



# All we Are

*We won't say our goodbyes, You know it's better that way  
We won't break, we won't die, It's just a moment of change*



Lissie  
Love

# Copyright & Distribution

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This story was written 2014-15.

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# Background

## Inspiration

After I rewrote *Poisonous Dreams* as *A Few Words Too Many*, I eliminated the marriage of convenience angle. It's a concept I like reading in general because there's a vast difference between developing a relationship outside of marriage and then making it work once you're in one. So I started to think how I could do that concept again. What would make Jason and Elizabeth take that step? Spousal privilege, of course.

And from there, I looked at different time periods until I found my favorite one: Summer 2006. My God, the amount of story I've planned that uses this as a jumping off point is legion. I loved 2006 so much.

## Timeline

So, this begins in October 2006. All of the events of the summer have happened through the point Lucky leaves for rehab in mid-September after throwing Elizabeth to the floor. Ric has taken over as DA for Alexis due to her cancer. Elizabeth has told Jason about the paternity issue, but rather than running the test at GH, she had it done at Mercy for more secrecy. I haven't changed much except for the Jason and Sam relationship. There's been no real movement to getting back together. Also, while Sam and Carly are aware of the NOP, only Sonny knows about the paternity test.

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# Chapter One

*There's an albatross around your neck,  
All the things you've said,  
And the things you've done,  
Can you carry it with no regrets,  
Can you stand the person you've become*  
- The Weight of Living, Part 1, Bastille

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*Friday, October 20, 2006*

## **General Hospital: Nurse's Station**

Elizabeth Spencer glanced up as Kelly Lee tapped her fingers on the counter in front of her. “Hey, Kelly.”

“Hey, babe.” The obstetrician joined her inside the hub and reached for a chart. “Ah, I hadn’t heard from you since we confirmed your condition. Regarding that test. Have you decided not to take it?”

“Oh.” Elizabeth flushed and looked down at the charts. “No, it’s not...I decided to have it at Mercy.” She bit her lip. “It’s not personal, Kelly. It’s just...his family works here. I’m afraid if his name comes across on a record, they’d look into it, and it’d be out before I knew how to deal with it.”

Before she could tell Jason and see his reaction face to face.

“No sweat.” Kelly set the chart down. “But, hey, let me know if there’s anything I can do.” She touched Elizabeth’s elbow. “You just say the word and we will totally replace the tequila with some ice cream.”

“Thanks, Kel.” The beeper at her waist vibrated and emitted a sound. Elizabeth glanced down, frowning. “I’m being paged to the conference room.”

When she opened the door to the conference room, a chill slid down her spine. Epiphany Johnson sat there with an annoyed look on her face—but next to her, Ric Lansing with a smirk.

God.

“Um, what can I do for you guys?” Elizabeth asked, stepping over the threshold.

“You’d better close the door, Elizabeth.” Ric leaned back in his chair. “You don’t want others to overhear.”

“Shut up,” Epiphany shot back. “You’re here as a courtesy. I do *not* have to allow you to harass my nurse on my watch. Elizabeth, before we start this, I think you should call a lawyer.”

Elizabeth shut the door and leaned against it. “I—I don’t think...why do I need a lawyer?”

She didn’t even *have* a lawyer.

“Elizabeth, the board has voted to suspend you indefinitely without pay,” Epiphany said bluntly. “The DA here has informed them you’re under suspicion for theft and distribution of narcotics.”

Elizabeth just stared at her. Those words—they made sense. But they couldn’t. Because how was *any* of this possible? “I—” Blindly, she reached out for the chair and dragged it out so she could sit before her knees gave out.

“I fought it, honey, but they weren’t interested.” Epiphany leaned forward. “Call a lawyer—”

“Elizabeth can trust me to watch out for her interests,” Ric said coolly. “While the DA’s office *is* pursuing the charges, Nurse Johnson, I am not a vindictive man. I believe Elizabeth made a mistake. I’d like to make it go away.”

“I’ll bet you do.” Epiphany rose to her feet. “You don’t say a *word* to this scum, Elizabeth. You get yourself a lawyer and keep your mouth shut.”

“It’s time for you to leave, Nurse Johnson,” Ric said. “Elizabeth and I will discuss her options.”

“It’s all right,” Elizabeth told her supervisor while looking at Ric. “I can handle this.”

“Ain’t right,” Epiphany muttered as she made her way out of the room. “Going after a woman like this.”

“Put your cards on the table, Ric.” Elizabeth took a deep breath, hoping her face looked as stoic as she intended. She was a quivering mess of jelly inside, but Ric Lansing would not prey on her again.

“Your husband is in a rehab center recovering from an addiction to Oxycotin,” Ric said, flipping through a file. “We served a search warrant on your home this morning—”

“You did what?” Elizabeth cut in, stunned. “How—why wasn’t I notified?”

“I’m not required to do so.” Ric set the paper aside. “We found a stash of pills in the cookie jar. Despite the fact your husband has been gone for some time.”

Elizabeth closed her eyes. “I—I thought I found them all—” How could he have left that in her home, the sanctuary she shared with her son?

“The pills have been traced back to General Hospital, where a rash of thefts have occurred recently. On your floor, during your shifts.”

Her heart began to race. This wasn’t Ric playing around. The PCPD had searched her home, had had her suspended from her job. *Without pay*. Those words began to sink in. “I didn’t—”

“Elizabeth, no one wants to see a single mother go down for this. I want to make this go away for you.” Ric leaned forward. “If you can help me, I can help you.”

“There’s always a price isn’t there?” she murmured. She swiped at her eyes. “You don’t want to *help* me. You started this. You came at me because there’s something you want from me. What is it?”

“I’m empaneling an investigative grand jury to bring RICO charges against Jason Morgan,” Ric said simply. “You testify truthfully in front of that panel? This goes away.”

Elizabeth folded her trembling hands in her lap. “Are you kidding me? I don’t *know* anything—”

“You don’t even know what you don’t know.” Ric turned a page in his file. “You’ve been in and out of Jason’s life for many years, Elizabeth. More than anyone else, *I’m* aware of the hold he has over you.”

“Ric—”

“But now I’m asking you to make a choice. Do the right thing. Save yourself for once. Save your career, your life with your son.” Ric leaned forward. “You wasted so much time running after Lucky and Zander, after Jason, trying to save them. You sacrificed yourself for them. What have they *ever* done in return?”

“Are you *insane*? What about what *you’ve* done to me? What you’re doing *now*?” Elizabeth started to shove the chair back, but he held out a hand.

“I’m giving you a choice, Elizabeth,” Ric repeated. “It’s Jason or your freedom. You will be convicted for this. What happens to your son if you go to jail? Audrey’s in her seventies, hardly able to care full-time for a toddler. He might end up in Lucky’s custody. A drug addict for a stepfather?” He pursed his lips and leaned back. “I don’t know if I could stand back and let that happen. I might have to step in, petition that he enter the system—”

Her vision blurred and her heart felt like it was leaping into her throat. “You...you stay *away* from my son. How...” She closed her eyes. “You can’t do this to me.”

“I can, Elizabeth, and I will. I may not be able to work on cases involving my brother, but I will punish Jason—”

“Why?” she bit out, her voice sounding tinny to her ears. Distant. “Because Sonny chose him?” She raised her eyes to his. “Or because of me?”

“Because he’s a criminal,” her ex-husband said tightly. He rose to his feet. “You have a week to consider your choice. Testify against Jason or you’ll go to jail yourself.”

### **General Hospital: Parking Lot**

Elizabeth’s hand slipped as she tried to slip her key into the lock. God. What was she going to do? She couldn’t testify against Jason. She couldn’t. He was...it was *Jason*.

But she couldn't lose her baby. Her career. Her freedom.

She had to talk to Jason.

The phone was in her hand before she could remember removing it from her bag, but she stopped before she could dial.

What if Ric had her phone bugged? What if he'd put a GPS on her car? Was he even required by law to inform her? She couldn't do that, get Jason swept up in this mess that way.

"Elizabeth?"

Robin Scorpio's soft voice broke through the haze of terror and Elizabeth focused on her dark-haired friend. "Robin. Thank God. Thank God. I—" She closed her eyes. "I need you to do me a huge favor and not to ask a lot of questions."

"Of course." Robin stepped forward. "Honey, what's going on?"

"I—I need your car. And your phone." She dug her keys out. "Here. Can we trade? Just for tonight."

"Um..." Robin blinked and looked down. "I mean, it's not a problem. But what's going on?" Her eyes were soft with concern. "Elizabeth—"

"I need to make sure that no one follows me. Or knows who I'm calling." Elizabeth shoved her hair out of her face. "I-I need to talk to Jason. I might have to meet with him. I can't...*no* one can know."

"Oh." Robin held out her keys and phone. "Are you in trouble? Is he? Is there anything else I can do?"

Elizabeth accepted them gratefully and traded her own. "Yes. But I can fix it. I think I can fix it. I *have* to fix it."

"Elizabeth, let me drive you somewhere. In my car. I'm...you don't look good." Robin held out a hand. "Please. Come with me. We'll have dinner with Patrick and we'll work this out—"

"No, I can't involve you more than this. I wouldn't ask but I just...I don't know..." Elizabeth took a deep breath. "Okay, okay. I have to chill out. I just...I need to talk to Jason. He'll make this go away."

Robin still looked unconvinced but reluctantly pointed out her own car. "Elizabeth, promise me, when you can tell me what's happening, that you'll tell me."

"I...yes." Elizabeth nodded. "Yes, I can do that."

Once inside Robin's car, she took out the phone and dialed Jason's number. Let him pick up, let him pick up.

*"Robin? What's up?"*

“Thank God, you’re there. It’s Elizabeth.”

His voice shifted to worry. “*Elizabeth? What’s wrong? Why do you have Robin’s phone? Are you all right?*”

“I—I didn’t want anyone to know I was calling you. I have to meet with you. Please. I promise it’s an emergency.” The first tear slid down her cheek. “God, this is all falling apart and I don’t know what to do. I just made Robin trade me her car and her phone so no one would know and that’s all I know to do. I don’t know if I can make this go away.”

“*Hey, hey...*” Jason paused. “*Give me one second.*” She heard mumbling in the background. Oh, God, what if Sam was there? She squeezed her eyes shut. “*Sorry, Carly’s here. I had to leave the room. Listen, are you...are you okay to drive? Can you come here?*”

“No, no, he might be watching your building. If he finds out I contacted you—”

“*Who? Elizabeth—*”

“Vista Point. We-we can go there right? It’s out of the way. He’ll never think of it.”

“*Elizabeth, what’s going on?*”

“I-I can’t. I mean, over the phone.”

“*Okay. Right. I can be there in a half hour. Elizabeth, are you sure you’re okay to drive?*”

“Yes. I can be. I have to be. I just...” She took a deep breath. He had enough crazy people in his life. “I’ll be fine. I just...I’ll be fine as soon as I see you.”

### **Morgan Penthouse: Living Room**

Jason emerged from the kitchen and scowled, finding Carly still there. “I told you to go away.”

“Please,” his friend snorted. “You mentioned two of my *least* favorite people on the phone. If you think I’m—” She stopped. “Jason, what’s wrong? Is...Elizabeth okay?”

Jason reached for his keys. “No, but I’m going to find out what’s going on. I think someone’s threatening her. She had Robin’s phone, she’s using her car. Which means she’s scared to be her in own.” He tugged out his phone and sent a quick message to Milo to track Elizabeth’s car, to make sure if someone was tailing Elizabeth, Robin wasn’t in any danger either.

“It’s not like her to overreact,” Carly followed him out the door and onto the elevator. “I mean, she’s a pain in my ass, but not as much as she used to be. Do you think it’s Lucky bothering her?”

Jason hesitated, because that had been his first worry. But how could Lucky simultaneously be tailing her car, monitoring her phone, *and* watching his building? “I don’t think so.”

The elevator opened to the parking garage. “All right, well let me know if there’s anything I can do.” Jason frowned at her, and she scowled. “Shut your face and just go.”

## Vista Point

He pulled his bike into a parking spot next to a red sedan he recognized as Robin’s. She must have broken all the speed limits to get here before him, and *that* all but terrified him. Elizabeth knew better than to take risks like that when she was pregnant.

Pregnant. God. What if something had happened to the baby?

Elizabeth was pacing on the upper landing of the point, where the cliffs opened up over the Port Charles skyline out to the harbor. Her fingers were twisted together, her movement jerky. Tears stained her face.

“Elizabeth—”

“Oh, thank God.” She rushed towards him but drew up short just before reaching him, as if she’d been out to embrace him in relief. “God, Jason. I’m *so* sorry. I don’t know what to do.”

“Okay.” He put a hand on her elbow and drew her closer. “Just take a deep breath. Someone’s threatening you? Is it Lucky?”

“No, no.” She shook her head, her loose hair flying around her face in the October wind. “No, I—” She took that deep breath. “Okay. Okay, I can do this. I was paged to the conference room at work. Epiphany and Ric were there.”

Ric. That slimy piece of shit. He should have known. “What did he do to you? What did he say?”

“I’ve been suspended indefinitely without pay,” Elizabeth said, her words tripping over each other. “The board found out the DA is investigating me for stealing pills and giving them to Lucky, I think. They—they searched my apartment this morning. I-I didn’t even know until Ric told me, but Lucky had one more stash, and they traced it to GH.”

Would those two assholes never stop ruining her life? “Okay. Do you need a lawyer? I can get Diane —”

“Ric said he’d drop the charges if I testified against you in a grand jury he’s putting together.” The words flew out of her mouth so fast he nearly missed them. Christ. *This* is what that little animal was holding over her?

“Elizabeth, I don’t know what you could testify about—” And then he stopped. “Did he ask you about anything specific?”

“No, no, and I don’t even know what I could tell him.” Her face was sheet white. “Not that I *would*. I mean, Jason, I can’t testify. But what if I refuse, and he does that subpoena thing? I’ll have to lie, and I don’t even know what he wants from me—”

“Just...” He placed his hands on her shoulders. “Okay. Let’s just take a minute, okay? He told you if you testified against me, these other charges go away?”

“Yes. He told me if I don’t, he’ll make sure I get convicted, then he’ll petition to send Cameron into foster care. Jason, I can’t—my baby.” She pressed her lips together. “I don’t know what to *do*.”

“You have to testify.” His mouth was dry. “Elizabeth, I can’t ask you take a chance with your freedom, with your son—”

“Jason, I *can’t* testify against you.” She stepped towards him, her hand slid over her still flat abdomen. “What, I should raise my child to know I allowed myself to be blackmailed? What if this baby is yours? What if you go to *jail*?”

His fingers tightened around her shoulders before they slid away. “I’ll make sure you have everything you need—”

“There *has* to be another way,” Elizabeth said. “I mean, Jason, why do you think I panicked and freaked Robin out? I came to you so we could find a way out of this without Ric knowing. I was scared he’d see me coming to the penthouse, or if he could search my place, I thought maybe he could bug my cell phone. I-I don’t know how any of that works.”

“Elizabeth, I can’t let you protect me. Not again. You’ve already risked yourself enough,” he said, remembering the file she’d shredded. “Tell Ric you’ll take the deal.”

“No,” she said, some of the panic fading from her expression. “No. I can’t...I *won’t* be responsible for that. There has to be away to make sure he can’t force me to testify. If I can’t testify, he won’t bring those charges against me, right? He already told me he’s not really interested in that.”

One day, Jason was going to make that psycho pay for the pain he’d inflicted on the people he cared for, particularly Elizabeth and Carly.

Carly.

Sonny and Carly.

An idea flickered in the back of his head. A crazy idea. He swallowed. “I might—I have to check with Diane to see if it would work. Okay? How long did Ric tell you had?”

“A week.” She drew closer to him. “What? You know something.”

“It’s...an idea, but I have to check with her. Can give you me a day? I have to make sure all our bases are covered.” Without thinking, he stroked her cheek, and she turned into his touch. “I *will* make this go away, Elizabeth. No matter what I have to do.”

“Hey, you don’t want me sacrificing myself to protect you?” She arched a brow. “I don’t intend for *you* to sacrifice yourself for me, either.”

He nodded. "I'll call a guy. I'll have a burner phone sent to you at your apartment. And a temporary car so Ric can't trace your movements. Give Robin back her stuff."

Jason took her hand and led her back to the parking lot. "Ah, when do you hear back about the paternity test?"

"Next Friday." She closed her eyes. "The same day I have to tell Ric."

"Okay." He stopped next to Robin's car. "Are...everything else is okay?"

"Other than my blood pressure today? It's fine." She touched her belly. "I should—pick up Cameron. Drop Robin's car off so he doesn't know I had it, and then go pick him up. I can do this."

"Okay."

He watched her drive away before pulling out his phone. Diane was on speed dial and picked up on the second ring.

*"Hello, hello. I'm ready to earn my fabulous retainer."*

"Diane, I have a question about spousal privilege."

# Chapter Two

*What happens when all your dreams are lying on the ground  
Do you pick up the pieces all around  
And if the world should fall apart hold on to what you know  
Take your chances turn around and go*  
- Chapter One, Lifehouse

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## Greystone Manor: Living Room

Jason stepped into the room to find Sonny sipping a glass of water and perusing some paperwork on the sofa. His friend rose to his feet. “Hey. You didn’t sound good on the phone.”

Jason hesitated but nodded. “Yeah, a situation has come up. I-I think I know to handle it, but I’m going to need you.”

“Sure.” Sonny waved him forward. “What’s up? Did Elizabeth get those results back?”

He wished that were the *only* thing to worry about, but for the first time in several weeks, the possibility of becoming a father was much further down the list.

“Ah, not yet. Next Friday.” Jason waited. “Elizabeth was suspended from the hospital—the DA’s office has initiated an investigation into the theft of OxyContin, and Lucky’s stash was traced back to the hospital.”

Sonny’s face tightened. “Little punk. How many times is he going to wreck her life before she gets it?” He shook his head. “I still remember having to hide her while they were faking her death.” He sighed. “So what’s the plan? We can find a dealer to blame it on—”

“I wish it were that simple.” Jason crossed the room just to have something to do. “Ric’s going after her. It’s personal to him, you know.”

“Talk about people wrecking your life,” Sonny muttered. “He does complicate it—” He paused. “But Ric wouldn’t put Elizabeth in jail. He’s threatening her. It’s for leverage.”

“Yeah. He’s empaneling a grand jury to investigate me, and he wants her to testify.”

Sonny lowered himself back to the sofa and rubbed his chin. “Well. *That’s* a different tactic.” He squinted. “What’s he looking to get out of it?”

“I don’t know.” Jason sat in the arm chair adjacent to the sofa. “But, Christ, Sonny, it could be any number of things. Just think of the things Elizabeth doesn’t even *know* that she knows. She helped me track down Manny Ruiz. She knows I’m the one who pushed him from the roof.”

“Not to mention the night Moreno was killed,” Sonny murmured. “Still an open case, you know. And she knows you were there. Maybe not the specifics but they could put it together with dates. Then she was kidnapped by Roscoe’s men. Was around during Luis, and then Lorenzo the next summer. I don’t know, Jason. It’s a lot of little things that could just put the nail in the coffin with whatever else Ric can dig up.”

“I told her to testify,” Jason said after a minute. He stared at his hands. “Ric is threatening her livelihood but he also went after Cameron. Said he’d try to get him moved to foster care once she was in jail.” His chest tightened. “Ric doesn’t even know she’s pregnant. If she were in jail—”

“It’s not even an option.” Sonny leaned forward. “Of course Elizabeth isn’t going to jail, but there *are* ways around this, Jason. I could set her up somewhere. Get her out of PC—”

“And she’d never be able to come back. She’d have to leave her family, her job, her friends.” He dipped his head. “I can’t—she’s *pregnant*, Sonny. The baby—”

“I see the problem. I don’t relish sending her away either.” Sonny leaned back. “But you’ve already thought of the second option, haven’t you? The one that keeps her close, but unable to testify.”

“She wanted to find another way,” Jason said. “She’d never go for disappearing. And...short of putting her through a trial and buying the jury in hopes to secure an acquittal, I don’t know if anything else *could* work.”

“With a history of miscarriage,” Sonny said slowly, “anything we can do to lessen pressure, keep her blood pressure down, is a good idea. She’s had, what, two?”

Jason raised his eyes. “Two? I just—the one with Ric, but—”

“I forgot.” Sonny sighed. “You were sick and lost your memory. She was going to be a surrogate for Courtney and Jax. Last year, about this time. She was in a car accident with Jax and lost the baby.” He exhaled slowly. “Not sure if it would affect future pregnancies, but I—”

“I—I didn’t know.” Restless, Jason pushed himself to his feet. “She works too hard, Sonny. I wish she’d let me take care of her.”

“Well, if she goes for your option, you’ll have your chance. Have you spoken to Diane?”

“Yeah. I just came from her office.” Jason sighed. “She says it’s tricky. Most judges won’t challenge spousal privilege because it’s problematic on the stand. Every question and answer has to be weighed to be sure it falls under the exception. It leads to mistrials, which costs money to deal with. So she thinks it’ll protect Elizabeth from subpoena.”

“Well, that’s good. Can we make these other charges go away? To ensure her safety? I’d hate for you guys to do this and find out while you’re protected, she’s still under fire.”

“Diane doesn’t think Ric’s serious about the charges.” Jason rubbed the back of his neck. “That he’s not interested in torturing Elizabeth if there’s nothing to be gained. To be sure, she’ll motion to keep

him from any case dealing with me or Elizabeth.”

“And another prosecutor is less likely to see Elizabeth as good leverage. So Diane can protect Elizabeth, and marriage protects you.” Sonny nodded. “Seems like a win-win situation.”

“She could still get Elizabeth off on these charges,” Jason said. “I mean, Ric could be disqualified just because of his past relationship to Elizabeth.”

“But she could still be subpoenaed against *you*,” Sonny said. “Do you think Elizabeth would be happy about this? Ric is just using these charges to show Elizabeth he’s got the power. He doesn’t need them.”

“That’s the worst thing. He went after her because he could, because of my relationship to her.” Jason shook his head. “To punish her. How can I ask her to do this when I could protect her without it?”

“For the same reasons you’re not wild about sending her away. She’s likely having your child, and I’m sure she’d like you to be in the kid’s life.” Sonny hesitated. “Look, I get why it’s complicated. You’re still in love with Sam, she’s still married to Lucky. But you guys get along well enough—”

“Sam has nothing to do with this,” Jason said. “We’ve been...over for months.” And she’d slept with Ric. He had tried to forget it, tried to tell himself that it hadn’t technically been a betrayal.

But it had felt that way.

And there had been that night with Elizabeth.

“Okay,” Sonny drawled. “So what’s the problem? You know Elizabeth will agree if you lay it out for her like this. She’ll have security while she’s pregnant.” He waited a moment. “Or is it the idea of asking Elizabeth to marry you under these circumstances?”

“She’d have to get a divorce in the Dominican Republic and figure out how to get Lucky to sign the paperwork, or New York won’t recognize it which would invalidate the privilege.” Jason rubbed his eyes. “She’s had two bad marriages, and I’m supposed to ask her to marry me for my own protection? What does *she* get out of it?”

“For starters, a husband who won’t cheat on her, won’t hold her children over her head as leverage, won’t feed her birth control pills—Christ, Jason, you’re the better choice on every level. Those two idiots claimed to love her, but they sure as hell didn’t cherish her.” Sonny got to his feet. “Maybe you give *Elizabeth* the options. She can make her own choices, Jason.”

“Yeah.” Jason exhaled slowly. “You’re right.”

“Let me know how it works out. You’ll be in the DR, it’s just hop over to the island.” Sonny slapped him on the shoulder. “You should have the ceremony there. I can put something together, make it look good. For appearances.”

“I’ll let you know.” Jason sighed. “I’ll let Diane know she can draw up the paperwork. If Elizabeth

agrees, then I want to put it in motion as soon as possible. She...has until Friday to make her decision or Ric will have her arrested.” He paused. “And she gets the paternity results back the same day.”

“It’ll be a big day,” Sonny said. “Go call Diane and see if you can rustle yourself up a bride.”

### **Patrick’s Apartment: Living Room**

Elizabeth stepped hesitantly into Patrick’s living room, Robin’s phone and car keys in her hands. “Hey.”

“Oh, I’m so glad to see you.” Robin joined her and Patrick at the door. “I was so worried, Elizabeth —”

“It’s okay.” She set them on the desk. “I’m sorry. I just—”

“The charges are bullshit,” Patrick spat. “And I told Epiphany that. I’ll tell *anyone* who asks, and if I see that little piece of shit husband of yours, I’ll rip him apart.”

“With those precious hands?” Elizabeth asked, her eyes burning. God, what a good friend he’d turned out to be. “I’m touched.”

“I’d hire someone,” Patrick said. “But I’d take the first punch for satisfaction. Have you called a lawyer?”

“Is that why you wanted to talk to Jason?” Robin asked. “So he could get Diane for you?” But her eyes were confused.

“It’s more...complicated than that,” Elizabeth offered. “I wish I could tell you more. I know Jason will find a way to make this go away. I just want to do my job and raise my kids in peace.”

Robin nodded and put a hand on Patrick’s arm. “Well, I’m sure Jason will handle it—”

“Can I hire *him*?” Patrick asked. “Because that sounds like a terrific idea. Let’s do that. I think he’d pound Ric *and* Lucky into small little pieces—”

“We’re very blood thirsty tonight,” Robin cut in. “Liz, just remember—when you can tell me more, I’m here.” She bit her lip. “Or Emily—”

“Emily is Lucky’s best friend.” Elizabeth wrapped her arms around her waist. “And she encouraged me to give Lucky another chance, to wait until his rehab was done. So did my grandmother and Nikolas.” She closed her eyes. “I wish I hadn’t listened. If I had filed for divorce, if I had walked away from him, maybe it wouldn’t be believable that I stole those drugs. But I *stayed*. I kept my child in that home.”

“Elizabeth, this is going to work out,” Robin said. She elbowed Patrick in the rib. “Tell her.”

“It’s going to go away. I don’t much like Jason Morgan, but if he’s half as loyal to you as you are to

him, then it'll be fine." He pouted. "What is it with the women in this town and that man? I'm just as pretty."

Elizabeth cracked her first smile in hours as she reached for the keys and phone Robin held out. "You're downright adorable. In a brotherly fashion."

"I blame you for this," Patrick was telling Robin as Elizabeth headed down the hallway. "You've domesticated me and ruined me for all women."

"Yeah, I don't see the problem there."

*Saturday, October 21, 2006*

### **Elizabeth's Apartment: Living Room**

Elizabeth set a blanket over Cameron's napping body on the sofa and switched off the cartoons that had lulled him to sleep. It was the first day in weeks she'd been able to devote completely to him, a realization which made her feel lower than an ant.

How was she going to take care of her little boy with no money? She'd lose the apartment for sure, and she did not want to move in with her grandmother. She'd probably feel pressured to stay with Lucky.

That *was* one thing that was going to change. If a divorce wasn't part of Jason's plan, she was going to add it. It wasn't enough that Lucky had humiliated her, lied to her, cheated on her, but he'd continued to place Cameron in danger by leaving pills in the apartment.

And now he'd cost Elizabeth her job and possibly her freedom.

"It's a hell of a way to smash a permanent lock," she murmured as she rose from the sofa, her stomach twisting in knots. She rubbed her hand absently. "Please, Baby, be Jason's. That's the only thing that would make my life remotely easier."

She hit play on her answering machine and listened to the messages she folded some clothes. One from Nikolas, concerned about news he'd heard from Emily. Emily had also called, hoping she wasn't blaming this on Lucky. Her grandmother had called—

But the cell phone a man in a suit had delivered to her door the night before remained silent. If Jason had a plan, he was taking his sweet time.

And, God, didn't it gall her to be *so* dependent on him? Why couldn't she stand on her own two feet and make this go away? She could turn Mac's daughter in—the affair and her volunteer work at the hospital would surely point the police towards her as the culprit.

But as much as she wanted to hate Maxie, she couldn't.

She remembered what it was like to be young and desperately in love, then to have it shattered. If

Maxie had had a Jason in her life, someone she could turn to keep her from trashing her life, the way Jason had stopped Elizabeth that night in Jake's so long ago, would Maxie have turned to Lucky?

She knew what it was to be desperate, to want to keep someone's love so badly you'd do *anything*. What had she done in the name of her love for Lucky? For Ric?

No, turning the attention to a desperately unhappy, barely legal adult wasn't fair. Maxie didn't deserve to pay for Lucky's mistakes any more than Elizabeth did

So how else could she make this go away? How could she protect herself and her children without throwing Jason to the wolves? Lying in front of a grand jury seemed like the best bet, but that would just land her even more on Ric's radar.

Maybe Jason's idea would allow her to be more involved, to make an active choice to help rather than passively sitting back and hoping he could make it go away.

And since she was the weapon being used against him, it was fair Jason had a hand in making this go away, right? It didn't make her weak, just smart.

"I'm using all my available resources," she told the room. "Jason is a resource. He's always been there for me. I didn't do this. There's no harm in making sure I don't pay for it."

Right. That sounded good.

The black cell phone vibrated suddenly, the force of it sending the device sliding across the coffee table. Elizabeth snatched it up. "Hello?"

*"Elizabeth. I—I need to see you. Can we meet at Vista Point?"*

Elizabeth chewed her lip. "I just put Cameron down for a nap. Let me see if Robin or Patrick can come watch him." People who wouldn't ask her questions. God, it was nice to have people to depend on for a change.

*"Okay. I'll be there in an hour." He paused. "I have a way to make us both safe, I just...I need you to let me explain it."*

Well, that sounded odd and disturbing, but she swallowed. She trusted Jason. "All right, I'll be there in an hour."

She hit the end button and tapped the phone against her mouth. What if he was sending her away? To a jurisdiction where she couldn't be extradited?

What if that was the only solution? Could she give up her family, her friends, her life here? Any hope of having Jason in her child's life?

"God, I hope that's not the plan." She reached for her own cell phone in order to dial Robin's number, hoping she'd come through for her again.

## Vista Point

Elizabeth pulled into a spot next to Jason's bike. She could see him standing by the bench on the lower portion of the cliff, not looking at anything in particular.

He didn't look like he was about to send her away forever, but hell, what would that even look like?

"Hey, Robin came through?" he asked as she approached.

"Sort of. She sent Patrick while she finished up at the hospital." She pressed her purse strap higher on her shoulder. "I told him I was meeting with someone to make the charges go away, but he's been talking to Robin enough to know something more is up."

"If Robin trusts him, that's good enough for me."

She nodded and then folded her arms. "So...your plan?"

"Yeah." He scratched the back of his neck. "Listen. I—we can do a couple of things, but not all of them are guaranteed to work the way we want it, too, okay?"

"Okay," Elizabeth drawled. She sat on the bench—something told her she didn't want to be standing for this. "One of them is sending me to some place they can't find me and make me come back, right?"

He exhaled. "It's...an option. I don't like it for a lot of reasons." Jason sat next to her. "I don't...want to ask you to leave. I'd rather have you stay in Port Charles."

Well, that was something. "Okay, so what are our other options?"

"I talked to Diane, and she thinks she can get Ric disqualified from any investigation involving you," Jason told her. "And it's unlikely another prosecutor would take up the case without the personal relationship."

"Which fixes the problem of *my* charges, but not the one where I'm subpoenaed against you," Elizabeth said. "So what's the plan to keep me from testifying? Sending me away until the grand jury is dissolved?"

"It would be a short term thing." Jason looked away. "But *you'd* be okay, Elizabeth. Diane can make the charges go away—"

"I already told you I'm not interested in any solution that doesn't protect you, too," she told him. "I'm glad Diane can help me, but I want to help *you*. I won't let Ric use me as leverage." She arched a brow. "So, what's the rest of the plan?"

"This is where it gets...complicated." Jason paused. "Spousal privilege."

She blinked because she could not have heard those words correctly. No way in hell did Jason say a word whose root was *spouse*. Elizabeth cleared her throat. "You said...spousal privilege. L-Like

Sonny and Carly? Or you and Brenda?”

“Yeah.” Jason clasped his hands together. “Diane told me that even though it’s technically for things said between spouses after the marriage, most judges and prosecutors aren’t willing to take the risk and contest it. Too easily thrown out and mistrials are common.”

“So this would keep me from testifying against you.” Elizabeth leaned back. She’d wanted an active role this plan, but this...

And really, knowing all the history involved, this *should* have occurred to her as an option.

“It would,” Jason told her. “But—I can’t ask you to do that.”

She closed her eyes. Of course not. She was insane. Jason was still in love with Sam. He had already done this once, hadn’t he? Married to Brenda, involved with Courtney?

No. *Not* going to think about those days. Best left in the past.

“Why?” she asked flatly. “Am I suddenly less marriageable than I was two weeks ago when I told you about the baby?”

“What?” Jason leaned back, his eyes wide. “*No*. I mean, Elizabeth, you’d have to convince Lucky to give you a divorce in the Dominican Republic so we could get it done by next week. After how things turned out for you with Ric and Lucky, how can I ask you to get married again when it’s for my protection?”

Oh. What a sweet idiot he could be. “Jason, you signed a false statement to the police to keep me out of jail after the hotel fire, remember?” she said. “You could have done time for that. Are you the *only* one that gets to make sacrifices in order to protect people?”

He shook his head. “It’s not the same, Elizabeth. This—this is an open-ended solution and you’d have to be sure. I mean, we’d live together. You’d be in my life for at least a few years.” Jason cleared his throat. “A-And you said that night...it couldn’t work.”

Because she’d been trying to beat him to the punch of establishing what had happened was a one-night stand, but hell if she was going to admit *that*. “I say a lot of things when I’m trying to protect myself,” she murmured. “Jason, maybe that’s what I said then, but you know it’s different now. I’m pregnant and there’s a very good chance you’re the father. What, you think I’d keep the baby from you?”

“No. I mean...” He exhaled in a quick rush of air. “I just want you have all the choices in front you.”

“So I can pick the one that asks the *least* of me?” Elizabeth demanded. “What kind of person would that make me if I took the easy path? The one where Diane makes it go away for me, but leaves *you* in Ric’s crosshairs?” She shook her head. “I’m not going to be the reason you go to jail—”

“My *job* is the reason I’d end up in prison,” Jason cut in. “It would *never* be your fault—”

“And you’ve done a great job of staying out of it on your own. Besides, if you weren’t doing this work, someone else would be.” Elizabeth rose to her feet and started to pace. After a moment, she turned back to him. “You’re doing a pretty thorough job of keeping me from agreeing, Jason. So why even bother bring it up if the thought is so distasteful?”

Slowly, Jason got up and approached her. “I don’t think that. I asked you weeks ago, remember? You said no then.”

Because she’d almost said yes and that had scared the bejesus out of her. “I—we don’t know if you’re the father of this baby.” Elizabeth tucked her hair behind her ear. “You would have been stuck.”

“So you would have said yes if we knew the paternity for sure?” Jason asked, tilting his head.

“*That*,” Elizabeth said carefully, “is not the issue here. The issue is that you’re very reluctant to take this step. Are you just...not thrilled with asking me for help? You’d prefer to fix this on your own, but you need me to make sure it works.”

“I—” He stopped. “I don’t want you to feel obligated. That’s why you’re stuck with Lucky, why you kept Ric around. You deserve better than that.”

“Funny, the *last* thing I feel is an obligation to keep you out of jail. It’s not a tit for tat thing. You’re not making my charges go away by doing anything nefarious.” Elizabeth pursed her lips. “Ric wanted me to panic. Maybe he even wanted me to run to you. But he isn’t going to expect me to fight him. He’s trying to make me choose what’s more important to me—my freedom or yours.”

She tossed her hair over her shoulder. “I’m not interested in any solution where he gets what he wants. He should have thought of this—any lawyer worth their salt would file the motion Diane is planning to file. I’d have no incentive to tell the truth in front of the grand jury without these charges hanging over me.”

“The last thing I want is for you to lie—” Jason began.

“So that Ric can use what little he does know as a weapon?” Elizabeth challenged. “Think of the leading questions he could ask. He could put our history out there for strangers to know about, to dissect. I don’t know what I might know about your business, but *whatever* I say could add to what he already knows. So if we don’t do this, I promise you, Jason, I will protect you another way. Ric is *not* using me as a weapon.”

Jason sighed and looked away. “So either we stop you from testifying or you’ll commit perjury.” He scrubbed his hands over his face. “I think I had this conversation with Carly once.”

“I’d be insulted you’re comparing me to her, but in this case, she had a point. Carly didn’t want to be the reason Sonny went to jail, especially since if I recall correctly, it *was* her fault he was in that particular mess to begin with.” Elizabeth huffed. “Now, are you going to marry me or not?”

# Chapter Three

*You think that you are strong but you are weak  
You'll see  
It takes more strength to cry admit defeat  
I have truth on my side  
You only have deceit  
You'll see, somehow, someday  
- You'll See, Madonna*

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*Saturday, October 21, 2006*

## **Elizabeth's Apartment: Hallway**

Elizabeth stepped through the door that separated the stairway from the hallway of her apartment and scowled. Ric Lansing was leaning against her door with a stupid smirk on his face.

God, she couldn't *wait* until next week when he learned she wasn't the weak and vulnerable girl he'd preyed on all those years ago. She was going to wipe the floor with him.

"Elizabeth, I was hoping you'd be back soon."

"This is harassment, Ric, and my lawyer isn't going to like that," she said, fishing her keys from her purse, making sure the paperwork for her Dominican divorce was safely stowed inside and out of sight.

"I just...wanted to check in." Ric straightened. "You hired a lawyer?"

"Not yet, but I will. Do you *have* a purpose here, Ric? Or should I call the police?"

"You think Mac Scorpio is going to protect you from me? He blames you for his daughter's transgressions." He sniffed. "Misplaced to be sure, but it serves me well enough for now."

"Well, then maybe I'd call Jason," Elizabeth retorted. When Ric's smirk deepened, she snorted. "You'd like that, wouldn't you? You *want* me to go running to Jason to protect me?"

"Didn't you?" Ric asked. "You went to Robin and Patrick's last night. You think I won't find a call to Jason from Robin's phone?" He lifted an eyebrow.

"I think you have no probable cause to search Robin's phone and if you tried, her parents would break your arms," Elizabeth responded sweetly. "And thanks, Ric, for letting me know you're tailing me."

He hesitated, his face dropping a bit. Score one for her. "Where were you just now? Your car was

outside in the parking lot.” He narrowed his eyes. “Did you borrow a car?”

“I walked to Eli’s for some lunch.” She tilted her head toward the door. “Robin and Patrick are inside now watching my son. And that’s the *last* time I’ll voluntarily tell you my whereabouts, Ric. Stay away from me.”

