

Aftermath

By Wendy Arthur

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This romantic thriller is an Uber, however all characters are created by me.

All characters depicted, names used, and incidents portrayed in this story are fictitious. No identification with actual persons is intended nor should be inferred. Any resemblance of the characters portrayed to actual persons, living or dead is purely coincidental.

WARNING

****This story contains descriptions of an extremely violent murder/crime scene – which includes children – and subsequent suspect interview. There is also a recollection of child abuse included in interview. If you are offended by, or are sensitive to, this sort of content, please do NOT read on****

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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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I cannot thank my beta-reader, Norsebard, enough. You continue to be very much appreciated.

This is the fourth installment in a series of stories. While you don't need to read the previous Ubers to enjoy this story, it will definitely help with some character backgrounds, connections and references.

Comments and/or opinions can be sent to stagefreakmusic@hotmail.com ...or left here.

Chapter 1

Kate Marshall-Carson arrived home mid-afternoon. Saying her farewells to Tony, her driver, she sauntered towards the pretty whitewashed farmhouse, noticing the perfectly polished blue Dodge Ram sitting out front. She grinned, knowing her partner had loved the birthday gift so much, it had barely seen a day without a clean or a wipe down. She entered the property and shed her actress façade completely, feeling truly home when she changed into her favorite comfy clothes. Not finding her spouse anywhere indoors, she donned a warm jacket and headed outside.

Kate stood on the back porch looking out over the farmland she shared with her best friend and wife of almost two years. She watched as Special Agent CJ Carson rode the tall golden mare across the field, the beast gracefully cantering – almost gliding – through the long grass reeds. The actress had one of those

strange deja-vu moments when the vision of her wife astride the horse, yelling out a gleeful ‘yeehaah’ in the distance, was strikingly familiar to her. She shook it off, knowing that she and CJ shared something beyond their comprehension, and focused back on the beautiful woman.

The agent was smiling, Kate could see, and she knew her darling spouse felt so free when out in the space around their home, away from the rigorous daily life of her job with the FBI. CJ wore faded blue jeans, a white shirt under a navy, sleeveless sports jacket and dark brown boots that neatly matched the Stetson, settled proudly over the long, black locks currently tied back in a ponytail.

The actress hummed at the delicious sight and pushed off the pillar she was leaning on, walking down the few steps into the large backyard area. The petite blonde strolled over to the fence and grinned as CJ got closer and closer to the barn, just off to Kate’s left.

The tall agent suddenly looked down behind her as the horse dropped into a trot. She laughed, and it was then that Kate noticed Kamali, their big black German Shepherd, bounding along behind the horse, his tongue practically hanging down to his feet in doggy exhaustion. He continued to prance around Nevada’s hooves as CJ brought the mare to a halt. Kate could hear her wife talking to the panting canine.

“Aww, don’t feel bad. She has much longer legs than you, buddy,” the agent giggled, looking at the dog while patting the horse on the neck.

CJ looked radiant, her skin flushed with the exhilaration of the ride combined with the cool Los Angeles air. It was winter – well, as much of a winter as they got in LA – and today was surprisingly chilly, a crisp wind blowing across the open fields. The agent dismounted – still not noticing that Kate was home early from work – and headed into the barn.

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Kate stood leaning on the fence, wrapping her arms over her chest to hold her jacket closed. The sun was out and the land around them held a silvery-gold hue, making it appear unusual and quite spectacular. The actress inhaled deeply, closing her eyes, just being still and quiet in this beautiful place and moment, then opening them again when she heard CJ say something in a ridiculously high-pitched voice and Kamali barking in response. Kate smirked as CJ re-emerged with the dog in tow and crossed the expanse of dirt covered ground to get to the backyard. It was then that the tall raven-haired woman looked up from playing with the dog and stared slack-jawed at her wife.

“Ahh!” she screamed, “I didn’t know you were home!”

CJ vaulted over the fence and swept Kate into her arms.

“Well, hello to you too, hon...”

A pair of velvety soft lips silenced the actress. The top of Kate’s head pushed the brim of CJ’s Stetson up as the agent deepened the kiss, making the smaller woman moan into her mouth.

When they parted for air, CJ grinned. “To what do I owe the pleasure of your early arrival?”

Kate sighed, trying not to be distracted by the sight of her incredibly gorgeous wife in the hat. “I got my scenes done without too much trouble today. Some others were not so lucky, so I left them with ‘Phil-in-a-very-grumpy-mood’ and got the hell outta there. I knew it was your one and only day off and you’ll soon be away too.”

“I wish I didn’t have to go, Katie, but they seem to need me on this,” the agent said, kissing her wife’s forehead.

“Series of murders, isn’t it?”

“Yeah. I should be away for a few days. But they only want help with the profile. They seem to have hit a brick wall with this one. Maybe a fresh pair of eyes...”

“CJ... don’t get into the killer’s head too much, okay? I mean, I worry about you,” Kate said, hoping her spouse wouldn’t get mad at her coddling.

The tall woman’s arms tightened around Kate’s back. “I won’t. I’ll come right back to you as soon as I’m done. Promise.”

“And call me when you can... or when you need me?”

“Honey, I’ve been doing this for years. I’ll be okay. But I will call you every day because I want to. And I always need you,” CJ said, tipping her wife’s head up with her finger under a delicate chin.

CJ kissed her soundly and they walked into the house. The tall agent went upstairs to get rid of the dusty clothes and threw on a warm pair of black sweats and Kate’s UCLA sweater. Shaking out her hair and tilting her head, she looked in the long mirror on the bedroom wall, smiling at how they both had their favorite clothes. CJ loved Kate’s sweater, because it was Kate’s... and Kate loved CJ’s Foo Fighters tee, because it was CJ’s.

“People are strange,” she said to her reflection, then chuckled as she left the room.

As she passed through the hallway, the phone rang and she lifted the handset from the base unit on her way to the kitchen.

“Hello?”

“*Oh... uh... is Kate there?*”

“Yes. Who’s calling?”

“*Oh... it’s Jack, uh, Jack Bannerman,*” the actor stuttered.

CJ grinned at his nervousness, remembering the last time she’d encountered the man. “Oh hello, Jack. This is CJ.”

“*Uh yeah, I know. How are you, CJ?*” he said politely, lightening his voice.

“I’m fine, thank you. Hold on and I’ll see if Kate’s available,” the agent said, covering the handset with her palm.

“It’s Jack. Did you ask him to call?”

“Oh yeah,” Kate said, gesturing for the phone with her hand. “I’m organizing the end of season get-together here, remember?”

“Oh God, when is that?”

“Monday... only night most could make it. You did remember, didn't you?” Kate winked.

“Oh... yeah. Great,” CJ grumbled.

“Hold on, Jack,” the actress said into the phone.

“*Okay, Kate.*”

The blonde covered the phone again and looked at her wife. “You're supposed to be inviting your colleagues too, especially Jamie.”

“I know, I know. I did.” At Kate's raised eyebrow, CJ rolled her eyes. “I did!”

The actress grinned and walked over to the window seat to talk to Jack. CJ took over the coffee-making while listening to the one sided conversation. Once Kate had hung up the call, she came to CJ's side and lifted her X-Files mug from the counter.

“So, who's coming to the party from the studios then?” CJ asked, lifting her own mug to her mouth.

Kate paused. “Where's your Star Trek mug?”

CJ pouted and put on her best poor soul face. “I was uh... playing with Kamali in here earlier... and he knocked me off balance. I dropped it and it smashed.”

CJ's bottom lip was sticking out so far now that Kate couldn't resist. She reached up and took said lip between her teeth gently, then wrapped her lips around it and sucked the soft skin. The agent's eyes rolled back in her head as they closed and she moaned pleurably.

Kate let go and began to walk to the living area. “We'd better let Santa know then, huh?” she said over her shoulder, tossing her strawberry blonde hair as she went.

CJ just gaped after her; not able to move her legs yet due to the wonderful tingling sensation that shot from her lip to the rest of her body. “That woman is amazing,” she whispered to herself.

Kate's head popped around the doorframe. “I heard that,” she grinned menacingly.

CJ groaned and followed her spouse to the couch. Once they'd settled next to one another and Kamali had flopped at their feet, CJ turned to Kate.

“So? Who's coming to the party from the studios?” she repeated, trying to shake off the clenching in her groin for a few moments.

“Only a few people. Most of my 'colleagues'...” Kate said, putting air quotes around the word, “are a real pain in the ass. So, I've invited Jack, Cyn, Sam, Tony, Tina and a few of the others who aren't too bad, just to make up the numbers. It's not a big party, honey. Just some friends over for a buffet and drinks. Should be fun,” the actress replied persuasively.

“Hmm. Okay. I just invited the guys from my office. Not saying they'll all be able to make it... depends what we have going on... but I'll make sure Jamie is here.”

“Did you invite Mark?”

“Do you honestly think the Assistant Director would pass up the chance to try and talk you into being an agent?” CJ asked, eyebrows high under her dark bangs.

Kate laughed. “I guess not. It’ll be nice to see him again. I like that guy.”

CJ nodded and took a slurp of her coffee. “It’s funny. Every time we get a case that’s puzzling us or Mark wants another opinion, he tries to get me to take the file home to – and I quote – ‘see if you can uh... figure something out’. Honestly Katie, he thinks you’re a genius.”

Kate snorted.

CJ grinned at the sound. “He’s right. I agree with him.”

“So why didn’t you bring the files home then?” Kate asked, blushing slightly at the compliment and sipping from her mug.

“I just don’t want to drag you into my work all the time. It’s kinda depressing,” CJ sighed.

“Honey, I told you I’m interested in your work. I’d love to go over cases with you, especially if I could maybe help in some way or you could just bounce ideas off me. Really... next time, bring ‘em.”

CJ looked at her stunning little wife and saw fire and wisdom burning in those bright green eyes. “Okay.”

“Okay? Yeah? No argument?”

“No argument.”

Kate smiled from ear to ear. “Wow. I was all ready for a debate,” she grinned.

“I can think of other things I’d rather be doing with you right now,” the taller woman purred, swallowing the last of her coffee.

“Oh? I wonder what that could be.”

“I could give you some clues if you’d like...”

Kate put her empty mug on the coffee table and moved to sit on the edge of the couch. She got up and pulled CJ to her feet, raising an eyebrow in an unspoken question.

CJ inhaled deeply. “Well, it involves my tongue... and a certain part of your anatomy...”

Kate felt her stomach clench in glorious anticipation. “Uh huh. What part of my anatomy?” she said as she pulled CJ up the stairs.

“Oh, it’s a soft, wet, warm, delicious part... I could spend all day tasting it,” CJ husked as they entered the bedroom

Kate groaned and realized that CJ was already pulling the tee from her body, over her head. As her strawberry blonde hair fell back onto her shoulders, the agent’s long arms wrapped around Kate’s torso from behind, immediately cupping her full, warm breasts.

“Ohhhh...”

CJ smirked, feeling the heat rush to that spot in the pit of her stomach. She watched over Kate’s shoulder as the pert pink nipples stiffened at her touch. She loved how her wife reacted to her... and how her own body reacted to that reaction.

The taller woman was suddenly short of breath, but tried to continue her verbal foreplay. “I could start with these. Oh, but there are so many parts of you I want to taste.” CJ took her hand up to the actress’ mouth. “These lips... this tongue...” she whispered, slipping her finger into Kate’s mouth, feeling the tongue brush over the tip. “Then maybe this neck...” The wet finger trailed down over each body part. “Or perhaps this collarbone...” Kate moaned and CJ felt her weaken in her grasp. “But I can’t take too long over those because... I want these in my mouth... these nipples, this flesh...” Another moan from the blonde. “But we both know where I’ll end up. I want to taste your... thigh. You’ll be crazy by this point, wanting me in that pink, sweet place where I can feast on you until you can’t...”

“God, Ciara! Just do it!” Kate growled. “I’m crazy now!”

Kate spun around and grabbed CJ’s sweater, pulling it vigorously over the tall woman’s head, the agent having to duck down to allow the movement. Before they knew it they were both naked and Kate flung herself down on the bed.

“Get on me... please!”

CJ smiled widely, her eyes alight with passion and mischief combined. She crawled over Kate, noticing the actress’ flushed face and neck. She knew her wife was so very ready for her, which was just as well, because the thought of doing all the things she had just talked about had sent the delicate flesh between her own legs into an aroused frenzy.

Kate shook her head. “No... not that way. I need to taste you too.”

CJ swung round and Kate immediately grabbed her buttocks. The agent almost drooled over the moist flesh she could now see was begging for her touch. Kate opened her legs wider and tried to pull CJ’s body down but the taller woman resisted. The agent grinned, nostrils flaring, when she heard Kate growl in frustration.

“Ciara... please... I can see how wet you are. I need it... now,” the blonde demanded.

CJ couldn’t resist anymore and relaxed her legs. The pressure from the strong grip the actress had on her, forced her clit right down onto Kate’s mouth. The relief the actress felt was evident as her own hips thrust upward at the contact and CJ needed no encouragement to close the distance, sinking her mouth into Kate’s drenched center.

They licked and sucked, one seeming to match the actions of the other, urging one another on, knowing that this wouldn’t take long. CJ broke the contact she had with Kate’s incredibly swollen clit as she felt her orgasm building fast. She inhaled deeply the scent of the flesh before her and as she came, she latched onto her spouse, teasing and sucking on her the way she knew would bring Kate to climax with her.

Kate was there, at that point of no return. Her orgasm washed through her entire body so slowly that she could savor every single nanosecond. She convulsed pleasantly, thrusting up harder onto CJ’s mouth, as she lapped up every drop of her lover’s essence at the same time. It was such an amazing feeling... so delicious... so mutually satisfying. Kate fleetingly thought how well matched they were. Or was that just because they were truly in love... true soul mates? The thoughts were quickly lost when CJ slowly drew her tongue from the top of Kate’s clit down to her warm, moist opening and kissed the tender flesh before lifting her head.

CJ moved to lie next to Kate, top to toe. They lay silent, inhaling and exhaling forcefully to bring their breathing back to normal. Kate ran her hand over the top of the thigh next to her, lightly scratching through the dark thatch of hair at the juncture of CJ's legs.

Finally feeling like she could talk, the actress raised herself up onto her elbow. "Hey, did I hurt you there? I thought I felt you flinch a little."

CJ didn't move, still basking in the wonderful afterglow. "You didn't hurt me, but I did. I was half way over one of the fences earlier and my foot slipped. I landed on my..." The agent covered her face with her hands in embarrassment. "I've been so clumsy today."

"Aww, honey. You should've told me."

"Why? So you would be gentler with me? Oh nooooo, that was too awesome. Besides, it's not that sore."

"Let me see," Kate said. "Open up."

CJ lifted her head and grinned when she realized Kate was serious. "You wanna check, huh?"

"Definitely", the actress purred, her green eyes dark and hooded.

The taller woman bent both knees up and let her legs fall open. She raised up onto her elbows to watch her little wife, as Kate positioned herself between CJ's legs and tilted her head to examine her spouse closely.

The blonde checked the soft outer lips and the still somewhat swollen clit. Not seeing any injury to her wife's tender area, she touched the skin gently, occasionally glancing up at CJ's face. "Is it sore here, baby?" she asked, tickling her fingertip down the right side.

CJ swallowed hard. "No..."

"How about here?" Kate said, her voice low and velvety as she trailed her fingertip gently up the other side.

"Mmmm... no."

The actress dipped her head. "How 'bout here?" she whispered as her tongue met with the soft, sensitive ridge, sliding slowly up and down.

"N... n... nuh... no," CJ finally managed.

Kate raised her head and looked at her wife. "Seems fine to me," she hummed, licking her lips.

"You're gonna kill me, aren't ya?" CJ panted.

"Yeah. But you'll enjoy every minute," the blonde husked as she crawled up her wife's body. "Every minute."

Chapter 2

The next couple of days passed at a steady pace, both women working for long hours. Kate was trying to get all her final scenes completed before her scheduled time off and CJ was finishing up paperwork and various FBI tasks relating to a human trafficking case Agent White had somehow dragged her into.

Clearing her desk and sighing with satisfaction, CJ looked over to Agent Jamie Green. The tall blonde woman was typing away on her computer keyboard; her dark brown eyes scanning the screen as she worked her way through some unending report.

“Penfold?” CJ said, utilizing the nickname she had for Jamie and cocking her head to observe her friend.

“Yeah?” Jamie grinned but kept her eyes on the screen.

“You *are* gonna make it to the little party tonight, aren’t ya?”

Green stopped typing and looked up. “Yes. Wouldn’t miss it for the world. Why?”

“You just look like you have a *lot* of work to do,” CJ said, nodding to the pile of papers on Jamie’s desk.

“Nothing that can’t wait. It’ll keep me busy while you’re away,” the blonde winked and threw a sultry smile in CJ’s direction.

The raven-haired woman raised a curious eyebrow. “Is there something I should know, Jamie?”

“What do you mean?”

CJ could see by the blush creeping up the blonde’s neck that she knew exactly what she meant. “Oh, I’m just sensing that you’re, uh…”

“Yes, I am attracted to you. But don’t worry CJ, I have it under control,” Jamie said, beginning to type again.

“Wow, that was direct. Okay… good.”

Jamie glanced from the side of her eye. “I figured we should just get it out in the open. I’m sure I’ll get over my crush soon.”

“Jamie… you know I think you’re a beautiful woman and as it turns out, you’re an awesome person too… who knew?” CJ said, earning her a half smirk from her friend, “but I’m simply not on the market and I never want to be…”

“CJ, I get it. And I knew that. It doesn’t stop what I feel though. But you know what?”

“What?”

“I’m so glad we got over our initial problems. I consider you a real friend. Actually, you might be the first I’ve ever had.” Jamie suddenly slumped back in her chair. “Oh God, that sounded pathetic. My first real friend at thirty one years old!”

“It’s not pathetic. Aww, come here,” CJ drawled, getting out of her seat and opening her arms to offer the blonde a hug.

“Is that a mischievous glint in those baby blues, Dangermouse? And anyway, I’m not sure hugging you is a good idea.”

“Aww c’mon. We’re both grown-ups. Gimme a damn hug!” CJ pouted.

“Oh, jeez. How can I say no to that?”

Jamie got up and walked into CJ’s arms. The instant the blonde agent felt CJ wrap those long arms around her, she melted and a little groan escaped her lips by accident. And she was suddenly very aware that they were alone. Her heart thumped a little faster and she tried to back away. CJ smirked and gave her a squeeze before releasing her.

Blue eyes met brown and the raven-haired agent bit back her giggle. “Lookin’ a little flushed there, Penfold.”

“Uh huh. No more hugs for me.”

“Well, at least ya didn’t smell me,” CJ teased.

“Oh Christ, gimme strength. Go home before I do something silly,” Green said, waving over her shoulder as she went back to her desk.

CJ was momentarily worried that Jamie was serious, but then the blonde winked that signature wink at her, and smiled widely.

“Okay. I’m outta here. See you around eight?”

“I’ll be there, DM.”

* * * * *

CJ walked in the front door to the sound of Kate shouting at someone. The agent could only guess that her wife was on the phone and followed the sound of the raised voice. On entering the large kitchen diner, she spotted her spouse with her cell phone stuck to her ear, her free hand running through her strawberry blonde hair in what looked like frustration.

“Aaron, I offered to work on tonight. I knew he wasn’t happy with the scene!” she yelled.

CJ walked over, placing her jacket down on the counter, her keys clinking on the surface to alert Kate to her presence. The blonde spun round and brought her hand up to make a yapping mouth gesture while rolling her eyes. CJ moved behind her and slipped her arms around the slim waist, leaning her head against the blonde hair. She could hear someone chattering wildly at Kate through the phone and bit her lips in a frown.

“Yes Aaron, I know.” Kate’s voice had calmed somewhat and CJ hoped her actions had something to do with it. “Yes, I’ll come in tomorrow and the next day if you need me to. I’m just irritated that I offered to stay late tonight and was told no. Then you call me and yell down the phone that I should’ve waited and spoken to you? Phil told me he was done. And now I have to come in on my vacation time.”

CJ felt Kate breathing deeply in an attempt to calm herself even more.

“All right, Aaron. See you tomorrow.” She hung up the call. “Jerk.”

The agent kissed her wife's cheek. "Hi. Crap bosses?"

"Today? Yes," Kate said, leaning her head back on CJ's shoulder and sighing. "Mmmm, that's nice, honey."

The taller woman assumed Kate meant the hand that rubbed over her belly in soothing circles, so she continued to do it. "Do you want to cancel the party tonight?" CJ whispered hopefully.

A chuckle escaped the actress' lips. "You'll try anything, won't you?"

CJ shrugged. "Worth a shot."

Kate turned in her embrace, putting the phone down on the counter. She slipped her arms around the tall agent's waist and returned the hug.

"How was *your* day?" she mumbled into CJ's shirt.

"Fine, actually. Although Jamie did declare her undying love for me."

Kate lifted her head and narrowed her eyes. "She did *what*?" she said, with a territorial edge to her tone.

CJ quickly recovered from her weak attempt at humor, knowing it had backfired a little. "Honey, she didn't say that. Sorry. I was trying to be funny. She just admitted she's attracted to me."

"And?" the blonde said with her eyebrow quirked.

"I confirmed to her that I would never be interested and she said she knew that. It's all fine."

"Uh huh."

"Hey! You know it's true."

Kate relented. "Sorry... not sure why I got all possessive there. Hmm..." she said, rubbing her chin.

CJ stepped back out of the actress' embrace. "See this?" she said, flailing her hands up and down the length of her entire body, "and these..." she added putting her hand to her head, then her heart, "they all belong to you... and only you. Body, mind, heart and soul... they're yours. So quit it!" she grinned.

Kate got that dangerous look in her eye, the kind of danger CJ loved. But they just didn't have time to do it justice.

"Nuh uh... don't you dare. You can have it later," the agent warned.

The fiery little blonde's nostrils flared. She could feel heat suffusing her body, suddenly feeling a strange need to possess her spouse. She glanced at the clock. '*Damn!*' she thought to herself. "Okay," she breathed, "but this better be a quick party!"

CJ laughed and Kate grinned shyly. The tall woman took her into her arms again and kissed her briefly. "I love it when you get all territorial. Makes me feel special," she teased.

"I'll give you special... later," Kate purred, leaning on her favorite spot under CJ's chin.

They finally parted and began to organize themselves – and the large room – for their guests.

* * * * *

The long table and kitchen countertops were set with the buffet and various finger foods. The lights were adjusted to set the mood and the drinks were flowing. The large double doors were open to let the kitchen diner flow into the living area and the fire was crackling in the hearth. It wasn't cold as such; the flames just added to the atmosphere. The steady beat of the music set a nice backdrop to the continuous conversation that threatened to drown out CJ's thoughts. Kamali had retreated to the upstairs hallway and the agent kinda wished she could do the same.

Cyn was snuggled on the couch with Tony, Kate was standing talking to Sam and Tina, and Jack was loitering over by the drinks, chatting distractedly with other actor people while glancing occasionally at CJ. Thankfully, her colleagues had just started to arrive and finally she could talk to someone who wasn't in showbiz. The agent had never been so glad to see Jamie in her life.

"Hey! Thank God you're here," CJ said, dragging her friend through the door.

"Hi. That bad, huh? Here... I brought wine." Jamie handed the bottle to her friend. "I know you don't drink but..."

"I might need one tonight. God no, I can't. I'm leaving for Washington tomorrow," the dark-haired agent said as they entered the party area.

Jamie's eyes took in the scene. She scanned the room, her eyes briefly lingering on Jack before moving on to the obvious lovers on the couch, then resting on the petite redhead talking to Kate... on the *body* of the redhead talking to Kate. "Busy little party so far."

"Yeah, but you're the first Bureau person. Where the hell are they?"

"Well, Ethan can't make it... something about family commitments. Mikey said he would be here and Mark told me he'd be here at eight, which is... now," Jamie said, looking at her watch.

"I knew about Ethan. I think Alice's mother is ill, so he may have to take care of the girls," CJ said, sipping her juice.

Jamie looked around the room again, nodding to Kate when she saw the actress looking over at them. The blonde agent felt a little uncomfortable with the stare the actress pinned on her. "Uh, CJ? Did you tell your wife about, uhm..."

CJ sought out her spouse and tried not to laugh. Only CJ would know that Kate's glare was fake. She could tell that her wife was going to have some fun with Agent Green tonight. "Oh yes, I did. Don't worry, I'm sure she won't beat you too severely."

"Not funny," Jamie groaned, shaking her head. "I've seen her in action, remember?"

"Aww, come on, that is funny. I'm sure it'll be an interesting battle to watch," CJ snickered.

"Good evening, ladies," Mark said behind them, making CJ snort some juice down her nostrils and Jamie jump out of her skin.

"Jeez, Mark, don't do that!" CJ said, trying to recover her dignity.

The Assistant Director laughed. "Sorry, CJ."

"Hello, Sir," Jamie said.

"Oh Jamie... we're at a party. I think Mark is fine, don't you?"

"Uh, yeah. I guess I'm just not used to it... Mark."

Kate had spotted Mark and excused herself from her conversation. She crossed the room while noting Jack's change of position on the couch. He had been watching the actress closely since he'd arrived and it was starting to make Kate wonder what he was up to.

"Hello, Mark," she smiled as she approached.

"Hello, Kate. Good to see you again," Mulroney said, wrapping her in a hug.

CJ was warmed and slightly amused by Mark's big smile and genuine embrace. Kate hugged him back and stepped over to link arms with her wife.

"I'm glad you could make it... both of you," Kate smiled, shifting her eyes to Jamie.

"Well," Mark said, "I'm happy to be invited. Gives me a chance to try and lure you into the Bureau..."

Kate laughed heartily and CJ smiled simply because she loved hearing that full-bodied laugh. Agent Green scanned the room again, trying not to make eye contact with Kate, but it didn't distract the actress from her game.

"So, Jamie, see anyone you like?" Kate queried casually.

CJ squeezed the small shoulder admonishingly but waited silently for the response.

"Uh..." Jamie stammered.

Mark frowned a little, wondering what was wrong with his agent. Jamie fiddled with the sleeve on her blouse.

Kate decided to push it a little more. "Is something wrong, Agent Green? You seem a little... uncomfortable," she said, licking her teeth and sneering in a threatening manner.

"I... listen, I'm sorry. I should never have said anything. I'm so sorry. Please... I really wouldn't ever do anything to jeopardize your..."

Kate couldn't keep up the pretense. Hearing Jamie go into her nervous diatribe was too much for the little blonde. She burst into fits of laughter, doubling over and holding her stomach. CJ opened her eyes wide, biting her lips, trying to wait and see how her friend would react before laughing herself.

"Oh! Oh, no way! You... you're shitting me?" Jamie said in disbelief and not a little relief. "Oh my God, that's not funny, Kate!"

The actress laughed through her tears, clearly very amused by the little show. "I..." *Chuckle*. "I'm sorry..." *Snort*. "Couldn't resist."

