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Warnings We Do Not Heed

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The Last Flight to Omaha

When she noticed the flashing red lights in her rear view mirror, Alice quickly took the Glock 9mm from her purse and put it next to her leg. The gun was a gift from Jack and not meant for this sort of situation, but still. She would use it if she had to.

“Are we there, Mommy?” Little Charlie asked from his car seat in the back, “Are we at the place where the planes fly?”

Alice pulled the car over and calculated what to do next. If this was just a routine traffic stop, odds were fifty-fifty the officer would write her a ticket and send her on her way within twenty minutes. Less if she was able to sweet talk him. They’d still have enough time to make the airport. But if it was one of Jack’s people, one of his thug bootied minions who’d followed her from the house, she might have to use the gun to get away. Which reduced the odds considerably and could set off all kinds alarms. Though they still had a one in four chance of making their flight. Once in the air though, she and Charlie would have a very reasonable ninety-two percent chance of making their destination, and eight-five percent chance of being safe while doing so. Alice could accept those odds. Anything to protect Charlie and the information he was carrying.

“Mommy?”

Watching the lights approach, Alice thought, *My heart’s about to explode. Why doesn’t pilates teach breath control for those times when you need to be free from your megalomaniacal*

husband!? When the ambulance sped past, taking its flashing red lights and siren with it, Alice laughed. *Way to go, James Bond. Nice nerves.*

“Mommy, are we there yet?”

“Not yet, Sweetie. Mommy had to pull over to let an ambulance go by. We’ll be at the airport soon.” Alice returned the gun to her purse and pulled the car back onto the road. “Are you looking forward to your first airplane ride, Charlie? Do you still have Mr. Wubbie?”

“Yes Mommy. Mr. Wubbie says, ‘*Yaaaayy, we’re gonna fly!*’” Charlie giggled holding his stuffed bear up and shaking him so she could see Mr. Wubbie in the rearview mirror.

“Good boy. Keep a good hold on Mr. Wubbie now. Don’t let him go. He’s your buddy bear.” *He’s also holding a terabyte of company secrets sewn up his ass, Alice thought. That’ll teach you for abusing me, Jack! And taking us for granted.*

The remaining drive to Mineta airport took five minutes. Alice parked at curbside, ditched the Glock in the glove box, and got Charlie out of his car seat. A minute more and she was in the terminal, walking up to the United Airline counter to buy tickets. And then guiding Charlie and Mr. Wubbie down the long hallway through screening and security.

Few paid Alice or Charlie any mind-- as Alice intended. There weren’t that many people flying out at this time of night and she’d dressed Charlie in pajamas to ensure advantage. She’d also purposely worn her form fitting track suit, hair pulled back in a ponytail, with no makeup to give the impression they were just your average Silicon Valley mom and child heading off to visit to the grandparents for the weekend.

But despite her dressed down demeanor, the nighttime TWA security employee clocked her approach and was giving her the once over. Looking at her figure, or more

specifically her breasts, as most men did, and almost audibly thinking, *Body pat down, yes please!*

Alice tried to telepathically messaged him back with her best jedi mind meld. *You can pat me down, feel the breasts and decide for yourself if they're real, but please ignore the child. Please be cool. Please don't suspect us of anything.*

"Step over here, ma'am," the security guard directed.

Alice took Charlie's hand and walked over, noticing the guard didn't seem to mind Charlie tagging along. Or that Mr. Wubbie hadn't been placed on the conveyor belt with their carry-on. Because he was looking squarely at Alice's breasts. Though, to be fair, he was shorter than her by a few inches and his eyeline directly lined up, so maybe he couldn't necessarily help himself.

Here we go, Alice thought, the moment of truth. In her head, she calculated the statistical odds of getting by undetected. A habit formed writing tech code for a little indie start up she'd founded after college. When Jack's company, Bellion, found her, bought up her algorithm and made her rich -- changing the face of data sharing forever and simultaneously granting and destroying every dream she'd ever had in the process.

I have a two in four chance, Alice thought, with some statistical variations nearer to three, that he will pat me down, but ignore Charlie. She recited more statistics in her head, *On average, 27, 435 passengers fly in and out of Mineta every day. Of those, 53% are men, 32% women, and 15% children. TSA statistics indicate women are three times as likely to be patted down when the screener is male and the female travelling solo. But if the woman is a mother with a small child say, between five and ten years old, and both are screened in tandem, then, statistically, security is 37% more likely to search the woman, but not the child.*

Let's just hope, Alice thought, this guy follows the same statistical blueprint and leaves Charlie and Mr. Wubbie alone.

The TWA security employee did. He barely glanced Charlie's way, or at Mr. Wubbie. And despite some initial ogling, didn't seem all that interested in Alice after all. He just ran his beeping wand around her waist, then said, "Thank you, ma'am. You're free to go." He even managed to sound bored.

