

After Jack

by Wendy Arthur



DISCLAIMERS:

This romantic drama is an Uber/Original, however all characters are created by me.

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No violence in this one, just a little drama.

This story depicts a sexual relationship between consenting adult women. If such a story frightens you, you better click on the X in the top right corner of your screen right away.

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So many thanks go to my beta-reader. Your help is very much appreciated and continues to be most welcome.

And thank you to all of my readers. I'm glad you continue to enjoy the characters.

This is the ninth full length installment in my series of stories, 'After Montana' which can be found at <http://marshallcarson.wordpress.com> . To understand and enjoy the characters and situations fully, you should probably start at the beginning.

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

Chapter 1

High in the Hollywood hills, with a million dollar view of the city and beyond, Jack Bannerman sat on his expansive terrace sipping a Bloody Mary. It was 9.30am and the actor had a hangover, a regular occurrence in his life of recent months. His blurry, bloodshot eyes were hidden by mirrored shades that reflected the beauty of the day away from his dark thoughts; his suffering body barely covered by cropped khaki shorts and a thin white cotton shirt hanging open to reveal his dark, hairy chest. For the tenth time in as many minutes, he smacked his lips together as a huge yawn forced its way out, before picking up his glass and downing a hearty gulp of the deep red liquid.

He scowled at the stabbing pains shooting through his skull as he lifted his feet to rest them on one of the other chairs in the patio set, which thankfully had a huge canvas parasol to protect him from the morning's rays. If it hadn't, he would soon be similar in color to his beverage.

On the table beside him lay a pack of painkillers, his expensive Rolex watch and his cell phone which seemed to continually bleep, signifying a multitude of messages were waiting for his attention. When the phone began to send out an infernal electronic ring, he was not amused. "Aww, c'mon!" He roughly grabbed the device and saw that his caller was none other than Elizabeth Emerson. He sighed heavily, having had a recent change of heart about their briefly discussed 'plans'.

Having Elizabeth agree with him about Kate needing a man in her life had given Jack the boost to try and force the actress into submission, which had backfired miserably. When he had hidden inside Kate's trailer and basically assaulted her, he had been drunk and could only remember bits and pieces of the event. It was enough to make him realize he had been lucky she didn't have any witnesses. When he thought about the things he had done while under the influence, it just made him want to drink more to forget the look on Kate's face; to forget her extreme dislike of him and to forget how he truly felt about her. He still couldn't say it out loud and it had hit him like a freight train.

He was in love – for the first time in his life – and that particular blonde co-worker was the focus of those unfamiliar and overwhelming feelings. He had absolutely no idea how to handle them and spent most of his day drinking in denial of his revelation. Now, he had to tell Elizabeth that he couldn't participate in any future schemes she was certain to be planning. "Hello?"

"Jack, dear. How are you?"

After a very large swig of his Bloody Mary, he closed his eyes and replied. "I'm just peachy. And you, Elizabeth?"

"Fine, fine... I was wondering how things were going?"

"Uh, they're not really going at all. I'm off work. Break between seasons... you know, just sitting here in the California sun?"

"Sounds divine... it's not so pleasant here. If I could pay to control the weather, I would," the vile woman snickered with the fakest laugh Jack had ever heard... and *he* worked in showbiz!

"Where are you again?"

"Connecticut, dear... it's really rather lovely but the weather does change quite a bit. But what I really want to know is... did you get any further with Katherine?"

"Elizabeth..." Jack began. He was trying to figure out how to let her down easy... if that was possible. "Like I said... I've been off work for a while. We don't go back for another week so..."

"Why did that stop you? Don't you know where she lives?"

"Uh, no."

"Well, I can fix that. Get yourself a pen and—"

"Elizabeth?" the actor intervened.

"Yes?"

"I don't want to know. I'm afraid I've been thinking things over and I'm not going to pursue it..." Silence ensued and Jack was waiting to be chowed out for his change of heart.

Finally, Elizabeth spoke... although her tone had changed drastically. "Well, I see you're just as weak-minded as that daughter of mine. You'd be a perfect match indeed. And here I was, hoping for a wonderful son-in-law and some beautiful grandchildren."

For some reason, Jack suddenly wondered if he'd been too hasty. This woman had a way of making him feel incredibly guilty for letting her down. It was a skill Elizabeth had honed over many years but the big actor didn't know that. "Well, listen... I'll see her again when I go back to work. I'll try and figure out what's been going on with her. I have contacts, you know..."

"Hmm, well I'd like to be able to rely on you to get the job done. I want her away from that woman. What she has is not a family, Jack. A family requires a mother and a father... not that... that abomination they call a marriage. Do what you can to woo my daughter... or whatever you young people call it these days. I want to be kept updated!"

“Elizabeth, I...” Jack pushed up his shades and pinched the bridge of his nose. He could not figure out what it was about the woman but she made him feel like a pathetic loser. It didn’t occur to him that that could actually be the case. He was in no condition to fight his corner at the moment and decided to appease her for now. “I’ll see what I can do. I’ll call you next week. I have to go.”

“All right, dear... and remember... there are plenty of incentives for you to succeed. For one, you get Katherine all to yourself. I don’t care if you continue your exploits... just break those two up!”

Jack silently blew out a huge breath. “Goodbye, Elizabeth.” He hung up the call and wondered if he had ever agreed to any of this. He couldn’t remember the fine details since he’d been drunk when Elizabeth had called him before she left Los Angeles a few weeks ago. His phone beeped and vibrated against the table. It was a text message from Elizabeth and he shook his head when he read Kate’s address and a final instruction from the demanding woman. *‘Go and see her. Make her see sense or you’ll force me to deal with it myself!’* Jack’s face contorted in disbelief. “Crazy bitch,” he mumbled.

But the crazy bitch wanted the same thing he did, right? He wished Kate wanted him and as the minutes ticked by, his train of thought skipped onto another just-as-ridiculous track. Maybe... just maybe if he went to speak with her, explain things, offer an apology and tell her he’s actually on her side in all this, she would realize how wrong she was about him and miraculously fall in love. His dark eyebrows raised as that ideal but highly unlikely outcome settled over him. Downing the last of his drink, he noticed his headache subsiding a little, and without further thought as to why he was drinking he got up and poured himself a large bourbon.

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Lucy Carson sat astride her mother, bouncing on the partially relaxed abdomen that doubled quite well as a trampoline. “Mommy... s’time to get up!” the youngster shouted.

“Awww, Luce,” CJ grumbled, prying one eye open to see a smiling – and far too awake – face peering down at her. She could smell the campfire puffing away outside and knew Kate and Shannon would be making breakfast. They had been out on the rural area behind their land for the past thirty hours or so, on a ‘real’ camping trip. The kids had absolutely loved it and what’s more, they had spent some glorious quality time with their parents while Kate was off work. “I wonder what’s for breakfast...” the agent said, suddenly sitting upright and grabbing her daughter around the waist with large but gentle hands. “Maybe I’ll have this little girl for starters!”

Lucy squealed with delight as the hands began to tickle her and she wriggled uncontrollably in her merriment. She managed to break free and her head was the first thing to exit the tent. “Mama! Help meeeee!”

Kate howled with laughter when she saw a slithering, giggling Lucy emerging through the space in the zipper. “Is the monster awake?”

“Yes!” Lucy shouted while escaping and running around in the grass.

CJ poked her head out with a growl and searched the area for her escaped prey. “Did a sweet little Lucy come out here? I *rrrrreally* need to find her...” It was pretty obvious where Lucy was as she giggled hysterically behind the tent.

Shannon joined in the game as her Mommy crawled around on all fours. “I haven’t seen anyone little here. I’m quite a big girl but if you’re hungry, you could eat some of my toast?” she offered, patting the ‘monster’ on the head.

CJ couldn’t keep up the act. The cheeky look on Shannon’s face was priceless and she chuckled as she nudged her daughter with her shoulder. “Where did she go?” she whispered. Just then, a small fireball of energy came barreling out from behind the tent and jumped on CJ’s back.

“Ahhhhhh!” Lucy slung her arms around the monster’s neck but was quickly grasped with long arms and as CJ got to her feet, the girl found herself wrapped up in front of her Mommy.

“Gotcha, Little One.” CJ raised the small body up to her mouth and blew a raspberry on the exposed tummy, causing a multitude of coughs and laughs to explode from Lucy’s mouth. A few seconds later, the girl was lowered into a hug, and a kiss to the small forehead showed that the monster would not gobble her up whole. She continued to giggle as she nuzzled her face into a nearby shoulder. It was one of the best sounds in the world.

Kate’s heart was filled with love as she shook her head slowly at the amusing display. When Shannon came back to help her with the cooking, the blonde eyed her wife. “Can you two stop messing around and come help with the food, please?”

CJ raised an eyebrow, mirroring the one that was crawling up Kate’s forehead. “Yes, boss. I just have to uhm... where’s the toilet again?” she asked, knowing two little voices would shout back in response.

“Behind the buffalo!” came the cheery reply.

The agent smirked and grabbed some tissues as she headed for the wild, oversized shrub that strangely resembled a huge buffalo. Shannon had noticed it yesterday and both her parents were amazed she was already seeing shapes in the undergrowth the same way they did with clouds and star formations. Once she had extinguished the call of nature, CJ returned and assisted with the remainder of the food preparation. As they all sat cross-legged on the picnic blanket, the tall Federal agent looked at her loved ones. Three gorgeous females munched down some fried bacon and eggs on toast and she smiled broadly, feeling completely happy and contented to be out here with them. It was moments like this that made up for all the difficult situations that cropped up in her life. “Well... this is delicious!”

“It weally ish...” Kate added with a mouthful of food, scrunching her face when CJ snorted at her.

“I made the bacon!” Shannon exclaimed, popping her last bite into her mouth.

“And I see Kamali’s *watching* the bacon,” the agent grinned, seeing the dog waiting patiently for his treat. He had eaten his dog food already and now lay under the shade of the nearby tree, eyeing his humans as they ate. When CJ signaled to him, he came bounding over and sat up proudly on his haunches; ears pricked forward and a look of complete concentration on his face. “Lie down,” the agent instructed. The dog immediately lowered himself to the ground and even went so far as to lay his head on the grass to show how incredibly clever and cute he was. “Wait...” After a quick check to see if everyone had finished their breakfast, CJ pulled the leftover piece of bacon from the frying pan and held it in front of the dog’s nose. Kamali was completely in control of his faculties – well, maybe not his drool – and he waited for a few seconds until his human said “take it”... only then did he gratefully gobble up the delicious meat.

A short time later, the children were skipping around the campsite while the grown-ups packed away the small tent, sleeping bags and utensils. CJ and Kate were just glad Shannon was acting like a child for a change. The young girl was finally starting to let go of her responsibility for her sister. The two siblings would always be close but now Shannon had loving parents who connected with them deeply... just as it should have been before. Both women had noticed the changes and had discussed it briefly a week ago but Kate was still thinking about their whole setup... including her problems at work and her yearning to be with the children more.

The actress had been home for almost five weeks and was not really looking forward to her return to the studios. She had looked over her current contract and didn’t think she could get out of it until next season was filmed. A call to her agent would help and she planned to do that before her hiatus ended.

Kate had received only one text from Jack Bannerman since she’d last spoken to him and it hadn’t made much sense. She suspected he had been drunk and she hadn’t bothered to reply to it. The thought of going back to work with *him* was not appealing. Alternative jobs had been running around in her mind but she couldn’t settle on the one with the most potential yet. She could afford to stop working for a while but she wanted to have something to focus on that kept her mind engaged and that would keep her linked to the showbiz world. She and CJ had plenty of savings put away and had no mortgage or debt. She also had some interviews and a guest appearance on her calendar that would boost the bank account further. Their monthly outgoings – including the salaries they paid – were manageable. CJ brought a good amount of money home every month and the girls had their trust funds and policies in place that Charles Davenport had left for them. It seemed the perfect time for a break but all needed further thought and discussion with her spouse.

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When they got back to the house, two slightly grubby tykes were first into the tub. While CJ supervised the bathing, Kate unraveled and unpacked their camping gear in the kitchen, throwing the various items into the washer, the closet and the sink. Once she had organized everything, she headed upstairs and walked along the hallway toward the loud singing coming from the main

bathroom. She couldn't stop a chuckle when she heard a drum beat accompanying the three almost-in-tune voices and knew CJ would be playing percussion.

The actress held her hand over her mouth and stopped in her tracks to let them finish their impromptu concert. *"Hey!" – Beat – "Let me know ya... you're all that matters to me!"*

The loud singing and the drumming continued in time with the song that played at low volume on the iPod. Kate knew the tune quite well as they had tried to find artists who sang songs suitable for anyone to listen to – including two very young music lovers – and they had gotten to know this British band quite well as a result of their research.

"Hey!" – Beat – "Let me show ya... you're all that matters to me... shiiiiine... shiiiiiiine..."

Kate resumed her walk and entered the slightly misty room. There she found a Federal Agent with her hair tied back in a ponytail wearing nothing but a deep blue terrycloth robe, and two beautiful girls sitting submerged in the tub wearing nothing but lots of bubble clusters. All three didn't stop singing and CJ had her back to the door so hadn't noticed Kate's arrival. Lucy waved at her with a big grin on her face but the tall woman didn't see that either and continued to wiggle her rear in time with the beat as she slapped her hands on the marble top of the vanity unit. Once again, Kate had to hold back the laughter. She bit her lips and watched as CJ shook her hips to the right for one beat then left for the next. Once the music had stopped, Kate let out a massive round of applause that finally got the agent's attention.

CJ quickly turned and threw her wife a shy look. She then bowed dramatically giving Kate a decent view of her ample cleavage. "Thank you, thank you..."

"Great singing, everyone," the blonde said while trying to draw her eyes away from the soft skin peeking over the blue robe.

"Mama... you sing too!" Shannon exclaimed.

"Uh, I think I'll leave the singing to you guys. You sounded really good together!"

CJ discreetly pressed pause on the iPod and both women kneeled at the side of the tub. She gave Kate a peck on the cheek and turned back to the girls. "Maybe we should put on a concert tomorrow in the living room since it's my last day off, huh?"

"Yes!" came the resounding chorused reply.

Lucy was busy building bubble towers on her knees. "Aun' Cece comin'."

The girl's casual and rather random comment suddenly reminded CJ that her aunt was indeed coming over for dinner tomorrow. "Oh... I had totally forgotten."

"Me too," Kate nodded. "How did you remember the day, Luce?"

"Ho'd it," Lucy said to Shannon as the older girl rushed to stop a falling bubble tower. Once the structure had been saved, the youngster looked up. "On... the phone."

"What do you mean, honey?" the agent asked, noticing that Lucy was really working on her 'th' words. Sometimes she used an 'F' or a 'D' if she was tired and not concentrating but she was getting better at every aspect of talking. CJ was very impressed with her efforts.

"I talk on the phone. Aun' Cece and me..."

"Oh, you did, huh? When did that happen?"

"Yes-yeste'day." Lucy paused to try and think of the words to say. "She said she... coming fo'dinner."

"Why didn't you tell us she called, sweetie?" Kate asked, leaning in to assist with the bubble sculpting.

"I fo'got. You went to get 'Mali from... the yard an' Mommy 'n' Shan feeding the horses. Den we go to the camp."

"Ah," the blonde nodded, understanding why she hadn't heard the phone yesterday morning. "That's okay, Luce. And thank you for reminding us." She turned to CJ. "What could we make? I didn't even think about that when we went to the store."

"How about those chicken breasts we didn't take on the camping trip... and some Parma ham?"

"Ooh, I could make something tasty with that!" the actress said, rolling her eyes and making yummy noises. That in turn made the children copy her and soon the bathroom was filled with 'Mmmms' and 'Ahhhs'. Once they had all finished thinking about food, the girls were scrubbed clean and Kate took them to their rooms to find fresh clothes to wear for the remainder of the day.

As the bath water drained away, CJ bent down – to rescue the Nemo toy that had swum in and out of the bubble chicane earlier – and had one of those frozen-in-time moments where she remembered what her life used to be like. Going from living a very solitary existence in her rental apartment in Springfield with its sparse, lifeless décor to a warm, loving farmhouse full of her own family and so many happy moments she would never be able to count them. Or from a time when she constantly lived her job, working day in, day out at Quantico and always on the move flying here, there and everywhere, to having a steady, albeit difficult job in LA and relishing her days off and her vacations. It was a huge shift... a shift that she couldn't have anticipated back then, but now would never, ever change for anything in the world.

“I’m so damn lucky,” she said to Nemo before drying him off and placing him in the bath-toy bag. She chuckled to herself as she left the room in search of her precious family. As she walked, she thought of Cecilia Carson’s impending visit. CJ knew her aunt was bringing some “interesting finds” with her. She wasn’t sure what that meant but hoped it would be something to do with her Mom. Cecilia had quite a lot of memorabilia from her childhood years and had been searching through her storage unit when she had the time. Little pieces of CJ’s deceased mother’s past were being revealed to her, which only made her miss and love Alyssa Carson even more. And in turn, it had made her want to be the best Mom she could be to her own children.

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As dinner time approached, the shortage of sleep from their exciting camping expedition was catching up to a grumpy Lucy Carson. She had started her tantrum in the kitchen and escaped to the living room, where she currently had her face buried in the couch cushions to avoid having to help set the table. If she couldn’t see her Mommy, her Mommy couldn’t see her, right?

“Luce? C’mon... let’s help Shannon...”

“No!”

“No?”

“No.” A foot stomp followed and Lucy’s frown deepened as she forced her face back into the couch cushions.

CJ sat next to the small curly-haired head. “It’s not very fair if we all help with dinner and you get to have fun and play... is it?” As the agent lifted the small girl – who conveniently went limp to make it harder for her Mommy – she sighed. “Okay... enough!”

A squeal of protest and kicking legs was her response. “Nooooooo!”

CJ raised Lucy up to face her and clamped the kicking limbs between her own knees. “Hey! That’s enough. How about I just kick and scream every time I don’t want to do something, huh? Waaaaah! No fair... I don’t want to go back to work... waaaah! Nooooo!” Lucy hiccupped in between her wailing cries. With angry tears in her big brown eyes, she looked at her Mommy in disbelief as the raven-haired woman continued her tirade and made some rather weird faces to boot. “I don’t wanna set the table... it’s not faaaaaair!”

Lucy forgot why she was crying and let out a tiny chuckle but soon after, her face turned pretty serious. “Mommy, stop! Is okay... I show you,” she said, taking a large hand in hers when she was lowered to the ground. CJ got to her feet and pretended to whimper while she was led to the kitchen. As they approached the doorway, she saw Kate and Shannon watching the performance from beyond the island counter. The agent still had her pouting, sad face plastered on and Lucy patted the tabletop. “Here... I show you how to do it!”

Kate passed by behind her wife and leaned in to whisper. “I think I’ll nominate you for an Emmy.” CJ – still playing the part – turned to look at her with her puppy-dog eyes and the actress almost laughed.

The blonde rejoined Shannon at the counter. “Why did Mommy do that?” the elder daughter asked quietly.

“She was trying to distract your sister from her tantrum by... uh, acting silly. Seems like it worked though, huh?”

Shannon nodded and noticed the other half of her family had gotten back to their preparations... although Lucy had decided she was the delegator and told CJ where to put the plates without lifting a finger herself. It was a compromise of sorts but it was better than Lucy having her fit of temper then falling asleep in a bad mood due to being over-tired. The youngster was communicating and her co-operation was gained without shouting or violence. The Carsons were very aware of what happened to their precious daughters before they adopted them, and they’d do everything they could to avoid anger in their household. It hadn’t been difficult so far. There was so much love and laughter, it was impossible for any of them to stay angry for too long.

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Just before dinner was ready, the doorbell rang and CJ went to answer it. “Hey... come on in. Thanks so much for doing this.”

Sam stepped over the threshold. “Hi, CJ... no problem. We’re glad to let you guys have a night out on your own... I mean, it *is* your Anniversary,” the redhead replied as she hugged the agent.

“Shhh... Kate still thinks I’ve forgotten.”

“No way?”

“Yeah... so we’ve made enough dinner for four. I was hoping you guys would want to have some with the kids?”

“Great idea,” Sam nodded.

“Where’s Jamie?”

“She’s getting her bag from the trunk of the car...”

Agent Green bounded up the porch steps a second later. “Hey, DM...”

CJ was surrounded by five foot ten of blonde-agent-bear-hug. “Hey, you... what’s all this?” she said, letting Jamie go and pointing to the bag.

“Oh, I brought a couple of books. I wanted to read one of them to the girls.”

“Awww... really?”

Jamie glanced shyly at her colleague. “Well, yeah. It was my favorite book as a child... oh... I hope it’s not too much for them to take in. I never thought about their ages.”

“They’ll love any story... what’s the book?”

“Charlotte’s Web...”

“Honey, they’ll adore you for that,” CJ declared, softly punching Jamie on the shoulder.

“Shucks... ya called me honey again...”

CJ rolled her eyes and stuck out her tongue. Both agents then noticed Sam had wandered off during their conversation and shrugged in unison before following. When they entered the living area, they found Kate – looking rather surprised by the visit – perched on the end of the couch and Sam hugging the two girls. CJ smiled at her wife then turned to Jamie. “C’mon... I’ll set out dinner for you and then we’ll get a move on.”

“Who’s we?” Kate queried with a head tilt.

“Me and you, my darling.” CJ stopped to kiss her spouse sweetly before she walked into the kitchen with her friend.

The actress licked her lips and eyed Sam suspiciously. “Well? What’s going on?”

The redhead held up her free hand – the other one was holding a snuggling four-year old. “Don’t look at me.” She then zipped her lips shut and threw away the imaginary key.

Kate’s green eyes narrowed even more and she got up to eavesdrop on what CJ was saying in the kitchen but she was too late. The tall agent came back through the door and took Kate’s hand, leading her towards the staircase. When they got to the master suite, the feisty blonde pushed her wife down on the bed and straddled the larger body quite effectively. She pinned a very submissive CJ’s hands above her head and leaned down to interrogate her wife. “So... why are we leaving our two friends to eat our meal... with our children?”

“Ohhh... you’re going to have to do better than that if you want me to break...” CJ purred.

Kate moved in to lick her wife’s lips before her tongue gently entered an eager mouth. She kissed her hotly until the agent thought she would pass out from lack of oxygen. Kate breathed in slowly and pushed her breasts onto CJ’s. “Are we going out?”

The taller woman’s eyes were glazed pools of love, lust and mischief. “Mmmmaybe...”

The blonde ground her crotch into the body below her in a slow, seductive rhythm. She analyzed the naughty, playful expression on her wife's gorgeous face. "You didn't forget after all... did you?"

CJ stayed silent until a soft tongue licked its way from her cleavage to her ear. "Unnngg... surprise..." she panted.

"So... we're going out to... where, exactly?"

"That's also a surprise..." CJ husked, pushing her body up into her incredibly sexy partner.

"I won't know what to wear if you don't tell me where we're going."

Kate was now nibbling across her collar bone and the taller woman couldn't think how to form any coherent words. "I... we... let me... choose what you'll wear..."

The actress stopped and eyeballed her wife. "Hmmm... all right. I'll go get washed." And with that, she got up and disappeared into the en suite, leaving a very aroused agent lying on the bed.

CJ sat upright and looked at the bathroom door. "Just leave me high and... wet, why don't you?"

A giggle was heard from behind the door before she got her response. "*I'll make it up to you later... if you're a good girl.*"

"Grrrr..." she mumbled to herself. Adjusting her pants to ease the sudden pressure, she got to her feet and shuffled over to the walk-in closet. "I'm frickin' drenched here... how does she do that? Okay... time to focus..." She flicked through the numerous hangers for just the right dress.

"*Did you say something, CJ?*"

"No... just get a move on!" The agent laughed to herself when she got an indecipherable and lengthy response.

Chapter 2

CJ stood in low heels, wearing her full length black halter-neck dress and her hair clasped back in a shiny, loose ponytail. She was made up to perfection and held a small purse in her left hand. Her earlobes displayed simple diamond and silver stud earrings and on her wrist, the silver bracelet Kate had given to her on their first Wedding Anniversary. She ran her thumb around the engraving on the inside and couldn't believe two years had passed since that night in Vermont. Leaning her elbow on the roof of the black Mercedes, she wandered off in her head, thinking about how glorious Kate looked in her green summer dress that day, and the way the blonde had

swayed across the floor in their hotel room. It had been a sight to behold. A few seconds later, her attention was diverted to another sight to behold at the front door of the farmhouse.

Her wife, her one true love, her soul mate walked carefully down the porch steps. The actress looked completely stunning in her black knee-length gown. The material held her in a sensual embrace and the tight long sleeves gave her a regal and elegant air. Her golden hair tumbled in gentle waves over her shoulders and her make-up was subtle, allowing her natural beauty to shine through.

She glided across to the car, extended her arm – showing that she also wore her ‘Forever’ bracelet – and slipped it around CJ’s waist. “You look so incredible, honey.”

The agent caught the breath that was stolen by the vision of her beloved spouse. “Thank you. I can’t find the words to describe how stunning you look, Katie.”

The blonde stood bashfully and looked CJ up and down. “Yeah... incredible just doesn’t cut it for you. You’re beyond beautiful...”

The taller woman kissed her on the cheek and opened the passenger door of the Mercedes. “Your carriage, my Lady.” If her dress had allowed it, she would have bowed but instead she bent her knees in a small curtsy.

