

Take Me Home (My Heart Is Heavy)

a *Fallout (TV)* fanfic

by Rodo

for *All_InProcess*

NORM STARED AT the empty cryo pod in front of him. He barely noticed the shimmering black cables winding their way from each pod upwards like tentacles reaching for a victim to strangle, nor Bud wheeling around at the entrance to the cryo vault, defeated by a set of stairs – the least effectual guardian you could imagine. No, Norm was too busy staring at his father’s name, resplendent in neon green. Hank MacLean. A man that Norm should know better than almost anyone. He knew his little tics: How his eyes narrowed slightly when chewing spam, how he moved his head when he was exceptionally proud of Lucy (never Norm). But all that meant nothing. Hank MacLean might as well be a complete stranger he happened to share some DNA with.

“Well, what are you waiting for?” the brain-in-a-jar asked. “I still have my syringe, if you’d prefer. It’ll just be a tiny prick. Nothing to worry about.”

Death or... life, in potentially hundreds of years, surrounded by people who were like Betty and Steph and his father. Norm felt his lips curl in a disgusted smile before forcing his face to turn blank. Neither was what he’d call an appealing choice. He’d rather go back to Vault 33, even if he now realized he’d never belonged there either. He was too much like the people frozen around him, just without the batshit purpose they’d subscribed to. His best option, if he could swing it, was Vault 32. At least there he’d have Chet. Still... Norm stared at the pod, weighing his options.

“You know what, I think I’ve got a better idea.”



The Ghoul didn’t tire, Lucy thought. This was the second time she was walking through the Wasteland with him, and while he drank and ate like her, he didn’t seem to sweat. His movements didn’t get sluggish after what must have been a vicious fight at the Observatory, followed by a grueling walk. He simply kept trudging on, the doctor’s dog dogging his heels, with Lucy stumbling after them, her thoughts a mess. Within a couple

of minutes, her whole world had been turned upside down. All certainty had been stripped from her, and all she longed for was returning to life at Vault 33, blissfully unaware of who her father was, with Maximus at her side. But that could never be more than an idle dream now. She'd changed. That first night above ground she'd been warned. Some things you just couldn't forget.

Finally, the Ghoul entered a shack that looked much like the rest of the pre-war buildings around: a washed-out ruin drowning in sand. He led her to the living room and sat down in an old armchair that might have been purple, once upon a time. Next to it, a skull was peeking out of the sand. Lucy stared at the empty eyes of a person who would have been around the same age as her father, maybe, and decided to take the couch. The springs gave a rusty moan when she plopped down, but the pleather held. She was simultaneously bone-tired and too wired to get her shoulders to relax.

The Ghoul didn't seem to care. He took some jerky from his bag for himself and the dog and tossed her a can. Pork n' Beans. The can opener followed a moment later.

"Thank you," she said. It appeared her manners had survived the Observatory, despite all odds.

The Ghoul scoffed. "If you want to thank me, figure out how we can get the supplies to follow your old man wherever he flew off to. I ain't got enough on me to feed your skinny little ass the rest of the way."

Of course. Lucy sighed. That was more like him. She wondered what he'd been like, before whatever had turned him into what he was now. Surely he must have had a more agreeable personality back when he had the family he was looking for. Now, the only one who seemed to be able to stand him was the dog lying down at his feet.

"The only place I can think of is back home," Lucy admitted. She'd hardly been able to think of anything else for the last few hours.

The Ghoul laughed. It sounded like someone was dragging sandpaper along his vocal cords. Not a pleasant sound at all, and to make matters worse, it kept rattling on, as if Lucy had said the funniest thing he'd heard in a century.

"If you have any better ideas, let's hear it," she grumbled.

The Ghoul kept chuckling. "And how many men and women like your father are in your vault?"

She'd forgotten about that, Lucy realized. At first, she wanted to argue. These people were her friends. She'd known them all her life, except for Steph. But she'd known her father all her life too. "I could just lie. Or not. I'll just tell people I'm still looking for Dad. They don't have to know the rest." Only Norm. He had a right to know.

The Ghoul stopped mocking her, turning pensive instead, staring past her into the darkness beyond the ruined window. “It might not be the worst idea... And there’s something else we might pick up while we’re there,” he grumbled to himself, leaning forward and letting his gloved fingers run over the dog’s head.

