

Chapter 33

I break tradition

Sometimes my tries are outside the lines

We've been conditioned to not make mistakes

But I can't live that way

Staring at the blank page before you

Open up the dirty window

Let the sun illuminate the words that you could not find

- Unwritten, Natasha Bedingfield

Monday, May 15, 2006

General Hospital: Nurse's Station

Though Elizabeth Spencer didn't hear the whispers for herself, she saw enough facial expressions and heard conversations that stopped abruptly that she could almost predict their content.

There goes that slut. She left her husband, did you hear? A cop is dead because she can't keep her legs closed. And her husband nearly lost the ability to walk because she's addicted to danger—

Her grandmother had suggested she call in sick. Emily had offered to call in a favor with her family for vacation time.

But Elizabeth had refused, insisting on returning to work for her next scheduled shift — the day after she'd reported Lucky to the commissioner for a suspected drug addiction and filed charges of physical abuse.

She kept her head held high as she walked the gauntlet of curious nurses, doctors, orderlys, and other hospital employees between the locker room and the nurse's station where she logged into the computer to find her rounds for the day.

Please let it be a scheduled surgery. She was supposed to start observing this week after more than two months of training as a surgical nurse, and she wanted nothing more than to be in a quiet room for hours at a time with a small group of people hand-picked by the hospital's new hotshot neurosurgeon, Patrick Drake, who just happened to be one of Elizabeth's best friends.

One of the few people who had suspected what was going on in her marriage but had said nothing because of the privilege that existed between doctor and patient, though his girlfriend had told Elizabeth Patrick had agonized over it, wanting to say more. If they were in surgery, Elizabeth wouldn't have to put up with anything

anyone said to her—

But unfortunately, there was no surgery scheduled today. Not for her. She was on post-op rounds and insurance paperwork, just like she had been for the last two months. She wrinkled her nose, then went to pull the patient charts so she could create a stack.

A pair of student nurses stepped up into the hub. One, a dark-haired girl Elizabeth remembered vaguely from working on a different floor, gestured at the computer. "Are you finished?"

"Yes," Elizabeth said, stepping aside. She reached for a pen to begin her work and took the stack over to the waiting area. Not far enough away to avoid the whispers or not to notice the stares from the nurses.

"Can't believe she bothered to show up."

"Shhh, Jo, she'll hear—"

"I don't care, Leyla. If I got a cop shot because I was standing too close to a gangster, I wouldn't have the nerve. I don't care how good Jason Morgan looks in tight jeans. They're nasty for what they did—"

"We don't know everything—"

"I know enough," Jo said with a snort. "She was married. He was engaged. His fiancée went after her right here in the hospital. Don't you remember?"

"I don't know."

"She's trash, and if he were anyone other than the chief of staff's son, she'd have been fired—"

Elizabeth got to her feet, leaving the charts on the table. She returned to the hub, pleased to find that Jo and Leyla's whispered conversation halted. Just like the other three or four conversations she'd heard that day.

"Did you want something?" Jo asked flatly.

"The pen doesn't work." Elizabeth reached for a new one. "By the way, that cop? He was shot because my husband's drug dealer was sending a warning shot. Turns out heroin addicts aren't very good at paying their bills."

Jo's mouth dropped. "Excuse me?" she sputtered.

"He was aiming at me, of course," Elizabeth continued, checking the pen by scribbling on her palm. "So when you tell the story again, you can get it right. Jason Morgan, his nephew, and my son nearly died because they were standing too close to me. And I never did get back the television Lucky pawned to pay off his dealer after the carnival." She arched a brow. "Questions? You each get one before I stop finding this amusing."

Leyla—one of Nadine's friends, Elizabeth remembered now—darted a panicked look at Jo before clearing her throat. "And the cop?"

"Jesse came over to yell at me for being a slut and a whore. Nothing I could do about that."

"Well, he wasn't wrong, was he?" Jo asked, snottily. "You are a slut *and* a whore. Everyone knows it."

"Everyone knows? Really? Did I miss the memo?" Elizabeth tipped his head. "That's a shame. I hope it had some sort of definition for slut and whore. I hope it doesn't include a woman who leaves someone who shoves her into walls and leaves bruises on her arms."

"You—" Jo closed her mouth. "I didn't—"

"And here's a freebie for you." Elizabeth leaned in, lowered her voice, and almost laughed when both nurses leaned towards her. "Jason? His ass looks even better out of jeans."

She took her pen and went back to her paperwork. That probably hadn't helped her cause at all, Elizabeth thought as a tinge of regret sank in. It wasn't like anyone would believe her about the abuse. About the drugs. About the reason for the shooting on Saturday. But she knew they'd believe her about Jason, and that would be what spread like wildfire.