“Thank you... *my* Lady.”

As CJ closed the car door, she noticed four faces peering out the living room window watching the couple as they left. She could see Sam with her hand over her mouth and tears in her eyes. The producer was such a sucker for romantic evenings. CJ smiled and waved before floating around the vehicle and getting into the driver’s seat. “Are you ready?”

“Of course,” Kate replied lovingly. “But I’m still totally curious about what you have planned.”

CJ slipped her hand behind her wife’s neck and kissed her softly. “You’ll love it.”

“I love *you*.”

“Ditto.”

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As the car pulled slowly into their destination, Kate marveled at the strings of twinkly lights that hung between each post on the harbor and gently swayed in the breeze against a golden sunset. Rows of sparkling white yachts and motor boats lined the wooden walkway next to the entrance road. When CJ shifted the car into park, she turned off the engine and looked at her wife. “We’re here.”

“We sure are. It’s so beautiful! Is this a private marina?”

“Yeah... I know some people...” CJ winked.

“I can’t believe you planned all this.” Kate was overwhelmed. “I’m so lucky...”

“Nah... I’m the lucky one. Let’s go... there’s more.”

They started walking toward the jetty, not the building housing the restaurant like Kate was expecting. “Uh, honey... are we going sailing in our evening wear?”

CJ giggled. “Kinda.” She stopped in front of a sleek, sixty foot motor yacht and opened her arms.

Kate walked into the embrace and hugged her wife close. “It’s huge! We’re going... on this?” she asked, squeezing CJ’s waist.

“Yes. Our crew awaits.”

“Oh no... you’re gonna tell Star Trek jokes all night, aren’t you?”

CJ laughed and led the actress onto the magnificent boat. They were greeted by a young gentleman wearing a black tuxedo who asked them to follow him. When they arrived on the aft deck, Kate spotted the table for two. It was draped in a red tablecloth and held some of the finest dinnerware she had ever seen. A small vase sat in the center and two velvety, blood-red roses stood proudly from it. Candles were lit around the deck which was partially sheltered by the level above but most of the area was open-air and the atmosphere was electric. Everything glimmered and reflected each ceiling light, and even the deck boards shone since they’d been polished to within an inch of their lives. The actress was buzzing with excitement and CJ wasn’t managing to conceal her giddiness either, as was evident by the toothy grin that was permanently stuck on her face. Once they were seated, the waiter poured two elegant glasses of champagne and gave them the limited choices for the main and dessert courses of the meal. The agent hadn’t wanted to pick everything out for Kate and had asked them to give her a couple of dinner options.

“This is amazing, CJ. Thank you so much!”

“It was totally worth it just to see that smile,” the agent purred, taking Kate’s hand into hers. “I love you more with every passing day, Katie. Thank you for being my wife.”

The blonde successfully held back her tears... for now. “I love you too... so much. Like I said before... there are no words to explain how much you mean to me.”

“Happy Anniversary, baby. Here’s to us,” CJ said, raising one of the champagne-filled flutes.

“To us.” Kate took a sip of the bubbly liquid and her eyebrows shot up at how good it tasted.

“Oh wow... this is delicious!”

“It sure is. Looks like I’ll be persuaded to have a few tonight... I mean... it is a celebration, after all.”

Kate smiled widely. “Three years. Still glad you married me?”

“Oh hell, yes!”

“Hey... shouldn’t we get married again now... you know, since it’s legal in California?”

“Do you want to?”

The actress took in CJ’s ambiguous expression and thought for a second. “Actually... I’m not sure where that came from. I don’t feel the need to, do you?”

“Katie... I married you because I love you and only you... for the rest of my life. I had never wanted to commit myself to anyone before... ever. But I wanted to show our loved ones what you mean to me... and show *you*. I guess what I’m trying to say is that us having a piece of paper will never change the fact that you’re part of me... my soul mate. If you want to have another joining ceremony, we can... you know I’d give you anything.”

“I love you so much,” Kate whispered. When CJ looked at her from under dark lashes, she smiled. “I don’t think we need to do it again. I know how I feel. You’re my heart. And I agree with you about why we got married in the first place. I just wanted to celebrate my love for you and show everyone that you’re the one... my only one. I’ve already changed my name and as far as I’m concerned, we’re more bonded by love than any couple I can think of right now.”

CJ grinned. “You get more beautiful every day, do you know that?”

“I was about to say the same thing to you,” Kate said coyly.

At that moment, their waiter returned with an older gentleman. The dashing gray-haired man clothed smartly in his dress whites, nodded in greeting. “Good evening, ladies. I’m Captain Shepherd. I hope everything is to your liking. My crew are about to serve you some delightful tapas to tide you over while we get underway.”

“That’s wonderful, Captain. Thank you,” CJ replied graciously. “The boat is amazing.”

“It certainly is. Miss Chapelton tells me it’s your Anniversary?”

Kate looked at her wife, who nodded as she answered the man. “Yes.”

“Well, happy Anniversary. Here’s to many more.” He offered his hand to Kate and when she took it, he kissed her knuckles. “Have a lovely evening.”

“Thank you.”

He gave CJ the same courtesy and said goodbye. The waiter stepped forward when the captain left and noted down their choices. "I'll be right back with your snacks."

CJ nodded in acknowledgement and looked at her surprised spouse. "Sounds good, huh?"

"Uh, yeah. We're 'getting underway'?"

"Well, it's a calm night. We're going on a little cruise while we eat."

Kate sipped her champagne while watching her wife winking at her. "And who's Miss Chapelton?"

"Hah! I was waiting for that." CJ slapped the tabletop then took Kate's hand once more. "She's a good friend of Cecilia's. Apparently she's a surgeon at the hospital and she loves scuba diving. And as you can see, she has a few bucks!"

"Seems like it. So she just let us use her yacht for the night?"

"Yes... as long as I hired the crew. Aunt Cece was my go-between."

"That's so sweet. I'll thank her when she comes over tomorrow night. And thank you, my darling."

CJ got up to kiss her love. "Remember when you romanced the pants off me that Valentine's day?"

"There have been many romantic occasions for us... too many to count... but I know the one you mean..."

"Everything you did that day left me speechless... so thoughtful. I just wanted to do something special in return."

"You do... every day of my life." Kate covered CJ's deep red lips with her own. "Thank you for this."

The waiter came back followed by two more men. They were all carrying small platters of delicious-looking nibbles and CJ slid back into her seat. Kate's eyes widened as the food was put on the table and she swallowed the saliva that gathered in her mouth. Once the men left, she heard a snicker from her wife and looked up. "What?"

"Watch ya don't drool in my food there, Shorty..."

"Shut it, Legs... I'll drool where I want to..."

CJ eyebrows shot up at the host of images that sentence invoked in her head and both women burst into a round of laughter before settling down to devour the flavorsome offerings.

A few moments later, the boat began to slide effortlessly out of its berth and the actress finished chewing her mouthful as she looked around her. “And we’re off...”

“Yee-hah!” CJ raised her refilled glass and gave the blonde a dazzling smile. Kate returned it, her blood pumping fast with all the anticipation and excitement. The agent really had surprised her. She clinked her glass against CJ’s thinking her wonderful wife had done good... again.

* * * * *

It had been a delightful trip around Catalina Island then up to kiss the southern coast of the Channel Islands National Park. The scenery and the ocean were a spectacular backdrop for a perfect romantic evening together. And now as the marina came back into view, two rather jolly women finished their sumptuous desserts. The sky was dark and Kate gasped a little too dramatically when she saw the multitude of twinkly lights in the distance. “Oooh, look at that!”

CJ followed her wife’s pointing finger and saw nothing but the marina. “What?”

“All the lights. They’re so lovely! It’s like a carnival!”

“O-kay... no more champagne for you, my dear.”

“Oh hush you...” Kate laughed, throwing a napkin at her spouse. “It looks beautiful from out here, don’t you think?” She rose from the table and went to the railing to breathe in the sea air before they got back to dry land.

CJ was at her side in a second, just in case the over-exuberant actress toppled overboard. She wrapped her arms around the slim waist from behind. “I guess it does look pretty.”

“Hah! Of course it does.” Kate turned a little and snuggled close to the smooth material of the agent’s dress, finding a warm cleavage with her mouth. “Ooh...” She placed a delicate kiss on the sweet-smelling flesh.

“Wait ‘til we get home... please... you’ve been turning me on all night. My panties are soaked,” CJ whispered into a nearby ear.

The blonde looked sensually at her partner. “I’m not wearing any panties...”

“Seriously?!” Kate nodded seductively and licked the agent’s collar bone. CJ’s jaw dropped as her mouth filled with saliva. “Unnnnggg... stop!”

“You look so tasty in that dress... of course... you’d look even tastier out of it... and I still have an appetite...”

“Hey!” CJ pried the questing fingers off her breast and held them tight. “Please come sit down at the table and I promise I’ll let you do whatever you want when we get home.”

“Anything?”

“Anything. C’mon... sit. I’m just gonna head to the uh... head, before I burst,” the agent said, throwing her thumb over her shoulder. Kate let out that chuckle, snort and nose scrunch combo that shot straight to CJ’s heart. Just before she left, she shook her head. “Damn, I love it when you do that...”

The tall woman walked away swaying her hips under the sexy black dress and Kate’s eyes glazed over as she watched the movement hypnotically until her spouse was out of sight. “And I love it when she does *that*...” The blonde’s face became serious for a brief moment as she felt their bond so intensely she wanted to cry. They were still totally in love with one another and it never ceased to amaze her. This evening had been incredible and she smiled to herself as she took another sip of her bubbly beverage. She turned a few minutes later to see CJ creeping back over to the table. She wasn’t sure it could be called stealth mode when it involved a long black evening gown and heels. “Why are you being all sneaky?”

“I peeked into the bridge. It’s so awesome... all shiny wood and lights and knobs and switches everywhere. I wanted to go in there and say something in a Kirk voice... but some of the crew was there and... I just couldn’t do it, Captain!”

Kate rolled her eyes at the bad Star Trek impression. “Must you?”

“Aww c’mon, Katie... I wanna be silly for a change...”

“I believe that would be an inefficient use of your time.”

CJ giggled. “Perhaps, but it’s a highly logical choice...”

“Okay, okay... but only if I can be your Number One,” Kate snorted in her merriment.

“Make it so...”

The actress merrily tapped her forehead in thought then stood and slipped a hand onto her wife’s backside. Giving it a gentle squeeze and nipping CJ’s chin with her teeth, she whispered, “Resistance... is futile.”

“Oh jeez... no more Star Trekking. And just for your information...” She placed a quick kiss on Kate’s champagne lips. “You’re my *only* One.” CJ sat back down but as soon as her derriere touched the chair, she sighed. “I forgot... I need to make a quick phone call. Be right back!” With that, the agent sauntered away again, this time looking back and giving Kate that unmistakable look.

The actress licked her lips as she watched. “Mmmm, she said I could have anything I want later... yeah. Maybe I’ll take her on the bridge and strip her down a rank... oh no wait... a strip down? A beat down! No, that’s not right. No... is it? Aw heck, I don’t know. I’ve had too much champagne.”

Kate was still chuckling to herself when CJ came back and sat across from her. “What’s so funny, honey?” That sent the actress into hysterics and the agent squinted to look carefully at her spouse. “Awww, my Katie’s drunk.”

“I am not! I’m just cheerful... and happy... and lots of other wonderful things,” the blonde nodded.

“Uh huh?”

“Yes. And you are too... I can see it in your eyes.”

“You might be right...”

“I am right. And you know it. Damn, you’re so gorgeous. I think about it every day. I say ‘Look at her, she’s so gorgeous’ and then I thank my lucky stars and...”

CJ let out a hearty belly laugh. “Oh Katie, I surrender. How can I not be happy when I’ve got you to keep me entertained?”

Kate stood again and approached the agent, an uncontrollable snicker escaping here and there even as she concentrated on being sultry. She needn’t have bothered trying. CJ found her sexy no matter what. “So... you want to be entertained?” the actress purred as she pulled up her dress skirt and straddled her wife’s lap to whisper against her ear. “I thought you wanted to wait until we got home?”

“Oh boy... you don’t have any pantii... oh!” CJ knew Kate’s bare thighs were touching her lap and it was almost too much to resist. “I don’t want to wait another second... but I think we should. The crew may have us arrested if we get down on the deck... and boogie.”

The blonde barked out a laugh. “I see I’m not the only one who’s a little merry tonight. Hey... how’re we getting home, anyway? You can’t drive...”

“That’s all organized. I’m a Federal Agent, ya know... I got it aaaaalllll under control.”

“Mmmm, I like the sound o’that.”

“Let’s finish our champagne before we dock, hmm?” CJ stood – a little awkwardly – and carried Kate to her seat. Lowering the smaller woman and fixing her dress, she ran her tongue along the delicate lips and sucked one into her mouth. “More later...” she promised as she backed away.

“Oh... yummm.”

* * * * *

As CJ thanked the crew for a fantastic evening, Kate danced her way down the gangway, sliding her hands along the railings to prevent herself from falling over. The special agent caught up to

her wife on the dock and they strolled together towards the parking lot. Kate stopped in her tracks when she saw Tony standing by the Mercedes dressed in a fine black tuxedo. “Oh honey... you thought of everything!”

“Well we certainly can’t catch a cab. Nu-uh,” the tall woman said as she waved at the driver.

“Tony!” Kate pranced over to her friend and gave him a clumsy hug. “It’s so good to see you, Tony. I’ve had an amazing night!”

“That’s great. You both look stunning.” He looked at CJ as he held onto the over-affectionate blonde.

“Thanks, Tony. She’s had quite a lot of champagne,” the agent explained.

“Ah!”

“Tony... this woman here...” Kate grabbed her wife around the waist. “...she is the most incredible woman ever. I should know. She’s all mine. Isn’t that fab?”

“Yes, Kate. It’s fab.”

“It’s absolutely fabulous! Oh, I love that show! And they drink champagne... but I bet it wasn’t as delicious as our champagne tonight. You should’ve tasted it... like a bubble party on your tongue... amazing!”

Tony opened the car door and CJ herded the jolliest, feistiest blonde in Los Angeles into the car. Once the actress was safely in her seat, CJ surveyed the parking lot. “Where’s Cyn?”

“She already left. She’ll be waiting to pick me up at your place,” Tony whispered.

The agent smiled at their driver and thanked him again for his help while wiggling her hips to escape the clawing hands of her amorous wife. During the journey home, Kate chattered non-stop while lying across CJ’s lap in the back seat. The taller woman cradled her precious wife in her arms and shook her head occasionally when Kate got all mushy and told Tony how much they were in love. The driver thought it was incredibly sweet and nodded in agreement but in the next minute he’d have tears running down his cheeks from laughing so much at his boss’ antics. He hid his chuckles quite well and CJ grinned at his reflection in the rear-view mirror while she hmm’d and uh-huh’d in response to the actress’ continual monologue. She was slightly relieved when the car turned into their driveway.

“... and the crew... they were great. So polite and pleasant... weren’t they, CJ? And that boat? Oh my God, it was beeeautiful! Must have cost a fortune-“

“Sweetheart?” CJ interrupted.

“Hmm?”

“We’re home. Let’s get you unbuckled...”

“Oooh, thanks CJ. You’re the best.”

“Yes, I think we established that on the 101 earlier, hon,” the agent smirked.

Kate frowned. “Oh yeah... we were on the freeway!”

Finally, Kate was on her feet and breathing in the cool night air. Her eyes popped open and the sudden change in temperature and position seemed to sober her up quite a bit. Tony locked up the Mercedes and said goodnight to them both before heading over to his own car. That’s when Kate saw her make-up artist sitting in the driver’s seat but thankfully she didn’t run over to regale Cyn with her epic tales of their trip on the boat. When the car drove past the two women, Kate stood to attention, saluting the vehicle as they left. CJ smirked at Tony and Cyn’s laughing faces then guided her wife indoors. “Hey... you need to be quiet now... don’t wanna wake the whole house.”

“Okay... very, very quiet.” Kate tip-toed across the hallway toward the study. There was a low light emanating from it so CJ followed and as soon as they got inside the door, Kate closed it behind them. “So, baby...” the blonde said, clicking the lock, “what now?”

CJ was astounded at the change. Her wife had gone from jolly to lusty in the space of one second. “What’s going on?”

“Nothing... I was just really enjoying being silly for once. Plus, that cool air out there hit me like a wet blanket in a fire.”

“Uh huh?” The agent approached Kate and pulled her into her arms. “Wet blanket in a fire?”

“Something like that. Soooo, it seems the study was calling us. I mean, it was the only room with a light on. Must have been a sign and I think we should take advantage...” She didn’t finish the sentence and nudged CJ until the agent’s back was against the wall. Two wandering hands tickled up the waist of the smooth black dress, then around to the back to find the fastening.

CJ heard the zipper and felt the material falling away from her body. Kate could feel the heat from the expanse of skin beneath and lifted the dress to unhook the halter-neck over CJ’s head. The actress could now pull it down and let it fall to the floor, revealing her wife’s breasts to her. “No bra?”

“Mmm-hmm... don’t have... bra to go with... dress,” CJ panted as Kate’s hands traced a path over her nipples. “Oh God... don’t stop.”

“I won’t.” The blonde’s hazy eyes were fixed on her lover’s aching body. CJ’s breaths were coming hard and fast and Kate didn’t really notice the agent was removing *her* dress until it was tossed aside on the couch. “Wow, you’re good.”

“I have... many skills...” CJ was having trouble thinking. She quickly changed their positions and once Kate was against the wall, she kneeled down in front of her. “Mmmm... no panties.” She ran her hand up the inside of the strong thigh, tickling over the scarred flesh until she felt the moisture that had worked its way down the creamy skin. “My, my... someone’s a little wet...”

Kate whimpered. “You’re not... the only one... who was horny all night...”

“So I see.” CJ kissed over the firm abdomen in front of her and Kate slid down the wall, bending her knees to give her wife’s hand better access to her burning flesh. The new position meant two supple breasts were now level with CJ’s face and she smiled widely. Kate reached back quickly and loosened her bra, throwing it across the room with no thought to where it landed. “Perfect,” CJ said in a deep husky voice. As she drew one pink nipple into her hot mouth, she pushed her body against Kate’s to hold her in place. She could feel hands massaging her head and fingers curling around her hair. She waited for the right moment and after giving the first breast plenty of loving attention, she switched her mouth to the other one and simultaneously dragged her fingertips through her lover’s slick folds. The actress gasped loudly and opened her legs wider. CJ manipulated the slippery clit with well-practiced skill and when she felt the grip on her head tighten, she bit down gently on the nipple and entered Kate with two long fingers.

“Yessss...” The blonde was pinned to the wall by her strong wife, CJ’s tongue batting over the tip of her nipple while it was gripped between hard teeth. The agent’s hand thrust slowly in and out of her and she could feel the burning start somewhere deep inside. “Ciara...”

The agent quickened her thrusts and sucked harder on the rigid nipple. She took her free hand and molded Kate’s other breast, twisting and flicking the elongating bud until Kate screamed out. She felt the velvety walls around her pumping fingers start to spasm and increased her efforts, pressing the heel of her hand against the sensitive ridge and driving her wife through her climax. Kate pawed at her head, pulling it against her full breast, encouraging CJ to keep suckling. The blonde’s orgasm was powerful and her taut body bucked against the agent, who looked up to watch her beautiful spouse in the throes of ecstasy. She let the nipple slide out of her mouth. “Oh... so hot...” she growled before going back to kiss it.

Kate bit her lips as she tried to slow her breathing. She glanced down at the flushed face of her lover. “Damn... that was so good.”

CJ rubbed her thumb lightly over Kate’s center then begrudgingly removed her hand from her wife’s body. She stood up, taking a weakened Kate with her. Holding the woman securely in her arms, she kissed her soundly. The kisses slowly migrated to her neck and collarbone and Kate took the agent’s face in her hands, bringing her back up to kiss her on the lips. “Get on the desk...”

CJ opened her eyes and pouted. “But... but we fell off the desk last time, remember?”

Kate chuckled. “Oh God, yeah... we did. Uhm... okay...” She took CJ’s hands and as she walked backwards to the couch, she gave the taller woman such a sultry come hither look that CJ

followed in a trance, her eyes trailing over her spouse's body from head to toe and back again. "Like what you see?" Kate asked as she gently pushed CJ back onto the plump cushions.

"Oh yeah... and I like what I can smell too..."

"Oh? And what would that be?" the blonde posed with her hands on her nude hips.

"You. I need to taste you, Katie..."

Kate watched as CJ swallowed a mouthful of saliva and licked her deep red lips. She doubted she was capable of another orgasm right now but granted her wife's request nevertheless. She lifted one leg to place her knee on the other side of CJ's head and stood over the lounging woman.

The agent opened her mouth as the tempting sight came into view. Kate's center was pink and glistening... too delicious to miss out on. CJ wrapped her hands around both thighs and pulled her wife to her, elongating her tongue to get the first taste of her lover's essence. Kate sucked air quickly between her teeth as the jolt shot through her body. CJ's mouth felt so good on her, so warm and soft, and she didn't want it to end. But the agent wasn't the only one who could smell the scent of her mate... and it proved too enticing to resist. Once the taller woman had stroked her a few times, Kate shakily moved away and sunk down onto the couch, pulling her wife's legs apart and smirking at CJ's sounds of protest at losing her feast.

"I want you..." the blonde growled. She immediately lowered her head and inhaled the alluring scent. Her eyes settled on the soaked flesh she was so hungry for. Kate latched on to CJ and pushed her tongue inside her wife. Holding the agent in place, she began sucking mercilessly on the swollen ridge.

"God!" The tough agent shuddered at the contact, her body experiencing instant waves of pleasure. "Oh please... please..."

Kate thrust her tongue inside again, trailing it back out and pressing hard on the bundle of nerves, teasing it as it continued to swell in her mouth. CJ was making those begging, sobbing sounds with every breath, the exquisite sensations too much for her to take. The actress flicked her tongue back and forth, using the very tip to only *just* graze over CJ's clit. The whimpering became louder and more desperate and the taller woman wrapped her long legs around her lover's back in an instinctual bid to intensify the touch. Kate relished her oral task, giving more of her mouth to CJ, deriving more pleasure for herself and her lover. She brought her hand up to penetrate her wife with four fingers and the cry that came from the agent was of relief, want and insane arousal. Pushing her hand in further, she curled a finger to seek out the smooth velvety spot she knew CJ would react to. Kate devoured the agent with renewed vigor. She knew CJ's climax was going to be explosive and she wanted to feel it. They had been teasing one another all night and now, after the adrenaline of their happy evening combined with a lot of love and a dash of champagne, it was literally coming to a head.

"Yes!" CJ screamed. Kate breathed heavily through her nose and worked her magic on her wife. The tall body suddenly tensed and CJ surprisingly opened her legs even further. Kate thrust her

hand once and swirled her tongue around CJ's clit, drawing a loud moan from her lover. Kate thrust again and batted her tongue hard and fast. The result was instant. CJ's torso raised off the couch then slammed back down. Her hips thrust wildly as her orgasm took complete control of her movement. She cried out Kate's name and managed to open her eyes momentarily to see her wife suckling on her aching center. The sensation shot out from every nerve ending in her body and she knew she hadn't felt anything like this before. She gripped at the fingers inside her as Kate licked gently, prolonging the experience beyond what she had imagined. As stars seemed to dance around her head, she lay flat out and tried to keep breathing. Finally, the feeling began to fade and her head lolled weakly over the cushion, her body shivering in the aftermath. "Oh Katie..."

The actress licked and kissed the sated skin and carefully withdrew her hand, feeling CJ's inner muscles spasm at the gentle action. She slid up her wife's body and kissed her on the chin. "You okay?"

Two long arms curled around Kate's back. "I've... never been more okay."

"I thought I'd lost you there for a minute. You looked at me but didn't seem to see me."

"I almost blacked out. Never felt anything like it. You blew my mind..." CJ croaked, wiping her sweaty brow off before pulling Kate even closer.

"That good, huh?"

"Always."

"Haven't lost my touch then..."

"Uh, no! That was incredibly... incredible."

The blonde grinned when CJ opened her eyes. "Well, we really did work up to it... I wanted to do that before we even left tonight."

CJ felt intoxicated and it wasn't the champagne. She looked dazedly into heavily-lidded green orbs. "Yeah... I seem to recall enjoying your interrogation techniques."

"Hah... I'd be useless at interrogating you, honey. You'd wiggle your tongue at me and I'd melt into a useless heap on the floor... with my legs open."

CJ laughed shakily, running her hand through Kate's blonde hair. The actress started to laugh too and their combined movement coupled with the sweat of their lovemaking meant Kate began to slide off the larger body. "Woah..." The agent decided it would be easier to go with Kate than to try and pull her back. "I've gotcha..."

They landed on the rug with a thump and Kate started laughing again. "I don't think you do..."

“Kinda?”

“Nah... you’ll always have me, baby.”

“Baby? Think you might be ready for round two?” CJ covered the smaller body with her own and found just enough energy to make love to her wife one more time before they dragged themselves upstairs and fell into bed. It had definitely been a night they’d remember forever.

