

One Moment Changes Everything

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One Moment Changes Everything

by [orphan_account](#)

Summary

A slow day at the claw turns into Ace's worst nightmare when he receives a call from Carson that Nancy's in the hospital from a wreck.

Notes

I blame Nikki for coming up with this idea.

Nothing Is Guaranteed

It has been a pretty slow day at The Claw so far, mid-November is sluggish in general so it was no surprise that they hadn't had many customers. Ace was leaning against the counter while he waited for more dishes to wash when he heard his phone ring. He excused himself and headed to the locker room before he answered. "Ace's phone, this is Ace. What's up Mr. D?" He greeted cheerfully, he was always happy to see Carson's caller ID pop up because the conversation was guaranteed to be about Nancy.

"Ace, there's been a crash. It's Nancy, she's in the hospital," Carson explained on the other end his voice was clearly strained from trying to hold himself together. Ryan's panicked rambling could be heard in the background.

Ace swore his heart stopped. It was like the entire world had just faded into static, crumpled around him into nothing. No. No, this could be. Not Nancy. He regained control of his racing thoughts and reminded himself how to breathe before he answered. "We'll be right there," was all that he managed to reply as the shock wore off and turned into anxiety. He vaguely registered the sound of Carson hanging up on the other end, but that didn't matter. Nothing else mattered beside getting to Nancy as soon as possible.

He was halfway across the kitchen before he even realized he was moving. He exited into the diner and beelined straight for George's office. He barged in without hesitation, he heard what sounded like George complaining but she stopped when she saw the look on her face.

"Ace? What's wrong? You never look this scared."

"Nancy's in the hospital."

Everything after that moment faded into a blur as everyone quickly closed up The Claw before leaving. Ace had already left the parking lot before Nick could ask who was riding with who.

It took him three minutes to make the seven minute drive to the hospital. He rushed through the automatic doors so fast he nearly slipped on the freshly waxed linoleum. He regained his

balance and found Carson and Ryan in the waiting room. He approached them hastily, turning to Carson since Ryan was currently pacing a hole in the floor. “What happened? How is she? Where is she? Who did this to her? Was it Gil?” Ace rambled off questions in one jagged breath, still far from calming down since Carson had called him with the news.

“Ace slow down, take a breath. She’s alive but currently unconscious. She was waiting at a four way stop when an out of control car rammed into her from the side. The car was reported stolen a couple of days ago so the driver is still unknown. That’s all we know right now. We’ll know more when she comes to,” Carson stated, his tone even and kind as he tried to help the young man he had grown to appreciate over the time he had been there for Nancy.

“How are you so calm right now?” Ace asked as he listened to Carson.

“I’m a lawyer, it’s my job to get the facts. Plus, even as stressed and worried as I am, someone has to be here for you lot. Speaking of, where’s the rest of the group?”

“On their way in Nick’s truck. George had us close early, declaring a family emergency. I-uh- may have broken several traffic laws to get here.”

“That’s not important right now. What is important is that you’re here and will be there for her when she wakes up.”

“Right, do the doctors know when that will be yet?”

“No, not yet but she’s stable and they expect her to make a full recovery. It’s just going to take her a little while to process the trauma and sleep is the best way for her brain to sort everything out.”

“Okay, going to take her time to heal,” Ace repeated back, more for his own sanity than Carson’s. “I can deal with that. I’ll wait forever as long as she’s okay.”

“Let’s sit down. You’re looking pale, don’t want you to pass out,” Carson suggested, he guided Ace over to nearby chairs and sat down next to him so he would know he wasn’t alone. Carson was aware of how much the situation must scare Ace from the knowledge that McGinnis shared during Ace’s car crash. The young man was terrified of them and the damage they could do to the people he loved. That trauma based fear was written all over his face as he stared at the nearest wall and anxiously tapped his foot.

“Mr. D?” He asked, his voice small and fragile like a scared child. “This is going to sound selfish and I’m sorry, but I can’t lose her. I know she’s your daughter and you should be the most concerned over this, you have every right to be mad but it’s true. I can’t lose her Mr. D. It’s come real close before, and there were times I was afraid she wasn’t going to pull through. But those were always mysteries for her to solve, puzzle pieces to fit together where only she could see the picture. Supernatural or not it’s always been a case for her to figure out. This was most likely an accident, and I know too well there’s nothing to be done about those. There won’t be a crew meeting for her to point out clues or make our next course of action, it will just be something we have to learn to move on from and I’m really bad at that.”

Carson couldn’t stand to see Ace so terrified, hardly anything ever seemed to phase him so seeing him so scared was worrying. Nancy might be the one in the hospital, but at that moment Ace was the one in need of help. “I’m not mad, if anything I’m glad that you care as much for her as you do. You’re a good kid Ace, and I know that. I know that you mean a lot to Nancy and she means a lot to you. I’m grateful that she has such an amazing group to be there for her and support her through whatever she decides to do. I don’t think you’re being selfish, it’s hard to sit helplessly when you know someone you love is hurting. But just like you assured me, Nancy is tough. She’ll pull through just fine and will yell at all of us for hovering over her.”

“Never thought I’d be looking forward to hearing Nancy complain,” Ace joked, although they both knew the humor was forced. He was about to say something else before he heard someone call his name and turned to see the rest of the crew rush over.

“Ace! Don’t scare us like that!” Bess chided him before she sat next to him. She glanced at Ryan before she turned to Carson. “Clearly things are bad, do you know what happened?”

