten.

"Good morning."

She looked up and smiled. Virgil stood in the bedroom doorway, a towel slung around his neck.



He wore his pants from last night, but was barefoot and his hair was damp from his shower. "Good morning."

He walked over and kissed her, then turned his attention to the stove. "Bacon? You're making me breakfast?"

She laughed. "Bacon and eggs. And there's coffee on the counter."

"I may never leave." Virgil padded over to the cupboard and took down two mugs. He filled them with coffee and handed one to her. She added milk and sugar, then nodded for him to sit down at the table.

"Go ahead, this is nearly ready."

He sat down, keeping a wary eye on Henry, who in turn was watching back. Virgil shook his head and laughed to himself. He then looked up to watch Elise finish cooking. She wore a thin white robe and her blonde hair fell loosely down her back. She took a piece of bacon from the pan and tossed it from hand to hand until it cooled, then smiling, knelt down and fed it to the kitten. She talked baby talk to the little cat, who looked up at her in adoration.

What is it about her? Virgil thought to himself as he sipped his coffee. She completes me somehow. Like there was some part of my life missing, that I never realized until I met her. It's more than just attraction. Much more. He smiled as she crouched, still talking to the kitten. Then it hit him. My God...Now it makes sense. Should I? He took a deep breath. What the hell. "Elise?" She looked up. "I love you."

She stared at him in shock. "You...what?"

Feeling like a huge weight had lifted from his heart, Virgil walked over and pulled her to her feet. "I love you." He kissed her and spun her around in his arms. "You know, I never knew how wonderful it felt to say that to someone."

"But, Virgil..."

He silenced her with a kiss. "Elise, I've never felt like this with anyone before. You're smart, witty, beautiful." He kissed her again. "And all mine!"

Elise shook her head. "Virgil...I don't know what to say..."

"Then don't say anything." He rested his forehead on hers. "You don't have to say it back. Just know that I mean it. I love you."

She pulled back and walked over to stand in front of the doors, watching the sun glint off the waves. "I've never felt this way either," she said softly. "I never thought I could." She turned to face him and smiled. "I guess that means, I love you, too!" She laughed. "You're right. It is a wonderful feeling!" She jumped into his arms, kissing him. Within a heartbeat, the kiss turned from friendly to steamy. She broke apart and took his hand, leading him back to the bedroom. "I think you're going to need another shower."



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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 03:33:47 GMT  
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3 p.m. Thursday January 12, 2069 in Bozeman, Montana  
(11am Friday January 13, 2069 on Tracy Island).

The knock on the door roused Luke from the couch. His mother was out grocery shopping, leaving him alone in the house with just Rommel for company. "Well Rom, if it's someone for Mom they'll have to come back," he said as he stood up and stretched. He walked to the door, Rom at his heels.

He opened the door to one of the last people he expected to see. "Anna! What are you doing here?" Rommel barked a 'welcome' bark.

"Visiting you, of course. And bringing Rommel a treat. Can I come in? It's a bit cold out here." Anna stood on the porch wearing a coat that would be fine for Seattle or Christchurch but wasn't quite up to a Montana winter.

Luke stepped back. "Sure come on in. I don't want you to freeze out there."

Anna came in and took off her hat and gloves. Then she took off her coat to reveal a heavy sweat shirt. She unzipped that to reveal a sweater. "Actually, I'm fine. I learned about layering a long time ago. I figured this would be colder than we were used to so I made sure we all had extra sweaters to wear under our coats."

"We? Who all is here? And can I get you something to drink? Coffee, tea, hot chocolate? A soda?" Luke led Anna over to a chair in front of the fireplace.

"If you have a diet soda that would be wonderful. I think I over layered and got overheated." Anna sat down on the bench by the door and took off her boots. She wiggled her toes then decided to take off the top pair of socks. She had over dressed, forgetting she wouldn't actually be outside for that long. Her feet were sweating. She stuffed the socks into a coat pocket.

Luke grinned and headed for the kitchen. He put ice in two glasses and grabbed a diet cola for Anna and a regular one for himself. He then raided his mom's cookie jar.

"Here you go. One diet cola and to balance it out, a plate of home baked chocolate chip cookies. We also have oatmeal-raisin but I thought I knew what you preferred." Luke set the tray down on the table between the couch and a stuffed chair Anna had sunk down into. He sat back down on the couch and poured the sodas. Rommel sat on the floor next to him and looked pitiful. "Yes Rom, I brought you a treat too." He tossed Rommel a rawhide treat and the dog promptly lay down to chew in it. Luke turned to Anna. "So what are you doing here?"



Anna put down her cola and bit into a cookie. "I mentioned to Alex and Tyler once that I had always wanted to see Yellowstone in the winter. So guess what Mr. Tracy gave me for Christmas? A week-long stay at Yellowstone lodge for me and my family and a week in Seattle to visit my mom and the rest of my relatives there."

Luke grinned. "I'm not surprised. Did he ask you to check on me?"

"No. Actually, I'm hiding from my family." Luke raised an eyebrow at her. Anna sighed. "I get along fine with my family -- when they're several thousand miles away. But we have nothing in common, really. After three days I felt I needed to run away from home. It's amazing how someone can make you feel like a 13 year old who nobody expects anything important from." Luke winced at that comment. "My daughter Mary is thinking of spending a year at the University of Washington so we toured the campus. Then I told everyone we needed to be in Bozeman early. We're spending the day here and will go on to Yellowstone tomorrow. Since we were in town, I figured I'd drop in to see you. And Rommel, of course." Rommel, having finished his treat came over to Anna. She grinned down at him and scratched his ears.

"Where are the rest of your family?"

"Back at the hotel. Probably in the swimming pool," Anna answered. "Where's yours?"

"Dad's working at the store. Mom's at the store too -- the grocery store, that is. We're out of Rom's favorite treats."

"Oh, horrors!! Emergency shopping trip needed, of course! Maybe these will help." Anna reached into her shoulder bag and brought out some gourmet dog treats. She tossed Rommel one. He immediately gobbled it up. "And if no one else is here I can give you this. I saw it at the airport and couldn't resist." She handed him a paperback.

"'International Rescue: The Authoritative History' by Steve Gunner." Luke chuckled. "I wonder how much he got wrong."

"A lot. I finally had to stop reading it on the plane. I couldn't hold back my laughter any more and I couldn't explain what was so funny. Do you realize you belong to an organization of several hundred people with a secret underground base in the Australian outback?"

"Well, that's better than some of the theories I've heard. My favorite is the Antarctic base where we're all required to sit in the tanning beds so we're all tan. This is meant to throw people off about the real location."

"This one wouldn't be so bad if he hadn't gotten everything so wrong. And if he wasn't so petty. Among other things, Ned Cook faked his accident to get a story."

"He arranged to have a building fall on him. Right," Luke chuckled. "Well it should be an interesting read, at least. I'm sure it will cheer me up."

"Getting bored?"



"I feel so useless," Luke grumbled. "I can't do anything. I feel like I'm stuck here all the time, except for therapy."

"Why can't you get out to do anything else?" Anna reached for another cookie. She deliberately kept her 'professional' voice off. "Do you need to stay home for some reason?"

"I can drive all right but we only have two cars here. I take Dad to work sometimes so I can get out but all the places I want to go are places where I'd be doing something -- something I probably can't do right now. I guess I'm just bored. I know I'm doing better at my twice-a-week therapy sessions but," Luke raised his head and grinned wryly at Anna, "I just hate feeling helpless!"

"Where have I heard that before? Maybe from every cop and firefighter I ever worked with? So when are you coming back to the Island?" Anna looked at the last cookie on the plate and reminded herself that she didn't need it. She'd already gained weight on this vacation and was looking forward to a fancy dinner tonight with just her husband. Visions of crème brûlée went through her head. She told herself she couldn't have both the cookie and the dessert. When she realized the silence had gone on too long she looked up at Luke and raised an eyebrow.

Luke hesitated. "Do you think they'll want me back soon? I may not be recovered completely for a while."

"Horse puckies." Anna's voice had not gotten louder but the intensity had changed. "I know you know how bad Gordon was after his accident. They didn't let him down and they didn't let him hide. They're not going to do it to you."

"You swore. I didn't know counselors were allowed to swear," Luke said, smiling slightly.

"Ok. Change my comment to excrement of a male bovine. Now that we have that out of the way, why don't you tell me what you're really worried about?"

Luke hesitated. He wasn't sure what was wrong but something was. Anna was right, he was worried. But about what?

Anna watched him for a minute. When he didn't answer she went on. "Tyler really needs you to come back even if it's just for a visit. He took your accident pretty hard. He's had too many close calls this year and needs some reassurance that you're ok."

Luke continued to look down at his hands without speaking. He was saved by the bell. Or to be more exact, by the sound of his mom turning the door handle. "Luke? Whose car is that in the driveway? Do you have company?" His mom was carrying three grocery bags while pushing open the garage door.

Luke went over to take one of the bags but his mom refused to give it up. "The doctor said no heavy lifting."

"Three boxes of Kleenex is not heavy lifting, Mom," Luke grumbled. "Mom I'd like you to meet Anna Hansen, a friend from work. You were gone for a while; how much shopping did you do?"



"More than I expected. I need to fatten you up still. Pleased to meet you Ms. Hansen. Nice of you to stop by. How long are you in town? And would you like to stay for dinner?"

"I'm just in town for tonight. My family and I have reservations at Yellowstone lodge for the next week. I may stop back in on my way home next week though. And thank you for the invite but my husband is supposed to be taking me out for a romantic dinner in," she looked at her watch, "about an hour and a half. Here, let me help you bring the rest of the bags in. Luke can put the things away. As long as you didn't buy a fifty pound bag of rice, that's not heavy lifting, is it? And can I get your chocolate chip cookie recipe?" Anna chatted away while bringing in several bags from the garage. "Can you recommend a good restaurant? Someone at the hotel recommended Vince's. Is it romantic? Or should we try a steak place?" Anna kept busy for a couple more minutes, then excused herself. "I have to go try and make myself look beautiful. I have a big date with a cute guy in an hour."

"You'll stop by again when you come back through, won't you? It's been so nice that so many of Luke's friends from work came all the way up here from California to visit him. Bring your family and come for dinner." Mrs. Morel liked this friendly woman and was reassured that someone would be looking after Luke while he was so far away.

"I don't know. We were talking about renting a car and driving through Jackson to see the Grand Tetons. Maybe get in some skiing. It might depend on the weather." Anna realized that if her family met the Morels the fact that Luke didn't live in California would be bound to come out. She'd have to think of a cover story if she came back.

"Let me walk you to the door. Although I don't think you could get lost between the kitchen and the front door," Luke laughed.

"I wouldn't bet on it. I have a friend known as 'Anna the Lost'. She once managed to get lost in her own kitchen." Anna sat down to put her boots back on. "Even if I don't get back next week, I will keep in touch. If for no other reason than to get your Mom's cookie recipe."

Luke watched her drive away. Her visit had left him unsettled and he didn't know why. He wanted to go back to work for International Rescue. So what was bothering him?

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 03:34:33 GMT  
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Sunday, January 13, 2969, New Zealand

Izarra Soto Fernandez kicked off her high heels as she sank into her brother's sofa with a glass of wine in hand. After her trip to Tracy Island, she was looking forward to relaxing amongst family.

"Ah, Joaquin, you always have the best reds."

Izzie's brother walked into the room with a tray of snacks and laid it down on the coffee table.



"Well, Izzie, I always break out the best for you."

"And it is always appreciated, little brother."

She reached out and picked up a handful of pretzels and Joaquin sat down with his own glass of wine.

"So how have you been?" he asked.

"Not so busy," Izarra answered, trying to hide a little smile. She had, of course, just accepted a job with International Rescue. She continued. "With the other dentists in the practice, I am mostly focusing on administration, but I get it done very quickly. I have been reading my Chase Rivers books again -- I'm looking forward to the next one; hopefully there will be a next one."

"How many times have you read those books?" Joaquin said, chuckling.

"Too many to count," she said, grinning. "And how are you? How is Wellesley? How are the children?"

Joaquin chuckled as his sister plied him with many questions at once as usual, and he took a sip of his wine.

"Wellesley is fine. Working hard as always in the office. I've tried to tell him to take it easy, but you know what he can be like. That's where he is now."

"Indeed," Izarra said, munching another pretzel.

"Peter and Darcy seem to be enjoying their classes. I did worry that they were only studying medicine to follow in my footsteps, but as always, my twins surprise me."

"Is the University of Auckland suiting them?"

"They say that they wouldn't have wanted to go elsewhere. They have made a huge amount of friends, as always."

Izarra smiled and sipped more of her wine. The plum and berry flavours of the smooth merlot danced in her mouth before the liquid sank smoothly down her throat. She closed her eyes and tipped her head back to rest on the plump sofa cushions. In part I still cannot believe it. International Rescue! It is so strange. I look forward to this challenge very, very much. When Izarra opened her eyes again, she saw that Joaquin had fixed her with a hard stare.

"Are you sure you made the right decision in coming here?"

Izarra chuckled lightly and lifted her glass to him.

"With wine like this, it can't have been a bad decision."



Joaquin kept his gaze steady and stared her down. Izarra finally sighed and shrugged her shoulders.

"When my Sébastian died, I knew I could stay no longer in Spain, nor return to our house in France. When I went back to mother and father, I knew that the Dominican Republic was not the place I wanted to be. I love our homeland, and I will return to live there when I am an old soltera with ten cats and a fat, drooling dog... but I am not so old yet. Where else would I go but to be with my brother in this beautiful country, to work and to own my own practice? Yes, Joaquin, it has been the right decision."

"As long as you're sure, Izzie," he said. "I don't want to see you sad again."

"No one can ever make me as happy as my Sébastian did," Izarra said, briefly closing her eyes. "But I must move on. And I have, and I am happy."

"I never thought that you would be happy just being a dentist," Joaquin said, shaking his head.

And that shows all that you know, little brother, Izarra thought, and she hid her grin behind her wine glass.

--by ArtisticRainey

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 03:35:26 GMT

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Tracy Island, Late afternoon . . .

Edward sat silently as the nurse pushed the wheelchair toward the hospital exit. He would have preferred to walk but just the prospect of finally leaving the hospital had eliminated the will to make too much of a fuss over the hospital policy. As the doors parted, and he made his way through the doorway, Edward took in a deep breath of the fresh air. It was good to be free of the sterile environment of the veteran's hospital.

The nurse brought him to a stop beside his brother's car. Ted opened the door for him and, refusing help, Edward climbed into the passenger seat. As he waited for his brother to walk around the car, Edward thought about how to start the search he had been waiting almost two months to pursue. He was determined to find Desert Rose.

Satisfied with the ending of the chapter, Lana saved the file and closed her laptop. She looked over toward the pool where Aaron and Lea were throwing a ball back and forth. A smile came to the mother's face as she watched her kids play.

More voices made Lana look toward the Villa to see Alex and Tyler making their way down, followed closely by their mother. Dianne spotted Lana and waved. Lana returned the greeting, and



as Alex and Tyler made a beeline for the pool, Dianne walked over to her.

"Mind if I join you?"

"Not at all," Lana said indicating the empty chairs at the table.

Dianne sat down across from the other woman. She placed the book she had brought down to read on the table.

"Wasn't sure anyone else would be down here," she commented.

"Well, the kids wanted to go swimming and I figured the fresh air would be nice." After a short pause, Lana continued. "Izzara is a very intriguing woman. I enjoyed talking with her last night."

"She is indeed. Those who have visited her already report she's a very competent dentist. I'd definitely recommend her if you're looking for a nearby dentist for your own family."

Lana smiled. "Izzara managed to fit her own pitch in last night. The kids are actually due for a check-up next month. I'll probably call her office and set up an appointment. At least the dentist issue is one thing I can check off my to-do list."

"Always a nice thing to be able to do."

"I actually wanted to talk to you about another item on the list -- schooling for Lea. Aaron's continuing the internet program he did back in Hawaii. I was homeschooling Lea back home, but it was set up locally so I need to figure out something else."

Lana looked over at the pool. Aaron had organized the younger kids in a water version of monkey in the middle. Tyler was currently in the middle and looking to get a bit frustrated. As Lana watched, Aaron purposely made a bad throw and let Tyler get the ball.

"He's pretty good with kids," Dianne commented, having followed Lana's gaze.

Lana nodded, a proud smile on her face. She took her eyes off the game and looked back at Dianne as she continued. "Anyway, given the isolation here on the island, Vince and I thought about sending her to a school on the mainland but needing to fly her back and forth daily just seems impractical, especially after her reaction on the flight over here."

"Yeah, a daily flight back and forth could be hard on her, though Jeff and I would definitely work something out to accommodate you if that's what you want."

Lana shook her head. "It would be good for her socially but one of the reasons I started homeschooling her was so I could be involved in her education, especially with my degree in elementary education. Your kids are schooled here on the island, right? Is it something I could get Lea involved in?"

"Yes. Tyler, Alex and Cherie are all involved in a satellite program. It runs along the U.S. school year, but some of the teachers are from New Zealand and Australia. It's all done via the computer.



It wouldn't be hard to include Lea in with the group. Right now my mother, Emily or I supervise them during 'school hours'. Another hand with that task would be very welcome and you could stay involved in her education. If you want, we could get things set up tomorrow."

"I'd like that," Lana replied, happy that her the question about her daughter's education was resolved.

The two women continued talking as the kids played in the pool.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 03:38:40 GMT

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Tracy Island, the beach, sunset...

Elise walked barefooted along the edge of the surf. She held her sandals in her hand and hummed softly to herself. She wandered over to a cluster of boulders and settled herself down, watching as the sun dipped lower on the horizon. She rested her chin on her knees and smiled.

After a late breakfast, Virgil had headed home to change while she packed a picnic lunch. They meandered through the jungle, finally arriving at a secluded pool, complete with waterfall. They swam and frolicked in the water like children, then made love in the sun-dappled clearing. She sighed happily.

I can't believe the way my life has turned around in a year. From a job I was only mildly happy at to working for International Rescue. I've found a new "family" in my friends and co-workers, and even more in Virgil. He loves me. And I love him. I've never told that to anyone before.

She watched as the sun dipped lower, turning the sky a brilliant shade of red. I've never met a man so generous before. He's always giving me things! My necklace, the comb, even those little notes and sketches in my mailbox. She smiled. Let's not forget the physical. He's certainly perfect there too! Elise giggled to herself.

"Elise? Am I disturbing you?"

She looked up to see Tin-Tin standing near. "Of course not! I'm just watching the sunset. Here, pull up a rock and join me."

Tin-Tin sat down and looked out over the sea. "It's a beautiful night."

"It is."

They were quiet a few moments. "I often walk here in the evenings. I hope I wasn't bothering you. You seemed very deep in thought."



"Not really. Just daydreaming." Elise glanced over at the young Asian woman. "Tin-Tin? Did you ever have something inside you, so exciting that you wanted to share with the world, yet at the same time, keep it secret to enjoy all yourself?"

Tin-Tin's thoughts wandered to a certain blue-eyed scientist. "I do indeed," she said quietly.

Elise shot her a glance, and smiled to herself. The two women sat in comfortable silence, and watched the sunset.

The Lounge, early evening....

Scott made his way down the hallway, following the sound of the piano. He stepped into the lounge and smiled at the scene in front of him. His parents were sitting on one of the couches, Jeff's arm around Dianne's shoulder. Alex and Tyler were on the floor, heads bent over a book of some sort. Virgil was at his piano, playing something Scott didn't recognize.

He smiled at his parents, then made himself comfortable on one of the other couches. "What's he playing?" Scott asked his father.

"I'm not sure what it's called. Something he's been working on," Jeff replied.

Scott nodded. "It sounds good."

"Doesn't he always?"

They listened for a few minutes before Dianne sat up. "All right, boys. Time to get ready for bed." Tyler and Alex both groaned, but Dianne shook her head. "It's a school night and you both need showers. Let's go." With much muttering, both boys shuffled out the door. Dianne smiled after them. "I think I'd better go with them." She leaned over and kissed Jeff. "Don't be too late," she said with a coy smile.

Scott and his father sat listening to Virgil for a few minutes longer before Jeff got to his feet. "I'm going to go call Alan then give your mother a hand. Good night."

"Night, Dad. Tell Al hi," Scott said.

"I will."

"Bye, Dad," Virgil called out as Jeff left the room.

Scott got up and grabbed a beer from the bar fridge. He watched his brother at the piano, then carried a second bottle over to him. "Here, take a break."

"Thanks," Virgil said gratefully, flexing his fingers before taking the bottle.

Scott settled himself on the sofa again. "So, I noticed you never came home last night," he said conversationally.



Virgil met his brother's gaze evenly. "No, I didn't."

"You and Elise weren't playing Parcheesi, I take it."

"No, we weren't." Virgil took a long drink from his beer. "And frankly, I don't see that it's any of your business." He got up and went out to stand on the balcony. Scott waited a few moments, then followed after him.

He found his younger brother leaning on the railing, looking out over the ocean. "So," Scott said after a few minutes of silence. "Want to tell me what that outburst was all about?"

Virgil sighed. "Do you know how hard it is for us to have any kind of relationship? I mean, besides IR, the whole tropical island thing, not to mention the rich playboy persona the press has pinned on us." He shook his head. "I feel like we...like I live in a fishbowl. I can't even stay over my girlfriend's without being interrogated."

Scott raised an eyebrow in surprise. "Virg, I wasn't interrogating you. Believe me, you'd know if I were. And yeah, I know exactly how you feel."

"I'm sorry, Scott." Virgil smiled sheepishly at his older brother. "Guess I'm just feeling testy."

"You are? No kidding, I never would have noticed." Both brothers stood in comfortable silence for a few minutes. "Well, who won the Parcheesi game?" he asked, sipping at his beer.

Virgil chuckled. "I think it was a tie." He glanced over at Scott, his expression sobering. He paused and took a deep breath. "I'm in love with her, Scott."

Scott nearly choked on his beer, coughing and spluttering. "You what?"

"I've never felt like this about anyone before. It's like...like there was something missing in my life, something that I never noticed, until I met her."

"That may be, but, Virg, love?"

"Yeah, love." He sighed. "She's beautiful, smart, funny..."

"Stubborn, pushy, annoying."

"She's all that, too. And it's just more of the reasons why I care about her." He turned to face his older brother. "You've known her longer than I have. After her folks died, she could have curled up and lost herself. Instead, she pulled herself up and made a life for herself. Sure, she still has issues; hell, who doesn't? She didn't ask for this life, or even this job, but she's doing it anyway. She's finally found her place, and she's happy."

Scott frowned. "How does she feel about you?"

"She loves me, too." He shook his head. "Look, I know it's not going to be this perfect all the time. I'm sure there will be things we'll disagree on and even argue about. But life is full of risks. I'd



rather see what happens, then always wonder what could have been."

"I just don't want you hurt. Either of you."

Virgil smiled. "I know."

"Good." He paused a moment. "So, when's the wedding?" He had the pleasure of seeing Virgil's eyes widen in shock.

"Marriage? I never said anything about marriage! We barely..." he stuttered, his face pale.

Scott burst out laughing and draped his arm around his brother's shoulders. "Gotcha."

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 03:39:22 GMT

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Monday, January 14th, after lunch . . .

As Gordon brought the boat to a stop, Vince let the anchor go. The former navy man was looking forward to the upcoming dive. Gordon had already shown him IR's atmospheric dive suits. They were an improvement upon the ADS 2001 that the Navy now used. From the look of them, they looked to be more maneuverable than the suits he was used to. This dive would give him a chance to compare the two suits.

As he turned he saw Cassie looking over the edge of the boat into the water below.

"Hey Gordon, exactly how deep did you say we would be diving?" the dark-haired firefighter asked.

"We're only going down about a hundred feet," Gordon replied. "No deeper than what you've already been down. This is just to get you and Vince familiar with our ADS suits. You'll do a deeper dive later, after you get the hang of the maneuvering jets on the suits."

"That's good to know," she replied.

"Well, let's get started," Gordon said enthusiastically. He went through a brief refresher of the suits, which he had explained to both Cassie and Vince back on dry land. Though movement in the suits was possible, Brains having taken care to make the suits more flexible than other atmospheric suits, it was limited and slow. After answering a few questions, all three of them began to don their equipment.



"I'm not sure I'm going to be able to walk in this thing, let alone swim," Cassie commented after she had gotten the suit on except for the helmet.

Gordon laughed before replying, "that's what the maneuvering jets are for."

"You think these things are hard to move in, you should try the ones the navy used," Vince informed her. Speaking of the Navy, they sure wouldn't mind having their hands on these suits. Not only are they easier to move in, but they're much lighter too, he thought.

The group donned the helmets and then Gordon checked over the suits of his two companions, making sure everything was connected right before they entered the water. When the copper-haired Tracy had finished checking the connections on his suit, Vince returned the favor.

"All right, guys. Let's get started," Gordon said, his voice coming from the radios built into the suits helmets.

With the slow, awkward movements that the suits allowed, the three divers made their way into the water and began their test dive.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 03:40:09 GMT

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Elise found herself sitting on the same cluster of boulders where she had watched the sunset the last evening. This time, she had come down there with Cassie, who was currently playing her guitar. The dark-haired firefighting was playing an original piece that she had finished the day before.

As the last notes drifted away, Elise clapped softly.

"That was lovely. It was about your son, right?" Elise asked, as Cassie laid the guitar down across her lap.

"Yes. It started out as a poem, but it didn't seem quite complete in that form," Cassie said, her voice echoing the sadness that she still felt at the mention of her son. At least I'm not avoiding the thought of Nathan anymore, she thought, knowing that though she still had some healing to do, she had come a long way since the previous summer. "I almost gave up on the song a couple of days ago. It probably would've gotten filed away with other works in progress that never got finished if Scott hadn't come along."

"You and Scott seem to be spending a lot of time together."

Cassie shrugged her shoulders. "Guess we have more in common than I thought at first."

"Sure it isn't something else?"



"He's just a friend. I've been spending time with Dom, too."

"Fair enough," Elise said, sensing it was time to drop the subject. "What do you say we head back to my place and I'll make us something for dinner. I think I've had enough sun for the day."

Cassie nodded and, picking up her guitar, stood up from the boulder she was sitting on. Beside her, Elise stood up too and the two girls started walking across the sand both lost in their own thoughts.

"Hey ladies!"

The shout brought both women out of their thoughts. Glancing in the direction the shout had come from, they spotted Gordon and Aaron walking up from the surf, surfboards tucked under their arms.

"Hey, Gordon," both Elise and Cassie responded. "How's the surf?" Cassie added.

"Great! Why don't you give it a try?"

Cassie laughed. "I don't think so. Somehow tempting a wave to knock me off a colorful board has never appealed to me."

"Oh, come on. It's not that hard and the feeling you get when you're riding a wave is like nothing else you've experienced. It's like sitting on top of the world."

"You can use my board," Aaron offered, holding out his board to her.

"No thanks, I'll pass. You guys have fun though," Cassie told them.

"Suit yourself," Gordon said, with a shrug.

"You don't know what you're missing," Aaron added.

As the two surfers headed back to the water, Cassie and Elise continued their trek back to the Cliff House.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 03:41:02 GMT

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Monday, January 14, 2069, 7:30 pm, Tracy Island

"You wanted to see me, Father?"



Kyrano turned from where he had put away the last of the pots they'd used for dinner. He smiled widely at his daughter.

"Indeed, I did, Tin-Tin," he said, motioning to the small kitchen table. "I would offer you tea, but I feel that we are both still sated from dinner."

Tin-Tin laughed as she joined him at the table. "You're right, Father. I am still stuffed. I couldn't handle anything more right now." She sat down across from him. "Where is Lisa? I didn't see her at dinner."

"She is still resting," Kyrano replied, seating himself. "She has suffered greatly from jet lag this trip, and it will take more than one day for her to recover. I will take her a tray later, when I myself retire for the evening."

"Well, it's good to have you both back home. Thank you so much for the mementos from Kenya and Paris!"

"I am glad you like them, my daughter. Lisa chose them with you in mind."

"She made some wonderful choices!" Tin-Tin cocked her head to one side. "What did you want to speak to me about?"

Kyrano reached across and captured his daughter's hands. "I wanted to ask you to consider doing something. Not for me, nor for Lisa, but for someone else very special."

"What do you want me to do?" Tin-Tin sounded confident; her eyes shone with the eagerness of youth. "And who should I do it for?"

He took a deep breath to steady his voice. "When we were in Paris, we saw many sights, but we also made a very special visit. You see, when I had last visited Paris, I had promised your mother's father that I would bring Lisa to meet him after we were married." He shook his head and squeezed her hands slightly. "Your mother's sister, Tamea, had written to me, telling me that your grandfather was... he is dying."

Tin-Tin's eager smile faded. "Oh, Father, I am so sorry! Was the visit difficult for you?"

"In a way, it was, yes." Kyrano found it difficult to admit to the sadness he had felt at the time. "Lisa was a gift, however; she brightened your grandfather's day so much, and he was so happy to meet her." He paused, trying to decide how to phrase what he wanted to say. "He also expressed a desire to see you, before he leaves this plane." He smiled slightly. "I made him no promises, but determined in my own mind to tell you of this desire, and to ask you to consider making the trip to Paris."

Tin-Tin's expression had turned thoughtful. "Hm. I don't remember him well at all; just a few fragments of memory here and there. It would be nice to have some memory of him that wasn't so dim and distant." She gazed at her father. "When would I have to go? Soon, I would think."

"Yes, Tin-Tin. Soon. He fades with each passing day and does not have much time left." He



tapped her hand with a gentle finger. "I also suggest that, if you go, you bring someone with you. Paris is a city meant to be shared, and you will want someone to buoy your spirits after such a visit."

"I see."

They shared a thoughtful silence, which Tin-Tin broke. "You've given me a lot to think about, Father. I'll consider it carefully, and make a decision in the next day or two. I don't want to leave if there's a huge workload; it wouldn't be fair to Callie."

Kyrano smiled. "Only Callie?"

Tin-Tin blushed and chuckled. "Well, if I'm going to bring someone along, I would want it to be Brains."

"Ah, I understand. Paris is meant for lovers," he teased.

"Father!" Her outrage was feigned, and the two of them shared a laugh.

She rose, and leaned over to kiss him on the cheek. "Thank you, Father, for telling me about Grandfather. When will we see the photos you and Lisa took?"

"Soon. Lisa will want to be able to add her own comments, and should be rested by mid-week."

"Then let's put that tray together, and you can get some rest, too. You do look tired."

Kyrano rose, too. "Thank you for offering your help, my daughter. I think I will take advantage of it."

Together they moved deeper into the kitchen, and began to prepare a tray for the jet-lagged Lisa.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 03:43:36 GMT

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Monday, January 14, 2069, 7:30 pm, Tracy Island, Cliff House

Finishing up the email she was typing to Jackie, Cassie clicked on the send button. She had enjoyed hearing some of the adventures her old crew had been getting into and it was nice to know that some things never changed. She was about to open an email from Sachio when her messenger chimed. Looking at the alert, she saw that Luke had just signed on. Opening a window, she typed him a message.

Kitten2039: Hey there! How are you feeling today?



MTHawk17: Hey. Same as usual.

kitten2039: Anything I can do to cheer you up?

As Cassie sent her second message, she heard the alert for an incoming email. Refreshing the page, she saw that she now had a message from Alex.

MTHawk17: Got a way to instantly heal me and teleport me there?

MTHawk17: Forget me, how's you?

Kitten2039: Not bad. Scott had me try landings for real for the first time today.

Hitting the return button, Cassie switched over to the window with her email and opened the message from Alex. She had been waiting for the last couple of days for his reply and didn't want to wait to read it.

MTHawk17: Did you total the plane?

Kitten2039: No! The plane is in one piece. Not so sure about Scott's nerves.

Kitten 2039: Thank-you so much for your vote of confidence!

MTHawk17: Anytime. So, what are you up to?

Kitten2039: Catching up on email. Leaving for Kabul tomorrow for a few days.

MTHawk17: Sounds fun. Pack your sunscreen.

Cassie heard the chime of the incoming message but didn't look at it this time as she was absorbed in reading Alex's email.

MTHawk17: Hey, you still there?

Ignoring the second incoming message, Cassie continued to read through the email. Reaching the end, she blinked away some tears that threatened to fall. Dom was right about one thing; I do know where I stand now.

Cassie glanced at the messenger and saw that Luke had sent her three messages since her last comment. Switching over to the messenger box, she typed a message.

Kitten2039: Sorry! I was reading an email from Alex.

MTHawk17: Alex? Your ex, Alex? What's going on?

Kitten2039: It's nothing important. What were we talking about before?

MTHawk17: Cassie, what's going on?



Cassie stared at the screen. She had a feeling that Luke wasn't going to let the subject go but she also wasn't sure what to write and how much to explain to him. Before she could decide what to type, her phone rang, startling her out of her thoughts. Without looking at the caller ID, she simply picked the phone up and answered it.

"Hello."

"Cass, it's me," Luke told her. "What's going on? Talk to me, girl."

Cassie sighed. As she hadn't mentioned Alex to Luke since before he had left the island, she told him about the conversation she'd had with Dom the previous week. "So, I did what Dom suggested, and told Alex that I was enjoying my new position with Tracy Industries and how he would feel about considering a move to Wichita."

Luke sighed. "I take it you got an answer tonight?"

"Yes. To make it short, he suggested I put in for a transfer to the New York City branch," Cassie told him, fighting to keep her voice from breaking. "He's never going to change, is he, Luke?"

"No, honey, I don't think he will. Hold on. I have to go downstairs; the folks are sleeping." He made his way down to the living room, and settled down on the couch. "There, that's better." He sounded slightly out of breath. "Have you actually talked to him? Or just emails?"

"I talked to him a time or two before Christmas, but it's mostly been emails. Guess the emotional distance that comes with exchanging emails made it easier for me to deal with."

Cassie got up from the chair and headed out onto the balcony. A cool breeze blew as twilight settled over the island.

"Don't you think, that if he really wanted things to work out, he would have tried harder? Instead of asking you to come to him, he would have shown you what you mean to him by coming out to you?" Luke shook his head. "That didn't come out right." He sighed. "He could have at least called you in person. Don't you think it's a little cold that he never even called?"

"Sometimes I'm not even sure what to think anymore. Last summer, being apart seemed so right and then he tells me he wants to give our relationship another try. I guess part of me wanted things to work out. He's been a part of my life since I was sixteen. Guess it's harder to turn my back on that than I thought it was."

"I know where you're coming from, honey. When Barry came to visit at the hospital, then stuck around until I was released, I thought things were back to how they had been. But then he went back to LA and..." His voice trailed off. "I wish I were there to help you through this instead of being seven thousand miles away."

"You don't know how much I wish you were here too, but you getting better is what's important right now," she told her friend. "I'll be all right. Dom was right; if he can't even consider making the move to be with me, then Alex doesn't care for me as much as he claims to." Cassie paused. After



a few moments of silence, she continued. "It's telling Alex that is going to be the hardest thing."

"You can do it; you know you can."

"Thanks for the pep talk," Cassie said with a smile. She looked down at her watch. "It's too late to call him tonight. Guess I'll try to get a hold of him before I leave tomorrow."

"Anytime, Cass. Wish there was more I could do," Luke replied.

"I know. Just hearing your voice tonight helped a lot. Thanks for calling me, though it's getting late there, isn't it? Your body needs proper rest in order to heal."

Yeah, yeah. I get any more rest and I'll be back in a coma," he muttered back.

"I guess your family has still been getting on you about taking it easy then?"

"My family and everyone else I know," Luke sighed again. "Cass, are you going to be all right?" he asked, changing the subject.

Cassie shook her head. Leave it to Luke to switch the conversation back to me, she thought.

"Well, I'm not going to tell you I'll be fine, because I know you won't believe that. It's not going to be easy to tell Alex that it's truly over, but that's what I need to do. The next few days, maybe weeks, are going to be rough but I don't want you worrying about me. I've got Dom and Elise here to talk to if I need to, and the business trip will be a good distraction. I never dreamed I'd get a chance to go to Afghanistan. I'll get through this, Luke."