For some reason, the intent look on his leathery face made Lucy rue her words; maybe bringing the Ghoul to Vault 33 wasn’t the best idea...



“Huh.” That was all the Ghoul said. Lucy watched from the corner of her eye as he pushed up his head to scratch his head. He looked past the entrance of Vault 33 at the ruined wheel cowering at the shore in the distance. Lucy was curious as to what that was all about, but not curious enough to ask.

“When we go in,” she told him and his head turned towards her. “Let me do all the talking.”

The Ghoul scoffed and the dog whined. “Think those civilized folk can’t deal with the likes of me?”

Lucy cocked her head. “Correct me if I’m wrong, but have you ever been to a vault?”

For a moment, the Ghoul was silent. “Not in a very long time,” he conceded.

“Then it’s decided: I’ll do the talking. And you’ll act like you’re, you know, nice. If that isn’t too much to ask. The dog won’t have any problems with that, right?”

The dog barked. Lucy decided to take it as a yes. With as much self-confidence as she could muster, she squared her shoulders and walked to the console next to the entrance. She’d watched Chet do it, it couldn’t be that hard. Plug in the Pip-Boy, hit the button, and a tense second later, the doors started to move like tired giants, shaking the ground. Behind them, her home was waiting.

The Ghoul walked in first while Lucy unplugged her Pip-Boy. At the threshold, she hesitated. Once she went in, there’d be no going back. All of a sudden, she didn’t want to go in and she couldn’t even tell why. The Ghoul noticed. He turned and looked her right in the eyes with his own unsettling ones. So Lucy did the only thing she could: she gulped and stepped in, and just in time. The doors began closing a moment later – there was no going back now.

They took the elevator down, and it was maybe the most awkward elevator ride that Lucy had ever been on, including that one right after she’d broken up with Chet and he’d looked like he might be about to start crying the entire time. Unlike Chet, the Ghoul just

stood there, looking completely out of place with his shotgun and red skin, especially because he was so blasé about everything. He acted as if he'd done this a thousand times, but he couldn't have. Then the doors opened—

“Stop right there, or I'll—Lucy?”

She was staring down the barrel of a rifle. It was shaking, badly, as was Reg, who was hanging on to it for dear life. Her eyes flickered left to make sure the Ghoul kept their agreement, yet all she saw was dark amusement.

“Hi Reg,” she began, putting up her arms as the muzzle moved towards her left. “This is my friend, uh... Ted?” Lucy shot the Ghoul a look. He seemed vaguely amused by the exchange. “He's no threat, I promise. It's just what sometimes happens to people up there, you know. He's a real softie, once you get to know him.”

The Ghoul smiled like a shark. Reg blinked. The dog growled. Reg twitched. Then he finally lowered the rifle after one slightly desperate look at her. It was for the best, really. Reg had always been a terrible shot. He was just as likely to hit the water mains as any of them.

“Hi Ted,” Reg said, forcing an awkward smile on his face and offering his hand. To Lucy's surprise, the Ghoul took it.

“Where is everyone?” Lucy asked. This was highly unusual. Chet was supposed to guard the doors. That was his job. And there were about three dozen people down here who would be better suited to confronting potential raiders.

Reg swallowed audibly and looked rather like Chet had that day in the elevator. “Oh Lucy. You missed *so much*. I don't even know where to start.”



She really, really had missed so much. Vault 33 had changed, profoundly so. It wasn't visible in the walls or the posters – those looked the same way they always had, like home. There was no trace left of Moldaver's assault. Vault 33 was at peace, as it should be – unless you knew how to read the signs. The corridors were *empty*. Lucy had never seen the vault this stripped bare of people. Most of the people she'd known all her life were gone – either killed or reassigned. It was no wonder Reg looked like a shadow of himself. Everything did. Lucy wondered what the other vault dwellers thought of her as she walked past. Did she look like a different person to them too?

“I'll go tell Betty,” Reg said, after dropping them off at a familiar door. He waved at her and the Ghoul then seemed to want to pet the dog before thinking better of it and

withdrawing his hand. Lucy looked after him as he scurried off back towards the elevators.

“Not what you expected?” the Ghoul asked in a low voice once Reg had rounded the corner.

“That’s not what’s important right now,” Lucy argued. She rang the bell.