But at least she'd attempted to set the record straight. It wasn't her fault no one would believe her.

Even though everyone word of it had been true.

People always believed what they wanted to, and a sleazy affair between a cop's wife and the local mobster was better gossip than an abused wife and a drug addiction. Though the affair—she taped her pen against the form—the affair wasn't a lie. Not entirely.

It just hadn't been sleazy.

Lucky & Elizabeth's Apartment: Living Room

Lucky Spencer looked around the room, trying to focus. Something was missing. Wasn't it? He stumbled into the bedroom, frowning at the stripped down toddler bedroom and empty shelves where toys had once been stacked.

It was all gone.

He lunged for the dresser, dragging out drawers that were so hollow and light that the force of his pull broke them. He fell back, his head spinning. He pressed his cheek to the threadbare carpet, blinking at the small pieces of plastic nearby. He forced himself up and picked up a piece of red — a leg piece —

What—

How did one of Cameron's toys end up in pieces?

Why couldn't he remember? He dropped it back to the carpet, then scrubbed his hands over his face. The last thing he remembered was...arguing with Elizabeth...His stomach rolled as flashes bombarded him—

Flying into a wall—knocking over the toys—

He'd done this. He'd destroyed Cameron's toys. He'd hurt Elizabeth. Again. What day was it? How long had it been?

There was a knock on the door, a brisk but insistent one. Lucky lurched to his feet and stumbled towards the door. Maybe it was Elizabeth, back to give him another chance—their love was permanent, a lock—

But it wasn't his wife that stood at the door, it was his boss. Commissioner Mac Scorpio who just glared at him, then closed his eyes, muttering something Lucky didn't quite catch.

"Where the hell have you been?" Mac demanded, his voice like sharp ice picks digging into Lucky's brain. "I've had a guy sitting on this place since Sunday—"

"Sunday?" Lucky shook his head. "No—no—it's—" He cleared his throat. "It's...what day is it?"

"Damn it." Mac gripped Lucky by the forearm and shoved him over towards the sofa. Lucky fell down, still trying to understand. "Robinson said you stumbled in

here about an hour ago. No one has seen you since you banged on Audrey Hardy's door yesterday afternoon."

Lucky licked his cracked and dry lips. "Audrey—why I was I—"

Mac was walking around the apartment, looking in the the kitchen, in the bedroom — "You were trying to get to Elizabeth."

"That's—that's where she is?" Lucky sprang to his feet. "I have to see her—"

"Not a chance in hell, Spencer." Mac shoved him back. "She's pressing charges against you for assault and Morgan's lawyers are already filing papers for separation and a TRO."

"TRO—" Lucky hissed. The letters filtered through the fog. Temporary Restraining Order. "He can't keep me from my wife!"

"No, but he can pay for the lawyers who damn will see it done. Elizabeth is accusing you of hitting her. Of being high on drugs—" Mac scowled. "I can see at least the second part is true. What the hell were you thinking?"

"I don't know," Lucky said dully. Elizabeth had left him again. She was telling people he'd hurt her. He hadn't—he hadn't really meant to. It was an accident. "I didn't—" He cleared his throat. "I didn't hit her."

"Spencer—"

"I—she's lying. I—I was angry," Lucky said slowly. "She—she never stopped having the affair." He looked at Mac now as it became more clear. As the last few days came back to him. "She's been screwing him the whole time. I went to therapy just like she wanted me to. She made me look stupid. I just—I confronted her. I told her it had to stop—and she—" He remembered now. "She pushed me, and I pushed her back. She just—she hit the wall—I shouldn't have—"

"Okay. Okay—" Mac exhaled slowly. "I'll investigate the charges, but I don't know if the DA will even take it. Not with the Morgan connection."

Lucky nodded. "Good—"

"But the drugs, Spencer. I can't overlook those. You need to get yourself cleaned up. You need to accept that Elizabeth is gone and she's not coming back. She's going to get the temporary TRO. Ninety days."

Lucky grimaced. "She's ruined my career again," he muttered. "Goddamn it."

"You go to rehab," Mac told him. "You get clean, you get back on the job, and you stay the hell away from her for ninety days, the judge won't make it permanent. But you get yourself checked in, you hear me?"

"I—"

"Look—" Mac hesitated. "You're not the first cop to get hooked on pills. You've spent most of the last year injured, and I've seen it happen to others. And you're also not the first guy to end up with anger problems. You go to rehab, you go to therapy—you'll still end up on desk duty, but this isn't the end. Lots of guys make it on desk duty."

