

After the Rain Ends

A.N.D

"Now, you remember what to say?" Catherine prompted.

Kanin nodded unhappily. "That I haven't driven or taken a drink since that night. That I have character witnesses who will attest to that."

"And when the judge asks how you've earned your living?"

"I've worked in the construction industry taking payments under the table to keep the police from finding me, or working under an assumed name. Despite that, I'm a hard worker. I have character witnesses for that, too."

One of the helpers was in the construction business and would corroborate the story. Fortunately, it wasn't a total lie; Kanin had helped out upon occasion.

"Where have you lived?"

"I've kept moving. Right now, I live at... at..." It took him a moment to remember the helpers address. "I've rented a few rooms for myself and my wife."

Another half-truth; Olivia and Luke had been living part time there in the three months he had awaited trial, lest any questions be asked about where his family was. Fears of the community being discovered kept many of Kanin's friends Below, but Olivia had come to the jail every visiting day.

Catherine nodded. "Good." She reached up to adjust his tie, and Kanin caught her wrist.

"Catherine - I know that it's due to you that I'm getting my trial so quickly."

"It's not just me. It turns out that Mrs. Davis has a few friends on the bar too. She cashed in several favors to get this resolved quickly."

But that wasn't what he really wanted to hear. "Whoever did it, please don't think I'm ungrateful. It's been torture to be away from Livy and Luke. But... I've worried and dreamed about this day and now that it's here, I'm terrified."

"Don't worry," she leaned closer her voice low so the guard wouldn't hear. "I pulled some strings, too. Since you waived your right to a jury trial, I had to be sure we got a

good judge. Judge Posner is a great believer in self-rehabilitation. If you can convince him that you have truly changed, he'll probably just recommend probation."

Kanin sighed. "Where they'll do random checks of my house, keep on my work... I won't dare go Below. Maybe even Livy won't be able to go Below, if they ask too many questions. She'll be cut off from everyone she knows. Another family broken because of me."

He was interrupted by a knock at the door. The guard opened it, nodded to the person outside, and told them, "It's time."

Kanin gulped, turning even paler than his prison pallor. Catherine grabbed his shoulder. "Listen to me! Whatever happens today, it's all going to be over. No more fear, no more running. It will all finally be over. It's going to be all right. I'll be with you all the way."

"I'm so glad."

That makes one of us, Catherine thought as she followed him into the hall of the courthouse. *Joe may never forgive me for taking personal time to work defense instead of prosecution on this one.*

Joe had been shocked when she announced her decision, then furious. Her punishment - aside from the cold shoulder and even more work - was having to argue the case against Bob "Pit Bull" Palmer, the best - and nastiest - lawyer in the DA's office. Nobody knew why he didn't find some high-priced law firm to work for. According to rumor, he was afraid that any other law firm wouldn't let him be "mean enough."

Although she didn't dare rubberneck, Catherine glanced quickly at the audience as she entered the courtroom. The usual collection of students and court groupies were there, but there were a couple of people for Kanin - his wife, some helpers come to provide testimony.

Kanin himself had eyes only for Olivia, who was seated in the front row with the rest of the character witnesses. Mrs. Davis glanced over once, then looked resolutely down at the photograph in her hands. To Catherine's relief, the other woman once more looked like a polished professional; although she was still grieving, she wasn't falling apart anymore.

At last, at long last, there would be resolution, for her and for Kanin.

Pit Bull caught Catherine's eye, bared his teeth in a false smirk, and took a breath. Catherine clenched her hands under the table. One of his signature tricks was to say something nasty to the opposition to get them off balance before the trial began.

Fortunately, he had to swallow whatever insult he planned because the bailiff came in, calling "All rise, all rise, court is now in session."

Kanin turned from whispering to his wife as everyone came to their feet. Catherine gave him an encouraging smile. Then the bailiff continued, "The honorable Harold T. Stone presiding!" and it was all Catherine could do not to drop back into her chair.

Her gasp was covered by Pit Bull's angry shout. "This is Judge Posner's case!"

Whispers and murmurs ran across the courtroom. "What is it, what's wrong?" Kanin asked, panicked.

"Nothing," Catherine lied through gritted teeth. *Stone? That madman from midtown night court? Of all the cases that had to be reassigned, why this one? Stone's a laughingstock! He treats the bench like a Las Vegas stage, telling jokes and doing magic tricks during court! DAs tell tall tales about his unprofessional exploits. Law students make book on his outrageous decisions — it was a constant amazement to all of New York that none of his decisions was overturned. But night court is misdemeanors; is he even qualified to judge this case?*

The judge swept in to the courtroom and Catherine's heart sank. He looked like a teenager playing dress up and the knot of a truly unfortunate tie peeked out from the top of his robes. But his attitude was all business as he climbed to his chair.

