

Needless to say, the rest of the drive was extremely awkward.

“Well, well, well,” began the man jovially, “I think this is going to work like a charm. Mr. Capone should be very pleased with me. You are – and my dear I mean this as the highest form of a compliment – going to work out so much better for us than that friend of yours back there.”

Stony silence reigned.

“Oh come on,” he continued in extremely high humor, “don’t be so upset with me! I didn’t shoot to kill. As long as your young man has the intelligence to call 911 he should be fine. Merely a flesh wound as the Monty Python boys say.”

Silence.

“You know what else they say?” the man persevered, “Always look on the bright side of life.”

“What is your name?” Cady finally snapped out.

“Well that entirely depends. Why do you want to know? Is it to rate the quality of this kidnapping experience? Because if you like it my name is Jack, and if you don’t my name is Bob.” The man chuckled softly at his joke.

“Oh you’re so funny,” she spat out biting. “I want to know because I don’t want to keep calling you ‘the man’ in my head. It makes it sound like you’re at a level of importance that you simply are not. Please tell me you have a name. And please tell me it’s a horrible one. Did your parents name you Eugene?” she added hopefully after a slight pause.

“No such luck doll face. Name’s actually Jack.”

“Jack? Jack? I guess that fits for the hit man of a mafia.”

“Hey no,” Jack interrupted her, sounding a little offended, “what makes you think that I’m the hit man? And we are the mob. NOT the mafia. Get it right. We’re not Italian and we’re proud of it.”

“You just shot Von!” Cady practically screamed back at him.

“But I didn’t kill him. Hit men shoot to kill. Besides, me? I’m way better than a hit man. Hit men are at the bottom end of the totem pole in mobster life. Why, any Joe off the street (and believe me, we have several Joe’s at the moment) could qualify to be a hit man. I’m Mr. Capone’s right hand man! And don’t you forget it.”

“I’m sure I won’t make that mistake again,” Cady responded, her tone so cold that Jack involuntarily twitched his hand towards the heater. After a few more minutes of cold, hard silence Cady gave in to the curiosity that was welling up inside of her. “Where are we going?”

“Ah. I was wondering when you’d break. I’m impressed by the way. Normally they ask me WAY sooner. Especially the women. They really are much more curious than men.”

“Great. I’m glad to see that I can break the norm. Where are we going?”

“Would you believe me if I said the Bat Cave?”

“You’re not funny Jack.”

“You’re just saying that because you don’t really know me yet. Trust me, I grow on people.”

I’m sure,” Cady sniffed in a disdainful manner, “like a fungus.”

“Hey! You’re pretty funny yourself! You’d think that you’d be more respectful of a fellow comedian though. I always try to be.”

“Cut the laughs Jack. Where are we going?”

“You know what else I like about you Cady? You’re fearless. See, most girls that have been in your shoes they’re all scared right now. Like little mice. Impossible to talk to. They ask one question, tops, and if I don’t answer they just sit there. You? You don’t stop. It’s refreshing.”

“Well clearly you don’t want to kill me because you seem so thrilled about me meeting Mr. Capone. Plus, as you’ve so eloquently informed me, you’re not a hit man. So my life doesn’t seem to be in any danger at this moment. So where are we going?”

“I would think it would be obvious. Especially to a smart girl like you. We’re going to see Mr. Capone.”

“Yes thank you very much,” Cady’s voice oozed so much sarcasm that she almost cringed. “And where would he be located?”

“Boston.”

“Boston?”

“Yeah, Boston. You know, home of the Red Sox?”

“I’m a Yankee’s fan,” Cady muttered absentmindedly.

“Ooh, I wouldn’t mention that to Mr. Capone if I were you. He might not like you as much. Truth be told I’m a Yankee’s fan myself. Never told the boss of course. I like my job.”

“But how are we getting to Boston?” Cady said, completely disregarding Jack’s commentary. “We’re in Washington.”

“He’s a mob boss Cady. He has his own plane.”

.....

