

It's funny how people say I can hear voices. The truth is, I don't. I don't hear every rasp and crack and organic note in a voice. I don't hear every trace of hate or innocence or love or any intentions.

I just hear a message. Two words, maybe three. They come over me and strip me of my intuition. They are my only sense, and my body and mind are completely their own. But they can't be voices.

If the things I heard were voices, I would know by the trembling in its form that they were sinister. I would know not to follow them.

I shuffle through pages and pages, but I can't pay attention. The scent of library is all that I'm interested in as I skim through covers in an airport gate. I'd never been the type to read. I can never keep my eyes steady.

I see a glint, one far too familiar to miss. It forms a line, and then a stripe, and then a card in someone's pocket. It's silver body, so light and so sleek, is too easy to swipe. Too easy to take.

"Steal it." They say, their words appearing like a shadow in my brain, overpowering my every muscle. "Steal it," they echo, over and over and over until walls cave in, and all there's left to do is one action. Steal it.

My heart pounds in my chest. It isn't the adrenaline, no, that is a side effect. I slide my way over into a bistro. "Number four," I chime. It's all about the tone. I've found my target.

She stands, her hair chopped to her shoulders and roots stripped down to their natural color. Let's call her Cheryl, yes, she looks like a Cheryl.

"It's a beautiful, clear day to ride a plane, isn't it?" She laughs with the cashier. "I guess we just have good luck." This is how you strike. Rule number one: never start the conversation. "Not where I'm going." I shake my head jokingly. "Tampa is going to be storming."

Lie. I'm flying to Manhattan.

And then comes the conversation. Through phrases and chuckles, and the slow chatter of the bistro, everything is a distraction. The lazy afternoon sun contrasting to the bustling people is a distraction. And distractions are a friend of mine.

In about three and a half feet tall, there stood the best distraction possible. The child cried to Cheryl hysterically, explaining how he bumped his head. And as she tamed him, I could see the leather wallet sticking out of her pocket, and the silver card sticking out of the leather.

My form had done me well in the sense that I was a small, quick man. I could get through unexpectedly. That's exactly what I did, as I was loading the plane with an identity in my backpack. It happened before I realized it did.

It always happens that way, I guess.

I had picked economy for the sake of blending in. I hustle my way through the tunnels, into the aircraft. I zone out during the safety demonstrations and look through my bag

until I see the little flash of silver once again. Amanda Wells. Her name was Amanda Wells. I can't help letting out a chuckle. Her picture is a plastered smile. She looks so... normal. Just so normal.

I guess bad things can happen to normal people. Normal people lose credit cards. I guess I was never the type to be normal.

But I knew that if I couldn't have a golden life, if my heart ripped at the thought of a golden life, if I cried and prayed and screamed and I couldn't have a golden life, I could have something else.

I could have power. Golden was nothing if it wasn't a silver card. I held it all in my hands, the money that made the world go round, that bitter world that brought me to my knees and ripped my soul out.

The clouds are gone and so is the lightness in my heart, the kind that only clouds can make you feel. Welcome to Manhattan.

The tile has the sounds of millions of bags and steps all over it. The sky is black and the mood is grey and spacey, the way airports always made me feel. The baggage claim circles. Albuquerque to Manhattan. One by one. Again and again. The baggage claim circles. People are leaving. The sky is getting pinker and I'm getting anxious. My heart beats in my chest as the loop looks to be going faster. My palms sweat as I ask for some help. The lady talk on the phone.

Soon enough, there's a six foot five security guard in my five foot seven face. The lump arises in my throat again. No. for five years, I haven't been caught. I'm picked up and thrown into a room before I have the time to breathe, with my heart exploding against the pale walls.

They make a few calls, something about criminal history.

I was not a criminal. I was a man, just a man, taking the life I couldn't have.

I doze off a few times. I can't breathe yet, I can't feel yet. Before I know it, my body is in a cell with one payphone on a wall. I want to scratch the wall until it looks silver. All I see is silver. My mind is itching at me to steal the invisible.

An officer comes in, with one pen and a pad. "Sir, I'd like to ask you a few questions." He eyes me with his own beady ones, looking for some sense of an evil man.

Like a whisper, the shadows come out of me. I don't even think. The response just finds its way out of my lips. "I plead the fifth." He looks frustrated. A win for my case.

There's just one problem.

His card is in my pocket.