"I know you will. Keep me posted."

"I will and take care of yourself. We all miss you here."

After exchanging good-byes, the two friends hung up. Cassie stood at the balcony and looked out over the island trying to figure out how she was going to tell Alex what she needed to tell him.

Written by: lillehafrue and starrynebula

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 03:44:22 GMT

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Tuesday, January 15, around 11:15am . . .

Cassie headed toward the hangar at a very brisk walk. She was already running late for her flight to Christchurch International Airport. She could just picture the impatient look Scott would be



wearing went she reached her destination.

I'm actually surprised he hasn't tried calling me yet, Cassie thought as she hurried along. I really didn't think the conversation with Alex would take so long but I guess I should have expected it. Alex has never been one to take the answer no very well.

Cassie tried to put what she hoped would be the last conversation with her ex-husband out of her mind. She didn't want to talk to him again. He was a part of her past. Even so, she was certain that if she dwelled on him or the conversation too long she would start crying again and that wasn't something she had time for right now.

"You're late," was Scott's greeting as she reached her destination.

"Sorry. I got caught up in something," Cassie said. She didn't want to give a long explanation nor did she think it would do any good.

She noticed the quizzical look Scott gave her and wondered if he could tell she had been crying. She wasn't sure how well the cold water she had splashed on her face had really helped.

"Are you okay?"

"I will be," she replied. "Are we ready to go?" Cassie asked, wanting to change the subject.

"Yeah, I did the pre-flight checks while I was waiting," Scott told her.

Cassie nodded and then headed to board the airplane. Scott followed her silently. As they entered the cockpit, Scott motioned for her to take the pilot's seat, wanting to use this flight to the mainland as a chance for Cassie to get some practice in.

After getting clearance from Jeff for take-off, Cassie soon had the airplane in the air and headed toward New Zealand. Once they approached the air space for the Christchurch airport, Scott took over. He landed the plane on the indicated runway. Despite their late start, Cassie still had plenty of time to catch her flight to Kabul.

The two hadn't talked much during the flight, conversation having been limited to the topic of flying. As Cassie retrieved her bag and exited the plane, Scott silently followed her. Once off the plane Scott broke the silence.

"Have a safe trip. Make sure you don't get too wrapped up in business to do some sight-seeing while you're there."

"I won't," Cassie replied, having already figured some time for that in her itinerary.

"And if you need someone to talk to, feel free to call me," Scott offered.

"I will. Thanks," Cassie replied, forcing a small smile.

With a quick wave, Cassie headed inside the airport. Scott watched her for a moment and then



turned and boarded the plane for his flight back to Tracy Island.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 16:34:51 GMT

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Wednesday, January 16th, Tracy Island . . .

"Okay, Virgil, I think I got what I need," John said into his wrist com. He then reached out to turn off the small digital camcorder he had setup on a tripod to record the movements of the dicetyline cannon.

"Copy that," came Virgil's response over the wrist com.

John reached out and separated the camera from the tripod as the cannon disappeared back up into the underside of the green aircraft. He knelt down and carefully placed the camera in the bag at his feet. Standing back up, he picked the tripod up and started folding it up.

"Think you have enough data to create a simulation for the cannon?"

John glanced in the direction of his brother's voice and nodded. "Between the data I've already gathered while Tin-Tin and Brains were working on this thing and the shots I now have of the cannon's actual movements, I should be good to go."

Virgil nodded as John folded up the tripod's legs. "It'll be good to be able to get some practice with it in between its actual uses. Last thing we need to do is be out in the field and nobody be able to aim the thing."

John smiled. "Well, in most cases you'll probably have a decent size target but you're right, extra practice is always a good thing." John knelt down and put the tripod into the camera bag. "So where's the cannon at in terms of production. Anything else to do?"

"We've got a field test left," Virgil told him as John got to his feet, putting the strap of the bag over his shoulder. The two brother's headed toward the exit of the hanger. "We've got it scheduled for when Cassie gets back from Kabul. Hopefully it'll go smoothly, if not we'll have some things to tweak with it. Hopefully no situations come up where it would be useful before then, though I suppose we could make do with out it as we've done in the past."

John nodded as the two left the hangar and headed for the monorail.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 16:35:33 GMT

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Wednesday, January 16, 2069, 11:55 a.m., Christchurch, New Zealand

Dianne maneuvered the sports car she had picked up from the family garage at the airport into a parking space. Normally, she would have driven something less ostentatious, but in this case, she wanted to declare her more recent status as Jeff Tracy's wife. Still, she was excited knowing she was not just picking up the family's latest pharmaceutical order, but seeing someone she had not seen in a long, long time.

There were people waiting in the reception area of the salesroom floor, but as soon as she appeared the receptionist touched two buttons on her phone and murmured, "Ms. Addams, Dr. Tracy is here." Then she smiled at Dianne and said, "Ms. Addams will be here momentarily. Would you like your order delivered now?"

Dianne returned the smile. "I think I'll wait until I return from lunch with Ms. Addams."

The door behind the receptionist opened and Sally Addams came through, a broad smile on her face. Dianne could see very little change in her old friend. The platinum blond hair was still as straight as ever, though there was the hint of a recent trim and layering. Sally's clothes were still as up to date as her budget would allow. The only thing Dianne truly noticed were the laugh lines on her friend's face. They were deeper, indicating that Sally laughed much and laughed often.

"It's good to see you again, Dr. Tracy," said Sally, using Dianne's formal title as she was considered a representative of the company while on company time. "I only have an hour for lunch so we should move quickly."

Dianne nodded, and the two women left the building. Once outside, they both squealed and embraced. Sally held Dianne at arms' length and looked her up and down.

"Oh, God, you're looking good, Di," she said, grinning. "Life must be agreeing with you."

"You're no slouch either, Sal," Dianne replied. "You look fabulous!"

They walked out to the car together, but Sally stopped when she saw the make and model. "Driving yourself? No limo?"

"Oh, God, no!" Dianne shook her head as she unlocked the doors. "My husband is of the opinion that the fewer people know of our comings and goings, the better. And nothing screams, 'Here I am, look at me!' more than a limo." She slid into the driver's seat, and Sally took the passenger's side. "Still, sometimes I like to flaunt it," she explained as she started the car. "Not often, but it beats driving a van."

"I can see your point... and Jeff's," Sally said as they pulled out of the parking lot. "And if you've got it, why not flaunt it?"

"Exactly!"

They talked almost incessantly on their way to the restaurant where Dianne had a luncheon



reservation. The maître d' guided them back to the most secluded of alcoves, and the sommelier approached, offering the wine menu. The women exchanged glances, and regretfully declined.

"I have to fly back this afternoon," Dianne told her friend.

"And it would look bad for me to come back to work with alcohol on my breath," Sally explained. She leaned over and gave Dianne a conspiratorial look. "But we will indulge in dessert!"

"Yes, we will!" Dianne said, grinning.

They spent a little time figuring out what they wanted to eat. Sally chose a crab and lobster meat salad. "Need to keep my girlish figure somehow."

Dianne chose grilled scallop and shrimp kabobs. "Not that we don't get seafood at home, but I just love scallops."

As they settled down to eat, Dianne asked, "So, how do you like New Zealand so far?"

"I haven't gotten out to see much of it," Sally explained. "But so far so good... though the lingo and the accent will take some getting used to."

"Oh, don't I know it," Dianne said. "I still have trouble figuring out what to buy on the rare occasions that I grocery shop. Clothes shopping is another animal entirely."

"Oh!" Sally gave her a wink. "You mean, you don't have an assistant to shop for you?"

Dianne shook her head and rolled her eyes. "There is no way on God's good earth that I am going to let someone else choose my clothes."

"I can see you've learned a little bit about fashion," Sally teased, waving her fork at her friend. "I never thought you'd ever wear anything but jeans and scrubs."

Dianne swallowed a mouthful of her scallops. "I still wear jeans and scrubs," she said. "But I've had a few good... guides to the world of fashion." She took a sip of her soft drink. "Are you enjoying your job?"

"Absolutely!" Sally nodded firmly. "I have a great group of coworkers. I also have great classmates; I've had to take some refresher courses on drug names because of the differences between the US and New Zealand."

They sat quietly eating for a time, then Sally said, "I saw on the news that you were a speaker at the Memorial service."

Her friend nodded. "I think I have some closure now, especially since La Fontaine was convicted."

They continued to chat until it was clear that Sally needed to return to work. However, they made sure there was time for dessert.



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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 16:37:06 GMT  
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"I'll see you tomorrow," Scott told Vince as the two of them parted ways. They had finished another session in the Thunderbird 1 simulator and Scott was pleased with the progress that Vince was making.

"See you then," Vince replied, with a quick wave as he headed to his apartment.

Scott boarded the monorail and headed back to the Villa. After a few quick conversations with family members he passed, he finally reached his room. He glanced down at his watch. It was a little after four-thirty, which was what time he had decided to give Cassie a call. Giving the time difference it would be about eight o'clock in the morning in Kabul and he wanted to catch her before she headed to the branch of Tracy Industries there.

With his satellite phone in hand, Scott walked over to the couch and sat down. Looking through the programmed numbers, he searched for Cassie's name. He had programmed her number into his phone when he had taken her to the Sydney branch of Tracy Industries last month. That trip had been a day trip like the visit to the Christchurch offices had been. After leaving Cassie at the Tracy Industries offices, Scott had taken advantage of the opportunity and had done some Christmas shopping until Cassie had called, saying she was done at the offices.

The call was answered on the second ring with a awake sounding, "Hello."

"Hey, Cass," Scott said in reply. "You sound awake so I take it I didn't wake you up."

"No, you didn't. I've been up for about an hour now. Too wound up to even attempt to sleep longer."

"Nervous or excited?"

"Nervous, mostly. Granted, this is the fourth different branch of Tracy Industries that I've visited in the last three months. It should be second nature to me, but this time feels different. Guess maybe because I'll have a chance to evaluate first hand the knew protocol I proposed."

"I'm sure things will go fine. Just relax."

"Easy for you say."

Scott found himself smiling at her response. "So how was your flight?"

The two chatted for a little while longer, before Cassie said good-bye so that she could leave and



make her appointment on time. Having disconnected the call, Scott placed his satellite phone on the coffee table and stood up. He headed to his computer to check his email.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 21:36:30 GMT

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Thursday, January 17, 1:55 am, Tracy Island (1:55 pm, Wednesday, Mediterranean) . . .

The seafloor research centre Capullo had been built in 2068. Dr Marvin Strand had been integral in its inception, and now he smiled as he looked out from his office window. Capullo's purpose was to study the effects that the mass dumping of OD-60 in 2065, placed there to colonize the sea floor so that it could be harvested as an ingredient for dog food. Dog food, Dr Strand scoffed. What a foolish notion. How that company ever got permission from the World Government to dump this stuff here I'll never know. Such a foolish notion. It's destroying the eco-system!

Indeed, the placing of large amounts of OD-60 in the Mediterranean would have caused indigenous species of plants to completely die off and invasive fish to transform the ecology of the sea for the worse. It would have, if not for the great work of Capullo's researchers and ecologists. Not only were they documenting the changes, but they were also helping to restore the natural balance of the ocean by culling the fish and destroying the plants. Another of my excellent ideas, Dr Strand thought, buffing his fingernails on his jumpsuit. The fact that I struck a deal to sell those fish on to food processing companies is just a bonus -- especially for my wallet.

Dr Strand looked out through the clear bubble of strong polymer that surrounded Capullo with a mile radius. Huge processing plants took oxygen from the water to provide atmosphere for the research centre's population, which was not limited to researchers alone. Due to the long-term nature of the study, many of them had brought along their families. There were elementary and high schools, as well as clinics, a cinema and many shops. Dr Strand crossed his arms across his chest and grinned. Yes, it was a great achievement.

Strand turned from the window and made his way to his desk. He sat down and picked up a data pad, when he felt an unfamiliar vibration. He looked up, his greying eyebrows drawn together, and suddenly the vibration gave way to all out shaking.

"What the --"

It didn't last for long, but Dr Strand's heart rose into his mouth. There hadn't been an earthquake in the region in over fifty years, and any tectonic activity before even then had been limited. There had been no chance of an earthquake happening. None at all, and yet... Strand ran to the window again and --

"NO!"

Cracks were beginning to form in the polymer that protected them from ocean and streams of



water began to flow through them. Strand reached for his communicator.

"Orson! Orson, what happened!"

There was a short burst of static on the line; Strand cursed. The comm lines had been affected.

"...rand! Can you h...r me?"

"Orson?"

"Wa--!"

Strand cringed as a louder burst of static sounded through the comm, but then Philip Orson's voice came through clearly.

"Dr Strand! Can you hear me now?"

"Yes Orson, I can now! What in blazes happened?"

"There was a sudden burst in tectonic activity! By the time we detected it, it was almost over!"

"The shell has been breached, Orson! I can see it from my office!"

"Wait, one second, sir! I have another incoming transmission!"

There was a moment's silence before Orson came back on the line. His voice was grave.

"Sir, the emergency submarine launch, it's been damaged. A piece of sea floor debris fell against it after the earthquake. The doors are jammed. We can't get anyone out."

Dr Strand's face paled and he fell into his seat.

"Orson, contact WASP. See how quickly they can get a sub out here to clear the debris so we can evacuate."

Strand clawed at his desk as tense moments passed, and he set his mouth in a firm line when Orson reported back.

"Sir... WASP can't get here for another three hours."

"Three hours?" Strand spluttered. "We'll be under God knows how many meters of water by then. There's only one course of action. Call International Rescue!"

The Seafloor Research Centre . . . written by ArtisticRainey



Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 21:40:59 GMT  
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Alan lay in his bed on TB5 not able to fall asleep. He stared up at the ceiling, his thoughts on Nikki and the current state of their relationship. The alarm for an incoming call was a welcomed relief. Alan sprang out of the bed and headed for the control room.

"This is Dr Strand of the research colony Capullo calling International Rescue," came the voice over the radio.

"This is International Rescue," Alan said, responding to the call as he sat down in front of the console. "What's the nature of your emergency?"

"Oh, thank God I could get through," came the relieved voice of Dr Strand. "I'm in charge of the seafloor research center Capullo in the Mediterranean. We've experienced an unexpected quake here and the colony has taken damage. There are cracks in the protective dome causing the colony to take on water. Our launch bay doors have taken impaired and we can't open them. Maintenance crews are currently assessing what other damage we have sustained. I put in a call to WASP. They're responding but the colony can't hold out that long. Can you help us?"

"We will definitely do our best. What are the current conditions there?"

"We're on emergency power. Security is currently moving people toward the central locations of the colony."

"Any injuries?"

"Some minor injuries have been reported but nothing our medical staff can't handle."

"What's the complement of the colony?"

"There is a total of 432," Dr Strand began but then corrected himself. "No, 433 people here at the colony. One of the researchers and his wife here just welcomed their first child last night."

"Understood," Alan replied. There is no way we'll be able to evacuate all those people, he thought to himself. Thunderbird 4 doesn't have the capacity. I sure hope Brains can think of a way of saving the colony itself. "Keep this line open, Dr Strand. I'll need updated information and I'll also let you know when to expect people on scene."

"Of course. Please hurry."

"We'll do our best. I need to contact our main base now. Please stand-by." Alan just barely heard Strand's response as he switched frequencies. "Base from Thunderbird 5," he said, putting in the call to the island. It seemed like ages before his father's face appeared on the screen in front of him.

"This is base. What have you got, Alan?" Jeff asked, and then stifled a yawn. He didn't miss the fact that Alan seemed to be pretty wide awake, though he didn't have time to dwell on it.



"We've received a request for help from the undersea research colony Capullo," Alan told him and then glanced down at the information the computer had pulled up about the colony's location. "It's in the Mediterranean, southeast of Majorca . . ."

A Call for Help . . . written by icarus1982

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 21:42:28 GMT

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The sound of the alert, signaling an incoming rescue call, woke Vince from his slumber. He reached out and turned on the bedside lamp. Throwing back the sheet, he climbed out of the bed and walked toward the dresser.

"What's that?" Lana asked, propping herself up on one elbow.

"IR has received a rescue call," Vince told her, pulling a t-shirt on over his head. As he was already wearing sweatpants, he figured he was presentable enough to show up in the lounge. Before he had a chance to say or do anything else though, Lea came running into the room through the bathroom that separated her room from her parents.

"What's the noise?" she asked fearfully, throwing her arms around her father's legs.

"It's nothing to worry about, Poppet. Just a call for Daddy to report to work," he told her, unwrapping her arms from his legs and picking her up.

"Does it have to be so loud?"

Vince laughed at his daughter's comment as he walked over to the bed. "Why don't you spend the rest of the night with Mommy?" he told her, putting her down. The little girl wasted no time settling down in the bed.

"Be careful," Lana told her husband as he headed for the bedroom door.

"Don't worry. They probably won't even send me out this time. Get some sleep," he told her, blowing her a kiss before disappearing through the door.

Navigating through the dark apartment to the door, Vince waited for the lift. When it arrived he stepped inside and headed for the ground floor.

Interrupted Sleep . . . written by icarus1982

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Jeff turned towards his gathered crew and set his face in his usual stern and encouraging expression as he processed the information Alan had relayed.

"Well, Brains. Any immediate ideas for repair?"

Brains took off his glasses and rubbed the lenses with the cuff of his sleeve before replacing them and nodding his head.

"Yes. From what Alan has told us, the colony is taking on water, but slowly. With that many people, and the damage to their launch bays, we need to focus on plugging the cracks."

"Yeah," Scott said. "In any case, we couldn't evacuate that many people with just Thunderbird Four. We would need WASP."

"And they're too far away to get there in time," Alan chimed in, his handsome face scrunched with concern.

"Well, I believe that a combination of certain polymers I have developed may just do the trick," Brains said.

"Your blue goo?" Dianne asked, placing her hands on her hips.

"Yes, that would be one of them," Brains said. "I believe that if we can get a big enough work crew down there, we should be able to identify the worst of the cracks and inject the polymers into them. That would stem the flow of water, and give the colonists time for WASP to arrive and help with repairs, or evacuate if necessary."

"Can you figure out which polymers will work en route?" Jeff asked.

Brains nodded.

"If Alan can patch me through to the engineers at the colony while we're on our way, I'm sure that I can."

Jeff nodded.

"Good."

Gordon folded his arms, his face pulled with thought.

"I think this might need to be Thunderbird Eight's maiden voyage," he said. "How many divers are we talking about, Brains?"

"And we're talking some far depths. We'll need the JIM suits," Vince said, standing at Gordon's side.



The gathered crew could practically see the thoughts racing through Brains's head.

"To be safe, a dive crew of four, plus someone to man TB4 to provide light, as well as someone in TB8 to monitor the divers. Thunderbird Four isn't designed to support that many divers at once. Especially not at the depths we're talking about," he said, nodding at Vince. "We can load the JIM suits into TB8 in a manner of minutes."

Jeff set his lips in a firm line, before placing one hand on his desk.

"Well, Thunderbird Eight has passed all of its trials, and we're not talking about travelling at high speeds," he said, suppressing a glance at Gordon. "She can go." He glanced at the faces around him, all set like his own, and he nodded. "The crew will be Virgil, Brains, Tin-Tin, Scott, Vince, Gordon and Dominic."

The Irishman barely stopped his mouth from falling open, and Jeff pinned him with a hard gaze. Gordon clapped a hand on Dom's shoulder.

"I'll take care of ya," he said. "You've got to start somewhere."

"Actually," Jeff said, "You will be piloting Thunderbird Four, Gordon." Gordon opened his mouth to protest but Jeff held up a hand to stop him. "Think about it, son. WASP could arrive on the scene at any time we're there -- we can't take the risk of you being recognised, however slim it may be."

Dianne nodded.

"Your father's right, Gordon."

Gordon cleared the expression from his face and stood up straighter.

"Of course you're right, Dad." He turned to Vince. "Well, looks like you'll be in charge of the dive, amigo," he said.

"I'll be piloting Thunderbird Eight?" Scott asked.

"Yes, Scott. We need your expertise there. Thunderbird One won't be needed." Jeff said. He looked at his crew one last time, before nodding again. "Let's get to it," he said. "There's no time to waste."

There was a chorus of "FAB!" before the six-strong crew scrambled to their places. Thunderbirds are go, Jeff thought as he watched them disappear.

Jeff deploys . . . written by ArtisticRainey



As Thunderbird 2 flew toward the Mediterranean Sea, Vince went through the preliminary plans that they had already come up with. He knew from experience though that things would change once they got to the scene. That things would come up that none of them had anticipated. There was also the chance that the compound of Brains's that they were planning on using wouldn't work and they would need to move onto another plan.

The alternate plan was what Brains was currently concentrating on, as he looked down at the computer padd he held. With Tin-Tin looking over his shoulder, he tried to come up with another way to save the colony if the goo didn't work as expected.

"Nervous?"

Vince looked over at the dark-haired nurse that was sitting beside him. "I guess a little. You never know what might happen in situations like this, but from what I hear I'm working with one of the best rescue operations in the world."

"Well, you hear right," Dominic said with a wink.

Dom gave off an air of confidence, but Vince cocked one eyebrow as the other man's leg jiggled up and down rapidly. Dom whistled and fiddled with his hair. Brains cast him a stern glance, and the Irishman quieted his lips.

"Nervous yourself?" Vince asked.

"Me? Nah, never," Dom said, twisting a particularly long strand of hair between two bony fingers.

"For someone who isn't nervous, you seem pretty tense," Vince said, pinning Dom with a strong glance.

Dom's leg jiggled all the faster until finally he slumped in his chair and held out his palms in supplication.

"T' tell you the truth, I am a bit on the edgy side," he said.

A bit? Try a lot! This isn't good... Vince thought. "Why?" he asked. "You're a heck of a lot more experienced at rescues than I am."

Dom looked up and smiled nervously.

"Not underwater rescues," he said.

Ah, I see, Vince thought. He cocked his head to the side to encourage Dom to continue.

"I've been trained, don't get me wrong," Dom said, raising one hand to knead at his neck, "I've just never been on an active underwater rescue."



"Mr. Tracy must have every confidence in you if he chose you," Vince said. "If you weren't ready, he wouldn't have chosen you."

"I know," Dom said. "I'm not nervous; I know I can do this. I'm just... edgy. I'll be fine once we arrive."

Vince nodded. It wasn't uncommon for someone to be nervous en route, when you had time to think about everything that could go wrong. Once things started happening, training kicked in and you put those thoughts in the back of your mind. Vince was sure the nurse would be able to do just that or he would have never been recruited for IR.

Vince turned to his other two companions that were to dive with them. "How about you two? How much dive experience do you have?"

"Brains and I are both experienced divers," Tin-Tin said, speaking for the scientist sitting beside her, lost in his own work.

"Good to know," IR's new aquanaut replied, making a mental note to keep a close eye on Dom during the dive.

TB2 Conversation . . . written by ArtisticRainey and icarus1982

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 21:47:32 GMT

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"ETA two and one half minutes," Virgil said, deftly steering his giant craft through the steady winds.

"FAB, Thunderbird Two," Jeff answered over the comm. "Is the crew in place?"

"Yes. All are present and accounted for and are good to go."

"Good. Deploy Thunderbird Four first, and then Thunderbird Eight."

"FAB," Virgil replied, trying to keep the mild frustration from his voice. They had been over the launch procedures several times. That's Dad, he thought. "Will check in once launch is complete. Thunderbird Two out."

Virgil kept a close eye on his instrumentation as he approached the Danger Zone, and soon he was hovering over the co-ordinates.

"Thunderbird Four and Thunderbird Eight from Thunderbird Two. All clear to drop the pod"



"FAB, Van Gogh," Gordon and Scott replied in unison from their respective craft.

"Dropping pod... now."

Thunderbird Two automatically recalibrated itself as its belly fell out, and Virgil heard the splash of Pod Four hitting the waves even from inside the cockpit.

"Opening pod door now," Virgil said once the all clear was given.

After a few moments, Gordon's voice rang clearly over the comm.

"Okay, guys. Launching now."

Thunderbird Four glided deftly into the water, and Gordon piloted the submersible far enough away to give Thunderbird Eight clearance to launch itself. It wasn't long before both craft were in the water, and ready to go.

"Base, Thunderbird Two and Thunderbird Eight from Thunderbird Four," Gordon's voice came again. "Diving now. I'll keep this channel open for further communication," he said.

He received a chorus of "FABs", before he keyed in the sequence, and the yellow submarine began to dive beneath the waves.

TB4 and TB8 Launch . . . written by ArtisticRainey

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 21:48:10 GMT

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Thunderbird 8 had come to a stop on the surface above Capullo. On board, Brains went over last minute instructions to his comrades about his plan to fix the cracks in the dome of the colony.

"Any questions?" the scientist asked, looking around at the group gathered around him. Like him, the other three had donned the atmospheric dive suits except for the helmet. He was met with shakes of heads.

"Okay, then," Vince said, speaking up. "Brains and Tin-Tin will start the dive first. Dom and I will follow. This should be a routine dive, but you never know what can happen, so keep an eye on your dive buddy at all times," Vince instructed.

There was a chorus of FAB's before Brains, Tin-Tin, and Dom started putting on the suits' helmets. Vince turned to Scott, who stood at the controls of the hovercraft. "We're ready to begin the dive."



Scott nodded in acknowledgement. "Gordon just called in that he's in position. You're good to go. Alan said that Dr Strand is reporting some of the colonists are starting to panic. We need to get things patched up before anyone does something stupid down there."

"That's for sure," Vince said as he put the helmet on.

Minutes later, Vince and Dom were slipping beneath the surface of the Mediterranean. Using the suits' maneuvering jets, the two headed deeper into the water behind Brains and Tin-Tin. As they dove deeper, the light from the surface began to fade. Eventually, the only light came from the lights on the four dive suits. It seemed like quite awhile before Capullo came into view, Thunderbird 4 hovering nearby shining its own light onto the research colony.

"The research colony is in view," Vince reported back to Scott still on board Thunderbird 8. "Team 1 is approaching the south side of the colony. We're heading to the north side to begin repairs there."

"FAB," came Scott's reply through the suit's radio.

Vince glanced over at his dive companion though due to the suits they were wearing he couldn't make out the nurse's features.

"How are you doing, Dom?"

"I'm doing okay," the nurse replied after a moment of hesitation.

The two finally reached the dome of the research colony and used the maneuvering jets to come to a stop alongside the base of the dome. There were numerous cracks in the dome. Without another word, the two IR agents got to work injecting the goo into the cracks in an attempt to seal them.

The Dive Begins . . .written by icarus1982

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 21:49:06 GMT  
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"Base from Thunderbird 8."

"Base here. Go ahead," Jeff replied, setting his cup of coffee down on the desk and sitting up a little straighter in anticipation for the report from the field.

"Good news, Commander. The dive teams report that the goo is taking and effectively sealing the cracks in the research colony's dome."

"Glad to hear it. What kind of progress have they made?"



"Best estimate from TB4 is that about a quarter of the cracks have been sealed at this time."

"FAB. I'll contact Alan and have him report to Dr. Strand the progress we've made. Keep me updated."

"FAB. Thunderbird 8 out."

Ending the call with his eldest son, Jeff made a call to his youngest son.

"Thunderbird 5 from Base."

"Thunderbird 5 here."

"Alan, relay to Dr. Strand that our method of sealing the cracks in the dome is successful."

"Will do. I'm sure he'll be happy to hear that. My last conversation with him was interrupted when he got a report of someone attempting to launch a sub despite the bay doors still being jammed."

Jeff shook his head. It still amazes me what people will attempt when panic sets in, he thought to himself, as he once again ended a call. At least things seem to be going smoothly, he thought, picking up his cup of coffee as he felt a hand come to rest on his shoulder. Looking up, he saw his wife was standing behind him. Reaching up with his other hand, he let his hand come to rest on top of hers.

Report to Base . . . written by icarus1982

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 21:54:56 GMT

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In, out. In, out. Dominic's breathing was steady as he worked alongside the rest of the crew to plug the holes in Capullo's protective sphere. He marvelled as Brains' goo sealed the fissures immediately, even under the surface of the ocean.

Dominic's eye twitched. The ocean. He'd never been deep sea diving before apart from in training, but then he guessed that most people wouldn't have. He cast a glance at Vince as subtly as possible. His dive partner was working diligently. Like a fish in water, Dominic thought, but the thought was not accompanied by his usual corner-twitch smile. There must have been so many fish in the ocean. Millions, perhaps billions? Dominic felt his mouth go dry, and he noticed his breathing was beginning to get faster. How many billions -- trillions? -- of litres of water were surrounding him? He looked to the side and saw nothing but darkness, the unending depth of the water glaring back at him. The ocean literally never ended, he thought. With the curve of Earth, one could swim endlessly, round and round, occupying a practically limitless space...



Dominic felt his chest tighten. Not now. For the love of God, not now... His breathing hitched and he felt his hands go limp around blue goo applicator. I can't go on. He closed his eyes tightly and gritted his teeth before grinding out several words.

"Ace, I need to surface."

"Huh?" Vince's voice sounded through the headset in the dive suit's helmet. "What's wrong?"

"I need to surface now."

"Understood," Vince replied catching a note of panic in the nurse's voice. He still had no clue what was going on but this deep beneath the surface was not a good place to deal with it. "Head to the surface, I'm right behind you."

As Dom fired the suit's jets to head to the surface, Vince did likewise. "Team 1 from Team 2."

"Team 1 here," came Brain's quick response.

"Just letting you know we're heading for the surface. Keep going on repairs. I'll rejoin you as soon as possible."

"FAB, Team 2."

As the two IR agents continued to head toward the surface, Vince held a quick conversation with Scott on Thunderbird 8, letting the field commander know to expect them. It seemed like an age before they finally broke the surface of the water and Dominic's breathing exploded into full-blown gasps for air.

"Oh God, oh God," he rasped, but as he realised they were in the open air he squeezed his eyes shut and gritted his teeth again. "All right, Kelly, catch a grip. Deep breaths..."

Vince floated at his dive partner's side as Dominic pulled himself back together. Once Dominic was visibly calmer, he answered before Vince could even ask what was wrong.

"Spaces. Endless spaces," Dominic breathed. "There's just something... Ugh. I can't even think. The idea of the unknown, of emptiness... I've never been able to deal with it."

"Well, the ocean isn't exactly empty you know. It's full of life," Vince commented, hoping a little levity might help take the Irishman's thoughts off his fear.

"What's going on?"

Both divers looked over to see Scott at the side of Thunderbird 8, which was near-by.

"Dom had a panic attack but he seems better now," Vince replied. "I think he should probably sit the rest of the rescue out."

"No. I'm fine, now, really."



Vince looked at the other man, his facial features hard to read through the helmets they both wore. "You sure?" Vince asked, not wanting to force the nurse into doing something he wasn't ready for.

"Positive," Dom said, trying to sound more convinced than he was really feeling.

"Okay. Looks like we're going back down then," Vince said, knowing how important it was to face a fear as soon as possible. The more time that passed, the more time you had to psych yourself out about the whole situation. He knew he had to keep a close eye on his partner, though.

"FAB," Scott replied.

Moments later, Vince and Dom disappeared back underneath the surface.

Panic . . . written by ArtisticRainey and icarus1982

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 21:55:36 GMT  
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"Thunderbird 4 and dive teams from Thunderbird 8, just wanted to let you all know that a WASP submarine is going to be arriving in the area. They plan on tackling the blocked launch bay."

A chorus of "FABs" greeted Scott's announcement. Vince finished sealing the crack he was working on and then glanced to his right at his dive partner. Since they had come back down, Dom had kept himself composed and focused on the task at hand. Looking past Dom, he tried to gauge how much more area they needed to cover. Not far away, he saw the blue goo in cracks that Brains and Tin-Tin had previously sealed.

"Team 1 from Team 2. How much area do you have to cover?" Vince asked, over the radio.

"Approximately twenty square meters, Team 2. We won't be much longer," Tin-Tin answered.

"FAB, Team 1. We're about the same. I'll radio again when we're finished."

"FAB, Team 2. Team 1 out."

Dominic and Vince worked quickly, and the latter heard a definite sigh of relief from the former as they sealed the last crack.

"Well, that's us then?" Dominic asked.

"Yeah, we're done here. I'll radio the others and we'll surface."



"And then it's homeward bound, thank God."

Vince let Brains and Tin-Tin know that they had finished, and soon all four were bobbing on the surface of the water and waiting to board Thunderbird Eight. Vince couldn't help but smile as the magnanimity of the situation finally dawned upon him. I guess we can chalk that up as another victory for International Rescue...

Finish . . . written by ArtisticRainey and icarus1982

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 21:57:22 GMT  
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Dominic kept his head hung low as he trudged back to his apartment. The monorail ride had seemed agonisingly slow, though he knew it was just his perception. Every rise and fall of his feet was as if in slow motion as the events of the day descended upon him like thick and syrupy shame.

He should have known it would happen. He should have thought about it and realised that the deep, dark sea was endless, and that was something his brain would not tolerate. What was worse was that when Jeff had spoken to him, it hadn't been the bawling out he was expecting. There were stern words, but also concern, and even... disappointment? That was the worst part. He had let Jeff down, and had let the whole crew down by his negligence. It's just... awful. I can't even think of a better word to use. Just... awful. Dom decided to take the outside stairs up to the apartment to let the fresh air into his lungs, and hopefully into his mind to blow the shame and sorrow away.

\*\*\*

Creeping slowly along the concrete desert, Blacktuft took in his surroundings. I've never been here before, he thought. I've never been this high up before! He walked slowly up the strange vertical thing at the edge of the desert. It was very hot from the sun! Luckily as an adventurer, I can cope with such things, Blacktuft thought. As he reached the top of the thing he surveyed the view in awe. Wow... Look how big the Big Blue Wet Thing really is! The guys are going to LOVE this when I tell them the story.

Just then, there was a loud exclamation behind him, and it was a good thing Blacktuft couldn't understand English, because the exclamation was very rude indeed. He turned to see the big pink human he had climbed on before. It was pressed up against a wall, tensed and quivering. It's going to attack me! was Blacktuft's own exclamation. There was only one thing for it. Giving himself only a second to prepare, Blacktuft launched himself from the big shiny thing down towards the ground, shrieking as only a brave spider can.

The big pink human shrieked even louder and jumped in the air, and for a split second Blacktuft



feared he would come to a messy end under the human's foot. But he dodged the descending appendage and ran as fast as his eight legs could carry him back into the shadows. I'm alive! he thought, I can't believe it! I'm going to end up being the most adventurous spider in the whole world! Blacktuft scuttled off, back into the wilds of the jungle, leaving the pink human behind.

\*\*\*

Dominic thought that his heart was going to come out of his mouth. Despite his training in anatomy telling him that it was impossible, it still felt as if it was going to happen at any moment.

"Oh... my... God... "

He blinked several times before trying to prise himself off the apartment block's wall. One arm came unstuck, and then one leg, and he glanced up and down the balcony to see where the little expletive had gone. His scalp began to crawl and he began tearing at his hair with his hands.

"Oh my God!" he screamed, yanking two large clumps of hair on either side of his head.

He bent over, prostrate, and felt tears well in his eyes.

"Oh my God... "

Suddenly he sprinted to his apartment and threw open the French doors. He yanked them shut again and pulled the curtains across the glass, before crumpling to the floor in a heap. Bloody phobias, bloody nuisance! I'm just pathetic! A grown man scared of spaces and spiders -- USELESS! Thankful that his son was still in the care of Emily, Dominic allowed himself to lie flat on the floor, and he cried.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 21:58:17 GMT

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Stevens Healthcare Clinic, Bozeman, Montana. Thursday January 17th, 2:00 pm (9:00 am the 18th on Tracy Island)

Luke pulled his coat collar up tighter around his neck as he made his way through the windy parking lot. An arctic cold mass had moved in and the current temperature was five below zero, the wind chill putting it even lower. Glad I left Rommel at home. Knowing the mutt, he's curled up at my mother's feet in front of the fire. He finally reached the doors of the medical clinic, giving a sigh of relief as the warm inside air hit him. He walked over to the elevator and headed up to the floor his doctor was on.

