

Out of Range

Short Story

by

Angela Johnson

The opening notes of Schubert's "Impromptu" filled the music hall just before the theater suddenly went dark. Cameron stopped playing the Schubert piece in mid note and tried to stay calm. In a moment he heard the conductor's voice from the far side of the room and a faint light began to stream in as he watched him pull back a curtain.

"I'm sorry everyone. They have been working on the building all week. Looks like they have knocked out the power again." Thomas shook his head. "Do you want to wait awhile and see if it comes back up?"

Cameron had been up since 4 that morning with throbbing pains in his head and his migraine was not letting up. He stood up from the piano bench and went over to the window where Thomas, the conductor of the orchestra was standing watching the construction workers and power company employees engage in an animated conversation. "Tom, I would stay but I'm really tired. Would you mind if I went home?" He watched the forced smile form on the conductor's face because he already knew the answer. It

was his charity concert, and he was the headliner. There was no one to stop him from leaving. The idea was to try to keep Cameron happy, so that he might come back again or give them a positive mention in interviews.

"That would be fine." Tom smiled. "We can finish this up tomorrow. Just to get the timings right. You sound wonderful of course."

"Everyone is doing a great job." Cameron deflected his praise as he went back to the piano bench and began to gather his music folder. He glanced at the door for his assistant Allison out of habit. She was on a two-week vacation in Hawaii. As Cameron thought about how cold it was at night here, he wished he were in the islands too. It was not that he couldn't handle doing things for himself, he liked taking steps toward independence. Gerry seemed to fight him every step of the way though, especially since he had gotten out of the hospital this last time. Allison was Gerry's idea. She was like a babysitter for an adult. He almost smiled when he remembered how he had complained about not wanting an assistant. Gerry was only trying to help, like always, because he cared about him and was used to doing things for him, Cameron thought. But he was well now and did not need constant care. Cameron was not sure how he was ever going to get him to notice that he was not still the six-year

old he had taken in as a favor to his troubled housekeeper and who he discovered was a piano phenomenon.

He said his goodbyes to the orchestra members who were still in the hall and headed for the lobby. His driver was usually sitting in the lounge on his phone or watching television, but today the place was empty. The black SUV was not out front and did not arrive while Cameron waited. He looked at his cell phone and noticed the voice mail icon blinking. He selected the speed dial number for his voice mail and waited for the message. His driver had taken the SUV for service while he waited and it would be right about 6 when he got back. Ordinarily this would have been all right, but today, with the power out at the theater, Cameron was quite ready to go home now at a quarter to 4. He was about to call Frederick and ask him if he could postpone the car maintenance and come back when his cell began to vibrate again. He answered before the second ring.

"Hi Gerry."

"Oh, hello. I'm surprised you answered. I was going to leave you a message." Gerard hesitated. "Is the rehearsal going any better?"

"It's not going at all. The power just went out." Cameron frowned. This concert had been Cameron's call. Gerard thought he wasn't ready for it yet. After ten years of sell out concerts and four platinum classical crossover albums, the trouble had

come out of the blue, and he had spent two months in the hospital. During that time Gerard had come to see him every day. He would not have recovered so quickly if it had not been for Gerard's unwavering support. But then Gerard had been his support system since he was a child. "I guess you were right again. I have a bad headache."

"I'm sorry about your migraine. Are you in the car now?"

"Frederick is getting the car serviced. He won't be back for a couple of hours."

"Well, I can..." Gerard began.

"You're still getting over bronchitis. Just stay home. I can...take a taxi."

"Don't be ridiculous. I'll call a car service to come pick you up."

"How long will that take? I don't feel like waiting. I don't even have that medicine with me or I would take it now."

"Look in your brief case pocket." He said and Cameron slid his hand into the side pocket of the tan leather case where he kept his music. His fingertips brushed against something in the bottom and he pulled out the small silver pill case.

"You're a life saver Gerry." Cameron set his phone down, put one of the pain relievers in his mouth and washed it down with his bottle of water. His vision was getting blurry and he felt the beginning feelings of nausea. "I could be half way home

by the time you find a car for me. I see three yellow taxis out front. I'll be okay." He said after putting the phone back to his ear.

"You haven't taken a taxi in a long time and besides..."

"Please stop treating me like a child." Cameron's head throbbed when he snapped at his mentor.

"Will you just text me the cab number you are in and the driver's name? It should be visible."

Cameron felt a sting of regret as he caught a glimpse of himself in the hallway mirror. "I'm sorry Gerry." He paused as he gathered up his bag. "Yes, I will text you from the cab in a few minutes." He said cordially before disconnecting the call. It was not quite dusk when he went out to the sidewalk filled with a steady stream of people. The theater doorman, Les, volunteered to get him a cab. He was about to call out for one when he turned back towards to Cameron.

"Looks like you are in luck Mr. De la Valle. Here's one right here near the corner." Les, a slender man of about 50 dressed in a uniform, got to the taxi first and leaned down towards the car window. "You have a fare."