Jamie wagged her finger in front of CJ's face when she began to laugh too. "No fair!" Green barked, slapping the raven-haired agent on the shoulder.

But CJ could see the humor twinkling in the dark eyes and continued to laugh.

Mark was completely baffled. "Can someone enlighten me?"

Kate wiped her eyes and nodded to Jamie, effectively telling her that it was up to her to divulge the information to the boss.

The tall blonde cleared her throat. "Well... before I tell you I must say that it will not affect my work in any way." Mark raised an eyebrow but Jamie continued. "I have a little uh... crush on CJ," she admitted cautiously.

"Ah." Mark replied, nodding. "Well, I guess I can... understand that. As long as it doesn't affect the job."

"No. It won't... and it hasn't."

CJ smiled, knowing that Mark once felt the same about her. "It won't, Mark. And as you can see, it's out in the open... nothing to worry about."

"Easy for you to say. I'm afraid of your wife," Jamie gasped, looking at Kate, who was now fully recovered from her giggles.

The actress grinned. "Aww, you are not! I was just playin' with ya," she said, punching Jamie on the arm lightly.

"Uh huh."

"Seriously, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be so cruel but it was too good to miss. Hell, who wouldn't have a crush on her... look at her, she's gorgeous!" Kate said, leaning her head on her wife's shoulder lovingly.

"Jeez, CJ, how many drinks has your wife had?" Jamie chuckled.

A slightly red-faced CJ replied. "Would you believe, just two?"

They all laughed and as Kate linked arms with Jamie and dragged her away, CJ and Mark followed. After doing the introductions, CJ went to get another grape juice, noticing Mikey standing in the doorway. She went to greet him and did the introductions all over again.

* * * * *

A couple of hours later, Kate met up with CJ at the kitchen counter for a gossip – after a kiss, of course. Once they'd parted, CJ flicked a long, dark strand of hair away from her face and leaned her hip on the edge of the island unit.

"Soooo, anything interesting?"

"Oh, tons. Let's see, apart from the fact that everyone except us and Mark are getting slightly drunk... Tony and Cyn are inseparable, seems pretty serious. They're such an unusual looking couple but their personalities seem to match well. Tony has really started to come out of his shell recently. Have you noticed that?"

“Yep. How long has he worked for you again?”

“I hired him about a year before I met you. He was quite shy at first.” Kate thought for a moment. “Actually, I was pretty quiet and withdrawn too, so maybe he sensed I was...”

“Was what, honey?”

“I wasn’t happy, CJ. It was the actress who smiled a lot, not me... not in my heart.” She paused. “Anyway, he’s become more... friendly, since I met you. God, was I really giving out such a cold bitch vibe before? Holy crap.”

“I doubt ‘bitch’ is the word but if you were unhappy... maybe a little lonely, he could’ve responded to that, huh?” the agent said, brushing her hand up the blonde’s cheek.

Kate nodded. “Yeah.” She gazed into CJ’s deep blue eyes in a momentary daydream.

CJ wanted to tell her how much she had changed her life too but now wasn’t the time. “So, what other observations have you made tonight, Agent Marshall?”

“Har-de-har-har. And it’s Carson, if you don’t mind,” the actress said, poking her finger into her wife’s ribs.

“Sorry, Agent Carson... man, that would get confusing,” the taller woman snickered.

“I’ll say. Anyway, not too much more gossip. I did notice Mark talking to Jack for a while. I have no idea what they would have in common. Oh, and Jamie... well, I’m not certain but I could’ve sworn I saw her checking out Sam!”

“Really?” CJ raised an eyebrow.

“Yep. In fact, look! They’re engrossed in one another right now,” Kate said, pointing across the room.

CJ turned, and there it was... agent Jamie Green ducking her head down, listening to the apparently intriguing words of Samantha Morris. The little redhead was gazing at the agent as she spoke and it sure looked like a little more than friendly interest. “Well, who could’ve predicted that?”

“I know, right. I have to say, though, they could be a good match. I know Sam can handle her. She’s feisty, ya know,” Kate said, sipping on her glass of soda.

“Just like you, huh?” CJ replied, earning her a slap on the buttocks. The agent turned back to face her wife and chuckled. “Well, our matchmaking plan backfired, but maybe not all the way. Looks promising.”

“Yep.” Kate nodded thoughtfully. “What do you think Jack is up to? He’s being awfully pleasant but... I dunno, he’s watching us a *lot!*”

“Don’t know. I haven’t paid any attention to him. Didn’t wanna end up threatening him at our party,” CJ smirked.

“Oh God,” Kate groaned.

At that point, Mark came over to refill his glass and the two women started chatting to him. CJ remained a neutral but interested party, as Mark and Kate sparred over the actress joining the Bureau.

* * * * *

Somewhere across the living room...

Jamie was deep in conversation with her newfound friend, whom she had to admit, was turning her on by simply talking. The blonde agent studied the very full lips, the hazel-gray-green eyes – she couldn't settle on one color – and the way Sam curled her mouth when she said the word 'studio'. She was just about to tell Sam a story about her younger life, when she noticed the producer beginning to squirm, crossing her legs and wiggling slightly.

"Time for a pee break?" Jamie chuckled, raising an amused eyebrow.

Sam laughed. "Yes. I was just so engrossed in our talk, I didn't want to go."

"As much as I don't want you to go either, I think it'd be preferable to you leaving a stain on the rug."

"Eww," Sam said, scrunching up her face. "Hold that, will ya? I'll be right back," she blurted, handing her glass to Jamie and running off.

Jamie slowly shook her head and smiled. Sipping from her own glass, she looked around and saw Jack headed straight for her. She'd heard various comments from CJ about him and it served to counteract the handsome, well-groomed appearance of the man. '*Ugh*,' she thought.

"Well, hello there. I haven't had the chance to talk with you yet," he drawled.

Jamie almost rolled her eyes and decided to be polite... for now. "Hi, I'm Jamie. You must be Jack?"

"Why, yes. You recognize me?" he grinned, framing his face with his hands.

"Uhm, sorry, no. I just heard CJ introduce you earlier."

"Ah. And why haven't I seen you around the lot? I wouldn't miss a stunning actress like you."

Jamie realized that Jack had paid about as little attention to their introduction as she had. Clearly, he hadn't caught the fact that she worked with CJ. She had noted his attentiveness toward her two friends and decided to play along for now.

"I guess you didn't look hard enough," she said, throwing him a fake smile.

"Well, I noticed you have a little thing for CJ and her wife..." Jack said, quirking a dark eyebrow.

"Me? No. They are attractive, though. It's hard not to notice that."

"Aww c'mon, I saw the looks. You like CJ," the actor pushed.

"Is that a problem? Is she on your hit list?"

"What? You think I'm some kind of predator?" Jack asked, hand on heart in mock hurt.

Jamie laughed heartily. "Oh come on... I've seen your type a thousand times. Seriously, is she just part of the hunt?"

Jack seemed to get serious for a moment. “Well, to be honest, I want her but it’s a... a lust thing. She’s just so delicious, I can’t *not* want her. But Kate...”

His face changed and Jamie hid her shock. She thought she had him pegged, but did he actually want Kate for more than sex? ‘*Nah, surely not,*’ she mused. “You uh, want Kate?”

“Hmmm. You want CJ. I want Kate... and CJ,” he grumbled.

“Hah! I think you just want whatever you can get your hands on,” Jamie smirked.

“You offerin’?” Jack slurred.

“Sorry, man. No way.”

Jack’s grumbling voice faded away as Jamie spotted Sam returning and her eyes were fixed on the little redhead as she crossed the room, stopping to hug Kate on her way past a crowd of people.

Sam exchanged a few words with the actress and continued on her way, heading straight to Jamie. Seeing Jack standing there with a shit-eating grin on his face, the producer faltered. Jamie saw the change in Sam’s eyes. She looked... worried? The tall blonde ushered her friend over to her by holding a glass in the air and nodding. Jamie felt pleasantly warmed by the look of relief on Sam’s face.

“Sorry I took so long. I’m such a social butterfly,” Sam said nervously.

“No problem. Jack was just keeping me company while you were... *gone,*” Jamie replied, glaring at Jack and leaning heavily on the last word.

The actor surprisingly took the hint and jutted his chin out. “Oh, right, well... I think I’ll go talk to, uh... what’s ‘er name,” he stammered, pointing to the room in general.

“Oh, and Jack?” Jamie shouted after him.

“Yes?”

“I’m not in showbiz,” she said cheerfully.

She watched his face as he processed the words. When his broad shoulders slumped and he walked away, she knew he had figured it out.

“What was all that about?” Sam quipped.

“You know, I’m not entirely sure. I think he was trying to hatch a plan to split CJ and Kate up,” Jamie said, taking a sip of wine.

“That’s mine, honey,” Sam laughed.

“Oh! Sorry, here, take it before I finish it,” the blonde said shyly, liking the endearment.

Sam shook her head and took the glass. “Doesn’t he know that a meteor couldn’t split those two up?”

Jamie laughed out loud and Sam watched her. The producer was a little confused by her reaction to this tall, beautiful special agent. The seemingly straight redhead hadn't contemplated being with a woman before, but now... now she wasn't sure. She decided to stay right here and talk as much as she could with Jamie Green. Maybe if she spent more time with the blonde, she'd figure it all out.

* * * * *

As the evening progressed, CJ was almost shocked to find that she was enjoying herself. It could have been Kate's current musical selection that had livened things up... or the copious amounts of alcohol that most of the others were consuming, but the agent found she was laughing and smiling a whole lot. After Sam and Kate had somewhat painfully performed their rendition of an Alanis Morissette song, leaning on one another for moral and physical support, most people had started to dance around in the living area.

The tall woman watched with a smirk as Tony and Cyn boogied – yes, boogied – to a fast-paced Anastacia number. She giggled when Tony tried to pull off a particularly daring move and fell on his ass, much to the amusement of Cyn and Kate, who had just left the improvised dance floor and was heading CJ's way.

“Hey baby, are you having fun?” the tall woman asked her wife.

“Yep. I saw you laughing just then... are you enjoying yourself?” Kate said, dabbing down her sweaty brow with a napkin.

“Actually, I am. You look like you could use a break from dancing, though...”

“Yeah.”

CJ noticed that her wife didn't actually seem too inebriated and nodded proudly. She never expected Kate to abstain. Just because CJ didn't see the appeal in alcohol, didn't mean Kate couldn't have a drink, but she was happy that – as they were the hostesses of this night – her wife was still standing upright. She chuckled inwardly at her thoughts. *'I love her any old way,'* she thought.

The actress spun around to watch her friends having fun. It had turned out so much better than she'd thought and she realized it was because they had kept it small. It had definitely been a good night. Even Jack was up dancing with Tina. Mark sat on the arm on one of the couches but was clapping along as they all goaded Tony into doing the limbo under an improvised limbo bar made out of a broom from the kitchen closet. Kate laughed out loud when he fell on his ass yet again. She heard CJ laugh behind her and then felt two long arms slide around her waist from behind. The agent's chin rested on her shoulder as their guests started dancing again.

Kelly Clarkson's song, 'Gone', came on the stereo and Cyn bounced over to turn up the volume. CJ began to sway her hips to the beat and Kate didn't dare say anything, knowing her wife didn't dance. Well... not in front of an audience. The actress decided to encourage the agent a little. She covered CJ's hands as they rested on the blonde's abdomen and swayed in time to her wife's movement.

The tall woman spoke in Kate's ear. “I definitely can't sing this one to you and mean it.”

Kate nodded, knowing what her spouse meant. The song was all about leaving one another, about a broken love, but it didn't stop the smaller woman shivering in CJ's arms when the agent sang some of the words, breathing sensuously into her ear.

With her crotch still moving against Kate's behind, CJ tightened her arms around her wife and proceeded to nibble on her neck. The actress was quite surprised at CJ's public show of affection. Glancing around and seeing that nobody was paying attention anyway, she enjoyed the moment and melted into the touch. When

another Kelly Clarkson song started, Kate could barely remain standing when CJ sang it in perfect tune into her ear.

“Is... this a dream? If it is, please don’t wake me from this high. I’d become comfortably numb, until you opened up my eyes... to what it’s like, when everything’s right, I can’t believe. You found me when no one else was lookin’... how did you know just where I would be?”

Kate closed her eyes as the sensations took over her body and soul. The velvety voice vibrating against her ear, CJ’s hands softly gripping her swaying body in a loving and arousing embrace, the melodious music, the small amount of alcohol she’d consumed buzzing through her and her wife’s breath tickling past her hair. All of it served to help her get lost in the moment.

“... The ups and the downs and you still didn’t leave... I guess that you saw what nobody could see... the good and the bad and the things in between... you found me.”

Kate was gasping now – CJ could tell from the rise and fall of her wife’s chest – and the agent thought it might be a good idea to stop before she had to drag her wife upstairs and make love that very second. She kissed Kate’s creamy soft neck and stopped her movement. The smaller woman continued to sway against her with her eyes closed and CJ grinned, removing one arm and lifting her glass from the nearby counter. Kate finally stopped and turned around.

“That was incredible,” she purred near CJ’s face so the tall woman could hear her.

“Too incredible. I’m uh... a little wet...”

“A little? I’m drenched here!” Kate confessed.

“Oh God. Please don’t make me think of that... not yet. We have to get rid of this lot first,” the agent said, spreading her hand out to the room.

“You started it... all of it, missy,” the blonde growled, poking her finger between CJ’s breasts.

The tall agent just grinned at her jolly little wife and pondered what would happen once their guests *did* leave. As if her thoughts had been voiced out loud, Jack approached them, veering slightly off course and muttering curses at a piece of furniture.

“Hi, l-ladies. My car is here... soooooo, I’ll bid you adieu. Great parting... no, partly... no, party,” he slurred.

He leaned forward clumsily, possibly trying to kiss Kate, but lost his balance and CJ’s strong arm settled on his shoulder, helping him regain his equilibrium. Jack took the contact as a warning and put his hands in the air.

“Don’t shoot occifer... I don’t did it!”

CJ bit back her laugh and Kate put her hand up to Jack’s other shoulder.

“It’s all right Jack,” the actress soothed, “Thanks for coming and I’ll see you tomorrow, okay?” she said, ushering him towards the front door with CJ following.

“Tomorrow?”

“Yes. Aaron wants us back in, remember?”

“Oh yeah, that dimwit.”

“Yes. That’s right,” the blonde agreed, trying not to smirk.

As Jack fell into his limo, the two women waved him off and headed back indoors. People slowly started to leave soon after and CJ was kinda relieved, even though she had ended up having fun.

* * * * *

It was now after midnight and most of the guests had gone within the space of an hour, leaving Tony, Cyn and Jamie, who sat on the couch with an unusual pout on her face. Sam had left with some colleagues and the blonde agent was wondering if she should’ve asked for the redhead’s number. They’d had such a wonderful time together with easy conversation, lots of laughter and subtle touches throughout the evening.

CJ went over and sat on the coffee table, facing Jamie. “Hey Penfold, what’s up?”

Jamie looked up slowly. “Nothing. I had a great time, CJ.”

“Uh huh, I see that. Is that why you’re sulking now? You like her, don’t you?”

“Who?” At CJ’s raised eyebrow and sideways grin, the blonde relented. “Yeah, I really do. She could be the one to crush the crush, DM.”

CJ grasped at her chest in mock pain. “Oh! Oh no! Please don’t leave me!”

Jamie just shook her head and threw a bunch of chips at her from a nearby bowl.

“Hey, I’ll have to clear that up…”

“Did you just assault my wife?” Kate said, now standing over them with her hands on her hips.

Jamie stuck her tongue out at the actress in a show of bravado… and fun. Kate smirked at the blonde agent.

“So, you’re not scared of me anymore?” the actress asked as she sat next to Jamie.

“No.” Green got awfully serious, possibly due to the alcohol she’d consumed. “You do know I would never…”

“I know,” Kate said, leaning over to hug her. “But that doesn’t mean I’ll let this Sam thing go. I’ll be happy if she can keep you busy.”

Jamie released her little blonde friend. “I was that obvious, huh?”

“You were *both* that obvious,” Kate grinned. “You seeing her again?”

“Uh… I didn’t get her number.”

“What?! Oh, for goodness sake, Jamie,” Kate screeched.

“What?”

Kate heard CJ chuckle from the table and looked over. “What you laughin’ at? She didn’t even get her number. Well, I’m gonna fix that tomorrow. I can play cupid!”

“Oh Kate...” Jamie begged. “Please don’t embarrass her... or me. I mean... uh, if you could be not so direct about...”

Kate laughed out loud. “Of course, I’ll be discreet. She’s my best friend at work. I’m sure she’ll ask me about you anyway. The two of you were practically in each other’s laps.”

CJ barked out a laugh, causing Jamie to giggle. Kate just smiled smugly and got up from the couch, finally letting go of Jamie’s hand, which she hadn’t realized she’d been holding. CJ and Jamie waved at Tony and Cyn as Kate escorted them out front.

“Hey,” CJ said, catching the blonde agent’s attention. “She seems pretty cool about everything. That hug said it all.”

“She has every reason to be cool about it, CJ. I can see what you two have... tonight, more than ever. Both of you are so in love and you trust one another. That’s pretty darn cool,” Jamie said, smiling solemnly.

“You’ll find that soon.”

“Well, who knows. And if I do find it, I gotta try and *not* fuck it up,” the tall blonde sighed.

Kate came skipping back into the living area, whistling the song from earlier... slightly off key. CJ bit back her smile, as did Jamie.

“There’s another car coming up the drive, Jamie. I guess it’s yours,” Kate said, breaking from her tune.

“Thanks, Kate.”

* * * * *

After seeing Jamie out to her waiting cab, CJ returned to find Kate standing with her hands behind her back, leaning on the island counter. She held a long chip-stick between her lips in a cigarette-like fashion and winked at her wife. CJ narrowed her eyes and stalked across the room, immediately leaning her body against Kate’s. The actress was ready for a revival of their earlier encounter. CJ could tell by the look in those slightly glazed green orbs, which also held the invitation she now accepted eagerly.

Grabbing Kate’s butt with both hands, CJ dipped her head and wrapped her lips around the offered chip, effectively kissing Kate as she did so. The petite blonde moaned as they bit the salty snack in half and after crunching and swallowing quickly, two tongues instantly met in a sensuous dance.

“Take me to bed,” Kate purred once they’d parted.

CJ glanced around them at the mess and drew her brows together.

The actress smiled. “I’ll get it tomorrow after work, honey. I have more important things to do to you before you leave in the morning.”

CJ didn't speak. She took Kate's hand and pulled her through the house as she did various necessary tasks, the blonde following and randomly chuckling in her merriment. Once in the bedroom, CJ stood back and looked at her wife.

"I like this shirt on you," she said, unbuttoning the shirt. "But I like it better off you."

"Mmmm, cheesy line, but it works."

"I think anything would work with you right now. You're practically licking me with your eyes," CJ said, suddenly feeling her breath catch.

"Anything would work, as long as you're the one saying it."

"Yeah... that," the agent husked as Kate nibbled her exposed collarbone.

The taller woman's hands were still unbuttoning the shirt but she could feel her concentration waning.

"Katie, let's undress and get into bed. I can't think..."

They undressed one another in a flash and bundled onto the bed, one naked body wrapped around the other. They teased one another with kisses and touches. CJ sucked Kate's nipple into her mouth as she covered the smaller body with her own.

Kate was breathless, her entire being crying out for what only CJ could give her.

"Ciara..."

CJ knew it was a request but she decided to let Kate dictate what they would do.

"What... do you want, baby?" she gasped, leaving one breast only to find the other as quickly as possible and take it into her warm mouth.

Kate's hands were tangled in the long dark hair, kneading the agent's scalp. CJ opened her eyes thinking Kate wasn't going to answer. She found her lover watching her, watching the full lips surround the hardened nipple, watching CJ's body as it slid over her own, watching the blue eyes that now pierced through to her very core.

"I... I want..." The actress couldn't verbalize, so she grabbed CJ's upper arms and pulled her up to her face. As she kissed the taller woman deeply, she wrapped her hands around her wife's thighs and moved her until she was straddling Kate's mound.

"Oh yeah. I know what... you want," CJ purred.

CJ rose up above her spouse and licked her lips so slowly, Kate thought she might die if she waited any longer. Slipping her hand between them, the agent spread the swollen outer flesh at her own center and held the pose as Kate looked down at the tender, moist skin.

"Ohhhh," the actress moaned, opening her legs wide.

CJ lowered herself onto Kate with her fingers still in place and used them to open her wife even wider, almost collapsing at the intense sensation of their contact. As she slipped her hand carefully from their drenched folds, she brought it to her mouth and sucked the fingers. Kate let out a strangled sound that came

from somewhere deep in her throat and CJ started a slow, thrusting rhythm in response. Both were so aroused that it didn't take long for CJ to climax, the delicious friction just too much for her to hold back from. Kate was so close as CJ came, flooding the blonde's swollen ridge with her essence. It was almost enough to bring Kate to orgasm... almost. As CJ was recovering, she saw her wife trying to concentrate. She continued to thrust back and forth over Kate's clit, while reaching round behind her, seeking out the hot entrance and barely entering her wife with one finger. But it was enough, and CJ smiled as Kate screamed and promptly came, her green eyes popping open to watch CJ as she drove her through it. The agent was still thrusting slowly and Kate grabbed her wife's breasts and almost climaxed again at the sight of those perfect dark nipples peeking out from between her fingers, and the tanned, athletic body writhing on top of her.

They both halted their motion and panted harshly, still staring at one another, still very intimately connected. CJ loved it when they kept eye contact. It made it so incredibly intense sometimes.

Moments later, the agent lowered her body onto her wife's and kissed her.

"You okay?"

"Better than okay. I love you, Ciara."

"I love you too, my beautiful Katie."

CJ rolled them onto their sides, still in the embrace, and pulled the covers up around them. They were soon lulled into sleep – Kate's almost immediate light snore making CJ smile before she succumbed – lying nose to nose in a warm, sated bundle.

Chapter 3

After CJ had called her from the airport the next day, Kate focused on getting her scenes done, trying to keep from missing her wife too much. It never worked, of course, but being so busy did distract her slightly and the days began to pass.

When she was at home she cleaned the house while listening to Kelly Clarkson loudly on the stereo, took care of their animals and called her family to check in on what was happening in their lives. She missed CJ like crazy but the agent was keeping in touch and Kate had to content herself with hearing her wife's voice and imagine those lips forming the words and those blue eyes piercing into hers. She laughed at herself missing the woman so much. "Ah, what the heck. I'm in love," she mumbled, shrugging her shoulders.

* * * * *

Even after shooting for three days, there were still a few takes to get. Jack was off his game again and Kate wanted to shake him and scream to get him back to smooth-talking, super-ego-driven Jack. Although, his prima donna attitude was the reason they were running over schedule. He was a conundrum, that was for sure.

As she stood off set waiting for another reset, her phone vibrated in her pocket and she wondered who would be calling her cell while she was at work. She saw the name on the screen and answered immediately.

"Hey you!"

“Hi, Katie. I hope I didn’t catch you at a bad time?” CJ said smoothly.

Kate closed her eyes briefly, the sound of her wife’s voice, a balm on her soul. “Never a bad time for you to call, honey. How’s it going over there?”

“Ugh. It’s a horrid case and I’m glad it’s not mine. I’ll tell you about it when I get home but like I said last night, I’m not convinced the killer’s a male. Anyway, I don’t want to talk about that. I’m still on schedule to leave early tomorrow.”

“Great. I might be in here again in the morning, but hopefully not all day. I really need my time off to start now.”

“I bet. I’ll try and grab a couple of days off soon and spend them in your arms, okay?” CJ smiled into the phone.

“Oh I hope so, honey. Are you okay? I mean, with the case and everything?”

“Yes. Calling you every day sure did help. My work life disgusts me sometimes but knowing I have you... well, it sure keeps me feeling alive.”

“God, I miss you.”

“Ditto, Katie. I gotta go. See you tomorrow,” CJ said. “I love you.”

“I love you too. Bye, CJ.”

“Bye.”

* * * * *

‘This is my last day... this is my last day...’ Kate chanted in her head over and over as she arrived at the studios on the fourth day of her supposed leave. They got a lot done in the first three hours, then things slowed again. She hated it when directors got conflicting ideas in their heads and wanted to re-shoot everything. It would have gotten frustrating for Kate, but her impending time-off and the fact that CJ would be home today, kept her giddiness at a surprisingly high level. She went looking for Sam, knowing her friend would be expecting her soon.

Skipping across the lot, she waved to some colleagues and threw a polite ‘hello’ to others she didn’t know so well. She pulled her collar together, noticing the coolness in the air. December in LA wasn’t the worst thing in the world, but it was strangely chilly again today. They’d had a quiet Thanksgiving last month but Kate wondered if CJ would like to try a ‘family’ Christmas. Problem was, the agent’s job was very unpredictable and the family was spread out over quite a few states. There was also the sad fact that the agent’s mother had died near Christmas, so CJ hadn’t really celebrated one in years. ‘Maybe I’ll talk to her about planning a proper Christmas next year,’ she mused.

She entered studio 7-C and spotted her ex-executive producer standing on set, clipboard in her arm and gesticulating wildly with the other. Sam’s face held a grumbling frown as she barked out a list of items she needed to the young runner, who frantically scribbled down her instructions. Once he left, Kate headed toward her red-haired friend.

As she approached, she studied Sam and noted the pronounced features that, while on their own would not look particularly attractive, together made up a very pretty face. Her deep auburn hair came to rest on her shoulders in a bob-style cut and it almost matched the dusky lipstick color on the voluptuous lips.

Kate shook her head, never having noticed her friend that way before. She wasn't romantically interested of course, but she did want to ask Sam why she was still single and perhaps get some details on what she thought of Agent Green.

"Hey," the actress smiled, placing a hand on the shoulder that was level with her own. "Having a bad day?"

"Oh hi, Kate. Yes! But I'm mighty glad to see you. Are we still on for lunch?"

"Of course, but it looks like you're busy. Can you spare the time?" Kate said sympathetically.

"Are you kidding? We just sent the cast off for a full lunch break. They were all over the place today. Outtakes city this morning," Sam sighed, slapping her forehead.

"C'mon," Kate said, taking Sam's hand, "I'm hungry. I need to eat."

"That's the best offer I've had all day."

Both women looked at one another for a second, simultaneously realizing the innuendo behind their words, and they broke into fits of giggles as they walked out of the studio doors.

* * * * *

Over in the cafeteria, Kate snagged a pre-prepared salad that she knew she'd like – since she had it quite often – and caught up with Sam so that her friend could pay, since it was her turn.

"Hey, you want any sauces?" Sam asked Kate as the cashier processed the items.

"Nah. This salad has dressing with it," Kate replied, sniffing an orange then putting it on her tray.

Once they were seated, they began to munch on their food. Kate watched Sam as she chewed on a piece of pasta. The producer looked up and smiled.