“You have six days, Elizabeth. Your freedom or Jason’s. You’d better make the right choice.”

Elizabeth pushed open the door and then found great pleasure in slamming it shut in his face.

Patrick rose from the sofa. “Was that Lansing? Was he waiting for you?”

“Down, Patrick.” Robin stepped through the threshold. “How did it go?”

Elizabeth held a finger, turned and opened the door to find Ric still there. “You keep standing there, Ric, I’m going straight to Alexis to tell her how you spent the blackout.”

He pressed his lips together. “Why do you know about that? Did Jason tell you?”

“Maybe Sam and I are besties,” she said. “Stay away from me, Ric. I don’t need Jason to make your life a living hell.” She leaned forward. “Alexis is a *Cassadine*. Her family makes you look positively normal, so if you want her to know your newest dirty secret—”

“I’m going.” He glared at her. “This isn’t over.”

“I didn’t think so,” Elizabeth murmured, watching her ex-husband stalk down the hallway toward the stairwell. Satisfied he was really gone, she closed the door. “So, I confirmed he had me followed last night, so thank God I switched cars.”

“I put in a call to my mother,” Robin said. “She’s having my phone records wiped for the time you used it.” She lifted her chin. “That scum isn’t going to know what you’re planning until it hits him in the face.”

“Does someone want to tell *me* what’s going on?” Patrick complained. “I mean, I’m all for showing Lansing up, but I’d like to be in on it.”

“I…” Elizabeth sighed. “So Ric started this investigation and had me suspended because he wanted leverage.”

“He wants to use you against Jason.” Robin sat down, a mug of coffee in her hands. “Oh, Cam’s playing in the bedroom, by the way. Patrick brought over the race cars.”

“Just a loaner,” Patrick said. “For like a week. I want them back in mint condition.”

“Hush.” Robin waved a hand. “How does he plan to use you?”

“He wants me to testify against Jason in a grand jury hearing.” Elizabeth took a seat on the sofa and

removed her bag from her shoulder.

“Oh, hell, I see where this is going,” Robin sighed. “So, you’re going to protect Jason—”

“And Diane is filing a motion to have Ric pulled from any case dealing with me,” Elizabeth replied.

“For the Port Charles newbies,” Patrick said, raising a hand. “How exactly are you protecting Jason from your testimony—” He closed his mouth. “Oh. *Hell*. Liz. Babe. We can find another way.”

“How are you going to deal with the Lucky situation?” Robin asked, ignoring Patrick’s outburst.

Elizabeth pulled the papers from her bag. “Diane drew up the papers I need to file in the Dominican Republic. Lucky has to agree to let me file there in order to have the divorce recognized in New York.”

“How are you going to swing that?” Patrick asked. “Because this is one part of the nonsense I’m okay with.”

“I’m going to use the same thing he’s used on me for years. Guilt.” Elizabeth pulled out her cell phone. “I’m going to tell Nikolas what’s going on, and then tell him the best way to make me look innocent is if I walk away from Lucky, that they’re using our continued relationship as evidence of my involvement.”

Patrick whistled. “And you’re not going to mention that you intend to go through with the divorce. He’ll think you’re just filing for divorce and maybe you guys will stop it before it goes into effect and the charges are gone.”

“Lucky can draw *whatever* conclusions he wants to,” Elizabeth said. “They searched my home and found one last stash. In the cookie jar. My son lives in this apartment. He could have found them.” She closed her eyes. “Whatever loyalty I had left vanished in that moment. Cameron is more important.”

“No, no, I like this. It’s ice cold, just what he deserves.” Patrick clasped his hands. “So how long do you and Jason have to stay married?”

“That’s difficult to say,” Elizabeth admitted. “It’s...pretty open-ended at this point. We can’t get divorced as soon as Ric drops the grand jury proceedings because they can challenge the privilege.”

“You’d probably have to wait at least a year,” Robin said. “Because a ton of marriages fail in the first year—” She stopped. “Sorry.”

“Yeah, I’m living proof. One and done.” She leaned back. “I’m not going to think about that right now.” She took a deep breath. “I just...I have to get my paperwork done tomorrow because I’m leaving for the DR on Monday. I’ll be divorced Tuesday morning, and married that evening.” She rubbed her eyes. “Oh, man, put me on Maury now.”

“Well, whatever you need from us,” Robin said. “Cam can stay with us—”

“He can?” Patrick repeated. “I don’t know about that—”

“Actually, I’m going to have him stay with my grandmother. I’m going to tell her I need a few days to sort through my options regarding these charges and my marriage. I don’t want anyone else to know about this until Jason and I come back on Thursday. I don’t even plan to tell Emily or Nikolas, because they might stop Lucky from signing the papers.” She hesitated. “But, Robin, there is something maybe you could do for me.”

*Sunday, October 22, 2006*

### **Kelly’s: Courtyard**

Elizabeth pushed through the doors of Kelly’s, a cup of coffee in her hand stopping when Emily jumped up from one of the tables. “Emily.”

“You’ve been dodging my phone calls,” Emily said, folding her arms. “Elizabeth—”

“I’m just...dealing with some things.” Elizabeth furrowed her brow and looked around. “How did you know I’d be here—” She stopped. “Nikolas told you.”

“He said you two were going to Promises in order to get Lucky sign some divorce paperwork.” Emily stepped forward. “Elizabeth, I *thought* you were going to give Lucky a chance to clean himself up—”

Not this again. It *always* came back to this. “I have to do what’s right for me and Cameron, Emily.” She pressed her lips together. “You know about my suspension, what they suspect me of doing. Being connected to Lucky looks bad. I have to do what’s right—”

“I can talk to my parents—try to get the board to reinstate you,” Emily began.

Elizabeth shook her head. “They won’t. Not until the charges go away. I’ve talked to a lawyer, Emily, and she agrees this is the best thing—”

“You talked to *Diane*, you mean.” Emily pursed her lips. “Which means you went to Jason. Instead of talking to me or Nikolas, you went to my brother.”

Elizabeth sighed and looked away. Any thought of confiding in Emily was off the table. “I wanted to get in to Diane immediately. She’s a good lawyer, and I knew that since Jason has her on retainer, she’d call him back faster than she’d call me. I’m just *trying* to get this part of my life over with.”

“Jason has a lot on his plate, Elizabeth.” Emily tucked her hair behind her ears. “I mean, I know he’ll do what he can to help you, but he’s still dealing with Sonny’s illness and the breakup with Sam.”

“And I’m not dealing with anything?” Elizabeth retorted. “I’m pregnant, my husband screwed a teenager and his drug addiction lost me my job and might cost my freedom. I’m supposed to sit back and *not* pull strings with Jason because he broke up with his girlfriend five months ago? And don’t pull that bull with Sonny on me. He’s been on the road to recovery since August.”

Emily sighed. “I’m not saying it’s not difficult, Elizabeth, and I hate that it’s happening, but it’s just... Lucky’s in a bad place—”

“Oh, my God, I’m not listening to this anymore.” Elizabeth started past her, but turned at the entrance to the court yard. “You know, I get it. Lucky was your childhood best friend and Jason’s your brother. I’ve known for *years* I rate below both of them—”

“Elizabeth—”

“When I was drowning inside all those years ago during the modeling and the brainwashing, you kept telling me to stick it out. That Lucky would be himself again one day.” Elizabeth huffed. “It’s always about Lucky with you. Well, I’m tired of sacrificing myself on the altar of Lucky Spencer. Where the hell has it gotten me? Cops searched my home, I’ve got a police tail on me, I’m a month late on my rent because Lucky drained what was left of our money for the rehab.” She stepped towards him. “I’m pregnant, Emily. I have a son. At what point does it get to be a *little* about me?”

“I’m sorry,” Emily began but Elizabeth walked away, finally accepting that best friend was a label they’d put on their relationship years ago.

It no longer qualified.

### **Promises Rehab: Lucky’s Room**

“Are you sure about this?” Nikolas asked as they waited for Lucky to return from a session. “I’m sure Diane can get these charges dismissed.”

Elizabeth sighed, feeling so drained by the day which wasn’t even half over. She still had to pack Cameron up for the four days he’d be with her grandmother, drop him off with her grandmother tonight and then pack for herself.

And somehow come to term with the fact that in three days, she’d exchange one husband for another.

“I have to do what’s right for my son at the moment, Nikolas. I don’t want Ric to be able to point to our marriage as a reason to believe I’d steal those pills.” Elizabeth held up the paperwork. “I just need to Lucky to sign this paper not to contest the divorce. If he’s really sorry for what he put me through, he’ll do it.”

“I know what he did with Maxie was wrong—”

“God.” Elizabeth tilted her head back. “It’s not even really about Maxie.” She looked away, thinking of how her life had changed since walking in on them in Kelly’s that night.

How far away it all seemed. No, the affair had simply been the last straw. She’d been clinging to the wreckage of her marriage for months—maybe since the moment Lucky had been injured and Jason had been the one to save her. The accusations of an affair with Patrick had been humiliating, but thank God Lucky hadn’t seen the truth.

She'd settled a year ago with her marriage and this summer had just opened her eyes to what her life could have been like if she'd made different choices once.

"I'm just...I'm *tired*, Nikolas. Please, be my friend and just help me talk Lucky into this." She hesitated. "It's better for him, too."

"Better that the mother of his child wants to run away from him as fast as possible?" Nikolas said without heat. His eyes met hers. "Elizabeth, did he ever—that night when I found you on the floor—he *never* put his hands on you other than that?"

"What? No." Elizabeth shook her head. "No, Nikolas. I never would have stayed. I—" She bit her lip. "But that was definitely the last straw. I've been...planning this for several weeks. I just...didn't pull the trigger." She sighed. "Maybe I was waiting until our anniversary so at least one of my marriages could make it that far."

"I get it, Elizabeth. I know Emily still thinks you should hold out, but you're right. You've got your kids to worry about." Nikolas shrugged. "And even if he gets clean, he'll always be a drug addict."

She closed her eyes, the tears burning against her eyelids. "God, Nikolas. Thank you. You're the only one who's friends with us both to even consider me."

"Hey, I tried to kill you once," Nikolas murmured. "That makes us family."

She laughed and wiped her eyes as Lucky pushed open the door. It was the first time she'd come into contact with him since he'd left for the rehab, since the second time she'd taken a hard fall and telling him and Jason about the baby.

He looked tired, his hair unruly like he'd been running his fingers through it. But his eyes were clear. "Elizabeth, Nikolas. They said you were waiting for me."

"How's it going here?" Nikolas asked, as Elizabeth shuffled some paperwork.

"Ah, it's going." Lucky eyed her. "I didn't think you'd come—"

"The police are investigating me for stealing drugs in order to feed your habit," Elizabeth cut in, coldly. "I've been suspended pending the outcome, but Ric has already informed me I'll be charged by the end of the week." She narrowed her eyes. "They found one last stash of Oxy you kept in my son's cookie jar and were able to trace it to the hospital."

Lucky's shoulders slumped. "God, Elizabeth—I'll sign an affidavit, testify, anything. I'll tell them it was Maxie—"

"And ruin her life more than you already have?" she shot back. "I've got my beef with Maxie, but she was a young, vulnerable girl who'd just watched her boyfriend murdered in front of her. I've been there, thinking you have nothing to live for." She shrugged. "I'd rather you keep her out of it. I've consulted a lawyer who recommended I file for divorce."

“Divorce.” Lucky swallowed. “But we’re having a child—”

That fact remained to be seen, but Elizabeth tapped the paperwork on the desk. “I’ve brought the papers she drew up for an uncontested divorce. I need these charges to go away fast. I need my job, Lucky. I need those paychecks or I’m going to lose the apartment—”

“Elizabeth, you know I’d help—”

Elizabeth held up a hand to cut Nikolas’s offer in mid-stream. “You *say* you’re sorry. Well, I need you to prove it. You’ve almost shot me, you’ve thrown me to the ground, you’ve taken drugs, hid them in the home we shared with my son, and you screwed a teenager in our bed. You owe me this.”

He swallowed again, his hands trembling. “I want to make it up to you, Elizabeth. Please. Just give me a chance—”

She held out a pen. “This will be the start, Lucky. If you ever loved me, you’ll do this for me.”

Lucky looked at his brother. “You’re here with her...does that mean you think I should do this?”

“I—” Nikolas hesitated, clearly uncomfortable with being in the middle of this. “Lucky, you’ve put her through a lot. If this can help her get her job back and keep the DA at bay—you should do this.”

Lucky slowly reached for the pen and sighed. “I guess you’re right.” He cleared his throat. “Just...tell me where to sign.”

Elizabeth held back a sigh of relief as Lucky initialed and scrawled his signature on several pages where Diane had put flags without noticing it was paper work for the Dominican Republic. If he had noticed, she would have come with something but it was better than it had stayed under the radar.

Lucky slid the papers across the desk to her. “I’m sorry you’re dealing with this, Elizabeth. I’ll testify. Just tell your lawyer that.”

“I’m confident I’ll be exonerated,” Elizabeth said, putting the papers back in her bag. “After all, I didn’t do anything wrong.”

### **Greystone Manor: Living Room**

Sonny set down a phone receiver as Jason entered that afternoon. “Hey. I pulled some strings to get Elizabeth a court hearing in Santo Domingo on Monday morning at ten-thirty, and I’ve got things set on the island—” He stopped. “You okay?”

“Uh, yeah.” Jason rubbed the back of his neck. “I just heard from Robin. Elizabeth convinced Lucky to sign the paperwork, so we’re good to go in the DR tomorrow.”

“I figured she’d be able to do it.” Sonny reached for another piece of paper. “Why is Robin getting in touch with you? I thought you gave Elizabeth a burner cell.”

“Yeah, but she’s still nervous about Ric. Robin said he was waiting for her when she got home from talking to me yesterday.” He exhaled slowly. “Let it slip he’d had a tail on her the night before.”

“Does he know she’s come to you?” Sonny asked, leaning against the table. “Should we move the time table up?”

“No.” Jason shook his head. “No, she needs—she needs time to get Cameron settled with her grandmother tonight. We’ll leave early tomorrow so she can file with the courthouse by noon.”

Sonny hesitated. “It’s happening pretty fast, isn’t it?” he asked quietly. “Five minutes ago, you were just waiting to find out if you were going to be a father, and now you’re looking at spending at least the next year as a husband.”

Jason lowered himself on the sofa. “I tried to talk to her out of it. Make her understand I could make the charges go away.” He rubbed his chin. “She threatened to lie in front a grand jury if Ric called her anyway.”

“You know, Jason.” Sonny said, crossing to the armchair and taking a seat. “It’s *not* the end of the world to accept help. Elizabeth wanted to help.”

“It just...” Jason shook his head. “I don’t know.”

“You want to say it doesn’t feel right,” Sonny said, “except those aren’t the right words.” He leaned forward. “Have the two of you discussed what this could mean? Particularly if you turn out to be the father of that child? You’d be in Cameron’s life as his stepfather, in your child’s life every single day for a while. Could you let that go?”

“It doesn’t matter what I want.” Jason looked straight ahead. He couldn’t think about the day to day of being married to Elizabeth, of having a family.

It never worked out for long.

Sonny cleared his throat. “Have you, maybe, considered not...making this...a simple marriage of convenience?”

Jason whipped his head around to face his partner. “What—what do you mean?”

“It’s not like you’re strangers,” Sonny said. “Or even bitter acquaintances. You two have a...bit of a past. Possibly a future. I know you care for each other. Have you discussed what kind of marriage this will be?”

“It’ll be whatever Elizabeth wants it to be,” Jason muttered, wanting a change of conversation immediately. “You said things were ready on the island?”

“I’ve arranged for the license, for a justice of the peace, you know—all the details. Robin called me—said Elizabeth asked her to be a witness at the wedding.”

Wedding. License. This...was really happening. He was going to marry Elizabeth on Tuesday evening. In forty-eight hours. "I'm glad Robin's helping out. She—she said that her mother is having her cell phone calls wiped in case Ric figures out Elizabeth borrowed it."

"I always liked that girl." Sonny leaned forward. "So I know we're letting the rest of the town find out about the marriage in Friday's newspaper, but have you thought about...warning certain people?"

Jason blinked and looked away. "No. Elizabeth told Patrick and Robin, and I trust them to keep quiet for her sake. This works best if we move fast. Too many people know and the secret gets out."

"You don't think *Sam* is going to be interested in this news?" Sonny asked. "It's only been five months—"

"A lot's happened in those five months." Jason shook his head. "I know I don't have the right to be angry about Ric, but—"

"Why not?" Sonny asked. He lifted a shoulder. "Look, maybe she wants to excuse what she did and blame my brother for it. He's not innocent, but Jason, she probably planned it for weeks."

Jason rose to his feet. "Sonny—"

"Sam's a *con* artist. Retired, maybe. But a con artist at heart." Sonny crossed to his mini bar. "No accident that she latched on to you. Read you like a book. You like babies, like saving damsels in distress—"

"Sonny," Jason began.

"—then she twisted herself all around to be the kind of woman you'd keep around. Tough, smart. Ruthless. Someone who'd follow you through the door. And you walked away from that. She blamed her mother. So, she tried to take away what her mother valued most—her stable family life."

Jason exhaled slowly. "No. Sonny, she's not like that. She wanted to hurt herself—"

"You *know* what I'm saying is true, because it's why you're twisted up about it." Sonny gestured at him with the tumbler of bourbon in his hand. "Elizabeth used to be married to Ric, but that didn't stop you from sleeping with *her*. She slept with Zander a few times, too. You couldn't stand him. You don't hold *that* against her." He lifted a brow. "It's because you know Sam wanted to kill two birds with one stone—to destroy her mother and destroy you. Sleeping with Ric did it." He tilted his head. "And she ran right over to tell you, didn't she?"

She had. The very next morning. Something sour burned in the back of his throat, because there was something to it. If Sam had just wanted to hurt herself, she could have slept with anyone else, but she'd chosen Ric Lansing.

"It doesn't matter. I'm not warning her. She's...unpredictable," Jason admitted. "She's gone after Elizabeth more than once because I told her about that night. I don't trust her not to go to Ric to punish Elizabeth."

“And that says it all, doesn't it?” Sonny murmured as he sipped his drink.

# Chapter Four

*Tell me now if you came sneaking up behind  
Would you know me and see behind the smile  
I can change like colors on a wall  
Hoping no one else will find what lies beneath it all  
I think I hide it all so well*

- Everybody Knows, Dixie Chicks

*Sunday, October 22, 2006*

## **Hardy Home: Living Room**

Her grandmother did not quite believe her, but Elizabeth knew there was enough truth in the story she'd fed to Audrey that she would not quibble: a quick getaway to a spa resort because Robin wanted to treat her, to get her away from this stress, from the charges, from her life.

"Kelly's concerned about my blood pressure," Elizabeth said, handing Cameron a truck and then watching as he returned to the toys in the corner of the room. "With the suspension and these charges..." She lifted a shoulder. "I'm just trying to play it safe. I normally wouldn't accept something like this, but—"

"Robin's a good friend." Audrey perched at the edge of the flowered covered arm chair. "I just...I wish I *knew* what to do about this. I hate that you had to file for divorce in order to prove your innocence. It's probably the last thing Lucky needed right now."

Elizabeth took a deep breath. "Yeah, well, losing my paycheck is the last thing *I* need right now. My lawyer suggested a show of independence from him would be a good sign." Was it ever about her? For Christ's sake.

"I suppose. And I imagine Lucky's protestation of your innocence wouldn't carry very far." Audrey hesitated. "Darling, *who* is your lawyer? You haven't said. Alexis isn't available anymore. Though it was hardly ethical for her to marry your ex-husband after she handled the divorce."

"I asked around." Elizabeth stood. "I was lucky to find someone who hates Ric and isn't charging me anything." Diane was on retainer with Jason, but in light of the changes she was about to make, she didn't think enlightening her grandmother as to the identity of her lawyer would be helpful.

Audrey would just look at her with that sympathetic look, with those soft eyes. Those disappointed eyes. She could even hear the admonishment now. *Oh, Elizabeth.*

She'd never grown up in her grandmother's eyes, but Elizabeth supposed she couldn't blame the woman. Every five minutes, Elizabeth was running to someone for help. This...this *was* different. Yes, Jason was helping her, but she thought Diane might have helped her on principle without Jason's

involvement.

And she was helping Jason right back. She was protecting *him*. If they didn't keep her off the stand, Elizabeth planned to lie her ass off in front of that grand jury.

It was the first active thing she'd done in the months to take control of her life, and it felt good. At the moment. In five minutes, her stomach would be twisting again with all the ways this could go wrong.

Audrey pursed her lips. "I suppose. Well, Cameron is welcome to stay with me a few more days, but my love, I don't know how much more of this I can do. I'm not particularly young anymore and he's an active little boy. He's in preschool during the day, but—"

"I know, Gram. That's why I have to do this." Elizabeth rose to her feet. "I've been sitting back, waiting for things to happen to me. I knew something was wrong with Lucky, I suspected he was using too much of his medication, but I never dreamed it was so bad. Or that he was having an affair. I tried to walk away then, but everyone told me to give him another chance. But...I'm facing jail time for this. Lucky slept with the commissioner's daughter and Mac blames me. These charges aren't just going away." She folded her arms and looked away, towards the doorway. "I'm divorcing Lucky, Gram. His recovery is his business, but my life and my children are mine."

"There's not a lot there to argue with." Audrey sighed. "I know you feel as though I'm taking Lucky's side—"

"Aren't you?" Elizabeth demanded. "Asking me to give him more time? He'll always be a drug addict, Gram. Even if he never takes another pill—it's always something he'll have to deal with. I've dealt with brainwashing, faked my death to save him, I nearly died for my first husband—when does it get to be *my* turn?"

"I just..." Audrey lifted her hands, held them out at her sides. "I remember your grandfather and I. And how we let our happiness slip through our fingers because we didn't take chances. Because we didn't stick by one another when times were tough. We wasted years, Elizabeth. And while I love your father very much, and I know Steve never saw Tom as anything other than his son..." She closed her eyes.

"You wished you could have had more time together, more children," Elizabeth murmured. "I—I do understand that, Gram. And I thought about that. With Lucky the first time. With Ric. I kept thinking that love isn't supposed to be easy, that marriage is...it's a battle sometimes." A tear slid down her cheek. "But at some point, it has to feel like it's worth it."

"All right, darling." Audrey stepped towards her and wrapped her in a tight embrace. "You're right. You deserve a few days of rest, of relaxation. And...I can see you're looking at this situation with open eyes. I'll respect your decision to leave Lucky."

"Thanks, Gram." Elizabeth stepped back and bit her lip. "You might not always believe me, but I *know* what I'm doing. How I'm handling this—I didn't choose the easy way like maybe I would have done once. It's going to be scary sometimes, but I know I'm doing the right thing. For myself and my

children. They come first.”

## **Morgan Penthouse: Living Room**

“Something is going on, and I don’t like it,” Carly declared, her hands at her hips as she watched Jason set a duffel bag by his desk and flip through some paperwork. “You and Sonny are just taking off to the island for some problems, but you *never* go at the same time—”

“If you need anything with the boys or their security, you can talk to Cody. He and Max are running point while we’re gone.” Jason made another notation, ignoring her growl of exasperation.

He had thought about confiding in Carly because he thought she might understand. After all, she was familiar with the spousal privilege option. But if Carly thought Jason was in trouble, there was no telling what she might do to help.

Better to leave her out of it for now. He’d call her from the island when it was a done deal and cite her dislike for Elizabeth as a reason he’d kept it from her.

“Is this related to Elizabeth?” Carly asked. “Because Jax came home yesterday absolutely *livid*. He’s talking about finding someone to run against Ric in the next election.” She huffed and looked down. “He’s been kind of protective of her since...last year.”

Jason raised his head and frowned. “That’s right. Sonny mentioned something about a surrogacy and Elizabeth having a miscarriage.”

“She and Jax were driving home.” Carly pressed her lips together. “I was...in the middle of my breakdown, and I ran in front of their car.” She wrapped her arms around herself. “They both forgave me. For some reason.”

Jason rubbed the back of his neck. Christ. He hadn’t known Carly was involved in that. “It was an accident, and Elizabeth doesn’t hold grudges.” Even when she ought to. “So Jax knows about her suspension?”

“Oh, he is through the roof.” Carly said, eager to move away from the previous topic of conversation. “Ranting and raving about the policies at General Hospital, how he knew Lucky was bad news. He treated her like crap during that surrogacy, according to Jax. There she is, trying to make money to pay bills by giving Jax and Courtney a child, and it’s like she had an affair.” Carly snorted. “Jackass. It’s always the cheating ones that are overly paranoid. I know—I used to accuse Tony all the time of going back to Bobbie.”

He had a headache. “Carly, go away.”

“No.” Carly stepped towards him. “Just—just tell me you’re okay. Ric doesn’t do anything without a reason. If he’s going after Elizabeth, there’s a *reason* for it. I know him. Is he trying to get something from you? I know you and Elizabeth are friends again—after the surgery with Sam, I mean. I know how she nearly sacrificed her career. And then she ran around like Florence Nightingale when you

checked yourself out the hospital—” She narrowed her eyes. “Jason. Are you...*involved* with her again?”

This was the problem with Carly. You could never write her off because she was usually five steps ahead of you. “If I were, it’s none of your business—”

“Hell, Jason, she’s in the middle of this mess, and then there’s the disaster of her marriage to Lucky. Look.” Carly tilted her head back. “It’s not that I don’t like her—”

He arched his brows and she snarled. “All right, it’s mostly because I don’t like her. I don’t really care to examine the reasons why at this point because I suspect it’s more about holding a grudge than an actual complaint. But I just...you’re both coming out of super serious relationships—” Carly stopped. “Okay. I’m going to shut up. You’re a grown man, and she’s mostly a grown woman.” She snorted. “It’s not like you wouldn’t be the *best* choice she’s made in her life so far.”

Jason waited a moment. “I have no idea what you’re talking about now. So I’m just going to ignore all of that. Go tell Jax to destroy Ric’s career. It can only help.”

She narrowed her eyes. “Fine. But when you and Sonny come back, I’m going to want answers. And I mean it.”

“And you’ll know *what* I want you to know *when* I want you to know it.” Jason sighed, frustrated. “Carly, if I thought for one minute you wouldn’t try to help me, I’d tell you now. But you’ll go and help. And how do your plans usually end?”

“Um...massive amounts of destruction,” Carly admitted. “There was that seducing my mother’s husband part. And then there was Michael’s paternity. I tried to help Sonny, but he almost went to jail. Twice. I tried to set you and Courtney up, but you were both miserable—and of course, there was John’s paternity.” She winced. “So yeah, you know what? *Don’t* tell me. I could promise to stay out of it, but you and I both know I couldn’t help myself.”

“And Sonny said you’d never learn your lesson.” He opened the door and pointed. “Now, go away.”

“I’m gone.”

*Monday, October 23, 2006*

### **Elizabeth’s Apartment Building: Sidewalk**

Robin pulled her car to a stop in front and waited while Elizabeth waved to the cop she knew was tailing her, stowed her suitcase in the back seat and then got into the passenger seat.

“Are you going to be able to lose him?” Elizabeth asked, fastening her seatbelt.

Robin smirked. “Did I ever tell you about the summer I spent with my mother in Pine Valley learning defensive driving maneuvers? Ha. The PCPD is *no* match for Anna Devane’s daughter.” She shifted the car into first gear. “You might want to hold on.”

And she stepped on the accelerator.

Three lights, twelve turns, and six minutes later, Robin had left the PCPD in the dust and made a turn towards the private air strip where Jax, Sonny and the Quartermaines housed their planes.

“That felt good,” the brunette said cheerfully. “Like I’m fighting against the man. I think I’m starting to get why my mother has trouble leaving the WSB behind.”

“Right,” Elizabeth said weakly, holding a hand over her abdomen. “I’ll never doubt you again.”

“Are you ready for this?” Robin asked, slowing the car down to a normal speed.

Choosing to believe her friend was asking after the practical details, Elizabeth nodded. “My grandmother probably thinks I’m up to something, but since I didn’t tell her Diane is representing me, she’s not connecting it to Jason. Diane’s already filing an appeal with the board at the hospital and she’ll file a motion to disqualify Ric on Thursday afternoon after we get back.”

“Why is she waiting until then? Why not file now?” Robin asked, squinting at the traffic light in front of her. “Clear it up faster.”

“Because she’s going to try to get Ric thrown off any case including Jason since he’ll…” Elizabeth’s throat tightened. “Well, yeah. You know what I mean.”

“I do, but don’t you think you’re going to have to work on saying it?” Robin asked, glancing at her as the cars in front of her started to move. “You’re marrying Jason tomorrow.”

“Oh, man.” She closed her eyes. “Okay. Okay. Stop *saying* that.”

“Elizabeth, if you’re having second thoughts—”

“Not about marrying Jason,” Elizabeth said. “Okay? That’s…that’s all fine. I’m protecting him. It’s my fault Ric is going after him like this, that he even has the chance—”

“Considering Jason’s job, it’s a *little* bit his fault,” Robin replied dryly. “But I take your meaning. So if marrying him isn’t freaking you out, what is?”

“It’s not…the idea itself. I mean, Jason suggested it as an option, but I pushed for it. I told him I would not be part of sending him to jail, so he’s really doing this to prevent me from perjury charges.” Elizabeth leaned her head back against the seat. “It’s…what comes after.”

“Ah. So it’s not marrying Jason that’s the problem. It’s *being* married to Jason.” Robin nodded. “It’s what, your fifth wedding to your third husband?”

Elizabeth shot her a dirty look. “Was that part necessary? You think I can’t count?”

“Ha,” Robin retorted. “No, what I mean is that you’ve been married twice. Each lasted barely a year. I cannot imagine the terror of one marriage, much less the third.”

“This is not helping.” Elizabeth scrubbed her hands over her face. “Look. It’s not even that, okay? It’s...those were real marriages. I thought they were—for some ridiculous reason, I thought I was marrying forever. And now, there’s Jason. And we’re not marrying because we’re in love, but...” She pressed a hand over her child. “But it’s not like we’re strangers who feel nothing.”

“You’re extremely close friends who may soon be raising a child together in holy matrimony,” Robin murmured. She pulled into the small parking lot of the air strip, turned off the ignition, and turned to Elizabeth. “Sweetie, I cannot tell you the right thing to do in this situation. You know I’m usually jumping at the chance to tell people how to live, but I’ve been working on that. And even if I wanted to, I don’t *know* what to tell you. I know Jason cares for you. I know you care for him. Sometimes, it can be just that simple.”

“This...this isn’t weird for you?” Elizabeth asked, undoing her seat belt and letting the strap slide back into place. “You...used to date Jason—”

“In another lifetime, and those were two different people. Jason is my friend now. Like you are. And I want the best for you both.” Robin bit her lip. “Look, maybe you should just ask him what his expectations of this marriage are—”

“Because I’m terrified he’ll tell me he has none. That it’s all up to me.” Elizabeth pushed her door open and stepped out into the brisk October morning. “He’s *always* doing that. The first time he asked me to marry him, I asked him that. I asked him what kind of marriage we would have. If we’d be... more. And he told me it’d be whatever *I* wanted.”

“Yeah, that’s what I mean about different people.” Robin removed her suitcase and a garment bag from the backseat as Elizabeth also retrieved her luggage. “The Jason I knew once didn’t know how to protect himself. He used to put himself out there, figuring the truth was always the best option. He took what he wanted, who he wanted...” She sighed. “But I changed that. I think I broke that in him. Or maybe I taught him to hold part of himself back.” She shook her head. “It’s a not a horrible thing to do—but he takes it to the extreme now.”

“You’re not kidding.” Elizabeth glanced towards the air strip where Sonny’s jet was waiting, the flight stairs already attached. A few figures milled about the bottom, and she recognized Jason and Sonny. “The night we were together? You know, the blackout? He wasn’t like that.” Her cheeks burned. “He and I—it was like the world didn’t exist. He wanted to be with me, and I wanted to be with him, so we just were. And we ignored everything else that didn’t fit in.”

“I don’t know how Jason feels about all of this,” Robin admitted. “But I know you’re half in love with him already. You can do two things, Elizabeth. You can do exactly what you and Jason have done for years. Hold yourself back, protect yourself. But you’ll do it at the cost of being happy. Or you can go and demand he tell you what he wants. And if he asks what you want—”

“I could tell him that the last thing I want is to find out on Friday Lucky is the father of this child. That I want him to be in my life, and that I don’t want to sleep in the guest room.” Elizabeth chewed her lip and looked at Robin. “Easy, huh?”

Tuesday, October 24, 2006

## Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic: Courthouse Plaza

Sonny sipped his espresso as Robin stirred sugar into her iced tea. “How much longer do you think it’ll be?” he asked. She looked up and blinked at him.

“What?” she asked.

“Getting the divorce decree,” Sonny clarified. “It’s already been an hour. We...wanted to be on the island by two.” He checked his wrist. “It’s already eleven-thirty.”

“So? It’ll take as long as it takes.” Robin squinted at the entrance of the court house where Jason and Elizabeth had disappeared to earlier that morning. “It’s at least a twenty-four hour process. She didn’t file until eleven yesterday.” She sipped her tea. “What’s the big deal? They’re getting married on the island with your justice of the peace. He’ll just wait until we get there.”

“I have *plans*,” Sonny complained. “They’ll ruin it if we’re not there by two.”

Robin furrowed her dark brows. “Ruin it?” she echoed. “Are you on drugs, Sonny? How—” She closed her mouth. “What do you have planned?”

“Look.” Sonny shifted, feeling heat on the back of heck. “I just...I wanted to help.”

“I think you were married to Carly a little too long,” Robin mused. “What’s going on?”

“This...is their third go around at this, you know?” Sonny shrugged. “Jason’s been married once for spousal privilege, but not like this. It’s...Elizabeth. And they might have a kid together. I just...in case they decide to...”

“You planned an *actual* wedding, didn’t you?” his old friend asked with a soft look in her eyes.

“Sonny, you marshmallow.”

“This last year has been hell for Jason,” Sonny said. “First, he lost his memories. And then he had brain surgery. Carly was finishing up her meltdown, but then there was the virus. Sam got shot. I—I dated his sister, and he...had to deal with my illness. And that’s before we even get to the summer. I wanted to do something nice. In case they decided to stay married, they won’t necessarily feel the need to renew their vows.”

He looked into his dark espresso. “I married Carly the first time because of spousal privilege. It was quick ceremony that didn’t do justice to the way we felt about each other then. We weren’t...quite in love yet. But we were halfway there. And she wanted something more. She wanted to renew our vows so they’d mean something. I just...I know how they feel about each other.”

“You do?” Robin repeated. “Because I’m pretty clear on Elizabeth. Jason’s a mystery to me these days.” She glanced towards the court steps again, but they were still empty. “And, as you pointed out, it’s not the first time Jason’s married for this reason.”

“Well, that’s not *why* he and Brenda got married, but it’s why it lasted so long.” Sonny shifted again. “I think they’ve cared for each other long a very long time. And this summer, with what happened with Sam and Lucky, they finally started to open the door to it again. They’re not there yet. It might be months before they are. But I just...I thought they deserved something they could look back on with fond memories.”

“I agree,” Robin nodded. “What do you have planned?”

# Chapter Five

*It's alright if you don't know what you need  
I'm right here when  
You need someone to see  
It's not speak  
Or forever hold your peace  
It's alright to take time  
And find where you've been*  
- Porcelain, Marianas Trench

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*Tuesday, October 24, 2006*

## **West Plana Cays, Bahamas: Corinthos Villa**

When Elizabeth was ten minutes late to meet them downstairs for the ceremony, Jason reluctantly went in to check on her. The strain of the day, the surprise of finding the terrace at Sonny's island home decorated with flowers for the wedding with someone standing by with a damn camera to make the event look good...he wasn't surprised she was having second thoughts.

And he told himself as he lifted his hand to knock on the door, that if she wanted to back out, he would let her. It didn't matter that he'd half been looking forward to living with Elizabeth and her son, with a child he believed might be his.

He would let her go.

"Elizabeth?"

"J-Jason?" Her trembling voice wafted out. Below him, he could see Sonny and Robin milling about on the terrace. Sonny had constructed his villa with a long winding stairway on the outside of the building rather than inside.

Sonny avoided walls whenever he could.

"Hey." He kept his voice light. He didn't care if Sonny or the justice of the peace were getting impatient. If Elizabeth wasn't ready, then they weren't doing this. "I just wanted to make sure you were okay."

"I-I'm s-sorry. I c-can't..." Her voice faltered. "I *can't* d-do this. I thought I could, but I-I can't."

He closed his eyes, resting his forehead briefly against the oak door. After a moment, he exhaled slowly and straightened. "It's okay, Elizabeth. You don't have to do anything you don't want to. I told you that."

Then the door opened, and she was standing there a strapless white dress that fell to her knees. She wore some makeup, but her eyes were red and some of her mascara had smeared. “But—”

“This part of it was just to keep you from testifying.” Jason slid his hands into the pockets of his khakis. “You’ll be in the clear on the other charges—”

“I want to protect *you*,” she said, her hand gripping the door so tightly her knuckles were white. “But I’m just...I don’t know what happens next.”

He furrowed his brows. “What do you mean?”

Elizabeth stepped away from the door and gestured for him to come in. He did so, and closed the door behind him, wanting some privacy. “I mean, it’s not...the wedding that has me upset, okay? It’s...not like I don’t get what Sonny’s doing. He’s done this before. I have to wear a dress, and you have to...” She hesitated, and chewed on her bottom lip, looking at the white button down shirt he wore and the light pants. “You look nice.”

“I can tell Sonny to get rid of the flowers and the photographer,” Jason said. “Robin has one of those phones with a camera if the court wants it—”

“No, none of that...” She sighed, pressed a hand to her forehead and turned away. “It’s not the wedding. It’s...the *marriage* part of it.”

He blinked, because that didn’t make sense. Weren’t they the same thing? “I don’t—I don’t understand.”

“It’s...about tomorrow and all the days that come after it.” She turned back to him. “What about Cameron? What if this baby is Lucky’s? What if you fall in love with someone else? What if this doesn’t work and Ric makes me testify or—”

Jason held up both hands to halt her rapid flurry of questions. “Wait, wait—” He stepped towards her. “Let’s just...take this one step at a time.” She pressed her lips together and looked away. “About Cameron? I don’t know what—I’d be his stepfather. I’d love and care for him. As for the baby...”

