

Erin Albus
A Slight Misunderstanding

Smith checked her phone one last time, staring at the address written in the email. Glancing at the apartment door in front of her, she finally managed to convince herself that it was the same one. She tugged on the bottom of her shirt, adjusting it.

Ok, you can do this.

She rapped on the door as loudly as she dared. She was fine. Everything was fine. *She was not fine. Everything was not fine.* Was she crying? She was definitely crying. God, what a way to show up at someone's house.

The door opened just as she made up her mind to run away. She froze in place, her arms up at an awkward angle, her eyes glued to the confused look on the man's face.

"Hi." She didn't lower her arms—the only part of her that moved was her mouth.

"Hey." His expression did not change despite the strange sight. "You, uh, alright there?" He gestured to her.

"Yes." She still did not move.

"Are you sure?" Still no change.

"No." She might have been crying again. She wasn't sure.

"Are you crying?"

"I think so." Honesty is the best policy, she told herself. She finally straightened up, a smile (though it looked more like a grimace) plastered on her face despite the fact that tears were definitely present. "I'm, uh, Smith Wesson. I spoke to you about the... ad." She puckered her lips. Her voice sounded way more confident than she felt.

The man's face did not change. Smith tried not to feel self-conscious as he glanced up and down her. Was she dressed too casually? She had decided to wear a simple black shirt and canvas jacket, but maybe she should have worn something else. But then again, the ad only said, 'Wanted: Someone to take me out.'

"I'm Lukas Banks." He clucked his tongue. "So, how do you want to do this?"

Smith tilted her head, unsure of what he wanted from her. She could not make a decision for her life and now he wanted her to just start planning out an evening? Biting her lip to hopefully stop the building word-vomit creeping up her throat, she let out a loud noise of what sounded like pain. She really was not cut out for this socialization stuff.

"I don't really know what that means." He still had the blank stare from before.

"Um," she muttered as her face turned an excellent red. "How... about... dinner?" She figured he would be the one to figure everything out. After all, he was the one looking for a date on Craigslist.

He raised an incredulous eyebrow, his first sign of emotion since he answered the door, but eventually shrugged. "Whatever makes this easiest for you."

Her sigh of relief was almost inaudible as she watched him turn back into his apartment to grab a coat and slip on his shoes. She closed her eyes and counted to ten, a trick everyone said was supposed to calm your nerves but really just made her thoughts run wild on the back of her eyelids for ten seconds.

"Are you ready?" When she opened her eyes, he was in front of her, his expression back to the ever-present blank look. Was she ready? She didn't feel ready. She honestly just needed money. That's the reason she was doing this in the first place.

“Uhhhhhhh...” *Very eloquent, Smith.* “Sure?”

Lukas raised a single eyebrow, once more doing a sweep over her. He shook his head slightly and locked his door. Smith tried not let the scrutiny bother her— even though it did. She tried not to think about how she was going to have to talk to this guy— even though that was all she was thinking about.

When Smith was ten years old, she was crying when her nanny picked her up from school. The kids had been making fun of her. It was a normal occurrence at that point, but it was still something that hurt her deeply.

“What time are my parents coming home?” Her voice was quiet, broken and stolen by the harsh wind.

Her nanny clutched her hand, a tight-lipped smile on her face. She was only a child herself; she was eighteen years old. A child raising a child.

“They’re not coming home tonight, sweetie,” she said gently. “They got caught up at work.”

Smith felt the tears start again, freezing on her cheeks as she clung to her nanny like a lifeline.

She went to the only place she could think of—a diner that she spent most of her childhood in. Her nanny took her there the many times when her parents couldn’t be bothered to make it home. It wasn’t too far from Lukas’ apartment and the food was cheap (Did he expect her to pay? She was doing this because she *didn’t have any money*). She didn’t talk much on the walk over, but

then again, neither did he. Which honestly made her more uncomfortable than if he talked and she gave one-word answers because she didn't know what to say.

By the time they finally sat down in the booth, she was a mess. She could already feel her mood dropping from too much social interaction and she honestly just wanted to go home a sleep for about five years.

For a long while, there was silence. Smith just stared at the menu and took small sips of her drink. She already knew what she wanted, but she didn't want to talk to Lukas.