Once there, he checked in with the desk, then shedding his heavy jacket, settled down with a magazine. He didn't have to wait very long before his name was called. He followed the nurse into the examination room.



"How are you feeling, Luke?" she asked.

"Not bad considering the weather," he replied.

She chuckled as she wrapped the bio-cuff around his bicep. "I heard the wind had picked up." She pressed a few buttons on the cuff and turned to the computer screen.

Luke nodded. "It's probably close to fifteen below out there."

"Brrrr." She finished up her readings and removed the cuff from his arm. "There you go. Doctor Wetzeler will be in shortly." She left the room, closing the door behind her.

Ten minutes later, the door opened and a tall, dark haired woman walked in. "Good afternoon, Luke."

"Hey, Doctor Wetz."

"Why don't you get undressed and I'll see how you're doing today." She turned to the computer screen and pulled up his file.

Luke meanwhile took off his layers of shirts and sat on the edge of the examination table. Dr. Wetzeler listened to his chest and back, then gently probed his ribs. She had him take a few deep breaths, then listened again. She consulted her screen again and nodded. "You're looking good. I'd like you to go down to the cardio lab for some more tests."

"Sure thing, Doc." He put his clothes back on and headed for the cardio wing. Once there, they gave him a pair of shorts to change into, then connected some electrodes to his chest and put him on the treadmill. The technician started the machine at a fast walk, gradually increasing the speed to an easy jog. After about five minutes, Luke signaled that he had to stop and the tech eased the machine slower until it stopped. Breathing heavily, he sat down in a chair, his head resting in his hands. Sweat poured down him and his body shook.

Dr. Wetzeler knelt in front of him, one hand on his shoulder. "Luke?"

He looked up at her. "That went... well," he panted. "Not."

She smiled. "Actually it did." She beckoned to the tech who brought over a computer read-out. "Your lungs are functioning at nearly seventy percent. That's excellent progress in this short time. Why don't we go back up to my office and I'll explain."

A short time later, Luke was back in the examining room. He had changed back into his clothes, and his breathing had steadied out. He was reading his file when the doctor walked in. She nodded at the papers. "Well? Didn't I tell you?"

He smiled ruefully. "I guess it's not that bad. I just expected better results."

She gestured him to sit then sat down across from him. "Luke, you shouldn't even be at this level



at this point in time. You suffered a severe injury to both lungs. The right one was all but shredded. They didn't think they'd get you'd get put back together. You're lucky to be alive, much less in the condition you are." She let that sink in a moment. "Now, how's the muscle pain? Bones knit faster than tissue."

Luke shrugged. "Not too bad. I've been working out at the gym a couple days a week. Nothing major, just trying to get back into shape. Also helping with the stock on the ranch and working one or two days at my folk's store."

The doctor nodded thoughtfully and gently maneuvered his shoulder, noting when he winced. She lifted his shirt, and probed at the scar on his back and his chest. "Are you still having shoulder and chest pain?"

"Some." She stared him down for a moment. "OK, more than some. It's bothering me now but that's probably due to running."

"That could be true. All the same, I want you taking it easy with your workouts. Don't stop them by any means, but don't re-injure yourself. You haven't come this far to set yourself back."

"Any idea when I can go back to work?" Luke asked, remembering seeing International Rescue on the news that morning.

Dr. Wetzeler thought a moment. "I'd say three to five weeks, then light duty for another month or so. By the beginning to middle of March you should be back full time." She leveled her gaze at him. "As long as you continue with what you've been doing and not carry it too far. I mean it, Luke. The surgical team didn't spend all that time patching you up for you to tear yourself apart again."

Luke grinned. "No worries there, Doc. The less time I spend in the body and fender shop, the happier I am."

Doctor Wetzeler laughed. "Good, get out of here then. And button up that coat! It's cold out!" she called after him.

Luke waved good-naturedly and left the building, a lighter spring in his step. He started the truck, blowing on his cold fingers as he waited for the engine to warm up. Can't wait to get home and email the gang. Let them know I'll be back soon. He put the truck in gear and headed home.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 21:59:10 GMT

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Friday, January 18th, around 1 pm, NZ mainland . . .

"Why don't you and Lea wait in the car," Vince said to his wife as he pulled the vehicle into an empty parking spot. He had borrowed the car from the Tracys so that they could run some errands while on the mainland. The company they had hired to ship the seaplane from Oahu to



Christchurch had called the other day. As Cassie would be arriving back from her business trip today, it had been arranged for the Crenshaws to pick up the plane, do some shopping and then pick Cassie up before flying back. "I'll go with Aaron to make sure everything is in order and then the three of us can go shopping."

"Okay," Lana replied, as Vince brought the car to a stop.

Vince and Aaron got out of the car. Excited, the teenager led the way toward the main building. Vince smiled as he followed. It's good to see him finally showing some enthusiasm for something, Vince thought.

Father and son went entered the main building. After a short conversation with the man at the desk, and a quick check at the computer records, the duo was led back outside by one of the shipping company's employees.

"Our mechanics have checked the plane out. She's ready to fly," the employee commented as the small group headed down to the dock. "We haven't seen a Neptune 340 in quite a while, but this one looks to be in good shape."

"She's been restored. Aaron did most of the work," Vince commented with a nod toward his son.

"Quite a feat for someone your age," the man said, his voice showing that he was impressed.

The small talk continued until they reached the dock. Once he had shown Vince and Aaron to the plane, he didn't hang around long, moving on to his next task. Vince helped Aaron go through pre-flight checks, wanting to make sure nothing had been overlooked by the shipping company's mechanics.

"Well, things look to be in order," Vince commented when they had completed the checks. "Have a safe flight back to the island. Give me a call when you get there."

"I will," Aaron told his father from the pilot's seat. He reached out and placed the headphones on his head, as Vince closed the airplane door and took a few steps away from the plane.

Vince waited as Aaron started up the plane. He watched as eventually it left the dock and headed out across the water. Before long, the seaplane gained enough speed and left the surface for the air. Once the plane was too far away to see anymore, Vince turned and headed back to the car where his wife and daughter waited for him.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 21:59:55 GMT

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After having stopped by the community center to sign Lea up for art classes, Vince headed for the DIY store he had been given directions to. They had found a beginning art class for Lea's age group that met on Tuesday, at the same time that Vince had choir practice for the church that they



had joined. As long as he wasn't out on a call with IR, Vince would be able to drop Lea off for her class, go to choir practice, and then pick her up.

"So, Poppet, how have you decided to decorate you room?" Vince asked, glancing quickly in his rear-view mirror at his little girl in the back seat.

"Sea creatures!" she said excitedly.

Vince managed to refrain from groaning. He was hoping she would pick something simple. It didn't look like he was getting his wish.

"Don't worry, honey," Lana told him. "I've got it figured out. We'll paint the walls blue and then I plan on getting stencils to create a mural of sea life on one wall. Lea can help me with that. Then we just need to see what we can find for sheets, spread and curtains."

"So I can paint the walls and then let you two go to town?"

"Yes, you can. I'm sure I can get Aaron to help with putting things up higher on the wall. I was thinking we could look for some kind of net to hang on one of the other walls."

"And add seashells to it," Lea piped in from the back seat.

Looks like it's going to be a busy afternoon, Vince thought, as he made the turn into the parking lot of the mall containing the DIY store.

Vince found a parking space, and soon the trio was at the paint counter of the DIY store. It didn't take long to pick out a blue for the 'ocean' and the light topaz that Lana wanted for the living room and kitchen. Picking out colors for the sea life took a little longer, but eventually they had their paints and headed in search of the other materials they would need for Lea's room.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 22:00:10 GMT

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Christchurch International Airport, about 4 pm . . .

Cassie stepped off the plane, still not completely awake from her too brief of a nap. She had boarded the plane at eight pm in Kabul the previous night having spent the better part of the day sightseeing. The fact that it was now Friday afternoon made her tired just thinking about it.

I hate time zones, Cassie thought as she walked with the rest of her fellow passengers toward the baggage claim area.

She was able to grab her bag from the carousel the first time around. Maneuvering out of the



gathered crowd, Cassie scanned the area for the Crenshaws. Jeff had called her yesterday to tell her they would be picking her up.

"There she is!"

Cassie recognized the voice of Lea and looked in the direction the shout had come from. She spotted the little blonde perched on her father's shoulders. Smiling, Cassie headed in their direction. It didn't take her long to reach them.

"I'm so relieved you guys aren't late," Cassie remarked as she joined them.

"Yeah, well, that's only because I kept rushing these ladies in their shopping. Though I was happy for the excuse to hurry the expedition along. I can only look at so many curtains and bed sheets before I'm totally bored," Vince told her.

"Just be happy we weren't clothes shopping, dear," Lana replied.

Cassie smiled at the little exchange.

"Here let me take that bag for you," Vince said, reaching for Cassie's bag. The dark-haired woman gratefully handed the bag over.

"Mommy and Daddy let me pick how to paint my bedroom," Lea told the newcomer excitedly, as Vince started leading the small group out of the baggage claim area. "Guess what I picked."

"What did you pick?" Cassie asked, smiling at the little girl's enthusiasm. Lea reminded of her own nieces when they were her age.

"Sea creatures. Just like the ocean. Star fishes, and dolphins, and whales, and fishes."

"Sounds nice. Who's doing it? Your Dad?"

Lea nodded. "Mom too. And they're letting me help!"

"Sounds like fun!"

Not to mention those two must be awfully brave, Cassie thought to herself, wondering if she would be brave enough to let a five year old help decorate a bedroom. Though I wonder what Nathan would have chosen for his bedroom when he was old enough.

Cassie didn't have time to dwell on it as Lea continued to babble on about things they had bought for her room.

---

Subject: Re: New Beginnings



Dominic read over the email once more and rubbed his face with one hand. Two words kept jumping off the screen at him: back soon. Back soon. Luke would be back soon. The previous day's events had made Dominic realise just how much he had missed his friend. With Nikki gone and then Luke, his two best friends on the island, Dom had found a gaping hole where they had been. But he had missed Luke even more, and at first he had thought it was simply because the man had been shot and Dom had gone out of his mind with worry. But as Luke's recovery proceeded swifter than it should have, Dom began to realise that it wasn't just the worry.

He turned around to check on Joshua, who was still happily watching something bright and nonsensical on the televiewer, and then sat back in his chair and laced his fingers behind his head. Memories of the rescue flashed before him and he shut his eyes tightly against them. All that space, seeming to go on and on forever... He shuddered and felt fresh tears on his cheeks. And then that damn spider! It looked like the very same one that had climbed on him months before... although it couldn't possibly have been. Even so, it had come along at the very worst of times, and Dominic cursed his own irrational fears. He fought against another self-deprecating tirade and instead crossed the room to the vidphone. He didn't even check to see the time difference, and placed a call.

\*\*\*

Luke hummed as he continued to tidy up the kitchen. It was nothing more than straightening cups and wiping down surfaces, but it was at least a way to kill the time. His visit to the doctor that morning had put him in good spirits, and the email he had sent to all the crew on the island had been chirpy and cheerful. I'll be back soon! he had written.

Just then the phone rang, and he tossed down the cloth he was holding. He strode quickly to the receiver and pressed the answer button. The face he saw stopped his words of greeting, and he frowned.

"Dom, you look awful!"

"Yeah, I know."

Luke's frown deepened at the lack of a retort from his friend. He knew that something was definitely wrong.

"What's up, bud?" Luke asked, softening the tone of his voice. Dominic's eyes looked suspiciously watery.

"I... " Dom stopped and gulped, before opening his mouth and trying to speak again. He tried once more, before he buried his face in his hands.

"Dom, you're scaring me here. What's wrong? Or do I have to call Dianne to come and get it out of you?"

At the sound of Dr Tracy's name, Dominic's head shot up, and the look of terror in his eyes made



Luke wish he hadn't said a word.

"No, please!" he said. "I... It's a long story."

Dominic recounted a coded tale of the rescue and his panic attack, Jeff's subsequent talk with him and the re-emergence of the spider. Luke shook his head in sympathy and tapped a nearby table with his fist.

"Damn, guy," he said. "That's rough."

"I didn't know what to do," Dom said.

He wiped his nose on his sleeve, at which Luke suppressed a smile. It was such a child-like gesture, and for a moment he could see the family resemblance between Dominic and his son.

"Then when I got your email," Dom continued, "I realised how much I wish that you were here."

Luke felt a tiny pang in his chest, as if his lungs had begun to hurt again, but it passed quickly.

"Aww, man. I wish I was there too to help you through this."

"I just don't know what to do, Luke," Dom said. "I need your help."

Luke sat forward in his chair.

"Well, first things first: change your shirt. You've got nose gunk all over it."

Dominic chuckled, causing further bubbles of 'nose gunk' to protrude from his nose. He blushed and wiped them away with a little chuckle.

"Secondly, go see Dianne and tell her how you're feeling. You're not fit for duty and she needs to know that."

At first, Dom looked as though he was going to protest, but he nodded in agreement.

"Thirdly, arrange to see Anna."

At that Dominic did protest, but Luke quickly shushed him.

"No, you need to," he said firmly. "If your fears hinder your work, then you need to try and work through them. You can't go on any more 'business' like yesterday's until you get everything sorted out."

Dominic exhaled and seemed to deflate in his chair, and suddenly a little blond head appeared on the screen.

"Hi, Wuke!"



Luke smiled and waved back as Joshua waved at him.

"Hi,kiddo!" he said.

"When you come back?" Joshua asked. "I wanna see Wommel!"

Luke chuckled, and so did Dominic, who gave Luke his first genuine smile of the call as he hoisted his son onto his lap. Luke gave a little shrug.

"I'll be back soon, Josh; I promise."

"Miss you!" Joshua said with another wave.

"I miss you, too," Luke said, and his eyes flicked back up to Dominic.

"Thanks for listening to me," Dom said.

Luke held up a hand.

"I haven't finished yet," he said with a smile. "Fourthly: go and hang out on the beach with some of the crew. I'm sure the company would take your mind off things."

Dominic hesitated before he nodded.

"I guess you're right. Thanks, Luke."

"No problem, Dom," he said. "Call me any time."

"I will."

The two exchanged goodbyes, and Luke sat back in his chair as the image of Dom and Josh disappeared from the screen.

"Damn... " he said.

\*\*\*

An hour later, Dominic found himself walking along one of Tracy Island's luscious beaches. He had a heavy picnic basket in one hand and his young son running off in front. By his side walked John, who was throwing a stick for Joshua to chase after.

"My son isn't a dog," Dom said, but he did so with a smile.

"No, he's not very good at fetching," John said as Joshua picked up the stick and continued to run onwards.

Dom chuckled. Dianne had given him the rest of the day off after their talk, and said that she would get in touch with Anna to arrange an appointment sooner rather than later. He looked up to



the clear blue sky, and tried to put all thoughts of the previous day out of his mind.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 22:02:46 GMT

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"Your grandmothers are going to take care of the kids' schooling while we're away," Jeff said, starting to go over the list he'd prepared for Scott. "However, they are starting riding lessons tomorrow so you need to make sure they get to the mainland for that. Cherie does have the fan club meeting next Saturday but we should be back for that. You'll also need to make sure that someone picks Jenny up on Friday from visiting her mother. Kyrano's already agreed to take her there when he makes his shopping trip on Tuesday."

Scott nodded as he added notes to the data padd he held in his hand.

"Gordon is heading to the mainland on Tuesday. I believe he said they plan on taking Aaron's plane for the trip."

"I wouldn't mind having an excuse to take that seaplane up myself," Scott commented. He had been down at the boat pen helping to make a place for the Neptune seaplane when Aaron had arrived back at the island with it earlier that afternoon.

Jeff looked up from his list and over at his son. "I'm sure if you asked, the kid would let you take it up."

"If I get some free time, I might just do that," Scott commented. "So, what's next on your list?"

Jeff glanced back down. "Brains and Tin-Tin are heading to Paris on Monday. That's going to leave Will on his own for a few days. You and your brothers are going to have to pitch in a bit more with the maintenance work."

"Yes, sir," Scott replied, without missing a beat adding it to the list he was making for himself. "The fuel run to Mateo is scheduled for Wednesday, right?"

"That's right. Why don't you have John take Vince with him to make the fuel run? Gordon can use the trip out there and back as a training session for Vince. It'll give our newest recruit an opportunity to get familiar with TB4 as well as see Mateo."

"Understood." It also means that I can stay here while they make the run, Scott thought, catching his father's unspoken meaning.

"I'd also like you to set up a time for us to conduct a field test on the dicetyline cannon once I get



back. I haven't had a chance to get to that."

"No problem. I'll talk to Virgil and Cassie and we'll get something set up."

"Good," Jeff commented, glancing over his notes. "I think that's everything for around here. Things with Tracy Industries are mostly business as usual. I think you can handle that without too much trouble. There is one item I need you to keep an eye on though. I got an email from headquarters earlier today. Seems the city is trying to put new fire codes into effect. If the legislation goes through, I'd like Cassie to oversee making sure changes are implemented to meet the new codes in a timely manner. Keep tabs on the situation. It might be a good idea to let Cassie know what's going on. With her just coming back from Kabul, I didn't think today would be a good time to spring this on her."

Scott made a couple of quick notes before he addressed his father. "Don't worry, Dad. I'll handle it. Anything else?"

Jeff looked down at his own list, quickly making sure nothing had been skipped. "I think I covered everything. If I think of something else, I'll let you know."

"Yeah, I'm sure we'll all be getting last minute instructions before you and Mom leave," Scott commented lightly.

"You can count on it," Jeff told him, in mock seriousness.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 22:03:45 GMT  
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Saturday, January 19, 2069, 1:00 p.m., outside of Auckland, NZ

John stood by the paddock rail, watching as Tyler mounted a horse within. The horse was full-sized, not a pony, and the instructor had to cinch up the stirrups quite a bit. Other students stood nearby, some older than Tyler, watching the proceedings with varying degrees of interest.

"Mr. Tracy?" a soft voice called his name, and John turned. A short 30-something blonde with a windblown braid stood there, smiling and offering her hand. Two men, one dark and in his 20s, and the other just as fair as the woman and about her age, stood behind her. "I'm Esther McGill, of Tracy Industries Security." She motioned to her companions. "This is Maaka Potaka, and here is my twin, Edward. We're here to see after the children."

"May I have your identification please?" Actually, John had already seen pictures of the trio, and showed them to the kids, but he wanted to make perfectly sure that these people were who they said they were.

Edward extracted his first, and handed over the card with the data chip embedded in it. John



pulled a small data pad and scanner from his pocket and inserted the card into a slot. The pad read the chip and indicated that this was indeed Edward McGill. The other two did the same, and when he handed Maaka's card back to him, John said, "Everything looks like it's in order. I take it you're going to shadow Cherie, Ms. McGill. Which one of you gents will be keeping an eye on Alex?"

Maaka smiled. "I will."

"And I'll be shadowing Tyler," Edward confirmed.

"Very good." John gestured in the direction of one of the other paddocks. "My sister will be in the beginner's class for English dressage, which starts in an hour. Right now, she's across the way there, looking out over the pasture." He gestured to where Cherie stood, on the opposite side of the paddock, gazing out over the green lawn and talking to a girl about her age. "Tyler is here, in the beginner's Western class, while Alex is with the intermediate group." John indicated another paddock behind and to his right. "I'll be hanging around today myself, just to get acquainted with the way things are run, though I'll probably not be here every week." Actually, that's a given, he thought.

"Sounds good," Esther said. "Do the children know who we are?"

"They've seen your pictures. I've also made sure that the owners here realize that there will be security for the kids, and there can be no press allowed. They're not very happy about it, but I assured them you'd be discreet. And you have the power to deal with any members of the press who might slip in."

"Right." Esther glanced at her companions. "Well, then, let's get to our stations."

John turned back to watch Tyler for a moment. He had swung back off the horse, ending up on a box that was placed there for the younger kids. There had been quite a bit of "discussion" about what the kids would do next as far as an outside opportunity was concerned. Each of them had proposed their own ideas, and there hadn't been much overlap. Finally, their father had weeded out some of the more outrageous things, and a few that only one would like and the others would loathe, coming down to three choices, of which riding lessons was one. Then there was the kerfuffle over which kind of riding lesson. Cherie was adamant that they take English-style lessons as she felt she was proficient in Western riding. (John remembered Virgil's quickly covered snort at this statement.) Both of the boys, however, preferred Western.

"English riding is for sissies," Tyler had firmly declared.

"No, it's not." Gordon weighed in. "The only type of riding allowed at the Olympics is English-style. So, you'd be learning an Olympic sport. And those aren't for sissies."

A quick bit of on-the-spot research came up with a riding stable that held lessons in both English and Western. When Jeff approached them by phone, the owners had originally suggested private lessons for the kids. But Jeff said no. "Part of the reason I want my children to take classes is for them to get to know others of their own ages. Private lessons defeat that purpose." Once it was clear that the boys could take Western while their sister learned English, the choice was made.



Jeff and Dianne went back and forth with the stable's owners about the timing of the lessons. The Tracys preferred that the children have their lessons on the same day. It took some shuffling, but the name of Tracy did carry quite a bit of weight, and as a result, the children were enrolled in classes on Saturday afternoons.

"I wish Mom and Dad were here." John turned to see Cherie come up beside him, putting her hands on the paddock's rails. "I'd have liked them to watch our lessons."

"You know they're celebrating Dad's birthday," John reminded her. "They'll have some time to come out when they get back."

She glanced behind him. "Is that my bodyguard?"

"Yes." John didn't look. He'd seen Esther out of the corner of his eye. "She'll be discreet, just like your other one was."

"I wish we didn't have to have them."

John rolled his eyes. "You went through this before last time." Changing the subject, he asked, "Who were you talking to over there?"

"Her name's Patty and she'll be in my class." Cherie put her chin on her forearms, which now lay on the paddock rail. "At least there'll be one person my age there." Sighing, she added, "I miss my art class."

John just smiled a little and put a hand on his sister's shoulder. "You'll have fun here, too."

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 22:04:20 GMT  
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Friday, January 18, 2069, 7 p.m., Dallas-Fort Worth Airport, USA (2 p.m. Saturday, January 19, Tracy Island)

"Bad news, honey."

Jeff sauntered over to where Dianne stood, sipping a cup of coffee. She turned to him as he came up beside her.

"What is it?"

"Boston and points north are being hammered by a big snowstorm. Logan Airport is closed. We're going to either have to change our destination, or stick here until Logan's opened up again."

Dianne sighed, and her shoulders slumped. "How is New York?"



"The city airports report light snow and are open," Jeff told her, consulting the pad in his hand. "You want to head for the penthouse and spend the night there?"

"Sounds like as good a plan as any," Dianne said, sighing again. "We could take a helijet out of La Guardia instead of Boston... and a pilot, too."

Jeff's face softened, and he put an arm around his wife. "You're still worried about me piloting to New Hampshire, aren't you?"

There was a moment's hesitation, and she nodded slightly. Jeff smiled. "If you remember, I wasn't piloting on my first visit. And I promise we'll wait until the weather clears before heading up there."

Dianne looked up at him, and stroked her fingers along his cheekbone, then reached up for a kiss. "I'll hold you to that, Jeff Tracy." She leaned her head against his shoulder, sighing deeply again.

"Why so melancholy, love?" he asked, a slight frown of concern wrinkling his brow.

"I don't know." He felt her shrug a little. "Part of me wishes I were home to watch the kids with their new classes. Part of me wishes they were with us for this vacation."

"And here I thought you wanted for us to be alone for my birthday," Jeff gently quipped.

"I do. But... well, I hope Drew can handle things, that's all. Especially with what Dom's going through right now..." She shook her head.

"If Drew needs help, he's got both of our mothers there," he reminded her. "And I wouldn't be surprised if Maggie manages to pull herself away from the grandkids and goes with him."

"I'd feel better if she did," Dianne said. "It's going to be such a busy week at home."

"Well, give them a call and nudge her into going while I change our flight plan and make sure the plane is ready."

Dianne smiled. "All right. I'll do that. And don't forget to call Aline and let her know when we're going to get there. It's short notice, but..."

"She can handle it," Jeff said, completing her sentence with a grin. "I'm on it."

As he went off to make arrangements, Dianne pulled out her satellite phone and pressed a quick dial number. Settling her earphone and mike connection, she waited until the phone on the other end was answered.

"Dianne!" Maggie's face appeared in the tiny screen Dianne held before her. "Where are you?"

"Dallas-Fort Worth and on our way to New York. Boston's airport is closed." Dianne paused, then asked, "Aunt Maggie, could I persuade you to go to the island with Uncle Drew?"



Maggie gave her niece a coquettish look. "Hm. Depends. How much are you willing to do to persuade me?"

Dianne laughed and shook her head. "Maybe I should leave the persuasion up to Uncle Drew."

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 22:06:49 GMT  
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Bozeman, Montana, Friday January 18th, early afternoon (next day, Tracy Island)...

Roger carefully made his way up the snowy walkway to his parent's door. He knocked once then stepped inside. "Anybody home?" he called out as he took off his coat.

Richard appeared from the living room. "Hey, Roger. Good to see you, son." He gave his eldest a hug.

"You too, Dad. What's going on?"

Richard rolled his eyes. "Your mother and brother."

Roger grinned. "Uh-oh. Who killed who?"

"It's not funny. Luke was out shoveling when your mother got home from the store. She lit into him about it, he snapped back and it got ugly." He glanced back at the kitchen and lowered his voice. "Apparently Barry called earlier and that put your brother in a bad mood. He was spoiling for a fight and your mother walked right into it."

"So now you want me to play Switzerland and calm Mom down?"

Richard shook his head. "I'll handle your mother. You talk to Luke. He's upstairs."

"Great, give me the hard job. Thanks, Dad." Roger made his way upstairs. He paused in front of his brother's door and knocked.

"Leave me alone."

Roger opened the door. "No can do, little brother. What's going on?"

Luke lay on his bed, arms folded under his head. He glared at his older brother. "Why are you here? Dad call?"

"Got it in one." Roger sat down on the edge of the bed. "Want to tell me what happened?" He reached down to pat Rommel, who was curled up on the rug.



"Don't touch him!" Luke snapped angrily, sitting up quickly. He hissed in pain causing his brother to narrow his eyes in concern.

"Luke?" he called out tentatively, watching his brother pace the room.

"Don't you start. I'm fine."

Roger settled himself on the bed. "Well?" he asked when the silence had gone on too long.

Luke turned, his grey eyes flashing angrily. "I'm not an invalid and I wish everyone would stop treating me that way. I know perfectly well what I'm capable and not capable of. Shoveling the damn steps is not going to kill me."

"I agree."

"Then why does she keep harping on it! She must call ten times a day, asking if I'm OK. Do I need anything? Did I take my meds? Dammit, Roger, I'm a grown man! I can take care of myself!"

"Luke, she's just..."

"And then there's Rom." The dog looked up at hearing his name. "She feeds him treats all the time, lets him lounge with her in the kitchen, tells me to leave him here when I go out. He barely listens when I call him anymore. I'm already behind with his daily training as it is, and she's not helping! He's not a pet; he's my partner. He can't behave like this or why have him?" Luke took a shuddering breath and sat down heavily in the chair near the window.

"Are you done?"

"Back off, Roger," Luke growled.

"No." He sat up and walked over to sit near his brother. "I can't tell you how to deal with Rommel, other than to take him with you everywhere. You told me yourself as a SAR dog he has all the rights as a Service animal. He can go where you go." He paused a moment. "As to her babying you, you have to see this from her point of view. You're her child and she almost lost you."

"But she didn't lose me! I'm fine! Hell, the doc said I could go back to work in another month! She needs to get over this."

"You died, Luke."

His head snapped up. "What?"

Roger took a deep breath. "Your heart stopped just as the Life-Flight team landed. They had to resuscitate you." He looked up, his eyes boring into Luke's.

Luke grew quiet and he looked down at his hands. "I didn't know."

Roger shrugged. "It's not really the type of thing that comes up in everyday conversation, know



what I mean?" He paused a few moments. "It was probably one of the scariest times in my life. So give Mom a break."

"Yeah, I guess you're right. Again." He grinned up at his brother.

"So, want to tell me what happened with Barry?" Roger asked.

Luke's head snapped up in surprise. "Who told you about that?"

"I have my sources. What happened?"

His brother got up to pace the room again. "He told me he was going to come up and visit sometime after the New Year. When he called today, I figured he was telling me his flight info."

"And?" Roger prompted after the silence went on too long.

"And he's not coming." Luke's tone turned cold. "Seems his boyfriend has a prior engagement that they can't get out of. What kind of name is Sloan anyway?" he snorted.

Roger was torn between amusement and sympathy. Looking at his brother's distressed face, he softened. "Luke, it's over. You need to move on. He obviously has."

"I know. But... I was sort of hoping, you know?" He sighed. "I guess you're right."

"I'm the big brother. I'm always right."

Luke chuckled. "Thanks, Rog." He ran a hand through his hair. "Guess I need to go talk to Mom."

"Yeah, good luck with that." Roger got his feet and pulled his brother into a hug. "Give yourself and the rest of us a break, OK."

"I will."

"Good. I'm going to check in with Mom. I'll talk to you later. Maybe I'll bring the kids over this weekend. They can help you muck out the barn." Roger grinned at his brother's expression.

"That's one chore I don't mind missing! Bye, Rog."

Roger headed back downstairs, leaving Luke alone with his dog. He sighed and rubbed Rommel's head. "I need to get back to the island, boy. I miss my work, my apartment, my friends..." His voice trailed off. He heard the downstairs door slam and the start of Roger's truck a few moments later. He smiled ruefully down at Rommel. "Well boy, what do you say we head downstairs and see if Mom is ready to start peace negotiations?"

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Friday, January 18th, 7:00 PM, Bozeman, Montana (3:00 PM the following day, Tracy Island)...

Luke leaned on the porch railing, watching Rommel run in the yard. His thoughts however, weren't on the falling snow, but thousands of miles away. I can't get Dom out of my head! What is going on down there? He sighed and whistled to Rom. The dog hurried over and both went inside.

"Luke?" his mother called from the kitchen. "Everything all right?"

He rolled his eyes. "I'm fine, Mom." He tried to keep the annoyance out of his voice.

Rommel shook himself and trotted towards the kitchen. "Rom, get back here! Rommel!" Luke swore under his breath as the dog ignored him. He hung his coat and marched up to his room, slamming the door behind him. He paced across the room, too restless to sit. If anyone would know what's going on with Dom, the rest of the team would. He booted up his computer and checked his email, disappointed to not find the one he was hoping for. Sighing, continued walking around the room, gritting his teeth as he heard his dog barking happily downstairs. I should go bring him up here, but don't feel like dealing with the family right now. He spied his phone on the bureau and got an idea. If no one is writing, I'll give them a call. Elise must have talked to Dom or at least knows what's going on. I hate this, being so far out of the loop. He did some quick mental addition to figure out the time difference, then dialed her number.

"Hello, sorry I'm not here. Leave a message and I'll call you back. Bye!"

"Strike one." Luke muttered to himself and tried Cassie.

"Moshi, moshi. You know the drill. Sayonara!"

"Today just isn't my day!" He sat down on the edge of his bed and took a deep breath. "One more try, then I give up."

"Hello?"

Luke sighed in relief. "Hey, it's me, Luke. Is this Virgil?"

"Yes, it is. Long time no hear! How are you?"

"Pretty good. Cold, but good. We're in the middle of a cold snap. It's below zero here."

Virgil chuckled. "Guess I shouldn't mention that how beautiful it is by the pool then, should I?"

"Not at all! Anything new and exciting going on down there?"

"Not since our big underwater adventure a couple of days ago," Virgil replied.

"That's kind of what I'm calling about. Is your father or mother around? I'd like to talk to them



about something."

"I'm sorry, Luke. They took off for the States for a long overdue vacation."

"Damn."

Virgil caught the frustrated tone in Luke's voice. "Is everything all right? Something I can help you with?"

"No, not really. I wanted to talk to them about me coming back sooner than planned. But I guess I'll try them when they get back." He sighed despondently.

"I will. Sorry I can't help you. But I'll pass along the message."

"Thanks, Virgil. Say hi to everyone for me."

"I will, Luke. Take care of yourself."

"I will," he snorted. "Not much else I can do at this point," he added ruefully. "Talk to you later." He hung up and lay back on the bed, his thoughts troubled.

Back on Tracy Island, Virgil frowned at the phone, then dialed his father's private number. "Hi, Dad. Hope the trip's going OK so far. Give me a buzz when you get in. It's not an emergency, but there's something I need to talk to you about."

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 22:10:37 GMT  
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January 18, 2069, 11 PM, New York City (9 PM same day, Bozeman, Montana; 5 PM January 19, Tracy Island)

"Okay, Virgil. Thanks for telling me." Jeff folded up his satellite phone. He turned to his wife, who was sprawled on the sofa, a glass of white wine in her hand. "Virgil just told me that Luke has called. He wants to talk to one or both of us."

Dianne groaned. "Oh, Jeff. Can't it wait until tomorrow?"

Jeff looked at his watch. "It's only nine o'clock out in Montana. I might as well call and get it over with."

Dianne shook her head and rolled her eyes as Jeff stepped over to the vidphone. She sipped her wine as Jeff dialed the number he'd been given.



Luke was in the family room, surfing the channels on the television, looking for a hockey game. Rommel lay at his feet. He glanced down from his searching.

"You and I are going to get back into training again no matter what the weather," he promised the dog.

His satellite phone sounded off, using a tone that he had reserved for the Tracys. He picked up the phone and frowned; the number was not one he recognized. "Hey. I wonder who this is." He opened the phone, putting a wireless transmitter in his ear so he could see the screen, and said, "Hello?"

"Hello there, Luke," Jeff said. "How are things in Bozeman? I had a message from Virgil about your returning earlier than expected."

In the background, Luke could hear Dianne let out a loud, "What?!" In a heartbeat, Dianne's voice was added to Jeff's, and she was there, peering over Jeff's shoulder.

"What's this about you returning?" she demanded.

Luke laughed. "In answer to your question, Mr. Tracy, things are very cold and snowy here, and I'm suffering from cabin fever. Where are you right now?"

"We're in New York," Jeff explained. "We'll be heading to New Hampshire sometime tomorrow. So, what's this Virgil was telling me about? Has your doctor released you?"

"Well," Luke said, "Not exactly. But my thought is that I could finish my recovery just as well on the island as I could here." He sighed. "Never thought I'd say this, but I can't stand much more snow. I can't get out do actually do anything..."

"Cabin fever, shmabin fever. What does your doctor say?" Dianne's question was pointed. "I want details." She shook a finger at him. "And don't sugarcoat it. I'll have it out of him or her myself soon enough."

Luke seemed taken aback. He paused to collect his thoughts. "Well, she told me yesterday that I should be back to work in three to five weeks, and on light duty for a month after that." His tone sounded disappointed as he added, "Dr. Tracy, I really need to get out of here. My mom... she's treating me like I'm fragile. Doesn't want me to do anything around the place. We got into an argument over shoveling the steps..."

"Good for her," Dianne commented tartly. "That's what a mother's supposed to do."

Jeff's eyebrows went up, and he said, "Excuse us one moment, Luke." He leaned over and whispered in his wife's ear. Luke watched as her expression first turned thunderous, then sour as she glared at her husband. She folded her arms and took herself away from the screen. Luke was certain she wasn't far away, though.

"I was just reminding my wife of her own words during her recovery from that... ahem... auto



accident." Jeff's tone was blasé, but there was an undercurrent of amusement there as well. "So, you think you can do better at the island than at home. Why?"

"There won't be the temptation to get out and shovel snow, for one thing," Luke said, wryly. His face hardened. "Then there's Rom. My mother treats him like a grandchild, and between her babying me, spoiling him, the weather, and my recovery, I haven't been able to train with him. He's losing his edge. Getting back to the island means I'll be able to get his training in hand; in fact, it's something I can do while waiting to go back on full duty." He smiled ruefully. "And there's the fact that I miss everyone there, too. I love my folks, but I can only take so much of them, y'know?"