Von had never been in so much pain in his life. He'd had broken bones. He'd had plates shattered over his head by irate sisters. Never had he been shot. (Although, when he thought about it it's not like it was a very common occurrence in the average person's life. Or at least not the people he knew.) At first he was dramatically certain that he was dying and he wished he could just go ahead and get it over with. Eventually the logical side of his brain was able to take over and he realized he had only been shot in the arm. And it was nowhere near fatal. As this realization washed over him he felt a little ashamed. "Well," he muttered to himself, "at least no one else was here to see me be an idiot." Just as the last word fell from his mouth sirens flashed behind him and a car pulled up.

"Excuse me sir," said a polite looking lady from beside his window, "we had a 911 call. A lady reported hearing a shot in this area. Is everything alright?"

"Are you really a cop?"

"I beg your pardon?" the lady responded, somewhat indignantly. "Look, just because I'm a woman does not mean –"

"No, no! That's not what I was trying to imply at all!" Von hurriedly cut her off, "I'm sure you are a much better cop than I could ever be. It's just, the last person who told me they were a cop shot me." Von lifted up his arm as much as he could before he winced and let it drop back against his body.

The woman's brow drew together worriedly, "So the report of a shot was real?"

"Sure was," came the cheerful, if slightly forced, reply.

"Alright. Can you tell me what happened now or do you need to wait for the ambulance to come and fix you up?"

"How about you call the ambulance and then I'll start telling you the story. We're also going to need to file a kidnapping report...if that's what those things are called."

.....

Cady couldn't help the tiny smile that drifted onto her face. At least if she was going to get kidnapped she was going to be kidnapped in style. This was luxury unlike anything she had ever seen before. The chairs were quite literally the softest she'd ever sat in in her life. And they fully reclined – bonus! There was a startling array of food, and not like the peanuts and soggy salad airplane food that she was used to. More like the incredibly fine, ridiculously tender steak dinner dining she'd had all of once in her life on the night that she'd turned down a proposal. But that was a different story. She smiled slightly and shook herself back to reality – extremely comfortable and delicious reality.

"What was that smile about?"

Cady sighed dramatically. “Ya know Jack, for a brief second I was able to forget that I was, in fact, a kidnapped person on their way to go see a mob boss. I was lost in the luxury. Way to spoil that for me.”

“Not a problem! It’s what I do kid. Luxury Spoiler Jack – that’s what they call me.”

“Really? That’s what they call you?”

“Nah. But what they call me wouldn’t be appropriate for your tender ears.” He leaned closer to her and whispered conspiratorially, “It has impolite phrases in it.”

“Yeah, got that. Thanks.” Cady responded ever so sarcastically as she turned her head to look out the window.

There was companionable silence for a few minutes while the jet took flight until Cady gasped out in delight, “Oh! It’s beautiful!”

“Haven’t you ever seen the lights of Seattle before? From the space needle or anything?”

“No.” There was the slightest bit of hesitation to her voice before she continued, “I’ve never been able to go. And I’ve never ridden a plane before. This...this is amazing!” Her face lit up with joy and excitement as every second revealed something incandescently gorgeous. “I just, I never knew the sky could look like this!”

Jack’s toughened face softened ever so slightly as he saw the wonder in her eyes. “She’s really a beauty,” he murmured softly to himself.

“Sorry, what was that?” Cady asked.

“What? Nothing. I was just admiring the view too.”

“Oh, alright.” Cady put her chin in her hands and happily went back to staring outside the window. Jack felt the oddest urge to engage her in conversation. And not just to keep her distracted from the fact that, despite the view, she was still in fact being kidnapped. He honestly wanted to know more about her. “What is wrong with me?” he thought to himself, “Sure she’s pretty and she’s even got a brain but, this is just a job.”

But before he could stop himself he blurted out his question, “So why haven’t you been to the Space Needle?”

“I beg your pardon?” Cady reluctantly dragged her eyes away from her view.

“The Space Needle. Every Seattleian has been there at least once.”

“Seattleian?”