He paused. "Elizabeth says it was more than a push. Look at me, Spencer." Lucky focused on his boss, squinting at him. "I've known her a long time. She's not someone who lies. Not about this. I know how angry an affair can make you. I went through it with Felicia. I know her leaving you for a guy like Morgan can eat at you — did you put your hands on her first? Ever? Did you hit her?"

"No." Lucky looked at Mac. "No, I never hit her. She's trying to make me look like the bad guy. I wouldn't hit her. You're right. I let my anger get the best of me, and I shouldn't have pushed her. She pushed me first, but she's smaller than me. Weaker." He cleared his throat, reassured himself. He wasn't lying. He'd never, not once, hit Elizabeth. He'd never used his fists.

"Okay." Mac's shoulders eased. "Okay. I'll make some calls. I'll find you a program. We'll get you sorted, Spencer. I promise."

Greystone: Living Room

"Where did you leave things with Mateo?" Jason Morgan said as soon as Max closed the doors behind him. Across the room, Sonny Corinthos paused in the act of pouring himself a bourbon.

"Hello. How are you?" Sonny set the bourbon down. "Nice weather we're having here—"

Jason scowled. "You're not serious are you? His nephew tried to kill Elizabeth forty-eight hours ago—"

Sonny sighed. "I told you, I'd handle it. I talked to Mateo, and he basically repeated what we talked about Sunday morning. If we want to take out Santiago, we're welcome to do it, but he's not going to be the one to do in his own nephew."

Jason grimaced, shoved his hands in his pockets. "That's not good enough—"

"No. I told him that. It was one thing when we thought it was the idiots making an attempt on you with the kids around," Sonny continued. "That's suicide on its own, but aiming for a cop's wife and killing a cop instead? That's asking the PCPD to roll into Courtland Street and dismantle everything. Hell, I'd slip them the information they need if I thought it suited us. But the cops start digging into the Escobars, one of them will take a deal and next thing you know, we're in the line of fire." He sipped the bourbon. "So we got two choices — take out Santiago and hope he's just a rogue dickhead, or sit back and see if it's worse than we thought."

"Sonny, we've known for months that the Escobars are crawling out of Courtland Street. They've already hit Kelly's, and Luke said they've been sniffing around him for protection." Jason shook his head. "Either Matteo is testing us or his nephew is looking to take the reins. Either way, it's not good to let it sit."

"Until things calm down from the carnival," Sonny said, "that's exactly what we're going to do. The cops are all over all of us. I don't like it either, Jason, so don't look at me that way. That shooter was aiming for Elizabeth. We're damn lucky she got grazed and the kids came out unscathed."

Jason folded his arms. "Elizabeth almost died the last time you wanted to sit back and wait," he reminded him. "Manny Ruiz could have had her out of the country if he hadn't been crazy enough to grab Lucky the same time and call me." Though it made sense to Jason now — Manny had seen the bruises and leapt to the right conclusion that they'd been created by Lucky, and in a bizarre way, had punished Lucky for hurting Elizabeth. Psychopaths never did the expected. Jason had seen the same bruise on her face and had immediately swallowed a story about tripping on a rug.

He'd never forgive himself for not noticing, for not *listening* when she'd hinted at how bad Lucky's anger had become. She was out of it now, but it wouldn't be enough. Lucky Spencer had better stay the hell away from Jason or he'd make sure the asshole stopped breathing—

Sonny scowled. "Look, I made it clear to Mateo that Elizabeth is off limits. Even if she was still a cop's wife, going after your customer's family to get the bills paid is going to create more trouble than anyone needs right now."

Jason bit back a response to that. All Sonny seemed to care about these days was avoiding trouble. It wasn't like Jason wanted to go looking for violence, but they'd let the Escobars get away with way too much over the last few months, distracted by internal issues and Manny Ruiz.

But it was Sonny's show, and Jason wasn't going against him on this. Not outright. But he'd be keeping his own eye on Santiago Escobar. Eventually the little shit would mess up and Jason would be there to take care of it.

Kelly's: Courtyard

Elizabeth managed to get through the rest of her shift, even though the whispers and stares only seemed to get worse. She really should have just kept her mouth shut, she thought as she headed for the entrance of the diner. The momentary satisfaction hadn't really been worth it—

But the shift was over, and she'd find a way to battle through the next day. She'd seen this cycle over and over again in the two years since she'd started working at the hospital. If she kept her head down and her life quiet, then it would eventually blow over. Someone would get caught stealing from the drug closet or in the supply closet, and they'd forget her.