"Yes, I do." Jeff stroked his chin, looking thoughtful. He glanced over his shoulder in Dianne's direction. Luke could hear a "hmph!" in the background, but she reappeared, standing next to her husband and looking stubborn. "What do you think, Dianne? Scott is picking up Drew, so there'll be someone to keep Luke accountable. Scott could make a detour and pick Luke up as well."

Luke crossed his fingers, and looked hopeful. He knew that Dianne's word would be the final say in the matter.

"Ah'd rathuh he waited until he was back on light duty," Dianne said, her drawl making Luke's heart sink. "But... if'n he has his doctuh send his records on, and lets Drew examine him right off th' bat, an' he is off duty entirely until Ah get back an' take a look... Ah suppose he can go back to th' ahland." She snorted. "Ah'm only doin' this because o' Rommel, y'hear. An' t' keep yoah poah mothuh from havin' t' put up with yew any moah than she has tuh! Unnerstan'?"

"Yes, ma'am!" Luke grinned, and all but saluted. "I'll do exactly as you say."

"Well then," Jeff said, returning Luke's grin and tipping him a sly wink. "I'll let Scott know about this development and have him make the detour needed. He'll be in touch with you about pick up times and such. You can be packed and ready within a day, I hope."

"Yes, sir! I certainly can!" Luke couldn't stop grinning. "I'll be ready."

"All right, then. Is there anything else?"

"No, sir, but I hope you and Dr. Tracy enjoy your vacation. The skiing should be good."

Jeff nodded. "I expect it will be." He glanced at Dianne. "Love, is there anything else you want to say?"

Her response was terse. "No."

"Then we'll talk to you later, Luke."

"Right, Mr. Tracy. Goodbye."

The call ended, and Luke pumped his fist with a hissed, "Yes!!" He looked down at Rom, who gazed back up at him and thumped his tail on the floor. "You hear that, mutt? We're going home!"



Jeff approached Dianne, and put his hands on her shoulders. She huffed a breath out through her nose. "You know that Drew won't let him do anything that will jeopardize his recovery, Dianne. And you can give Gordon a heads up, too. I'm sure he'd be willing to help out with any physical therapy Luke might need." He shook his head. "I do wish Nikki was available. I'm not sure that Dom will be up to helping Drew..."

"Ah took cayuh o' that," Dianne said, shaking her head once. "Maggie is going t' th' ahland with him."

"That's great! If anyone can keep Luke in place, she can." He leaned in to kiss the side of her neck. "Now, let me help you work out that tenseness..."

"Don't yew have t' call Scott?" she asked, a slightly haughty tone in her voice.

Jeff groaned. "You're right. He needs to know about the flight deviation." He turned her around and kissed her on the forehead. "Why don't you fill up the Jacuzzi for a late bath? I'll join you as soon as I finish talking with Scott, and giving Drew a heads up." He smiled at her and added, "Please?"

Her shoulders dropped, and she sighed. "All right." Waving a hand toward the vidphone, she said, "Go make your calls. I'll fill the Jacuzzi."

He kissed her again. "Thank you, love."

As he went to the vidphone, she watched him for a moment, then went off toward their sleeping quarters.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 22:11:29 GMT  
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Somewhere over the Pacific Ocean...

Scott checked his watch and did some quick mental calculating. "We've made good time. We should be landing in less than an hour."

Elise nodded from the co-pilot seat. "Gotta love a good tailwind," she quipped.

Scott chuckled. "It certainly helps, that's for sure. Drew should be waiting at the airport. Between the three of us, the trip back should be easy." Before he could continue, his phone rang. Fishing it out of his pocket, he glanced at the screen and frowned. "It's Dad. I'd better take this."

"Got her." Elise took the controls as Scott sat back.



"Hello?"

"Hello, son. Are you still in the air?" Jeff asked.

"Yes, we're about an hour out. Is everything all right?"

"Everything is fine. Scott, there's been a slight change in plans," his father replied.

"Change? Like what?" he asked.

"Well, for starters, Maggie will be joining Drew. Your mother talked to her earlier and has it all arranged."

"No problem. It'll be good to see her again."

"Also, you're making an unscheduled stop to Bozeman to pick up Luke."

"Luke's coming back already?" Scott shot a glance over at Elise who looked just as surprised. "What brought that on? I didn't think he'd be back for another month or so."

"Apparently there are things going on at home that aren't very conducive to his recovery. Your mother and I talked to him and he's awaiting your call. He's to be checked over by Drew when we you land and be completely off duty until we get back." Jeff's tone booked no argument.

"Yes, sir. When is he expecting us?"

"Tomorrow sometime. You can stay at Drew and Maggie's or get a hotel. Whichever is easier. Give Luke a call and set up a time that works best for all of you."

"FAB. Consider it done. Are you in New Hampshire?" Scott asked.

"Not yet. We're headed that way in the morning. Now, I'd better get back to your mother. This vacation isn't exactly starting out the way she had planned." Jeff sighed. "I'll talk to you soon. Good-night, Scott."

"Night, Dad." Jeff signed off and Scott looked over at Elise. "Well, that was certainly unexpected. Did you have any idea that Luke was coming back this soon?"

She shook her head. "No. He mentioned in his last email, that his doctor's appointment had gone well, but nothing about returning to the island. Wonder what's up?"

Scott frowned thoughtfully. "I have no idea. But I expect we'll find out soon."

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Saturday, January 19, 2069, 1 p.m., Black Mountain, NH (Sunday, January 20, 7 a.m., Tracy Island)

The helijet's rotors stirred up a wild dusting of light, stinging snow, making Jeff squint as it hit his face. He raised a hand in a gesture of farewell as the transport rose into the sky, then he ducked into the SUV that sat idling by the helijet pad.

"Everyone set back there?" The dark-skinned man at the wheel asked. His name was Tighe, and he was a local who specialized in keeping track of vacation homes while the owners were away.

"We're set," Jeff said. He had opted to ride in back with Dianne instead of up front with the driver. Taking her hand, he squeezed it, then drew it to his lips for a kiss. She favored him with a chuckle and a fond look.

"Then we're off," Tighe said, putting the heavy-duty SUV into gear. As they rolled slowly along, he told his passengers, "My partner and I were up here early with the SnoCat to clear the way to the landing pad. Travis is back at the house, taking care of a few last minute details. We weren't able to get out here yesterday; the state police told everyone but essential personnel to stay home." His tone was apologetic. "We're not exactly essential personnel."

"How much snow did that storm drop on you?" Jeff asked, leaning forward a bit.

"Three quarters to a full meter, depending on where you were." Tighe shrugged. "It's good to see it, though; up until now, we've had a pretty dry winter. The skiing should be prime." He paused, then asked, "What slopes are you folks interested in?"

"I'm not sure," Jeff said. "My wife made all the arrangements." This wasn't exactly true; Dianne and he had planned the itinerary together. Dianne had called their stateside representatives with their plans and set them the task of making the actual reservations, etc.

"We're probably going to go to Bretton Woods at some point," Dianne said, being intentionally vague. "I understand they have very good skiing here."

"Some of the best," Tighe said, smiling. "I know you'll enjoy yourselves there."

The light, powdery snow, driven by the wind, scurried across the freshly plowed road. Holding his wife's hand, Jeff peered out to see that other residents along the way were digging out their own homes. A small plow rumbled past, forcing the SUV far to one side. Dianne grimaced as the doors scraped against the piled edges.

"Will the outlets be open?" she asked. "I do want to get in some shopping."

"Travis will be able to tell you," Tighe assured her. "He'll have all the local lowdown."

The vehicle swung onto the long drive leading up to the house. As it came into sight, Dianne drew



in a sharp, delighted breath. "It looks so... so..." Jeff opened his mouth to make a suggestion, but she finally came out with what she'd been trying to say. "...perfect."

Jeff grinned. "That's what I'd hoped you'd say when I bought the place last year."

The snow covered the roof in a thick blanket, with icicles hanging down as the day's bright sun melted some of the layer. Bushy young pine and spruce wore epaulets of white on their boughs, which bent down under the weight of their new finery. One or two lost the battle with gravity, spilling their decorations to the ground and springing back up with vigor. A lazy curl of smoke rose from the chimney.

Tighe honked the horn, then pulled the SUV in next to a no-nonsense, extended cab truck, emblazoned with the words, "Property Preservation Professionals" on the door. A heavy-duty trailer was hitched to the truck, and a small SnoCat, with caterpillar treads and plow blade, rested on it. As Jeff alighted, he saw the French door swing open and a fresh-faced young blonde step out onto the long porch. She adjusted her gloves, tugged down her heavy Nordic sweater, and hurried down the steps toward them.

"Mr. Tracy, Dr. Tracy, this is Astrid, our official go-fer," Tighe commented as the young woman approached, hand outstretched. "Astrid, our clients, the Tracys."

"Oh, wow!" she gushed, pumping Jeff's hand. "I'm, like, so excited about meeting you! It's like meeting..." She glanced away, toward the snow-covered mountains. "George Washington or something! A real historical figure!"

Dianne smothered a chuckle, and Jeff struggled to hold onto his pleasant expression. "Nice to meet you too, Astrid." He extracted his hand and gestured toward Dianne. "My wife, Dr. Tracy."

Astrid gave Dianne's outstretched hand a desultory shake. "Pleased, I'm sure."

Tighe, who had been subtly shaking his head, now spoke up. "Astrid, please get the Tracys' luggage and bring it up to the house." He then gestured to the well-cleared steps, indicating that Jeff and Dianne should ascend. "Welcome home."

"Thank you," Dianne said, nodding regally. She made her way up, Jeff close behind.

The interior of the main room was warm and inviting. A fire crackled merrily in the fireplace, and flowers added their own fragrance to the space. Dianne took a deep, appreciative breath, and smiled at Jeff.

"Welcome home, Mr. Tracy, Dr. Tracy!" A broad-shouldered man with close-cropped dark hair and a luxurious dark mustache greeted them as they divested themselves of their coats. He crossed the room to shake their hands, his thick work-boots making a muffled thump on the hardwood floors.

"This is my partner, Travis," Tighe said, subtly moving in to take the outerwear. "He's been dealing with the inside of the house while I've dealt with the outside."



"Everything should be in order," Travis told them, drawing them further into the room, while Tighe took the opportunity to hang up the coats. "There's plenty of firewood. The refrigerator is full. I've checked on the new addition to the master bedroom; the Jacuzzi is in fine shape. The installers did a fantastic job." He picked up a data pad from the dining room table, and scrolled down through its information. "The plumbing is leak-free and running freely, and the generator is primed and ready... just in case." He nodded to himself, then handed the pad to Jeff. "If you'll take a look around, then sign off, we'll get out of your way."

"Dr. Tracy would like to know if the outlet shops will be open, and if so, when," Tighe brought up.

Travis chuckled. "Stores stay closed because of a little snow? Pfft." He waved a hand. "Now, a good Nor'easter, yeah. That might close them down for a day or two, but not a gorgeous day like today. The main roads are clear, and the slopes are open." He paused, then added, "I can double check for you, of course, but..."

Dianne waved her hand. "No, that's all right. I'm just an old Southern girl who's not used to the roads being cleared so fast after such a heavy snow. Where I come from, four inches or more is enough to cause a panic. You wouldn't believe how fast the bread and milk aisles clear at just the threat of snow!"

Travis and Tighe both laughed, and Travis added, "You'll want to go to Settlers' Green, then. Loads of outlet stores there. I'll make sure the SUV has the coordinates programmed in for you."

Astrid moved to join her employers, rubbing her hands together and blowing on them. "I have everything inside, now, Mr. Tracy. Luggage is in the bedroom, that big picnic hamper is in the kitchen, and I put anything that looked perishable into the fridge. Your ski equipment is in the closet over there." She pointed to a wide coat closet. "The SUV has ski racks on top, and room for a snowboard... if you're into that."

"I may give it a try while we're here," Jeff said, smiling. "Once I drag my wife away from the pleasures of bargain hunting." He looked down at the pad he still held, then too the attached stylus, and signed his name. "Here. I think everything's in apple pie order."

Travis extended his hand once again. "Pleasure doing business with you, sir. Let us know when you want us to close up."

"We will."

They shook hands all around, and the crew left. Dianne crossed over to the wide windows and watched the truck pull carefully out of the parking area, and... turning around... roll cautiously down the long drive.

Jeff joined her, putting his arms around her from the back, and resting his chin on her shoulder. "Gorgeous view, isn't it?"

She sighed deeply, a contented sound. "Yes. It's beautiful." She turned in his grasp, causing him to straighten up. Draping an arm over his shoulder, she stroked his face. "An' we're alone."



"Hmm," he murmured. "That opens up a whole world of possibilities."

Running a finger lightly over his lips, she smiled, her eyes half-lidded. "Ah can think o' one in particulah, suh."

She drew his mouth down to hers for a long, lazy kiss. As they parted, she slowly slid her hands across the thick cable knit sweater he wore.

"Too bad theah's no buttons heah," she purred.

"Well, there are other ways of removing... impediments," he rumbled. He took her hand, and raised it to his lips, turning it slightly to kiss the inside of her wrist. "How about before the fire this time, hmm?"

She regarded him with a sultry, yet thoughtful look, then smiled. "Well, suh, it is yoah birthday..."

His startled smile grew into a sensual one, and he took her face in both hands, kissing her roughly, passionately. She responded eagerly, and as they broke their clinch, she drew him towards the fireplace, and the thick piece of carpet that lay before it.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 22:13:09 GMT

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Sunday, Jan. 20th, Christchurch, NZ, 11:25 am . . .

"I'm going to wait outside," Aaron told his mother, as he stood up from the pew as the service came to an end. This was their second week at the church and the teenager figured his parents would be hanging around talking for a while like they had the week before.

"Okay," Lana replied, as Aaron stepped past her into the aisle. "We won't be too long."

Aaron nodded as he headed for the exit, more than ready to get some fresh air. At least the pastor gives a good sermon, he thought, as he stepped outside of the Oxford Terrace Baptist Church. Aaron leaned against the nearest column and looked around the area, watching the cars driving by.

"Hello," a voice said bringing Aaron out of his thoughts. Aaron looked over in the direction of the voice to see that a boy about his age had come out of the church. "You're Aaron, right?"

"Yeah. How did you know my name?"

"Well, your family is the only new family in the church so it wasn't too hard to figure it out. Plus, along with being a plod, my dad is also the Youth Group Leader. He spoke to you last week about joining the Youth Group here."



Aaron nodded. "So, this week he put you up to it?"

The boy shrugged. "He thought you might take the invitation more seriously from a peer," he said with a shrug. "By the way, my name is Maru. My friends call me Ru," he continued, holding his hand out. The two boys shook hands. "Dad said your family moved here because your Dad is working for Tracy Industries. How come I haven't seen you around school?"

"I'm doing my schooling via an internet program. Was doing it back home and didn't see a reason to change when I came here."

"Wow. I don't think my parents would even consider letting me do something like that. However, that means you won't meet any other kids so joining us for Youth Group makes even more sense. My Dad actually manages to make the meetings interesting unlike the last youth leader. We're also planning a trip to go tramping in a couple weeks at Bottle Lake Forest."

"Tramping?"

Ru smiled. "I think you Americans call it hiking. We usually plan some kind of outing once a month. We all went ice skating a couple of weeks ago. So, what do you say?"

"I'll think about it," Aaron promised him.

"Great. My dad will be chuffed to hear that. Let me see your church program," Ru said, pointing to the program from that day's service that was sticking out of the top of Aaron's Bible. The teen complied, taking it from the front of the bible and handing it to the other boy. Ru wrote something across the top and then handed it back. "That's my number. Give me a ring and let me know what you decide. Our next meeting is Wednesday at seven."

"Okay," Aaron replied as he put the program back in the front of his Bible.

Just then, a couple of other teens called out a greeting to Ru, who returned the greeting. He then introduced them to Aaron. The teens chatted while they waited for their parents.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 22:14:10 GMT  
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"Can we look for seashells? We need them for the net for my wall!"

Cassie smiled as she walked hand-in-hand with the little blonde. She had agreed to watch Lea for the afternoon so Vince could paint his daughter's bedroom. They were both dressed in shorts, tank tops, and sandals. In her other hand, Lea carried a small plastic pail and a couple of shovels. The two of them were walking across the Cliff House balcony to Dom's apartment to see if Josh could join them.



"Can I knock?" Lea asked excitedly, when they reached the door.

"Go ahead."

Lea reached out and knocked on the door. Cassie was starting to think Dom might be out when he finally appeared at the door.

"Hi Cassie. Hi Lea," Dom said opening the door, Josh in his arms. "What do I owe the pleasure of two beautiful ladies dropping by?" he asked, directing the comment mostly toward Lea. The little blonde giggled.

"We're going down to the beach. Wanted to see if Josh wanted to join us," Cassie replied.

"What do you say, Joshua? Do you want to go to the beach with Cassie and Lea?"

"Go with Auntie Cass," Josh said, reaching toward the dark haired woman.

"Guess that's a yes," Dom said, as Cassie took Josh from him.

"You're welcome to join us."

"Nah. Think I'll take advantage of the kid-free apartment and do some cleaning."

"Suit yourself."

Cassie waited while Dom grabbed a pail and shovel for Josh to take to the beach. Then, holding Josh in one arm and holding Lea's hand in the other, the little group headed down the steps of the Cliff House. Once they reached the sand, Josh wanted down. Cassie placed him on the sand next to Lea.

"Josh, want to help me find some sea shells?" Lea asked the little boy.

"Find sea shells," Josh replied happily.

"Let's go," Lea said, reaching out and taking Josh's hand. The two of them headed off toward the water at the Josh's pace.

Those two are so cute together, Cassie thought as she followed the two kids. She knew she was going to enjoy her afternoon. Being around both Josh and Lea had a relaxing affect on her and she was starting to realize how much she missed having that carefree joy in her life that only children could bring.

Before she got too sentimental, Cassie brought herself out of her thoughts and focused on the two kids in front of her.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 22:15:22 GMT

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Dominic flopped down on the sofa and threw back his head. Joshua had been riled up from his trip to the beach earlier in the day and it had taken him hours to calm down again. That kid is just full of beans. I don't have the energy to deal with it right now... He looked around the now-clean apartment and caught his reflection in the glass of the patio doors. Eww. I need a shave. And probably a shower. He sniffed one armpit delicately. Gross.

He stood up to make a beeline for the bathroom when the door chime sounded. He stilled. Should I answer? I could pretend I was in bed? Ugh! Deciding it was probably better not to hide from his friends, he walked to the door and opened it.

"Hey, Vince," he said. Memories of the rescue flooded back at the sight of the other man's face.

"Aloha, Dom," Vince took in the appearance of the other man, trying not to wrinkle his nose at the smell of body odor that he caught. The guy looks like hell, and smells like he's been out on a multi-day mission with the SEALs. I think stopping by and checking up on him was the right thing to do. "Just wanted to stop by and see how you were doing. Haven't seen you around much but then I have been busy with things. Should I come back some other time?"

"Well, if you don't mind my appearance, I'm not doing anything. I just got Josh tucked into bed."

"After some of the places I've been, not much phases you," Vince commented as he stepped inside the apartment as Dom stepped to the side.

"Would you like a drink? I've got some soda or I can make you a cuppa. I was going to stick the kettle on anyway."

"A soda would be good, thanks."

Vince watched as Dominic moved around the apartment with slouched shoulders, sighing as he picked the kettle up to fill it at the sink. The man was clearly a big, big mess. I wonder how he's doing with Josh...

"Take a seat, Vince. I vacuumed the couches today," Dom said with a wink. The gesture lacked its usual sparkle. "Cassie took Joshua to the beach and I took the opportunity to clean. Things were a bit... stinky. Like me right now."

Vince sat down and crossed his arms across his chest. He hadn't been into Dominic's apartment very often. The colour choices on the walls, the upholstery, and even small details - down to the colour of the cups in the kitchen - all matched perfectly.

"You've done a nice job decorating in here," Vince said as Dominic placed a can of soda and a glass with ice down on the coffee table.

"I see you were doing some DIY yourself today. There's paint on your temple."



Vince chuckled and brought a hand up to touch the offending area.

"Yeah. There's always a bit left no matter how carefully you wash."

The kettle clicked and Dominic made his own drink -- from the smell it was coffee -- and the younger man crossed back over to the sofa and sat down.

"So, everything okay with you?" he asked.

Vince poured his soda into the glass and pinned Dominic with a look.

"I'm here to ask that question to you," he said. "How are you after the rescue? We haven't seen much of you."

Dominic was about to open his mouth but Vince stopped him.

"And don't say you're fine. I've seen enough denial in the services to last me a lifetime."

Dominic visibly deflated and his coffee cup nearly slipped out of his hands.

"I screwed up," he said quietly. "I should have thought. I should have used my God-given brains and realised all that space would trigger my cenophobia. And then that damned tarantula. I'm tellin' you, it's the same damn one every time. Ugh! I'm such weakling."

"Don't think you're weak just because you fear something. An admiral once told me that 'if a person claims they're not afraid of anything they're either just too weak to admit it or not capable at looking at things from all perspectives'."

"Good words," Dom commented, as he silently repeated the words to himself. "Mind if I ask what you were afraid of?"

"Monsters in the dark," the older man replied. He couldn't help but smile at the disbelieving look he got from the nurse. "I was six and had been picked up from my first sleep over early because I was afraid the monsters at my friend's house were going to come out when we went to sleep and get all of us. On the way home, I started worrying about what my friends were going to say at school. That was part of the speech my father gave me."

Vince picked up his glass and took a sip from it. As he placed it back on the coffee table, he continued talking. "You know the monsters in the dark seem silly now, but those words stuck and I've repeated them to myself plenty of times over the years. It's not always about conquering the things you're afraid of but taking what you learn about yourself from them. Perhaps deep sea diving wasn't the best situation for you to be in but you know your limit now and you did pull yourself together enough to finish the task at hand. Not much more yourself or anyone else could ask of you."

"Yeah, things worked out this time but what about next time?"

Vince shrugged his shoulders. "Sorry, but I can't help you answer that question. If it helps though,



it's a question I ask myself from time to time; usually when I wake up at night from a dream of being buried alive. I've overcome a lot of fears in my life, but somehow that seems to be one that I just can't get past. It bothers me enough that when Lana and I took the kids on vacation in Shenandoah last year, my parents took the kids to see a couple of the caverns. Being underground like that didn't exactly appeal to me."

"But I bet it didn't stop you from making sure your kids had a good time, eh?"

"No, it didn't," Vince said with a mild smile. "We had a great vacation. Lana once said something to me that I find helpful to remember in times like this: 'what can't be cured must be endured.' You might not be able to get rid of your phobias; if not, you just have to endure them."

Dominic nodded, seeming to mull over the words, but was suddenly overcome with a yawn.

"Oh, man. Sorry. I guess I'm just exhausted."

Vince drained his soda and gave a satisfied sigh.

"Well, I'll get out of your hair," he said as he stood.

Dominic walked him to the door and gave him a grin.

"Thanks for stopping by, Vince. I feel a little better now. You've given me some food for thought."

"No problem, Dom, and if you ever want to talk or anything, you know where to find me. Get some rest. But can I give you some more 'food for thought?'"

"Sure."

"You stink. Have a shower first."

Dominic's face broke into a grin and he clapped Vince on his broad shoulder.

"Yes sir!" he said.

Vince gave him a mock salute as the door swished shut behind him, and Dominic folded his arms. What can't be cured must be endured. That's a good sentiment... and it gives me an idea. Dom nodded, and then headed off for a much-needed shower.

Collab between Robin and Rain

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 22:18:08 GMT



Bozeman, Montana, Sunday January 20th, a little after 10 AM (6 AM Monday, January 21st, Tracy Island...)

"Remember, Scott," Drew said, poking his head into the cockpit. "There are certain deliveries we'll be waiting for when we touch down in Bozeman."

"Right." Scott nodded. "Have you come up with a story...?"

"Of course." Drew gave him a smug smile. "We're just on our way home from visiting with you folks... in Wichita."

"That should do the trick," Elise said, grinning. "As long as Luke's parents don't ask too many questions."

Drew's grin grew wider. "Oh, don't worry about that. Maggie has that covered."

Luke meanwhile, stood in the private lounge terminal, gazing out over the tarmac. Rommel wearing his orange service vest, sat by his side. A few yards away, his parents stood talking, his mother kept shooting him furious glances.

"I still don't understand why he has to leave so suddenly."

Luke sighed and closed his eyes, leaning his forehead against the cool glass. She just doesn't understand. I have to go back. Before I don't want to anymore. He took a deep breath and straightened up. "Mom? Please, don't make this harder for me than it already is."

"Harder for you?" Melisa replied heatedly. "How can you say that, Luke? How on Earth can you say this is harder on you?"

"Melisa, please," Richard tried interjecting, but she brushed him off to march over to her youngest son.

"Your own doctor said you weren't ready for full time work yet. And still here you go, back to Los Angeles. Who's going to take care of you there?" She paused and thought a moment. "I'm going with you."

Luke held up his hands. "Mom, no. I'm perfectly capable of taking care of myself." He sighed. "Yes, for a while I needed looking after, and believe me, there's no place I would have rather been." He smiled ruefully for a moment. "If truth be told, I wish I'd never needed taking care of in the first place!" He got a chuckle from his father, but his mother stood fast. He placed his hands on her shoulders. "I have to go, Mom. I have to make sure I can," he said quietly.

Her expression softened. "Oh, Luke." He pulled her close.

"Excuse me?" They looked up to see a flight attendant standing near. "I'm sorry to interrupt, but Tracy One has just called the Tower. They should be landing momentarily."



"Thanks," Luke told her, then turned back to his mother. "Please, don't worry about me. If I have any problems I'll get myself to a doctor immediately. And I'll call. I promise."

She smiled, her eyes wet. "I suppose that will have to do. But I expect to hear from you a lot more frequently that we do now, is that understood, Luke Francis?"

Luke winced. "Yes, ma'am."

The door to the terminal opened, and a delivery man, wearing the uniform of a medical supply company, entered, a hefty crate on his dolly. He looked around at the small group and asked, "Dr. Carmichael? Dr. Andrew Carmichael?"

The Morels glanced at each other, then Richard replied, "There's no Dr. Carmichael here..."

The flight attendant came up and spoke quietly to the delivery man, who took a seat, his dolly standing next to him. Luke glanced at both his parents and shrugged.

"Tracy One has landed," the attendant announced. Luke reached over to pick up his bag, but his father got there first.

"I know, I know, you can carry it. But just let me this one time, OK?" Richard asked.

"OK." Luke smiled. "Thanks, Dad."

"Luke!!!"

He turned just in time to catch Elise as she rushed into his arms. He held her close, swallowing the lump in his throat. "God it's good to see you," he said hoarsely.

"I've missed you! We all have!" she said, her green eyes filled with tears despite the smile on her face.

She was followed by Scott, who held the door open for Drew and Maggie. Richard's eyes went from Luke to the small group arriving. "Looks like you have a welcoming committee, son." He gave Elise a smile. "Good to see you again, Elise."

"Good to see you, too, Mr. Morel," she replied, holding Luke's hand tightly.

Scott stepped forward, holding out his hand. "Mr. Morel, I'm Scott Tracy. We spoke on the phone a few times."

Richard shook it warmly. "It's nice to meet you. This is my wife, Melisa." She came forward and also shook Scott's hand. "I can't thank you enough for all you and your family have done." Richard said.

"Dad..." Luke said, clearly embarrassed.

Scott chuckled. "No problem, sir. Have they gone to trial yet?"



Luke shook his head. "No. They were found negligent at the preliminary hearing, but the formal trial will be later. Sometime in March is what we were told."

Scott shook his head. "Gotta love the justice system."

Drew and Maggie hovered in the background, and Scott turned to them. "Mr. and Mrs. Morel, this is my... great-uncle, Dr. Drew Carmichael, and his wife, Maggie."

Drew eyed Scott. "Great-uncle, huh?"

"Well, by marriage," Scott replied, looking sheepish.

"Don't mind them," Maggie said, moving in to shake hands with Richard and Melisa. "I'm pleased to meet both of you."

The flight attendant came over and spoke quietly to Drew, indicating the deliveryman and his burden. Drew nodded and followed her over, signing the data pad the man held out.

Richard's gaze followed him, and he frowned slightly. When Drew returned, he said, "I feel like I've seen you before, Mr. Carmichael."

"You probably have, Mr. Morel," Elise said, smiling. "That is, if you're into watching parades."

"Parades?" Melisa asked, then she smiled. "The Rose Bowl! You were the Grand Marshall."

Drew grinned. "Guilty as charged."

"I never miss it, all those flowers." Melisa nudged her son. "This one however, only has eyes for the football games."

Luke shrugged. "What can I say? A bunch of guys marching with carnations? About as boring as figure skating." He winked down at Elise.

"I'd hit you, but I'd be afraid to break you," she retorted.

Richard nodded over at the boxes. "What is all that?"

"Well," Drew drawled. "I have it on good authority that someone isn't quite fully recovered from a rather serious accident he had a few months ago. Those," he indicated the boxes, "are supplies to be used on the flight... if needed."

Luke groaned. "Dr. Tracy ratted me out, didn't she?"

"My niece is anxious that you get to LA in one piece," Drew replied.

"And since we were on our way home from a visit, we thought we'd pick up what we needed here," Maggie added with a smile.



Melisa let out a sigh of relief. "I won't tell you how much better that makes me feel," she told Maggie.

"Being a mother is the toughest job in the world, isn't it?" Maggie replied.

"You can say that again. Especially with this one!" Melisa frowned at her son.

Luke merely smiled. "I am a model if not patient, patient."

Everyone laughed. "I'll see about getting this loaded. Are those the rest of your bags?" Scott asked Luke.

He nodded. "Yeah, I've got a carry-on with stuff for the mutt here, but that's all of it. Thanks, Scott."

"No problem." He walked over and talked to the flight attendant.

"I'll go start the pre-flight checks. It was good to see you again, Mr. and Mrs. Morel," Elise said.

"Good to see you, too. Don't be a stranger. Come back and visit us again, with or without this guy," Richard quipped.

Luke rolled his eyes. "And you all wonder why I want to get out of here."

Maggie and Drew said their good-byes, and left Luke and his parents alone. Richard grasped his son's hand, then pulled him into a hard hug. "You take care of yourself, son."

"I will, Dad," Luke replied huskily. "Thanks for everything. Really."

Richard didn't reply, but squeezed his son's hand then stepped back. Melisa held Luke close. "Oh, Luke."

"It's OK, Mom. Really, I'll be fine. And I promise I'll keep in touch."

She kissed his cheek then brushed his hair from his forehead. "You need a haircut," she told him, smiling through her tears.

He held her hand. "I'll get one when I get ho...back to LA." He hugged her tightly. "I love you, Mom."

"I love you, too." She reached over and patted Rommel, who woofed. "Take care of him." She took her husband's hand and stepped back, watching as the two of them walked down the hall to the plane.

By Tikatu and Lillehafrue

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Monday, January 21, 2069, Tracy Island, around 8 a.m.

After planning to meet with Gordon at Thunderbird Four a few days ago, Callie arrived at Pod 4 in the Thunderbird Two hangar. "Good morning, Gordon."

"Good morning, Callie. Welcome to Thunderbird Four. I figure since you're interested in training on it, showing what it looks like inside and out would help you first."

They entered the pod, where Callie looked up. "I guess we'll have to climb up to get in, won't we?"

Shaking his head, Gordon answered, "Nope. We can get in through the telescopic airlock on the side."

"I didn't even know that was there." She watched the airlock open.

"It really comes in handy in the water. When people in another craft have to come in, the airlock provides the dry link between the two."

"Even under the intense pressure of the depths?"

"Yeah, to a certain degree. If it were down around the Marianas Trench it would push it quite a bit."

As they walked into the sub, she became curious. "I know it's the smallest of the Thunderbirds, but just... how small is this thing?"

"Well, it's about 29-and-a-half feet long and nearly 10 feet wide."

With a nod she smiled. "Okay, that makes sense. It probably can't fit that many people, though, can it?"

Gordon shook his head. "There wouldn't be room for 100 people if that's what you mean. Brains and I tested it out with just the residents of the island. Everyone could fit in here safely with room for more. He calculated it to hold up to 20 people safely. In terms of weight, though, she displaces 16 tons. Brains tested it and determined we could put in that much without causing it to sink."

Callie nodded. "That's good to know." Looking around the interior, she asked, "Has it ever taken on water?"

"No. When Brains designed it, he asked me to test it out to make certain it could handle some of the deepest parts of the ocean. The good news is it's held up at every possible depth."

"What would happen if by chance it does take on water at a pretty good depth?"

Gordon had to ponder carefully. "To be honest with you, it wouldn't matter how deep Four would



be. If someone's in danger, I have to get the sealant and fix the leak as soon as possible. There's no way I'm going back up when a life needs rescuing."

Callie nodded in understanding. "I assume Brains came up with the sealant?"

"Of course. He tested it himself to make sure it worked at any depth in the water."

Looking around at the controls again, she asked, "And that's the control yoke?"

"That's right. It's used just like an airplane." He had her sit down in the seat and showed her how to move the stick in the proper directions. "Yeah, that's it. You're already getting the hang of that part."

Going for another 30 minutes, he showed her the ins and outs of the sub, including the flaps for turns.

When they got back outside the sub, Callie had one last question. "I know this will sound silly, but why is Thunderbird Four yellow?"

Gordon chuckled at that one. "That's the first time I've ever been asked that question." His tone then went serious. "Yellow's usually the color associated with caution, but it can also be for emergency. Let's face it, the street signs for slowing down and such would normally be yellow for caution. In Thunderbird Four's case, though, it's a matter of people being able to see the yellow, since the deeper waters can at times be so murky. I am glad there're headlights on the front of it to make it even easier."

"That does make sense," Callie said. "I've been in murky waters before, and it really is hard to see anything."

"Got any more thought-provoking questions?" he asked.

"Not for now. If I think of any more, I'll let you know."

"Well, then, that's all for your first encounter. We'll plan things out some more after I get back from the day trip tomorrow."

"Okay. I'm gonna head to the lab to get some work done. With Brains and Tin-Tin gone, someone's got to hold down the fort."

With a nod he said, "All right. I'll see you later."

Satisfied with her first lesson, Callie left the hangar to head for the lab while Gordon searched for anything he needed for the trip the next day.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings



Monday, March 21, Fireflash, somewhere between Sydney, Australia and Mumbai, India (10 a.m., Tracy Island)

"Here you go." The waiter set a wine glass on a coaster before Tin-Tin, and a martini before Brains, who sat next to her at the round table. "Is there anything more I can get for you?" His smile, wide and white in his dark brown face, seemed sincere.

Brains glanced at Tin-Tin, who shook her head slightly. "Nothing at the moment, thank you."

Their waiter, whose Air Terrainean ID badge said, Ranjit, nodded. "If you should need anything, merely press the button. I am at your service."

"Thank you," Tin-Tin said with a gracious smile and dip of her head.

Ranjit smiled once more, then left them. Brains took a sip of his drink, and sighed, contented.

"I didn't know you drank martinis," Tin-Tin commented as she sipped her wine.

"I don't usually drink them at home; I find that whoever is serving them is usually a bit heavy on the vermouth," Brains admitted. "But away? I like to live a little more dangerously."

She chuckled. He reached out to clasp her hand.

"So, this is the famed Fireflash," he said, looking around. "I've never really had the opportunity to fly in one." He made a wry face. "In fact, I know more about the wiring schematics..."

Tin-Tin squeezed his hand a bit. "Let's not talk shop," she said, giving him a gentle smile. "I would have reserved a spot on a Skythrust, but the Fireflash is faster. It will be easier to spend less than half a day flying to Paris, especially since we're only to be there for a few days. And when we get back to Sydney, Ladybird will be waiting for us."

Brains smiled at her warmly, raising her hand to his lips and kissing it. "You are a very practical lady, my love. Practical and beautiful. What more could I ask?"

Tin-Tin blushed, smiling. "Flatterer."

