

Cabe and The Ghost  
A Scorpion Love Story  
By Kate Simon

## Chapter One

Cabe looked around the Scorpion garage and marveled at how his life had changed in the last two years. Wrangling a team of geniuses was akin to herding cats. They were four of the smartest people on the planet but they had problems working and playing well with others. He'd known Walter the longest, having arrested him when he was eleven. It had taken some time but he'd gotten to know Sylvester, Happy and Toby. As much of a pain in the ass they could be, they were good kids.

Paige had walked into their lives the same day Cabe had returned to Walter's life. As a single mom, she was used to handling tough situations. She was their project manager and office mom, acting as a buffer between the team and the world. The work he did with Scorpion had been the most rewarding of his life.

He topped off his coffee while he waited for Assistant Homeland Director Katherine Cooper to arrive for a briefing.

"You'll take a lickin' from my rubber chicken,"

"Toby, I told you to stop playing with my Super Fun Guy statuette," said Sylvester as he grabbed it from Toby.

"It's a toy. It's supposed to be played with," said Toby

"Alright, listen up," Cabe shouted. "You people need to settle down. Director Cooper will be here any minute and she said it's a high priority assignment."

"That it is." Katherine Cooper stood at the entrance of the garage but she wasn't alone. As they approached the team Cabe made a quick appraisal. The woman was in her late forties or early fifties and looked as squared away as any Marine. She wore a plain black jacket and skirt with a crisp white blouse. Her Irish heritage was evident in her bright green eyes and a long mane of dark red hair she'd restricted into a tight ponytail. He found himself wondering how her hair would look, loose and spread out over his pillows. Cabe tried to push the thought from his head, but it was fighting eviction.

"Alright everyone, this is Special Agent Kate Riley." Cooper began introducing the team. "Kate this is Walter O'Brien, Happy Quinn, Toby Curtis, Sylvester Dodd, Paige Dineen." Kate gave everyone a quick acknowledgement. "And this is Agent Cabe Gallo."

Kate smiled and nodded at him and his heart skipped. He thought, "Oh, this is gonna be trouble."

Cooper handed a flash drive to Walter and he pulled up a slide showing a well dressed man in his early forties. His hair was jet black and his skin was dark, tanned brown. "Kate has been investigating Alessandro Cavello, a trade official with diplomatic immunity. She's been undercover at the Italian embassy for two months."

"I hate to point out the obvious, but doesn't diplomatic immunity make any investigation moot?" asked Toby.

"We aren't as interested in prosecuting him as we are stopping him. We know he is using his diplomatic status to move weapons through the Port of Los Angeles."

"I've been working as an administrative assistant for two months, looking for files, money trails, anything we can use but Cavello is smart. I've been all over that embassy and the files aren't there," said Kate.

"How do you investigate in a foreign embassy for two months without anyone noticing?" asked Sly.

Kate smiled. "I blend into the wallpaper. No one ever notices me."

Cabe looked at her in amazement. "Impossible," he murmured. He saw her a slight blush color her cheeks.

She took a breath and continued. "Cavello comes from a very powerful family, old money and he likes the high life. A lot more than his salary or any family assets should allow. He is throwing a gala celebrating the Festival of the Republic at his home tomorrow night. Everyone from the embassy has been invited, including me. Cavello has an air gapped system in his home I need to get to."

Walter flipped through more of the presentation, looking at pictures of Cavello's home. "What do you need from Scorpion?" he asked.

Kate looked at Cooper. "Honestly I always work alone but Director Cooper is insisting."

"Cavello has a ruthless reputation. He wouldn't be able to touch her in the embassy, too many witnesses he can't control but in his own home it's another story. I don't want her going in to this particular lion's den without backup. Kate's invitation includes a guest."

Cooper looked at Kate and smiled. "Agent Riley needs a date."

Cabe thought Kate looked extremely uncomfortable at the idea.

"I would prefer only handling the tech, but very well," said Walter.

Kate smiled and Cabe was dazzled. How could anyone not notice her?

She turned to Cooper. "You're right, he's adorable." Kate looked at Cabe. "I'm afraid that task will fall to Agent Gallo."

Cabe nodded and smiled. She actually looked apologetic, as if she was giving him an assignment he would hate.

"Ah, it's black tie," she said.

"Not a problem," he replied.

"Okay, that's settled," said Cooper. Pictures and all the blueprints for Cavello's home are on the drive."

Walter displayed pictures of a large estate, with a long driveway circling an enormous fountain. Large statues bordered the front entrance. Views of the back showed an Olympic size pool and a large garden. The entire house was wrapped in terraces and balconies.

"Subtle," said Happy.

"A place this big is bound to have a security staff. How are you going to get past them? It's not like Cabe can go around taking out the taking out the guards," said Sly.

Cabe shot him a look.

"Allow me to rephrase. He could take them out, but it wouldn't be advisable."

Cooper looked at Kate. "Agent Riley is an expert at infiltration and retrieval. She moves in and out of a location without anyone ever noticing. Like a ghost."

Kate shot Cooper a startled look. Cabe looked back and forth between the two women. Then it clicked. "Like a ghost?" asked Cabe. "The Ghost?" Kate's slight blush told him he was correct. "Holy crap," he said.

"What's going on?" asked Paige.

"The Ghost is a legend in the business. An agent who infiltrates locations and gets intel no one else can. The Ghost has the highest closure rate in the department." Cabe looked at her as smiled. "There was always lots of speculation but The Ghost has never been identified."

"Until now," said Toby.

"That information is highly classified. It absolutely doesn't leave this room. I need to get back to Homeland," said Cooper. "You have all the intel, Kate will fill in any of the blanks. I'll leave you to it." Cooper left leaving an uncomfortable looking Kate behind.

"Walter, what do you think?" asked Cabe.

"It's a fairly straight forward operation. The estate is protected by a private security firm," said Walter.

"Meaning?" he asked.

"Meaning I could hack this in my sleep." Walter made a huff of derision. "Ralph could hack it in his sleep."

"Ralph?" Kate asked.

Paige smiled. "My ten year old son. He's enabled like they are and he helps out from time to time."

Kate nodded and smiled. "I'd love to meet him some time."

"If I may continue?" said Walter "We can monitor the security from outside. That's not the problem. The problem is finding the files in such a short time frame."

"It will probably be on his laptop. Most likely in his home office." Kate pointed to a location on the blueprints. "Which is most likely here."

"Agreed," said Happy.

"You have this under control, Walter?" asked Cabe. Walter gave him a look that said 'Seriously?'. He looked at Kate and smiled. "Scorpion has this covered. If you and I are going to look like a couple we should get familiar with each other. There's a cafe not far from here. Let's get a cup of coffee." He walked towards her. "They have terrific bear claws."

"Sounds great."

He'd taken her to a local shop without the pretentiousness of the chain shops. He got their order and picked a cafe table in the back.

"Well, Agent Gallo, your file was very impressive."

"Thank you, and call me Cabe."

"Kate." She tucked her hands into her lap, the image of a proper teacher, a hot teacher. He mentally chastised himself and tried to focus on the matter at hand.

"You seem more of a Katie to me," So much for focus.

She smiled. Oh, he could get used to that smile. "No one has called me that since I was a kid."

He pressed forward, "I don't see a ring so I take it you're not married."

She blushed. He didn't even know people their age could still blush.

"No. Never married. You?"

"Divorced."

"Do you have any children?"

He fortified himself with a sip of his coffee "I had a daughter, Amanda. She died when she was six. Cancer,"

"I'm sorry that happened."

Cabe looked at Kate and saw sadness, but not pity. "Thank you," he said softly. "It was a long time ago."

She covered his hand with hers. "No it wasn't. Something like that is never far away."

He looked into her beautiful eyes and realized he was in big trouble.

Cabe checked the studs on his tux for the third time. He shouldn't have been nervous. It was a straight forward op. Then he thought about yesterday, the cafe, her smile. He tried to clear his head. Kate had insisted on meeting him at the garage, even though he'd offered to pick her up. He took one last look in the mirror and told himself to stop fussing. He turned and saw Toby smiling at him.

"Ahh. Prom night is a momentous occasion in a young man's life. Do we need to have 'the talk'?" said Toby with way too big a smile.

"Shut it, jackass."

The team were reviewing their sections of the mission and would follow Cabe and Kate in the van. Paige looked up from her monitor.

"Oh, Cabe. You look very handsome."

"Thanks, kid."

The door opened and Kate walked into the garage. He knew the others were talking but he wasn't listening. She was breathtaking. She was wearing an emerald green gown that reached mid calf. It had full skirt and sheer shoulders and sleeves. Her hair was loose and wavy. The final touch was a sparkling hair clip. She looked like a movie star from the forties. She walked towards him and smiled.

"James Bond," she said.

"Veronica Lake," he replied.

"Shall we go?" he asked. Kate took his arm and nodded. He escorted Kate to his car, leaving the team scrambling to get to the van.

Cabe drove up the circular driveway of the overdone home. He handed the keys to his car to the valet and escorted Kate to the line of people waiting to get into the party. They'd been right about the security. Private guards were checking invitations. Kate handed hers over. "Kate O'Hara and guest. It was preferable to keep as close to the truth as possible when undercover. Kate Riley was as Irish as it got.

They joined the receiving line and waited their turn to greet their host. Cabe reached for Kate's hand. He was surprised when she flinched at his touch. He leaned in and whispered, "Relax Kate. Remember we're a couple."

Alessandro Cavello was holding court at the head of the receiving line. His tuxedo was perfectly tailored, his hair perfectly styled, his teeth perfectly white. He could have made a living as a model if he was already an international gun runner. Cavello's smile turned leering when he saw Kate. He took her hand and held it too long for Cabe's liking.

"You look lovely tonight, my dear."

Cabe realized he didn't remember her name.

"Thank you sir. Thank you for inviting me. You have a lovely home. This is my friend, Cabe."

Cavello looked him up and down. "What do you do?"

"Retired marine."

"I see," he said, obviously unimpressed. Cavello turned his attention back to Kate. "You will need to save me a dance."

Her smile faltered. "Of course, sir."

Cabe led Kate away from the receiving line and toward the crowd. He didn't like the look on her face. "What's wrong?"

"He's never spoken to me before. This is not good. We need to get on with this and get the hell out."

"We can't disappear that quickly. He's still watching you." Cabe led her to the dance floor. The band was playing a slow song and gave him an opportunity to take her in his arms. He began moving her around the dance floor while keeping an eye on Cavello. He didn't like the way he was looking at Kate.

He moved her toward the back of the dance floor out of Cavello's line of sight. They stopped dancing as the song ended but he didn't let her go. For a moment Cabe lost himself in her eyes. He smiled and stroked her cheek, telling himself he was keeping up the cover. The truth was he was beginning to think he was under a spell. It was the only explanation.

Walter snapped Cabe back to the moment when he came over the coms telling them he's figured out what room they need to go to. Walter led them down several hallways and turns. He caught Kate with a slight smile. Walter was sending her to the

room she'd pointed to on the blueprint. Cabe opened the door to a private office where she spotted the laptop.

"There," she said.

They both heard Walter in their ears. "Tell me what you see and I'll walk you through this."

Kate gave him a curt, "I've got this, Junior."

Cabe smiled. It wasn't often he met someone who could take Walter O'Brien down a peg.

"Oh my God," she whispered.

"What?" asked Cabe. Kate had gone pale. What the hell was Cavello into?

"There's more here than we estimated. It's going to take me longer to download."

Cabe touched the com in his ear. "Guys, watch every camera you've got." He watched her hands fly over the keys. She reminded him of watching Walter or Sly.

"Got it," said Kate. She pulled the flash drive from the computer and handed it to Cabe. He slipped it into his inside pocket and grabbed her hand. He headed toward the door when Walter shouted into the com.

"Not that way. Cavello is coming. Cabe, get out of there."

Kate looked at Cabe. "Now what?"

Cabe looks around the room and said, "This." He pulled her close into a passionate kiss. Her gasp of surprise opened her lips to him and he took complete advantage. For a moment he forgot where he was, that a suspect was barreling down on them. His tongue explored her warm heat. She slipped her hands around his neck and met his heat with her own. Cavello entered his office to see Cabe pressing Kate up against his desk.

"Oh, sir. I'm so sorry," she said, her blush very real.

"It's my fault, sir" He looks into her eyes and smiled. "I just wanted a moment alone with her." He looked at Cavello. "I'm sure you can't blame me." He gave her cheek a tender touch. "We'll be going now."

Cavello's surprise gave them enough time to get out before he figured out his computer had been compromised.

