

“After A Carson Family Christmas”

by Wendy Arthur



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This family short story is an Uber, however all characters are created by me.

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No real need for other disclaimers in this one... it's light and fluffy and so sweet you may get a cavity

No sex (OMG!) and no murder/violence this time (meaning CJ is not at work – phew!). This is just a family get-together, so relax and enjoy!

Comments and/or feedback can be left at <http://marshallcarson.wordpress.com> or emailed to stagefreakmusic@gmail.com

Thanks to my sooper-doooper beta-reader, Norsebard, for his continued help and support. And thanks to my readers for their patience and feedback.

Even though life is getting busy for me, CJ and Kate will continue on... even if it's at
a somewhat slower pace

Okay, so let us go forth... and be merry!

A Christmas Eve – Amidst The Preparation

Assistant Director Mark Mulrone y sat behind the large oak desk in his office at the FBI's Los Angeles field office, glumly resting his chin on his hand. As he stared out the window at the silvery sun's rays crossing his view, he wished he had someone to spend the Holidays with. Not that he had much time off; it was Christmas Eve and here he was at work as always. His agents, Jamie and Mikey, were in their office along the corridor. They had opted to take the New Year off instead of Christmas, letting CJ and Ethan take tomorrow since they both had kids.

Mark sighed and looked at his watch – noting the time at an unbelievably slow 11am - and took a slurp of his lukewarm coffee, grimacing at its bitter aftertaste. *'God, I'd hoped it was 5pm already,'* he grumbled to himself. He took a deep breath, fully intent on organizing his large drawer-full of files since he had the time to do so. Instead, he let the breath out with a groan and returned to his detailed study of the weather. His eyes had just gone out of focus and begun to glaze over when the phone rang, roughly jolting him out of his lazy musings. "AD Mulrone y."

"Hi, Mark... its Kate ," said a cheery voice across the line.

The Assistant Director's face immediately lightened... then darkened as he thought about why Kate might call. "Hello, Kate. Is everything okay?" he asked, concern lacing his words.

"Oh yes, thanks... I'm just calling to invite you to dinner tomorrow..."

"Oh... well, eh... I have to work, Kate, but thank you for the offer."

"Yeah, CJ said you would say that, but we're not eating until six or seven. I just wanted to let you know that you are more than welcome... even if it's just for dessert ." The actress paused briefly. *"I'm making that cheesecake you like..."*

Mark's mouth watered at the memory of the cheesecake Kate had made a few weeks ago. The fresh raspberries, the most amazingly sweet cream cheese filling, the crunchy base... and the oh-so-tasty crispy caramel top layer. The actress had sent a piece to him at the office... efficiently delivered by CJ. He smacked his lips together and was pretty sure he could hear a giggle on the other end of the line. Suddenly, he realized he hadn't answered. "Oh... I might make it. I'll see what I can do."

"Great. I'll put some cheesecake on hold for you," the actress retorted, knowing he would turn up for sure.

"Thanks, Kate. I hope you guys are having an enjoyable few days..."

"Yes, thanks. Just running around getting prepared for tomorrow... oops, I have to go, Mark..."

"Okay, Kate. Bye then."

"Bye... see you tomorrow." The actress hung up the call leaving a chuckle ringing in Mark's ears.

He leaned back in the chair, feeling a small smile creasing the sides of his mouth. *'Yep, she's a sweetheart. And so is that agent of mine...'*

* * * * *

Kate Carson ended the call and craned her neck to look at the three year old jumping up and down at her side. She turned her whole body to the ferocious bundle of energy Lucy had become over the last few months, and raised a curious eyebrow.

“Mama, Mama... ‘Mali made it fa’down!” the youngster exclaimed, holding two Christmas tree baubles in her small hands. Lucy was grasping every aspect of talking now but used a convenient diminutive for their German Shepherd, Kamali.

“Oh my!” Kate replied with a huge smile, glancing at the slightly regretful-looking dog. “We’d better hang them back on the tree, huh?”

“Yes!” Lucy responded enthusiastically. “Quick!”

Kate chuckled at the urgency in her daughter’s husky voice and shuffled after the running girl. “Careful, Lucy... let me help.”

“M’kay... ‘dis one...” the girl said, offering a shiny red bauble to her parent.

The actress took the offered item and began to replace it on the branch of their Christmas tree, noting that Kamali’s wagging tail was about to repeat the over-dramatic bauble atrocity. She snapped her fingers and pointed away from the tree. The big black dog obeyed and moved behind the actress. “Sit!” she instructed. Once he had done so, she added, “Good boy!” earning her a lolling-tongue expression from the clever canine.

Deciding that five seconds was enough to comply with his owner’s command, Kamali bounded across the room to meet the other half of his family who were just coming through the front door.

* * * * *

In the hallway, six year old Shannon was first to be greeted and she giggled as the dog wagged his bushy tail in all kinds of odd directions in his excitement. “Hey boy,” she said, patting her hand on the big black head.

Six foot of Federal agent followed, carrying the last minute items they had forgotten for the family Christmas dinner tomorrow. CJ smiled when she saw the dog and scratched behind his ear in greeting. She walked toward the living area and spotted her wife reaching to put a decoration on the tree. Lucy sat on the floor at the blonde’s feet, wrapping a piece of tinsel around her neck like a scarf. “Hello beautiful family...” she grinned.

Hearing the silky, beloved voice of her partner, Kate turned her head. “Hey, you guys. How did it go?”

“We got everything including the chocolate sauce... more half ‘n’ half... cranberry sauce... and uh, toilet paper,” CJ replied with a lop-sided grin.

“Aww... how’s your tummy feeling now, honey?” Kate asked, knowing her wife’s instant and rather rude throwing up attack last night was highly unusual. They had used a lot of toilet paper in the initial stages of the projectile vomiting.

“I feel much better. We are not, however, getting take-out from the place again!” CJ said, putting the bag on the end table at the couch and sliding her arms around her spouse.

“Agreed!” the actress nodded.

“Did you manage to get hold of Mark?” the agent asked while placing a kiss on her wife’s forehead.

“I did. He gave the excuse you said he would but I think I managed to convince him to join us after work,” Kate said with a knowing look.

“Cheesecake?” the taller woman smirked.

The blonde grinned and squeezed her wife. "Cheesecake," she confirmed. She belatedly looked down when she realized there was a whole other conversation going on below them.

Lucy was now standing and Shannon was kneeling in front of her. The older girl was still protective, loving and helpful toward her little sister. The new parents were still waiting for Shannon to throw a tantrum or rebel against... well, something, but the girl was the sweetest sister in the world. Shannon had also firmly established that she was the 'girly' sister, loving Kate's jewelry and makeup, while Lucy was a jeans and tee kinda girl, preferring to play in the dirt with Kamali, although Shannon was not adverse to doing that either on occasion. They were like night and day, but loved one another dearly.

"Look, Shan... pretty," Lucy gushed, holding the ends of the bright green tinsel.

"Wow... yeah, Luce. You could use it for a belt too," Shannon responded eagerly, removing the meter-long strand from the smaller girl's neck and tying it in a bow around the tiny waist.

Lucy giggled, "S'my belt."

"Yep. It's cute," Shannon nodded, ruffling her sister's brown curls.

CJ and Kate watched in their usual subdued but secretly-astonished fashion as Shannon continued to act like an adult and took the bag of groceries to the kitchen and began to put them away. Lucy skipped after her with Kamali in tow as usual.

The tall agent turned to her wife. "I know we have our tense moments as a family..." she said, "...but do you ever feel like this is all too easy?"

"Oh God, honey, don't jinx it," Kate offered with a cute nose scrunch, "but yes. We're gonna have to keep reminding Shannon that she's a kid though..."

"I know. We'll keep doing what we're doing. They seem happy, hon." CJ smiled widely and kissed her love, slipping her arms tighter around the slim waist but knowing that two pairs of young eyes were watching. She gently pulled back, hearing the unmistakable chuckles of their daughters coming from the kitchen. "Right, you two... who needs a tickle?" she growled, turning on her heels and rushing at the suddenly excited children.

Kate followed and soon, screams of laughter – and a few Kamali barks - could be heard throughout the house until several minutes later, when the quiet dictated that the small people had been captured and tickled to exhaustion. Four bodies now lay haphazardly on the couch.

CJ blew the end of the tinsel off her face and scratched her nose. Lucy brought her small hand up to double-check that her Mommy had managed to remove all the itches. The tall woman smiled and winked at the younger girl, receiving a stuck out tongue in response. "You cheeky monkey!" the agent said lovingly. Her reply was a slightly sloppy kiss to her nose and she laughed heartily.

"What is going on up there?" Kate mumbled, her head buried somewhere at the other end of the couch.

"Lucy's just being the comedienne today, that's all," CJ smirked.

"Ah," Kate sighed. "I suppose we should get up, huh? Still lots to be done..."

A grumble from Shannon was her only reply.

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Very late that night – after finally getting two extremely excited children to sleep – CJ stood in the living area surveying the Christmassy scene she never thought she'd see... her wife, standing in their home surrounded by festive decorations; a stunning Christmas tree with brightly wrapped gifts around the base ; six stockings (yes, six) hanging from the mantel and twinkling lights scattered around the room. The agent smiled, having never experienced anything like it.

Kate saw the look on her face and swooped into her spouse's arms for a hug. "Happy?" the blonde husked.

"Very," CJ replied, kissing Kate tenderly, "and exhausted. It's time for us to sleep too, my love."

"Yes! I'm sooo tired... maybe even too tired for sex."

"Wow! That *is* tired," the agent chuckled.

Kate laughed. "Hah. C'mon Legs, put those lights out and take me to bed."

"Yes, ma'am."