“Sorry we’re late Mr. Drew,” George apologized as she and Nick sat on Carson’s other side.

Carson began to catch the others up on what he was previously telling Ace, glad that all of Nancy's friends would be right here when she woke up.

Some time had passed before they got an update on her condition. Ryan had finally calmed down enough to stay in one place although he still refused to sit down.

"Mr. Drew? Mr. Hudson?" A doctor inquired as she approached the two men, all eyes immediately fell on her.

"Yes? Is everything alright doctor?" Carson replied as he stood up, Ryan still hadn't trusted himself enough to speak.

"We have an update on your daughter's condition."

"How is she?"

"She is starting to stir, we think she will regain consciousness shortly. Anyone who wishes to see her is now permitted to do so. It may still be another few hours yet, but she'll be alright."

"Thank you doctor, glad to hear it."

The moment the doctor turned to leave Bess tackled George in a relieved hug. "She's okay! Or at least she is going to be, isn't that great!"

"Get off of me."

"Sorry."

Ace felt like he could finally think clearly for the first time in hours. He wanted to see her immediately, he didn't care if she wasn't awake yet. He had so much that he wanted to tell her! How much he cared for her! How grateful he was that she's okay! How much he loved her! Wait a minute, where'd that last one come from? Well he supposed it wasn't that big of a deal, friends do say they love each other. But this feeling wasn't the same, this one only happened when Nancy was involved. What could it- *oh*.

It was Nick who spoke into existence the question they were all thinking. "Can we go see her?"

Fear Brings Clarity

Chapter Summary

Ace can't stand to see Nancy laying there helpless, but he'll stay strong for her. He'll do anything for her. Even pour his heart out.

Chapter Notes

I've never written anything this quickly before.

As Carson led them to Nancy's room Ace felt like he was going to have a heart attack. He had thought hearing that she was doing better would have calmed him down, but it only seemed to make him more anxious. It wasn't until they had reached her room that it clicked. The sight of her laying there, helplessly hooked up to the heart monitor and IV. The others went inside to be with her, but Ace couldn't bring himself to move. The sight of her so bloodied and bruised was too much, he could take another step no matter how much he wanted to be by her side. So he ran.

He didn't know what wing of the hospital he ended up in, or when his anxiety attack stopped. He had curled up, hands locked around his knees with his head hidden to keep anyone from seeing just how broken and lost he felt. It wasn't until he heard someone sit down next to him that he looked up for the first time.

"She'll kill me if she wakes up and you're not there," Carson said with a kind and wise expression. He offered Ace a box of tissues that he had most likely taken from Nancy's room.

"This is my biggest fear Mr. D. Losing someone to a car accident or them never being quite the same after," Ace admitted, he accepted the tissues as he tried to keep himself from crying again.

"I know Ace. I know what it feels like to see someone you love so dearly lay there hurting while you feel useless to do anything but watch. It's a pain that you never forget, but you can't let it consume you."

"And how do I do that?"

"You think about what she wants you to do and what you would want her to do if the situation was reversed. Stay strong."

“But what if I can’t? What if I don’t know how?”

“Then you do your best and you be there for her when she wakes up. You rely on others for your strength, just like she relies on you.”

“Thanks Mr. D. I’ll try. Nancy’s lucky to have such a great dad.”

“You make sure to tell her that the next time she blatantly ignores my concern over her health.”

“I think I’m ready to go see her now,” Ace sighed, he felt exhausted but better nonetheless. He dried the last of his tears before he stood up. Carson followed.

When the two returned to where Nancy was being monitored Carson held the door open to let Ace go in first. Upon entering Ace immediately noticed that the two chairs were positioned on either side of her cot and had purposefully been left empty. Ryan had collapsed into the far corner, his adrenaline finally giving out. George and Nick were side by side against the opposite wall. Bess was by the door, nervously messing with her jacket zipper. No one looked at him as he entered, and he was thankful. He immediately went to the nearest chair and pulled it even closer to her bedside as he sat down.

If coma patients can hear people talk to them then surely Nancy could too. Here goes nothing. “Hey Nance,” Ace began softly, using the nickname he reserved for when she needed support and reassurance. “I’m glad you’re going to be okay. I’m really worried about you, we all are. Everyone is right here, ready for when you want to prove the police wrong. It’s only been a few hours, but I’m willing to bet there’s more to what happened then they could ever figure out on their own. Normal people things don’t happen to us anymore. Heard the mayor was going to be in town next weekend. Bet he’ll have a stroke once he hears about everything you’ve done for Horseshoe Bay. But you’ll have to tell him yourself. I know that you’re going to make it through, I know better than to doubt the resilience of Nancy Drew.”

Carson had made his way to the chair on the other side of the bed and was watching both young adults with a fond expression. He thought back to all the things he would tell Kate while she was resting after treatment. Nothing makes a person more honest and open than seeing their loved one asleep in the hospital. Something told him that Ace would need to be alone in order to spill what was really on his heart.

“I was so terrified that I-we might lose you. So many things have happened to us, I doubt anyone would have predicted that it would be a wreck that put you in the hospital. You probably hate hospitals as much as I do, maybe more. McGinnis used to tell me that no amount of cleaning products can remove the remainder of death’s presence. He said as you get older it gets to a point where you’re so familiar with it that you can tell when someone is about to die. I hope it’s a long time before I ever recognize that feeling,” Ace continued to say whatever crossed his mind, his eyes glued to the floor.