Lukas was the one to speak first. "So, like, do you have a gun or something?"

Smith almost choked on her drink, but saved it at the last second. Patting her chest slightly, she stared at him, alarmed. "On me?"

"Yes. On you."

She had no idea why he said that like it was obvious. It was not obvious. She didn't even think this was an open carry state. She also did not have a concealed carry permit. While she was at it, she didn't even own a gun!

"No." She paused, taking in the slight confusion on his face. "I don't have a gun."

"Huh."

They lapsed back into silence. Smith closed her menu and pushed it toward the end of the table. She watched Lukas do the same, his eyes on her face. She tried not to look at him, staring at the table.

Smith was used to the quiet.

When she moved out of her parent's house, she didn't really have a plan, but she knew it really wouldn't be all that different than being in the large, empty house she grew up in. At least she'd be able to be herself there.

Smith used to say that she liked the quiet, but that wasn't quite true. She guessed it was more that she was accustomed to it. Like climbers acclimate to the thin air of Everest. Like soldiers find themselves no longer hearing the fire of their guns.

Smith didn't particularly like the quiet, but it was all she knew.

"So, how are you gonna do it then?" Lukas tapped his fingers on the table as if he was impatiently waiting for something.

Smith frowned. "Do what?"

Was there more to the date? Was he expecting more than dinner? Did he want to go to the movies? *Did he want sex?* Oh God, she hoped not. She just met the guy and she was not, in fact, into gunplay. Or, you know, men.

"Kill me?"

This time, Smith did choke on her drink. In hindsight, it was stupid to start drinking at that point in time. But, as they say, hindsight is twenty-twenty. And she was pretty fucking blind.

It took her a moment to compose herself before she sputtered out, "Excuse me?" Smith took a second before speaking again. "Why would I kill you? I barely know you—that's at least third date material!"

The waitress walked up to their table, halting their conversation. She was actually thankful that the woman was a talker (she was going on about some local event this weekend she

was planning on going to with her boyfriend). Smith had never been more willing to talk to someone in her life. Lukas was just as blank as ever as he talked to the waitress, putting in his order in a clipped tone.

Once the waitress was gone, Lukas was leaning on the table, his hands folded together in front of him. He looked every bit a mob boss trying to hire a hitman—just, uh, for himself. That did not, she was sure, happen very often in the mafia. Well, she couldn't say for sure, but she knew that, generally, *people did not actively try to get someone to murder them*.

“Are you saying that you were not aware that you were supposed to kill me?” Lukas' face was still somehow blank, but he did now have some sort of spark in his eye as he stared at her.

Smith opened and closed her mouth. “Um? Yes?”

“My ad was very clear.”

“It just said, ‘take me out!’”

“Yes. Take me out in the death way, obviously.” He tapped his finger on the table, peering at her with incredulous eyes. “I thought that would be obvious.”

“Not really? I thought you wanted a date!”

In what world is someone supposed to hear ‘take me out’ think the person wants to be killed? Smith didn't have that many social skills (she had been homeschooled from a young age because her parents didn't want her to associate with ‘people of lesser status’), but she did pride herself on the fact that she at least *understood* the implications behind what someone said. And she did not, in any way, believe that his ad could easily be understood to mean he wanted to die.

“Why would I go on Craigslist for a date?” He scoffed slightly at the accusation, as if that was possibly the worst thing she could say about him.

“Why would you go on Craigslist to find someone to kill you?” She was practically yelling at this point. She cast a few glances around, but no one was paying them any mind. Everyone was just going about their lives as if this guy hadn’t just asked Smith to kill him. Which was pretty reasonable all things considered. “Normal people don’t do that.”

“It’s a perfectly reasonable thing to do.” He paused. “Wait, so is your name *actually* Smith Wesson? That’s not, like, an undercover hitman—well, hitwoman, I guess—name? Like your parents looked at baby you and were like, ‘Ah yes, our child. We shall name it after a gun manufacturer. But not the cool one ‘cause fuck the Colts. And fuck her.’”

His eyes were bright with mirth and he had an actual expression on his face. Smith was a little irritated that it was because he was making fun of her. She never cared much for her name—it was just a reminder of her childhood and leaving home. But it was still her name and she didn’t appreciate someone straight up making fun of it to her face. At least do it behind her back like most people.