A Christmas Awakening – Before Dawn (Yawn)

At exactly 5.18am the next morning, Shannon sprung from her bed. "It's Christmas day!" Suddenly on her feet, she got her bearings and ran to the closet. She selected her favorite pink girly tee and her denim skirt. Grabbing some clean underwear, she rolled all the clothing in a ball under her arm and headed for the bathroom to perform her usual morning rituals. She was a very independent young girl but her child-like excitement finally got the better of her once she was dressed, and she ran along the hallway to collect her sister, leaving her pajamas in a bundle near the bath tub.

"Lucy! It's Christmas!" she squeaked, gently shaking the little girl awake. Lucy now slept in her own room and Shannon skipped over to the closet to choose some clothes for her sibling. But when she turned around, Lucy was already on a half-awake shuffle to the toilet. The older girl followed and made sure her sister didn't need any help.

"No," Lucy mumbled when Shannon tried to remove her PJ's. The smaller girl dazedly walked to her parent's room and hung off the door handle, using her body weight to open it. Giving up on trying to dress her little sister, Shannon just sighed and followed.

Inside, they were greeted by CJ's face almost hanging off the side of the bed, relaxed in her deep slumber. Her hand trailed on the floor as she draped bonelessly over the side of the mattress. An unruly head of shaggy blonde hair could be seen pressed against the agent's naked back as Kate snored lightly, no doubt due to her awkward positioning. Shannon giggled quietly but Lucy was not so considerate.

The smaller girl patted her Mommy's cheek repeatedly. "Kissmas, Mommy. Wake up, wake up!"

CJ was jolted out of her dream. "Mmmm... not yet," she groaned.

"Yes! Nowwwwww!" Lucy said unforgivingly.

Shannon bit her lips, waiting for CJ to open her eyes. As a thin slit of blue emerged from under a sleep-darkened eyelid, she smiled. "I'm sorry, Mommy, but it'smorning. Happy Christmas."

The agent saw the reserved, apologetic look on the six year old's face and immediately sobered. She opened both eyes and took in Shannon's worried demeanor. "Oh girls, I'm sorry. I'm awake now. Merry Christmas!" she said, rising up and then realizing she was naked. Seeing nothing but childlike excitement at their impending gifts buzzing

from her daughters' faces, she decided that her reservations about being naked in front of them should not be their reservations as well. Relaxing her posture, she looked at them both. "Shannon, honey... can you pass me that robe?" she requested, pointing to the couch.

"Sure, Mommy." On her return from the couch, Shannon noted her Mommy's body but said nothing. *'I think that's what happens when you grow up,'* she thought to herself. *'Mommy's chest is bigger than mine.'* She passed the robe to CJ, who didn't miss her daughter's quick observation of her body.

"Shannon... do you want to ask me anything? It's okay to be curious, sweetie..." the agent said, raising her eyebrows lightly.

The girl thought about it for a few seconds. "Maybe another time... it's Christmas!" she exclaimed, noticing Lucy using both hands to pull CJ out of bed.

"Okay." CJ shimmied slowly out from under her wife and got to her feet. Closing the robe around her, she placed a kiss on Shannon's forehead. Turning back to the bed, she frowned and half-smiled. "Hmmm, it could be a little more difficult waking your Mama though..." she added, observing her wife who was now practically molded to the mattress, lying on her front with her cheek squished against the sheet.

"We could jump on the bed?" Shannon offered helpfully.

CJ stifled her laugh. "Uhm... no, sweetie... I think a more gentle approach might be better." The agent sat on the bed and lowered her head until it was just above Kate's. She looked at Shannon, who nodded at her to kiss Kate. CJ leaned down and gave her wife an upside-down kiss on the lips, making her older daughter giggle quietly. The other daughter was hopping from foot to foot impatiently. "Katie... wake up," the tall woman said into a delicate ear. A low mumble was heard and CJ tried again. "Wakey-wakey, darling, it's Christmas morning... and we have an impatient crowd here waiting for presents."

Kate twisted her neck to look at the clock. "Oh man," she croaked, "it's not even six." Rubbing her sleepy eyes, she looked in the direction of her family. "Mornin'... Merry Christmas ev'one," she yawned. A chorus of greetings was her response and she scratched through her messy blonde hair as she stood up, grabbed her sweatpants and tee shirt from the end of the couch, and pulled them on. CJ just shook her head slowly and smiled at her wife's naturally relaxed attitude about her own nakedness.

The actress caught the look from her spouse and raised a sandy eyebrow. "No point in making a big deal about it, my dear."

"Indeed."

"But... what *is* a big deal... is breakfast! I'm starved," Kate said to the two girls' expectant faces. "I'm guessing gifts are first though, huh?" she smiled as their daughters' nodded in unison. "But we need to be quiet as we go down the stairs. Grandpa Eddie and Jeffrey arrived last night. They'll still be very sleepy."

The two grandpas had arrived incredibly late the previous night after their long trip from New York City. Coming straight from work at the restaurant to the airport, they'd arrived in a cab after their delayed flight had finally landed at LAX, and had been so exhausted they had dropped into bed in the guest room after a brief 'hello'.

CJ quickly pulled some sweatpants and a hoodie from the closet and put them on as a temporary measure, until they had time to get properly dressed later. She turned to her family. "Ready?"

Grabbing a grown-up each, the two nodding girls made a point of urging their parents toward the hallway. Shannon was her usual sensible self but CJ could see the barely-contained excitement twinkling in her wide blue eyes. Lucy, on the other hand, showed no signs of stifling her emotions. Ever since the infant had found her voice, she had been

the loudest member of the family and had no trouble getting her needs and wants out there for all to hear. One of those wants was now being voiced.

“Gan’pa up!” the husky little voice exclaimed.

“No, Lucy. Your grandpas will be very tired. Let’s give them a little more sleep,” the agent suggested. CJ put her finger to her lips with a quiet ‘shhh’ as they descended the staircase, making Lucy tiptoe in what could pass as quite an acceptable Scooby Doo impersonation. The agent tightened her lips in an effort to contain her laugh and looked to Kate, who yawned and was still slightly on automatic pilot. CJ shook her head briefly in awe of how her spouse could still look beautiful with messy hair, sleepy eyes and no make-up. The tall woman smiled widely then turned to see Shannon, who was too busy dancing down each step with her hands on her hips in some kind of imitation Irish jig to notice anything. It was going to be an exhausting but great day.

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CJ and Kate were overjoyed to see the girls’ reaction to their gifts, all laid out with glitter and streamers and balloons around the Christmas tree. After many squeals of delight and much over-excitement, all the children’s presents were opened. The Carsons were not extravagant types and they had decided to ensure that their children would appreciate the simple things in life. So far, it had not been too difficult, as Shannon had said on more than one occasion that she lived here with her new family and that was all she wanted. Still, both actress and agent had spoiled them slightly this year with a bicycle each, clothes, art supplies, games and learning toys, and various smaller bits and pieces in their Christmas stockings.

Shannon put on her tiger mask – the girl had a love of all animals – and CJ jumped to her feet, flailing her arms above her head and running away from the scary feline. Delighted at the response, Shannon formed claw shapes with her hands and ran after her Mommy making growling sounds. Kate just sat watching and laughed at how Shannon took the cheapest gift and was having the most fun with it. Lucy – with her new ‘Finding Nemo’ tee shirt pulled askew over her pajamas - had now joined in the chase and was screaming her little lungs out as they both chased the agent into the hallway.

The actress’ heart was bursting as she chuckled at her wife’s antics. ‘*She’s the biggest kid of them all,*’ she mused with a smirk. She turned to Kamali, who lay on the floor beside her feet. He had a few stray pieces of tinsel and wrapping paper draped over him and a look on his face that screamed, ‘*It’s swaaaay too early in the morning for this!*’ Kate sympathetically petted him and got up, gathering the trash and shoving it into a bag for disposal. A few moments later, Lucy came bouncing back into the living room with a slightly forced smile on her face. “Hey, sweetie... where did they go?” Kate said with a head tilt.

Lucy trapped her tongue between her teeth and dropped half her smile. “Outside.”

When a very dirty FBI agent came back into the room, the blonde had to stifle her initial humor-filled reaction. Instead she coughed, put her hands on her hips and plastered on her best stern face. “CJ Carson! What have you been doing?”

The tall woman blinked and took a second to figure out what response her wife required. “Uh, I fell?” she offered with her cutest pout.

“Uh huh. Up to the family bathroom with all of you while I make breakfast,” Kate ordered. Shannon returned - now a sheepish tiger, if that was possible – and shuffled in behind CJ’s long legs. “I see you, little tiger. You two are quite a pair,” the actress added, spotting yet more dirty knees.

“We were crawling in the back yard,” Shannon said quietly.

Kate realized the 'fake' in her little charade was not coming through. '*Some actress I am,*' she chuckled to herself. "Shannon, honey, I'm kidding... but not about the bath. Go get washed up and I'll make breakfast then we'll get the Grandpas up before Uncle Eddie gets here with his girlfriend," she finished in a softer tone.

Shannon ran over to Kate and hugged her middle quickly before taking Lucy's hand and heading back to their Mommy.

CJ smirked. "Yes, Mama," she replied with her best toothy smile, taking the girls and shimmying away swaying her hips. Kate rolled her eyes and proceeded to the kitchen.

A Christmas Morn – After The Sun Came Up

Jeffrey yawned widely and sat up. He was momentarily confused by his surroundings until his brain caught up with what day it was. "Ooh! It's Christmas!" he squeaked. A semi-frown crossed his face. "I don't care what day it is... I still have to empty this old bladder," he muttered to himself as he stood up. Finishing up in the guest room's ensuite, he strolled back to the side of the bed and pulled on the comfortable but dapper clothing that he had selected for today's festivities. Leaning over the mattress, he rudely nudged his husband's upper arm. "Eddie! Get up, sweet cheeks. It's Christmas day!!"