Thank God, Alice smiled, taking Charlie's hand quickly and walking into the airport terminal. Checking over her shoulder every few seconds to make sure no one was following her or Charlie or Mr. Wubbie. *You're definitely no James Bond, Alice.*

One more statistical calculation ran through her head. There was a 92% chance her husband, Jack Bellion, was still trapped in his office, unaware she'd run away, thanks to a little distraction she'd orchestrated to improve her odds of escape. Otherwise, he'd have gone ape and sent an army of goons after her. But Alice had written a backdoor virus to ensure Jack would be completely consumed for several hours dealing with "minor server glitches" growing exponentially across Bellion's mainframe. His I.T. people around the globe panicking. And Jack, who refused to delegate because he always believed he was the best man for the job, working late into the night trying to stop the hack invasion. Which bought her and Charlie time to get to the airport and fly away.

Of course, she thought, *there's an outside chance -- not more than four percent really -- that Jack will recognize my code fragmenting his main frame. And be able to shut it down within minutes. A small chance, but again. He is pretty brilliant. And if he solves that nifty little virus then there's a high percentage that he'll realize I stole over a terabyte of information through a ghost portal when he re-initiates diagnostics. Then he'll be coming for us. Which, ironically, would force him to pay attention. Something he hasn't done in a while.*

He'll come for me, Alice thought, *but I doubt he'll consider Charlie a threat.* Which broke her heart knowing Jack never cared about Charlie. Barely even acknowledged his existence.

If he'd been more of a father to Charlie, or even a tenth as attentive to us as he has been to his company, I would've stayed and made it work.

"The most dangerous animal in all of nature," Alice remembered her father once telling her, "is a mother protecting her young. Never get between a mother and her cub."

Alice agreed. Which is why she began coordinating with the FBI out of Omaha, Nebraska about Jack and his company. Because Jack was dangerous. He had the resources and the ego to be so and didn't tolerate opposition or defiance. So to ensure she and Charlie found a point of safe harbor once they left, because there really was nowhere they could go where Jack couldn't find them, she decided to orchestrate a trojan information protocol and leak Bellion's less than legal operations to the government as well. *The odds being pretty good Jack will be distracted for a long time with that big ol' circus, she figured. Maybe long enough to forget about Charlie and me.*

"You okay, Mommy? You're shaking. Are you cold?" Charlie lifted up Mr. Wubbie. "Here, give Mr. Wubbie a hug. He'll warm you up."

"Thank you Charlie, that's sweet. But you keep Mr. Wubbie. Hold him tight no matter what. He's your buddy bear and will keep you safe."

"Ma'am," the airline stewardess called out, looking concerned, "the flight is boarding now. Are you ready?"

"Yes, of course." Alice took Charlie's hand. "Sorry, I was just having a word with my son, but we're coming now."

The stewardess gave her the oddest look before quickly switching back to her most professional smile. "Very good, ma'am. Your ticket then, please. Right this way."

Alice handed over her tickets noticing the stewardess didn't even glanced toward Charlie when she stamped them. Just stared at her. *Just like the TWA security screener,*

she realized. *Odds are they either they don't have children or it's late and they're too tired to care.* But as she walked onto the plane, Alice realized she wasn't feeling safe. She held a strong sense of déjà vu and felt unnerved a bit. *No, I ran the numbers before we left. From this point on, the odds are in our favor. Forty percent and climbing once they shut the airplane door and we start taxi-ing toward the runway. I shouldn't feel nervous. All I have to do is get Charlie into his seat, buckle up, and we're home free.*

Alice guided Charlie into their first class seats and got him buckled in before asking the stewardess for a box of juice and crackers for Charlie.

"The plane hasn't left the gates ma'am. We don't provide drink service till we're in the air."

"Sure," Alice replied, "but you just set a glass of champagne down in front of me. Surely you can put a box of juice down in front of my son here."

"Of course, ma'am," the stewardess replied looking over at the window seat and giving Alice a quizzical look before walking back up the aisle. She returned less than a minute later with juice and crackers. "Here you are, ma'am."

With Charlie and Mr. Wubbie comfortably sitting in the window seat, Alice looked around to see who else was seated. Which is when Morris walked up and sat down next to her in the open seat.

Oh fuck! Alice jumped trying not to audibly yelp in surprise. She didn't want to panic in front of Charlie. But Morris Jacobi, Bellion's head of security, had just sat down next to her.

"Hello, Alice," Morris spoke, "How are you this evening?"

"Hello, Morris," Alice replied wondering if it was just Morris on the plane or if there were more of his thugs stationed about. Odds are there were more. And here she'd left

the gun in the car. *Shit*, she thought. *I'll just have to re-calculate and scare him away on my own.* "Okay, Morris, let's cut the bullshit. Are you going to threaten me or try to bribe me?"

"Whatever do you mean?"

"You obviously are here for me. And you know I have something important. Otherwise you wouldn't be here. But I'm in public, and there are witnesses, so I figure odds are you're not going to just grab me and try to drag me away. You'll either threaten my life or try to bribe me into returning. Which won't do you any good either way."