He hesitated because he didn’t like to think about the alternative. He wanted this child to be *his*, not Lucky’s. But she was right to be concerned. “If the baby isn’t mine, we’ll handle it however you want. We can—we can keep that to ourselves. Or if you think Lucky should be in the child’s life, then we can do that, too.”

Her eyes were closed, but tears were slowly sliding down her face. He didn’t know if any of these answers were helping, but he didn’t want her to say no for the wrong reasons.

Jason stepped closer to her, sliding his hand along her cheekbone so she’d open her eyes. When she was looking at him again, he cleared his throat and continued. “I’m not going to fall in love with *anyone* else, Elizabeth.”

Her lips trembled, then parted. “Right. I mean, of course not. I—you’re in love with Sam, so what if

you want her back a-and you're stuck with me—”

“That’s not going to happen,” he told her, rather than explaining all the reasons he was finished with Sam or why he’d never look at being married to her as being stuck. Damn Ric and Lucky for dragging her down, for making her feel less.

“Jason...” His name was almost a plea as she stepped back and his hand fell away. “I just—I don’t know what you see for us. What kind of marriage you want.”

He frowned. “Elizabeth, I’ll do whatever you want—”

Elizabeth actually growled and dug her hands into her hair. “Don’t say that! Stop *saying* that!”

“Then what do you want me to say?” Jason demanded, finally frustrated. Damn it, he just wanted her to be happy but how was he supposed to accomplish that if she wouldn’t tell him what she needed? “I don’t know what you want from me—”

“I don’t care about what I want!” Elizabeth retorted. Her eyes were angry now, sparks all but flying from them. “God, Jason, stop asking me that. I asked you what *you* wanted—”

“I want whatever you want,” Jason interrupted. “Why does it have to be more complicated than that —”

“Because you *always* leave it up to me.” She slashed her hand through the air. “You leave it up to me, so I try to do the right thing for both of us and I think my track record has proved that I suck at it. So, for once, just tell me what you want.”

“I want—” Jason shook his head. “Elizabeth—I just want—” He stopped and sat on the edge of the bed.

After a long pause, he finally spoke. “You asked me—if we go ahead with this—what kind of marriage I want.” He looked up from his hands and met her eyes briefly before looking away again. “I want you to trust me. I want...” He hesitated. “I want to come home to something that’s separate from my...job. I want to listen to you ramble about your art, about the people you saw that day...so I don’t have to think about the things I do when I’m not with you.”

“Jason...”

He felt the bed dip as she settled next to him. “I want you to trust me,” she murmured. “And I want to trust you. I want you to listen to me ramble on about a problem and then say something that’s so simple, it seems to solve all my problems at once. I want to *stop* pretending to be someone I’m not.”

“I—” Jason looked up and met her eyes, still damp but not as panicked. “I never wanted you to be anyone else.”

“I know,” she responded with a small smile. “Which always confused me.” She reached for his hand and laced their fingers together. “If we’re going to do this, Jason, I want us to be honest with each

other. Like we used to be. I don't want to always be afraid or worrying about protecting myself."

Jason stood then, and drew her to her feet as well. He reached into his pocket and drew out a small velvet bag. "I—I bought rings for today," he told her, pulling the string to loosen the bag. "I was just going to buy the set, but—"

He drew out the small diamond ring he'd seen in the jewelry case and held it between his thumb and index fingers. He reached for the hand he had just released and held it still as it shook slightly.

"Jason, you didn't have to do—" she began, her voice trembling as much as her hand had.

"I wanted to." He slid the ring over her knuckle. "I could have bought something bigger, but your hand is small—"

"I don't care about that." Elizabeth lifted her hands and framed his face. "This is going to work, isn't it?"

Rather than answering her with words, he took a chance and dipped his head down to taste her mouth, her sweet taste mixed with the slight salt from her earlier tears. "Will you marry me?" he whispered against her lips, hoping the second time he posed this question would bring him a different answer.

"Yes." She laughed then and nipped at his mouth. "Let me redo my makeup and I'll meet you out there." Elizabeth drew back, the shadows lifted from her expression. "Go before Sonny sends in a search party."

### **Sonny's Villa: Ocean Terrace**

Elizabeth stepped to the top of the stairs and glanced over the side of the railing, down to the terraced pool where Jason, Sonny, and Robin waited. The explosion of flowers, the wildflower arbor where she and Jason were expected to stand, even the photographer Sonny had arranged—she understood it was all part of a carefully crafted image.

But as she clutched the small bouquet of orange and yellow orchids Sonny had sent to her, as she looked at the diamond engagement ring she wore, as she remembered their conversation just minutes earlier...

This was starting to feel less and less like a marriage of convenience.

"I'm sorry I'm late," Elizabeth called as she started down the stairs, her voice nearly lost in the sound of the rushing ocean a few hundred feet away from Sonny's villa.

"The bride," Sonny declared as he met her halfway, "is *never* late." He offered his arm. "Everyone else is just appallingly early."

"Sonny..." But his easy smile was contagious, and she linked arms. "You're having fun with this aren't you?"

“I think I have untapped talents,” he replied, escorting her to the bottom of the stairs. “Now, just remember, I have your best interests in mind.” They stepped down from the stairs onto the stone terrace.

“The only way that would scare me more if is if Carly had said it,” Elizabeth murmured as they approached Jason and Robin and the justice of the peace. In the distant, the sun was beginning to set into the ocean horizon, but Sonny had lit some scattered torches around the terrace and pool.

“That really hurts.” Sonny stopped in front of Jason and put Elizabeth’s hand in his. “Humor me, both of you.”

Elizabeth laughed lightly, but it felt shaky to her as she handed Robin the bouquet and linked both hands with Jason. There they were, standing under an arbor of flowers in front of someone would say a few words before pronouncing them man and wife.

She could do this. She *really* could. She met Jason’s eyes and was relieved to see the same tinge of anxiety in them. For all their promises upstairs, there was something about this moment was so terrifying she had trouble breathing properly.

The minister, a dark-skinned man with kind brown eyes, lightly cleared his throat and spread his hands out. “We are gathered here today to celebrate one of life’s greatest moments, to give recognition to the worth and beauty of love, and to add our best wishes to the words which shall unite Jason and Elizabeth in marriage.”

Her breath caught at the words and she saw Sonny’s unabashed grin over Jason’s shoulder. Then she looked back at Jason with a hesitant smile. His hands tightened around hers, reassuring her.

“Before the vows, Miss Robin would like to say something on behalf of the couple,” the justice continued in his lyrical Bahamian accent, his voice carrying as if there were three hundred guests rather than just the four of them.

“What?” Elizabeth blinked as the justice stepped back and Robin handed both her flowers and Elizabeth to Sonny. “Robin—”

“Sonny had a very specific vision for today,” Robin said with a good-natured smile. “But he at least let me pick what I wanted to say. Well, he gave me three options.” She reached into her bodice and unfolded a small slip of paper.

“We’re all seeking that special person who is right for us,” she began. “But if you’ve been through enough relationships, you begin to suspect there’s no *right* person, just different flavors of wrong. Why is this?” She glanced up with a smirk at Jason, perhaps in shared memory of their past. Jason just sighed, but didn’t appear to be annoyed, which Elizabeth decided to take it as a good sign.

“Because you yourself are wrong in some way,” Robin continued, “and you seek out partners who are wrong in some complementary way. But it takes a lot of living to grow fully into your own wrongness.”

Elizabeth broke out into startled laughter. “Seriously, Robin?”

Robin stuck her tongue out at her but forged on. “And it isn’t until you finally run up against your deepest demons, your unsolvable problems—the ones that truly make you who you are—that we’re ready to find a lifelong mate. Only then do you know what you’re looking for.”

Elizabeth turned her attention from Robin then to Jason, and in the pit of her stomach, something stopped twisting. She was beginning to understand why Sonny had suggested this particular reading and why Robin had chosen it. Jason’s eyes were on her as well.

“You’re looking for the wrong person,” Robin said. “But not just any wrong person: the right wrong person—someone you gaze lovingly upon, and think...” She hesitated, probably for effect. “*This* is the problem I want to have.”

And God, wasn’t that the truth? Hadn’t she been denying that for months?

Robin folded the slip of paper and tucked it back in her bodice. “So you guys, go forth and be as wrong as possible.” She took her flowers back and resumed her position at Elizabeth’s side.

The justice grinned. “What honest friends you have.” Then he cleared his throat and looked to Jason. “Do you, Jason, take Elizabeth, to be your wife? Do you promise to love, honor, cherish and protect her, forsaking all others and holding only unto her?”

Jason swallowed hard but his steady voice and calm eyes kept her pulse from racing too fast as he responded, “I do,” while looking straight at her.

“And do you, Elizabeth, take Jason, to be your husband? Do you promise to love, honor, cherish and protect him, forsaking all others and holding only unto him?”

“I do,” Elizabeth responded, feeling her fingers tingle where they touched Jason’s. They were really doing this.

“Wedding rings,” the justice continued, completely unaware of the byplay in front of him, “are an outward and visible sign of an inward spiritual grace and unbroken circle of love, signifying to all the union of this man and this woman in marriage.”

Sonny stepped forward and placed slim diamond and sapphire band in Jason’s palm, while Elizabeth retrieved a silver band from Robin.

“Please place this ring on each other’s finger,” the justice continued, “as a promise to one another.”

Jason took Elizabeth’s trembling hand in his steady one and, as he had only little earlier, slid the ring over her finger until it rested against the engagement ring.

And somehow that action steadied her hand, no longer shaking, as she mirrored his movement on his own finger. She rubbed her thumb over the silver metal, feeling as though this were some sort of dream and at any moment, she’d return to the nightmare of her old life.

“Jason and Elizabeth,” the justice said, breaking the moment, “as the two of you come into this marriage, I would ask remember that you must be able to forgive, to not hold grudges, and live each day that you may share it together—as from this day forward you shall be each other’s home, comfort, and refuge.

“I now pronounce you husband and wife. You may kiss the bride.”

Elizabeth exhaled slowly as Jason released one hand and cupped her cheek. His lips brushed over hers lightly until she fisted her hand in his light cotton shirt and pulled him closer.

She was going to have the marriage she wanted, and she was going to start it right.

His hand slid into her hair, tilting her head back to deepen the kiss.

The clapping drew her back, her cheeks heating, as she looked towards Sonny, then at Robin, before looking at Jason with an embarrassed smile.

“Since I’m the only one here,” Robin said, “I guess throwing the bouquet is really a gimme, huh?”

### **West Plana Cays: Morgan Villa**

Jason pulled into the winding drive in front of his home on the island and looked at Elizabeth, whose eyes were on the two story structure situated on the tip of the western side of the island, a fifteen minute drive from Sonny.

“You can go ahead if you want,” Jason said. “I’ll bring in the bags.”

Elizabeth looked away from the house and offered a half smile. “All right.”

When he set down his duffel bag and her small suitcase by the sofa, he saw that she had gone towards the terrace that overlooked his view of the ocean.

“Is everything okay?” he asked, stepping out to join her, his hands in the pockets of his khakis.

“What?” She turned slightly and smiled again. “Oh, yeah. I just...I just saw the view. It’s so beautiful.” Elizabeth turned back to the ocean. “I grew up in Colorado, and even with the lake in Port Charles, I don’t get to the beach much.” She wrapped her arms around herself, her rings catching a reflection from the pool just in front of her. “And I’m trying to picture you in this house.”

Jason shrugged. “Sonny built it. He lived on the island for a while after he left Brenda at the altar.” He stepped towards her, their shoulders brushing. “And after he was done with his place, he did this. I never—I never use it much.”

“I didn’t come to this part of the island when I was here a few years ago,” Elizabeth said. She glanced at him. “I had to fake my death during the whole Cassadine nonsense. Sonny offered me a cottage near the resort and casino to keep me out of sight.”

“I—” Jason hesitated. “Yeah, I know.” His mouth twisted. “Carly called me to tell me you were dead. Sonny called me later to sort it out.” He didn’t like to think about that, so he said nothing more.

“Ah.” Elizabeth pursed her lips. “Well, anyway. I can see Sonny saved the best views for this side of the island. They don’t compare to the resort.” She closed her eyes and tilted her head up as the ocean breeze gently lifted her hair from her bare shoulders.

“You—you can come here any time you want.” Jason cleared his throat. “I mean, you can—the jet only takes three hours.”

She laughed, the soft sound rippling through the air. “Any time I want, I have a jet at my disposal? That sounds too good to be true.”

“You can—” He stopped for a second. “You can have anything you want, Elizabeth.”

“Anything?” She turned then, with a glint he didn’t quite recognize in her eyes. “You don’t want to put any limitations on that?”

Something squeezed inside as she smiled and tilted her head, her hair falling like waterfall to one side. “Why would I?” he asked, his voice feeling rusty.

Her hands were sliding down his chest until they reached waistband of his pants. She tugged him forward. “What if what I want,” Elizabeth drawled, “is you?”

“Y-You have me.” He slid his hand into her hair, the silky strands slipping through his fingers.

“Well, then...” She leaned up on her toes to press her mouth to his, open and soft, then gone before he could respond. “What do you want?”

“I want...” Jason leaned down to capture her lips, his hand at the nape of her neck so she couldn’t escape again. “To be with you.”

“You are,” she whispered as his mouth found the skin under her ear, tasted the sweetness. “I want you to take me inside.” He drew away slightly, and she licked her lips. “To your room,” she finished.

He lifted her then, bracing his arms at her hips. Her fingertips were light against his temples as their eyes met. Elizabeth leaned down and kissed him.

Without breaking their kiss, he strode through the open terrace doors into the living, down a short hallway to the master bedroom.

He set her on her feet and dived into her mouth again, her fingers almost ripping the buttons of his shirt. “I want to see you,” he breathed, reaching for the zipper of her dress, underneath her arm, tugging the bodice down.

“I want to be in your bed this time.” She drew back, letting her dress float down to her feet. Elizabeth kicked off her heels and reached for him again.

When she was underneath him, her pale skin against the dark sheets, he stopped to look at her. Her eyes were wide, her skin flushed, her lips parted. “I don’t want you to walk away tomorrow,” he said, dragging his thumb over her bottom lip.

“And I don’t want you to let me,” she responded. She drew his head down to hers and it was the last words they spoke.

# Chapter Six

*Well, you have suffered enough  
And warred with yourself  
It's time that you won  
Take this sinking boat and point it home  
We've still got time  
Raise your hopeful voice, you have a choice  
You've made it now*  
- Falling Slowly, Glen Hansard and Marketa Irglova

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Wednesday, October 25, 2006

## **Morgan Villa: Bedroom**

The sun was warm on her bare shoulder when she drifted into consciousness the next morning. Elizabeth blinked once, then twice, before shifting slightly on her side, the thin dark sheet sliding down her torso.

The Caribbean sun burned in through the balcony that stretched across the opposite side of the room, the ocean a wall of sparkling diamonds.

For a moment, she wasn't sure where she was, but the warmth at her side quickly brought back the events of the day before.

And the night before.

She pushed her hair away from her face and peered over at Jason, who still lay asleep. Sprawled on his stomach, his arms half under the pillow on his side of the bed, his blond hair tousled and a morning stubble on his cheeks.

This was her *husband* with whom she had had a passionate wedding night.

Her lips curved into a smile just at the thought of it, and for the first time in months, she felt the weight of her problems, her burdens...just drift away. They didn't disappear—and she knew they'd be waiting for her back in Port Charles.

But for this moment, for this day, she was going to embrace this new life. Robin had told her to ask Jason what he wanted, and Elizabeth was profoundly grateful she had listened.

Not wanting to wake him, Elizabeth slowly slid from beneath the sheets, reaching for the button down white shirt he'd worn the day before as it lay discarded on the floor nearby.

She slipped into it, wrapping the ends around herself rather than buttoning it. The sounds of the waves

crashing against the shore, the smell of the salt air, and the vision of the sun glinting off the water drew her out to the balcony with its wooden rails.

Elizabeth braced a hip against it and surveyed the beach below, the greenery that dotted the edge of civilization, away from the golden sand dunes.

She heard rustling behind her and glanced back just as Jason slipped into a pair of black briefs.

She liked to think she wasn't a particularly shallow person, but was there *anything* more delicious than the vision of Jason Morgan and his golden skin in nothing but a brief piece of black cloth?

"I'm sorry if I woke you," she murmured as Jason joined her, sliding a warm arm around her waist. Elizabeth leaned her head back against his chest, tucking her head under his chin simply because she could. How many times had she wanted to touch him and resisted?

She wasn't depriving herself any longer.

"I don't sleep much anyway." His lips brushed against her hair. "You okay?"

"Practically perfect." Elizabeth held her left hand out slightly, her eyes on the newly minted rings on her finger.

She'd worn Lucky's rings until Monday morning, and had left the slim bands on the top of her bureau in the apartment. Maybe she should feel guilty that she now wore another man's rings, but she just couldn't dredge up the emotion.

She'd spent too many years trapped by guilt and obligation.

"We don't have to be back in Port Charles until tomorrow," Jason said after a long moment. "Did— Did you want to do something today?"

Elizabeth turned so that she was facing him. Tilting her head to the side, she peered up at him. "You're always asking me what I want."

"Well," Jason said, cupping her chin, his thumb smoothing along her jaw. "I have what *I* want."

She grinned—it seemed as if they had both discarded whatever guards they'd constructed over the last few years. It was the most in tune she'd felt with him since the early halcyon days of their friendship.

Could it be this simple? If she had just taken one step forward all those years ago—would he have followed?

"You always know exactly the right thing to say."

He dipped his head down to kiss her, but she giggled and drew away. "Morning breath," Elizabeth told him with a wagging finger. "I haven't brushed my teeth yet."

“In that case...” Jason surprised her by plucking her up as if she weighed nothing more than air.

In less than a minute, he had carried her into the adjoining master bathroom, set her back on her feet, and handed her a bottle of mouth wash. “Ladies first.”

## **Morgan Villa: Kitchen**

Jason glanced up as Elizabeth emerged from the short hallway that connected the bedrooms to the front of the house.

Her smile was quick and genuine, her eyes were clear and content, and the tension he’d seen in her for months had dissipated.

As she perched on a stool on the other side of the kitchen island, her hair tumbling to the middle of her back in a mass of waves, he noticed the blue bikini she had changed into after their shower, and the floral fabric tied at her waist.

He set a plate of food in front of her along with a glass of orange juice. “I guess you’re not interested in spending part of the day at the casinos or resort.”

“Mmm...is this a frittata?” Elizabeth picked up the fork and knife he’d set out. “And no.” She wrinkled her nose. “I spent *way* too much time on that side of the island the last time I was here.” She took a small bite and closed her eyes. “I wish I could cook like this.”

“Still only confined to brownies?” he asked with a light smile. “I would have thought you’d branched out by now.”

“Hey.” She jabbed the fork at him, her eyes sparkling. “I’ll have you know I can make *anything* that comes in a box.”

“I stand corrected.”

He leaned back against the stove, his mug of coffee in his hand and watched her eat with enthusiasm.

She was his wife. They were *married*.

It should feel odd, even awkward. But it didn’t. Was it simply being away from Port Charles? From the outside tensions that so often influenced their interactions?

“Anyway,” Elizabeth said a few moments later, taking a swig of juice. “I was never any good at the casinos. I managed to lose even when I suspected Sonny was fixing the tables in my favor.” She laughed. “I know that’s the only way Carly ever won.”

“There’s the resort,” Jason offered. “They’ve got, I don’t know, shopping and spas or something.”

“That’s where everyone thinks I am anyway.” But her smile faded a bit. “Did—did you want me to go the resort for a while or something? Do-do you need to do something? With Sonny, I mean?” She bit

her lip, and for the first time since the ceremony, a bit of uncertainty flashing in her eyes. “Or do you just want some time to yourself—”

“No.” Jason set his coffee down abruptly. “No, that’s not—” He exhaled slowly. “I just...I thought *you* might want to go—”

“Because if you need to meet with Sonny while we’re here, that’s okay.” Elizabeth pushed her half-eaten plate away from her a bit. “I mean, it’s...it’s your job, Jason. I-I can go get a massage—”

She started to slide down the stool, but he rounded the granite counter and stopped her descent, his hands at her hips. “Elizabeth. Sonny asked us to dinner tonight so you could keep Robin company for a bit while we dealt with anything we need to talk about. I just—” He stopped. “I’m sorry, I just thought you might want—”

“No, I’m sorry.” Elizabeth looked past him, her eyes cast down as if trained on the marble tiles. “I guess, I mean...this morning—and-and last night, it’s just...maybe I don’t always trust feeling happy for more than a few hours.” The corner of her mouth lifted. “There’s...there’s always something waiting just around the corner—”

“I know.” He let her slide the rest of the way to the floor, then tipped her chin up to force her meet his eyes. “Elizabeth. Remember what we talked about yesterday?”

“Honesty.” Her smile was back now, smaller and maybe a bit shaky—but genuine. “Right. So I guess I just have...to trust that. I’m sorry—”

“Don’t apologize—” He cut her off with a firm shake of his head. “I know what you went through with Lucky—I saw it. I watched him try to break you into little pieces every time he accused you of having an affair with Patrick—”

“To the point when I merely mentioned a paternity test to Kelly and Epiphany, they both assumed Patrick was the other party.” She sighed. “I’m working on it, Jason. I guess—I mean, we knew it would be more complicated than just...getting married to keep me from testifying—”

“That’s *why* we started this,” Jason said, “but it’s—it’s not entirely why we went through with it. Is it?”

“No,” she whispered. “Can—can we have more mornings like before? I mean, once we go back to Port Charles, this—it won’t go away?”

“No.” His thumb passed over her bottom lip, tracing its softness. Her eyes changed again—darkened. He replaced his thumb with his mouth.

For so many years, she’d been at the edges of his life—someone he cared about but could never hope for more. If he could have even guessed how good it would feel to touch her, to be with her—

He wouldn’t have needed the tequila to work up the courage.

Maybe this had all started as a mutual agreement to protect one another, but those reasons were a distant memory as he tugged her away from the kitchen, towards a nearby sofa. The fabric at her waist slipped to the marble floor, his shirt was tossed somewhere.

They tumbled to the sofa, his back against the cushions and her soft curves pressed against him. Her curls caressed his skin as he swept them away from her face, his fingers sliding through the strands.

Elizabeth broke away from him, straightening. She pressed her hands flat against his chest as he began to sit up. “Elizabeth,” he began.

“I just—” Her breath was shallow, her chest rising and falling rapidly. “I just—this is different. Not like last night. Or this morning. I just—” She bit her lip. “I don’t want there to be any misunderstandings between us—”

Jason’s hands slid from her hips, curling into fists to keep from reaching for her. “Do you want to stop —”

“No.” The corner of her mouth curved up. “I just wanted you to know that my eyes are wide open. This isn’t about wanting to feel something, to forget about anyone else. It’s not our wedding night or the afterglow.” Her fingertips trailed down his chest towards the waistband of his sweats.

“There’s no one else here,” he replied, his voice raspy. “It’s just you and me.”

“Exactly.” Her fingers slid lower, and everything in him tensed as that hesitant smile turned a bit wicked. “Now where were we?”

### **Corinthos Villa: Veranda**

Robin stepped through the open arch that connected Sonny’s living room to the sprawling veranda at the front of his face.

“What are you doing out here?” she asked Sonny as she joined him. “Are you waiting for Jason and Elizabeth?”

“A bit.” Sonny leaned against one of the large granite pillars. “They looked good yesterday, didn’t they? You don’t think I pushed too much?”

“I think,” Robin said, perching on the edge of a white railing, “it was a lovely ceremony and they’ll have good memories of it. They looked startled, but not upset.” She peered over the vast greenery that separated Sonny’s home from Jason’s. “I never would have put them together. Even when Elizabeth told me what had happened this summer—I still couldn’t *see* it.”

She smiled and looked back at him. “But now that I have? I like it.” Robin laughed, wrinkling her nose. “It’s weird to think of him of being right for someone else. I mean, I’ve moved on with Patrick and I love him, I really do. I know Jason was married to your sister, that he was engaged with Sam, but I don’t know...he always seemed...” She wiggled her shoulders. “Stressful. Every time I saw him with Sam, he was tense. Not because of her, I guess, but—”

“She didn’t offer him a break from his world,” Sonny murmured. “She miscalculated there. She knew that Courtney had left him over the job, heard the rumors it was why Elizabeth had walked out—so she turned herself into the perfect sidekick.”

“But Jason didn’t want a sidekick.”

“He thought he did, and I can see how it made sense.” Sonny sipped his bourbon. “But maybe he’s starting to get that you need something else. A sense of separation, of...”

“Peace,” Robin murmured. “Of quiet. Of something stronger than the next rival, the next catastrophe.” Her lips curved. “Well, Sonny, I think you gave them a really good start. What they do with it from here out is up to them.”

Through the sounds of the waves behind them the roar of a motorcycle broke though. Around a corner of trees and bushes, the bike appeared, then turned into the drive.

Sonny grinned. “Still got the bug I see.” He took Robin’s arm and drew her back into the shadows by the house.

“Ugh, I tolerated that bike, but he always went too fast—” Robin broke off when Jason pulled his bike to a stop.

Elizabeth drew off her helmet, letting her hair tumble down her back. Whatever she said to Jason was lost to the wind and ocean, but there was no mistaking the broad smile on her face and her laughter.

They stood close to one another after climbing off the bike for a long moment, before finally making their way up towards the front of the house.

“I think they’ll be just fine,” Sonny murmured. “We better get inside before they catch us spying.”

### **Corinthos Villa: Terrace**

Robin tipped some sparkling cider into Elizabeth’s glass. “So, while the boys are talking business, I think it’s time you tell me how the honeymoon is going.”

Elizabeth’s cheeks flushed and she dipped her head. “Robin...”

“Listen.” Robin settled onto the long chaises dotting the area around the pool, tucking her legs underneath her. “You forget, I’ve been in this since the beginning. I remember the way you looked a week ago, in that parking garage.”

Elizabeth sighed and sipped her cider. She looked to her left, and saw through the open terrace doors into the kitchen where Jason and Sonny were talking as Sonny cooked.

“It feels so far away,” she murmured. “You told me to ask him what he wanted.”

“Oh, wait, don’t tell me I was right—” Robin held up a hand. “Let me get a witness or Patrick won’t

believe me—”

“Jason and I used to be honest with each other, but I guess...that was only until I looked at him one day and realized he just wasn’t just...my friend.”

“He was the sexy man standing over there.” Robin sipped her wine. “I remember.” She frowned. “Wait, is that *weird*? Because I mean, I dated him—”

“It’s fine. It feels like another lifetime ago.” Elizabeth lifted a shoulder. “I don’t know, Robin, we just started talking again in the spring and it’s like...all those feelings—all that love I had for him, and maybe whatever he felt for me, it was just...dormant.”

“Like kindling waiting for a match,” Robin nodded. “It happens sometimes, you know. It doesn’t mean you were destined to have an affair—”

“But we did. Technically.” Elizabeth sighed. “Or I did. Part of the reason I never really lost it when Lucky accused me of being with Patrick was the fact I knew something wasn’t right. I was—” She lifted her free hand in the air. “Overly involved in Jason’s life by that point. Turning to him when things with Lucky were falling apart, trying so hard to get him to go back to Sam—”

“I guess.” Robin pursed her lips. “But nothing happened until you found out about Maxie—”

“And I didn’t go find Emily or Nikolas, or even you. I didn’t stay with my grandmother.” Elizabeth bit her lip. “I took the *first* excuse I could find, Robin, to crawl into bed with Jason. I have to be honest with myself about that.”

“Fair enough.” Her friend tilted her head to the side. “Are you sorry?”

“No—but I felt so guilty about not being sorry I ran right back to Lucky to prove I wasn’t that kind of woman...” Elizabeth shrugged. “But I was. I married two other men because I didn’t believe I could ever have the one I wanted. I kept settling—”

“And the universe kept dumping Jason in your path, so maybe it’s trying to tell you something.” Robin leaned forward. “What’s going to happen next in Port Charles is going to be tough. I’m not even talking about Ric Lansing—”

“I know. There’s Carly, my grandmother, Lucky, Emily—Sam—” Elizabeth chewed on her lip. “That’s why I’m just...I’m going to trust Jason. We can make this work. He’s going to be so wonderful with Cameron, I know that. And this baby...” She pressed a hand to her abdomen. “I’m going to hope like hell we find out on Friday this is Jason’s child. Because I want to give him a child, I *want* a child with him, Robin. But even if it’s not, I can’t let that shake what we’re trying to do.”

“Exactly.” Robin gestured with her glass of wine. “It’s going to be you two against the world—with a little help from me and Sonny.” She frowned. “And Patrick, because I’ll make him. But if you guys can keep your foundation strong, you’ll get through whatever Ric has ready for you.”

“Yeah, I’m not crazy. Just getting Diane to get Ric tossed off my case and marrying Jason is not going

to fix anything.” Elizabeth rolled her shoulders. “It’s only going to piss him off. You’re not that familiar with a vengeful Ric Lansing.” She dipped her eyes down. “But I am.”

“Then we’ll just have to beat him.” Robin held her glass out. “To kicking ass and taking what we want in life.”

Elizabeth clinked her glass with a grin. “And I’ll tell you what, Robin, for the first time in years? I’m going to do exactly that.”

### **Morgan Villa: Terrace**

“So back to Port Charles in the morning.”

They were stretched out in one of the wicker chaise lounges, Elizabeth’s head tucked under his chin, his arms wrapped around her waist.

Elizabeth sighed. “I know. My grandmother is expecting me in the afternoon to pick up Cameron.” She tilted her head back to catch a glimpse of his face from the light of the torches. “Should...should I tell her? Or should I wait until the notice is in the papers—”

“It’s done now,” Jason replied, idly lacing the fingers of their hand together as they had that night in his penthouse. “You might as well let her know before the papers. If you don’t—”

“It would probably be even worse later,” Elizabeth murmured. “I know Ric isn’t going away. I just hope he’s distracted enough by Alexis and her health that he won’t take extreme measures—”

“He’s capable of anything,” Jason replied. “But we’ll be ready.”

“I’m glad we had this today.” Her eyes grew heavy as the steady beat of the waves crashing against the shore echoed in her mind. “It was perfect.”

“Yeah.” Jason pressed a kiss to the top of her head. “It was. Do-do you want to go inside?”

“Mmm...” She curled her hand into a fist and rested it against his heart. “Just...a little longer. I love it out here.”

“We’ll come back,” he promised her. “For longer. And we’ll bring Cameron. And-and maybe the baby, too. Does Cameron like the water?”

But she didn’t answer him. Her eyes were closed, her lips curved into a gentle smile. She was so beautiful, this woman who had trusted him with so much.

She could have done the bare minimum—Diane had assured him that the charges were all but baseless and Ric’s involvement a pure conflict of interest. Elizabeth had never been in any true danger of going to jail.

But she’d refused to stand by while Ric had gone after him—the loyalty she had always shown him

even in the darkest of moments humbled him even as it frustrated and worried him.

He didn't know what the future held for them, but Jason thought if they could just hold on to this day, maybe it would be okay.

# Chapter Seven

*But I'm only human  
And I bleed when I fall down  
I'm only human  
And I crash and I break down  
Your words in my head, knives in my heart  
You build me up and then I fall apart  
'Cause I'm only human*  
- Human, Christina Perri

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*Thursday, October 26, 2006*

## **Hardy Home: Sidewalk**

The day was fading into early evening when Jason pulled the SUV to a stop in front of Audrey Hardy's home. He switched off the ignition, but Elizabeth made no move to exit the car.

"I can stay in the car," he offered. "It might be easier for you to tell her—"

"Having you wait out here for us is like..." Elizabeth sighed, letting her head fall back against the head rest. "It's being ashamed of what I did. It's not going to make it any less true if you sit out here." She turned her head to meet his eyes. "And I want her to believe me when I tell her I'm *not* sorry."

"Okay." There was no arguing with any of those reasons, though he didn't care for the pressure she was putting on herself. But he knew what it was like to have family who claimed to care about you only as long as you performed to their expectations.

"My grandmother encouraged me to stay with Ric, so it's not like her credibility with me is high anyway." Elizabeth pushed open her door and stepped outside the car.

Jason removed the keys from the ignition, slipped them into his pocket and joined her on the sidewalk. "Did you tell her everything he did?"

"Well, no," Elizabeth admitted as they started towards the house. "Holding Carly hostage in our local panic room didn't seem quite believable, particularly when Scott Baldwin hired him to work at the DA's office rather than you know, prosecuting the bastard." She huffed. "I told her he'd had an affair—which was technically true."

Should have shoved the scum off a cliff in Venezuela that summer—their lives would be a lot easier right now.

"And your grandmother still encouraged you to go back to him?" Jason asked, his respect for Audrey Hardy all but disappearing.

“Well, I think her exact words were something along the lines of—’at least he’s not Jason’ or my personal favorite, ‘he didn’t get you shot at or kidnapped’.” Elizabeth rolled her eyes. “Yeah, because those were the worst things that ever happened to me.” She touched the door knob. “So, yeah, she *really* doesn’t care for you. I’m sorry. This is going to suck.”

“It’s not going to be nearly as bad as other people,” Jason told her, knowing that Sam was going to take it particularly hard since he hadn’t warned her and had ignored all of her calls for more than a week.

“You say that now,” she murmured as she pushed open the front door.

Audrey sat on the sofa, a book in her hands. Cameron was at her feet, using a pile of Legos to construct a large tower. At the door opening, Cameron’s head snapped up. He grinned and lunged to his feet, rushing towards Elizabeth.

“Mommy!” The curly-haired boy threw himself into her arms, and with a laugh, Elizabeth lifted him into a tight embrace.

“Cam, I missed you so much.” She pressed kisses to his cheeks until he giggled.

Audrey rose to her feet, not looking at her granddaughter any longer. Her eyes were on Jason. “Mr. Morgan.”

“Gram…” Elizabeth bit her lip. “Cam, do you remember my friend Jason?”

Cameron nodded, but buried his head in his mother’s chest with a small smile in Jason’s direction. “Hi,” he said quietly.

“Can you show Jason your room and let him get your things together so we can go home?” she asked him. “Mommy has to talk to Grandma for a minute.”

“Okay.”

Elizabeth carefully transferred Cameron into Jason’s arms. He’d held him before—when he was just a baby and then a few times in the ensuing years, but this time was different.

This was his stepson, a little boy who would be living with them, and part of the family they were putting together. Who had been shuffled back and forth between his apartment and his great-grandmother’s as his adopted father struggled with injuries and drug addiction.

“His room is upstairs,” Elizabeth murmured to him. “He doesn’t have much to put together, but knowing him, it’s strewn all over the room.”

“You’ll be okay?” he asked, glancing at Audrey who looked distinctly unhappy at being ignored.

“Okay is a relative term.”

He wanted to stay, to stand beside her as she told her grandmother about their marriage but maybe it would just make things worse if he insisted, so he started to climb the stairs.

Once Jason and Cameron were on the second floor, Elizabeth stepped further into the living room and knelt on the floor to begin putting Cameron's Legos into a container.

"Elizabeth, I want an explanation."

"I've been trying to think of the best way to tell you this since I left on Sunday," Elizabeth said, tossing the last yellow plastic piece in the container and fitting on the top. She drew herself to her feet. "But I suppose the best way is to just say it, like ripping off a bandage. I divorced Lucky in the Dominican Republic in Tuesday morning. Diane filed the paperwork here to register the divorce that afternoon. And that evening, I married Jason."

Audrey sucked in a sharp breath. "*Elizabeth.*"

"And I know you're going to be angry, but I was afraid if I told you my plans, you would have—" Elizabeth sighed. "You would have tried to stop me."

"I would have tried," Audrey replied, her pale cheeks flushing. "What in the world could you have been thinking?"

"I know you don't care for Jason, but you don't know him," she responded. "Not the way I do. You don't know how good he is to me, how good he's going to be for Cameron and this baby. He doesn't treat me like garbage or—"

"No, he'll just get you killed or put in jail," the other woman snapped. "For heaven's sake, Elizabeth, you were kidnapped because of him—shot at—"

"And I was raped because I walked through the park one night alone," Elizabeth murmured. "And my ex-husband's mistress poisoned me, put a venomous snake in my studio, and caused my miscarriage. The worst things in my life, Gram, cannot be laid at Jason's feet. And I wasn't shot at because of Jason." She pursed her lips. "That was because of Zander."

"Another one of your stellar choices," Audrey retorted. "My God, Elizabeth, have you *no* self-respect?"

Tears burned in her eyes, but she refused to allow them to fall—she would not give her grandmother the satisfaction. "Maybe I didn't for a long time. After all, why else would I stay with Ric Lansing when he'd brought me nothing but pain and misery? Or why would I put up with a drug addict who put my child in danger and slept with a teenager? I must have thought very little of myself to allow those situations to continue, but it's over now. I'm done with guilt and obligations, doing the right thing because someone *else* told me what it is." She tossed her hair over her shoulder. "I married Jason because I wanted to, and that's good enough for me."

"Well, I hope that's a comfort to you in his bullet proof penthouse," Audrey murmured. "With your guards and the danger—I hope you're happy with the world you're bringing your children into. I

cannot imagine Lucky will allow you to keep them full-time after this.”

“If you think any judge is going to give him custody of my children,” Elizabeth said evenly, her blood boiling just at the thought, “you’re insane. He’s an unemployed and unstable drug addict who screwed an eighteen year old in our bed.”

“I see you have answers for everything.” Audrey pressed her lips together. “I can’t imagine what else we have to say to each other—”

“Neither can I, Gram.” She picked up the container and watched as Jason came down the steps, Cameron’s duffel bag slung over one shoulder and her son in his arms. “Thank you for watching Cameron for me.”

When Jason stepped on the landing, Elizabeth tilted her head to the door. “Let’s go.”

## SUV

“Cameron,” Elizabeth began as Jason pulled away from the curb, “we’re not going back to the apartment.”

“Why?” Cameron asked from his booster seat in the back. “My toys are there.”

“Um.” Elizabeth bit her lip. “You know your friend Morgan from school? How his mommy is going to marry Jax?”

“Yep,” Cameron nodded. “Morgan is my best friend in the whole wide world. Jax is gonna be his second daddy and he’ll live with them.”

“Well…” Elizabeth glanced at Jason who pulled to a stop at a traffic light. “I married Jason, so we’re going to live with him.”

Cameron frowned. “So he’s my second daddy like Mister Jax?”

“He’s your stepfather now.” Elizabeth twisted in her seat to get a better view of him. “Is—is that okay?”

“Do I got my own room?” the little boy asked. “Because I gots my own room, it’s okay. I don’t wanna share. Does he got kids too?”

“Not yet,” Jason told Cameron. “You’ll be the only kid until your mom has the baby.”