"Ouch!" Eddie muttered. "What's wrong with a peck on those sweet cheeks to wake me?"

"Oh, grumble, grumble, grumble. You can be grouchy with me in the morning but not with our precious souls downstairs. They're up already, so let's get into the festive spirit!"

Eddie got up stretching, and popped out a plethora of creaky bones. "That's much better. Morning, Jeffreydoodle. Merry Christmas," he said, hugging his partner briefly before disappearing into the ensuite.

"Right back to you, darling," Jeffrey drawled.

Ten minutes later, both men were smartly dressed and descended the staircase to join the family. Eddie found everyone in the kitchen, working together like a well-oiled machine. Kate stood at the counter brushing an egg glaze over a rather enormous turkey; Shannon sat on the counter holding the bowl containing said glaze mixture; CJ stood not far from her wife, chopping vegetables and adding them to the relevant oven trays, and Lucy... Lucy was sweeping the floor... closely monitored by the dog.

The younger girl was the first to notice the new arrivals. "Gan'pa, look! Spiss! I sweep it!" she exclaimed.

Eddie's face contorted slightly as he tried to understand what she had said. He walked over and crouched down beside his granddaughter. "Oh goodness!" he eagerly responded, touching the floor and smelling the dust that was sprinkled on the wooden boards. "Who spilled the spices?" he added with raised eyebrows.

"Mama!" both girls sang out.

"Well, let's get it all swept up then. Merry Christmas, beautiful girls!" Eddie sang back.

"Yes! Merry Christmas everyone!" Jeffrey added as he belatedly came through the door. "The living room looks fabulously festive! Oh!"

After a round of merry greetings and loving hugs – avoiding sharp knives and egg-covered brushes - Eddie stood next to Kate. "Can I help with anything, sweetheart?"

“Nope... we’re almost done here. Everything’s ready to pop in the oven later. Give us a minute then we’ll come and give you your gifts. CJ and I still haven’t opened ours yet either and we all wanted to do the Christmas stockings together,” Kate smiled.

“Great! And we have some presents for two wonderful little girls!” Grandpa Eddie replied.

Lucy stopped sweeping. “Me an’ Shan?” she asked excitedly, dropping her broom and heading for Grandpa.

“Yes, my little cherub,” he said, scooping her up into his arms.

She clapped her hands and wrapped her arms around his neck “Yay!”

CJ lifted Shannon off the counter and they all washed their hands in the kitchen sink. Soon after, they were gathered around the couch making yet more mess with the ubiquitous gift wrap. Once all presents were gratefully received, Shannon showed off her tiger mask to her Grandpas, making Kate laugh again. It seemed they needn’t have bought her anything else!

* * * * *

Two hours later as Eddie Junior signaled to leave the freeway, he turned to his girlfriend, Sasha, who sat in the passenger seat ringing her hands nervously. “Sweetie, it’s only my family not a firing squad. You’ll do fine.”

Legal PA, Sasha Amoretti - twenty nine years old with naturally curly, long blonde hair and a svelte, womanly figure with curves in all the right places - threw a glare at him. “*Sweetie*, its Christmas day and I’m meeting them *all* for the first time. Talk about breaking me in gently! I don’t want to do ‘fine’... I wanna do uber-great!” she exclaimed, adding jazz hands to emphasize her point.

Eddie laughed. “Seriously, you’ll do great. They’ll love you.”

“Do you have any tips for me?” Sasha asked, batting her eyelashes.

The tall man took a breath while he thought about that. “Hmm, not really. CJ and Kate are pretty laid back when it comes to family. Just don’t call Kate ‘Katherine’ and we’ll be fine... ha ha ha...” Eddie said in jest.

Sasha’s mind was now ticking over at a million revolutions per second. *‘Katherine? Wait... wait a cotton-pickin’ minute... he’s Eddie Marshall. Please don’t tell me... no, no it can’t be...’* she thought frantically. “Uh, sweetheart?”

“Yes, diddums?” Eddie grinned.

“Your sister... her name was... Katherine Marshall?”

Eddie looked puzzled. “Well, yeah, of course that was her name... before she got married. But she prefers to be called Kate Carson now for sure. I’ve never met a more ‘married’ couple,” he chuckled. “Why?”

“You didn’t tell me your sister was THE Kate... Katherine... whatever... Marshall. The actress?” Sasha screeched loudly.

“Yea-owww, honey, my ears!”

“Well, pardon me, Mister! Holy shmoly, this is too much. I love her show... and that last show she did... and those movies she made.... oh no! I’m gonna be such a pile of mush... royally embarrass myself... and you!” the blonde

bombshell said, poking her boyfriend in the arm. “You should’ve told me sooner... I’m a big Deadline fan. Oh God, she’s gonna think I’m a freaking idiot!”

“Sasha, honey, calm down. Kate will love you,” Eddie placated.

“And... her wife... the FBI agent... oh God, I never put it all together before. I saw them at the Emmy’s on TV. Oh nooooo!”

Eddie was concerned at the heightening – verging on sonar - pitch of his girlfriend’s voice. “Honey, it’ll be okay...”

The PA attempted to calm her suddenly pounding heart by forcibly breathing very deeply. It wasn’t working. “Pull over... like, now... I need some air!”

“Okay, okay!”

* * * * *

Cecilia Carson ran her hands through her mop of damp hair. After a surprisingly busy morning shift at the ER, she had run home to shower before going to join her new-found family for Christmas dinner. She was so excited about the prospect that she jumped out of her skin when the phone rang. “Hello?”

“Hi, Aunt Cecilia?”

“CJ... Merry Christmas!” the older woman gushed over the line. When CJ called her ‘aunt’ it brought a tear to her eye and warmth to her soul.

“Merry Christmas. Are you still on for today?”

“Absolutely! I just ran home to wash. Someone threw up all over my uniform this morning...” Cecilia said with a grimace.

“Eww... I know that feeling,” CJ sympathized.

“I bet you do,” the older woman chuckled. “I won’t be too long... I’m not holding you up, am I?”

“Oh, no, no... plenty of time... we’ll see you when you get here. I just wanted to check you were still coming. Take care driving.”

“I will, CJ. Thank you. See you in about an hour.”

“Okay, bye Aunt Cece.”

The woman gulped back her emotion at the affectionate abbreviation of her name. “Bye.” She hung up the phone and held her hand over her heart. A smile slowly creased her cheeks and she ran quickly to the bathroom to dry her hair. “I’m so excited,” she said to herself as she bustled about in her make-up bag. “Oh! I’ve already done make-up... hair now... right!”

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After the agent hung up the phone, she turned to see Lucy sitting on her new tricycle in the hallway. The tiny girl knew she had to put her feet on the pedals but wasn’t sure about anything else. CJ strolled over and knelt down beside her. “Hey, Little One, whatchadoin’ huh?”

“Ride it,” Lucy said with a frustrated edge to her voice.

“Tell you what...” CJ said, pulling the girl into her arms, “... how about we go outside tomorrow and I’ll teach you all about riding your bike? It’ll be so much fun!”

“Yeah... fun!” the infant said, flinging her arms in the air.

“Me, you, Mama and Shan will all go out and play tomorrow. But today, the house is very busy and there’s no space to ride around... so I promise we’ll do it tomorrow. Deal?”

Lucy looked at her Mommy’s outstretched hand, but not knowing that she was supposed to slap it and say deal, she bent down and kissed it instead. CJ let out a hearty laugh then put her lips to Lucy’s little palm and blew a raspberry, making the girl laugh with her. The agent stood up, shifted her daughter onto her back and neighed like a horse. Lucy let rip another round of husky laughter as they headed back into the living area to rejoin the family.

A Christmas Baptism... Of Fire – After Sasha Arrived

Eddie Junior finally pulled the rental car up in front of the house. He turned to Sasha, who still looked a tad shell-shocked at the prospect of meeting her favorite TV star. They were warmly welcomed at the door by CJ, Lucy and Shannon. The children then disappeared to go and alert the Grandpas to the new visitors. Sasha had only just managed to cope with the three of them - her tremendous nerves getting the better of her – when Kate appeared from the living room door looking like a dream in her deep scarlet tee shirt, form-hugging denims... and a Santa hat snugly fitted over slightly wavy blonde hair. As the actress walked across the hallway toward them, Sasha began to see spots and realized she had stopped breathing. She concentrated on what she had to do. ‘*Inhale slowly,*’ she told herself silently. ‘*Yes, that’s it... inhale, exhale, inhale...*’

After Kate greeted her brother with a hug, she turned to face Sasha whose knees immediately tried to buckle. She slammed those knees together in the hope that they would support one another and save her from falling on her ass in front of one of her idols.

“You must be Sasha,” Kate said kindly.

“Hi, Kate. It’s g-g-great to meet y- you...” the nervous woman stammered. Her heart was pounding again and she was sure she was about to faint.

“Great to meet you too. Eddie’s told us all about you,” Kate said, stepping forward to hug the woman.

But Sasha was going for a polite handshake and as they came together, the PA’s hand squashed against Kate’s breast. After a startled gust of breath, the actress stepped back to see a crimson-faced Sasha, whose eyes were so wide they could easily have popped straight out of their sockets.

“Oh my God, I’m so sorry. I was going to shake your hand!” Sasha blurted. “Oh, I’m such a total loser...”

Kate raised her hand to cease the blonde’s tirade of self-deprecation. “It’s really okay... just a miscommunication. Shall we try again?”

CJ was doing well to hold back her chuckles but she saw how worried Eddie seemed and doubled her efforts to remain neutral. “Let’s all have a group hug and get it over and done with, huh?” she suggested lightly.

Sasha’s face seemed to lose some of its unnatural color, Kate nodded and Eddie dropped his shoulders in relief. He knew his girlfriend could be ditzy at times, but she was also a very loving, compassionate and intelligent woman. He

had realized a few weeks back that he was falling in love with every aspect of her, but he hadn't plucked up the courage to tell her yet.

