

Unhappily Ever After

Sylvia Martinez had grown up with privilege. Her parents owned a vineyard on the outskirts of Barcelona. Ponies for play, a wardrobe of clothes that were seldom worn a second time and private tutors to prepare her mind. At 19 she ventured away from home for college in America. She met Paul her senior year at Georgetown. Growing up she had wanted for nothing but the feelings she had now were new to her. It was nice to have a companion for a change.

Despite the romantic feelings they both had they kept the relationship platonic because she planned to return to her family's estate and Paul had been recruited by the FBI. Tragically that all changed when her parents were killed in an accident while traveling. Despite her fairy tale life, she suddenly felt like a poor maiden. Paul's strength and support during this time of her life endeared him to her even more. Her parents would never have approved such a thing but she chose to move into a small apartment with Paul when they graduated.

Initially she started attending law school just to keep her mind occupied but found that the material came quite naturally to her. She excelled in school, and eventually in her career as did Paul. They hadn't touched her inheritance until their 10th wedding anniversary when they decided to use it to purchase a home. He explained to her the tradition of carrying one's wife across the threshold as he picked her up. As he set her down their eyes locked. She thanked him for being so gallant and curtsied as a proper princess would.

Despite his denials that nothing was wrong she began worrying about him when he continued waking up night after night in a cold sweat and tossing frantically. Paul finally broke down in tears upon awakening one night and Sylvia held him in her arms as he wept. Muttering only 1 phrase that made no sense to her "One of them is a robot." After preparing breakfast Sylvia was more persistent than she had ever been and gave him no choice but to explain.

"Paul, I agreed that there were parts of your job that had to remain confidential. But this is costing you your sanity and I will not accept anything other than the truth right now." Sylvia exclaimed with an air of authority that only a lawyer could bring to the conversation.

"You won't believe me if I tell you. Heck I don't believe it" Paul said as though he was 10 again trying to weasel out of something when his mother would corner him with a wooden spoon.

Sylvia replied, "You would be surprised what I've heard and believed, despite not wanting to in court so try me mister."

Paul knew his wife was right and for his marriage and his own sanity he had to get these demons out of his head. He began speaking and once he started he kept going without any further prompting.

"Me and Brian had been brought in to interrogate some suspects after an attempted cybercrime. These pricks were trying to hack one of the smallest mom and pop banks in the city. I've worked a lot of hacking cases but this thing through me for a loop from the second we started. Not one of the 3 tried to hide anything and none of them had an ounce of remorse for their attempt.

The guy we thought was the ring leader was a real piece of work. His hacker name was King Louis XV. Apparently, the country he ruled was ArroganceVille because he had never successfully completed any jobs in the past but still thought he was God's gift to the digital world. He had been arrested for all 3 of his previous crimes within hours of the attack. The only thing I liked about the guy was his persistence. His parents were 4th generation farmers until bad weather 2 years in a row caused serious financial strain. The bank foreclosed on the farm and home. The strain was so great that his mother had a stroke that she didn't recover from and his father committed suicide.

This guy was a skilled coder for sure. But his only luck seemed to be that of growing up in a time when access to help online abounded. Hell, if that had happened to me at 14 I would probably have made it my life's mission to get everything from any bank I could as well. I would just have been smarter doing it. I mean for crying out loud the guy enlisted his queen based only on a signal they had arranged on the dark web. Samantha was to wear a red pin on her lapel and meet him at Reflections lounge on 41st and 7th streets at 10:00 PM.

The real Samantha probably had no idea how lucky she was that Horizon had liked the pin and lifted it from her on the way in to the trendy night club. Meanwhile this low-level confidence girl, Horizon, now found herself in the hot seat for a cybercrime she seemed to legitimately not understand the ramifications of nor care about. She wanted the pin, so she took it.

When King approached her, and started asking questions she simply played along. For as long as she could recall she was great at reading people and telling them what they wanted to hear. This guy bit hook line and sinker and seemed like an easy mark. He was going to pay her handsomely for simply connecting with people online and extracting information that would help him. She had never done anything like that but her motto was “when you are given a chance, take it and figure out if you can do it later.” She was apparently good at figuring things out because the network she built through online social media was very impressive.