“Okay.” Cameron nodded. “Okay. It’s cool. But what about my toys?”

“I packed our things after I dropped you at Gram’s,” Elizabeth told him. “Some friends of Jason moved them for us, so we’ll unpack everything tomorrow after school, okay?”

“Okay. As long as I got my toys.”

“To be three years old,” Elizabeth murmured, leaning her head back against the head rest, “and *that* be the most important thing in the world.”

“It’s going to be okay.” Jason took a hand off the wheel and laced their fingers together. “I know it was rough with your grandmother, but we’ll get through it tomorrow.”

“Yeah, letting the *Port Charles Herald* announce it to the world may not have been the best idea,” she murmured.

*Friday, October 27, 2006*

### **Kelly’s: Dining Room**

Emily slapped a newspaper down in front of Nikolas, the dark headline crawling across the front: **Cop’s Ex Married to the Mob!**

“What the hell is this?” she demanded.

Nikolas took the paper from her and frowned as he read the brief account. “Looks like Elizabeth divorced Lucky in the Dominican Republic and married your brother on the island that evening.” He set the paper aside. “I wondered.”

Emily dropped into the seat across from him. “You *wondered?*” she repeated. “What the hell does that mean?”

“When Elizabeth went out of town immediately after getting those papers signed, and Jason disappeared as well?” Nikolas shrugged, sipping his coffee. “I assumed they were Dominican divorce papers.” He tapped the headline. “The marriage...well *that* I didn’t see coming.”

“How could she do this to Lucky?” Emily asked. “This is going to set his recovery back so badly—” She shook her head. “With the second baby coming—she should have waited. He’s going to get over this and be himself again—”

“And there’s no law that said Elizabeth had to wait around for him to get there. Christ, Emily, he had an affair with another woman.” Nikolas eyed her. “If you remember correctly, that was reason enough for *you* to leave *me*.”

“That is just—” Emily pressed her lips together. “That’s not the point, Nikolas.”

“I’m not sure what caused her to turn around and marry Jason so quickly,” Nikolas said. “I worry that maybe she’s in trouble, but I do know that your brother saved her life last spring. After the hell my family put her through—I don’t know that I have the right to judge.”

He set his coffee down and handed the paper back to her. “And I don’t know why *you* are.”

### **General Hospital: Nurse’s Station**

“Well.” Kelly slapped the paper down, her dark eyes lit with excitement. “Never let it be said that our Lizzie doesn’t know how to make a splash.”

“I feel like this violates some sort of Girl Code,” Lainey murmured, taking the paper from her and skimming the text again. “I feel like a decision of this magnitude should be covered in some sort of way over drinks. Or tea, since she’s pregnant.”

“Hey, more power to her. She traded in a five for an eleven on the smoking hot scale.” Kelly leaned across the counter, her lips curved in a wicked smile. “I would *not* mind a piece of Jason Morgan—”

“Everywhere I go,” Patrick complained as he stepped up to next to Kelly with a chart in his hand. “People are poring over that damn paper.”

“Well, we’re concerned,” Lainey said. “We consider Elizabeth a friend. She divorced one man in the morning and married another by the end of the night. I just hope she knew what she was doing—”

“Oh, she did,” Patrick muttered, thumbing through the chart and scrawling his signature. “Wouldn’t listen to reason.”

Kelly and Lainey both stared at him for a long moment until he felt the heat of their gaze and raised his head. “What?”

“You *knew*?” Kelly shrieked.

“Oh, see, now you have to die,” Lainey said, jabbing him with the pen.

### **Carly’s Home: Dining Room**

Carly stepped into the dining room and held the paper up. “So, this happened.”

Jax glanced up from his breakfast and coughed harshly. Next to him, fourteen-year-old Michael pounded him on the back until his future stepfather had regained his breath. “What the hell?”

“You know, *I* should have seen this coming,” Carly mused as she took a seat at the head of the table, skimming the paper. “Jason thought someone was threatening her—Elizabeth was calling him for help. She was being charged with a bunch of nonsense—this all makes sense.”

“In what bloody universe does it make *sense* that Elizabeth is now married to Jason?” Jax demanded, snatching the paper from her hands. “A Dominican divorce? Hell.”

“Ric must have tried blackmail,” Michael shrugged. “Ha. This is going to piss him off.”

“Watch your language in front of your brother,” Carly told her son as she glanced at three-year-old Morgan, who just blinked at his mother. “An angry Ric is a dangerous Ric.”

“True.” Jax shook his head. “I thought spousal privilege only protected you after the marriage?”

“That’s technically true,” Carly said reaching for a muffin and tearing off a piece. “But this makes it way more complicated to compel her testimony. She can only testify about what she sees with her own eyes. Communications with Jason are off limits. Ric could ask her about something before the marriage, but she could easily derail the whole thing by telling him something Jason told her after the marriage.” Carly grinned. “And then her testimony is thrown out, there’s a mistrial. *Very* expensive. Hardly worth the trouble.”

“Mom has some experience in this matter,” Michael told Jax wryly. “No one knows the spousal privilege laws better.”

“Eat your breakfast, smart mouth.” Carly grinned. “God, I would love to be a fly on the wall at the Davis-Lansing home when Ric and Sam read the news.”

### **Davis-Lansing Home: Breakfast Nook**

Sam’s wail broke the silence of their normal quiet breakfast. Alexis stopped trying to force Molly to eat her oatmeal and turned towards the front door. “Sam?”

“What now?” Ric muttered, reaching for his coffee.

“Look at this!” Sam shoved the paper at her mother. “Just *look!* What the hell was he thinking? He loves me.”

The first inkling of danger seeped into Ric’s brain and he tuned back into the conversation. “Can I see the paper?”

“This is not an attractive headline,” Alexis murmured as she passed the paper to her husband. “I thought she’d left this life behind.”

### **Cop’s Ex Married to the Mob!**

Son of a bitch.

### **Morgan Penthouse: Kitchen**

Elizabeth wrinkled her nose. “They make me sound...I don’t know...like some sort of femme fatale.”

Jason scowled and leaned against the kitchen counter. “Sonny said he was just putting an announcement in the paper. I didn’t think they’d go this far—”

“How could they resist?” Elizabeth rolled her eyes. “Listen to this: *‘The new Mrs. Morgan was not only previously married to a detective with the PCPD, but to our very own interim prosecuting attorney.’* She huffed. “He wasn’t the DA when I married him, and he sucks at it now.”

“I’m going to call Diane,” Jason muttered. “Did you see what they said about Cameron?”

“Oh, yeah, where they insinuate he’s the illegitimate son of a wannabe gangster.” Elizabeth pursed her

lips. “I want to be angry about this, Jason, but it’s not like it’s *not* true. I’m not sure what Diane can do.” She set the newspaper down. “Cameron is Zander’s son—it’s a fact I’ve never tried to hide. He was killed in a shootout with the PCPD, so you know, it’s not like I can pretend he was an upstanding citizen.”

She peered down at the newsprint. “Though I noticed they left out Lucky’s stint in drug rehab and his affair with the commissioner’s daughter. Are they more scared of Mac than they are of you?”

He continued to scowl. “Why aren’t you more angry?”

“Because I don’t see the point.” She wrapped her arms around his waist and tilted her head up to look at him. “They didn’t print anything that wasn’t true. And I’m glad they left out some of it.” She pressed a quick kiss to his lips and returned to making Cameron’s breakfast.

“Which parts?” Jason reached for the newspaper again. This wouldn’t bother him normally, but he didn’t like the way the Port Charles Herald had talked about her or Cameron.

Maybe they should buy the newspaper.

“I’m glad they left Maxie out of it.” Elizabeth stepped towards the doorway of the kitchen to peer into the living room where Cameron had been glued to his cartoons since waking up twenty minutes earlier. “She’s dealing with enough.”

Jason frowned and picked up his coffee mug. “Elizabeth, she slept with your husband—”

“I remember Maxie a year ago, when she first started to date Jesse.” Elizabeth scooped the last of the scrambled eggs onto a plate. “She was different—still headstrong, but a good heart. And then he was murdered. Right in front of her.” She turned to him. “I remember what that was like—to think you’ve got your future in front of you and then to see it literally shatter into a million pieces before your eyes.”

“Elizabeth—”

“And I know that it can make you so angry that you decide you’d rather feel anything other than the despair, the devastation.” Elizabeth pressed a hand to her chest. “So you start to do self-destructive things. I got lucky, Jason. The first time I decided to go wreck my life, I found you.” She arched a brow. “I should punish Maxie because she found *Lucky*?”

He exhaled slowly. “You’re giving me too much credit.”

She just smiled and set Cameron’s plate on the table. “Anyway. This is a phase for Maxie. It’ll pass. She and I will never be friendly again, I’m not crazy, but you know, I can see her pain. She’s clinging to Lucky because he makes that pain go away for a bit.” Elizabeth shrugged. “She’ll figure it out.”

She stepped towards him, her eyes soft. “And if she’s really *fortunate*,” she began, stressing the word, “she’ll find someone who doesn’t make her forget about the pain of losing someone you love, but helps her learn to live with it. And move on.” She kissed him again. “Like you did for me.”

She went to the doorway to call to Cameron as Jason tried to process the way she saw their early friendship. He remembered the night of the blackout—when she'd told him she'd been in love with him back then. He had assumed she'd meant that last summer—before Courtney and Ric.

But maybe she had meant those first few months.

Cameron rushed into the kitchen and climbed into his booster seat. "I can't wait to tell Morgan about my new room," he chirped, shaking the ketchup bottle over his eggs. "It's so big, Mommy."

"And yet you still managed to make a mess in less than three hours." Elizabeth slid into a chair at the table, sipping her tea. At her side, her cell phone vibrated and shook but she only reached for it to look at the caller id.

The only phone call either of them had taken all morning had been from Sonny. At last count, Jason had two missed calls from his sister, one from Carly, and three from Sam.

Elizabeth pursed her lips. "It's Patrick again, but I bet he just wants his race cars back now that we're back in town."

Jason sat opposite of Cameron and furrowed his brow. "His race cars?"

"Yeah, Mister Patrick has the best!" Cameron told him, bouncing in his seat. "He lets me play with them sometimes." He pouted. "Do I gotta give 'em back, Mommy?"

"I'm sorry, baby." Elizabeth ruffled his curls. "It was nice of Patrick to lend them to you this entire week, but he loves those things more than some people love family members."

"Man." Cameron huffed and pushed his plate back. "How come I gotta play with otha people's toys?" He sniffled. "Morgan's got a whole room for his toys."

"Cam..." Elizabeth bit her lip. "I-I know I wasn't able to do much this last year, and I'm sorry—but things *are* going to be different—"

And that was all Jason was going to listen to. "Cam, you know, I missed your birthday last year."

"Jason..." Elizabeth began. She laid a hand over his. "You don't have to—"

"I-I know, but I didn't get him anything and I should have. We're friends," he told her. "I mean, then. We were friends—"

"But—"

"Can I have race cars for my birthday now?" Cameron demanded, not interested in his mother's protests. "I don't gotta wait until I'm four do I?"

"If it's okay with your mother," Jason said, glancing at Elizabeth, "maybe we can go to Wyndham's after school."

“Please, Mommy?” Cameron asked. “Pretty please?”

She sighed. “All right.”

“Yay!” Cameron slid off his chair and rounded the table to launch himself at Jason. “Thank you, thank you!”

Jason hugged him and set him back on the ground. “Finish eating so you can go to school.”

After Cameron had finished eating and returned to his cartoons, Elizabeth started to clean up. “I didn’t overstep, did I?” Jason asked, setting his dirty coffee mug in the sink.

“What?” Elizabeth blinked at him. “No. No. I—I just hate that I haven’t been able to do much for him.” She sighed and tucked a plate in the drying rack. “We were barely able to celebrate his birthday at all this year. Lucky had just left the hospital and he was still in so much pain.” She bit her lip. “I was working on Sam’s case. There wasn’t much money because Lucky’s health insurance with the department only covers him when he’s working, which is idiotic but it’s not like *I* make the rules.”

She sighed. “Bobbie made him a cake, and my grandmother bought him a few toys. There were some clothes, but it’s hard for him. He started preschool this year and he’s absolutely in love with Morgan. But Morgan has a big house and lots of toys—”

“I get it.” Jason touched her back lightly. “I just—there’s no reason for him to go without something he really loves. I have money—”

“But it’s not why—” She stopped. “Never mind. I know you don’t think I married you for money, so there’s no point in arguing that. It’s more that...” She pressed her lips together. “I’m not entirely used to having someone to...share in the decisions.”

“But Lucky’s been in his life—”

“Yeah, Lucky and I have been together since Cameron was a baby, but—” she paused for a long moment. “He left most of it to me. I took Cam to the doctor, got him ready for daycare, spent my free time with him. I’m not saying Lucky was a bad father....just...” She shrugged. “Not very involved. He never got around to adopting him—never enough money for that either.”

Jason didn’t know what to say to that, so he didn’t respond at all. The more he learned about Elizabeth’s marriage to Lucky even before the drugs continued to leave him confused as to why she’d married the bastard at all.

“Um, so when I turned my phone on this morning,” Elizabeth said, wiping her hands dry on a towel. “I had a voicemail from Mercy.”

He tensed. “They—they didn’t give you the results over the phone did they?”

“No, but it was a message to let me know the results are ready today.” Her cheeks flushed. “Um, I thought I’d pick them up after I drop Cameron at school. And-and if you’ll still be here, I could bring

them back...” Flustered, she twisted her hands together. “I mean, unless you have to go meet Sonny or something—”

“I told Sonny we were getting the results back today,” Jason said. “And that we’re getting everything settled. I’ve got the day clear.”

“Okay. Good.” She smiled, but it was nervous now. “I mean, I just—I think we should look at the results together.”

“Hey, whatever they say, Elizabeth...” He drew her close and pressed his lips to her forehead. “We can deal with it.”

# Chapter Eight

*And you say, just be here now  
Forget about the past, your mask is wearing thin  
Just let me throw one more dice  
I know that I can win  
I'm waiting for my real life to begin*  
- Waiting For My Real Life to Begin, Colin Hay

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*Friday, October 27, 2006*

## **Port Charles Academy: Parking Lot**

As Elizabeth approached the dark sedan where Cody stood waiting for her, she slowed her steps.

Emily stood at his side, her arms folded, her eyes narrowed.

Well, perhaps it would be easier to deal with Emily first. There was really nothing the woman could throw at her that she hadn't said before.

"I knew I could find you here." Emily let her arms fall to her side and gestured at Cody. "Doesn't a bodyguard work better when he's by *your* side?"

"Ah, not that it's any of your business," Elizabeth began, "but we ran into Michael, Morgan, and Rocco as we arrived. Cody decided to wait at the car while Rocco walked with us. You know how close Cam and Morgan are." She eyed Cody who just offered a small shrug of his shoulder.

She'd been relieved to learn Cody Paul was still working security for Sonny and Jason when he'd been assigned to her the night before. Cody had guarded her briefly during the time she'd lived with Jason several years earlier, and for a few days while she'd been in the hospital with her pulmonary embolism.

He was a familiar and friendly face at a time she desperately needed one.

"I suppose you saw the newspaper," Elizabeth said, leaning against the passenger door. "I wanted to tell you but—"

"Did you tell *Lucky* it was a Dominican divorce?" Emily demanded. "Nikolas says you didn't. How could you do that to him?"

Elizabeth pressed her lips together briefly and counted to ten briefly before answering. "It was on the paperwork. Lucky declined to read it. That's really not my problem."

"And I'm sure your marital plans went unmentioned as well," Emily snapped. "You sure as hell

didn't tell *me* you were marrying my brother before the ink on your divorce papers was even dry. How was that even legal?"

"Not that I owe you an explanations, but I had an expedited hearing on Monday in the Dominican Republic. I had the right paperwork, so it only takes twenty-four hours. Once the divorce was issued, Diane registered it here in New York so that left me free and clear." Elizabeth arched a brow. "Lucky for me, I live in one of the few states in the US that recognizes that kind of divorce."

"What the hell is this marriage even about? I know you've been harassing Jason the last few months \_\_\_"

Elizabeth held up a hand. "Whoa. Excuse me? First of all, one of the reasons Jason and I started to get close again was because I went to see him on *your* behalf with Sonny. You're going to call *that* harassing? Or when I risked my career to get Sam treatment? Or when he saved my life when Manny kidnapped me? What the hell, Em?"

"Lucky swore you were having an affair this summer." Emily stepped towards her, her face taut with anger. "It wasn't with Patrick, was it? You never denied anything too much. He was right. You were with my brother."

"You believe what you want to believe," Elizabeth snapped. "This conversation is over."

She jerked open the passenger door. "Let's go, Cody. I have somewhere to go."

"Yes, ma'am." Cody shot Emily a smirk, "Mrs. Morgan."

Emily scowled as Cody rounded the car to get into the driver's side.

"That *wasn't* entirely helpful, Cody," Elizabeth murmured as he put the car into gear and stepped on the gas pedal.

"Maybe, but I enjoyed it."

### **Morgan Penthouse: Living Room**

His first visitor came about ten minutes after he would have expected her, but he thought Carly was mellowing a bit. Or that Jax had attempted to hold her back.

Jason calmly let Carly in. "Hello."

"You know, I think I'm getting soft in my old age." Carly slapped the newspaper at his chest. "You should sue these bastards for libel. I wouldn't talk about my dog the way they talked about Elizabeth."

"Carly—"

"Really, I should have seen this coming." Carly planted her hands on her hips and whirled to face him. "Ric's trying to get leverage on her to flip her against you. Easy, peasy. But, he underestimated

her.”

Jason frowned. Was...was that a compliment for Elizabeth?

“Elizabeth is *way* too obsessed with you to be the reason you go to jail.”

No, *that* sounded more like her.

“Carly—”

“I can’t think of how I would have screwed this up if you’d told me,” Carly continued, “but we both know I could have managed it. But hey, it’s done now. What can I do to help?”

Help. Carly. He hated those words together.

“Nothing. Just—*don’t* annoy Elizabeth.”

Carly pursed her lips. “I like her kid, you know. Most parents won’t let their kids within five feet of mine. But Elizabeth knows the score. She had no problem letting Cam play with Morgan, be his buddy at school. Morgan talks about this kid every day.”

“Yeah, I know they’re friends.” Jason leaned against the arm of the sofa. Better to let Carly just wind herself down. “Does that mean you’ll give her a break?”

“Isn’t she pregnant?” Carly wondered. “Cam said something about getting a new brother.” She frowned. “How is she going to work being married to you and carrying Lucky’s kid?”

Jason hesitated just a moment too long—he hadn’t been prepared for this train of conversation. Carly’s eyes bulged and she whacked him in the chest.

“It’s *your* kid! Holy hell!” She whacked him again. “I did *not* see that coming!”

“Carly—”

“Well, this will make everything easier.” She nodded. “Yeah. Sam will finally be out of all our lives —”

“What the hell is this?”

The penthouse door flew open again and the woman in question stormed in, the *Port Charles Herald* crumpled in her hand, tears streaming down her face.

“Oh, yay, I get to be here for this!” Carly rubbed her hands together. “Fantastic.”

“Carly, go away—” Jason began, but Sam shoved the paper in his face.

“Why did you marry her?” Sam screeched. “How could you *do* this to me?”

“Well, you screwed your stepfather,” Carly began, “so really, I don’t know what your problem is—”

“Carly—”

“You said you *loved* me—”

“Men say a lot of things for sex, you should be used to them—”

“*Carly*—”

“Why wouldn’t you tell me?”

“Why the hell is it *your* business?” Carly snarled.

Jason rubbed his eyes. He wanted his quiet morning back. He wanted to be back in the kitchen making breakfast with Elizabeth and promising Cameron a set of race cars.

Was that so much to ask?

“Ah—” Elizabeth blinked as she stepped over the threshold, her eyes sweeping over a crying Sam and a smug Carly. “I guess I’m interrupting something.”

“You *whore!*” Sam threw the paper down and stepped towards her. Jason reached for his ex-girlfriend’s arm to hold her back, but then Carly grabbed a chunk of Sam’s hair and wrenched back.

“Son of a—”

“Carly?” Elizabeth said blankly.

“Hey, the *only* person who gets to scream at Elizabeth right now is someone who doesn’t live in a fucking glass house,” Carly hissed. She released Sam’s hair and pushed her away, putting herself between Sam and Elizabeth. “Is that you, tramp? No.”

“It’s certainly not *you*,” Sam spat. “You two have chasing Jason for years—you never liked that he was happy with me—”

“Yeah, because he certainly ran right to the altar.” Carly arched a brow. “Hey, Muffin, how long were *you* and Jason engaged?”

“I’m not answering that.” Elizabeth frowned. “Muffin? What the—”

“Carly, you should—” Jason stopped. “You should *both* go.”

Sam wheeled around on him. “How long *were* you engaged to her?” she demanded. “We were engaged almost a year—”

“I—” Jason just stared at her, because of course she was right. They’d been engaged for months. But

then again, there'd been his illness and then Manny Ruiz. When would they have found time?

"Sam," Elizabeth said, but stopped, because clearly she didn't know what she would have said.

"Now that we have *that* settled." Carly eyed Elizabeth. "Jury's still out on how I feel about you, but you never slept with Sonny, so I suppose you've got that going for you."

"Um."

And Jason watched his wife fiddle with the strap of her tote bag, remembering that she was supposed to pick up the paternity test results.

If she was back, then—

"You should both go. *Now*." Jason reached for Sam's arm to propel her out the door. "Cody, make sure Sam gets out of the building—"

"How can you treat me like this?" Sam blinked. "Wait, how does Carly know about Ric?"

"Please." Carly snorted. "Sonny told me."

Jason closed his eyes and cursed his friend.

"Carly, don't help," Elizabeth said with a wince.

"Ah, Jase, we got a situation." Cody finally spoke up from his position by the door. "The DA's on his way up with an officer. So...maybe..." His eyes took in the scene. "We can stash Mrs. C and Sam across the hall—"

"What?" Sam screeched. "Why is Ric here—"

"Call Diane," Carly ordered Jason. She reached for Sam's hand. "We'll be in the old maid's room. And don't worry about her." She grinned. "I'll keep her quiet."

Carly, with a strength Jason hadn't expected of her, hauled Sam away as the other woman continued to screech. The more she talked, the less Jason could remember why he'd been in love with her in the first place.

He sent Diane a quick text message to get her ass over here in case there was a search warrant or Ric tried to take Elizabeth into custody. He heard some more scuffles and another screech that was abruptly cut off from the direction of the maid's room.

"This is *insane*..." Elizabeth pressed a hand to her forehead. "We can't have him in here right now. What if Sam—"

"Carly will keep her quiet." Jason closed the front door and took Elizabeth's purse from her. "Listen, just—don't say anything. Diane might not show up in time—"

“I can’t keep quiet—what if he’s here to arrest me?” she hissed. “Jason—”

“He’s *not* going to arrest you today. He’s bringing the cop to scare you. He knows better.”

Cody knocked lightly. “The DA, Mr. Morgan.”

“Since when does he call you that?” Elizabeth demanded, perching on the edge of the sofa. “Jason—”

He pressed his mouth to hers for a brief moment. “I’ll take care of this, Elizabeth. Just don’t say anything—”

“Okay,” she murmured. “You’ve got more experience in this.”

“Let him in, Cody.”

When Ric walked in, Elizabeth remained perched on the sofa, while Jason angled himself in front of her, his arms crossed. “What do you want?”

“What do you think?” the piece of scum retorted. Ric glared at Elizabeth. “*This* is your bright idea for handling this, Elizabeth? You lose your job, so you run to the richest man you know—”

Elizabeth lunged to her feet, opened her mouth, but Jason held up a hand. It was essential she gave him no ammunition to work with. “If you have anything you want to discuss with my wife, then you should talk to our attorney.”

“This isn’t even legal,” Ric snarled. “I’ll challenge whatever junk divorce you got, Elizabeth—”

“You can speak to Diane about that—she filed the papers.” Jason moved to the desk and handed him a card. “In case you forgot her number. Now get out.”

“Do you think this is over?” Ric hissed. He stepped towards Jason, who just stared at him. “Do you think you’ve *protected* her? You’ve just made her a target, Morgan. And now, when I take you down, *she’s* going with you.”

He and the unfamiliar cop left then. Jason moved to the doorway and waited until the elevator doors had closed. He looked to Cody. “Let me know when he’s out of the building, and from now on, *no* law enforcement gets clearance for this floor without a warrant.”

“Understood.” Cody nodded.

Jason exhaled slowly and then turned back to Elizabeth, whose face was a bit paler than he’d like. He had to get Carly and Sam out of here before they could deal with what might happen next. “Carly!” he called.

There was another yelp, then Sam rushed out of the back, rubbing her mouth. “That little bitch taped my mouth shut and my hands to the bed—”

Carly was tucking the duct tape in her purse. “Lucky finding that back there,” she said. “I’m keeping it by the way, you never know when it’ll come in handy.”

“Oh my God...” Elizabeth pressed her hands to her face, her words coming out more as a half moan. “This is such a goddamn farce.”

“Is Ric coming after you?” Sam demanded. “Is that what’s going on here?” She looked to Elizabeth who just kept her eyes closed. “You should have said something—I wouldn’t give you away to him —”

“Whatever. Time to go.” Carly reached for Sam’s arm.

“I mean, I thought you were lying all this time,” Sam said, wrenching away from Carly and moving towards him. “That—you didn’t think that night was a mistake and maybe the affair had continued—”

Jason flinched and looked to Elizabeth whose face was now expressionless. He had *never* told Sam that night had been a mistake.

“You need to go now,” Jason told her. He opened the door. “Cody, make sure they get out the building.”

“We *will* be discussing this later—” Carly tapped Jason as she pushed Sam past him. “You owe me.”

Jason closed the door behind both of them and pressed his forehead to the door. That was a half hour of his life he was never going to get back.

Elizabeth cleared her throat. “So. Well, that takes care of most of the people that are going to flip out. At least on your side. I still have—” She stopped. “Anyway.”

Jason turned to her. “Elizabeth—I’m sorry. I know I shouldn’t have let Sam leave with the wrong impression—”

She shook her head. “I don’t—I don’t want to talk about Sam. I’m sure Carly enjoyed herself.” She crossed to the desk where Jason had set her purse and drew out a white envelope. “I—I went to Mercy.”

He looked at it—this piece of paper that could change everything. “Ah. Well.”

“I couldn’t—I couldn’t open it. I wanted to, but I was afraid—” Elizabeth pressed her lips together and held it out to him. “I want—can you do it? I just...my hands are shaking too much to deal with it.” But just as he reached for it, she drew back. “Wait.”

“Elizabeth—” He thought about just yanking it from her—now that the knowledge about his future as a father was in front of them, he just wanted to know.

But he stopped himself.

“No, I just...” She gestured toward the recently closed door of the penthouse. “I just...it’s...I wanted to keep this to ourselves and this penthouse today has been like Grand Central station. Maybe we could...go upstairs where we can’t be...interrupted?”

Jason nodded, because she had a point. He couldn’t guarantee Carly wouldn’t come back, that Ric couldn’t slither past security again—

“Let’s go upstairs then.”

### **Morgan Penthouse: Master Bedroom**

Elizabeth followed Jason into the room that she was still struggling to see as theirs—her two suitcases were near the closet where she had not yet begun unpacking in earnest, and there were several boxes of personal belongings that rested next to the bureau.

But it was still the sparse room it had been after Elizabeth had packed Sam’s belongings in June when Jason had broken up with her, and she was conscious of the fact that the night they had spent together had *not* been in this room. He had carried her into Brenda’s old room, a pink confection down the hall next to the room Cameron currently occupied.

At the time, she had not really considered his reasons for choosing that room but now that she was expected to share the master with him, Elizabeth wondered if even in that moment, he’d been thinking of Sam. Of not wanting another woman in *their* room.

It shouldn’t matter. Jason had walked away from Sam, and they were married. Not for the reasons Elizabeth might have dreamed of once, but it was a marriage. They shared a bed, they cared for one another.

And yet...wondering if in the middle of one of the most passionate and electric nights of her adult life when Elizabeth could barely remember *she* was married, if Jason had been thinking of Sam...

It dug at her just a bit.

She turned to face Jason as he closed the door, the sun streaming in through the sheer curtains. She again held out the envelope. “Moment of truth.”

Jason took the envelope and stared at it for a moment. What did he want? Did he want this baby to be his, to be theirs? It would make so much about this situation easier in the short-term, but a child was forever. Did he really want that connection?

And God, what would she do if it were Lucky’s child?

Jason slid the single sheet of paper out and slowly unfolded it, his face stoic as ever.

Then his shoulders slumped.

Her heart was slamming against her chest. “What does it say?”

“The—” Jason stopped, and his fingers tightened just slightly, the results crinkling in his grasp. “I’m...the baby is mine.”

Oh, God. All the air rushed out of her in one swoosh and she swayed slightly. “What?” She reached for the paper and he released it.

She skimmed down to the conclusion which did indeed read that Jason Morgan, with a 99.999999% match was proved to be the father of the fetus.

“Oh, God. This is—” Elizabeth pressed her lips together, afraid to reveal just how relieved she was.

“It’s...better this way, isn’t it?”

Jason’s uncertain tone had her raising her head from the results to meet his eyes. Though his expression had not changed, he looked...uncomfortable.

“This,” Elizabeth began as she folded the letter and slid it into her purse, intending to burn it as soon as possible, “is the *only* outcome I could think about. Jason—” She stepped closer. “I *never* wanted it to be Lucky.”

His lips parted just a bit. “But—”

“I would have dealt with it,” she told him. “But from the moment I learned I was pregnant, I wanted it to be yours.” She licked her lips. “I was afraid to admit that, to really hope for it—but, God, Jason, I wanted to give you a child—”

His hands cupped her face, his thumb sliding across the jawline. “I wanted it, too. More than I should have.”

She wasn’t sure who moved first—maybe they did so together, as if words were no longer enough. The terror and uncertainty had dissolved into a dizzying relief—even excitement.

“We’re going to have a *baby*,” she murmured against his lips, feeling him grin in response, her own joy tingling down to her toes.

The back of her calves hit the bed before she even realized they had begun to drift in that direction. It seemed right, it seemed natural to take this moment and celebrate it without words, using kisses and caresses to express what simple words never could.

She was having a child with Jason Morgan, her husband, and in this moment, *nothing* could touch them. For this brief time, her world and everything in it was perfect.

# Chapter Nine

*I shot for the sky  
I'm stuck on the ground  
So why do I try, I know I'm gonna fall down  
I thought I could fly, so why did I drown?  
Never know why it's coming down, down, down*  
- Down, Jason Walker

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*Friday, October 27, 2006*

## **Morgan Penthouse: Living Room**

Jason had just set his cell phone on the coffee table when Elizabeth descended the stairs later that night. He glanced up at the sound of her soft footsteps. “Hey. Cam asleep?”

“Finally.” She offered a tired smile as she joined him on the sofa, curling up against him. They had had what amounted to an almost perfect family afternoon—after picking Cameron up at school, they had taken him to Wyndhams where Jason bought him the promised race track set (and one or two extra things Cam just couldn’t live without). After dinner, the three of them had set the new toys up in Cam’s room where he played until Elizabeth put him to bed.

“Three stories before he finally fell asleep, but he was still looking at those cars.” She closed her eyes, exhausted by the day. From the newspaper article to the confrontations with Emily, Carly, and Sam—

To learning she and Jason were having a child together.

“Sonny called,” Jason said after a long moment. “His source in the DA’s office got in touch.”

Elizabeth lifted her head from his shoulder and frowned. “What? Why? I thought—”

“Ric’s going ahead with the paperwork to convene the grand jury,” Jason told her. “But it’s possibly just because he doesn’t expect to lose on Thursday at the hearing.” He took her hand in his. “But just in case...”

She straightened, twisting to look at him more directly. “But—”

“Just in case,” Jason repeated, “Sonny and Diane want to meet on Monday. Diane wants to talk to you more about your relationship with Ric. She’s worried that he might harp on the short time you two were together—it was a more than a year between meeting him and the final divorce.”

Elizabeth sighed and tilted her head back. “So I’m going to have to tell some judge all the nasty reasons I divorced Ric the first time, make some cogent argument for why I ever went back, and then

explain why I left him again.”

“Yeah.” Jason hesitated. “And Diane wants to talk about some...things Ric might ask about if he gets you in the grand jury.” She snapped her head back to look at him, but his eyes were trained on their joined hands. “If the hearing doesn’t work, Elizabeth, I can’t—you’ll *have* to testify. I can’t send you out of the jurisdiction. Not now.”

“Because you’ll be seen as an accomplice.” She pressed her lips together. “Yeah. I figured. We’ll—” She took a deep breath. “We’ll cross that bridge when we come to it, okay? Let’s just...work with the idea that Ric was an awful husband who can’t be trusted to prosecute his ex-wife.”

“Okay.” After a long moment, Jason spoke again. “Emily’s called me all day, but I didn’t—I haven’t taken her calls. Do—do I want to?”

Elizabeth frowned. “Why didn’t you talk to her?” she asked curiously. “She’s your sister—”

“I listened to one or two of her voicemails,” Jason said. “Which led me to believe that she’s pretty angry at you. What’s going on?”

“Oh...” Elizabeth leaned back against the sofa. “She kept telling me to stick with Lucky, to give the rehab a chance. Apparently, me divorcing him and marrying you is going to be really hard on Lucky.” She chewed on her bottom lip. “Ah. She thinks we were having an affair this summer.”

“I had a feeling.” Jason shifted again. “She asked me a few weeks ago if—if I gave you money for Cam to go to school.”

“What?” Elizabeth demanded. “How—” She huffed. “Honestly. She could have just *asked* me. Cameron Lewis—Zander’s father—he knew I was having his grandson. I didn’t—I was scared of having Zander in my life, in Cam’s life, because he was just—he was spiraling out of control...” She sighed. “But Cameron was a good man, and I knew he’d be kind to his grandson. He’d lost his wife and was alone in the world. So he left money to Cam in a trust to be used for his education.”

“Emily didn’t know about the trust?”

“I guess not.” Elizabeth shrugged. “I found out after I had him and by then, Emily was dealing with Nikolas and Mary Bishop. I guess it never came up.” She shook her head again. “But of course she’d think I’d go to you to put my son in a private pre-school. Why not? That’s the kind of person she thinks I am.”

“I’m sorry,” Jason began.

“I’m not,” Elizabeth interrupted. “Because now I know who my friends were. Lainey and Kelly called and left messages. *They* congratulated me for trading up. Robin stood by me every inch of the way. Patrick loaned his prize possession to my son—”

“Why are race cars—”

“Sonny arranged for my divorce and planned the most beautiful wedding,” Elizabeth continued. “And Carly duct taped your ex-girlfriend’s mouth shut. I know who I can count on, Jason. And it’s not going to be Emily. I’m just glad I know it for sure now.” She hesitated. “I’m sorry if it creates difficulties for you, I know how close you guys—well I mean, I know you guys have been working on things,” she murmured, remembering the distance over the last few months after Emily’s relationship with Sonny came out. “But I can’t pretend anymore her priority isn’t Lucky.”

“Okay,” Jason said simply. “I’ll give her some more time to cool down. She’s the least of our problems.”

Which now included baring her soul for Diane Miller to use in court. Fantastic.

*Monday, October 30, 2006*

### **Miller & Associates: Diane’s Office**

Elizabeth settled in a seat at a conference table, Jason at her side, Sonny across from them and Diane at the head of the table.

She knew that the next few hours were likely to be difficult. She would have to talk about her marriage to Ric in excruciating detail. It was true that Jason and Sonny knew the big moments, but there was so much they didn’t know.

So much she had hoped to take to her grave.

But her desire for privacy was outweighed by the need to keep Ric away from her, from her family.

“So, Elizabeth, I wanted to say ahead of time that I’m aware this is going to be a bit rough,” Diane said. She drew out a tape recorder and set it in front of her. “I don’t want to miss any details, and I want to be free to pay attention to you, so I intend to tape this session. Do you have any objections?”

“Do you promise to destroy it after the hearing?” Elizabeth asked softly. “And is it possible to have the records sealed? I can...I can live with the three of you knowing what happened, but I don’t want any spoken record to ever leak out—”

“I’ll file a motion.” Diane gestured towards Sonny. “Sonny is present due to the possibility of grand jury testimony—”

“But I can step out for this first part.” Sonny leaned forward. “I want you to be comfortable—”

“I trust you, Sonny.” Elizabeth looked to him, then to Jason. “I trust you both, I’m just—you’re not going to like a lot of what I’m going to say. I’m not proud of some of my choices, but I’ve learned to live with them.”

“I’ll do whatever you need.” Jason drew her hand into his, his thumb smoothing over her wedding rings.

“Ric delivered a brief in response to my motion to disqualify. He states that the marriage between the two of you lasted less than a year and ended amicably.” Diane slid the papers across to Elizabeth. “You were pregnant with another man’s child at the dissolution of the second marriage, and he agreed to generous alimony.”

Her stomach pitched as she skimmed Ric’s brief statement. “He makes this sound like I had an affair, that he tried to forgive—” Elizabeth blinked. “This is...this is such a lie, Diane. *Every* word of this.”

“He’s banking on you not wanting to say some of the worse details,” Sonny mused. “It’s been three years since you two were married. Not long in the grand scheme of things, but a lifetime considering where the two of you are today.”

“He says I was never the same after we lost—” Her voice broke. “God. He *always* comes back to that miscarriage. He blames it for everything wrong he’s ever done, as if we’d still be together if I had had that child—”

Diane gestured for Jason to fill a glass of water. “Elizabeth, now that we know his position, I need yours. Go back to the first ceremony. Your decision to marry him.”

Elizabeth took a sip of water. “We weren’t dating anymore when I found out I was pregnant. He’d lied to me and done some horrible things to people I—” She hesitated. “To people I knew. To people who mattered to me in some ways. I couldn’t—I couldn’t deal with it. So I walked out.” She hesitated. “But when I found out I was pregnant...”

She closed her eyes, pressing her hand to the slight swelling of her child. “I always thought about having children one day, but it was abstract, you know? The way girls dream about getting married without knowing who will be at the end of the aisle. But that baby—” She looked at Sonny. “Carly talked me out of an abortion. Sometimes I wish I had never seen her that day.”