Before the judge could tell everyone to be seated, Pit Bull went on the attack. "Your Honor, we've done all the preliminary work with Judge Posner..."

"Well, I'm sure he would rather be here too, but you can't hold court in a hospital room. He had a heart attack last night. He'll be okay, but in the meantime, they're staffing his cases with anyone who is free and qualified."

There was a slight but unmistakable stress on the last two words. He waited a few moments to see if there would be more objections when neither Pit Bull nor Catherine said anything else, he announced "Please be seated," and turned to his bailiff with a crooked grin. "Usually I try to loosen things up with a magic trick or two, but I hear you're more conservative during the day. So, what's up?"

"Case number 1752, People vs Evans. Manslaughter and flight to avoid prosecution."

That wiped the smile off the judge's face. "I see." The bailiff handed him the file, which he opened but didn't look at. "The DWI case, I read up on this when I got the call. A child died. Defense, how do you plead?"

Kanin struggled back to his feet, bit his lip, looked at Mrs. Davis (who was still not looking at him), gulped, and finally got out, "Guilty on both counts, your honor."

"That makes for a short trial," Judge Stone said, slamming the file folder shut. "Do you have anything to say for yourself before I pass sentence?"

"Only that I would do anything to take it back. I've done everything I can think of to make up for it. I know I ran, I was young, I was afraid! But I have never touched another drop of alcohol. I cut up my driver's license. I've never gotten behind the wheel of a car since that night. I've apologized to Mrs. Davis."

"Sixteen years late," Pit Bull scoffed.

Pit Bull had heard enough. "Your Honor, it's all very well for him to come back sixteen years later and cry his tears. He killed a little boy! He ran! He destroyed my client's family and for all we know, he's been living it up ever since, unpunished!"

Through a dry mouth, Catherine tried to bring the case back to the facts that might help Kanin's sentence and not the emotions that could destroy him.

"My client has made mistakes, but he has punished himself much more than he would have been punished had he turned himself in that night. I have the records from NYU showing that Kanin Evans dropped out after the accident and has not come back. He has lost contact with his family. I have character witnesses, your honor, who can say that they have never seen him drinking. But moreover, he has rehabilitated himself. He has built a stable life. He works steadily and supports a wife and a child of his own."

Pit Bull went off again. "Your Honor, is that supposed to make him a better person? Are we supposed to feel sorry about putting this man in jail? Jail is temporary! He took my client's son away FOREVER! Her husband divorced her. He took her marriage away FOREVER! He..."

The judge banged his gavel, or at least tried to; it squeaked and he tossed it over his shoulder with a nonchalant, "Oooops, wrong one."

Pit Bull was so shocked that he also broke off with a squeak. Catherine was horrified herself - a joke gavel at a trial this serious? She turned to cast a sympathetic glance at Pit Bull, who was speechless for the first time since Catherine had ever known him.

Wow, he shut Pit Bull up! Nobody's ever done that before! Even judges have to scream at him and threaten him with contempt of court. What were the odds of... Wait a minute. Oddball as he is, Judge Stone wouldn't have made it this far, this fast, if he wasn't a very smart man. Wrong gavel my foot! He did that on purpose to throw Pit Bull off balance!

She settled back in her chair, elated and wary. This was going to be a very interesting trial. No time to reflect, though; if she was going to reclaim the judge's ear, she had to talk now, before Pit Bull got his feet back under him.

"Your Honor..."

He held a hand up to silence her, although his expression was gentle. "I'll take it as a given that you have a lot of witnesses to tell me how wonderful your client is, so let's skip that part."

He looked at Kanin. "No contact with your family at all? You just left your old life behind and started over?"

"Yes, sir."

"I don't suppose you could prove that?"

Pit Bull and Mrs. Davis looked at each other in confusion, while Catherine shrugged.

"He can give you his word," she said on Kanin's behalf.

"I can prove it," a voice called from the back, among the spectators. It wasn't proper court procedure, but Judge Stone must be used to looser conduct on his watch; he beckoned the speaker forward. Catherine turned to see a middle-aged, relatively well-to-do woman step forward from the back row of spectator seats.

Kanin gasped. "Maureen?"

"Hi, Kay."

"I take it this is your family?" Judge Stone asked.

"The family he said he hasn't seen?" Pit Bull sneered.

"He hasn't," Maureen and Kanin were staring at each other, tears beginning to spill from their eyes as she spoke. "This is the first time I've seen my big brother in sixteen years."

"And yet you happened to show up at his trial," Pit Bull pointed out sarcastically. "Why, I'm sure it's just a coincidence and you weren't planted in the audience at all."

Her answer was to hand a stack of papers to the judge, who flipped through them.