It took Norm all of eleven seconds to answer the door. Lucy had counted. When he stared at her in utter disbelief, she couldn’t help it; tears rose in her eyes and she grabbed him in a big, desperate hug, one he would usually wriggle out of because he hated everything touchy-feely. This time, he hugged her back, shaking with silent cries of his own.

“Touching as this reunion is, I think we should move it inside,” the Ghoul suggested. He was looking up and down the corridor, where people were not-so-discreetly peeking out of windows and around the corner. Suddenly, the shaking stopped and Norm’s eyes were as sharp as she remembered. He ushered them inside, dog included.

“What happened?” Lucy asked. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah,” Norm said, putting a finger to his lips. “Just... I missed you and Chet, is all.” He pointed at the couch, beckoning them to sit while he went to get them something to drink, resorting to chit-chat and introductions before putting on a record. To say Lucy was alarmed would be an understatement. Even the Ghoul seemed tenser than he had when staring down Reg’s rifle.

“Just a precaution,” Norm told them when he sat down next to Lucy. Bing Crosby was crooning in the background. “I don’t know if anybody’s listening, but I don’t want to risk it, not after what happened at Vault 32.”

“That was—”

“It wasn’t raiders,” Norm told her. “I think it was 31. Lucy, you won’t believe what I’ve found out, about the vault, about Vault 31, about Dad.”

“Oh, I think she just might,” the Ghoul drawled. It had taken all of a couple of minutes and he’d become very interested in Lucy’s brother – and if Lucy had learned one thing about him these past few days, it was that he wasn’t the type of guy whose interest you want to arouse. “And I, for one, am dying to hear what you’ve got to say.” He let his fingers drum over his knees.

Norm stared back. If he was taken aback by the Ghoul’s, well, ghouliness, he didn’t let it show. Norm had always been sharp – it’s why he’d had so much trouble fitting in. But that sharpness had been tempered by comfort and what he’d called cowardice when she’d left. Now though, his spine was as straight as their father’s. The resemblance was uncanny. What the heck had happened to him? The vault was supposed to be safe...

“Ted, right? You don’t look like a Ted.”

“And you look a great deal like your father, young MacLean.”

Norm smirked, darkness leaking from his eyes. “I wouldn’t be alive if I was less like him,” he said, “even if I’m not proud of it.”

“What happened,” Lucy asked again, and Norm told her.



“I think I’ll go back to Vault 33,” Norm told Bud the Brain, squaring his shoulders and jutting out his chin. Not that puffing himself up was any use, usually. This was one of a handful of arguments in his life where *he* was the taller one for a change.

The brain laughed. “Whyever would you think that that’s on the menu, son of Hank?”

“You don’t have that many options, do you?” Norm pointed out. His mind kept flashing the list of transfers that he’d found on the Overseer’s terminal at him. “You’ve already lost Vault 32 and the ones killed in 33 by the raiders, Vault 33 isn’t even close to half capacity... all that’s standing between you and losing 33 is Betty, and she’s old. Who’s going to take over once she can’t lead anymore? And what’s going to happen if I just vanish? What if people start asking questions? Can you really risk them knocking at your door again?”

“Now that’s—”

“Steph was supposed to take over for Dad, right? But she’s overseer of 32 now. Which leaves one of these guys.” He gestured at the people frozen around him. “But it’s too early for another exchange, and I bet you’ve got some sort of schedule figured out or you would have done something about 32 before now. No, you need to not make any more waves, and you need someone who can act as a backup for Betty. I can be that someone.”

The brain laughed again, then became eerily silent and still, floating in his glass display case. It looked pensive and threatening at the same time, oddly luminous in the half-light of Vault 31. Norm wanted to run, wanted to hide, but there was nowhere to run or hide. No, all he could do was be strong, like Lucy.

“There’s just one tiny little snag in your proposal,” the brain said. “I can’t trust you. You’re not one of my Buds.”

“Because I’m just a bit of genetic material to you? Ask Betty, if you must. She knows that I was always too clever for Vault 33. She knows what I’ve needed all my life was to find a purpose *and I have*,” Norm insisted with all the force he could muster. It was true – he realized just then. He had a purpose. Only it wasn’t to support Vault-Tec’s madcap idea of world domination. Someone needed to know the truth. Someone needed to protect it,

and pass it on, when the time was right. “These people are my family. I want to protect them, more than anything, even if that means protecting them from themselves.”

