



☐☐If You Must Lie, Be Honest☐☐

Batman - All Media Types · Not Rated · 2335 words

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Characters: Edward Nygma, Stephanie Brown

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As far as Edward is concerned, parent-teacher conferences should be one of the circles of Hell. But for his daughter, he's willing to go through even that.

The way Riddler's mind works is partially based on Sherlock Holmes and his Mind Palace.
Fanart at end of Stephanie/Spoiler!

I have absolutely NO IDEA how schools work, so apologies for any big inaccuracies.

"Would you care to sit down, Mr Greene?"

"Yes, thank you. And, please, call me Edward."

"Edward. First off, Stephanie is a very intelligent girl. She just has a few behavioral issues..."

As far as Edward was concerned, parent-teacher conferences were one of the circles of Hell. Edward Nashton had suffered much through Highschool, Edward Nygma had sworn to never go back under any circumstances, and now Edward Greene was sitting in a class room talking to an angry teacher.

Edward didn't lie, which meant that Greene wasn't an alias. It was who he was as long as he was in that building. Mr Greene was a single father with a part time job doing cybersecurity and accounting at the Iceberg lounge. He was in therapy, had been attacked by several supervillains, and hosted a book club. All true, of course.

Edward tried very hard to stay tuned in to the utter dribble the teacher (Mrs Dreyhorn, or something? He didn't care) was spouting. Apparently Stephanie had developed a habit of correcting her teachers. They thought she was arrogant, snarky, and a smartass -- though it wasn't said in those precise words.

Edward couldn't be prouder of her, honestly. This deserved ice cream and a movie night. "Don't worry, Mrs-" *Accessing memory: Stephanie >> School >> Teachers >> Dreyzen* "Dreyzen, I'll have a talk with her about it."

"I hope you won't be too harsh on her." Mrs Drey-whatever smiled, but it didn't reach her eyes. "I think she could be a very lovely girl, if she could just learn how to work with others."

Stephanie was very skilled at working with others, she just had no patience for idiots. Edward was nodding, about to say something polite, when the next sentence caused him to freeze.

"I mean, the only other student she ever seems to talk to is Timothy Drake."

"Timothy Drake?" *Accessing memory: no match found.* "She's never mentioned him."

"Well, it seems like a relatively new friendship." Mrs Teacher assured him. "Transferring in the middle of the year doesn't tend to lend itself to making friends. What school did you say she went to last?"

"Southwest Ivory." They'd done an hour-long tour of the Highschool before deciding on Gotham Central High, and she'd been in Southwest Ivory Preschool years ago. That counted, right? "So, this boy is the only student she really interacts with?"

"For the most part, yes." Mrs who-cares nodded. "While making friends is certainly not mandatory, I consider it vital to a teenager's healthy development."

"Yes, certainly." She *had* friends, outside of school. They all just happened to be the children of supervillains (and that one ghost kid). The teacher said more, but Edward had stopped paying attention. Stephanie had made friends with a boy? Why hadn't she told him? Were they just friends or..?

"..Which is why I've asked Stephanie to join us. She should be here in a minute." Shit, he really needed to start paying more attention. *Memory review: nonsense, nonsense, stupidity, Stephanie yelled at a teacher; it isn't the first time, and Mrs Dreyzen wants to talk about possible problems in the home environment that could've led to these difficult behaviors.*

Edward wanted to talk about the statistical probability of a Riddler attack in Dreyzen's neighborhood. (Un)Fortunately, the door opened to reveal Stephanie, trying to cover up how puffy and red her eyes were.

"Ms Greene? Are you alright?" Teacher asked, half-standing in concern.

"Huh? Oh, I'm perfectly fine, Mrs Dreyzen." Stephanie smiled, still failing to hide the fact that she'd been crying.

And that certainly wouldn't do. Edward stood up, walked over, and pulled Stephanie into a hug in one fluid series of movements. "Sweetie, we've got to work on your lying."

"Dad, I wasn't-"

"First off, never try to lie about something so obvious." Edward interrupted, pulling back to look her in the eye. "If you don't have enough time to *properly* hide the evidence of tears, simply come in crying about something else. Something you don't mind others knowing, or at least not as much as whatever it is you're hiding. Understand?"