Chapter 3

At 8.23am the next morning, CJ’s eyes were barely open as she hauled herself out of bed to go to the ensuite. After she flushed and washed her hands, she looked in the mirror and noticed she hadn’t removed her make-up from the night before. It reminded her of the whirlwind of romance it had become and she smiled. “What a night.”

Removing most of the make-up and brushing her teeth, she switched off the light and grinned to herself when she saw... and heard Kate. The actress was curled up in a ball – head between the two pillows – and by the sounds of it, firmly ensconced in her slumber. The agent snagged her robe and left the room since she was sure she could hear movement downstairs.

On entering the large living space, the noise became clearer. Jamie, Shannon and Lucy were in the kitchen and going by the conversation, they were having breakfast. “Good morning!”

A combination of “Hey, CJ!”, “Mommy!” and “... in my Cheerios...” came back at her.

“Hey... how is everyone?”

“Fine”, “Mmm!” and “Want some of my Cheerios, Mommy?”

CJ bent down to Shannon and opened her mouth. The girl scooped the spoon into the cereal then fed her mother some breakfast. The agent crunched and frowned. “Hmm, Cheerios don’t really go with toothpaste.”

Jamie smirked and looked up from her food. “How did it go last night?”

“Great...” The taller woman said, kissing Lucy’s little head. “It was amazing actually.”

“I knew it would be. Did Kate enjoy herself?”

CJ knew from her friend’s wiggling eyebrow that Jamie had heard them in the throes of passion last night and was going to tease her mercilessly later on. “Kate was overwhelmed by it all... and the champagne.”

“Nice!”

“How did things go here? Did you and Sam manage?”

“Oh yeah... we had fun, didn't we girls?” A chorused ‘Yes!’ was her reply. “Sam's just having a shower. She has work in an hour... actually, I think she's gonna be late.”

“I'm back at the office tomorrow. You're in today, right?” CJ said, popping some fruit into her mouth. Jamie had laid out various foods for the children and the agent was impressed once again with her friend's breakfast spread. It reminded her of the time when Jamie had made pancakes, fruit, syrup and lots of other tasty things. The blonde agent's voice came back into focus.

“... told Mark I'd be in by ten. He was fine with it, actually.”

“Well, good... what?”

Jamie laughed. “I knew you weren't listening. I said... the boss knew I was taking care of your kids last night. He said starting at ten was fine.”

“Ah... thanks, Penfold.” CJ sat down to have some food and Sam joined them a short time later, dressed and ready for work.

“Is our Kate last up as usual?” the producer chuckled.

CJ finished chewing her toast and smiled. “Yeah... poor baby was exhausted with all that celebrating last night. I left her up there snoring.”

“I do not snore!” Kate said, appearing behind them and pretending to be offended.

CJ turned to see a wild-haired actress shuffling into the kitchen in sweats and a hoodie. “Hey, honey... and yes... you do... sometimes.”

A grin and a kiss to her cheek was her response. “Good morning, all.” After many greetings, Kate sat down at the island counter and looked at everyone. They were all eating, drinking or in Lucy's case, making a house out of toast, and she felt the peace in her heart she only felt when she was at home with her loved ones. It reminded her again that she had to go back to work the day after tomorrow. And it confirmed her decision. She wanted to quit the show.

* * * * *

The Carsons had one of those good busy days where the time passes so fast you wonder where the heck it went. Something that had been planned for the afternoon was Lucy's first visit to meet her new pre-school teacher. Since she had only learned to speak in her new home after being scared into silence by an abusive Steve Coburn, she had not yet attended pre-school like most four-year olds would have. But now she had all but caught up to where she should be... and she'd done it quite loudly. However, she was much quieter than normal during their visit today.

It had been met with mixed feelings from the youngster. She had been excited to see the classroom and all the interesting things she'd be doing there but wouldn't venture more than three feet away from her family, even when the delightful and friendly teacher encouraged her. Neither parent was looking forward to the first day they'd have to leave her there.

After that emotionally exhausting hour, they had come home and gone out to take care of the horses. Lunch was eaten in the barn where both children pretended to be animals. They would only eat the food on all fours, munching off the picnic plates with their mouths. Kate took a piece of hay and stuck the end of it between her teeth, much to the delight of the two girls... and CJ, who watched her flick her blonde hair back and lean on the bales as she pretended to chew on it like a horse. She smiled, but her mind wandered off on the wrong track when Kate pulled it back out, making her bottom lip drop with the movement. It took another round of laughter from the children to snap her back to reality.

Various other daily tasks had also been undertaken – including preparing the chicken and Parma ham feast – and now it was fast approaching 6.30pm.

Kate stood at the window, gazing at the lake and thinking about her family. A wide smile spread over her entire face as memories of last night flashed through her mind. It had been romantic, exciting, hot and funny all at once. The conversations she'd had with CJ replayed in her mind and the expressions on the agent's face as she goofed around on the boat made the actress fall in love all over again. She shook herself out of her daydreams when she saw Cecilia Carson stepping out of her Honda and grabbing a small box from the back seat.

As the woman approached the front door, it was swung open by an excited seven year old. "Hi 'Celia!"

"Shannon! So good to see you," the woman said, bending down to hug the excited girl.

"Mommy said you were bringing pictures of her when she was little!"

"And I did. Let's go inside and see what's in this box, hmm?"

Kate stood in the hallway and greeted Cecilia when she eventually got past the ever-happy-to-see-you Kamali. Shannon pulled the older woman into the living area and once she had said a quick hello to the other two and put her handbag on the coffee table, it was straight down onto the floor to look inside her box of treasures.

"One of my favorites," Cecilia said, handing a photograph to CJ.

The agent felt a surge of emotion and tried to hold back her tears when she looked at the image. "Me and Mom..." she whispered. "I've never seen this one before."

Lucy shuffled around to sit next to her Mommy. "Who s'at?"

“That’s my Mommy, Luce. See... right there?” As the child nodded, she passed the picture to Kate.

“Aww, honey... you were just as cute as you are today... and Mom is so beautiful,” the blonde smiled.

Cecilia almost cried. “You call her Mom too...”

“Yes.”

CJ nodded. “Kate and I agreed that our Mom and Dad are Alyssa and Eddie... and Jeffrey too, I guess,” she chuckled. Her aunt took a moment to figure out the names before CJ looked at the picture again. “I was, what... three in that photo?”

Cecilia nodded. “That was a good day. We took you to a local city farm. You loved the horses...”

“I still do.”

“Yes! We have two horses!” Shannon declared while digging carefully in the box. “What’s this, ‘Celia?’”

The older woman took the tiny box from her. “This is something I brought to give to your Mommies.” Cecilia looked to her niece. “I ordered one of these when you were born... as a gift to your parents... but two came by accident and they were identical. I called the company to return it but they didn’t want to know... said they didn’t make a mistake. When I told your Mom she said I should keep one because she knew how much I loved you.” She choked a little on her emotion and handed the item to CJ.

Opening the lid, the agent gasped and leaned in to show Kate the contents. “It’s beautiful.” Tears overflowed from her eyes at the thought that her aunt hadn’t seen her all these years and had held on to all these items, perhaps hoping to find CJ again. “I have Mom’s... it’s at the cabin in my old toy box. You remember that, Aunt Cece?”

“I think so... isn’t that the grubby wooden box your Mom carved ‘my dream’ and ‘my love’ into?”

“Yeah... and I have them both now.”

Cecilia held her hand to her mouth. “Oh my... you two are... oh, it’s just lovely.”

Kate looked at her wife and smiled before turning to the nurse. “We’re very lucky.” She took the small silver intricately carved sculpture of two cupped hands holding a tiny book and studied it more closely. “Ciara Jane Carson – A Gift to Behold,” she read. “This is so well-made, so intricate. Wow!” CJ’s throat had closed up, rendering her speechless, and the actress pulled her in for a hug. “And look, honey, your birth date is on the other page.”

“Okay, Mommy?” Lucy said, patting the agent on the knee.

“I’m fine, Luce... happy tears.”

The infant was satisfied with that reply. “Dis?” she said, pointing to the photograph.

Cecilia lifted the precious girl onto her lap and pointed to the child in the picture with black pigtails and a rather garish yellow sweater. “This cute little girl here is your mommy... a long time ago.”

“She’s tiny as me!” Lucy exclaimed.

“She was a bit tinier! Only three years old!”

“Three? I’m four!” the small girl stated with her eyebrows hiked up to her hairline.

“I know. You’re growing so fast.”

CJ watched her Aunt interacting with her daughter and was overwhelmed all over again. Just a few years ago she never had any family to speak of. Now, her life was so full... her heart was so full. She took a deep breath and realized she was still holding Kate tightly to her. She released the actress after kissing the blonde hair. “Thank you for bringing these, Aunt Cece.”

“You’re very welcome, CJ. There’s more,” she said, nodding towards the box. “Including a few things I bought on your birthdays... even after we lost touch.”

CJ smiled and dug in. She found six brightly-wrapped gifts with her name on them and the children helped her reveal the surprises within. She was so glad Cecilia Carson had recognized her that night in the hospital. Memories like this were priceless.

* * * * *

The next couple of days passed uneventfully. CJ was back at work which, thankfully, meant staying in the office doing paperwork and some monotonous investigative enquiries. Kate relished her time with her daughters and looked forward to being able to do it much more often in the future. They had all eaten dinner together since CJ managed to get home at a reasonable hour and after the children were asleep, the late evenings had been spent in each other’s arms. Surprisingly, that entailed watching a movie, talking or just being together in a peaceful silence. They knew they would always have a very healthy and active sexual relationship – it showed no signs of slowing or lessening in intensity – but now and again they just needed to be near one another in their free time without taking it further. Each woman was so perfectly in tune with the other that it wasn’t even discussed and didn’t need to be. A look, a certain smile or a feeling would pass between them and told them much more than any words could.

One night, Kate had been sitting in the corner of the couch reading scripts and the agent sat on the floor surfing the web on her laptop. Every now and then, their eyes would meet. The

connection would sometimes last for several minutes or they'd maybe just smile at each other before continuing their separate tasks. The moments they spent together were never taken for granted and their contentment was very evident in the way they shared their lives. Neither knew what the next day would bring and they were very aware that anything could happen, especially with the type of job CJ had and what Kate had been through in the past. Every second of their lives together was savored. At one point, Kate glanced up at CJ again only to find the blue eyes gazing back at her, lost in a love-struck trance. The actress' face split into a toothy smile, breaking the hypnosis, and the taller woman chuckled and blushed before looking back at her screen. The smile on the blonde's face remained even as she returned to reading from the numerous pages on her lap. A low "I love you" was heard from the agent and Kate looked up.

"I love you too."

* * * * *

It was 7pm. Kate had to return to work tomorrow and the thought made her grumble as she cleared up the dinner plates. While CJ was upstairs sorting through laundry and helping the kids get washed, the doorbell rang. The actress had no clue who would be visiting them at this hour without calling first, and went to the living room window to look outside. She saw the red Ferrari and her face fell. It was Jack Bannerman.

She opened the door as quickly as she could but knew CJ would have heard the bell. "What are you doing here, Jack?"

"Kate... sorry about just turning up like this... can we talk?"

"Uh, no... you need to leave. I don't want to speak with you and I know CJ will go nuts if she sees you here. Actually, how did you get our address?"

"Uh... your mother insisted. She keeps contacting me... even when I told her not to... and she made me--"

Kate stepped outside the door and pulled it closed behind her, worried that her wife might just kill the guy considering what he had done to the actress recently. "Elizabeth?! You spoke with her again? What the hell...?"

The big actor was unusually sheepish-looking. He shifted nervously, backing away from her and shoving his thumbs into the belt loops of his jeans. "Listen... she seems to think I can win you over... break you guys up... make you see sense... her sense," he said, twitching his shoulders. "I told her it was pointless... I mean, you know what I think about us, how great we'd be together... but uhm... I finally get the message, Kate. You don't want me... seems you never will. But I'm worried..."

"About what?"

“Well... just her determination. She’s a little crazy... I dunno... I wondered if you wanted to get some coffee with me so we can talk about it...I could tell you more...?”

“Coffee? Are you kidding? Since I met you, you’ve felt me up numerous times, left disgusting, explicit messages on my cell phone, forced your tongue down my throat on more than one occasion, assaulted me in my trailer and now it seems you’ve been plotting with that vile woman to make my life a misery? Leave, Jack... before CJ sees you. If you ever gave a damn about me, you’ll stay away from Elizabeth and stay away from me. I can’t believe you came to my house... *MY* house! I don’t think it’s my mother you need to worry about... it’s...” Just then, Kate heard her spouse shouting her name. “Seriously, just go... now!”

Too late.

CJ pulled the front door open. She had spotted Jack’s car from inside the house and her blood had started to boil before she even confirmed it was actually him. When the agent saw him standing directly in front of her wife she – surprisingly – walked calmly over and put her hand on Kate’s shoulder. CJ gave her wife a hint of a smile and stepped in to position herself nose to nose with the actor just like the first time she had met him. “I can’t imagine what you’re doing here...” she said a little too sweetly.

Jack gulped. The last time CJ did this, he had experienced some strange sensations but now there was more of the terror, less of the arousal. “I... I just came to say sorry to Kate... and to you, I guess.”

“Sorry for what, Jack?”

Kate disappeared when the girls came to the front door and she sent them inside, suggesting something fun to keep them occupied. Watching her daughters from the hallway, she stayed as close as possible to CJ in case she needed to intervene and save Jack’s life.

The big actor felt like he should protect his crotch but resisted the urge to move his hands in case it gave the agent ideas. “Sorry for lots of things... stupid decisions I’ve made... stupid assumptions...”

“I see.” CJ stepped even closer, her eyes burning so fiercely Jack thought he might need to put his shades on to stop his own eyes melting. The tall agent quirked her head to the side and studied him closely. The silence was deafening but finally, she spoke. “So... are you sorry for the stupid decision you made to call me at work and tell me that Kate was having an affair with her friend?” She watched as the man’s expression changed and gave him away. It was miniscule but to CJ’s trained eye, it told her he was guilty and hiding a multitude of sins. She knew it had been him who had called that day. She was impressed the rest of his body and features remained still and impassive though, and raised her eyebrow before she spoke again. “Who’d have thought... you *are* a good actor...” The agent brushed an imaginary piece of fluff from his sturdy shoulder. “Get. Out. Of. Here.” She flicked the ‘fluff’ hard with her finger. “Now.”

Jack backed away, feeling a few beads of sweat appearing on his brow. "I really am sorry." He walked a few paces in reverse before throwing Kate a look that made the blonde frown in confusion. He seemed truly remorseful but it only made CJ want to punch him very hard and she balled her fists before turning rigidly toward the house.

Kate touched her arm when they met in the doorway. "Thank you for not hitting him."

"He's never treated you with any respect, Katie. Believe me... I want to do more than hit him."

"I know, honey... I kinda want to help you."

With a smirk, CJ threw her arm around her wife's back and they closed the door behind them as Jack's Ferrari growled down the driveway and through the gates.

They hugged inside the hallway and Kate assessed her spouse's frame of mind. She checked behind her and saw Shannon and Lucy busily drawing a picture for her at the coffee table.

"Hey... what you thinkin'?" CJ probed.

Kate turned back to her. She figured it was best just to give it to her straight. "Jack... he said he got our address from Elizabeth..."

It took a few seconds for the agent to connect the names. "How does he even know your mo... Elizabeth?"

"I'm not entirely sure but I think they met outside the studios. He says she... she recruited him to try and break us up. I honestly don't think we've heard the last from her."

"I've not heard anything from my contacts." CJ sighed. "Typical... the two people I cannot stand... and they're in cahoots? Sheesh..."

Kate tried to cover her smile. It seemed like an inappropriate time but then she remembered that nobody was going to stop them from being happy. "Cahoots? Who says cahoots anymore?"

CJ narrowed her eyes playfully and gave a little pout. Kate's mood was infectious... hell, Kate herself was just infectious. "Well, obviously *I* say cahoots... and so do a lot of other cool people," she said with her chin in the air.

Kate laughed and the agent gawked at her but she could see the sparkle behind the blue eyes and punctuated her mirth with a snort. "Okay, sorry... you're one of the coolest people I know. Thank you for setting me straight..."

It was CJ's turn to laugh. "Oh I *never* want to set you *straight*..." She swallowed Kate's retort in a sensual kiss, leaving them both breathless a short minute later.

They chuckled together as they walked into the living room and the agent realized her mood had been lightened considerably. Soon, she was so distracted by the happiness of the three females around her, she forgot all about her unpleasant few moments with Jack.

* * * * *

As the sun begun to descend over the mountains, CJ and Kate both walked out into the hallway after finishing up an elongated version of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*; a firm favorite in the Carson household. Kate had ad-libbed between pages – much to the delight of her daughters – and the caterpillar had gone off course a few times throughout as a result, but it was always enjoyable and the story was brought to a satisfying conclusion.

So now, a slumbering Lucy was placed in her own bed and as CJ left her room, Kamali stood up from his usual spot midway between the two doors to follow her downstairs. She met up with Kate again in the kitchen and leaned her hip on the counter. “So... what shall we do now?”

The actress spun around slowly and looked her partner up and down. “I dunno... any ideas?”

The look in Kate’s green eyes told the agent all she needed to know but she wasn’t going to be that easy to lure. “I might go work out for a bit...”

“Sounds like a good idea. I’ll unload the dishwasher then...” The blonde could not keep the smile from her face so she quickly turned her back before the agent could see it. It wasn’t long before a solid body pressed up against her.

“So...” CJ purred deeply in her ear. “You don’t want to *come*... and work out with me?” Her hands grasped two full buttocks and squeezed. Her mouth landed on Kate’s neck, sucking and nibbling the soft skin there. “All those times you’ve teased me until I was insane with want... I think it’s your turn tonight...” The blonde hair was lifted and a hot tongue trailed languidly up the back of her neck.

The actress knew what was coming next. CJ bit down like a vampire marking her prey then gently pulled at the skin before kissing it better. Kate felt her legs weaken and the goose-bumps erupting all over her body. She turned, and the taller woman’s hands allowed the movement, landing back on her buttocks to hold her close.

Kate stretched out and placed both her hands on the counter behind her, opening herself up to the agent’s caress. CJ grinned devilishly and leaned down to kiss her wife’s collarbone. A low neckline meant a questing tongue could delve deep into Kate’s cleavage resulting in her nipples straining against her black tee shirt. The contact became feverish as CJ continued her hungry journey and the actress whipped her hands up and around CJ’s head. Tangling her fingers in the dark strands, she pulled the agent upward and kissed her passionately, grinding her crotch into her lover’s thigh. Moist mouths met repeatedly, tongues danced and fought for dominance, and teeth nipped at willing lips.

“I want you,” CJ panted as she lifted Kate off the floor. Two legs wrapped around her hips and the tall agent walked into the gym, kicked the door closed behind her and headed for the horizontal workout bench. She never stopped kissing and teasing Kate the entire time and when she lowered the actress onto the padded bench she could see how fast and shallow she was breathing. Those beautiful green eyes were ablaze with desire and it made CJ’s heart pound like thunder in her ears. Taking a few deep breaths to slow the encounter down before she lost control completely, she stood and devoured Kate with a look.

The actress lay on the bench, sliding her hands behind her head to form a makeshift pillow. She watched CJ avidly, waiting to see what was coming next. Her center ached and she really hoped her wife was going to touch her soon... otherwise she’d start touching herself. “What are you gonna do to me?”

CJ’s clit twitched at the question. Her control was waning fast. She looked at Kate’s clothes and decided the tight little tee-shirt could stay but the sweatpants had to go. She leaned down and whipped them off, seeing the cutest pair of white panties covering her wife’s delicate folds. Kate’s buttocks were at the end of the bench and CJ drooled. She quickly lost the comfortable pajama pants she had pulled on earlier and kneeled in front of the blonde, pressing her nose against the white cotton. A gasp from Kate was followed by the actress grabbing onto the weight stack at the head of the bench, her abdomen muscles flexing as she held her arms above her head. CJ licked the inner thigh at her right cheek and watched as Kate met her gaze. She let her wife see the pink tongue poking out of her mouth and licking her lips, making Kate moan as she dropped her head back down onto the bench.

Smirking and reaching up to massage her lover’s breasts through the thin material, the agent grazed her teeth against the soft panties, feeling the engorged ridge quite easily and teasing it with a gentle bite.

“Please, Ciara... more...”

The scent of Kate was driving CJ crazy and she pulled the panties off. Settling herself between her wife’s knees once more, she scratched her nails lightly over the blonde triangle of hair while she nibbled from inner knee up to damp thigh. She could see Kate’s moist folds and throbbing clit due to the position the actress was lying in. CJ gently nudged the legs open further to watch as the skin parted even more. She swallowed the saliva that gathered in her mouth and groaned at the wetness that gathered between her legs. She was so determined to make this last but when the blonde raised her hips off the bench in an effort to attract her wife’s mouth, all bets were off. The movement worked like a charm... as always. Like a moth to a flame, CJ placed her lips around Kate’s clit but she didn’t move or let her tongue reach out yet. She could feel the heat exuding from her wife’s skin and was impressed when the actress didn’t force her hand.

For just one second, CJ’s tongue flicked out and caught the tip of Kate’s clit. The actress stifled her scream. She was going to get up and throw CJ down on the floor if she didn’t make her come soon. The hot breath from CJ’s mouth was driving her to distraction and the agent scratching over her nipples through the cotton was intensifying the sensation.

The taller woman sensed the anticipation and slid her tongue slowly down between wet folds, avoiding the top of Kate's swollen nodule, knowing that's where she needed the pressure the most. Tasting the hot entrance and the abundant nectar flowing from it, she lingered deliberately, barely moving the tip of the muscle and feeling Kate's body clench as a result. When the smaller body began to squirm, the agent gave up the sweet torture. She would give Kate everything she wanted. Her strokes were long and deep as she pressed her lips harder against her lover. Bringing her tongue up, she began suckling while swirling around and over the tip of Kate's center. "Harder... yes..."

CJ could do nothing but comply. All she wanted was to please her love. Kate was trying to rock her hips as CJ's head began to bob, her tongue taking fast, long, delicious licks over the sensitive ridge. She pinched at Kate's nipples and her mouth moved more frantically as she sensed her wife building to climax. The actress tightened her hold on the weight stack above her head and let out a sound that was a combination of a whimper and a scream. Her orgasm flowed through her in waves, washing away everything but the feel of CJ on her skin. Her mind had to try and focus on the basics of breathing until the peak subsided.

When she finally looked down, she saw CJ kissing and lightly sucking on her. It sent another little pulse through her body but then she saw the agent's hand leaving her breast and heading toward the floor between two long legs, and she knew her partner needed release. "Hey... don't touch yourself."

"But I..."

Kate waved a finger at her. "Look... I'm sure you could... hold on up here..." she pointed above her head, "... and stand over me here..." She pointed to the dark blonde thatch of hair at the juncture of her legs.

CJ's eyes glazed over when she pictured that position and immediately swung one leg over the bench. She could feel the wetness between her legs and if she waited much longer, it would be dripping onto Kate's body. She planted her feet firmly on the floor and grabbed hold of the top of the weight stack. When she looked down she could see the angle of Kate's hips. The actress' feet were also on the ground and it made her mound protrude much more than it usually would. She lowered herself down and when they made contact, Kate could feel her soft curls becoming increasingly drenched as her wife's juices mixed with her own arousal. "You're so wet..."

"Uh... huh..." CJ had started thrusting, the friction from the hair giving her much pleasure, but when Kate placed her hands on both sides of her center, tilted her hips even more and pulled at the skin to open herself up wide, CJ's eyes popped open. The actress watched her tall wife as she pressed herself harder against the exquisite feeling of Kate's clit brushing against her own. "Oh..."

CJ's open mouth, her wanton eyes and her thrusting body was a visual feast, and the feeling of their intimate connection was utter bliss. Kate felt the heat gathering in the pit of her stomach and pushed her mound even further upward. CJ was watching her and Kate was impressed by the agent's control, but it wasn't long before the taller woman had that look on her face; the look that

told the blonde it was time. Kate reached up and grabbed CJ's breasts, thankful that the agent also had on a soft, thin tee-shirt. Rolling the pert nipples between her fingers, she began rocking her own hips as much as the bench would allow.

"Oh... so close... too... good..." CJ's neck muscles tensed and her thrusts lost their flawless rhythm. "Now... Katie..." As CJ pressed harder and faster, letting more of her body weight push onto her lover, Kate nodded slowly, licked her lips seductively and flicked her tongue back and forth to simulate something else she wanted to do right now. "God... yes!"

CJ's arm muscles bulged as she held onto the weight stack for dear life. Her eyes were forced to close as her orgasm exploded through her buzzing body. Her hips almost stilled – slowing to a heavenly grind – and Kate felt her wife's wet release trickle over her clit. It was almost enough to make her come and she moved her body against CJ's to try and achieve another climax. As the agent recovered, she realized what her partner wanted and her over-sensitized flesh moved easily with the new lubrication. Kate raised her hands again to hold onto the bench as she listened to the erotic noises created by the added wetness. She knew there was no stopping it now and when CJ whispered, "Did I come inside you, baby?" her whole body seemed to still as she fell over the orgasmic crest once more.

As she came back to herself, she saw the most gorgeous blue eyes looking down on her. CJ looked well and truly sated, her hair fell in ruffled clusters around her face, little beads of sweat dotted her rosy cheeks from the exertion and now that she was exhausted she pretty much sat on Kate, enjoying the close, intimate contact as the afterglow settled over them.