"It's not flattery if it's true," he replied, squeezing her hand before releasing it.

They sipped their drinks, the low-level murmur of their fellow first-class passengers and the occasional clink of silverware or glass providing a pleasant background noise. Finally, Brains popped the martini's olive in his mouth. Once he was finished with it, he asked, "What are your plans for our visit?"

"Well." Tin-Tin pulled a small datapad from her handbag. "It will be nearly 2 a.m. when we arrive in Paris. I thought we might go to the hotel, deal with our luggage, and find an all-night café for a bite to eat. Then, perhaps a nap before visiting my grandfather."



"That sounds like an excellent idea. And after that?"

Tin-Tin gave him a sly smile. "We could go sightseeing a little, or maybe shopping..."

Brains laughed. "I should have known that shopping would be on the agenda." He cocked his head to one side. "I've never been shopping with you before; at least, not for clothing or personal items. Groceries and supplies, yes, but not the other. I'm rather looking forward to it."

"You may wish you hadn't said that when we are through," Tin-Tin warned him. She gave him a thoughtful look. "Did you get to do much sightseeing when you were there last? For that conference?"

He shook his head. "No, I didn't, which was probably a good thing. I was being followed, you know, by the Hightowers."

"Were you?" Her green eyes opened wide. "I didn't hear about that!"

It was Brains's turn to blush. He leaned close and lowered his voice. "Lady Penelope, Parker, and the gentleman in charge of our French operations kept an eye on both me and my would-be abductors." He chuckled. "You'll have to ask Lady Penelope about it sometime; she said I had the luck of St. Patrick himself. They would try something, and I totally, obviously did something that kept me safe."

"Oh, my!" Tin-Tin lifted her hand to her lips. "I most certainly will ask Penelope when we see her on Wednesday."

"Is that part of our agenda?" he asked, leaning over to see her datapad.

"Yes, for Thursday afternoon and evening. I hope to do a little bit of shopping with her, too." She frowned. "I'm not sure what to do during the early hours, though. More sightseeing?"

"Well, I have an idea."

"What's that?"

"My friend, Professor Borrender, has moved to Paris. I have no idea why; he seemed to enjoy living in Bern. But he is living there now and I would like to see him... perhaps introduce you to him." He paused, giving her a hopeful look. "What do you think? We could have lunch with him..."

"I think that's a wonderful idea, Hiram," she replied. Taking out a stylus, she quickly added the date to their itinerary. "Would you call him and make sure it's all right with him?"

"I'll do that when we get to Paris, and after we see your grandfather," Brains promised. "Don't want to wake him up."

"Of course."



Ranjit reappeared as Tin-Tin tucked her pad away. "May I interest you in some coffee, or a light repast?"

Brains glanced at his watch, but asked, "How much longer to Mumbai?"

"We are forty-five minutes from the city and will land in about an hour."

The pair glanced at each other, and Tin-Tin nodded slightly. "Then, yes, we would like some coffee, and perhaps something light to eat," Brains said.

"Very good," Ranjit said, making a note on his own datapad, and sending their order on to the galley. "I will return shortly."

With their attendant gone, Brains and Tin-Tin fell into a comfortable silence. Brains pulled out his PDA, and looked up the weather for Paris. He smiled at Tin-Tin as he said, "Looks like we'll have clear weather for the duration of our visit."

"Even if it were raining, I'd still cherish Paris... especially with you," she replied, leaning over to kiss him gently on the cheek.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 22:22:04 GMT  
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Nearing Tracy Island, around 1:00 pm...

Scott opened his eyes and yawning, stretched his arms over his head. He gave himself a light shake, then stood up and glanced around.

The interior of the plane was dark. The shades were drawn and the lights dimmed. Towards the back of the plane he saw Luke, apparently sleeping, with an oxygen mask over his face. Rommel lay on the floor by his side. Scott walked over to them. Rom looked up, tail wagging. Scott crouched down and patted him, sending an inquiring glance at his uncle. "How's he doing?" he asked quietly.

Drew nodded towards the young man. "Better than earlier. The oxygen helped, but I'll be happier when we land. How much longer?"

"I'll go find out right now." He made his way towards the cockpit, knocked once on the door, then stepped inside. He slipped into the co-pilot's seat and pulled on headphones. "Hey, how's it going up here?"

Elise smiled. "Great. How was your nap?"

"I feel much more human again."



"Really? Didn't think that could happen with just a nap," Elise quipped.

"Ha-ha. I will admit, a quick hop like this isn't that tiring. We weren't gone long enough for my internal clock to change. A nap was all I needed. That and some lunch. How far out are we?" Scott asked.

Elise made a minor adjustment. "Not long. About twenty minutes."

"Good. Drew's getting anxious about Luke. He's fine," Scott added at Elise's sharp glance. "Everyone will just feel a lot better when we get home. Want me to take over so you can go sit back there?"

She shook her head. "No thanks. It's only a few more minutes. You flew the whole way to the States. It's only fair." She glanced over at him, green eyes twinkling. "Besides, you keep flying and you'll be grounded for too many air hours. Then I'd be stuck flying your baby."

"God forbid!" he chuckled. He stood up and headed back towards the cabin, pausing at the door. "In that case, I'll leave you to it and go finish my nap."

A short time later, the plane touched down easily on the landing strip. Elise taxied over to the hanger and the plane came to a stop. She quickly went through the post-flight checks, then made her way to the cabin.

Scott had already opened the door and dropped the steps. She could hear him talking to Virgil and she smiled.

"Thank God we're finally here."

Elise turned to see Luke sitting up, holding his head in his hands. Drew was standing by his side, one hand resting on his shoulder. "Luke?" she called out, walking over to him.

He looked up and smiled thinly. "I'm fine. Just anxious to step on solid ground again." He stood up slowly and took a deep breath.

"Easy, Luke. Take it slow," Drew told him.

"I take it any slower, I'll be dead," Luke muttered to himself. He turned and nodded towards Drew. "I'm OK, Dr. Carmichael. Really. Though I have to admit, I won't be traveling by air anytime in the near future."

Drew nodded in agreement. "No, you won't. I'd like to see you in the infirmary before you head to your apartment."

Luke sighed resignedly. "Yes, sir." He snapped his fingers and Rommel rose to stand next to him. He was reaching for his carry on bag, when Elise snatched it first. "I'm not crippled," he growled.

"No you're not," she replied. "But learn to accept help when it's offered." She turned and marched



off the plane.

Maggie edged by him and patted him on the arm. "Listen to her, dear. She's a smart woman."

He waited until she had disembarked then turned to Drew. "I'm starting to think coming back wasn't such a good idea after all."

Drew laughed. "You might as well get used to it, son. And enjoy it while you're at it, too. This is a chance in a lifetime! All the women here will be falling over themselves to make sure your every need is seen too."

Luke rolled his eyes. "Terrific. I'd rather be pushed off a cliff." He made his way down the aisle and stepped outside. The hot humid air hit him like a brick wall. "Well, Toto, we sure aren't in Kansas anymore."

"Luke! Welcome back!" Virgil stepped forward and held out his hand, then gave Luke a light hug. He bent to scratch Rommel's ears. "You too, Rom."

"Thanks, Virgil. It's good to be back." He grinned. "It's a lot warmer here than in Montana."

"I'm sure it is!"

"Well, well, look what the cat dragged in." They turned to see Gordon walking towards them. He enveloped Luke in a hard hug. "It's good to have you back, man."

"Thanks, Gordon," Luke replied.

"My grandmother instructed me to tell you that you will be having dinner with us tonight. She's been cooking up a storm since she found out you were coming back. Rumor has it, there's chocolate cake." He bent to give Rommel a scratch. "She and Lisa also said to make a list of what you need in your apartment. If we don't have it, we'll have it shipped in."

Drew gave him an "I told you so" look and Luke sighed. "I guess there's no chance of me coming home quietly, is there?"

"Well, it's mostly just us who know you're here. We didn't want to get everyone's hopes up in case something fell through," Virgil told him.

"That's understandable." Luke snapped his fingers to get Rom's attention, then smiled. "Please tell Mrs. Tracy that I'll most certainly be there for dinner. And I appreciate all the help. Right now I want to take a shower and get settle in."

"Right after a stop at the infirmary," Drew interjected.

"How could I forget that?" He turned and called out to Scott. "Are you sure you don't mind bringing that up? I can come get it later."

Scott shook his head. "No problem at all. See you at dinner!"



Everyone started forward towards the elevator. Luke and Rommel bringing up the rear. Listening to the chatter of conversation, Luke smiled down at his dog. "Rom, it's good to be home."

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 22:23:00 GMT

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The Cliff House, early afternoon...

Will sat at his desk, sorting through his email. He cleaned out the spam, then started reading the latest from his family. A motion outside caught his eye and he looked up towards the glass doors. Seeing nothing, he shook his head and turned back to his computer.

He was replying to a note from his father when the motion caught his attention again. This time he spotted a large German Shepard trotting back and forth along the balcony. It's just Rommel, he thought to himself and resumed typing.

Suddenly his head snapped up. "Rommel?!" The dog paused in front of the door and woofed. Will got to his feet and hurried to the door, pulling it open. Sure enough, Rommel stood there, tail wagging happily. "What are you doing here?" he asked, rubbing the dog's head. He walked over to Luke's apartment and knocked. "Hello? Luke?" he called through the screen.

"Yeah, come on in," Luke called from somewhere inside.

Will stepped inside, Rom following at his heels. The dog trotted to the kitchen and a moment later, Will heard him lapping water. Just then, Luke appeared from the bedroom. He wore a pair of tattered cut-offs and a khaki green t-shirt. His hair was wet.

Will stepped forward and pulled him into a hug. "I didn't know you were coming back! Your last email didn't mention you were coming so soon. How are you?"

Luke winced but replied with a grin. "Better than I was. Sit down. I'd offer you a drink but..." He sat down gingerly on the couch.

Will chuckled. "The larder is bare, huh? Feel free to come over anytime. I've got plenty. And Mom told me today that she sent some brownies."

"You really shouldn't have told me that." Luke sighed in ecstasy. "Your mother makes the best brownies I've ever tasted. And if you ever tell my mother I said that, I'll deny it to my grave."

They both laughed. Rommel trotted out and lay down at Luke's feet. "Seriously, I have plenty to eat. Help yourself."

"Thanks, Will. I appreciate it. Mrs. Tracy invited me up for dinner tonight, but I don't want to



impose. She has enough to do with all the family."

"Tell you what," the older man said. "Make a list. I'll get it on the next supply run."

"That would be great," Luke said gratefully. "I'm not boarding a plane again anytime in the near future."

"Anything special? Besides chocolate?"

"Well...there is one thing. But I need someone to go in person..."

"What is it?"

"Wood." Luke grinned sheepishly. "I want to get carving again. I haven't really been able to with this arm." He shrugged his right arm carefully. "Anyway, I hate just ordering stuff from the lumber yard. They always send crap. I'd rather someone pick out some good pieces, something I can work with."

"No problem. I'd be glad to. I had a great time making the mailboxes. I was hoping we could build something else sometime," Will told him.

"I'd like that, too. Thanks, Will." He tried, and failed, to stifle a yawn. "I'm sorry. I'm still all mixed up from the traveling."

"Get some rest. And don't forget to come over anytime. Door is always open. We have a lot of catching up to do." Will stood and walked out the door with a wave.

Luke leaned back and propped his feet up on the coffee table. Just a quick nap, then I'll head down to see Dom. He closed his eyes, opening them when he felt Rom jump on the couch next to him. The dog placed his head in his master's lap and Luke patted him idly. The dog sighed in contentment and Luke chuckled. "I know exactly how you feel, boy. I know exactly how you feel."

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 22:24:11 GMT

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Sunday, January 20, 2069, 7:30 p.m., New Hampshire (1:30 p.m., January 21, Tracy Island)

"This is a lovely place," Dianne said, looking around, taking in the snow white tablecloths, the sparkling crystal and the gleaming silverware. They were in the dining room of the Mount Washington Hotel, seated in a slightly out of the way corner. "I can see why they want you to dress up in order to dine here."

Jeff tugged a little on his black bow tie. "If I'd known black tie was optional, I would have worn something more comfortable."



Dianne leaned across and clasped his hand, smiling. "You look fabulous, dear. I do like you in a tuxedo; you wear it so well."

"And you are a vision in white," Jeff replied, raising her hand to his lips.

"Thank you," she said, with a gracious nod. "I wasn't sure if this dress was going to work here," she added, gesturing to the tea length white dress with its intricate beadwork. "But it seems that white is in, no matter what time of the year."

The sommelier arrived at that point, bringing the bottle of wine they'd ordered, and pouring it into delicate stemware before departing. Their waitress came next, bringing the salad course of their meal. She disappeared as quickly and quietly as possible, leaving the two in their secluded corner. Jeff was sitting just so; he wasn't easy to recognize from the back, and from the angle at which he sat, he also obscured much of Dianne's form as well.

"So, did you enjoy the skiing?"

Dianne smiled and sighed, a contented sound. "Oh yes. I haven't skied much before, but the slopes here are perfect for someone like myself."

"Even if you had to start on the bunny slopes?" Jeff asked, a mischievous twinkle in his eye.

She pursed her lips and raised an eyebrow. "At least I didn't fall down."

"True." He shifted in his chair a little, wincing.

"The Jacuzzi and I will work those pains right out," she promised, smiling coyly.

"Something to look forward to, then." His tone was husky, and sent a frisson of excitement up her spine.

They applied themselves to their meal, finishing their salads, the conversation centered around the food, the atmosphere, and their activities of the day.

"Perhaps we should come back tomorrow and take a sleigh ride before more skiing," Dianne suggested.

"That sounds like a fine idea. I'll ask the concierge about it on the way out; make sure that people who aren't staying here can hire the sleigh."

They were halfway through their entrées when someone came up behind Jeff. "Jeff? Jeff Tracy? Is that you?"

Dianne looked up and smiled. "Mr. Dandridge! How nice to see you again!"

Jeff swallowed his mouthful, patted his lips, and turned to shake his old friend's hand. "Dandridge, you old... gazelle! How are you?"



Both Dianne and Wilbur Dandridge laughed at Jeff's gazelle comment, but the woman on Dandridge's arm just rolled her eyes. "You remember my wife, Eunice, don't you?"

"Of course!" Dianne offered her hand, and Eunice, a heavily made-up, middle-aged redhead took it firmly, smiling. "You were at our wedding!" Dianne gestured to a chair. "Please sit down and join us."

"Don't mind if we do, for a few minutes. anyway." Dandridge pulled out one of the empty chairs for his wife, seating her by Dianne, and took the seat on the other side of Jeff for himself. When Jeff made to motion for the waitress, Wilbur shook his head. "No need, Jeff. We've already eaten. And don't stop because of us. The food's no good cold."

"So, what brings you to New Hampshire?" Dianne asked of Eunice, taking a bite of her meal once she'd finished speaking.

"Oh, Wilbur is looking into expanding his company and building a manufacturing plant somewhere around here," Eunice said, waving a dismissive hand. "He's been looking at some of the older towns, where there are buildings already available." She glanced around as if seeing the room for the first time. "We were going to go back to New York on Friday evening but then it snowed..."

"Yes, yes," Dandridge said. "I decided that we could stay on for the weekend; take a little break from work."

"Get in a little skiing?" Jeff asked.

"Oh, no!" Eunice shook her head, her eyes wide. "We're not into winter sports much." She wrapped her arms around herself and shook a little. "Too cold."

"Are you staying at the hotel?" Dianne patted her lips and sipped her wine. Holding out her glass, she gave Jeff a look that asked him to refill it for her, which he did.

"Yes, it's such a lovely place. The view of the mountains... just spectacular!" Eunice smiled dreamily.

"Then you might want to consider a sleigh ride," Dianne suggested. "We're going to look into it ourselves for tomorrow."

"That's a great idea!" Dandridge exclaimed. "Hon, let's do it!"

Eunice leaned forward and put a hand on Dianne's arm, as if confiding in her. "It does sound romantic, doesn't it?"

"Yes, it most certainly does."

There was a brief pause, then Dandridge asked, "So, what bring you up here, Jeff? Business or pleasure?"



"Pleasure," Jeff replied. "We're celebrating my birthday... albeit a bit belatedly."

"Then happy birthday!" Eunice was all smiles. "I must admit, Jeff, you're looking good for a man of... what is it now?"

"Fifty-nine and holding," Dianne quipped.

Those at the table laughed, and there was a brief interruption as their waitress came by, asking if they were ready for dessert. Jeff indicated that they weren't quite done, and she promised to come back in a few minutes.

"So, are you staying here, too?" Wilbur asked once the waitress had left. "We could meet for a nightcap."

Jeff shook his head. "No, we have a little place not far from here. I bought it for Dianne last year and we're staying there for the week." He sipped his wine, then patted his lips. "You're welcome to drop by any time."

"Wish we could, but I'm due back in New York on Tuesday," Dandridge said, his tone sad. "I mean, the boss can justify taking a day off here or there to be with his honey, but not too often." He turned to Eunice. "Right, dear?"

She nodded slightly, her smile becoming strained. "Yes, Wilbur." Dianne reached out and put a hand on her arm as Dandridge continued, unheeding.

"You were pretty smart to retire when you did, Jeff. It's more cutthroat now than it's ever been." He shook his head. "And the tech piracy that's going on, I tell you...!"

Eunice took her husband's hand. "Now, dear, let's not talk shop. Jeff and Dianne are on vacation, and we still are, too."

He put his hand on hers and patted it. "You're right, honey, you're right." He turned to Dianne. "Say! Have you seen that Duchess of Royston lately? What a funny old gal she was!"

"We saw her in England on New Year's Eve," Dianne replied, sipping her wine. "She was in fine fettle then and dancing with all the young, handsome men."

"At Lady Creighton-Ward's party? We got an invitation this year but with business the way it is..." Dandridge shook his head.

"Oh, you must come next year," Dianne insisted. "Eunice, you would have such a good time."

"I'd love to," Eunice said softly. "But..." She made a fluttery motion with her hands.

"Don't you worry. We women must stick together." Dianne's tone was conspiratory. "We'll get you and your husband to that party by hook or by crook."

"There they go plotting again," Dandridge said genially. "I swear we men are never safe when the



ladies put their heads together like that."

At this point, the waitress returned, and the Dandrighes took that as their cue to leave. "Well, it was nice seeing you both," Wilbur said, standing and pulling the chair out for his wife. "I'll take your advice on that sleigh ride. It'll be nice treat before we leave."

"You do that, Dandrigh," Jeff said, holding out his hand. "It was good to see you again." Dandrigh took his hand and shook it.

"Good to see you again, Dianne." The ladies shook hands with each other, and with the other's husbands.

"And to see you, too, Eunice. I meant what I said about that party."

Eunice just smiled, then took her husband's proffered arm. Once they were out of sight, Jeff turned his attention to the dessert menu.

"Something chocolate to share, Dianne?"

Dianne started a little. She had been watching the Dandrighes go, a thoughtful look on her face. "I'm sorry, love. What did you say?"

Jeff smiled as the waitress walked away. "You snooze, you lose, love. I just put in our dessert order. You'll have to put up with whatever I chose."

"Oh, really?" Dianne gave him a calculating look, a slight smile on her lips. "Well, I'm sure you chose wisely. After all, you don't want to sleep in one of the guest rooms tonight, do you?"

Jeff laughed, and took her hand. She squeezed his and said, "Happy birthday, love."

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Mon, 30 Jul 2012 22:25:44 GMT  
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The afternoon was wearing on and clouds were wearily drifting across the blue sky. Dominic rolled his eyes and planted his hands firmly on his hips.

"No, Joshua. You may not have ice cream. If you tidy your toys away we can have some after dinner."

"I want ice cream now!"

"No, Joshua. Tidy your toys now, please."

"NO! I WANT ICE CREAM!"



"Joshua, go and sit on the naughty stool."

"NO!"

"Joshua, go and sit on the naughty stool."

"NOOOOOOOO!"

At this point the door chime sounded, and Dominic rolled his eyes again.

"For God's sake," he huffed. "Joshua, I'm warning you. Go and sit on the naughty stool."

Joshua burst into a full-scale flood of tears and clung onto his father's long cargo shorts. Dominic dragged himself over to the front door and hit the release.

He blinked.

And blinked again.

"LUUUUUUKE!"

"Hey, Dom." Luke grinned sheepishly, running a hand through his hair. "Surprise. I guess no one told you I was coming back. Mind if I come in?"

Dominic spluttered and Joshua detached himself from his father's leg to cling on to Luke's.

"Geez, yeah, come in! Come in! Man, this is... geez!"

Luke grinned at the abject delight on Dominic's face, and he figured that it was a change from the man's more recent expressions. As Dominic leaned in close to extract his son from Luke's leg, Luke had the chance to see up-close the Irishman's too-pale pallor. Also he got the fresh scent of a musky soap and aftershave. There was no five o'clock shadow to darken Dom's chin.

Dominic whirled Joshua up into the air, all thoughts of ice cream forgotten as the small boy giggled with delight.

"Where is Wom?" he asked, his grinning face suddenly crumpling in confusion.

"Rom's having a nap at the moment," Luke said, "but I'll be sure to bring you so see him later -- if that's okay with your dad."

"Of course!" Dom spluttered, looking as if he were torn between saying, 'You should have brought the dog!' and 'Thank God you didn't bring the dog!' It creased his eyes in an endearing way.

As soon as Dominic deposited Joshua on the floor the boy was straight back over to Luke, who smiled and went to pick him up. A twinge of pain went through him and he stumbled. Joshua's eyes filled and Dominic was by his side in a minute.



"Sit down," he ordered.

Luke glanced up and saw that Dom's medical face was on, and there was no point in arguing. The man was learning well from Dianne. Luke sat down carefully on the couch and Dominic wiped Joshua's newly wet face.

"Oh, buddy, you didn't do anything wrong," Luke said, regaining his composure. "I just... "

"Luke was sick, remember Jak?" Dom jumped in.

Joshua nodded his head slowly.

"Yes, and he's still getting better."

"Like Daddy?" Joshua asked, and Dominic's mouth fell open.

Luke raised an eyebrow and muttered, "Smart kid."

"Yeah, like Daddy... " Dominic said. "Where he got that idea I have no clue."

"I do," Luke said, pinning his friend with a hard stare.

Dominic cleared his throat and knelt down on the floor to look Josh in the eye.

"Why don't you show Luke what you were making for him, hmm?"

"But it's not finished!"

"He might like a sneak-peek," Dominic said, and he propelled his son towards his room.

Joshua came running back in with a large piece of paper, stumbled but regained his balance, making his face light up even more. One more good thing and that kid'll look like a Christmas tree, Luke thought. He allowed the paper to be thrust in his lap, and he laughed with delight. It was a beach scene with two large figures holding hands and one small, evidently Joshua because of the huge glasses and the bright blond hair. All three figures were standing beside a huge sandcastle -- or at least Luke assumed it was a sandcastle.

"Oh, cool man!" Luke said, urging the child to jump up beside him on the sofa. "So, this is you, right?"

"Yes! That's me! And this Daddy," he said, pointing to the larger figure with a mess of black hair.

"Yeah, you've caught him perfectly," Luke said with a wry grin, at which Dominic rolled his eyes.

"And this you!"

It was Luke's turn for his face to crease in confusion, and he ruffled the little boy's hair.



"Are you sure this is me? I'm holding hands with your daddy."

"Luuuuuuuuuke!" Joshua complained with a scowl. "Yes, YOU. You and daddy with Jak on beach -- happy!"

Dominic grinned and shrugged his shoulders.

"It's because we're friends," he said. "Joshua's made a new friend with Vince's daughter, and they hold hands all the time. That's what friends do, right, Jak?"

"Yes!"

Luke chuckled.

"It's a wonderful picture, Josh."

There it was -- the Christmas tree look was apparently in. Dominic fussed over the picture and asked Joshua to put it away for now. Josh looked as if he was going to object, but Luke gave him a stern look, and the boy went running to put the picture away. Dominic folded his arms at the scene.

"Hmm. I think I might want to keep you around here for a while," he said. "I could use that kind of discipline."

Suddenly his face went bright red, and he turned away, muttering something about tea. Dominic was all about the tea. Luke cocked his head to the side. That man has had his wits scared out of him, he thought. His butter is quickly slipping off his noodles. He sat back in the soft couch cushions, huffing out a half-contented, half-concerned breath. Joshua launched himself onto the seat beside him and began animatedly telling him about something -- what, Luke couldn't say. Maybe I can get some info out of the kid as well, he thought. Dom, don't think I'm going to let this lie.

Post by Lillehafrue and ArtisticRainey

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Tue, 31 Jul 2012 02:50:17 GMT

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Virgil walked toward the basketball court in search of Scott. Since they had talked at the plane, he hadn't seen much of his elder brother. He had searched the house and not finding him, had headed outside. The effort had finally paid off, as he saw that both Scott and Cassie were on the court. From the looks of it they were playing Around the World.



From the top of the key, Cassie sent the ball toward the basket. The orange sphere hit the backboard, bounced off the rim and careened across the court in Virgil's direction. Sprinting forward, Virgil grabbed the ball as it reached the side of the court.

"Just a little more to the right and you'd have it," Virgil commented.

"Yeah, and last time it was a little to the left. I have a feeling I'm never going to leave this spot."

"Toss her the ball, and let her take another shot," Scott said from the other side of the court. He had already made the shot from each position and was working his way back to the beginning. He had two more shots to make.

Cassie shook her head. "Nah. I'm conceding this game. I've had enough basketball for the day. Think I'm going to go shower and curl up with a good book. I'll catch you both tomorrow."

The two Tracy brothers said a good-bye to her. Scott watched Cassie for a little while as she headed back toward the Cliff House.

"Earth to Scott," Virgil called, trying to get his brother's attention.

"What? Did you say something, Virge?" Scott asked, turning his attention to his brother.

"Asked if you were up for a game of one-on-one?"

"Yeah, sure," Scott told him. "You can have possession first."

The two brothers started a game. They were evenly matched and possession of the ball passed from one to the other frequently. It was Virgil who managed to score first.

"Wonder how Dad and Mom are enjoying their trip?" Virgil commented, shadowing Scott as he dribbled the ball to half court.

"Let's see, they're in the mountains, in a secluded cabin, with no kids. I have a feeling they're enjoying themselves quite a bit," Scott replied. Having reached the middle of the court, the elder Tracy became a bit more serious about what he was doing. Trying to work his way past Virgil, he concentrated on making progress to the basket. "It's going to be strange not having them around the rest of the week, though"

"Ha. You're not fooling me! I'll admit, I enjoyed my two days of being in charge," Virgil replied, pausing a bit as he snagged the ball away from his brother. "I know you're looking forward to sitting in the big chair."

"Yeah, well, maybe," Scott said, jumping up to block Virgil's shot. He knocked the ball out of the air and the two brothers scrambled after it. Scott got to it first. "Still, being the one everyone depends on can get stressful."

"Maybe you need to take a trip yourself then," Virgil said as Scott took a shot at the basket. The ball flew over the younger brother's outstretched hands. He turned and watched it fall into the



basket, the score now even. "Get away and just relax, if you can remember how to do that," he commented as he retrieved the ball.

"I know how to relax," Scott told him.

"This from the guy who keeps avoiding high school reunions, saying he's too busy to go," Virgil replied. "When's the last time you talked to your pals from college?"

"I was talking to Bill the other day, actually. He and Jen welcomed their third child. A little girl -- Emma Nicole."

"That's awesome. Also sounds like a perfectly good reason to pay him a visit."

"Maybe," Scott said, stealing the ball from him. "Trying to get rid of me so you can be in charge on a rescue or something?"

"Course not. Besides, if a call came in, Elise would take your place in the field."

Scott took a shot at the basket. "And you'd have to take orders from the little woman," he said as he watched the ball drop through the net.

"Might be preferable to whom I normally take orders from out there," Virgil commented without missing a beat. He retrieved the ball and headed back to the middle of the court.

"Are you saying Elise would make a better field commander than me?" Scott asked, trailing after his brother.

"You can take that however you like," Virgil replied, with a smile as he started his advance to the basket.

Taken a bit off guard, Scott let Virgil slip past him. Though he chased after his opponent, Virgil had an easy shot at the basket and quickly scored another point.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Tue, 31 Jul 2012 02:51:26 GMT  
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Monday, January 21, 2069, 10 a.m., Paris, France (10 p.m. Same day, Tracy Island)

Brains covered his yawn with his hand, trying to stifle it as best he could. The nap he and Tin-Tin had taken might have been sufficient, as far as length was concerned, but his body was still running on Island time, and to him, it felt like 10 in the evening.

The car, provided by Tracy Industries' Parisian motor pool, pulled up in front of the vine-covered apartment building where Tin-Tin's grandfather and aunt lived. Brains checked the device in his



ear; it had worked well for Kyrano and Lisa on their honeymoon, but he wanted to test it out for himself as they conversed.

"Reviendrez-vous ici en une heure," Tin-Tin said to the driver he handed her out of the car. Brains let himself out on the other side, bringing with him a shopping bag. The device translated it as, "You will return in one hour."

"Oui, mademoiselle." The driver touched his cap, and closed the car door as Brains joined Tin-Tin on the walk up to the house.

"Are you ready?" he asked, offering his arm.

Tin-Tin took a deep breath and nodded. "I'm ready." She took his arm, and together they walked toward the house.

Tamea was waiting for them in the vestibule. Her eyes grew wide and she put her hands on the sides of her face. "Mon Dieu! Comment bien que vous ressemblez à votre mère!" Brains heard it as, "My God! How much you look like your mother!"

The older woman took Tin-Tin's face in her hands and kissed the girl on both cheeks. "Come in, come in!" Brains heard her say. "Come see your grandfather!"

With a bemused glance at Brains, Tin-Tin allowed herself to be led into the apartment. "Papa!" Tamea called. "She is here!" Brains followed, amused.

He stopped just inside the door. Emily Tracy was old, and Kyrano was elderly, but compared to them, Elias Manabo looked positively ancient. The bony hands that reached out for Tin-Tin's were covered with age spots, and the nearly bald head was practically skeletal in its appearance.

"Ma chere petite-fille!" Dr. Manabo whispered as he took Tin-Tin's hands in his own.

"Bonjour, mon grand-père," Tin-Tin said, smiling.

Brains heard the next whisper from Dr. Manabo as, "I am so glad you came!" He made a mental note to test the translator in a crowded room; the microphone was very good at picking up the whispers and he wanted to make sure it would function as well in a noisy environment.

He was startled by the gentle touch of Tin-Tin's hand on his. She had taken a chair so she would be on the same level as her grandfather, and was in the midst of introducing them.

"Grand-père, je vous presente mon ami..." She stopped short, an expression both stricken and puzzled on her face.

Brains picked up on the problem. She can't exactly introduce me as Brains, he thought. I had better fill in my real name here.

He gave a little bow and said, "John. John Grayson. I'm very pleased to meet you, Dr. Manabo."



Tin-Tin gave him a look of surprised delight. Dr. Manabo, still speaking French for Tamea's sake, said, "Welcome, John. I am pleased to make your acquaintance."

"Likewise, sir."

Tamea came out with a laden tea tray. Tin-Tin jumped up to help her, but Brains was there first. He took the burden, and placed it where Tamea told him to. She seemed surprised that he understood her when, to this moment, he hadn't said a single word in French. He decided not to say anything about the translator; it would take any conversation off into directions he'd rather it didn't go.

Tamea indicated another chair, smiling at Brains. He sat next to Tin-Tin, who gave him a grateful look. She seemed unlike herself, so ill-at-ease, that Brains thought he should take the initiative. He motioned toward the bag. "Tin-Tin, don't you have something for your grandfather and your aunt?"

"Oh, yes!" She ducked into the bag and pulled out a small book. "I brought this," she said in French, "so that you and Aunt Tamea could know me better."

The gift was a photo album, filled with pictures taken from Tin-Tin's life. Elias smiled, smoothed his hand over it, and opened to the first page. Brains himself was fascinated; here were pictures and moments in Tin-Tin's past that he was totally unaware of. As she explained the significance of each photo, he too became better acquainted with the woman he loved.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Tue, 31 Jul 2012 02:53:54 GMT

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Tuesday, Jan.22nd, around 9:30 am . . .

"I am certain you are pleased to be going home for a few days," Kyrano commented, glancing over the plane's controls as they headed toward Australia.

"Yes, it will be nice to see Mum and Wendy again, though I feel a bit guilty leaving right now, what with you having guests and everything," Jenny replied, letting the knitting she was working on come to a rest in her lap.

"Do not worry about us. You have not been home since you came here in November. We will be fine for a few days. "

Jenny nodded, happy for the reassurance. As much as she enjoyed her new job and the people on the island, she was looked forward to seeing her mother and sister again. Two months had gone by quickly, and though she kept in touch with email, it wasn't the same as seeing them face to face. She would have gladly put off the trip if the Tracys had needed her but was grateful that she didn't have to.



And I was able to finish the booties for the baby, Jenny thought happily. The dark blue items were tucked into her bag. She planned on giving them to Wendy now and hang onto the jumper she was currently knitting for later.

"As much as we all appreciate having your help in the kitchen, I admit I will enjoy being more involved in meal prep for the next couple of days. I have missed it."

"Well, then, I'm glad I can oblige you by going away for a few days," Jenny told him. "I'm also glad Tyler and Alex were willing to keep an eye on Hiss for me. Wendy will certainly be glad not to see the snake."

"I can imagine that a snake is a pet that would not be popular with everyone."

"That's for sure. Still, it's nice having Hiss around. Not to mention he's quiet and when he does shed, does so in his cage not all over my apartment."

"Nice qualities in a pet. Cleaning up cat fur all the time is not always pleasant," Kyrano commented, thinking of his own pet.

Jenny nodded, picking up her knitting. The two fell into a comfortable silence as the flight continued.

Thanks to Tikatu for helping with Kyrano's dialogue

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Tue, 31 Jul 2012 02:55:21 GMT

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Picking up the coffee pot, Cassie poured the coffee into a thermos. Putting the empty pot in the sink, she twisted the lid on the thermos while walking to the table. Placing it in the box with other items she was taking over to Luke's, the dark-haired woman looked over the items.

After saying a brief hello to Luke when he had arrived back, and telling him she would bring breakfast over in the morning, Cassie had returned to her own apartment. Besides breakfast, she wanted to cook up a few easy to re-heat meals for her friend. His surprise return meant that no one had time to stock his apartment with any food.

Satisfied she had everything, Cassie picked up the box and headed for her door. Moments later she was outside Luke's apartment waiting for him to answer the door.

Rommel trotted over and woofed at her through the screen. "Yeah, yeah, I'm coming. Hold your horses, mutt." Luke walked into the living room. Spying Cassie he called out, "Hey, Cass, c'mon in."



She walked through the door and Luke moved to take the box from her. "Please tell me you have coffee in there."

"I've got the box," Cassie told him, refusing to let him take it from her. "And yes, there is coffee. Do you really think I'd show up with breakfast and not bring coffee?" she told him as she walked toward the table with her burden.

"I'm not crippled, you know," he grumbled as he sat down at the table. He yawned hugely and rubbed his hands over his face. "What time is it anyway? I'm still all screwed up. I hate crossing the IDL."

"A little after ten," Cassie told him, as she took the thermos and coffee cup out of the box and place both in front of Luke. "I've got less than an hour before I'm supposed to meet with Scott," she told him as she continued to take things out of the box.

Luke dumped two teaspoons of sugar into the mug and took a sip. His eyes closed and he sighed in contentment. Cassie chuckled and he looked up. "What else do you have in there? I'm starving." He glanced over at Rom. "I only brought food for the mutt here. Guess I'll have to make a grocery list." He shrugged and took another sip of coffee.

"One thing's for sure. I'm not hopping on a plane again anytime soon. That flight wasn't as easy as I thought it would be." He finished his drink and poured another. "Meeting with Scott, huh? Flying lesson?"

Cassie shook her head. "We're ready to field test the Dicetyline cannon and getting that set up is on the agenda. He also mentioned there was Tracy Industries business to discuss. Not sure what that's about."