Or – more likely – from whatever way the brain had used to kill everyone in 32 when they’d rebelled. They hadn’t just gone mad all of a sudden because they’d found out the truth; people weren’t that stupid. No, there had to be something in the water supply or ventilation system that was linked to a control panel around here that had been used to poison them...

“You know, you remind me of your father quite a bit,” the brain finally said.

Norm felt like puking.



“And what’s your story?”, Norm asked. Lucy watched as her brother stared at the Ghoul, who had taken the revelations regarding Vault 31 with his typical calm demeanor. He seemed almost bored even, lounging on the couch with one arm outstretched across the back. Unlike her, Lucy thought. She was a mess. Norm had almost *died*. “None of this surprises you,” Norm continued. “You’ve met Dad, and you’ve been tense the entire time as if you’re waiting for something... who are you?”

The Ghoul smiled. Lucy’s stomach dropped. Of course it had been too easy. He’d just said yes, let’s go to Vault 33, Lucy, great idea. She had seen his face at the Observatory when he’d confronted her father; she knew he was a hunter who went after his prey relentlessly. He hated Vault-Tec – even wasted a bullet on Vault Boy. But he’d just accepted her suggestion? Of course, there was another reason he’d agreed – only now it was too late. She could only hope that she hadn’t just got everyone killed with her stupidity.

“Now that’s—”

The apartment door opened, and Betty entered, while what looked like a quarter of the remaining population of Vault 33 stood outside, peeking in.

“Dear God, Lucy MacLean! What were you thinking, leaving the vault? You know your father wouldn’t have wanted that. And bringing someone back down with you? We’ve got protocols for that,” she admonished Lucy, walking straight towards her in all her glory before embracing her in one of her bear hugs. Lucy had loved those as a child. Now, she looked over Betty’s shoulder and took in Norm’s cold frown, while the Ghoul unfurled himself and stood up with a dramatic flare of his coat. Betty was unaware of all of that. “It’s good you’re back,” she said when she finally let Lucy go, eyes brimming with tears. “I promised your mother I’d take care of you, always, and I mean to keep that promise.”

Something in Lucy broke. She remembered the undead corpse of her mother and it froze every muscle in her body, which was probably a good thing. Those tears... Betty was acting. That was all they were. Betty came from 31 too just like her father. Had she helped him murder and all those innocent people at Shady Sands? Her mother... if she could move, she'd have strangled or shot her on the spot.

"Is that any way to treat you guests?" the Ghoul interrupted, voice as sharp as his knives.

Lucy watched helplessly as Betty turned her back on her to face him. Her eyes flickered to Norm, who seemed to sense that something was about to go down and retreated to the door.

"Well," Betty said with what sounded like a forced smile in her voice. Lucy stared at the cipher that was the back of her head. "You have to excuse us. We don't get *guests* down here often, especially ones such as yourself, Mr...?"

The Ghoul's mouth contorted in what might have been a smile, were it not so full of hatred. "Now you're insulting me, Betty. I haven't changed *that* much over the years. Granted, I used to be a lot paler and had a nose back then, but I think I look remarkable for my age, don't you? You, on the other hand, the years haven't been kind to."

Confusion radiated from Betty's shoulders. Then, she realized who he was. Lucy could tell by the way the Ghoul's smile became even nastier. He'd come for Betty or someone like her. He'd come to tear someone apart for answers, and Lucy couldn't even be mad. She wanted those answers too.

"Excuse me, but what is going on here?"

For a moment, the tense confrontation was interrupted and everyone looked at Reg, who seemed like he wanted to crawl out of his skin to escape from all the attention.

"Nothing much," the Ghoul answered, stretching out one gloved hand to pat Betty on the shoulder. "Just happy to see an old acquaintance. I've got so many questions after all these years."

That, Lucy knew all too well. She flexed her fingers, and that seemed to shake her out of her stupor. She used her newfound mobility to creep over to the door to stand with the others – and to protect Norm if it came to that.

"Yes," Betty agreed. "Mr. Howard and I knew each other... oh, a long time ago."

"So he's from Vault 31 as well?" Marianne asked.

"Yes," Betty answered while the Ghoul – Mr. Howard – said "No."

"Why don't you tell them the truth?" the Ghoul suggested. "And while we're at it, why don't you tell me where my family is? Young Hank wouldn't answer my question, but maybe you will."