"Oh, it's nothing like that, Alice. Not at all. I'm only here because Jack is worried and asked that I see to your safety. You haven't been yourself of late and Jack is worried you might be off your meds and in trouble."

"Medications? I don't take any medications. And I'm perfectly fine. Nor am I going back. You can't make me."

"Really, Alice, it's nothing like that. Jack just wants to make sure you're well. He loves you and has been very worried about you. He thinks you might be putting yourself in danger. You know how you get when you don't take the medications the doctor ordered."

"I'm fine, thank you. As you can plainly see."

"Well, not to be insensitive, but you look exhausted. And though it's none of my business, you do seem to be having a difficult time of late. Not eating or sleeping. And making some very strange accusations toward Jack and the company. Then you up and run off tonight without a word to anyone? Why, if you don't mind me asking? Why are you flying to Nebraska?"

“The anti-IT technology unit with the FBI are in Omaha. I’ve already spoken with them and told them all about Bellion’s anti-trust violations. So, you should know they’re expecting me when we land. If I don’t show up, they’ll know. They’re expecting me. They are.”

“I see. But why two tickets? Why did you buy two one-way tickets? Will someone be joining you on this flight? Is someone here with you?”

“How do you mean?”

“Why did you buy two plane tickets tonight? Are you expecting someone to fly with you? Is someone else coming?”

“Not that it’s any of your business, but I would never leave Charlie behind. Not with you or Jack or anyone else. He’s my son!”

“Charlie?”

“My son,” Alice repeated, looking over at Charlie in the window seat. Adorable Charlie who just smiled back at her. *Why am I even talking to this man?* She wondered. *If he doesn’t know, I shouldn’t be telling him anything. I guess I’m not James Bond after all.*

“Your son. Charlie.”

“Of course. He’s right here next to us. Don’t be dense. And don’t try anything cause it won’t go well for you.” Alice turned to Charlie wanting to reassure him. “Don’t worry Charlie, you’re safe. Just keep a hold of Mr. Wubbie, okay?” Then to Morris, “Don’t think you can do anything,” she spat, “to me or Charlie! Not here. Not now! I won’t allow it! You and Jack will just have to deal with the consequences of all you’ve done with Bellion by yourselves. It’s no longer my concern.”

“I see.”

"You see? What do you see? Why are you looking at me like that?"

"Alice, I don't mean to be insensitive, but Charlie's not here. You seem to be having a break from reality. You are, well, confused."

"What does THAT mean!? Are you trying to threaten me and my child?"

"No, nothing like that. I'm here at Jack's request. He's worried about you. I'm a little worried myself. You haven't been yourself of late. I would never threaten you, let alone....err...anyone's child."

"Good. Then you can just get up and leave this plane this very instant so Charlie and I can be on our way."

"Alice, Charlie died. You had a miscarriage six months ago and have been suffering post-partum delusions since. That's according to your psychiatrist. Jack and I are just trying to look out for you, is all."

"That's not true. You can plainly see Charlie sitting right here next to me. But he's not your concern. I believe this game you're playing has gone on long enough and I won't stand for it any longer. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'd like you to leave now."

Morris smiled sadly. *Well, you can't always fix what's broke*, he thought.

Alice looked around for the stewardess, trying to get her attention. But Morris was still sitting next to her. "I'll be flying directly to the FBI offices in Nebraska to meet Agent Thompson. He's expecting me and will sound the alarms if I don't arrive on time. Then I'm going to turn over all the evidence I've collected against you and my husband and all the people who helped you so you won't be able to harm anyone else. You'll just have to answer to the FBI now. And a congressional hearing at some point, I suppose."

"I think I understand now," Morris replied, "I want to assure you you're perfectly safe, Alice. I'm here to make sure of it. You understand?"

“Charlie and I are perfectly safe despite your threats. Aren’t we Charlie,” Candice smiled turning to the window seat, “Are you enjoying your first airplane ride? We should be taking off any moment now. The bad old man will be gone soon.”

“Yes, I see,” Morris nodded, signaling the psychiatric nurse he’d hired to prepare the injection. Then nodding to the Air Marshals in the parallel rows watching them. It was going to be plan B after all -- Alice would be placed under an involuntary civil commitment and the psychiatric nurse would administer an IM back up of Ativan, Haldol, and Benadryl to sedate her. Then, with the assistance of the Air Marshals, Morris and his private security team, he would escort Alice off the flight to a private car. Where she’d be driven to El Camino’s Psychiatric Acute Care Unit in Mountain View for a 5150W&I admission.

“Charlie, are you enjoying the flight?” Alice asked again, clutching Mr. Wubbie to her chest.

“Alice, this is for the best,” Morris said taking her left arm and pinning it to the arm rest while the Air Marshals and the psychiatric nurse moved in.

The End.