The blonde smiled, feeling the twitches through their intimate connection. "You're shaking, honey..."

"I know... my thighs are gonna be agony tomorrow," CJ chuckled.

The grin on the agent's face made her look excruciatingly beautiful and it stole Kate's breath. "Look at you... we've just had incredible, sweaty sex and you still look like a Goddess..."

That made the agent laugh outright. "You're biased!"

"Well, yeah... but it's still the truth."

CJ leaned down until her face was an inch from her wife's. "The truth is... that you are the most beautiful woman in the world..." She reached out her tongue and licked Kate's chin, each word followed by a touch to a different part of her face. "Everything... about... you... is... sheer... beauty..." Once she had tasted all she could reach, she pulled her head back. "And it's all miiiiine."

Kate giggled. "And you're all mine, you gorgeous supermodel you... but we've been in here for at least fifteen minutes and now your bare ass is in full view of the door. Let's not tempt fate, my Goddess..."

A smirk was followed by a raised eyebrow. “You were timing us?”

“Hah! Are you kidding? I didn’t even know my own name there! Oh and by the way... you *did* come inside me,” Kate finished with a wink as she pushed her hand between them and touched herself. She brought their combined juices up and offered the fingers to her lover.

CJ sucked, and growled deep in her chest. “Mmmm... delicious...” She rose back up and looked down between them. “I love this position. I could get so... uh, close to you. Everything was touching... I could feel it all,” she said, wiggling an eyebrow at her wife.

“Uh huh... me too... now get off me before I get all horny again.”

“That’s not really a good way to get me off you...”

Kate rolled her eyes and jerked her hips. “Get up, sexy!”

CJ chuckled throatily as she got to her feet. “Hey... maybe we should move this bench.”

“Why?”

“Because then, when we do that again, I could watch us in the mirrors,” CJ purred.

Kate turned to see what she was talking about. The view of the bench they were on had been blocked from the full wall of mirrors at the back of the gym by the vertical weight stack.

“Oooh... yes... and I get to be on top next time.”

“Fat chance,” CJ goaded as she ducked away from Kate’s groping hand. She blew a kiss at her mischievous wife and grabbed the clothing from the floor. As she headed toward the door, a noise from the kitchen stopped her in her tracks. “Uh... maybe we should put these on...”

Kate popped her head out to see if the coast was clear. She saw Kamali drinking the last droplets from his water bowl and realized the noise was the metal clattering against the cabinets. “It’s okay, honey, it’s just the dog. But still, let’s get dressed. These’ll just have to go straight in the wash since you made a complete mess of me.”

“Hah... right back at ya,” CJ said, nipping the actress’ butt as she hopped out of the room pulling up her sweats. They teased one another mercilessly for the rest of the evening but the memory of their impromptu lovemaking in the gym made sure they would be trying that position again when they got the chance... after CJ had repositioned the bench, of course.

Chapter 4

Another wonderful evening over, CJ fell asleep with Kate plastered around her back and happy thoughts in her head. The night seemed to last all of five seconds and it wasn't long before it was time to wake up once more and get ready for work.

Two hours passed in a blur and CJ yawned widely as she got out of her truck and stood in the elevator, waiting for the big metal box to do her climbing for her. Once in the office, she sparked the coffee machine to life and checked the pin board in case she'd missed any important cases on her days off. Reading the two papers attached to it – one of them the old photo of Frank Hess and the computer-generated version of what he might look like now – she shrugged and signed in to her email. Not much there either, except the usual memos and status updates on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted list.

While she was reading through the daily briefings for the past few days, Agent Ryan came in the door. "Hey CJ... how goes it?"

"Morning, Mikey. It goes fine." She looked up and saw what he was carrying. "Oh man, I love you. Gimme, gimme!"

Mikey took one of the aromatic coffees off the cardboard holder and put it on CJ's desk. "Welcome back."

Lifting the lid and taking an exaggerated sniff, the tall woman moaned as she exhaled. "Thank you, thank you, thank you..."

Ryan laughed. "Thought you might have missed your usual latte... and anyway, I don't mind being sent for the coffees anymore." He eyed his colleague as she relished her drink. "They have a new barista," he winked.

"Hah! She cute?"

"Hell, yes."

Soon after, Jamie arrived and the two agents updated CJ with everything she had missed. Agent Matthews was on attachment to another unit and was investigating a string of high value robberies. Mikey would be occupied for a good part of the day when the IT expert arrived. Apparently, their office was getting a systems upgrade and the techy agent was trying to hide his excitement about the new gadgets to be installed.

That left CJ and Jamie to do a pile of the usual paperwork and pick up on any cases that were going cold... including the ongoing search for Frank Hess. Mark came in for a few minutes for a briefing of sorts then left with one of the good coffees in hand.

A half hour after Mulrone left, someone knocked on the open door of their office and CJ glanced up fleetingly. As her eyes fell back to her desk, her brain caught up to what she saw and she studied their visitor once more. "Eddie?"

Eddie Marshall Junior stood with a surprised look on his face. “CJ... I didn’t know it was your office I was coming to. Good to see you...” He approached her desk but she was already on her feet.

Hugging her brother-in-law warmly, she noticed the weird look on Mikey’s face. “Mikey Ryan... this is Eddie Marshall... top brainy geeky guy at Cole Intelligence Systems.”

Mikey leaned over his desk and shook Eddie’s hand. “Good to meet you, Eddie.” He frowned and took in the way CJ held onto the man’s shoulder. “Marshall? Any relation to...?”

The tall man nodded. “Absolutely... Kate’s my sister... which means... CJ’s also my sister.” He turned and smiled at the cute, shy look on the normally cool agent’s face. When he spotted Jamie on the phone, he waved and sent her a silent ‘hello’.

CJ patted his shoulder. “So... you’re gonna hook us up, Eddie?”

“Sure am, Sis. Then I thought I’d come by the house later...?”

“Sounds good. But right now, I need to get back to work.”

“Me too.” He turned to Agent Ryan. “Seems you’re the man I need to see. Ready?”

The young agent jumped up. “Yep!”

* * * * *

Meanwhile, across the city, Tony drove the black Mercedes along an unusually busy South Avon Street. Well, maybe not ‘drove’... he could’ve walked faster. “Sorry about this Kate... there’s just no way through.”

“Don’t worry, Tony... I’m just glad we left early. I wonder what’s going on...”

“There must be something blocking Warner... it’s never like this.” Even though television and film studios were dotted along most of Warner Boulevard, Kate was headed to stage 26 today so Tony had to somehow get to the dead end part of the street. The young man threw his hands up in the air when another black Mercedes identical to Kate’s cut in front of him, almost taking the fender off. “Hey!”

Kate also sat with her hands in the air. “What the...?” She quickly remembered that Shannon was in the back seat and swallowed her curse. “That was incredibly rude!”

“No kidding.” Tony continued to release the brakes for a couple of seconds at a time, letting the car creep along the street. He glanced in the rear-view mirror to see other vehicles slowing from their regular pace and joining the crowd.

A mere few seconds later, Kate’s voice drew him back. “The road cleared, Tony.”

The young man was astonished at the speed at which the traffic had moved in front of them. “Wow... I guess someone finally woke up...” They eventually reached the appropriate junction of Warner Boulevard. The road was still pretty blocked and he sat waiting until the Mercedes in front of him moved. It was also heading into the dead end street but before it could clear the junction, the traffic unexpectedly stopped again and the rude black Mercedes blocked Tony’s path and left him sitting half way around the corner. “Agh!”

Shannon looked up from her coloring book, having come along for the ride. “What is it?” She had been missing her morning trip in the car with Tony and had persuaded her Mama to let her ride with them. Plus, Tony was going to take her shopping after they dropped Kate at work. She needed a new pencil case and other interesting things for school.

“Oh... just a car same as ours, honey,” Kate said with a smile.

Tony couldn’t complete his right turn off South Avon Street, and avoiding the parking lane had left him at a strange angle to the following traffic. With its busier route and two driving lanes of vehicles moving at medium speed, South Avon was getting back to normal while they were still stuck bumper to bumper. Tony kept his signal flashing to let the other road users know his car was waiting to turn but a couple of horns still sounded due to the trunk of the Mercedes protruding into the driving lane and causing an obstruction. He sighed and saw a large rig up ahead trying to maneuver into one of the lock ups across from the Olympian gates. Nodding his head resignedly, he turned his attention back to the car in front. “Looks like somebody important in there, huh?” he said, pointing ahead.

“How do you know?” Kate queried.

“It has government plates.”

“Oh yeah... so it does. I wonder who it is.” Kate played with her bottom lip and tilted her head. “How do you know about government plates anyway?”

“CJ’s been teaching me a lot of different things...” the driver smirked.

“Ah.”

Tony thought he heard a squeal of brakes and turned to look over at the opposite side of the road behind him. Coming down the street, he saw a bright red Ferrari F430 and knew it was Jack Bannerman. He kind of expected to see the actor driving erratically but suddenly, another car swerved into Jack’s lane, touching the front wing of his sports car, making Jack impressively change direction to avoid an all-out collision. In the next second, Tony panicked when he realized that Jack was not correcting his change of direction and driving into oncoming traffic. The red sports car was now heading straight for the left side of their car at quite a speed. Tony shifted the Mercedes into reverse but he wasn’t fast enough... no one could have been fast enough.

“Shannon! No!”

The girl had no idea what was going on; Kate felt a horrifying wave of shock burn through her body at the panic in Tony's voice; the car's wheels had barely moved from the warm concrete when a screaming, crashing sound was accompanied by an abrupt and painful sideways shunt to the Mercedes. When the movement settled, Kate was disorientated but she had remained conscious. She was on the passenger side of the car. Tony and Shannon were not.

She willed her head to stop spinning and touched the sticky, warm trickle of blood running down her cheek. She felt terrified of the sudden silence; a silence only infused with broken glass dropping from the window frames, the hissing of fine jets of steam shooting up from under the crumpled hood of the other car, a high whirring sound coming from the Ferrari's now-dying engine and the distant echoing sound of the traffic, which now seemed very far away. When she finally looked up, she saw the Olympian Studios security guards running along the sidewalk towards the scene. She turned to her loved ones and her eyes widened in horror.

"No!" Kate struggled with the seatbelt, tugging at the buckle that seemed to resist her every move. "No... no... no."

* * * * *

In the bright red Ferrari, Jack Bannerman shook his head and looked dazedly at the many airbags that had deployed around him. "Fuck me!" He managed to clumsily push open the door and was beginning to climb out when he saw what he had hit. He recognized the driver, whose head hung loosely on his shoulders. Jack jumped up, not really thinking that he might be injured, and ran towards the black car.

"Kate! Oh God... no!" He got to Tony's door and suddenly saw the small girl sitting in the back seat, her presence usually hidden by the darkened privacy glass that was now shattered. His fear increased and he tried to tug on the mangled door. There was no way it was going to open but before he started moving to the other side of the Mercedes, another squeal of brakes from the street made him whip his head around.

There, he saw a dark Chrysler 300 with a strange looking driver, swerving and slowing to a stop, causing other traffic to sound multiple horns and slam on their breaks. The back window rolled down only part of the way and Jack soon saw why. A handgun protruded from the gap and in a move that was reminiscent of a cop, he shouted at the top of his lungs, "GUN!"

At that moment a whole host of things happened at once. The security guards who were now coming past the identical Mercedes in front of Kate's car, ducked instinctively. The Government-owned Mercedes shot forward, hitting the car in front of it in line. Jack – still staring disbelievingly at what was happening – suddenly saw eyes appear behind the gun and knew what was coming. All he could think about was Kate. He shifted in front of Shannon and spread his body as widely as he could over the car in an attempt to protect all its occupants from the line of fire. He didn't hear the first shot – the silencer sending it's bullet on a soundless mission – but he heard the missile puncture the rear window which had not shattered in the crash. In his foggy brain, he hoped that might be all that was coming. He was wrong.

Four more silent bullets ran along the side of the Mercedes, two of them tearing through the actor's large body, the other two embedding themselves somewhere behind him. The dark Chrysler left a cloud of smoke behind it as the tires shrieked against the road surface at the sudden acceleration. Before Jack had even hit the ground, the car was gone.

Kate screamed inside the Mercedes when she saw a fine spray of blood exploding from Jack's back. She couldn't understand what was happening and was still in shock from the crash. But now, seeing Jack sliding to the ground... it felt like a thousand little bombs were going off in her head. She tugged at the seatbelt once more and when it gave way, she pushed the car door open. She entered the back door and was overwhelmed to see Shannon awake but covered in blood. "Oh God, honey, it's okay... it's gonna be okay."

"Mama..." the girl cried. "What happened?"

Shannon's eyes were heavy as if she had just woken up and Kate wondered if she had been knocked out by the impact. "Someone crashed into us, honey." She tried to unlock the seatbelt but it wouldn't budge. "Shannon, are you hurt?"

"I don't think so... but that thing hit me on my shoulder," she added, pointing to the now-deflated side impact airbag.

The actress checked over her daughter's body frantically, feeling quite sick at the thought that she was hoping all the blood was Jack's. Sirens could be heard in the distance and she knew the paramedics would be here soon. She saw the security guards outside Shannon's window now.

"Miss Marshall... are you all okay?" one of them asked.

"I don't know, Jim. My driver.... I don't know," she sobbed. "And Jack?"

"Chuck's trying to help him. The ambulance and police are almost here." The guard began organizing the few people who had come to help.

Kate's mind froze for a second as she looked at Jack's Ferrari. It sat a few feet away from her car – most likely due to the fact that the impact had shunted the Mercedes – and the front end of the expensive vehicle was completely destroyed. *'How fast was he going?'* she vaguely wondered. Anger rose within her as she held onto Shannon's hand. "I'm going to check on Tony, hon... I won't move too far away."

"Don't leave me, Mama!"

"Never... I'll never leave you. Do you hear me?" Kate declared, holding the girl's cheek in her hand. After a tearful nod from her daughter, she moved between the two front seats – careful to kneel lightly on the thousands of pieces of safety glass – and placed two fingers gently on Tony's neck. He was alive but still completely motionless.

Two paramedics dropped to their knees outside the car to tend to Jack, but a third one from a second ambulance leaned in Tony's smashed window. "Ma'am, are you all right?"

"Yes. I think so... but my daughter's covered in blood. She says she doesn't feel hurt but I'm worried. And... and this is Tony... he hasn't regained consciousness since the crash."

"Okay. This here is Julie... she's going to come back there to assess your daughter."

Julie came around to the open door where Kate was backing out of the seat. "Let me just check her over. I won't be long."

Kate nodded. "I'm going to stay right here, Shannon. This lady needs to come in there to help you, okay?" When the girl nodded again, the actress could see the fear in her daughter's beautiful, innocent eyes. It sent a jolt of pain through her heart and that feeling made her realize she needed to call her wife. CJ would want to be with them. As soon as she had the chance – and found a phone – she would make the call. She stood up straight and surveyed the scene. What the hell had happened? She turned to her right and saw someone from the other black Mercedes arguing with a security guard. He seemed to be screaming that he must get his boss into the studios to safety. His 'boss' was nowhere to be seen so she presumed he was still hiding inside his vehicle. Her attention was drawn to Jack, who was now being rushed into a waiting ambulance but she couldn't really see him due to the amount of people around his stretcher. She could tell he wasn't doing well though. One paramedic seemed to be attempting CPR.

Still staying in full view of her daughter, she stood on tip-toes to see over the car and noticed the other EMT talking to someone. Relief seeped through her when she realized Tony was awake but the look on the EMT's face didn't bode well for the young man. Ducking back down, she saw the driver's deep hazel eyes. "Tony... are you okay?"

"Kate... thank God you're all right. I... I couldn't get out of the way in time... I'm sorry..."

"Hey..." She reached in and took his hand. "Don't you dare apologize... I'm just happy to see you awake."

"Shannon...?" the young man heaved.

"I'm okay, Tony," came a small, quivering voice from the back of the car.

Tears streamed down Tony's face, perhaps a combination of relief and pain as he winced and grasped onto his leg.

The female paramedic crawled out of the back seat and turned to Kate. "Your daughter seems fine but I want her taken to the ER on a stretcher. It's procedure. I need to check you over too. Once we get her out, I'll take a look at you in the back of the ambulance."

"Thank you." When the EMT walked away, her male colleague stood up and made way for two firefighters. Kate frowned – having not even noticed them arriving – and looked closer at Tony.

He was trapped under the steering wheel and on even closer inspection she saw the front of the driver's side doorframe was buckled and had his leg in a tight grip against the seat. "Oh, Tony..."

"I'm okay... I'll be out soon," the brave young man assured. Kate wasn't convinced and held her hand to her forehead as the tension mounted.

What seemed like an eternity later, the EMT's had expertly removed Shannon from the car and had her secured to a stretcher with a brace fitted around the girl's body and neck. Kate didn't want to leave Tony on his own but there was no way she was leaving her daughter. As they entered the rear of the ambulance, another siren could be heard and when an unmarked Dodge Charger with blue and red lights flashing from the front grill and back passenger shelf came screeching to a halt, a highly agitated FBI agent leapt out followed by Assistant Director Mark Mulroney.

Sam Morris had heard something about the incident – through the super-information-highway that was Olympian – and contacted the field office. She had deliberately called the AD, knowing that if she told CJ over the phone, the agent would have a fit. Mark had somehow managed to get the tall woman out of the office and up to the location without mentioning Kate's name. As the local law enforcers cordoned off what was now a crime scene, he realized that not fully informing his agent had been a mistake as she charged full force and full of fear over to the very familiar black Mercedes.

* * * * *

"Oh God... where... where are the occupants of this car?" CJ shouted, seeing only a brightly-colored protective cover over the driver's seat. The firefighter turned briefly and pointed to the ambulance before returning to the task of planning where he was going to cut through the metal in order to get Tony out.

CJ couldn't process more than his pointing finger and almost knocked over a couple of cops as she ran to the back door of the medical vehicle. Seeing her wife sitting upright made her almost collapse on the spot. Her legs momentarily gave way but she quickly grabbed onto the open door to steady herself. Then she saw Shannon on the stretcher and her fear returned. "Katie?!"

"CJ..."

The agent jumped into the ambulance and held her wife's outstretched hand as she sought out the face of her daughter. Relieved to see the girl's eyes open, she spoke softly. "Hey, Squirt..."

"Mommy... I don't like it in here."

“I know... but these people want to make sure you’re not hurt inside, so you need to go to the hospital. You need to stay very still. I know you’ll be brave for me and Mama... it’ll be okay...” she choked as tears filled her eyes.

“Don’t cry, Mommy.”

The agent sniffed. “I won’t... just be strong for me, okay?”

“Uh-huh.” Shannon curled her small fist around her Mommy’s fingers and CJ slipped her free arm around Kate’s shoulder.

The agent saw the remnants of the blood trail on Kate’s face. Thankfully, she hadn’t seen the blood on Shannon due to the braces and blankets covering the girl. CJ gulped and touched a finger to her wife’s cheek. “Are you...?”

“I’m fine... really.” The blonde kissed her lips to reassure her. “Honey... I’ve been checked over and taking Shannon into the ER is just procedure. She says she has no pain at all... but they want her thoroughly examined.” She looked deep into her wife’s eyes, knowing that CJ would be terrified inside. “Can you please go and be with Tony? He’s all alone over there and I can’t leave Shannon.”

CJ’s mind caught up to what Kate was saying. “Oh no... he’s still in the car?”

“Yes, honey... he’s under that blanket right now.”

The agent followed Kate’s eyes and her stomach unpleasantly flipped over. “I... I’ll go... but I... I’ll be at the hospital as soon as I can...”

“I know. I love you. Now go... they’re about to start cutting.”

CJ squished her face carefully in between the straps of the head and neck restraints and placed a soft kiss on Shannon’s nose. Standing up and kissing the top of her wife’s head, she unwillingly left the ambulance. As she quickly strode over to the wreckage, she realized Kate was right, that this was definitely the right thing to do. That was Tony in there... one of their best friends and someone they loved. And Kate had said she and Shannon were okay. Yes, she could do this.

After a brief and rather heated discussion, the Fire Chief realized that the Special Agent wasn’t going to take no for an answer and allowed her to climb into the passenger side of the car. CJ ducked under the blanket and sat down. “Hey, man...”

A very pale Tony opened his eyes. “CJ... when did you... how?”

“Never you mind... just focus with me, okay? They’re gonna start cutting the car... we’re getting you out of here...” the agent said, taking his hand.

“I’m so sorry, CJ...”

“Hey... how the hell could this be your fault? I saw the car, Tony. That Ferrari hit you from the side... nothing you could've done.” Just as she said it, she realized that the Ferrari was probably Jack's and her inner vicious warrior fought to get out. She was ready for another round in the ring with Mr. Bannerman. Grinding her jaws together, she pushed down her anger and refused to jump to any conclusions. Her thoughts were soon drowned out by the loud machine grinding through the Mercedes. As the skilled Firefighter methodically began his task, the car groaned and creaked under the stress. Shards of loose glass sprinkled onto the top of the protective blanket and Tony grimaced at the movement, feeling it intensify his injury. “Look at me, Tony.”

The young driver did so and CJ forced a smile. He gripped her hand tighter as a shrieking snap signified that part of the roof had been freed. A sudden siren was heard and as it got further and further away, CJ hoped it wasn't the vehicle her family was in. ‘*No,*’ she told herself, ‘... *they were okay. It's not them... otherwise I can't do this.*’ She concentrated back on Tony. She talked calmly to him throughout the extraction and stayed with the young man until he was wheeled into the ER.

Due to the crime scene being on the junction of Warner Boulevard, and studio 26 being on a dead end section of the street, nobody from inside the compound could get out. CJ ducked outside the hospital for a minute and called Mark – knowing Cyn would have been waiting for Kate – and asked him to find the make-up artist to let her know everyone was alive.

The AD had remained at the scene and when he found out about the shooting, he called Jamie and Mikey to assist him. The area was now crawling with police and crime scene investigators. Agent Carson didn't know yet that someone had shot at her wife's car... and they weren't looking forward to her finding out.

* * * * *

CJ located her family and when her spouse rushed into her arms, she held her like there was no tomorrow. Repeatedly kissing her hair, head and cheeks, the agent chanted in a whisper that she loved Kate. The smaller woman sunk into the contact and clung as tightly as she could until the doctor came out of Shannon's cubicle. “Mrs. Carson?”

“Yes,” both women replied together.

The doctor looked between them until his awareness kicked in. “Your daughter's going to be fine but I'd like to keep her in for observation, just for a few hours. The scan showed no internal damage but the EMTs told me she was unconscious?”

Kate wiped her damp eyes. “She seemed to be... but only for a couple of minutes.”

“Okay. I see no problems but if she complains of headaches at all, bring her back in. She might have a whiplash injury so her neck may get stiff tomorrow... but she doesn't have any obvious head trauma at all. I think the airbags saved her a good deal of pain.”

CJ was still staring at the man and didn't seem inclined to speak. Kate thanked him and when he left, she touched the agent's face. "Hey... she's okay."

"You're both okay. I've never been so scared in my life." She kissed Kate's forehead again. "Let's go see her."

When Shannon saw her parents, she smiled. "I could hear you talking to each other." She reached out her arms and both women smothered her in hugs and kisses. "Can we go home yet?"

Kate sighed lightly. "Not yet. They just need to do a few more checks. Then after that... we can go see Tony."

"Did he get hurt?"

Kate looked to her wife for the answer and CJ tried to hide her concern. "Yes, honey. The doctors are fixing him right now." What she didn't say was that Tony had gone straight into surgery to try and save his crushed leg.

Kate bit her lips and squeezed Shannon's hand before turning to her wife. "We'll be fine here, CJ. Please go find out what happened and..." the blonde paused, not sure if she should say the next part, "... check on Jack?"

CJ's eyes became stormy and she once again forced back her anger. "I'll let you know how he is." With that, she kissed the two precious souls and left the cubicle. She found out that Jack was also in surgery. They wouldn't tell her much more at this point so she still didn't know there had been a shooting. CJ related the limited information to her wife and tried to reassure the actress before she left. Kate seemed to be taking everything very calmly and CJ figured the shock might lift later and the blonde would realize the full extent of her distress. But she also knew Kate was incredibly strong and resilient, and was no doubt coping with all this better than she was. The agent forced herself to leave the hospital, knowing that her family would wait for her to come pick them up. She didn't plan being at work for very long today.

* * * * *

Back at the scene, Mulroney had organized his team and spoken with the cop in charge, making sure the man knew he was not there to take over the investigation but would be working it alongside them due to the possible link to an existing case. The area was being marked and photographed by crime scene investigators and Mark had sent Jamie and Mikey to assist with the witness statements – and to forward CJ's message to Cyn. All vehicles in the immediate area of the crash had been 'seized' by the police and remained where they had been during the incident – including Kate's Mercedes, minus its roof and driver's door. A Be-On-the-Look-Out alert had been put out for the shooter's car but they only had a vague description of it so far. A second cordon had been placed at the point where the vehicle had swerved into Jack's Ferrari before the impact, making the temporary single lane of traffic on South Avon Street wind through the cones like a chicane.