Betty matched the Ghoul in hatefulness one crooked smile at a time. She no longer looked anything like the warm, grandmotherly figure Lucy remembered, but like a predator. Nobody could believe that they were friends – not even naive Reg. Her eyes were dark and burned with anger the same way Lucy's father's had.

"I'm afraid his time outside the vault must have warped Mr. Howard's mind along with his... face," she finally hissed.

"Warped my mind?" The Ghoul laughed. "You're the one who's been warping minds, Betty." Then he did something Lucy had never expected of him. Like an actor in a play about to launch into a monologue, he turned to his audience assembled at the door and surveyed them. "Do you want me to tell them the truth? Or will you tell me what I want to know?"

"I'll never—"

"Everything about Vault 31 is a lie." Lucy's head turned towards her brother, as did everyone else's. Norm stared at Betty. "There is no Vault 31. It's just a bunch of cryo pods and a brain in a robot. And every once in a while, someone gets unfrozen and sent to us or 32 to become the overseer. We're just... a bunch of dumb idiots that can be controlled. By people like Betty. By people like my father." At this, Norm turned to look at the other citizens. He was shaking with anger. "But we don't have to be. I know it's easy to give in – I'm just like you, I voted 31 because that's what you do when times are tough. I want to pretend everything's okay and go on. But all these years, we've talked about resettling the world, about rebuilding America, about making the world a better place. We can't do that if we're cowards who hide behind their vault door and close their eyes to the truth. We have to become who we want to be, or we'll die being nothing more than breeding stock for people who control others like they're puppets. That's not a world I want to live in. Do you?"

Everyone stared. Lucy doubted what he'd said made much sense to people, but more than that, she didn't think she'd ever heard Norm string that many words together in one sentence. Usually, he left it at an acerbic remark or a grunted answer.

"Tell you what," she said. "How about Betty" – she glared at the old woman who had been something of a surrogate aunt to her – "stays in her apartment while we talk this out?"



It took hours – the longest hours of Norm's life. He'd had to tell everything thrice, it seemed, from what he and Chet had discovered in Vault 32 to his father's and Betty's

pasts, to the guy who had put his brain in a jar in order to be able to mess with all their lives two hundred years after he should have bit it. And still...

"Are you sure there isn't a reasonable explanation for everything? I mean..."

Norm sighed. It wasn't Reg's fault. It wasn't any of their fault. They just didn't know how to cope with the fact that there were people in this world who were just warped. It had been the same with the raiders. Down here, the world was simple and people were kind, and to 31's credit, they had made sure it had stayed that way. Which made Bud's experiment so much more ridiculous: it hadn't created managers capable of taking over the world. It had created sheep who'd been conditioned to follow. They all stared at him as he stood where Betty would, at the head of the assembly in the atrium, looking for answers, reassurance, someone to tell them it was all a joke. Norm was not that someone – he was someone who was slowly running out of patience with their willful ignorance.

"He's right," Lucy said, sending an apologetic glance his way before launching into her own tale of betrayal and discovery. When she revealed the depth of their father's evil, Norm felt like he'd been punched in the gut and when she was done, there was no one left to defend Betty. All that was left was a bunch of lost sheep looking for a shepherd.

"What do we do?" someone asked, voice small and skittish.

"We act like everything's normal," Norm told them. "And we take our lives into our own hands. Malcolm will focus on trying to figure out how to fix the water chip and how everyone in 32 could go mad and die. We'll get our food production up to snuff, and we'll keep Betty under lock and key – I'll take care of the overseer of Vault 31."

It wasn't a solution, Norm knew that, but it would buy them time to find one. Once they were free of the threat from 31, they could think about what kind of future they wanted to build – whether it involved the people in the wasteland or not.

"We'll need a new overseer," Reg pointed out.

"Norm's got my vote," Malcolm said. Norm spotted a couple of nods.

That wasn't what he wanted. Not at all. Being overseer wasn't him. It was their dad, and if the past weeks had taught Norm anything, it was that he didn't want to be like him in the least. When he looked at Lucy for guidance – she was the brave one, after all – all he saw was a sad, crooked smile, and he knew he was done for.