Not only had she extracted everything needed in a matter of weeks she had King wrapped around her finger. Her only weakness appeared to be the fact that she didn’t know it. He was more than happy to confess to everything and was willing to go to jail to save her. Had she known that, she probably wouldn’t have been so willing to tell us everything. Her confession was more like a recital of facts than a confession. It was all Brian and I could do to write fast enough.”

Sylvia hesitated to interrupt but when Paul stopped talking she had to ask “What’s bothering you so much about this then? In the five years I’ve been trying cases I’m not sure I’ve ever seen a more open and shut case.”

“That’s just it. This isn’t an open and shut case.” Paul’s body language changed dramatically as he spoke and his breathing was clearly labored. Sylvia had never seen him like this while he was awake.

Paul struggled but continued. “Brian and I both said the same thing before we walked in to talk with the third member of their gang. Something seemed off about him from the minute we walked in. We expected to see him nervous as he had been waiting for hours. Instead he was humming.”

Brian started the interrogation “Ok Ralf why don’t you help yourself out and just tell us about your involvement?”

This flip flop wearing fool kind of hummed his answer “Missed the Saturday Dance”

Brian asked, “What dance were you and the goon squad supposed to be at?”

“Heard they crowded the floor” was his next statement, to which Brian replied “You aren’t making any sense. Back up a bit.”

The fool responded by snapping his fingers with a rhythm and sort of sang out “I couldn’t bear it without you”

Brian and I just stared at him.

“Don’t get around much anymore.”

Finally, I realized this guy was jerking us around. “Look Ralf you seem to think this is a game. You aren’t going to get out of this with some kind of mental insanity plea. Your King and his Queen told us everything. We already know that Thomas hired Horizon by mistake after she had lifted a lapel pin from the real Samantha he planned to meet. That when they needed another coder she recommended you. You were arrested in the room with them and we’ve already confirmed your finger prints and DNA on the laptop with the code found on it.”

I paused only long enough to let that sink in. “Yes, we cracked your password to the laptop already. You hackers think you are so clever but we’ve got pretty good people on our team as well. You can keep going with the song and dance or you can help yourself out here. We know Prometheus or King or however you knew him was the ring leader. But you are still going to prison. We don’t really need any more information from you. This talk was kind of a favor in case you wanted to share anything to help yourself out.”

Sylvia was about to repeat herself as Paul hesitated for a minute. But she knew him long enough to recognize that look in his eyes that told her he was going to continue without prompting.

Finally, he broke the silence “If you already have everything then you don’t really need the recorders, do you? Turn them off and I’ll share a little something with you” Ralf said in this comical surfer voice.

“Sylvia turning that recorder off was the biggest mistake of my life. As soon as I did Ralf completely changed his demeanor and was no longer playing the role of a court jester.”

- “Look I am going to get a maximum 6-month sentence as the third wheel in this small-time gang. A loose acquaintance of mine asked me to help her and that bumbling Prometheus out, so I did. I will serve no more than 3 months of the sentence. During which time I will likely spend more time being interviewed than I do in my cell. Mark my words I will fox trot out of prison into one of the most notable and high paying jobs in history. Meanwhile you clowns will be left scratching your heads.”

“Something in the way he said it really ticked me off. Apparently, it really ticked Brian off as well and he snapped back.”
“Pal if I had a dollar for every low life that was arrested who thought we were clowns I could retire.”

I still haven’t been able to get over what Ralf said next. “Did any of the other low-life’s you arrested provide you with the information that led to their arrest? I can see your slow little hamster wheels turning in your heads. I’m the one that called in the anonymous call at 9:42 AM on Tuesday that led you to find us. Cracked my password? Cracked my password? I wrote it on a napkin that was under the laptop. I’m shocked your cracker jack team was smart enough to try it before bagging it as evidence and then losing it in your evidence room.”

I couldn’t hold it back “And just why would you do that?”

“Because my goal wasn’t to actually complete the hack. My aspirations were much higher.”

Brian responded right on cue and I thought surely this is where this guy will trip himself up. But that’s, that’s. Whew this is hard to say. That’s....

Sylvia took Paul’s hand and then leaned in to hug him. She quickly grasped that whatever happened was something that Paul hadn’t been prepared to hear. That maybe she wasn’t ready to hear either.

Paul finally burst out ... That’s when he said, “I created the first robot with artificial intelligence so powerful that it fooled the FBI?”

Sylvia’s knight in shining armor was never able to slay this dragon. Instead he continued withdrawing and eventually Paul had to be committed.