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Boston, Massachusetts

All gypsies aren't from Romania

Rainy nights at Logan Airport were usually best, the women eager to get inside his cab, not paying much attention to whether it was licensed or why the roof TAXI sign barely glowed.

For Luddy Pugano, this particular curbside pickup seemed as though it would work out much like two others earlier in the year – one during a January snowstorm and another amid an early-March cold snap that brought sleet and plunged Boston temperatures to below freezing. He had put the young woman's two suitcases in the trunk. Fake packages wrapped in brown paper filled the back seat so the fare was invited to sit up front, relax and pick a radio station. Once she appeared at ease, he'd slammed her head against the dashboard, then poked her menacingly with the tip of a clamming knife while driving to a deserted industrial lot in Eastie within earshot of the runways. But somehow this one had managed to squiggle out of his beefy arms. His leather belt was still cinched around her neck as she cast aside her thin trenchcoat and clawed her way up the muddy embankment to the highway.

The woman couldn't believe this was happening to her. She was a sophisticated sales rep flying into Boston to sell medical devices at three hospitals and heading home the next day – at least that was the plan. Abduction by a weirdo cabbie who clearly was trying to kill her was something that happened to other people. She didn't dare look back. The mud was slippery but she was determined to get away. This wasn't how she would allow herself to die, so she climbed, yanking clumps of weedy grass as she put every last bit of energy into reaching the highway. Her gray pinstriped dress was torn at the neckline and she was shoeless, her hair disheveled, her bruised and muddied face a mask of sheer terror as she flagged down passing cars for help. She waved wildly at three drivers who kept on going, their tires hissing on the rain-soaked roadway. “What the

hell? Why doesn't anybody stop? Am I some sort of Kitty Genovese? A tragic headline in the making?"

She thought her heart would burst through her chest as a fourth vehicle – which in the dark resembled a police cruiser with a driver-side spotlight -- switched on its directional signals and pulled over onto the road shoulder. Her face showed relief for a fraction of a second until she realized the worst had happened. It was him.

The woman tried to scream but no sound came out, her vocal cords compressed by the leather belt that flapped from her neck. The rain spattered her face and mixed with the coppery taste of blood on her lips as she stepped back against the metal guardrail. The driver's door opened and a large, barrel-chested man got out. The woman noticed he wore a dark hooded sweatshirt and knit watch cap. Despite her willingness not to die along the shoulder of a highway, she felt a paralyzing wave of fear wash over her from throat to toes.

The cabbie rushed toward her and reached for her arms, raised in self-defense. He'd grabbed her just as a BMW sedan pulled alongside the cab. A silver-haired man in business suit and necktie rolled down the passenger-side window and shouted over the sound of a plane taking off, asking if everything was all right. The woman felt the grip on her arms loosen as the cabbie turned and bolted. She watched in disbelief as he clumsily folded himself back into the driver's seat, spinning the rear tires on the wet pavement as he roared away into the night. She saw the red taillights getting smaller as she leaned her weight against the guardrail and sobbed uncontrollably.

The woman's suitcases were mostly filled with medical device samples, branded coffee cups, pens and notepads. Luddy tossed them into a dumpster behind a gas station. During the following week, he scoured the newspapers for any reference to an attempted abduction at Logan Airport, just as he had done after the other two grabs, but there were no stories. An attempted abduction wasn't exactly news in Boston, not like a murder. The police had previously recorded two similar incidents at the airport as missing person cases. To the news reporters who covered the city's crime beat, none seemed worth the airtime or page space, so the public remained unaware of the danger. Only State Police Detective Lt. Hannah Summers, after interviewing the woman who had escaped, theorized the three cases might be related. She wrote a report that was read by her commanding officer with great amusement and summarily tossed aside.