Lucy sighed as she walked towards Betty's apartment. This wasn't how she'd envisioned the day would go. She still didn't know what to make of most of it, but she agreed with the

other citizens: Norm would be overseer, whether he wanted to be or not. He'd turn Vault 33 into what it should have been all along. And Lucy would leave again, the moment she had supplies and the Ghoul his answers. She had unfinished business to take care of, even if it hurt to leave Norm alone when he needed her the most.

She opened the door to the apartment, only to find Betty sitting on her couch in one corner and the Ghoul on a chair in another, shotgun on his lap, hat on the kitchen table, the dog at his feet, like a parody of a sheriff in one of the Westerns her father loved to watch so much.

"Has she said anything?" Lucy asked.

"Not a peep," the Ghoul answered.

Betty snorted. "I've got nothing to say to you, Cooper Howard. Do you even know what you've done?"

"Do you?" Lucy fired back. "Do you know what you've done to me, to Norm, to the citizens of Vault 33? To the people of Shady Sands?"

"All I've done I've done to protect the people I love."

The Ghoul – Cooper – snorted. The name tickled at something in Lucy's memory but now wasn't the time to go digging for the answer to that question. "Barb used to say the same. Where is she, Betty? That's all I want to know. All you've got to do to get rid of this ugly mug of mine is tell me."

"We'll find out anyway," Lucy supplied. "It'll only take longer. Dad's left a trail. It's only a matter of time until we find out where he went." T-60s weren't exactly inconspicuous. "And who knows, maybe this can be a first step in making it up to all of us."

Betty didn't look like she thought she had anything to make up for, but she did consider her words for a while. Cooper – that name would take a while to get used to – kept his eyes fixed on her and Lucy watched him watching Betty. Two hundred years. That's how long he'd been looking for his family. He must love them a great deal, and that gave Lucy hope that there was good in him. Not everyone on the surface was bad. Moldaver had wanted to bring back civilization. The doctor had sacrificed himself for it. Maximus was more of a knight than he gave himself credit for. You just had to go digging for the good in people, they had learned to hide it so well.

"Vegas," Betty finally muttered. "He'd have gone to Vegas."

"There, there. Now was that so hard?" Cooper asked.

"Go fuck yourself. I hope I'll never have to see you again."

“The feeling is entirely mutual,” he replied dryly, picking up his hat. Then he walked out without so much as a glance at the old, angry woman on the couch, dog at his heels. Lucy on the other hand glanced at Betty sulking in her corner one last time before following suit.



“I can’t talk you out of this, can I?” Norm asked her. The last time they had stood here, at the door to the outside world, he’d supported her going after Dad. Now, the world was weighing heavy on his shoulders – but he was just as desperate for justice as she was. She’d get it for the both of them, she promised herself in silence.

“You know I have to go,” Lucy pointed out.

“Yeah, but I don’t like it.”

Lucy laughed. “Maybe you’ll leave too, one day. There’s so much to see up there, even if most of it isn’t pretty.”

“Not a chance,” Norm said. Then he turned towards Cooper. “You’ll keep her safe, won’t you?”

Cooper didn’t answer. “I won’t go out of my way to get her killed, but if she insists...”

“I can take care of myself,” Lucy promised him. “And you take care of everyone here.”

Norm didn’t answer, he just looked towards the elevator, brow furrowed. “Not sure I’m the right person for the job,” he muttered eventually.

“Doesn’t matter,” Lucy told him. “You’re the person who has it. You’ll be fine. I know you – you’re capable of so much more than you give yourself credit for.”

“And you’re braver than all of us put together. Take care.” He went to the console and inserted the key. A moment later, he hit the button, and hot, dry air that smelled of salt entered the vault shaft. The dog yipped, wagging her tail. She shot out into the light at the first opportunity.

“You too. Love you.” With those words, Lucy turned to face the world, barely hearing Norm’s “You too” over the deafening sounds of the door as she stepped outside. She felt better prepared for the sight this time. A large, blue sky and a desolate, yellow wasteland. The shapes of people long dead were still cowering in the shade of the weathered and broken concrete pillars.

“Vegas it is,” the Ghoul—Cooper said. Which tugged at her memory again.

“Wait, Cooper Howard, like the actor?” Her dad had loved his movies and probably knew them by heart.

“Feo, fuerte y formal,” Cooper quoted, voice coated with nostalgia and regret. “I haven’t been that man for a good long while, sweetheart. Just forget about it and focus on the job.”

Not a snowball’s chance in hell, Lucy thought. “Okey dokey.”

Fin