Special Agents Green and Ryan entered the Olympian Studios stage 26 lot and were met by a group of people who had gathered in the parking area. In the middle of the crowd was Cyn, clutching her phone to her chest and Sam, clutching at her heart when she saw her lover.

The redhead ran over to the agents but stopped short of hugging Jamie, knowing her partner was on duty. “What happened? Is Kate okay? Oh God, Jamie... I’m so worried...”

Jamie stood holding the woman’s shoulders. “They seem to be okay. Kate, Tony and Shannon were in the car and from what I’ve heard so far, Jack wasn’t hurt in the crash but... he’s at the hospital too. I think Tony’s going into surgery but don’t quote me on that. I have no idea what’s going on. There’s too much to piece together right now so I’m going to interview the witnesses. I need you to keep Cyn calm for me.”

Sam looked round to see the make-up artist with blackened mascara tears running down her cheeks and an incredibly worried look on her pasty face. “I will...”

“How come you’re not over at the Phoenix lot?”

“I, uh... they’ve only closed off the junction to vehicles and they’re only keeping the people at stages twenty five and twenty six inside. I managed to come in through the side door of the warehouse... over there. I know these lots like the back of my hand, Jamie.”

“I guess you do.” Jamie turned to wave Tony’s girlfriend over.

Cyn came shuffling across the lot at speed and immediately asked the inevitable question. “Are they okay?”

“Seems like it. Sam will update you... I need to go,” Jamie said with a half-smile and a pat to Cyn’s back.

Mikey followed his colleague to the small catering room where the police had set up a holding area for the witnesses. There were about fourteen people in all and some were sitting at individual tables being interviewed by cops. The others were waiting their turn. The cafeteria staff dutifully lingered behind the counter and the few customers had been evacuated a short time ago to make way for the officers. While Jamie approached the cop who seemed to be organizing the others, Mikey headed for the official-looking man who was flanked by two bricks... the bricks being his bodyguards. “Sir? I’m Special Agent Ryan with the FBI. May I speak with you?”

“Agent Ryan,” the man nodded, shaking Mikey’s hand. “I didn’t know the Feds were here.”

“Yessir... we need to take statements about the shooting.”

“Ah. I already spoke with the police officer over there but I’ll tell you what I know,” the handsome gentleman nodded. He pulled out a chair and gave a slight hand signal to his two staff. The bodyguards backed away and remained at a respectable distance.

Mikey opened his notebook. "Can I have your name, please?"

"Senator Andrew Riley."

Agent Ryan wrote the name down, followed by the answers to a few more rudimentary questions. "Can you tell me what you saw happening out there?"

The Senator gave him a full account of his view of events. The man sighed as he got to the end of his story. "I'm really not happy at the way my guards handled this. I mean, those poor people were suffering and that man got shot, and all they could do was restrain me in my own damn car and try to drive off. As soon as the threat to my life is over, they are fired." He shrugged at the agent's raised eyebrow. "I need them right now... they're good at protection."

Mikey nodded. "What's the threat? Is it to do with this interview? Or your politics?"

"Neither actually." Andrew shook his head regretfully. He leaned in close to the young man and lowered his voice. "About six months ago, I was at one of those high class functions full of businessmen and many politicians. I unfortunately overheard... and saw... something I shouldn't have. A major player in a drug smuggling ring was having a heated discussion with someone I knew and I had to report what I heard. The politician... dirty politician... seemed to have knowledge of this man's business so I had to make sure my initial call and subsequent contact with the police was kept classified. I wouldn't allow witness protection because my identity was being kept under wraps so I didn't think I needed it... and I also have a campaign to run. The drug smuggler was a real big wig... international... under investigation by the FBI and the DEA actually... and has now been arrested. Problem is... he has loads of people on the outside. I have no idea how they found out about me but they have. This is the third attempt they've made to... silence me."

At that point, Jamie approached from behind the Senator and when her colleague looked up, she spoke. "Could I speak with you for a moment, Agent Ryan?"

"Of course..."

"Jay?"

For the first time, Jamie looked at the man Mikey had been speaking to. The color drained from her face and her stomach fell to the floor. She hadn't seen him in so long and didn't know how to act. After a moment frozen in time, full agent mode kicked in and she gave the man a single nod. "Senator Riley... please give us a minute?"

A fleeting look of pain swept across Andrew's face at the detached way she'd spoken, and Mikey saw it before excusing himself and getting up. Once they'd walked a few paces away, he faced his colleague. "What just happened? You know that guy?"

Jamie swallowed uncomfortably but didn't answer the question. "What did he see?" Mikey told her what information he had gathered so far and she sighed. "Okay... I need to speak to the boss. Go continue with your interview, Ryan."

"But-" Jamie walked away quickly, leaving a confused look on Agent Ryan's face. Slow realization filled his eyes. "D'uh, Mikey... she knew his name... of course she knows him." He shook his head to chastise himself and went back to the Senator to conclude his statement.

Chapter 5

When CJ arrived back at the scene, she looked at the vehicles more carefully. She couldn't linger on Kate's car for long before her stomach threatened to rebel. The blood on the remainder of the car window where she knew Shannon had been sitting was enough to make her head spin. '*Blood...?*' She frowned deeply at the positioning of the spatter. '*On the outside of the car...?*' Her mind finally clicked into investigative mode and she soon saw two bullet holes. Her eyes widened and she spun on her heels to scan the rest of the site. Seeing a cop measuring distances and analyzing tire marks, she shouted him over. "CJ Carson... I'm with the Bureau. Can you tell me what happened here? I thought it was only a car crash?"

"Uh no, the crash came first... seems Mr. Bannerman was possibly forced off the road and his car..." he pointed to the Ferrari that sat crumpled behind him, "... hit the black Merc there. But after that happened, another vehicle pulled up and shots were fired at Miss Marshall's car."

CJ tried to process what he was saying without throwing up all over the man. Someone shot at her family? She tried to suppress her anxiety-filled mind and stick with her line of questioning. "So... how did Jack... Mr. Bannerman get shot?" she asked, tension creasing her eyebrows.

"He got out of his car after the impact and went to help the people in there," the man said, flicking his head towards the roofless wreck. "Apparently, he was standing in front of the Merc when he got shot. That's all I know so far..."

"Thanks." CJ walked away and again forced her mind into full agent mode otherwise she'd break down and cry. She ducked under the cordon tape and headed for the small temporary-looking building with cops standing at the door. Seems she spent her working life ducking under that tape and she frowned heavily. Seeing Jamie coming toward her refocused her mind and she approached the fast-walking woman. "Agent Green..." Jamie didn't break her stride. "Hey... where you going?" No response and CJ checked the area around her. Since nobody was within earshot, she tried again. "Penfold? What's wrong?"

Jamie stopped walking and quickly stepped over to her friend. "I can't be involved in the investigation... conflict of interest. I need to speak with Mark."

“Jamie, I have a *huge* conflict of interest. Seems my wife might have been a fucking target but Mark knows better than to try and pull me off this.”

“Kate wasn’t the target... she just got caught in the line of fire. I’m so sorry, CJ.”

The tall agent looked at her with a frown. “Why are *you* sorry?”

“Because my father was in that other fucking car... seems *he* was the target,” Jamie growled.

“Father?”

“Yes. Senator Riley... he’s had two attempts on his life so far. According to Mikey’s notes, this is the third. The Senator’s here for a supposedly secret recording of an interview. Nobody was meant to know the date or time.”

“Shit.” CJ scratched her head. “Is he a target because he was going to reveal something in the interview? I mean, I don’t know anything about him but...” she shrugged.

“I don’t know... I didn’t catch that part...”

“Jamie, I need you with me on this. Please don’t tell Mark until later... and please don’t leave me right now...”

The blonde agent looked into her friend’s eyes and could see she was scared. Others wouldn’t see it but she was one of the few who could. “Okay... okay, let’s go back in.”

Jamie stood in the background while CJ asked the Senator to reiterate what had happened. He was only too happy to tell his story and occasionally glanced at his daughter while he spoke. The rest of the statements had been taken and now Jamie waited, shifting from one foot to the next, only remaining there in support of her best friend. Finally, CJ stood from the table and shook the Senator’s hand. She approached the blonde and raised her eyebrows in empathy. “He wants to speak with you...”

Jamie shook her head vehemently. “I can’t...”

The Senator saw the response and CJ discreetly backed up when he came and stood in front of his daughter. “Jay... I just want to talk...”

Jamie looked at her feet. “I’m working... and I don’t really know what to say.”

“I’m just so happy to see you... and you’re a Federal Agent. I’m so proud of you, Jay.”

The blonde looked up and searched her father’s eyes. “Proud?”

“Yes. And you look so... so healthy and beautiful-“

“Compared to when I was a partying slut... is that what you mean?”

“Honey, I never, ever thought that about you. Your mother and I... we were just worried about where your life was headed... I guess we didn't handle things in the best way but...” He held his hands out in front of him in a hopeless gesture.

“I knew I was a disgrace to you-“

“No! Never... but when you were attacked and you just left us... I didn't know what to think anymore.”

“I was ashamed... and I knew you expected better...” Jamie gulped and held up her hand when the Senator was about to protest. “Listen, I don't have time for this right now but... but maybe we could talk later?”

“Yes... please.” Andrew reached into his pocket. “Here's my card... although I think your colleague there is forcing me into protective custody now... so I might not be able to use my phone.”

Jamie saw CJ loitering nearby to keep an eye on her and she felt a surge of love for her friend. Even in the middle of CJ's obvious anguish, she was still concerned for the blonde's wellbeing. “I would listen to her if I were you... and do as she says. She's the best FBI agent I've ever known.”

“That's good enough for me. The number on that card will be useless then... you'll know where to find me.”

The blonde agent nodded and held out her hand. After the Senator shook it – swiftly rubbing his thumb over the knuckles before he let go – she left him, heading over to CJ to continue with her work. Andrew's melancholy eyes showed a spark of hope... hope that he could get to know his daughter again. He couldn't believe he'd found her.

* * * * *

Two hours later at the hospital, all of Shannon's results had come back and the girl was given the all clear. Kate now sat in a clinical ER corridor with her unusually quiet daughter on her lap, the girl's small head neatly tucked under her chin. They were both exhausted. She had called home and told Alice of the morning's events. The young woman had already heard from Ethan and assured the actress not to worry about Lucy. Apparently, the information about the crash and subsequent shooting had filtered through to the necessary people.

Kate rocked back and forth to comfort Shannon as she waited for news about Tony. The last update she'd received was that the driver's leg had been saved. After assessing the blood vessels and nerves, they were now re-setting the break and trying to fix up the ripped muscle and skin as best they could. Her thoughts turned to Jack. She hadn't heard anything about his condition and wondered if the man had any next of kin. She considered that even though she had worked with

him for a while now, she didn't know much about him... apart from the obvious fact that he had been a nightmare to deal with since he'd joined the Deadline cast. He had done so many small and not so small things to hurt Kate and she just couldn't figure the guy out.

Her thoughts were interrupted when Shannon quietly said, "Mommy." The girl's hand pointed along the corridor and Kate looked up to see her wife gliding towards them.

"Hey, you guys. I brought some juice and sandwiches," the tall woman said, sitting down close to her spouse.

"Thank you, honey."

Shannon sat upright and fingered the paper bag. "What kind, Mommy?"

The taller woman lifted her daughter onto her lap and gently hugged her while doing a quick check of the small face and arms, and running her hand over the girl's body just to make extra sure she was all there and in one piece. "I brought you cheese 'n' ham..."

"My favorite!" The girl dug into the bag, snagged a carton of apple juice and waited for CJ to hand her the correct sandwich.

The agent offered another one to her wife but Kate wasn't hungry and refused the snack. "Try and eat something, Katie."

"I can't... not until I hear from Tony's surgeon."

CJ nodded. "Okay." She sat with her family while Shannon ate her late lunch, watching the people pass by and go in and out of various rooms.

A short time later, a very tall man – he must have been a good six foot five – came out of the secure door opposite them with a surgeon's mask hanging round his neck. He mopped his brow with a handkerchief. "Kate Carson?"

"Yes... that's me."

"Ah... hello. Mr. Wilkinson made me promise to update you when I was done," he smiled.

"How is he?"

"He's fine. His leg will be in plaster and he'll need plenty of rest. He'll be on crutches and he'll need a fair bit of physical therapy. How long, will depend on how determined he is to get well. His recovery could take up to six months. The leg was badly broken and the crushing injury made it all the more complicated but I'm sure he'll have no permanent disability. He's coming out of the anesthesia now."

"It's... good to hear you think he'll make a full recovery. Thank you, Doctor."

CJ also stood, lifting her daughter with her. “When can we see him?”

“Shouldn’t be too long now... just sit tight and I’ll have the nurse come get you when it’s time.” He turned to go and paused. “Oh... do you know where I can find a Miss Hart?”

“She’s not here yet. I’ll be sure to tell her when I see her,” Kate said. “We’re all good friends.”

“Ah... fine. Thank you.”

Once he’d left, they sunk down on the seats again and waited. CJ wrapped her arm around Kate’s shoulders. “Told you he’d be fine. He was so brave when they were pulling him out of the car.”

“I’m just so relieved. He saw the Ferrari coming at us and tried to avoid it.” Kate blew out a breath. “I just can’t believe we got out of all that... with our lives.”

“I can’t even think about that. To say I’m relieved is such an understatement...”

Kate turned her head and gave CJ a quick kiss on her neck. “Honey... when you came into the cubicle earlier... my mind was so preoccupied. Did they not give you any details about Jack’s injuries?”

“No... they said they couldn’t be more specific...”

“I saw... I saw Jack when he...” She gulped at the memory and moved closer to CJ’s ear so that Shannon wouldn’t hear. “...all the blood.”

CJ pushed back and caught Kate’s gaze. “We’ll talk about everything tonight. And I’ll know more by then too... okay?”

The actress nodded back. “Was someone trying to hurt us...?”

“Why do you ask, honey?”

Kate brought her voice to a whisper. “It looked like Jack was... shot?” CJ didn’t want to answer. They did need to talk about it but a single nod was all she gave for now. The actress bit both her lips. “But why...?”

“You were just in the wrong place at the wrong time...”

Kate stared momentarily before she nodded and gripped her wife around the waist. Shannon reached a hand out to her and she took it, kissing the small knuckles and giving her daughter a reassuring smile. Her tired eyes wandered until they landed on a spot on the dull hospital floor tiles. She just wanted to go home... after she had seen and spoken to her driver.

* * * * *

Seeing Tony awake and trying to smile – although it came out more like a grimace – gave Kate the boost she needed to stay positive about his condition. She leaned over the bed and hugged the driver very carefully. CJ stood back and held Shannon but the young girl wanted to kiss her buddy and when Tony nodded his acceptance, the agent suspended her daughter over him until she could peck him on the cheek.

“You still look a little dazed. Want us to come back later?” the blonde said, squeezing his hand.

“No... I’m glad to see some friendly faces. I was so worried about you guys.”

“We’re fine. Shannon got the all clear...”

“Good. I was... scared. I tried to move the car but...”

CJ remembered the tire marks and some information she’d gotten from one of the cops. “Tony... you *did* move the car... about two feet actually. That’s why the majority of the Ferrari impacted your door and not Shannon’s. I’d say you saved us from a *lot* more heartache.” CJ’s throat closed up again. “Thank you,” she choked. Shannon’s head snuggled in under the agent’s dark hair, the girl seemingly understanding what her mother meant.

“I... I don’t know what to say...”

“I do,” Kate whispered. “But we’ll never be able to say thank you enough... so I think you should come to our house to recuperate. That way, we can help you...”

“Oh, I couldn’t impose...”

CJ narrowed her eyes. “No argument... unless you wanna take me on?” At Tony’s raised eyebrows, she let out a smirk. “I’ll set up the study for you. That way you won’t have to navigate any stairs. Your apartment’s on the fourth floor, Tony... and your building doesn’t have an elevator!”

The young man’s eyes flicked back and forth between his two employers. It sounded wonderful but he still felt like he would be intruding. “But I...” The looks firing back at him bordered on angry-maternal and he surrendered. “Okay... but we’ll talk about it a little more... later. I’m kinda fuzzy right now.”

“I know... so we’ll leave you to rest and get this tired girl home. Do you want us to call your parents?”

“No thanks, CJ... I’ll call them first thing tomorrow. If someone else calls, they won’t believe I’m okay...”

“All right... I’ll make sure Cyn knows where you are. I’m sure they’ll reopen the Boulevard soon and let her get the car out... if they haven’t done it already,” CJ said, letting him know why his girlfriend hadn’t arrived yet.

Tony nodded then remembered something else. “CJ?”

“Yeah?”

“P...A...C...”

The agent thought the man had really zoned out. “Tony?”

“The license plate... PAC... I didn’t catch the numbers but it made me think of 2-Pac so I... the car that tried to force Jack... off the road... that was the plate...”

The agent signaled to her wife to take hold of Shannon. She grabbed her notebook out of her pocket and went to the young man’s side. “So that *did* happen? You think it was deliberate?”

Tony nodded weakly. “I’d say so... there didn’t seem to be a reason for the Chrysler to swerve. I tried to observe as much as I could... like you were teaching me.”

“You’re amazing, Tony,” the tall woman said proudly. She jotted down what he had said so far. “Did you notice the color of the car?”

“Dark gray... windows were darkened... all dark. Driver had... melted face.” His heavy eyelids slowly closed. He’d be happy to rest now, knowing he’d remembered the info and the people he cared about were safe. Kate touched her wife’s shoulder and with only a look, told the agent it was time to go home.

* * * * *

Navigating the 405 freeway wasn’t much fun and while CJ slowed in a sea of red brake lights, she realized she’d taken the Bureau sedan from the scene and left Mark there without transport. A couple of seconds flashed by until she remembered he had *told* her to take it. Also, Jamie and Mikey had come to the scene, so he’d have a ride back to the office. *‘Jeez, my mind turns to mush when my family’s involved in these things...’*

Kate had been pretty quiet since they left the emergency room but when the agent chanced a quick glance to the back seat, she saw her wife had a tired but somehow contented look on her face, most likely from relief at the outcome of today’s drama. The blonde did still look a little preoccupied though, and CJ suspected she was thinking about how it had all unfolded and how Jack was fairing under the surgeon’s knife.

Shannon also sat in silence holding her Mama’s hand tightly as they traveled. CJ’s heart lurched. Having a family in a situation like this brought out a whole different level of emotional stress for the tall woman, but in her soul she knew she wouldn’t trade it for anything in the world. She felt

a massive swell of protectiveness for them all and would no doubt spend the next few weeks phoning Kate every two seconds to make sure things were all right.

Once they were back at the farmhouse, Alice offered to stay and help out but Kate wanted the house to herself to spend some quiet time with her children. She assured the child-minder she would still get paid and sent her home with a hug and a thank you.

As CJ was preparing to leave again, she sought out her wife and wrapped her taller body around the blonde. "I have to go... but I'll find out exactly what happened, Katie, then I'll come home as soon as I can and we can curl up together and talk."

Kate breathed in CJ's scent as she rested her face at her partner's collarbone. "That would be good. I want you with us but I also want you to find out who fired the shots."

"We think we know who was responsible, honey," she said in a low voice, kissing the blonde head to soften the words.

Kate looked up. "Who?"

"Looks like it was a few drug runners who were trying to silence a key witness in their boss' Supreme Court trial..."

"But...?" Kate shook her head.

"There was a Senator in the other Merc... they were trying to kill him," the agent whispered. When her wife's bottom lip started trembling, she knew it was frustration and hurt. They'd been caught in the crossfire of someone else's fight and it just wasn't fair. CJ pulled her closer again. "Hold it together for a while longer, Katie... and I will too. I need to go back to work. I promise I'll talk to you about everything tonight." She kissed the blonde locks again. "I love you... so much."

"I love you too," Kate said shakily. "Will you be able to come see Tony with me this evening? I think they said we could visit again at eight..."

"Definitely... I'm not letting you go alone, that's for damn sure. I promise I'll be back before then." Lucy and Kamali came into the hallway and CJ hugged her tiniest daughter before going into the living area and hugging Shannon who was lying on the couch watching Arctic penguins on the Discovery Channel. Just before the agent left, she told Kate she would retrieve their things from the Mercedes since it had been impounded by the FBI and with yet another hug to her spouse, CJ closed the door securely behind her. She sat in front of her home in the Bureau sedan and took a deep breath in an attempt to relax. It didn't really work so she growled as she took off down the driveway.

* * * * *

When CJ got back to the office, she was puzzled to see a large cardboard box sitting on her desk. Jamie came up behind her in the doorway. “Hey, DM.”

CJ jumped. “Oh... hey. What’s that?”

“I already pulled all the stuff out of the car. Didn’t want you to have to see the wreck again unless it was absolutely necessary,” Jamie said, sitting down at her desk.

“Thanks, Penfold.” CJ also sat but she just stared at the box at first. “Where are the guys?”

“They’re still in Burbank collecting the camera footage... seems the shooter’s car can be seen pretty much the whole time from private security cameras on South Avon and a red light camera on the junction.”

“That’s good...” CJ said distractedly. She began digging inside the box and found Kate’s bag, her cell phone and a few other random things that were always lying in the car. A couple of items were broken and when she found Shannon’s coloring book, she gasped at the blood staining that had soaked through the pages. It reminded her that she could have lost one of her precious girls and she bit her lip to stave off the tears. Jamie appeared behind her and bent down to give her a quick hug. After a kiss to CJ’s head, the blonde went back to her desk without saying a word. CJ gave her a lop-sided grin then noticed the pile on the floor behind her friend – the children’s car seats. They both had a lot of blood spatter on them and Shannon’s was damaged. She curled her lips in her discomfort. “I’ll buy new ones.” A quick nod between the two women confirmed that they both agreed. Silence settled around them as CJ absorbed the reality of the day. She’d be glad when it was over.

* * * * *

Twenty minutes later, Eddie entered the office and CJ lifted her gaze from her computer. “Eddie... shit, I forgot you were here. How’s the upgrade going?”

“It’s pretty much done, CJ. I’ll finish it up once Mikey gets back but I don’t want to talk about that right now. Uh...”

The man looked really worried and the agent smiled. “Somebody told you, huh? Kate and Shannon are okay. They’re at home now.”

Eddie collapsed into a chair. “I was real worried. I tried to call her cell when everyone ran out of the office. All I knew was that something happened near the studios. Then... Agent Matthews, was it? He came in and told me it involved your wife. I guess he didn’t realize Kate was my sister.”

“Sorry... I should’ve-“

“No, CJ. You had too much to think about. As long as they’re okay...”

“They are.”

“Maybe I’ll forego my visit today...”

“Nah... wait ‘til I’m done here then we’ll go. Kate would want to see you,” CJ said, getting up to pour some bitter coffee. “Anybody want one?”

All three sat and drank quietly; only the intermittent tapping of computer keys and ringing of internal phone lines occasionally breaking the silence. It wasn’t long before Mark and Mikey walked in the door with evidence in hand.

The boss gave CJ an almost imperceptible nod of acknowledgement before he sat in Ethan’s empty seat. He hadn’t expected her to come back in. Mikey sat at his desk next to Eddie who was in the spare chair he’d used earlier, working on his laptop. The AD utilized Ethan’s computer and uploaded the footage, sorting the relevant camera views into the time frames required. It seemed to take forever and nobody spoke... so CJ’s coffee sips got faster and faster until she’d finished her drink – something she didn’t usually do with the crap office coffee. She wanted to see what had happened in Burbank but on the flip side of that, she really didn’t want to see her loved ones in danger. It was a toss-up. Her Special Agent side won out and she got to her feet. “Sir?”

“Almost done, CJ...” Mark shoved the mouse over the mat a few more times, clicking here and there until he stopped and looked over the top of the monitor. “Mikey, could you come and show me how to transfer this to the big screen?”

“Yes, Sir.”

CJ was baffled by that until she turned around to see where Mikey was going. Behind her on the wall next to their old reliable pin-board, was a very large flat-screen TV. She hadn’t even noticed it. “Whoa... where did that come from?”

Eddie smirked. “Part of your systems upgrade. You can view anything from any of the computers on that now... makes it easier to share info, right?”

“Uh, yeah... I like it... I mean, as long as I can keep my board too...”

Mark stood. “I wouldn’t dare take it away from you, CJ.” He started placing small evidence tubs on the desk, lining them up. “Mr. Marshall, could you go for a break... give us about fifteen minutes?”

“Sure... just gimme a call when you’re done.” Eddie nodded, knowing that they needed privacy.

“Thank you.” Once Eddie had left the room, the AD turned to his agents. “Mikey, take these down to the lab while I show the footage to CJ and Jamie, will you?”

“Yes, Sir...”

As the young man lifted the little evidence tubs and headed for the door, CJ stepped toward her boss. “Bullets...?”

“Yes. Only two recovered from the scene so far. One punctured the car’s back windshield and lodged in the pillar; the other one somehow missed everything when it went through one of the smashed window spaces, embedding itself in the wall across the street.” The tall agent’s face contorted and Mark patted her shoulder. “They’re still examining your Merc. Going by the holes in the metal and in that poor guy, it seems we have five shots fired in total. We’ll find them, CJ. I have an agent waiting at the hospital for the one that was lodged in Mr. Bannerman.”

When he trailed off and didn’t say anything else, CJ took a deep, deep breath and let it out slowly. “Only one in his body...?”