"What? Do I have a booger?"

Kate laughed and almost spat her lettuce across the table. She coughed and cleared her throat after swallowing the mouthful. "No. I was just appreciating you," she said with a wink.

Sam waved her finger in front of her face. "I know you don't be appreciatin' me *that* way, sista," she said, sliding her head from side to side in some kind of Whoopi Goldberg imitation.

"God, I hate it when you do that. Must you?" Kate sighed.

"You don't really hate it but I knew you'd say that," Sam giggled. "So, seriously, what did you mean?"

"About appreciating you?" When the red head nodded, Kate continued. "I appreciate you because you have been – and still are – a great friend to me. That's kinda rare in this business, what with all the ass-kissers, catfights and everything else that goes on. But you... you're a true friend. Thank you."

Sam raised two dark eyebrows and Kate guessed she was trying not to tear up.

“How sweet are you?” the producer said, gulping back her emotion.

“So sweet you may get a cavity. But I’m serious. You’re an amazing woman, Sam. How come you’re still single?”

Sam barked out a laugh but reached across to cover Kate’s hand with her own briefly. “Well, I suppose I just haven’t found the right person yet. You’re lucky, Kate, you found Miss Right. Oh, she’s away right now, isn’t she? How are you coping?”

Kate narrowed her eyes and smirked, sensing that she was being teased ever so slightly. “I’m coping just fine, thanks.”

“Okay. I just know how you two get when you’re separated.”

Kate sighed in defeat. “Yeah. She should be back today and she’s probably in her office by now. I miss her like crazy. Satisfied?”

“Yes,” Sam smiled.

“You spent a lot of time with Jamie the other night,” the actress stated plainly, glancing up to see her friend’s reaction.

Sam coughed. “Uh huh.”

“You like her?”

“Uh huh.”

“I think you’d make a great couple. And she seems to like you too.”

“You do? She does?” Sam squeaked.

“Yeah.”

The producer sighed. “I never even thought about it before, Kate. Even with you being my friend and having an amazing marriage with a woman, I never considered it for me... until now.”

“And?”

“She’s gorgeous. Too gorgeous for little old me,” the producer mumbled.

“Uh, I hate to tell you, Sam, but you’re gorgeous too. And that’s coming from me... *and* Jamie,” Kate smirked. “And up until I met CJ, I had never contemplated it either. I mean, sure, women were beautiful and attractive to me but I never thought about acting on thoughts like that until it overwhelmed me in CJ’s presence. Sometimes it just takes one person – *the* person – to make you realize what you really want.”

“Wise words, my friend. And I do like her... I’m just a little scared,” Sam said, patting Kate’s hand on the table.

“Well, after you left the party, Jamie was pouting so much I thought she might trip over her lip. She told CJ she wanted to ask for your number.”

“She did?”

“Yes. But don’t tell her I told you that, unless it all turns out great... then I’ll take the credit,” the actress said, wearing an evil grin.

“Uh huh. So, uh... could you pass my number on to her?”

“That was my next question. And yes, of course I could. I’m sure you’ll hear from her pretty darn fast too. She won’t be able to resist that fiery red hair.”

“Oh, ha... ha... ha!” Sam said, throwing a napkin at Kate and proceeding to stuff a large scoop of potato salad into her mouth.

Kate just grinned and they continued with their lunch, accompanied by some shoptalk. Little did they know that Jack Bannerman had been observing their interaction from across the cafeteria with a devious, trouble-making smile on his face.

* * * * *

CJ sat at her desk, writing up some final paperwork on the profile she had assisted with in Washington. She had flown out there, given them some help and her expert opinion on the case of a series of gruesome murders, and flown back in the space of four days. Getting in to LAX at 8am, she hadn’t managed to catch Kate before the actress left for the studios. The agent had grabbed a quick shower and a coffee and hurried in to the office, arriving at eleven thirty. A couple of hours later, she’d made a decent dent in her workload and yawned, just as Assistant Director Mark Mulrone walked in the door. He seemed tense and looked at his watch, muttering something the agent couldn’t decipher. Jamie and Ethan looked up and mimicked CJ’s raised eyebrows.

Mark exhaled forcefully. “Right, all of you. I want you downstairs in the parking garage in five minutes. Call Ryan in, we’ll need him too. We have a kidnapping slash multiple murder to attend. Here’s the address,” he barked out, throwing a piece of paper on the desk and leaving as quickly as he came in.

CJ was a little startled by his abruptness but began to organize the team. As she grabbed her voice recorder, she checked on her colleagues.

“Ethan, grab that bag,” she said, pointing to the nearby cabinet. “Jamie, do you have the camera?”

“Yeah, CJ. Got it,” the tall blonde nodded, slamming her desk drawer shut and getting to her feet quickly.

All three walked down the corridor, Ethan on his cell phone to Agent Ryan, and CJ and Jamie talking quietly to one another.

“He wants us *all* on this?” Jamie asked.

“Seems like it,” CJ replied.

“Is that normal for you guys?”

“For ‘us’ guys... and no, not normal. There’s something he’s not telling us. We’re not usually on the scene for a kidnapping. Yes, it’s a murder too, but the cops would deal with that. There’s definitely something else,” the raven-haired agent stated.

“Well, the address is in Bel Air. I guess that’s a priority for starters,” Green murmured, reading from the page. “Charles Davenport.”

“Davenport?” CJ repeated.

“Yeah. Charles Davenport, international banker, married, kids... two from a previous...” Jamie trailed off.

CJ turned to her as they stood in the elevator. “Kids,” she said quietly.

They were all silent as they descended to the parking garage. *‘There go my days off,’* CJ thought morosely.

Mark was waiting for them, standing by a dark sedan. “Are we all set?” he asked plainly.

Ethan spoke up. “Yes, Sir. Ryan will meet us at the scene.”

“Okay. Green, Carson, take a separate car and we’ll meet you there. Matthews, you’re with me.”

* * * * *

On arrival at the Davenport residence, CJ scanned the gardens and exterior of the house as they drove up from the electric gates. She noted the surrounding wall to the property and while it was not impossible to scale said wall, this area had an ever-present security patrol that would surely have caught someone climbing over it. She nodded to herself, filing that away for later.

“My God,” Jamie gasped, “this place must be worth about forty million.”

“And the rest,” CJ added. “You ready?”

Jamie nodded and turned to grab the bag from the back seat. They had followed Mulroney on the way there and his car was just ahead of them in the makeshift parking lot the house’s courtyard had become. The gardens had been taped off, a few cops in white forensic coveralls slowly searching the grounds. Stepping out of the car, CJ looked around her, noticing the amount of police and experts from the various departments, both in and out of the house. *‘VIP treatment,’* she thought with disgust. She knew that the ‘average’ family murder wouldn’t get this much attention and it made her a little sick at the thought.

They all entered the house after flashing their ID’s and Mark found a nearby Lieutenant.

“AD Mulroney, FBI,” he said to the tall, well-built cop. “What do we have?”

The Lieutenant sighed and shook Mark’s hand. “Lieutenant Dickson. It ain’t pretty, Assistant Director. If you take about three steps to your left there, you’ll see Mr. Davenport. Two other bodies are upstairs.” The Lieutenant nodded toward CJ and Jamie. “FBI’s getting better lookin’ huh?” he winked at Mark, who grimaced at his words.

CJ glared at the cop. “Seriously?” she said in a low voice.

He put his hands up. “Sorry. It’s been a long day.”

CJ just snarled at him before she and Jamie took those three steps to their left, leaving Mulronee talking to the man. Neither of the professional women made known the stomach-churning feelings they felt inside when they saw the body, and they walked towards the taped off area below it.

Charles Davenport had been 'displayed' hanging from the ornate cast iron railing that curved up the grand staircase. The body was hanging from the upper landing section of the railing and was reminiscent of a crucifixion.

CJ analyzed everything she could see. She stood shoulder to shoulder with Agent Green and knew the tall blonde was doing the same.

Davenport was secured to the railing around his neck, his legs dangling below the floor line and his hands bent into the curled metal to keep them in place. A long scarf was stretched like a banner from hand to hand across his chest, neatly tied to his fingers. His bare stomach was gauged out leaving a dark and bloody hole in his torso. There was so much blood it was impossible to tell how deep it went. His blood and some of his flesh had fallen on the plush carpet below, a very large stain inside the cordoned off area.

"This would be part of the 'something else' we talked about before. What do you see, Agent?" CJ said in a low, steady voice.

"He's killed before," the blonde returned in the same tone.

CJ knew what she was talking about and nodded. "He enjoyed displaying the body. Look how neatly he's tied the tassels around each finger. And the scarf has been positioned so precisely."

"He cut the body after he hung him, though," Jamie said, maintaining a cool, detached attitude as was necessary at these scenes.

"I agree, but what makes you say that? I'm just curious..." CJ spoke quietly, trying to ignore the stench of the slowly stagnating blood.

"Look at the surrounding cuts. They're so uneven, untidy... leading me to believe he was standing on one of the top steps while he reached over to try and carve the guy post-mortem... and post-positioning. Also, the pieces of flesh on the carpet," the blonde mused.

"Yes. But why make all that work for himself?"

Watching the way CJ scratched through her dark hair in thought, Jamie knew the question didn't require an answer right now.

The two women walked carefully through the entire lower level of the home. It was overtly luxurious and spotless. The kitchen, living areas, downstairs bathroom, sauna, library and the dining room were all seemingly untouched except for the cops who were working quietly in every room looking for clues. CJ and Jamie walked into the study and were greeted by a different sight. Papers were strewn all over the desk and floor, and a couple of drawers had been busted open. The drawers must have been locked to require so much force to penetrate them. It looked like someone had been searching for something. The first thing to cross CJ's mind was that Davenport had been in some trouble – maybe criminal activity – but she didn't voice the thought... no evidence yet. Apart from that, nothing looked unusual.

They headed for the bottom of the staircase, noticing Mulronee was still standing in the hallway talking with Ethan about the body. CJ nodded almost imperceptibly in approval, as she watched Mark talk Ethan through what was probably his first gruesome murder scene.

Just as Jamie put her foot on the bottom step, she saw a cop coming down the stairs. He stopped briefly in front of them and nodded up towards Charles Davenport.

“Ransom demand at the top of the stairs, two bodies in the second bedroom on the right,” he said as he rushed past them, obviously seeing the badges they had pinned to their lapels.

CJ looked at Jamie and after a mutual nod, they ascended the stairs, keeping to the right of yet more tape that spanned the entire length of the iron railing. The ransom demand was pretty obvious once they reached the top. Large letters were scrawled across the wall in... blood?

\$10 million or they die.

I'll call you.

The first thing that swam through CJ's mind was slight puzzlement. *They* were already dead. It was assumed that he had taken the wife as a hostage. But was there more to this? She hadn't had a chance to look at the initial file due to her being the driver on their way here.

“I'll be right back,” said CJ, as she turned to head downstairs again.

“Agent Carson?” Jamie said, maintaining their professional roles at the crime scene.

The tall woman stopped. “Yes?”

“I think the killer has the wife and two other kids, if that's what you're gonna check...”

CJ came back to stand next to her colleague. “How do you know?”

The sharp-eyed Agent Green had spotted a family photo on a table in the upper hallway. “The file said four kids, two from a previous marriage, and I'm assuming that's a family shot,” she said, pointing to the picture.

CJ nodded as they went to look at the photo, encased in an expensive looking frame. Crouching down, she viewed the idyllic scene. Charles Davenport was sitting with his wife, two sons and two daughters, around a big table adorned with brightly colored plates and food. It looked like a birthday party and CJ couldn't believe the smiling man in the photo was the same man who now hung dead, not fifteen feet away from her. She stood up and turned to Jamie.

“Let's go,” she said sullenly, heading for the second bedroom.

As they walked through the door, they saw two cops standing guard in front of a closet door. The room was decorated in colorful children's wallpaper, which was now partially covered in blood spatter. Was the father killed in here trying to protect his children? CJ's gut was heaving from the horrid anticipation of what she might see. The cops saw the women approach and stepped aside slightly, leaving the contents of the closet open to view.

On the floor, just inside the doors, lay two boys.

Jamie and CJ maintained their professional exterior but their eyes said it all. It was a devastating sight. The two smaller bodies had been shot. If it hadn't been for the one visible wound, they might have been asleep.

CJ kept her emotions at bay by going into full-blown agent mode.

She cocked her head to the cop on her right. "Who are they?" she croaked, then cleared her throat.

"Uh..." he flipped open a notebook. "On the right, Simon Davenport, ten years old. On the left, Craig Davenport, seven years old. Both shot and placed in here post-mortem, we believe."

CJ nodded slowly. "Thanks."

As much as she didn't want to do it, she had to look the bodies over. Things just didn't add up for CJ. The father was carefully placed and quite dramatically displayed. It must have taken the killer a reasonable amount of time to do all that... and a lot of brute strength to lift Mr. Davenport into position. Yet, here were the two sons, shot and stuffed into a closet. It seemed hurried and 'sloppy' in comparison.

CJ looked more closely, emphatically separating herself from the fact that she was looking at two dead children. She pulled a latex glove from her pocket and snapped it on. Pulling the little football top slightly, she could see the hidden wound on Craig's body. "Only one gunshot wound each?" she asked the same cop.

"Yes, ma'am."

She brought her un-gloved hand to her mouth and quickly changed her pose to rubbing her chin in thought. In truth, she wanted to throw up. Jamie came down next to her, the tall blonde's face tight and rigid.

"Are you thinking what I'm thinking?" Jamie asked.

"That it doesn't make sense?" CJ whispered.

"Yeah."

"It's like the killer wasn't expecting to deal with two kids..."

"That's what I was thinking. The father is arranged as if this guy is an experienced serial killer, but these," Jamie said, gesturing toward the boys, "are not."

"We'll talk at the office, okay?"

"Sure."

CJ stood up and turned to the cop again. "No nanny or housekeeper at home when this happened?"

He shook his head. "No. Just the father and two boys from what we can tell. No staff at all."

"Who called it in?"

"Their regular mailman found the door open when he tried to deliver a package. He's been delivering mail here for the past twenty years and had the code to the gates."

"Is he a suspect?"

"I don't think so, ma'am. He's sixty-two years old and almost had a heart attack when he found Davenport. He called 911 immediately from the phone downstairs. He also said he wants to help in any way," the cop replied, checking his notebook for any other details. "He called the deceased 'Charlie', so I think he knew the family. Thankfully, he didn't see the boys."

“Okay, thanks,” the tall agent replied as Jamie noted the information down.

They continued with their investigation of the crime scenes, getting as much information as they could and taking the photographs they needed. CJ knew the crime scene photographer would get all the official shots but they never took pictures of the things that CJ needed to help her profile the killer. It was a quirk very personal to her, to help her ‘create’ the murderer in her mind.

They met Mark in the hallway where the relevant people were beginning to try and remove Charles Davenport from the railings.

“You okay, Agents?”

“Yes, Sir. But I have a lot of questions... and a lot of work to do,” CJ replied thoughtfully.

Jamie nodded in agreement and Mark looked at them approvingly. He was very proud of his small team.

“I sent Matthews and Ryan out to canvass the area. We need as much information on this family as we can get. I want us all to meet back at the office. Before this thing touches paper, I need us to discuss everything we’ve learned today. Agent Carson, I need you leading on this, but the whole team will be available to help you.”

Both women nodded and turned to look at the banker’s body.

“What do you think of the scarf, Sir? Why did the killer take the time to tie it on there?” CJ asked, wanting to hear her boss’ take on it.

“Not sure,” Mark replied thoughtfully. “*Whose* scarf it is could be significant.”

“Good point. But still, some things don’t add up. Hopefully, forensics will turn something up... and I need to do some digging.”

* * * * *

Sitting at her desk a few hours later, CJ held her forehead in her left hand, tapping on the smooth surface with a pen in the other. As she scribbled out her thoughts, Jamie put a mug down next to her and she grunted a thank you of sorts to the blonde.

After Jamie sat down on the opposite side of CJ’s desk, she leaned forward on her elbows. “Want to brainstorm?”

“I think so. I’m not making sense on paper. It’ll help when Ethan and Mikey get back though. I bet they found out a thing or two,” CJ said, taking a slurp of the hot liquid.

“Okay. What were your first thoughts when you saw Charles Davenport?”

“At first, I got confused as to why there was a ransom. The way that body was displayed suggests a serial killer... a very experienced serial killer. And if that’s the case, how the hell is he still out there?” CJ offered a trifle angrily.

“We need to look through unsolved cases...” Jamie began.

“Already on it. That’s what I was talkin’ to Neeson about earlier. He’s looking them all up and sending them to me... checking for any matching MO’s or markers.”

“Great. So, the positioning of Davenport, I’m thinking...”

Mark walked in, effectively cutting Jamie off mid-sentence. He pulled up a chair and joined the women around CJ’s desk.

“Ethan and Mikey are five minutes out. Once they get here, we can get started. Hideous crime scene, huh?” he said, inhaling deeply.

“Worst one I’ve seen so far, Sir,” Jamie replied.

CJ picked up the phone handset and dialed a number. “I’m just gonna let Kate know I’ll be late tonight,” she said, by way of explanation.

A few rings later, Kate answered her cell phone.

“*Hello?*”

“Hi Katie, it’s me.”

“*Hey, I have your office number stored but I wanted to be sure. Hi, honey. I miss you so bad. How are you?*” the actress said, feeling quite excited to hear CJ’s voice.

“I miss you too...” At this point, CJ knew it was a bad day at the office when Jamie didn’t even look up to tease her. “I’m sorry I didn’t call earlier. I figured you’d be busy on set. Then we got a real bad case this afternoon. I’m gonna be late tonight. Sorry, Katie.”

“*Oh CJ, it’s okay. I got your text this morning. I’ll be up when you get home, honey. I love you.*”

CJ knew that Kate could sense her mood. Her wife was so in tune with her, it bewildered CJ at times.

“Thanks, Katie, but I might be really late. You don’t need to wait up.”

“*I’ll see you later then. Please be careful, CJ.*”

“Always. Oh and I love you too... a lot. Bye Katie,” CJ whispered into the handset, receiving a genuine smile from Mark.

“*Bye, CJ.*”

She hung up the phone and sighed. Jamie and Mark remained silent, looking as drained by the day’s events as CJ felt. A few moments later, Ethan and Mikey came in and headed straight for the coffee machine. Once they settled round CJ’s desk, they all began organizing their notes.

“Okay,” Mark sighed. “What do we have?”

Ethan put his finger in the air, since he was mid-coffee-gulp. After he swallowed it, he looked at Mark.

“We spoke to the neighbor – a Mrs. Angela Ward – and found out a ton of information. She pretty much knew the Davenport schedule for the day because she went to a pre-schoolers play date with Mrs. Sheila

Davenport and the girls. The two daughters – Shannon and Lucy – are four and two years old respectively. She says that when Sheila left this morning – around 10am – Charles was home alone.”

Ethan flipped the page in his notebook. “She says he had a conference call and would probably be in his home office for that. Anyway, she told us the boys were visiting their father, as he and his first wife have joint custody and they come to stay sometimes. The boys have a karate class on a Saturday morning, so that’s where they should have been. She thinks the karate takes place over at the local sports center.”

Matthews paused again and drew an asterisk at that part on his notes. “I’ll check out that lead first. I want to know why the boys were home.” He chewed on the end of his pen while the other agents waited patiently.

“Angela also says that Sheila told her, the pest control guy was coming over again, as they seemed to have an infestation problem. Angela showed some confusion there... might be worth looking into the pest control firm.”

CJ was forming a mental image of the whole layout in her head. What Ethan was saying made sense. For some reason, the boys had come home early. Mrs. Davenport wouldn’t have known about their presence and so wouldn’t have told her friend about that. It didn’t explain why the killer was so haphazard about their murders though.

“Anything else?” Mark asked Ethan.

“Not yet, but I did say to Angela that I would be back. She was quite distraught. What do you guys think?”

Jamie spoke up. “CJ and I were trying to figure out why the father was so carefully presented and the boys were hidden away. It just doesn’t add up. And also, why did the killer not just hold the whole family to ransom in the house if he only wanted money? I’m working on a theory, but I need more facts first.”

All four nodded in agreement to that and they began to discuss Mr. Davenport. After exchanging their opinions on the state of the body, they fell silent for a moment.

“What’s bothering me...” CJ said, “is that it looks like the killer didn’t expect the boys to be home, meaning he wasn’t watching the house, or he would’ve known they’d returned. It’s like he knew... or was told that Davenport would be alone. And where was the staff? People who have money and houses like that would surely at least have a maid. What also bothers me is, did he take Mrs. Davenport from the house? Did she return home after the play date? We still have no clue how he came to have her as a hostage... and why he killed the boys but not the girls.”

CJ paused and scratched her head. “There’s no sign of struggle or disturbance, other than the obvious murder scenes and in the office, which is another thing. When I saw the state of the desk, I immediately thought somebody was searching for something. But was there some criminal activity going on? Was Mr. Davenport in some kind of trouble? Aaaaand...”

CJ stopped and everyone remained silent, knowing she wasn’t finished.

“You know what bothers me the most?” CJ looked up and saw the raised eyebrows as her colleagues waited for the punch line.

“How the killer got in to the property undetected. Did you see the height of the walls? And those gates? There was no smashed window and no forced entry. And there are patrol cars driving around that neighborhood all the time. We saw three security vehicles on our way in!”

“We did too. I wonder if Mr. Davenport knew his killer...” Ethan said, Mulroney nodding along at his side.

They all seemed to inhale in unison.

Mark tapped a pencil against his bottom lip. “What we need to do is get as much investigation done as possible into the Davenports while we wait for the killer to contact the police. I told them to call me immediately when he does. When that happens,” he said turning to Ethan, “I want you and Mikey to go to the incident room and remain there. I need you to report back to me at regular intervals.”

“Yes, Sir,” the two agents said.

“I’ll chase up the forensics and autopsy teams tomorrow, Sir,” Mikey added.

“Good.”

“Uh...” CJ murmured.

“Yes?” the AD said, quirking an eyebrow.

“Sir, I should be the one on the phone with this guy. Maybe then I could get a sense of what’s really going on with him.”

“Well, the cops say they have everything set up and they expect him to call the police, not the FBI. If the killer calls here, you’ll deal with it. If he calls the cops, they’ll have to take the initial contact. Unfortunately, we have to wait... he’s gonna call us, remember? We have no idea who this guy is right now. Hopefully, he left some DNA at the scene. We’ll figure it out, guys. I have complete confidence in you all.”

“Thanks,” CJ said, slumping her shoulders.

The others nodded.

Jamie looked at CJ and realized that her friend had been up since the previous morning. “CJ, do you want me to take shift tonight? You could get some sleep.”

CJ looked at Mark. The Assistant Director looked thoughtful before he spoke.

“Good idea. You’ve been going since yesterday, CJ. I need you fresh, and until this guy calls, we can’t just go after him. We can handle it for now, so go home and get some shut-eye. That’s an order,” Mark said.

“I’ll finish up my report and go home this evening. I need to find out some stuff first, or I won’t be able to sleep anyway.”

“Fair enough. Come see me before you leave,” Mulroney said, getting up from his chair.

After the AD left, the agents all got their heads down and wrote up their reports, organizing all the information they had collected. Once they had done that, it would be merged into one file. CJ couldn’t get the images of the boys out of her head. She was trying to get into the mind of this killer, but it kept pulling her back to how this guy could shoot two children in cold blood. She had dealt with more than a few serial killers in her time with the FBI – and plenty of crime scenes, some of them extremely grotesque and bloody – but dealing with children at a murder scene was very upsetting and it affected the agent more than she’d

thought it would. She focused on her report and hoped this guy could be brought to justice sooner rather than later.

Chapter 4

CJ rubbed her tired eyes as she got out of her truck and entered the darkened house. Kamali lifted his head sleepily, recognizing his owner's vehicle and footfalls as she came in.

"Hey boy," she whispered.

He slumped back down and CJ headed for the kitchen. Opening the fridge, she narrowed her eyes at the harsh light from within. Popping the lid off the milk carton, she took a few gulps, knowing that Kate always hated when she did it but she was dog tired and didn't want to waste time or energy finding a glass.

Rubbing her eyes again, she crossed the hallway and headed for the stairs. Her mind was still whizzing, trying to figure out what was in the killer's head and what his motive was... if he had one. She had checked with the security firm and after a few hours of passing her around to various people, she found out that nobody had seen Mrs. Davenport since she left that morning. So, did the killer take her from the street before she returned home? Was he laying in wait? Was he just in it for the killing and the power? Maybe he was in it for money. But why not take the boys as hostages too? Why kill them? And why did he not kill the girls? She was still deep in thought when she walked into the bedroom and suddenly looked up from the floor when she realized there was a light on.

"Hey you," Kate said from the bed, putting down her book.

CJ paused for a moment, as if trying to return from the dark thoughts. "Hey. Why are you still up? It's..." CJ looked at her watch, "one thirty!" The agent's 'not working late' plan had backfired when she found some information she just had to follow up on.

"I know. But I also know your day was really rough and I wanted to be here for you."

"Oh, Katie," the tall woman said, stumbling forward to the bed and sitting down.

Kate immediately moved to her side and kneeled on the soft mattress while wrapping her arms around her wife's neck. CJ remained tense and didn't return the hug.

"What's wrong, CJ?" the actress asked, concerned at her spouse's conflicting states.

"I... I need to wash... don't touch me yet," CJ said, moving away.

Kate was a little hurt and confused. "CJ... please talk to me."

The agent turned around on her way to the ensuite. She saw Kate's pained expression and closed her eyes. "I will. Just let me clean today off me, okay?"

"Okay," the smaller woman said quietly.

CJ disappeared into the bathroom and Kate soon heard the water falling from the showerhead. She was a little concerned. CJ had never had to 'clean the day' off her before. "Musta been a really bad day," Kate muttered.

The actress got up and drew back the covers. She moved her book to the nightstand and went to pee, not saying anything to the agent, who was now standing under the hot water, facing the tiled wall.

“CJ, will you... uhm, flush this before you come to bed?” Kate said, not wanting to affect the water temperature.

Inside the shower cubicle, CJ smiled briefly, then frowned at her smile.

“How do you do that?”

“Huh?”

“Nothing. Yes, I’ll flush.”

Kate left the ensuite, wondering if her wife was losing her mind. Thinking furiously about how to help her spouse talk about her day, she pulled at her bottom lip as she sat on the side of the bed. That’s how CJ found her when she eventually emerged from the bathroom, completely naked, hair dried and her skin flushed pink from the steaming water.

Kate didn’t look up and CJ knew that her wife would be worried about her behavior. She watched the small blonde as she sat pensively, green eyes fixed on the carpet, toes wriggling unconsciously into the deep pile. Kate only wore her favorite tee and a pair of soft girlie shorts. She looked adorable and the agent wondered how she had ever managed to do her job without the support of this beautiful soul in her life.

She crossed the space between them and Kate looked up, almost choking at the sight before her.