“Hey, it’s a technical term. You know, Utahan, Idahoan, Michigonian, Seattleian.”

“Yeah, I’m pretty sure that’s not the right term. It’s definitely SeattleTONIAN. That T is super important. Besides, I’m not from Seattle originally.”

“Oh, well that would explain it. Every true Seattleian knows that there’s not a T there. Obviously. So you moved to Seattle huh?”

“Gee, what was your first clue?”

“Well, I kidnapped you from there,” Jack immediately regretted his slip-up when he saw Cady’s eyes dim slightly at the reminder of why she was where she was, “Plus,” he hurried to continue, “the car had Washington licensed plates.”

“Well, that wouldn’t prove anything. That was Von’s car.”

Jack silently kicked himself in his brain. Of course that was Von’s car. Man he sure was looking smart right now. Nevertheless he decided to persevere. “Okay, so how long ago did you move here?”

“Oh, about a year. I guess. A little less maybe? 11 months or so.”

“And you haven’t gone to the Space Needle yet? What have you been doing? I thought that was the place people went to first!”

“I’ve been busy!” Cady said defensively, “It’s not like all of us work for mobsters and have endless amounts of time to just travel the globe okay? I’ve had things to do.”

“Oh yeah? What kind of things have you been doing that you’ve been so busy that you couldn’t even take one day off?”

There was silence for a good, long minute while Cady stared off into the distance. “Watching my father,” she finally responded in a voice that was barely above a whisper. “He needed full-time care ever since we moved here so we could be closer to the specialist. I never left him. Not once.”

Again Jack felt like kicking himself. But a lot harder and for a completely different reason. After a few minutes he tried to nudge her out of her morose silence, “when did he die?”

“A little less than a month ago. That’s how I met Von actually. His grandma died around the same time and we met at the funeral home.”

“And you guys just hit it off right away I suppose? Like some fairy tale?” Jack was surprised at the amount of bitterness in his voice.

“No actually,” Cady said, oblivious to any undercurrent of feeling in Jack, “I didn’t really like him. The only reason I was nice to him was because his grandma had just died. He seemed like a total jerk. He really isn’t though – he just didn’t know how to handle her death. She practically raised him you know.”

“Why on earth would I know that?” Jack snapped out before he could stop himself.

“Wow. Mr. Grumpy Pants now are we? Look, you were the one asking the questions. I was just answering them. I could only assume that you guys had done your research before you picked Von to do whatever errand it is he needed to do. Obviously you’d have to know something about him.”

Grudgingly Jack remembered that he himself had picked Von out for this job and that he had written in his file ‘Parents killed in car crash. Raised by grandmother.’

“Okay. Maybe I actually knew that.”

“Anyways,” Cady continued, “he was all alone after his grandma died and he didn’t handle it well. He lashed out at every one. Even the mortician didn’t like talking to him. But everyone was trying to be really nice because, well, he had just lost his only living relative. Finally I couldn’t take him treating everyone like crap anymore, so the day after I buried my dad I let him have it.” She chuckled slightly at the memory. “I think I yelled at him for 10 minutes straight. I didn’t hold back at all.”

“He probably deserved it.” Jack said, bluntly.

“Oh he did. I could have been nicer, but it was what he needed to hear. He broke down in tears and actually showed an emotion besides anger. And that’s when we started to become friends.” She looked up at Jack, true worry showing in her eyes, “He is going to be okay isn’t he? I’ve only known him for a month but –”

“But he’s your one true love and you don’t feel as though you could live without him?” Jack interrupted yet again, his tone still resounding of bitterness.

“No!” Cady sounded a little shocked. “I mean, I like him, but it’s not that. It’s just, he’s really the only friend that I have in Seattle. I have my roommate and I have my co-workers, but they’re not the same. Ever since my dad died I’ve been alone too, and he’s the only person who gets what that feels like. He is going to be okay. Right?”