Her hand was on the handle, nearly ready to tug it open, when she heard a voice behind her. Elizabeth sighed, then turned just as her father-in-law, Luke Spencer, ambled into the courtyard from the parking lot. "Hey, Luke."

"Hey, darlin'. You've, uh, been avoiding my calls." But he smiled as he said it, and she was relieved not to see any judgment. "You got a minute?"

She checked her watch. "A few. I'm early picking up dinner." She was going to have a quiet night at home with Cameron and Jason — Gram was going out with friends. She desperately wanted some normalcy, to just enjoy her son and whatever was happening with Jason.

But Luke had done a lot to support her, so he was at least owed an explanation for this weekend, and a warning about Lucky and the drugs. She didn't think Mac planned to take her situation all that seriously, and someone had to do something about it.

She was just done being that someone.

She sat at the table, and Luke sat across from her. "I know it feels like it all went crazy, but—" She focused on him. "Luke, Lucky's abusing drugs."

The smile faded from Luke's face. "What are you talking about?"

"I don't really know all the details—I'm not even the one who figured it out." She bit her lip. "He's been on pain meds off and on since last year. When he was shot and in the hospital. Then the train accident, the car accident, then Manny—he just never

got off them this time. Patrick cut him off, so Lucky used contacts on the street."

"Christ."

"I didn't see it. I was so—" Elizabeth rubbed her wrist. "I knew he was angry. I knew he wasn't okay. But we couldn't really talk. And—" She closed her eyes. "Things were really crazy. Manny was always lurking, and Sonny and Emily just blew everything up."

"And there was your guilt," Luke said gently. "Over whatever happened with Morgan. Am I right?"

Tears stung her eyes. "Yes. We—we just had—we had conversations we shouldn't have. And just once—before Lucky pushed me that first time. We kissed. But that's it, Luke. And I didn't—"

"Honey, you owe me zero explanations for any of that. I know how a marriage goes rotten from the inside out. You look around one day and it's collapsed, but you're don't even remember seeing the cracks. I'm no saint, sweetheart." He patted her hand. "Lucky used contacts. How bad is it?"

"Bad," Elizabeth whispered. "Luke, the shooting at the carnival, it wasn't about Jesse. It was me. Jason took me to the apartment on Sunday morning to pack some things, and my jewelry was missing. Apparently, he told me later, the TV was gone, too. It's what made Jason look into it." She tucked her hair behind her ear. "Um, he might know more if you wanted to ask, I know he didn't say everything. But the dealer Lucky used — Lucky wasn't paying him, so the carnival—"

"Warning shot," Luke said dully. He scrubbed a hand down his face. "They were aiming for you, weren't they?"

"That's what Jason said. Um, Lucky pawned everything to make good, but Luke — it's not just pain meds he's buying. Jason said Lucky's been buying heroin."

Luke dipped his head, took a deep breath. "Okay. Okay. That's—that's not good. But it's early. We can—" His head snapped up. "You left him before the carnival. Why?"

"Luke—"

"He put his hands on you again? I told him if he did it again, I'd tear his damn head off—"

"I broke my promises, too," Elizabeth said gently. "I told him I wouldn't see or talk

to Jason. I didn't mean to, but we ran into each other on the docks, and I didn't walk away—"

"I don't care if you staged an orgy in front of him, he doesn't put his hands on you—" Luke wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "Damn it. Damn it. He was supposed to be better than me. He was once, wasn't he?" He looked met, his blue eyes pleading. "He was something special. It wasn't wrong of me to want that back, was it?"

"No." Elizabeth reached for his hand. "No, Luke. It wasn't. He was so good to me once, and we both wanted to believe we could find him again. Maybe he's still in there, I don't know. I just know that I can't keep looking. It's killing me."

"No, no. You're out of it now. You take your boy, and you run. You run the way I wish like hell my mother would have." Luke closed his eyes, took a deep breath. "You're okay, I mean? Did he hurt you?"

"Scared me. But no, no marks. Not like last time." Elizabeth's heart broke for him, for the father who had just tried to do right by his son. "I'm so sorry, Luke. For all of us."

"I know, kid. I know. Thank you for sitting with me. For taking the time. For trying so damn hard. You always did, you know? Somewhere inside, our Lucky, the boy we knew—he'd be telling you to run. You don't have anything else to prove to me. Or him. Or yourself. You did everything you could, Elizabeth. More than I ever had a right to ask of you."

"I shouldn't have gone back," Elizabeth said. "I'm glad I did in some ways because now I have no regrets. I have no what ifs. But I made things worse. I wish I could have learned that lesson another way."