After a successful group hug, the new arrivals shed their coats and followed their hosts into the living area for more introductions. Eddie and Jeffrey were their usual jovial selves and welcomed Sasha into the fold, handing her a glass of champagne to settle her obvious nerves.

"When we came up the drive... well, the house just looks super festive. All the white lights and the Christmas tree... it's totally gorgeous!" Sasha said, taking a rather large gulp of the bubbly liquid.

"Thanks," CJ replied. "It took me forever to put them up. Kate was out with the kids but I had Tony's help towards the end." CJ smiled and tried to put the woman even more at ease.

"Who's Tony?" the PA asked, attempting to find anything to say to stifle the jolts of unwanted adrenaline firing through her body.

"He's Kate's driver... and PA... and a really good friend of ours. You'll meet him later. He should be popping in for a while."

"Great." Sasha's stomach flipped when she saw the actress come back into the room. "Maybe I should just tell Kate I'm a fan... at least then she'll know why I'm acting like a fool."

CJ placed a hand on Sasha's shoulder. "Just relax... and tell her how you feel. I'm certain she just wants everyone to have a great time today."

As the petite blonde joined the group - having overheard the preceding conversation - she smiled warmly at everyone. "So you like the show, Sasha?"

Blushing again, Sasha looked shyly at the glass in her hand. "Yes, I love it. You're such a talented actress, Kate. Eddie only told me you were *that* Kate Marshall on the way over here today. That's why I'm so nervous..."

The actress turned to her brother. "Eddie! That's not very fair. Did you know she was a fan... and you didn't tell her who your sister was?"

"Aww, c'mon Sis... I didn't know she loved the show. I never really think of you as this famous actress anyway. You're... you know... just you," the tall man shrugged.

Kate laughed heartily. "Well, thank goodness I'm me. I was worried there for a second."

Seeing the actress' good humor and the way she interacted with her brother, Sasha relaxed a little more. She could feel the warm, loving environment in this house and she was so amazed that she was here to witness Kate Marshall in her own home... with her family. 'Wow,' she thought, ' *so many people would kill for this. I'm so lucky!*'

CJ suddenly disappeared. She seemed to be on a mission and the group turned to watch as she ran to the dog, who was about to swallow a tree decoration. Choking disaster averted, they followed the agent further into the living area and rejoined the children who were sitting on the floor in front of the fireplace, engaging in a make-believe scenario with their new plastic farmyard animals.

As the grown-ups naturally dispersed to do certain Christmassy tasks, Sasha took a deep, cleansing breath and sat on the couch to gather herself. She closed her eyes for a few moments, and was taking another sip of her champagne when she heard a small voice in front of her.

Shannon stood with an armful of cheerfully wrapped gifts. “You have some presents to open, Sasha,” the girl said softly.

The PA’s heart melted. “Oh sweetie, thank you. Who are they from?”

“One’s from Grandpa Eddie and Jeffrey... one’s from Lucy and me... and there’s one from our Mommies,” Shannon offered. “Here...”

Sasha quickly put down her glass to take the gifts. “Thank you so much.” She noticed that the adults who were still in the room were giving her a little space and chatting to each other at a distance. Kate and CJ had disappeared into the kitchen again, and Lucy now came to assist with the gift opening. Sasha felt another notch of stress leave her and made a firm decision to just be herself from now on. But would that make any difference to her clumsy, embarrassing day?

* * * * *

Eddie Senior and Jeffrey bustled into the kitchen to see if Kate required any assistance. They found CJ standing at the counter with a petite, blonde actress wrapped around her back. Jeffrey turned to his husband. “I don’t think she needs *our* kind of assistance, darling!” he drawled.

“Oh har-de-har-har,” Kate responded sarcastically. “If you guys want to make yourselves useful, you could check on the desserts. Cheesecake, trifle and tiramisu are in the fridge. Gimme your professional opinion, Dad,” the actress finished.

Jeffrey tootled over to the two conjoined women. “Oh, pumpkin, I’m pretty sure you’ve got your fabulous Father’s cooking skills. They’ll all be just delicious!” he said, washing up his hands at the sink. “Now... what can I do to help?”

Eddie returned from his inspection of the fridge. “They look really good, Katie. I’ll do the taste test later!”

CJ and Kate both smiled but they could see the two men were at loose ends since they usually worked hard in the restaurant on Christmas day, so they gave them a few tasks to do for the next half hour.

“Who’s running Precilla’s today, Dad?” CJ said to Eddie as they stood adjacent to one another at the kitchen island.

“Oh, we have Eduardo and Shania as acting managers for the next few days. I always want to burst into a rendition of ‘Man, I feel like a woman’ when I say her name... oh!” Eddie giggled hysterically.

CJ chuckled in response since the man’s good humor was infectious at the best of times. “Feel free to sing any time today. It is Christmas after all,” she winked.

Jeffrey bounced on the balls of his feet. “Ooh CJ, you and I could duet later... those velvety tones of yours... just divine!”

Kate wondered if her wife would be comfortable performing in front of everyone in such an intimate setting. “I’d love to hear that too, honey... if you feel up to it.”

CJ gazed at the petite blonde. “For you? Anything, my darling.”

Eddie and Jeffrey both rolled their eyes and gave a round of applause. Kate blew her spouse a kiss from across the kitchen and continued her current task.

“I get to pick the song!” Jeffrey blurted.

“As long as you start with a slow one... and nothing too difficult,” the agent warned. “I need to warm up, ya know.”

“But of course... let me go rummage through your CDs. Ooh, it’s exciting.”

* * * * *

When Cecilia arrived at the house, CJ met her at the front door. “Hey, Aunt Cece.” The agent didn’t miss the giddy look on the woman’s face and decided to call her that from now on.

“Hello, CJ. Merry Christmas!” Cecilia replied, hugging her niece warmly.

“Right back to ya,” the tall agent said, returning the hug. “The gang in there is getting bigger by the minute so let’s do the intros now,” she added, pointing her thumb to the living room.

As they entered the homey space, everyone was present and CJ clapped her hands to get their attention. “Right everyone, since there’s a small hoard of you now, I want you all to line up along the couch like soldiers and I’ll do the introductions,” she chuckled, thinking that nobody would do it.

When Shannon jumped up and down with excitement, everyone caught on to the game and began to line up. They didn’t look much like soldiers with their paper hats and various pieces of tinsel wrapped around them, and CJ laughed outright when Lucy tagged onto the end of the line and stood wiggling her hips on the spot, unable to stay still as she danced to an imaginary tune in her head.

The agent linked arms with Cecilia and moved in front of the troops. “So... Aunt Cecilia... this is...” she took a breath to clear her head, “... Eddie Senior, Kate’s Dad... Jeffrey, Kate’s other Dad...” Each person leaned forward to hug Cecilia as they were introduced.

“We’re *your* Dad too, CJ,” Eddie Senior said, breaking the silence in the ranks.

The tall woman stuck her tongue between her teeth. “Very true.” She went back to her role call. “This is Kate’s brother, Eddie Junior and his girlfriend, Sasha...” As Cecilia was finishing her hug with Eddie, a little hand tugged on CJ’s pant leg. Lucy had moved along the line. “This is Lucy,” CJ smiled.

Cecilia bent down and giggled conspiratorially with Lucy, since they had met before. “Well hello, beautiful girl!”

“Hi,” Lucy grinned and wiggled away.

“This is Kate...” CJ continued. The actress stuck her tongue between her teeth to save her from laughing out loud. The two women hugged and Cecilia pursed her lips to prevent her own laughter. “And this is Shannon...” CJ finished.

“Merry Christmas, ‘Celia,” the girl said, hugging the older woman’s waist.

“Merry Christmas, sweetheart.” Just then, Lucy tugged on Cecilia’s clothing. “Well hello again! Did we meet already?” she asked, pretending to be puzzled.

Lucy chuckled and nodded. “I’m Lucy!” she exclaimed with her eyebrows hitched high.

“Oh my goodness... so you are!” Cecilia replied, lifting the small child. “Did you get lots of lovely Christmas presents?” she asked, looking between the two girls. They both nodded. “Well, come show me,” the brunette added as she reached a hand toward Shannon.

As Cecilia Carson was led away from the crowd, she threw a contented smile over her shoulder. “I’ll come and talk to you all again so that my old brain remembers your names...” The group laughed and broke rank. Aunt Cece watched her new family as everyone mingled together in front of the cozy fireplace and twinkly Christmas tree. It was already the best Christmas Cecilia had ever had.

Christmas Afternoon – A Bashful Agent

During a lull in the preparations, everyone found themselves gathered around the couch area. Lucy and Kamali sat on the floor; Eddie Senior was perched on the edge of the coffee table talking to the infant; CJ, Jeffrey, Eddie Junior and Sasha sat on the comfy cushions chattering quietly on and off, and Kate stood with Cecilia and Shannon fixing yet more baubles that had tumbled from their branches.

As CJ leaned back on the couch, a slow Christmas tune began to play at low volume on the stereo. It was a Karen Carpenter rendition of a well-loved song. The agent closed her eyes and began to hum along. She didn’t notice everyone gradually becoming quiet and when she started to sing, Kate’s lips parted just a little as a shiver traveled through her body. Her green orbs were fixed on CJ’s face, simply in awe of her wife’s beautiful voice.

“Chestnuts roasting on an open fire... Jack Frost nipping at your nose...” CJ’s velvety tones filled the room and even the children were silent as she sang another couple of lines. Little Lucy rocked from side to side in time to the music and Shannon placed the last bauble back on the tree then turned to watch her Mommy. The agent got lost in her song for a few moments and when she opened her eyes, she found everyone’s gaze turned in her direction. She felt the blush rising and slammed her mouth shut.