Cabe drove Kate back to the garage while the team followed in the van. At first he thought her silence was because the kiss, but she didn't look embarrassed. She was disturbed. When they finally arrived Cooper was waiting for them.

Kate handed the drive over to Cooper. "Everything is on here.

"Everything?" she asked.

"You knew how bad it was, didn't you?"

"We'd heard rumors but we had no proof." Cooper smiled. "Thanks to you, now we do."

Cabe heard the barely restrained anger in her voice. "You told me it was weapons. It was slave trading! Women, children. Why did you feel the need to withhold that?"

Now Cabe understood her reaction in the library.

"Cavello is very connected. His family has protected him at every turn. He has friends in high places and I couldn't afford the information to get out before we had proof. I didn't want him circling his wagons."

Kate handed over the drive. "It's all here. There are documents...and photos. He's front and center in a lot of them. When his very proper family finds out what he was really into they will abandon him" Kate shivered at the mention of the pictures. "Do yourself a favor, Director. Don't open the file yourself. Have someone else do it. Someone you don't like."

Cooper took the file and placed it in her bag. "Good work everyone. The after action reports can wait until Monday." Kate stood stock still, watching Cooper walked out the door.

Cabe placed his hands on Kate's shoulders. "Are you ok?"

"Yeah. I'm fine." she tries to smile.

"Bull. Come on, I'll drive you home."

"I have my car."

"You can get it tomorrow." He took her by the arm. "Let's go."

Kate realized he's wasn't going to take no for an answer and followed him back to his car. He opened the door for her and she smiled to herself as he went around to the driver's side. She couldn't remember the last time someone did that for her.

"Address?" he asked.

"1815 Oceanside drive".

He looked at her a bit confused, knowing the area. His suspicions were confirmed when they arrived in front of a massive oceanfront home. Kate gives him a small smile. "Dad did very well for himself."

"I would say so."

Cabe walked into her living room to see wall to wall floor to ceiling windows. She walked over to the window and opened the slider. "I know it's a lot space for one person but I love it here. The sound of the ocean, it's soothing."

He moved up behind her and looked out the window at the ocean. "It is beautiful" He turned her to face him. "Now, tell me what's going on, beside Cooper withholding information."

Kate gave a small smile. "Wow. You're good." She walked away from him, giving herself some space from him she took a deep breath. "I owe you an apology."

"How do you figure that?" He walked closer but she backed away.

"For the first time I didn't dress for the job and it got me noticed. That put you at risk."

"I don't understand."

"I deluded myself into thinking if I dressed like this I would look like I belonged with someone like you."

"Someone like me?"

She waved her hand at him in exasperation "Please. You're James Freakin' Bond. For the first time I wasn't dressing for the job. It got me noticed and then you had to do what...well what you did in the den to distract him."

Cabe smiled already knowing the answer. "If not for the job, then why?"

His heart ached for how shy she suddenly looked. Very quietly she said, "You. I dressed like this because I thought you would like it." She turned away from him her face scarlet with embarrassment. "I was vain and stupid and I'm sorry."

Cabe smiled. "First. I think you look beautiful, but then I thought that the first time I met you in the garage."

She looked at him with genuine surprise.

"Second, I need to admit that kissing you in the den wasn't my only option. Think about it. There were windows."

"Alarmed," she whispered.

"Disabled by the team. I kissed you because I wanted to kiss you. How do you not see that?"

"Because James Bond never winds up with Moneypenny."

"Well maybe its about time he did." He leaned and kissed her, gently at first, but as she responded he took the lead, holding her tighter.

She pulled back and looked into his eyes. She could see he was telling her the truth. Kate spent thirty years as an agent and she read people as easily as others read a menu. Going undercover unarmed meant her survival depended on it. She put her arms around his neck and drew him in.

He leaned into her neck and places soft kisses mixed with little nips. "My God, Katie" he whispered.

His gravel voice stoked the fire that was about to consume her. "Cabe."

He pulled back and straighten a bit. "I'm sorry, Katie, I got carried away." He brushed her cheek.

She looked up into eyes that still were dark with want. "This is probably a bad idea right after an assignment. Adrenaline and all."

Cabe smiled. "Probably."

"I've spent the last thirty years making the smart choice. The safe choice. Cabe, I'm tired of making the safe choice."

His smile turned the slightest bit wicked as he took possession of her lips.

Her heart pounded as she formed one last coherent thought. "Cabe, I only have one question."

"Okay" he smiled.

God she loved that smile. "The question is, do you want to stay?"

He took her hand in his and placed a kiss on her palm. "Yes."

She smiled and hoped he didn't notice she was shaking a bit as she led him upstairs to her bedroom.

Moonlight lit the bed room. Cabe barely noticed glass wall or the sound of the ocean when Kate opened the sliding door. He cupped her cheek in his hand and pulled her close. He thought to himself he'd be perfectly happy kissing her like this all night. Well, maybe not perfectly happy, but it was pretty damn good.

She pulled away and could see a nervous smile. Part of him wondered why she seemed so unsure. She was a seasoned field agent who, he imagined, had seen her

share of tough situations in her career. Now, she seemed like a nervous school girl. She turned her back to him.

"Could you help me?"

He smiled and slowly pulled the pulled down the zipper. He had shed his jacket and was reaching for his tie when Kate's dress hit the floor. He froze. He thought his heart might stop. She was a vision. Even in the dim light he could see her trim figure was barely covered by some elaborate black lace.

"Holy Crap!" he said, not realizing he'd said it out loud.

Kate giggled. "I take it you like my fondness for fancy lingerie.

He just nodded, not yet having recovered his senses. She approached him, seeming a bit emboldened by his response and slid her hands up his chest.

"I've spent my whole career being invisible. This has always been my way of reminding myself I'm still female."

"Hell yes," he said, senses recovered.

She stood on her toes, barely reaching his ears without shoes on. "You're wearing too many clothes, Gallo. What do you say about fixing that?"

He stood still as she undid the studs on his shirt. She walked slowly around him as she pulled it from his shoulders. Returning to face him she smiled. "Ummm. Much better." The nervousness flashed across her face as she whispered, "There's something I've been wanted to do since yesterday in the garage."

He smiled "What's that?"

"This." She looked fascinated as she slid her hands slowly up his chest, tracing his pecs, moving to his shoulders. He knew he wasn't the man he was twenty years ago. Hell, he wasn't the same man he was ten years ago. But what ever he was seemed to be working for Katie.

"You work out a lot," she said as she worked her hands down his arms.

"I try." He was still having trouble forming words.

"Ummm, yummm."

He snickered quietly. "You make me sound like an ice cream."

She looked up and he saw a grin that threw him off balance. "Well, let's see how you taste."

Cabe tried to focus despite what Kate was doing to him. Thoughts tumbled in his head, disjointed. "Christ, she really must love ice cream," he thought. "Calm down or this will be over before it starts."

He tried focus breathing. He glanced down and quickly looked back out at the ocean. God, she was beautiful. He thought about yesterday in the garage. She'd been wearing the standard agent uniform. He wondered what gun she preferred, anything to keep focus.

"Oh, God this is good." he thought. "She's going to kill me."

He remembered thinking when her first saw her that her dark auburn hair would look beautiful loose instead of the tight ponytail she'd worn. He'd been right. She'd looked spectacular tonight. The way she moved on dance floor made him suspect the hidden passion he was seeing now as she...Oh, Christ.

His focus snapped and he lifted her to her feet, picked her up and tossed her on the bed. She squealed in surprise.

"Next time, we'll take it slow." He peeled the black lace from her body, marveling at her ivory skin in the moonlight. She looked at him in a way he'd never seen a woman look at him. He knew everything for him was going to change. Maybe he knew that first day in the garage, the first time he'd looked into the beautiful green eyes. What surprised him was, he might be glad about it.

He whispered in her ear "Now lets see what you taste like." He loved her gasps as he explored, tasted every inch. God, she was delicious. He began a slow torture with his tongue.

"Oh God, Cabe. Please"

"Please what?" he smiled as he tasted more, teased and nipped.

"Please, I need you."

He raised himself up and smiled. He kissed her as he slid inside.

"God, yes" she moaned. "You feel so good"

He'd been right. She was amazing.

Listening to the sound of the ocean in the morning was nothing new for Kate. This morning the sound of the ocean blended with the sound of Cabe breathing. She cuddled up against him and he pulled her close. She smiled at the memory of last night. The first time was passionate and flat out hot. The second time Cabe delivered on his promise to take it slow. It was beautiful and amazing.

This was nothing she ever expected. Her brain started analyzing possible outcomes, all the things that could go wrong with a relationship between agents. But she wouldn't be an agent much longer. After twenty years at the FBI and ten with Homeland hadn't she earned the right to have a life? The last case was one case too many. Always one more bad guy to catch. One more assignment for the Ghost. It was time to retire, if they would let her. It wasn't like she needed the pension but she was a very valuable government asset, even more valuable than Cabe realized. The powers that be did not give up so easily.

Now was not the time figure out the rest of her life. Right now all she wanted was sleeping right next to her.

"Mmmmm Good Morning," Cabe said as he planted a kiss on her forehead.

"Good morning to you too."

They both looked at each other and laughed.

"Yeah, I don't know what to say either." said Cabe.

"It was kind of amazing."

He planted a sweet kiss on her lips. "That's putting it mildly." He glanced around the room "Bathroom is?"

She pointed to the far corner of the master suite. "Over there"

Kate picked up Cabe's tuxedo shirt and slipped it on. She inhaled his scent still in the fabric. She looked at herself in the mirror and smiled. She looked a little tired, saw the traces of a stubble burn on her cheek and most striking of all, she looked happy. Happier than she'd been in years.

Cabe popped his head out of the bathroom "Mind if I use your toothbrush?"

She laughed. "Considering what we were doing all night sharing a toothbrush would be fine, but unnecessary. There's a box of toothbrushes under the sink."

He left the door open as he located a new toothbrush and broke it open. He hadn't bothered with clothes so she was getting a perfect view of his ass. "He must work out a lot." she thought. She leaned against the door frame and smiled.

"I don't have a box of toothbrushes because I have overnight guests."

"You don't owe me any explanations, Kate."

"I know. But if the situation was reversed, I'd want to know. I just have a thing about changing my toothbrush often so I buy a box of them."

He noticed her eyes were wandering down as she approached him. Still looking in the mirror as he washed his hands, he smiled. "What are you doing Katie girl?"

She ran her hand over his skin. "I have to say, Gallo, you are in terrific shape, but you have a spectacular ass."

He laughed. "Oh really?"

She nodded as she knelt down. "Oh yes." She waved her hand at him. "Please continue, I'll just amuse myself." She caressed, tasted, nipped. She was thoroughly enjoying herself when he turned around.

"Oh hello," she said in a happy voice. He pulled her to her feet and kissed her.

"How strong is this vanity?" He asked.

"We're about to find out."

## Chapter Two

He should be going home. He didn't even remember taking the turn off to Kate's. They'd been seeing each other for a few weeks, keeping to themselves while everything was still so new. He should have just cancelled dinner but he kept driving. Before he realized it he was punching in the security code and parking in front of her home. He was already a hour and a half late. She was probably worried. He turned of the engine and stared at the huge home. White stucco and dark trim, manicured palm trees. It was a perfect oceanfront property. He'd never really studied it until now. He'd been too busy inside, with her. The woman who'd made such a difference in his life. Suddenly he needed to see her more than his next breath.

The door opened just as he was about to knock.

"Cabe."

Kate greeted him with the smile he'd come to love. When she looked at him like that it made him feel like everything was right in his world. He needed that tonight, more than she could know. He entered as she closed the door behind him.

"I'm sorry I'm late."

Her face softened. "That's okay. The steaks waited for you. So did I." She put her arms around his neck and placed the softest of kisses on his cheek. She whispered in his ear, "I'll always wait for you."

He realized she knew something was wrong. Maybe it was because she was an agent too or maybe it was because she knew him so well. She understood. She just held him. He closed his arms tight around her waist. She kissed his neck and whispered "I'll always be here for you."

He pulled back and stared into those beautiful green eyes. She was here. Just for him. He took possession of her mouth, kissing her hard, desperately. She responded with her own fire digging her hands into his hair and pulling him tight to her. He pushed her up against the door, continuing his capture of her mouth. His hands roamed, pulled her sundress up and over her head, leaving her gasping, wearing only red lace panties. Her reached for her caressed her. She closed her eyes and gave a deep moan.

"Oh yes, babe. Please yes," she moaned.

That was all it took. What little control he'd walked in with exploded with a force that frightened him but he was unable to stop. He tore the scrap of lace from her body. He freed himself, then lifted her up against the door as she locked her legs around her waist. He entered her and his fire blazed to an inferno.