Luke nodded. "How are the flying lessons going anyway? And what else have I missed around here?"

"Believe it or not, I'm actually doing well with the flying bit now," Cassie told him, taking out the containers filled with the eggs, toast, bacon, and hash browns she had made for their breakfast. "Scott thinks I should be ready to try for my license by the end of next month. I'm mostly just trying to log the necessary flight hours right now."

Having taken out everything needed for their breakfast, Cassie took out the last four containers. "I prepared a few reheat-able meals for you. Wasn't sure what your plans were for food for the next couple of days but I figured this way if don't want to go begging for food from your neighbors you don't have to," she told him as she headed to the refrigerator with them.

Luke got up and grabbed a couple of plates and some silverware from his kitchen. He carried them back out and filled them with food. He handed one to Cassie. "Here, sit." He took a bite and grinned. "These are great, thanks! Elise brought some soup by last night too. And Will promised me some cookies from the latest batch his mom sent. I'm going to owe all of you."

"Mr. Tracy has hired someone to take Brandon's place," she told him, going back to answering his previous question. Getting her own breakfast, she continued. "His name is Vince Crenshaw. He's



a former Navy SEAL. Vince and his family have the apartments below us."

His mind registered what she had just told him. "There's a family downstairs? Like with kids? No kidding. Dom had mentioned that Josh had a new playmate, but it never clicked. Tell me about them."

"Josh's new playmate is Lea. She's five and a bundle of energy. The two of them wore me out when I had them down on the beach Sunday," she told him, smiling at the thought of how much fun they had. "She's a bit shy when she first meets someone but once she gets past that she's very talkative and loves to ask questions. She even wanted to know how Dom and I were related because Josh was calling me Auntie Cass."

Luke laughed. "Gotta love kids. One thing about being back, I'll miss my nieces and nephew. They spent a lot of time with my while I healed up." He grew quiet as his thoughts turned. "I'm hoping to spend some time with Dom later. We have lots of catching up to do. Emails and phone calls just aren't the same." He sighed. "He's still shook up over what happened."

"I know," Cassie replied, her smile fading. "Unfortunately, I was away when things happened and he hasn't really been too talkative on the subject around me. Reminds me of someone else I know," she added, giving Luke a sidelong look.

"Ha, ha." He looked around his apartment. "The place looks neater than I expected it to be. Have you all been taking turns keeping the dust bunnies away?"

Cassie sighed. Men, she thought before answering his question. "Yeah, between Elise, Jenny and myself we've tried to keep things clean in here." She decided to go back to the abandoned subject of their neighbors downstairs. "Anyway, the Crenshaws also have another kid. Their son Aaron has the one-bedroom apartment down there. Gordon has taken on coaching him in swimming as he has his eyes set on the competing at Worlds. I've done some workouts while they were training. The kid is really good."

As they continued their breakfast, Cassie continued to fill Luke in on things that had been happening.

"Shoot! I didn't realize so much time had passed," Cassie said suddenly catching a glance at the clock. She stood up and started to clean up.

"Just go," Luke told her. "You don't want to face an angry Scott. I can clean up."

"Thanks, Luke," Cassie said. She picked up her coffee cup and downed the last of her coffee. "It's great to have you back," she added as she headed for the door.

Breakfast . . . written by lillehafrue and starynebula



Tuesday, Jan 22, 11:20 am, the lounge . . .

"So, we'll set the test for Friday the first," Scott repeated, making notes as he talked. Virgil, Cassie and he had been going over schedules and trying to find a good time to for testing the dicetyline cannon. They were trying to disrupt routine training and work as little as possible. "That should give everyone time to make the necessary preparations. Do you know who all you want to be involved in this?"

"Well, I know Brains wants to be on hand to see how the cannon does out in the field," Virgil commented. "And of course, myself and Cassie in Thunderbird 2."

"We should also have some support personnel on the ground. I know we all want this to go well and hope the cannon puts out the fire out but in reality that might not happen. Virgil and I have discussed having the Firefly on site in case of that scenario."

"Probably a good precaution. Callie could be on stand-by with the Firefly and personally, I'd like to be out there to see the test first hand."

"I kind of figured you'd say that," Virgil said, casting an 'I told you so look' in Cassie's direction.

Ignoring Virgil's commentary, Scott continued. "What about triggering the fire? Do we need anyone else helping there?"

"Well, Brains is planning on overseeing it but perhaps Will could give him a hand. He seemed to enjoy being involved in the training exercise."

Scott nodded, adding Will's name to the list. "Okay, well I'll leave it to the two of you to plan the details of the field test but I'll let Dad know we've got a time scheduled and who will be involved. I'm sure he'll also want a briefing before the first sometime next week."

"I'll handle that," Virgil told him.

Scott nodded. The three wrapped up their meeting.

"So, what else did you want to discuss with me?" Cassie asked as she leaned back in the chair after Virgil had left.

"It's more of an FYI at this point. Seems the New York City legislature has proposed new fire codes for the city. Dad wanted me to give you a heads up about it because if it does pass, he wants you to oversee making whatever changes are necessary to bring the NY offices up to the codes."

Cassie nodded. "Do we have any idea what's being proposed?"

Scott shook his head. "Not at this point. There hasn't been much in the way of details about the



proposal going out, though the email from headquarters hinted that they felt it was probably going to be passed."

"Well, I'll be ready if it does get passed." I think I might also send an email to the Chief and see if he can give me anymore information. "Anything else?"

"Not at this time," Scott said. "Though, do you have any plans for lunch?" Cassie shook her head. "Want to join us here and then when we're done we can head down to the hangar for your lesson. Maybe get some extra flight time in."

"Sounds good to me," Cassie replied.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Tue, 31 Jul 2012 02:57:08 GMT  
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New Zealand, outside of Christchurch, after 11 am .. .

As Gordon drove the car down route 75, Aaron glanced through the pamphlet for Dale Scenic Cruises. Other than what Gordon had told him about the dolphin cruise, the teen wasn't sure what he was getting himself into. The opportunity to swim with dolphins had sounded like an adventure, though. Now, to pass some time on the hour and a half drive from the airport to Akaroa's main wharf, he decided to look through the pamphlet Gordon had gotten with his gift certificate.

"So, Coach, have you actually read this pamphlet?"

"Not really," Gordon replied. "I looked at the important stuff -- the schedule, directions, and the section labeled 'Information You Need To Know Before Arriving'. The pictures are pretty cool, too."

Aaron smiled at the last comment. The two were quiet for a bit before Aaron spoke up again.

"It says here that Dale Scenic cruises was started thirty-nine years ago by Anthony Dale, Sr. They only had one catamaran when it first opened and they did four scenic cruises of the harbor a day. Now they have a six boat fleet: two devoted just to the swimming with dolphin trip we're going on. Two others do scenic cruises; one does lunch and dinner cruises, and the sixth boat is devoted to charters or a back-up vessel."

"Sounds like a very enterprising family," Gordon commented.

"Maybe I should mention the meal cruises to my Dad. He's been trying to find somewhere to take Mom for Valentine's Day."

"Well, that's one thing I don't need to worry about this year. Other than it's my birthday, it's not going to be a special day for me. I kind of envy Virgil right now."



"I don't see what the big deal is about Valentine's Day is anyway."

"Give it some time, kiddo. When you find the right girl you'll get it," Gordon said slyly.

"I plan on staying single, thank-you very much."

"Sure," Gordon said, dragging out the one syllable word. He remembered going through a stage like that himself, however he had been younger than Aaron when that had changed.

"The pamphlet says that in the past couple of seasons they've had successful swims with the dolphins on eighty-three percent of their trips. Sounds like we should have a fairly good chance at actually swimming with the animals, huh?"

"Yeah, it does," Gordon said, trying not to laugh at Aaron's sudden change of the subject.

Aaron finished browsing through the pamphlet, mentioning a few other things to Gordon. After he had finished with it, he put the brochure into the glove compartment and turned his attention to the passing scenery.

Upon reaching Akaroa, Gordon didn't have much trouble finding the place; the company's name was painted on a dolphin-shaped sign which sat on top of a azure blue building. The unconventional sign and painting made the place stand out from the other businesses around it.

Gordon easily found a parking place and the two of them headed toward the building. Once inside, it didn't take them long to figure out where to go. They joined the others going on the same cruise in a room with folding chairs set up in rows. Gordon and Aaron found seats in the back.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Tue, 31 Jul 2012 03:00:17 GMT

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A gentle breeze was blowing in off the sea as Dominic and Luke took a stroll along the beach. Rommel was trotting along a few paces in front of them. Joshua had one hand securely placed on the soft fur of the dog's side. Rom set the pace for the little excursion, and Dom was glad. Luke didn't look too good.

"How're you feeling?" he asked.

Luke smiled wearily at Dom and shrugged.

"I'm bone weary," he answered. "Not that I really thought I would feel differently. You don't feel top-notch after being shot in the back, straight through the lung."

"I'll bet," Dom said in a voice that was strained with an attempt at normality.



The small group continued on a little further until Luke signalled that he needed to sit down. Immediately Rommel returned to his master's side, his tall ears folding downwards and his brow pulling back.

"I'm okay, boy," Luke said as he settled himself on a boulder.

The rock was warm from the midday sun, and Rommel sat down by Luke's legs, his long tongue hanging out of his mouth as he gently panted. Seeing this, Joshua decided to sit by the dog's side and stick his own pink tongue out. Luke chuckled and ruffled the little boy's blond hair, but as he did so Rommel looked up with his head cocked to one side.

"Here," Dominic said, and slowly reached out to pet the dog's head.

Luke chuckled again.

"I think that's the first time you've ever petted him," he said.

Dom's fingers relaxed as he rubbed them over Rommel's soft fur.

"Maybe dogs aren't so bad after all," he said. "Or maybe I'm just making an exception for this mutt."

Luke shifted a little and made room for Dom to sit down beside him. The rock was one of the larger boulders by the shore, brought down by volcanic activity many millennia before. Dominic sat and placed his ever-present bag in between them, pulling out some strong sunscreen. He brushed some errant sand from Joshua's pale arms and sprayed the liquid over them. Joshua frowned.

"I don't like it!" he complained.

"Well, you wouldn't like melanoma either, so sit still."

Joshua's little brow creased.

"What's melon-coma?"

The two men laughed, and Joshua couldn't help but join in after a moment's confusion.

"You're a pistol," Luke said to him.

"Bang, bang! Pistol!"

Joshua ran a little way out onto the beach, causing Dom to splutter with annoyance. As he saw the little boy make his hands into the shape of guns, he hung his head. Luke saw his hands tremble. He watched as the man's demeanour changed completely, the veiled normality sloughing away like melting snow. Luke felt a pang in his chest and shifted around carefully. What is this all about? he thought, but before he had the chance to ask, Dominic began to answer.



"You know," the dark haired man said, sniffing sharply and hiding his eyes underneath his hands, "I felt like throwing up when I found out you'd been shot," he said, letting the bottle fall out of his hands. "I couldn't believe it. When I heard where you'd been hit, it was even worse -- all I could think about was that your heart could be damaged, and that... "

His voice trailed off as Joshua ran back over and turned his attention to Rommel. Luke signalled to the dog that it was okay to relax, and Rom allowed himself to be petted and even rolled over to give Josh access to his belly.

"I could see myself, you know, as part of the LifeFlight crew that pulled you out. I could see myself as the nurse assisting in the operation to remove the bullet, because I've done both in my time. Then we had the back-to-back rescues in November. When I had to body-bag fatalities, all I could see was your face on their bodies, even though I knew that you were going to recover." Dom stood up abruptly and paced away from the rock and back again. "It's been like that ever since."

"I'm back now," Luke said, stumbling over the words. He wasn't entirely sure where this was all coming from and where it was going. What he did know, however, was that he was becoming more and more worried for his friend. "You've had a shock recently; you're still mending yourself. And think about it: it's been two months since my accident, and I'm here. I'm fine." His mind flashed back to the memories of Roger and those words Luke had never expected to hear: 'You died, Luke.' He suppressed a shudder. "I've been really worried about you," he continued. "From that phone call, and even just from the way you were yesterday when we met, something's really wrong. And I don't think it's just because of the rescue. Something else is up. I'd like you to tell me."

"Don't, Luke."

"Don't what, Dom?"

"Don't ask."

"So there is something more, then."

"Please, Luke --"

"Dom, you've become a great friend of mine here, and I want to help you. Just spit it out. I'm not going to drop it because it's obviously something that's really bothering you."

"I don't want to ruin that friendship!" Dom snapped, but immediately his face paled and he turned away.

Luke narrowed his eyes and raised an eyebrow.

"How could you ruin it?" he asked. "What, are you going to tell me you hate me or something?" he asked, trying to inject some mirth into the very heavy atmosphere.

"I could ruin it because I think -- dammit, I think I love you, Luke!"



"What?"

"There, I said it!" Dominic said, throwing his hands up into the air. Joshua looked up from where he had been digging a hole with Rom standing by, and Dom shook his head. "I've said it. God damn it, I haven't been able to get you out of my head for months! It's been killing me. I mean, maybe it's not love, but it's definitely more than just friendship. I don't know what it is!"

Luke gulped and stood up. Rommel trotted over to him. Joshua looked as if he was going to cry.

"Dom, I had no idea," he said.

"How could you?" Dom answered, visibly deflating. "You haven't been here. No one has any idea. I haven't said thing-one about it."

"I didn't even know you... swung my way."

Dominic reached out for his son and picked him up. Joshua buried his face in his father's neck.

"I don't think anyone does. I haven't talked about it to anyone. But yes, I'm bisexual. To be honest, I haven't really viewed myself as attracted to anyone since Josh's mother. She burned me so bad I vowed I'd never be with anyone ever again. I didn't even realise myself how I was starting to feel until what happened to you, and I realised I saw you as more than just... a friend."

There was a moment between them where the only sound was the wind and the waves, and Dominic turned away.

"I'm sorry."

"For what?"

"I guess I've just ruined our friendship," he said. "I can't say you'll want to be around me much. It'll be too awkward."

"Now hold up, Dominic," Luke said. "Look at me."

Reluctantly Dom turned back around, his eyes shining.

"Now, I'm not going to deny that this is all coming as a big shock," Luke said, spreading his hands in front of him. "But, and I want you to listen to me here and not disappear inside your own brain: it's not necessarily something that's a bad thing."

Dominic jiggled the little boy in his arms. His eyes widened in confusion.

"What?"

"Well, have you ever looked at yourself? You're a good looking guy. I've never thought about you in that way before because I never suspected that you walked on my side of the street, but... that



doesn't mean I'm going to hate you because of how you feel. And it doesn't mean things need to be awkward. Maybe... maybe I'm happy about what you just said."

"Huh?"

"Maybe it's given me some food for thought. Some nice food."

"Gah?"

Luke couldn't help but chuckle at Dominic's slack jaw.

"I think I can see you brains dribbling out of your ears, guy," he said. "Come on, let's go and grab some lunch. We can talk more later."

"Mugh."

On that articulate note, the small party began to walk back up along the beach.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Tue, 31 Jul 2012 03:01:05 GMT

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A little after 1pm, Akaroa Harbor . . .

"Wow, this place is awesome," Aaron commented as he leaned on the rail of the catamaran, taking in the view of the surrounding harbor.

"Yeah, the scenery is great," Gordon commented absently.

Aaron glanced over at his coach to find that he wasn't even looking out at the surrounding harbor. Gordon had his back to the vessel's rail, and was looking in the direction of something much closer. Aaron turned to follow his companions gaze. He found himself looking at their guide for the trip, Alysha. The brunette was currently talking to a couple of other passengers.

"I was talking more about the natural beauty of the place."

"Right there my friend is 'natural beauty," Gordon said. "Give it time and you'll know exactly what I mean."

Aaron said something under his breath that Gordon couldn't understand as he turned back around.

The two fell silent as the catamaran, skippered by Anthony Dale, continued heading out into Akaroa Harbor. So far, they hadn't come across any Hector dolphins but there was still plenty of time.



It was a ten-year-old kid who spotted one of the sea mammals first. "There's a dolphin!" the little boy called as he pointed toward one jumping out of the water.

As everyone on the vessel turned their attention in that direction, the captain came on the loudspeaker.

"Well, folks, I'll head the boat in the direction that our little scout has indicated. With any luck, the situation will be right for our swimmers to be able to join the Hector dolphins in their environment."

As the boat got closer, they found that there were actually three dolphins in the area. As there were no calves with the dolphins, the crew of the boat made the decision that it would be a good situation to attempt a swim.

"All right, I need all of the swimmers to listen up," Alysha called out, clapping her hands to get people's attention. "I'm going to go over the safety instructions you were given back at dock one more time before we proceed. Safety for our swimmers as well as the dolphins is our number one priority."

Those on board the catamaran listened intently as Alysha and Jonathan, the other guide, went through the safety guidelines again.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Tue, 31 Jul 2012 03:01:53 GMT  
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About 2:15pm

"That was awesome!" Aaron exclaimed as he climbed out of the water and back onto the boat.

"I'm glad you enjoyed yourself," Kristin, the photographer for the trip, told him as she stood nearby in case any of the guests needed assistance.

"Definitely one Christmas present I'll never forget. I'll have to thank Alex and Tyler again when I get home," Gordon commented, as he climbed the ladder behind Aaron.

"Thanks for inviting me along, Coach."

"You're welcome," Gordon replied as the two of them moved away from the ladder to allow those behind them to climb on board. "This was definitely one of those things that experiencing it with someone else makes it all that much better."

The two of them headed for the cabin of the catamaran to get something to drink as they waited for the the trip back in to begin.



Around 3pm

After showering and dressing, Aaron headed back outside in search of Gordon. His coach had showered quickly and yelled to Aaron that he'd meet him outside.

He's probably taking another shot at getting Alysha's phone number, Aaron thought as he stepped out the front door of the main building. Gordon had spent most of the trip back in chatting with the brown-haired guide, who, though she had been polite, hadn't seemed all that interested in Gordon.

As Aaron looked around the premises, he sure enough spotted Gordon talking with the brunette. He debated whether he should go join him or wait elsewhere. The teen decided to head for the car and wait there.

As he walked in that direction, he glanced over at Gordon and Alysha trying to decide if his coach was having any better luck this time around. He noticed Gordon writing something down, using the clipboard and paper the guide had with her.

Aaron didn't have to wait long by the car before Gordon joined him.

"So did you get her number, Coach?" the teen asked.

"No," Gordon replied, as he hit the button to unlock the car doors. "However, she did agree to exchange internet chat names, so there is hope," he added, as he climbed in behind the wheel of the car. Wearing a satisfied smile, Gordon pulled the car out of the parking lot as he headed back toward Christchurch.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Tue, 31 Jul 2012 03:03:41 GMT

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Alysha Dale watched the young man, who had introduced himself as Gordon Tracy, walk away. This wasn't the first time that she had someone from a trip ask for her phone number. However, she had to admit, this was the first time that she found any interest in spending time with the person.

He certainly is cute, she thought, finally looking away from his retreating figure and down at her clipboard and the instant messenger and email address he had written down for her. Which is definitely a different tactic, she told herself. The guys usually asked for her number but never offered their own.

Gordon had come off as polite and charming. The brief conversation she had with him led her to believe he could be a fun person to spend time with. Still, Alysha had her doubts, a few which revolved around the young man's name.

The name Tracy was well known even in her small home village of Akaroa. She was suspicious enough to wonder if he was really who he said he was, or some guy dropping a name, hoping it



would score him a date.

"That guy giving you a hard time, Sunshine?"

Alysha turned to look back in the direction of the boat. Her father, Anthony Dale, walked along the dock in her direction.

"Nothing I can't handle," she told him with a shrug of her shoulders.

Alysha had always had a close relationship with her father. She had been about five years old when she started tagging along with him at work. Like him, she loved not only the water but just being outdoors. For as long as she could remember, her goal had been to join her grandfather and father with the family business. The only stipulation they had ever imposed on her was that, if she wanted to be a part of the business, then she had to graduate from a university with a degree that was somehow relevant to their work. Due to her interest in nature and the environment they shared with so many creatures, she had chosen a major in biological sciences along with a minor in business.

"Good," he told her, patting her shoulder. "I want to check on things inside. Want to help Jon in making sure the boat's ready for the next cruise?"

"Sure, Dad," Alysha replied. As Anthony headed toward the main building, she turned and headed back to the boat.

When I get my regular duties done today, I think I'll do a little research, she thought to herself. If she checked the reservation records she could at least verify that there was indeed a Gordon Tracy on the noon cruise today. If that checked out, then she would consider whether she wanted to take the initiative to contact the guy or not. Who knows; he could turn out to be a nice guy and we might even have some common interests. Everyone keeps telling me I should start dating again. Perhaps its time I take their advice, she thought, as she stepped onto the vessel.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Tue, 31 Jul 2012 03:04:34 GMT

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Tuesday January 22nd, a little before 5 pm . . .

"Are you coming with us, Mommy?" Lea asked as Lana braided her daughter's hair. Lana didn't want it getting in the girl's way during her first art class.

"No, sweetie. I'm gonna stay home and do some writing. You can tell me all about your first class while you get ready for bed tonight. I do plan on coming down to see you and your father off though."

"Good!"



"All done," Lana said, finishing the braid off with an elastic.

"Daddy, I'm ready!"

"Great," Vince replied from where he was rinsing his plate from the quick dinner he had eaten. "Then why don't we get going," he added, setting the plate down and turning from the sink. "Don't want my Poppet to be late for her first class."

A few moments later the three of them were in the lift, heading down. When the doors opened on the first floor, Lea preceded her parents out of the lift.

"Can I check the mail?" she asked, without looking back.

"Go ahead," Vince said with a smile, having anticipated it. Like a lot of little kids, Lea loved checking for mail even though she seldom got anything addressed to herself.

The little girl hurried to the mailboxes but then had to wait for Vince to catch up. Coming up behind her, he gave his daughter a boost so she could reach the family's mailbox. There were two white envelopes and a manila envelope in their space. The little girl grabbed the three items and then her father placed her down on the floor.

"I got something!" she exclaimed after looking at the three envelopes. She held the prize up in one hand as she handed the other two items out to her mother who had joined them.

"Who's it from, sweetie?" Lana asked as she looked at the other two envelopes. One was a letter from Vince's parents and the manila envelope was from her publicist, Jean.

"Grandma and Grandpa," Lea replied. As the little girl referred to Lana's parents and Nannie and Pop-pop, Lana knew she was referring to Vince's parents.

Leave it to May to think of sending something just to Lea, Lana thought before addressing her daughter. "Well, why don't you let me hold onto it for now. We can read it together at bedtime."

"Okay," the little blonde replied, sounding a little disappointed. She slowly handed the envelope over and the little group headed for the airstrip.

Lana entertained her daughter while Vince did preflight checks. She then watched as the plane headed down the runway and took into the air. She watched the craft until it was out of sight and then headed back to the apartment.

Upon entering, Lana took the letter from her in-laws into the bedroom. She placed it on top of the vanity so she and Vince could read it together. She then headed out to the little workstation that Vince had set up in the living area of the apartment with the other envelope. She turned on her laptop and while it was loading opened the other envelope. Inside she found a handful of letters. Looking at them she saw that they were all addressed to Chase Rivers.

While a lot of her fans tended to send correspondence via email, there were still some that chose to write her actual letters. To keep her address secret, such mail had always been sent to her



publicist who then made sure she got it. Despite the move overseas, that practice had not changed.

As much as she enjoyed hearing from her fans, she also knew that Lea liked to read the letters with her. Lana found sharing them more pleasant than reading them by herself and it also gave her a chance to help her daughter with her reading. She placed the small stack of letters off to the side and turned her attention to her computer. With any luck she could take advantage of the quiet and get some work done on her next novel.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Tue, 31 Jul 2012 03:06:43 GMT

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Tuesday, Jan. 22, after dinner . . .

"I know you miss him, and at some point you're going to want pictures of him to remember him by."

It seemed like such a long time ago since Jordan had said those words. In reality it was only about four months ago. She had known then that he was right, she just hadn't seen that time coming any time soon.

Now she was sitting on the couch looking at the small photo album that her brother had put Nathan's pictures in.

She glanced up from the photo album, to the entertainment center in front of her. On top, the baby shoe she had taken before leaving the city now sat next to the signed fire helmet. She wasn't sure what had possessed her to suddenly dig the things out of the bottom drawer of the vanity but she had. Her unfinished dinner still sat on the table.

Cassie thought about the email she had sent to Dr. Lindon the other day, telling the psychiatrist about how she had been feeling lately. About how her thoughts revolving around Nathan had gone from what she was missing with him to wondering what he would've done had he had a chance. It didn't seem like much but somehow, she thought it was significant. She also recalled what she had written about Josh.

My one neighbor has a little boy who is about the same age that Nathan would have been. When I first met them, it was hard being around the boy and his father. It just reminded me of my little boy and what I was missing. I can't say everything is better as my neighbor and I still have some awkward moments from time to time but there is a difference. I don't think about how I could avoid them. In fact, I actually enjoying spending time with both of them. The little boy has even taken to calling me 'Auntie Cass' and I've got to admit, I like the being called that.

She had ended that email with the line, 'perhaps its time I stopped dwelling on what I've lost and remember what I gained in the short time I had with Nathan'. Still, now that she had the photo



album out and in front of her, finding the courage to open it was proving to be difficult.

Taking a deep breath, and letting it out slowly, the dark-haired woman tried to calm herself. While she had been digging the photo album out, she had been so sure this was what she wanted to do. I think I'm already past having second thoughts about this. Maybe fourth or fifth thoughts.

She picked the dark blue book up in both hands, held it a few minutes, and then placed it back on the coffee table. Getting to her feet, she walked into the kitchen and stood staring at the unfinished dinner still there. Eating was the last thing on her mind so instead she picked the plate up and went to the trash can.

Just as Cassie was finishing cleaning up her abandoned dinner, the door chime sounded. She headed for the door and opened it. "Scott?" she said, unable to keep the surprise of seeing him there completely out of her voice. Though he had been to her apartment before, he had never stopped by unexpectedly. "Is everything okay?"

"Yes. Sorry, I didn't think me showing up would be such a surprise."

"It's just that I wasn't expecting anyone. Please, come in," she added, stepping aside so he could come into the apartment. "Can I get you something to drink -- ice tea, water, milk, soda?"

"Soda would be fine," Scott replied stepping into the apartment.

"Please, have a seat," Cassie told him, waving a hand toward the couch as she headed for the refrigerator. "What brought you up here anyway?"

"Wanted to get away from my siblings for awhile."

Cassie nodded despite the fact that Scott couldn't see the gesture. "What flavor? I've got grape, cola, ginger ale, and orange."

"Cola will be fine."

Cassie grabbed a can of cola and ginger ale, filled two glasses with ice, and headed for the living room. She placed the items on the coffee table and took a seat on the couch.

"Did I interrupt something?"

Scott nodded toward the photo album still sitting out, as he opened the can of soda and poured it into the glass.

"Not really. Haven't been able to get the courage to actually open it. I thought I was ready but I'm having second thoughts now."

"Second thoughts about what?" Scott asked

"Before I left New York, my brother went with me to gather photos from my old apartment. Jordan went through the album containing pictures of Nathan and picked out ones for me. He even



bought and put the pictures in that album. When I moved in I packed the album and other things that belonged to my son away. I dug them out tonight but now I can't seem to find the courage to open that book," she said waving a hand toward the book. "Guess it sounds kind of silly," she said, feeling her cheeks grow warm as she glanced down at the floor.

"Not at all. I can't say I know what you've gone through with losing your son but I know it couldn't have been easy. Maybe looking through the album wasn't something you were supposed to do alone."

"Yeah, I thought of dropping in on someone but the two I would feel comfortable going to are dealing with their own issues right now."

Scott nodded, knowing who she was talking about without her saying names. "Well I'm here. That is, if you don't mind sharing the pictures with me."

Cassie paused. It seemed like she had been spending more and more time with the Thunderbird 1 pilot lately, but looking through a photo album with him had never crossed her mind. It just hadn't seemed like something that would interest him. Now, that he had made the offer though, something about it seemed right.

Cassie leaned forward and pulled the album closer to the edge of the coffee table. Taking a deep breath once again, she reached out and grasped the cover of the album. Slowly, she opened it, revealing pictures that had been taken at the hospital shortly after Nathan had been born, one of which showed her holding the little boy and all four of her brothers gathered around her.

Cassie slowly flipped through the pages, finding herself telling stories that went along with the pictures occasionally. At times, she'd stop in mid-sentence as the emotion would overcome her voice. In appropriate places, Scott made comments while other times he remained silent. He did notice that her one brother seemed to be in more pictures than the others. As it wasn't one of the triplets, Scott knew it was her younger brother without asking. If he hadn't already known it, looking through the album would have told him how close the two siblings were.

Turning the page again, pictures of Nathan's first birthday came up. Cassie scanned over the photos, memories that went along with that day surfacing. On one of the pictures, a date caught her eye -- 02-22-2067.

Nathan would have turned three next month, Cassie realized. Reaching up, she wiped away a couple of threatening tears.

"Cass, you okay?"

"Yeah. Fine," she replied, reaching out to close the book. "I think I've seen all the pictures I can stand tonight." Spotting his empty glass she decided to try changing the subject. "Can I get you anything else?" she asked, waving a hand toward the glass.

"No, thank-you."

Cassie picked up both his glass and her own and got to her feet. "I'm just going to set these in the



kitchen."

Not saying anything, Scott got to his feet and followed her. Cassie went over to the sink, and took longer than necessary rinsing out the glasses. Watching her, Scott leaned against the end of the counter, thinking over what to say.

"His birthday is coming up soon isn't it?" Scott finally asked. He saw Cassie nod, but she didn't turn to face him. "Perhaps you should go home for it. Maybe visit his grave." Scott paused for a moment. When she didn't turn to face him or say anything he continued. "When we lose someone unexpectedly it takes awhile before we're really ready to say good-bye. Even then, it's good to have a place to feel close to them."

"Are you a psychologist along with everything else?" Cassie asked finally breaking her silence.

"No. Just someone who's lost someone unexpectedly, and an older brother to seven siblings now. Not to mention, going to my mother's grave and talking to her, reminds me of how much she is still a part of my life. Part of who I am. Just like your son will always be a part of you."

Cassie finally turned away from the sink. Scott noticed the thoughtful expression on her face and chose to remain silent for the moment.

"I think I'll talk the idea over with Dr. Lindon. Thanks for the suggestion and for listening."

"Anytime."

Scott glanced at his watch and frowned.

"Shoot. I've got to get going," he said. "I'm meeting Virg for a chess match in five."

Cassie nodded and stepped forward, to lead him to the door. Scott smiled at her, and then reached out to draw her into a hug. Cassie stilled for a moment, before she relaxed into the embrace. Scott gave her a squeeze and drew back.

"I'm here for you any time you need, Cass," he said.

"Thank you, Scott," Cassie said.

Scott gave her a warm smile before crossing the threshold and out of the apartment.

"I'll catch you later," he said.

"Goodbye, Scott."

Scott waited until the apartment door closed before making his way back down to the monorail. He rode across to the Villa with his hands in his pockets, leaning his back against the glass. This has got to be tough for her, he thought. I can't imagine what it would be like to lose a child. And what's worse, his birthday is coming up. I wish I could do something. I guess I can just be there for her.. The monorail came to a stop, and Scott walked towards the lounge. He couldn't help feeling



gratified that Cassie had opened up to him. He resolved to be there for her as much as she would allow, and smiled.

Thanks to ArtisticRainey for her help writing the ending of this!

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Tue, 31 Jul 2012 03:08:24 GMT  
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Tuesday, January 22, 2069, 5 a.m., NH (10 p.m. same day, Tracy Island)

Jeff rolled over, his mind barely conscious, his arm reaching for the warm body next to his in the bed. It took a few uncoordinated, unsuccessful grabs for him to realize that the portion of the bed beside him was empty. That realization brought him slowly awake; he touched the bedside lamp and squinted at the rumpled, thrown back covers. A quick glance at the clock showed him that the sun was far from rising. With a heavy sigh, he scrubbed his face with both hands and shoved his own blankets aside, padding off barefoot in search of his wife.

A quick check in the bathroom disclosed that she wasn't enjoying a soothing soak in the hot tub. He shuffled out to the main living area, intending to head for the kitchen.

He didn't have to. There, standing before the window, looking out at the night sky, was the soft, pale-limned silhouette of his wife. She was draped in the long embroidered robe that she loved so well; it was open at the front, revealing her shapely legs and bare feet as well as the short, sheer chemise she had worn to bed. Her hands were clasped around a cup, steam rising from its depths. The light aroma of orange and spice wafted his way. Herbal tea, he realized, his mind's catalog automatically bringing recognition to the fore. His body stirred at the sight of her, and he moved without thought in her direction.

He must have made a sound, for she turned to look at him. Starlight on her face enabled him to see her weary smile before she returned to her contemplations.

"Ah'm sorry if Ah woke you," she said as he came up behind her.

"You didn't," he replied, sliding his arms around her waist and kissing the top of her head. Her hair was damp and stuck up at odd angles; she smelled of shampoo and perspiration. "I reached for you and you weren't there." He set his own gaze to follow hers. "What's going on? Didn't I wear you out today?"

He could feel the muscles in her face move as she smiled. "You'd think Ah'd be dead to the world with all the skiin' we did today, wouldn't you? Then the ice skatin' an' the sleigh ride?" She leaned back a bit, resting her head on his bare chest. "You did wear me out, suh. Ah was sound asleep when..." She drew in a large breath and sighed. "Ah just suddenly woke up, all covered with sweat. Mah sheets are probably still damp."



He frowned a little. "Not that I noticed." Lowering his head a little, he rubbed his stubbled cheek over hers. "How long have you been up?"

She shrugged. "Ah dunno. Ah jus' couldn't get back t' sleep, an' Ah didn't want to wake you. So, Ah thought Ah'd have some tea, see if it'd help."

"I see." He slid his hand up, surreptitiously feeling her forehead as he smoothed her damp hair back.

"Ah'm not fevered, if'n that's what yoah worried about," she told him. "Ah already checked."

He smiled at her perceptiveness. "You know a parent's instinct never quits."

"Noah does a husband's, it seems."

They stood silent together for a few moments. His hands ghosted over her form. Her skin was chilled and the gooseflesh he encountered wasn't raised by his touch. "So, any ideas about what brought this on?"

She shook her head slowly, her hair brushing soft against his neck and collarbone. Her shoulders lifted and fell with another deep sigh. She sipped more of the tea, the steam long gone. One sip, two, and she let her arm drop. The lukewarm liquid sloshed in the cup; a few fragrant drops fell on his foot.

"Ah've had enough of this," she said. "It's no good cold."

"Let me take it." He slid his hand down her arm, encouraging the elbow to bend, taking the cup from her fingers. He was loath to leave her, and so reached out for a nearby table and left her drink there. When he straightened, he found they were now face to face. Her eyes, shadowed by the starlight behind her, still glimmered as she raised her mouth to his. They kissed; her mouth held the tang of orange and spice. He couldn't help himself; he cupped her face in his hands and deepened the kiss, conveying the urgent hunger that swept over him.

"Come back to bed with me, love," he whispered, his voice husky with desire.

She dipped her head, a single, solemn nod, and reached up to run her hands through his hair. They slid around his neck, then down, trailing warm fingers over broad shoulders. He caught one hand with his; their fingers entwined and he drew her to their bed to satisfy both his ardent yearning and hers.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Tue, 31 Jul 2012 03:09:01 GMT  
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January 22, 2069, noon, Paris, France (midnight, Tracy Island)



The car pulled up before a modern set of condominiums. Brains glanced at his watch. "I hope Professor Borrender will be available for lunch today."

"And I hope he doesn't think he has to provide it for us," Tin-Tin said as the driver handed her out of the car. "This is to be our treat." She turned to the driver and gave him instructions about when to return.

"He did say he had something new he wanted to show me." Brains offered his arm, and the pair walked into the well-appointed lobby. "Looks like he decided that it was time to live in something modern instead of the old place he had in Bern."