"This is from a detective agency," Stone told Catherine and Pit Bull. "A notice with the time of this trial and a series of bills paying for a standing order to search for any news about one Kanin Evans." He turned more pages. These bills go back years. You've been looking for your brother for a long time."

He stopped suddenly. "The payer changed eight years ago. Why?"

Maureen sniffed as she turned to face him. "Mother originally paid for it. She went wild when you left, Kanin, she cried for weeks. She was convinced that you were out there,

hiding. Did you see the newspapers? She kept putting ads in the newspaper begging you to contact us."

"I saw," Kanin whispered.

Judge Stone's eyes flicked to one side, and Catherine subtly leaned back to see what he had glanced at. Mrs. Davis' head was finally up, and she was focusing on the Evans family instead of the photograph in her hands.

"What happened, why did your mother stop? Why did..." He squinted at the bill. "Why did you start paying instead?"

"I OBJECT!"

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Counselor, you can't object to a judge's question!" Stone yelled back.

Pit Bull was undeterred. "Your Honor, this is the most unprofessional, unprocedural ... "

This time the gavel hit with a resounding **BANG!**

"Counselor, I may have offbeat methods, but they are legal and if you interrupt me one more time, I will charge you with contempt of court!" Judge Stone swung his chair around, grinning at the bailiff. "Yay! I always wanted to say that!" Once again, Pit Bull was rendered speechless with shock and Stone went on in a much more somber tone.

"Mrs. Davis, I have not forgotten you or your little boy. You will have your chance to speak. But please... before you speak, listen. It sounds to me like two people have lost their families."

"Not forever," Mrs. Davis said softly. "He didn't lose his forever."

"Forever now," Maureen said sadly. "When Kay didn't contact us when Daddy died, Mother listed him as dead in the obituary. Randy and I asked, 'What if he comes back?' And Mother said, 'if he's going to miss this, he can't come back. He's dead too.' Randy agreed with her, so I'm the only one left looking for him."

"You see," Catherine said gently, "a mother lost her son and a son lost his mother."

"It's not enough." Mrs. Davis was finally starting to crack. "It's not enough! You can't just let him go! That's not justice!"

"What is justice?" Stone asked gently. "Nothing I can do will bring your son back. So, what do you think is the right thing to do?"

Tears welling, Mrs. Davis shook her head silently, shrugging.

Pit Bull wasn't as indecisive. "Jail. Definitely jail. The maximum for both the manslaughter and the flight, to be served consecutively."

"NO!" Olivia shouted. Stone frowned at her and she sat back down, hands clamped over her mouth.

"Your wife?" the judge asked Kanin.

"Yes, sir."

"Are you the sole supporter of your family?"

"Yes, sir. Livy - Olivia - she takes care of our son."

Stone turned back to Mrs. Davis. "Is it right to take another mother away from her son? If I put this man in jail, Olivia will have to find a job."

"Yes... no... I don't know..." Mrs. Davis found courage, or at least coherence, in her photograph. "I just know that he has to be punished somehow. I don't hate his wife, I don't hate his child, but he HAS to be punished for what he did to Joey!"

Stone leaned back in his chair, nodding. "Yes, he does." He banged the gavel - the real gavel - again. "Kanin Evans, I sentence you to 18 years in jail without the possibility of parole..."

Catherine went cold. Olivia and Maureen burst into tears. Pit Bull was starting to smile victoriously. He should have known better, because Judge Stone's next words horrified him again.

"... to be suspended."

"NO!" Mrs. Davis screamed. "You can't! That's not justice!"

"Mrs. Davis, I believe in justice. Sometimes, I believe in justice more than I believe in the law." Stone leaned forward earnestly. "The law says I have to send this man to jail. I think that justice - to his wife, to his child, to him, to you, and most of all to your Joey - calls for a more creative solution. Are you willing to think about that?"

"Your Honor!" Pit Bull started, but he had lost so much of his usual bluster that he shut up without a fight when the inevitable interruption came.

"I'm not talking to you. I'm talking to her. You're going to get paid no matter what happens and move on to the next case. She's the one who is going to have to be satisfied."

Mrs. Davis was no more convinced than her lawyer. "I'm not satisfied with a suspended sentence. What do you have in mind?" she asked cautiously.

"First of all, a revoked license. You never get a driver's license again, Mr. Evans. I can't really control if you drink, but I can make sure that you never drive. Do you agree to that?"

"Yes, sir!"

"It's not enough," Mrs. Davis whispered.

"Don't worry, there's more. Mr. Evans," he checked the folder, "it says here you are a construction worker. Is that right?"

"Yes, sir."