"God yes, Cabe. Please. Yes. Don't stop."

Every emotion he'd ever had exploded and he poured them into her.

He leaned his forehead against hers, afraid to look into her eyes. Afraid of what he'd done. Afraid of what she'd say. He carefully set her feet on the ground.

He took a deep breath. "Katie, I..." Before he could finish her hand was on his chest.

"Don't you dare apologize, Cabe."

If she'd told him her next mission was on the moon, she couldn't have surprised him more.

"You sit down while I go freshen up. When I come back you're going to tell me about the shooting."

"How?"

"I can smell the gunpowder."

He just stared at her as she left the room. He'd been wrong. She could surprise him more.

Kate slid next to Cabe on the couch and took his hand in hers.

"Tell me" was all she said.

"An assignment went bad. The team was supposed to go in and get proof of a terrorist cell in LA planning something big. It was a building that intel said the cell had abandoned. Walter and I went in to see what info we could find. Walter found a wiped laptop but he managed to recover data. It was all going as planned but we found a bomb ready to go. They hadn't just abandoned the site, they were willing to blow it and several city blocks. No time for a Tach Team.

"Happy?"

He snickered. "Yeah. The girl is incredible. She was disarming it when one of the terrorist surprised us. She'd come back for a final sweep of the area before it blew."

"She?" Kate asked.

He nodded. "I was watching Happy when I heard the slide of a gun." Cabe shuddered at the thought. "This young girl had a nine mm pointed at Walter's head. She didn't say a word so the rest of the team couldn't hear what was happening. I was trying to come up with options when Toby barged in wondering what was taking so long."

"It was the moment I needed. She turned her gun toward Toby."

"You fired."

Cabe nodded. "It was a clean shoot. Director Cooper has already cleared it. A young girl is dead and life goes on."

Kate continued to hold his hand and let him tell it the way he needed.

His voice softened. "She was American. Blonde, pretty girl. So young, twenty two. She'd been a college student when she was radicalized by a group the government has been watching for years." His voice broke as he whispered "Her name was Kathy."

Kate wiped a tear from his cheek he didn't realize had fallen. "She gave you no choice, Cabe. She made the decision to threaten the people you are sworn to protect." She forced him to look at her. "You did your duty and you saved your team's lives. But sometimes duty sucks." She paused and stroke his hand. "How old would Amanda be?"

He gasped. "Twenty five." Then he nodded. He could see where she was going.

"Of course this is going to affect you. You wouldn't be the man you are if it didn't."

He gave her a soft smile.

"If you weren't the man you are, you wouldn't be here, with me."

He glanced at the door "What I did..."

Kate stopped him "What you did was reaffirm life. It was what you needed most at that moment and I was happy to provide it for you."

He looked doubtful.

"I have complete trust in you, Cabe, with my body and my soul. I have absolutely no doubt if I had said no or stop, you would have. But I didn't, did I? In fact, if you recall, there were several 'yes, please' and 'oh God's' in there."

He managed a small smile.

"Cabe, when you make love to me it's amazing and tender and beautiful and mind blowing. But going a little...primal...well that's pretty damn good too."

She held his hand to her chest and smiled. "I'm no delicate flower, Gallo."

Cabe leaned in and gave her the softest of kisses that said all he needed to say. She was continuing to surprise him.

Cabe looked at Kate as she slept. Last night was a blur of emotions, anger, frustration and most of all overwhelming sadness. That is it was, and then he had his Katie girl in his arms and the world seemed to right itself again. At least part of the way. All he really knew was he felt a damn sight better than when he'd arrived.

Kate had forced him to eat the dinner she'd made. He barely tasted it, but had to admit it was a good idea. She distracted him the rest of the night with movies from the Western channel. She asked questions about stories and locations and John Wayne's horse. She laughed as the questions got more and more obscure and yet he had all the answers. He shook his head. All the answers he thought. "Not even close, Gallo. Not even close"

It was one of the only nights they'd gone to bed and just slept. She cuddled up next to him like a kitten. He stroked her soft skin until exhaustion like he'd never known, not even in the Marines, engulfed him. Now he was wide awake, looking at his girl.

"Huh, when did that happen, My girl." He hadn't thought of any woman that way in forever. Not since Rebecca. And now, even the thought of Rebecca and the love that went horribly wrong, didn't sting quite as much. She'd done that for him. He leaned in and kissed her cheek, her shoulder, her neck.

"Ummm, Good Morning" she whispered.

"Good morning yourself." he replied.

"How are you doing?"

He knew what she was asking. "Well, I woke up in bed with a gorgeous naked woman, so I'd say I'm doing pretty good." She reached for him but he held her back. "No," he whispered. "This time its all about you."

Kate closed her eyes and let her mind float. Over the past few weeks he had made a study of her, her wants, desires, everything that gave her pleasure. He took his time, then sped up. He took her to the edge over and over and then brought her back. Some part of her realized the noises she was hearing was her own voice, calling his name, begging, pleading for more. Finally, he took her hard, deep and rode with her over the edge as her mind exploded with color.

"Katie, Katie wake up."

She heard his voice in the distance until, like turning up a volume dial, she heard him clearly. She opened her eyes and wondered why she saw fear.

"Oh God, Katie. Are you ok?"

"Gallo, I can honestly say I have never been more okay in my entire life." she laughed and smiled at him. "Holy crap! That was amazing!" She stroked his face "What's wrong?"

"What's wrong? You passed out, that's what's wrong."

"That's crazy. I don't pass out."

"I'm telling you, you passed out."

"How long?"

"Ten or fifteen seconds."

Kate smiled. "Well, it was worth it."

"Kate this isn't funny." Cabe jumped off the bed and started gathering his clothes.

"Cabe, what are you doing? Come back to bed."

"I'm taking you to the ER."

She stayed still until she realized he was serious. "Cabe, I'm not going to the ER for a little faint."

Cabe sat back down and held her hand. "I couldn't wake you."

She saw genuine fear in his face. After what he'd been through she understood his overreacting and didn't want to add to it. "I'll compromise. We'll go see Toby."

"What?"

"Are there any doctors at the ER smarter than Toby?"

"No."

"Will he be at the garage?"

"Yes."

"Then let's go." She stood up and started for the bathroom.

"Are you sure? Toby?"

"Think of it like this. I will have to tell him what happened...and when." She could have sworn he was blushing. "I will have to tell him and because of doctor-patient privilege he won't be able to tell anyone else." For the first time in two days she saw a real smile on his face. Kate laughed "I bet his head blows off his shoulders."

Cabe looked at the door to the garage, then turned to Kate "Are you sure about this?"

"Yes, it will be fine. You said yourself that Toby is a brilliant doctor."

Kate knew he was still reeling from yesterday. Her fainting set his anxiety in overdrive. She rested her hand on his thigh.

"I'm sure. Please try not to worry."

As soon as she said it she knew it would be impossible.

"Where's the Doc?" Cabe asked.

Paige looked up from her desk. "He's in the back."

"Yo, Doc!" Cabe called.

Kate drilled him with a look.

Paige stood to greet them. "Agent Riley. It's nice to see you again."

"Good to see you too." Kate saw a small boy following behind Paige.

"This is my son Ralph."

She held her hand out to him and shook it. "I'm very happy to meet you. I've heard a lot about you."

"Are you Cabe's girlfriend?" Ralph asked.

Everyone in the garage froze.

"What makes you ask that?" Kate asked.

"I've seen him smiling the last couple of weeks at nothing."

"Maybe he's just happy."

Ralph turned his head. "Nope. Now he's smiling the same way at you."

"Well..ah..."

Paige place a hand on Ralph's shoulder. "Ralph, lets not embarrass Agent Riley."

Cabe moved to Kate's side and put her hand on her shoulder. "Yes, Ralph. She's my girlfriend."

Kate looked at Cabe with surprised pleasure.

Ralph looked at both of them. "That's good. I like it when he smiles."

"Me too, Ralph," said Kate.

Cabe looked around the room at the shocked faces. He didn't know whether to laugh or be offended. "Toby, the loft. Now." He leaned in closer "Bring your bag."

Toby followed Cabe and Kate up the stairs. Cabe closed the door. "So...you and Cabe."

"Yes, me and Cabe."

"We need you to take this seriously Doc," said Cabe.

Toby set down his bag and forced a neutral expression on his face. "Serious as a peak frean."

Cabe did not appear convinced.

"So, what's up?" asked Toby.

Kate knew she was losing control of the situation. She opened her bag and handed a twenty dollar bill to Toby.

"What's this for?"

"You are now officially my doctor."

Toby looked back and forth between them. "Oooo Kkkkk. And?"

"First things first. Cabe, go get yourself a cup of coffee."

"I'm fine."

"Okay, let me put it this way. Get. Out. I can handle this."

Cabe showed no sign of moving from his sentry post at the door.

"Toby I want you promise to tell Cabe the truth about my health."

Toby pulled his hat off and held it over his heart. "Cabe, I promise on my hat I will tell you the truth."

Kate pointed at the door. "Ok?"

Cabe nodded.

"Good. Now get out."

Cabe turned on his heels and closed the door behind him.

Toby stared at the door and then back at Kate. "Wow. I've never seen that before."

Kate smiled. "I have some influence."

"I would say so. Okay, tell me what happened." Toby grabbed his pressure cuff and wrapped it around Kate's arm.

"Well our romantic life is pretty...dynamic. This morning that was particularly true."

"Dynamic?" he asked.

"Dynamic, enthusiastic, amazing, all related synonyms."

Toby froze for a moment before he continued. "And the medical issue?"

"I fainted."

"Did you hit your head?"

"No."

"Have you fainted before?"

"No, What happened was I had the biggest orgasm of my life and passed out. Cabe said 10 to 15 seconds." Kate would have laughed at Toby's stunned look if it weren't for the fact that if he didn't stop pumping the blood pressure cuff her arm would turn blue. "Ah..Doc?" She pointed at the cuff.

"Oh, jeez. Sorry."

He released the cuff and retook her pressure. "It's a bit elevated but nothing out of the ordinary." He reached for his stethoscope and listened to her heart. "So, when you say dynamic.."

"Let's call it a high frequency of events."

"High frequency for a man his age?"

Kate smiled and let out what sounded to Toby like a purr. "High frequency for anyone."

"Every day?"

"At least."

Toby nodded toward the door. "We are talking about the guy who just walked out of the room, right?"

Kate leaned in towards him and whispered, "He's a machine."

"Ahhh come on... You're killing me here."

Kate just smiled and sighed.

"Okay..ah. Other than Super Gallo, how's life, the job?" Toby started taking her pulse.

"Life is fine. The job won't be the job for long. I'm retiring."

"Won't you miss it?"

"No. I've been doing this work for thirty years. It's time."

Toby sat back and looked at Kate. "I am prepared to give my diagnosis."

"You might as well call him back in so you don't have to repeat yourself."

Toby opened the door to yell for Cabe, but found him standing on the stairs.

"Come on in."

"Well?" asked Cabe.

"It is my medical opinion that what we have here is a perfectly healthy woman who had a momentary aberration in blood pressure that caused her to faint."

"You're sure?" Cabe asked.

Toby dropped his normal snark to reassure him. "I promise, She's fine. Her pulse and pressure are completely normal. The only time her pulse speeds up is when she talks about you." Then the snark rushed back. "Also, she's practically purring with satisfaction." Toby grabbed Cabe's arm. "You're my new hero."

"Alright Doc, ease up there."

Kate moved toward Cabe and slipped her arms around his waist. "I told you so, Gallo." She laughed. "I'll never get tired of saying that." He placed a soft kiss on her lips.

"That would be my cue to leave," said Toby on his way out the door.

"I needed to be sure." said Cabe.

"I know."

They headed back down the stairs and saw the team in a close huddle around a monitor. "I've seen these looks before. What are you up to?" asked Cabe. They looked up from their screens, but none were looking either of them in the eye.

Kate nodded. "They ran a check on me." Sly's blush told her she was right.

"You did what?" Cabe all but bellowed.

Kate rested her hand on his arm. "Calm down. They were only trying to see if I'm worthy of you." See looked at the group. "I can tell you right now, I'm not." She smiled "I'm not, but I'll certainly try to be."

Walter approached her. "I'm curious Agent Riley. Why is someone worth two hundred and fifty million dollars working for the government?"

Cabe looked at her in shock. "How much?"

"I told you Dad did well."

"Apparently."