She turned to Diane, whose face remained stoic. “I was pregnant, I was working as a waitress and living in a studio apartment without a bathroom, without reliable air conditioning or heating. My grandmother and I were at odds over—well, a lot of things. We usually were. I was scared. And so I told Ric. He made it sound like this could be a fresh start. He wanted to move past his hatred for Sonny, and I wanted to believe him because I didn’t have anywhere else to turn—”

Elizabeth stopped and took a deep breath. “So I married him. I knew he had done horrible things, but I—” She looked to Jason, then to Sonny. “I had some experience caring for people who were good men, but did things I didn’t necessarily agree with. That’s how I rationalized it. We all do horrible things, but maybe he could be different.”

“Elizabeth,” Diane murmured, “you don’t have to rationalize the decision to go forward—”

“I do. Because I did that to myself and I can’t always understand why.” Elizabeth took a deep breath. “It might have been okay, we’ll never know. Because I had the miscarriage, and I’m not—I don’t know how Ric dealt with it at first. I was—I was in shock. I was devastated. I’d had this little life inside me for a brief shining moment, and then it was gone—”

Her breath caught. “I’ve had another miscarriage since and it—it just stays with you. I couldn’t get out of bed for a few days. When I could finally face the world, Ric talked about Sonny. How it was your fault—he was convinced *you* had pushed me that night, but I never could believe that. However we felt about each other that night, Sonny, you were my friend. And I was yours.”

“I always wondered...” Sonny hesitated. “If you were pushed by someone else. You weren’t the type to fall. You were there because you were having a child. Because Carly was having a child. You wanted peace. You wanted safety. I understood that, Elizabeth. So I wondered why you would have rushed down stone steps.”

“We moved about two weeks after,” Elizabeth continued, because she couldn’t dwell on Sonny’s words, *couldn’t* think about it too closely. “I look back now and I think maybe I was just...tired. Worn out. It had been a long year already—so much had happened, and I just didn’t want to deal with the world. So when Ric told me he’d found a house with a nice yard—when he told me he was going to open a law office and we were going to have a good life, I thought...why not. He said he loved me.”

“You never saw the house before you moved in,” Diane said.

“No, I didn’t know there had been a breakfast nook there once—where Ric had a panic room filled in.” Elizabeth sighed and leaned back in her chair. “We were okay at first, but then Carly went missing. Jason and Sonny were convinced Ric had something to do with it. I couldn’t understand why—he was home so often. When would he have been able—”

She closed her eyes. “The period with the panic room is where most of the damaging information will come in handy, I think. You, ah, might need Carly to verify it. There were...monitors so Ric could make sure the coast was clear before leaving. She...she told me a lot of it when I was leaving for Napa Valley that last time. I think she had tried to put it behind her, but I don’t know...” She lifted a shoulder. “There’s...you know the basics. He was never prosecuted for kidnapping her, which is just—I can’t believe he’s the DA.” She pressed a hand to her eyes. “I had a pulmonary embolism the day I found her. I passed out before I could tell anyone and Ric and Lorenzo Alcazar moved her.”

Diane frowned. “About the panic room—”

“I’m getting to that.” Elizabeth twisted her hands in her lap. “The embolism—it was odd, according to my doctors. I didn’t have any of the usual risk factors, but my estrogen levels were high. They told me I couldn’t use birth control pills anymore, that it was likely I had messed up my dosage or something. I wasn’t—I wasn’t *on* them. Not then. I—didn’t even take birth control until...” She took a deep breath, her cheeks flaming.

“Elizabeth, take your time,” Diane said. “I can have Jason or Sonny—”

“No, it’s—it’s fine. They know—” She raised her eyes. “I was raped when I was fifteen and you know, I hadn’t—I was a virgin. So I wasn’t sexually active. Lucky and I—once or twice, shortly before I called off the wedding. He—he took care of the protection. So I didn’t use birth control pills on a regular basis. Not until...I was in the hospital after I was kidnapped last summer.” She glanced

at Jason who was looking at her. “And I just—I thought it would be a good time to start. So I had them for a few months, then stopped. Then another few months that spring.”

She cleared her throat and avoided Sonny’s eyes as he stared at the ceiling. “I’m saying that because I read into it after I started nursing school. I didn’t have the right kind of build up for an embolism based on long-term usage. I would either have developed it right away if the hormone levels were wrong, or I would have required birth control for more than three years. I want you to know all of that, because Ric is going to claim I’m lying when I tell you what caused my embolism.”

Sonny swore. “That son of a bitch—” He sat up. “I just thought he was slipping the pills—“

“Are you telling me—” Jason straightened, twisted in his chair.

“I can’t prove it with the medical evidence, but Carly told me she saw him slipping me pills.” Her eyes burned, but she struggled to continue. “He used to put them in the hot chocolate I drank in the morning. And sometimes, if I didn’t finish it, he would put them in a glass of water—she saw him slipping me three pills one day because he wasn’t sure I had ingested them.”

She looked at Jason whose face was expressionless while his knuckles were white where his hands were wrapped around the arm rests. “I swear that I didn’t *know* when I agreed to marry him again. Carly—Carly can tell you that I was upset, that I called her a liar—until she told me that Ric sat by while I was poisoned.”

“Poisoned?” Diane blinked. “How the hell is this man in charge of a patch of grass? He—”

“Faith poisoned a pitcher of lemonade, Carly saw her do it. And she told Ric. She warned him, but he couldn’t stop me. Not unless he wanted me to see him come out of the panic room.” She closed her eyes. “It would have ruined his plan. So he waited until I passed out to take me to the hospital.”

“You *did* know about the panic room when you married him again in December,” Diane said with a slight hesitation.

“Pregnant again,” Elizabeth sighed. “And I had alienated pretty much everyone I knew by that point. I was still recovering my eyesight after a car accident that fall, and Ric—he’s good at making you believe in him. He said he would get counseling, that he just—he blamed Sonny and Carly and he wanted revenge. He said that losing the baby had broken him, and I *believed* him, because it broke me. It had to have, because what else could explain what he had done?”

Her cheeks were hot as tears slid down them. Jason pressed a tissue into her hands. “We’re done,” he told Diane. “You have enough—”

“No, no. I *have* to do this. I have to make sure we’re safe from him.” Elizabeth wiped her eyes. “I married him because I was scared and alone. I was pregnant. And I blamed myself for Carly. He couldn’t have gotten away with it if I hadn’t been so blind. So maybe if we had a child together, if he could open himself up to my child, it could be okay. I still saw the good in him. I thought—he has a good heart and I can fix him. I *can*, if I just try hard enough—but I couldn’t. I never trusted him again.

He framed Nikolas for murder, he manipulated Zander right to his death...but worst of all—” She choked. “He didn’t love the baby. My sweet little Cameron. He didn’t give a *damn* about him. He was doing to prove he was better than Sonny.

“So I left him,” she said simply. “It was one thing to torture myself with a bad marriage, but now I knew my child would never be a priority. He would never look at Cameron and see his own son. He’d always be my bastard child. So I walked away. And I filed for divorce when Carly told me about the pills, about the lemonade.”

“That’s *enough*,” Sonny said softly. “There’s no way a judge is going to let Ric prosecute her for anything. Carly will get on the stand and demolish him. She’s an eyewitness. There’s no statute of limitations on kidnapping, on attempted murder.”

“I’m inclined to agree that this should be enough, but I suppose...” Diane tapped her pen against the pad of legal paper where she had scribbled notes. “Just for form, we should discuss any information Ric might have gleaned from you regarding Jason and Sonny.”

“Nothing,” Elizabeth said firmly. “I never knew anything really important, and even if I did, I would *never*—”

“Let’s just—take it slow. Did Ric ask you questions about Jason and Sonny? Did you discuss them in any fashion?” Diane asked.

“In passing,” Elizabeth admitted. “You know, the way you might talk about friends and people you know. He was trying to work for Sonny, he asked if I knew him. I said yes, everyone did. Sonny and I had been friendly for years, but I don’t know...” She blinked at Sonny. “We hadn’t been particularly close for months at that point.”

“And Jason?” Diane asked. “Did he come up?”

“In passing,” Elizabeth stressed. “As someone I had been involved with briefly. I don’t recall him asking for more information, I can’t imagine what I might have told him.” She sighed and shifted a bit. “I think maybe he tried more for Jason at the time—it’s probably why he sought me out at all. Hoping for a scorned ex or something. It didn’t work. Whatever I know about Jason and Sonny is separate from the rest of that.”

“Are you sure?” Sonny pressed, leaning forward. “You have to think about this. Ric’s a con man. If he gets past the hearing on Thursday, we need to be ready—”

“I *am* thinking,” Elizabeth retorted. “I didn’t want to talk about Jason or you then. Remember? I was pretty goddamn pissed off and trying to put it all out of my head.”

“Elizabeth, we’re not trying to accuse you,” Jason broke in quietly. She twisted to stare at him. “It might have been an accident—”

“And you *were* pissed at us,” Sonny repeated. “We were in your face that summer about Carly. You pulled a gun on Jason—”

“Are you two serious right now?” Elizabeth shoved back from the table and got to her feet. “What would I have told him that was so goddamn crucial? I didn’t know *anything*, Sonny. That was the whole damn reason we were in that mess at all—”

“Oh, it’s back to me keeping you out of the plan again.” Sonny also stood. “You were demanding I leave Ric alone. You were protecting him while my wife was in a locked room—”

“Sonny—” Jason stood, holding up a hand. “That’s enough.”

“I didn’t know she was there!” Elizabeth snapped. “I turned him in the second I was conscious enough. You want to blame me for being in this mess? How about you? You didn’t take care of this—you let him into your goddamn business. Anything he knows probably can from you—if you had just taken him out when he kidnapped your wife like a *normal* criminal—”

“Oh, for Christ’s sake—” Diane groaned. “I didn’t hear that.”

“You didn’t give a damn about me then, Sonny,” Elizabeth snarled. “I was a means to an end. You didn’t think about what it would mean that I was married to a man who drugged me, who watched me drink poison—you knew all of this before I married him again. You knew I didn’t know the worst of it and you let me walk into it blind—*literally*,” she finished, venom dripping from her. “You and Jason covered for Courtney while I was sitting blind in a hospital room. I’m supposed to apologize for doing the best I could?”

Sonny took a deep breath and dropped it into his seat. “You—you’re right. I’m sorry.”

“Elizabeth—” She turned at Jason’s stricken voice.

“I’m *not* mad about the accident,” Elizabeth told Jason. “You did what you had to do, and Courtney had a problem. I got it. I don’t know, maybe I was able to let it go because I recovered. I can’t answer that. It’s not important.”

“It is,” Jason insisted. “Let me—”

She turned to Diane. “You want to know what I know? I know that Jason was shot for some reason in December 1999, right around the time Anthony Moreno was killed in a shootout. I know that I lied to everyone in my life to keep the police from finding out. I know that I had a bomb in my studio, but the police knew that as well. I didn’t tell them that Sorel planted it or that he admitted it.”

She hesitated. “I know Jason had something to do with that guy Roscoe being killed because I was kidnapped five seconds later. I know Jason is the one who shoved Manny Ruiz off the hospital building, not Lucky. Those are the things I know for sure. And I never repeated them to anyone except for right here in this room.”

Jason just stared at her. “Elizabeth—”

“The only person who knows that we weren’t sleeping together that December is Lucky, and if *he*

tries to make something of it, I'll tell everyone I lied to him to spare his feelings because I thought he was supposed to be dead," Elizabeth cut in. "It's close enough to the truth."

"What—"

"Ah, well..." Diane capped her pen and switched off the recorder. "I really don't think we're going to get that far. Though, in the future, I'd rather not know if you plan to tell a specific lie under oath."

"Fair enough." Elizabeth took a deep breath. "Sonny, it's all fine. It's over with. It was a long time ago, and I've put it behind me. He's a lousy human being who's just trying to terrorize us. "

"I was a selfish bastard then." Sonny pressed a hand to his chest. "I'm not much better now, but I wish to hell I had told you what I knew then—"

"You were going through a lot with Carly and Alcazar. I made my choices. I have to live with them." She looked to Diane. "Can we go? Is that enough?"

### **Morgan Penthouse: Living Room**

Jason said nothing as they stepped out of the office and until Sonny's limo dropped them off at the Harborview parking garage. He was silent as Cody rode the elevator with them before opening the penthouse door.

"Let's—let's go upstairs to talk." Jason cast an eye towards the door, remembering as she had a few days earlier that his home was often Grand Central station and telling Cody to prevent visitors was asking someone to hold back a hurricane often enough.

"Fine." She looked tired as she trudged up the stairs towards their room.

He closed the door behind them. "I'm sorry that Sonny—"

"Sonny and I never talked about that summer when Carly was missing," Elizabeth interrupted. She wrapped her arms around her torso and looked to ceiling. "I'm not surprised he had some residual anger left over. He's not wrong to be annoyed with me for being so blind. But he knows better than anyone how Ric can play a person. He actually let Ric work for him."

"Yeah...well..." Jason let that go, because explaining *that* was beyond him. "Elizabeth—"

"And I'm sure he's held back all these years because he knew what Carly knew." Elizabeth tilted her head back. "It's *fine*—"

"It's not," Jason told her. "Because I want to make sure you believe me when I tell you I know you didn't tell Ric anything. I didn't think you did, but—"

"You wanted to make sure." She sat on the edge of the bed. "Jason, we have to get Ric disqualified. Because if he starts fishing with the basics, there's no telling what might happen. He knows about Manny Ruiz. He has to. I saw the autopsy report—Manny had no gunshot wounds. Alexis declined to

prosecute, but Ric might try to. He can't work on cases that involve you or me—”

“I'm not worried about me—”

“I am. I told you—I will not be the reason you go to jail.” She closed her eyes, her face pale, her mouth set in a thin line. “After Thursday, this might be over and I can get Diane on getting my job back. Can we just stop talking about this—”

“Fine.” Jason let the subject drop, but he wouldn't forget the way she'd looked in Diane's office, hesitantly describing the nightmarish things Ric had done to her. He had nearly killed her with pills, had allowed her to drink poison—

Someday, somehow, he was going to wipe Ric from this Earth and he didn't care what Sonny said about it.

# Chapter Ten

*But there's a side to you  
That I never knew, never knew.  
All the things you'd say  
They were never true, never true  
And the games you play  
You would always win, always win*  
- Set Fire to the Rain, Adele

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*Thursday, November 2, 2006*

## **Morgan Penthouse: Master Bedroom**

Elizabeth stood in front of the dresser as she fastened a gold chain around her neck. This was the day. If all went well, she could put Ric and his threats behind her. Diane was sure that no other lawyer would go to the trouble of subpoenaing her.

If Ric was disqualified, she could just go back to her life. To her job. To enjoying this dream of having Jason as her husband. They would have to be married for more than a year to ensure the court took their marriage seriously, but maybe, just maybe, she and Jason could just...*be* married. Could raise Cameron and the new baby together.

Why not? *Why* couldn't she have this life where she felt cherished? With a man she knew respected her, valued her, loved her son as much as he would love their new child.

"Because he doesn't love you," she murmured.

"Carly picked up Cam."

Elizabeth twisted to find Jason standing in the doorway. "What?" She blinked. She hoped he hadn't heard her self-recriminations. She was just in a mood today.

"Carly picked up Cam," he repeated, stepping over the threshold. "He was pretty excited to go to school with his best friend and his new aunt."

"Oh. Right. I appreciate Carly stepping in." Elizabeth closed the top of her small jewelry box. "I'm nearly ready to go—"

"Were you saying something as I came in?" he asked, his eyes concerned. "Is everything okay?"

"They're fine." Elizabeth smoothed her hands down her Kelly green skirt. "Just—just nervous. I know we should be fine, but—" She shrugged. "Doesn't change my anxiety level."

“Okay.” She could see he didn’t believe her, but he said nothing to challenge it. Thank God. The last thing she needed today was a state of their marriage discussion.

It was perfect as far as she was concerned. Love would only be icing on the cake.

“We should get going.” She moved past him, but he caught her hand, drawing her back to him. “Jason —”

“Elizabeth,” he began, but he hesitated. “Once this part of it is over—” He stopped. “I don’t know. I just—it’ll be better once this is behind us. We can do anything you want. You can go back to work if you want, we can take Cameron somewhere for Thanksgiving—it’ll be better once these charges go away.”

And she believed that—believed that he would dedicate himself to her, to this family. And maybe it *would* be better, and maybe she would be happy.

But how long could it last? She loved him, she could admit that to herself, had loved him for so long, she could scarcely remember a time she didn’t. But he had moved on long ago—to other women. He still loved Sam.

Would he hate her one day for trapping him?

“It can’t get worse,” she responded finally with a hesitant smile. “I’m not—it’s fine, Jason. I told you, I’m just nervous. It’ll be okay. We should get going.”

But he looked unconvinced as she pushed past him and left the room.

### **Promises Rehab: Lucky’s Room**

Nikolas stepped over the threshold into his brother’s room, not at all looking forward to the discussion he was sure was going to go badly.

Lucky knew about Elizabeth’s hasty divorce and remarriage—Emily had told him several days earlier. Nikolas had hoped learning the news in rehab would enable him to deal with it in therapy, but he knew his brother.

And how stubborn Spencers could be.

Lucky was sitting in a chair by the window, staring over the grounds with a sullen look on his face. His scowl only deepened when he saw his brother. “If it isn’t Judas.”

Nikolas sighed and closed the door behind him, leaning against it briefly. “I wasn’t aware she was planning to fly to the Dominican Republic and then remarry within twenty-four hours. She wanted to me to witness your signatures. I did that.”

“You convinced me it was the right thing.” Lucky launched out of his chair. “My family is gone now—she took them to Jason. Do you think I’ll get within five feet of my kids now?”

Nikolas did not roll his eyes, though he was tempted. “Your *family* was gone before that. You got high, you had an affair with your boss’s daughter—and do you remember the last time you saw Elizabeth before you came here?”

Shame filled Lucky’s eyes as he turned away. “That’s right,” Nikolas continued. “It was the night she found the pills and you threw her to the ground. She’s pregnant, Lucky. If you were capable of that merely a few months into this drug habit you’ve developed, what kind of violence might you have unleashed later? She had a right to protect herself and her kids. Even if you recover, you’ll *always* be in recovery. And she has a right not to deal with that.”

“Fine. So what. That doesn’t mean she should go and marry before our divorce is a day old!” Lucky retorted. “How do I ever go back to my job? My wife married a gangster—”

“Ric’s coming after her,” Nikolas interrupted. “So maybe she went to him for protection.” Though after a week to consider it, Nikolas thought the marriage had been designed for *Jason’s* protection. Ric wanted Jason and Sonny, not his ex-wife.

And if that were the truth, Nikolas would do whatever was required to keep Elizabeth safe from his aunt’s husband.

“These charges would have gone away. She didn’t do it—”

“*These charges* would destroy her career, cause her undue stress during her pregnancy, cripple her financially—” Nikolas bowed his head. “You used to think about Elizabeth before you thought about yourself. You and Elizabeth—I could see what love was, what it could be. What I wanted it for myself—”

“That was then,” Lucky said dully. “I died. I never came back enough for her. She’s never loved me again the way she did.” He met his brother’s eyes. “She settled for me. You think I don’t know that now? Jason’s been single since May. How long has she been back in his life? That stupid damn surgery. I can still see her refusing to come home after he got her arrested for the operation. She almost sacrificed her career for him—I thought it was for Patrick, but I was too blind to see it.”

“Lucky—”

“I see it now. She did it for *him*. She always did what he needed. Did what was good for him. I was a consolation prize. She doesn’t need me now.”

Nikolas remained quiet. There was nothing he could say to that. Hadn’t he known that for years? He could still remember the sting of realizing Elizabeth preferred Jason to him, that she had moved on from Lucky to someone like him. The anger in her eyes when he challenged her on it then—

Some people were inside of you, and no matter how you tried to move on, you simply couldn’t. How could he argue with that?

“You still have a few weeks before you’re scheduled to be released,” Nikolas said finally. “I hope you use that time to work through this in therapy. You’re welcome to come to Wyndemere.”

“I’m going after my kids. Maybe I won’t get visitation with Cameron, but I want my child. She can’t keep the baby from me.”

“Get better first,” Nikolas suggested as he opened the door.

He had his suspicions about the baby, too.

### **Port Charles Courthouse: Courtroom B**

If Jason so much as glanced to his left at Ric’s smug, smarmy face, his legendary control would splinter. He’d known Ric was an animal, a monster who preyed on the weak, on the vulnerable. He’d suckered Elizabeth and Carly, Sonny and Alexis. Had somehow maneuvered himself into a position of authority.

“Ms. Miller.” The judge leaned back in his chair. “You’ve filed a motion to disqualify the district attorney’s office from prosecuting any cases in which Elizabeth Morgan or her husband are involved. I’m curious—which charges are we speaking of? Hypothetical or—”

“Your Honor.” Diane rose, a pen in her hand. “My client, Elizabeth Morgan, worked as a surgical nurse at General Hospital until this last month. Ric Lansing’s office in conjunction with the police department reported to the hospital board that she was under investigation for theft of narcotics from the hospital with an intent to distribute.” She reached for a piece of paper. “I have an affidavit from Head Nurse Epiphany Johnson stating that Mrs. Morgan was informed charges would be filed shortly.”

“I cannot be disqualified from a case that hasn’t been filed yet,” Ric said smoothly. “This motion, Your Honor, is premature, but moreover, baseless as my brief indicates.”

Diane arched a brow. “Mrs. Morgan was suspended from her job without pay. In her own affidavit, she states that she was informed that charges were imminent. How *long* should we allow a conflict of interest to continue? Your Honor, DA Lansing chose to be involved personally with this case. If this were to go to court, we would probably discover he pushed the department to investigate—”

“Hardly unusual, Your Honor,” Ric cut in. “The police department was avoiding looking into drug addiction in their own squad. The district attorney is concerned that if we did not discover the source of Lucas Spencer’s drug addiction—his dealer, so to speak—then, it might compromise further cases.”

“But the district attorney chose to focus on *his* ex-wife.” Diane shot Ric a scathing glance. “I do not have to prove an actual conflict of interest. The appearance is enough to challenge on appeal, if it were to get that far.”

“Mr. Lansing.” The judge leaned forward. “I’ve considered your brief. You don’t consider your previous marriage to be a factor due to its nature. You married due to a pregnancy that did not come to term, and separated due to the miscarriage.”

“That’s right, Your Honor,” Ric said smoothly. “My ex-wife, understandably, had a difficult time with the loss of our child. While we were separated, she became pregnant again by someone else. We made another attempt to salvage the marriage, but there didn’t seem to be a reason to. It was nearly three years ago. Mrs. *Morgan*,” he said, stressing the name, “has been married twice since, pregnant three times as well. I, myself, have remarried. We have an amicable relationship.”

“Hmm…” The judge looked to Diane. “Ms. Miller, the brief you filed is four times as long as the district attorney’s. You make…quite a few accusations.”

“And I can back them up.” Diane stood, a sheaf of papers in her hand. “Contrary to the rosy picture the DA is painting, their divorce was anything but amicable. I have a copy of a deposition Mrs. Morgan gave at the time to her lawyer, Alexis Davis, whom the DA later married. In it, Mrs. Morgan states the same reasons she states today, so this is *not* something that she has conjured up to preclude any case against her.”

“Yes, I’ve considered the deposition. Mrs. Morgan accused her husband of giving her birth control pills surreptitiously in her food and beverages, causing a life-threatening illness. Carly Corinthos has also filed an affidavit stating she was being held against her will and saw the DA committing the crime. That’s, again, quite the accusation—”

“And slanderous, I might add,” Ric cut in. “There’s no evidence—”

“The charges were dropped because the complaining witness was unavailable,” Diane said. “Mrs. Morgan’s police statement is on the record. But don’t take Carly Corinthos’ word for it.” Diane reached into her bag and pulled out more paper.

“Dr. Monica Quartermaine operated on Mrs. Morgan. She states it was a pulmonary embolism requiring emergency surgery. Dr. Robin Scorpio, head of pathology at General Hospital, will testify that the results indicate that Mrs. Morgan’s embolism was caused by an overdose of estrogen. Dr. Kelly Lee is Mrs. Morgan’s obstetrician and will state Mrs. Morgan was not prescribed birth control pills at that point due to her recent pregnancy and miscarriage. In fact, I have Mrs. Morgan’s entire gynecological history. She took birth controls pills between July and November of 2002, then again from February to April 2003.”

Diane held up another affidavit. “I have statements from several well-respected pulmonologists stating that the type of embolism Mrs. Morgan experienced was due to high levels of estrogen, *not* from long-term use or a hormonal imbalance—”

The judge held up his hand. “I get the point, Ms. Miller. Is there a reason your client did not press charges?”

“She wanted her divorce. She leveraged that very fact to force the divorce through.” Diane held up yet another sheaf of papers. “The divorce decree states that Ric Lansing will drop his opposition to the divorce if Mrs. Morgan agrees not to seek criminal charges.”

“Your Honor, she was upset at the time. Again, the loss of our child—” Ric began.

“This divorce decree, these depositions....” The judge leaned back. “The argument you’ve made to the court, Mr. Lansing, is that you and your ex-wife are almost friendly, that you attended her wedding last year—”

“And became drunk and disorderly, announcing to the world you had had an affair with your brother’s lover,” Diane supplied with a sweet smile. “DA Lansing is married to our beloved former DA Alexis Davis, who is aunt to one of Mrs. Morgan’s oldest and closest friends. The invitation was for her and a guest. He was not *personally* invited.”

“At the very least, Mr. Lansing,” the judge said when Ric tried to speak again, “your relationship with Mrs. Morgan is anything but amicable. I’ve seen the so-called evidence that you propose to utilize against Mrs. Morgan. It would not pass a preliminary hearing, but your office was intending to go forward with it. Therefore, I not only disqualify you, but your *entire* office from pursuing any charges against Mrs. Morgan or anyone in her immediate family.”

Elizabeth closed her eyes, felt Jason squeeze her hand. They had won. This was going to be over—

“Your Honor, you cannot tie my hands when it comes to pursuit of justice. Elizabeth Morgan is married to Jason Morgan. This office has the right to pursue charges against him—”

The judge held up his hand again. “A special prosecutor, independent of the office, must be appointed on any cases concerning Elizabeth and Jason Morgan or Sonny Corinthos, seeing as how he *is* your brother after all.”

“That is—”

“You’re free to appeal, Mr. Lansing, but you’ll lose.” The judge rapped his gavel, closing the session.

Ric waited until the judge had left the bench before storming to Diane’s table as she calmly gathered her notes. “You think you’ve *won*?”

“Walk away, Ric.” Jason leaned over the table. “You’ve lost. You over played your hand. Walk away.”

“I warned you, Elizabeth.” Ric stabbed his index finger at her. “I *warned* you. I tried to save you from throwing yourself on a sinking ship. You should have taken the chance—”

“Why, DA Lansing, is that a threat?” Diane drawled. “Just try me. I’ll have your office hauled up on charges of harassment so fast, your head will spin before the mayor cuts it off—”

“It’s not a threat,” Ric snarled. “It’s a promise. You made your choice, Elizabeth. You’ll go down with him.” He glared at Sonny who had remained quiet.

“Diane, about that special prosecutor—” he said finally after his half-brother had stormed out of the court room.

“I can’t promise they won’t appoint someone who will go after the two of you,” Diane said to Jason and Sonny. “But no special prosecutor is going to try to tangle with marital privilege. Not if they want to keep the job. So Elizabeth is off the table. And if she can’t be used as leverage, there’s really very little point to going after her for these scurrilous drug charges.”

“Thank you, Diane.” Elizabeth hesitated. “I didn’t think of all the medical evidence—and you did so much with only a few days warning.” She flashed a hesitant smile. “I wish you could have been here to help me then. Alexis told me I couldn’t file charges on hearsay—”

“Well, my dear, I *am* the better lawyer.” Diane gathered her bag, patting Elizabeth on the arm. “I would have raked him over the coals, and if a criminal case hadn’t gone forward, we would have shredded him in civil court.”

She turned back to her primary clients. “I’ll be in touch if I hear any gossip about a special prosecutor, but for now, I think we can relax. This particular storm has been averted.”

Sonny followed Diane out of the room, but Elizabeth lingered for a moment, staring at the judge’s bench. Jason leaned against the table where they had sat during the hearing. “He can’t hurt you now, Elizabeth.”

“Not legally,” she murmured. “But I would never count Ric out. The judge—you think he believed me?”

Jason was quiet for a moment. “I think the fact that you’re telling the same story today that you told three years ago helps. That Ric agreed to a quick divorce to forestall any further damage to his reputation...it weighs heavily on your credibility.” He paused. “Did—did you want to file something now?”

“No.” She sighed. “No. I don’t want to put Carly through it. I’m past it. If Ric stays out of my way, I’ll stay out of his. But maybe it’s enough that he knows I could if I wanted to.” She looked at him. “Do you think it’s really over?”

“This part of it,” Jason replied. “But Diane will keep her ear out.” He held out his hand, waited for her to take it. “Let’s go home.”

# Chapter Eleven

*Please don't shout*

*Oh no*

*I stopped listening*

*I'm not listening*

*No, I'm not listening*

*Can't you hear me?*

*I'm not listening*

- Please Don't Shout, Billie Myers

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*Monday, December 4, 2006*

## **Morgan Penthouse: Living Room**

Elizabeth pursed her lips and studied her husband before looking back down at the child-sized motor bike he had had delivered that morning. “Jason. Where are we going to hide this until Christmas?”

Jason opened his mouth, then frowned. “I—I didn’t think that part through, I guess. I just...I saw Cam’s eyes when he saw the stupid convertible Morgan has and I thought *he’d* want one—”

A smile tugged at Elizabeth’s lips as she knelt and picked up another box, this one much lighter. “And this one?”

“A helmet. He might—” Jason scowled at her, but his eyes were amused. “You’re laughing at me.”

“No, no. I wouldn’t dream of it.” The generosity of his gestures—the way he had fallen in love with her son and his penchant for anything fast or on wheels—if Elizabeth wasn’t already head over heels, this would have done it. “Do you think one of the guys would take it to Sonny’s? I’m sure he’d hide it for us.”

“Yeah, I’ll call Nico.” Jason passed her as he headed for the desk. “Have you thought about what we talked about on Thanksgiving?”

“The island?” Elizabeth asked. She bit her lip. “I like the idea, don’t get me wrong, and Cam would love to have Christmas on the island with Carly, Jax, and the boys. I’d also pay good money to see Sonny and Jax celebrating together.”

“But?” Jason prompted, picking up the receiver.

“But,” Elizabeth continued, “Cam has his Christmas traditions, too, and he’s been asking about Gram. He hasn’t seen her since we got married, and I know—that’s her fault, not ours. But we go to the hospital party, and Gram comes over during the day. We drink egg nog, and he falls asleep in her lap.” Elizabeth set the box down, twisting her fingers together. “I guess if I say let’s change it, let’s go

away for the holidays—it's admitting that Cam doesn't have that anymore."

"I guess." Jason left a message for the guard to make the pickup and turned to her. "Did you want to call Audrey? Ask her?"

"I was thinking about it," Elizabeth admitted. "I don't know. I mean, we *should* go. Cam loves the beach. It's warm. It makes sense to go." She leaned against the arm of the sofa. "Robin, Lainey, Kelly, and I are having lunch before the holidays because Lainey's going home to Buffalo, and Kelly's flying to Key West for a few days."

"Then I should call Carly?" Jason asked, frowning in confusion.

"Can we just...hold off a few days in making a decision?" she asked. "We'll probably go. I just want to be sure—"

"Of course." He took her hand, drew her closer to brush his mouth against hers. She fisted her other hand in his shirt, and he contemplated taking another hour this morning to go upstairs.

Then Cody knocked.

Jason pulled away and turned to the door. "Yeah, Cody? You can open it."

"Ms. Miller's here."

Cody pushed the door all the way open to admit the redhead who breezed past the guard with an apprehensive smile. "Jason, Elizabeth. Sonny said you were home this morning." With a cheerful tone that sounded flat, even false, Diane continued, "Marriage must be agreeing with you. You always seem to be here when I call."

"Diane." Jason moved away from Elizabeth, reaching for his coffee on the desk. "What brings you by?"

"Ah, well, my visit is twofold really." Diane set her bag on the desk and drew out some paperwork. "Elizabeth, your ex has hired a lawyer—or his brother has. He wants to settle custody."

"Custody?" Elizabeth blinked. "I thought—" She flushed. "When the *Herald* printed that article a few weeks ago—"

"Ah, the one that gleefully announced your pregnancy and speculated as to paternity?" Diane pursed her lips. "Yes, I rather thought he'd get the message myself. Your divorce papers stated custody would be determined later, so...Lucky's attempting to determine it."

"He can't have Cameron," Jason said. "He never adopted him. There's no standing."

Elizabeth blinked at Jason's abrupt dismissal, but directed her attention back to Diane. "What should we do?"

“Well, a copy of the paternity test will do for this unborn child, but Cameron may be a bit trickier.” Diane slid on her reading glasses. “The lawyer acknowledges that while Lucky did not formally adopt Cameron, he *has* acted as his father since the child was roughly ten months old. Cameron considers him a father?”

“I suppose, but—” Elizabeth cleared her throat. “Diane—”

“And as there is no biological father or anyone else with a legal claim, there’s a case here. Lucky has shared in the raising, he’d like to continue.” Diane handed Elizabeth a copy. “I’m not saying he’ll win. I’m just saying he’s not without precedent.”

Elizabeth scowled. “He’s just doing this because he’s angry with me. The police found drugs in the apartment. He has an addiction—when did he get out of rehab?”

“Last week, apparently. He’s staying with his brother and he’s been encouraged to keep his distance from you.”

“What’s our next move?” Jason took the paperwork from Elizabeth to look it over. “The paternity test, but what about Cameron?”

“Oh, well, we’re going to have a court date set by the court. Probably after Christmas.” Diane drew off her glasses. “You did hear that part about anyone else with a legal claim, yes? I’d look into finding someone with a legal claim.”

Elizabeth frowned at her, but the redhead steamed ahead. “Now, as to the other purpose for this visit—the mayor has appointed a special prosecutor vis á vis you and Sonny,” she told Jason. “He’s tapped Scott Baldwin.”

“Baldwin? He was run out of town in disgrace.” Jason’s scowl only deepened. “What the hell?”

“Well, none of the DAs since Ric—Durant and Alexis to be exact—filed charges. Scott’s record is clean, and he’s the only one who’s a glutton for punishment, I suppose.” Diane pursed her lips. “Elizabeth, this is a good thing for you. Ric despised Jason. Scott’s target is *Sonny*. You’re probably not a blip on his radar at the moment.”

“Somehow, that doesn’t feel all that comforting,” Elizabeth replied, “but if you feel good about it, that’s fine.”

“Well, that might be too strong,” Diane admitted. “I can’t promise he won’t turn his eyes on you, but as he lacks the personal connection, he might see what the rest of us do—these charges are insane. I’ll have more of a feel for him once he’s been on the job a bit longer.”

She made her goodbyes and exited, leaving her clients somewhat speechless.

“I can’t believe that bastard is coming after Cameron,” Jason muttered, looking over the paperwork again. “What did Diane mean about legal claim?”

Elizabeth sighed and pulled the paperwork from his hands. “She means you. You’re his stepfather at the moment.” She hesitated. “And I think she’s hinting we should talk about a more permanent legal claim regarding Cameron.”

“Adoption?” Jason asked, surprised. He blinked. “Are—are you sure that’s what she meant?”

“I guess it’s something we’ll have to talk about.” Elizabeth glanced at her watch. “I’m meeting Robin for lunch, so I’ll pick up Cam. Will you be home for dinner?”

“Ah.” Jason blinked again. “I don’t know. Maybe not dinner. But I’ll be home to put Cameron to bed.” He offered her a smile. “We’re on the last chapter in the first Harry Potter, and Cam wants to catch up to Jax and Morgan.”

“Okay.” Eager to be away from this moment and Jason’s stunned reaction to the idea of adopting Cameron, she kissed him on the cheek and darted out the door.

### **Metro Court: Restaurant**

“I think you’re reading too much into this.” Robin set her menu aside and reached for her tea. “You know Jason loves Cameron. You know Cameron loves Jason. I’m sure he’ll agree—”

“I’m not sure how I feel about it,” Elizabeth interrupted. They paused to give the waiter their lunch order before continuing. “I mean, they *are* good together. And Cam has all these new ideas about how a dad should act because he’s with Jax and Morgan, and you know how amazing Jax is with Carly’s boys.”

“Jax has been eager to be a father for a long time.” Robin pursed her lips. “And Carly is *much* less annoying now.”

“But Jax reads to Morgan, so Cam wants Jason to read to him. Cam wants to play soccer with Jason in the spring, because Jax is signing Morgan up and is thinking of being a coach.”

“I would love to see Jason as a peewee coach,” Robin said, grinning. “That is a fantastic visual. Elizabeth—”

“And Jason never protests. He brings home toys for Cam all the time. All Cam has to do is mention something he likes, and it gets delivered within a day or two.” Elizabeth chewed on her lip. “Robin, my family life is perfect. My husband is amazing, he’s incredible with my son. We’re excited about having a new child—do you understand how *terrifying* this is?”

“Oh, yeah.” Robin nodded. “When things are perfect, that’s when they fall apart.” She leaned forward. “Can you picture Jason looking at you and saying, no, no, I don’t want Cameron, I don’t want to adopt him?”

“No.” Elizabeth sighed. “No. But—”

“But nothing. You’re actually jealous, that’s what it is.” When Elizabeth just blinked at her, Robin

shrugged. “You have two children, who are about to be tied forever to Jason, without any equivocations. You know that Jason isn’t going to walk away from Cam or the baby. And you want that kind of reassurance.” She reached for a bread stick. “You and Jason got married for a specific reason. But neither of you have ever treated the marriage like that. You had a beautiful ceremony with a romantic honeymoon, then you came home and started a life together.”

“I want him to love me,” Elizabeth murmured. “I want him to love me as much as I love him. But that seems like a lot to ask at this point. He’s been so good to me—”

“Maybe,” Robin said, “he’s having the same thoughts. Jason just doesn’t reach out for what he wants anymore.”

“I know what you’re going to suggest.” Elizabeth thanked the server as they set her salad in front of her. When Robin had her food as well, she continued, “You’re going to suggest I talk to him.”

Robin waited a moment. “No. I don’t think either of you are ready for a conversation like that. Neither of you is going anywhere. Maybe...maybe you just let this happen.”

“That sounds like something I can do,” Elizabeth replied with a wry smile.

“Though it sounds like you’re on board with Jason adopting Cameron.” Robin arched a brow. “No hesitation there?”

“None. If it’s something that keeps Lucky out of Cam’s life, then great. But more importantly, it would be great for Cam. Jason’s so good to him. He’s already been so much more there than Lucky ever was.” Elizabeth paused. “I want Cam to have what this baby is going to have. He deserves it.”

