

CLOTHING DESIGNER'S PROLOGUE: In the subway car, everyone looked at each other. Their faces reflected the same emotions: confusion, worry, and fear. No one could think of anything to say. Only the rich woman's bodyguard and the pale woman, Maia, looked calm. The bodyguard stood up, cracking his knuckles. He strode down the car, and everyone watched him in silence. He pulled a M249 Light Machine Gun out of his coat as he opened the door of the car.

Amahl was still standing by the intercom, waiting for someone to start their story. A tear fell down his cheek. His back was to the door. It opened swiftly, but didn't make any sound. The bodyguard's face was devoid of any emotions as he easily lifted the gun. Amahl started turning when he heard the first shot, by the fourth, he was dead. The bodyguard gazed down at the hijacker for a few seconds; put the gun back into his coat, and left.

They had all heard the blasts from the gun. Several of the women gasped, and the rest looked somewhat relieved. They discussed what they should do. No one wanted the bodyguard to be punished, but they weren't sure what he had done could be called self-defense. Eventually they had to call 911, and a little while later the police and CSI showed up. No one was aloud to leave, and because the subway itself was part of the evidence, it couldn't be moved either.

Every passenger was questioned, and they all said the same thing: Amahl killed himself. The police knew this couldn't be true because not only was there no weapon, but it just didn't add up. Some of the passengers wouldn't even respond to questioning.

After hours of getting nowhere, the police told the twenty-five people in the first car that they were all suspects, and they couldn't go anywhere until someone told the truth. They all exchanged looks. Noah looked directly at the Chief of Police and said, "We have already told you the truth." Brett Evans nodded in agreement.

"Well, I guess we are going to be here for a while." The Chief of Police said, sighing. He signaled to one of the officers to keep an eye on the suspects, and went to speak to the head of CSI.

The clothing designer looked up. She had already missed her meeting, so there wasn't really anything else she had to do. "Why don't we tell stories to pass the time?" She suggested. She looked around.

"Well there's nothing else to do, that's a good idea." Jessica said.

"Why don't you start." Someone said from the other end of the car. The clothing designer realized he was talking to her. She had expected this, so thankfully she had a tale to tell. With her eyes downcast, she began...

HERE BEGINS THE CLOTHING DESIGNER'S TALE: She sat on the opposite side of the table from him. She picked up her glass, and watched a drop of condensation fall onto the clean white tablecloth. It was so quiet in the dimly lit room that the ice cubes clinking together in her glass sounded loud and inappropriate. She watched him, but he didn't look up. His plate was set aside, his laptop in its place. You can understand why she was unhappy, wouldn't you be if your spouse worked during every single dinner?

Sophia straightened her button-down blouse. “So, how is work going honey?” She asked, trying to sound interested and cheerful, but falling short. Even to her ears it sounded forced. It didn’t matter though because it appeared that Landon didn’t even hear her.

Suddenly she wasn’t hungry. She was mocked by all of the food left on his plate. Why should she bother preparing such a nice dinner, if he wasn’t even going to pretend to enjoy it? She placed her fork carefully across her plate, and stood up. He was so absorbed in his work that he didn’t notice her leave the room.

From the beginning of their relationship, Sophia had known Landon’s work was his first priority, but she had thought that after they married she would be higher on his list. She should have known better than to get married so fast. As I always say, love can be unpredictable. I’m not saying that she still didn’t love Landon, but she felt like she was on a sinking ship. There was no way their relationship could withstand any serious problems.

I should probably mention Landon’s line of work, for it is a peculiar one. Sophia knew what he did, but she actually wasn’t supposed to. Landon led a double life: a well-known lawyer, and also the head of a giant underground “black market”. This organization was a dangerous one to be involved in. Many very important people had a lot invested in it. One mistake, and BAM! You’re in an “accidental” house fire. Is this a good excuse for Landon’s behavior? That’s for you to decide.

Sophia washed the dishes in the large downstairs kitchen. It was filled with matching appliances of every shape and size. While she was scrubbing the marble-topped counter, Landon walked in. “I have to go back to the office, I still have a lot to do,” he said, deadpan, and walked out again, no good-bye, no kiss goodnight. Unfortunately, that had become the routine. At first it had been a joke between them, that his office was his real home. Now, every night it was like a slap in the face, he was spending more time away from her.

After he left, Sophia went upstairs and straightened her already tidy bedroom. Then she slowly got ready for bed. Once she had made sure all of the doors and windows were locked, she got a glass of water, took a sleeping pill, and lay down. Right before she fell asleep she looked at her little blue alarm clock, and saw that it was only 7:30.