She turned her attention back to the team. My father's hard work left us very well off. But my father was also devoted to the community and giving back. When I was twenty two I was finished with academics and was looking for a challenge. My father had a friend who worked for the FBI. He recruited me. After twenty years, Homeland called. That was ten years ago. I think that brings us all up to speed"

She looked at Walter. His expression had not changed. "Damn it," she thought. "He knows."

"That's not all you found, is it?" she said softly.

"No, it's not." Walter said with a superior tone she instantly hated. "I've got to give you credit O'Brien, you're good. I buried that myself."

"I'm curious as to why you would hide it. And if that, what else are you hiding?"

Cabe looked at a scene that was spinning out of his control. He turned Kate to face him. "Kate, what is he talking about?"

She sighed and cast her eyes back at the team and sighed. "It's not some secret husband or I'm a communist. Kate looked at Walter and sighed. Cabe was an inch from losing what patience he had left. "Somebody better start talking!" he shouted. He instantly regretted his tone when he saw Kate's eyes watering when she turned to face him.

"He found out I'm like them. I graduated from Caltech at fourteen, masters at fifteen and my first PHD at seventeen."

"First? How many do you have?" he asked.

She held up three fingers. "Computer engineering, AI theory and encryption technology." A tear ran down her cheek as she whispered "I'm sorry" She turned and dashed to the back office.

Cabe turned and pointed at Walter. "You stay put. I'm going to fix this and then you and I are going to have a conversation." He walked into the back office to find Kate opening cabinets.

"Tissues! Damn it! Why aren't there any tissues in this place?"

He smiled and pulled a fresh handkerchief from his suit coat pocket. "Here." She took it and dabbed at her eyes.

"Damn it! I hate weepy. I don't do weepy."

Cabe walked to her and rubbed his hands up her arms. "Take a breath." She complied. "Good. Now just talk to me, Katie."

"I didn't get specific about the money because I knew from the start that my money was irrelevant to you no matter how much of it I had."

He nodded. "True."

"As for the rest of it, I could say I didn't tell you because of my undercover work, but that would be a lie. You have a high enough clearance. I could have read you in."

He looked into to her eyes and Cabe saw something he'd never seen in her, pain.

"The truth of the matter is all my life I felt like no one really saw me. To some I was the heiress that cared about books instead of parties. To others I was the mousy agent they occasionally took pity on and invited to lunch. They never saw me and after a while I kept it that way. The few people I did let in...it never went well. They were shocked or intimidated. Some were just greedy."

She looked at him and smiled. "Then I met you. I love the way you look at me, like you see all of me. I'm not a ghost anymore. I couldn't bear the idea that changing." She rested her head on his chest and whispered, "That's why I didn't tell you."

He kissed the top of her head and then lifted her chin to face him. "None of that matters to me," he smiled.

Kate smiled but then she pushed back against him, looking confused. "You knew," she whispered. "Did you run a check on me? Were you taking pity on the Ghost?"

Cabe grabbed her by the shoulders and forced her to stand still, He wasn't about to lose control now. He wasn't going to lose her. "No Kate. I didn't run a check. I suspected."

"Suspected?"

He nodded back toward the main room. "You have an awful lot in common with those kids. The brilliance, the focus, the...."

"Complete lack of social skills?" she managed a small laugh.

"Let's just call it a bit shy."

"Why didn't you say anything?"

"I was waiting for you. I thought eventually you'd get around to it." He leaned in and gave her a soft kiss. "Now it's my turn to apologize."

"How is any of this your fault?"

"If I had been completely honest with you then you might have felt secure enough to tell me everything."

"Honest about what?" she whispered.

Cabe noticed a slight tremble in her and took her hands in his. "I didn't say anything before because we haven't been together that long. I didn't want to rush you." But at our age, why waste time. The truth is I knew from that first day in the garage everything in my life was about to change." He kissed her softly. "I'm all in, sweetheart."

"What?" she gasped.

"Katie girl, I'm in love with you." There. He'd said it and it felt as natural as his next breath. Now he had to hope...

Her face went from shock into a broad smile. "Well, that's very good news because I'm in love with you too."

He felt every muscle in his body relax. He looked into those beautiful green eyes and stroked her cheek. "So beautiful, " he whispered as he kissed her softly.

"I promise," she said. "No more secrets."

"Agreed" he smiled. He held her tight until he felt the both of them relax.

"I should let you get to work." Kate dabbed at her eyes. "How do I look?"

"Perfect."

She smiled at him like only she could, that way that made him feel invincible.

The mood in the main room seemed subdued, everyone focusing on their monitors. Cabe knew better. They were hiding. Kate looked at him and smiled. "I should let you get some work done. Why don't you give me the car keys and I'll come back for you later."

"Sure," he reached for his car keys and pulled out a slip of paper. "Crap."

"What?"

"I forgot about my dry cleaning and I'm down to my last couple of suits."

Kate waved at the slip. "Give it to me. I'll pick them up."

"It's kind of hard to find. You turn left on Pico,..."

She grabbed the keys and slip. "I'll find it" Then she pointed to her head. "Smart girl, remember?" She glanced at the slip, "Hey, Gallo." She held the slip up. "It says sixty dollars."

He chuckled as he pulled three twenties from his wallet and she tucked them in her jacket. Cabe grabbed her hand "One more thing." He slid his hand to her cheek and kissed her deeply. "I love you, Katie girl."

She glanced at the shocked team and smiled. "I love you too."

Cabe turned and faced his team. Now it was time for a conversation. Cabe's smile faded as the door closed behind Kate. He turned and faced the team. He stood stock still to impress on them his displeasure but also to gain some needed calm. He glanced over at Ralph focused on his laptop.

"Hey Ralph buddy, can you give us the room?"

Ralph smiled, knowing he was the only one in the room not in trouble. "Sure. I'll be in the loft, Mom."

"Okay sweetie," answered Paige.

"Alright you people, listen up! Kate is a part of my life and that's not going to change."

Walter moved forward with an indulgent look on his face. "Cabe, we were just gathering all the relevant facts. She's been deceptive. No telling what else she's hiding."

Cabe had been angry with Walter in the past, but this required every ounce of strength he had not to lash out.

"Walter, Kate has been an undercover operative for thirty years. She went into dangerous situations, unarmed with little back up and completed her missions. She never had a team of geniuses in her ear to help her." Cabe had a small spark of satisfaction when he saw Walter wince. He'd deserved the shot.

"All of you, you remember how it was for you growing up. Happy, how was it for you being the smartest girl in shop class and every class for that matter?"

Happy nodded. "It sucked."

"Just imagine going through what you did in the sixties and seventies instead of the two thousands."

Happy shook her head. "Damn."

"Exactly."

"You know if you were as smart as you think you wouldn't be investigating her, you'd be asking her to join you."

There was a beep on the intercom. "I'd like to discuss her thesis on Artificial Intelligence. It was ground breaking and the basis for a lot of the things I'm studying now."

"Ralph, you know eavesdropping is wrong," said Paige.

"Sorry Mom. Cabe, would you ask her for me?"

Cabe smiled. "Sure kid." He took a breath and looked over his team. One more time they were being a giant pain in his ass. Well, not this time. "Okay, so here's how it's going to be. You are all going to treat Kate with the respect she deserves not because of my relationship with her but because she is as person of integrity who spent her life serving her country. Do you copy?"

He heard multiple "Copy that". He leaned in close to Walter, lowering his voice. "If you every make her cry again you and I will have a situation. Do you copy?"

"Cabe I..."

"Do. You. Copy?"

"Copy that."

He heard another beep but this time it was from his phone. "Director Cooper wants to see me." He put his hand out. "Keys." Walter reached in his pocket and handed them over.

Paige followed him outside. "Cabe, you know they mean well."

"Not all of them do. He has issues."

"I know." Paige surprised him with a hug. "I'm really happy for you."

"Thanks kid. I'm happy for me too." Cabe managed a smile for her before he drove off.

Paige turned and stared at the door. She took a deep breath and thought some days she really earned her salary. Today was going to be one of those days.

"Well that was painful" said Paige.

Walter leaned back in his chair. "Agent Riley is deceptive and a possible risk to the team. Toby, what happened upstairs?"

"Not a chance one ninety seven." He said as he straightened his hat.

Walter moved toward Toby's desk. "This is a matter of protecting Scorpion and nothing is more important than that. I insist you tell me."

Toby stood and faced him. "You insist?! Who the hell do you think you are?"

"I think I'm your boss."

Paige stepped between. "Alright that's enough. Toby, was what happened upstairs covered by medical privilege?"

"Yes."

Paige turned to Walter. "There's your answer. Now sit down."

"I was being proactive to protect all of us, including Cabe." said Walter.

Toby moved toward Walter. "I am prepared to make the diagnosis that you are full of shit."

Paige wheeled round to Toby. "Sit down. Now."

"Thank you," said Walter.

"Oh he's right. You are full of it."

Walter sat in his chair and flipped through papers on his desk.

She forced him to look at her. "You're afraid she will distract Cabe's attention from you. And you know what? You're probably right."

Walter smiled.

"But that isn't a bad thing. We all need to have lives, Walter. Something that exists for us outside of this garage."

"I've been looking into her," said Sly.

Paige glared.

Sly stuttered. "No, not like that. Only in readily available information. Her father, John Riley was the founder and CEO of Rimark Computing Systems,"

"Wow" said Happy. "That company is one of the leading software companies in the world."

Sly continued, "Yes. They specialize in security and encryption software. They've always been cutting edge. Over the last ten years they've expanded into cutting edge laptops and accessories for gaming. John Riley and his wife Ann were killed by a drunk driver twenty five years ago."

"Oh, that's sad. She's been alone since then?" asked Paige.

"Looks like it. Only child, never married."

Happy looked over Sly's shoulder. "The company made headlines in nineteen seventy seven with groundbreaking encryption software. Kate would have been what, sixteen?"

"You think the company was founded on her work?" asked Paige.

"Looks like it," said Sly.

Walter stood. "Irrelevant. She is a distraction to the team."

Paige faced him. "You mean a distraction to Cabe."

"That too."

"You're being illogical." All heads toward Ralph. No one had noticed him coming into the room.

"What do you mean honey?" asked Paige

"Walter, Kate is nice and smart and he loves her."

"How do you know that?" asked Walt.

Ralph looked at him like he was trying to explain his download software to him all over again. "Haven't you seen how different he's been lately?"

Happy laughed. "Yeah. Not nearly as grumpy." She looked at Toby and smiled. "I wonder why?" Toby's blush answered her question.

"You should ask her to consult with the team." said Ralph.

"What? Why would I do that?"

"I've been reading some of her papers and they're amazing. That must be why she was able to crack that encryption so quickly. And since she's so rich you probably wouldn't have to pay her. You see, logical." He grabbed an egg bagel as he walked back upstairs. "Besides I like her. Firm handshake."

"The kid's right." said Happy.

"Walter, how long has Cabe been divorced?" asked Paige

"I think about twenty years or so."

His voice had gotten quiet. She was getting through. "That's an awfully long time to be alone."

"He's not alone. He has us."

"It's not the same and you know it. He has found a partner who loves him and understands the work we do. That's a rare combination. After everything he's done for this team and for you, would you deny him that?"

Walter sat and pushed papers out of his way. "Are there any egg bagels left?"

### Chapter Three

It had been a hell of a couple of days. What he wouldn't give for a couple of days on the beach with Kate and no phones. Oh well, a man could dream. He stood when Director Cooper entered the room. Nonna raised him right.

"Agent Gallo, thank you for coming."

"Of course, ma'am. Is this about the cell?" Gabe couldn't bring himself to say shooting. Not with the memory of the young girl so fresh in his mind.

"No. As I said on scene, we had enough evidence on site to make a finding of a justified shooting."

Gabe let out a breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding.

"This is about another matter entirely. It's about Agent Riley"

His pulse jumped. They hadn't purposely hidden their relationship but neither had they gone public before today. If this was Walter's doing they would have a serious situation "Ma'am?"

"How would you evaluate her field work?"

"Top shelf. Efficient, thorough, professional."

"Agreed." Cooper grabbed a file and handed it to Cabe. He opened to see a photo of a very young Kate from her first FBI id. He fought the urge to smile.

"Agent Riley is a very valuable asset, more than you most likely saw during your assignment."

"How so?"

"You know the reputation of The Ghost."

"Yes. No one knew who she was. She was a master of infiltration and information extraction. High success rate, no body count."

Cooper smiled "Turn the page."

Cabe fought a gasp as he saw the list of infiltrations she'd completed. Page after page of locations, some places he would never have allowed any agent to go in alone, let alone the woman he loved.

"This is very impressive, Director, but why show me?"

"Agent Riley has announced her intention to retire."

"It looks like she's had a long career. Isn't that to be expected for any agent?"