Jack looked into her blue eyes and knew that he had to reassure her, even if it meant revealing a little bit of the boss’ plan. “Yeah kid. He’s going to be just fine. I only shot him in the arm, and even then I only did it so that he would call the ambulance and get the story of your kidnapping out onto the news.”

“Wait. What? You want people to know that you’re about to engage, or have already engaged, in something illegal? That seems stupid.” Cady’s voice sounded hopelessly confused.

“Trust me. For what the boss has planned, the more people that see the better.”

.....

Mr. Capone glanced idly down at his watch. If everything was going according to plan Jack should be on the jet right now with Von. And the police, poor stupid fools that they were, should be out looking for them. This was going to be wonderful. Everything was going his way.

First there would be the kidnapping. A sweet, innocent young man with so much life ahead of him – taken. Mysteriously. The police would look for him of course, and it would be a big news story. After all, less than two months ago his only living relative had died. This poor man had not only been kidnapped but he was alone in the world. Could there be anything that news reporters would love more?

After the police had failed time and time again and all hope was lost, his body would finally turn up – in a sewer perhaps. Tragically murdered. At such a young age. Again the police would search for clues, and nothing would be found. Then, just as everyone would be ready to stop trying, Mr. Capone would swoop

in and save the day. He'd find the evidence pointing to the murderer. He'd find the weapon, the motive, the man. And of course he'd be the hero of the story. Running for mayor's office after that would be a breeze. And once he took the mayoralty all of his connections would come into play, and he'd have the entire city under his thumb. And really, once you've got Boston, America isn't far behind.

Leaning back into his chair Mr. Capone chuckled mischievously. Everything really was perfect. And Jack, poor, stupid Jack, didn't have a clue that he was going to be the patsy in all of this. That he, dutifully performing every little function that his boss demanded of him, was going to be framed for murder.

.....

Von lay back in his hospital bed, trying with all of his might to relax and failing miserably. What was happening? What were the police doing? Anything at all? Because it looked an awful lot like they were just milling around the hospital talking in hushed tones. Shouldn't they be out looking for Cady? She could be anywhere by now! That character who had taken her had at least a five hour head start, and who knows what kind of resources were at his disposal? They could be on a plane to China!

Von sighed deeply and waited for the drugs that were supposed to calm his nerves to kick in. He didn't know why the doctors had insisted on giving them to him. Sure, his arm hurt – but it was nothing compared to the chill in his stomach when he thought of Cady being hurt, in any way. "How could I have brought her into all of this?" he thought out loud. "How could I have been so selfish? This is all my fault! I should have just done what Mr. Capone wanted by myself. I shouldn't have ever even gone into the interview! How could I have been so stupid?"

"Sir?" A kind looking nurse stepped into Von's room, looking concerned. "Is everything alright sir?"

"Aside from the fact that I'm an idiot and stuck sitting here in this bed when I should be out looking for Cady everything is just fine."

"Cady." The nurse hesitantly repeated, "Is that the girl all the officers are talking about?"

"Yes," Von replied unhappily. "She's been kidnapped and it's all my fault."

"I don't have a whole lot of experience with kidnapping really, but I think that generally it's the kidnappers fault. Not the friend." Seeing that his face didn't lighten at all she tried a different tactic.

"Were you two close?" she asked, slipping into the chair by his bed.

"Yeah. We only met about a month ago but we are pretty close. Her dad died around the same time that my grandma did, and they were both our only living relatives. It was just nice having someone to relate to, you know? Someone who knew that you didn't want to hear sympathy anymore, you just wanted to lose yourself in a movie for the night. Somehow who could understand that there are good days and bad days, and on the bad days all you can do is order a pizza and eat the entire thing. Does any of that even make sense?"

“Not really,” the nurse shook her head with a slight smile. “I have three older siblings and two younger, both of my parents are alive and well and all four of my grandparents are as healthy as horses.”

“Wow, you really don’t get it then.”

“Nah. Sometimes I wish I was a lot more alone than I am actually. It’s always ‘Cissy, you should do this with your life’ or ‘Cissy, why couldn’t you have graduated with higher grades?’ or ‘Cissy! Can’t you just meet a man and settle down?’ It’s kind of never ending. Better that than being alone though I guess.”