Carson stood up, he knew what he should do. “I’m going to get some coffee,” he stated simply, as he nudged Ryan’s foot for him to follow. Luckily Ryan seemed to understand the message and go to his feet to leave as well. Bess, ever curious, was quick to pick up on

Carson's plan and gave George and Nick a look to do the same. Soon Ace was left alone to pour his heart out to the girl he had just recently realized meant the world and more to him.

"I can't lose you Nancy. I know we have this talk each time the other narrowly avoids whatever danger the world has thrown at us this time, but it's true. Nothing scares me more than the thought of losing you. I know I was mad at you for what you did at the old paper mill, but honestly I would have done the exact same thing and we both know it. We would give the whole world for each other's safety. It's taken me a long time to figure out why you are always my top priority. Amanda and I got into many arguments about how I would drop everything and come running the moment you needed me. That's why she broke up with me too, said I could never truly make her my first priority as long as you were in my life. I didn't understand her at the time, but I think I do now. I'm sorry it's taken me forever, I'm sure you had it figured out a long time ago being such an amazing detective. You amaze me everyday. You're so smart, creative, determined, strong, and passionate. I am so lucky to have you in my life, because without you I don't know if I ever would have found where I belonged. You helped me find a sense of belonging and purpose. I know we all owe you a lot, but I think I owe you the most. I don't know if I'll ever be able to repay you but I do know that I'll have a lot more to tell you when you wake up," Ace confessed, finally saying everything in his heart. He looked up and forced himself to see her pale and bruised face. He glanced down to the hand less than a foot away from his own, he wondered if he should hold it when he noticed it twitch.

Ace knew Nancy well, he often picked up on details that the others overlooked. One of those many details was how important physical touch was to her. It was her love language, her tether to reality when she felt like she was spiraling into an endless abyss. So he knew that she was wanting him to help ground her to whatever was going on inside her head as she slept with just that simple movement. Nothing Nancy does is accidental, all of her actions are deliberate even if impulsive. This was confirmed when she squeezed his hand the moment he held hers. She may not be awake yet, but she knew he was there and waiting for her. That's all he needed to know she would be okay.

It was an hour before the others returned, doctors followed behind them. No one commented about how her hand was encased between both of his or how hair had been brushed away from her face.

"We've slowed the dosage on her pain killers. She might still be a little hazy from the side effects plus she probably has a minor concussion so if she's a bit confused or forgetful at first don't worry that should wear off shortly," one of the doctors informed everyone before leaving. The other two checked her vitals quickly before leaving as well.

"Pain killers never clouded her mind before. She'll be as sharp as ever, no matter what they gave her," Carson commented, as he returned to his spot in the opposite chair.

Nancy let out a groan from discomfort as she began to stir.

Sharp As A Tack

Chapter Summary

Nancy awakens as coherent as ever and finally fills the crew in on the full story of her accident. Some take the news better than others. Only one thing, or more accurately person, can make Ace's blood boil.

Chapter Notes

Something normal happen to Nancy Drew? Inconceivable!

No, literally, you didn't think a multi-chapter fic that starts in the hospital was going to be about a normal situation did you?

Nancy slowly opened her eyes then immediately scowled as she adjusted to the bright fluorescent lights of the hospital room. She took in her surroundings first, memorized every detail of the room. Next she observed the state she was in, frowning at the many bandages and bruises. Finally she looked at the people around her as they waited for her to take everything in. She met everyone's eyes, starting with Carson's and ending with Ace. She had to force herself to look away from his hopeful expression.

Nancy took a deep breath. "I am going to kill Gil Bobbsey!" She declared with rage she hadn't felt since she kidnapped Everett.

Ace was the first one to speak about the dots connected to the newly revealed information. "He did this to you? I knew it, I knew this wasn't an accident," he replied, his blood boiling at the revelation that Gil had tried to kill her. The only thing that kept him from acting on that anger was Nancy's hand tightening her grip on his. A silent message he thankfully received and understood.

Ryan responded next, speaking for the first time since he had found out that his daughter was hurt. He knew the look of Hudson rage well, but did not care if his expression currently matched that of Nancy's for he had always been horrible at controlling his anger and today was proving to not be any better. "He hurt you again? That absolute trash of a human being, no good manipulative little--"

"-Ryan, calm down. Right now Nancy's health is more important than revenge. Let her talk," Carson interrupted, knowing he had to stop him before he stormed out and did something he would regret.

“Right right, sorry.”

“Do you want to hear my full statement now or wait until I talk to the police?” Nancy asked, her one-track mind focused on the crime aspect of her situation and ignoring the injury part.

“How about both at the same time, Miss Drew?” Offered a voice as the door closed behind a certain regular detective that most of the crew found annoying.

“Tamura. What, were big city crimes too much paperwork or did you just miss us?” Nancy taunted, a challenging look in her eyes. Daring him to insult her back in her current situation.

He didn’t take the bait. “I was just reassigned back here after finishing my former investigation. Now, Miss Drew I think I speak for everyone present when I say we would like to know what happened.”

“Fine. It was 10:23, I wanted to stop by a friend’s house before my eleven o’clock shift. I was at a four-way stop, between a red truck and black minivan. It was 10:25 when I noticed Gil watching suspiciously from around a storefront corner. And at 10:26 I noticed the stolen car mere seconds before it crashed into my car,” she explained carefully, waiting for questions before going into detail.