"Yes, but she's not any agent."

"Agreed. But I still don't see why you're sharing this with me."

"Agent Riley rarely worked with anyone else but she seemed to work well with you.

I got the impression for her reports and after action interview that she had a great deal of respect for you."

Cabe risked a smile. "That's nice to know."

"I want you to convince her not to retire."

He fought to maintain his composure. "Excuse me?"

"I want you to contact her. You'll find her personal information in the file. Study it."

"Ma'am, why?" He cursed himself the minute the words left his mouth.

"Agent Gallo, since when do you ask a superior why you've been given an order?"

He needed a quick recovery. "I need all pertinent information if I am to complete my assignment."

"The administration feels she is too valuable an asset to lose." She stood and gathered some files. "Now if you'll excuse me, I have a meeting to attend. I'll expect your first report by the end of the week."

With that Cabe stood and stared at the door Hurricane Cooper had just blown through. He could only hope she hadn't blown apart his life.

What the hell was he going to do? Cooper wanted him to convince Kate to stay with the agency and wanted him to help make it happen. He hadn't come clean with Cooper and told her he was in a relationship with Kate. That omission would bite him in the ass. His instinct told him to talk to Kate before anything. They'd promised each other no more secrets. Paused at a light, he spotted one of her favorites stores and pulled in. Nobody said the truth couldn't come with presents.

Cabe hit the speed dial number on his phone for Kate. "Did you find the dry cleaners?" he asked.

"Of course. Roberto was very nice." she replied

"I bet he was." Roberto thought himself the great lover.

"Oh, and he said to tell you 'Giunto il momento' ".

Cabe chuckled. "That means 'It's about time' ".

"Ah, nice."

"Were are you now?"

"Your place. I left my grey jacket here the other night."

"Great. Stay put."

"Ah, Gallo. I have your car."

"I'll get a lift from Paige. I should be home in a couple of hours."

"Okay. I'll get stuff for dinner."

"Sounds good."

"I love you."

"I love you too."

He ended the call and stared at the picture attached to her number. She's been showing him how to use the feature and took the picture herself. God, he loved that smile. He wondered if it would be there for long once he got home. He slipped the phone in his pocket. He looked up to see Toby, smiling at him.

"Aww...Mr. Romance," said Toby

"Shut it, jackass."

Cabe secured himself in Paige's passenger seat and placed the pink and white striped bag between his feet. Inside the bag was not only the gifts he'd selected but the file he wished he didn't have. He caught Paige grinning.

"Thanks for the ride, kid."

"No problem. She nodded toward the bag. "Is that to make up for this morning? You know we feel pretty bad about it."

"It's not about this morning. Can't a guy get his girl a gift?"

"It's nice to hear you talk like this, Cabe."

He looked at the never ending LA traffic and thought about how much his life had changed in the last two months. "I never expected anything like this, not at my age." he said softly.

Paige pulled into the parking lot of Cabe's apartment and parked. "Cabe, you deserve to be happy."

Cabe smiled back. "So do you."

He found Kate washing dishes in his tiny kitchen. Here was a woman who could buy the whole building and ten more just like it and she was washing his dishes, and smiling. He wondered for how long.

"Hey."

"Hey. You're home." She planted a quick kiss on him as she dried her hands. "How did the rest of the day go?"

"Fine."

She drilled him with a look. "Bull. You fought with them, didn't you."

"Let's just say we had a discussion." He slipped his arms around her waist, placing a kiss on the top of her head. Without heels she barely reached his shoulders. "Paige is firmly in our corner."

Kate smiled "Of course she is. So what's in the bag?"

"What bag?"

"The one you tossed on the dining room table."

"A little present."

She amazed him when she squealed like a school girl as she lunged for the bag. "Presents?! I love presents! What'cha get me?"

He snatched it out of her hands and grabbed the file.

"Manila folder? How romantic."

He tossed on the table and reached back into the bag pulling out a pair of familiar looking red lace panties. Kate looked at him and smiled.

"I think I owed you a replacement pair."

"Right size. A plus, Agent Gallo."

"I always notice what's important"

Kate grinned. "Awfully big bag for a little panty." She grabbed the bag pulled it open and gasped. She pulled out an emerald green bustier trimmed with black lace with matching thong. "Ohhh. Pretty," she purred.

"I thought you'd like it."

"Ummm yes," Then she shook the bag. She reached in and pulled out a bottle of massage oil.

He smiled. "I'm give a pretty good massage,"

"Of that I have no doubt." She nodded back toward the table. "Wow. That file must really suck."

Cabe finished the ziti Kate had made. He'd been surprised an Irish girl could make sauce as good as his Nonna. But then she was constantly surprising him. "This is delicious."

"Stop stalling, Gallo. What's in the file?" She grabbed it off the table before he could set down his fork. The look on her face told him she was not a happy camper. "What the hell, Cabe? This is me." She flipped page after page. "This is my entire career! What the hell. Is this O'Brien's work?"

"No, Cooper."

"Cooper?"

"Cooper called me in to her office today. She handed me your file including all your personal contact information. She wanted me to get in touch with you."

Kate couldn't help but smile. "Mission accomplished. But why?"

"She wants me to convince you not to retire?"

"What?!"

"Uh oh," Cabe thought. This isn't going to be pretty.

"Does she know about us?"

"It doesn't seem like it."

Kate tossed the file back on the table. "Then why you?"

"She said I was one of the few agents you ever worked with and you had high regard for my work." He smiled. "Thanks for that, by the way."

She grinned. "It's not hard to like working with James Bond, babe. Now continue."

"She showed me your file to impress on me your value as a government asset. Damn it, Kate. What were you thinking?"

"Excuse me?"

"You went into places I wouldn't have sent an armed swat team. Arms dealers, drug cartels, underground antiquities rings. You went in alone and unarmed."

Kate's face softened. "Just because I was unarmed didn't mean I was defenseless. If you don't believe me I'll show you my best krav maga take downs."

He sighed and pushed himself away from the table. "She wants me to convince to keep doing it and my instinct is to stop you from ever going on another mission."

Kate stood and moved to his side. She sat down in his lap and gave him a soft kiss. "So you're supposed to be my personal Mata Hari."

"Everything except the veil dancing."

Kate laughed. "Oh, I don't know I think you'd be a cute harem girl."

"So you're not angry?"

"At you? Hell no. At her, yes." She felt his sigh of relief.

"Cabe you don't have to worry about me. I am done. I don't want to be in the field anymore. The last Bad Guy was the last straw." She shuddered and Cabe held her close. "The real problem is what will Cooper do to you for not convincing me to stay."

He kissed her and smiled. "Let's not worry about that now. So long as we're good, I'm fine with what ever happens."

Kate stood and grabbed the bag with her gifts. "I cooked. You clean. I'm going to try on my presents."

"Yes ma'am"

Cabe smiled to himself as he dried the last of the pots. His instinct had been correct, talk to Kate first, figure it out later. He shuddered to think of the places she'd been in and he'd do anything he could to not let it happen again.

"Well, Cabe me boy, have you finished your chores?"

He laughed at Kate's pretty convincing Irish brogue and turned toward her. The pan he was drying slipped from his hands and bounced off the floor. "Oh my God.." he whispered.

"It seemed like you were havin' a bit of an Irish fantasy, boyo, so I thought I'd play along."

He stepped over the pan and moved toward her.

"So are ya likin what ya see?"

All he could do was nod. It had looked good on the mannequin. On her...it really was an Irish fantasy come to life, right down to the accent. The bustier elevated her breasts to near overflowing. She did a turn and showed her exposed bottom. She'd loosened her dark red hair and it fell over her shoulders. She was wearing heels she must have left behind after their last date night.

"Well, are ya just gonna stand there like a statue or are ya gonna do something about it?"

He walk to her, dug his fingers in her hair, pulling in for a deep, hungry kiss. He had planned a slow, tender night. He smiled and then picked her up and tossed her over his shoulder. "Primal it is."

Kate giggled when Cabe tossed her on the bed. He needed to get naked fast. He was so turned on his clothes were causing him pain. He managed it in record time. He stood still for a moment to appreciate the sight before him. God, she was beautiful. And she was his. All his.

He slid himself on top of her and possessed her with a deep kiss. He felt the need as if he was claiming her, once and for all, she was his. Their kisses became frantic, the definition of breathtaking. He slid down her body, tasting as he went. He slid off her thong and tasted, teased. He began to remove the bustier, a silent thank you to the designer that put the zipper in the front.

He stopped caught his breath, glancing up at his wrought iron headboard. An idea flashed in his mind be he quickly pushed it aside. He could only have so many fantasies come true. When he looked back at Kate she was smiling.

"Do it, " she whispered.

"What?" he asked.

"I can see what you're thinking." She reached her hands up and grabbed hold of the rails. "Do it, " she whispered.

He slipped off her quickly and found his tie on the floor. He wound an end around one wrist, then the other and then wove it through the rails. All the time watching her eyes. Watching for hesitation and finding none.

He pulled back for a moment and thought if he this night killed him it would be completely worth it.

Cabe was consumed by his desire for her. He need to touch her, taste her. She was writhing under his mouth, calling for him. He thrust hard inside her and they both let out groans of pleasure. He kissed and nipped at her neck while she whispered her brogue in his ear. "I'm here for you, only you. For what ever you want. How ever you want it. For as long as you want."

Every ounce of control exploded inside him. He locked her legs around him and went mad. Finally, to keep from screaming, he bit her shoulder. They'd found what they needed, together.

Cabe sighed, unable to move. "Holy Christ, he whispered." He reached up and freed her wrists. "Katie," he held up the tie. "Was it to much?"

She smiled and kissed him softly. "Cabe that wasn't about submission. That was about trust. I knew your only purpose was to give me pleasure. And holy crap, baby, mission accomplished."

Cabe slid next to her and pulled her close. Whatever they did about the team and Cooper could wait until tomorrow. Tonight it was just the two of them.

## Chapter Four

Cabe watched Kate as she slept. Last night had been like nothing else he'd ever experienced. But then, so was she. He leaned in and kissed her forehead. She stretched like a kitten.

"Good morning, sleepyhead." he whispered.

"Good morning. What time is it?"

"Five thirty."

"What? It's not morning it's the middle of the night. Go back to sleep." She grabbed an extra pillow and put it over her head.

Cabe grabbed the pillow and tossed it on the floor. "We can't. I got a text from Cooper. She wants the team assembled by nine a.m. at the garage."

Kate flipped on her stomach. "Fine. Go with God. Just leave me sleep."

"I heard your phone beep about the same time. I bet you got the same message."

She opened her eyes with no small amount of disgust. Reaching for her phone she swiped a practiced finger over the screen. "Well...fuck."

Cabe laughed. "Is that anyway for a nice Irish girl to talk?"

She reached up and slipped her hand to his cheek. The stubble felt scratchy and wonderful in her hand. "I am a nice Irish girl, boyo. At least you thought so last night." She said her sexy Irish brogue.

He leaned over her and gave her a sweet kiss, which she tried to deepen. It took everything in him to pull away. "We can't, Kate. I need to get showered and changed and then I need to get you back to your place so you can do the same."

"Ugh. Mr. Responsible. God, I'm gonna love retirement."

It was then Cabe saw it, a deep purple bruise on her shoulder. A bruise he put there. He ran a finger over it and she winced. "Oh, God sweetheart. I'm so sorry. I can't believe I did that."

She check her reflection in the mirror over his dresser. "Huh. How about that." She flopped back down on the bed. "So I don't wear strapless for a few days."

"I'm so sorry, " he repeated. "I don't know what got into me. You were just making me crazy with that accent and everything." He saw the smile slip from her face.

"You're upset."

"No, it's not that, Cabe." She ran her hands over his strong shoulders. "You must think I'm so ...well. You're right, it's not what a nice Irish girl does."

He kissed her quickly. "No, sweetheart. You did nothing wrong. You're a beautiful, sexy woman." He laughed a bit. "Sexy as hell".

"Cabe, this is not my normal way of being."

"What do you mean?"

"I've never been this physically...aggressive. Ever." She stood and grabbed his shirt, her favorite bathrobe." I don't know where it's coming from. It's not because it had been so long, it's just you. Every time I see you..." She sat back down on the bed next to him. "There is something that pulls me to you. I can't explain it, or stop it."

A tear slipped down her cheek. He pushed it away and put a kiss in it's place. There was that look. The look that told him from the beginning that she was different. The confident, brilliant agent disappeared and in her place was a shy, insecure woman, "Why the tears?" he asked.

She all but whispered "I don't want you to think badly of me."