“He really does.” Robin sighed, a bit wistfully. “How fast do you think Patrick would run if I told him I wanted a baby?”

“Ah.” Elizabeth blinked. “Do—are you guys going in that direction?”

“Not really.” Robin lifted a shoulder. “But I’ve seen him with Cameron. And I want that with him. Am I insane?”

“No, he’s amazing. You know I love him.” Elizabeth hesitated. “But if you brought up babies right now? He’d feel sorry about it later, but he’d run so fast, he’d vaporize. A few more months, you might be able to say something without completely spooking him.”

“Well, I guess that’s the price you pay for falling for a playboy.” Robin wrinkled her nose. “You have to wait for the boy to grow up a bit.”

### **Greystone Manor: Living Room**

Sonny sighed and sank onto the sofa. “It really never ends, does it?”

Jason leaned against Sonny’s desk and nodded. “Diane’s not wrong in thinking the risk to Elizabeth is

minimal at this point, but still—”

“Trying to flip her against you was the last tactic by these bastards, so I’m not convinced they’re not going to have Scott pick it back up.” Sonny stood, pacing to the window. He turned around. “The cops traced the stash of pills from their apartment to Elizabeth’s floor to GH. That’s not easy. Ric spearheaded it, but the cops have it in their teeth now. You can’t tell me someone who works down there isn’t *pissed* about Elizabeth shacking up with you.”

“I don’t know how Scott can go forward with that. It’s the only evidence against her, and with Elizabeth having divorced and remarried, there’s no reason for her to risk her career for him.”

“Don’t underestimate the boys in blue. They hate me. They hate you. And they’re not entirely fond of Elizabeth.” Sonny rubbed his chin. “But odds are Scott will come after me first. And I don’t think anyone is going to make that jump. No one is going to try to flip Elizabeth on me.”

“I told Bernie and Stan to make sure our accounts are squeaky clean,” Jason told Sonny, “and I put the word out to the Families that the authorities are looking into us a bit more closely for the time being, so we’re changing some things around. Zacchara bitched, but that’s not news.”

“Yeah, make sure there’s nothing to see if they do look.” Sonny waited a moment. “You said Diane had news about Lucky?”

“Nothing much to worry about.” But Jason slid his hands in his pockets and looked at the floor. “It’s not related to this.”

Just Lucky forcing Elizabeth to say out loud what most of the goddamn world had already figured out last month. He was making her admit the baby’s paternity in open court to embarrass her. Humiliate her. Jackass.

“If it’s about Elizabeth and the kids, I’m concerned.” Sonny stepped forward. “You need to be home more? The new system is working—”

“No, it’s...” Jason hesitated. “You know Elizabeth couldn’t put anything in the divorce papers about custody—not if we wanted it to be uncontested. So Diane just put a clause in there that any custody issues would be settled at a later date. It’s a boilerplate clause, but Lucky’s forcing the issue.”

“He doesn’t read the papers?” Sonny poured himself a glass of water, offered the pitcher to Jason who shook his head. “I’m thinking of buying the *Herald* and firing everyone. Maybe leaving a monkey in charge. Can’t do much worse.”

“Elizabeth asked me not to read the articles about it.” Jason looked away, still remembering the day he’d come home from a meeting to find her crying on the sofa. She’d begged him not to read it, and he’d promised her. If it had been worse than the articles regarding their marriage, then it was for the best he be in the dark.

Though Sonny’s idea was starting to sound good.

“He’s forcing a hearing,” Jason said. “Diane seems to think it’ll be enough to send over the results of the test, but I know better. He wants to drag her through the mud. He’ll want another test, put her on the stand and cross-examine her.” He paused. “And that’s just the baby. Diane says he’s going for custody of Cameron.”

“I guess there’s a point there. He’s raised Cameron since he was a baby.” Sonny sipped his water. “Cam talk about him much?”

“Not really. He asked me once or twice where he was. Elizabeth and I decided we would tell him Lucky was going away for a while because he wasn’t feeling well.” He pinched the bridge of his nose. “We were hoping, with Cam being four and Lucky not usually being around, it would just...stop being an issue.”

“What does Diane think about Elizabeth’s chances? Did Lucky adopt Cam?”

“No.” Jason shifted. “But since Cam doesn’t have anyone else, the court might give him visitation.” He waited a moment. “Diane hinted I might—that maybe I should do something about it. Or at least, that’s what Elizabeth says.”

“Adoption?” Sonny asked. He paused. “Why not? Keeps it simple. Does Elizabeth have any objections?”

“I don’t know.” Jason recalled her quick exit a few hours ago. “She was meeting Robin for lunch so we didn’t really talk about it.”

“Listen. I don’t know much about what’s—” Sonny hesitated. “I know the reasons this started, but I doubt you guys have some sort of calendar with a divorce date circled. It’s not like you and Brenda.”

“No, but—” Jason shifted again, uncomfortable. How could he explain the way things had changed since that night at Vista Point when they’d first broached the topic?

They had a life together, a routine. They had divided caring for Cameron—he’d gone to his first doctor’s appointment the month before, and they were finding out the gender later this month. She’d picked out a room for a nursery and was going to have it cleaned out in a few months. They shared a room—shared a bed.

They were married. She was his wife. And Jason didn’t see that changing at any point in the future. Or wanting it to.

“And I’m not asking for details,” Sonny continued. “I do think that it might be a good idea to consider something more permanent for Cameron. If it weren’t for the baby, you could ease away one day, play the role of close friend, honorary uncle. But Cameron is going to have a front row seat for you and Elizabeth playing Mommy and Daddy.”

“No, I—” Jason paused. “I get the reasons why—”

“But *you* have to want it,” Sonny continued. “It can’t be so Lucky stays away, or because it just makes

sense, or even because it looks good on paper for Elizabeth's charges." He paused. "At some point, Jason, you're going to have to think about why you and Elizabeth are married, because I'm telling you—she already is."

And then, mercifully, Sonny dropped the subject entirely and they moved on to other concerns—shipments, accounts, and events on the island.

Jason wasn't ready to examine his relationship with Elizabeth too closely yet. If he did, he might have to admit to himself that he wanted to be married to Elizabeth, to be Cameron's father.

He wasn't ready for that. Not quite yet.

### **Port Charles Municipal Building: Scott Baldwin's Office**

Scott Baldwin took in the austere interior of the office he had been assigned upon his return to the district attorney's office. While the mayor had acquiesced to Alexis's request that Ric take over her duties as district attorney, Ric Lansing was on thin ice and everyone knew it. Having his office disqualified from pursuing charges against Sonny Corinthos and Jason Morgan had been devastating.

Scott had made mistakes during his first tenure, but he wouldn't make them again. There would be no rush to judgment, no quick charges. He would do this right.

And he already had the inklings of a brilliant idea.

Mac pursed his lips as he set files on an empty table to the left of Scott's desk. "You don't have access to any of Lansing's files do you?"

"Nope." Scott picked one of the files up at leisure. "I just know his court docket. He was working on paperwork for a grand jury intending to investigate Jason Morgan on RICO charges. Then he was disqualified from any case regarding Corinthos and Morgan—" Scott glanced up with a gleam in his eye. "As well as Jason Morgan's brand-new wife, Elizabeth. I don't have to have Ric's notes to realize he was trying to flip the wife. She tried to avoid it with a hasty divorce and remarriage."

"She had her reasons for divorcing Lucky," Mac admitted. "I'm sure you're familiar with some of them."

"I am." And Scott's tone evened out. "As well as the rumors that Lucky was having an affair with your daughter. I'm sorry, Mac."

Mac's lips thinned as he pressed them together. "He took advantage of her after Jesse was killed—"

"I'm sure that's true." And Scott knew the pain of a father whose daughter had fallen victim to an older man who damn well should have known better. Sonny hadn't given a damn about Karen.

"Are you going to attack spousal privilege?" Mac asked.

"Nah. No point. I don't have Ric's knowledge of Morgan and his wife, and I'm not allowed to have

them. I don't need them." Scott glanced at a file from the summer. "But I like the idea of using the wife."

Mac hesitated. "I may not agree with Elizabeth's decisions or her choices, but—"

"She made her choice, Mac." Scott lifted a shoulder. "She's in this up to her eyebrows." He lifted a report. "For example, I took a glance at a few things before I came in today. A file containing bank records and other things pertaining to Alexis's investigation went missing last summer."

"Sam McCall was blamed and fired," Mac said. "You don't think it was her?"

"Not likely, no." Scott took out a single sheet of paper. "The sign in list for that day has Elizabeth Spencer, there to check up on her husband. Did anyone ever question her?"

Mac narrowed his eyes and reached for the sign in sheet. "Alexis did, informally, but—" He muttered under his breath. "*She* stole the file?"

"I can't prove it." Scott leaned forward. "Not yet. But if I could, I could take these drug charges and spin them into a larger narrative. She didn't steal those drugs to make Lucky happy, but to keep him drugged. So he wouldn't discover her actual affair. And I have proof of that affair—she's carrying Morgan's kid."

Mac reached for his phone. "Should we bring her in?"

"No, that's what we would have done in the old days." Scott took a seat behind his desk. "When I meet with Elizabeth Morgan and her husband, I'm going to make them an offer they can't refuse—not unless they want Baby Morgan born behind bars."

"How are you getting around spousal privilege?" Mac asked. "I—"

"You leave that to me, Mac. This is a new era in Port Charles." Scott leaned back, a broad smile on his face. "And I'm going to be in charge."

# Chapter Twelve

*The human heart is a scary part in fact  
'Cause I could break you and you could break me back  
Though my head says just forget it  
You'll get hurt and you'll regret it  
Ask me now and I won't hesitate*  
- Hesitate, Steve Moakler

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*Wednesday, December 6, 2006*

## **Morgan Penthouse: Living Room**

Against Elizabeth's better judgment, she allowed the front desk to send Nikolas upstairs when they called. Lucky wasn't allowed past the front doors, but Nikolas had treated her fairly so far.

And maybe she could convince Nikolas to get Lucky to drop his pursuit of Cameron and avoid the court hearing where she would have to admit to that night with Jason. She did not want to be cross-examined about her relationship with him. Not at the moment.

And honestly, not ever.

She and Jason had gingerly discussed Diane's visit, but had reached no specific conclusion, only that any decision would be life-changing and required some more thought.

Cody opened the door, his expression skeptical. "Nikolas Cassadine. If you're sure."

Behind Cody, Nikolas merely rolled his eyes. Elizabeth gestured him forward. "We'll be fine, Cody. Thanks."

When the door was closed, Nikolas lifted his brow. "Some security there."

"He doesn't like people coming to my home in order to harass me." Elizabeth sat on the sofa and gestured for Nikolas to take a seat as well. "I'm sorry, I know we haven't spoken since that day at the rehab. I thought you might be angry with me."

"Not angry," Nikolas said after a moment as he considered his words. "Sad."

She frowned, tilting her head. "Because of my choices?"

"Because you didn't feel you could confide in me." He leaned forward. "I know your issues with Emily at the moment, that you feel as though she's taking Lucky's side, and maybe she is to a certain extent. I also know that you need to do right by you, and by your children. The divorce was a good idea." His gaze flickered around the room. "I just—I don't know about any of *this*."

Some of the tension eased from her chest as she realized Nikolas had an open mind. “There were a lot of reasons why I did this,” Elizabeth said.

“I’m assuming Ric was one of them.” Nikolas rose and crossed to a shelf where a framed photo of her wedding sat. Jason and Elizabeth stood next to each other, each with smiles. Robin and Sonny on either side. It sat next to another photo from the ceremony itself—from their kiss at the end.

Sonny had given her the wedding photos at Thanksgiving, suggesting with a sly smile that putting some on display would be good in case the PCPD ever came knocking.

They both knew it was just an excuse. Her wedding had been beautiful, and she wanted to remember those moments with her friends, with the man she loved.

“I won’t say it wasn’t a factor,” Elizabeth murmured. She pressed her hand against the slight swell of her abdomen. Four months along, and only just beginning to show. “But you know it wasn’t all.”

“I read the papers,” Nikolas said. “And I’m not stupid.” He looked back at her. “You always turned to Jason in moments of crisis, in grief. In sorrow. It was this summer, when you found out about Maxie.”

“I didn’t mean for it to happen,” Elizabeth admitted, “but I’m not sorry.”

“I told Lucky that filing for custody was a bad idea.” Nikolas faced her, setting the photo down. “That the papers were probably right. And that it would be better for everyone if you and Jason raised Cameron with the new baby. Lucky should have a fresh start, and I worry that some of this might be triggers.” He hesitated. “I’m not *blaming* you, just—”

“You’re just stating the facts.” Elizabeth nodded. “I get it, Nikolas. I really do. I can see how this might be a setback, and I hope it isn’t. I don’t love him anymore, but I don’t wish Lucky ill. I just don’t want him near my children.”

“But Lucky worried that Cameron would remember him, and wonder why Lucky didn’t want him. He didn’t want him to have the same doubts Lulu has.” Nikolas paused. “Lulu loves Luke, but there’s no doubt that he hasn’t known what to do about her. She was our mother’s pride and joy. And she fears he didn’t want her so much as he wanted whatever our mother wanted.”

“I suppose.” Elizabeth shifted. “But it’s not enough of a reason to allow Lucky to be in Cam’s life. Not after what he put us through.”

“I suggested as much to Lucky, but you know how he can be.” Nikolas sighed. “So I’m hoping you and Jason can figure out how to stop a court hearing.” He sat in the arm chair. “Insisting on one is Lucky’s petty idea of revenge. He wants to put you on the stand and make you admit you wanted Jason, that it always him. That there was some sort of affair.”

“He wants to humiliate me,” she murmured. “Jason and I surmised as much. I’m not much interested in it either, but I don’t know if we can make it stop. A paternity test for the baby seems straightforward, but Lucky would have to let go of visitation for Cameron on his own.”

“Jason should adopt Cameron,” Nikolas said bluntly. “The only reason a judge would even entertain giving Lucky any custodial rights is that Cameron doesn’t have a second parent with legal standing. It’s patriarchal nonsense, but I’m afraid with your history of divorce, a judge might think keeping at least one stable father in Cam’s life by force is the best bet. I don’t agree, but—”

“Jason and I are considering it,” Elizabeth interjected, bristling at the accusation but understanding Nikolas’s motives. “It’s not something you can just decide over lunch. You know how serious Jason takes these kinds of things. He’d be making a lifetime commitment to Cam. I mean, I’m not saying we plan to divorce—” She stopped. “I don’t know how that would stop a hearing.”

“If you and Jason filed the paperwork before the hearing is set,” Nikolas told her, “I’d have a better shot convincing Lucky to drop the suit. He has a slim chance now. It disappears entirely if Cam has a legal father who lives in the home full-time.”

He stood. “I know we may not be close going forward,” he told her. “But you know that I love you, and if you never need anything, all you have to do is ask.”

Her eyes burned with tears as she stood and accepted his hug. “Thank you, Nikolas. You have no idea how much it means to me to hear that from you.”

### **Greystone Manor: Living Room**

Diane scowled at Sonny and Jason. “I cannot believe the two of you asked to meet with me when you damn well know I cannot discuss Elizabeth’s custody arrangements with either of you.” She huffed. “Does attorney client privilege not mean anything to anyone anymore?”

Sonny frowned. “I just wanted to make sure Elizabeth has everything she needs and you know she won’t tell me—”

“And I want Lucky to go away,” Jason said bluntly. He crossed his arms. “They’re not *just* Elizabeth’s arrangements. Cameron—” He hesitated. “Diane. I’m serious.”

“Then ask your wife,” Diane retorted. “You live in the same home, I presume. She knows the status.” But she paused, remembering who she was talking to.

Men. Insufferable jackasses.

“I responded to Spencer’s attorney this morning,” Diane said. “I sent a copy of the paternity, offering to have another test performed after the birth of the child if his client was so inclined. There isn’t much I can do regarding Cameron Webber. Legally, it’s a gray area. Stepparents rarely have legal standing, but courts look kindly on petitions by former stepparents because they want to preserve the stability of the child.”

“Stability.” Sonny snorted and moved away, to pour himself a tumbler of water. Too early for bourbon, Diane thought sourly.

“I laughed at the notion in the response,” Diane told them. “Cameron has the stability of two parents at the moment.” She studied Jason. “Though I’ve told you already how to improve the situation.”

“I wanted to talk to Cameron about it,” Jason admitted. “He considers Lucky his father. I’m his mother’s husband. I’m his friend. But I don’t know how he’d feel if those roles changed.”

And responses like that were the reason Diane couldn’t stay mad at him. Adorable bastard. “Well, then you need to *have* that conversation with him. The sooner you file paperwork, the sooner I can scare the crap out of Spencer. If Elizabeth walks into that court and presents a normal nuclear family with Mom, Dad, child, and baby, the judge is going to laugh Lucky out of court. You might be an *alleged* criminal, but he’s an *actual* drug addict.”

She looked at them. “Now, if we can put away the reality show nonsense, I’ve been digging into Scott Baldwin. My sources in the DA’s office tell me he’s working on something, but he’s keeping it close to the vest.”

“Against us or Elizabeth?” Jason asked.

“Hard to say. He’s not working with the PCPD so much as he and Mac have their heads together. The problem with Scott Baldwin is he’s a good lawyer. A damn good lawyer,” Diane said. When Sonny rolled his eyes, she scowled. “Don’t underestimate him. He made some mistakes and that deal with Ric Lansing was beyond the pale, but it doesn’t change anything. If Scott puts his head down, and doesn’t rush into anything, he’s a formidable foe.”

She turned her attention to Jason. “If he comes after Elizabeth on these drug charges, it’ll be because he *knows* he can break privilege. Because he knows a judge won’t toss him out. He doesn’t have Ric’s notes, but he has a brain. He knows they were trying to flip her. Which means she probably knows something.”

Sonny’s expression had shifted into trepidation. “Do you think they’re working out a way to flip her on *me*?”

“It’s possible,” Diane allowed. “I don’t see how they could do it at the moment. Elizabeth’s involvement comes through Jason, and they’re protected by privilege. They can’t break that. They can’t challenge it.” She looked at Jason. “You two have done a good job of being married, by the way. And the fact she’s knocked up by you makes it almost impossible for a court to say you’re faking.”

Jason scowled. “Don’t talk about her that way—”

“Exactly my point.” Diane jabbed a finger at him. “This is not a case of you and Brenda Barrett managing not to murder one another long enough to avoid jail. There’s history with you and Elizabeth. So I’m not overtly worried about Scott breaking marital privilege.”

“But?” Sonny prompted.

“I don’t *know*,” Diane admitted. “There’s something about this that doesn’t feel good to me.” She

paused. “What if...” And hell. “What if Scott uses these drug charges to flip *Jason*?”

Sonny frowned in confusion, but Jason’s eyes narrowed. He understand Diane’s point exactly. “Can he do that?” Jason demanded.

“Do what?” Sonny demanded. “How could he flip Jason? Jason’s not involved in this—”

“No,” Diane allowed. “But he might be invested in not letting the mother of his children go to jail.” She pursed her lips. “Technically, it borders on illegal. It’s one thing to flip one defendant against another, but a third party not facing charges? It would violate the Ethics Code.”

“But you think he could do it.”

“I think Scott wants Sonny’s head on a platter,” Diane said. “We tied his hands when it came to using Elizabeth against Jason. But it wouldn’t surprise me if Scott was trying anyway.”

“It’s too risky.” Sonny dismissed it with a wave of his hand. “The drug charges are weak—you said so yourself. All of this happened to keep Elizabeth out of the grand jury. None of us were seriously worried about the charges.”

“No,” Diane allowed. “And I’m still not.” She was quiet for a moment, her mind racing. She couldn’t *stand* not knowing what Scott Baldwin was planning. It would be too risky for Scott’s career to go after Elizabeth in order to scare the shit out of Jason, but just maybe... “Thanks to Ric,” she said slowly, “Scott Baldwin can surmise that Elizabeth knows something about Jason’s criminal activities. Would it be so much of a stretch to think she knows something about yours?”

“But she doesn’t—” Sonny began, but then he faltered. “Does she?”

“I don’t know,” Jason said. “I’ve never—I’ve never considered it. She’s...seen a lot,” he admitted. “But most of it is related to me.”

“But maybe not,” Sonny said with a sigh. “She and I were in contact while you were out of town. I put a guard on her. I can’t guess what she might have seen and not spoken about.” He smiled, almost sadly. “Her loyalty has never been in question, though I didn’t always remember that.”

“So which is it?” Jason demanded. “Is he going to try to flip me or Elizabeth?”

“I don’t know,” Diane said. “But he’s up to something, and you’ll have to be ready.” She reached for her briefcase. “Now if you’ll excuse me.”

As she left the estate, she wondered which tactic Scott *would* take and how her clients would respond. Would Elizabeth go to trial on her own charges to refuse to testify against Sonny?

Would Jason flip on Sonny to protect Elizabeth?

No matter how it shook out, Diane was going to have to drop one of her clients. Their interests were about to conflict, and she could hardly tell one to sell the other down the road.

It would be interesting to see how it would all shake out.

## **Morgan Penthouse: Cameron's Room**

Jason finished the last words in the chapter they were reading and set the closed book on the night stand. "Can we talk for second before we go on to the next chapter?"

Cameron, still sitting cross-legged in his race car pajamas on his new race car bed, nodded. "Uh huh. What about?"

"Um." Jason hesitated. He hadn't cleared this conversation with Elizabeth first, and now he thought maybe he should. He wanted to protect Cameron from Lucky Spencer, to be sure, but mostly, he just wanted Cameron to be his.

"You know your mother and I are married," he began, shifting on the bed. "And you're going to have a brother or sister soon."

"Yup." Cameron nodded. "I'm gonna be *awesome* at it."

"I know you are, buddy." Jason ruffled his dark hair with a smile. "And you know—the baby is—I'm going to be the baby's daddy."

Cameron frowned a bit, but nodded. "Okay. Right. Because you're married and married people have babies."

Because that explanation was simpler than the truth, Jason nodded. "Your mom and I—we were thinking about you. And we—I—wondered if you..." How did a man ask a four-year-old if he wanted a new father?

"Does that make you *my* new daddy?" Cameron asked, with a skeptical eye. "I have a daddy, right? I think. I don't see him much." He looked down, "Mommy said he was real sick and wouldn't come around no more."

"That's—that's true," Jason allowed. "Would—would you mind if we signed some papers that said I was your dad? You—" His throat was tight. "You wouldn't have to call me Dad. I mean, you could if you wanted to—" He was close to babbling. Damn it, he should have had Elizabeth here for this.

"Do you *want* to be my dad?" Cameron asked. "Do people change daddies a lot?" He frowned. "Am I going to have another one someday?"

"No," Jason said firmly. "If we sign these papers, if we make this decision, Cam, I promise you, we won't *ever* change again."

Cameron wrinkled his nose, his expression almost identical to Elizabeth's in that moment. "And you wouldn't stop being around? I like playing cars and reading books." He shrugged. "My first daddy didn't. Mommy said he was always working."

“I would always be around,” Jason told him. And he was going to keep that promise. His responsibilities with Sonny had shifted once the paternity test results came back. He would be a father. And nothing was more important to him. “Just like Mommy is.”

“*Could* I call you Daddy?” Cameron asked. “I mean,” he said, with wide eyes, “the new baby might not know what to call you if I didn’t—”

“Nothing would make me happier,” Jason told him. “What do you think?”

Cameron climbed into his lap and wrapped his arms around Jason’s neck, hugging him. “Okay. I’ll sign papers, too.” He leaned back, and smiled broadly. “Daddy.”

Jason’s chest tightened as he gripped Cameron’s head and pressed a kiss to the top. “I love you, Cameron.”

“I love you, too.” Cameron’s grin slid into a smirk. “Can I have a real race car like Morgan?”

Jason laughed. “We’ll see what happens at Christmas.”

### **Morgan Penthouse: Master Bedroom**

Elizabeth twisted at her vanity table, the brush in her hand falling to the ground. “You asked *Cameron?*”

Jason drew on a pair of sweat pants, balling up his jeans and shirt to toss in the hamper. “Yeah. I mean, I guess we should have talked about it together with him or talked about what we were going to say to him, I’m sorry—”

“I’m not...” Elizabeth rose, his old blue t-shirt falling halfway down her thighs. “I just—I wasn’t thinking about asking him.” Tears glittered in her eyes. “I should have. It *should* be his decision. You always seem to know exactly how to handle him.”

Jason shrugged. “It just—it seemed right. He had a father. If he didn’t want me, then we’d figure out another way to deal with things. But—” He looked at her. “Why did you think we hadn’t made a decision?”

“I—” Elizabeth hesitated. “I suppose I thought you were thinking it over. It’s not an easy decision to take on another man’s son—”

“I’ve never considered Cameron in that light,” Jason cut in. “He’s *your* son. Not Lucky’s. Not Zander’s. You’ve raised him. I love him, you know that. And it was easy for me.” He paused. “I just didn’t—I didn’t know if you’d want it.”

“To give my son an amazing father?” Elizabeth blinked. “Jason, I told you—from the moment I found out I was pregnant, all I could pray for was you to be the father. I saw you with Michael. I see you now with Cameron.” She stepped towards him. “I wanted to give you a child. Why would I hesitate to give you Cameron?”

“I—” Jason faltered. “I don’t know,” he admitted. “I mean...” he exhaled slowly. “It’s one thing for us to be having *this* baby together...” He gestured towards her in the space that remained between them. “That’s a situation that existed before everything else, and exists regardless of it. But—” He paused and swallowed. “But to be married, to adopt your other child—it’s—it’s saying something.” He looked at her, his eyes soft. Open. Even vulnerable. “About where we’re going. And what we want our future to be like.”

Elizabeth closed the distance between them, sliding her arms around his waist. “I want my future to be with you,” she told him. “And I want my children to be yours.”

When he kissed her, closing his mouth over hers, almost devouring her, his hands in her hair—she knew that while neither of them had said the actual words, they’d made promises here every bit as important as the ones they had made the day they married.

A week later, Scott Baldwin called Diane to discuss a plea agreement in advance of filing charges against Elizabeth for theft of narcotics, drug possession, and obstruction of justice.

# Chapter Thirteen

*You're always on display  
For everyone to watch and learn from  
Don't you know by now  
You can't turn back  
Because this road is all you'll ever have*  
- Fences, Paramore

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*Tuesday, December 12, 2006*

## **Port Charles Municipal Building: Scott Baldwin's Office**

Scott was standing by a conference table stacked with paperwork and files as his secretary opened his office door and presented an unhappy trio of guests. Diane Miller strode in first with an annoyed expression drawn on her impatient features.

Jason and Elizabeth Morgan were expressionless, stoic, and even blank as they filed in behind her and took the seats Scott offered them. He was surprised at the poker face Morgan's wife managed, but all those years of exposure to criminal elements had clearly rubbed off.

He had practiced for this moment, rehearsed this presentation—he was as ready as a man could be for the biggest moment in his career. This meeting would kick off his attack.

He was going to nail Sonny Corinthos to the wall, and the couple in front of him was the key.

“Would you like anything to drink?” Scott asked once the trio was seated, Diane adjacent at the head of the table while the Morgans sat next to one another directly across from him. “Mrs. Morgan?”

“No, thank you.” Diane sniffed. “My clients are here to get to the bottom of your scurrilous and potentially inflammatory threats. They do *not* intend to make any statements at this time.”

“No problem.” Scott sat and reached for his legal pad. “I'm prepared to do all the talking.” He picked up his pen with one hand and reached for the stack of paperwork with the other.

“While I was unable to confer with DA Lansing regarding current cases pending against Sonny Corinthos or Jason Morgan, I *did* have access to his court docket. When I saw that he had specifically been barred from dealing with Elizabeth Morgan, I asked the PCPD to provide me with any piece of paper in their archives featuring Elizabeth Webber Lansing Spencer Morgan's name.” Scott shot Morgan's wife a smile. “A lot of names for such a young woman.”

He cheered when he saw a muscle twitch in Morgan's face. Ha! It wasn't much but it was something.

“I was surprised to see so much.” Scott patted the pile. “But some of it we can discard.” He reached

for the first one and set it down. “Your name as a witness involving a drive by shooting at Luke’s in which Nikolas Cassadine was injured, another as a witness to a fire in a garage owned by Morgan... obviously, these aren’t pertinent.”

“Mr. Baldwin,” Diane began.

“But here’s where your history starts to get interesting, Mrs. Morgan.” Scott reached for another report. “A bomb was found in your studio building. Morgan knew about it and saved your life.” He tilted his head. “You were dating back then according to the rumor mill.” He tapped a line. “The officer on the scene refers to you as Morgan’s girlfriend.”

“My clients are not commenting—”

“No need.” Scott reached for another report. “Both questioned when Emily Quartermaine was kidnapped by Zander Smith. Mrs. Morgan is again a witness to *another* fire involving Morgan—the warehouse fire in 2001.” Scott placed each report down as he enumerated them. “A report to Lieutenant Taggart stating Elizabeth Webber was kidnapped. You and Taggart worked closely to get her back according to the reports. She was rescued, though a bit ill.”

And then Morgan’s wife glanced at her husband, surprise in her eyes. Should he be enjoying this so much?

“The warehouse explodes *again*. You’re both on scene, just a month later, when Zander Smith accidentally shoots Mrs. Morgan.” Scott arched a brow. “Not the last time your name appears with him, is it, Morgan?”

“Baldwin,” Diane cut in, her tone much less impatient. “We don’t have all the time in the world.”

“I’m previewing my opening statement, Counselor,” Scott said, not taking his eyes from Jason Morgan. “Mrs. Morgan gives a statement about her ex-husband taking Carly Corinthos hostage, though we’re unfortunately unable to corroborate it. And then...” Scott slid another paper on top of the growing stack.

“Morgan gives a statement that disgraced former officer Andrew Capelli admits to hitting Zander Smith in the head after the Port Charles Hotel burns to the ground. Zander Smith’s murder case is closed—though your statement appears to superfluous since he escaped and was killed in a hail of gunfire.”

“What does that have to do with my clients?” Diane admitted.

“I’m just getting started, Ms. Miller. This will go faster if you don’t interrupt.” Scott held up another report. “The two of you are questioned in relation to the murder of Mary Bishop, but then you both seem to disappear from the files for a bit. Until this year.” He held up a photograph of Jason and Carly standing with a police officer. “Recognize this, Morgan?”

He tossed it across the table. “From this last February.”

Morgan barely glanced at it before glancing at Diane. “No,” he said shortly.

“I have it on video as well. You and Carly are demanding access to the building because you have the antidote to that terrible virus.” Scott leaned forward. “You’re not asking to speak to Patrick Drake, who was nominally in charge. Or Robert Scorpio, head of the medical team and quarantine. Do you know who you ask for? Nurse Elizabeth *Webber*.” He smirked. “Couldn’t quite remember her married name, could you?”

“Baldwin—”

“The two of you really seem to be back in each other’s lives after that point,” Scott continued, ignoring Diane’s annoyed interjection. “You saved her life when she was kidnapped by Manny Ruiz. She came to visit you while you were in lockup. Then you were both arrested for an illegal surgery.”

The stack of papers in front of him was nearly an inch and a half thick by the time Scott placed this last report on top. “Do you know why I took you down this walk on memory lane?”

“My clients are not making a statement—”

“Because it’s part of my larger narrative. When I tell a jury the charges against sweet and compassionate Elizabeth Morgan, I *don’t* want them seeing the town sweetheart they all know,” Scott continued. “Granddaughter of Steve and Audrey Hardy, hard-working nurse. I want them to see the woman who has been steeped in the criminal element of this town since she was old enough to drive.”

Again Morgan’s muscle twitched, but the two of them remained poker face, even if Elizabeth’s face drained of color.

“Lansing had the wrong theory of the crime,” Scott continued. “You didn’t steal those drugs to help your husband. You stole them to drug your husband so he wouldn’t discover your affair.”

At that, Morgan stood up. “We’re leaving,” he told Diane.

“If you walk out now,” Scott told Elizabeth Morgan, “I’ll have Detective Rodriguez slap handcuffs on you now. I’ve already drawn up the arrest warrant. I just have to execute it.”

“Jason.” Diane nodded, but Morgan didn’t resume his seat. He shoved the chair away from the table and moved to stand behind his wife. “Baldwin, you spoke of a plea agreement but I *still* don’t see a shred of proof—”

“Because I haven’t finished,” Scott said, offering her a pleasant smile. He took the stack of paperwork and put it to one side. Then he slid a paper across the table to Elizabeth. “Do you know what *that* is?”

“I—” Elizabeth swallowed and handed it to her lawyer. “A sign in sheet of some kind.”

“It’s for the PCPD.” Diane narrowed her eyes. “What game are you playing?”

“Do you know what happened on this date?” Scott asked. “Alexis Davis had served a subpoena on Jason Morgan’s financial records, but a crucial part of the file disappeared from the squad room.” He tapped the sheet. “Right during the window Elizabeth Spencer signed in to speak with her husband—who was not on the scene.” He set down a few still photographs. “I have you standing near Alexis and Sam, where you could likely overhear them discussing the case. You stole that file and *you* destroyed it.”

Elizabeth’s eyes widened and she looked again to her lawyer. “Diane—”

“Baldwin,” Diane began but some of her bluster had dissipated. “What—”

“Look at this stack of reports.” Scott patted it. “Morgan rescued you over and over again. You’re telling me you *didn’t* take this opportunity to do the same for him?”

“I—” Elizabeth closed her mouth when Jason’s hand dropped down on her shoulder.

“This interview is over—” Diane began, but then stopped when Scott held up the arrest warrant. “Put your goddamn cards on the table, Baldwin,” she snapped.

“I’m about to, but I want Mrs. Morgan to understand the stakes.” He looked back at the pale woman in front of him, her blue eyes filled with fear, with shock, with worry. “Lucky Spencer asked Cruz Rodriguez, a fellow officer, to follow you. He knew you were having an affair with someone. Rodriguez saw you going into a hotel with Patrick Drake, and reported that to Lucky.”

“I wasn’t—” Elizabeth’s voice was faint. “I was *working*.”

“I know,” Scott told her, ignoring the faint curl of shame in his chest. He knew he was going after a woman who’d led a difficult life, but he told himself that if this worked she’d be free of all of this.

He was helping her, even if she didn’t see it.

“And Rodriguez knew that, too,” he said, a bit more kindly. “He bribed staff to tell him. He knew when he told Lucky about the hotel that it wasn’t true. But he’d seen you going into Morgan’s penthouse by then. And he’s worked in Port Charles long enough to know a bit of the history. He has signed an affidavit claiming to have followed you on several more occasions when you met up with Jason Morgan, going to his penthouse and staying for several hours at a time.”

“Even if it were true, it’s hardly a crime,” Diane said, leaning forward. “I’ll object to any mention of such things—”

“It’s part of my narrative,” Scott repeated. “Elizabeth knew her husband was having her followed—Lucky Spencer confronted her about the hotel. I’m confident he’ll give us a statement to that effect—she was aware Lucky suspected her of having an affair, but knew he had the wrong man.”

When Diane said nothing this time, Scott knew he had won. The lawyer had connected the dots. “And she drugged him to keep him none the wiser.”

“No—” Elizabeth started to protest, but when Diane cut her a scathing glance, she closed her mouth.

“You weren’t ready to leave your husband—maybe Morgan hadn’t given you the go ahead. Why leave a sure thing for something that might not pan out?” Scott shrugged. “You played it smart, Mrs. Morgan. You waited until you knew Lucky could be painted as the bad guy, but you still didn’t leave him. Not until you discovered you were pregnant. Jason Morgan had to pay attention then.”

There was murder in Morgan’s eyes as he listened to Scott paint the picture of Elizabeth as a grasping, greedy woman who had set out to trap him. “Diane—”

“You, again, cannot prove any of this—” Diane said.

“Can’t I?” Scott raised his brows. “Elizabeth is pregnant with his child. I’m sure her medical records will reflect she knew about the pregnancy before Lucky Spencer went to rehab, before the marriage to Morgan. I can tie her to the drugs found in her apartment, I can tie her to the theft of the files last summer. I have means, I have opportunity, and I’ve told you the motive.” He looked to Diane. “Do you *really* think I can’t convince a jury?”

Diane exhaled slowly and looked at her clients for a long moment before she focused on him. “You mentioned a plea agreement. Let’s just…” She spread her hands out. “Let’s just *entertain* it for a moment.”

“I don’t want Elizabeth Morgan in jail,” Scott said. “Justice isn’t served that way. And I can’t have her testify against her husband or even his business partner.” At that, Diane’s eyes narrowed. “I thought about trying to leverage her against Sonny, but you could always waive that pesky privilege in my face. Anything she might know might be due to it. Fair enough. But that doesn’t stop me from leveraging her against Jason in another way.”

“I don’t—” Elizabeth licked her lips, flicking her eyes to Diane, then to Morgan who had resumed his seat at those words. “I don’t understand.”

“Do I have to *explain* marital privilege to you?” Diane demanded.

“I want Jason Morgan to testify against Sonny Corinthos,” Scott told them. “If he cooperates, we can talk about making the rest of this go away.”

“How many ethical violations are you trying to break?” Diane demanded. “You *can’t* involve a third party—”

“Prosecutorial discretion.” Scott blinked. “Maybe I don’t think these crimes are so important after all. I mean, I don’t have to prosecute her. I could be busy with other cases. More important ones.” He flashed a smile. “It *might* be on the edge, Ms. Miller, but you and I both know I’m not outright violating anything.”

Diane scowled as she leaned forward. “Are you telling me that unless Jason Morgan testifies against his business partner, you’ll prosecute his wife? Is *that* what you’re telling me?”

“I’m saying,” Scott said slowly, locking eyes with Jason Morgan, “I have both cases in front of me. It’s up to Mr. Morgan which one I look at first.”

Game. Set. Match.

### **Kelly’s: Diner**

Emily knew when to throw in the towel, and that moment had arrived. Lucky was seething over the response his lawyer had given him, with the copy of the paternity test and Jason’s petition to adopt Cameron.

She had been on Lucky’s side from the start because she knew what it was like to blow up your life with drugs. She knew the importance of family standing behind you when you emerged from rehab, knew that support was essential.

In all these years, she had never relapsed, and she was determined Lucky wouldn’t either.

He had stood by her, how could she do any less?

But she knew Nikolas was judging her. Knew she had lost her brother in this mess.

Had lost Elizabeth.