“Where do you think the stolen vehicle came from if you weren’t in a clear shot of the perpendicular road?”

“Probably an inclined alleyway. Lots of dead end alleyways are angled so that the rain runs down onto the street to keep from flooding.”

“What did the other vehicles on the four-way do when the missing car started rolling towards you?”

“I don’t know, I wasn’t paying attention to them. I was focused on trying to figure out what Gil was doing and then I barely had time to register what was happening before I got knocked out.”

“Alright. Do you think Mr. Bobbsey intended to cause you harm?”

“Obviously, he’s a horrible person and has never cared about anyone but himself,” Ace interjected, unable to stop himself from giving his opinion on the prime suspect. He refused to make eye contact when the attention was suddenly on him.

“Drew?” Tamura pressed, refusing to acknowledge Ace. The two men had never gotten along to begin with and things had only gotten worse, the only time they could tolerate being in the same room together was when Nancy was also present to lead the conversation.

“Well Ace is right, but to answer the question, yes. I do think he had malicious intent behind his actions. I distinctly remember thinking ‘oh Gil’s trying to kill me’ right before I blacked out. He’s probably on the run or hiding by now, so I don’t know how much luck you’ll have at his trailer. Anything else?” Nancy continued, waiting for the detective to leave before she addressed Ace’s comment directly.

“That’s all I need for now. Get well Miss Drew,” Tamura replied simply before he headed back out into the hallway.

The moment the door closed behind Tamura, Bess forced herself to relax. “Nancy, must you antagonize every police officer you know?”

“Not all of them. I was respectful with Captain Thom. I just ended up accidentally angering him.” Nancy shrugged, unbothered.

“I’m going to get another cookie, this is too stressful,” Bess declared as she left.

“Hey Ace?” Nancy asked, turning her attention back to her main source for support.

“Yeah Nancy?”

“I know you hate Gil, but if anyone’s going to get arrested for revenge it’s going to be me. I’m not going to allow you to get in trouble over my toxic ex. He’s not worth it.”

“He tried to kill you Nancy!” Ace retaliated, not understanding why she couldn’t see how much she meant to him. “He’s not going to stop. I’m not going to allow him the chance to ever get near you again!”

“I know, but you’ve fought so hard to stay out of jail. I’m not going to let him drag you down to his level. Please Ace, just trust that they’ll find him before he tries something else.”

Ace sighed in defeat, he could never say no to Nancy. “I don’t trust the police, but I trust you. If you think he’ll stay in hiding and won’t try anything soon then I promise not to punch his skull in the moment he’s in custody.”

“Thank you, I appreciate that. Now, someone catch me up to speed about everything. When am I allowed to go home?”

Nancy spent the next couple hours listening to all of her favorite people. Carson informed her about her current condition and when she was most likely to be cleared to leave. Ryan didn’t have much to share about the five hours she had missed, having done nothing productive with his day. George talked about how it was a boring day at the Claw anyways. Nick mentioned that the kids at the youth center were doing well. When Bess returned she was happy to talk about how interning was going. She commented under her breath that Addy was visiting the Historical Society frequently. Finally it was Ace’s turn to distract her from focusing on her injuries, something he had trouble doing himself.

“I did a bit more digging into the case you’re working on last night. I was going to tell you what I found when you got to work, but then your dad called and well all plans got thrown out the window. I think Florence is mad at me, I kinda accidentally cut the drive across town in half to get here. I can bring in my laptop later to show you if you want,” Ace explained, careful not to mention any specifics in case she hadn’t told Carson or Ryan about what new danger the crew had discovered yet.

“That would be great, I can’t wait to see it. I’m sure whatever you found will be crucial to solving this case, you always know how to discover the right piece of information. But I probably won’t be allowed to go investigate the site for a couple more days at least so mystery talk will have to be put on hold for now. How are you?”

“Shouldn’t I be the one asking you that? You’re the one in the hospital after all,” Ace answered with a dry laugh, trying to avoid the real question in her tone.

“Ace...”

“I’m not doing so great, but your dad gave some words of encouragement and that helped. Plus you’re awake now, so I think I’ll be okay. I might insist on you calling me whenever you go anywhere for a while so I know you’re safe, but I’ll make it through,” he admitted, he found himself unable to look away from her soft gaze. He felt like every inch of his soul was out on display for her to read, but strangely he didn’t mind. They had been doing this for a while now, able to understand each other and how they were truly feeling just with one look. They both knew their eyes gave them away, but when it mattered most they always ended up trusting each other with their most interpersonal thoughts.

She gave his hand a reassuring squeeze, another silent conversation shared between them. “Alright. Maybe one day I’ll get injured for a normal reason. Nobody would believe me if I did. You guys would assume I was hiding something,” Nancy tried to joke, wanting to keep the mood from getting too serious.

When her joke wasn’t appreciated she tried a different approach. “Well I love you all, and I’m glad to see that I have so many people that care about my safety, but I’m still pretty worn out. I promise you can all come back as soon as visiting hours open tomorrow, but right now I need some peace and quiet,” Nancy stated, she didn’t loosen her grip on Ace’s hands as she spoke. She knew he would understand what she was really saying.

And he did. As the others said their goodbyes and wished her well, slowly filing out of the room until it was just the two of them once again.

“So,” Nancy sighed, turning in her cot to better face him, “total honesty time?”

