

Chapter 2

*Go ahead as you waste your days with thinking
When you fall, everyone stands
Another day, and you've had your fill of sinking
With the life held in your
Hands are shaking cold
These hands are meant to hold*
- Move Along, All-American Rejects

Monday, September 29, 2008

General Hospital: Emergency Room

Elizabeth craned her neck to peer over a pair of paramedics at the check in desk, then sighed in relief, having found her target. She had a lot to do today before she had to leave for the airport, and having to page Patrick would eat up some of those valuable minutes.

She tugged on his sleeve. "Hey! Do you have a minute?"

"Hey." He turned away from a nurse, gestured over to the waiting area. "Aren't you supposed to be on your way to Italy by now?"

"Not until tonight. Our plane is taking off at six." Elizabeth reached into her purse, drew out an index card. "I wanted to bring you the flight information and hotel we're staying at—"

Patrick frowned even as he accepted it. "Why?"

"Because you're the only one I told about..." She glanced around. "About who's going with me. I'm not telling Lucky. He knows he's not supposed to contact me about the boys unless it's an emergency." She made a face. "Otherwise he calls for me every snuffle and sneeze."

"Yeah, he's a terrible father. I've been studying them over the last year," Patrick told her when Elizabeth raised her eyebrows. "I'm going to be one in a couple of months, so I figured it was important to know what makes a good one. Lucky doesn't realize he's supposed to be parenting the kids when you're not in the room, so he treats it like babysitting."

"That is..." she pursed her lips. "Accurate. But not my point. Lucky's a cop. He doesn't need to know where Jason is when he's not in town. So—"

"Look at you, my little mob moll." Patrick pinched her cheek, and she smacked his hand away. "Okay, so I got your flight info—" He paused. "Wait, you said you were taking off at six? You gotta be at the airport by at least three or four, right?"

"For international flights, yeah. I have a few things to do at home, then I'm going to drop the boys—"

"Sonny and Kate are getting married this afternoon. Maxie was complaining about Jason refusing to go to fittings," Patrick said. "Don't tell me he's flying separately? He really sucks—"

"So much for discretion," Elizabeth muttered, but there was no one listening. "Listen. We're flying together, but he's got that clearance thing. It takes him five minutes to get from the parking lot to the gate—"

"So he's attending his best friend's wedding without you," Patrick said slowly, "and then going to the airport. Instead of getting you this clearance thing so you can go with him. Yeah, this is great. You picked a winner—"

"Patrick."

"What? What? Where does it say in the contract that support means I can't criticize?" Patrick demanded. "I would never sign away my right to point out your mistakes—"

"Patrick."

"You can keep saying my name. It's not going to change my mind. This is ridiculous," he hissed. "He's off living his wife, going to *weddings*, hanging out with Maxie and Carly and her kids, and all these non-involved people, but *you* get what, an hour of time once a week in bed?"

"Stop—" Her voice faltered, and Elizabeth glanced down at the ground, the truth in his words almost too much to bear. "I told you. I had chances before. I didn't take them. Right now, I have to show him—"

"You don't have show anyone shit, Elizabeth—" He bit off whatever he was going to say next. "I'm not trying to hurt you. You know that, don't you?"

"Yes. Yes, I do." She cleared her throat, raised her head. "And, okay, there's truth to what you're saying. But I need you to think about Robin. And how much you love her. And how irrational you've been since you started dating her."

"Irrational—"

"Patrick. I'm not—I just want to be happy. I've dreamed about going to Italy with Jason for so long. And now I get to do it. Okay? I just want this. I deserve this."

"You deserve the world, but we're not going to fix that right now. I'll work on you when you come back." He paused. "And hey, maybe seven straight days being around you all the time, Jason will buy a damned clue, and you'll fix it for yourself. That's the ticket. Sex him into a coma until he changes his mind." He patted her shoulder. "I believe in you."

"Thanks...?" Elizabeth rolled her eyes, kissed his cheek. "I'll call you when I land."

"Yeah, I want daily reports, Webber!" he called after her, watching her disappear through the doors of the emergency room, then winced. Maybe he shouldn't have been so hard on her, but damn it—

"Patrick?"

He turned to find Nadine behind him, a chart in her hands. "Hey, what brings you down this way?" he asked.