"That's life, darlin'." Luke got to his feet. "I'll take it from here. You look that kid of yours. He's just a sweet little boy. I'm going to—" He closed his eyes. "I'll miss the hell out of him."

"He'll still be at Bobbie's all the time," Elizabeth said gently. "He loves you, too, Luke. You stop by anytime to see him, okay?"

"Thanks." He kissed her forehead. "Go get your dinner. I got work to do."

Hardy House: Living Room

Elizabeth stepped off the bottom step, the white monitor in her hand. "He always falls sleep the second time through *Spiderman*," she reminded Jason as she went

over to sit next to him on the sofa. She snuggled close to him, sighing as his arm closed around her shoulder. "I can recite that movie in *my* sleep."

He laughed and reached for her hand, drawing it in his lap, lacing their fingers together. "It's not a bad movie."

"No, it wasn't the first eighteen times I saw it. The last one thousand times, it starts to wear on you. But it makes him happy." She closed her eyes, and just let herself enjoy the moment. The warmth and safety she felt right now.

She didn't exactly know what they had right now — was a little scared to put a label on it. The last thing Elizabeth wanted to do was rush into another relationship. She'd rushed into marriage with Lucky, she could see that now. Barely a few months after beginning to date again, he'd proposed and she'd accepted. They'd fought so much when she'd tried to be a surrogate—

There had been red flags from the beginning, Elizabeth could see it now, but she'd so wanted a family for her little boy, and when things had been good with Lucky, they'd been really good. She'd trusted the sweet more than she'd noticed the dark.

It would be different this time, she promised herself. Yes, she and Jason had already skipped a few stages. They'd said the L word and had slept together on Saturday, but she'd already taken a step back. She hoped he'd be patient.

And she hoped she'd know when it was right to move forward, and not just her impatience to get to the happy ending. This time, she really wanted to enjoy the journey.

"You seemed a bit sad earlier," Jason said. "Was work okay?"

"It sucked. But that's not why." Elizabeth leaned up, twisting on the sofa so that she faced him. "I ran into Luke at Kelly's. I'd been avoiding his calls. He knew I'd left, but not the details."

Jason tensed. "He didn't try to change your mind, did he? Emily told me what he did the last time—"

"No. And even if he did, there's no going back. I like where I am. Where I want to go." She took the hand he'd clenched into a fist, holding it between both of her own. "But he needed to know about the drugs. And he realized on his own that I'd left before I found out about the drugs. So he knew Lucky..." She paused. It was still so hard to say. Especially to Jason. "He knew Lucky had gotten violent again."

"Again—" Jason scowled. "He knew the last time?"

"Yes. And if it happened again. Luke knew I was leaving. I know there are reasons I'm not sorry I went back. I needed to understand, I think, that it wasn't just Lucky's injuries. It wasn't just you and me, or Manny, or the situation. I needed to know that it was a deeper problem than that. Lucky and I were always going to end up here. Somehow, someday. He doesn't love me. Not who I am today. And I don't love him. And we were destroying each other by looking for who we used to be."

Jason's shoulders seemed to relax slightly. "I'm sorry. That you had to go through it at all. You deserved so much more."

"I'm learning to believe that. And Lucky—he doesn't deserve to be an obligation. That's all he was at the end." Elizabeth sighed. "But it was hard to tell Luke about the drugs. He might have questions for you. I hope you'll tell him what he needs to know."

"I will, but—"

"I want to be done with Lucky. I will be as soon as the lawyer Justus recommended can get the divorce petition together. I don't want anything from him — just his signature on the dotted line. I want my life back, and I want my little boy to be surrounded by love and kindness." She paused. "But Lucky matters to be people I care about. To Bobbie and Luke. I know you're angry that Luke asked me to stay. But I said yes. I let myself be convinced, Jason. That's not entirely his fault. I let myself think that the boy I loved so much could be saved. It was arrogance that sent me back. Arrogance that I could be enough to save him from himself. I can't save Lucky, but that doesn't mean I don't hope someone else will some day. Or that he finds a way to save himself. Because the boy I loved deserves it. It just doesn't have to be me."

She stopped, then smiled nervously. "Sorry. I know Lucky is the last person you want to talk about."

"I want to spend time with you," Jason told her gently. "And I know that everything you've been through doesn't disappear overnight because I told you I loved you."

"I love you, too." She leaned forward, brushed her mouth against his. "And I hope you'll still love me when the new rumors start flying because these ones are my fault."

Jason frowned, tipped his head, his thumb against her chin. "What rumors?"

"Listen, if you hear anything about your ass, jeans, or the lack of them, just know that I was really ticked off."

"Wait, what?"