“C’mon,” CJ said, “bedtime.”

Kate stood up in front of her. She removed her clothes, wanting and needing to feel CJ’s skin on hers, and climbed into the bed. The agent followed and once they were settled, she scooped the smaller body into her arms, feeling the actress’ heartbeat next to her own. Just holding Kate brought her back to herself a little and for a split second, she forgot the horrifying crime scene. She closed her eyes and it came flooding back, the boy faces seemingly printed onto her eyelids. She tensed again.

“Talk to me. Please, honey,” Kate whispered, tightening her hold around her tall spouse.

“I don’t think I can.”

“Why not?”

“I... it was so... awful. I don’t want you to...”

“CJ, please tell me about your day. I can handle it. You know I can,” Kate pleaded.

“It was a triple murder, honey. Not something you want to have described to you.”

“I don’t mind you describing anything to me if it helps you to relax a little,” Kate said, kissing the agent’s collarbone.

CJ sighed. “I’m not going to win this one, am I?”

“When do you ever win?”

“Good point. Are you sure you want me to talk about this?” CJ asked, giving the feisty little blonde a final chance to opt out.

“Yes. Tell me...”

“Okay. Like I said, it was a triple murder. A banker and...” CJ faltered.

“And?”

“And... his two sons.”

Kate lifted her head to look at her wife in the dim illumination. “How old?”

CJ knew Kate would pick up on everything so she decided not to mess around. “Seven and ten years old.”

“Oh God,” the smaller woman gasped, tears springing to her eyes.

“See? This is why I didn’t want to...”

“Don’t, CJ. I want to know. I need to share these things with you. For better or worse, remember? This is the ‘worse’. Tell me more and maybe I can help somehow.”

The agent thought back to the bank robbery they had been caught up in a few months back and remembered what happened when she tried to cut Kate off from her to do her job. That thought seemed to open the floodgates and CJ told her everything that happened, only leaving out the really graphic details. Kate held it together, as CJ knew she would, but by the end of it they were both shedding tears, although the agent suspected Kate’s tears were partly for what her wife had gone through.

Sniffing loudly, Kate moved out of CJ’s embrace and went to the bathroom, returning a short time later with a long piece of toilet paper, which she tore in half. She handed one piece to CJ and climbed back in the bed.

Snuggling up beside her wife again, the actress stifled a yawn. “You must be so tired, baby. Can you try and get some sleep now?”

“With you around... yes.”

“Will you wake me if you can’t sleep? Please?”

“Okay,” CJ said quietly, pulling Kate into her arms.

CJ reached over and turned the light off, feeling the blonde tighten her hold.

“I really missed you, you know,” Kate whispered.

“I missed you too. It’s been a busy week and as soon as I file this case, I’m taking some time off. Maybe we could actually spend a whole day together.”

“Yeah, it’s been pretty hectic recently. Just stay close to me, CJ.”

The agent knew exactly what Kate meant. “I will, Katie. I promise.”

* * * * *

It was so noisy. The wind was blowing hard through her strawberry blonde hair as she moved quickly through the trees. Suddenly, she was at a precipice, lightning bolts passing her head as the ground left her feet. She was falling. She looked to her right and CJ was falling with her. Fear filled her body until she couldn't focus anymore. An instant later, she was lying on the sand and she couldn't move. The sounds of the ocean crashed over her mind. CJ stood over her, wailing and crying. "I'm not dead, CJ," she shouted. But it was no use... the voice was only inside her head and her wife couldn't hear her. The pain on the tall woman's features ripped Kate's heart from her chest...

Kate woke up in a sweat, her heart thumping so fast she thought she might pass out again. Reaching over automatically to search for her wife, she found nothing but cold sheets. The actress opened her eyes and a flood of unshed tears ran down her face and onto her pillow.

"Well... that's new," she mumbled to herself.

She sat up and rubbed her eyes, noting from the clock on the nightstand that it was 10am. She hadn't had nightmares for a long time and she couldn't remember a single one since she'd met CJ. Kate sat in deep thought for a few minutes and decided that it was probably down to CJ's case and that fact that she was worried about her wife drifting away from her while trying to solve it.

She sighed heavily and went into the ensuite. After turning on the shower, she dealt with a couple of biological necessities before looking at her reflection in the mirror. "Ugh. I'm so glad I have some time off... finally," she grumbled, pulling at the dark circles under her eyes that were usually covered in make-up. Clothes on and a light breakfast consumed, she took Kamali out for a walk then fed the horses, followed by some grooming and pampering.

A couple of hours later, Kate was sitting in the house drinking tea and pondering her dream. She couldn't shake the distraught expression on CJ's face and the fact that she, herself, had been paralyzed. It was an unsettling vision and had felt so real, but she put it down to feeling so helpless when CJ had to attend horrid crime scenes and Kate couldn't be there to support her. She supposed that, even if she was an agent and somehow could be there, it wouldn't be any easier anyway. They'd both be feeling the effects of such a difficult job. She stopped her musings when she reached the bottom of her mug. Sighing heavily, she got up and walked over to the window seat in the kitchen, snagging her cell phone on her way.

After receiving a text message back from CJ, saying she was available to talk, she dialed the agent's office extension.

* * * * *

CJ stood waiting for the machine to dispense her coffee. On her way back to her desk, she saw Jamie getting up to answer CJ's ringing phone.

"I'll get it, Jamie. Here... take your coffee," she said, handing a mug to her colleague. "I bet it's Kate anyway."

"Thanks, CJ," Jamie said, settling back into her seat and sipping the bitter liquid.

CJ slumped down at her desk and picked up the phone.

"Special Agent Carson."

"Hi, honey."

“Hi, Katie. What are you up to today?”

“Not much at the moment. Just thinking of you, so I thought I’d see how you were coping,” the actress said, leaning her elbow on the window ledge and cupping her chin in her hand.

“I’m okay. We’re waiting for a second call from the killer.”

“He called today?” Kate asked, feeling the need to know everything in order to help somehow.

CJ looked up from her desk and noted only Jamie was present in the room and the door was closed, so she figured she’d tell Kate what happened. “Yeah. He only called to let the cops know that he has Mrs. Davenport and the two daughters. He cut off pretty quick before they could trace the call... told them he’d call back with the details of his demands.”

“Damn,” Kate said, *“he seems to know what he’s doing where calling the cops is concerned, huh? I was thinking about what you told me last night and something doesn’t feel right about this.”*

Despite everything, CJ smiled. “Oh, Agent Carson? Care to elaborate?”

“Quit that. I’m not an agent,” the actress muttered.

“Tiny formality. You have an agent’s brain,” CJ said, still curious about Kate’s feelings on the case. CJ hadn’t told her wife about her suspicions, just the facts. “What feels weird about it, Katie?”

“I’m not sure... just a feeling. Could you uh, bring the case file home?” Kate asked hopefully.

CJ bit back her initial protective response. “I could... if I actually get home in the next few days.”

“Well, I’d like to look at it but it’s up to you. Just please call me if you need me... or if you need a little distraction for a few minutes, okay?”

“Of course I will.”

“Have you had lunch yet?” Kate said, concerned that CJ would just work and consume coffee all day.

“Uh, no. I haven’t had time to eat yet.”

“Please try and have something, CJ. Take care of yourself or I’ll have to come do it for you.”

“Yes, dear.”

“I’m serious. Please?”

“Okay,” the agent relented. “I will. I gotta go, Katie. I’ll get home as soon as I can.”

“Okay. I love you. Talk to you later.”

“Love you too. Bye.”

CJ hung up the phone and turned to Agent Green who was wagging her finger back and forth.

“Listen to her, CJ. She knows what she’s talking about.”

“Oh, you be quiet. You don’t have to side with her. She can’t hear you,” CJ grumbled.

“That’s not why I said it. I’m serious. Once, I had this case that took over so much, I forgot to make time to eat. I almost passed out while driving. Your body needs fuel while working these things. The hours pass without you noticing it,” Jamie chastised.

“Who are you? My mother?” CJ said, flinching because she never usually mentioned her mother to people.

Jamie caught the flinch, seeing pain flash across CJ’s eyes. Even though the blonde wasn’t sure why it happened, she softened. “Hey... I care about you, remember? Did you even eat breakfast this morning?”

CJ dropped her head. “No. I couldn’t sleep and got up at 5am. I wasn’t hungry before I left.”

Jamie let the conversation drop, sensing stress and sadness warring within her friend. CJ got up a short time later to go to the restrooms and the blonde got straight on the phone.

“Hello?”

“Hi... Kate?”

“Yes?”

“It’s Jamie. I need to be real quick... could you come over to our office and bring a lunch for CJ?” Jamie said, knowing she was meddling but she didn’t care.

“Uh, yes. You read my mind. I’m on my way out the door. Is she all right?”

“Well, yes, but she didn’t have breakfast and I’m grassing her in because I care about her.”

“Is she really coping, Jamie? She says she is, but I’m not sure,” Kate said, concerned that CJ was trying to protect her from everything, as usual.

“She’s coping, Kate, but her mood is hit and miss here at the office. She lights up every time she talks about you so it would be good for her if you popped in with a sandwich or something,” Jamie persuaded.

“Okay. I’ll leave now. I’ll bring you something too. I bet you didn’t eat either.”

Jamie scrunched up her face. “Uh, no. But at least I had breakfast.”

“Uh huh. I’ll see you both soon. Bye.”

“Bye Kate,” Jamie said, hanging up the phone just in time as her colleague came back through the door.

CJ sat down at her desk and got back to work. Jamie observed the permanent little frown on her friend’s brow and knew that, even though Agent Carson could cope with a lot, she’d do it a lot better if she would fully accept her spouse’s support. ‘Well, I can act as go-between to make sure she does,’ Jamie plotted.

She knew CJ got ‘into’ the killer’s mind. She knew that’s why this particular agent was one of the best in the Bureau... especially at profiling murderers. CJ had already decided that the scarf the killer used was

most likely significant to something from his past. It had nothing to do with Davenport. When the dark-haired agent had called Neeson about searching for files, she had told him the scarf would be a common factor in possible previous murders... and she'd been right. Four more unsolved cases had appeared, all had the scarf in the same formation, displayed like a declaration over the body, although the body positioning was different each time. Jamie had decided to trust CJ's judgment. Even though the blonde had been with the Bureau for years, she could still learn a thing or two.

She just wondered how much damage CJ's getting so close to the mind of this killer could do... and at what cost.

* * * * *

Approximately fifty minutes later, Kate arrived at the FBI's Los Angeles field office, hoping that CJ hadn't been called away for anything. As she approached the security guard, he stood up and smiled at her.

"Hello, ma'am. How can I help you?"

Not wanting to alert CJ to her presence – and allow the agent to prepare a fake façade for her wife – she decided to ask for Mark. "Hi. I'd like to see Assistant Director Mark Mulroney. Could you call him?"

"Okay. Who should I say is here?"

"Kate Carson."

"Hold on one minute," the guard said, checking his extension list and dialing.

A few minutes later, Kate was headed through the corridors with a visitor's pass on her jacket. Mark had told the guard to let her in straight away and said he would meet up with her in CJ's office.

When she got to the office, the door was open and she could see both women working away at their desks. Her wife was on the phone, holding her head with her free hand. Kate thought she looked drained and the agent's dark eyebrows were crinkled with tension. Jamie looked up and smiled silently as Kate walked in the door.

CJ was still listening to the person on the other end of the phone and was now pinching the bridge of her nose with her thumb and forefinger, her eyes squeezed shut as if she had a headache. When she opened them, she lifted her head and saw her wife. The agent's face completely changed, lighting up with some kind of hope and relief, although the tight lines between her eyebrows remained. Kate could now see her spouse was incredibly tired and pale already and it worried the blonde no end.

CJ smiled and raised her hand in a tiny wave, then pointed to the phone. Kate nodded and headed over to Jamie to give the agent her lunch.

"Hey," she whispered to Jamie, "I hope you like chicken Caesar salad?"

"Love it. Thanks, Kate."

The actress put the salad and a decent coffee down on Jamie's desk and the agent accepted it gratefully, taking the lid off the cup and savoring it with a deep inhalation. The office coffee machine just didn't compare.

CJ finally finished her call and turned to the two blondes, her eyebrow quirked in a question.

“Hi,” Kate said, as she walked over to her wife. She leaned down and placed a quick kiss on CJ’s forehead. Putting the food down on the desk, she pulled up a chair. “Eat some lunch. No argument.”

CJ just looked at her, then to Jamie and back at Kate again. “Is that an order, Assistant Director Carson? CJ asked plainly.

“Yes. And thanks for the promotion,” Kate said, munching on her salad. “Tuck in...” she added around her mouthful of greens.

CJ looked baffled but did as she was told.

Kate glanced up at the wall behind the office door and froze, mid-munch. The wall was covered in the photos from the crime scene and the actress’ face contorted a little. CJ noticed her wife’s expression and sighed.

“Sorry, Katie. If I’d known you were going to be here, I would’ve covered that.”

“No. I don’t want you to cover it. It just caught me off guard. I don’t want you to cover or hide anything from me, CJ, no matter how horrid it is,” Kate stated, turning to her wife, her eyes saying so much to the agent in their intensity. “Anything. Okay?”

CJ was stunned at how much information her wife had just communicated to her. She knew what Kate meant on every level but could she do it? It was so hard to let anyone into her mind when she was on a case like this. Of course, she had never had anyone care so much about her before either. “I’ll try.”

“That’s all I ask. Now, let’s eat lunch.”

Jamie was observing all this and knew without a doubt that CJ would be fine if she just stayed close to her strong little wife.

The blonde agent was quite astounded by the power the actress had over CJ but also noted that Kate would never abuse that power. Jamie had never seen a relationship like the one playing itself out in front of her right now. It was almost a communication beyond comprehension. Yeah, Kate would keep the darkness from taking hold. Jamie was sure of it.

But she also knew most of the pressure was on CJ as she was leading this investigation and she was aware that her friend was sensitive under that cool, tough, professional exterior. Jamie decided that she’d keep a close eye on CJ’s mood when Kate wasn’t around. Because that’s what friends do.

* * * * *

All three women finished eating and sipped their coffees quietly. Mark popped his head around the doorframe and smiled when he saw that he hadn’t missed Kate’s visit.

“Hello, agents,” he smiled at Kate and looked at his team with one of those sympathetic head tilts.

“Hi, Mark. Thanks for letting me in,” Kate said with a corresponding ‘I know what you mean’ smile.

“Of course I’d let you in. Have you come to sign up?” he replied with a hopeful wink.

Kate snorted. “Not officially, no.”

“Shame. CJ, can’t you talk her into it?”

CJ shook her head. “That’s your job, Sir. But it’ll be a tough one. She’s stubborn as a mule.”

Kate pursed her lips and decided that deserved a slap on the shoulder, which she proceeded to give to her wife.

Mark smiled again, but Kate could see the strain. She could see it on all three faces and wished she could help. As if he had read her mind, Mark turned to the wall behind him.

“Do we have anything new on this?” he asked, spinning back round to his agents.

CJ nodded. “Yes, Sir, but uhm…” she paused, looking at Kate.

“Spit it out, Agent,” Mark said, knowing what her problem was.

Kate gave CJ such a warning look – a ‘don’t protect me’ look – that the tall agent decided to speak up promptly.

“I was checking up on the staff situation at the Davenport residence. Apparently, the nanny was the one who took the boys to their karate class, but she was told to go off duty after that by Mrs. Davenport, as she usually doesn’t work weekends. The maid should have been at the house. We haven’t tracked her down yet,” CJ said, noticing her wife getting comfy on a nearby chair.

To her surprise, Mark closed the door and sat down too. “Have you let Kate look at this yet?”

“Uh…” CJ frowned.

“It’s okay, CJ,” Kate responded. “Mark, I’d like to look at it. I actually asked CJ today and I think she almost gave in. But I know it’s none of my business and she’s also trying to protect me.”

Kate expected CJ to be angry at what she’d said but when she looked to her wife, the agent just continued to stare at her desk. She looked so lost. Kate knew she was in there but she could feel her getting further away with every passing hour.

“Well, you can see the horrifying facts on this wall. Maybe you could, you know, see what you come up with?” Mark requested.

“I’d like to help,” Kate nodded.

CJ suddenly broke from her daze and put her hand on Kate’s arm. The actress was concerned about her spouse’s changes in mood when she saw CJ smiling at her.

“I have a strong suspicion about something relating to this case. It’s just a gut feeling at this point. I’d like to see if that’s what you were talking about on the phone. You know, you said something didn’t feel right? Maybe you could tell me what that is once you look over this,” CJ said, handing the file to Kate.

The actress nodded again and took the file. Mark said his good-byes and closed the door firmly behind him when he left, not wanting to acknowledge the fact that he liked having his ‘non-FBI’ FBI agent around. He supposed he could get into trouble for allowing Kate into the office but she was such an intelligent mind and he was able to explain it away to anyone by saying that she was CJ’s wife and had just ‘popped in’. And what’s more, he trusted the little blonde.

As Kate flicked through the information, she almost cried at the description of the crime scenes. She got to the part about the pest controller being called that morning. CJ had added information about previous visits from the firm. Kate stopped and turned back a few pages to the statement from the neighbor.

She brought her hand to her bottom lip and squeezed it as she thought. Then she stood up and went to the wall of photos. She looked at Charles Davenport's body, then at the boys. A tear sprung to her eye automatically but she wasn't crying. It was just so heartbreaking. The facts played heavily on Kate's mind. From the small drops of blood found on the carpets, it seemed Charles had indeed ran into his boys' room to try and protect them, even after he had been shot once. The actress could only imagine the panic and fear going through the father... and his sons.

She blinked away the moisture and gathered her thoughts. "CJ?"

"Yeah?"

"Could you come over here a second?" Kate asked quietly.

CJ got up from her desk and walked over to stand next to her wife. "You okay?"

"Yes, honey. I wanted to know if you found out who called the pest control firm each time."

"I'm not sure yet. They're pulling the phone records for me. Why?" CJ said, sensing her spouse thought the same thing she did.

"I think Mrs. Davenport is involved."

Stated so plainly, CJ just gaped at the actress, knowing that once again, Kate saw what she saw. "Why... why do you say that?"

Jamie had heard what Kate said and joined them at the wall of photos.

"Let me think for a second," Kate sighed and tapped on her chin. "I looked over everything. The security at the house, the pest control being called, the fact that there was no break in. Then I looked at this statement from Angela Ward. She seems to think they have a regular infestation, like it's been going on for a long time. Then..." She paused, looking at the wall, "the way the father is hung... like... the killer was proud of it. But the boys were almost an afterthought..." Kate faltered.

CJ put her hand on the smaller woman's shoulder, feeling so much love for this amazing, intelligent being. But the agent couldn't show it right now. There was too much horror here and she couldn't divide the nightmares in her head or let them seep into her 'real life'. She realized then, that she was separating herself from Kate again, but she didn't know how to do this any other way. "Go on," was all she could manage.

"Well... you guys said that you believed the killer wasn't expecting the two boys to be there and that's why they were so carelessly killed in comparison, right?"

Jamie saw CJ struggling – with what, she didn't know – so she answered. "Yes, Kate."

"So, Mrs. Davenport would have thought the boys were at their class and the nanny was off duty. The boys left for the class at nine-thirty according to this," she said, shaking the file slightly, "and Sheila left at 10am. But the boys came back at 11am because..." she read from the page again, "they shut down the sports center due to a burst water main. I just keep thinking Sheila told the killer that her husband would be there alone and gave the guy access to the house too. If she was the one calling the pest control all the time,

maybe she was having an affair with someone there. Maybe Charles had found out? And I bet she told the maid to take the day off too...”

Jamie stood with her mouth hanging open but CJ just nodded thoughtfully.

Jamie spoke first. “Wow. I had thought Sheila was involved, what with the lack of any evidence of her abduction, but I never considered her having an affair with the killer.”

CJ broke from her thoughts. “I thought she was involved too. I think she planned to have the husband killed for insurance money. Your theory is definitely sound, Katie. I’m guessing Charles would’ve had a prenuptial agreement drawn up before they married. Maybe she just wants his money... *and* her affair.”

Kate noted the monotone voice and the far away look in those unusually dull, blue eyes. But CJ continued to call her Katie, so somehow the actress knew her wife was still with her... for now.

“That could also be why he didn’t kill the girls. Maybe he has his ‘family’ with him,” Kate said, watching CJ closely.

“Even though I think he’s definitely killed before, I don’t think he wanted to kill the kids. I’ve requested medical records for the two daughters. You really do think like an agent, Katie.”

Kate sighed at CJ’s expressionless face and squeezed her wife’s arm. Jamie just stood there, nodding and thinking.

The blonde agent’s head suddenly sprung to attention. “If *we* think this guy is an experienced killer... in fact, we pretty much know he’s killed before, do you think *Sheila* knows that?”

CJ shook her head. “The file for the first murder that matches this guys MO was six years ago; the last one, two years ago. She may not know. Killers like this hide their work very well. He could just be the pest control guy she was fucking. She gets pregnant and for some reason, continues to have the affair. She decides to off her husband and figures her lover has the personality and the balls to do it. But Katie could be right. The girls could be his. I hope we get DNA from the scene.”

Every moment that passed made Kate worry a little more. Now her wife was using derogatory language. Of course, maybe CJ talked like that at work, but Kate doubted it. The agent was so articulate and certainly never needed profanity to express herself. The blonde wasn’t sure what else to do, other than what she was currently doing... staying as emotionally close to her spouse as she could.

Mikey came back from his investigations and Kate took that as her cue to leave. Hugging her wife briefly, they said their farewells and the actress left. As she walked out to her car, she decided to go home and think of something to settle CJ when she arrived at the house... something quiet and peaceful, where Kate could take her away from her dark thoughts and worries. It would be impossible to remove them completely right now but if Kate could somehow help her wife to relax – just a little – then she’d do it.

As Tony drove her home, she thought of just the thing.

Chapter 5

It was 2am when CJ’s truck finally pulled up outside the house. Seeing the building in complete darkness, the agent hung her hands from the steering wheel and dropped her head in exhaustion and defeat. She was

sickened by the case and they had found out from forensics that the killer left DNA on Craig Davenport's body. It had made CJ think the man had been disturbed by murdering children, but he had still done it, even though he'd made a mistake.

They had a name for him now. Steven Coburn was on file for various small-time violent offenses like bar brawls and assault and battery. But he had moved on to a more serious attack when he attempted to kill a guy one night in Georgia, where most of his priors had taken place. CJ had his file but it was old. The picture was ten years old. Coburn had managed to skip bail on the last charge and had never been seen since. CJ guessed he'd been murdering his victims since then – all male victims – and she just didn't know where to look for him. Not yet, anyway. She and Jamie had been checking out his last known addresses for most of the day and came up with nothing.

She broke from her thoughts and noticed she was crying silently. She didn't know how to stop it and suddenly jumped when a petite figure came towards the truck in the darkness.

The agent looked up when Kate opened the door, the interior light coming on to reflect CJ's tears. The actress didn't say a word but her eyes were the biggest and greenest CJ had ever seen them. She noticed Kate was wearing warm clothing and had a small bag over her shoulder, a flashlight in her hand and a pair of sweat pants and a large coat flung over her arm. The agent was extremely puzzled at her wife's appearance but still did not speak. Kate took a larger hand in her own and pulled CJ from the vehicle. The taller woman didn't resist when her wife took her away from the house but she did wonder where Kate was going in the middle of the night. Still, the words would not fall from CJ's lips and she decided to see what would happen.

As they walked across the field, the agent noticed the stars and a thin slice of moon in the dark sky. She shivered and inhaled deeply as she was led over the rough terrain in her blouse and work pants, holding her face in the air as she walked. For a split second, everything came into sharp focus and clarity... the horrid case disappeared... and tears sprang to her eyes when she came back from that moment of calm. She lowered her head to find Kate had stopped walking and was standing by a small campfire just waiting for someone to spark it to life. Next to it, were two thick sleeping bags, zipped together to make one large one, with two pillows tucked inside.

Kate – still silent – knelt down and lit the fire with a match, setting the bag down as she did so. She took out some sandwiches, a small thermos and two mugs. When she placed a little container on the ground with some left over chip sticks in it, CJ almost smiled. They had bought way too much food for that party and were still wading through it.

Kate sat on the sleeping bags and looked up at her wife. "Put on these sweats. They'll be more comfy," she said in a quiet and loving tone.

"We're sleeping out here?" CJ asked, eyebrows hitched up under her bangs.

"No," Kate replied. "We're just going to spend some time here. I hope you'll eat a little. And we can be quiet or talk. It's up to you. Will you stay here with me for a while?"

CJ crouched down, leaning her elbows on her thighs. "Yes. I will." She took the coat and pulled it over her blouse, then quickly changed into the sweats. She knelt down next to Kate. "How do you do it?" she asked, her eyes holding some wonder and confusion.

"Do what?"

"This. How do you do this...? Make me feel so loved... so..." CJ choked on her words and the tears came again.

Kate didn't want CJ to get bogged down in emotion and kept her tone light, but soft. "Here. Sit down and eat this. You love chicken mayo," the actress said, scooting closer to her wife with the thermos between her legs. "I brought peppermint tea. I figured maybe you'd had enough coffee today."

"Thank you, Katie," CJ whispered.

"Thank *you* for being here with me. I know you're struggling to stay with me, CJ. Just know I'm here, okay?"

"Oh, honey, I haven't left you in any way. But this stuff in my head..."

"I know," Kate soothed. "I know. We won't talk about it tonight. Just eat now. Then lie with me for a while."

CJ took a bite of her sandwich and found she desperately wanted more. Her appetite returned with a vengeance and she scoffed three of them, accompanied by some salty chip sticks. After they had some tea, the agent lay down on the sleeping bag, noticing the fire crackling and burning bright off to her left side. She looked at her wife and opened her arms, inviting the actress in.

Kate was overjoyed to see CJ smile and offer to hug her. She had felt so distant over the last few days, having the case in Washington to deal with, then drifting further and further away as this new murder progressed. Kate didn't take it for granted that it would all be okay now. She was smarter than that. But for now she would gladly accept the invitation and lay down beside her beloved spouse.

As CJ lay there on the quilted blanket with Kate snuggled in her favorite place under the agent's chin, she looked up at the sky and couldn't believe how beautiful it was this night. "Katie?"

"Yes, honey?"

"Did you rearrange the stars for me tonight too?"

A small chuckle escaped Kate's lips. "No. But I decided that those ones over there look like a frying pan," she said, pointing up at a constellation.

"A frying pan?" CJ barked. "Oh, I don't think so. It's a turtle... see his head sticking out of his shell?"

"Are you crazy?" Kate replied, slapping down the hand that CJ had pointed up into the darkness.

"Nope. You are. It's definitely a turtle."

"Frying pan."

"Turtle!"

"Frying pan!"

"Turt..."

A firm little hand silenced CJ as it came down over her mouth.