"I asked for a shift down here today. Spending too much time in ICU lately," Nadine admitted. "But I was checking on one of my patients from up there—and I don't know. I know it can't be my fault because I don't prescribe things, but I feel cursed—" She handed him the chart. "Ronald Myers. He's in the ICU after a heart attack and triple bypass. He's not responding to meds. I've lost two patients this week, and I don't know—" She sighed. "He's got a wife that sits in his room all the time, and two kids—"

"ICU has the highest death rate in the hospital, Nadine, you know that—" He flipped through the chart, checking the notes and meds. "Only one that's worse is the NICU and we're not talking about that right now. Sixteen percent of all patients admitted die — and if they're there longer than two weeks—"

"I know, I know. It just feels like lately I'm getting every single one of those patients, you know? And it's exhausting—"

"I'll check in with Monica about this patient, but she's probably already aware." Patrick handed her back the chart. "But you're doing everything right. And so is everyone else. We're not miracle workers. We want to be, sometimes we pretend to be, but—" He sighed, thinking of nine-year-old Michael Corinthos, who would keep getting older but never wake up to experience any of it. "Sometimes we don't win, Nadine. Sometimes medicine isn't enough."

Crimson Pointe: Foyer

"Where are you running off to?"

So close. Johnny sighed, his hand falling away from the handle to the front door of the house and turning towards the stairs where his sister was making, in typical Claudia fashion, a grand entrance, sauntering down the steps, trailing her fingers along the banister. She arched a brow, placed one red-tipped hand at her waist. "Well?"

"I'm going to pick up Lulu," he said slowly. "I'm taking her to the wedding, then taking her back to Shadybrooke, then coming home. Anything else?"

"You know, the first sign of mental instability should have been a grown woman using the name Lulu," Claudia said, and Johnny just shook his head. He yanked open the door and left.

Claudia watched her little brother leave, a bit put out that he hadn't even tried to banter with her. That Loo-Loo girl was ruining everything, she thought darkly, then turned into the main living room where she found her father perusing a newspaper and sipping his coffee.

"Good morning, Daddy," she said, plucking a croissant from a basket on the table. She ripped off a piece. "How are the legs?"

"Still dead," Anthony Zacchara muttered. "You gonna ask me that every day, Jezebel?"

"Oh, well, if you're going to call me a whore every day, then—" she shrugged, tearing off another piece of the croissant. "Let me have my fun."

"Shows how much you know. Jezebel was traitor," Anthony sneered. "You being a whore is just an added mark on your character."

"You know, Daddy Dearest—" Claudia leaned forward, resting an elbow on the table. "I'm not sure you want to have a discussion about character since only one of us has driven one wife insane and murdered the other one—"

Anthony hissed. "Don't tempt me—"

"What are you gonna do, Daddy? Wheel really fast after me?" She snickered, then rose. "Enjoy your day. You don't have many left."

She rose then left, intending to hunt down Ric to take off the edge of her boredom. If

Johnny and Anthony weren't going to play, maybe the lawyer would. She could always tie him to the bed to make it interesting.

Anthony tossed the newspaper on the table, glared after his daughter malevolently, then rose to his feet. He stretched out his legs, wiggled his toe, then grinned.

Time to cause a little chaos.

Spencer House: Porch

Elizabeth snuggled Jake one more time, pressing her cheek to his blond hair. He grinned at her, flashing his baby teeth. He looked so much like Jason, she thought, in photos she'd seen at the mansion. Would he continue to favor Jason as he grew up? How many people really believed he was Lucky's son?

"I'm going to miss you both so much," she said, switching her attention to Cameron, the four-year-old on the porch swing next to her. "Will you be good for Daddy?"

"I be bestest," Cameron pledged. "Take good care of Jake."

"I know you will." She kissed Jake again, then set him on down on his chubby toddler legs. He waddled over to the corner where Lucky kept some toys, and both boys distracted themselves.

She glanced over her shoulder when Lucky stepped out of the house. "Hey."

"Hey. I wanted to talk to you about something before you head to the airport." His mouth pinched. "Since you're still insisting to go with everything going on right now. You know, I've got to take care of my sister—"

"Lulu is being cared for at Shadybrooke," Elizabeth said. "And Lucky, I'm sorry for that, but how many months have I had them both full-time? I don't ask you for much." And that was a mistake, she thought. As her relationship with Jason had developed last winter, she hadn't pushed for Lucky to be hands-on, secretly hoping that Jason would change his mind — and that they could raise the boys together.