“Yes. The other was a through and through... they found it on the street. It’s in one of those tubs Mikey just took to the lab. I’m thinking the team will find the remaining bullets in the car’s structure somewhere.”

CJ’s mind and heart froze. The bullet that came out of Jack’s back would have passed right over Shannon’s head... and that must be what Kate had witnessed when she talked about all the blood she saw coming out of the actor.

Jamie, who had been listening in the background, handed her slightly pale friend another coffee which CJ took automatically. “Hey... let’s sit, DM.” The raven-haired woman dropped into her chair and Jamie propped herself on the corner of her friend’s desk to offer her moral support.

“Before we start...” Mark said thoughtfully, “... I should tell you that just as we were beginning to clear the scene, the press started crawling around. News teams... on the ground and in the air... got footage of the cars being removed and they’ll no doubt get the full story. It might be a good idea for you to call family... anyone who’ll worry. This will hit the headlines once they figure out who was involved.”

CJ just stared at him until she realized what he meant. She sometimes forgot she had a famous wife, and Jack had been a movie star before he joined the show. “I’ll do that once I’ve seen this,” she muttered, pointing at the screen “Thanks, Mark... uh, Sir.”

He grinned at her mistake but let it slide since only Jamie was there and he knew CJ had a lot to process. “Okay...” He clicked the button on the mouse and the highly technical looking display sprung to life. “This is the first time we see the shooter’s car...”

CJ nodded. “Tony said it was a Chrysler...” She watched as the car swerved violently into Jack Bannerman’s Ferrari. There was no obvious reason for it and as she watched further, she saw the impact. The Mercedes buckled and numerous airbags deployed in both cars. Glass shards blew out from the windows as the big black car was pushed to the side. She gasped – her eyes fixed to the screen – when she saw the dark Chrysler come back into view traveling in the opposite direction. It turned once again and came barging through traffic to stop near the accident. During this, Jack could be seen quite clearly running towards the black Mercedes and only seconds later,

turning around and shouting something to nobody in particular. He didn't duck out of the way like everyone else seemed to... he deliberately slammed his bulky body over the car. "Oh God..." The back window was shot through and a small plume of smoke rose from just above the rear wheel as the second bullet impacted. Then Jack's body jerked reflexively as he was shot... twice. CJ almost cried when she saw him claw at the smooth black metal and struggle to remain standing. He had tried to save her family. Maybe he *had* saved her family.

At this point, Mark paused the footage. "Want me to view this later, CJ?"

"No... no, I think I need to watch it. I want to know everything that happened..."

Mark looked at her with pride and not a little affection. He knew CJ would remain professional even when it tore her up inside. He restarted the file and they all watched Jack sliding to the ground. The black car in front of Kate's shot forward and seemed to shift back and forth a few times in an attempt to escape the area. The tight queue of traffic halted its movement and CJ seethed silently as she remembered the Senator's version of events. Her eyes widened when she saw Kate get out of the Mercedes with blood dripping down her face. When the agent got home, she would be examining every millimeter of her wife's head to triple-check the cut was superficial.

On the screen, Kate disappeared back inside the rear door of the car and the Olympian Studios guards arrived; one helping Jack, the other leaning in Tony's shattered window. CJ was amazed at the amount of people on the street that *didn't* come to help. She silently praised the few who did. The rest of the incident played out with CJ subtly swallowing the bile that wanted to work its way up from her stomach when her daughter was brought out and put on the stretcher, but somehow she managed to watch it all, appearing – on the outside – to be coolly detached from the whole thing. When CJ appeared on camera, the screen froze and she looked at Mark. "Can our new system zoom in on certain parts of that...?"

"Yep. It does a whole ton of stuff and as soon as Mikey comes back, he can give you a full run down. It's going to save a bucket-load of time if we can just zoom in on license plates or get still frames of faces without sending the footage to the techs. We have all the bells and whistles the other departments have now, including facial recognition..."

"That's gonna make our lives easier. I have a partial plate from Tony and his description of that car looks to be spot on. I wanna try and get a close up of the driver too," CJ said, tapping her pencil on her knee.

"What else did he manage to tell you?"

"I gotta be honest, Sir... I was so preoccupied with my family and Tony was so drugged up, that I wasn't even thinking about getting a statement from him. He was the one who told me what he could remember, but it was only bits and pieces and I'll make sure to get a full statement when he's more lucid. He did say that the driver of that Chrysler had a melted face... so I want to see a close up and figure out what he meant."

Mark leaned on Ethan's desk. He had also been very worried about his agent's family but would not be admitting that any time soon. "Could have been a mask..."

"Maybe..." CJ muttered, pulling thoughtfully on her bottom lip. Agent Ryan came back into the office and went to his seat. "Hey Mikey... can you work your magic and get me a close up of the driver?"

"Sure, CJ." The young man showed off his technical knowledge by finding the best angle from the two available cameras and producing a still image, zoomed in right through the windshield of the dark Chrysler.

CJ was about to commend his skills when the image was covered by a digital panel hosting a myriad of electronic levers and buttons. When the panel disappeared, the picture of the driver's face had been cleaned up considerably and it was as if CJ was seeing it for real. "Whoa... that was impressive. Way to go, Mikey."

"Once you get familiar with the system, you'll be doing that just as fast. Looks like an old-man mask..." Mikey said, pointing at the big screen.

CJ stood up close to the image. "It sure does. I can see why Tony thought it was melted... everything's sagging downwards."

"Okay... you guys continue what you're doing and get as much info as you can from this," Mark affirmed with a deep breath. "When you're done, send it all to me and I'll pass it on to the DEA and whoever else was dealing with the drug smuggling case. I'll go find out who that is right now but I do want us to keep a full report for ourselves too."

After Mark left, the three agents got together and pulled every relevant still from the footage. CJ lost count of the amount of times her back got a supportive slap when her injured family appeared on screen. An updated BOLO was distributed for the car after they cleaned up the image of the license plate and CJ wasn't surprised when it flagged up as stolen the previous week. They also found a red paint scrape on the front fender. It seemed to show the suspects had indeed hit Jack's Ferrari and the transfer would help them identify the correct Chrysler... if they ever found it.

* * * * *

Back at the house, Kate was doing a lot of thinking. She wasn't really taking in what was happening in Monsters Inc. but every time the girls giggled, she knew simply being there beside them was enough for her daughters to feel secure. As her mind wandered again, she considered all that today had brought and it confirmed to her that it was truly time for a change.

She thought about how much she had changed too. As a person, she had grown into something very different to her teenage self. She supposed everybody did but she was pleased to realize she no longer wanted the attention she had so desperately sought when she first came to LA looking for fame. It had all been part of a naïve and desperate craving to show her mother that she was

worthy of her love. It was evident Elizabeth was never going to change no matter what Kate did and the blonde knew now that she would never strive for that acceptance again.

In her heart she was profoundly grateful she had met CJ and developed into the person she was today. The agent had shown her that she was worthy of love without even trying to; that the attention the spirit needs does not come from the outside... it comes from within. As her thoughts fell deeper, she knew CJ *was* within her and vice versa. The inexplicable bond she had with her partner wasn't so much a change but a realization of her soul's needs and a rejoining with something she had known before. She knew without a doubt that those needs were the love and connectedness she had with her family; something that now filled her life and fed her being.

Forcing herself back to the surface, she looked at both children. Four feet lined the edge of the large couch cushions – one pair protruding farther than the other – and as the little toes wriggled and fidgeted, she smiled. *'Life happens the way it's meant to... and my life is here... that's what I want...'*

Remembering the rest of her extended family, she shuffled off the couch. "I'm just going to make a phone call..." she said when Shannon reached for her.

"But where are you going?" the girl said, still needing to have her mother close.

"I'll be right in the kitchen. I don't want to disturb Boo while she's coloring in..." Kate winked and looked at the television.

When Shannon chuckled and went back to watching the film, Kate opened the double doors wide and sat at the island unit with the phone handset. Once she'd hit the speed dial for her Dad's office, she gazed out the window to the idyllic, peaceful lake outside her home and waited for a reply.

"Good evening! This is Prescilla's... what can I do for you?"

The actress recognized those melodious tones. "Jeffrey! It's Kate..."

"Oh! Babycakes, how goes it over there in sunny LA?"

His question told Kate that he hadn't seen any news reports about the accident. "I'm just fine. Are you guys getting busy? Its dinner-rush time over there..."

"Oh! Yes... it's quite full tonight. You wait right there and I'll get your Dad. Love, love..." Jeffrey said, sending kissing noises down the line.

"Love you too." Kate waited for all of twenty seconds before her father spoke.

"Katie? Hello, sweetheart..."

"Hey, Dad... I just wanted to call you guys to tell you about today..."

“*What happened?*” Eddie said, immediately frantic.

“Uh... Dad, calm down... why do you think something happened?”

“*Oh honey, I’m your father. I know when your voice sounds like that... you’ve had a very rough day. Tell Dad?*”

“Well, I’ll start by saying we’re all alive and well...” And with that, she relayed all the information she could think of and repeated over and over that they were all going to be okay and that he shouldn’t worry when the headlines made it sound much worse. It turned into quite a long and emotional phone call.

Chapter 6

It had felt like such a long day but at 5.45pm, CJ was packing up to leave the office. Everything Mark needed had been hand delivered to him and it was time to go home. Eddie grabbed his bags and they headed down to the parking garage together. He had already offered to stay with his nieces while the two women went to the hospital to visit Tony, and CJ was very grateful for that since she didn’t want Shannon to revisit the place anytime soon.

When he arrived at the house, Eddie looked down the driveway but couldn’t see CJ’s truck anywhere. Suddenly, a burst of dust signaled that she had arrived and he watched her coming towards him. She jumped out and put her hands on her hips. “Speed much?”

“Don’t tell Kate... she’ll nag me for the rest of my life.”

“I will too! And you should know better than to do that with a Federal Agent trying to keep up with you!”

Eddie winced and after a short silence, he tried to identify the mischievous glint in the otherwise steely gaze but he wasn’t sure what to say. “Uhhh...”

“Hah! Gotcha!”

The man grumped and huffed as he headed up the porch steps, making CJ snicker to herself. They went indoors and found Kate in the kitchen on the phone to her favorite pizza place. The actress waved at CJ and when she saw her brother, she grinned widely. “Hi!” she squeaked before going back to her conversation with the eatery. “Can I add another pizza to the order, please?”

“*Of course. What else would you like?*” the person on the other end of the line asked.

“Hold on a sec... Eddie, you want a Mediterranean Magic?”

The tall man looked to CJ while picking up Lucy, who had welcomed her uncle with her customary leg hug. “Do I?” The agent nodded profusely and he turned back to Kate. “Yes!”

While the actress finished up her order and Eddie chatted with a rather excited toddler, CJ went looking for her other daughter. Popping her head round the door of the crèche, she saw Shannon sitting with a coloring book and crayons but the girl was staring sightlessly at the page. “Hey, Squirt... I’m home.”

Shannon looked up and smiled but it didn’t quite reach her blue eyes. “Hi, Mommy.”

“You okay, honey?”

As the agent crouched down, Shannon got to her feet. “Yes. I just remembered I was coloring in when I was in the car,” the girl said while automatically climbing onto her mother’s back.

CJ rose to her full height, cradling her precious load with both arms behind her. She looked over her shoulder. “Do you want to talk about that?”

Shannon leaned her chin on a convenient strong shoulder. “Mmm-no. I’m okay, Mommy. I just liked my coloring book...” She pointed to the low table. “That one isn’t so good.”

“Ah. Well, how about we go out and get you another copy of the good one?”

“Today?”

CJ began a slow walk into the kitchen. “No... but maybe tomorrow... if I can get home for a while.”

Kate heard her wife’s last sentence and once she’d placed the last plate on the table, she approached the twosome. “You’re going in tomorrow?”

“I have to, but I’m gonna get away for a long lunch...”

“We’re going to buy another coloring book!” Shannon announced from behind her Mommy.

“Well, good... I’m not going to work so maybe we can go shopping together.”

While Eddie Junior and Lucy were deeply involved in their most important of tasks – setting out the forks and ‘Finding Nemo’ napkins in preparation for the pizza’s arrival – CJ leaned in to kiss her wife. “This was supposed to be your first day back, hon. How long do you think they’ll give you?”

“I haven’t asked and I don’t care right now. I’m taking a day or two... they’ll just have to deal with it.” Kate shrugged. “Medical leave...”

CJ ran her tongue around her teeth and glanced at the large Band-Aid on the blonde's temple. "Sounds reasonable... talk later, yeah?"

"Yes... I've made some decisions. We have much to discuss." The actress put all her fingers to her lips and whirled her hands through the air before transferring the kisses to CJ and Shannon's cheeks.

The girl giggled. "So we can all go together tomorrow?"

"Sounds like it, Squirt," CJ nodded, sliding her daughter to the floor. As Shannon ran off, CJ pulled Kate to her. "If you really need me to be home, I'll tell Mark I can't-"

"No, honey... we'll be fine here."

"Hmm. Okay, but call me if you need me... I mean it."

"I will, darling..." Kate rose up on tip toes and pecked her wife on the nose. CJ decided that wasn't enough and ducked her head for a proper kiss. She lifted Kate briefly off her feet and finished with a soft suck on her bottom lip before releasing her. The blonde swallowed and caught her breath. "Love you..." she whispered.

"And I, you," CJ purred. A rather excited voice from the kitchen alerted them to the doorbell, breaking the warm physical connection for now. They both inhaled together and joined their family. It was time for pizza.

* * * * *

Two hours later, CJ and Kate were on their way to the hospital. The freeway was much clearer now and the blue Dodge Ram flowed unhindered on a very quiet middle lane. CJ rested one elbow on the armrest and listened to her wife humming along to the low music playing on the stereo. She smiled and as soon as she did so, the humming stopped. She realized Kate must have been watching her

"What you smirking at?"

"Moi?" the taller woman said, bringing her hand to her chest. "I didn't smirk... I smiled."

"You smirked... and I know why."

"You probably don't, actually. I thought you sounded really nice and I was smiling because you're here... with me... whole, alive... and safe." As the word 'safe' left her mouth, she scanned the road ahead and looked swiftly in each rear-view mirror, paranoid that something would happen to prove her wrong. Thankfully, everything was as it should be.

"Yes, I am." Kate squeezed her wife's thigh and felt the larger hand cover her knuckles. "We are safe, CJ. Plus the surgeon said he expected Tony to recover fully and I know he'll be determined

to do that... especially since he'll want to get back to his Special Agent training as quickly as he can," she winked. CJ snorted and kept her eyes on the road. "I... I'm a little worried about Jack, though. I know that sounds silly but--"

"Honey, it doesn't sound silly. I know the amount of compassion you have for others, how caring you are. Even though he's tried to hurt you so many times in the past, you'll still hope he's okay. And I know I don't like the guy but..." When CJ trailed off, Kate looked across at her.

"But...?"

"Katie... we watched footage of the crash and the shooting. Jack... deliberately stayed in the line of fire to protect you. In fact, he moved his body in front of Shannon's door just before the shots were fired." When she chanced a quick glimpse at her spouse, she saw Kate's mouth hanging open.

"He... did that?"

"Yes. He might have saved you... saved our daughter and as much as I hate the guy, I'm hoping he's gonna be okay."

Kate was dumbstruck. "I... well... can we check on him when...?"

"Of course we can." CJ signaled to change freeways. "I love you, Katie."

The actress gazed at her for a few seconds, still a little in shock that Jack had done something selfless. "I love you too, honey." The rest of their trip was held in silence, each of them reflecting on the day's events and on the mind-boggling conundrum that was Jack Bannerman.

* * * * *

Kate laughed out loud at Tony's unexpected request for her to autograph his full-leg plaster cast. The actress took the pen he handed to her and tapped it against her lips while she thought of something to write. CJ sat and munched on some grapes while Tony lay, arms crossed, waiting for his boss to get on with it. He was still on heavy painkillers and had a slightly unfocused glint in his eyes but he was smiling so neither woman was worried.

"Okay..." Kate finally announced. Leaning one hand on the hospital bed, she wrote a short message on the white plaster, finishing it off with a kiss.

Tony leaned forward to try and read the words. "Aw, Kate... you should've written it upside down so I could read it..."

Kate chuckled. "Sorry, Tony. I never thought of that. I was too busy trying to be a smart ass... and failing miserably."

“Lemme see...” CJ’s curiosity got the better of her and she stood up to read it out loud. “Good luck in your recovery. In my business they say break a leg but you’ve already done that.” She made kissy noises as she read the x’s at the end. “Oh, Katie... really?”

“What? He appreciates my sense of humor... don’t you, Tony?” The driver nodded drunkenly and Kate suppressed her smile.

“He’d appreciate anything right now... even our crappy Star Trek jokes... he’s totally out of it.”

The actress chuckled. “Are you real sleepy now, Tony?”

“Mm-hmm...”

“We’ll come back and see you tomorrow night. Get some rest.”

Tony’s eyes drifted shut and after two kisses to his forehead, the women left the room. As they walked hand in hand along the corridor toward the nurse’s station to enquire about Jack, a tall redhead wearing a white doctor’s coat made a bee-line right for them.

“Excuse me,” she said to the blonde. “Are you Kate Marshall?”

“Uh, yes...?”

The doctor took in the uncertain look on Kate’s face and held her hands up. “Sorry, I recognized you but that’s not why I approached. Mr. Bannerman woke up about twenty minutes ago and he’s been asking for you.”

“Oh? How is he?”

“I’m afraid I can’t say much at this point but we did all we could for him. I’m waiting for his brother to fly in from Oregon so if you want to see him, you can pop in through there...” she pointed to a set of double doors marked ‘Critical Care’. “He’s in the third room on the right.”

“Okay... thank you,” Kate nodded, grasping tighter onto CJ’s hand.

As they walked through the doors, the agent’s voice was quiet. “She kinda told us plenty there, Katie...”

“I know... they did all they could... it doesn’t sound like it was enough.” Kate walked into the actor’s private hospital room with CJ following silently behind. She looked at the man in the bed and her stomach turned over. He didn’t look good at all. Kate could see he was wired up to just about every type of machine the hospital had and a tube dropped from under his sheet, disappearing below the bed. Occasional globules of blood traveled through it and the blonde’s eyebrows lowered. She reached behind her and felt CJ’s hand take hers once more. “Jack,” the blonde said gently, touching his shoulder with her free hand.

The big actor opened his eyes, his gaze eventually landing on a fuzzy figure standing by his bed. He blinked hard a couple of times and managed to focus much better. As Jack looked at the angel standing before him, he saw the light surrounding Kate. She was exuding love and compassion, goodness and forgiveness, and he saw for the first time what he could have had in a different lifetime. As he began to let go, his mind reached heights of spiritual realization and he wondered how many times he had met this perfect being, and screwed up much like he had done this time around. The feelings and thoughts washed freely over him. His arrogant self-absorption and undeniable stupidity flooded his soul and he realized he needed her forgiveness.

“Kate, I...” He was so weak he needed to take a breath. “I’m so sorry...”

“Don’t talk now, Jack-“

“No...” he gulped. “I have to talk... has to be...now.”

Kate turned to her wife and smiled before letting her larger hand go and settling on the edge of Jack’s bed. “So talk...”

CJ remained in the background, glad that the man hadn’t seen her yet. She wanted to hear what he was going to say. She wanted to continue hating him but as much as she searched for the feeling, she just couldn’t find it. He had protected her family when she wasn’t there to do it herself. A pang of irrational guilt went through her and she felt tears sting the back of her eyes. How could she be there to protect them every moment of every day? It was impossible. She had no way to predict the future, no way to know what would happen tomorrow or the next day, so she tried to shake off the nonsensical thoughts and stood silently to listen to the conversation.

“I need to tell you... why I drink... why I’m such an asshole. I see now... it took a bullet... but I see...” He paused and closed his eyes, his breathing deliberate and deep to try and regain his dwindling strength. “I made so many mistakes in my life... but the mistakes I made with you... were too much to bear... God, I was an idiot.”

Kate frowned and scratched her head. “Why was it too much to bear?”

“I started drinking... because I had no idea... what I was feeling... why I was feeling it. It felt... alien to me. I’ve never been in love before. Never... and I guess... I just couldn’t handle...” Jack reached for her hand and her initial response was to pull it away. She bit her lips and let him touch her... but only just. “See? You hate me... wasn’t my intention.”

“Jack, I don’t really understand what you’re saying?”

“You don’t... understand what? That I was a stupid ass because I... didn’t know how to be... in love?”

“Who are you in love with?”

“You...”

“Wha...?” The actress blinked a few times and couldn’t believe what she was hearing. “Jack... you have done so many horrid things to me. And this morning... but I... I just can’t comprehend what any of it has to do with love-“

“I’ll never be able to apologize enough... for what happened today...” he said weakly.

“Maybe not but I didn’t come here to talk about this anyway. I came to check on you and now that I’ve done that, I should go. We can talk when you’re well enough-“

“I’m... not going to be well enough, Kate...” Jack croaked as he sneered at a sharp pain somewhere deep within his body.

“I’m sure you will...”

“No... I’m not completely stupid... I... I can feel it... and I saw it in the doc’s eyes when I asked her if I... was going to be okay.” The actor was getting tired... uncontrollably tired. The room looked hazy to him as his eyes flitted in and out of focus. “Tell CJ I’m sorry...”

The agent was biting her lip in an effort to stifle her emotions. She had seen this too many times before. She knew he needed to try and make it right before it was too late, and somehow her anger melted away. She could never completely forgive him but she could allow him to see her without the rage he had always witnessed in her. “I’m here, Jack...” she said softly as she stepped forward. She slipped her arm around Kate’s shoulders and looked down at him with sad blue eyes.

He took a few seconds to find her face but when he did, he saw something old and familiar in it. He let a few tears fall... something he *never* did. He weakly lifted his hand and pointed to Kate. “Don’t... don’t ever let her go, CJ... ever... and please... I... I’m sorry.” He closed his eyes again. He couldn’t fight it any longer. “Sorry...”

CJ leaned down over his graying face. “Apology accepted,” she whispered.

His breath caught and his pulse raced, the only tell-tale sign being the quickening beeps of a nearby monitor. He used all his willpower to force his eyes open. CJ had moved back but he could still focus on her. She half-smiled and he was consumed by a sharp and ancient memory of that simple smile; sitting on a rock in the middle of a beautiful clearing... a mortal being... a one in a billion chance, she had said... so there *was* a chance. Maybe someday in some other lifetime that chance would come. Then he could see Kate with weapons in her hands and rage in her heart... a budding warrior... and she was so angry. Other images whipped through his mind and he soon saw himself standing in a field... a rifle in his hand, the smell of war in the air... CJ stood ahead of him again but her uniform was confusing to him. Another soldier with a bright head of hair lay on the ground... barely alive. Why was it always a battle? How many lifetimes had he known them?

Jack couldn’t grasp the feelings but the visions seemed so real. It could have been a cruel madness ravaging his body as he began to fade away and he gulped back an unusual swell of

emotion. He was so confused. What was it about these two women? He shifted his dark eyes from CJ to Kate and committed their faces to memory. He would never forget them. But for some reason, Kate was 'The One' this time. It was she who'd stolen his heart when he hadn't even realized he had one. Jack's dwindling brain put it all down to his growing, endless fatigue but he somehow knew these women would always be there in the end. One way or another, they came into his life and affected him greatly. His pleading, moist eyes were entranced by Kate's green orbs. "Forgive me..."

Kate knew he was slipping away now and her heart pounded uncomfortably in her chest. She wrapped her hand around his. "I forgive you, Jack. Completely..."

"You two... you belong together. Don't let her... tear you apart..." His eyes closed one more time and Kate knew he was talking about her mother. Tears spilled from her eyes as his head sunk into the pillow. His chest seemed to cave slowly and the room suddenly filled with alarms and flashing lights.

Kate stood abruptly as tears now flowed freely down her cheeks. CJ took her into her arms and they moved aside for the hospital staff who now rushed through the door. Somebody shouted, "Code blue!" and the agent guided her wife into the corridor, helped along by one of the nurses. "Please wait here," the woman said before disappearing back into the actor's room and closing the door behind her.

Kate clung to her soul mate as Jack's final words echoed in her ears. '*Don't let her tear you apart...*' The actress sniffed hard. "She could never tear us apart, Jack," she said aloud.

CJ tightened her hold and rested her mouth on Kate's hair. "Never, Katie... never. I love you."

As the blonde attempted to get her emotions under control, she turned her head and looked up at her one true love. She saw CJ's tears trickling down her face and when the agent's lips made contact with her forehead, Kate whispered. "I love you more..."

The noises around them blurred together and faded into the background. CJ wiped her face only to find it damp again in seconds. "It's not possible..."

"I... I beg to differ..." Kate stammered.

"Let's agree to disagree," the taller woman murmured as she kissed her love's salty skin. She knew they had just re-affirmed their bond in a moment of need; so simple yet giving each other so much. They stood on that same spot holding on for an amount of time they couldn't even quantify, both of them trying to reconcile their feelings about Jack but reassured by their profound love for one another. When the door finally opened, they knew it was over. Most of the staff left the room and as the doctor approached, CJ straightened up but didn't release her grip on Kate.

"He's gone," the tall redhead said with a sympathetic look.

Both women just stared at her for a few seconds before CJ spoke. “Thank you for letting us know...”