Kate had never seen her spouse’s skin turn quite so crimson. She only managed to hold back for a couple of seconds then took pity on the squirming agent. As she moved towards CJ, Jeffrey let out a half snort, half snuffle and began to clap his hands profusely. The music continued subtly in the background and everyone in the room joined in the round of applause. Kate was now at CJ’s side and the usually-tough woman buried her burning face in the actress’ tee shirt... which was about the same color as the agent’s skin.

“Bravo, CJ! Oh, that was wonderfully gorgeous!” Eddie Senior announced.

The tall woman looked to her family and gave them a shy smile as she clung to Kate’s waist. If anyone had seen her at this exact moment they would never have taken her for a fearless Federal Agent who dealt with serial killers, kidnappers and had caught a few bullets during her time with the Bureau. The thought made her chuckle bashfully and thankfully, it didn’t take long for everyone to start chattering again, with a few “Wow, CJ!” comments thrown in. The two children piled on top of their Mommy, gave her lots of hugs and then they were gone.

Kate leaned down to give her wife a gentle kiss. “That was beautiful, honey... gave me shivers...” she whispered in CJ’s ear.

The tall woman looked up to see sparkling green eyes. “I’m glad, baby,” she whispered back. “Seems the only person I can sing in front of without blushing, is you.”

“You sang to me in front of an entire restaurant, CJ!” Kate said as she stood upright.

“Those were strangers... and anyway... in my world, I was singing only to you that day.”

Kate’s heart soared. “Do you know how much I love you?”

“Just a teeny, weeny bit less than I love you, I suspect...”

“We’ll agree to disagree about that, my darling,” the actress winked.

CJ laughed and got up from the couch, slipping her arms around Kate and kissing her soundly on the lips. “C’mon... let’s refill all the glasses...” As they did so, Lucy and Shannon returned to the room, having gone off whispering to one another a few moments before.

“Buzz it!” Lucy announced loudly. She and her sister were carrying a boxed game.

Jeffrey clapped his hands. “Ooh, I want to play!”

The two girls plonked themselves on the floor and Grandpa Jeffrey joined them, grumbling at his old body as he crossed his legs and pulled his feet towards him. Kamali positioned himself a few feet behind his little humans.

Shannon opened the lid and looked around the room. “Does anyone else want to play Operation?” she smiled hopefully. ‘BZZZZ...’ “Lucy, wait a sec... maybe more people can play.”

‘BZZZZ...’ The infant was too excited and looked up. “Gan’pado it!” she ordered as Eddie Senior joined the team.

Eddie took the little metal tool that was used to connect to the buzzing power supply. “Let’s see... what should I remove first, Shannon?” he asked, keeping the older girl involved. A serious discussion ensued between the four players.

CJ and Kate made sure their guest’s glasses were filled and laid out a little snack plate of tasty bites. Eddie and Sasha sat contentedly on the couch and Kate smiled at them before she left the room. Dinner would be another hour and a half and the smells wafting through the house were making many tummies gurgle with anticipation. Surveying the scene in the living area and satisfied everyone was happy, CJ followed her wife back into the kitchen to get a quick ‘hug’ while the others were occupied. She hadn’t realized Cecilia had gone to the downstairs toilet, which was just off the kitchen.

Slipping quietly behind her beautiful spouse, CJ kissed a delicate neck and pushed the blonde hair aside when it blocked her access. “Mmmm... you smell amazing, honey.”

Kate grinned. “Are you sure that’s not the chicken?”

A sexy giggle erupted in the actress’ ear. “Hell no... no chicken is this delicious.”

“Good to know,” said Kate, who was now slightly wobbly on her legs. “But don’t they say that people taste just like chicken?”

“Who are ‘they’? You mean cannibals?” CJ laughed. She dropped her voice a few octaves and whispered hoarsely. “I’m the only one who gets to eat you... and I promise you’ll enjoy it...”

“Oh... honey... stop...” the blonde managed as her wife nibbled the tender skin of her neck.

A deep sigh ruffled the silky blonde strands. “Yeah, I know I have to... maybe a wake-up call will be in order in the morning though... ohhhhh yeah.”

The thought made Kate’s knees buckle. It was just as well the agent was holding her around her waist or she would’ve clattered to the floor. The actress turned in the strong embrace and wiggled an eyebrow at her amorous spouse. “I’ll hold you to that, wife of mine.”

A face-splitting toothy smile was her reply. It gradually faded when Cecilia came shuffling through the kitchen, coughing rather exaggeratedly, her face slightly flushed. But it was nothing compared to CJ's face which now seemed to be on fire. Once her aunt had passed through with a subdued smirk on her face, the agent turned to her wife looking completely horrified. "Oh. My. God! Do you think she heard all that?"

Kate scratched her chin in thought. "It looks like it, honey. Don't worry. I'm sure she won't tease you about it." *Giggle* "And she doesn't know what our wake-up call is." The actress laughed outright as her Special Agent wife rolled her eyes incredulously and flung her red face into her hands.

* * * * *

About twenty minutes later, Cecilia took Lucy to the bathroom and the game player 'surgeons' dispersed. The room was suddenly quiet.

Eddie Junior scooted closer to his girlfriend on the couch. "How you doing now, sweetums?"

"I figure if I just stay still for a while, I won't make any more mistakes," Sasha responded with a deep sigh.

"I don't think I've ever seen you this nervous..." Eddie slipped his arm around the PA's shoulders. "Kate's just a human being like the rest of us..."

"Oh, Eddie... I can be clumsy sometimes but the surprise of meeting one of my favorite actresses... well, that just multiplies it tenfold!" Sasha said, taking a sip of her current glass of wine. "I have to say, though, I feel much more settled now."

"That'll be the alcohol, honey."

Sasha pinched her boyfriend playfully and gave him a peck on the cheek. "Mmmmaybe..."

A manic-but-happy-looking Lucy ran into the room from the kitchen. Shannon was hot on her heels and they both had glitter stuck to their faces. "Uncle Eddie, look!" the older girl squeaked. "Mama put it on for us. Do you want some too?"

Eddie grinned. He loved both his nieces. "Yeah! I'm in... how about you, Sasha?"

"I'll just stay here... you go," the PA smiled.

Eddie was dragged to his feet and led to the kitchen. Lucy was bouncing the entire way on both feet, kind of like a kangaroo. It seemed the excitement of the day had charged her up to extreme proportions. "Ed... here!" she ordered, buzzing like the game of Operation.

The tall man stooped down to lift Lucy onto the counter. "You sit here and help me, Lucy."

Kate strolled over from the sink, where she was washing up some of the food prep dishes. "What's going on here?"

"Uncle Eddie wants glitter too!" Shannon replied.

CJ turned with a menacing grin on her face. "I'll do that, Katie. You go have a break."

Eddie suddenly looked a little concerned. "Uhm... sure, CJ."

"Mommy, make him two sparkly cheeks, like me!" the older girl said giddily.

“Yes! Twooooo!” Lucy repeated at fever pitch.

The agent moved to pick up the tiny girl. “You need to calm down, Little One. How about, I give Uncle Eddie two sparkling cheeks and you all go upstairs for a little bit, and read a nice story?”

“That sounds great, CJ,” Eddie replied enthusiastically. “Hey Shannon, maybe you and Lucy could show me and Sasha your favorite storybook, huh?”

“Okay, Uncle Eddie,” the polite girl said with a nod.

CJ took great delight in painting her brother-in-law’s face with the edible sparkles. Once he was suitably silly-looking and spattered with green and pink glitter, he wandered away with his two nieces and took Sasha with them upstairs. Kate returned to the kitchen, chuckling at the sight of her brother. “What did you do to him?”

“Nothing he didn’t want. He may have pretended he didn’t like that, but he loved it really,” the agent snickered.

“I tried to have a chat with Sasha while you guys were busy. She’s settled a little but she still reacts like I’m some kind of royalty.”

“Well, you are, I guess,” CJ responded, taking her love into her arms. “To Sasha, you are this amazing actress who’s on her TV screen every week... and she idolizes you to the point of making you seem untouchable and unreal in a way...”

“Well, you’re quite the psycho-analyst, honey.”

“Hah! But think about it. Who is your favorite actress? Actually, I can’t believe I don’t know that...” the taller woman frowned.

“Who’s yours?” the blonde countered. “I don’t know yours either...”

“Hmm, weird... I guess it never came up yet. Well, apart from you, of course...” That earned her a seductive smile. “I’d say... Sandra Bullock.”

“Nice choice. I think mine is Angie Harmon... you know... tall, dark, beautiful...”

“Hey! I might get jealous,” CJ said, rubbing noses with Kate.

The actress laughed. “You know damn well I’m all yours... and you also know we can both appreciate beautiful women. It doesn’t mean we want to be with them.”

“But if you met her, wouldn’t your stomach churn just a little?”

“I guess... for a moment or two maybe.”

“Okay... and now think about Sasha... she’s not an actress. She just sees you on TV every week and thinks you’re super awesome. She doesn’t work with movie and TV stars every day. You do... and you’d still be a little nervous.”

“Hmm, I see your point. But you were never like that with me,” the blonde mused.

“True. But think about how we met, honey. And also, I’m just not like that... never have been. I’ve never gushed over a celebrity... present company being the only exception.” CJ grinned mischievously. “Of course, with Sandra...”

“Hey... don’t you dare,” Kate jested.

“You know I’m just messin’ with ya, baby.”

“Uh huh. I love you, ya big softie.”

“I love you too, little softie.” That resulted in a firm swat to the agent’s backside as she ran out of the room, leaving Kate pursing her lips in a lop-sided smile.