"It's lovely." Tin-Tin looked around, taking in some of the more esoteric architectural details. "They keep it very clean."

"Hm." Brains frowned as they entered the elevator. "That may be a problem."

"Why?"

Brains said, "Seventh floor." The lift immediately rose. "Professor Borrender isn't known for being very neat."

"Oh, dear."

xxx

"Come in, come in!" the old man called, waving the two younger people into his condo. He closed the door behind him, and hurried to move a short stack of books from one of the comfortable chairs. "Please, Fraulein Kyrano, sit here." The books joined another stack in the corner, by the televid. He then gathered up a pile of data padds that were scattered across the sofa. "And you, my young friend, sit here."

When he had disposed of the padds...by tucking them into an almost dangerously full closet...he rubbed his hands together. "Now, can I get you something to drink?" He wagged a finger at Brains. "I don't have the ingredients to make you one of your martinis, Hiram, but I do have a good beer, a bottle or two of wine, and some soft drinks."

"Oh, we couldn't possibly," Tin-Tin said with a soft smile. "Breakfast was so very filling..."

"Ah, I see," Borrender nodded vigorously. "We should save some room for luncheon in any case."

"Yes," Brains said, smiling. "We'd like to take you out for lunch, if that's all right with you."

"Ja, ja, I think I would like that." The older man glanced around the room. "Sometimes I forget what the world outside is like, though on cold days it's better to stay home and keep warm."

There was a moment of silence then Brains asked, "What made you move to Paris, Professor? And why did you leave that big old place you had in Bern for..." His voice trailed off, and helplessly



waved a hand, "... this?"

"Oh, that old place was too hard to keep up," Borrender said. "I was always losing things. So I decided to downsize. As for the move to Paris, well..." He tipped a wink at Tin-Tin. "Das Mädchen here are much prettier, and I have access to one of the best laboratory facilities in Europe. It is also easier for Sir Jeremy Hodge to visit and help me with my work. He has an apartment here, you know." He shrugged, holding up his hands. "What more could I want?"

Tin-Tin decided to change the subject. "What are you working on now, Professor?"

"Ach, ja!" A broad smile spread across his face. "Hiram tells me you are yourself an engineer, nicht war?"

She inclined her head gracefully. "I am, Professor."

"Then you will understand what I am trying to do."

He got up and beckoned them to follow. The condo had two bedrooms, and the second one was dedicated to his workspace. It was less cluttered than the living room, but only marginally so. They followed him to a long table he had set up. "Of course, I cannot work on this in the research facility; the owners would think it below them. To them it is a passing fancy or perhaps a hobby. But that lovely girl, Lady Penelope, brought me a most interesting problem some time ago, and asked if I could duplicate the effects in a way that would bypass the original methods."

There were several cans lined up on the table. Brains squinted at them. "Beans?" He looked thoughtful for a moment, then his face cleared. "I think I know what this is. Tin-Tin, do you remember Mr. Tuttle and Lady Penelope's visit to him?" He was being circumspect; though Sir Jeremy was a member of International Rescue, Professor Borrender was not.

"Yes! I do remember!" Tin-Tin picked up one of the cans. "This couldn't possibly be..."

Brains nodded as they said in unison, "Ma Tuttle's beans!"

"Ja, ja, it is the beans," Borrender said, nodding vigorously. "Lady Penelope assured me that these beans had explosive properties. I thought she was joking until she demonstrated it for me one day." He shook his grizzled head. "I am trying to figure out exactly what it is that makes the explosion. Is it the spices? The beans themselves? The method of canning? Mrs. Tuttle refused to give out her recipe and its secrets, so now I must try and discover them for myself." He chuckled as he swept a hand toward the cans. "I am lucky that Lady Penelope's chauffeur was able to procure these samples for me. I do not think the old woman would have let her Ladyship take any home."

The two engineers glanced at each other. Brains smiled, while Tin-Tin stifled a giggle. "That's Parker for you," Brains said. "He's very good at, ah, procuring things."

"What progress have you made?" Tin-Tin was determined to treat this as a legitimate line of inquiry...which for the professor and for Penelope, it indubitably was.



Borrender sighed. "Not much. I have been having great difficulty in reproducing the exact conditions under which the beans are cooked and canned. Most people who can their own foods use glass and pressure. Mrs. Tuttle has managed to use a lightweight metal. I have found no historical references to this at all."

"Perhaps we could ask Mrs. Tracy," Tin-Tin suggested. "She might know of the method used."

"Or know where to find a description," Brains added. He glanced at Tin-Tin. "Tin-Tin's father is a chef; he might have some insight, too."

Borrender nodded. "It seems that perhaps this is not a job for a scientist, but for a cook." He glanced at his watch. "Speaking of cooks, where would you like to go for luncheon? I can recommend a good German restaurant..."

The conversation turned to cuisine, but Tin-Tin studied the cans for a long moment, wondering if it would be safe to take one or two of them back home with her. She decided against it, and resolved to ask Parker if he could provide another can or two for their own analysis.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Tue, 31 Jul 2012 03:10:59 GMT  
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Wednesday January 3rd, The Cliff House, a little after dawn...

Luke leaned back in the lounge chair and propped his feet up on the balcony railing. The sky was lightening in the distance and around him, the birds were slowly waking. At his feet, Rommel groaned and rolled over. Luke chuckled and rubbed the dog's belly with one foot. "Hard to believe we were freezing our butts off less than a week ago, hey mutt?" he said quietly. The dog merely rolled over more so his master could continue. He closed his eyes and breathed in the scent of the frangipani. It's good to be back where I belong. Now if I could only get my body clock back to normal. Dawn is never a good time to be awake.

He opened them again as he heard movement off to the side and the lights popped on in Will's apartment. I think I'll take Will up on his offer to hang out in the bay today. I'm tired of all the fussing. I came here to get away from all that! The meals and stuff are great until I get my own supplies in, but the hovering can stop.

He nudged Rommel. "C'mon boy, let's get some breakfast. Then you and I are going down to the beach and do some work." They went inside and Luke hit the button on his coffee machine. A few moments later, he held a steaming cup in his hand. Not bothering to let it cool, he sipped (and burned his tongue in the process) as he nosed through the freezer. Spying a glass dish, he grinned and popped it in the microwave. As he waited for the egg casserole to heat up, he wandered back to the living room. He sat down on the couch and continued drinking his coffee. Spying a picture from Josh on the table, he smiled, then it slowly faded as he thought back of the conversation on the beach yesterday.



I never in a million years would have thought Dom was bi. Never. He still seems so broken up over his divorce. As to his feelings for me...Luke sighed. I can't believe it. I'd like to but...He's under so much stress at the moment, he must just be seeing things that aren't there. He's one of my best friends here. Do I feel more than friendship?

Luke's thoughts wandered back to those early days in the hospital after he'd been shot. Most of that time was a hazy blur, but he clearly remembered a point where he'd woken up to find Dom at his side, gripping his hand tightly. He hadn't really thought much about it at the time, Elise had been there as well, but now...

He's gorgeous. I wasn't kidding when I told him that. But how can I know if he really feels that way or if it's just a by product of all that's happened? I wish Anna were here. The chiming of the microwave interrupted his thoughts and he went to get his breakfast. His attention wasn't on eating however, but still on Dominic. I'm already in love with Josh. And it would be oh so easy to fall for Dom, but I can't. Not until we can talk, really talk and get to the bottom of this whole situation.

Rommel nudged his leg, demanding his master's attention. Luke looked down and smiled. "Feeling neglected, are we?" He reached down and scratched his dog's ears. "Well we can't have that." He stood and put his dishes away, then pulled on his sneakers. He grabbed a backpack and threw a water bottle and a chocolate bar in. Pulling on his Rockies cap, he turned back to his dog.

"C'mon, Rom, let's hit the beach for a walk before work." As they walked into the lift, his thoughts turned back to Dom. And maybe the fresh air will do me some good, too.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Tue, 31 Jul 2012 03:11:56 GMT

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In the pilot's seat of Thunderbird 4, Vince listened patiently as Gordon went through some instructions as they waited for John. The copper-haired aquanaut was standing behind him, one arm resting on the chair back as he leaned over Vince's shoulder. The plan was for Vince to pilot Thunderbird 4 out to Mateo and back. It was the first time the former Navy Seal would be behind the controls of the little sub outside the simulator. Though his performance had improved greatly from his first time in the simulator, the blonde was a bit nervous at the prospect of piloting the yellow sub. And apparently I'm not the only one, he thought, as he listened patiently to Gordon tell him things he had told him before.

"Sorry to keep you guys waiting," John said as he entered the cockpit of the sub.

"Not a problem," Gordon said, glancing in John's direction. He smiled as he saw what John was carrying with him. "Was just going over a few last minute things."

Hearing the amusement in Gordon's voice, Vince shifted in the seat enough so that he could see John. He saw that the blonde Tracy had brought scuba gear with him. "And just what is that for?"



Vince asked.

"Well, seeing as you're piloting Four out to Mateo, I figured it would be best to be prepared just in case you sink her for real."

"I'm never going to live that down, am I?" Vince said, though he had a smile himself, taking the comment good-naturedly, as he had the other jokes at his expense since the 'fatal' simulator experience. He cast a questioning glance over at Gordon who was grinning.

"Probably not," the two Tracys said in unison.

Vince just shook his head. "Why don't we get this trip started," he suggested, turning to face the controls again.

Gordon and John got themselves settled in the two other seats in the cockpit and strapped themselves in. Vince radioed for clearance to leave. Receiving clearance from Scott, Vince fired the hover jets on the craft and maneuvered Thunderbird 4 out of the hangar and down the runway normally used by Thunderbird 2. Reaching the end, the sub made its way down the lowered end of the runway and slipped beneath the surface. Gordon refrained from making any comment as Vince pointed the yellow submersible toward Mateo.

With a little coaching from Gordon, Vince piloted the sub away from Tracy Island and toward Mateo. Without incident Thunderbird 4 reached the smaller island and was docked inside the hangar built there.

"There you go. No scuba gear necessary," Vince commented as he powered down the submersible.

"We've still got the return trip," Gordon quipped, before John had a chance to make any comment.

"Keep it up and I might sink her on purpose," the older man told him as they stood from their seats.

"Got it," came the aquanaut's reply. He still wasn't sure how far he could push Vince's sense of humor sometimes and he figured now wasn't the time to find out. While Gordon knew the older man wouldn't actually sink the sub on purpose he was convinced Vince would find a way to get even.

Gordon and Vince followed John into the small hangar where it TB4 was now docked. Vince glanced around the small area though there wasn't much to see. Without a word, he followed the blonde headed Tracy across the cavern to a set of stairs leading upwards, trying not to think about the fact that like the hangars back on the island, they were underground.

Get a grip, Vince chided himself as a shiver went up his spine. They would have made sure the place was perfectly sound when they built these caverns.

"We'll give you a tour of the facility before we take the fuel tanker to the island," John said as he led the small group up the steps.



"Good. I've heard people mention Mateo on the island. I've been looking forward to getting to see the place first hand."

"Well, you didn't have to wait as long as some of the recruits. Not to mention that Dad thought this would be a good opportunity for you to see the routine for the fuel run and get some experience with the VTOL engines for real. Scott said you've been doing well with the simulator."

"Yeah. Piloting air craft comes more naturally to me than piloting submarines," Vince said, casting a glance back over his shoulder at Gordon.

Gordon held his hands up in mock surrender, indicating that he wasn't going to touch the comment. I'll let him cool down a little, first, the aquanaut thought.

As they made their way through the complex John told Vince much of the same information Scott had given the other recruits a few months earlier, answering questions as they came up.

"And these are the medical facilities here," John said as the three of them stepped into the room off of the temporary quarters.

"Not one of the most impressive things I've seen since coming to the island," Vince commented.

"Yeah," Gordon said, standing on Vince's left. "Scott and I were going to mention the fact that this place could use some renovations." He leaned forward slightly to look around Vince. "Maybe that's something you could bring up to Mom when she gets back?"

John nodded. "I can do that. We leave it to you and you'll probably forget again."

"I've got a lot of things on my mind."

"Sure you do," the older Tracy said. "Well, now that you've seen most of the complex, how about I show you what you get to fly back to the island now?" he said addressing Vince.

"Just lead the way," Vince replied.

While the other two headed to the fuel tanker's berth, Gordon hung behind. He'd run the necessary diagnostics while they made the fuel run.

Fuel Run by icarus1982 and starrynebula

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Tue, 31 Jul 2012 03:13:35 GMT  
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Around 4:30 pm, Tracy Island (3:30 HI, previous day) . . .



The sounds of Kahanu Iona, a popular Hawaiian musician, filled the apartment of D2. At the table, Lana and Lea were playing a game of Go Fish. The little girl currently had quite a few more matches than her mother. In the kitchen, Aaron was cooking baked mahi mahi, a recipe he had learned from his grandmother. Lana was enjoying a break from the cooking.

The telephone rang, and Aaron stepped away from his prep work, to answer it.

"Hello. Crenshaw residence," he said into the phone.

"This is Jean Harper. Is Lana available, please?"

"Hold one moment, please." The teen placed a hand over the mouth piece of the phone, and addressed his mother. "It's for you, Mom. Mrs. Harper."

Putting down her cards on the table, Lana pushed her chair away from the table. Reaching her son, she took the phone from him, as the teen went back preparing dinner.

"Hi, Jean. How are things there in Hawaii?"

"Same as usual. How's New Zealand?"

"We're settling in. Found a church that we like here and Vince is enjoying his new job."

"How's the new book coming along?"

"Steadily," Lana replied. She had written quite a bit before Vince and Lea got home the previous evening even with taking a break to hear about Aaron's trip.

"Glad to hear it. Sales on Coping At Home are still steady. Did you get the pack of letters I forwarded to you?"

"They came yesterday."

"Good. The main reason I'm calling though is to run something by you. I've been doing some talking to store owners more in your neck of the woods. Thought this might be a good opportunity for you to get out and greet some fans who haven't had a chance to meet you. If you're up for it, I have two stores willing to hold a book signing. One would be in Sydney on February 1st, and the second in Christchurch the following day. Are you interested?"

"Sure. Sounds like a good opportunity to promote the book," Lana replied, even though questions on how to handle it had already started going through her head. Not only would she need to figure out transportation for both events, there was also the issue of keeping Jean from knowing that they weren't exactly living on the mainland.

"I was hoping you would say that. I'll give the two stores a call and close the deals today then. I'll be in touch with all the details in the next two days; tomorrow if I can get things accomplished that fast. I'll have to book flights and hotel rooms for myself. Speaking of which, do you need me to arrange a flight from Christchurch to Sydney for you?"



"No. Don't worry about it. Just tell me what time you need me in Sydney and I'll make my own arrangements," Lana told her. "Could use a ride from the airport to the bookstore and back though."

"I'll have that covered," Jean told her. "I'm making a note of it now."

Lana continued the conversation with Jean for a few more minutes, before hanging up and returning to the game of Go Fish. The upcoming book signings were an exciting prospect and she couldn't wait to break the news to Vince. She also knew her husband would help her figure out answers to all the questions that were going through her mind. [/color]

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Tue, 31 Jul 2012 03:14:49 GMT  
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Wednesday, January 23, 6:15 p.m., Thunderbird Five

Alan sat in Five's small lounge, his feet on the table, the remains of his dinner pushed aside, and a pouch of lemonade at his elbow. It was the first time he'd had all day to relax, and he was using it to catch up on his email. One window was open with his list of mail, and another was open to his favorite sports network. There wasn't much of interest to him there; the racing season hadn't yet started in the States, and though the Paris-to-Dakar race was nearing completion, he hadn't been able to muster much enthusiasm for it. No one he knew was participating.

He opened the first of his emails and scanned it. "Hm... Kenny Malone wants to know when my next race will be. Gotta talk to Dad about that." He gave a sharp bark of laughter as he read about Kenny's latest girlfriend. "If she thinks she's going to get her claws into him, she has another think coming. Kenny's the perpetual bachelor."

Scanning down the rest of his list, he sighed. "Let's see: a bunch of forwards from Gords...I hate to see what weird stuff he's found this time. What's this? A note from John?" Opening, he scanned down. "Ah, yeah, John. I've been doing maintenance on the scope. No, I'm not having a good time up here; it's boring beyond belief this month. Only bright spot has been that rescue in the Mediterranean. Wonder if Dom's okay. He sounded kinda shaky." Glancing down, he smiled. "Ah, an email from Dad and Mom. With pictures of their vacation. That chalet looks nice; I'll have to see if I can get out there sometime before the snow melts." He shook his head slightly. "They look so happy. It's great seeing Dad smile like that."

A chime sounded, announcing the arrival of another email. The address made him take his feet from the table, and sit up straight. "Hot damn! Nikki!"

"Hullo there, Alan.

"I'd have rung you up, but my landlocked mobile doesn't work where I am now, and the satellite phone needs a good recharge and wouldn't you know it? I forgot the charger. I'll get it from the



island as soon as I can.

"How are you? Nothing caught on fire up there yet? Did Gordon leave you any presents? I keep getting these strange emails from him. Where does he find those things?

"Have you heard anything about Luke? How are the children? Has Cherie finished that big project? How is the rest of the family? Thanks for forwarding those pictures from Kyrano and Lisa's honeymoon. It looked as if they enjoyed themselves. Elise has been in touch; it seems she and Virgil are an... ahem... item. Cassie sent me an email the other day, and told me about the Crenshaws. Lea sounds like a doll.

"I heard there was a rescue in the Mediterranean. Is everyone all right? I tried phoning Dom, but he wasn't at home. It feels very odd not to know all the details.

"I'm finally in Auckland. The flight from Heathrow was long; guess I'm spoiled from flying direct. Half my bags were lost for a day... you'd think that in this day and age they could keep bags and passenger together! But now it's all here, and I'm getting settled in my own little flat. Tomorrow I'm going to find out what I need to do so that I can work as a nurse here. Most of the information I've had is spot-on, but some of it conflicts, so I want a definite checklist of what to do. I'll be in classes, but I don't want to depend on your parents for everything, nor do I want to dip into my savings any more than I must.

"I might advertise for a flatmate; I'm not used to living by myself. I mean, on the island I had my own flat, yes, but there were always people around that I knew. Elise often popped by, and so did Dom and Josh. God, I miss them. I miss the infirmary, and working with Dianne. I miss swimming in the pool, and playing basketball.

"And, oh, yeah. I miss you, too. I miss you most of all.

"I'll give you my new mobile number as soon as I have it. My email remains the same. You'll have to reply to get my flat's address. I expect you to come out and visit once you're back home. As much as I like email, and phone, it's better to see you in 3-D, if you understand me.

"Waiting impatiently to hear from you.

"Love,  
Nikki"

Alan smiled and chuckled. "So, she's getting settled in. And classes don't start for a few weeks yet." He pulled up the calendar. "I'll have to make the trip early in the month; don't want to miss Gord's birthday." Choosing a date, he shot off a quick email to his father, asking for that weekend off to see Nikki. Then he settled back in his chair and put his feet up on the table. "Computer, new email." Thinking a moment, he nodded, and began. "Hey, Nikki! I was terribly bored, and ready to throw myself out the airlock when I got your email. You saved my sanity!" He paused, moistening his lips. "Now, which of your questions should I answer first?..."

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Tue, 31 Jul 2012 03:16:27 GMT

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He made his way down the rock corridors of Mateo. Ahead of him was the blond head of John, who was recounting information about the facility they were making their way through. Suddenly, the narrative was pushed to the background as a low rumbling came from above. His feet froze as he glanced upwards to see rocks falling down from behind him. As the ceiling came down around him, he thought he heard Gordon's shout from behind.

"Run!" his mind cried, but his feet wouldn't cooperate.

With a gasp, Vince sat up in bed. Breathing heavily, he looked around at his surroundings. In the dark he could make out the now familiar shapes of the furniture in his new bedroom.

"Honey, are you okay?" Lana softly asked, as she rested a hand on her husband's arm.

"Yeah. Just a bad dream," Vince said, trying to get the image of rocks falling around him to leave his mind. Guess visiting Mateo bothered me more than I thought, Vince thought to himself. "Sorry I woke you up."

"Want to talk about it?"

Vince shook his head. He was sure he'd eventually talk to her about it, as he had in the past. Right now though, it was still too close. The last thing he wanted to do was relive it.

Throwing back the sheet, Vince swung his legs over the side of the bed. "Why don't you go back to sleep? I think I'm going to step outside and try to clear my head."

"Okay. Whenever you want to talk . . ."

"I know," Vince said, leaning over and stopping her words with a kiss.

Vince headed for the dresser. In the dark, he changed into a T-shirt and some jogging shorts. Retrieving a flashlight he headed for the balcony door. The morning air was on the cool side as he made his way to the side stairs.

The island was quiet at this hour of the morning, the sounds of nature being the only interruption of the silence. Vince headed down to the beach, where he turned off the flashlight. He stood there, letting his eyes adjust to the dark. Not far away, the waves crashed onto the beach.

It's been quite awhile since I've been up this early in the morning, Vince thought. I'd forgotten how peaceful this time of day can be.

As his eyes adjusted, Vince started walking down the beach, thinking about his dream and trying to rationalize away his fears.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Tue, 31 Jul 2012 03:33:59 GMT  
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After retrieving a cup of coffee from the kitchen, Scott headed out to the balcony. He figured the combination of caffeine and fresh air would help wake him up while Kyrano finished cooking breakfast.

Scott leaned one arm on the balcony railing and took a sip of the hot beverage. Looking down, he saw Gordon and Aaron conversing by the pool. They're probably finishing up a lesson, he thought, even as he noticed the pool was occupied by someone else. Cassie was reaching one end of the pool as she swam some early morning workout laps. He remembered the dark-haired firefighter mentioning at Penelope's party that she had been on the swim team in junior high. As he watched her swim he could see that training in her technique.

Cassie had been on his mind a lot since the other evening. Though they had spent time together the day before, the topic of Tuesday evening had not come up.

Not that I haven't thought about it since then, Scott admitted to himself, leaning on the railing, the cup grasped in both hands. I just wasn't sure how to bring her son up or even if I should. She needs to work through this at her own pace.

Scott shifted his position, taking another sip of his coffee. The eldest Tracy son kept watching the scene by the pool. Eventually, Aaron left. Probably heading back to his apartment, he mused.

Cassie had reached the end of the pool where Gordon was. The black-haired woman grasped the side of the pool as Gordon squatted down to talk with her. From his vantage point, Scott couldn't make out what the two of them were saying but whatever it was, it made Cassie laugh.

Standing up straighter, he told himself. Cassie is just a friend, just like the other recruits are.

Scott turned away from the railing, taking a gulp of the the cooling liquid. Anything more wouldn't work. Given the situation, the two of us can only be just friends. Anything else wouldn't be appropriate given my position as IR's field commander, he told himself. He crossed the balcony to the door he had exited earlier. Even a friendship is questionable but--given the circumstances--cutting myself off from interacting with the all the recruits on a day-to-day basis just wouldn't work. It's one thing for Virgil or Alan to pursue closer relationships, but given my position, it's not right to be closer to one recruit over the other. It would be unprofessional as well as possibly detrimental to IR and the work we do.

Falling back on what had been drilled into him during his years in the Air Force, the rational part of him could easily convince himself that Cassie could only be a friend, just as all the other recruits had become.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Tue, 31 Jul 2012 03:34:51 GMT  
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Early afternoon, right after lunch...

"Patient has glucose of 30. You give him D50 and he states that he wants to leave. He tries to take out the IV and appears not fully alert. The next step would be to..."

Luke sighed and shut his laptop. I am so NOT in the mood to study today, he thought to himself. "What I need is a decent study partner. One who can actually help me." He nudged Rommel, who was sleeping at his feet, with his toe. The dog merely rolled over, tail wagging sleepily. Luke chuckled. "Some help you are."

He set the computer on the coffee table and leaned back. I could ask Dom to help me. I'm sure he wouldn't mind. But that brings up a whole set of other issues. Luke stared up at the ceiling. Does he want me because he's attracted to me, or because I need looking after? That's how it all started with Barry and me. Is Dom feeling the same way? He's never even given me an indication of feeling like this before. Dammit, I'm so confused... His thoughts were interrupted by the ringing of the door chime.

Rommel sat up, eyes alert. "Come in!" Luke called out.

The door opened and Alex and Tyler walked in. "Hi, Luke!" Alex said.

Luke smiled. "Hey, guys! How are you?" He nodded and signaled Rom, who trotted over to the boys, tail wagging happily.

"Great!" Tyler replied, sitting on the floor to scratch Rom.

Alex handed Luke a basket. "We had fried chicken for lunch and Grandma sent some over for you."

"Terrific. I'm starving. Tell her thank-you for me." Luke walked into the kitchen and put the basket in his nearly empty fridge. "So, what are you guys up to this afternoon?"

"School," Tyler said morosely.

"Hey," Alex piped up. "It's not too bad. It's only one more class and it's science!"

"I have history. Bor-ring," Tyler muttered.

Luke smiled at their banter. "Hey, I have something for you guys. Be right back." He disappeared into his bedroom for a moment, then came back out holding two packages. "Better late than never. Merry Christmas." He handed one to each of the boys.

Both tore into them. "Awesome!" Alex said as he pulled out a green t-shirt with the phrase: Support your local Search and Rescue. Get lost. There was also a ball cap with a SAR Rocky Mountain Division patch on it. "Thanks, Luke!!"

Tyler promptly pulled his t-shirt over his head. "Wait until Mom gets back and we show her!"



"I also have this." Luke handed Alex a computer disc. "Remember how we talked about stocking a trout pond?" The boy nodded. "Well, here's some preliminary data. It looks like it would be too hot for trout, but bass might work. Take a look and tell me what you think. Put a report together for me and then we'll work on the next step."

"Cool!" He glanced down at his watch. "C'mon, Ty, we have to get going."

"Awwww! Do we have to?"

"Tyler, listen to your brother," Luke told him. "Tell you what. I haven't given Rom a good workout since I got here. Go to class then check with your grandmother. If she says it's OK, come get me and we'll go do some training with him."

Tyler jumped up and headed for the door. "We will!!! See you soon, Luke. Bye, Rommel!!!"

With a wave, both boys left. Luke smiled down at his dog. "Well boy, looks like I'll go pack a bag. We have work to do."

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Tue, 31 Jul 2012 03:36:01 GMT

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The north side of the island, around 2:30pm...

Luke, Tyler, Alex and Rommel stood on the beach near the north end of the island. "OK, guys, here's the plan. Tyler, I want you to head back the way we came, then duck into the jungle. Not too far. Find a decent hiding place and stay there." The boy nodded enthusiastically. Luke then turned to Alex. "I want you to head north along the beach for a while before heading into the jungle. Stay away from the cliffs, do you hear me?" Alex also nodded. "Rom and I will wait fifteen minutes, then go searching for Tyler. We'll then head out and try and find you. Alex, if by some chance you find a stream or puddle in the jungle, cross it. Make this hard for him." He glanced down at his watch. "OK, go!"

Both boys sprinted off, each in a different direction. Luke sat down in the sand, idly tossing a stick for Rom to fetch. A few minutes later he got to his feet and whistled to his dog. Kneeling down, he fastened Rom's orange vest on. He grabbed the dog's muzzle and looked into his eyes. "Rommel, time to get to work." The dog instantly came to attention and sat rock still at his master's side. Luke hefted his pack on his back and the two started off down the beach.

As soon as he was out of Luke's sight, Tyler trotted off into the woods. He wove through the underbrush, scouting for a good hiding spot. He spied a medium-sized tree, with plenty of low hanging branches. He quickly scrambled up, and found a decent branch near the top, then settled down to wait.

Alex wandered along the edge of the water until it started to turn rocky. He made his way to the edge of the jungle, skirting the bushes, but still staying in view of the water. He carefully watched



his step. The land here dropped sharply into the ocean, the cliff edges meeting the water about forty feet below. The constant wind at this part of the island had smoothed the land, and made the rocks slick with sea mist.

He was about to turn into the bushes when something in the water caught his eye. He paused for a moment, staring out at the sea. He was rewarded a moment later when he spied a pod of whales, breaching and sounding not far from the island. He crept closer, staying well clear of the edge, trying to get a better look.

A sudden gust of wind tore his new ball cap from his head. He tried to snatch it as it flew past, but missed. The hat landed on the edge of the cliff, a few feet in front of him. He cautiously made his way forward, reaching out to grab it. Suddenly, he slipped on the wet rock and with a yelp, went plummeting off the side of the cliff.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Tue, 31 Jul 2012 03:36:36 GMT

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Luke led Rommel back to where he and the boys had stood. He moved to where the boys had separated, then knelt down and pointed to the tracks in the sand. "Rommel, find." The dog sniffed around a bit, then looked up and barked. "Find him, Rom," Luke said again. Rommel moved forward, nose to the ground. He followed the footprints to the edge of the jungle, then turned and barked again before plunging into the greenery.

Luke followed close behind, giving the dog space but keeping him about four feet in front of him. Rommel suddenly paused, and sniffed, appearing to lose the scent. He looked up at his master. "Find him, Rommel. Find him." The dog nosed around a bit more, then looked back and barked before moving forward. Less than ten minutes later, they paused at the foot of a tree. Rommel looked up and barked sharply, standing on his hind legs and resting his forepaws on the tree. Luke joined him and looked up. "Found ya, Tyler. Good job."

The boy waved then skirted down the tree. He stopped in front of Rommel and held out his hand. The dog sniffed him, circling all around his body, then woofed. Luke grinned. "Good boy, Rommel. Good boy." He pulled a treat out of his pocket and handed it to the dog.

"That was fun!" Tyler said. "Can I come with you to find Alex?"

"Sure." They made their way back to the beach. "I need to sit for a second though." Luke sat down on a boulder and pulled off his back pack. "Want a chocolate bar?" he asked Tyler.

"Yeah!!" Tyler parked himself next to Luke and took the offered bar. While eating, he peered down into Luke's open bag. "What kind of stuff do you have in there?"

"Well, snacks for all four of us, water too. Then a first aid kit, some ropes and calipers. Basic



stuff."

"What do you need ropes for?"

Luke shrugged. "Nothing at the moment. But I'm working on building my strength back up and this is a good way to do it. I can't carry a full pack yet, so I just put a few things in, and add more each time."

Tyler nodded. "That's a pretty good idea."

Luke chuckled. "Thanks, I'm glad you think so." He zipped up the pack and turned to the boy. "Ready to go find your brother?"

Tyler jumped down off the rock. "Yep! Let's go!"

"Easy there, Tiger. Stay back here with me, quietly. Let Rommel do his stuff." The boy held back as Luke approached his dog. "Rom, find." He pointed to the ground. Rom sniffed and looked up at Tyler, whining. "No, find him." He once again pointed to the sand. The dog bent down and nosed around. Then his head snapped up and he looked northwards. Giving a low bark, he trotted off, Luke and Tyler following close behind.

They walked for about quarter of a mile before the beach ended and Rommel moved into the jungle. He then paused and looked back. "What is it, boy?" Luke asked. The dog merely whined and pawed at the ground.

"What's wrong?" Tyler asked.

Luke frowned. "I'm not sure." He looked around. "I don't really see anything. Stay here." He moved forward, breaking out of the brush to scan the cliff. Rommel pushed past him, nose to the ground. Suddenly the dog sprinted forward. "Rommel! Get back here!" He cursed under his breath as he followed the dog. As he finally got out into the open, he scanned the cliff for Rom. "Rommel! Where...Oh, God, no!!"

Spying the discarded ball cap on the edge of the cliff, Luke raced forward. "Alex!! Alex, answer me!!" He came to a stop at the top of the cliff and looked down, heart pounding.

On a ledge about fifteen feet below, lay Alex. His left arm seemed to be twisted at unnatural angle, and he appeared to be unconscious. Dear God, please let him only be stunned, Luke prayed as he pulled off his backpack.

"Luke?" Tyler called out, breaking through the trees. "What's going on?"

"Stay back," he snapped as he quickly pulled out some rope. "Rommel, guard." He pointed over to the boy and the dog hurried over. He tied a length of rope around his waist and pressed the button on his wrist-com. "This is Luke, come in, Base."

"Hey, Luke, it's John. What's up?"



"John, I have a situation here. Tyler and Alex were helping me with Rommel and Alex is hurt."

"Hurt? Hurt how?"

Luke filled John in on what had happened. "We're on the northern face of the island. About a mile from the house."

"I can track you with the microchips. I'll let Scott and the others know and get rolling."

"Hold on a sec." Luke quickly anchored a belay line to the rock, and grunting, pulled it tight.

"What are you doing?" John asked, though he suspected he already knew.

"I'm going after him. He's down about fifteen feet, on a rock ledge."

"I don't think that's a good idea. Help is on the way. Wait until we get there."

"There's no time, John. What if he wakes up and panics, rolling off the edge? Or worse. What if he's too badly hurt to wake up?"

"Dammit, you're right. But be careful. We don't need to rescue two of you."

"FAB. Get here as soon as you can." Luke cut the connection and looked up at Tyler. "Your brothers are on their way. I need you to stay put until they get here."

The boy nodded. "Are you going down there?"

"Yes. Alex needs help. We can't wait for the others. Stay there," Luke said again. He turned towards the cliff edge, and taking a deep breath, started his descent.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Tue, 31 Jul 2012 03:37:17 GMT

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"Come on, honey."

Drew was sitting under the shady arbor, reading a book, when Maggie came up and snatched the book from his hands.

"Hey! I was reading that!"

"I know, but we have to set up the infirmary." Maggie tucked the book firmly under one arm and extended her hands to her husband. He frowned, but took her hands, and allowed her to pull him to his feet.



As he followed her inside, he asked, "What's going on? Who's the patient?"

Maggie shot him a look, her face showing that she was both troubled and exasperated. "Alex. John says he's fallen off a cliff..."

"What!?" Drew's eyes widened. "Where? When?"

"I'm not sure where, just that it's at the north end of the island." As Maggie stepped into the sick room, the lights switched on. "When? It seems Luke just called in a few minutes ago. The boys are preparing the family helijet. Luke is going down to the ledge..."

"Luke is doing what?" Drew's training had kicked in, and he was already pulling out the equipment he thought he'd need. He paused, frowning. "He's supposed to be on light duty."

"Right, but from what I've heard, Alex is on a narrow ledge and unconscious. If he wakes, he'll be disoriented and could roll off..." She let her voice trail off, letting the implications of her words sink in.

Her husband drew in a deep breath and let it out in a huff. "Okay. I get the picture. As long as Luke doesn't try anything stupid, like hauling Alex up himself, he'll probably be okay. But I'll insist on looking him over, too."

Maggie shook her head and rolled her eyes. "I'm sure Luke will be fine. It's Alex we need to worry about right now."

They worked in silence for a bit, Maggie making sure the sick beds were clean and their linen was fresh, Drew stepping into the scanner room and preparing it for both scanning and possible surgery. He stopped long enough to pop his head into the sick room and ask, "Has anyone told Dianne and Jeff yet?"

Maggie scowled at him. "Not that I know of. And it's better that they hear about this once Alex is rescued and treated. They don't need this kind of worry while they're on vacation. You hear me, Andrew Barclay Carmichael?"

It was time for Andrew to shake his head. "I hear you, Margaret Jean."

There was a moment of silence, then Maggie said softly, "I'm sorry, Drew. I'm just worried. Seems even Dianne's little ones can't catch a break."

Drew came over and put his arms around his wife from behind. "I'm worried, too, but we don't have the luxury of being great-aunt and uncle right now. Doctor and nurse until he's treated." He rested his chin on her head and said, "You might want to reconsider your words, too. Alex may very well have 'caught a break'."

Though Drew couldn't see her face, he could tell when she caught the double-entendre of her own words by the way her shoulders relaxed. "Oh, Drew. You know I didn't mean it that way."

He chuckled. "Yes, I do. Just wanted to see if you were listening to yourself."



"You know I never do that. It's what gets me in the most trouble!" She turned around and gave him a kiss. "Now, let's get this place ready."