“It was good he had someone with him in his final moments. We’ll be waiting for his next of kin to get here before we move him.” The doctor smiled at Kate. “I watch the show, Miss Marshall. I’ll ask Mr. Bannerman’s brother to notify the studios when the funeral arrangements have been made.”

“That’s... that’s very thoughtful. Thank you,” Kate replied, keeping a firm hold of her wife. “Can I ask... was it complications from the gunshot...?”

The doctor could see the genuine concern in the blonde’s eyes and thought it couldn’t hurt to tell them what they wanted to know. “Yes... we did the best we could during the surgery but we just couldn’t stop the bleeding. There was too much damage so it was only a matter of time. I’m sorry for your loss.”

The actress nodded and after CJ thanked the doctor, she left. The taller woman pulled her wife close again. “C’mon, honey... let’s get home. There’s nothing we can do here.”

Kate looked up into the most beautiful and loving blue eyes. “Okay.” She thought for a moment. “CJ... thank you for how you were in there... with Jack, I mean.”

“Katie, I can’t deny I hated everything he did to you... and what he did to Tony... what he almost did to our daughter. There’s too much to forgive. I’m not as strong as you in that way... so I just can’t forgive him. I admire you so much for being able to. But that last good deed he did went some way to redeeming him in my mind, and in that room I finally found some compassion for the man. You taught me that. You feel compassion for people I don’t think deserve it. I want to learn from you... for the rest of my life.”

Kate let a few more tears fall would not relinquish her physical contact with CJ as they left the ward. Grabbing some tissues from a nearby restroom, they slowly walked along the corridor to head home. A quiet evening together was just what they needed after what had become an emotional rollercoaster of a day.

* * * * *

It was 11pm. Kate was lying on the couch in a very quiet living room, the TV whispering continuously in the background in a long-abandoned broadcast. CJ had gone upstairs to settle a rather restless Shannon and Eddie had left after a short but heartfelt chat with his sisters, promising to visit soon with Sasha. Then Kate had “sat down for just a second” after the events of the day had overwhelmed her. That had been about an hour ago.

The blonde pried one eye open as her sluggish brain tried to recall what time it was. Looking at the clock on the opposite wall, she sat up and realized she must have fallen asleep quite instantaneously. Her last thought had been that she would clear up downstairs and go for a soak in the tub in an effort to relax but now she realized sleep had to take priority. As memories of the

day invaded her mind, she yawned widely and knew she would relax better with a pair of long, protective arms around her.

She blinked a few times and scratched through her golden locks before standing up, switching off the lights and heading upstairs in search of her partner. She looked in the master suite – where she shed her shoes, socks and constrictive jeans – then padded along the upper hallway on her bare feet to check Lucy’s bedroom. It was empty and when she opened Shannon’s door, she saw why. Her older daughter lay in her bed as normal but next to her, on the faraway side of the bed and curled into a tight little ball, was Lucy. Kate smiled at the other occupant of the bed... or perhaps that should be ‘half-occupant’. CJ reclined on Shannon’s other side, her body miraculously perched half-on, half-off the bed in her slumber. One foot on the floor and one buttock on the small nightstand were the only things stopping the agent from falling. Her cheek rested on her shoulder and a book lay limply in her hand.

Kate thought about going to get her camera to capture the moment but decided she was just too exhausted and anyway, she wanted her wife in her own bed. She figured it wouldn’t do Lucy any harm to stay in her sister’s room for the night but Shannon’s bed was too small for both of them so Kate scooped Lucy’s tiny body up into her arms and carefully placed her onto the spare bed under the window. It was the one she had used when the girls had first arrived home and when Lucy stirred with the movement, her Mama grabbed a nearby Piglet and snuggled it into her daughter’s chest. Lucy settled and with a kiss to the small, chubby cheek, the actress went to stand over the biggest kid in the family. A light snore came from CJ and Kate decided a soft touch on her lips might be the best way to wake her.

Leaning down, the blonde took the copy of Charlotte’s Web from her wife’s hand and put it on the nightstand. She gazed at CJ for long moments, enjoying the fullness of her lips; the gentle flutter of the lashes as her eyes shifted back and forth under the lids; the rise and fall of her chest as she breathed long and slow, and the tangle at the end of her long, dark hair where a small hand had twisted it relentlessly around its fingers, no doubt subconsciously while listening to the agent reading the book. Kate smiled and leaned over to sever the simplest of connections. Once she had released every strand – surprised that CJ had not stirred – she delicately covered her wife’s lips with her own. “Honey... wake up.”

Blue eyes opened and blinked lazily a few times before a smile creased CJ’s lips. “I was already awake...”

“Uh-huh...” Kate whispered with a doubtful raised eyebrow. “Come to bed with me...”

The tall agent rose smoothly to her feet and stretched out a couple of creaky bones. She rubbed her half-numb butt cheek before turning to fix Shannon’s sheet and place the book on the nightstand. She spun on her heel and slid a hand under Kate’s hair. “I saw you putting Lucy in the other bed and wanted to see what you would do with me...” she husked, kissing the smaller woman sweetly.

The actress rolled her eyes and pulled her spouse along the hallway to their bedroom, where she continued the conversation. “Well, I couldn’t lift you into bed so I thought maybe a kiss would wake you enough to get you on your feet.”

“A kiss always works. And thank you for detangling Shannon’s hand... I don’t even think she knew she was doing that. I think it was a comfort thing.”

“Yeah... I want to talk with her about everything tomorrow... after a decent sleep. Today was just so manic...”

“It sure was,” CJ nodded as she undressed.

“How come Lucy was in with you guys?”

“I’m not sure. When I got up there, Shannon said Lucy came into her bed and snuggled in without saying a word. I think their bond is pretty strong... Lucy probably sensed her sister was having trouble sleeping? I dunno...”

“Probably,” Kate nodded as she followed her spouse across the plush carpet.

They both washed their faces and performed the usual night-time rituals in silence, each going about their business in a perfectly timed dance around the ensuite. The agent flipped the light switch and watched Kate crawling into bed wearing her thigh-length pale blue nightshirt. She paused to study her wife, loving the way the blonde plumped both their pillows together and turned down the blanket on CJ’s side of the bed in preparation for them to lay wrapped around one another as always. “I love you...”

Kate looked up when she heard the words and her heart fluttered when she saw the depths of blue that held her with such respect and unconditional commitment. “And I love you too. Come here... I want to hold you,” the actress said, patting the sheet with her hand.

CJ shuffled across the room in her favorite soft cotton boxers and tank top. Once she was situated comfortably against the pillows, Kate wriggled into her open arms. The agent rested her mouth on her wife’s hair, inhaled deeply and hummed in gratitude. “Want to talk some before we try and sleep?”

“Yes...”

CJ waited and when nothing else was forthcoming, she realized she was going to have to prompt the conversation. “Can you tell me what happened before the crash?”

A big sigh came from Kate and she snuggled in a little closer. “We were just driving to the studios as normal. It wasn’t until we got to South Avon that the traffic started to back up. That other black Mercedes cut in front of Tony... like, really cut in. It almost hit our car.” The blonde shook her head. “Anyway, when we stopped, that same car was right in front of us... waiting in line.”

“And what happened next?”

“Well I... I don't know exactly... Tony screamed Shannon's name and I knew something bad was going to happen. That's when Jack crashed into us...”

CJ raised her hand to stroke Kate's face and brought her lips to her temple. “It's okay... it's over now...”

Kate looked up. “CJ, I'm not upset. I mean, I'm sad that Jack didn't make it... and I will grieve... but I'm not going to dwell on the crash... living each moment, remember? We made it out of all that. I'm not wasting a single second...”

“Do you know how much I'm in love with you?” When Kate nodded, CJ grinned. “I wish I was more like you... I'm gonna be re-running this around in my head for weeks and you know I'll drive you crazy by calling you every five minutes...?”

The actress raised a sandy eyebrow. “Just every five minutes?” CJ snickered and Kate reached up to kiss her. “Can you tell me what you found out?”

“Well... we watched the camera footage. It captured quite a lot, actually. It was hard to watch... the crash... and seeing you... and Shannon...”

“Maybe we should talk about it another time?” Kate suggested, seeing her wife's mouth curling downwards.

“No... I'll tell you. There was a dark car that tried to force Jack's Ferrari off the road. When Jack swerved, he didn't correct it and that's when he crashed into you. He got out and ran over to your car. He tried to open Shannon's door but it was jammed. Then he turned around to look at something on the road... it was the same dark car again. He must have seen the gun and he looked panicked... he spread himself across Shannon's door. He shouted something at this point and I know he said, ‘gun’ because I could read his lips. He had time to duck, Katie... like the guards and everyone else did... but he didn't. He tried to protect you, protect Shannon. I... I can't believe he did that...”

“I must admit, it doesn't sound like Jack. He was one of the most selfish people I've ever met. But maybe... considering what he said in the hospital, it makes a little more sense?”

“I guess. But if what he said was true... if he *was* in love with you... I just can't understand why he did all those stupid, hurtful things to you... to us...”

“Honey, he was one of those people who'd probably never experienced any kind of real love in his life... never been shown how to express it or receive it. It made him cold, selfish and ignorant to what love was... probably why he treated people like objects. Maybe his heart was a completely foreign thing to him?”

“You mean... he was disconnected from his own feelings?”

“Yes. He lived in his head... always thinking about image, money, status, what woman he could conquer next. He went through them like candy... a different one almost every week. If his heart was even remotely connected to other people, he’d have more compassion and respect than that.” Kate sat up a little. “Maybe I’m not explaining what I mean...?”

“No... you are. I understand you completely. So when he felt something for you... something real... it screwed him up so much he just couldn’t comprehend what it meant, how to respond... or how to get rid of feelings he was having?”

“Yes. I’ve been thinking about it and that’s the only way it makes sense to me.”

CJ inhaled slowly. “Hmm, I suppose it’s entirely possible. Maybe it’s so hard for me to understand because my heart is yours. I can’t imagine hurting you or forcing you or coercing you into my life... or trying to ruin the happiness you already have. That’s not love...”

Kate brought her face close to CJ’s and slipped her arms around the agent’s neck. “That’s because you know how to love... and you do it so very well. We fell into one another’s lives because it was meant to be. Our souls followed their instincts to join us and I’ve never felt something so... *right*. I don’t know how many times we’ve done this CJ, but I’m glad we have the ability to love each other so, so deeply... and the sense to know it means everything...”

“You don’t know how many times we...? Katie... do you sometimes get the overwhelming feeling that we’ve been together for... I don’t know... a really, really long time?”

Tears sprang to the blonde’s eyes as she nodded. “Yes. I doubt we’ll ever be apart. We might be the luckiest two people in the Universe.”

“There’s no ‘might’ about it...”

Kate kissed her love, softly playing with the full lips and tentatively tasting CJ’s tongue, taking the agent’s breath away before she pulled back for air. Green eyes studied the taller woman for long moments. No one spoke. Hearts thumped soundly, both alive, both in sync.

The caresses were gentle yet intense; face to face, gazes locked. Only hands roamed the curves and crevices of their bodies; their mouths too busy kissing and uttering quiet words of love and commitment to venture away from one another. Fires burned gradually and blunt nails scratched on skin. Torsos, legs, feet... everything touched and pressed against the other; soothing and arousing, needing and allowing, reassuring and fulfilling.

Heat suffused each woman and when the pressure got to be too much, they both felt it. Effortlessly, two thighs rose and slid into warm depths, initiating a slow grinding dance only they knew the steps to. Mouths tore apart as oxygen became harder to grasp. Declarations came forth in bursts, hardened nipples scraped against hardened nipples and slippery sweat eased their paths. Hands clawed at buttocks as two screams filled the room and mere moments later, two beings, two soul mates slept as one, under the veil of a cool white sheet, secure in their belief that they would be joined forever.

Chapter 7

Another day at the Los Angeles Field office brought some unwelcome news. As CJ read the report, she repeatedly glanced at the numbers written in bold on the page. '*Blood Alcohol... 0.13*,' ran over and over in her head, eventually making its way out of her mouth. "His BAC level was 0.13..." she uttered a little too quietly.

Jamie just nodded her head, not sure of what was coming next. She watched as CJ stared at the piece of paper and wondered what was going on inside her friend's mind. She couldn't detect any rage or possible outbursts so she chanced a basic question. "Want to talk about it?"

Blue eyes looked up to settle on the blonde before any sound came. "I just can't believe he was so far over the limit... almost double... and so early in the morning. And..." she ground her jaw together, "if he'd been sober... could he have avoided the fucking crash?"

"It's possible, DM, but we'll never know. Please don't let this eat you up..."

"But I actually felt sorry for him in that damn hospital! I just don't know what to feel now." She slammed the report down on the desk.

The blonde agent sighed. "Listen, CJ... say he hadn't been over the limit... say he hadn't crashed into Kate's car..." She got up and walked over to her colleague and placed a hand on her shoulder, making CJ look up at her with those wide ocean eyes. "Say he wasn't standing there in front of them when the shots were fired..."

A few long seconds passed as the agent's dark thoughts caused her throat to close up. She had to cough just to feel able to speak. "Oh God..."

"Maybe it happened the way it was supposed to. Don't let it get to you anymore... okay?" Jamie squeezed the shoulder and went back to her seat.

"I... I'll try." CJ shook her head to erase the possible scenarios Jamie's words had brought to mind. "So... help distract me... are you going to see the Senator?"

"Yeah... after work."

"How did you lose touch?"

Jamie noted the way CJ's hands fidgeted and realized a distraction was definitely needed, so she decided to ramble a little about her life. "When I was about seventeen, I started hanging with the wrong crowd... easily led and finding out more about my sexuality..." She paused and locked eyes with her friend. "You know... it didn't take long for me to hit rock bottom. I was with

somebody different practically every night... drinking... partying... and it wasn't good for my father's public image. Over the next year or so, we fought quite a bit, me and him... and well, when I was attacked by Timmons, I had nothing but a bad attitude and whole bunch of rage inside me." Jamie sighed. "I disappeared from my parent's lives... left a letter for them saying I'd be better off on my own. I was such a shit, DM... such a shit. I never went back... didn't even call..."

CJ was on her feet and hugging the blonde before she finished her story. "You're not a shit... you were a confused, out of control teen. I'm sure you weren't the only one in the world." The tall agent perched on the edge of Jamie's desk. "So... how come your dad calls you Jay? Weren't you Lisa before the attack?"

"Yeah but that was the nickname he always called me... right from when I was little... which is why I kept the Jamie part when I changed my name."

CJ nodded and patted her colleague's hand on the desk. "Maybe you'll get a chance to rebuild a relationship with your parents, huh?"

"Maybe."

"So... with all of that happening in your life, how the hell did you end up being a Federal Agent?"

Jamie smiled. "I ask myself that a lot. Before I went off the rails, I had really good grades in school... I mean... *really* good grades. I guess being attacked shocked me so much that I obsessively tried to change what my life had become. I got myself into University and ended up on the fast track to the FBI."

"So, you're a brainbox, huh?" CJ said, nudging the blonde's shoulder.

"That's debatable. Hey... don't tell anybody though," she winked. "Actually, the Senator doesn't know anything of my life since I left. I guess I owe him an apology, huh?"

"You mean... your *dad* doesn't know any of this."

"I'm... not quite there yet, DM. I suppose I could manage to call him Andrew..."

"Well, maybe start by talking to one another? Take it from there, Penfold. I bet you both made mistakes."

Jamie stood up and pecked CJ on the cheek. "Thanks for the chat... now get back to work!"

"Who made you senior agent?" CJ quipped, getting up and going back to her desk.

"Sorry, Boss."

“Hey... Mark’s the boss. Actually, I kinda like the sound of- “

The raven-haired agent was silenced by a scrunched up ball of paper hitting the back of her head. She spun round to see Jamie innocently tapping on her keyboard and chuckled to herself as she sat down at her desk. Distraction over, she pushed the blood results aside and sat trying not to brood over everything that happened yesterday. She tried... for the next few hours.

* * * * *

Kate sighed, then sighed again as she listened to her rather snippy agent-slash-manager reading through parts of her Deadline contract with quite a bit of attitude. She decided to interrupt the monologue. “I know I signed up until the end of this coming season, Maddie, but I wanted to know if there was any way to break that contract without them suing me or something.”

“Well there might be, but I’ll have to negotiate with the studios and it could take a while to get an answer. Don’t be surprised if you get called into a meeting or six with the head honchos. Why would you want to leave anyway? The show is a huge success and you’re getting more famous by the day...”

“It has nothing to do with fame... and I’m sure Deadline will continue to be successful without me,” Kate said, knowing that getting Maddie off the phone was going to be difficult.

“I’m not so sure about that, Kate. Do you know how much fan mail comes here to my office on a daily basis?”

“Uhm, no.”

“Exactly! That’s because I handle it.”

“You handle it? Shouldn’t I be reading through those?”

“More than a thousand per day? The stuff that ends up at the studios is only the half of it. If you want to deal with this half too, be my guest...”

Another huge sigh escaped Kate’s tightening lips. “Okay... that is a lot. Can you just find out about the contract please? I’d appreciate it.”

“I will but I can’t say I’m pleased about you wanting to quit. I benefit from your success, you know...”

“I’m not here to please you, Maddie. I... oh never mind...”

“I know you’re not...” A few seconds of silence indicated that Maddie was not happy. *“I’m just trying to do my job here.”*

“I realize that. Please let me know what you find out.”

“As you wish.”

“Thanks.” Kate hung up the phone and wondered why she was still employing that woman. “All she wants is money. I have nothing in common with her at all. I bet half that mail... heck, all of it gets tossed in the trash,” she muttered. The blonde supposed it was partly her own fault. When she had chosen Maddie, that was all Kate had wanted too – money and fame – and as she’d grown, she hadn’t bothered to change her agent to match up to her evolving ideals. She shook out her hands, wiggled her shoulders and took a few deep breaths before heading downstairs in search of Alice and the kids.

In the crèche, she found almost everybody. Shannon soon came through the door after a visit to the bathroom. “Hi, Mama,” the girl said, flinging her arms around the blonde’s waist.

“Hey, Squirt. I’m going out to get groceries. Any special requests?”

“Frozen yogurt!”

Kate squinted. “Really?”

“Yes please, Mama. We got some last week and it was banana flavor and it was sooo good!” Shannon enthused.

“Who’s we?”

“Me and Tony...”

“Ah. You miss him already, huh?”

“Yes!” both Shannon and Lucy said together, making Alice laugh.

The actress scratched the two small heads that now leaned on each side of her hips. “Okay... frozen yogurt for everyone. As long as you eat up all your lunch while I’m out...”

“We will,” the older daughter promised. A few gurgles, nods and slightly muffled words came from Melissa and Sarah who were sitting on the play mat with their mother, possibly indicating they also agreed with the frozen yogurt idea. Lucy went back to join them and Shannon looked up to Kate. “Can you lift me up?”

The blonde did so and held the sensitive girl in front of her. “What’s up, honey?”

“When can we see Tony again?”

Kate pushed back a few strands of dark hair and tucked them behind her daughter’s ear.

“Mommy and I will go get him from the hospital tomorrow night. How would you feel if Tony came to stay with us for a while... just until he gets better?”

“With us?” After Kate nodded, Shannon smiled. “I’d like that. Tony’s my friend.”

“I know. And he has a very sore leg so we’ll need to help him until he can walk around and get things like drinks and snacks for himself again, huh?”

“Yes.” The youngster played with her parent’s hair while she spoke. “When we were in the car... is that what hurt Tony’s leg?”

“Yes...”

Shannon nodded. “We can help him get better.”

“And we will, sweetheart. Now, I’m gonna go get food... and yogurt,” Kate said, kissing the girl’s forehead and lowering her to the floor. Once she had said goodbye, she went into the hallway to get the car keys. She smiled when she looked at the note she had found that morning, still sitting underneath them. She picked it up and read it again.

‘Good morning darling wife, I’ve sacrificed my truck AND my morning drive/singing time in case you need to go out. I’ll take a cab to work and steal a Bureau sedan to get home. THAT’S how much I love you 😊 Have a good day and take it easy! Call me if you need me. I’m yours forever. CJ x’

Kate held the little piece of paper to her chest and felt the pounding of her heart, a heart that belonged to that tall, intelligent, protective, caring, tough, funny, sexy and sometimes incredibly goofy special agent. “Damn, I love her,” she said as she walked out the door stuffing the note in her pocket. The actress didn’t take the shiny Dodge Ram out very often – she’d maybe driven it once or twice since it had arrived – and when she got into the driver’s seat, she laughed out loud. Her feet were about ten inches away from the pedals. “My God, she’s tall... or maybe I really am a short-ass.” She was about to try and remember how to adjust everything to accommodate her smaller stature when she saw another note on the plush center console.

‘Hey Katie, it’s your awesome wife again. Put the key in the ignition. Remember that button I was playing with the last time you drove this? Well, press it now before you read on...’

The actress found the button and did as she was told. With a small rumble, the driver’s seat rose up and moved forward, and the rear-view mirrors adjusted until they were in the perfect position for Kate, leaving only the interior mirror to be altered by hand. She looked back at the paper with her eyebrows raised.

‘See? You ARE so good at gift giving... this baby has all the gizmos. Now take your time and keep that precious body safe for me. I’ll be bringing car seats for the kids so you don’t need to do that. We’ll go new-car shopping on my days off next week. Remember to call me if you need me. Now get going and... you’re welcome, Shorty. Xx’

Kate laughed and shook her head. She sent a text to CJ and started the truck. The CD in the stereo came on and she sang – or perhaps howled – along with Kelly Clarkson as she drove off.

* * * * *

Agent Carson picked up her cell phone and read the incoming message from her beloved. *'Thank you for making me laugh and brightening up my day even though you're not here. I adore you, Legs. Hurry home to us. And I am always yours. Katie x.'* The tall woman blushed for some reason, and sent a lovey-dovey message back to her spouse. When she looked up, Jamie was smirking at her. "What?"

"Oh, nothing... just not sure I ever saw you blush such a becoming shade of red before. I take it that was Kate?" she said, nodding toward the phone.

"Uh, yeah. I left her little notes everywhere today... you know, just to cheer her up. She musta found some of them already."

The blonde agent grinned wider. "My God, you are such a mushy kitten."

CJ thanked her lucky stars the boys weren't in the office right now. She put on her best intimidation face, leaned back in her chair and folded her arms over her chest. "Wanna come over here and say that?"

Jamie's eyes widened. "Uh, no... no I don't. And by the way, that face only works with suspects."

"Uh huh?" CJ put her feet up on the desk.

"Don't you have some work to do?"

"I'm actually caught up on everything... I think. I'm just waiting for this database search to finish."

"What search?"

"Just helping out Agent White... another human trafficking case..." CJ's email binged and she sat forward to click on the flashing icon. She scanned the contents and sighed for the hundredth time that day. "They found the Chrysler."

Jamie looked up from her work. "And...?"

"Burnt out in Riverside. They're bringin' it in for forensics. Damn... they'll never find the fucking shooter."

"It's their problem, DM. Just remember your family survived it in one piece. That's all that matters."

CJ nodded slowly. "You're right. I know you're right. And your dad's safe for now."

“Yeah, that too. I guess I should find out where they took him...” Jamie mumbled, lifting the receiver to her office phone. “Trial starts beginning of next week so at least he’s not cooped up for too long.”

CJ nodded and looked at the clock on her computer screen. *‘Just a couple more hours and I can go home. Ugh, I wanna go now...’* Her blue eyes sightlessly watched the search flickering past in front of her and she chewed on the end of her pen while she pondered what her wife was doing now. Hopefully, Kate was relaxing at home. She wondered if she had found the silly note in the agent’s underwear drawer. She began to imagine Kate going in there to steal her favorite pair of CJ’s socks and chuckling at the words on the scrap of paper. But then the chuckle would fade as the agent came up behind her and slid eager hands around her waist and down into her warm...

A sharp slam brought her back to reality. “Wh-what’s up, Penfold?”

“They won’t let me see him! Zero contact...”

“Did you tell them you were his daughter?”

Jamie slumped in her chair. “No.”

“Well... uh, why not?”

“I... I don’t know.” The blonde agent threw her hands up in the air.

CJ bit her lips together and smiled sympathetically at her friend. “He’ll come find you after the trial’s over.”

“Ya think?”

“I know,” CJ said quietly. Jamie locked gazes with the raven-haired agent for a minute of contemplation. CJ allowed the contact and grinned when she saw her Penfold nod and blow out a breath in surrender. Without another word, they continued with their mundane tasks. Work was so the opposite of loud right now. But that was a good thing.

* * * * *

Kate edged the bulky truck into the only free parking space, satisfied that she could still open the door without bashing it against the badly positioned BMW beside her. Once she was outside, she slipped her shades onto her face and pressed the remote door lock before taking a few steps to the side to admire the German-made vehicle. “Hmmm,” she murmured, tilting her head. “That’s pretty nice.”

She turned away from the nearly-new five series and headed to the store. Walking across the lot, she tried to remember the last time she had done anything like this on her own. It had been a very long time. Suddenly feeling a little vulnerable, she glanced around her and actually saw a couple of people changing direction to follow her. *‘I’m just being paranoid, right?’* When she got

inside, she pushed her cart to the food isle on the right hand side and began choosing the items she needed for her family. On entering the third isle, she saw a middle-aged woman watching her. As she passed the brunette, she felt a gentle touch to her upper arm and jumped at the uninvited contact.