“Lucky,” she said, softly. “You said you were concerned about Cameron. That he wouldn’t feel loved if you didn’t try. And I understood that. But now we *know* he’ll be okay. You know my brother will be an amazing father—”

“But—” Lucky looked at her. “If I don’t have Cameron, if I don’t have the baby, what do I have?” He set the letter down. “I loved them. I *love* them,” he corrected.

“I know.” Emily hesitated. “I don’t like the way Elizabeth lied to you and deceived you into the divorce, but maybe it *was* for the best.” She reached for his hand. “You still have me and Nikolas. Lulu. Your grandmother. You’re not alone.”

“I wanted Cameron to know I loved him,” Lucky said. “I don’t want him to think I threw him away...” He looked away. “But Elizabeth thinks that.”

“No.” Emily shook her head. “No, she doesn’t—”

“I had him and it wasn’t enough to stay away from the drugs.” Lucky stared at his hands. “I saw you go through it, Em. How could I do it to my own family? I can’t stop thinking about how I wrecked it. I know Elizabeth was already—I know now I lost her once your brother was back in the picture, but I didn’t know that then. Maybe I could have saved my marriage. But I destroyed it, and I destroyed my family for what?” His mouth twisted as he crumpled the letter in his fist. “I don’t even know anymore.”

“Lucky—”

“I told my lawyer to drop the custody suit,” he said after a long moment. “He told me with these developments I wouldn’t win and I’d just waste my time and my money. He said I should focus on my recovery.” He exhaled slowly. “I went to a meeting after. And I’m going to another one tonight.”

“Good.” Emily nodded. “That’s for the best—”

“And I guess I’ll just go to a meeting every time I wish I were floating away from it all.” Lucky took his lawyer’s letter and tossed it in the busboy’s bin at the next table. “I hope your brother takes care of them. They deserved better than me.”

### **Greystone Manor: Living Room**

“How is Elizabeth taking it?” Sonny asked quietly after Jason had discussed the meeting with him.

“She went to Robin and Patrick’s. She’s—she’s devastated.” Jason sat on the sofa, his head in his hands. “I never—I never thought about the file she destroyed. I—I thought if they had any evidence against her, they would have come for her already.”

“What does Diane say about the chances?” Sonny asked. “She didn’t think the charges would be an issue—”

“When it was just Elizabeth risking her career because Lucky wanted her to steal the pills, no, Diane wasn’t worried. She said no jury in her right mind would believe it.” Jason clasped his hands between his knees and looked at Sonny. “But Scott’s not going with that narrative.”

“What’s the other narrative?” Sonny frowned.

“He’d gone through Elizabeth’s records from the station. *Every* time her name appeared in report—every time it was even remotely related to me or you.” His mouth twisted as he remembered. “He’s using our history to suggest we were having an affair, that she drugged Lucky to keep him from learning about it until she could leave him. That she stole those files to protect me the way I’ve always protected her.”

He waited a moment. “And I could see it in my head—the way he’d pictured it. A jury isn’t going to understand how it happened. They’re not—” Jason rose, restless. “An officer was tailing her last summer—trying to prove an affair to Lucky. She used to come to the penthouse, stressed about Lucky. Worried he was getting addicted. Wanting my advice. A jury won’t believe that’s all we were doing.”

“Not with you getting married only months later.” Sonny shook his head. “Did Scott say what he wanted you to flip on me for? Any specific case?”

“I get the feeling he’d like anything I can prove,” Jason muttered. “We have time to think about it. Diane is—she’s going to look at the case files. He gave her copies of the reports, of the evidence. He wants her to know how strong the case is.”

“I thought Diane said it would be career suicide to go after you like this?” Sonny demanded. “Can’t

we file a grievance?”

“Diane was hoping he’d tip his hand, show his vendetta against you.” Jason paced to the window, looked out over the grounds. “But he was smart. He phrased it as a matter of priority. If he were busy prosecuting you, he wouldn’t have time for petty offenses.” Jason looked at him. “Diane is going to put together a trial strategy.”

“If—” Sonny hesitated. “If she went to trial—”

“If she *were* convicted,” Jason said, “she’s looking at ten years. And no judge is going to be lenient on *my* wife.” He scrubbed his hands over his face. “We just—we have to get the charges dismissed. That’s all. Diane will get us out of it—”

But Sonny doubted it. Jason had panic etched into his normally stoic features. And if it came down to letting Elizabeth go to trial and possibly to jail or testifying against him...

Sonny had a good idea what *his* chances were.

“Jason, if we need to talk about you testifying—”

“It’s not going to come to that. Elizabeth told me not to even think about it. She said we’d find another way.”

But Jason didn’t meet his eyes.

### **Patrick’s Apartment: Living Room**

“I don’t understand.” Patrick scowled. “Jason has a get out of jail free card for you, and for some reason, Sonny Corinthos *isn’t* cooling his heels in jail already?”

“It’s not that simple,” Robin told him, with a shove to the shoulder. But she looked skeptical as she turned back to Elizabeth. “What does Diane think?”

Elizabeth rubbed her arms, feeling chilled through her thin sweater. “She came back to the penthouse to talk strategy with us.” She looked at Patrick and Robin as they loomed over her, their faces wearing identical expressions of confusion and concern. “Scott gave us a week. She wants to go over his reports to determine how a trial might go.”

“Trial?” Patrick demanded. “This is insanity. Sonny Corinthos is an *actual* criminal. *You* are his actual pregnant wife. Why isn’t this simple?”

“I told Jason it wasn’t even on the table.” Elizabeth rose to her feet. “Maybe if it were just the drug charges—I mean, those are insane. I never would have stolen from the hospital—” She dipped her head. “But the file—”

Robin held up her hand. “Stop there. If you say what I think you’re going to, Patrick and I will have to perjure ourselves in court. I mean, I’ll *do* it,” she added quickly when Patrick just scrubbed his hands

over his face with a groan. “But I’d prefer not to.”

“I’m sorry.” Elizabeth closed her eyes. “I just—Diane can make this go away. She’s an amazing attorney. She’ll make this go away, and Jason won’t have to make this decision. I don’t want him to make it. I couldn’t live with myself, and I told him that.”

“So what?” Patrick countered. “He should do it anyway—”

“We’re waiting to see what Diane says.” Elizabeth licked her lips. “I just—I left. I told him I needed some space, and I knew he had to talk to Sonny.”

“Robin, maybe it’s because I’m new, but I don’t get it,” Patrick said to his girlfriend. “She can walk away clean. The drug charges are bullshit and the others—” He looked to Elizabeth. “It was a moment of insanity, whatever it was. They can’t seriously mean to put you in jail.”

“Scott Baldwin has wanted Sonny Corinthos for ages,” Robin murmured. “Looks like he might get the chance.”

Elizabeth shook her head. “Not because of me. I won’t be the reason—” She took a deep breath. “Diane will make this go away. I have faith in her.”

The alternative was too terrifying to consider.

# Chapter Fourteen

*Help me out here  
All my words are falling short  
And there's so much I want to say  
Want to tell you just how good it feels  
When you look at me that way  
When you look at me that way  
- Please Forgive Me, David Gray*

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*Friday, December 15, 2006*

## **Greystone Manor: Living Room**

When Max showed Diane in that morning, Sonny had a feeling he knew what the conversation would entail. Diane had made a mint representing both Jason and Sonny because their interests had always been intertwined.

Until now.

“Sonny.” Diane hesitated, setting her briefcase on the desk. “I suppose Jason has been by, has mentioned our meeting with Scott Baldwin a few days ago.”

“It came up.” Sonny poured himself a glass of water, but he really wanted bourbon. Just when the situation had begun to feel resolved, damn lawyers had to come around. “You look a bit more nervous now. The charges are as bullshit now as they were before—”

“Not...” Diane exhaled slowly. “Not *quite*. I don’t want to admit it to Jason and Elizabeth but...” She lifted her hands. “I’m not a miracle worker, Sonny. Scott previewed his opening argument. Give him another few weeks, even months—and it will be rock solid. I can poke some holes in it, but Elizabeth is no longer the sympathetic nurse beaten down by the system. She’s the woman who left her cop husband for a mobster—”

“Damn it, Diane—”

“And Scott has prepared a theory of the case that allows him to introduce every alleged criminal activity Elizabeth has ever been involved with as long as he can show Jason’s involvement. The bomb in her studio, the fire at the warehouse, her kidnapping, the explosion at the warehouse, both times Manny Ruiz went after her—” Diane pressed a hand to her forehead. “And those are just the major points—Scott can call in character witnesses to show her connection to Jason—and there’s a plethora of cops who’d be happy to do it—”

“How is any of that relevant to the drug charges?” Sonny demanded. “Can you get it—whatever, suppressed?”

“It’s *relevant* because Elizabeth will now be charged with obstruction of justice—” Diane huffed. “Didn’t Jason *tell* you? Scott added a charge—for stealing and destroying police files relating to Jason—Scott can tie her to that in a much more solid manner. The drug charges are now just window dressing. He’s going to claim she’ll do anything to protect Jason, and he’ll use their history to prove it.”

Sonny blinked, then looked away. Because of course, it was true. And he wouldn’t ask if Elizabeth had committed this new crime—

He already knew she had.

“You don’t want to go to trial,” Sonny said finally. He looked at her. “You’re going to tell Jason to sandbag me. And you’re here to dump me as a client.”

Diane hesitated. “To be quite honest, Sonny, *Jason* retained me this summer after Justus Ward...” She pursed her lips. “Jason retained me while he was in charge. I don’t...exactly...officially represent you.”

“Ah.” Sonny nodded. “Fair enough. You’re just here to make sure I have my own counsel so I’m covered—”

“Jason hasn’t made—” Diane closed her mouth. “Sonny, you must appreciate the difficulty Jason is facing—”

“I do.” Sonny turned. “I get it. I know exactly what Elizabeth means to him. I set up their damn wedding didn’t I? I was the best man. They have a family. Of course he’s going to pick her. I want him to do that.” He turned away. “It’s the right thing to do. I don’t have to be happy about it though, do I?”

Diane waited a moment. “Sonny, I can give you the names of some very good attorneys—”

“Thanks, Diane.” Sonny looked at her. “But you don’t have to worry about me. I can take care of myself.”

She waited another moment before leaving.

He’d told her the truth. He fully expected Jason to testify against him in the end. He knew his friend would agonize over it, that Elizabeth would try to find another way, but it wouldn’t matter. Jason would choose, as he should, the woman who had always stood by him.

And Sonny would have to live with it.

### **General Hospital: Examining Room**

“A boy?” Elizabeth repeated, squeezing Jason’s hand as an ultrasound technician explained the image on the monitor to them. “Really?”

“Did you want a girl?” Kelly asked over the tech’s shoulder. She flashed a wicked smile. “You can always try again.”

Elizabeth flushed, but shook her head. “No, no, I guess...” She looked at Jason, who was squinting at the screen. “I didn’t know what to hope for beyond a healthy baby.”

“Cam asked for a brother,” Jason said idly. “To boss around. Then he wants a sister so she’ll have two older brothers.” He blinked at that, as if realizing what he’d insinuated. “So, ah,” he coughed. “He’ll be excited.”

“As for healthy...” The tech looked at them. “He looks good. The right length, heart beat is strong.” She looked at Kelly. “What do you think, Kel?”

“Everything looks fantastic.” Kelly nodded. “Your blood tests are great, your blood pressure is so much better—right in the levels we want to see at this point. Everything is on track for a safe and happy delivery around May 6.” Her grin flashed again. “Now that we have more accurate information, we’ve moved your due date up a bit.”

“I’m so glad.” Elizabeth winced as the tech cleaned the gel from her abdomen and then sat up, using Jason’s hands to climb down from the examining table. “I was so tired for most of November, but my energy is back.” Her pregnancy had been the *only* aspect of her life to run smoothly.

“We’ll see you again next month.” Kelly tapped the tech. “Haddie, make sure they’ve got prints and a video so they can share with friends, okay?”

“Will do.”

After the tech had printed the picture from the ultrasound and Elizabeth had tucked the video in her large tote, they left the maternity wing and headed for the elevators. As they approached the nurse’s station, Elizabeth’s steps slowed.

Her grandmother stood by the counter, speaking with Bobbie Spencer and another nurse. Audrey looked at her for a long moment, then her eyes moved to Jason. Her expression somber, she murmured something to Bobbie, then turned her back and walked away, disappearing around the corner.

Elizabeth drew in a shaky breath. Nearly two months after that difficult day in her living room, it was clear her grandmother hadn’t changed her mind. She felt Jason’s hand at her back.

“Elizabeth—”

“You should—” She swallowed hard. “You should call Carly. Tell her we’ll go to the island for Christmas.”

Might as well have one more vacation, one more holiday before it all blew up in their faces.

“Okay,” Jason said slowly. They moved in front of the elevators, and he pressed the button. “Did you want to grab something to eat? We don’t have to pick Cam up for a few more hours—”

“Maybe something from Kelly’s—” But Elizabeth stopped as someone came around the corner. Emily looked at both of them, pursed her lips, but said nothing. “Emily,” Elizabeth said softly. “Hey.”

“Hey.” Emily shifted. She looked down at the photo in Elizabeth’s hands. “I—I guess you had an appointment.”

“Yeah.” She held out the print, but Emily didn’t take it. “We’re—we’re having a boy.”

“Oh.” Emily looked at Jason, then back at Elizabeth. “And I guess every thing’s going okay?”

“They’re fine.” Elizabeth drew her hand back.

“Well.” Emily rocked back on her heels. “I guess I’ll see you around.” She tucked her chart back under her arm and then continued down the hall.

The elevator door finally slid open, and Jason gently propelled Elizabeth forward. “You okay?” he asked, as the doors closed.

“Um. Yeah.” She took a deep breath. “Just...a weird...couple of moments.” She looked at him. “Let’s get some lunch at Kelly’s.”

### **Metro Court: Restaurant**

Carly ended the phone call from Jason and lounged against the bar and looked over the lunch crowd. Elizabeth had finally given in to their experimental family Christmas celebration on the island, which she knew would send Morgan into fits of happiness. Carly wasn’t entirely sold on *Elizabeth* sticking around forever, but Cam—he could stay.

She saw Alexis and Sam sitting at a table and smirked. She might not be completely wild about Elizabeth, but she couldn’t deny she was happy to see the backside of Sam McCall for once and for all.

Alexis stood and walked away, probably towards the bathroom. Carly perked up. She hadn’t had fun in ages. Not since the duct tape.

“Well, well....” Carly sauntered up to Sam’s table and took one of the empty seats. “I hope you’re enjoying your meal.”

Sam narrowed her eyes. “What do you want? Come to bar me from the restaurant?”

“Oh, no, no...whatever momentary enjoyment it might give me to kick you out...” Carly leaned forward. “I prefer to keep my friends close, and my enemies even closer.”

“We weren’t enemies last year,” Sam snarled. “You’re such a hypocritical bitch, you know that? A year ago, you and I were fighting to save Jason’s life, and now, you’re cozying up to Elizabeth Webber. You hate her.”

Carly rolled her eyes. “I don’t give a damn about *either* of you, to tell the truth. I’m not loyal to anyone. Except Jason. And where Jason goes, I go. He wanted you, I put up with it. Now he wants her. I’m putting up with it.”

“I can’t stand you,” Sam hissed. “You’re supposed to be his friend, but you don’t even care. She trapped him. He won’t leave her now. She’s pregnant with his kid, and he feels sorry for her.”

“Oh.” Carly pursed her lips. “I get it. You think she took *advantage* of him. I bet she wrestled him to the ground and practically violated him in order to conceive that baby.” Sam’s scowl deepened. “Oh, maybe she cried woe me, woe me, I need someone strong to help me with my baby.” Carly fluttered her eyelashes. “Someone strong and *wealthy*,” she continued in a breathy voice.

“You’re such a bitch—”

“The problem, Sam, is that you’re pissed that Elizabeth plays the game better than you. Because you conned Jason into sticking around for your kid and hooked into his money, you think *she* must have as well.”

“Jason loved me,” Sam shot back.

“He probably did,” Carly responded. “And maybe you eventually stopped seeing him as a bank account. You’re the only one who can know that for sure, Sam. The thing is, people think that just because you love one another, that means something. Like *every* time you love someone, it’s forever.”

She tilted her head. “It’s not. You were a moment. A phase he went through. He thought he wanted someone strong, who could go toe to toe in his business. He doesn’t. There’s a reason you were engaged all those months and never got married.”

“Shut up, Carly. You’re not any better than I am,” Sam snarled.

“I don’t know about that,” Carly responded. “But I know you. I *do*,” she insisted when Sam just rolled her eyes. “I was you. You know your little summer indiscretion?”

Sam’s cheeks flushed as she cast her eyes to the empty hallway leading the bathrooms. “Shut up, Carly.”

“I slept with my stepfather once, too.” Carly leaned back in her chair, but pitched her voice a bit lower. “And I did it for the same reasons you did. I did it to destroy my mother because I blamed her for *everything* that was wrong in my life.”

“That’s not how it happened—”

“And maybe I could even understand that,” Carly continued, ignoring Sam’s protestations. “Alexis did her part to convince Jason to walk away from you. But you didn’t stop at trying to destroy her. You decided to punish Jason for leaving you.”

“I did not—”

“Yeah, you did. I told you, Sam, I know you. We’re alike. We do whatever we can to survive, and we don’t particularly care about collateral damage. Alexis took something from you, so you decided to take something from her. But that wasn’t enough. You went to Jason and you told him what happened, didn’t you? If it was a mistake, then why not just sweep it under the rug?”

“I wanted to be honest with him.” But Sam’s voice had lost some of the righteousness.

“And I’m sure he thinks you hated it, that you did it to punish yourself.” Carly smirked. “But revenge doesn’t work if no one knows, Sam. If Alexis wasn’t sick, how did you plan on letting her find out? Maybe you were going to let Ric seduce you again, and maybe the next time, you were going to let Alexis catch you in the act.” She smirked. “Until Jason told you about Elizabeth and you realized you had just given him the excuse he’d always wanted to be with her.”

“We’re not talking about this anymore.”

“Doesn’t really matter to me.” Carly rose. “But here’s a little something I’ll do for you. For old time’s sake.” She leaned down. “Jason told you he saw you, didn’t he? That he looked in those windows and walked away?”

“Shut up—”

“Sonny told me the part Jason left out.” She lowered her mouth until her lips all but brushed Sam’s ear as they both watched Alexis emerge from the bathroom. “Alexis saw, too. She’s known *all* along.”

Sam looked up sharply, her face drained of color as Alexis joined them at the table. “Carly,” Alexis said with a warning in her voice. “What’s going on?”

“Oh, just torturing Sam with tales of the happy newlyweds,” Carly said flashing a bright smile at Sam’s pale face. “How’s Ric taking that setback at work? Must suck to know your husband has pretty much lost your job at the DA’s office and that Scotty Baldwin is ready to swoop in.”

“Carly—”

“Lunch is on me, ladies. We need to stick together, you know.” Carly was practically giddy. “As the women Sonny’s knocked up, I mean. See you around!”

She offered a little wave and headed for the elevators.

She had the best life.

### **Morgan Penthouse: Living Room**

Lunch had been relatively quiet, and Jason knew it had been ridiculous to think they could avoid talking about the elephant in the room, even for a day. They were both tense, waiting for Diane to call.

Elizabeth entered the penthouse in front of him, and set her bag down on the desk as she drew out the

ultrasound photo of their son. Their son. The baby had been real to him, so much more than abstract, and yet—looking at him on the screen—knowing they were having a boy—it made it worse.

How could he let her go to trial? The drug charges were nonsense and they both knew it. And it was his fault she'd tried to protect him by destroying that police file. If not for him, Elizabeth wouldn't be in danger. Ric Lansing wouldn't be looking at him, Scott Baldwin wouldn't know she existed.

Jason knew Diane was a good lawyer, but she'd looked worried when they'd discussed a trial. And if Elizabeth were convicted, it would be too late to make any deal.

But *how* did he turn Sonny in? How did he let go of the loyalty that had been drummed in him for the better of the decade? He'd been accused of being more loyal to Sonny than himself, and part of Jason had always believed it to be true.

Maybe it was, but it didn't mean he could let Elizabeth pay the price for his choices in life.

"I want to call Diane." Elizabeth turned to face him. "I want to talk to her. Today."

"She said—" Jason hesitated. "She said she would call us when she was ready." When she'd found a miracle.

"Not about—" She chewed on her bottom lip. "Not about that. I want to make sure you have guardianship of Cameron."

Jason frowned, sliding his hands in his pockets. "We started the adoption papers, Elizabeth. It'll take a few months, maybe even six. But—"

"I want to make sure the boys can't be separated." Her fingers tightened around the photo, crinkling the edges slightly. "If I'm convicted—"

"You're not going to be—"

"I don't want my grandmother or Lucky coming after Cameron because the adoption isn't final," she continued as if he hadn't spoken. "I *need* to be sure Cameron will be okay."

"Elizabeth..." He took the photo from her before she twisted it beyond recognition. "I told you. You're not going to jail. I won't let you."

"Jason, just—please. Let's draw up the guardianship papers, okay?" He was a little taken back to see the tears swimming in her eyes. "Cameron loves you so much, and if I can't be here, you need to be \_\_\_"

He wanted to shake her, to make her stop talking about something that just *wasn't* going to happen. She wasn't going to spend a day in jail, not a minute. It was never going to get that far.

The PCPD had never been able to pin a damn thing on either him or Sonny. They were not going to start with his wife.

He exhaled slowly. “Elizabeth—”

“We can’t pretend this isn’t happening,” she cut in. “They’re not trying to dump some imaginary drug charges on me, Jason. They’re going after me for something we both know I *did*.” Her mouth was pressed into thin lines. “And I’d do it again. You did it for me.”

“What?” He shook his head. “Elizabeth—”

“You lied to the police about Zander. You put yourself at risk to protect me.” She lifted her chin. “And I destroyed that file to protect you. I’m not sorry I did it, I’m just sorry I got caught.”

Hell. He scrubbed his hands over his face. “Elizabeth,” he said for the third time.

“I have to do what’s right for my children.” She set her hand over the swell of her belly. “Our children. They should be with you.”

“They’re going to be with both of us—”

“Jason—”

“But I’ll call Diane.” Jason reached for the phone, because he wanted to make some of the tension disappear. If she knew Cameron was safe, then maybe she could trust him to make this go away.

“Thank you.” Her shoulders slumped. “I’m just—I’m scared, Jason. If Diane had a way to get out of this, don’t you think she would have called us already?”

Yes, but there was no way in hell Jason was going to answer that question.

“You’re not going to jail,” Jason said. He could promise her that, because it wasn’t a possibility. Their sons were going to grow up with their mother.

No matter what he had to sacrifice to make that happen.

# Chapter Fifteen

*You spend your days alone  
Still hoping for the truth, oh  
But all you hear are lies  
But no one else is going  
To tell you what to do now  
No one else is going  
To help you hold the line*  
- Something to Believe in, Parachute

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Monday, December 18, 2006

## **Port Charles Municipal Building: Scott Baldwin's Office**

When his secretary showed Diane Miller in first thing that morning, Scott knew he'd won.

Oh, she wouldn't admit it. She would *still* put up a fight. There would be skirmishes. She might try to force this as far as a preliminary hearing, try to call his bluff.

But she'd taken a week to review the evidence, and then asked for a meeting without her clients.

He'd won, and they both knew it. He had Elizabeth Morgan dead to rights, which meant he had *Jason* Morgan right where he wanted him.

Scott Baldwin loved his job.

"Scott." Diane took a seat at the conference table. "I hope you're doing well. Christmas is coming fast."

"It is," he nodded. "My daughter came home from college." He sighed at the thought of the beautiful girl he had left at home. His beautiful Serena. "I'm not sure how she got to be old enough to be in college, but time sure does fly."

"Hmmm..." Diane pursed her lips. "I reviewed your case files. You were...quite thorough. I don't believe I've seen a special prosecutor be *quite* so thorough before."

"Well, Diane—may I call you Diane?" Scott asked. When she just glared at him, he continued. "I want you to be prepared. To have your resources in order, so to speak."

"You didn't mention some of the more...prominent pieces of evidence during our meeting last week." She rested her hands on the table, laying them flat. "The, ah, security footage...I feel as though *that* should have come up."

“Would you believe General Hospital keeps security footage for six months?” Scott told her, with his eyes wide. “When I saw Alexis’s notes that she had informally asked Elizabeth about the file by the nurse’s station, I knew exactly what to look for and where.” He leaned back in his chair. “Have you mentioned the footage to your clients?”

“Not...” She hesitated. “Not yet, actually. I, ah—”

“It’ll be convincing in a courtroom,” Scott said. “And the camera is at a great angle, don’t you think? You can see Elizabeth from the back as Alexis steps up. They speak briefly. And then Alexis walks away. Then Elizabeth takes out a file and starts feeding it into a shredder. You can’t quite see what’s being shredded, but it’s a thick manila file. Quite similar to the PCPD files.”

“Scott...” Diane leaned forward. “I’d like to discuss a plea agreement. I’m sure we can come to some sort of arrangement—”

“No.” Scott was careful to keep his tone pleasant. “There’s no point, Diane. I only plea down when I’m not convinced of a conviction. I put that video along with the other evidence—after I prove Elizabeth Morgan will do anything to protect her husband—I put all of that in front of a jury, and they’ll convict her in a heartbeat.”

“Be that as it may,” Diane murmured, “she’s a young mother. Expecting another child. I should think probation—”

“She’ll do hard time. I intend to ask for the maximum.” When the redhead merely scowled, Scott shrugged. “And I’ll get it. That judge is going to take one look at Elizabeth Morgan and he’ll see through her town sweetheart persona to who she really is. She broke the law, Diane. She did it, and you and I both know she’d do it *again*. Look at the things she’s already done to protect Jason Morgan. Do you think she blinked at this? Do you think she wouldn’t do more in the future? That judge is going to give her ten years. She’s going to lose her freedom.”

“How can you be so cold?” Diane demanded. “She’s pregnant—”

“I’m not doing anything to her.” Scott arched a brow. “She committed a crime, Diane. You and I both know she’s guilty. I’m giving her a chance to avoid jail, because I don’t think she’s a hardened criminal. I think she’s a woman who fell in love with a man who treats her relatively well, and after her last two husbands, I don’t blame her. That doesn’t mean she gets a free pass. She’s guilty,” he repeated, “but you’re all acting like *I’m* the bad guy because she’s a nice girl.”

“Baldwin—”

“I’m not the bad guy,” he repeated. “*She* broke the law. I’m trying to give her a break. You need to make the facts of life clear to your clients, Diane. Because unless Jason Morgan figures out a third option, I’m putting *someone* he cares about in jail. I’m just leaving the choice to him. That’s downright generous.”

Diane rose to her feet. “You’re a regular saint,” she drawled, but her voice had lost some of its anger.

She left the office without another word or backward glance.

It would be easier for her to be self-righteous if not for the security footage that proved the case. Scott could arrest Elizabeth today and have her convicted by spring.

But he wasn't the villain here. He wasn't the man who had married the woman and brought her into the line of the fire. He wasn't the schmuck who thought he was a character in a Godfather movie.

He was an officer of the court trying to bring criminals to justice. He just believed Sonny Corinthos was the more dangerous criminal. He didn't want Elizabeth Morgan in jail, but he'd settle for her if it that's what it took for Jason Morgan to see the truth. Sonny Corinthos didn't give a damn about anyone but himself.

And it would be Scott's pleasure to prove it to the world.

### **Kelly's: Courtyard**

Elizabeth waved goodbye to Robin and Patrick as she exited the restaurant, Cody on her heels. They turned out of the archway and walked toward the parking lot.

Having lunch with two of her favorite people in the world had bolstered her spirits. Robin and Patrick seemed convinced Diane would find a loophole. "She's amazing," Robin had said. "Didn't she wipe the floor with Ric?"

And they'd talked about the baby and names, though Patrick had been more uncomfortable by that part of the conversation, darting looks at Robin that looked downright terrified. He'd joked about wanting the baby named for him, but Elizabeth knew he'd seen the baby fever in Robin's eyes. Poor bastard.

But now that she was away from her friends and their bright spirits, she felt the doldrums beginning to settle around her again. If Diane could have found that magical legal strategy, surely she would have found it already, wouldn't she?

Cody stopped in front of their SUV, and pulled open the door. Just as Elizabeth set her purse on the seat, she saw Emily's car pull up. She paused for a moment, hoping the brunette would engage her in civil conversation again. She had mostly given up on regaining their close friendship, but this was Jason's sister, and *that* meant something to her.

"Hey." Emily closed the door. "I—I was hoping I'd see you around." She flicked her eyes at Cody, but when it was clear he wouldn't leave the two of them alone, Emily approached. "I don't know if you'd heard, but Lucky decided to drop the custody suit."

"Oh." Elizabeth blinked. "No, ah, I guess Diane hasn't heard yet." She gripped the car door. "Not that I'm not relieved, but why?"

Emily hesitated. "He went for custody of Cameron because he was angry with you," she admitted. "And because he thought he owed it to Cameron to stick around, to make it up to him. But once the paternity results for the baby came back..." She lifted a shoulder. "The chances were slim to none to

begin with, and I told Lucky that Jason would take care of Cameron.”

“Oh. Good.” Elizabeth shifted. “I never—I never meant to hurt Lucky. Or for any of this to happen, Emily. It just—everything got away from me a bit. I’m not *sorry* it’s turned out this way,” she added quickly. “It’s just...I wouldn’t have picked the way it happened.”

“I get it. I’ve done my share of hurting people when I should have been able to let go. Everything that happened with Zander was a huge mess, and maybe it soured things for me with Nikolas.” Emily looked away. “Hard to know for sure.”

“Well.”

“I just wanted to support Lucky the way he did when I had a drug problem in high school,” Emily added. “Maybe I didn’t do it right, and I know I pushed you aside. I’m sorry about that, Liz. But you know, he never blinked. He never pretended he didn’t know me. He stood by me. I thought...I thought I owed him.” Her cheeks flushed. “I’m sorry.”

And the apology meant a lot to her, even if it meant things would never be the same. She even understood Emily’s point of view. What had *she* sacrificed because she’d felt as though she owed Lucky for his support back then? How many relationships had she wrecked in pursuit of that support?

“I’m sorry I wasn’t more honest with you,” Elizabeth said. “You shouldn’t have found out about Jason and me through newspapers and gossip. I just—I hope you’ll be involved with Cameron and the baby.”

“I’m sure I will.” Emily took a step backwards. “I should go. I’m meeting my mother for lunch. I’ll see you around.”

When Emily had disappeared into the courtyard, Elizabeth finally climbed in the car, relieved that Jason would be able to end his cold war with his sister. If the worst happened, if she ended up in jail, she wanted to know Jason could count on Emily.

She had to start preparing for the worst, even as she tried to hope for the best.

## **Diane’s Office**

Jason scrawled his name across the bottom of the page. “And the guardianship agreement should go into effect by the end of the month?” he asked, sliding the paperwork back across her desk.

His lawyer nodded, taking it from him. “You’ll be his legal guardian by January, and if all goes well, his legal father by June.” Diane slid it inside a folder and set it aside on the desk. “Jason, you know...the week Scott Baldwin gave you—that’s up tomorrow.”

“I know.” Jason exhaled slowly. “Did you go through the files? Is there something—” He stopped speaking when Diane gently shook her head. “You’re not finished?”

“Jason...” Diane pursed her lips, a pen in her hands. “There were a few things Scott didn’t tell us last

week, things that change the complexion of this case.”

He shook his head. “Diane, I don’t care about any of that. I want this to go away—”

“Jason,” Diane said his name again, her tone more gently. “Scott has her destroying the file on hospital security footage.”

He sat back, his shoulders slumping. “That’s not possible—”

“You can’t see the file very clearly, but she talks to Alexis, then shreds a brown folder that looks like a PCPD file. And it is after the file disappears, on a day when she is signed in at the time the file goes missing. Jason, I am an excellent attorney, but I am *not* a miracle worker.”

He shoved away from the table, his chair flying back. “There’s a technicality then. Some dirt on Baldwin—”

“If I take this to trial,” Diane cut in as if he hadn’t spoken, “I *will* lose. A jury is going to listen to Baldwin prove all the ways Elizabeth has been connected to you over the years, and then use your marriage, the existence of your child, the fact you saved Elizabeth’s life—he’ll tell them all of that and then he’ll show them that footage. And that’s the end of it. I cannot make this evidence go away.”

He shook his head. “Diane—”

“And Scott Baldwin intends to ask for the maximum. She’ll serve eight to ten years, and I can tell you the parole board isn’t going to look kindly on a woman who helped an alleged mobster get away with crimes. She’ll serve every minute of those eight years. By the time she comes home, her sons will be half-grown.”

His chest was tight, and Jason shook his head again. “No, that’s not going to happen.”

“It will if you don’t take the deal Baldwin put on the table,” Diane said softly. “Jason, I’m sorry, but the only way to keep her out of jail now is...you’re going to *have* to testify against Sonny.”

In the back of his head, he’d known she would come to that conclusion. And yet, somehow, he’d ignored that possibility. He’d never been in true jeopardy before, beyond the murder charges after Luis Alcazar had gone off the balcony at the Port Charles Hotel.

His lawyers had always kept him out of jail, had always swooped in on some technicality.

But the one time Jason depended on a lawyer, the *one* time he needed the system to work for him and not against him—he’d lost.

“Testifying against Sonny isn’t an option,” Jason said roughly. “Not just...not just because of who Sonny is, and my friendship with him. If I testify against him, if I turn against him, my life isn’t worth anything. I’ll be a traitor. People will come after me. They might come after my family.”

“There’s always witness protection,” Diane reminded him. “Jason—”

“And take Elizabeth and Cameron away from everyone they know, from their lives. Do *you* want to tell Carly and her kids they can’t be in my life anymore?” He couldn’t imagine life without his best friend. “Diane, I can’t do it.”

Diane looked away. Her normally bright, crackling, laughing eyes were somber. “I truly am sorry, Jason, but Baldwin hasn’t left us with many options.” She sighed. “Maybe I’m too pessimistic about a trial. I suppose I can try to spin it. Come up with an alternate theory as to why Elizabeth is shredding files that look so similar.” She met his eyes. “But I’d be lying to you if I felt confident. I am your lawyer, Jason. I am Elizabeth’s lawyer, and I’m supposed to give you the best advice I can.”

“And that’s to turn in Sonny?” Jason demanded.

Troubled, Diane waited a moment. “I hadn’t thought of the implications of you turning on Sonny,” she admitted. “Perhaps, Jason, we might consider asking Elizabeth to plead guilty and let the sentence be up to the judge. He may only give her five years if she cooperates—”

“She doesn’t spend a day in jail,” he cut in roughly. “Not a *single* moment. She belongs with the boys. She did this to protect me—”

“And she got caught.” Diane rose to her feet. “I *am* sympathetic, Jason, but throwing ourselves on the mercy of the court may be the safest bet. Or you can roll the dice with turning Sonny in and hoping that the people around you know the choices you were faced with. Both options are difficult. So pick your poison.”

He scrubbed his hands over his face and exhaled slowly. “I’ll turn myself in, then.”

Diane straightened. “Jason—”

“He wants a high profile criminal, doesn’t he?” Jason asked. “I’ll confess to whatever he wants from me. Racketeering. Manny Ruiz, Moreno, Roscoe. I don’t care. Tell him he’s got a deal if he wants me.”

“Jason—” Diane put her hands up. “That’s insanity—”

“I’m *not* letting Elizabeth go to jail and I can’t risk my family’s safety by testifying against Sonny.” Jason nodded toward the landline on her desk. “Set up a meeting—”

“Jason, he doesn’t want you—” Diane bit off her words. “It won’t work. If that were an option, don’t you think Scott would have suggested it? Jason, whatever he charges you with—it would put you in jail for *decades*! If you won’t testify against Sonny, then Elizabeth serving five years is your best bet.”

“No—”

“Stop being so goddamn stubborn, Jason Morgan!” She fisted her hands at her side. “You think Elizabeth would let you go to jail for twenty-five years? Think of what you’d be walking away from—not just her, not just Cameron. But this baby would never even know you.” Diane stepped around

her desk. “Jason, I cannot, in good conscience, be part of any deal that puts one client away for decades when the other could serve a handful of years.”

“Diane—”

“Your gallantry is very sweet,” Diane continued, “but you can’t give up your life to save hers. If Elizabeth didn’t want you to testify against Sonny, then why the hell would she want *you* to go to jail?”

He looked away. Elizabeth would be upset if he sacrificed himself rather than allow her to go to jail. But she’d be safe. She and the boys would never want for anything, and he knew he could count on Sonny and Carly to take care of her, look out for the boys.

“Elizabeth isn’t going to jail,” Jason told her. “Tell Scott I want to meet with him.”

“I’m not going to do that.” Diane lifted her chin. “You can fire me, but I’m not going to let you commit suicide. Jason, there’s no guarantee you would even survive a prison sentence. If something happened to you in there, what do you think that would do to Elizabeth?”

When he could think of nothing to rebut that point, Diane sighed. “Let me take another look at the files. I may come up with a trial strategy I feel better about. Let’s not throw the baby out with the bathwater. I have the rest of today and tomorrow. And maybe if we call Scott’s bluff, and force him to put her on trial, he’ll blink. I don’t like any of our options.”

Jason nodded, but he’d already made up his mind. It was going to have to be him.

### **Morgan Penthouse: Living Room**

It was Jason’s turn to pick Morgan and Cameron up from preschool—and host his nephew overnight with Cameron at the penthouse. He’d wanted to turn Carly down when she had suggested it because he thought he and Elizabeth needed a break, but Cameron had been so excited, and it was probably best they keep the next few weeks as routine as possible.

So he drove home in his SUV with two rambunctious boys strapped into booster seats in the backseat, both tossing questions at him, laughing at each other—

If his meeting with Scott the next day went as he expected, he wouldn’t be able to keep his promise to Cameron. He wouldn’t see the bright-eyed little boy with the messy curls grow up. He might see Cameron and the baby once a month if Elizabeth brought them to visit, but he didn’t want that. He didn’t want Elizabeth and the boys to wait for him.

Diane was right—if Scott took his deal, he wouldn’t be satisfied with a five or ten year sentence. Jason would go to prison for the rest of his life, and he would have to forfeit a future with Elizabeth that might have included another child, the little sister Cameron was chattering about to Morgan. Maybe she would marry again and have that little girl with someone else.

The image of that was almost too painful to bear and he’d had to dip his head and take a deep breath

when it had occurred to him in the elevator.

Turning himself in to Baldwin was the right thing to do, even it would be the most difficult thing he'd ever done his life.