"Yes." Stephanie nodded. She muttered. "I wasn't crying."

"What did I just say, sweetie?" Edward admonished, smiling. "Let's try this again. I want you to go out into the hall and come back in. This time, when I ask you why you're crying, you aren't going to deny it. Remember, misdirection is key. Go on, now."

To the teacher's bewilderment, Stephanie wordlessly obeyed, coming back in with tears streaming down her cheeks.

"Stephanie, sweetie, what's the matter?" Edward asked, hugging her again.

"I-it's nothing, really." Stephanie stuttered. "Just some of the kids have been saying things about me."

"What sort of things?"

"They called me an obsessive weirdo." She shrugged. "And an idiot that can't even get through a single class without getting into an argument."

Edward's blood began to boil at the word 'idiot', but he couldn't help smiling in pride. His clever girl knew exactly what to say to force him to hurry through this conversation -- he couldn't afford to break character in front of the teacher.

"Oh, dearest, you shouldn't listen to bullies." He comforted. He used his finger to tap out, in code, *They're the idiots*.

"Mr Greene, I must say that this is highly unusual." Mrs unimportant person protested.

"I must agree." Edward said sternly, turning on her. "Why wasn't I informed about these verbal attacks on my daughter? What exactly does the school plan to do to prevent such incidents?"

By the time Edward and Stephanie were cheerfully walking out of the school, he'd gone over a lecture on the history of bullying on schools, the panicked teacher had assured that something would be done, and not another word had managed to be said about Stephanie's 'behavioral issues'.

"That was amazing." Stephanie laughed, watching the sunset. "The look on her face when you threatened to get the media involved..."

"Misdirection is key." Edward repeated, grinning. He hugged her close. "So, are you going to tell me what you were *actually* crying about?"

"I had a panic attack."

"Triggered by..?"

"Guess close enough, and I'll tell you." Stephanie challenged. "Otherwise we drop it."

"Deal!" Edward jumped, clapping his hands. He thought, humming. "It wasn't about bullying... Did your dress rip in front of the cool girls?"

"Should I be insulted you think I'd cry over something like that?" Stephanie rolled her eyes. "And the only cool girl in that school is me, so try again."

"You told a riddle, no one understood it, and you felt the crushing realization that nearly everyone else is barely above amoeba in terms of IQ?"

"Yes, but it made me laugh." Stephanie shook her head, chuckling. "One guess left."

"What? That's not fair." Edward complained, crossing his arms. "You never said there was a limit."

"Of course there's a limit." Stephanie frowned. "Otherwise you could just keep guessing until you get it."

"But you didn't say that!" Edward argued, pausing for a second to grab Stephanie's hand as they passed into a dark alley, pulling her close. "I wouldn't have wasted the first guess on a joke if I knew I only had three."

"Fine, you can have two more guesses." Stephanie rolled her eyes, pressing closer to him in response to a loud clattering from deeper in the alley. "Next time, we're taking the sky trails."

"Agreed. Actually, let's do that now." Edward looked around for one of the secret climbing paths the Gotham underworld had installed on various buildings over the years. He helped Stephanie up a disguised ladder, following her to the rooftop.

As they skipped between the roofs, Edward thought. Stephanie used to get panic attacks often, she was scared of practically everything after he'd first adopted her. Then Jon had taught her a few tricks (under very careful supervision and a few panic attacks from Edward), and now she rarely freaked out over *anything*. If something frightened her, she thought through it logically, breathed deeply, and attacked the issue with a ferocity that honestly scared *him* sometimes.

Whatever had made her cry was going to face his utmost wrath. Or Twoface's wrath, more probably. Edward tuned out, not consciously focusing on the well-known path. He knew the answer already, he could feel it, he just wasn't seeing it.

The world around him faded away, and he saw himself in a dark room. Around him were various objects and notes, all connected by colored string. Every object, every color, where they were placed, the order they were in -- all of it meant something.

He followed the strings with his eyes, moving things as he thought through what he knew about Stephanie. His gaze tripped on a newspaper from last week, opened to a seemingly random page, tacked to one of the walls. Why had he saved that in such a prominent spot?