Kate brought her face close to her wife's. "It's. A. Frying. Pan," she said quietly, her eyes full of love.

CJ bit her bottom lip as the hand moved away. ‘Turtle,’ she mouthed silently. Kate smiled and the agent’s heart melted. “I love you, Katie.”

“I know. I love you too,” Kate whispered, kissing her wife softly on the cheek. “C’mon, let’s get inside this. I just want to hold you for a while.”

They slipped inside the warm sleeping bag and CJ bent her knees to scoot down. She knew Kate wanted to wrap around her and rested her head on the actress’ shoulder as two smaller arms coiled around her body. CJ felt so very warm and comfortable and even though she couldn’t control it, she knew she was falling asleep. What she didn’t know was that this had been Kate’s plan all along.

* * * * *

Kate lay under the stars, cradling her beautiful, exhausted spouse in her arms. She had figured that when CJ got home, she’d come into the house and lay in her bed in the dark, tossing and turning, not able to sleep. The actress decided to take the predictability out of CJ’s night by doing something different. And it seemed her plan was a roaring success. CJ snored lightly at her shoulder and the smaller woman was content to lie there awake and hold her as she slumbered.

Three hours later, she began to think that maybe she hadn’t thought this the whole way through. She had to wake CJ and get back to the house soon to let the agent get ready for work. Her wife still slept in the same position and Kate was glad that she at least had a few solid hours of rest. Kate had stayed awake. Perhaps it was the combination of her recent nightmare and the fact that she wanted to watch over her spouse that had kept her from sleeping.

CJ stirred. “Hmmm.”

Kate tightened her hold. “Hey,” she whispered as she kissed the agent’s hair.

A low mumble emanated from Kate’s shoulder. “What time?”

“6am, honey. Are you okay?”

“Hmmp... yeah.” CJ looked up. “Wow, we’re still outside, huh?” she slurred sleepily.

“Yep. I couldn’t carry you home.”

CJ’s face took on a crooked smile. “The size of me? Not a chance, Katie.” She rubbed her face. “Thank you for letting me sleep.”

“It was part of my plan. I know you didn’t sleep last night and you didn’t wake me like I asked, either,” Kate said, flicking her fingertip over the end of CJ’s nose.

“Sorry. It’s hard for me to drag you into all this. I would feel so guilty if you had nightmares because of *my* case.”

“CJ, I’m having nightmares because you’ve *not* dragged me into it.”

The agent got up on her elbow. “What?”

“Hey, it’s okay. It was just one bad dream and I think I was feeling you drifting away. I know it’s hard, CJ, but please... let me in. I’ll be better going through it with you than without you. Don’t you see?”

“I’m startin’ to...”

“Okay. Let’s get up and head back to the house. How does a hot shower sound before breakfast?”

“Sounds great. Will you wash my back?” CJ said, placing a delicate kiss on Kate’s cheek.

The actress knew her wife wasn’t ‘in the mood’ and she had to be honest, neither was she. It was highly unusual for them both but this was the first time they’d gone through this side of CJ’s work persona together and it was a learning experience for both of them. Still, she was glad of the offer to shower with her spouse.

“Of course I will.”

“Good call, choosing a grassy patch to lie on, Katie.”

“Yeah. I thought it might save our old bones.”

CJ smiled wanly as they got up and gathered their things, making sure the fire was completely out before heading back to the house. They had that hot shower, Kate washing her spouse lovingly, before heading downstairs for a light breakfast. CJ left for work and Kate began planning her day.

* * * * *

Mark was in CJ’s office when she arrived, talking with Mikey and Ethan.

Agent Matthews ushered her over to him. “CJ, come listen to this.”

“Listen to what?”

Mark interrupted. “Before you hear the recording of the second call from the killer, I want to say that I chose not to get you back in any earlier. He called the LAPD at 5am. This guy is definitely quite smart, calling when he thinks nobody will expect it.”

“You should’ve brought me in, Sir,” CJ muttered.

“Perhaps, but it was my decision to make, CJ. Anyway, it would have served no purpose. He will only speak with the cop he spoke to on the first occasion. I want to give them the chance to end it before we step in completely. So... we now have recordings of both calls and I want you to analyze them.”

CJ dulled down the hot temper she could feel rising. She knew it was due to stress and lack of sleep, although Kate’s little plan last night had gone some way to rejuvenating her. “Okay. I’ll grab a coffee and get started,” she said rather coldly, heading to the machine.

“No need,” Ethan said, “Jamie’s on her way with the good stuff.”

Mikey nodded. “We ordered you a latte. Is that okay?”

“Perfect,” CJ replied.

Mark left and headed down the corridor. He was a little concerned about Agent Carson. He knew how she acted during these cases as he'd seen it before but her mood was more unpredictable this time. He supposed it was because she couldn't just head down into that horrid place where the killer's thoughts merge with her own. She had Kate to think about. Mark wasn't entirely sure that was a good thing right now, as she seemed to be so conflicted. He vowed to himself to keep checking in with Kate. He seemed to have a strange friendship with the agent's wife and he was sure the actress wouldn't mind if he offered his support.

* * * * *

CJ listened to the recordings of both calls from the killer slash kidnapper. The first call had been very brief but she noted the melodic ring to the voice on the line and the use of some strange words. She re-played the second one, noting the word, 'cleansing' used a few times throughout. The killer also wanted his ten million dollars on Sunday and his chosen location for the drop was a churchyard. He wanted it in cash and delivered in a car so that he could drive away. CJ was slightly puzzled by that one but promised herself she would figure it out.

The hours passed and CJ was alone in the office. Jamie and Ethan were out following up on a few leads and Mikey had a half-day off for a family funeral.

The agent had the calls playing on a loop and was sitting with the office blinds closed and only a couple of lights on, trying to figure this guy out. This is what she did when she went in for the capture. This guy was a serial killer. He had at least four previous victims, CJ was sure of that. The MO's were too similar. She had ruled out any kind of copycat for the current crime, because tiny details like the way he tied the scarf tassels to the bodies would never be made public. All the victims were male, which made the agent think it had something to do with his father or perhaps a male ex-lover. She needed to do even more digging.

The tall woman listened to the second call again. Sheila Davenport could be heard in the background, screaming and pleading for help. CJ turned the volume up and listened again. She remained skeptical about the screams. The woman could be making a good show of the 'kidnapping'. CJ didn't usually think of victims this way but something about this made her sure that Mrs. Davenport was in on the whole thing. She just hoped that whatever was going on, the two young girls were not present while their mother screamed and wailed.

* * * * *

Kate stepped out of her Mercedes. Tony had a few days off since the actress was not at work and she had enjoyed her drive over to the FBI field office. She wasn't going in this time... just dropping off a package to Mark. She had called the AD earlier and asked if he could go with her to the café down the street from CJ's office. He had been glad to oblige.

Mark met the blonde at the front door. "Hello, Kate," he said warmly.

"Hi, Mark. Shall we go?"

"Yes. I don't have long but I wouldn't miss out on a coffee with you."

Kate smiled and nodded. They walked along the sidewalk and entered the coffee shop, ordering their drinks and sitting at the counter that ran along the front window.

"I want to thank you for helping me, Mark."

The AD sighed. "I'm just a little worried about her, Kate. I called Washington – private call, of course – because I was concerned that she's slipped so fast this time. And I think I can understand it now."

“Oh?” Kate said worriedly.

“Yes.” Mark lowered his voice and leaned in, as did Kate. “She’s been like this before on a couple of cases but never this quickly. Her old partner said she really starts to feel what the killer has done and almost thinks like him and even though she would *never* act on those dark thoughts, the very fact that she delves so deep is what makes her an incredible agent. Thing is...” he paused, biting his lips in thought.

Should he tell Kate about this or not? Yes, he should because CJ would find it too difficult to tell her wife. “Thing is, Kate... CJ was in Germantown once, trying to stop a hostage taker... she was right there with him on the street. She tried to talk him down. He had a baby held in front of him as a hostage and... he flipped out and shot the infant right in front of her.” Mark saw Kate’s expression freeze and covered her hand in a comforting gesture. “She shot and killed the guy right after that because he started firing his gun at bystanders, but CJ didn’t get over that for a long time... so maybe the fact that the two kids in this case were shot, is making her worse?”

Kate sniffed, feeling so much pain for her wife and the evils she’d dealt with, wondering how a person ever gets over seeing so much death. “That would do it,” she said, solemnly.

“But look how strong she really is, Kate. She still does her job; she survives anyway, even with that dark side to deal with. And she has you. What more could she need?”

“I’m trying to be there for her, Mark, I really am. But I still feel some distance, even when...” Kate faltered, wondering why she spoke so freely to this kind man who just happened to be her wife’s boss. “Even when she’s holding me, I still feel she’s not letting me in.”

“Don’t give up,” was all he said in reply.

Kate looked up from the mug in front of her. “Oh, I won’t. Ever.”

“Good, because this is partly why she found it so hard to have a relationship in the past,” he said, patting her hand again. “I need to get back. Sorry, Kate.”

Kate took to heart what he just said but didn’t respond to it. “I’ll walk you back along. And could you give her the box?”

“Of course.”

“Let me grab the hot food and coffee to add to it,” Kate said over her shoulder, heading for the cashier.

Mark just smiled.

* * * * *

Mulroney walked along the corridor to CJ’s office, carrying the small box under his arm and a cup holder full of coffees for the agents in his other hand. As he walked through the door, he realized CJ was alone in the darkened room. He knew this was part of the process for her but he never expected it during the day.

“Hello, CJ.”

“Sir...”

“These are for you,” he said, placing the items on the desk.

“Uh... thank you.”

“They’re not from me. Do you have anything new?”

“Not yet, Sir. Ethan and Jamie are still out and I’m getting somewhere with the profile now. I’m building on his background and childhood. I’ll let you know when I have something concrete.”

“Okay. Good work. Come find me if you need me,” Mark said quickly, exiting the room before CJ could query his statement.

The agent stared blankly at the closed door for a few moments, pondering the words, then turned her attention to the desk. She popped the lid from a coffee cup and took a sip, then opened the box.

A tiny card sat on top of the contents. It was only about two inches high and had a picture on the front, of her and Kate when they were in New York. Kate was raised up behind CJ as they stood at the viewing platform on the Empire State building and her wife was making large ‘ears’ on CJ’s head with her hands.

CJ didn’t smile but her eyes seemed to melt a little because the box was from her thoughtful spouse. She opened the card and saw the very brief message inside.

‘Stay close to me.

Love you.

K.’

CJ felt tears sting the back of her eyes and was a little shocked. She never cried at work. What on earth was Kate thinking? Or maybe that was her point... to throw a curve ball at CJ to make her realize she was still alive and so very loved. ‘*God, I love her,*’ CJ mused. She dug into the food supplies, realizing that it had distracted her brain from the horrors of the case for a few seconds. She had felt a spark of normal life for a moment... and it was nice, before the darkness smothered it again.

She ate some of the warm tuna-filled ciabatta bread then popped a few chocolate raisins in her mouth to accompany the rest of her coffee. Once she was satisfied, she got up and opened the blinds and as she walked back to her desk, she wondered if it was the little gesture from Kate that had lifted her frowning eyebrows. She sat down again, still pondering that thought when Ethan and Jamie walked in.

“Here... Kate sent us coffees,” CJ said, pointing to the cups and lowering her head to get on with her work.

“Tell your wife, thanks,” Jamie replied. “Hey... how’s it going?”

CJ didn’t reply at first, then suddenly realized someone had spoken to her. She raised her head again. “Sorry... what?”

“How’s it going?” the blonde repeated.

“Oh. Okay, I think. I’ll tell you guys what I have once I’m done.”

“Great.”

* * * * *

Kate drove through the gates into the studio lot. She had called Sam to see if she was free, feeling the need for a little support... and some distraction from worrying about CJ. Once she'd parked the Mercedes, she strolled across to the cafeteria and found her friend inside. After a brief hug, they grabbed two drinks and sat down.

Sam could see the stress on Kate's face as soon as she'd walked in. "So, tell me how you are. Honestly, Kate, you look like hell."

"Gee, thanks, Sam. You're a real pal."

"Just thought I'd start with a bang so you don't bullshit me. Come on... spit it out."

"I can't give you too many details but our Special Agents have a really, really horrid case right now," the actress said glumly.

"How bad is it?"

"Triple murder."

"Oh God, that's awful," Sam said, wondering how they did the job at all.

"You don't know the half of it... and unfortunately I can't tell you either."

"How's CJ doing?"

"Not great, I mean, she's coping. She always does. But it's a toughie, you know? She has to get into the killer's head. It's how she does her job so well."

"And you're not happy about that?" Sam asked, honestly wanting to understand.

"It's nothing to do with happy. I'm worried about her. I absolutely know she can handle it but she's very distant. I can manage to grab her back for a moment here and there, but she slips away again..." Kate began to feel emotional and stopped talking, sipping at her coffee to stifle her tears.

Sam covered the blonde's hand on the tabletop. "Hey... I'm here if you need me. Want me to come over tonight for a while... keep you company?"

"I'm not sure, Sam. I don't know when CJ will be home. She just sent me a text message to thank me for sending lunch to her. She also said she wasn't sure she'd get home tonight. Can I give you a call later if I need you?"

"Sure. Anytime, honey."

Sam decided to change the subject and not ask Kate about Jamie, which was what she wanted to do. They continued to eat their lunch with some easy conversation. Kate appreciated the break but her mind was still on her wife.

* * * * *

A few hours later, CJ stretched her painful neck and looked up to see what her colleagues were doing. She hadn't spoken more than a few words since they came in earlier and she wondered if she had missed anything they'd said. Her phone rang and she sighed deeply.

“Special Agent Carson.”

“CJ Carson?”

“Yes...”

“*I do believe your wife is having an affair,*” the rough male voice whispered on the line.

“What? Who is this?”

“*None of your concern. But she’s fucking her little redhead friend right now...*”

The line went dead and CJ frowned, her heart thumping at the unexpected words. Her first thought was that it was a load of nonsense, a prank call. Then, in her current state of mind, she began to run the idea around. The little redhead was Sam, right? But Sam liked Jamie. But Kate was feeling the emotional distance between her and CJ right now and maybe turned to Sam...

CJ literally slapped her own cheek. ‘*Jesus Christ, CJ. You know Kate would never! What the hell are you thinking?*’

But still... that call was not what she needed to hear right now. She had enough on her mind without horrid thoughts like Kate leaving her or cheating on her, running around in her head. She looked across the room to find her colleagues watching her with severely concerned looks on their faces.

“Sorry... just had to slap myself awake,” she lied.

“Ah,” Jamie responded, not believing it for a second. “Who was on the phone?”

“Nobody. Didn’t leave a name.”

Agent Green eyed her skeptically, wondering if she really could help her friend after all.

* * * * *

CJ got back to work for another few hours, trying desperately to get the ridiculous image of Kate and Sam out of her mind. She knew it couldn’t be true but her head was so messed up right now and it was an added dark thought she just didn’t need.

Jamie got up for a drink of water. On her return, she sat in the chair across from CJ. “Are you ready to tell us your thoughts yet?” the blonde agent asked.

CJ rubbed her eyes. “I guess so. I think I’ve figured out a way to find this guy but it’s all based on my theories regarding his profile.”

“That’s good enough for me. Let’s hear it.”

“Okay, here’s what I’m thinking,” CJ said, hunching over her desk, which was covered in papers and photographs. “I think the scarf is a significant marker stemming way back to Coburn’s childhood. I’ve looked over these earlier murders and the scarf is always pristine. He’s flattened it out and tied it so delicately to the bodies in some way... to Mr. Davenport at his fingers. The fact that the scarf is flat, stretched straight out and perfectly placed makes me think it’s a symbol of freedom for this killer, which leads me to believe that he has some past experience with being tied up against his will. Also, the use of the

word 'cleansing' in the calls... it's like he is trying to free himself by 'freeing' his victims or freeing himself by killing his father... seeing *him* in his victims. And it's possibly as obvious as his father tying him up with a scarf to beat him when he was a child."

"Why his father?" Jamie asked, already knowing the answer.

"Male victims. They're always male and always older than him, except for the boys, whom he didn't expect to deal with anyway." CJ paused to think. "If Coburn sees his abusive father every time he kills, where do you think he would look for some relief or comfort?"

Mikey and Jamie both spoke at the same time. "His mother."

"It's a definite possibility," CJ replied, still staring at her desk. "It says here, she died seven years ago. It seems to tie in with the time frame. The murders we know about started just after that. This is just a theory but it all seems pretty coincidental if it's not true."

"I'll look into it," Mikey said, getting to his feet. "Do you have the mother's name there?"

CJ flipped through her papers to find the right one. "Gale Coburn. Her maiden name was Phillips," CJ said, handing the paper to Mikey.

As the young agent left the room, CJ sighed, knowing she wasn't going home until she found a way to locate this guy. She was on a mission now. She looked at her watch and shook her head when she saw it was almost 8pm already. She sent a text message to her wife, getting an instant response. She lifted the phone and dialed home.

"Hello?"

"Hi. It's me."

"CJ? Hi. Are you okay?"

The agent tried not to give any indication to Kate that she was freaking out slightly. "Yeah. I'm fine. What did you do today?"

"Not much. Swung by the studios for a coffee with Sam..."

At those words, CJ's stomach lurched and she hated herself for even reacting to a stupid anonymous call. "Sorry Kate, I missed end of that. What did you say?"

"I said, I went home and tried to keep myself busy... did some Taekwondo. Are you sure you're all right, honey?"

"Yes. Sorry. Just a long day and it's not over yet," the agent said, holding her temples with thumb and forefinger.

"Oh. Will you be able to come home?"

"I don't know. I hope so."

"Okay," Kate said quietly. *"I love you, CJ."*

The tall agent wanted to cry but had to swallow it back. “I love you too. See you soon. Bye, Katie.”

“Bye.”

CJ hung up the phone, knowing in her heart that Kate would never cheat on her. She stared at the pile of work on her desk for a few moments until Jamie walked over and sat on the chair in front of her.

“Mikey called up from downstairs. He found an address still listed for the now deceased Gale Coburn, right here in the city.”

CJ looked up, slightly concerned that she couldn’t even remember hearing the phone ringing.

Mikey walked in a second later and came over to stand in front of the two women. “We missed it this first time around because his mother married again. Gale Foster owns the apartment – previously Gale Coburn – and she didn’t have a will. Steven Coburn is her only living relative,” he said, placing the information on the desktop.

“We’d better let Mark know and get out there then,” CJ said, standing up and grabbing her gun and jacket.

* * * * *

Kate paced the floor for a few moments after hanging up her call to CJ. Kamali watched her, no doubt wondering why his human was acting so strangely.

“Something’s wrong,” she muttered to herself. “She’s further away than she was earlier but it’s different. But I don’t know what else to do.” She walked to the living area, trying to convince herself not to panic. “We’ll be fine. Yeah, I’ll make sure of it. I’m worrying for nothing. If anyone can get through these crappy times, we can.”

After a strenuous workout in the gym, Kate had a shower and sat in bed with a good book, trying to keep herself from wondering what CJ was doing. Just after midnight, she dozed off.

A few hours later, the actress stirred, not knowing what had awakened her. She reached out sleepily, hoping to find her spouse beside her but felt nothing but an empty bed. She looked at the clock on the nightstand, noting it was after 3am. A slight panic filled her body as she swung her legs out of the quilt. She wasn’t sure why but she felt unsettled. She turned on the bedside lamp and got up. Carefully descending the staircase in the semi-darkness, she rubbed her eyes as she came to stand just inside the front door. She switched on the porch lights and saw CJ’s truck outside. The panic left her, only to be replaced by confusion.

She crossed the living area, heading for the kitchen in search of her spouse. Not finding the agent in there, she came back into the hallway and noticed the low light escaping from underneath the closed door to the study. She slowly turned the doorknob, thinking CJ had probably fallen asleep and once inside the room, the actress focused her tired eyes.

CJ was sitting on the couch, partially dressed, leaning back on the cushions with her left arm covering her eyes. Kate immediately noticed the bottle of vodka and the empty glass on the table and her slight panic returned. The only time Kate had seen her wife drink alcohol was at two weddings and even then, it was only one or two glasses of champagne. The next thing Kate saw was CJ’s gun and holster and her work pants lying on the floor. The actress’ eye trailed up the agent’s long bare legs to find her wife’s right hand was moving slowly inside her black panties.

Kate blinked and at that moment, CJ began gasping out her wife's name with every breath, her breasts heaving underneath the blouse that was unbuttoned down to her navel. Arousal and apprehension warred within the actress as she crossed the distance between them, her eyes never leaving her wife.

"Katie... Katie... Katie..." CJ gasped, breathing faster and faster in time with her hand movement.

"I'm here, Ciara," Kate whispered.

The instant the words left Kate's lips, the agent froze. Her arm remained across her face but her right hand stilled, she held her breath and a deep flush began at her neck and crept up her cheeks. Then came a single tear from under the elevated arm. Kate silently straddled CJ's thighs, effectively covering the agent's right hand with her center, and leaned forward until she was close to her wife's face.

"Why did you stop?"

CJ let out the breath she was holding and released more tears to roll down her cheeks.

"Ciara... why?"

"I... I'm embarrassed."

Kate frowned, knowing they had masturbated in front of one another before and it had certainly never embarrassed either one of them. The blonde kissed the underside of CJ's forearm. "Don't ever be embarrassed about your needs, baby. Not with me... ever. Do you hear me?"

CJ swallowed hard and uncovered her face, letting Kate see the sad, tear-filled, blue eyes.

"Why are you embarrassed? Tell me..." Kate requested again.

The agent could see the love and anxiety in the stormy green eyes above her. "I... I feel... disgusted... disgusted with myself for drinking. I downed four straight vodkas as soon as I got home. I just wanted to forget... or to feel something different... feel good... just for a while. I needed... release and I didn't want to wake you. I would feel like I was using you, Katie, and I can't do that... I can't..."

CJ's bottom lip was trembling and Kate couldn't stand to see her strong wife in such a state. She closed the distance before CJ could start crying, swallowing any sound as she kissed the agent. It was loving and possessive at the same time, which was just what the taller woman needed. CJ pulled her hand from between their bodies and wrapped her arms around Kate's back. She held her wife close until the actress pulled away a little.

"Why didn't you come to me, Ciara?"

"I told you, I was disgusted with myself."

"Honey, please... stop beating yourself up. You're not a machine. You're a strong, intelligent woman but you're also a kind and sensitive woman with such depth, it astounds me sometimes. Even you can't cope perfectly all the time," Kate said, wiping yet more fresh tears from her spouse's cheeks.

"How... you... God, Katie, I think..."

"Don't think," Kate purred, "not right now. I know what you need. And you're not using me if I want it too..."

The blonde sat upright and removed her tee shirt in one smooth movement over her head. CJ's gaze fell on the perfect breasts in front of her, her eyes instantly darkening with desire.

Kate leaned in to kiss her lover and the taller woman let out a heartfelt moan. The blonde slipped her tongue into CJ's warm mouth, tasting the vodka mingled with the agent's own sweet flavor.

"Put your hand back down there, baby," Kate whispered against CJ's skin.

Something between a growl and a squeal rose up from the agent's throat as the smaller woman repositioned herself on one of her lover's thighs, allowing CJ to open her legs wider.

"I..."

Kate licked her wife's ear and whispered, "What..."

"I need... I want..."

Kate lifted her head and looked at the beautiful, tear-stained face. She slowly and provocatively licked her lips and CJ's eyes rolled back in her head. The actress slid to her knees on the floor between her wife's legs, her breast rubbing over the wet panties as she moved down. CJ almost climaxed then, but forced her eyes open to look at her spouse.

Kate was staring at the thin piece of material that covered her lover's drenched folds. Lifting her eyes to meet CJ's, she removed the panties, slowly revealing the dark patch of soft hair and the wet, aching flesh beneath. The agent was unbelievably aroused, feeling about ready to explode, and Kate knew it.

Still locked onto CJ's gaze with her eyes, Kate lowered her mouth to the burning flesh. She poked her tongue out to taste the essence that flowed so freely. CJ's entire body convulsed as she pushed herself towards Kate. When the agent grabbed the blonde head gently and her long fingers curled around the hair, Kate knew her wife was about to come.

CJ sobbed with each and every breath and when her spouse began flicking her tongue back and forth quickly over the sensitive bundle of nerves, the agent screamed as she climaxed, her orgasm ripping through her in all its intensity. Then she was suddenly silent, her body twitching as Kate carefully kissed the sweet flesh at her lips.

The actress looked up and saw her wife crying but somehow she knew she wanted her to continue. The agent's head fell back onto the couch cushion, tears streaming down her cheeks and neck.

"Ciara... look at me," Kate husked. When her wife did so, she smiled. "I want you to do what you were doing when I came in."

CJ swallowed hard again. She couldn't speak but slowly did as she was asked. As her hand grazed over her own clit, Kate watched from mere inches away. The actress licked her lips, still tasting what CJ was now touching. She brought her hand up and let two fingers join CJ's. The taller woman gasped loudly as they both began a dance through the copious moisture and her stomach clenched when Kate's fingers left her own and slipped lower, seeking out the hot entrance. Once there, the blonde slowly penetrated her wife, watching their movements closely. The thought of Kate watching everything only served to make CJ even wetter.

The actress was aching with arousal but this was for her wife. She watched as the agent's finger rubbed back and forth over the hardened ridge, moving faster and faster. Kate kept rhythm with her spouse, feeling the tip of CJ's finger meet her palm as she thrust in and out of her lover's body. By the sounds coming from

the agent's mouth, the blonde knew she was still crying and when the silky inner walls began gripping at Kate's fingers, CJ's movements became frantic. The resulting orgasm flooded Kate's hand and she couldn't resist any longer. She moved in to let her tongue take what she really wanted.

"Katie... oh Jesus, Katie..."

Kate lapped up every drop, bringing CJ to climax for a third time. At just the right moment, she stilled her tongue, maintaining a light pressure on the very swollen clit, feeling it pulsing beneath her. CJ tried to catch her breath and Kate reached up to take the agent's hand to ground her. Her wife grabbed it and held tight as Kate kissed the very tender flesh then rested her head on CJ's stomach.

"It's okay, Ciara. Try to relax," the smaller woman said, rubbing her thumb over the back of CJ's hand and kissing the soft skin on her belly.

"I'm... thank you, Katie."

Kate rose up. "You're very welcome. Now, come to bed with me."

* * * * *

Once they were curled up under the quilt, CJ lay watching her wife in the near darkness. Kate was facing her, a few strands of strawberry blonde hair falling onto the beautiful skin at her cheek.

"What are you looking at?" the actress said, even though her eyes were closed.

"I'm just... always so amazed by you," CJ whispered.

Kate opened her eyes. "Me?"

"Yes, you. How the hell did I get so lucky?"

"We both got lucky, honey. You *are* incredible, you know."

"I don't feel too incredible right now."

Kate snuggled a little closer. "I know. And I know how much strength you possess. But I recently realized how very strong you are."

