

Rachel

I saw her through the window in her radiant splendor like I had so many times. She had not seen my yet, the layers protecting me from the spitting rain concealing my face. I hastened into the door to be nearer.

The air was smooth with the trumpet that played over the loud speakers. I felt my heart align with the rhythm of the *rat-a-tat-tat* on the high hat and thrumming of the snare. Casual. Cool. Calm. I needed them all. Strong. Brave. Corageuos. Yes. Even more important. Coy? Yes. Sure. That too. Suspicious? No. None of that. Not now. There would be time for that later.

“Hello. What can I get for you?” asked the barista.

“Hi. Yes. A coffee. Black. No room.”

She attended to her duty. I paid and shuffled down to the coffee collection point. Rachel still had not noticed me. This was good. All to plan. A casual run-in. A chance meeting. *Rachel? What are the chances? Just getting coffee. You too? Wow. What are the odds?*

The attendant placed the coffee on the bar. I grinned. Slight nod. Gripped the mug by the handle. Deep breath now. Calm. Cool. Casual.

“Rachel?” Perfect amount of surprise. “Wow. What are the odds?”

Rachel was taken aback, as I knew she would be. The blood left her face. She looked to the door. Made a move. I slid in to the booth next to her. She smelled floral. My hands were sweaty.

“You cannot be here. You know this. Did you follow me? You had to have followed me. This has gone on long enough. Please....Please.” She spoke softly but sternly. The worry in her eyes tantalized. Oh the facades. The complex games.

“How long has it been? Truly?” I sipped my coffee calmly, “Three weeks at least right? What are the chances? How long have you been coming here? Not your usual place.” Casually, the words fell from my lips. She understood the hidden context, the complex games. I was still figuring her out, sure. She was a tough nut to crack no doubt. Therein lay her appeal.

“Look. You know you are not supposed to be here. You know this. We cannot have this conversation again. I can’t. Please let me leave. I am ready to go.” She could be so demanding when she wanted to be. We had known each other so long, the allure there all along; she had stopped mincing her words. No small talk. All business. I remained cool.

“Come on, Rachel. I just sat down. You have barely touched your coffee. Anyway, as I was saying a meeting like this cannot just be chance right?” I leaned in close. Courageous. “The fates have aligned have they not?” A subtle wink.

“You know my names not Rachel. You’re a lunatic. Now please.” She shoved her body close to mine. “Please.” She shoved again.

“Okay. Okay. A guy can take a hint.” I moved to leave but stopped. Turned. I moved to brush her hair from her face. The perfect time to deliver the perfect line. Coolly. Casually. “Your eyes seem dif-“

She slapped me hard in the face. I stumbled back, shocked, my hands covering the sting. CASUAL. I removed my hands and laughed calmly. “Rach.” A dismissive head nod. I looked at the crowd. A slight shrug. Laughter roared and settled quickly. Rachel walked out the door. A stunning exit. Bravado now.

I moved after her and yelled her name in the streets. “Rachel! The fates have aligned, Rachel. Don’t fight it. Don’t.” The camera swirled in the air as the rain continued to fall. Her car sped away, and I was left in the street. In the rain. Cars came to a stop. Light foot traffic. Perfect shot.

I thought this was the last scene, but I was wrong. I stared out the window. Watching but not seeing. The events played again in my head. Maybe *too* cool this time. More openness. Shy? Yes. Shy even. I had not that of it before, but now it seemed so clear. And not jazz either. Something contemporary. More shy. Guitar. Acoustic. Raspy voice. Mellow beat. Much better. Coffee? Yes. The coffee had to be there. It was always there.

The slap was unexpected but, after some thought, it played perfectly. There was always tension. The fight before the embrace. The struggle. The obstacles. Oh! The obstacles. All making the resolution the sweeter. A little bitterness. Just a touch. Too much and you lose. Too little and it was too easy. The slap. Perfect.

Her timing was off though. Most definitely off. I had no chance to speak. No chance to finish. It was the perfect line. It was cool. Casual. Bravado. She needed to wait. She would wait. Was it my fault? Did I miscue? No. She was early. Too early. Always in a rush. She needed to listen. To look, frustratingly, then relent, slowly. A slight smile. A small laugh. She is coming around. The resolution near.

Okay. Again. This time from the top. Cool. Calm. Casual.

No coffee but this would have to do. The guitar streamed gently. Melodically . A man with long hair plucking the strings. Love lyrics sung with raspy voice. She had not noticed me yet. The haze from the streetlight not reaching me. She walked to the stairs that led to her front door. The perfect scene. This was it. A deep breath. Okay. Calm. Cool. Casual. Got it. Another deep breath. Bravado. You have rehearsed this. They were waiting on this. This was the resolution. The bitterness was done. The hero attains the crown. She was beautiful in her radiance. Her entrance light paled in comparison to her splendor.