Words To Be Said At A Later Time

Chapter Summary

Upon being left alone Ace finally allows his fears to be known and Nancy is there to reassure him after all of the times that he has been there for her.

Meanwhile Bess insists on being nosy about the obvious feelings between her platanchor and her best friend.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“What do you think they’re talking about in there?” Bess asked as she joined the rest of the group at a table, her second cup of hot chocolate in hand.

“Whatever they said between those looks. I swear they have their own language. They’re telepathic or something. How else do you have a full-fledged back and forth conversation with one look? Or a simple touch? I’m sorry, but I need words in order to understand what someone is trying to tell me,” George answered, she had her eyes glued to her phone as she updated Jesse on Nancy’s condition.

“Yeah,” Nick agreed, he rubbed his fiancée’s back to try to ease the tension in her shoulders. “It makes it almost impossible to believe that she used to be so closed off and refused to communicate.”

“You can’t force Nancy to talk if she doesn’t want to,” Carson explained. “Clearly Ace figured that out and adjusted to how Nancy operates in order to understand what he needs to do to be there for her.”

“She got that from Lucy,” Ryan mentioned, his expression a mixture of fond and sorrowful. “She never said what she meant, you had to figure it out yourself. Like a puzzle, constantly putting pieces together from a collection of little moments. She would also close herself off when she got stressed. The doctors eventually ruled that as part of her anxiety and depression disorders, but the medication didn’t keep her from shutting out the world. Looks like Nancy inherited that just like she inherited Celia’s migraines and Everett’s anger issues. I just hope she can keep a better control of the Hudson temper than I can.”

“Is no one else slightly curious about what they’re saying? What if they’re finally confessing?” Bess continued, confused as to why no one else was as excited for the potential of a love confession as she was.

“Bess,” George complained with an eye roll. “Just let them have their moment in peace. They deserve it.”

“Fine, but don’t be surprised if I end up stress stealing,” Bess sighed with defeat, she looked down the hall to the closed door of Nancy’s room where her two closest friends were having a private conversation.

On the other side of the door, a conversation began with a shaky sigh. “I had a panic attack when I saw you lying here unconscious. It reminded me too much of...” Ace trailed off, unable to finish his sentence but he also knew that he didn’t have to.

“I know. Shh, it’s okay now. I’m okay,” Nancy replied, her voice uncharacteristically calm and soothing. It was rare for Ace to be the one in need of support in their dynamic and Nancy wasn’t good with comforting words, but she had adapted to show Ace the same patience and compassion that he always showed her.

“How can you say that after what just happened?” Ace asked, tears had already begun to roll down his face as he clutched her hand even tighter.

“Because I have you, and that’s all I need to feel safe.”

“But I wasn’t there to pull you out of danger.”

“Ace, no one can protect someone twenty-four hours of every day. Plus, you know I can take care of myself in most situations. This was just one of those times where nothing could have been done.”

“You’re right. I just- It’s that- You know how car accidents scare me.”

“Yeah, but we agreed to stop blaming ourselves for things that are out of our control. And the last thing I want is you blaming yourself for what Gil did,” Nancy reminded him, she wished at that moment that she could move her other arm and pull him into a hug. She wanted to hold him tight and not let go until his tears stopped like he had done for her so many times before. But the IV stopped that from happening.

“Okay, I’ll try my best. Can we talk about something else now?”

“Of course. We can talk about anything you want. What were you able to find about the victim’s missing necklace?”

“Well a quick peek into her social media showed that she wore it everywhere, although never directly mentioned it and never answered any questions about it,” Ace began as he tried to decide who needed the change of topic more, himself or Nancy.

“So she always kept in on her but was secretive about its origin. Seems a bit too intentional for it to have just been her favorite piece of jewelry. Think she’s hiding something?” Nancy responded, going right into detective mode.

“Definitely, I dug a little deeper. Turns out it’s a family heirloom, it was her grandmother’s. Makes sense why she’s so proud of it but it doesn’t explain why she never talks about it even when directly asked.”

“Okay, let’s rule out some options based on what we know. She reported it as stolen after finding out someone had broken into her house. It was the only thing missing, that was no signs of property damage or any sort of disturbance. Insurance theft?”

“Nope, didn’t have insurance on it. Said it was irreplaceable and that money is nothing compared to her grandmother’s memory.”

“Publicity stunt? She is a hilltopper.”

“No, there’s been nothing in the paper and anyone who asks her about it gets told that the clasp broke.”

“So that opens the door for suspects. Bitter relatives, vengeful exes, anyone who knows what that necklace is and what it means to her.”

“Please don’t tell me my next internet deep dive is about celebrity drama. I think I’d rather have my list of felonies on display,” Ace complained half-heartedly. In reality, he would do whatever Nancy asked him to without hesitation, he would do anything for her.

Nancy laughed at his obvious distaste for her suggestion. “Maybe you won’t have to, we’ll ask Bess what she knows about her. You know she lives for that stuff.”

Ace was about to reply when the doctors returned which caused both of them to halt their conversation.

“Sorry to interrupt, but we would like to perform a more detailed examination now that Miss Drew is awake,” one of the doctors explained as she pulled a pen out of her neatly styled bun. “I’m afraid we’re going to have to ask you to step out for the sake of her privacy. I promise we’ll let you know as soon as we’re done.”

Ace gave Nancy a confused look, he wanted some form of clarification to that statement before he left.