"What do you mean?"

"Promise you won't get mad?" Kate said quietly.

"Why would I get mad?" CJ said, hearing Kate sigh at her answering a question with a question, even though the actress had just done the same thing. "Okay, I promise. Now, tell me what you mean."

"I know why this case is getting to you so much."

"Oh?"

“Yes. I know about the... baby in the Germantown shooting.”

“Oh.” CJ’s breath caught. “How... how did you find out about that?”

“I spoke to Mark. I’m sorry, CJ, but I was so worried about you.”

“Why are you sorry? *I’m* sorry I never told you about it but it’s just so...”

“I know,” Kate whispered, moving even closer, feeling CJ respond by doing the same. It encouraged Kate no end and she continued. “Please let me be here for you, honey. I told you I want to understand everything. And what I’m starting to realize is, that if you need me to leave you alone... like, go away... while you concentrate on a case like this, then I’ll do it. It’ll be tough for me, but I’ll do it if it’s what you want.”

The agent remained silent for a few seconds, which felt like years to Kate.

“No,” CJ finally stated, shaking her head emphatically. “No. I don’t want you to go away. It’s been really difficult to work this case and try and appear happy and normal around you. But you have to know, Katie, I *am* happy with you and always will be. When something like this happens, I... I succumb to the other side of me... the side that can pry into this guy’s mind. The killer, I mean. I guess I don’t know how to let both sides of me exist in harmony.”

“I know. I understand that now. Which is why I would offer to back off...”

“No. I don’t want that. You have no idea what all those little things you’ve done over the past few days have meant to me... especially tonight. You took me from shame and guilt about wanting to feel good, to being loved and cherished and knowing it was okay to *need* to feel good. You’re so... so... beyond amazing.”

“I love you so much, CJ. *So* much! And I hate to see you upset in any way. But don’t ever feel disgusted with yourself for having a human need or a perceived ‘weakness’... not in your line of work... and never in front of me.”

CJ nodded slightly against Kate’s hair. “Okay.” The agent drew back and stared into Kate’s eyes. “I love you more than the words ‘I love you’ could ever express,” she said, kissing the actress’ forehead.

“Ditto,” Kate said, feeling absurdly pleased at her wife’s words. “So, do you want to talk about what happened today at work? Anything to report to your wife?”

“Well, we found an address for the killer but he wasn’t there. We posed as door-to-door salespeople so he wouldn’t know the FBI had tracked him down. Jamie and Agent White are staking the place out right now and I’ll take over with Ethan tomorrow. I’m feeling a little more confident that we’ll catch him soon.”

“That’s great, honey. Well, as great as this situation can be.”

CJ breathed deeply and squeezed Kate tighter. “We’ll be fine, right? Me and you?”

“Always, honey. Don’t ever worry about that.”

“I won’t. But I did get a very weird and anonymous call earlier,” CJ said, thoughtfully.

“Oh?”

“Yeah. Some guy called my office and told me you were having an affair with Sam.” At the sudden tension in Kate’s body, CJ raised her hand. “Let me finish. As I said, an anonymous call, but now that I’m more calm and have thought it through, I’m guessing it was Jack.”

“Jack? Hmmm. Just one question, though... did you believe it?”

“Not in my heart, Katie, but my mind almost took off on a bunch of ‘what if’ scenarios.”

“Oh, CJ, you don’t honestly think I’d ever...”

“No. I don’t. And I actually slapped myself on the face right there in the office. I’m pretty sure my colleagues think I’ve lost my mind.”

Kate bit her lips, feeling like she had to laugh to release the tension, but she wasn’t sure it was appropriate. Then CJ burst out laughing and the actress had no choice but to join her.

They held onto one another, chuckling and crying at the same time. When Kate said, mid-giggle, that they could’ve lined up in the office, in front of CJ, like that scene in *Airplane* – with baseball bats, guitars and the likes, to knock some sense into the agent – they burst into fits of laughter again.

Lying in the dark, wrapped around her wife, CJ returned to normality for a while. And it felt great. It seemed like forever since she had felt this way, when in truth it had been less than a week. And it was something she couldn’t even contemplate feeling a few hours before. She shook her head in complete awe of her spouse as they settled down again.

The agent kissed the blonde deeply, tasting the saltiness of the tears and feeling the smile on Kate’s face. She loved it when her wife smiled as they kissed. CJ proceeded to make love to Kate, over and over again, savoring every touch, every kiss and feeling a warmth return that had been pushed away by the coldness of her work.

Later, they fell asleep, wrapped so tightly around one another that it was difficult to tell if they were one woman or two.

Chapter 6

CJ awoke early the next morning with a new sense of inner strength. Nobody had called during the night – which was a plus – and it meant Jamie and Agent White must still be sitting out there on the stakeout.

The agent opened her eyes, realizing that the warm body of her wife was missing from the bed. She got up to go to the bathroom and could suddenly smell the delicious scent of bacon wafting up from downstairs. “Oh, she is better than perfect!” CJ exclaimed to her reflection in the mirror. “I... on the other hand, am not. What is with these suitcases under my eyes? Holy crap.”

She shook her head and washed her tired face with cold water to try and wake herself up. A few moments later, she threw on a robe and headed downstairs. Her shower could wait. Food was calling.

Kate stood pouring some mix into the waffle maker. She turned around when Kamali jumped up from his bed to greet CJ.

“Hey, honey. I knew the smell would wake you,” the blonde smiled.

“Good morning,” the agent said, slipping her arms around her wife’s waist from behind and kissing her neck. “I think maybe it was you leaving the bed that woke me.”

Kate shivered pleasantly. “Yeah, right. I know you can’t resist some bacon.”

“I can’t resist you... but maybe the smell did help to wake my unconscious brain,” CJ admitted.

“Go, sit. You still have an hour before you need to leave right?”

The taller woman looked at the clock and yawned widely. It was seven thirty. She’d had roughly two hours sleep. “Yeah. I need to pop into the office before I go to relieve Green and White...” CJ barked out a laugh. “Oh God, I didn’t even notice that before.”

Kate grinned and was secretly overjoyed to see her wife peeking out from under all the stress. “I hope you catch this guy soon, then you can try and put this horrible mess behind you, honey.”

“Yeah, I know. It’s been tough, huh. I’m sorry I didn’t cope so well with everything, Katie.”

“CJ, we both had to learn this time. There will be a lot of firsts for us and we’ll make it though them together. Just remember I’m tough. I can deal with anything,” Kate winked as she put the cooked breakfast in front of her spouse.

“Oh, I know. Believe me, I know. Last night... God, Katie, you were so incredible. Thank you for that... and for this,” the agent said, pointing to her plate.

“You’re welcome. And uh, thank *you* for last night too,” the actress said, blushing and remembering what CJ had been like in bed.

CJ smirked. “I guess I got hungry.”

Kate raised her eyebrows. “*Very* hungry. Ravenous, I’d say.”

“Uh huh.”

Kate saw the sparkle start to reappear in her wife’s blue orbs and grinned. She sat down and they tucked into their meal.

“Oh...” the actress blurted around a mouthful of egg, “I forgot to tell you. I have an appointment with a director at the studios today. He wants to talk to me about a little producing job.”

“That’s great, Katie. What is it? The job, I mean...”

“It’s a short independent film. It sounds quite interesting and won’t take up too much time. I need to check my contract but I think it’ll be okay.”

“Cool. When are they making it?”

“Not scheduled for another couple of months, so I’ll just go and see what’s what,” Kate mumbled, taking a slurp of her juice.

“Can’t hurt,” CJ said, grinning at her wife’s voracious appetite.

They smiled at one another and continued their breakfast, sitting close together, discussing this and that. Kate suddenly remembered the call that CJ had spoken about and turned to her wife.

“Did you say last night, you thought it might have been Jack who called you?”

“What? Oh, yesterday? Yeah... I didn’t recognize the voice but maybe he tried to disguise it. He’s the only one I could think of with a motive and easy access to you.”

“God, he sounds like your next case, honey,” Kate chuckled. “But if I find out it was him, I’m gonna kick his...”

“No... you won’t. Once I’ve dealt with this case, we’ll figure it out together.”

“Yes, but CJ, he didn’t know you were in the middle of a nightmare at work. That call could have sent you over the edge. It was very cruel.”

“If it was him, he obviously doesn’t have a clue how much we love and trust each other. He was just shit-stirring,” CJ said, getting up to retrieve the waffles.

Kate sighed. “True. Okay, we’ll figure it out later.”

“That’s my girl.”

“Yes. I am.”

* * * * *

CJ entered the FBI building. Walking along the corridor toward her office, she was almost knocked over by a crowd of agents hurrying past her. People were filing in and out the door when she arrived and as soon as she saw Mark, she headed straight for him.

“Oh, CJ!” he exclaimed. “We got him.”

“What? The killer?” the tall woman blinked.

“Yes, yes, just now. But we need to go to LA County General.”

“Oh God, why?” CJ said, praying there were no agents down.

“Coburn was shot in the leg by Ethan. Jamie has concussion.”

“What happened? Why was Ethan there?” the tall woman asked as they hurried down the corridor and stepped into the elevator.

“Ethan was with the backup team who went out early this morning. He wanted some overtime and I granted it easily. Anyway... apparently, about an hour ago, Coburn arrived at the apartment and once he was inside the front door, our agents moved in, along with the backup team. Jamie was first through the door and Coburn went crazy... whacked her over the head with a golf club. She fired a shot...” he continued, starting the engine of the sedan and screeching out of the parking garage, “but the bullet didn’t hit anything. She was most likely disoriented and in pain... and Ethan shot the guy to incapacitate him.”

“Wow,” CJ said, worrying about her friend but still damn thankful that they’d got Coburn.

“Yep. If you hadn’t worked through that profile, we might not have looked into his deceased mother so much and in turn, wouldn’t have found that address. Well done, CJ.”

“Thanks you, Sir, but it’s my job and I think the others deserve more of a ‘well done’ than I do.”

“Nonsense. You all do great work. I think the Bureau will definitely keep our little experimental team going. And the others will get a ‘well done’, don’t you worry about that. Now, all we have to do is find Mrs. Davenport and the girls.”

CJ sighed. *‘Yeah, that’s all we have to do now,’* she thought silently.

* * * * *

Kate strolled through the doors at the Olympian Studio offices. She was meeting with John Thorpe, a writer and director of various short independent movies, that had received mixed but mostly positive, reviews. He’d had some kooky ideas in the past and the actress was interested to see what he would come up with this time. She found him in one of the empty meeting rooms, just like they’d arranged.

“Hello, Miss Marshall. Great to see you.”

Kate noted his tweed jacket and old-fashioned slacks. He sported a slightly disarrayed haircut and a pair of somewhat stylish glasses. “Hello Mr. Thorpe. Nice to meet you,” she said politely.

“Please, call me John.”

“Okay, John. As long as you call me Kate,” she smiled.

“That’s a deal. Please... sit down? Would you like anything to drink?” he offered.

“No, thanks. So, tell me about this short film,” she requested, tucking her hair behind her ear.

“Well, I know from Phil Romaine that you expressed an interest in directing or producing. I have full control of this shoot, as it’s my concept. I was hoping to find a producer who was fresh to the whole thing. I think you might be just the person.”

“I would certainly be interested in turning my hand to something other than acting. What’s your idea?”

Kate found out from their conversation that he wanted to write and direct a short film with a pretty small budget. He told the actress, he hoped she’d consider doing it for the experience and a small fee.

John’s idea was to recreate an incident from Baltimore, where an FBI agent was involved in a hostage situation in a convenience store. The hostage taker thought he was an alien from another planet and had severe mental health issues. The negotiator managed to take him down without harming anyone by breaking the number one rule – don’t get sucked into his delusion. John thought this would make a quirky short film but Kate wasn’t sure about being involved, although she clearly had a huge interest in the subject matter.

“It’s actually based on real life events,” John concluded.

“It certainly sounds interesting... and a little strange. But I like strange. Gives it an edge. Can I have a think about it and get back to you?”

“Sure. Here’s my card,” John said, following Kate’s lead and getting up from his seat.

“I’ll be in touch,” she replied.

Kate shook his hand and said her farewells, heading out into the lot and a cold, sunny day. She wanted to tell CJ about this one. It sounded like an X-File but John had said it was real. Kate giggled silently as she got into her car and left for home.

* * * * *

When CJ and Mark arrived at LA County General, there was an unmarked Bureau van outside and quite a few cop cars. Walking into the ER, she was surprised to see a few agents holding onto a cuffed man with a bloody pant leg. Through the hole in the center of the bloodstain, she could see white bandaging and knew this was Steven Coburn. She eyed the man as she turned to Mark.

“Is that him? He looks so different from his pictures.”

“Yes. They were pretty old pictures, though. I guess he’s been released. I’ll find out. You go check where Jamie is. I’ll meet you back at triage,” Mark said, pointing to a meeting place near the entrance to the secured areas.

“Right.”

About ten minutes later, CJ had found out that Agent Green was being kept in for observation and Coburn had been released as the gunshot had only caused a simple flesh wound to his thigh. The AD came towards her still talking on his cell phone. He snapped it shut and popped it in his jacket pocket.

“Okay. They’re taking him to the cells. I told them I want you and me to question him first. We’ll go and check on Agent Green then head back.”

“Sounds like a plan. They’ve moved her to a room on the first floor. It’s this way,” CJ said, gesturing to a nearby corridor.

They walked into Jamie’s room, finding the blonde agent sitting up in bed. CJ gave her a sympathetic smile and reached over to hug her friend.

“How you doing?”

“Ugh. I want out of here. I have a tough skull. I’ll be fine,” Jamie complained.

Mark flicked through her chart. “Says you have a pretty nasty concussion and some serious bruising on your head.”

CJ stood over Jamie. “Let me see. Where was it, Jamie?” she asked, looking at the agent’s head.

“Here.”

Jamie put her finger on her hair and CJ gently parted the strands. She saw a very dark area where the bruising was the worst and stood back to look at the blonde.

“It’s almost black. Best to let them keep an eye on you tonight. Don’t want anything happening to you, Penfold.”

Mark noted the nickname and shook his head with a smirk. "We'll go back and question your prisoner, Agent Green. Get some rest and someone will come pick you up tomorrow. And well done," he winked.

"Thanks, Sir."

CJ and Mark left and Jamie slumped her shoulders, already bored with her hospital stay. She picked up a magazine that the nurse had left and began to read about the biggest human baby in the world. 'Ugh,' she grumbled to herself.

* * * * *

Kate hung up her cell phone. She was happy that CJ sounded much more like herself and so glad that they had arrested Coburn. Her wife had asked her a little favor and she dialed another number to see what she could do about it.

"*Morris.*"

"Hi, Sam. It's Kate."

"*Oh, hi Kate. Sorry, I thought you were the grumpy production assistant I just shouted at. How are you?*"

"I'm fine actually. But someone else needs you," Kate said, trying to hold back her chuckle.

"*Oh? Who needs me?*" Sam asked.

"Well... now, I don't want you to worry... but Jamie is in hospital with concussion."

"*Oh God! Is she okay?*"

"Sam, I said, I don't want you to worry. She's absolutely fine. They're just keeping her in for observation but she's already getting grumpy because she doesn't want to be there. I was wondering if..."

"*Oh, Kate. Would you go with me?*" the producer said, already thinking about how to get off work.

"Uh, I could. Don't you want to go yourself?"

"*Oh no. I'll be nervous. Just this one time, come with me, okay?*"

"All right. And you can give her your number 'cause I didn't get a chance yet," Kate grinned.

Sam sighed. "*I need to get some things finished here first. Should be a couple of hours. And I'll need to come back afterwards too. Ugh.*"

"I'll pick you up and drop you back at the studios. How does one o'clock sound?"

"*Great, Kate. Thanks. See you then,*" the redhead replied.

"Bye, Sam."

When Sam hung up the phone she was surprised at how giddy she was at the prospect of seeing Jamie and how worried she was that the agent got injured. She walked briskly back to her office to organize a way to escape for a few hours.

* * * * *

As they approached Jamie's room, a nurse exited and Kate saw an opportunity.

"Excuse me. How has Agent Green been doing?"

"I'm sorry, who are you?"

"We're friends of Jamie's. Is she okay?" Kate said, hoping they'd be able to get in.

"She's fine. But..." The nurse frowned. "Aren't you Kate Marshall?"

The actress tried not to blush. "Yes, I am."

"Oh goodness, I'm a fan of yours. I love the show!"

"Well, thank you. I'm glad you like it."

The nurse tried not to gush. "When you slapped that guy last week... great acting!"

"Well, I actually did slap him," Kate admitted, remembering back to when they'd filmed the scene. She really did slap Jack on the face.

The nurse laughed. "Well, you two go on in. And please, try to cheer Ms. Green up?"

"Of course," the blonde said, Sam following her into the room.

Jamie looked up at the new arrivals and when her eyes landed on the producer, a look of excitement laced with mild horror crossed her face.

"What's wrong, Jamie?" Kate asked.

"Uh, hi. I wasn't expecting anyone. I must look a fright," the agent mumbled, running her fingers carefully through her unruly blonde hair.

"You look amazing," Sam said shyly.

The agent gazed at her for a moment, unsure of how to respond. "Oh," she finally said, "please, sit down."

Kate was highly amused by her two friends and took the seat furthest from Jamie's bed, leaving the closer one for Sam. The redhead sat down and could barely take her eyes off Jamie.

"How are you coping?" Kate said, since her friends had lost the ability to speak.

"Barely. I need to get out of here. I'm going nuts and I know CJ and the guys will be so busy."

"They'll manage. You took a pretty nasty blow to the head. Can't be too careful," Kate warned.

“Yeah, yeah. And I’ve had a few headaches, so I guess I need to rest a little,” Jamie replied. She looked at Sam. “Are you okay?”

Sam blinked, suddenly realizing Jamie was talking to her. “Oh... yes, fine. How did you hurt yourself?”

“Crazy killer came at me with a golf club,” the agent grumbled.

“Oh God! That’s awful.”

“All part of the job. Does that bother you?”

“Of course not. I think you agents are incredible. It’s just... well...”

“What, Sam?” Kate said, seeing the concern in her friend’s eyes and trying to get her to show her hand.

“Just... I don’t like to see that sort of thing... you know, you getting hurt,” she gestured to Jamie’s head.

The agent smiled. “I have a solid skull. I’ll be fine.”

“Yeah,” Kate interjected. “She has a thick skull.”

“Hey!” Jamie threw a plastic cup at the actress.

“What? You do!” Kate said, picking up the cup. “And anyway, it doesn’t matter what *I* think.”

Kate wiggled an eyebrow and signaled toward Sam with her thumb. The producer eyed the little blonde and turned back to Jamie, whose expression had changed. Her eyes were so dark they were almost black and Sam locked onto the gaze.

Kate watched with interest, waiting to see who would speak first. She bit her lips to make sure she remained silent. It was now or never, but who would break the silence. Eventually, the actress rolled her eyes and cleared her throat and Jamie shook her head to snap out of it.

“Uh... so, I guess CJ sent you guys over here, huh?”

“Oh for goodness sake, you two. Exchange numbers, will ya?” Kate blurted.

The other two women looked at one another and burst out laughing, Jamie holding her painful head as she did so.

“What?” Kate said. “It’s like frickin’ high school. God...” She threw her hands up in the air and went to talk to the nurse again.

“Oh, cool your jets, Kate.” Sam chuckled as the actress left. “Jamie, may I have your number?” the producer requested, feeling slightly bold for a moment.

Jamie looked at the little redhead. “You definitely may. I had a great time at the party. So much I was meaning to ask you but we never had time before you left.”

“I know. I can’t believe the time flew by so fast. It was a lot of fun.”

“Yes. It was nice. I’m so glad I transferred to California,” Jamie beamed.

“I’m kinda glad too,” Sam said, blushing hotly.

“So, do you want to join me for coffee one day... maybe I could pop by the studios?”

“I’d love that. I can’t believe you want to,” the producer blurted.

“I can’t believe you’re single...” Jamie replied smoothly.

Sam blushed furiously just as Kate blustered back into the room, pretending to cover her eyes with her hand. “Is it safe to enter?”

“Oh, ha ha,” the agent said sarcastically.

Kate smiled. “So, I just spoke with the nurse. They’ll let you out late tonight if you have someone to look after you for the next forty-eight hours. Seems your skull is tough after all. So, you can stay with me and CJ.”

“But...” Jamie began to protest.

“It’s either that or stay here longer.”

Jamie immediately nodded. “I’ll stay with you guys.”

Kate giggled and sat back down. They stayed for another half-hour. The actress tried not to speak too much to facilitate this potential blossoming romance. As they left, Kate told the agent she’d be back for her later. Jamie was just beginning to realize that she had found a friend in Kate, as well as CJ. It was a new experience for the blonde. She’d had no true friends... now, it seemed, she had many.

* * * * *

Special Agent Carson and Assistant Director Mulrone entered the interrogation room near the holding cells, intent on finding out where Mrs. Davenport and the two girls were being held, if they were indeed being held at all. They went through all the initial interview questions and the declaration that they were recording the whole thing. Then the questions about Charles Davenport began.

After finding out that the killer had intended on murdering Davenport all along – and quite happily admitted to it – understanding the body’s placement was something that had to be cleared up. If they could get him to explain or describe how and why he had done it – including the scarf’s significance – they could definitely link him to the other past murders with similar MO’s.

CJ’s poker face was set and her eyes were like ice as she listened to Coburn talk in a melodious tone about his ‘conquest’.

“It was art,” he said in a quiet, superiority-laden voice.

“Art?” CJ echoed, the bile churning around in her stomach.

“Yes. See... I had to shoot him. He would never have succumbed to his fate with any grace. Shooting him was not in my plan but he walked in on me in the study. So, the marks had to be removed and that was why he was cleansed. Cutting him cleansed him.”

CJ rubbed her forehead and heard Mulroney swallowing forcefully beside her.

She looked back up at this disgustingly proud killer. “What about the scarf? Why do you use one in every murder?”

“You’re assuming I did more than one, Agent.”

CJ looked at the forensic file in a deliberate fashion. “Didn’t you?”

“Well, yes. And we can discuss my other conquests later. I must admit, you are a piece of work yourself. You finally caught me, although I’m not sure yet if you’re worthy of my praise,” he sneered with fake politeness.

“Just answer the question,” CJ said steadily.

“My *loving* father used to tie me to a vertical pipe in our freezing basement when I was a bad little boy. He’d use a scarf to secure my hands behind my back, onto the pipe, then close the door and lock it. It would be tied so tight I’d have burns sometimes, as the pipe would be colder than ice. I would be left in complete darkness until he decided to return. I’d be there for hours, sometimes overnight. He’d beat me there too, while I was unable to defend myself. You see, Agent, I’m a perfect candidate for the typical serial killer profile. Classic, don’t you think?” When neither agent replied, he continued. “Anyway, that coupled with the fact that mother was a fastidious clean freak – not a spot on her house... or her child, or you’d get a whipping or hidden cigarette burn – I’m really not surprised I can’t stand to see a bullet hole or two.”

CJ wanted to put one of her suspicions to rest. “Did you kill your father?”

Coburn looked a little startled. “Why would you ask me that? Haven’t you linked me to the earlier cases?”

“We may not have reports for everyone you’ve cleansed.”

“Indeed.” The killer was silent for a moment and CJ thought she’d lost his sickening cooperation. “He was the first. But you haven’t found him yet.”

CJ nodded, knowing she had this guy’s psychological profile just about right. Mark sat next to his agent, realizing that he should never underestimate Special Agent Carson.

“Do you want us to find him?” CJ asked.

“Well, I don’t want to leave him out there all alone, now that you’ve caught me.”

“Why do you care?”

“Oh, I don’t really. But I hate to leave a mess,” Coburn said, flicking a piece of lint off the table’s surface.

“When did you kill him?”

“Like I said, he was the first... right after mother died, I got rid of him.”

“Why wait that long?” the tall woman probed.

“Mother had a huge amount of control over me. Silly, I know, but that’s just how it was. When she died, that control was lost. Don’t I sound like a psychotherapist?” he smirked.

CJ held back her growl. “All that doesn’t explain why you killed two innocent boys. You didn’t ‘cleanse’ them. Why?”

“Oh, Agent, I didn’t *want* to kill the boys. When Superdaddy was trying to protect his darling sons, one of them was shot by accident. I didn’t know they were there. And I couldn’t leave one little boy to watch his Daddy *and* his brother die, could I? That would just be cruel.”

CJ was getting too angry. She felt like she may explode and leaned into Mark to whisper to him. They called in two cops and took a brief break. She paced the corridor outside the room, the muscles in her jaw clenching along with her fists.

“Do you want someone else to continue this?” Mark asked.

“Absolutely not. I just needed a moment. He is a hideous nutcase,” she said, jarringly.

“An intelligent and sick hideous nutcase,” the AD agreed.

After a quick drink of water and a brief conversation, CJ and Mark returned to the interrogation.

“Why was there so much blood in the child’s bedroom?” the tall woman asked.

“Don’t you have experts for that kind of thing?”

When both agents remained quiet, Coburn relented and decided to describe it in detail, going on to tell them that once he’d shot the other boy, he “discarded” them in the closet. Then he shot the father to finish him off, before starting to cleanse him.

“There were no blood trails from the bedroom... not enough for you to drag Davenport through the hallway. How did you move him?”

“I’m strong. I lifted him over my shoulder.”

“*After* you cleansed him?” CJ said in disbelief.

“Yes, I had to burn my clothes. Such filth,” Coburn replied with distaste.

“But you cut Mr. Davenport while he was on the railing, too?” Mark broke in.

“Yes. I’d lifted his shirt when I was positioning him. I saw another bullet hole. So irritating,” Coburn said, picking his fingernails.

“So, how many other’s did you cleanse in this way?”

“I don’t know. I lost count a few years back. If I tell you where you can find the information, will you credit my cooperation by cutting me a deal?”

CJ sighed. “We don’t cut deals with serial killers, Steve,” she said, hatching a plan to get the information, nonetheless.

“Oh.” Coburn stared at the tabletop for a few seconds. “How many potential cases have you linked to me?”

“Quite a few,” CJ replied. She wanted to make him an offer. Knowing he was proud of his ‘work’, she thought it just might persuade him. “How about, you tell us where we can get the information about your ‘work’ and I will personally write a paper all about you, cataloging your ‘cleansings’ for all time? It will be available for everyone to read. I may even let you have some input.”

Coburn looked thoughtful and quite excited by the proposition and CJ had to hold back her intense displeasure. She hoped she had read him correctly. He wanted to be known for everything he had done – now that he had been caught – and she figured he’d be glad of the attention. This is why she had to speak face to face with the killer... to understand and read his body language, his eyes and even his sentence construction and the inflection in his voice. It all told a story.

“I think I’d like that. May as well go out in a blaze of glory. You may put your cases to rest, Agent. I kept information and trophies from all my conquests at my mother’s summerhouse. The house is in her husband’s name,” Steven said, finally dropping his eyes to the table again.