He approached the paper, squinting at the article; it was something about a cop getting released from prison... Oh. Like a remote switching channels, reality burst back into his vision, Stephanie humming ahead of him as she hopped to the next roof. His poor, brilliant little girl.

"Sweetie, *what is often nonsensical, but unwise to ignore?*" Damnit, he hadn't meant to turn it into a riddle.

"Uncle Jervis?" Stephanie guessed, smirking.

"Smartass." Edward chuckled fondly. He sighed, shoulders slumping. "The answer is emotions, sweetheart. Steph, it's okay to be upset about the man who shot your father getting released."

"I know." She muttered, not surprised for a moment that he'd figured it out. She stopped walking, waiting for him to catch up. Even when he did, she didn't keep going. "He shouldn't have gone to jail. Daddy was a bad man, he hurt a lot of people. He deserved to be shot."

"I know, Steph." Edward held her tightly. "It's okay to think that. But you know it's okay to miss him, right?"

"He killed people." She held onto him, tears welling in her eyes. "How can I feel anything but hate for him? Daddy was never there, I shouldn't-"

"Love him?" Edward asked. He swallowed, breathing deeply. "Sweetie, what would you say if I told you I still love my father?"

"Didn't he-?"

"Yes, he hurt me." Edward agreed. "He is a horrible man, and I never want to see him again. I still love him."

"...I wish my father was still alive." Stephanie admitted quietly. "But I'm glad he's dead."

"As I said, emotions rarely make sense." Edward smoothed her hair, kissing her head. "I knew your father a long time. He could be really great when he wasn't being absolutely terrible. It's okay to miss him, sweetheart."

"I know." Stephanie whispered. She didn't say anything more, and Edward didn't push her. At some point they started walking again, still staying close, stopping every once in a while to see who could spot more constellations.

By the time they climbed through their apartment's kitchen window (the only entrance not booby trapped), they were back to laughing over the parent-teacher conference.

Stephanie plopped onto the couch, clicking the TV onto the gameshow channel "Do you want to watch Jeopardy or Guess Who Said That?"

Edward switched on the stove, looking through their cabinets. "Guess Who Said That is skipping a week due to Joker taking over the airwaves *again*."

"Oh, good. Jeopardy was getting a bit old." Stephanie clicked the remote, and Joker's voice filtered through the screen.

[Heya, kiddies! Welcome ta All Jokes All Da Time! Today we're learnin' how ta properly keep your hostages from rebelling...]

Edward scoffed, breaking spaghetti into a pot. "Oh, please! Last time he *actually* took a hostage, the guy nearly used one of his own bombs to blow him up in a dirty alley."

"Didn't your last hostage hotwire an off switch into your maze?" Stephanie asked.

"... It's hardly my fault he cheated." Edward grumbled, pouting. "Speaking of things that annoy me, are kids really bullying you?"

"Huh? Oh, yeah." Stephanie shrugged. "It's not that big of a deal. No one's tried to hit me, and any words from utter morons are insignificant."

"If it gets worse-"

"No."

"Twoface-"

"No."

"They did offer-"

"Daaaad..."

"Oh, alright." He divided the pasta between two plates, switched off the stove, and joined her on the couch.

Stephanie yawned, laying her head on his shoulder. Edward held her, fingers trailing through her hair as they quietly watched TV together.

Edward had never thought he would have this. A daughter, a home, peace and quiet. He spent most nights either amongst supervillains or going toe-to-toe with Batman, yet this was the calmest his life had ever been. It was nice.

So he waited until after Joker had been caught by the Bat to spoil it.

"Your teacher says you've been hanging out with a boy named Timothy Drake." Edward said slowly. "He's your friend, or..?"

"Look at the time! I should get to sleep; I have school in the morning." Stephanie said quickly, jumping up and dashing into her room. A few seconds passed, and the door opened a crack. "Goodnight, Dad. Love you."

"I love you too, sweetest. Good dreams." Edward smiled, chuckling to himself. He pulled out his phone, dialing. Oswald owed him a favor and had the connections to do background checks. Timothy Drake was a mystery, a puzzle, and everyone knew how much the Riddler oh so loved solving such things...

— end of "¶¶If You Must Lie, Be Honest¶¶" —