"Yes'm!" Drew gave her a mock salute, and went back to the surgery.

Maggie watched him go, and shook her head, muttering, "From my mouth to God's ears. I'd better see what kind of cast cover they have around here."

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Tue, 31 Jul 2012 03:39:20 GMT

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Sweat ran down Luke's back as he slowly lowered himself down the cliff face. He paused a moment to glance down and assure himself that Alex hadn't moved. He wasn't sure if he was relieved or terrified to see the boy in the same position. Taking a deep breath, he started down again.

He had made it another couple feet when his wrist-com beeped. "Luke?" John asked.

He continued his decent, not able to find a decent hand-hold to pause.

"Luke? Is everything all right?"

"Hold on a sec," he muttered to himself, wincing as he reached a little too far.

"Luke! Answer me! What's going on?" John's voice was sharp with anxiety.

Finally he reached the ledge and pressed his com. "I'm down. Give me a minute," he grunted. He quickly fastened his rope to the cliff and knelt down to check Alex.

The boy was pale, his left arm bent wrong at the shoulder. Luke ran his hands lightly over Alex, relieved to find no obvious broken bones. He was loathe to move him however, until he awakened and Luke could assess him more thoroughly. "John? I've reached Alex. It doesn't look like anything's broken, but he's definitely got a dislocated shoulder."

"Is he still unconscious?"

"Yes. Breathing is even and... " He gently pried the boy's eyelids open. "Pupils are equal and reactive." He probed Alex's head, finding a small trace of blood behind his ear. "He has a small head contusion, but no immediate sign of major trauma."

"Thank God. Scott and, Elise are airborne in the heli-jet. They should be there shortly. Gordon and Virgil are en-route on the hover bikes."

"FAB."



There was a short pause before John spoke again. "How are you doing?"

"I'm fine," Luke said shortly. "Let's worry about Alex." As if on cue, the boy stirred, his eyelids fluttering. Luke placed his hands lightly on his chest. "Alex? Alex, can you hear me?"

Alex struggled to open his eyes. "My... hat... "

Luke smiled. "I've got it, kiddo. C'mon, open your eyes."

"Luke?" He finally focused and stared up at Luke. "Where am I? What happened?"

"Easy, Alex. Just lay still." Luke pressed his wrist-com again. "John, he's awake and talking."

They both heard John's sigh of relief. "Don't worry, Alex. Help is on the way."

"Help? Why do I..." His voice cut off in a scream of pain as he struggled to sit up.

Luke pressed him back down, kneeling on his left arm to prevent it from moving. "Alex! Don't move!"

"It... it hurts!" he sobbed.

"I know it does, pal." He carefully pulled off his belt. "Alex? I'm going to strap your arm down. It'll keep it from moving. I won't lie to you; it's going to hurt. I want you to close your eyes and count to one hundred. Out loud so I can hear you, OK?" The boy clenched his eyes closed and nodded. "Good. Go."

"One. Two. Three... "

Luke moved as quickly and gently as he could, steeling himself against Alex's whimpers of pain. "I'm almost done. I'm going to tie a rope around you so you can't roll off." After a few more moments, Luke had Alex's arm belted securely to his side then fastened another line to the cliff face. "There we go, done. Good man." He patted the boy's uninjured shoulder.

"I want my mom," Alex whimpered, tears running down his cheeks.

"I know you do." He heard the faint thump of rotor blades. "Hang in there; sounds like the cavalry is here."

"Luke? Scott says he's just about at your position. Can you see them yet?" John asked.

"Negative. But I can hear them." Suddenly a shadow washed over him. Looking up he saw the silver, black and gold heli-jet appear. He waved with his left arm as the craft circled around and came to a stationary position above them.

"Luke, we've got you." Scott's voice came across the wrist-com. "We're going to lower the platform and get Alex off first."



"FAB." Luke turned and smiled down at Alex. "Hear that? Your brother is here. Hang tight and we'll have you home in no time."

Alex tried to smile. "G-good."

They both looked up as the platform lowered towards them. As it got closer, Luke was stunned to see Dominic with Scott. "What are you doing here?" he demanded as the platform reached them.

"I could ask you the same question," Dom snapped back. He focused his attention on Alex and his tone softened. "Well, lad, you've gotten yourself in a mess. Let's get you home."

Scott held his younger brother's hand as Luke and Dominic carefully slid the back board under him. He then nudged Luke aside and lifted Alex onto the platform. "Hang in there, kiddo. Uncle Drew is waiting for you back at the house. We'll be there in no time."

"It hurts, Scott. It hurts." Alex's eyes filled with tears again.

"I know." He looked up at Dom. "Are we ready?" The nurse nodded. "Then let's go."

Dominic turned to Luke. "We'll be back for you."

"No, I'll be fine. Get the boy back to the house. I'll meet you there."

Dom shook his head. "No. We..."

"You're wasting time, Dom. Get him back." Luke looked up as he heard his name shouted. Gordon was peering down over the top. "I'll be fine. Go!"

Muttering under his breath, Dominic started the platform rising. Luke watched until it reached the heli-jet and sped off. He retied the rope around his waist and, taking a deep breath, started upwards. Halfway up, his arms started shaking and spots danced before his eyes. He stopped and clung to the cliff face, breathing heavily.

"Luke! Hold on, we'll hoist you up!" Gordon called out from above. Luke merely waved and a moment later, felt his line go taut. He walked slowly up the rock, letting them pull from above. When he reached the top, he was grabbed under the shoulders and hauled away from the edge.

Biting back a moan, Luke dropped to one knee, his left hand gripping his right shoulder tightly. He tried to breathe through clenched teeth. Someone pulled his chin up and placed a mask over his face. Breathing in the pure oxygen cleared his head a little and he looked up.

Virgil knelt in front of him, concern written all over his face. "Relax, Luke. Just breathe."

"Working... on it." He closed his eyes again, only to snap them open a moment later. "Tyler!"

Virgil pushed the mask back on. "He's right there with Gordon. We'll just wait a few minutes and see if you're up to riding back on the bikes or if we'll have Elise and Scott come out again."



Luke nodded and sat back on the rock, his head resting on his knees. A wet nose nudged under his hands and he smiled. "Hey, Rom. Good boy."

Gordon joined them. "Damn dog nearly took my hand off when I went for Tyler. But we're buddies now, aren't we, pooch?" He ruffled the dog's fur.

Luke smiled weakly. "Told him to guard... waiting for me... "

"That's what I figured. He calmed down when he saw you pop up from below."

"How are you doing?" Virgil asked.

Luke pulled the mask off. "I think I'm good. Could you give me a hand up?" He held his left arm out and Gordon carefully helped him to his feet. He took a cautious breath and nodded. "I'm ready to get out of here."

"Then let's go." Virgil led them over to the hover bikes.

Tyler rushed forward, wrapping his arms around Luke. "You're OK!"

Luke chuckled and ran his hand over the boy's head. "I sure am. And so is your brother." He smiled. "You did great, too, waiting with Rommel." Tyler blushed and shuffled his feet.

"C'mon, Ty. You're riding with me." Gordon swung the boy up onto the back of the bike and started it. "We'll see you back at the house!" he called out as he sped off.

Virgil rolled his eyes. "Always an adventure. OK, your turn. Drew wants to see you in the infirmary, too."

"I figured as much," Luke sighed. "Come on, boy. Up." The dog leapt up and lay down at Luke's command. Virgil fastened the straps, securing the dog to the pad on the back of the hoverbike, then indicated for Luke to climb on.

"Ready?" At Luke's nod, Virgil started the bike and followed Gordon back to the Villa.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Tue, 31 Jul 2012 03:41:09 GMT

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If Drew was surprised by the crowd waiting in the infirmary, he showed no sign of it. He just waved the anti-gravity stretcher through, letting Dom and Maggie take charge of a drowsy Alex. The Tracy sons got out of the way quickly at Maggie's glare. Leaving his brothers -- and Lisa - to oversee Alex's transfer to one of the sick room's beds, Scott stepped up to Drew, clearing his



throat.

"Before you ask, Scott, he's going to be fine." Drew glanced quickly over to the bed, and back again, meeting Scott's eyes firmly. "He's drowsy from the light sedation I used while putting his shoulder to rights. All of his neuro checks have been fine so far, but I want to keep him here a few hours for observation. At least until he's slept off the sedative, and we can introduce pain meds. I also want to see the muscular inflammation decrease somewhat before he leaves here." He raised an eyebrow. "He's not going to be a happy camper for a bit, I'm afraid."

"Yeah, that's true." Scott turned to watch Maggie shoo his brothers away from the bedside. Each of them managed to get in a quick pat on Alex's good shoulder, or a brief hair tousle before being ousted. Cherie had come, as well as Tyler. The girl gave her younger brother a kiss on the forehead, then made a beeline to Scott's side, as-yet-unshed tears pooling in her eyes. Tyler, on the other hand, climbed up on the bed and sat at his brother's feet, video game in hand. Lisa tweaked the covers that Maggie had pulled up, and found extra pillows to support Alex's immobilized arm

"Wait a minute, Cherry, until I see Alex for myself, okay?"

Scott excused himself from Drew, and went to Alex's bedside. "Get some rest, kiddo," he said in his best cajoling big-brother tone. "You'll be up and about soon enough." He tousled the already mussed hair. "See you soon."

"Scott?" Alex's voice was slightly slurred.

"What is it, bud?"

"When's Mom and Dad coming home?"

Scott had no real answer for that, but he said, "Soon, bud. They'll be home soon."

Alex yawned. His eyes blinked against the drowsiness he felt. "Good."

Scott smiled. "Don't fight it. Get some sleep."

"Okay." Alex closed his eyes and sighed deeply. Scott got out of the way as Maggie bustled in again, but not before he gave Tyler's head an affectionate rub.

Sitting on the other bed, looking both weary and pained, was Luke. He watched the other Tracys interact with Alex, and smiled slightly. He could be forgiven if he jumped a little when Dom touched him on the shoulder.

"Your turn," the nurse said, hooking a thumb in the direction of the surgery. Luke sighed, and slid off the other bed, groaning slightly as he eased himself to the floor.

"Hey, Luke?"

Both Luke and Dom paused as Scott came up. He put out his hand. "Thanks. For helping Alex."



Luke sighed, and took Scott's firm grip. "You're welcome."

Before any other Tracys could step up, Drew stepped in. "All right, you lot. Out!" The distraction gave Luke and Dom time to make it to the surgery. The last thing Luke heard before the door closed behind them was Scott asking, "Uh, Uncle Drew? Who is going to tell Mom and Dad?"

As he climbed onto the diagnostic bed, Luke groaned a little.

"Still in pain?" Dom asked, a concerned frown on his face.

"Just achy." Not quite the truth, but not a lie either. Luke glanced over at the door. "Don't know why they're thanking me. I'm the one that got the kid in trouble in the first place."

"Well, I guess they're not thinking about that right now."

Dom's words became uncharacteristically flinty, his face suddenly hard. Luke stared at him, his mouth open slightly, but before he could challenge the nurse Drew entered. Dom's face slid back into professional neutrality.

Drew was scowling, shaking his head, and muttering. "Nevah knew mah new great-nephews were such cowards. They go out an' rescue othah people all the time, but when it comes to tellin' theyah fathah and mothah some bad news..." He shook his head one more time, then turned his attention to Luke. "So, get that shirt off, and let's see how badly yew've messed up all that surgeon's fahne work." With a sigh, Luke unbuttoned his shirt. Once it was off, both Drew and Dom helped their patient lie back on the scanner.

"Well," Drew said from where he sat at the console, his drawl diminishing. "It doesn't look too bad. Some muscle strain and inflammation." He shot a look at Luke. "You'll need some anti-inflammatory meds for that, and maybe muscle relaxants to help you when it comes time to sleep. You should ice it, and maybe get in some more therapy exercises." Drew nodded at Dom, who helped Luke back up into a sitting position. "How's the breathing?"

"A lot better," Luke replied. "The O-two helped."

"Let me be the judge of that." Drew put in his ear buds, and rubbed the stethoscope's surface to warm it. He listened to Luke's heart and lungs, prompting him to take in deep breaths and let them out slowly. Finally, he nodded.

"Sounds good. You can put your shirt back on."

As Luke got dressed again, Drew went back to the computer console. "What do you have left of the meds you were prescribed stateside?"

"I'm pretty sure I have a couple of weeks' worth of pain reliever, and at least a week of muscle relaxant." Luke's voice sounded sure.

"All right. If you have that much, I won't write a scrip for it. However, if you run out, or find you



have less than you thought, I'll leave an order in your file so you can refill it."

After a moment's pause, Luke asked, "Am I good to go, Doc?"

"Yes, you are." Drew rose as Luke slid off the scanner. "And for the record," he held out his hand, "you did damn fine work out there."

Luke took Drew's hand and mumbled, "Thanks." Then he was off like a shot.

Drew watched him go, and sighed. Then he straightened. "Well, Dom, looks like that crisis is over. Let's clean this up..."

"I c'n handle it, Doc." Dom gave Drew a lopsided smile. "Won't take but a minute."

Drew snorted a laugh. "And here I was, hoping to forestall the inevitable." At Dom's quizzical look, he added, "Looks like Lisa is going to be the one to tell Jeff and Di what happened here today, and I'm expected to back her up."

A slow grin spread over Dom's face. "Better you than me, Doc. Better you than me."

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Tue, 31 Jul 2012 03:43:58 GMT

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[face=Arial]Callie was hard at work in the lab after working in the pod bay. Her attention, though, was focused on seeing the heli-jet take off just a couple of hours earlier as she made her way from the pod bay back to the lab. I can't stop thinking about it, she thought. I wonder why the heli-jet was needed? Could be for training? Perhaps there was a rescue and I didn't know about it? Oh, no, get real. If there were a rescue, everyone would know about it by now. If I don't contact John, I'm gonna go nuts.

Will was also at work in the lab when he saw the concerned look on Callie's face. "Hey, what's the matter?"

"We both saw the heli-jet take off when we were coming back from the pod bay. I can't help but wonder about it."

"You know, I'll admit I'm a little curious myself. Maybe we need to contact John and see what exactly is going on."

"I'm with you. I'll be back in a few minutes."

She walked to the nearby phone. "Okay, time to find out what's going on here."

At the desk, John noticed the light. "That's the lab. It's got to be either Callie or Will."



Answering it, he said, "This is John."

"Hey, it's Callie. Will and I were on the way back to the lab when we saw the heli-jet take off. What happened?"

With a sigh, John said, "Alex fell off a cliff, about 15--"

"Fell off a cliff!? Is he all right?"

"Take it easy. According to Luke, he's suffered a dislocated arm and a head contusion, but it appears to be nothing major."

"Luke?" Callie felt like her heart had just jumped into her throat. She tried hard to control her voice, only barely succeeding. "What in the world was Luke doing there?"

"Rescuing Alex, apparently. More or less against doctor's orders to be on light duty."

Callie sighed. "I'm just glad they'll both be okay."

"Yeah, but if Luke has injured himself again, a couple of doctors are not going to be happy with him. I'm just relieved he did reach Alex in time."

"If anyone had to get to Alex, I'm glad it was Luke." After a long exhale, she added, "Thank goodness he has those SAR skills, and no injury will stop him from doing his job."

"That's for sure. I know Alex is doing okay, and Luke's injuries didn't seem serious enough to send him to the mainland."

"I see. The only thing is... what about Mr. and Dr. Tracy? Are they going to know about this?"

"They'll have to eventually. I don't think Mom'll be happy with what Luke did, but when she learns about Alex, she may not be so hard."

"So am I, John. So am I. Thanks for the info." Hanging up the phone, she walked back to Will. "I know why the heli-jet took off." She told him all the details.

"Whoa," Will said, following with a low whistle. "That was a close call. I'm happy both of them are out of danger."

"Me, too, Will. John'll keep us up-to-date when he can."

"Oh, boy, when Mr. Tracy and his wife return..."

"I don't even want to think about that. I say leave that one to Mr. Tracy. I'm going to stay out of that as much as I possibly can."

"We'll think more about it after work."



"Yeah, you're right. Let's get back to it."

As Callie worked with a Bunsen burner, she thought, I know they'll be okay, so why can't I stop worrying? Alex isn't the one I'm concerned for. Just... Luke. She rubbed her chin while looking at the chemical. You'd better face it, girl. He may never return the feeling, but you've definitely got a crush on Luke.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Tue, 31 Jul 2012 03:44:49 GMT  
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Thursday, January 24, 2069, 4:30 p.m., Tracy Island (10:30 p.m., Wednesday, January 23, New Hampshire)

Lisa smoothed her hair as she sat down before the kitchen vidphone. Drew, a cup of coffee in hand, was seated at the little table where his sister and Kyrano took many of their meals.

"You sure you want to do this?"

Lisa turned to her younger brother, an eyebrow raised. "Of coahse..." She cleared her throat, and fought to keep her drawl under control. "Of course. She'll listen to me if she'll listen to anybody."

"What about Jeff?"

Lisa snorted a laugh. "Jeff Tracy is a teddy bear. Well, to me, anyway." She shook her head. "After putting up with Garrett all those years, a mere multi-billionaire is a piece of cake."

"A teddy bear, huh?" Drew sipped his coffee, using his cup to hide his smile. "I'll tell him you said so."

Lisa snorted again, a soft, offended huff. Then she told the machine to dial Jeff's satellite phone.

In New Hampshire, Jeff and Dianne were cuddling before the fireplace, watching the wood spark and pop. Jeff has his arm around his wife's shoulders, and she had her feet tucked up under her, her head on his chest. She shifted a little, and groaned as she rolled one shoulder.

"Are you okay?" Jeff asked, suddenly solicitous. "That was a nasty spill you took."

Dianne hummed a little, a tuneless sound. "Yes, I'm all right. Just a bit sore. I expect I'll be stiff in the morning."

"Well, we can let the Jacuzzi work its magic." He glanced over at the tall windows, where fat snowflakes plummeted down, whirling around in the glare of the security light. They joined the thick layer of snow that already lay on the chalet's deck. "It's not like we'll be going anywhere, not with that much snow on the ground. I understand that they may close the airports."



"Then I'm glad..." Her thought was interrupted by Jeff's phone ringing. He extricated himself from their clinch and went off to find the instrument.

"It's your mother," he said, calling from the bedroom.

Dianne stifled another groan as she unfolded her legs. "Why is she calling us? Is something wrong?"

"Hello, Lisa." Jeff's smiling face appeared on the viewscreen. "To what do we owe this pleasure?"

"Hello, Jeff." Lisa fidgeted a little in her seat. "How are you? Are you having a good time? What's the weather like out there." Her words came out a good deal faster than she had planned, and she grimaced a little.

"We're fine. We went skiing today, and Dianne took a little tumble, but she's just stiff and sore. The weather? We have heavy snow and we're pretty much snowed in." Jeff frowned at his mother-in-law's picture. "What's going on there? What's wrong?"

Lisa swallowed, and her shoulders slumped. "Theyah's no easy way to say it, so Ah'll jes' come out an' say it. Alex fell off a cliff today."

She regretted her words the minute she saw the blood drain from Jeff's face. He took a deep breath and let it out slowly. His face regained some of its color, but his expression was thunderous. "Now, let me get this straight, Lisa. You say Alex fell off a cliff?! What. The Hell. Happened?"

In the background, there was a shriek of "What!" and like a flash, Dianne had ripped the phone from Jeff's hands. "Alex? A cliff? What are yew talkin' about, Ma?"

All of a sudden, Lisa felt very weary. She shook her head. "Jes' listen to me, an' let Jeff listen in, too, so Ah only have t' tell this once. First o' all, Alex is okay. He had a bump on his head, an' a dislocated shoulder, both o' which have been tended. He was out helpin' Luke do some trainin' with his dog, he an' Tyler, an' he slipped on some rocks at the north end o' the ahland. Fell about fifteen feet onto a ledge. Rommel led Luke to him, an' Luke went down on a rope t' get him an' make shuah he didn't fall off. He also called John in th' office. John sent out Scott an' some othahs in th' helijet, an' they got Alex off'n th' ledge. Drew treated him an' he's in the infirmary ovahnaht foah observation. Maggie's with him now." She paused. "Okay, you ken ask yoah questions."

"It was an accident?" Jeff asked, his scowl ratcheting down to a less intimidating frown.

Lisa was visibly relieved at the change. "Tha's what Ah heah. His cap blew off'n his head an' when he went t' fetch it, he slipped on th' rocks theyah. Ah'm told theyah slick from sea mist."

"Then I think I know where it happened."

"What the hell was Luke thinkin', usin' mah kids lahk that?!" Dianne's face was red with anger. "Who was watchin' them?!"



Jeff put a hand on Dianne's shoulder. "If I recall correctly, Di, you said they could help him with Rommel."

This made Dianne stop in her tracks. "But... but... I never meant..." With that, she handed the phone back to Jeff, and buried her face in her hands, sobbing.

"How's Alex?" Jeff asked, his tone sounding resigned.

Drew moved in to peer over Lisa's shoulder. "He's gonna be fine, Jeff. I had to lightly sedate him to fix his shoulder. He was a bit dazed... Luke said he wasn't conscious at first. His neuro checks were fine, though; he answered all my questions, and there's no physical sign of concussion trauma. But I'm keeping him overnight, just to be sure. He's likely sleeping off the sedative right now." He paused. "Y'know, someone mentioned that if Luke hadn't been there, Alex might have rolled off the ledge."

Jeff paled again, and took in another deep breath, then cleared his throat. "How's Tyler?"

Drew smiled a little. "Perfectly fine. Sticking close to big brother, though. Anna might find this comes up in conversation when she gets back."

"How's Luke?" Jeff only just remembered Luke's condition.

"Can't discuss that with you, Jeff." Drew was matter-of-fact about the subject. "I can tell you that I checked him over too, and released him to his apartment."

Lisa now spoke up. "Alex did ask when you would be coming home."

Jeff glanced outside again, then shook his head. "Not for a couple of days, I'm afraid. It's been snowing hard all day, to the extent that we're pretty much socked in. The main roads are fairly clear, I think, but no one's thinking about the little side roads... or the helijet pad, I reckon. The last report was that air traffic was being rerouted to the coastal areas, where they're not getting quite as much of this." He glanced over at Dianne, whose breath was hitching from her cry, but was otherwise calm. "Di?"

She came over and took the phone. "Is Alex awake?"

Lisa shook her head, and Drew looked sad. "No, he's likely asleep," Drew said again.

"How about we call again early tomorrow afternoon?" Lisa suggested. "He should be awake then and it won't be too late where you are."

"That would be fine." Jeff took the phone again. "We're not going anywhere for a couple more days." He made a rueful face. "Even we Tracys have to bow to Mother Nature... once in a while."

Drew snorted a laugh, and Lisa smiled. Dianne stood next to Jeff, and he put his arm around her. "Give him... give him hugs and kisses from us, would you, Ma?"

"Of course. I'll give them all hugs and kisses from you... even the big boys."



This finally brought a chuckle from Dianne. "Love you, Ma. Uncle Drew... thanks. I'm glad you were there for him."

"So was I, truth be told," Drew said quietly. "Now, it's late over there, isn't it? Get some rest."

"Yes, Doctor."

It was Jeff's turn to talk. "Thanks, Drew, for taking care of my boy."

"You're welcome, Jeff. Anytime. Now go sleep!"

Drew pulled back, returning to the table and his cooled cup of coffee. Lisa lingered. "You two take care of yourselves and don't take any chances, y'hear? These kids will need both of you rested and whole when you come home." She shook a finger at her son-in-law. "Take care of my daughter."

"I will, Lisa. We'll talk to you tomorrow. Goodbye." Jeff finally ended the call, and put down his phone. He turned to find Dianne at the windows, staring through the pulled back slats at the swirling flakes.

"I used to love snow," she said with a sigh. "I loved it when we got a day -- or more -- off from school. Even when it was the kids getting the time off. Now..." She leaned back a little as Jeff wrapped his arms around her from behind. "... I think I hate it."

"Don't say that," he told her, his warm breath caressing her ear. "There's magic in it still. I think we should go out in the morning and make a huge snowman... just like my boys and I used to do when we lived in Kansas."

Dianne chuckled. "We had snow days with as little as an inch on the ground, if the weatherman predicted more. We never got to make a huge snowman. Just little puny ones."

"Then we'll be from Kansas tomorrow and play in the snow, like the kids we still are inside." He rested his chin on the top of her head. "Whattaya say, Mrs. Tracy?"

She turned her head, dislodging his chin so her mouth could find his, then said, "Sounds like a plan, Mr. Tracy."

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings

Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Tue, 31 Jul 2012 03:46:13 GMT

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The Cliff House, early evening...

Luke leaned forward, resting his left hand on the wall and let the steaming hot water run over his



back. He closed his eyes and tried to ignore the throbbing in his shoulder and chest. After a few more minutes, he shut the water off and stepped out. He wrapped a towel around his waist and stepping over Rommel, walked into the bedroom. He shook his hair out of his eyes and glared up at his bangs. I really need a haircut.

He paused in front of the mirror, his eyes going to the myriad of surgical scars on his chest. Sighing, he toweled dry and pulled on a faded Rockies t-shirt and a pair of cut-offs. He sat down on the bed and pulled a bottle out of the nightstand drawer. He shook two pills out in his hand and wandered back into the kitchen for water.

Luke opened the freezer and pulled out a package of frozen peas, then waited a moment before pulling out a similar bag of carrots. He grinned ruefully down at Rommel. "Bet Mrs. Tracy thought I would be eating these instead of using them for ice packs."

He went into the living room and settled down on the couch. He placed the bag of peas on his right shoulder, then put the carrots on his chest. He leaned back and closed his eyes. He felt Rom nudge his muzzle under his hand and smiled. "Good job today, Mutt." The dog's tail thumped happily.

He was just dozing off when he heard a tap on the French doors. He opened his eyes and saw Elise standing in the doorway. "Hey, come on in."

Rommel trotted over to her as she walked inside. "Hi, Rommel!" She bent to scratch his head, keeping the container in her other hand, well out of reach. She looked over at Luke. "I made you some tortilla soup. Want some now or should I put it away?"

Luke eased himself into a sitting position, wincing as he sat up. "I'll take some now, thanks. I just took some pain meds and they do a number on me if I take them on an empty stomach."

She smiled. "Be right back." She went into the kitchen, returning a moment later with a bowl of steaming soup and a spoon. She placed it on the coffee table and sat down next to him. She eyed the packages of frozen vegetables dubiously. "How are you feeling?"

Luke shrugged as he reached for the spoon. "Not too bad I guess. Achy mostly. Dr. Carmichael doesn't think I did any more damage. Just aggravated everything." He took a sip of soup. "This is great, thanks."

"You're welcome." She glanced over at him. "You know, you scared us today. We got the call that Alex had fallen and you were going down after him." She wrapped her arms around herself. "I still can't believe you did that." She turned to face him. "You did good work out there, but did it ever occur to you to wait for us?"

"Wait for you? I didn't know when you'd get there! What if Alex..." Luke's voice shook. "What if he was dead? It was my fault he ended up on that ledge!" He got up and paced the room, his movements stiff and agitated.

"Dammit, Luke, it wasn't your fault! It was an accident."



He shook his head. "No, it wasn't. I shouldn't have let him out of my sight. This never should have happened." He leaned heavily on the table. "It won't happen again."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Elise walked over to him shaking her head and huffing. She put a hand on his shoulder. "Look at you. Mr. and Dr. Tracy won't have to beat you up over this; you're doing a fine job all by yourself." She paused. "Alex needed you and you were there."

"He wouldn't have needed me if I hadn't sent him and Tyler into the jungle."

"Oh, and I suppose you told him to walk over and fall off the edge of the cliff, right?"

Luke glared at her, his grey eyes flashing angrily. "It wasn't his fault."

"And it wasn't yours either! Why can't you get it through that thick skull of yours! It. Was. An. Accident!!"

Rommel whimpered and lay down under the coffee table, his eyes on his master.

"Don't you yell at me," he snarled at the same time throwing a sharp look at his dog.

"I'll yell at you whenever I please," she snapped back. "Especially when you're acting like a moron!"

"Oh, so now I'm a moron?"

"If the shoe fits!" She stood glaring a moment, then her expression softened. "Luke, I'm only telling you this because I care about you."

He whirled on her, his temper exploding. "I don't need taking care of! If that was the case I would have never left Montana! I wish everyone would just leave me the hell alone!"

Elise's own temper flared. "You want to be left alone? Fine! I'm leaving!"

"Good!!"

"You can take care of yourself!"

"I will!!!"

Elise turned on her heel and stormed out the door, muttering under her breath.

Luke stood where he was for a moment, then went and picked up his empty bowl. He clenched it tightly for a moment, then turned and hurled it at the nearest wall. The ceramic broke with a resounding crash causing Rommel to leap up with a sharp bark. "Rommel! Go lay down!" Luke snapped. The dog's tail dropped between his legs and he slunk into the bedroom.

Luke stood with his eyes closed, his whole body quivering with emotion. I'm useless here, he thought to himself. I never should have come back.

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Australia, Thursday, Jan 24th . . .

"Jenny, love, you don't need to help me. I can wash up the dishes myself and besides you're my guest," Sandra Finch said as she noticed her daughter following her into the kitchen. Wendy, Murphy and Darren had left for their respective homes after they had all shared dinner together.

"I want to help. Besides, the task will go quicker with the both of us," Jenny told her mother. "You wash and I'll rinse and dry. Then we can spend out last evening together chatting."

"Fair enough," Sandra said, consenting. She could tell by the tone in her daughter's voice that she wasn't going to be able to talk her out of helping.

Mother and daughter worked in silence, quickly getting through the dishes that had accumulated throughout the day. When the task was complete, the two retreated to the sitting room, cups of hot tea in hand.

"So, what do you think of Darren?" Sandra Finch ventured. She was happy that she could finally introduce her second daughter to the pensioner with whom she had been spending time. Though she had enjoyed spending time with Bob, the time she spent with Darren was different somehow. Just like it was more important to her that her daughters like this guy. I'm not sure if it's love yet or not, but it's definitely more serious than the previous relationships.

"He seems like a decent guy," Jenny replied, glancing over at her mother. "Definitely a better sense of humor than Bob. Have you been seeing a lot of him?"

"At least a few times a week. We don't always do anything special but it's nice to just spend time with. First guy I feel I can talk to about anything since your father died."

"I'm happy for you, Mum."

Sandra searched her daughter's face. What she found there told her that Jenny really meant the words.

"No one can ever take your father's place, but I don't want to spend my life alone. I need some companionship, especially with you living so far away. Wish you had someone with you. I wouldn't worry about you being so far from your family then."

"I'm happy without a guy in my life right now," Jenny said. She had been hoping she could get through the visit without talk of her social life, but like always her mother had brought it up.

"I just don't want you to be lonely, love."

"I'm far from lonely at my new job, Mum. The Tracys are very nice people. Though I do miss you and Wendy and I'll miss being around to see my niece or nephew grow up. Still, I can't see myself being happier doing anything else at this point in my life."



Sandra couldn't say anything about that. She wanted her daughters happy and Jenny certainly seemed to be. "Speaking of Wendy's little one, I was thinking of giving her a baby shower next month. Do you think you could get a day off to come home for it?"

Jenny sat up in her chair. "Oh, I'm sure Mr. Tracy will give me the time off for it! Maybe I could even come the day before to help you prepare for it! What day were you thinking of? Who were you thinking of inviting? What about decorations?"

"I was hoping you'd be excited about the idea," the older woman commented, and then informed her daughter of what she had been thinking of doing for the shower. Mother and daughter continued to make changes and add to the plans as the evening got later.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Tue, 31 Jul 2012 03:47:49 GMT  
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Around 9:30 p.m., Tracy Island . . .

After a long, relaxing shower, Gordon turned on his computer and settled down in front of it. Logging into his messenger he scanned the list to see who was online. Besides Alan, none of his friends were currently logged in, though he was pleasantly surprised when a message box opened up.

The message was a request from bluedolphin to be added to the contact list. I guess she was mildly interested after all, Gordon thought as he clicked on the button to accept the request.

As bluedolphin was added onto his contact list, Gordon noted that it was highlighted. He smiled as he tried to decide whether to send a message or not. I don't want to come off looking desperate, he thought. He was just about to say "hi", when the chime indicating an incoming message sounded.

bluedolphin: Hey! Thought you might like to hear from me.

Gordon smiled as he tried to decide what his response should be.

Capnahab: Yes, I'm very pleased to hear from you. How have the cruises gone the last couple of days?

bluedolphin: Very well. The weather has been great and we've only had one cruise that we didn't see any dolphins. The others we got to swim with the dolphins which makes for happy customers!

Capnahab: I know I enjoyed my swim with the dolphins. Glad my little brothers thought of it as a gift.

Capnahab: Glad things are going well.



bluedolphin: Thanks. I'm just glad I got through yesterday. I worked until about eleven covering for one of the servers who was suppose to go on a charter cruise and was ill. Hazard of working for your Dad, I guess. I just can't seem to tell him no when he asks me to work extra.

Capnahab: I've had experience working for family myself. It definitely has it's drawbacks along with its perks. So are you the only child your Dad has working with him?

bluedolphin: Right now I am. My younger sister plans on joining us when she's done university. She helps out during the summer break, too. My older sister had other interests and we're not sure about my brother. He seems to be changing his mind on what he wants to do everyday.

bluedolphin: What about you? You said you had experience working for family. Still working with them?

Gordon considered his answer before typing anything.

Capnahab: Yeah. I joined my Dad's company after I left WASP. Like I said, it has its perks and drawbacks.

bluedolphin: Any siblings?

Capnahab: Quite a few actually, though only one sister. Step-sister actually though I don't often think of her or her brothers as step siblings.

bluedolphin: It's good to hear that. Family really is what you choose to make it, not always strictly flesh and blood.

Gordon found himself nodding as he read her last message. Kyrano and Tin-Tin had always seemed like family even before the recent wedding.

bluedolphin: So, was your companion the other day one of your brothers?

Capnahab: No. Actually that was my swimming student. I thought he'd enjoy the experience and I sure enjoyed the company.

bluedolphin: So you're a coach?

Capnahab: He's my only student and its something I just started recently. I've been enjoying it though.

bluedolphin: That's good. It's good for athletes to pass along their knowledge to younger athletes.

Gordon paused as he read her last message. Did I tell her I was a swimmer? He thought about his conversations with her on the cruise and on the dock the other day. He didn't remember swimming coming up. Then how did she figure it out? Or is she just assuming that because I'm coaching? Well, there is one way to find that out.

Capnahab: I didn't mention I swam competitively, did I?



There was a short but noticeable pause before her answer appeared on the screen.

bluedolphin: No and I also can't honestly say I was just making an assumption either. Truth is, after work Tuesday I did some research on my own. Guess I wanted to make sure for myself that you really were who you said you were.

As Gordon read the words, he felt a twinge of anger. He wasn't sure he like the idea that Alysha hadn't believed him when he had told her who he was. The feeling passed quickly though as he started looking at the situation from her point of view. He supposed if some woman had come up to him and claimed to be someone well-known, he might have his doubts, too. She was just being cautious. He knew what that was like in a relationship. How many times over the years had he wondered if someone had liked him, not because of who he was. but because of his last name.

bluedolphin: Are you mad?

Capnahab: No.

Gordon looked at the simple answer on the screen. It was the truth but he wasn't sure the simple word was enough.

Capnahab: So, did I pass your background check?

bluedolphin: Yes, but then I'm not a professional.

Capnahab: So if I asked you out again would I get a different answer this time?

bluedolphin: Can't say. Guess you would have to ask and see what answer you get.

Capnahab: Okay. How about you and I go out to dinner sometime?

bluedolphin: I'll think about it.

Capnahab: Fair enough.

Gordon smiled. It wasn't the answer he had been hoping for but at least it wasn't a downright refusal. Perhaps he did stand a chance.

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Subject: Re: New Beginnings  
Posted by [Lillehafrue](#) on Tue, 31 Jul 2012 03:48:22 GMT  
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And thus ends Chapter 14 - New Beginnings

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