"They're building a new children's shelter down in SoHo. I know the guy who's running the project. He'll put you on it." Stone turned to Mrs. Davis. "They say it will be done in 16 weeks if people put in double shifts. A week's hard labor for every year he ran, on a project for children, but he's still making a paycheck to feed his family. And one more thing. How old was Joey, ma'am?"

"Six, Your Honor."

Stone nodded. Then for the next six years, on the anniversary of the accident, you will give a lecture about the consequences of drinking and driving at a list of colleges to be drawn up by your attorney. Maybe you can keep one of the students from making the mistakes you've made. Mrs. Davis, are you satisfied that this is just?"

She was crying so hard that she couldn't speak, clutching the picture to her chest. But she nodded as she smiled tremulously through her tears.

Stone turned. "Do you agree to this, Mr. Evans?"

"YES, SIR!" Kanin was so happy he was almost laughing. Catherine kicked him under the table, although she was so giddy with relief that she had to drive her nails hard into her palms to keep from laughing herself.

"Be warned," Stone said solemnly, and for once he looked and sounded like a judge and not a teenager. "If you default on any of this - the license, the lectures, or the work - you will serve every day of that jail sentence. Don't run again."

"No, sir."

"All righty then! Bailiff, show these people out while I prepare for the next case."

Catherine looked back as they exited. Judge Stone had pulled a deck of cards out of his robe and was doing tricks with it.

"What the hell just happened?" Pit Bull snarled as they reached the corridor. "He's crazier than I ever thought! Mrs. Davis, don't worry, it's going to be easy to appeal that travesty."

"Don't." Her voice was shaky, but her expression resolved. "Don't. I think it's the right sentence. It's over now, and I can go on with my life." She looked over at Kanin, surrounded by his friends and family. "Mr. Evans, please don't take this wrong, but I hope our paths never cross again."

Their eyes met, and he said it one last time. "I am sorry. I am so, so sorry."

Mrs. Davis nodded, squared her shoulders, and walked away, her head high and her stride purposeful.

Pit Bull shook his head. "They are never going to believe this back in the office." He offered Catherine a sudden real smile. "And here I was looking forward to crossing swords with you. I've never had a chance to sharpen my skills on an opponent of your caliber."

Startled, Catherine blinked, trying to think of what to say. *Thank heaven Vincent has taught me to quote Shakespeare!* "Shall we, like two lawyers, strive mightily but eat and drink as friends?"

His tum to blink. Yeah, what you said, I guess. Is that from a book?"

"Something like that Pi—Bob. See you back at the office."

"Yeah. God help the folks in night court when that weirdo gets back to his bench!" With a curt nod to Catherine's coterie, he stomped out.

The helpers were next to leave, congratulating Kanin and shaking his hand. Soon no one was left but Kanin, Catherine, Maureen, and Olivia.

Olivia nervously smoothed down her dress. She was groomed very well, tunnel-style, but her secondhand dress, simple hair, and bare face were all thrown into glaring relief by Maureen's flawless makeup, coif, and couture - and Olivia was well aware of it. So was Maureen, but she did her best to be polite.

Unfortunately, even small talk was loaded with little land mines.

"So, you're Kanin's wife! Tell me a little about yourself," Maureen coaxed. "Where are you from? Where did you go to school?"

"Um... I..." Olivia threw Catherine a wild look.

"Amish? You told her we were Amish?" Vincent sounded torn between horror and amusement.

"I had to say something. She wanted so much to become a part of Kanin's new life; if I didn't come up with a good story, she would have been sure we were hiding a cult. After all she'd paid to private detectives over the years, deprogrammers would seem like a bargain. Besides, I told her you were like the Amish, not that you were actually Amish. Although you don't have phones, you barely have electricity, you make most of what you have yourselves, you wear clothes that set you apart..." A sudden thought struck her, and Catherine giggled out loud.

"What?" Vincent asked, his smile growing broader as he caught her mood. "What is it?"

"I was just..." She couldn't help laughing. "I was just imagining you and Father in overalls and broad black hats!" A more serious thought ruined the laughter. "Vincent? When Kanin comes home, will he be punished for lying to everyone when he came Below? Because he wants to come home, although he and Livy plan on regularly visiting his sister."

He shook his head. "Father has been discussing that with the council and the community. We all agreed that it might be an infraction of the rules, but it was so long ago, and since then he's been a model citizen."

"The statute of limitations has passed?"

Vincent smiled. "Yes."

"I'm glad." She nestled up beside him, lifted her face to his, and neither one of them thought about law for a while.

"Vincent, you're back! How did the trial go?"

"Father, you're not going to believe this. Remember Harry Stone?"

"What, that boy who used to drive Sebastian crazy by making him teach all his magic tricks? I haven't seen him since his father died. Don't tell me he was in the courtroom! What, was he going on trial for grifting?"

"Not quite..."

-fini-