Cameron saw the driver jump slightly as he turned around. "I'm not working. I don't have time." He stammered.

"Your sign is on." Les said. "You can take Mr. De la Valle over to Long Island, can't you? I'm sure there'll be a nice tip in it for you. Just drive careful."

Cameron got in the back seat and gave his address. He smiled and nodded at Les. "Thanks." He looked back and wondered why Les was looking at the taxi with an uneasy expression. When he turned back around, he looked right in the eyes of the driver who was staring at him. He looked around for the taxi information and saw the number, 1254, near the meter. The visor was up where the driver's picture should have been displayed.

"Is something wrong?"

"Uh...no, I didn't see your ID." He said casually, but he couldn't get rid of the nervous feeling he'd had since he gotten in. Maybe Gerry's nerves were rubbing off on him. After all, just because he had not traveled alone in years did not mean there was anything for him to be afraid of.

"Oh, I'm Danny, Danny Jackson." He gave a small smile. "I know who you are. I saw your concert on TV a couple of Christmases ago. It was great."

"Thank you." Cameron was used to being recognized. He had deep green eyes and wore his dark hair in its usual low ponytail. His diamond earring sparkled as much in everyday life as it did in photographs.

The earring and growing his hair long had been a rebellion. He had spent almost his entire life working with people who were three or four decades older than he was. Every now and then he sought out ways to remind himself and those around him that he was still a very young person. He was only 20 years old. He took out his cell phone and texted the cab number to Gerry.

The traffic was beginning to pick up. A red Honda changed lanes without any warning and Danny slammed on the brakes causing them to pitch forward. He yelled at the driver. He got so excited that for a few moments he did not notice that the visor had fallen down. He reached over and pushed it back up but not before Cameron saw the ID photo for the taxi license.

"Sorry about that. I get a little carried away sometimes." He said in a much calmer voice.

Cameron nodded and pretended to be busy searching for something in his bag. He did not want to appear nervous. Besides maybe he was over-reacting but he knew this was not Danny's cab. If that was his name. He was not the man in the photo ID. He pulled the novel that he had been reading out his bag and turned to a random page. He was not reading it, couldn't really see the words, but he did not want the driver to know how sleepy he had become after taking his medication.

When Cameron saw signs approaching the tunnel, he breathed a bit easier. After the tunnel it was only 30 more minutes to

the bridge and then the house. He would call Gerry before they went into the tunnel because once inside, he would not have a reliable signal. He felt the cab slow down and then come to a stop.

"Where are we going?" Cameron asked.

"Uh that's why I didn't want the fare. I'm kind of having a bad day." He stopped the cab in front of a gas station that looked as though it had was surely in the process of going out of business. "Where did you want me to take you again?"

"Look, I don't know what kind of game you're playing, but I can report you for this." He sounded sure of himself. "We were only going through the tunnel. We should have been there by now." He glanced at his watch.

"I just forgot for a minute." Danny looked at Cameron in the rearview mirror. "Are you sure we didn't meet a couple of years ago? I was on my way home and didn't want a fare that night either."

"I don't know what you mean. I just got a ride from you in front of the theater downtown.

"Sure. Sure." He started to drive again just as Cameron put his hand on the door handle. He took out his phone and texted Gerard, but it did not go through.

Since he had been staying at the house on Long Island Gerard had formed the habit of listening to the early news on his satellite radio. For a person as active as he was, being stuck at home ill was excruciating. When they had started the tour in Los Angeles, he thought he had a cold. By Dallas it was more like the flu. In Chicago he had asked the hotel doctor for some Advil and the doctor told him he suspected bronchitis. Now here in New York he had spent closing night of Cameron's tour in the rental house on strict bed rest.

Promptly at 4 he put his cell phone on his night table and reached over and turned the radio on. He did not even notice the phone fall softly onto the thick carpet. The broadcaster's voice filled the room. At 3 pm there had been a report that a mental patient may have escaped from the psychiatric ward of the hospital downtown, but they were still doing some additional searching of the building. The hospital was locked down until they were sure. Gerard had listened closely because that was the hospital where Cameron had been briefly and it was also only a few blocks from the theater where he was rehearsing today. The 4 pm update only said the search was still under way. Gerard looked for his phone on the table as he fumbled with the radio remote. He found it and dialed Cameron's number without reading the text message alert on his home screen. The call did not go through; it went straight to his voicemail recording.

At the hospital on 95th street a nurse in a crisp white uniform directed Detective Sam Ramos down a long gray hallway. He did not like hospitals, especially this kind. It reminded him too much of his old man. Being called in an hour before his vacation time was about to start was not improving his mood either. He wanted to find this guy and get out of this place quick, in that order. The doctor who rose from her chair to greet him was a poised, chic looking young woman who almost seemed too calm in this chaotic setting. "I'm Dr. Kahn, you are detective Ramos?" She looked at his badge as they shook hands.

"Yes, I've just been assigned. They brought me up to speed on the way over. Has anything new happened in the last half hour?"