* * * * *

A short while later, CJ entered the living room and found Kamali lying by the Christmas tree while Sasha helped a much calmer Lucy fix another runaway bauble back onto its branch. The PA was kneeling on the floor with her back to the dog. As she turned to say something to Lucy, her blonde wavy locks caught on another branch and when she tried to move her head, she felt the pull. Sasha thought the placid canine had grabbed her hair and she panicked. She didn’t know Kamali as well as the others did and her reaction was slightly over-dramatic.

“Oh no! Let me go... oh... help, help. Get him off me!” she screeched. Her voice was getting a little louder and more desperate the more she misread the situation. “Someone get the dog off me!”

CJ leapt forward, as did Eddie Junior, who had heard the sudden commotion and returned forthwith from the bathroom. Lucy, who was standing next to the flailing woman, got very scared of the PA and began to cry. As her little body started to shake with her sobs, Kate came rushing from the kitchen. Soon everyone was gathered around the emergency situation.

Eddie knelt in front of Sasha’s tilted face. “Honey... it’s not the dog... calm down!” he pleaded.

CJ swiftly took Lucy into her arms. “It’s okay, Little One. Sasha just got a big fright. Don’t cry, sweetheart.” She hugged the infant to her body and whispered ‘ssssh’ in her ear while intermittently kissing the child’s cheek.

“Sasha, your hair is caught on the tree. Let me untangle you... stay still,” Eddie Junior said calmly.

Sasha was ready for crying. She had screwed up again. She had scared Lucy and now everyone was looking at her. The tears came as her boyfriend released her from the clutches of the dreaded Christmas tree. She looked up to see Kate looking down at her with only empathy and a smile. But it just made Sasha feel worse to know that her idol had witnessed yet another ‘klutz’ moment. The tears came faster.

The young IT manager – Eddie had gotten promoted when he moved to San Francisco – helped his emotional girlfriend to her feet. Everyone except CJ, who was still consoling a hiccupping Lucy, gathered around Sasha, seemingly knowing that this had to be handled quickly and with humor. Eddie Senior and Jeffrey were first for form the group-hug around the hazardous woman. As they encircled her, Kate, Cecilia, Eddie Junior and Shannon joined in.

“Oh Sasha! You’re almost worse than me!” Jeffrey piped up. “But you can’t take the title of Drama Queen away... no, no, no, that’s all mine. You gotta work harder for that honor, darling! Oh!”

That was enough to make the others chuckle – including CJ – and Sasha laughed a little through her tears. She wiped them from her skin when her new friends backed away, and saw only compassion and cheerfulness on each and every one of their faces. She sniffed vigorously. “I’m so sorry for my silly reactions... gosh, I’m such a monster.”

Shannon stepped forward, always the grown up. “It’ll be okay, Sasha. Lucy just got worried because you were upset. I’m sorry your hair got messed up.”

The PA crouched down in front of the sensitive girl while fixing the messy hair. “You are so sweet to say that, Shannon. Thank you.”

“Would you like some fruit juice?” the girl continued, wanting very much to make everything all right. CJ and Kate watched this with their hearts pounding at their daughter who was so incredibly loving it stunned them most of the time.

“That would be so fabulous, sweetie. Yes please.” When Shannon ran to the kitchen to get the magical fruit juice that would make it all okay, Sasha walked slowly to CJ, who still held her smaller daughter. “Lucy... I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to scare you. Can you forgive me?”

Lucy thought about it for a few seconds in the safety of her Mommy’s arms. The worried look on the girl’s face gradually subsided and she reached her arms out to Sasha. CJ pinned her lips together since she was about to cry at how amazing her children were. Lucy snuggled into Sasha’s glittery sweater and gave the PA a hug, making tears spring to the blonde woman’s eyes once more... but this time, she was smiling.

“Oh, there’s so, so, so much love in this house. What a wonderful way to spend Christmas!” Eddie Senior announced.

“Hear, hear!” Cecilia cheered.

As Sasha lowered Lucy to the floor, she kissed the curly head. The little girl went to the coffee table and grabbed a paper Christmas hat. She smiled shyly as she handed it to the PA. Sasha thought putting it on was the least she could do and placed the hat over her blonde wavy hair. “Thank you, Lucy. How does that look?”

Lucy laughed loudly since the woman had put her hat on hanging to the right and covering on of her eyes. She stretched her little hands upward and the PA got the idea, crouching down again to let the girl fix it. Once that was done, Lucy looked very pleased with herself. “S’better.”

“Great!” Sasha confirmed.

With another disaster averted – kind of - the group dispersed, laughing and cajoling one another. Kate kissed her wife before dragging her back into the kitchen for more preparations. The actress knew today would be busy but she never expected it to be quite so... exciting? In the living room, the children settled down – after Cecilia took Lucy to pee again since the girl had drank about twelve gallons of juice – and things calmed into something resembling normality. Kamali slipped under the coffee table hoping to avoid any more drama; the Grandpas sat together on the couch sipping on some mulled wine and watching Shannon as she talked quietly to her Uncle Eddie and his now-smiling girlfriend.

All-in-all it had been quite a Christmas so far.

Christmas dinner – A Carrot Catastrophe

While Sasha and CJ waited for the last minute oven delicacies, Kate handed a full platter to Jeffrey, who as usual was overly enthusiastic in his praise. “Oh honeypie, this looks and smells so delish! You are definitely your father’s daughter. Oh!”

Kate raised an eyebrow. “Honeypie? Babycakes? Pumpkin? Am I for dessert today?”

Just then, a few things happened at once. CJ raised a sultry eyebrow as Jeffrey chuckled mischievously at the actress' comment. However, Sasha was not quite so reserved. As she barked out an uncontrollable laugh, the piece of cheesy garlic bread she had been masticating for the last few minutes flew from her mouth and attached itself quite impressively to Kate's tee shirt.

The agent's eyes opened very wide and Jeffrey was silent for a moment before he broke out in a full belly laugh. CJ began to giggle with her lips pinned tightly together and her wife squashed her lower jaw down to her collarbone to try and see where the projectile had landed. As her eyes rose again, she began to laugh too. But Sasha was mortified all over again. Her mouth formed a capital "O" and her brow was creased in a serious frown.

"I... I... don't know what to say, Kate. Klutz doesn't even cut it anymore!" A red hot blush swallowed Sasha's face and she looked like she might cry again.

The actress quickly stopped laughing. "Hey... it's really okay. I'm having such a fun day, Sasha... and I gottasay, you've contributed immensely!" she said, slipping an arm over the PA's shoulder. "Thank you for making us laugh."

"Oh... well... uhm... you're welcome," the blonde replied, smiling hesitantly.

"Laughter is a wonderful thing. You've helped to make this a memorable and great Christmas," Kate continued, trying to emphasize her point.

Sasha sighed, still encased in her idol's grip. "Thank you, Kate. I could never have imagined you'd be this amazing."

"Awww... ain't you sweet?" the petite woman said, stopping in front of the PA and fixing her paper hat for her. Sasha just blushed and looked sheepishly at this incredible woman, who now made her blush even deeper by winking at her before she walked away.

Kate disappeared to change her top and quickly came back wearing a crisp white fitted shirt. It was buttoned to exactly the right height – only offering a hint of cleavage – and Kate wore the collar flipped up. CJ's eyes trailed over her wife's body and came to rest on the blonde's head. She still had on her Santa hat. As Kate laughed with her brother on her way through the living area, the agent smiled to herself. *'I love that woman so damn much,'* she mused contentedly. Taking a deep breath, she followed the beautiful actress back into the kitchen to finalize their festive preparations.

* * * * *

The large table was set with just about every type of food imaginable. A large ham, many platters of vegetables and various types of potatoes graced the large dining table, leaving only just enough space for the poultry and dinner plates. Kate had outdone herself and had been pleased to have such an efficient sous-chef in the form of her wonderful wife.

The actress now had an oven mitt in her mouth and the other one on her hand, trying to get the turkey and the chicken out of the oven, when the dog came bounding into the room and hovered around the delicious smelling humans. CJ noticed him while she was switching off the stove. As she carefully took a tray of yet more roast potatoes out of the second oven, her leg shot out to hold Kamali back as he gave in to temptation and tried to get at Kate's chicken.

"Thanks, honey. You're awesome..." the actress grinned.

"I have many skills," CJ replied smugly, still balancing on one foot.

“Oh, I know,” Kate whispered while placing the dish full of chicken on the counter. “Here... let me take him out back. He can stay out there ‘til we eat. There are too many people around... and tasty things to grab too.”

“Good thinking, Batman,” CJ said distractedly.

The blonde let out a snort. “Gee thanks... Robin.” She heard her wife’s laughter as she left the room with the dog. Settling him out back with a nice bone, Kate returned to the kitchen to find a smashed bowl and a load of squished carrots all over the kitchen floor. Sasha stood with her hands covering her face – her shocked eyes very, very wide – and CJ knelt on one knee collecting the shattered pieces of pottery.

“Oh my God, I am so, so sorry,” the PA exclaimed. “I’m super sorry... here... let me clear that up, CJ. Oh cripes, I’m such a blonde... no offense, Kate... oh crap....”

Kate grasped the flailing arms of the accident prone woman. “It’s okay, Sasha. It could’ve happened to anyone. I’ll help CJ if you go collect everyone for dinner. But,” she said, pausing for effect, “please bring them in through this door,” the actress added gently, pointing to the crèche which had another entrance to the kitchen diner.

“Oh, of course. I am sooo sorry. I can be radically blonde sometimes!” Sasha left, wringing the end of her sparkly sweater through her hands nervously.

“We need to calm her down some more,” CJ said from her place on the floor once the PA had left.

“I know... but how do I calm her down? She’s like a kid hyped up on sugar! What happened anyway?” the actress replied, grabbing a cloth and joining her wife. “Careful you don’t cut yourself, honey.”