“We’ll need an address, Steve,” CJ said, poised with her pen.

He nodded. “I’ll give you that. It’s up at Big Bear Lake. That’s where Sheila and the girls are too. They might not be home though.”

At those words, CJ’s stomach flipped over. “Might not be home? Where would they be?”

“I don’t know. Sometimes she goes out shopping.”

“So, they’re not hostages?”

“Oh, no,” Coburn said quietly, suddenly seeming remorseful.

“Steve, you must tell us what Sheila has to do with this. And are the girls okay?”

The killer looked up, his eyes taking on a whole new expression. “They’re fine.”

CJ and Mark looked at one another, almost as if they had thought the same thought... at the same time.

“Steve,” Mark asked in a low voice, “what’s wrong?”

Coburn shifted his eyes. “What will happen to the girls after you arrest their mother?”

CJ decided to push a little. “Why do you care, Steve?”

“Because... they’re mine.”

The tall woman had to make a quick decision. She knew the kids were not his. The DNA information she’d found did not match up. The girls were not Davenport’s or Coburn’s. “They’re not, Steve. She deceived you.”

Rather than the shocked or violent response she was expecting, the tall agent watched as Coburn sat silently, as if he suspected as much.

Mark and CJ continued to get every piece of information they could from Steven Coburn, who was now deflated and had certainly come down from any high he may have been experiencing. CJ found out about the location he had chosen for the money drop. It turned out to be as simple as the timing for a church service, where there would be a lot of people around and it would be easier for Coburn to slip past them. CJ had to admit she had been looking for something a little more complex. *'Guess I can't be right all the time,'* she'd thought.

* * * * *

Much later that day, they headed back to their building, where Mikey and Ethan met them at Mulroney's office.

"How did it go?" Matthews asked tentatively.

"Well," Mark said, sighing, "here's the bare bones of it. Coburn was the lover of Sheila Davenport, apparently for about four years. She didn't know of his past and he had tried to make a living as a pest controller. He eventually admitted to six past killings – two of which we haven't found yet and one being his father – plus the Davenport murders. Sheila told him the girls were his but she had many lovers, it seems. Charles had found out about a couple of them and so their pre-nuptial agreement would take effect. In the case of their pending divorce, she'd get nothing. She wanted his money and decided to stage a housebreaking and 'murder', with her and the girls being taken as hostages."

Mark stopped and hung his head low. CJ decided to take over and cleared her throat.

"According to him, Sheila had organized the break-in but didn't know the boys had come home early. She only expected her husband to be killed and when she was 'freed' from her abductor, she could claim the insurance money. Coburn hasn't told her about the boys yet. He's not remorseful about their deaths but he isn't proud either. So, obviously Mrs. Davenport wasn't a hostage and possibly stood to gain from the ransom too. Pure and utter greed – and it seems, seriously bad judgment in her choice of boyfriend – costs those two boys their lives... and their father."

"Wow," Ethan said, shaking his head. "I just cannot comprehend how her mind was working."

"There's a lot more work to do. And we have an address where Sheila and the girls are staying. I think we should stake it out... catch her unawares. Less chance of any resistance that way and less chance of scaring the kids. Might be an idea to go in late evening when the girls are asleep," CJ said confidently.

"Agreed," Mark replied. "Where is it? San Bernardino County?"

"Yeah. Who do you want me to take?"

"I'll let you know. All three of you will go with me and whoever else I decide on."

Taking that as a dismissal of sorts, CJ got to her feet. "I'll write all this up and hand it in to you once I'm done, Sir."

"Thanks, CJ."

Matthews and Ryan followed the tall woman out of the office and went to get the coffees in for the few hours of paperwork they had coming.

* * * * *

Driving through the gates toward the house, Kate glanced over at Jamie, who had been very quiet since they left the hospital. She stopped the Mercedes in front of the porch and turned off the engine.

“You okay, Jamie?”

“Yes. Slight headache but fine, thanks,” the blonde agent smiled.

“I’ll make you something decent to eat and you can get settled in the guest room.”

“Kate?”

“Yeah?”

“Are you sure it’s alright for me to stay here?”

“Oh, Jamie. Honestly, it’s fine. At least this way, me and Sam can keep an eye on you.”

“You mean CJ?”

“No. I mean Sam. I bet she finds a ridiculously obscure reason to visit me in the next two days,” Kate said, grinning as she got out of the car.

She went round to grab Jamie’s bag out of the trunk and headed up the porch steps behind the agent. Once in the hallway, Kamali trotted over to them and sniffed at Jamie before wagging his tail and lying down at her feet.

“Well, I think you’ve made another friend,” the actress laughed. “I’ll go and start our late dinner if you go get settled. Third door on your left at the top of the stairs.”

“Thanks, Kate.”

Jamie took her overnight bag and ascended the stairs, feeling strangely comfortable in this home. The house had an unusual warmth about it... it was spacious but homey and Jamie loved it. She paused to look at the Navajo painting on the upper landing before heading down the hall.

Arriving outside the third door, she looked ahead of her to the one that was open at the end on the hallway. The lights were off but she could see a little from the illumination on the porch outside. It was CJ and Kate’s bedroom. She bit her lips and stretched out her neck to see a little more. It had a distinctively native feel to the décor and was warm and luxurious in its fabrics. The bed was half covered in a patchwork quilt of sorts – again Native in its pattern – and a nearby couch displayed a faux fur throw with ease. ‘*Very nice*,’ the agent thought. With what little she could see, Jamie decided it was perfect for the couple. She shook her head, smiling as she entered the guestroom.

* * * * *

Kate strolled into her bedroom to get changed. Switching on the lamps, she threw on her sweats and a shirt then she bumped into Jamie when she walked back into the hall.

“Hey. Nice PJ’s,” the actress grinned.

“Oh, thanks. Is this okay?” Jamie asked, flapping her fleecy cotton top with her hand.

“Of course. Make yourself at home. Dinner is in the wok. How does a light stir-fry sound?”

“Ooh, sounds amazing. I didn’t eat anything today at the hospital,” Jamie said as they walked downstairs.

“No wonder. It’s not the most appetizing,” Kate empathized.

“Your house is beautiful, by the way.”

“Thanks. We like it,” the actress smiled.

“Did you hear from CJ?”

“Yeah. They’ve gone to arrest Sheila Davenport. She won’t be home ‘til late, I guess,” Kate replied, heading to the stove and stirring the food.

Jamie sat down at the dining table. “I wish I could be there to help.”

“I’m sure they’ll manage. You just rest for a day or so, and quit stressing,” the smaller woman ordered.

“Yes, boss.”

Kate laughed and they sat down to their meal, Jamie feeling quite at ease as the actress smiled at her warmly. The agent didn’t fully understand people being so nice to her. She decided that changing her ways was a great thing after all. ‘*Gotta grow up sometime... and now’s the time,*’ she mused, filling her fork with vegetables.

* * * * *

They had already posed as salespeople again and were now sitting in the car watching the house, since Sheila had not answered the door.

Mrs. Davenport had arrived a couple of hours later with the two girls in tow. Now they waited, thinking it would be better if the girls were in bed. There would be less risk of them seeing any nastiness if things went wrong.

CJ thought Big Bear Lake was beautiful on the way in, but now that they were in the middle of it, it just looked like any other street. She blew a gust of air out her mouth and grabbed her cooling coffee cup from its holder.

Mark sighed. “What do you think? Another hour?”

“Yep. Sounds about right. All seems quiet at the house.” CJ lifted the radio from the dashboard. “Carson to Matthews, over.”

“*Matthews here. Go ahead, over.*”

“It’s a go in one hour, unless we contact you before that. Keep your team awake,” CJ smirked, hearing Ethan stifle the humor in his reply.

“Roger that, Agent Carson. Matthews out.”

CJ pressed the button on the handset again. “Everyone else, remain on standby unless we call you. Carson out.”

The next hour was going to be a long one.

* * * * *

When the time came, Mark gave the instruction to move. CJ, Ethan and two other agents walked quietly up the path to the front door unnoticed. Once they’d knocked, Sheila Davenport answered, completely oblivious to what was about to occur.

“Mrs. Sheila Davenport?” Ethan said.

The woman nodded before she could wonder who was asking. Ethan flashed his badge and Sheila’s face suddenly paled in shock. Ethan and CJ quickly took an arm each and held the woman, since she looked like she’d thought about fleeing out a back door.

CJ was glad to find that the children were nowhere to be seen and assumed they were indeed in bed.

“Sheila Davenport, you are under arrest for your involvement in the murders of Charles Davenport, and Craig and Simon Davenport...”

At the mention of the boy’s names, Sheila’s face instantly contorted in horror and tears flooded from her eyes. “No!” she screamed.

She continued to sob and protest as Ethan read her, her rights. “You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say or do, can and will be held against you in a court of law. You have the right to speak to an attorney. If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be appointed for you. Do you understand these rights as they have been read to you?”

Sheila collapsed to her knees. Ethan repeated the last question and she nodded as the two agents lifted her back to her feet.

“Where are the girls, Sheila?” CJ said, standing in front of the woman to get her to focus.

Mrs. Davenport weakly nodded towards a door behind CJ. The agent looked round. “This door?”

After another nod, CJ turned to Ethan, who was holding the woman along with Agent Kerr. “Keep her here. I need to go get the kids.”

Ethan nodded and CJ entered the bedroom carefully, putting on a bedside light and finding two small girls huddled together, sitting in the center of the bed.

CJ crouched down so she didn’t look so intimidating and smiled at the two small faces.

“Hi, you must be Shannon,” she said to the larger girl.

Shannon nodded and sniffed, wiping her eyes.

“Don’t be afraid, okay? My name’s CJ.”

“Did you come to take us home?”

“I wish I could, sweetheart, but we have to go to my office first. I’m an FBI agent. Do you know what that is?”

“No.”

“Well, it’s kind of like a police officer. You know what that is, right?” CJ asked gently.

“Uh huh.”

“Is this your little sister?” the agent said, pointing to the infant.

“Yes. Her name’s Lucy,” Shannon said, still a little tearful at the scary people in the living room. “Is he a police man too?” she asked, pointing to Mark, who was now standing in the doorway holding two small jackets for the girls.

“That’s right. We’re here to take care of you now,” CJ said. “Do you think you could be brave and come with us?”

The little girl didn’t respond at first and CJ was worried until Shannon spoke again. “The man said Mommy would get taken away. Are we going with Mommy?”

“What man, sweetie?”

“The man. Uncle Steve.”

CJ hid her disgust. “What did Uncle Steve tell you, honey?”

“He said... he said that if we were bad, Mommy would get taken away. Were me and Lucy bad?”

“Oh no. You weren’t bad. But Mommy did something silly and she needs to go away for a while. Listen to me sweetheart. I need you to be brave. For Lucy... and for me, okay? Can you do that? You can ask me any questions you want to in the car.”

“Is it a police car?”

“Kinda like a police car, yes. It has blue and red lights but you can’t see them until I switch them on. I can show you if you want.”

“CJ... I... I can be brave.”

The agent smiled, her heart melting at the little girl who was the spitting image of her at that age. “I’m so proud of you, Shannon. Let’s get some warm clothes for you and maybe a favorite toy?”

“Lucy needs Barney. This is him,” Shannon said, picking up a nearby bear.

“Well, hello Barney. And what about you, Shannon?”

“I’m a big girl but I…” Shannon seemed to look around the room, searching for something.

“Are you looking for this?” CJ said, grabbing a plush toy from the floor that seemed to have fallen from the bed when the girls awoke.

“Piglet!” Shannon cried, taking the toy into her arms. “This is Piglet,” she nodded to CJ.

“Well, hello Piglet. I used to have one of these, too, when I was much younger.”

“When you were little?”

“Yes.”

“Can we go now? I don’t like this house.”

“Of course we can,” CJ said softly, stretching her arms towards Lucy who she was amazed to find, reached for her.

She lifted the tiny girl into her arms and took Shannon’s hand. Holding her emotions tightly inside, she walked towards Mark, who signaled to Ethan to leave with Mrs. Davenport, since the girls were definitely all right with CJ.

CJ took Shannon and Lucy outside and into her sedan. She sat in the backseat with them both and Mark got in the front.

“Are you girls okay?” Mulroney asked, turning around and smiling at the huddle in the back seat.

“Yes. Girls, this is Mark. He’s my boss,” the agent said.

“At work?” Shannon said, pulling at Piglet’s ear.

“That’s right.”

“Is that where we’re going now?”

“Yes, right after Mark shows us the flashing lights. Right, Mark?”

“Yep,” Mark quipped, pressing the relevant switch.

The two small girls stretched their heads around when the lights on the back parcel shelf began to flash in a fast strobe-like fashion. Little Lucy clapped her hands and Shannon had a look of excitement on her face. CJ guessed that they had not been too affected by everything, except that they would miss their mother once things had calmed back down.

Mark briefly talked with the backup team on the radio, making sure they’d secure the house after they searched it. Once he was satisfied that his instructions would be carried out, he pulled away from the curb.

As they headed back to the office, CJ was amazed at the two little bodies that were curled around her waist. *‘I could get used to this,’* she thought.

* * * * *

Jamie yawned widely and scratched her fingers through her hair. "Ouch!"

"Careful, Jamie," Kate said from beside her.

"Damn. I forgot about it for a while. Actually, that's good. Thanks, Kate."

"Well... you must have been enjoying my movie then."

"I really did. You're very talented. I'll need to try and catch that series you're in now."

Kate was a little bashful. "Thanks. You can watch it any time. We uh, have the DVDs of the first season."

Jamie grinned. "Cool. I'll come over and watch them sometime," she said, yawning again. "Bedtime for me, I think."

"Okay. If you need anything, gimme a shout, okay?"

"Thanks, Kate. Goodnight."

"Night."

Kate checked the clock. It was eleven thirty and she wondered how much longer her wife would be working. She tried not to think about it too much because ultimately, she would start to worry about CJ.

Clearing up their dinner dishes and letting the dog out one last time, she flopped back onto the couch and flicked through the TV channels, her heavy eyes drooping shut just as she'd settled on a show.

Chapter 7

With Coburn and Mrs. Davenport in custody, the agent's filed into the Assistant Director's office. Mark sat at his desk, looking as exhausted as they all felt.

"Agents. Come in... take a load off, in more ways than one."

Ethan slumped into the nearby couch and even though there was another free chair, CJ remained standing and stretched out her six-foot frame, yawning as she did so.

"Sorry, Sir," she said sheepishly, when she noticed Mark watching her with a small smirk on his face.

"No apology necessary, CJ. I am incredibly happy with how fast you guys turned this around. You've all worked your butts off, including Agent Green. How is she, by the way?"

CJ smiled, remembering her phone call to Kate earlier. Jamie was practically jumping out of her skin when the actress went to the hospital to pick her up. "She got released today under the proviso that she wouldn't be alone for the next forty-eight hours, so Kate went to pick her up. She's staying with us for a day or so."

"Excellent. What's the latest on our captures?"

CJ pressed two fingers to her forehead. “They’re holding Sheila Davenport in custody until her hearing. She’s a mess after her emotional outburst at the house, and her initial interview wasn’t very clear. We didn’t get much out of her. I have a feeling she’ll be in prison for a long time for this, though,” she said, sitting on the edge of the boss’ desk.

CJ knew Ethan would be thinking about his own kids through this whole thing. As if reading her thoughts, he asked, “What about the girls now?”

“I checked. They’re upstairs with the two agents from the CARD team. Not sure how they’ll handle it over the holiday season. Sheila’s estranged sister gets temporary custody but she’s from Boulder, Colorado and they’re still trying to track her down.”

“They brought the Rapid Deployment team in?” Ethan said, curiously.

“They’ve been ‘in’ the whole time. Seems they were watching the investigation closely, but from afar because there was no evidence of abduction except a vague note on the wall and an unconvincing call. They let us lead.”

Mark sat in his usual pose, elbows on the desk and fingers pointed to the sky, resting his chin on his thumbs. The agents waited for him to speak.

“Can you go up and see the girls off, CJ? You seemed to make a connection with Shannon at the scene. In fact, they seemed to love you.”

CJ tried not to blush. “Of course. When are social services coming down to get them?”

“Should be here soon, I suspect.”

“Right. I’ll head up now then,” the agent nodded and got up to leave.

Mark watched as Ethan excused himself and followed CJ out of the office. The Assistant Director was glad to see Agent Carson almost back to normal. He shook his head, never having cared so much for his employees in his life. “What a great team,” he muttered to himself.

* * * * *

In the room upstairs, the two girls were playing near a box full of plastic toys. When Shannon saw the agent, she sprang to her feet.

“CJ!”

“Hey! Whatcha doin’ huh?”

“Playing. Come see,” the little dark-haired girl said, taking the large hand in her own and pulling CJ across the floor.

CJ looked over at the two agents who were supervising them and got two smiles in return. As the tall woman sat down on the floor, legs out in front of her, Lucy climbed into her lap, still hugging Barney the bear.

“Hey, Lucy,” CJ said quietly, hugging the infant and kissing the little head.

“Look, CJ. There’s Nemo!” Shannon said, excitedly.

“So it is. And he winds up too. Watch this.”

CJ took the plastic fish from Shannon and wound it up, watching the girl squeal with delight as the fins flapped back and forth on the toy.

The agent sat with the girls for fifteen minutes, occasionally laughing at Shannon’s sudden changes in conversation and feeling her heart beat hard in her chest, hoping that the new guardian would take good care of these precious little souls.

When two women from social services arrived, CJ’s face fell. She quickly hid her sadness and focused on her new friends.

“Shannon? Come here, sweetheart,” the agent requested, patting her left knee.

Shannon came to sit on her and turned her head to see CJ’s face. The agent smiled.

“It’s time to go with these two ladies but I want to give you something before you leave, okay?” At the girl’s nod, CJ took her card from her pocket. “Now, I want you to be a brave big girl and stay strong. Take care of Lucy... and Barney and Piglet. This card has my phone number on it.”

Shannon took the card and looked at it with a frown. CJ smiled at her curiosity.

“If you need me for anything, even just to tell me how Piglet is doing... you can call me on this number. Get a grown up to help you if you want. Okay?”

Shannon nodded mutely, her face taking on a worried look. CJ hugged her tightly.

“You’ll be fine, sweetie.” She released the girl and repositioned Lucy. “Ready?” she asked with an exaggerated toothy smile.

CJ put the card in Shannon’s jacket pocket and took a deep breath before handing the girls over.

Once they had left, the tall woman stared at the empty doorway for a few moments, not noticing the other agents leaving. Her heart felt shredded by what these two children would go through now. She told herself that she would check with social services in a few days – even if she was off work – to make sure Shannon and Lucy had gotten home safely... wherever home was going to be.

* * * * *

At 2am, CJ sat in her truck in front of her house, hands on the steering wheel, head hung low. She thought back to the recent night when she had done the exact same thing, feeling so incredibly dark and lonely, obsessing about the case. She hadn’t been alone, of course, but that’s how she’d felt in her mind. She was glad it was over. And she was more than glad she had Kate in her life. She took a deep breath and opened the door, noting the crisp air hitting her skin.

“Chilly,” she muttered as she walked up the porch steps.

Inside, she dropped her jacket and keys in the usual place and noticed the fluttering light from the TV in the living room. Walking through the door, she saw her wife, sleeping curled up on the couch with the remote still in her hand. CJ smiled and went to Kate, bending down to kiss the smooth cheek.

“Mmph... jus’ come back, seej...” Kate mumbled in her sleep.

The agent knelt down beside her wife. “I’m here, honey. I never left.”

Kate didn’t awaken, still mumbling something the agent couldn’t understand. CJ turned off the TV and slipped one arm under Kate’s head and one under her knees, scooping the petite blonde up into her arms easily. The actress’ hands automatically slid around the tall woman’s neck. CJ smiled again and started walking towards the stairs.

“CJ?”

“Well, I certainly hope so,” the agent said as she went up the stairs.

“Hi, baby... are you okay?” Kate asked, partially awake.

“Yep.”

“Why are you carrying me?” the smaller woman said as they entered the bedroom.

“Because I love you... and you were sleeping... and I can,” CJ smirked.

She deposited her wife on the bed and grinned at the slightly bewildered look on the blonde’s face. CJ walked into the ensuite and was followed by her dazed wife.

Kate went to pee and CJ giggled, knowing her wife was still very sleepy and pretty much on automatic pilot. Once they were done, they both fell into bed, Kate’s arms immediately sliding round CJ’s body.

“Did you get her?” Kate slurred.

CJ knew she was talking about the case. “Yes, honey. We found her and the girls at the house in San Bernardino County.”

“Where are the girls now?”

“With social services until Sheila’s sister comes to get them,” CJ said solemnly.

Kate sensed her wife’s mood and looked up, suddenly a lot more awake. “Hey, what’s wrong, honey?”

After a sigh, the agent tightened her hold on her wife. “They are such sweet kids, Katie. And they seemed to love me. I spent some time with them. Just made me realize how much I’m gonna love our kids when we have them.”

“Aww, baby. Tell me everything that happened tonight?”

CJ lay wrapped around Kate and told her how the entire thing had played out. The actress smiled lovingly as the agent talked about the interaction with the girls.

“You are so damn sweet,” Kate grinned.

“I really am,” CJ retorted, swiping her finger down the tip of the blonde’s nose.

“You’ll make a great Mom. That was such a good idea you had to give them your number, honey. I bet it made Shannon feel a little better.”

“I hope so. C’mon, let’s get some rest. And I bet you’ll be the best Mom ever.”

“We’ll both be great.”

Kate kissed her wife and even though she was tired, she still felt the pounding of her heart and the heat suffuse her body at the touch of CJ’s lips.

“Mmmm,” the actress moaned, pulling back from CJ. “We can’t do that. Jamie’s next door.”

“Uh huh. And I’m exhausted anyway. Just hold me, Katie.”

“Gladly.”

And with that, both women dozed off, CJ’s mind calmed by her wife’s love and attention once more.

* * * * *

The next morning, CJ paused half way down the staircase, listening to the giggling coming from the kitchen. “I detect two blondes,” she chuckled to herself, then laughed out loud at the irony in the stereotype in this case. The two blondes in her kitchen right now, were two of the most intelligent women she’d ever known.

“*Hey Legs, get in here,*” a certain actress shouted, after hearing CJ laugh.

CJ smirked and slid her robe up her leg, then wrapped the bare limb around the doorframe, leaving no clothing visible to the two women. The agent ran her hand up and down the naked thigh and pointed her toes out straight ahead of her, wiggling her foot before cocking her head to the side to see the response. She found four wide eyes staring at her, mouths open and a huge smile on Kate’s face. Jamie looked like she might have an aneurysm and CJ thought she may have overdone it a little.

“Good morning, ladies,” the raven-haired agent said, crossing the floor to her wife.

“Uh huh,” Jamie grunted.

Kate laughed. “I think Jamie just had a heart attack, honey. Please don’t do that again.”

CJ slipped her arms around her wife and kissed her briefly, eyeing Jamie as she headed for the coffee pot. “Sorry, Penfold. You okay today?”

Jamie shook her head to erase her train of thought. “I’m fine. And I agree with Kate. Don’t do that again.”

“I thought your little redhead was gonna crush the crush?”

“We’ve barely gotten started yet. Gimme some time, will ya?” the blonde agent grumbled.

CJ stood behind the stool Jamie was perched on. “Let me check your head. Stay still.” She gently moved Jamie’s hair and Kate saw the blonde agent close her eyes.

“CJ... you’re torturing her. Quit it.”

“I am not. And it looks fine... not as black as before. Thick skull indeed,” CJ chuckled.

“Smart ass,” Jamie grumbled.

“Yep. That’s me.”

Kate slurped from her mug then tapped her wife on the shoulder. “How come your so chipper this morning?”

CJ twisted her face and pretended to think about it. “I have the most amazing wife in the world. I have some great friends, a good job and a solved case. I’d say that counts for some of it.”

Jamie pretended to gag. “I’m gonna barf.”

“Hah. Just you wait ‘til you fall in love. You’ll see...” CJ grinned, leaving Jamie lost for a response.

They settled down around the island unit and had breakfast, accompanied by some chitchat and some FBI talk. CJ gave Jamie a run-down of everything that had happened after she went to hospital.

“Are you going in today?” the blonde agent asked.

“Yeah. Just to tie up some loose ends. Should only be a few hours.”

“Can I come with...?”

“Nope. You’re supposed to rest. Doctor’s orders,” CJ said, wagging her finger for emphasis.

Just then, someone rang the doorbell and Kate went to answer it. She came back into the kitchen with an eyebrow raised, trying to hold back her smile. “Well, look who I found.”

Sam followed her into the room and showed her teeth in a cheesy grin. “Hey all. Hmm, I feel a little overdressed,” she added, seeing all three women in pajamas and robes.

Jamie swallowed the food she had in her mouth and just about passed out. All the blonde agent could think was that she looked a fright... again. ‘*Aww crap,*’ she silently groaned.

CJ grinned. “Hi Sam. What brings you here?” she said, leaning in towards Kate who was back next to her. “Like we don’t know,” she mumbled to her wife, making the actress laugh.

“What?” Sam said, looking at Kate. “I’m here with your mail. You said Tony had a few days off so I thought I’d deliver them for you since I had the day off too.”

Kate nodded, biting her lips to stop the giggles she could feel bubbling up inside.

CJ nodded. “Uh huh.”

“It’s true,” Sam pouted.

Jamie smiled. “I believe you.”

CJ laughed. "You would... sap!"

After a piece of bacon flew past CJ's head, she decided to shut up for a second or two. A black haze in the shape of Kamali, rocketed through the room, vacuuming up the piece of bacon quite efficiently before disappearing again.

"How are you, Jamie?" the redhead asked shyly.

"I'm fine. But again, you caught me on a bad hair day."

Sam shook her head. "You look great," the producer said, giving the blonde agent a look of such desire, the tall woman almost blushed, her eyes wide as she stared at Sam.

Kate and CJ watched from the sidelines like two monkeys perched on a branch, highly amused but trying not to show it.

After a few intensely silent moments, CJ stood up. "Well, I have to get ready for work... unfortunately. Sam, help yourself to breakfast... just the food for now though. Give Jamie a chance to heal."

CJ ran out the door, hearing Kate laughing loudly behind her and imagining the bright red faces of the other two.

* * * * *

After CJ left, Kate finished her second mug of coffee and excused herself from the kitchen, leaving her two friends to chat in private. She got dressed and was just about to go out with the dog when the phone rang. She picked up the extension in the upper hallway.

"Hello?"

"Oh hi, sweetheart, How are you?"

"Hey, Dad. I'm fine. It's good to hear from you."

"Oh, I just wanted to check up on your two ladies. Last time, you said CJ had a bad case. How is she?"

"Yeah. It did get tough for a while but it's pretty much cleared up now. We're absolutely fine," Kate said, smiling at her father's loving nature.

"That's good, sweetie."