“First of all, it wouldn’t work with Colt because my last name is Wesson, idiot,” Smith bit out with a glare. What is about people being jerks that made her forget that she couldn’t talk to people? “Second of all, my father liked guns.”

Lukas rolled his eyes before settling back in the booth, playing with his drink. For the first time, his face didn’t slip back into his blank look as soon as he was done talking to her. Instead, he regarded her with a holier-than-thou smirk as if he hadn’t asked her to kill him less than a minute ago.

Anger was always on the fringes of her life, orbiting but never touching. She always told herself that confronting people would just leave her worse off than whomever she was speaking to.

She always took things much more personally than she supposed she should've.

Smith was never one to get angry. She usually just let people say whatever they want and then go and cry about it when she was alone. At this moment, however, she felt her blood boil with righteous fury. Her lips puckered slightly, trying to stem the flow of angry words that were threatening to spill out of her. It was like her nervous word-vomit only much more painful and likely to be yelling.

“Is this how you get me to kill you?” she hissed. “Piss me off until I want you dead?”

“Well, no, but it does get the job done.” He let out a slight laugh. “So, like, are you gonna kill me or not?”

“No!” Smith lowered her voice as she saw the waitress start to make her way back over to their table, their food balanced in her hands. “I’m not killing you. I’d prefer not to go to jail.”

“You won’t go to jail if you do it well.” He tilted his head to the side. “I don’t even think it counts as murder if I wanted it.”

“For one, assisted suicide is *not* legal in Pennsylvania; second, it doesn’t count for someone you met on fucking *Craigslist*.” Smith glanced to the side, smiling at the waitress in thanks as she placed the food down. After she was sure the woman was gone, she turned back to Lukas. “So no, I’m not gonna kill you.”

“I’m not paying you then.” Lukas crossed his arms across his chest as if he just pulled a winning move in chess.

“That’s fine.” Smith took a bite out of her food. Waiting a second to chew her food (more to make him wait than to be polite). “I’d rather be broke than kill a man.”

“Wow, great morals, Kant.”

“You are literally such an asshole,” Smith said. She liked him better when he wasn’t expressing any emotions. She tried to ignore the headache creeping into her temples.

“Wait,” he said, his forehead crinkling slightly, “how do you know about assisted suicide laws?” He leaned forward once more, folding his hands on the table. “That’s not exactly common knowledge.”

“That was like two conversations ago,” Smith answered, defensive. She crossed her arms across her chest. She knew a thing or two about body language, and hoped he did not know anything about it. Crossed arms meant closed off.

“It wasn’t even a minute ago.” He had that stupid smirk on his face again. She had never been a violent person, but honestly just wanted to hit him. Very hard. In the face. Preferably with a chair. “What are you hiding, Smith and Wesson?”

“Just Smith, thank you very little.” Smith took a sip of her drink, taking time to formulate her response. She never really could act; she tried once, but cried as soon as the lights hit her during the audition. “And, uh, nothing.”

“Hm, I’m calling that some bullshit,” Lukas said with a laugh.

They were both finishing with their food— Smith was eating way faster than she usually did, but she just wanted to *get out of this diner*. The turn in the conversation had thrown her for a loop, but she could see in his eyes that he was not going to let this go as long as she was here. She just needed to leave.

“So what’s the dealio? You got some deep, dark backstory you’re hiding under your awkwardness?”

He was pestering her, his teeth glinting like a shark’s in the dim light of the diner. She did not like where this was going and could already feel the tears threatening to spill over. She would *not* cry in front of this guy (at least, not any more than she already has, that is). Smith was also not going to just spill her guts to some stranger with a death wish.

So she grabbed her jacket, glared at Lukas one last time, and left.

Her apartment was empty when she returned. It was chilly, but not so much that it bothered her. She always liked the feeling of being cold, the feeling of her limbs falling into oblivion. It was freeing. It was calming.

All her life, she had to be something very specific. She was the daughter of a rich man. A powerful man. *It weighs on you*, she told people when they asked why she left. *I just wanted it to be over*, she said when they asked why she did what she did.

I just want to be alone, she had told herself all those years ago when she piled pill after pill into her mouth.

Now, Smith was cold, but alive. And that was all she needed.