Instead, she'd just trained Lucky to be a babysitter, not a parent. "If something happens with Lu, you know you can get in touch with me. Patrick has all my contact information—"

"Why can't I have it? You don't want me to know where you are?" Lucky demanded. "That you're with Jason?"

"I don't have to tell you anything about what I do when the boys are with you,"

Elizabeth said. "That's how divorce works, Lucky." She folded her arms. "Is this what you wanted to talk to me about because we already had this argument—"

"No, I just—" He grimaced. He dug out a pamphlet from his pocket, which had been folded a few times to make it fit. "Nikolas and I have been talking. Lu's still...she's still drifting off. Missing time."

"I'm sorry. I really am, Lucky. You know—" She frowned as she took in the contents of the pamphlet. "This is in California."

"He's been looking into Mom's condition, too. If we move Lu, we want somewhere Mom can go. Because whatever's going on, won't be fixed overnight. He's trying to get two spots opened, but if we get one, we're moving Lu there." Lucky tucked a thumb in the belt loop of his jeans. "And we're going with her. I'll go first. And Nikolas is following with Mom."

Elizabeth exhaled slowly. "You're planning to leave Port Charles. What about the boys?"

"What about them?" Lucky glanced over, smiled faintly as Cameron offered Jake a block which was immediately stuffed into Jake's mouth. "There's summer vacation. Holidays."

"Right. Right."

"I know this feels like it's sudden," Lucky continued as she grappled with the idea that the father of her children—the supposed father of them—was planning to pick up stakes and move three thousand miles away without even discussing it first. They had an informal custody arrangement — and Lucky planned to take advantage of it. She'd promised Jason Jake would have a family, and instead—

"It's just—I didn't do enough for my mother," Lucky was saying when she tuned back in. "I don't want to say that about my sister. I have to take care of the family that needs me, Elizabeth. You get that, right? It's not about the boys. I love them. But they have you. Lu doesn't have anyone. My dad is a waste, my mom is—" He looked away. "She needs me. She's my little sister. And I've never been there enough."

"No, I know. Luke likes to show up for the big moments and play hero, but he's not big on the every day moments. Not anymore." He wasn't the man she'd met a lifetime ago who had loved his family, and adored his kids. No, Luke couldn't be counted on for Lulu. "I get it, Lucky. I'm sorry that you feel like it's come to this."

"Yeah, me, too."

She handed him back the pamphlet. "I need to get going." She hugged and kissed both boys one more time, then headed to her car.

Time to get to the airport and prepare to stand in a security line for at least an hour. But at six, she'd be in a first class seat with Jason at her side, and he'd be all hers for almost a week. No cell phones. No children. No bosses. No ex-husbands or ex-girlfriends — just the two of them and Venice at their fingertips.

St. Timothy's Church: Anteroom

Sonny Corinthos, clad in a black tuxedo and gray vest, shook his head. "I don't need another security check," he said with a roll of his eyes. "We need to get to our seats before Maxie over there—" he gestured towards the blonde who held a clipboard and wore a headset. "Sets us on fire—"

Jason gritted his teeth. "I don't care about what Maxie wants—" he began. "There's nothing wrong with taking another five minutes—"

"I'm not doing it. I'm out, I've been out for months, and everyone knows it. I let you handle security, didn't I?" Sonny asked. "You telling me you got doubts?"

"No—"

"Then let's get this show on the road." Sonny clapped a hand on Jason's shoulder. "And hey, don't you have a plane to catch? You'd think you'd want to hurry up unless you're rethinking taking off for a week with no contact?"

Jason shook off Sonny's hand. "Fine. If you don't another security check, then we won't do it." He left Sonny in the anteroom and went through the double doors leading into the chapel proper. He'd offered Sonny the benefit of more than a decade of surviving in this business, and Sonny decided he knew better. That would be his prerogative.

Jason took his seat in front pew, next to Bobbie Spencer. She smiled at him, the expression tinged with a touch of sadness that he felt himself. Another moment that Michael should be here for — and instead he was laying in a coma from which he would never wake.

The tightness in chest only increased as Jason remembered where he'd been when he'd received the call. Standing in his penthouse, looking into Elizabeth's eyes, filled with happiness that he was finally going to have her with him — that the whole world would know that he loved her and the boys—he'd get to have his son and Cameron—

He'd promised her he wouldn't take it back. How many promises had he broken to her over the years? How many more opportunities would she give him to be part of her life before she walked away for good?