“You don’t know what I’d give to have someone ordering me around, thinking that they know what’s best for me and my life. You never really miss it until you don’t have it.”

“The grass really is greener on the other side isn’t it?”

“Certainly is. Except I’ve been on both sides of the grass. And trust me – your side really is greener.” Von stopped for a moment to recollect his early childhood, back when the grass had been a vibrant, lovely shade of green. “I know what it feels like to have a family and I know what it feels like to be alone. Having family is definitely preferable. At least you know all their heckling is because they care.”

“Heckling?” Cissy laughed, “I haven’t heard anyone under the age of 60 use that term.”

“Well I was raised by my grandmother,” Von reminded her, a hint of a smile finally appearing on his lips. “I imagine I have a very old vocabulary compared to my peers.”

“That’s okay. I’m the only one in my family that went into anything medical. They’re all super geniuses that sit around and talk about quantum physics all day. I can’t understand a word they say, but whenever I feel like getting back at them I just tell them that their clavicles are looking sickly and they start to get very concerned.”

“Your clavicles? Aren’t those—“

“Your collarbones? Yeah. But they don’t need to know that.”

Von chuckled, but his mind quickly went back to Cady. Was she alright?

“Why don’t you tell me what happened? If you’re allowed to that is.” Cissy prompted. “Sometimes it helps to talk about it.”

“Well, it all started with this stupid job interview....”

.....

As the plane touched down in Boston Cady couldn’t help but ask a few more sarcastic questions. “I don’t suppose we have any time set out for site-seeing do we?” she flippantly tossed the question over her shoulder as she got ready to walk off the plane. “I’ve never been to Boston before but I’m a huge history buff.”

“Ha. No. We gotta go meet the boss. I’m already running a little behind schedule. You’re pretty and I’m pretty sure you were worth the delay, but you were a little bit of a delay.”

“Ah, you think I’m pretty? Well that’s comforting. If you’re going to get kidnapped at least make sure you look good. Words my dad told me to live by.” Despite her casual words Cady’s stomach was doing flips and turns that were worthy of an Olympic gymnast. She came up to the door of the plane and tried to put one foot down, but she simply couldn’t.

“Hey!” Jack grumbled from behind her. “What’s your holdup? You may have light luggage but I’m carrying some seriously heavy stuff here.”

“I don’t have any luggage.” Cady replied tonelessly, the full weight of her situation hitting her for the first time. “I don’t have anything. No family. No job. No luggage. And now I don’t even have my freedom.” She turned to face Jack, a faint sheen of tears glistening in her eyes, “What’s going on Jack? Why are you doing this? You seem like a decent guy! Maybe even a little funny. Maybe. Why me? Why Von? What’s going to happen to us?”

“Ah crap,” Jack thought to himself. “Now? Now she’s going to get hysterical? It couldn’t have been on the plane when I actually had time to calm her down?” Not that he could really blame her. He’d been thinking that she had been taking the whole kidnapping thing remarkably well. It only made sense that she’d cave eventually.

“Hey, hey, calm down,” Jack tried to reassure her. “Yes, you are being kidnapped. But it’s mostly for a big publicity stunt. You won’t be seriously injured. I promise you. You’ll just lose a few months of your life to being in hiding, but you won’t be hurt.”

Cady paused, looking straight into his eyes. He looked truthful, but what did that really mean? His whole livelihood was based off of lying truthfully. “Are you telling me the truth Jack? Tell me the truth. I don’t care how bad it is, I want to know the truth.”

Jack swallowed, looking deep into her eyes. Dang she was attractive. He was already wishing he hadn’t brought her into this kind of danger. That he’d left her back in Seattle, where she was happy – but most of all, safe. Horrified, Jack realized that he was getting far too emotionally attached. He did his best to shrug it off. “Yes, yes I’m telling you the truth. I will personally make sure that no one hurts you.”