"No, my staff is still searching the hospital floor by floor. They should know if he is still here soon."

"What can you tell me about Daniel Jackson? Why is he here?"

"He was a cab driver. Three years ago he was in a bad accident. His fare was trying to rob him and he wrecked the cab. In the process he struck and killed a pedestrian. After he got out of the hospital he found the guy again, his passenger, and killed him."

"Because he hit somebody with his cab?"

"It was his fiancée. He is here now because he wasn't responsible at the time of the murder."

"How did he kill him?" Detective Ramos frowned.

"Forced him off a bridge."

Ramos had not realized that he was shaking his head.

"Detective, Danny can be quite reasonable for long periods of time, but in stressful situations he can become quite violent. He may be right here in this hospital."

"But if he's not, where would he go? You probably knew him better than anyone at this point."

"Other than Leslie, his fiancée, he loved driving a cab. He'd be looking for familiar settings and behind the wheel in a cab would be about as close to happy as he ever got."

Cameron sat frozen in the backseat of the taxi and thought about his options. This was not a neighborhood that he was at all familiar with, but there was still daylight left and he would have to take some chances. Danny had been going through intersections on yellow traffic signals for several blocks. At the last light before the Lincoln Tunnel he stopped when the light changed before he could get through. Cameron seized his opportunity and got out the moment the cab stopped. He put the strap of his messenger bag over his shoulder and ran away as fast as he could. His phone kept showing no signal strength so

he couldn't be sure if Gerry had even gotten his text message. Almost as soon as he started running towards the corner, he heard a voice behind him. "Hey! Where you going?" He tried to ignore him and keep walking without looking back, but he heard the sound of footsteps running towards him and could not help but look behind him as he began to run towards the intersection. He could see that there were a few more cars there than on the side street where they had been. But he was disappointed when he got to the street. In a major metropolitan area, no one wanted to stop for a hysterical man yelling for help in an intersection.

Cameron dodged traffic and crossed before Danny could get by. Once he realized no one was going to stop he looked for another option. The bag he was carrying was slowing him down, but he decided to hang on to it. Danny had stopped running and was only walking following him now, and to onlookers it may not have even looked like too much was going on. Cameron stopped at the first open business he came to on the next block over, a rundown cafe. Everyone looked up when he came in and the small place seemed to go quiet. "Is there another exit?" He asked the man behind the counter.

He seemed to debate for a moment as he looked at Cameron. He nodded towards a swinging door in the back of the restaurant. "Through the kitchen."

"Thank you." He said before he quickly went to kitchen area. The startled cook looked up from the hamburgers he was frying and Cameron gestured towards the exit sign. The staff was busy with their work and did not notice that he ducked into the pantry.

A few seconds after Cameron came in, Danny approached the counter. "Did a guy just come in here, pony tail, carrying a bag?"

"Yeah."

"Did you see where he went? Can you believe he stiffed me for my fare?"

The clerk shook his head. He had a bad feeling about this one. "I didn't see which way he went."

Danny began to scan the tables and then walked back towards the men's room.

Cameron looked at his phone and was relieved that he had a cell phone signal. He dialed 911 and tried not to panic when the automated system put him on hold. He didn't know how long this was going to last before someone needed something from the pantry and threw him out, so he sent out a text message to Gerry to call the police too. He had no idea what the address was, but he remembered the sign had read "Mike's Place" and that it was before the tunnel. He clicked send and waited for the message to go through. A message popped up asking if he wanted to try again

because the delivery failed. He jumped when the voice came on the line asking him what was the nature of his emergency and just as he began to speak the pantry door burst open and Danny was screaming at him.

"I thought I took care of you before! How did you come back?" Danny was at his throat in an instant. Cameron regained his footing and managed to push him off before swinging wildly. To his surprise he made contact and Danny fell backwards. As he got up the clerk from the counter came in and got in front of him. "I don't know what is going on with you two, but I have already called the cops! Get out front, both of you."

Almost immediately after they went out front, police cruisers started to arrive. The police took Daniel Jackson back into custody and he would be taken back to the psychiatric hospital under closer surveillance this time.

About half an hour later, Cameron finished giving his statement to detective Ramos. "How did you get here so fast?"

"A lady called in about a guy yelling in the intersection who had just run away from a cab. Mr. Jackson has a history driving cabs. It was just a hunch."

"I'm glad you followed up on it." Cameron shook his hand and was surprised to look around and see his driver waiting at

the curb. "Dr. Wright called me and told me the street you were on. He got the location from your phone." He explained.

Once inside the vehicle, he realized his headache had gone away. He let himself sink into the plush leather seat as his phone began to vibrate in his pocket. "Cameron, are you..."

"I'm okay, the police came and Frederick is bringing me home now. I will tell you all about it when I get there. And Gerry, next time I'll wait for you to call a car service or even drive in to the city." He laughed as Frederick pulled the vehicle out of the parking space and headed towards the tunnel.