The next morning, the beep of the alarm clock interrupted her deep sleep. After hitting the off button, Sophia slid out of bed. She was used to eating breakfast alone, and preferred to eat in the upstairs kitchen. Not only was it smaller, but the atmosphere seemed friendlier. She left for work early, choosing the busy office over the silent house. Landon had already left, even though he hadn’t gotten home until the early hours of the morning. Sophia walked into the three-car garage and got into her green Mini-Cooper convertible.

She worked for an interior design company. The company was involved in many aspects of the industry ranging from single room renovations to whole dwelling

restorations and international commercial projects. Sophia's current project was redecorating a kitchen for a client who had a lot of money at their disposal.

About halfway to work, Sophia remembered that the day before, her computer at work had been acting crazy and slow. She cursed under her breath for forgetting to get someone to look at it. She knew almost nothing about the technical part of computers, but she did know someone she could call. Jack.

Jack was good with computers. Don't get me wrong, he wasn't the stereotypical glasses-wearing computer geek who is thirty-five and lives in his parent's basement with his X-box. Jack's not like that at all, he wears contacts. No, I'm just kidding. Jack lives in a three-bedroom apartment, not owned by his parents, overlooking Central Park. Sophia had known him for years, and he had bailed her out many times.

She had his number memorized, so she used her car phone to call him and hoped that he would answer. As soon as she heard his voice she smiled. He had one of the voices that made women melt; the cute part was he didn't even notice his effect on them. The only bad thing about talking to him on the phone was that she couldn't see his eyes. His gray-blue eyes were her favorite thing about him. I'm not saying she didn't like his voice too, she just didn't let herself think about how much she liked his voice.

"What are you doing working so early?" he asked.

"I was about to ask you the same thing." Sophia replied. He chuckled.

"What's the problem?"

"I could just be calling to say 'hi' you know", she said, faking resentment.

“Well, are you?”

“No, I need your help.” She blushed, “There’s something wrong with my computer.”

He met her at the office half an hour later, and he had solved the computer problem in a matter of minutes. She laughed, feeling slightly foolish for not being able to figure it out herself, but he assured her that it wasn’t a big deal. “Actually,” he said, and paused, “I don’t want to put you on the spot, but I have a problem you will probably be able to help me with.” She glanced up at him.

“*You? You* are asking for help?” She said, feigning amazement.

“Yeah,” Jack said, smiling, “So if *you* want to be the one helping *me* for once, then you should probably listen and stop being so sarcastic.”

“Okay, okay. I can’t guarantee anything about the sarcasm though.”

“Well at least I know you’ll try. Anyway, you know how I just bought a bunch of new furniture and stuff?” Sophia nodded. “Well, I don’t know, my apartment just...doesn’t look right now. I’m not sure if there’s too much stuff, or if it’s missing something.” He shook his head. “I’m no good at decorating.”

“Well I guess it’s good that I am then.” Sophia said. They agreed to meet up the next day after work. Sophia found herself looking forward to it. She was really glad he had asked her to help him with something that she knew about. Besides, hanging out with him would be a million times better than sitting at home alone watching “The Young and the Restless”. I hope I didn’t just make it seem like she was only excited

about that afternoon because she could get out of the house. Sophia found herself dressing a little nicer, and putting a little more make-up on than usual. She rationalized away any motives for it of course.

Finally work was over, and Sophia was mentally reciting Jack's directions to his place. She had almost forgotten how impossible it was to find parking in the city, and decided to just put her car in a nearby parking garage. She eventually found his building and was relieved to find that she was only five minutes late. She ran her finger down the list of names until she saw Jack's and rang the buzzer. The front lobby of the building was nicer than most hotels, and there was a wide main staircase on the far side of it. There were two elevators as well, one on either side of the staircase. Jack lived on the third floor. Sophia looked at her Versace Metallic Leather sandals and then chose the elevator. She was surprised to see that the third floor hallway was just as nice as the lobby. She located Jack's apartment, and knocked delicately on the door.

The apartment was amazing. Not only did it have two bedrooms and a bar; it had a gorgeous balcony with a little table and a grill. Jack pointed out the new couch and lounge chair, and the oriental carpet.

"The sales woman talked me into that," he claimed. "I had no idea what kind of carpet I was looking for, to tell you the truth I didn't even know there were different kinds." Sophia grinned, and studied the room more carefully.

"You know what would help?" she asked.

"No."

“Well, you have nothing on the walls. We should go find you some paintings or something.” She hesitated as she considered the different art galleries they could visit.

