



BLUE IN THE FACE

By Jacob Graysol

“Cleared for landing,” Meg said as the elevator reached the hospital lobby. She turned to the man beside the control panel. “Wasn’t that smooth?”

He shrugged, held the door, and gestured for the nurse to wheel Meg out first.

“Oh, thank you!” Meg waved her left arm, heavy with a fresh cast. As Nurse Debbie wheeled her down the corridor, Meg said, “Even on the elevator, you make friends here.”

“Glad you’re feeling happy, Meg. And unbothered that he told you he didn’t speak English. Twice.”

“Ooh! I’m like an ambassador, then.”

They reached a large glass door, *Patient Discharge*, with a black Malibu parked outside. Meg grinned. “Charlie’s here to pick me up!”

“Of course. We sent him ahead to get the car.” The door slid open and they continued out.

Meg yelled, “Hey, sweetie. I’m going to be a diplomat!”

After Charlie helped Meg with her seat belt, he asked Debbie, “How long is she going to be so loopy and friendly?”

“Don’t worry, it’s temporary. Morphine does this to some people.” She gazed at Meg, “Do what your husband says for the next few hours, OK? No major life decisions, however many pet adoption ads you see.”

“Puppies!” Meg squealed.

Debbie waved papers at Charlie and added them to a plastic bag. “Post-op instructions. She won’t remember them well.” She laid the bag at Meg’s feet. “No more ladders, Meg.”

“I thought I could stretch—”

“You’ve told me. That’s how accidents happen. Just listen to your husband today, and keep that arm elevated.”

“I love you, Nurse Debbie.”

After they drove a few blocks, Meg giggled. “You’re the sexiest ambulance driver.”

He sighed. “Yes, Meg.”

“Hey, why are you stopping at the red light?”

He tapped the dashboard. “Not a real ambulance, remember?”

“I’ll just show the cops this.” She swung her cast, then squinted and brought it to her face, studying each swollen finger. “Ew! Sausages!”

An alarm shrilled to their right, Hestia Bank. A Mustang zipped past against the light.

“Geez!” Charlie said. “That idiot could’ve—”

A man in a ski mask yanked open the driver’s door. He shoved a gun in Charlie’s face.

“Get out!” He unfastened Charlie’s seat belt and grabbed his shirt; Charlie’s knuckles turned white clenching the steering wheel.

“My wife’s coming from the hospital!”

Meg held out her cast, “I need to elevate my arm.”

The intruder bashed Charlie’s fingers with the butt of his pistol and threw him to the pavement.

Charlie yelled, “Get out, Meg!” as the gunman jumped into the rolling car.

Meg contorted her arm to poke numb fingers at the seat belt release. The gunman pulled his door closed and peeled out through the intersection.

Meg turned toward her abductor. He was dressed in black from head to toe, but covered in fluorescent dye. She chuckled. “Are you blue?”

“Quiet!”

She crooned, “Speeding in a ski mask, not blending in—”

He glanced over, furious. “Shut up!”

She stopped singing, stunned by his angry eyes. As he turned back to the road, he blinked, completing the blue canvas, even his eyelids tinted. “Doesn’t that sting?”

“Damn bank teller snuck me Jacksons with a dye pack.”

“Do you need a doctor?” She raised her arm. “Doctor Beal makes you feel real good.” She chortled. “Doctor Beal can heal your teal.”

He took his gun hand off the wheel and pointed the muzzle at her. “Snap out of it and shut up!”

“OK, OK.” Meg pinched her lips. It was hard to remember to keep silent, to watch the buildings float past as the car sped along.

He shot across Route 215, then turned onto Wood Avenue. “Where’s your phone?”

She picked up the plastic bag. “See the hearts? Nurse Debbie gave me this pretty bag for my things.”

“Call 911. Tell them you were carjacked outside Hestia Bank and that you’re heading toward Springfield on Route 215.”

“Didn’t we pass the highway?”

He waved the gun. “Just do it.”

She tried switching the bag to her left hand and dropped it. “Whoops.” She grabbed the bag again, held it between her legs, then fished inside. “Yay! Charlie bought me a cold Dr. Pepper.”

The robber slammed on the brakes. The car jerked to a stop, blocking the driveway of a Dunkin’ Donuts.

“We’re getting Munchkins?”

He slapped the can out of her hand, dumped the bag onto her lap, and thrust the phone toward her. “Heading toward Springfield on Route 215. And tell them we switched cars. Say you’re in a black Chevrolet.”

She giggled. “This *is* a black Chevy.”

“Then a yellow Ford!”

“Like a cab? We switched into a cab?”

“A blue Toyota!”

She pointed at him and laughed. “Blue ... blue!” She clasped her hand over her mouth. “I think I peed.”

He threw the phone down. “Get out!”

She opened the door, then raised her immobilized arm over the seatbelt latch. “I’m still strapped in.”

He brushed her cast aside and poked the release. The seat belt retracted across her body, under her right arm. “Why didn’t you just use your good hand?”

“I hadn’t thought of that.” She pushed the door open, swiveled her legs out, and scooped for her phone.

“Uh-uh.” He shoved her shoulder. “Leave that.”

Meg scrambled to get her footing, the flailing cast almost shattering the window. She took a step to clear the door, tugged right by the overextended seat belt looped around her arm. As she shook it free, she elbowed the door closed, catching three feet of belt outside.

As the robber sped off, sparks flew from the seat belt buckle clanking against asphalt, and her captive phone pinged cell towers every few seconds.

Blue Man wasn’t getting far.

Originally published in *Yellow Mama*, Issue 109.

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