He pulled her tight and kissed her. "Sweetheart, I would never think badly of you. Being with you has been unlike anything I've ever experienced." He looked into her eyes and hoped he was convincing her. "Every time gets better and better."

She smiled and he pulled her close for a kiss. Then something jumped out at him. "Wait. What do you mean it had been so long?"

She blushed. "Ah, damn. I wasn't going to mention that."

"Katie, we said no secrets."

She took a deep breath and seemed to brace herself. "Before I met you it had been a long time since I'd been with anyone."

"How long?"

He barely heard her whisper "Ten years."

"What?" he said loud enough to startle her. " How is that even possible? Is every male on the planet blind?"

He saw her visibly relax and that smile he loved was back. "You really believe that, don't you?"

"Hell yes."

He pulled her back on the bed and pushed the front of his shirt open, He began kissing and tasting. He wasn't going to stop until he was sure she knew how much he desired her and loved her.

"Cabe" she laughed. "You said we couldn't."

"Yeah, well..." he started a slow movement down.

"You'll be late."

He looked up at her and smiled. "There's a first time for everything."

## Chapter Five

Kate was dashing around her house, looking for her purse and securing her hair in a tight pony. "Where the hell is my bag?"

"Here." He held her purse up. It was eight thirty and Cooper would be at the garage in thirty minutes. They needed to get out of the house right away and hit every light if they were going to be on time. She tossed her jacket at Cabe and moved a painting on hinges he'd never noticed before. Behind the painting was a safe with a digital keypad. She entered the code and it popped open.

"If you ever need to know, the code for this 74578."

"What are you doing? We're late."

"And whose fault is that?" she smiled. "I'm getting dressed."

"What?"

She pulled out a holster and slipped it over her shoulders. She reached further in and pulled out a nine mm pistol. She checked the gun, like any other agent and slipped it in the holster. Grabbing her jacket and purse she looked at him. "Okay. Let's roll."

He was staring at her like she said let's blow off work and hit the beach.

"What?" she asked.

"What's with that?"

She stopped cold. She pointed at her weapon. "You mean this? It's called a gun, Gallo. It's what people like us use to shoot bad guys."

"You never carry."

"No. I never carry when I'm undercover. I'm not on assignment and my boss has ordered me to a location. Would you arrive without your weapon?"

"No."

"So what are we debating?"

Cabe sighed and held open the front door. "Let's roll."

LA traffic was legendary and today was no exception. "We're going to be at least 20 minutes late." Cabe grumbled.

"We might be late but chances are, so will Cooper."

"Yeah well you better call the garage."

Kate picked up her phone and hit the speed dial for the garage. Fortunately, Paige picked up.

"Scorpion. How can we help you?"

"Paige, it's Kate. Cabe and I are stuck in bumper to bumper."

"I heard there's an bad accident on the I5."

"Dandy. Well we'll be there as soon as we can."

"What?" asked Cabe.

She picked up her phone and paged through the local news. "Accident on the I5, Everything on it and all adjoining arteries are back up."

"Fannntastic," he muttered. "Who did you tell?"

"Paige." she smiled. "Agent Gallo are you perhaps embarrassed that your colleagues will know you're late because you were making mad, passionate love to your woman?" She laughed when she saw a small smile play on his face.

"Of course not" he said.

"Good. Because I gotta tell you, Gallo, blush is not a good color for you."

He laughed out loud and reached for her hand. He pulled it to his lips and place a kiss in her palm. She went still and very quiet. "What?" he asked.

"There's something I wanted to talk to you about and from the look of the traffic we have some time."

"Okay." He saw her agent face fade and his shy Katie girl appeared.

"I've been thinking...I mean I know this may not be the best timing," she pulled at her jacket hem " and things are moving fast... and you do say at our age we shouldn't waste time"

"Katie," he said softly. "Take a breath. Good. Now just talk to me."

She smiled. "Okay, here's what I've been thinking. We've been spending a lot of time running back and forth between your place and mine."

"Yeah, true." He smiled because he could see her bracing herself for her next words until they finally spilled out.

"I would like you to think about moving in with me. I'd move in with you, but lets face it, my place is pretty nice. I don't expect an answer now, so just think about it. If you think it's not the time I'll be okay with it."

Cabe just smiled. How could he ever imagine winding up with someone like her.

She saw him staring. "What? Too soon?"

"No, Katie girl it's not too soon. I think that's a great idea."

"You do?" she looked like someone gave her proof Santa is real.

"As it happens my apartment lease is up next month and I haven't signed the renewal."

"Really?"

"Really," he said. "We'll work out details later but I think it's a great idea."

"Put the car in park."

"Why? We're not moving."

"Indulge me."

He moved the shift to park. "Now what?"

"This." she smiled. She unhooked her seat belt and slid into his lap. She pulled him into a deep kiss. "All in," she whispered.

"All in" he replied.

"Get a room!" shouted the guy in the next car. Kate pulled her badge from her jacket and flashed it.

"Our tax dollars at work," the guy grumbled.

"Damn straight," yelled Cabe.

They broke into peals of laughter as the traffic moved forward.

"You'll take a lickin' from my rubber chicken."

Sly grabbed his Super Fun Guy away from Toby. "I have asked you to leave this alone."

"Come on, Sly dog. I was just having some fun with your toy."

"It's NOT a toy!"

Paige shook her head. These are the same guys who've saved the world from nuclear disaster. Twice. "Guys, guys, guys, settle down. Director Cooper should be here any minute."

Sly stood in front of Paige's desk holding Super Fun Guy in death grip. "Where's Cabe? He's late. He's never late. Something must be wrong."

"Nothing's wrong Sylvester, he called. They're stuck in that traffic mess from the 15."

"They?" he asked.

"He and Agent Riley. Apparently Director Cooper asked her to attend the meeting too."

"And they're traveling together," smiled Toby "early in the morning."

"Behave yourself, Toby" Paige pointed to the rest of the group "And that goes for all of you," she added glaring Walter.

"What?" said Walter. I'm always professional. Walter ignored Toby's snort of derision. "It's none of my concern if Cabe wants to waste his time with frivolous activities."

"Frivolous?" asked Toby "Is that what the kids are calling it these days?"

Cabe pulled into the garage lot and turned off the engine. "I don't see Cooper's SUV."

"Good," said Kate as she unhooked her seat belt.

Cabe grabbed her hand. "What are we going to do about Cooper?"

"I think the best course of action is to wait and see what today is about." Kate squeezed Cabe's hand. "I'm retiring, Cabe. No matter what she says. If I have to blow off the pension, I will. It's not like I need the money."

Cabe smiled.

"My only concern now is what she'll do to you when I say no."

He leaned forward and gave her a soft kiss. "I don't want you to worry about me" He nodded toward the garage. "I'll walk away from it, if need be."

Kate was stunned, for that matter, so was Cabe. He realized as soon as he said it, he meant every word. He pulled her in for a sweeter, deeper kiss.

"All in, sweetheart." he whispered.

She gave him a smile that set his world to rights. "All in," she repeated."

"Anyone hear from Cooper?" asked Cabe.

"Yes," said Paige. "She's about 15 minutes out."

Kate turned to Cabe and put her hand on his chest. "Go get yourself a cup of coffee and relax."

He thanked God there was a fresh pot without cinnamon. He was going to need a few of these if he was going to make it through the day. He smiled. Loving Kate Riley was exhausting. And completely worth it.

Cabe leaned against the closest desk and took a sip. He smiled as he watched Kate and Paige talking. He couldn't believe how much his life had changed in three months. He went from frozen dinners alone in front of his big screen, to sharing strawberries and whipped cream with a beautiful woman. He chuckled remembering where some of that whipped cream ended up. He looked over at his Katie girl and smiled. He noticed Toby watching him. He was always doing that. But this time all he did was smile and raise his own coffee cup in salute. Cabe smiled and returned the gesture.

Kate joined Cabe and poured herself a cup of tea. "You look lost in thought."

"Just waiting to see what Cooper's got for us."

She leaned in closer and whispered, "What I'd like is for us to blow off this meeting and go home so I could have my wicked way with you." Kate thought when Cabe's ears blushed red it was cute as hell.

"Behave," he growled through clenched teeth.

"Since when did you become such a stick in the mud, Gallo." she replied in her Irish brogue.

He leaned in closer and whispered, "If you don't behave I will put you over my knee."

Kate's eyes flashed. "Oh. Promise?"

He nearly dropped his coffee as she smiled an innocent smile and grabbed a seat.

Cooper blew into the garage. "Alright people, let's get started." She handed a flash drive to Sly. He loaded it and a surveillance picture of a two men standing in front of a warehouse. "This building is own by a shell company we traced to Alan Dussault, French national and arms dealer. Beside his reprehensible yet legal arms dealings, we suspect he's trading in government secrets. We need Scorpion to find the proof."

"What do you need, Director?" asked Cabe.

"We believe he may have files in that warehouse that will tell us what has been compromised. That's were you come in, Agent Riley. She is the best encryption analyst the agency has ever had."

Walter looked toward Kate. "If looks could kill," she thought.

"That won't be necessary, Director Cooper. While I'm sure Agent Riley is...competent, we are perfectly capable of completing this assignment."

Cooper hit a key on the computer and pulled up a heavily encrypted file. "This is our problem. We believe the information we need is in this file which no one at Homeland has been able to crack."

Walter looked at the screen. "It's very complex. I should be able to decode it in twenty four hours." He turned to Kate and smiled his best "one ninety seven" smile.

Kate smiled back and addressed Cooper "I agree with Walter's assessment. It will take him twenty four hours. Or you could ask me to do it." she said. Everyone looked at Walter like they were waiting for the next hit in a prize fight.

"Why would I do that?"

"Because I wrote it." She thought she heard Cabe say, "Uh oh". Kate held out her hand. Walter gave her the wireless keyboard.

Cabe watched as her hands flew over the keys.

"You didn't recognize it because I wrote this when you were still in diapers."

Cabe coughed and she glanced over. A slight shake of his head told her to go easy. A final click and the jumbled data reformed.

While Walter tried to regain his composure, Sly jumped in to describe the financial statements they were seeing. "These are mostly bank transfers. Millions, tens of millions. You can see who's been paying what to whom but not for what."

"Then it's got to be in the warehouse." said Cooper. "Cabe you get Agent Riley in." Everyone turned to Cooper. "No." said Kate.

"Excuse me, Agent? I gave you an order."

"Director. I do encryption. I can do that from the van. Determining what other information is pertinent is Walter's specialty."

Cooper sighed. "Very well."

Kate looked at Walter. "It's the logical choice."

Cabe smiled to himself. "Score one for Katie girl," he thought. She was just as qualified to do the work as Walter. She was letting him have this one.

Happy stood in front of the split screen and looked at the picture of Dussault and another man. "This guy looks familiar. Who is he?"

"That would be Congressman Mark Brookstone. We think he's the source of the leak." Cooper continued, "Dussault has been out of the country. The warehouse is alarmed but not guarded."

Cabe stood. "Okay. Let's roll."

He watched as Kate grabbed her laptop and followed the others to the van. He shook his head "This is going to be interesting."

"Com check, everyone." said Cabe.

Walter, Happy, Paige, Sly and Kate all acknowledged the system check. Toby and the Director acknowledged from the garage.

"Happy, can you disable the alarms and get us in?" asked Walter.

"Don't insult me, " she replied as she got out of the van.

Walter and Cabe got out of the van and closed the door. Cabe looked in the window at Kate. " Everyone keep an eye on your monitors and stay in the van." He could see the shock on her face but didn't have room to worry about her on the job.

Happy got them in smoothly and they followed the blueprints to the room they believed most likely to find the computer. Everything was going as planned. Walter found

the files and Cabe was keeping watch. Then Kate saw it. Movement in the alley. A limo pulled up and two men got out. It was Dussault and Brookstone.

"Cabe, the mission is blown. Get out now!" yelled Kate.

"I need a few more seconds," said Walter.

"I thought you said Dussault was out of the country?" Kate yelled.

"He must have slipped in under an assumed name." replied Cooper.

"And Brookstone?" she asked as she saw the both of them open the door, realizing it wasn't locked. Dussault signaled to the van and the driver got out, weapon drawn. Dussault pull a gun from his jacket. Now two of the three men were armed and Cabe was out gunned.

"Cabe, three men, two armed. Find a secure location and we'll get you out." yelled Kate.

She knew it before Sly said it. "It's too late. They've got them."