“I know a great little place just a few blocks from here.” They decided to take a cab, and before long they were standing outside the Cheim & Read Art Gallery. It was known for the modern paintings and photographs it displayed. After wandering around the gallery for a while, they returned to a piece in one of the small front rooms. It was an acrylic on canvas. It was very simple; just lines and shapes. There was something about it though, that made it stand out. Also, the colors went with Jack’s living room.

They returned to Jack’s apartment to hang the new painting. Jack had chosen a few framed photographs to go with it. At last, they were able to decide where everything should go. The painting over the couch, three of the photographs on the opposite wall, and one hanging on either side of the doors to the balcony.

“Wow, it looks a lot better,” Jack said as he looked around. Sophia nodded.

“All thanks to me.” She laughed. She glanced at him, and he smiled at her. She liked that she felt so comfortable talking to him and joking with him. Not to mention the fact that he actually listened to what she said. She couldn’t help but compare him to Landon. Landon never cared what she thought or wanted anymore, and he never had time to go anywhere with her. Besides, he hated art galleries. She focused on the painting, feeling sort of guilty. All of a sudden it looked a little crooked, she wondered if she was just standing too close to it. She backed up, and stumbled over the coffee

table. Thankfully the carpet was soft, but the back of her head immediately started to ache.

“Are you okay?” Jack asked anxiously as he helped her up.

“Just embarrassed,” Sophia said, and put her hand to the back of her head gingerly. Jack led her to the couch and made her sit down while he got her some ice. Again she found herself thinking about how different he was from her husband. Landon probably wouldn’t notice if she got hurt. She was so confused. If her marriage was a good one she wouldn’t be thinking like that would she? What if Landon was always so caught up in his work that he never had time for her? Would she have to be all alone in her horribly big house forever? Jack returned with an ice pack and a glass of diet Pepsi with a lime slice on the rim. He had remembered that was her favorite drink.

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As soon as she saw Landon she knew something was wrong. They barely ever fought, but she had seen him angry a few times before because of work. His face was dark, and his eyes were narrow. He had never looked at her like that before. Suddenly she realized. He knew. Before he could say anything, his cell phone rang, and for the first time she was glad it did. She wondered where Jack was, she had to tell him that Landon knew, she had to warn him. She watched Landon’s face twist into an evil smirk, and her heart started beating faster. Who was on the phone? What was going on?

“Thank you very much, I’ll be right over,” Landon said, and snapped his phone shut. Sophia felt the hairs on the back of her neck rising with fear and anticipation.

“There is something you should see,” Landon told her. Not knowing what to do, Sophia followed him out to his red Ferrari Spider 360. He gestured for her to get in, and she did with reluctance.

Twenty minutes later, after passing through unfamiliar countryside and driving down a winding dirt lane, the car stopped at an old barn that appeared abandoned. Uneasiness filled Sophia, but she sat in the car trying to appear calm. Landon got out without saying anything. It was obvious that he expected her to follow him, and it was the last thing she wanted to do. Her hand shook as she opened the car door. A small door on the side of the building was propped open, and they passed through it into the darkness. The few small windows in the barn were boarded up, but small rays of moonlight shone into the drafty room somehow. They made the room just light enough to see that there was someone sitting in a wooden chair with their back to Landon and Sophia. When Sophia saw that this person was Jack and that he was tied to the chair he was sitting in, she started trembling violently. Another man stepped into the room, his face just barely visible; he didn’t look familiar to her. As he walked through one of the beams of light it reflected on the Walther PPK that he was holding.

“Landon?” Sophia said weakly. He didn’t look at her; he was looking at Jack.

“Landon?” She repeated, louder. Finally his eyes moved over to her, but he didn’t even

look like the same person, he was so furious. “What are you doing? Please, I didn’t mean to hurt you.” The other man was the one who answered her.

“We have reason to believe that this man here,” he motioned to Jack, “is involved in stealing money from your husband.” Sophia looked from the man to Landon, bewildered.

“What?”

“As you know, I am the head of a rather large organization”, Landon said, clearing his throat. She immediately knew he was talking about the Black Market, but what did Jack have to do with that? As if she had spoken out loud, he answered her question. “Jack is also involved in it, but he has now become too greedy and selfish, and should be...eliminated.” Could it be true? She wondered. She wasn’t sure why Landon would have wanted her to come if that was what it was. He didn’t ever involve her in his work with the market. He had to know something else. Landon was looking at her, and she studied his face, but couldn’t read anything off it. Jack didn’t seem like the type of person who would do something like that. Had she totally misjudged him?

Everything was getting more puzzling by the second, especially when the man handed the gun to Landon and left the room.