With a deep breath Cady took one step down the stairs off the jet. “Thanks Jack.”

“Sure kid,” Jack responded, ignoring the uneven beating of his heart, “whatever.”

Cissy was heading into a world of emotional hurt and she knew it. As she listened to Von tell his story she could feel herself becoming more and more drawn to him. “Stop it!” she firmly ordered herself. “He is going through a ridiculous emotional experience right now. He’s been shot and his friend has been kidnapped. Besides that he’s obviously attached to her. They’re an item. Get over it.” And yet, as she looked at his face, lined with fatigue and worry, all she wanted to do was give him her phone number and beg him to call her as soon as this whole thing got figured out.

“---and find out where she is!” Cissy’s attention was snapped back into focus as she realized that Von was basically shouting.

“Hey, hey! Calm down.” She rushed over to his side. “That is NOT good for your blood pressure and I’m supposed to be helping you keep it down. If you keep doing that they’ll kick me out and replace me with Nurse Conta. And believe me, you don’t want that okay? She’ll just...she’s scary. I’m much nicer. Promise.”

“Sorry, sorry.” Von muttered to her as he slowly unclenched his fists. “I just want to do something! You know? Find her and fix this mess. But I don’t even know where to begin.”

“Yeah. Not to mention that you won’t even be certified for release from the hospital for at least a day. Besides,” Cissy added, chuckling to herself, “what could you do? Break into the office from the interview and search for information?” She continued chuckling to herself until she looked up and saw Von’s face. “No. No, Von I was just kidding. You can’t do that. That is what they do in cheesy detective stories. I was being facetious.”

“It’s not a half bad idea you know,” he mused out loud.

“Yes it is. In fact it’s an all bad idea! Forget that I ever said anything! Von, this is what police are for! The police will search the building and find clues. They’re trained and, and not shot! Leave it to them.”

“I can’t!” Von started to shout again but at a warning look from Cissy he settled down into a whisper. “Don’t you see that I can’t? I have got to do something, anything.”

“You’ve done what you can Von. You’ve told all that you know to the police. You’ve given them a picture of Cady and a description of the guy who took her. Their faces are all over national TV and they’ve already started up a hotline. You can’t do anything else. You have GOT to let them handle this.”

“No. No I don’t. I am going to that building.”

Cissy sighed audibly. Why? Why were men so stupid? “Aside from the fact that that’s still an incredibly stupid plan, you’re forgetting one pretty important thing.”

“What?”

“You’re still stuck in a hospital! You were shot earlier today and you’re not getting out of here until the paperwork clears.”

There was silence for a few seconds as they stared at each other, Cissy wondering why he was being so stupid and Von wondering how he could possibly get out of the hospital earlier. The answer hit him as he looked into her determined blue eyes. He noted with some surprise that they were actually very beautiful – a brilliant shade of blue. “Cissy,” he began hesitantly...

“What?” there was a certain wariness to her reply.

“Well, you’re in charge of my paperwo ---“

“No. Absolutely not.” She cut him off before he could even finish his sentence. “That is completely unethical. As a medical professional I absolutely will not release you before I’m certain that you’re going to be okay.”

“Isn’t it unethical to hold someone who doesn’t want to be held?”

“Not if it’s for their greater good! Von, you were shot! What part of that are you having a hard time comprehending right now?”

“It doesn’t even hurt anymore.”

“Yeah, because you’re on drugs. I gave you drugs. Do you remember this? I promise you that once those wear off you’re going to be in a world of pain. And you’re going to want more. But if you leave I can’t give you more. Because you wouldn’t be here.”

“Then I’ll just suffer through the pain. This is more important. Cady could be in pain. Cady could be dying! Don’t you see?” Von looked at Cissy with a pleading gaze, “Cissy. I have to do this.”

“I...you can’t...” Cissy’s responses faded out as she looked into his eyes. ‘Oh I know I’m going to regret this.’ She thought to herself. ‘I already regret this...’ “Okay, fine. I’ll help you.”