Nancy understood what he was asking instantly. “They probably want to check the bruises and gashes that are currently hidden by the hospital gown. I know the one on my hip is pretty bad just from how much it still stings even on pain killers.”

Ace only nodded as he stood up, letting go of her hand for the first time since he had found the courage to enter the room. He still had so much to tell her, but at least he knew he would have the time to now.

It didn’t take him long to find his friends, they were known for being quiet. He pulled up a nearby chair and tried to jump seamlessly into the conversation, but he found no such luck.

“So, did you tell her? Did you finally confess?” Bess asked immediately, causing a halt in the previous conversation.

“No, I didn’t tell her.”

“Why not?”

“Didn’t feel like the right time. I want her to be in a safe and comfortable situation. Want her to know she has a choice, that she’s in control of the situation. Hospitals only cause helplessness, especially when you’re the one in the cot. I’ll probably wait until she’s back at home.”

“Oh Ace, that’s very thoughtful of you. The thing is, you don’t need to wait. She feels the same! She has for forever now!”

“Bess!” George reprimanded, giving Bess a death glare.

“It’s about more than just how we feel. I don’t want her to think I’m confessing now just because of her crash. I want her to know that her voice and opinion are respected, and she is under no obligation to give me an answer. I want her to have the option to walk away, right now she can’t do that. It’s not the right time,” Ace continued, unable to stop himself once he started talking about Nancy.

George turned to Nick. “Why didn’t you give me the option to walk away? You were my ride home.”

“Because I figured you’d rather humiliate me,” Nick answered casually.

“Good thing I didn’t.”

“Yes, thank you very much for not making a fool out of me.”

“So, if you didn’t confess your undying love for her despite the fact that we all know you two are deeply in love with each other, what did you talk about?” Bess pressed, although disappointed she supported her platanchor’s decision.

“We talked about her current case. Went over why the victim is withholding information about her stolen necklace and why it was the only item taken. I don’t know who needed the distraction more, but I know I was very thankful to focus on something other than the attempt on her life,” Ace mentioned, he was still trying to calm down from the realization that Gil had tried to kill her.

It wasn’t long after that the doctors returned. “You may see her again if you wish, but visiting hours will be ending soon,” they informed the group before heading off to presumably check on other patients.

Without a word of discussion, everyone left the table and returned to Nancy’s temporary quarters of residence. This time Ace was first to enter the room as he immediately took the same chair again and slipped Nancy’s hand between his own.

“How are you feeling?” Carson asked as he sat in the other chair just as before.

Nancy answered her father’s pointless question with a sarcastic smile. “Just great Dad. Absolutely fine, except for you know everything.”

Carson shook his head at her attics but was silently grateful that she was feeling well enough to tell jokes.

Ryan, who had crashed in the corner again, laughed outright at her remark. “She’s got a point, Carson. She’s not going to be any better now than she was five minutes ago. Let the kid rest, she’s tough she’ll be fine. You didn’t raise a quitter, you raised a detective.”

“Alright I get, I’ll stop hovering. Get some rest sweetie, I’ll see you tomorrow,” Carson relented, he pressed a quick kiss to her temple before giving Ryan a glare as he went to leave.

Ryan took that as a challenge, still not completely broken of his Hudson ways. “What are you going to do Carson? I already sleep on the couch and do chores, you can’t make me pay rent because I’ve never worked a day in my life. You gonna kick me out?” He taunted before his brain caught up to his mouth. “Oh wait, we took his car. He’s about to leave me without a ride! I gotta go! Get well kiddo, I’ll be back the moment they let me, with gifts.” He realized as he scrambled to his feet and rushed out the door after Carson.

Nancy laughed at Ryan as nearly slipped. “You know, legally I have two dads. But the reality of the situation is, Carson has two accidentally adopted kids. I’m pretty sure Ted has more life skills than Ryan.”

“Speaking of, I got to go pick her up from a friend’s. Bess, you need a ride back to the Drew’s?” George added at the mention of her youngest sister.

“If you don’t mind, could you drop me off at the Historical Society? I promised Addy I would look into a potential stolen artifact for her,” Bess replied. She reached over and patted Nancy’s arm with a sympathetic look before she followed the couple out the door.

“You’re probably exhausted, I should let you rest,” Ace began as started to stand back up.

“Actually, I’d prefer it if you stayed. I don’t think either one of us wants to be alone tonight,” Nancy interjected immediately, she tightened her grip around his hand and tugged it closer towards her. While she sounded fairly calm considering the circumstance, she knew how scared they both were.

Ace did not protest, going back to her side as if it was the only place he wanted to be. In a way, it was. “I’d love to. There’s so much more I want to tell you.”

The hours went by, the two of them talking about anything other than her wreck or the poorly concealed feelings that they harbored for each other. Eventually Nancy fell asleep, and Ace followed shortly after.

Maybe in the morning they’ll think about the fact that no one came to extract him from her side, or how peacefully they both slept despite the situation. Hands still entwined like even fate itself couldn’t separate them.

Y'all thought he was gonna confess this early? Nah. This is a slow-burn ship so you have to wait. At this rate we'll probably get a canon confession before I write that chapter considering my plan, but who knows. They very well could wait a-whole-nother season and make us suffer even more.

Stubbornness Meets Kindness

Chapter Summary

Nancy wakes the next morning, to find Ace still by her side.

Chapter Notes

I'm alive! Organ failure is no fun.