“I think I got it all. As for Sasha... maybe she’ll be less accident-prone once she’s sitting down. She came prancing into the kitchen and must not have been looking where she was going. She bumped straight into my back and the bowl went flying,” the tall woman grinned.

Kate chuckled as she rose to her feet, disposing of the cloth and the ruined carrots. “Uh huh...” CJ sighed, straightened her paper Christmas hat and opened the double doors to tell the others that it was all clear and they could come in anytime... and through any door. Kate patted her on the butt as she passed. “Darling, what can we have instead of the carrots?”

“Katie, you have enough here to feed the entire US Army. I think we’ll be fine,” CJ retorted with a smile, receiving a shy smile from her wife in return.

“I did get a little carried away, didn’t I?”

As the hoard of hungry bodies entered the kitchen diner and descended upon the food, CJ quirked an eyebrow and looked again at her spouse. “Uh, maybe not, baby. C’mon, let’s sit down before they finish it all,” she winked, folding an arm around Kate’s shoulder and leading her to her seat. She kissed her hard-working wife on the forehead and helped Lucy onto her booster chair between Kate and Grandpa Jeffrey. She moved to the chair beside her wife – they both sat at the head of the table – and began serving up the meal. “Right... who wants what?”

* * * * *

As Kate, Shannon and Jeffrey were reaching for their second helping of the main course, CJ finished off her last bite of succulent chicken accompanied by the roasted herb potatoes she loved. She tilted her head and listened. “Was that the door?”

Kate stopped, mid-munch. “Could’ve been...” she said around her mouthful.

CJ grinned and got up from her chair. As she headed out into the hallway, the doorbell sounded again. She peeked through the small glass window at the side of the door and saw her boss standing there with two small gifts in his arms. She guessed they were for the kids. "Mark! Merry Christmas!" she said cheerfully as she opened the door.

"Hi, CJ... merry Christmas," he replied. "I hope I'm not intruding?"

"Not at all. Have you eaten?" she asked as she waved him inside.

"No... I came straight from the office."

His face looked slightly glum and CJ frowned. "Bad day at work?"

"Not really. Boring day, but what's more upsetting is that I found a few gray hairs at lunchtime," he said, pushing his hand over the side of his head.

"Aww, Mark, you look great."

"Ah, who am I kidding? I'm getting older."

"Aren't we all? I think you look dashing," the agent smiled. "How old are you anyway?" she chanced with a grin.

Her humor was infectious it seemed, and the Assistant Director chuckled as he removed his coat. "Heading for fifty, CJ."

She chuckled with him. "You don't look a day over forty. Come on, you can sit in my chair and have some dinner. I'm stuffed anyway," she finished, rubbing her belly.

"Thank you, CJ. That was such a nice offer you both made yesterday."

As they walked through the living room, CJ patted the back of her boss' shoulder. "I knew you wouldn't be able to resist Kate's famous cheesecake."

He nodded as they entered the kitchen diner and took in the family feast. "Well, Kate, I guess we could feed the whole FBI field office with this," he said, approaching his friend and hugging her warmly.

"Welcome, Mark. Everyone, this is Mark Mulroney, CJ's boss and a dear friend. We'll do proper intros later... take a pew and fill your boots, Mark!" Kate said gleefully.

Mark was warmed by the woman's declaration and introduction. "Hello everyone. Merry Christmas!" They all replied with appropriate festive greetings and he decided his Christmas day was looking up... even more so when he spotted a woman with a warm smile and blue eyes who sat at the other end of the table.

CJ put a fresh plate in front of her AD and Kate patted the man's hand atop the table. "Take whatever you want, Mark. It's all pretty darn delicious, if I do say so myself."

"Mark, have some of these potatoes," Shannon suddenly offered, pointing to a specific platter.

The man was surprised by the girl, who he had only met once before. "Thank you, Shannon. They look great." Shannon was suitably pacified and nodded proudly.

CJ nudged her wife over a little and squashed a butt cheek onto the actress' chair. Kate proceeded to wiggle closer to Mark. However, the Assistant Director didn't notice. While he served himself some food and the chatter around the

table resumed, he couldn't help but look up to the welcoming face of the woman he didn't know. He realized he would quite like to change that... very soon.

Once they had all finished their main courses, the introductions began around the table. While they were ongoing, CJ removed Lucy's booster seat and placed the infant on her lap, giving her and Kate a little more room. The actress and Cecilia had cleared the relevant dishes from the table and were now bringing in the desserts. This meant that Mark hadn't been introduced to the person he wanted to find out about the most.

As Cecilia sat back down, her eyes glanced in Mark's direction. *'It's now or never'*, he thought. When she made eye contact again, he smiled. "Hi, I'm Mark. It's nice to meet you."

Cecilia shyly smiled back. "I'm Cecilia, CJ's aunt."

"Oh... I didn't think CJ had... never mind." Mark was a little uncomfortable with his response. *'They don't want to hear that you thought CJ never had an aunt... such a dufus. Figures though, that she's related to CJ...'*

"It's a long story," Cecilia replied warmly.

"I'd like to hear it sometime," the AD said. Then he felt CJ's eyes on him and he turned to her. "That is, if it's okay with you, CJ," he added, coughing.

The agent grinned at her uncomfortable boss asking for her permission. "Of course it's okay, Mark."

He smiled at his agent, which she returned before being distracted by the giddy child on her lap. The sight of trifle and ice cream had set Lucy off again. Mark's gaze drifted back to his plate. Kate had just served him a large slice of that amazing cheesecake and he looked up adoringly at the actress, who still stood over him.

"Want a bigger slice?" she quipped with a menacing smirk.

"Might be best to offer it to everyone else before I devour the entire thing?"

That earned him a round of laughter and his eyes darted back to Cecilia. Her laugh was infectious and he joined in the merriment, thinking his Christmas day was looking up indeed. CJ watched her normally stoic boss. She knew he led a solitary life and it warmed her heart to know that he could leave behind the professional distance he had to maintain at the office. And she didn't miss his interest in her aunt. *'Interesting,'* she silently thought with a playful narrowing of her blue eyes. *'Verrrry interesting.'*

* * * * *

After the meal was finally over, everybody retired to the living area. Many satisfied groans could be heard as some held their stomachs and others continued to nibble on chocolate Santas. The entire gang were splayed out on the large couch and the comfy chairs, and CJ did not fail to notice her AD relaxing beside her aunt. Kate was talking with Sasha and it seemed that the PA wasn't stressing for once, which was a great relief. CJ rubbed her own stomach thinking she and her wife had made a great meal. Well, it was mainly Kate... but the agent didn't exclude herself from the praise. *'What? I'm complimenting myself? Well, that's new,'* she mused.

She sat herself down on the floor, leaning on Kate's legs and giving Shannon a tweak on the nose. The girl climbed onto her Mommy's lap and hugged her. "I had a good Christmas day, Mommy."

"I'm so glad, Squirt. I've had a good day too and it's not over yet. And tomorrow, we'll go outside and you guys can ride your bikes!"

Shannon rubbed noses with the agent. “Yes! Will you sing another song?”

CJ was charmed beyond words. “Any particular song?”

“I don’t know. Mama liked the one you sang before so another Christmas one maybe?” the girl said, plastering a sweet smile on her cute face.

“How about Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas?” CJ suggested, eyebrow quirked.

“Okay!” Every tooth in Shannon’s mouth was revealed in a giant smile.

CJ chuckled and got up. She went to the stereo and Shannon followed. They found the appropriate CD and put it in the machine. Everyone except Kate was oblivious to what was going on until the music began to play. CJ turned around and all faces were hopefully trained on her. Mark looked a little puzzled, not having experienced the earlier beautiful, albeit short, performance. He had no idea his agent could sing but when CJ opened her mouth in time with the lyrics, his mouth fell open in amazement. CJ fixed her gaze on Kate, knowing that it was the only way she would get through the whole song without her face catching fire. The actress smiled lovingly at her incredible wife and somehow encouraged her without even knowing it. The taller woman could feel Kate’s heart reaching out to surround her and she closed her eyes, letting her smooth, velvety voice float through the air. Everyone was silent and entranced for the next three minutes.

After another round of applause, CJ sheepishly slithered down onto the floor again, returning to Kate’s legs as her support. She felt a soft kiss to the back of her head and reached her hand back towards the blonde who took it in her own. When the doorbell rang, the agent didn’t want to move. She moaned quietly but Kate heard her. “I’ll get it, honey. You relax.”

The actress returned to the living area with Jamie and Sam in tow. “Look who dropped by!”

“Hey all,” Agent Green shouted. “Merry Christmas!” Sam echoed her lover’s greeting and a whole new round of introductions was soon underway.

Once they were done, CJ managed to drag her ass off the floor and hug her friends. “Hey, Penfold. Glad you could make it. Did you guys have a good day?” she asked, letting Jamie go and hugging Sam.

“We did. My best Christmas so far,” the blonde said happily.

“Mine too,” Sam piped in. “How did you guys cope?”

“So far, so good. C’mon, I’ll get you a coffee... or some dessert. There’s some leftover cheesecake and tiramisu. But if you want the cheesecake, you’d better grab it before Mark gets his second wind.”

“I heard that,” the AD said as he slouched in the soft cushions. “You’re welcome to the cheesecake. I’m truly stuffed. Over and out.”

Cecilia giggled next to the AD and CJ smirked at her easily amused aunt. Although, she suspected it was only Mark who could amuse her so easily. The agent led her two close friends to the kitchen where Kate was already setting up some fresh coffee in the machine. The agent then rushed back into the living room when Shannon shouted for her to assist with some random Christmassy task.

The producer skipped over to Kate. “Merry Christmas, Mrs. Carson.”

“You already said that to me, Sam,” the blonde replied as she hugged the woman.

“I know. I just wanted to give you a proper hug.”