"Crap!" said Kate. "Sly, keep an eye on the monitor. Let me know when they're coming out. Paige, give me your coat." Paige pulled off the white trench coat and Kate slipped it on, tucking her nine mm in the pocket.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"Anything I can," replied Kate. She heard a soft, stern, "No" in her ear. "Shut up Gallo and wait for it." Kate heard Sly in her com. "They're headed back out. Happy and Walter are covered by Dussault, the driver has Cabe. The door opened and Kate popped around the corner.

"Oh thank goodness, people! My car broken down about two blocks over." She approached the group and couldn't miss Cabe's anger. "My cell is dead and my feet are killing me." She slipped her hand into the coat pocket. "Do you have a phone I can use?"

"No," growled Dussault.

"Too bad," replied Kate as she pulled her gun from the coat and fired. Dussault went down screaming. Cabe used the driver's shock to disarm him. Happy and Walter got out of the way as Kate kicked Dussault's weapon out of reach. She looked back at the stunned team. "Handcuffs would be nice about now."

The trip to back to the garage was made in stony silence. Dussault had been taken to a prison ward for his wound swearing in pain and sending curses to all. The driver and Brookstone were taken to Homeland for processing. Cabe thought if Brookstone had the balls to be a traitor he shouldn't weep like a baby when arrested. At least the driver managed his arrest with a little dignity. As messy as it was, they'd accomplished the mission.

He didn't trust himself to talk yet. He'd told her to stay in the van. He'd never felt that kind of fear when she stuck her head around the corner. They could have killed her.

The team ran for their desks, everyone except Toby. They knew it wasn't going to be pretty. Toby did too, but he wanted to watch.

Kate stood in front of Cabe forcing him to look at her. "Alright, Gallo. Out with it."

Cooper tried to approach but Toby held her back. "This is going to be epic."

"What the hell were you thinking?!" Cabe shouted. "I told you to stay in the van."

"Ding. first round. Jab," said Toby.

Cooper tried to intervene. "I need to stop this."

"No you don't," said Toby. "Trust me."

"What was I thinking?! I was thinking they were going to kill you, all of you. I was thinking I had my partner's back! I will always have your back."

"Oooh. Upper cut but he's still standing," said Toby

"I have just as much training as you. They didn't give me this badge because I'm cute."

"You were never in that situation before. You never carry a weapon." said Cabe.

"Unarmed doesn't mean defenseless."

"His shoulders have dropped, he's on the ropes."

Cabe's voice softened. "You could have been killed."

Kate placed her hand on his chest. "So could you. Don't you understand? If anything happened to you and I knew I could have prevented it, I wouldn't survive that."

Cooper looked at Toby, totally confused.

"Neither would I," said Cabe softly.

"Ding Ding Ding, We have a winner. Fighting Irish tops the Italian Stallion."

Cabe and Kate both looked up and said, "Shut up, Toby."

Kate brushed her hand on Cabe's chest. "Are you done being an ass?"

"Yes."

"Good. Now come here." Kate grabbed his tie and pulled him close for a kiss.

"What the hell is going on?" shouted Cooper.

Kate smiled and patted his chest. "We'll finish this at home."

"At home?" said Cooper.

"Yes Director. I told you I was leaving to have a life." She pointed back at Cabe and smiled. "Say hello to my life."

"So you two are.." said Cooper.

Cabe put his arm around Kate's shoulder. "Yes. We are."

"Since when?"

"Since the first job. I guess I should thank you for putting us together." Cabe looked down at Kate and she smiled that smile and he knew no matter what happened in the next few seconds, they'd be okay.

"When I called you into my office you didn't feel the need to reveal this pertinent information?"

"I needed to find out what Kate wanted first."

Kate took a breath "Director, I'm retiring at the end of the month. There's nothing you can do to stop that."

"Agent Riley, Kate, you are a valuable asset to your country."

"I am not an asset," Kate replied. "Those computers, my bank balance, those are assets. I am a woman who has served for thirty years. I've earned the right to stand down."

Cooper sighed and reached for her things. "Very well, agent. If you ever reconsider..."

"I tell you what, Director. I will offer to consult from here, but only when requested by Scorpion, not by Homeland."

Cabe smiled. "I'd take it Director. You get to tell the powers that be you still have access to her."

"Fine," said Cooper and she looked to Cabe. "There's still the matter of you deceiving your superior."

Kate leaned in to Cooper. "The second you take any of this out on him, I'm gone. Do you copy?"

Cooper nodded. "Copy that."

Cabe watched as Cooper closed the door behind her. He reached for Kate's hand. "It's been a long day, Katie girl. Let's go home."

She smiled up and whispered in her best brogue, "There's still that matter to settle about my misbehavin'."

## Chapter Six

It had been a blessedly uneventful few weeks. His work with Homeland and Scorpion had been quiet. He spent the time getting caught up on the paperwork he'd been putting off. Today was the first day of the week he'd taken to move to Kate's beach house. He'd thought he was fine with it. He'd agreed quickly when Kate suggested it. It was a sensible decision. They spent all their time together. Driving back and forth between their places was a giant time suck. So why did he feel so queasy? Maybe it was because he was looking out on an ocean view most people could only dream of. Maybe because the picture over the living room couch was worth more than he made in ten years. Maybe it was because he was part of a committed couple for the first time in nearly twenty years. He looked into the kitchen and smiled as Kate prepared breakfast. He laughed as she cursed at a dropped egg. Nah, he was fine with being a couple. It felt as natural as breathing. She caught him watching and smiled.

"Hey Gallo, make yourself useful and pour some orange juice?"

He poured the juice and set it on the table. Kate joined him with omelets and toast for each. Just eggs and cheese and a few chives. Nothing fancy. Cabe didn't do fancy.

"I thought today we could decide where to put everything. I've cleaned out the walk in closet in the master and I thought we might see about the office. I think it would be a good man cave. Your big screen and that big leather monstrosity of a chair. There's a wet bar in there so we can stock it if you want to invite the boys over for a game.

"Wasn't that your father's office?"

"Yeah?"

"What about his things?"

"I'll keep what I want. Some pictures and a few knick knacks. We can sell the rest." She said as she grabbed his last piece of toast off his plate.

"That's desk is a Chippendale. It's got to be worth twenty thousand dollars. Do you really want to get rid of your father's things?"

"Cabe, first of all you get points for knowing it's a Chippendale and honestly it's probably worth a lot more than that." She reached for his hand. "My parents have been gone for a very long time. I have wonderful memories of them. I was loved and cherished. They tried their best to understand what I did, even though they really didn't." Kate smiled. "The desk is just a desk. I don't need it to remember them. You know what else is true? They wouldn't mind. They would be happy for me, happy that I've found such a wonderful man to spend my life with."

"I don't want you to feel like you have to change everything because I'm moving in."

Kate's eyes teared. "Cabe, I've been in this house alone for twenty five years. Now you're here. Now it's finally a home again."

Cabe pulled her to her feet and brushed a fallen tear. "Oh sweetheart. Please don't cry. I hate it when you cry."

"Happy tears. There's a difference." She smiled.

He leaned in and kissed her. Moving things would wait for a little while.

"Cabe we need to talk about the elephant in the room." He pulled her close and kissed the top of her head.

"And which particular elephant would that be?"

"Cabe, I have money. A lot of it."

He couldn't help but smile. "I've noticed."

"You know me. I don't spend money on frivolous things. Other than this house I live a very normal life."

Cabe laughed. "Yes, apart from catching slave traders and all manner of bad guys, completely normal."

Kate laughed and poked him in his side. "You know what I mean."

He rolled over on his shoulder and brushed a stray hair from her cheek. He put a kiss in its place. "I know, sweetheart." He started trailing kisses down her neck.

"Occasionally, I will make use of my resources to make things easier for us."

"Umm," he said as he paid attention to a sensitive spot on her shoulder.

"Like hiring a moving company to pack everything in your apartment."

His head popped up distracted from his mission. "That's not necessary. I'll get a u-haul, pack it up."

"Cabe, moving is a pain in the ass. I can hire a company to make life easier for both of us."

"No."

"Cabe, this is what I mean, the elephant. We are going to run into this again and again. We need to sort it out now. I have a suggestion. When something like this comes up, think if the situation were reversed would you be doing it? If the answer is yes, than you let it go. If the answer is no, then we discuss. Agreed?"

He smiled and laughed. "I hate your irrefutable logic. How's a man supposed to win an argument when his woman is so damn logical."

Instead of laughing she looked concerned. "What is it, baby?" he asked. "Talk to me."

"I don't ever want you to think I'm trying to buy your love." She touched his cheek. "There isn't enough money on the planet to buy you."

He kissed her softly. "Don't you worry Katie girl."

"We're going to be great." She whispered.

"We're going to be fanntastic!" he replied. He returned to his mission. Packing was going to wait a little while longer.

They'd finally made a dent in cleaning out the office and a few other spaces that would accommodate Cabe's things. Kate had added an additional chest of drawers to match the existing set in the master bedroom.

"When did you get this?" Cabe asked.

"The other day. It's amazing what you can accomplish on the internet. She smiled. "There is one thing I want to show you." She led him to her exercise room. It had an elaborate treadmill Kate used when the weather didn't cooperate for swimming or a run. Now things had been moved to accommodate a heavy bag hanging from the ceiling. Heavy gym pads were placed on the floor. "I thought you'd like it for days you can't get to the gym. I was hoping you could show me some of your moves." Kate suddenly spun in a circle and placed a foot on his chest, pushing him back a few inches. "And I could show you some of mine."

Cabe smiled, then grabbed her and flipped her over his hip onto the mat.

"Wow. Nice move, Gallo." She then slipped her feet between his and forced him off balance and on to the floor.

"Nice recovery, Riley." He pushed himself over her and pinned her arms over her head. She wrapped her legs around his waist and pulled him close. He laughed and kissed her. Kate deepened the kiss. He released her hands and she pulled him tight on top of her.

He raised his head and smiled. "Damn, woman. Does everything turn you on?"

"No," she said quietly. "Just everything about you."

He would have made love to her right there if her cell phone hadn't interrupted them.

"Ahh crap." Kate said as she pulled her phone out of her pocket. "Hello, John."

Cabe thought whoever John was she did not seem happy to talk to him.

"Yes, of course I remembered the gala is this Friday." She looked at Cabe and mouthed, "Forgot."

"Of course, I'll be there. Aren't I always? Yes, my speech is ready." She shook her head no.

"Something for the auction? Yes. I have a Chippendale desk. Send someone to pick it up. Yes, my father's desk. Yes I want to donate it." She looked at Cabe, obviously frustrated. "I'm redecorating and I have no room for it. If you like it so much, bid on it."

Cabe decided whoever he was he didn't like him.

"John, can you hold a sec." she put the phone on mute. "I forgot that it was this weekend. Can you go? It's black tie."

As much as he hated the idea he wanted to see this John. Maybe have a little chat. "Of course. I think I can dust off my monkey suit ."

She smiled and took the phone off mute. "Thanks for holding John. I'll be bringing someone so please take care of it. Yes, I know I never bring anyone. This time I am. Let me know when the desk will be picked up. Goodbye John."

She hit end on the phone and sighed. Cabe thought for a moment she was tempted to fling it across the room.

"Who's John?" he asked.

"John Williams, my estate administrator. He's very good at it but a bit of a pain in the ass. I've known him since I was a kid. His father was the administrator and a friend of my father's. When he died, John took over."

"So what's the event?" he asked.

Kate sat crossed legged on the floor. "It's a benefit for Mercy General. They're building a pediatric care wing. I'm a contributor. Actually the largest contributor, that's why the speech."

Cabe saw more than a frustrating phone call in her look. "Really? Well that's great but why the face?"

"There's something I wanted to talk to you about. As the largest contributor I'm expected to name the new wing." She took a deep breath and reached for his hand. "With your permission, I'd like to name it the Amanda Gallo pediatric center."

Cabe gasped.

"I thought it you might like the idea of her name being associated with hope."

He didn't know what to say. Didn't know what he could say. He stood and looked out at the never ending ocean view. "Why wouldn't you name it for your parents?"

She came up behind him and slipped her hands around his waist. "Because they didn't believe in it. They felt it was vain. They said they just wanted to help people, they didn't need to be thanked." She hugged him tight. "No need to answer me now. Think about it." She turned to leave him alone with his thoughts when he grabbed her hand and placed a kiss in her palm.

"I'd be honored to have the center named for Amanda."

"Are you sure? I don't want to push you to do anything you're not ready for."

"I'm sure." He pulled her close.

"There's one more person we need to talk to before we announce it."

He looked at her and nodded. "Rebecca."

She nodded. "It wouldn't be fair to do it without her permission."

"I'll make the call."