Nancy awoke early the next morning. She groaned as she tried to stretch. As she blinked away the blurry remains of sleep she made a second glance around the room, she wanted to memorize the details in case she ended up there again in the future. To her embarrassment, she had shuffled even closer to the still sleeping Ace in the night. In fact she was as close as the IV would allow. She smiled at the sight of her best friend and not-so-secret-crush sleeping peacefully. She couldn't remember the last time Ace looked so carefree. Nancy felt guilty at the thought that she was a main cause of why worry was always deeply embedded in his features. She tried not to think about the fact that their hands had somehow managed to stay entwined together the entire night. She failed.

Before Nancy had time to consider slipping her hand away from his, despite how much she wanted nothing more than to feel the security and warmth of his touch forever, a couple of doctors quietly entered the room. She watched as they silently approached her cot from the side, making sure not to disturb Ace, and slowly unhooked her from the IV before they left again.

With her left hand now free she began to lightly run it through his hair. She could be a little self-indulgent, right? Gil had just tried to kill her after all. There was no harm in a little affection.

When he began to stir Nancy quickly retracted her hand, but couldn't tear her eyes away from him. She felt pressure on her right hand and was filled with adoration at the realization that his first conscious action was to check that she was still there.

“How are you feeling?” Ace asked, his voice gravelly from sleep. He sat up and ran his free hand through his hair out of habit.

“Better, the medication is really helping with the pain,” Nancy answered honestly.

“That’s good, Horseshoe Bay needs it’s best detective to be well. And I need Nancy Drew,” Ace stated as he stretched. He was surprised he slept so well considering how uncomfortable the chair was.

“I doubt that, your life would be a lot less complicated without me chasing every mystery I get my hands on.”

“Nancy, listen to me. I love going on adventures and mystery solving missions with you. I love watching you work, it’s so amazing to watch you unravel a case. Just because you make my formerly boring life more *exciting* doesn’t mean I’m not a willing participant. If I could go back in time I would do it all again, I wouldn’t choose any differently. You’ve given my life a purpose, and I wouldn’t want it any other way. I love what we do Nancy Drew,” Ace replied, his tone completely serious. He wanted her to understand the weight behind his words and the meaning within them. He held eye contact the entire time so she could see what he left unsaid.

And she did. She saw into his soul. She knew that look well, it was one of the many they reserved just for each other because they knew they would be the only ones to truly understand what the other meant. He was asking her to trust him with her insecurities, with the promise that he would trust her with his in return. And so she did. Nancy lowered her mental defenses to allow him to see where she felt the most broken.

“I’m scared. I’m scared that one day I’m going to chase a mystery that gets you or any of our friends killed and I have to live with the knowledge that I caused it,” Nancy began to explain.

Ace pulled the chair impossibility closer as he listened. He leaned forward so she would know she had his full attention.

“Everyone tries to warn me against being impulsive and reckless. Trying to stop me from running head first into danger based on a hunch, but I can’t. I’m stubborn and I will always do things my way. I’m a Hudson by nature, and I’m terrified. Want to know the last thing Everett said before he got locked away?” Nancy continued.

Ace nodded to encourage her to go on.

“He said ‘welcome to the family.’ The only time I was able to get ahead of him was when I thought like him. I acted like such a Hudson that I made him proud.”

“Nancy, your heritage does not determine who you are. You’re human, everyone has done things they’re not proud of. I made my fair share in recent history. Not to mention what you were going through at that time. The fact that you feel remorse for your actions proves that you will never be like him. You have the power to rewrite the Hudson name, if you wanted to,” Ace interjected, he hated seeing how much she was doubting herself.

“Right. Monsters like him don’t feel guilt. Monsters manipulate and take advantage of others with no hesitation. Monsters hurt people willingly,” Nancy nodded, she felt better to have gotten that off her chest.

Ace’s expression darkened as it dawned on him who else her description would match. “Nance,” he began, his voice low and nearly choked with anger, “you would have told me if *he* had ever hurt you, right?”

Nancy immediately caught on to where Ace’s mind had gone. She squeezed his hand before she began to rub repetitive circles with her thumb. “Of course Ace, I would have told you. Don’t worry, he never did anything. Gil’s too much of a coward for that.”

“Okay, good. So no assault and battery, just attempted murder. Guy seriously needs to learn when to apply ‘go big or go home’ and when to have common sense,” Ace let out a sigh of relief. The two of them had never talked much about her time with Gil, mainly because any mention of the guy made Ace want to punch something until he broke his hand.

Nancy laughed. “You’re giving him too much credit. Gil isn’t capable of common sense.”

“Right as always Nancy. Still want to hit him till his brainless skull caves in. But if it’s any help towards your fear, you’re not the only one. I’m terrified of turning into my dad.”

There was the trade off, she opened up now he was returning the promise. Lock up your feelings Drew, Ace needs you. “He’s a good man Ace, he loves you and your mom with his whole heart. Was he wrong and selfish for choosing his secrets over his family and your safety? Absolutely. I could go on forever about how mad I still am at him for that, but at the end of the day he is a good man.”

“Yeah, a good man with a temper,” Ace sighed. He turned his attention back to the floor, although he never let go of her hand. He knew she had a point, she always did, but it wasn’t enough to quell his fears just yet.

“Is that why you’re so insistent about going with the flow? You’re afraid you’ll blow up like he does? Ace, you’re allowed to be angry over things. You don’t have to be the mediator all the time, that’s not fair.”

“Doesn’t change the fact that I have his anger.”