“Aww, you’re a sweetie-pie. Did you guys go to your Mom’s?”

Jamie stood behind her lover and slipped her arms around Sam’s waist. The redhead let out a gust of breath. “Yeah... she took it quite well. I was surprised, actually.”

Kate’s jaw dropped a little. “You mean you just told her about you two today... on Christmas day?”

“Yep,” Jamie nodded, with Sam copying the motion beside her. “But I turned on the charm. After the initial few moments of processing what Sam said, she was happy that we were happy.”

“Well, that’s fantastic. I’m glad.” Kate splayed her hand out to invite her friends help themselves to coffee, cake or whatever they desired. As CJ joined them, a relaxed conversation ensued about both workplaces, and what – if any - gossip the Carson’s had missed out on during their time off.

* * * * *

When the doorbell rang again a half hour later CJ was truly puzzled, then she realized Tony hadn’t been by yet. She greeted him and Cyn at the front door and did what was hopefully the last round of introductions. Once everyone had settled down again and more drinks were gratefully consumed, CJ noticed the small bundle of presents that had appeared since their evening guests had arrived. She knew they were mostly for the children so she gathered Shannon and Lucy in front of the fireplace and helped them open the correct gifts.

A stark few moments later, Cyn knelt beside Lucy and fastened a new necklace around the girl’s neck. She and Tony had bought a Nemo necklace for Lucy and the infant was only too happy to wear it... it matched her tee shirt, after all. CJ gathered up another pile of gift wrap and deposited most of it in the trash but saved the good pieces for recycling next year since there was so much non-ripped paper. Once Tony had finished his quick work-related chat with Kate, he decided a game was in order and he and Shannon chose musical chairs. A small group of revelers headed into the kitchen to collect the dining chairs and Kate grabbed a couple more folding ones from the closet. Mark decided he was a little too old for musical chairs – and besides, he had two of his agents present - and announced he would be the musical director. Since Lucy wasn’t sure of how to play the game, Cecilia was her chaperone for the duration. Needless to say, the two biggest kids in the room were the two Federal agents, who fought playfully over the chairs when the music stopped. Jamie slammed her ass down onto the nearest one, which CJ also went for.

“Hey! That was definitely mine!” Agent Green pouted with one butt cheek on the prize.

“Nuh uh... I touched it first,” CJ responded with her chin jutted out determinedly.

“We need someone impartial to judge, DM.”

“Uh, we’re in my house for Christmas, Penfold... and there’s nobody here who is impartial,” CJ snickered.

“Hmmm...” Jamie looked around. “Boss, can you decide?”

Mark puffed out his chest and maintained a mock serious expression. He approached the chair and craned his neck as he bent down to assess the... situation. “Hmmm...” he echoed, rubbing his chin and pretending to measure the rounded derrieres to see who had jurisdiction over the chair. Kate began to laugh from her backwards position on her own chair. CJ pinned her tongue between her teeth and Mark stood upright once more. “Sorry, Agent Carson, it seems Jamie has more... uh... advantage?”

“Awww, shucks. Okay, I’m out,” the tall woman said, standing up and swiping her buddy on the shoulder. “You may continue, Penfold.”

“Gee, thanks. Right, Mark... music pleeeeeease,” Jamie chirped cheerfully.

The music started again with a raucous version of ‘Rockin’ Around The Christmas Tree’ and every participant began running round the ever-dwindling bunch of seats. Mark had never had so much fun and it was giving the Assistant Director of the FBI’s Specialist Serial Homicide Unit cause to re-assess his life. ‘*I need someone to laugh with,*’ he thought. Glancing up, he saw Cecilia who was roaring with laughter as she ran with Lucy and bumped Kate out of the way with her shoulder so that the infant would be nearer the chairs. He smiled and waited for the perfect moment to stop the music, intent on spending some alone-time with that particular new female friend very soon.

A Christmas Moment – Gratitude

CJ stood by the kitchen counter and had just finished filling her glass with some sparkling grape juice when Shannon approached her and silently asked to be lifted up by raising her hands to her Mommy... something she had never done before. The tall woman was a tiny bit concerned about her daughter’s expression. She lifted the girl and held her so that they were face to face. “What’s wrong, Shan?”

Thinking for a moment, Shannon prepared in her mind what she wanted to say. “I... I wanted to ask you something.” At CJ’s nod, the youngster continued. “Do you think... if I closed my eyes and thought about it really hard... that I could tell Craig and Simon ‘Merry Christmas’?”

CJ immediately felt tears sting the back of her eyes. She squeezed her daughter and swallowed reflexively. “I think that’s a wonderful idea, Shan. I can wish it with you, if you want?”

The girl nodded eagerly. “And... and maybe Daddy and my first Mommy too?” she asked more quietly.

“Oh of course, sweetheart. Let’s do it now, okay?”

They both closed their eyes and CJ felt the girl bring their foreheads together, making the agent even more emotional. A few long heartbeats later, she pulled back and met the shiny blue eyes so similar to her own. “Better?”

“Yes. I’m sure they heard us. I... I saw it in one of my books where the little boy wished a happy birthday to his Daddy who wasn’t there anymore.”

“It’s okay to tell them things... anytime you want to, honey. If you need us to be with you, you must come and get me or Mama, all right?”

“Okay. I love you, Mommy.”

CJ couldn’t hold them back any longer and the tears streamed down her cheeks. “Oh, I love you too, Shan... so much.”

The girl looked momentarily worried and lifted her hand to wipe the agent’s face. “Happy tears?” she asked uncertainly.

“Yes, sweetheart, very happy tears.”

“I’m happy too, Mommy. Can you put me down now?”

CJ smiled and granted the request. When Shannon made a bee-line for Kate, the agent watched with great interest. She craned her neck to hear the conversation. Kate was standing at the nearby end of the couch, listening to an animated conversation between Jeffrey and Sasha. When she saw her daughter, she turned to face her.

Shannon immediately put her arms around Kate's waist and leaned her chin on the actress' stomach. "I love you, Mama," the girl said confidently.

CJ watched as Kate's eyes filled with tears. "Oh, sweetie, I love you too. Thank you for telling me that."

"You have happy tears too... same as Mommy did."

Kate sought out her wife and noticed CJ gazing at her with utter love. She turned back to Shannon. "It's just always so nice to hear those words, honey. We all love each other in this family. Always."

"I know. And me and Mommy just wished Craig and Simon a merry Christmas... and Daddy and my first Mommy too," the girl said, still holding onto Kate.

"Th-that's good, Shannon." The blonde crouched down. "Do you miss them, sweetheart?"

"Only sometimes... but I can be happy and miss them too, can't I?"

"Of course... and you can always talk to me or Mommy about it, okay?"

"Yes!" Shannon replied, suddenly smiling. "I'm going to dance with Luce now..." she added, before merrily skipping off to find her sister.

Kate stood up and locked eyes again with her spouse. She mouthed the words 'I love you' and held a hand to her heart. CJ returned the gesture with gusto... and a dazzling, toothy smile.

The agent retrieved her glass from the kitchen counter and walked back towards the crowded living area to scan the large room. The best Christmas day ever was almost over. She knew they would have more like this and it warmed her soul tremendously, even though their home looked like a bomb had hit at some point that afternoon - the wrapping that had still managed to evade the garbage bags and remain all over the floor; the glasses and mugs on the coffee table in various stages of emptiness; the streamers still hanging precariously over the end tables, lamps and couch; the now slightly forlorn looking Christmas tree devoid of all chocolate treats, and the dog with his tinsel collar, who was currently being taught a trick or two by the Assistant Director... with Cecilia looking on fondly.

CJ paused and observed, her heart filling up again at the sight. Everyone was talking or laughing or dancing with the children or, in the case of her wife, gazing at her lovingly. The agent realized for the first time, that she was completely comfortable at- and actually, immensely enjoying - a social occasion. *'But this isn't just any social occasion... this is the first proper big family Christmas I have ever had... and I love every minute,'* she mused. She caught her spouse's gaze again and couldn't break the connection with the green eyes. *'And it's all down to her,'* CJ silently gasped. She felt Kate's heart and soul reaching out to hers as the smaller woman approached. CJ's mouth opened in awe of the feeling and she stood there frozen to the spot.

Kate wrapped her arms around her wife's hips and pulled their bodies together. "What were you thinking, honey? You looked kinda surprised just then..."

The taller woman's blue orbs got lost in a sea of green. "You... I... I'm so happy. It was just a moment of complete happiness. And it's all because of you. I love you so much and I can't figure out how to explain how I feel... it's so..."

“I know how you feel, remember? Weird connection and all... I feel it too and I felt it strongly as I walked over here. You and I are bound together by so much more than love and family, honey. There’s something that neither of us know how to verbalize but we just *know* it’s right. There isn’t anything that can feel more right... and now our family and friends have been brought into it... our hearts surround them too.” Kate paused as CJ’s eyes filled with tears. “What, CJ?”

“That’s it,” the agent sniffed. “That’s exactly it. You... Katie... I love you,” she added, rolling her eyes and sighing because she couldn’t say it any other way.

“I love you too, darling wife. And I’m happy too. I’ve never been happier. Now let’s go finish off Christmas Day with our crazy family and friends, huh?”

“Yeah.” CJ kissed her spouse sweetly and rejoined their loved ones, knowing in her heart that she would never lose Kate. Somehow she was sure of that now. The feeling that they had both just experienced was profound and she was certain that they would never be apart no matter what... there would be no end to their connection. Her entire being finally accepted it completely. Her fear of losing her wife seemed to be released and she inhaled deeply, letting it wash over her. As she knelt down next to Lucy, who flung her little arms around the agent’s neck, she listened to Shannon chattering with Grandpa Eddie. Then CJ’s eyes met with Kate’s once more, and she knew she was truly home. Forever.

The End...