

-SYLVIA-

I had no idea that my going over to Lori's would be the worst mistake of my life. The Paramedic lady leads me into my room and asks me to sit on my bed. I grab for a stuffed horse of mine, and grasp it under my shoulder, and she pulls up a chair to ask me some questions.

“Where were you when she called, Sylvia?”

“I was at my friend Lori's”

From the family room I hear her shout at the other paramedics to stay away. The two men in the living room continue to shout at each other.

“We need to move this table out of the way.”

“Can we get a hoist, or a gurney Up here?”

“We'll still have to lift her, you know.”

The girl paramedic in my room with the chopped-off brown hair and glasses gets up and shuts the door. She returns again and asks me some more questions.

“She is a smoker, correct?”

“Yes.”

“About how much would you say she smokes?”

“About a carton every week.”

“How has she been receiving her cigarettes?”

“I buy them for her. For about a year now.”

“You say it's about a carton every week?”

“Yeah. About that.” I find myself hugging my stupid stuffed animal closer. I feel like a little girl half my age. I feel a bit more empty and more scared with each question she thinks to ask.

“Does your mother drink alcohol?”

“No. Not for a long time.”

“Has she complained about pains?”

“Yes. Sometimes. Mainly in her back.”

“She hasn't developed any bed sores has she?”

“Not that I know.”

She writes down the details, as I give them.

“How does she treat the pain?”

“I get her Pain-killers.”

“Aspirin, Ibuprofen?”

“Whatever. Both of those. Tylenol.”

“Is your mother bedridden to the couch?”

“Well...She hasn't been out in a while, I can say that.”

“How long has your mother been in this apartment?”

“I...Uh...”

I can't even begin to remember when this all started. I know it's been at least a year.

“Quite a long time. She just said her foot hurt her too much, and then that she was way to sick. I was only taking care of her.”

“What about her foot? It is a previous injury?”

“Yeah, from about a year and a half ago. She had to leave work because of it.”

“And when it got better, did she go back to work?”

“Well...” I say “...Not for long. It started bothering her again. Or at least she said so.”

“Can she put weight on that foot?”

“Yes. She should be able to.”

There is still more screaming from the two men in the living room. My mother is still trying to

keep them back. I know she is. I know it without even looking.

“Before the incident did she have any major health complaints? Anything out of the ordinary?”

“She said there was some numbness that came and went in her leg. Not the one with the broken foot, though, the other one.”

“Numbness?”

“Yeah, that came and went, and she had to shake it out once in a while. She said it was like pins and needles, and a little painful.”

“Was her leg swollen at all?”

“I didn't check.”

She scribbles the information down, shaking her head a bit.

“Let's review what happened. You were at your friends house when you got a call. That was when?”

“It was about noon, so about an hour ago. Mom said she was having trouble breathing. I left Lori's house and got here as soon as I could. She was saying that it hurt to breathe in and that her chest was awfully painful and tight.”

“Did she report any numbness, in either of her arms or any stinging pain in the chest?”

“No. Not that I know of, just that it hurts to breathe.”

“What has your mother been eating while she was here?”

“TV dinners, instant stuff. I keep stocks of them in the fridge.”

Mother starts calling for me. She's scared. She's scared of them, even though they are only trying to help.

“I think She's going into shock. She needs to get in the ambulance.”

“Anisette! Get in here! We're moving her now!”

She looks at the door, then back at me.

“Sylvia, I have to go help them and I want you to stay here, for now.” She gets up in a hurry to move to the living room.

“She's going to be alright, isn't she?” I ask, desperately hoping against cold, cresting waves of doubt.

“Sylvia, we are probably looking at a heart-attack or a pulmonary embolism; probably that. Either way this is severe.”

“Oh, God.” I breathe short.

“We'll be giving her heparin, which should thin the clot, but we have to get her out of here if she's going to have a fighting chance.”

She leaves, and now I'm alone. The paramedics in the other room start talking like they have the situation handled. I can't hear mother any more. I don't want to stay here. I can't go in there. I can't leave. I have no idea. What am I going to do?

If mom dies, that's it. That's all. I'll have no-one else, and nothing else to do.

“Oh, fuck me.” I say and roll onto my side on the bed, still clutching the stuffed horse between my tense, and working fingers.