“But you don’t let it control you. I’ve seen you upset before, and I know that you would never let it consume you. Take a page from my book, letting that negativity fester just causes you and everyone around you more pain. You get angry because you care, you care so deeply that you are blind to see how much others care about you.”

“Thanks, I’ll try to remember that. Hey Nancy, can you make me a promise?”

“Anything.”

“When you see me drowning in problems I’m keeping to myself, force me to open up. I can’t do it on my own like you can, I need someone to push my walls down for me.”

“Of course Ace. You always guide me back to safety when I’m drowning, so I would never let you suffer.”

“Like a lighthouse?”

“Yeah, like a lighthouse. Something constant and steady that I know I can always depend upon.”

Ace was about to answer when the two began to hear two familiar voices grow steadily closer.

“-Ryan that’s up to Nancy. I wouldn’t be the one representing anyways, that would be a conflict of interest. Let’s just calm down and worry about what’s going to happen after the police catch him,” Carson informed Ryan as the two approached Nancy’s room.

“I can’t calm down Carson! I didn’t get a wink of sleep and I wore oven mitts all night to keep myself from punching something! It didn’t work!” Ryan replied, his voice much louder than Carson’s.

They reached their daughter’s hospital room shortly after they had quit bickering. As they entered they were both equally relieved to see that Nancy looked much better.

“How are you doing? Can I get you anything?” Carson asked softly as he reached the side of the cot.

“No thanks Dad, I’m good. Ace could probably use some breakfast though,” Nancy replied with a small shake of her head, not wanting to bring her headache back.

“I’ll only eat if you do. You got hit by a car Nancy, you need to keep your strength up and stay healthy so you can heal properly,” Ace retorted, knowing just how difficult it was to get Nancy to eat a real meal.

Nancy huffed in reply, of course he knew what she was doing. He always did. “I will *attempt* a blueberry muffin.”

“Good enough for me. Be back in a bit. Can I get you guys anything, Mr. D? Mr. H?” Ace asked with a shrug as he stood up properly for the first time, slowly letting go of Nancy’s hand. He didn’t want to leave her side, but her dads were here now so she wouldn’t be alone.

“No thank you Ace, we’ve already eaten,” Carson answered with a small shake of his head.

“There’s nothing in the world that can help me right now. Hudson rage doesn’t subside once ignited until you act on it. I’ve been trying to think of a non-violent outlet all morning, haven’t found one yet,” Ryan admitted, consumed by the anger running through his veins.

“Yeah...it’s not a good feeling,” Nancy agreed slowly as she remembered when she allowed her Hudson blood to take over after seeing Celia’s corpse.

“I’ll see if the gift shop has a teddy bear you can tear the head off of,” Ace half-joked before he exited the room in search of a blueberry muffin.

“How’d you sleep kiddo? You look better,” Carson asked, his tone soft as if he was afraid anything louder would harm her.

“I actually slept really well. I was surprised I even got to sleep at all, let alone peacefully. That’s the first time in a while I haven’t woken up at least once.”

“That’s good. I know being in the hospital is hard for you, but you’ll get to come home soon.”

“Hey Ryan, where’s the gifts you promised me yesterday?”

“Bess is on her way with them. Said something about getting a decorative basket,” Ryan answered with a confused shrug.

“Oh no. You trusted Bess to go shopping, alone? We’re not going to see her all day,” Nancy replied.

“What is she like a shopaholic or something?”

“No, not that. It’s just that she’ll start overthinking about what would be the perfect gift then her anxiety and paranoia is going to get the best of her. She loves shopping, but the recovering klepto is still getting used to actually following a budget instead of shoplifting.”

“Well I have my phone on me if you would want to call and check on her,” Ryan offered.

Nancy was about to reject her father’s attempt to be helpful when the door opened and two more heads cautiously poked in.

“See! I’d told you she’d be awake. Nothing keeps Nancy down for long!” Bess cheered as she pushed the door the rest of the way open, Addy’s arm in her other hand.

“Clearly there is still a lot I need to learn about you and your friends and what you’ve all been through. Hi Nancy, Bess told me what happened,” Addy stated as she entered behind Bess. She gently closed the door behind her before setting a small wicker basket in front of Nancy.

“Hi Addy, glad you could stop by. Thanks for keeping Bess company,” Nancy smiled as she forced herself to sit up straighter to get a better look at what Ryan and Bess had collaborated on. She found a murder mystery novel, a chocolate bar, her headphones and laptop with a sticky note of the hospital’s Wi-Fi informed attached, plus her journal.

“We all knew you would want to keep yourself distracted from your injuries or all the possible ways of getting away with Gil’s murder so we figured this should last you at least a

couple hours,” Bess explained as Nancy put everything back into the basket and set it on the nearby nightstand. “Now, where is my platanchor? I know there is no way he would leave you right now.”

“Sent him on a wild goose chase. Said he wouldn’t eat anything unless I did, so I requested a blueberry muffin knowing that the hospital didn’t offer them.”

“Nancy!” Carson scolded lightly.

“What? He needs to stretch a little anyway, those chairs are *not* comfortable. It’s Ace, he’s smart, I’m sure he’s already figured it out and is on his way back to tease me for sending him after something that didn’t exist.”

At that exact moment the door opened once more. This time to reveal a returned Ace with a brown paper bag from Nancy’s favorite bakery and two coffees in hand. “Caught your goose!” He exclaimed with childish pride.

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