“Hi... my name’s Angie. Could I trouble you for an autograph?”

“Uh... sure,” Kate answered politely. “But I don’t have a...” The woman produced a pen and a piece of paper from her bag and Kate smiled as she signed her stage name. “There you go,” she said, handing the items back.

“Thank you so much. I’m a big fan, Kate.”

The actress nodded and bid Angie a good day before moving on. When she finally got to the last isle with a half-full shopping cart, she had done the same thing for four other fans at various stages of her shopping, and she sighed to herself as she rounded the last corner. *‘Not so paranoid after all, Katie...’* Approaching the cashier, she stopped in her tracks when about eight more people peered at her with hopeful and somewhat sympathetic faces – the cashier included. She flicked her eyes to the newspaper stand beside them and saw why they all looked the way they did. There, on at least five front pages, were large photos of Jack Bannerman, the crashed cars... and Kate. She closed her eyes briefly and rolled them under the lids. She quickly read one of the headlines written in massive bold print. “CARNAGE IN BURBANK AS TWO HOLLYWOOD STARS COLLIDE!”

She hated the sensationalist air with which the headlines were always written and, making her way toward the crowd of eager people, she suddenly wished CJ was with her for support... and protection. Everyone was polite enough and she courteously answered basic questions and signed what they wanted signed. Some cell phone cameras went off in her face and she tried not to feel suffocated.

The woman behind the counter took pity on her and didn’t ask for an autograph. Instead, she processed the blonde’s shopping quickly and bagged it for her too. When the crowd began to grow – as people from outside came in to see what all the fuss was about – she signaled to the tall, lanky security guard at the door who grabbed Kate’s bags and nodded to the actress over the multitude of heads surrounding her.

Someone nudged a sharp elbow into the Kate’s back by accident when the area they were in became too small for the amount of swarming fans. Kate’s heart started to pound as everyone around her spoke at once, asking her all kinds of questions about her family and about who got hurt in the crash. The news about Jack’s death hadn’t been released yet and she stopped trying to answer when she felt another push from someone behind her. A hand came down firmly on her shoulder. She’d thought it was the security guard but it wasn’t. Some man on the outskirts of the group was trying to pull her over to him for an autograph and the somewhat frenzied look in his eyes sent a wave of panic through her body. It was getting out of control.

Kate couldn't see a way out but when she turned around in the small space she now stood in, she caught sight of the tall guard and he reached a hand in over the sea of shoulders. She grabbed it and said a rather loud, "I really must get going!" as she was pulled out of the huddle. The store manager had appeared and was now holding the people back as Kate threw the money at the cashier and escaped out the front door. As much as it would do his business the world of good to have Hollywood actress Kate Marshall in his store, he certainly did not want Hollywood actress Kate Marshall getting *hurt* in his store.

The guard turned to Kate once they were crossing the parking lot. "Which car, Miss Marshall?"

"That... that blue Dodge right there," she pointed with a shaky hand.

"Nice choice. I'll put your bags in the back if you could pop the remote?"

"It's my partner's truck... and thank you so much for everything. It got a little hairy in there..."

The man smiled. "You're a popular star... and the headlines didn't help. I do hope everyone came out of it okay," he said, pointing to the slightly angry-looking laceration on Kate's head.

He was being so sweet but she couldn't tell him anything more than what the world already knew. When she closed the back door of the Dodge, she turned and held out her hand. "Thank you again." She reached into her handbag and got out a piece of paper. Rummaging around, she found a brightly colored pen with Piglet emblazoned around it. With a slight blush coloring her cheeks, she wrote a short message – *Thank you for all your help today. I really appreciate it* – and signed the piece of paper. "Could you give this to the cashier in there? She wanted an autograph but when she spotted the crowd getting a little pushy, she did all she could to get me out of there quickly... so could you give her my thanks too?"

"Of course, Miss Marshall. Take care now... and it was really nice to meet you."

Kate smiled bashfully and got into the truck after a final wave to the man. She clicked the locks closed and took a few deep, cleansing breaths. '*Stupid, stupid, stupid, Kate...*' That shopping trip did not feel good. She wondered if they would have actually picked her limbs off and sold them on eBay given the chance. Kate now realized why she didn't go to the grocery store anymore and why she was overwhelmingly grateful to have Tony in her life. He did so much for the Carsons on a daily basis and she'd never take him for granted again. She also knew now, that even if she did quit the show, they would keep Tony on as her PA.

Firing up the Ram's engine, she eased back out of the parking space and, glancing in the rear-view, saw some of the crowd leaving the store and searching the lot for her. She was glad they didn't see her getting into the blue truck – thinking some of them might just tail her along the street – and put her foot on the gas pedal to pull out into the traffic. It was time to head for the safety of home.

* * * * *

At 1.54pm, CJ hung up the phone and stood from her desk. “Right... I’m outta here.”

“Half day, DM?”

“Yeah... I just spoke to Mark.” The raven-haired agent grabbed her jacket. “Good luck tonight, Penfold. Let me know how it goes with the Senator?”

Jamie smiled wanly. “Sure. See you tomorrow.”

On her way along the corridor, CJ said her goodbyes to Mikey as he passed her on his way in. She headed downstairs to sign out a Bureau sedan, deciding on a navy blue Dodge Charger. “Closest I’m gonna get to my truck in here,” she grumbled. Then she remembered why she left the truck at home and grinned. “I’ll survive.”

After an improvised acoustic singing session in the car, she eventually turned into the approach road to the farm and spotted the tail end of her beloved Dodge Ram entering the gates ahead of her... with her even more beloved Kate inside. She sped up a little and when the actress pulled the truck up in front of the house, CJ was right behind her. Jumping out of the sedan quickly, she ran to the truck’s driver door and leaned her elbow on the mirror.

Kate smirked through the glass before opening the door. “What a sight for sore eyes...” she said, stepping out and taking in her wife’s tall form.

CJ wore her usual black pant suit and a crisp white shirt that only buttoned up to her cleavage – one of Kate’s favorites. Her raven, shiny hair was half-clasped back leaving just her bangs tickling her stunningly carved face, and her gun holster peeked out only slightly due to the sultry leaning pose she was currently standing in.

The agent took in the expression on her partner’s face and pushed off the vehicle to envelope the smaller woman in a loving hug. “Hi,” she whispered, kissing the cut on the side of Kate’s head, her nose then her lips. “Miss me?”

The blonde breathed in the scent of her mate for a few seconds before responding. “I always miss you.”

“I know the feeling. I had nothing left to do today... do you believe it? So I came home...”

“And I’m very grateful.” Kate squeezed the tall agent tighter. “I had a bad shopping trip...”

CJ pulled back and met the green eyes. “Bad?”

“Yes,” the actress said, shaking her head. “CJ, I never realized how sheltered I’ve become. I felt really vulnerable today... and Tony does so much for me...”

“For us...” CJ frowned and pushed a few blonde strands from her wife’s face. “What happened at the store, Katie?”

“They were like moths to a flame... bees to honey... the fans being the bees and me being the honey. The damn newspaper headlines didn’t help. I got a little scared...”

“You? Taekwando master who could kick *my* ass?” CJ said with a kiss to a smooth forehead.

“Very funny. I can’t go kicking the crap out of random people in a store, hon. But the crowd got to be too much and I had to be helped by the security guard... *and* the manager!”

“It was *that* bad?” CJ was now a little concerned.

“Yeah... I guess I just can’t go shopping on my own anymore.”

The agent nodded. “You are getting pretty famous... and right now you’re in the headlines so it’s gonna be much worse until things calm back down, you know?”

“I know. And I want to talk to you about the whole famous thing later. I’ve made a decision, remember?”

“I remember. You want to quit, don’t you?”

Kate searched into the deep pools of blue, realizing just how well her spouse knew her. “Would that be okay with you?”

CJ chuckled. “I want you to be happy, Katie. That’s all that matters to me. If you want to quit, then quit. We can afford it right now. As long as it’s okay with *you*... it’s your job, after all.”

“Well...” The actress smiled. “I knew you’d be supportive but you seem to be a mind reader now too. I’ll need to find out when I can get out of my contract. But let’s not talk out here... can you help me get the groceries from the truck?”

“Of course, my darling... we can talk in bed.” The taller woman let her wife go and walked to the back of the Dodge. “Let’s feed the Hungry Horde...”

Kate grinned as they went indoors, having to work their way past a bouncing Kamali before greeting the children and Alice. CJ kept her promise and took Shannon out for a new coloring book. Unable to come to a decision in the store, they came back two hours later with three for each daughter.

When the child minder left with her twins, the Carsons settled down to a family dinner. Two small children were delighted that both their parents were home and chattered constantly throughout the meal. CJ vowed to herself that if she wasn’t on a case, she’d get home for dinner as much as possible from now on. The whole family sitting down together to eat was something she had never experienced as a child – she suspected Kate hadn’t either – and she loved that they could give their children this most basic of gifts.

Chapter 8

Shannon Anne Carson had squealed with delight when she found out the whole family was going to pick up Tony. CJ had fitted the new car seats into the truck and both children were very excited to be traveling in “Mommy’s high car”. During the journey, Lucy had dozed off so now, Shannon quietly played I-Spy with Kate as they waited for their friend to be brought out of the large medical facility.

Once the nurse had pushed Tony’s wheelchair to the front door of the hospital building, he impatiently tried to stand up. CJ put a hand on his shoulder. “Hold on, wise guy. Crutches...” She slipped her arm underneath his and helped him to his feet. The pain on his face was obvious even with his powerful medication, and her strong frame lifted him a little higher until he shoved the crutch under his armpit. While Kate watched from inside the truck, CJ stood in front of the young man. “Hey... you don’t have to act tough. If it’s sore, just yell out. You’re gonna be with us for a while.”

“I... I know. We still have to talk about that further...”

“Yeah, yeah... once you feel better, okay? Now let’s get you into the front seat. I’m gonna be right here holding you... so don’t get any ideas,” CJ quipped with a wink. Tony blushed at her playfulness... and her close proximity. He wasn’t used to this kind of interaction from the tough agent. They walked the few pain-filled steps to the vehicle and as she practically lifted him into the seat, she realized he hadn’t responded and he was looking a little flushed. “Get used to me teasing you too. You’re gonna be living at our place so you’ll be seeing more of the real me.”

“Oh I’m... uh, looking forward to that,” Tony said with an eye-roll. As CJ laughed and pushed the door shut, the young man half-turned his head. “Stuck between the child seats again, huh Kate?”

“Always, Tony. CJ says I fit better,” the actress smirked.

He nodded knowingly and felt a small hand grasp his shoulder. “Are you feeling better, Tony?” Shannon asked.

“I feel much better now that I’m with my friends.”

“Is it sore?”

Tony stretched his neck to see the girl. “Yeah... but I’ll be okay.”

“I’ll help you, Tony.”

“Me too,” Lucy piped in, having been jostled awake by the door closing.

Tony turned back around when he felt the tears spring to his eyes. “Thank you, guys.”

As CJ pulled herself into the driver’s seat, she heard Shannon chatting to her buddy and when she looked at Tony she saw the wistful smile on his face. She chanced a look at Kate and got a cute kiss blown at her. She chuckled throatily and started the engine. “Okay, let’s get going.”

* * * * *

Tony was settled in his improvised bedroom in the study with strict instructions to use the entire ground floor like a second home. Cyn had finished up at the studios and was staying with him tonight in case he needed assistance. Two sleepy children were settled in their beds, hopefully on their journey to the land of nod. And CJ and Kate headed up to the master suite for some alone time and privacy to talk.

The house fell quiet and Kamali eventually plopped down in his spot in the upper hallway after a busy night. He was aware that two familiar humans were still downstairs so he lay with his eyes open for much longer than usual, before realizing they weren’t going anywhere and dozing off.

Closing the bedroom door and leaning her back on it, Kate took in a long, drawn-out breath. “I don’t even have the energy to shower.”

“Then don’t...” the agent chirped, pulling off her pants. “C’mere...”

Kate stumbled over to her tall wife and fell against her. “But I smell...”

“You smell great,” CJ hummed, taking a long, deep sniff.

Kate chuckled and pressed her nose against her spouse’s neck. “So do you.”

The taller woman’s eyes closed as she pulled Kate closer. She could feel her body responding even though she knew they needed to talk. “O-kaaay... all ya did is sniff me and it’s turning me on.”

The blonde looked up into beautiful azure eyes and grinned. “You’re so easy...”

“It’s your fault,” the agent purred as she pushed some blonde strands across Kate’s forehead. She examined her wife’s face for long moments, taking in the slight smile curling the most gorgeous lips she had ever seen, to the twinkle in the half-open green orbs and the unwelcome, raw laceration above her temple. The actress returned the scrutiny just as attentively and when CJ’s eyes lingered on the cut, she knew what the agent was thinking.

“I’m okay...”

“I... I know. I was just thinking about how many times you’ve been hurt... and how every time... it’s been work-related... in some obscure way. Even with the crash, if you hadn’t been at

the studios...” She lost track of what she was going to say and bit her lips. “You might be safer being a Federal Agent, Katie.”

The blonde thought about that for a moment. “God, you’re right... and I guess that nicely leads us on to what we have to talk about. Let’s get undressed and get into bed.”

“Smelly?”

Kate slapped her spouse on the shoulder. “Put your eyebrow down. You are such a goof sometimes.”

With a silent shoulder-chuckle, CJ let the precious woman go and they undressed before using the bathroom and jumping into bed. The agent sat up against the pillows – pulling all her long raven hair forward over one shoulder – and patted the sheets, motioning for Kate to sit in front of her. Once the smaller woman was tucked neatly between two strong thighs, her back leaning against CJ’s breasts, she took some of the silky dark strands and held them against her mouth. The taller woman smiled, knowing Kate loved her hair and had no doubt taken a hold of it automatically.

“So...” Kate said, leaning her head back under CJ’s chin and tickling her own face with the hair, “...I’m still thinking about what you said and after the latest incident, I’d have to agree with you.”

“What do you mean?” CJ asked, rubbing her hand in soothing circles on the perfect abdomen under the sheet.

“I definitely want to quit the show. I’m just not happy there anymore but you’re right... I have been hurt and it’s been down to the fact that I’m a successful actress... right from Jason’s motivations to kidnap me... to the crowd control issue today at the store. Maybe when I was younger, I would’ve welcomed the fame and drama of today but not now. Am I a bad person for wanting out of it?”

“No.”

“Some people would disagree. I mean, I love being an actress and I want to take parts or jobs I truly enjoy. I haven’t been enjoying Deadline for quite some time. And I want to be able to see the children more. I... I’d like to be home more.”

“But wasn’t the problem with Deadline mostly down to Jack?”

Kate’s breath caught. “Well... it was but...”

“Sorry, honey... I shouldn’t have mentioned that. I know you’re sad about his death.”

“I... it’s not that. I still don’t want to be on the show. As much as I love the character I play, I’ve never made a connection or bonded with anyone on that cast... in fact the only two people I’d miss from those studios are Sam and Cyn...”

“Uhm, while we’re on the subject of Jack...”

“What, CJ?” Kate frowned.

The agent bit her lip and figured she just had to say it. “Katie, when he hit your car... he was... over the limit.”

The blonde’s eyebrows lowered and she tried not to react. “He was drunk?”

“Pretty much, yeah.”

“Do you think it caused the crash?”

CJ took a deep breath. Kate was taking this better than she had. “I don’t know. His reactions would definitely be slower but who can say? Honey, Jamie pointed out to me that if he hadn’t crashed into you... if he hadn’t been there when the shots were fired... well, maybe-“

A delicate hand came across CJ’s mouth and Kate reassured her wife with a squeeze to the arm on her abdomen. “Okay, I get it. I can’t dwell on this, CJ, and I hope you can get past it too. I forgave Jack... things happen like they’re meant to... I *have* to think that way right now.”

“I wish I could take away everything that hurts you.”

“You do. You always do.” Kate pushed back further into her wife’s embrace. “There’s going to be a lot to deal with in the coming days... the funeral... the publicity... and everything that might come along because of what’s happened. And I’ll be able to get through it all because I have you and our beautiful daughters. You three are my focus and my strength.” Another sigh issued from her full lips and CJ remained silent to allow her spouse to thrash through her feelings. “I do want to stay in showbiz somehow... but I don’t want the limelight anymore. I’ll take a little longer to think about it... once the funeral has passed and I stop feeling so mixed up. My agent’s looking into the contract for me right now. I definitely want out. What do you think?”

CJ twisted her lips to kiss the nearby head. “All that matters is what you think, Katie... what will make *you* happy.”

“No... it matters to me what you think, CJ.”

“Honey, listen to me. I want you to enjoy what you’re doing. If that means you being a stay-at-home mom for a while... or if it means you taking another acting job... or working behind the scenes, I don’t mind any of it as long as you’re happy... and safe!”

Kate turned to her but didn't release the hair she was playing with between her fingers. "So, do you think I should finish my contract with the show, take a few months out and see what comes along?"

"I've never seen you so unsure of anything. Why don't you take it a step at a time? Wait until you're finished with Deadline and see how you feel then. We can afford for you to have some thinking time, and anyway... I kinda like the thought of having the wife at home for a while..." CJ said, trying to lighten her wife's mood a little.

Kate glared at her for a few seconds before they started laughing together. "So, I'll be the little woman tied to the kitchen sink while the big, bad, head-of-the-house FBI agent brings home the bacon?"

"*Little* being the operative word..." CJ snorted with a nod.

"Oh you...!" Kate whipped round and planted a hard, possessive kiss on CJ's lips. The actress was dominant and passionate and it quickly overwhelmed the agent's senses. Once her wife's head was sufficiently spinning, Kate withdrew. "Thanks for making me smile."

CJ's lips were bright red with the sudden assault, and the fact that she had been highly aroused by the little show was clearly marked on her face. "Okay... I give... you're the boss."

"You're looking kinda stunned there, Agent Carson..."

"You just take my breath away, honey." CJ observed the woman she loved and saw the sadness behind green eyes that also held some desire. Kate looked so conflicted but it was pretty evident what she wanted right now. "Do you need... to connect...?" A nod was her reply and as the blonde's nostrils harshly sucked in as much air as possible, CJ touched her face. "I'm yours. Do what you want with me..."

The deep timbre of the agent's voice was enough of an invitation and Kate trailed her eyes down the lithe, naturally-tanned body of her soul mate. She rose up and helped CJ to shimmy down the bed until she was almost lying flat.

Kate's knuckles landed on either side of her head, sinking into the pillow and bringing the blonde hair low enough to tickle the agent's cheeks. She forced her eyes away from the sea of green above her and saw Kate's breasts swaying gently as the actress moved to graze her clit against the taller woman's clenched thigh. CJ was entranced and lay still, allowing her wife to take her pleasure from her. She had to lift her hands though, just to touch the thrusting hips, the motion of which made her mouth water.

"I love you," Kate breathed out.

The agent felt her center throb and lifted her gaze, returning the words without a sound. She told Kate with a lazy blink of her eyes and a flex of her nostrils that she would love her forever, and the actress began gasping out her breaths through open lips. She pressed a little harder against

the smooth skin and felt CJ loosen the muscles then tighten them again. The sensation was amazing. Hard and soft played with her clit as she began to bathe the thigh with the abundant, sweet moisture running from her core.

CJ was in a place far better than heaven. Her stunningly beautiful partner was hovering over her, letting her watch the most vulnerable of moments; so open, so honest, so trusting. It was inspiring, it was a gift... and CJ was positive she was going to come simply from observing the sensual movement of the woman she loved more than life itself. Kate groaned low in her throat and CJ felt the sound pull her orgasm closer. Their eyes were now locked. They couldn't break the connection if they tried. The heat gathered between the agent's legs and when Kate lowered her head to lick the dark woman's lips, she could barely resist touching herself just to make sure she shared the climax with her spouse. She needn't have worried.

Kate rose up and shifted her knee until it touched the saturated flesh hidden by dark curls. She had kept her center in contact with CJ's thigh the entire time but now the agent could move against her too. Kate flashed the most loving, aching beautiful smile at her wife who returned it with one just as breathtaking. The actress' face flushed with arousal and CJ knew they were both rising together.

At the exact same moment, they both reached for the other, twisting, flicking and teasing erect nipples. When Kate put her other hand on her own breast, CJ followed. Now, with many erogenous zones covered – and covered so well – it was a matter of mere moments before they both lost control.

Kate's knee was now soaked; CJ's thigh was well and truly drowned. Kate flexed her abdomen impressively as she took more from CJ, quickening her thrusts and bringing herself to orgasm. CJ pinched Kate's nipple and her own, and when her wife cried out, she pushed into the knee between her legs and felt the delicious contractions in her groin.

Kate bit both her lips and continued to circle her center gently on the skin below her as she watched her stunning partner come. CJ's mouth opened, panting out her release, silently taking in all she could of her lover as the waves crashed around her. For just a second, the feeling was so intense she couldn't hold her eyes open but when the lids closed, she missed the sight of Kate and forced them to look once more. She saw her glorious soul mate, proudly holding herself upright and breathing deeply in her recovery, her breasts ravaged with the heat of their lovemaking.

CJ felt like molten lava and could not for the life of her, think what she had ever done to deserve Kate. "You are..." The tears welled up. "You complete me..."

Kate dropped onto her elbows, her face so close to CJ's, their breath combined. "I have to confess... I don't think I can live without you. I could never feel whole without you."

The agent smiled at the sparkle of moisture looking back at her. "You don't have to. I'll never leave you."

“I know.” The kiss was powerful. Both women knew they were joined by more than this life but they didn’t need to think about it beyond that. It was a feeling, a knowledge that transcended reason. It did not require explanation in words. All that mattered was that they were alive, they were in love, and their bond was complete.

* * * * *

As the evening sky darkened and the outside temperature dropped, Elizabeth Emerson stood at the expensive marble countertop in her large, warm kitchen. Her eyes were planted firmly on the front page of the Tribune. She fumed at her daughter being in the headlines again and didn’t stop for a minute to worry about the fact that the actress had been in a car accident. Her mouth crumpled into an ugly lip curl as she shifted her pale ice green orbs to look at Jack Bannerman. The news had finally broken that he had been killed and at this point, the reports were only speculating on a rumor about a shooting. She had no feelings whatsoever about him losing his life and her self-centered attitude was very evident.

“Dead?” she muttered distastefully. “I can’t believe it. I suppose if I want a job done right, I’d better take care of it myself!”

Long-suffering husband, Arthur Emerson walked through the door. “What did you say, Lizzie?”

She hated that he insisted on calling her that but she didn’t show it. After all, he was incredibly rich and kept her in the lifestyle she was accustomed to. “Oh... nothing, dear... just talking to myself.”

Due to a complete lack of interest on his part, he shrugged, put his empty glass down at the sink and left the room none the wiser. Elizabeth scrunched up the newspaper and walked to the trash can. Stomping down on the foot pedal, she threw the infernal rag into the opening with a forced exhale of envious frustration. “That’s it. No more playing around.”

As she stormed along the long hallway, she momentarily paused outside the formal lounge door, noting that her husband was watching the news. Kate’s beautiful face flashed up on the screen, followed by an aerial view of the smashed cars taken by the Channel-12 News chopper. Arthur waved the remote at her. “See that lovely actress was in a car wreck? I hope she’s okay... I watched her on Leno last year. Lovely lady...”

Elizabeth fumed and balled her fists. She had no worries about Arthur questioning her further. She had never told him of the ‘embarrassment’ that was her daughter. It was bad enough that some of her friends knew about her Katherine – well, they knew of the version of Kate she was now trying to create; the good, married to a man, obedient Katherine she needed to have control over. Her husband had turned back to the TV screen without waiting for a reply and she continued her walk to the staircase with fire shooting from her eyes. “Lovely? Lovely? I’ll give him lovely. She’ll soon be a blubbering wreck if I have anything to say about it! She *will* do as I say... once I get rid of that infernal, deviant, wretched wife of hers.”

Elizabeth smacked her lips at the bitter taste in her mouth as she went up the grand staircase to her private study. She had some important phone calls to make.

Epilogue

Nine days later, dressed in black, Kate stood on the grass as a small, private service took place at Jack's graveside. Behind her, CJ's hand cupped the back of her shoulder in support and the agent handed her another tissue when more tears threatened to fall. It was a time of mixed emotions and Kate didn't quite know what she was feeling.

Jed Bannerman looked nothing like his brother. He stood as tall as Jack had, but with a kindness in his face that the actor had never carried. The blonde looked around her as a solemn voice continued with the tributes in the background. It seemed Jack didn't have many family members but there were quite a few celebrities dotted throughout the small crowd, including most of the Deadline cast.

Kate looked back at the large, shiny, mahogany casket in front of her and her eyes misted up again. She recalled his face just before he died and hoped he had made some sense of what this life had been all about, even if it was in his last moments. CJ rubbed her back and she turned her head to look into tear-filled blue eyes. The actress gave her wife a sad smile and reached back to hold the agent's hand.

Once again, their deep love filled Kate. She thought about all the times they had said to one another how lucky they were. She realized that finding and recognizing the one true love of her life was a blessing of such huge proportions, that lucky didn't even begin to describe it. She supposed Jack had at least felt love. That was something, right?

Sniffing away another batch of tears, she bowed her head and CJ heard her whisper. "Bye, Jack."

The End...