I quietly moved to the base of the steps and called her name with slight desperation. Bravado.

“Rachel!” A slight scream. She dropped her keys as she flinched. “I have been waiting, Rachel. Contemplating the stars, Rachel. The moon pales. The streetlight glow. Please Rachel!” I moved up a step. She cursed, fumbling for her keys. “It is fate Rachel. The planets have aligned. This is our time. I know you are scared. I am too. I am. We all are.” Shy. Now. Shy. I looked away. Dapped at my eye. Silence. I summoned my courage. This was it. The timing. The lighting. The shyness. Bravado. Now. “I-“

Rachel leveled the gun at me. I could see the tremble. Her body trembled. The muzzle trembled. The music stopped. “Get away.” She sniffed. “Go away.” I was frozen. I flipped through the scene in my head. This was not right. This was *not* right. I took a step back. Cool. Calm.

“Rachel. I-“

“My name is not Rachel God dammit. I am not Rachel!” She was screaming with tears. More bitterness than I wanted. Too much. This was not right. She had not given me time.

“This is mine.” I said calmly. “Let me finish now.”

“No. No. Go away. There is no finishing. This is not yours. Leave.” She spat the words angrily. Not sweetly. Not lovingly. This was wrong. She was wrong. I told her.

“You are wrong. This is wrong. Let me finish. Rachel, I-“

“Call me that one more time. One more time. I swear I will kill you. Why won’t you leave me alone? Why? What did I do? What have I done? I can’t talk about this anymore. This cannot happen anymore. I have to live. I need to live.” She was in hysterics.

“Now. I-I-I-” I gripped my mouth. Stuttering! Not cool .Not calm. Get it together. You need this. This is the time. This is perfect. “Put the gun away please Rachel. The lights, Rachel. The night, Rachel. This is the time. They are waiting. This is it.”

“Don’t call me that you shit! I am not Rachel. Who is waiting? You are insane. You are crazy. Please leave me alone. No more of this. I cannot live like this.” One more shot. This was good. I see it now. Okay. One more shot. Bitterness. Yes. Too much? Maybe so, but she was right. This was good. Bravado now. This is it. Final scene. Resolution.

“Rachel-” I was struck back off me feet down the two steps I had ascended. My head clapped onto the sidewalk. Burning in my shoulder. I gasped and gripped my pain. I stared up at the streetlight and beyond. The camera pointed straight down and swirled. Not like this. Bad timing. Cool. Calm. I faded to black.

I stared out the window and replayed the scene. Truly her timing was excellent. She played her part perfectly. I had to give her that. She wowed. She did, though she did not give me enough time. Something else was wrong. The music! The music had stopped. Plus wrong entirely. Night time. Street scene. Mellow music. Not raspy. Crooning. Yes. Crooning. And dropping her keys? A little cliché was it not? The gun was interesting though. Different. Still not enough time though. Her timing was off.

The policemen shuffled his feet outside in the hallway and looked at the shine glinting of his shoes. I wish he would stop doing that. Shuffling.

The nurse walked in and checked a monitor. She didn’t look at me. Tried not to look at me. Coy. Shy. I went to move the hair from my face. The shackles stopped me. Rang metallically. The nurse looked over. Calm. Cool. She had an enduring face. Probably helped sick children. Brought them toys. Tussled their hair. Could not find a man that would treat her with respect. So many pigs out there. I looked at the cop. Chuckled.

I imagined her out on the town. Glass of wine. Friends drinking too much. She had to work the next day. Work was important. Became the most important thing. No I won’t have one more. I have to work. Sorry guys. She was glad to get out of the bar. Back into the open air. Hated the crowds. When would a man sweep her off her feet? Say she looked nice in her scrubs? Buy her flowers?

She wrote something in a chart. She was smart. Could have been a doctor but wanted to work with the patients. Wanted to be there with them. To really help. I winced. Coughed. She didn’t look.

Her last boyfriend cheated on her. She helped him through school. She worked while he studied. He graduated. Good job. She waited for the ring. It never came. He planned a big night. Took her out. This was the night? He broke the news. No man since. All men were the same. She turned to leave.

"I-" My throat was dry. I gulped and recollected. First scene. Very important. Calm. Casual. Cool. "Sorry to bother you. My throat is so dry..." A coy laugh. I looked down. Shy. "Could I have some water?"

"I will bring some on my next round." She didn't look up. Moved out the door.

Perfect timing. Perfect scene. Mellow music played. Crooning.

"Thank you Rachel."