He glanced at the clock on his phone, saw the notification from Elizabeth. She'd checked in her luggage and was heading to security. She'd see him at the gate.

She'd been sad, he thought, when they'd spoken of the wedding. She'd declined the invitation in July — but even if she'd attended — she couldn't have sat with him. The world wasn't supposed to know about her. Not his world.

Jason glanced at Bobbie again who squeezed his hand, then he faced forward, looked at the altar. Sonny was the one getting married. He'd lost Michael, but his life was still moving forward. He still had his son, his daughter. He would have a wife, soon.

Jason could only have those things in secret, unwilling to risk another Michael.

It didn't seem fair, somehow, that Jason was supposed to be alone. Sonny never had been — but he'd paid for it, hadn't he? Lily and their unborn son. Carly in the panic room. Faith kidnapping all three of the kids, Sam getting shot, Manny Ruiz kidnapping Elizabeth—

No, it was better to keep Elizabeth and the boys safe. Even if it ultimately cost Jason the chance to be with them. Better alive than together. He'd never sacrifice the people he loved simply to be happy. He wouldn't make Sonny's mistakes.

He glanced at his phone again, wishing it was over so he could be on his way to the airport, so he could be with Elizabeth and not worry about who was watching.

Port Charles Airport: Security Line

Elizabeth looked at her phone — Jason hadn't replied to her last text which made sense, she thought. The ceremony was due to begin any minute now. But Patrick had gotten in her head, which she didn't like. Jason could have easily pulled some strings for Elizabeth to have the same preclearance. She could have sat in the back of the church —

No. No. She'd spent months trying to get Jason back where they'd been a year ago. He'd agreed to meet her quietly, and they'd managed that for a few months. He'd been the one frustrated by it, he'd been the one looking for a change. She was sure it would happen again —

And maybe if Lucky did go to California, as annoying as that announcement had been, maybe it would give Jason even more of a reason. She'd be alone with the boys with no real competition for their attention and affection—

Elizabeth closed her eyes. God, she was starting to turn into exactly what Carly had always accused her of being — using her boys to get Jason's attention. But it wasn't like that — Jake was Jason's son. With no Lucky around, wouldn't he want more time? More chances to know him? That wasn't using him.

She took a deep breath, moved forward as the line did. No, it was just like she'd planned. They'd meet in secret again for a while. And maybe around the holidays, when things were quiet, Jason would change his mind.

And if he didn't—

Well, she was going to Italy. He'd offered her this chance once before, holding out his hand to her, and she'd rejected it. She'd had chance after chance to have all of Jason, and she'd pushed him away. She'd asked him to keep quiet about Jake's paternity. She'd made all the wrong choices two years ago. From now on, she was going to focus on making sure Jason knew that he was the only choice she wanted to make. She'd settle for whatever he could give her.

And he wanted to give her Italy. In less than two hours, they'd be on the plane, and the rest of the world would go away.

She just had to wait a little bit longer to get her dream.

St. Timothy's Church: Chapel

The music swelled, and Jason—along with everyone else in attendance—rose to their feet as the wedding march began to play. Kate Howard, standing at the end of the long aisle in her pristine white gown, radiating joy and happiness as she slowly walked towards Sonny.

If he hadn't backed out of their engagement six months ago, that could have been Elizabeth, Jason thought. Or they would have been married already. He wouldn't have wanted a long engagement. They'd waited enough time. She'd wear a dress that made her happy, even though she always looked beautiful to him. And she'd have walked towards him—

He shook himself out of the thought — it did no good to think about things he couldn't have. He watched as Kate walked down the aisle, drawing closer. She passed the front pew and stopped at the altar — Sonny was supposed to take her hand, and then they'd walk up a few steps to Father Coates at the top.

Sonny took a step—and then Kate gasped, the sound barely registering above the music—but Jason saw her jerk—and then a stain appeared—

A bright red stain at the back of her dress, spreading quickly, soaking the fabric. The flowers dropped as Kate crumpled to the ground. The screams started, and Jason was on his feet, shoving Bobbie down with one hand and twisting to face the back of the chapel—

People began to flee, the screams grew louder, and someone fell—there was trampling — the church had exploded into chaos.