“Please Landon, don’t hurt Jack,” Sophia pleaded. She looked over at Jack, who remained unconscious and unaware of the danger he was in.

“Jack.” Landon jeered. “I thought you would recognize him.” He tossed the gun from hand to hand. “You two are good friends aren’t you?” Sophia hung her head.

“Landon, I...” She drifted off. What could she say that would possibly make him understand? Out of the corner of her eye she saw Jack stir. His eyes opened and he blinked, staring first at Sophia, then at Landon, then at the gun.

“What’s going on?” He asked, his face showing his confusion and fear. Before Sophia could think of something to say, Landon spoke up,

“I know what you’ve been doing,” he said, “and if you think you can get away with it, you should think again.” He raised the gun up, and pointed it at Sophia, placing it against her left temple. She felt the cold metal against her skin, and tears welled up in her eyes.

“Landon, please, I am so sorry.” She began.

“Shut up.” He snapped, his eyes still on Jack. “Tell her the truth.” He commanded.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about man, just put down the gun. Don’t hurt her.” Jack pleaded.

“I think you’re lying.” Landon said heartlessly. “I know you have been embezzling company funds.”

“Company funds...?” Jack’s eyes flicked to Sophia.

“She knows about it.” Landon said triumphantly. “He’s been using you Sophia. Using you to get to me” Tears rolled down her cheeks, as her eyes met Jack’s. He shook his head.

“He’s lying Soph, I have no idea what he’s talking about. I haven’t stolen anything. I swear. You have to believe me.” But Sophia didn’t know what to believe. She felt Landon take the gun away from her head. Landon’s voice grew softer, gentler,

“Sophia, I know everything. But, I also know you’re sorry. I’m sorry too, that this scum used you, and made you think he loved you. *I love you Sophia.* But, he must pay for what he has done to both of us. Don’t you agree? Even when I pretended I would shoot you if he didn’t confess, he didn’t admit to his crime. He was willing to just let you be shot, right in front of him. Does that sound like something a man who loved you would do?” Sophia looked up at Landon, he hadn’t looked at her like that since the beginning of their marriage. He looked so honest, so kind, he couldn’t be lying. How could she have ever let herself be lured away by Jack, he was the enemy. She looked over at him coldly.

“You lied to me.” She accused.

“No, please Soph, I’ve never lied to you.” She was deaf to his pleading now. Landon smiled, and to her horror, he handed her the gun. She looked at it, holding it felt all wrong. She had to use both hands to lift it because they were shaking so much. She aimed it at Jack.

“I loved you.” She cried. Her finger curled around the trigger. Jack seemed to collapse in the chair, but his eyes never left hers. Those eyes, those gray-blue eyes. He looked so innocent.

“Do it.” Landon urged. “He deserves it.” She barely heard him. The gun felt ice cold. She couldn’t do it and she dropped to her knees. She could barely see she was sobbing so hard. Her tears pounded against the hard cement floor. She felt someone taking the gun away from her, and looked up to see Landon’s eyes, icy, angry. There was no sympathy in them, nothing friendly, there were almost inhuman. She suddenly knew that it was Landon who was lying. She looked at Jack again. How could she have doubted him? She felt like a fool. A look of acceptance had settled on his face, he looked back at her, and she could tell he didn’t blame her. Her tears slowed, then stopped, as anger wrapped its fingers around her. Her eyes widened as they slid back to Landon. Everything slowed down as he aimed the gun on Jack’s head. Sophia was still on the floor, she felt helpless, her heart was beating fast, and it sounded as if it was echoing in the silent room. Landon wasn’t watching her, his eyes were trained on Jack. There was no way she had enough time to do anything! Landon was only a step away from her. She was suddenly glad of his annoying pride and victorious sneer, and a new energy filled her up. He loved the fact that he was the one holding the gun. He was totally in control. He had won.

Sophia swung her arm into Landon’s knees, hard as she screamed, “You will not kill him!” His knees buckled and he staggered, almost falling. He lost his grip on the gun and it crashed to the floor, within Sophia’s reach. Landon was struggling to recover, and he shook his head. He was confused for a minute. She had time. Time seemed to be against her though, because it sped up again. Landon had quickly

straightened and was reaching for the gun. Sophia lunged forward and grabbed it right from under his hand. Landon paused, unsure of what to do next. Sophia looked at the gun. Such a little thing could take a life in a matter of seconds. Taking a life. That was one of the worst sins a person could commit. It was against her nature, against God's laws. None of this ran across her mind though, she did not think, she wouldn't let herself. She pulled the trigger without hesitation.

The car was still silent when the clothing designer let go of the button on the intercom.