"How are you and your husband doing?" the actress grinned.

"Oh! Haha! That still sounds funny to me. Oh, Jeffrey's fine. We're just busy, busy, busy on the run up to Christmas. What are you guys doing this year?"

"Not sure yet. CJ will be off work as of tomorrow. I think just a quiet one for us this year. But I was thinking about trying to plan a family Christmas next year."

Eddie almost squeaked. *"Oh! Fabulous idea, honey, just great! Well, you two have a lovely Christmas. I'll call you when it comes, okay?"*

“Great, Dad. You and Jeffrey have a great Christmas too. I love you both.”

“*Oh, we love you both so much. Speak soon, sweetheart,*” he concluded, making kissing noises down the phone.

“Bye, Dad.”

Kate hung up and chuckled to herself. She imagined Jeffrey dressed in his Santa suit on Christmas day. He always played seasonal songs on the piano while their customers ate at the restaurant. She smiled, shaking her head and went to find Kamali.

* * * * *

CJ knocked on Mark’s door.

“Come in,” the Assistant Director shouted.

“Hello, Sir.”

“CJ, why are you still here? It’s two o’clock!”

“Uh, I just finished up the last of the paperwork,” she replied, handing a copy to Mark.

“Ah, great. Thanks. Anything else to report?”

“I don’t think so. Coburn and Davenport are being held in custody – obviously no chance of bail – until their court dates. I checked with social services. They located Sheila’s sister and she’s coming to LA to stay with a friend until she finds out what’s happening with Sheila. Could be a long wait,” CJ said with a sigh.

“Yes. She only has temporary custody. Not sure how that works but I hope the girls will be okay.”

“Me too.”

“Well... go home CJ. Take two weeks. I have someone on standby to cover your absence over the holiday season. You deserve a break.”

CJ seemed thoughtful for a moment.

Mark waved a finger in the air. “No argument. That’s an order.”

“Okay. On one condition.”

Mulrone raised an eyebrow. “And what’s that?”

“That you come over for dinner tonight, just as a thank you for your support,” CJ said amicably. She saw him narrow his eyes a little. “Sir, you deserve some praise too. You’re a good boss. That’s kinda rare.”

Mark laughed, knowing CJ never had an ulterior motive. “Thank you, CJ. I suppose I could. Yes... what time?”

“Shoot for eight-thirty?”

“I’ll see you then.”

“Good!” CJ said, getting up. “See you later.”

“Later, CJ.”

* * * * *

CJ, Kate and Jamie sat on the couch, sipping from their mugs as they chatted. The actress had made herself comfortable, her back leaning against the end cushion and her feet on her wife’s lap. Once the FBI talk was done, Kate remembered about her meeting with John and decided to ask the two agents what they thought.

“Hey, I wanted to tell you about that producing job,” she said, nudging CJ’s thigh gently with her foot.

“Oh yeah, how did that go?” CJ asked.

“Well, wait ‘til you hear this. He wants to do a short film about a real life FBI agent.”

CJ laughed. “You’ve got to be kidding? Really?”

“Yep. Some case about a hostage taker who thought he was an alien or something similar,” the actress chuckled.

Jamie raised a dark blonde eyebrow. “Aliens?”

“Well,” Kate said, scratching her cheek, “he said it was a real case. Some guy in a convenience store who was certain he was either an alien or abducted by aliens. It sounds like something out of the X-Files but he said it was true...” The actress stopped talking when she saw her wife frowning. “What, CJ?”

“Where was this?” the dark-haired woman queried.

“He said Baltimore, I think.”

“Uh huh,” CJ said, nodding slowly. “I know of it.”

“You do?”

“Yep.”

“Oh God, it was you, wasn’t it?” Kate gasped.

Jamie leaned forward to see CJ’s face and the tall brunette smirked.

“Now wouldn’t that be hilarious if it was? No, it wasn’t me. But it *was* my partner, Billy Sharp.”

“Really?” Kate squeaked.

“Wow, talk about coincidences,” Jamie piped in.

“Are you gonna do the film, Katie?” CJ asked.

“I’d like to. Would you have a problem with me doing it?”

CJ shook her head. “Nah. I could even help if I have the time. I can contact Billy for you. Does John want any FBI input or is he just going by reports?”

“I’ll ask him next time I see him. Go figure…” the actress muttered.

“I know. We seem to have these freaky things happen quite a lot, huh?”

“Yeah.”

“I can’t give him actual details but I can certainly assist him in making it look like the real deal.”

Kate nodded. “I’ll let him know.”

Jamie leaned back to relax as they continued on to other things. Around 5pm, she was feeling a little dizzy and had a light snack before deciding to go for a nap.

“Want me to wake you later?” CJ asked.

“No. If I sleep all night, then I obviously need it.”

“Okay. But you don’t look so good, so I’ll be checking in on you. Make sure you cover your lady bits,” CJ grinned.

Jamie just shook her head. “Oh I will, Dangermouse. Good night, you two.”

“Night,” Kate and CJ shouted in unison.

Jamie headed upstairs and the couple helped one another set the table for Mark coming over.

* * * * *

When the Assistant Director arrived, they quickly settled down to their meal. After some initial conversation, which inevitably turned to the murder case, Mark sat quietly for a moment, finally nodding to himself and breaking the silence.

“You know what I find quite amazing about you, CJ?” Mark said, accepting a piece of bread from the basket that Kate held out.

“What?” CJ quipped, trying not to blush at Mark’s words.

“That the two things you are best at where work is concerned, are two things that require two completely different minds. Wow, that was a lot of ‘twos’,” the Assistant Director grinned.

CJ smirked, as did Kate.

“What do you mean, Mark?” the blonde asked.

“Well, CJ is a top class negotiator, which requires a huge amount of detachment from her subject. You have to have a lot of self-control, which she has in abundance. But you also have to avoid – at all costs –

being emotionally involved with what's happening. Also, you have to be a very good listener and to acknowledge the perspective and viewpoint of the other person without necessarily agreeing or disagreeing with it. It takes detachment... a lot of detachment. Yet..."

CJ and Kate watched Mark, spreading butter on his bread as he raved on.

"The other thing you're incredible at is serial killer profiling and I think we can all agree that you cannot stay detached from that to do the amazing job you just did with Coburn. You need to get into their minds... to think like they think. It's quite a skill."

He finally looked up from his task to see a red-faced CJ and a smiling Kate.

The tall agent took a deep breath. "Thank you, Mark. But I didn't exactly stay detached from a couple of negotiations I've been involved with."

Mark nodded. "Those were extenuating circumstances, CJ. Nobody can predict how they'd react when loved ones are involved. I'd imagine the ones with Kate were particularly frightening for you. Even I know that. But they don't happen every day."

"Thankfully," CJ replied, frowning. "Although, you're right... there have been two different situations with Kate."

Kate covered her wife's hand on the table and smiled. "Well, considering how we met, I'm not surprised. But no more... and *thankfully*, that's all over. I hope you're giving her some time off now, Mark?"

"I'm forcing her to take some time off, Kate... at least two weeks. And I know you're off work right now, so she'll take it. She did coerce me into dinner tonight, though," Mark winked at the actress.

"Uh, hello? I am here, ya know," CJ grumbled.

Mark laughed and CJ looked to Kate, who was grinning that mischievous grin she did so well. The agent gave in and laughed, then took a gulp of her favorite grape juice.

* * * * *

When Mark left that night, Kate and CJ sat on the porch steps and looked out into the darkness, watching the red taillights of his car disappear out the gates in the distance.

"How are you feeling, honey? Better?"

"I feel much better, Katie. I know I keep saying thank you... but, thank you. For your support, for your love, for everything you give to me. And thank you for you. I'm never letting you go, I hope you realize that," CJ said, letting a tear running down her face.

Kate saw it and smiled, knowing her wife was returning to her. "You don't need to thank me, honey. I don't ever want to be anywhere else. You're all I need. I should thank you for letting me love you and for everything you give to me too," she purred, wiping CJ's cheek.

The agent turned to her wife and took her hand. "Bedtime. I need to thank you another way."

Kate's eyes darkened as she allowed her tall, beautiful wife to lead her into their home, towards the stairs. "I'm sure there's more I need to thank you for too, baby... for the rest of the night."

“You’ll need to be quiet, though.”

Kate stifled her laugh. “Me? I think you’re the one who’ll need to pipe down.”

CJ stopped halfway up the stairs and turned to her wife. “How about the study? And there’s a lock on the door too.”

“You really think I can’t be quiet?”

CJ smirked. “Maybe you can, but with you on top of me, I’ll have no choice but to make lots of wonderful noises.”

Kate dragged her wife to the study, closing and locking the door behind her. “So, I’m on top?” she purred as she pushed her wife up against the door and licked at her neck.

“Any... anything... you want... ohhhhh...”

Chapter 9

“You ready?”

Kate nodded vigorously and held her faux fur collar tight against her neck. CJ opened the door and they ran out of the rental office and headed to the black Jeep Wrangler that was waiting for them.

After putting their bags in the back – and a box that CJ wouldn’t let Kate open – they jumped in. Kate started the engine and turned up the heat, her teeth chattering with the low temperatures. It was now December 22nd and so far, Kate hadn’t mentioned the significant date. They were in Montana, en route to their cabin for a quiet Christmas and she was happy that her wife was in good spirits.

CJ leaned over to kiss her wife. “Cold nose,” she smirked once they’d parted.

“Uh huh. Let’s get moving. I can’t wait to see Charlie. Oh! Did you call Dad?”

“Yes. I let him know we’d be out of contact and wished them a Merry Christmas. Told him we’d call at New Year,” CJ said, looking for some good music for the trip.

“Excellent.”

The little four-wheel drive pulled out of the lot and they were soon on the road. They both sang along with the music, CJ occasionally laughing at Kate’s loud, slightly off-tune singing. But it didn’t stop them. They were having too much fun. They stopped in Missoula for supplies, before finally arriving at the Sheriff’s parking lot in Alberton. As they walked inside they saw Charlie’s deputy sitting behind the counter.

“Psst... Jonathan,” CJ whispered.

The young man looked up. “CJ... Kate... hello. Good to see you.”

“Hi,” the actress said quietly. “How are you, Jonathan?”

“I’m good, Kate. And how are you both?”

CJ smiled. “We’re good. Right, Katie?”

“Absolutely.”

CJ looked around. “Where’s Charlie?”

Jonathan chuckled. “He’s in the bathroom. How did you know he was here?”

CJ shrugged. “I can smell the cigars and his truck is out front.”

“Go hide, and I’ll set him up for you,” the deputy said, pointing to the closet door.

Kate and CJ quickly slipped behind the counter and into the closet. As the door closed, darkness surrounded them.

“Oooh, baby,” the agent whispered.

Kate slapped the hand that slid up her butt cheek and CJ giggled silently, leaning her breasts on the back of Kate’s shoulders.

“Quit it, Carson. Shh!”

They heard Jonathan talking to Charlie, telling him that they had to hurry up and help two damsels in distress out on the road... out-of-towners, too. Jonathan opened the closet door and Charlie turned to get his coat.

“Ahh! FBI! Kate!”

“Hey Charlie,” the actress said, opening her arms to hug the man.

The Sheriff squeezed the living daylights out of the blonde and then turned to CJ. The agent winked at him and Kate caught the sly look from Charlie, too. ‘*What was that about?*’ she pondered.

“Hey, man. How’s my favorite Sheriff?” CJ drawled, pulling the stout little man into her arms.

“Fine, just fine. Haven’t seen you since your honeymoon. How’s married life?”

“It’s the best, Charlie. I have the best wife,” the agent said bashfully.

Kate smirked. “See... I’d disagree because *I* have the best wife.”

“Aww, shucks,” CJ giggled. “So, wanna catch me and the wife up on all your gossip over a coffee?” she said to Charlie.

Kate slapped CJ’s butt and sat down beside Jonathan on the edge of the desk. They all talked for a while until the two women were ready to go up the mountain trail. Kate held her arms out toward Charlie when she saw the man heading to the CB receiver unit on the shelf.

Charlie laughed. “I’ll carry it out to the car for you, Kate.”

“Such a gentleman,” the blonde grinned.

They said their farewells and drove off. Half way up the trail, Kate stopped the car and tugged on CJ’s sleeve.

“Look, honey.”

The agent leaned forward to look past her wife’s head, seeing four deer standing stalk still in the forest. All four stared at the vehicle for a few seconds before deeming it a threat and scampering off into the trees.

“Beautiful, huh?” CJ said.

“Yeah. Can’t believe how much I love it up here,” the blonde said thoughtfully.

“Well, I’m glad you do,” the taller woman nodded.

Once they arrived at the cabin, Kate pulled up next to the shed. CJ turned to her wife, hoping that the actress hadn’t spotted the lights hanging under the roofline at the front door.

“Keep the engine on to keep you warm and wait here, will you?”

“Why?”

“I can’t tell you. Please... wait here?” CJ said, batting her eyelashes.

Kate scrunched her face and smiled, highly amused by her wife’s antics. “Okay.”

“Great... be right back...”

The agent jumped out of the car, her feet crunching on the frosty ground of the little front yard. She grabbed the box from the back seat and Kate narrowed her eyes as her wife entered the cabin. A few moments later, a rather excited-looking CJ skipped over to the shed and grabbed the ladders. Quickly setting up the solar panels and a few other necessities, she closed the shed up and went back indoors. Kate was puzzled, but still she waited. Finally, CJ came back out the door and lifted their bags from the rear of the vehicle. She dumped them inside the cabin and came to the driver door, opening it and waving her arm, allowing Kate to exit.

“Can I get out now?” the smaller woman asked, raising an amused eyebrow.

“You may, my love.”

CJ walked behind her wife as they went through the door. Kate stopped abruptly just inside when she saw what the agent had done.

The living area was beautifully illuminated by two lamps, about thirty candles and a beautiful Christmas tree full of twinkling lights. The fire was roaring in the hearth, two Christmas stockings hung from the mantel, warm blankets were strewn on the large couch and Kate’s mouth was now hanging open. CJ looked at her spouse’s face, seeing a huge smile and tears falling from wide eyes, so full of wonder. The actress looked totally surprised and overwhelmed, just as CJ had planned it. She slipped her arm around her wife’s shoulder, nudging her forward a little to close and lock the door.

“You... you did all this?”

“Well, I had a little help from the Sheriff,” CJ said, kissing Kate’s cheek. “I love you, baby. I just wanted to surprise you. You’ve been incredible to me and I want to celebrate the Holidays with you this year.”

“Oh, CJ. It’s perfect, so perfect. I love you so much,” Kate gasped. Then she noticed the brightly wrapped gifts under the tree. “That’s what was in the box?”

CJ giggled. “Of course.”

“Oh, this is so great. I have your gifts in my bag. We can add them. Oh, honey…”

Kate was lost for words as more happy tears flowed from the sparkling green orbs. CJ came to stand in front of her and hugged her tightly. She ducked her head to capture Kate’s lips in her own. The kiss deepened and the actress melted in her wife’s arms. CJ lifted Kate around her torso and the blonde automatically wrapped both legs around her spouse. It was definitely the signal CJ was looking for and she walked over to the fireplace, lowering her wife onto the big rug in front of the dancing flames. She hovered over the actress on her hands and knees, her blue eyes, dark and hooded. Kate’s rapid pulse was visible under the creamy skin of her neck and the agent couldn’t resist. She grinned and licked her lips. Kate raised her chin to give her wife access and as her spouse’s mouth met her skin, she gasped and felt the heat pool rapidly between her legs.

They undressed one another, tossing the garments toward the couch, not really caring where they landed, and continued to light a fire all of their very own. Kate’s thigh pushed up between CJ’s legs and the agent instinctually began a slow thrusting movement.

Kate was in heaven, feeling her wife’s arousal painted slick on her skin. CJ’s swollen center glided smoothly back and forth and the actress felt her push harder as her climax took hold.

The taller woman broke the kiss, slightly caught off guard by how turned on she was, and how quickly. And she couldn’t stop it. Her orgasm shot through her body as Kate’s hands grasped her breasts and chaffed the hard nipples.

“Katie… oh God, yes!”

Kate watched CJ’s face as she came. It was so beautiful and when her wife opened those blue eyes, the actress could see the desire within them. The agent recovered, nostrils flaring, and licked her lips, dry from panting so hard.

“I think… it’s my turn to watch you… play with yourself,” CJ purred.

Kate stomach clenched at the words and she grinned at the thought. “You… gonna help me?”

“Oh yes,” CJ said, sliding down Kate’s body.

She grabbed Kate’s buttocks then slipped a nearby cushion underneath her wife to raise her up to a perfect height. Kate moaned as CJ kissed over her abdomen, the feather light touches creating a plethora of goosebumps.

“Touch yourself for me, baby,” the agent husked.

“Oh God, Ciara…”

Kate did as she was asked, trailing her fingers through her own wetness. CJ watched Kate's hand as its fingers glistened with the gathering moisture right in front of her face. She watched the swollen ridge as the actress manipulated it gently.

"Oh yeah..." the taller woman whispered, drooling at the sight before her and inhaling deeply.

CJ wrapped her arms around the outside of Kate's thighs when the blonde's rhythm became faster and harder. Kate was quickly edging towards her climax, the thought of CJ watching everything closely, setting her alight with desire. The agent waited for the perfect moment and when it came – just before Kate's orgasm – she curled her tongue and entered her wife with it. Kate screamed, her hand movements now erratic as she came hard.

CJ continued to thrust her tongue in and out of her wife's delicious opening, feeling the muscles contract around her. The agent's eyes rolled back in her head as she savored every drop. Kate was panting hard, trying to recover from the intense feeling, twitching with the occasional aftershock. CJ didn't want to move from the warm place inside her spouse but when Kate's finger left her own clit and tickled down the side of the agent's nose, she opened her eyes to find her wife watching her.

The actress smiled, still not able to speak. She cleared her throat and took a few deep, cleansing breaths.

"You gonna stay... there forever?"

CJ grinned – well, as much as she could grin with her tongue trapped inside her wife – and slipped the muscle out slowly. Another aftershock swept through Kate at the movement and she groaned.

CJ licked her lips. "You taste so incredible, baby. Let me share it with you," she added, crawling up Kate's body and kissing her deeply.

When the agent pulled back, Kate opened her eyes again and smiled.

"Not bad," the blonde grinned.

CJ closed her eyes. "Mmmmm, it's the best."

Kate giggled and lay back down, taking CJ with her. "Let's see what else is the best..."

* * * * *

They spent the next couple of days relaxing, eating, watching movies, playing games and making love. Lots of making love. CJ was relentless and Kate was happy to accept any and all advances... and initiate quite a few of her own. It was like they were regaining something that wasn't lost, but had been overwhelmed by the horrid murders that took CJ to those dark places where she couldn't let herself feel good. Now in the agent's mind, Kate was her savior, the person who brought her back from that place much quicker than she had ever returned before. And during that week where the agent felt lost, her wife had kept a strong link somehow, even when CJ hadn't been able to focus on it.

Sitting on the couch in front of the fire, they got bored with Pictionary, and modified it to something that was nothing like Pictionary at all really. Kate drew a strange line or shape and CJ had to make it into something that made sense, and vice versa. Most of the images the agent had ended up drawing were body

parts and Kate found it highly amusing when her wife pointed out those body parts with her tongue on the actress' skin.

"Quit licking me for a minute. I'm gonna be so wet, I'll prune!" the blonde chuckled.

CJ smirked and sat up. "So, distract me. Talk to me about something," the agent suggested.

"Well, let's see," Kate pondered, tapping her finger on her forehead for emphasis. "Oh, did you check up on the girls before you left?"

"Yeah. They're with their aunt, although they didn't even know they had an aunt. I hope they're okay."

"You really liked them, didn't you?"

"Heck yeah. They were so sweet, so curious about life and everything. And such innocence amongst all that crap going on around them."

Kate was staring at her wife as she spoke the heartfelt words. "You really are a beautiful soul, CJ. I love you so much."

The agent took her wife into her arms. "Ditto, Katie. More than I can ever express."

Kate giggled. "Well, you've been expressing it just fine for the last few days, honey."

"Yeah, I have been kinda hungry. I can't help it. You're just too delicious," CJ said, licking her lips then sucking on Kate's neck.

"Oh no... I need food and a bath... and you can join me for both."

"Sounds like a plan. Are we staying up after midnight? We could open one gift each then save the rest for the morning," CJ said hopefully.

"Whatever you want. I'm just so glad you feel like you want to do Christmas this year," the actress husked, kissing her wife's cheek.

"I told you when we met that it was time for things to change around here. I meant it and I think it's about time. Figured I'd start small..."

"Wow, when we met... that was three years ago. Time sure has flown," Kate murmured.

"It was. And I love you more every day. How can something so horrid turn into the best thing that ever happened to me?" CJ said, then frowned because that sounded wrong. "Sorry, Katie, I didn't mean you getting..."

Kate silenced her with her fingers to the full lips. "I know what you meant. And what freaks me out is that I can't ever regret what happened to me because it led me to you. I love you more every day too. Aren't we lucky?"

CJ smiled. "Yes." She kissed the actress lovingly.

Once they parted, Kate's stomach growled, indicating it really was time for dinner. After they'd eaten, they filled the tub and soaked for an hour in the hot, bubbly water, CJ making sure she washed every millimeter

of Kate's body thoroughly. Of course, the actress just had to return the gesture and paid very close attention to her wife's entire body, too.

CJ left Kate trimming her nails in the bathroom and went to bank the fire. She went around the room putting out any lights and candles and checked out front before re-locking the door. They'd had a light sprinkling of snow, but it was nothing compared to the storm of a few years ago. CJ's mind drifted back to that time again and she shook her head, telling herself that they were okay now. They were happy, together and safe. The agent strolled into the bedroom shedding her robe and sat on the edge of the bed.

She watched Kate walk through the door and remove her own thick robe, dropping it on the floor. The actress stood in front of her spouse and CJ wrapped her arms around Kate's buttocks, leaning her ear to her wife's stomach. The blonde held CJ's head to her, wondering what she was thinking as she continued to rub her cheek on the smooth skin.

"You okay, honey?"

"Yes. I'm just enjoying you. I always enjoy you."

"Like a dessert?"

CJ laughed. "Better than any dessert I've ever had."

Guiding her nude wife onto the bed, CJ turned out the light, leaving only the sensual glow of the candles on the nightstand. She kissed her way up the soft skin on Kate's calf, passing the inside of her knee and came to her inner thigh... and her wife's only remaining scar. Kate had healed well and even the marks on her back had all but disappeared. The agent lovingly kissed and licked the scar, paying special attention to the skin that had been so brutally injured in the past. CJ opened her eyes, puzzled when Kate chuckled between gasped breaths. The tall woman lifted her head.

"Why are you laughing?"

"I just love how you only do that when we're here."

"Do what?"

"You only stop that long to kiss my scar when we're here at the cabin. And you make that little noise too."

CJ felt a little self-conscious. "I make a noise?"

"Yeah. It's so cute. It's like you're... remembering..."

CJ crawled up Kate's body, her face less than an inch from her wife's. "I'll never forget it, Katie, but I guess maybe I do try and heal that memory while we're up here. Sorry."

"Oh God, don't apologize, Ciara. I love it when you do it. I shouldn't have said anything..."

"No. It's okay. But I won't stop doing it."

"Good!"

"May I continue now?" the agent requested, eyebrow raised.

Kate smirked. "I really wish you would."

Epilogue

Kate sat on the sumptuous couch looking through the book CJ had got her for Christmas – amongst other things. They had exchanged the remainder of the gifts yesterday and ate a delicious festive meal. CJ had brought crackers, which they had pulled and the actress now sported a hideous plastic necklace that her wife made her wear after Kate forced the agent to keep a paper hat on her head all day. She chuckled at how fun yesterday had been.

"Best Christmas ever... so far," she muttered.

She suddenly heard a rumbling above her and realized that CJ had been out chopping wood for about twenty minutes. Kate frowned and got up, grabbing the empty mugs from the coffee table – including CJ's new Star Trek mug – and took them to the sink. She snagged her coat from the hook, stuffed her feet into her boots and went outside in search of her spouse.

"CJ?" she shouted.

"I'm up here. Come join me," said a voice from the roof.

Kate went around the cabin and climbed the ladder. "What are you doing?"

"Just sitting. I never really noticed the view from up here. Usually, I'm too busy clearing snow."

The actress sat next to her wife on the gently sloping roof. "Wow, it really is beautiful... so clear today. You can see for miles."

"Yeah," CJ said, putting her arm around Kate's shoulder.

"I love that you put a Christmas tree outside too, honey."

The agent grinned. "I called Charlie with a list of tasks but he was happy to do it for us."

"I doubt we'll get to build a snowman this time, though," Kate said, looking at the sky.

"Yeah. It's kinda like a sprinkle of powder this year... so far. Probably best, since we don't have weeks this time," CJ sighed.

Kate smiled and took a deep breath. "Thinking about anything in particular?"

"Hmm. Not really."

"You were thinking about the girls, weren't you?"

CJ turned to her love. "Are you psychic?"

"No. I just know you very well. You're worried about them," Kate replied with certainty.

“Yeah. I guess I am. I just hope their aunt truly wants them. You know, Shannon looked just like me when I was little?”

“She must be beautiful then. I bet they both are.” Kate paused. “You thought about bringing them home, didn’t you?”

“Okay, now, you’re just freaking me out.”

“I just know how I would’ve felt, honey. And I know you have a big heart. Why don’t you check up on them again when we get back?”

“Yeah. I will. Thanks, Katie.”

A loud snort distracted both women and they looked down to the yard. A huge moose stood puffing out his breath next to the Jeep.

CJ giggled. “I wonder if that’s the same one I saw just before I found you.”

“You saw a moose when you found me?”

“Well, I think it was the day before, here at the cabin. I opened the door and he was standing right in front of me.”

Kate laughed, making the moose look up at them. “That must have been a surprise.”

“Yeah. He just snorted kinda like that one just did, and went into the forest in search of food, but it was funny.”

They watched as the large beast stretched to scratch his ear with his back foot and sauntered away, puffing out clouds into the cold air as he went. The two women admired the view for a few moments longer, then climbed down and headed indoors with a pile of wood each.

“Cold out there, huh?” Kate said, taking off her coat.

“Yep. Always chilly up here in winter.”

“So, what do you want to do for our last couple of days?” Kate smirked.

CJ pretended to think about it. “I don’t really care, as long as you’re doing it with me,” she said, taking her petite wife into her arms.

“Well, let’s stoke the fire together,” the actress teased.

“Oh... you mean the actual fire?”

“That first. Then, who knows...” the blonde retorted, wiggling an eyebrow.

“Oh yeah,” CJ groaned, releasing her and running to throw some wood on the fire. She whizzed back to Kate, slipping her arms around the smaller body once again. “Okay, first one’s done. What other fire would you like me to stoke?”

Kate laughed and dragged her wife into the bedroom, knowing that she was definitely about to burn... in a very good way.

The End...