Elizabeth had plastered a smile on her face when the boys came in from school, though he could see it wasn't completely genuine. The boys both ran to her—Morgan was excited to see his Aunt Liz, and the boys were both over the moon that Aunt Liz said they could have Christmas on the island together after all.

Would he be able to do that? Would Scott have him arrested then? Would he give Jason a few days to wrap up things? He couldn't tell Diane—she would refuse to represent him until it was a *fait accompli*, he knew that. And Elizabeth would probably have Sonny lock Jason up somewhere if she knew what he was planning.

Elizabeth tilted her head at him as she sent the boys into the kitchen where their snack waited. “Hey. Did you sign the guardianship papers?”

“Oh. Yeah, she said it'll go through by the end of the month.” He continued to stare at her—would he even be able to see his child? Would she agree to bring the baby to the jail after he was born?

Did Jason *want* either of his children to make the journey to whatever facility Scott sent him?

“Jason?” Elizabeth asked. She stepped forward, pressing her hands to his chest. “Are you okay? You seem distracted.”

He gave himself a mental shake. If this was his last night at home with his wife, with his son, then he wasn't going to waste it thinking of all the ways it would change tomorrow. “I'm fine, just some hiccups at work.” He kissed her, cupping her jaw in his hand. There was so much he'd never said to her, so much he'd felt but never admitted.

And now, Jason didn't see the point. If he was going to spend the rest of his life in prison, he didn't want Elizabeth to feel obligated to stay with him because he loved her, because of the kids. If she never knew, she would feel better when she inevitably left him and moved on. She wouldn't feel as guilty.

“Did Diane have any ideas about...you know?” Elizabeth asked when he drew away, furrowing her brows. “We have to give Scott an answer on Wednesday.”

And for the first time since the day he met her, Jason looked into Elizabeth's eyes and lied to her. “She has some ideas she think might work. She wanted to review it, but she looked optimistic.”

Elizabeth smiled then, the first signs of happiness in days filling her expression. “Oh. Oh, that's *great*. I'm so relieved.” She kissed him. “Maybe this will be over for real this time. I just want to get on with our lives.”

“Mom!” Cameron called from the kitchen. “You gotta pour the juice—”

“So do I,” he murmured as she headed for the kitchen. Jason took a deep breath and followed. He didn’t want to miss a minute.

# Chapter Sixteen

*Nothin' goes as planned  
Everything will break  
People say goodbye  
In their own special way  
All that you rely on  
And all that you can fake  
Will leave you in the morning  
But find you in the day*  
- In My Veins, Andrew Belle

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Tuesday, December 19, 2006

## Elm Street Pier

When Jason saw Sam sitting on the bench by the waterfront, he nearly backtracked and took another route to the street. He had been successfully able to avoid his ex-girlfriend for nearly two months—since he'd sent her out of the penthouse with Carly.

Sam rose to her feet when she saw him coming. "I thought I might be able to catch you if I waited here long enough." Her expression was pained as she continued, "I didn't think you'd want me stopping by the penthouse."

He didn't respond to that—there was nothing he could say. He *didn't* want her in the penthouse. "What's up?" he asked after a moment.

"My mother knows about Ric," Sam said flatly. "Why didn't you *tell* me?"

Jason looked away, remembering that night as Alexis had struggled to catch her breath but had been unable to hide the shock, the pain in her expression. "She said she'd handle it. I guess she has."

Sam huffed. "You told Sonny she knew. Can you guess who *he* told?"

Jason winced. Carly being in possession of that knowledge was a ticking time bomb. "I'm sorry if Carly told Alexis, but that's her problem—"

"Carly told me," Sam cut in. She slid her hands into the pockets of her coat. "And I decided that I wasn't going to let her have the satisfaction of holding that over me. So *I* told Alexis."

"Okay." Jason blinked. "I don't know what you want, Sam—"

"I want to know why you sandbagged me with this. I had a right to know she already knew—" Sam stopped. "And I want to know how you can live with yourself with what you've done."

“What *I’ve* done?” Jason repeated. “Sam, you slept with your mother’s husband. That’s not my fault. Alexis had the right to deal with it the way she needed to—”

“The way you dealt with it?” Sam demanded. “You jumped on the first excuse you could and crawled into bed with Elizabeth. What kind of person does that make you?” She smirked. “But I guess *she* got the last laugh. She managed to knock herself up. Maybe if I had done that, you wouldn’t have left me.”

Jason exhaled slowly and looked away. He felt guilty for the way he’d walked away from Sam, but not as much as he had once. He’d walked away for a good reason, but he’d changed his mind. *Sam’s* actions had prevented their reconciliation, not his.

And God help him, he was grateful. He would rather have had the horror of finding her with Ric a thousand times if it meant he’d be with Elizabeth today.

“I don’t know what you want,” Jason repeated. “I’m sorry if you’re having trouble at home, Sam, but it has nothing to do with me—”

“How could you promise to love me and then turn around and marry *her*?” Sam demanded as he started to walk past her. “I thought it was just to get at Ric—I thought he was up to something, but it’s not just that, is it? What the hell was I, Jason? A rebound? A stand-in? Someone to keep the bed warm until Elizabeth came back around?”

He shook his head. She would never understand. “Sam, I don’t owe you any explanations. We were broken up. I—” He hesitated. “I moved on. You should do the same.”

“I can’t believe you can stand there and act like things weren’t *completely* different a year ago. Six months ago.” She jabbed a finger in his direction, her eyes burning into his. “She was married to another man five minutes ago. What makes you think she’s going to stick around this time?”

“Sam—” He shook his head. “I’m going now—”

“You think your little happy life is going to last forever?” Sam called after him as he walked up the stairs. “I hope she leaves you the way you walked out on me. With no warning, no damn good reason. I hope she *crushes* your heart when she goes. Then maybe you’ll understand what you’ve done to me.”

He turned at the top of the stairs for one last look at a woman with whom he’d spent the better part of two years, had planned a life and family with. She was glaring at him, her breaths sending little puffs into the chilly winter air.

He didn’t have the space to feel sorry for her anymore. He was going to Baldwin’s office to confess to whatever would keep Elizabeth out of jail. There just wasn’t room for a woman who had once meant so much to him. He reached down for something, some emotion he could offer her in recompense.

And found nothing. He felt nothing for this woman, only relief he hadn’t married her after all.

“Goodbye, Sam.” He turned and walked away, not bothering to wait for her response.

### **Municipal Building: Scott Baldwin’s Office**

Scott frowned when Jason Morgan came in his office sans representation and closed the door behind him. This...this had not been the plan.

“Morgan.” Scott rose from his desk, and gestured for the younger man to take a seat. Morgan shook his head, indicating he would stand. “Is Ms. Miller parking the car?”

“She’s not coming,” Morgan said blandly. “She refused to represent me if I came here today, so I’ll waive my right to an attorney.”

At those words, Scott sank into his chair. No one had *ever* heard those words from Jason Morgan, and the fact that he was saying them at all—this could not bode well for Scott’s plans.

“Ah. Okay. Have you decided what you’d like to do, then?” Scott asked. He took a deep breath. He needed to be in control. “Which charges should I file tomorrow morning?”

Morgan stared at him, his expression as blank as it had ever been. “Whatever you want to charge me with, I’ll confess to it.”

*Hell.* Scott stood again. “What?”

“That’s what I want you to do,” Morgan said. “I want you to pick any of the thousand things the PCPD has tried to stick on me, and I’ll confess to it. I’ll go to jail, but you have to leave Elizabeth alone.”

And despite Scott’s best effort, he felt a grudging respect for this man who wanted to remain loyal to his wife as well as his friend and had picked the option of self-sacrifice.

To walk in here and tell Scott he would confess to anything—knowing Scott could put him jail for the rest of his life—it took a measure of gravitas that he had not credited Morgan with.

“You don’t think you’re being overdramatic?” Scott asked, arching a brow. “I might ask for the maximum for Elizabeth, and maybe I’d get it, but it’s more likely she’d serve no more than five years. That’s better than whatever you or Corinthos could face.”

“Testifying against Sonny isn’t an option,” Morgan said, firmly. “I wouldn’t survive long enough to give the testimony.”

Ah. Well, that was a wrinkle Scott hadn’t quite considered, but he doubted Morgan would be in serious danger if he testified. And it was a risk Scott was willing to take. “We could always arrange protective custody, even witness protection.”

"You get me, Baldwin. I'm not testifying against Sonny, and you're not putting Elizabeth in jail."

Scott hesitated, and considered taking the deal. Without Jason Morgan to bolster his organization, Corinthos would follow in a matter of years, maybe even less. Morgan's wife and children would likely be well-cared for if his assets weren't frozen.

But Jason Morgan wasn't Sonny Corinthos.

"I don't want you," Scott said after a long moment of silence. "If I wanted you, that would have been the deal. I want Sonny Corinthos. And if I have to prosecute your wife to make you understand that, I'll do it."

Morgan's face faded in color, just a little. "You won't take a confession from me?"

"I'll tell you why." Scott leaned forward. "If not for Sonny Corinthos, you and Elizabeth would not be in this mess. She did what she did to protect you. I get it. I even understand it to a certain extent. I've seen a little of the difficulties she's faced in life. I'm sure she panicked when she stole that file, didn't quite think it through. She's not a master criminal, that's for sure. She's in this mess because she loves you. And you're here to sacrifice yourself because you love her, too."

"I told you—"

"If not for Sonny Corinthos, Jason, you'd be a different person. In a different line of work. Where your wife would not have had to protect you by lying to the police and committing crimes." Scott leaned back in his chair. "I knew you before your accident—a little bit. But I also knew your family. And I know the challenges you faced after your accident."

"I'm not interested in what you think—"

"You maybe didn't have much of a career parking cars and working in construction, but you had a future. You didn't give a damn about it then, but you do now, don't you?" Scott raised his brows. "You know I'm right. Sonny Corinthos took advantage of you, Morgan. He took a kid who didn't care about tomorrow, and he removed any chance of you ever changing your mind. You can never walk away from this business, and that's because of Sonny Corinthos. Do you think I want to put a pregnant mother on trial?"

"But you will," Morgan stated, his voice cold. "You think I give a damn what you think about me?"

"I know you don't." Scott stood. "I'm not the bad guy in this, Morgan. You, your wife, your lawyer—you all seem to want to paint me that way. I get it. Ric Lansing was a piece of dirt. I don't think I'll go ahead with the drug charges because, while they may fit my narrative, they don't fit Elizabeth as a person. So when I take Elizabeth to court, we all

know I'll be prosecuting her for something she did. Your attorney has told you about the security footage. You know the evidence. That's my job, Morgan. To go after people who break the law. Your wife did that."

To this, Morgan said nothing, but he didn't leave either.

"If you're truly concerned about the safety of your family, of yourself," Scott continued, "I'm willing to work with you. Maybe you don't have to testify. Maybe you cooperate and give us information so we can pursue independent charges. I don't want any harm to come to your family. I have kids—" He hesitated then, thinking of Karen. Of the life she would never have.

"I don't want you on a silver platter, Morgan, though maybe I'm crazy for turning that down. I don't want your wife. I want Sonny. Putting him in jail will make the bigger difference. I'll use whatever I have at my disposal in order to put him there, including Elizabeth. I'm not the bad guy, Morgan."

"And that's your final answer?" Morgan asked after a long moment. "You're refusing to take me into custody. You'll continue to go after Elizabeth unless I cooperate with you?"

"I will prosecute a criminal," Scott said. "I told you, it's up to you how I proceed at this point. I look forward to hearing from you tomorrow."

Looking a bit stunned, Jason Morgan left his office, and Scott wondered if he'd made the right decision. Had he lost a chance here? But he still didn't see a way for Morgan to get out of this without turning on someone.

And Scott still had his money on Morgan sacrificing his boss to save his wife.

Outside the office, a paralegal saw Jason Morgan striding down the hall, his face set in annoyance. He picked up the phone to call Diane Miller, wondering if she knew her client was meeting with the special prosecutor—without his attorney.

### **Morgan Penthouse: Living Room**

"I think Patrick is convinced I want to have a baby next month," Robin complained as she tucked her feet underneath her and faced Elizabeth on the sofa. "He keeps sending me these panicked looks."

Elizabeth laughed, sipping her tea. "Did you tell him to relax?"

"Hey, I'm just relieved he hasn't headed for the hills yet," Robin replied. She sighed. "He's great, but he's a jackass." Her expression sobered. "Any word from Diane?"

"No, but Jason said she'd call today." Elizabeth hesitated. "He said she was optimistic

yesterday, so that's good. I'll go to trial if Diane feels comfortable." She shifted a bit, moving her hand to the small of her back. "I made sure Jason had guardianship of Cameron in case something happens before the adoption goes through." She bit her lip. "And I drew up paperwork stating you would be guardian if something happened to Jason and me."

"Me?" Robin repeated. "Why? What about—" She swallowed. "Carly? Or Sonny?"

"We talked about both of them, and I hope they'd be a part of the boys' lives, but if something—Robin, in the worst case scenario and my children were left without the both of us, I'd like it if they were with someone who knew both their parents and liked them. Carly puts up with me because Jason told her to, and she likes Cam. It's not the same."

"Oh. I'm—" She pressed a hand to her chest. "I'm honored. Of course, not that it would ever happen, but if I were needed, I would step up." Robin squeezed Elizabeth's hand. "It's not going to be necessary."

Cody knocked and pushed open the door. "Ah, Ms. Miller is on her way up," he told them. "Should I just let her right in?"

"Um, sure..." Elizabeth unfolded her legs and stood, hearing Robin do the same. "Should I call Jason to tell him? I'm surprised she didn't call and make sure we were together."

"Maybe it's good news and she didn't want to wait," Robin suggested.

They heard Diane the moment she stepped off the elevator. "Where is he?" her voice boomed as she pushed past Cody and swept into the room. "Jason Morgan, you come out here right now before I tear this place apart!"

Elizabeth blinked, stepping forward. "Diane! What's going on? Jason's at work—"

"The hell he is!" Diane growled, planting her hands at her hips. "I told him I wouldn't set up a meeting, and the stupid fool went to Scott Baldwin without me! How am I supposed to do my job unless he lets me?"

"Why would Jason go to Scott without you?" Elizabeth asked, her heart pounding. "Diane —"

"Jason doesn't breathe without a lawyer at the PCPD," Robin chimed in. "There's no way —"

"My source in the DA's office reported Jason talked to Scott Baldwin for twenty minutes, then stormed out. So thank God, Baldwin didn't take the deal—"

"Deal?" Elizabeth demanded. "Diane, what the hell is going on?"

"Your husband wanted to be the sacrificial lamb," Diane replied. If it were possible, her eyes would have shot darts. "He offered himself to Scott Baldwin on a silver platter. Wanted to have Baldwin charge him with anything he wanted as long as he left you alone."

Stunned, Elizabeth dropped onto the sofa. "What?"

"No way, Jason wouldn't—" Robin hesitated. "Baldwin turned him down?"

"He did not leave the office looking like a man who had won the day," Diane replied. She narrowed his eyes. "You didn't know what he was up to?"

"Do you think I would have let him out the door?" Elizabeth demanded, though she was feeling a bit dizzy. Jason had tried to sacrifice his own freedom in order to save her and Sonny. Oh, God. And it hadn't worked. Where was he? "I thought you were feeling optimistic. Jason said—" She closed her eyes. "He lied to me."

"To throw you off the scent," Robin said. "Oh, God, Elizabeth—" She looked to Diane. "Then you don't feel good?"

"I'm still working on something, but honestly, Elizabeth, no." Diane pursed her lips. "I don't feel quite optimistic. That does not mean I've given up." She lifted her chin. "You tell your husband I don't appreciate martyrs. He needs to let me do the job I've been paid to do. You tell him that!"

And with that, she swept of the penthouse, slamming the door behind her.

"Elizabeth—"

"He's at Sonny's, isn't he?" Elizabeth lifted her eyes to Robin's. "He went to Scott Baldwin, and Baldwin turned him down. Because he wants Sonny, not Jason. So Jason's going to give him Sonny."

"I don't know." Robin sat next to her. "But it looks like it—Elizabeth, I'm sure Sonny has a plan. He knew about this last week. And he had to know that if Jason were forced to choose, he'd pick you."

"He can't. I can't let him do this." She pressed a trembling hand to her mouth. "This is my fault—"

"Well, it's a little bit Jason and Sonny's fault, don't you think?" Robin asked. "They knew what they were getting into—"

"And they'd still be getting away with it if it weren't for me," she said. She looked to Robin. "I have to turn myself in."

"What?" Robin demanded. "No, no, no. That—Diane will flay you."

"It's the only way." Elizabeth rose to her feet. "Then Jason won't have to do this. He can't. I can't let him."

"Elizabeth, just wait a second—"

Elizabeth reached for her purse, and dragged her coat out of the closet. "Robin, I have to do this. This is my fault, and I have to fix it."

"Let's just talk to Sonny and Jason. Let's let Diane do her job!" Robin pleaded.

"Cody," Elizabeth said pulling the door open. "I need to go to the PCPD."

"Cody, don't!" Robin ordered, grabbing her own coat. "Elizabeth, just—just don't—"

"Did Jason or Sonny get arrested?" Cody asked, confusion in his eyes. "Mrs. Morgan—"

"Cody, you either take me to the PCPD or I'll drive myself." She lifted her chin. "And you know I'll do it."

"Mrs. Morgan, don't make me do this—"

"Then I'll go by myself." Elizabeth swept past him, and pushed the button for the elevator.

"Stop her!" Robin hissed to Cody, pulling out her cell phone.

"How?" the guard demanded. "Should I tackle her—" Cody jumped forward to make the elevator before they closed.

"Hell, Jason and Sonny are going to kill me," Robin muttered as she pressed Jason's number in her speed dial.

### **Greystone Manor: Living Room**

"I'm sorry, Sonny," Jason said after a long moment of silence. "I've tried every way out of this, but short of disappearing and taking Elizabeth and Cam with me, there's nothing."

Sonny nodded, but he hadn't said much since Jason had announced his decision. "And that would just turn you all into fugitives. It's no way for the boys to grow up." He rubbed his chin. "Baldwin wouldn't let you confess?"

"I thought about forcing his hand," Jason said. "Just—going to the PCPD and confessing to Mac, but there's no guarantee Scott wouldn't continue going after Elizabeth. I can't—" He dipped his head, looking at the ground. "I can't let her go to jail. Not for this."

"Of course not." Sonny paused. "Jase, I'm not angry. I'm annoyed that Baldwin boxed us in so neatly, but I guess once he realized he knew your Achilles heel, he couldn't resist exploiting it." He waited. "Ah, what kind of evidence were you thinking of turning over?"

"I don't know," Jason began, but his phone rang. He pulled it out and frowned at seeing Robin's name. "It's Robin. She's with Elizabeth—" He answered it. "Robin?"

"Go to the PCPD, you have to go right now!" Robin's panicked voice all but screamed out of his receiver.

"Robin? What? What's going on?"

"Diane told Elizabeth you tried to turn yourself in! Elizabeth went to the PCPD to confess. You have to stop her! I tried, but I couldn't—Jason—"

"I'm on my way." Jason hit the end button and just stared at it for heartbeat. "Elizabeth found out what I tried to do."

"Oh, hell." Sonny was already moving towards the door. "Max, we need the goddamn car!" He turned to Jason. "We should have seen this coming. She went all noble on us."

"I can't—" Jason swallowed. "She can't—I can't—"

Sonny nodded as he pushed his friend towards the door. "I get it, Jason. We'll stop it. You'll turn me in. It's fine. Let's just go stop Elizabeth from doing the right thing. And call your goddamn lawyer!"

# Chapter Seventeen

*Steady hands just take the wheel  
Every glance is killing me  
Time to make one last appeal  
For the life I live*  
- Stop and Stare, OneRepublic

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*Tuesday, December 19, 2006*

## **PCPD: Interrogation Room**

Scott glared at Elizabeth and the recorder she'd brought with her after a brief pit stop. "I'm *not* taking your confession."

Elizabeth turned her eyes to Mac, who looked a bit stunned at it all. "Then I'll give it to Mac. And if he won't take it, I'll send it to the *Port Charles Herald*."

"Scott..." Mac took a seat. "Maybe we should hear her out—"

"Damn it—" But Scott nodded. "Fine."

"Before I start, I wanted to say something off the record." She looked to Mac. "I could have told the world months ago that your daughter stole those pills from the hospital. You know that. I could have broadcast it—*Lucky* offered to."

Mac's face lost a bit of his pallor. "I—"

"The records would have matched—Maxie was a candy striper, and since she was having the affair, it would have made more sense for her to do it, to keep him interested." Elizabeth tilted her head. "I *never* intended to do that, Mac. Because it didn't serve any purpose except to wreck her life further, and I think Maxie's had enough tragedy."

Mac exhaled slowly. "Then why are you—"

"Because I intend to confess only to stealing and destroying that file," Elizabeth said. "I won't confess to the drug charges, but I didn't want the reason on record." She pressed a button. She was taking a serious gamble here, and this tape would either sink her or save her.

"When we met in your office last week, Mr. Baldwin," Elizabeth began, "you took us on a trip down memory lane. You intended to use all of those previous incidents as proof I would do anything to protect my husband. You accused me of taking that file from the PCPD and destroying it. I did it. *No* one else knew, but I did it. I shredded it at the hospital, and went on with my life."

“Why are you doing this?” Scott demanded. “Why are you letting Morgan protect his boss?”

“He doesn’t know I’m here,” Elizabeth said. “And I waive my right to an attorney. Neither one of them would approve of me being here. In fact...”

They paused because there was a commotion outside in the squad room. Mac stood and peered out the blinds. “Well, the cavalry has arrived,” he said dryly. “Jason and Sonny are here, my niece just barreled in after them with Diane. I guess we need to have Diane in here—”

“I don’t want to talk to any of them until I’ve finished my statement,” Elizabeth said. “Please go and tell them that.” She lifted her chin and looked at Scott. “There’s still a few things Mr. Baldwin and I need to sort out.”

Scott scowled, but nodded to Mac. “Let Diane know she’s waived her right to an attorney,” he muttered.

Mac pulled open the door and just managed to keep the crowd from rushing him. He pulled the door shut but not before Elizabeth met Jason’s anguished eyes.

“You’d rather send yourself to jail than an *actual* criminal,” Scott said, annoyed. “How does this even make sense?”

“Because you almost won, and I couldn’t let it happen.” Elizabeth smiled at him. She felt no panic, no anxiety. She knew Jason would be upset with her, but she was at peace with this decision.

She couldn’t let him pay for *her* mistakes.

“Jason tried to offer himself and you wouldn’t have it, so I know he was going to turn on Sonny.” She folded her hands in front of her. “And I couldn’t let that happen.”

“Oh, for Christ’s sake—”

“I’ve been in love with Jason almost since the day I first met him—the first time I really talked him and knew him to be more than my best friend’s brother and Lucky’s former employer. If you won, if he testified against Sonny, then maybe our life could go on. We’re married, and it’s a good marriage. He’s adopting my son, we’re having another child together. Maybe we could still be happy.”

“That’s *all* I’m trying to offer you, Elizabeth,” Scott told her. “A chance to keep your family together —”

“But one day, Jason would wake up,” she said softly, “and he would look at me, and he would resent me. And everything we built together would always be tainted.”

“Elizabeth—”

“Maybe if it had just been the drug charges, I could have lived with it,” Elizabeth said. “*Those* were a lie, and I think you know that. I think Ric knew it, too. But he wanted to use me. The way you’re using

me. If it had been just the trumped up charges, maybe I could have seen it the way you do.” She tilted her head. “But *I* stole that file. And *I* got caught. I can’t let Jason or anyone else pay for my crime.”

“Elizabeth—”

“I’m not confessing just because it’s the right thing to do,” she continued, “I’m doing it because I can’t let my marriage be poisoned. If it’s going to fall apart, it’ll be because we don’t love each other enough to stay together. Not because he sent his best friend to prison because of me. You understand that, don’t you? I love him too much to let him do this.”

Scott scrubbed his hands over his face. “Hell. You’re really doing this. You’re really sitting in front of me with a tape recorder and confessing to charges that will put you away for at least five years, if not ten.” He looked at her. “How can you have a moral compass and *still* be with Jason Morgan?”

“Because, as I’m sure you’d understand, Mr. Baldwin, love doesn’t require rational thought and reasonable explanations. It just is. I love him, and I can’t let you ruin that.” She hesitated. “And I’m sorry that this ruins your plans. I know you really think you were offering me a good deal, that you were trying to do something nice. I am guilty, and you didn’t have to offer a get out of jail free card.”

She lifted her wrists towards him. “I’m ready to be booked.” And then lifted her chin in silent defiance.

Scott sighed, leaned over and pressed the stop button. “Put your hands down, Elizabeth. I’m not arresting you.” He handed her the tape.

Elizabeth accepted it, confused. “I don’t—I don’t understand.”

“I don’t want you,” he said. “But now I *can’t* force Jason Morgan to turn over his friend because you had to go and do the right thing.” Disgusted, he stood. “You’re right. I’m using you, and I tried to use charges I damn well *knew* weren’t true. I wasn’t going to charge the drugs, but I thought about it.” He turned away. “I want Sonny Corinthos behind bars, but I want to be able to look myself in the mirror while I do it.”

“Mr. Baldwin—” Elizabeth stood.

“And if I took your confession and put you in jail, if I put Jason Morgan in jail for trying to protect you—what kind of man would that make me? I’d be nothing more than what people see. I’d be a bully who cared more about results than justice.”

Her heart began to pound. “You’re going to let me go?”

“I am.” Scott turned back and met her eyes. “And you’ll give that tape to your lawyer, so if anyone ever comes after you for this, we’ll have to explain why we declined to press charges after you confessed.”

“But...” She frowned. “I don’t—”

“I don’t want you,” Scott repeated. “And there’s no justice in prosecuting you. So you can go.”

He pulled open the squad door and gestured for her to go in front of her. “Before your husband rips down the walls—”

Elizabeth blinked but went out, dismayed to see Jason and Sonny standing with Diane and Robin, all four of them looking angry, scared, and seriously annoyed.

“Scott?” Mac said, coming forward, his hand at his belt for a pair of handcuffs. “Are we taking her to Booking?”

“I *demand* to know what’s going on!” Diane cut in.

“Mrs. Morgan is free to go,” Scott announced. The room crashed into silence. “She’s cooperated fully with our investigation and I’m satisfied that she’s been cleared of all charges.” He cleared his throat and looked at her. “Thank you for your time, Mrs. Morgan. Have a nice holiday.”

He sent a dark look at Sonny Corinthos before ambling out of the room. Mac blinked, then hurried after Scott, ostensibly to demand answers.

“We should go,” Elizabeth said to Jason. “I’ll—I’ll explain in the car.”

No one said anything until they had made it to the parking lot, where a cluster of cars was haphazardly parked. “Elizabeth,” Sonny began, but she cut him off.

“Diane, you’ll want to keep this in my case file.” Elizabeth handed her the tape. “A bit of insurance policy if Scott ever changes his mind.”

The redhead took the tape, but pursed her lips. “I don’t know how you did it, but I’m going to demand answers at some point.” She slid into her car. “And I may *seriously* consider resigning after this debacle. I don’t know why I’m being paid if you’re not going to actually heed my advice.”

“We’ll catch up later,” Robin said. She hugged Elizabeth, then looked to Jason. “*You* just remember you tried to do the same thing before you get all huffy with her.”

“Goodbye, Robin,” Jason said blandly. “Cody—” He looked her guard. “I’m sure Elizabeth left you no choice, but if you could follow us back to the penthouse?”

“Sure thing.”

“Jason—” Sonny began.

“I’ll talk to you later,” Jason told him. He looked at her. “Elizabeth and I have a few things to talk about.” His tone was almost empty, but a muscle was twitching in his cheek. She was in trouble.

She sniffed as she climbed into the SUV. He had some *nerve* being angry with her, when Robin was right—he’d tried the exact same thing only her plan had worked. And she’d tell him as much as soon

as they got home.

## **Morgan Penthouse: Living Room**

“Are you going to say anything?” Elizabeth asked. She drew off her coat and draped it over the back of the armchair. “Jason?”

He stood in front of the fireplace, staring straight ahead. He hadn’t spoken to her in the car, in the parking garage, or the elevator ride. When he still said nothing, Elizabeth started towards him. “Jason,” she said again.

This time he turned, but his face—it was unreadable. “Why did Baldwin let you go?” he asked, his tone even, even subdued. “Did you confess?”

“Yes.” Elizabeth twisted her fingers in front of her. “Not to the drugs—I told Mac before I started taping that I suspected Maxie had been involved but I didn’t want to put it on the record. But I told Scott I stole the file and that I destroyed it.” She hesitated. “I thought he might—he might turn away my confession, like he did to you. I thought he wanted Sonny more than he wanted me.”

Jason’s face was still set in that frustratingly blank expression. “And if he hadn’t?”

“Then I guess I would be cooling my heels in a jail cell.” Elizabeth sighed. “I know you’re angry with me—”

“I don’t—” He shook his head. “Angry isn’t the *word*.” He moved past her, toward the pool table. “Do you have any idea what you risked? You would have gone to jail, Elizabeth. For five, maybe more, years.”

“I know.” She followed him. “What about what *you* risked?” she challenged. “If Scott had taken you up on your confession, how long did you think he’d put you away for?”

“Doesn’t matter.” Jason shook his head swiftly. “It’s not the same.”

“He might have put you away for decades! *Decades*,” she repeated, her heart pounding. “The boys would have grown up without you. Is that what you were prepared for? To only see them once a month when I brought them to see you?”

“It doesn’t matter,” Jason said again. “*You* would have been with them—”

“Why isn’t what I did the same?” she cut in. “I wanted to protect you—”

“Because *I’m* the criminal!” he exploded finally, flattening his hand against his chest. “Not you! *I’m* the one who goes to jail! If you think I would have let Baldwin put you in a cell—”

“I committed a crime, too,” Elizabeth said softly. “Only I didn’t get away with mine.” She reached out to touch his arm but he slid away from her. “Jason, I couldn’t let you testify against Sonny.”

“I don’t—” Jason dipped his head. “I don’t know if I would have.”

“*Don’t* lie to me.” When he shook his head, she scowled. “You lied to me yesterday. You told me Diane felt optimistic, that she could make this go away, but that’s only because you were going to do it instead. Jesus, Jason, what did you think I would do when I found out?”

“I—” Jason looked away. “I don’t know. I hadn’t—I didn’t think that far ahead.”

“I would have been devastated.” She fisted her hands at her side. “I would have blamed myself. I would have *hated* myself for being the reason the boys didn’t have you, for being the reason everything we’ve built fell apart—”

“I would have been in jail for something *I* did,” he insisted. “Elizabeth, you’re only at risk because of me. Because of what I do—”

“What kind of life would we have if you were in jail for then next twenty-five years?” she cut in. “How could you think we’d survive—” Her throat closed, and she couldn’t continue. “Would you have divorced me?”

“I didn’t think that far ahead—” His eyes darted away. “Elizabeth—”

She closed her eyes, the tears building up behind her eyes. “Oh, God. You *would* have. You would have seen it as the right thing to do. You would have gone to jail for the rest of your natural life and divorced me.”

“He didn’t want my confession any more than he wanted yours, so why does it matter?” Jason asked. “Elizabeth, it’s not that I’m not glad you found a way out of this—”

“It *matters*,” she bit out. “Because I want to know what our future means to you, and if it means so little that you would have tossed it away—rather than me spending time in jail for a few years and moving past it—*you* wanted the option where you went away for decades and would have let me go.”

“No, that’s not—” He reached for her, but now she was the one to step back. “That’s not what I would—I wouldn’t want you to wait. It wouldn’t have been fair—”

“The legal troubles are over now.” She started to tug the rings from her finger, but her hands were slightly swollen from her pregnancy. “There’s no reason for any of this—do you think Scott Baldwin would even *care* if we got divorced—”

“Wait a second—” Jason’s hands closed over hers, preventing her from removing the rings. “I don’t want a divorce—Damn it, Elizabeth. *I’m* the one that’s supposed to be angry here—”

“Why?” Elizabeth retorted, yanking her hands back. “Because I stopped it myself? Because I fixed my *own* problems?” Her heart was pounding so fast, so loudly, she could almost hear it in her ears. “Do you think I was going to let Scott Baldwin *use* me to hurt you? To hurt your best friend? Why are *you* the only one who gets to risk their freedom? You would have walked away from me, from Cameron, from our child, so that you could be the one to save the day—”

“It wasn’t about saving the day!” He spread his hands at his sides, his face flushed with anger. “You destroyed that file for *me*! They came after you because of *me*—” He cut himself off and closed his eyes. “Elizabeth,” he said after a long moment. He opened his eyes and looked at her, his expression not quite so irritated. “The thought of being away from you and the boys—I *hated* it. All I want to do is come home to you. To be with Cameron, to see my son be born. But more than that, I wanted to make sure *you* could be with them.” He swallowed. “I love you. And I’m sorry, but I’m never going to want you hurt.”

Her vision dimmed for just a moment, and Elizabeth found it difficult to speak. “Could—” She cleared her throat. “Could you repeat that?”

His eyes were soft as his hand came up to tuck her hair behind her ears. “I love you. I’m sorry for not trusting you, for going to see Baldwin without telling you. I *had* to try.”

“I couldn’t let you turn against Sonny,” she whispered, as a tear slid down her cheek. “Not for something I did. It would have *poisoned* us. You would have looked at me one day, and saw everything you sacrificed for me, and you would have resented me—” She raised her hand, pressed her fingers to his lips when he opened his mouth. “Don’t say you wouldn’t have. I *couldn’t* risk it. I love you, too, and I just—I couldn’t bear losing you.”

Some of the tension bled from his shoulders as he exhaled slowly. He took her hand in his, kissed her fingers before drawing her against him. “This is our life,” Jason told her, “and we’re in this together. No more divide and conquer. I love you,” he repeated. “And I love Cameron and this baby. You just—you risked it all today. I—” He shook his head. “I was terrified, standing in the squad room, afraid Baldwin would bring you out in cuffs.”

“I’m sorry.” Elizabeth could feel his breath against her temple. “But *I* was terrified, too. When Diane told me you’d offered yourself, when I realized you were prepared to sacrifice Sonny, I could barely breathe.”

He looked down at her hand and straightened her rings. “I don’t want a divorce,” Jason told her, raising his eyes to meet hers. “Not today, tomorrow, next year. Not ever. I want our family.”

She laughed a little as he kissed her, his taste mingling with the salt in her tears. “Well…” Elizabeth murmured when he released her. “I guess Sonny knew what he was doing when he planned our wedding. Because, other than today, and I’m sure the births of my children—that was the best day of my life.” She slid her fingers through his hair. “Do you remember Robin’s reading that day?”

“Something about finding the right wrong person?” Jason asked, with a touch of amusement in his eyes. “Yeah. Why?”

“I didn’t know what I was looking for,” she continued. “Until everything in the life I thought I wanted fell apart. And I came to you. And you opened the door to me.” She tightened her arms around his neck. “I wouldn’t change a single moment.”

“Neither would I.” He dipped his head and kissed her again. “How much time do we have before we

have to pick Cameron up from Carly's?" he murmured against her lips.

"Oh..." Elizabeth smiled and tilted her head. "I think there's enough time for that."

# Epilogue

*When you love someone  
Your heartbeat beats so loud  
When you love someone  
Your feet can't feel the ground  
- Love Someone, Jason Mraz*

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*Wednesday, May 8, 2007*

## **General Hospital: Elizabeth's Room**

“He’s perfect,” Elizabeth murmured as she leaned down to kiss her newborn son’s head again. “Isn’t he the most beautiful baby you’ve ever seen?” She looked at Jason, her eyes dazzled.

He looked a bit like Edward—wrinkly and angry, his red face screwed up in a wail as their son seemed to protest the whole concept of childbirth. Jason didn’t think he could love anyone more.

Except Elizabeth, who looked exhausted from hours of labor, her eyes red, her skin still shining from the sweat and exertion. Somehow, she still looked as beautiful as she had the day he married her. Maybe even more.

“Is Carly on her way with Cameron?” Elizabeth asked, drawing his attention back to the present. “I want him to meet his new brother.”

Jason brushed a kiss on his son’s bald head. “She was picking the boys up from school and bringing them right over.” He perched on the edge of the bed. “I can’t believe he’s finally here.”

“I can’t believe how far we’ve come,” she murmured. She adjusted the baby slightly. “A year ago, we were at the PCPD, handcuffed together and waiting for our lawyers. And now, today...” She loosened one of her hands and reached for him. He rubbed his hands over her rings, a familiar habit he’d picked up in the last six months.

“Today, we have our son.” Jason leaned forward and kissed her. “Do you want to finish filling out the paperwork?”

“What’s left?” Elizabeth asked as he drew back and reached for the clipboard. “Do I have to sign?”

“You do,” Jason confirmed, picking up the pen. “Just his name and ours.”

She frowned. “But we decided on his name months ago. Did you change your mind?”

“No.” Jason scrawled in his signature and handed her the pen. She awkwardly added hers. “I just wanted to make sure *you* didn’t change your mind. It took us three months to decide—”

“Just because I changed my mind six times before we settled doesn’t mean I’m fickle. It’s his name.” Elizabeth sniffed and looked at their son. “Daddy thinks I’m flighty. I just wanted to make sure we didn’t saddle you with a name you’ll hate for the rest of your life.”

“I think we’re safe,” Jason said dryly as he wrote in their choice. Jacob Martin Morgan. “There, done.”

“It’s a good name,” Elizabeth said. “Jake. I can’t believe I didn’t think of it before or that we went through so many choices. Kevin, Nathan. David. I don’t like any of those names now.”

She’d loved them each for nearly a week, but once she’d settled on Jake in March, she seemed to feel good about it. Jason didn’t really care one way or another. It was just a name. People didn’t rise or fall based on their names.

She looked at him, her eyes sparkling. “Jason, how long do you want wait before we try for a girl?”

He blinked, then laughed because of course she was kidding. They’d just gotten through this pregnancy. They still had a newborn to contend with. She couldn’t possibly be planning more children already.

But then Elizabeth smiled at him, and Jason began to think a year wouldn’t be too long. Cameron wanted a little sister, after all.

“I love you,” he told her, kissing her again. “Let’s make sure Cameron likes this one before we bring home another baby.”

“I love you, too.” She sighed happily, looking back at their son. She looked back at him. “Do you think life could get better than this?”

“I don’t see how,” Jason replied, smoothing her hair back. “But I guess we could try.”

Elizabeth laughed at him. “Yeah, I guess we can try. Though, what’s better than perfect?”

**THE END**