God, if you are up there, please help me. I don't know what to do.

My cell-phone rings in. I have a text message from Loopy.

“Happy thanksgiving, Sylvia! You're a millionaire!”

-DAVE-

So this is Sylvias' mother? No wonder she never let me inside. The bellows of her breather press up and down, with slow ease. This is a monster. Her hair is long, and grungy. Her skin is patched with grime and blemishes. She's the fattest thing I've ever seen. Part of me wants her to just die.

"You've been taking care of her in this condition, Sylvia?"

Sylvia sits in her plastic chair as monitors and instruments beep and churn around us.

"How long has she been out?"

Sylvia doesn't move. Doesn't acknowledge. She won't talk to me. When I think about it, I'm taking a risk just being here. The car in the hospital lot, a lot loaded with security cameras, that car is hot. I should really go right now. I look over my shoulder to the fat mess in a hospital gown that once was a functional human being. I have to look away.

"What are you going to do, Sylvia?"

"Will we have enough to pay for her to get better?"

"Yes. We have to tie the money up in investments or derivatives for a little while, but paying for this will be the least of your worries."

"I need the money now."

"No, you don't. We're going to take care of it."

"Are you sure we'll have enough?"

I get up, and then kneel real close to her.

"Sylvia, now that job is done, and you're worth 2.7 million dollars."

"In stolen goods"

I put my hand on her knee.

"All your mom has to do is hold out for a few weeks." I look over, again, at the sickly woman. "Trust me, Sylvia. When she makes it on to her feet, you're going to be able

to get her right back into the swing of things. Everything will be alright.”

She puts her hand over mine.

“I think we should pray.”

“Pray?” I ask, suprised

“You're the religious one, don't you think it will help?”

“Well, do you?”

“I don't know. I just think that it's the only thing I haven't done yet.”

I flip over my hand to accept hers and move it up to my closed eyes.

“Dear God..”

God help us.

-ARTHUR-

"Damn, Tough break." I tell Dave on the phone.

"Do you mind? Sylvia's mom just died."

"I know. That's what I meant."

"Tough break? That's the most insensitive thing I've ever heard."

"Well, what should I have said, Dave? Oh, that's too bad. I feel so sad?"

"Yeah. Yeah, asshole, yeah." He barks back at me

"OK, then I'm sorry it happened. I didn't know. I'm sad."

"Just shut up, Arthur." He breathes, looking for words. I just want to get off the phone.

"How's Sylvia taking it?"

"I can't do anything for her, Arthur, She's cried for a while, and now it's like she's just not even there. We were at the bedside, she got hungry and I talked her into leaving the hospital for a bit and get some food and air. We got back, and Sylvia's mom had taken a dive. Less than an hour, and she was gone."

I take a deep breath and look up through the windshield of my Audi. Sitting back in the seat I'm just thinking 'what to do, what do do?'

"Arthur, I think you should come and see her. That would really help out."

"Me?" I ask.

"Yes. She really does care about you and I know that it's in a goofy teenage kind of way-but still-I know you can help."

I pick up the remote activator and turn the key. The light on the remote flashes red.

There are security cameras at the hospital. Those can record where I've been. Could be a great alibi.

"I'll be right over. I just have to take care of one thing."

"OK, then, Arthur. See you soon."

He hangs up. I hang up. I hold up the remote, and hit the button. The indicator light flashes over to green.

It's 10:40 on thanksgiving day. Today Sylvia lost her mother. Today I ruined my father. I look over the warehouses from the hill, where I am parked. The warehouse is not 100 yards away from where I am right now. I sit there. My gaze locked on the rooftops of the buildings.

"Come on. Come on. Come on."

It's three minutes, and then I see smoke. It's pouring out of Marvin Curosa's warehouse. I look around, and I'm all alone here watching the fire start up. No time to think. I start up my car, and drive off the hill, down through the streets and onto the highway. I put on some Rush, and everything is perfect. Somewhere behind me a fire is growing in size and intensity. The fire I made for myself. I cruise over a bridge and toss the remote activator into the river below. I can't see the smoke rising behind me, but I trust it to burn at four-alarm strength.

Next week Curosa is going to file a claim so big that it will be impossible for the tier one capitol of the DeLobb insurance company to cover the damage.

Send questions, Comments, thoughts to

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