"Wow," Kate whispered. She'd been wrapping pictures as Cabe cleaned out his closet. Among the suits now hanging on the rolling rack was his dress uniform. She touched the ribbons with reverence. They were the physical evidence of what a brave Marine he'd been. That and the scars he refused to talk about. She froze when she saw it.

"It was a long time ago, Kate."

She looked up to see Cabe watching her. "Silver Star?" she whispered.

He nodded and was surprised when she placed a soft kiss on his cheek and went back to wrapping pictures. She wouldn't push. "Who knows?" he thought. "Maybe one day I will tell her."

"These are finished. What else do you want packed?" They'd compromised on the movers. They would pack up personal items, like family photos and the movers would handle the rest.

"What's in here?" she asked as she moved to a small closet and opened the door.

"I'll take care of that." He said but not before she turned on the light. He heard her gasp and it was too late. She was standing in front of all his art supplies. Paints, canvases, and one covered work he'd just finished.

"You paint?"

"A little."

"This is not a little. These are enough supplies to fill a studio. Why wouldn't you tell me?"

"It's just a hobby. Nothing to write home about."

"Well, let's see about that." Kate reached for the cloth covering the painting. He knew it was pointless to stop her. "Oh my God," she whispered. She pulled it out of the closet and set it against the headboard. It was a portrait of her. She was sleeping in their bed of rumpled sheets. Her red hair was spread over the pillows and she had the slightest of smiles.

"I couldn't sleep one night and when I got up this is how you looked. The light was perfect on your skin. I wanted to try to capture the moment." He wasn't sure what she was thinking, or what he had been thinking for that matter. It had been a perfect night. One where all his demons stepped aside to let him feel something he hadn't felt in years, joy. He knew he had no choice but to try to put that moment on canvas. Then she reached for the edge of the painting and touched it.

"You made me beautiful," she said. He saw she had tears in her eyes.

"You are beautiful, sweetheart."

She glanced up at him as a tear fell down her cheek. "I look...loved."

He pulled her to her feet and wrapped his arms around her. "So I guess you like it," he said trying to lighten the moment.

She looked back over her shoulder at the portrait and smiled. "When I look at it I think I understand everything you feel for me and I'm humbled."

He let himself smile. She understood.

Cabe told Rebecca he needed to see her, telling her it was about Amanda. After their encounter last year he realized Rebecca's feelings for him were just as complicated as his feelings for her. He didn't want to add any more pain to what they'd already been through. He'd suggested a coffee shop near her law office and she's agreed.

He'd asked Kate to come with him so Rebecca could meet the woman who would immortalize their daughter's name. He was honest enough with himself to admit he'd also asked her to come with him because she was his anchor to the present.

He looked over at Kate in the passenger seat. She looked engrossed in her tablet, reading lines of code like it was a novel. He knew she wasn't. He saw the slight tremble in her hand. She was almost as nervous as he was.

"We're here. You ready?"

Kate glanced up from her tablet. "No. I'll stay here."

"I thought you were okay with this?"

"I am but Rebecca might not be. She might feel ganged up on. You can tell her I'm here and if she wants to meet me I'll come in."

She was wearing her 'mind is made up' face and knew there was no point in arguing. "Okay." He leaned over the console and gave her a quick kiss. "I love you," he whispered.

She smiled and said, "I love you too."

He shook his head and smiled, not because of her reply but because she knew he wanted to remind her before he went to meet his ex-wife. She really had him pegged. He closed the door leaned back in the window. "I never did ask you. How much did the name rights cost you?"

"One point five," she replied.

"Million?"

"Yeah," she said. "Now go on. She's probably waiting for you."

He shook his head and smiled. She never ceased to amaze him.

Rebecca was already seated looking out the window. She saw him come in and smiled. For a moment he went back thirty years, the eager young states attorney and the

newbie FBI agent. They'd both been filled with ambition and plans for their future. Then Amanda happened and everything changed.

He leaned down and kissed her cheek. "Hello Rebecca, how are you?"

"Curious. You'd wouldn't have asked to meet me if it wasn't important." He waved to the server, "Can I get a black coffee?"

That was Rebecca , he thought. Always to the point. "There is a new pediatric care wing at Mercy General. Someone wants to name it after Amanda."

Rebecca gasped and sat back. She took a sip of her coffee and set it back down. "Someone?" she asked.

"There's a woman in my life. Kate. She does a lot of work with charitable foundations and she asked permission to name the wing for Amanda. I gave my permission but she said she needed yours too. Said it wouldn't be right without it." The server came back to the table with his coffee.

"You're in love with this woman?" she asked with a not convincing even tone.

He nodded and smiled. "She's a Homeland agent. We met on a mission." He reached for her hand. "She's good for me, Becky."

Rebecca smiled. Cabe was the only person who ever called her Becky. She realized how much she missed hearing it. She pulled her hand back and forced herself to smile but she knew wasn't fooling him. "A Homeland agent and a charity worker. She sounds remarkable."

"She uses her family money to help people.

"Like children with cancer and no hope," she said.

"Yes."

"How much did she contribute to the this endeavor?"

"One point five million."

"Well. That's an impressive figure."

He sighed and took a sip of coffee. "Rebecca, she's in the car."

"What?"

"Kate thought you might want to meet her but she didn't want to come in with me. She said you might feel overwhelmed."

"Of course I want to meet her." She tried to smile but it was becoming increasingly difficult.

Cabe pulled out his phone and texted. It beeped a reply a second later. "She'll be right in."

Rebecca laughed. "You and a smart phone. Never thought I'd see the day."

"A lot of things changed, Becky."

In that moment Rebecca realized there was no age limit on having your heart broken.

Cabe stood to introduce Kate. The two most important women in his life were face to face and he had no idea what to expect. For an always on point agent, it was very disconcerting.

"Kate Riley, Rebecca Barnes."

Kate reached out her hand. "Hello."

"Please join us." Rebecca said indicating to the empty chair. "Cabe why don't you get Kate a drink."

He knew when he was being dismissed. Kate smiled. "She just wants to size me up. Go on."

"You're right to the point," said Rebecca. "Good. I will be as well. Tell me why?"

"Why?"

"Why do you want to name the wing after our daughter?"

"I had already made the donation and was expected by the committee to select a name. People would associate your daughter's name associate with children getting better and hope. I thought it would make him happy."

"You love him very much," Rebecca said.

"Yes. Yes I do," Kate replied. She sat back and gave Rebecca an appraising look. "So do you."

"Cabe and I have been over a very long time. I'm married and have a daughter in college."

"And you're still in love with him," Kate said. "I saw the look you gave him when he went to get my drink. I know that look. It's the same look I have."

Rebecca looked at Kate for a moment. "If I told him I was getting divorced and I wanted us to try again, you'd fight me, wouldn't you?"

Kate sat back. "Tooth and nail," she replied.

Rebecca gave her a sad smile. "Good. He deserves that." She waved at Cabe to rejoin them. He handed Kate an ice tea and waited for someone to say something.

Rebecca stood and reached to shake Kate's hand. "You have my permission. I need to go. I'm taking a deposition in twenty minutes."

Kate held on to her hand. "If you ever want to see the work they do, maybe participate? You could be on the board."

Rebecca smiled "I'll consider it."

Cabe stood and gave her a hug.

"She's lovely. I'm happy for you. Truly," she whispered.

"Thank you. Take care of yourself, Becky."

Cabe sat down and sipped his lukewarm coffee. He honestly didn't know where to go from here.

"She's still in love with you." Kate said.

Cabe looked up. That was a direction he did not expect to take. "Rebecca has been married to someone else for a very long time."

"That doesn't change the fact that she's still in love with you." Kate sat very still. "You still love her."

"No Kate," he was quick to answer. "I'm with you. I love you."

"Cabe I know how much you love me but it doesn't change the fact that you still love her. She's a beautiful, accomplished woman who was also the mother of your child. Of course you still love her."

Cabe was searching for words and finding none. Kate covered his hand with hers. "I don't expect you to stop loving her. All I need to know is that you've put that love in its proper place and you're ready to move past it, with me."

The words finally came. He leaned in and whispered, "I'm all in." He saw her relax against the back of her chair. She grabbed her drink and smiled.

"Let's go home."

## Chapter Seven

Kate fussed with her hair, pushing a stray curl in its place. She wore a long sleeved black gown, simple but elegant. It was cut a little lower than she was used to and also a little higher showing off more leg than she was used to. She put in the diamond studs her parents gave her on graduation from college. They'd made her feel so grown up, even though she was only fourteen. She's hoped they'd work their magic tonight.

Tonight was the hospital gala, or as she'd always thought of it, prom night for grownups. She'd always dreaded them. She rarely had an escort to these things but tonight she was bringing Cabe. Not just a date. A accomplished man who loved her. He was also hot as hell. She'd have to watch his back. She looked in the mirror and laughed. Things had changed so much so fast. Sometimes she thought she was dreaming.

"Wow." Cabe whispered.

She turned and smiled. She meant to thank him but she stood stock still. James Bond was back. He looked just like he did that first night. First kiss, first love. Her heart raced as he approached. He put his hands on her shoulders. She felt the heat of him through the fabric on her arms. He placed a soft kiss on her lips, careful not to spoil her makeup.

"You look amazing."

Kate couldn't help but blush. How does a woman her age still blush? It was embarrassing. "I was just thinking the same about you." She enjoyed the pleasure of looking him up and down. Broad shoulders, under a perfectly tailored jacket, strong arms. She smiled thinking about his powerful legs and his truly spectacular ass. "The women of the rich and powerful will be all over you. I may have to bring my gun."

Cabe laughed. How could he not? He kept himself in good shape but he also knew the limitations of his fifty seven year old body. "You over estimate the power of the tux."

Kate smiled and patted his chest. "Oh no I don't. I know these women. You'll see." She gave him a quick kiss. "Face it , Gallo. You're hot." She reached for her clutch and stopped. Her Homeland badge was on the bureau. She flipped it open and ran her finger over her shield.

"Katie, what's wrong?"

"Nothing really. I was just thinking, after all the years this badge gave me an identity and purpose. In a week's time that won't be true."

"Are you having second thoughts? You do know Cooper would take you back in a heartbeat."

"No second thoughts. I just will need to work on letting go." She turned to him and smiled. "You'll help me with that, won't you?"

Cabe was constantly amazed by Kate. She was a brilliant agent, a genius with computers and yet she was standing there looking like a nervous girl. He placed a kiss on her forehead. "Of course I will, Katie girl," he whispered. He stood back and reached for her badge and slipped it in her purse. "But not tonight. You are still with the bureau Agent Riley and as such you should have your ID at all times." He was glad when she laughed.

"Do you have yours, Agent Gallo?"

He opened his jacket to see his badge secured to the inside pocket. He could have sworn he heard Kate growl. She patted his chest again.

"Yup. Totally hot."

Normally he would have had his ID in his pants pocket but tonight was different. Knowing the type of people who would be attending, he'd figured he might need an edge. He knew how nervous Kate was about tonight. He didn't want her to know he was nervous too. She smiled at him and he thought "As long as she's smiling at me like that, I'll be fine." She took his hand in hers.

"Come on 007. Let's roll."

They pulled into the parking lot of the hotel and parked. Kate grabbed his hand before he got out of the car. "I really appreciate you escorting me tonight. I know it's not your ideal way to spend a Friday night."

Cabe smiled. "You're welcome, sweetheart."

"There's something you need to know."

He closed the door and waited. Kate was staring at the all women in gowns and men in tuxedos as they made their way into the hotel. "They don't know what I do."

"What?"

"They don't know I was an agent."

"Are! Are an agent at least for the next week." He couldn't believe what he was hearing. "How do these people not know?" He saw her eyes water so he tried to soften his tone, "I'm sorry sweetheart. You just took me by surprise. Tell me what you want me to know."

She nodded toward all the pretty people. "I don't know most of them. Oh, I know them by name because of functions like this but we never socialized." She took a deep breath and squeezed his hand. "There are a group of people I do know. Friends of my parents, their kids and now their grandkids. At first I didn't say anything because of the undercover work."

"And then?"

"It didn't seem to matter."

"What do they think you do?"

Kate smiled. "You mean other than go to proms for grownups?"

"Yeah, beside that."

"They call it my little government job. They all knew about my academics so they think it's something to do with computers. They think it's cute."

"Cute?" Cabe all but growled.

"Cabe please. These people are... well they've always lived a certain way, behaved a certain way. And they see no reason to change."

He stared at her in disbelief. He'd seen her subdue an international arms dealer without breaking a sweat. Here they were about to walk into a ballroom full of people she knew and she looked terrified.

"I'm sorry, Cabe. These things have always made me nervous. I've never been good in crowds, not as myself."

"Katie girl, look at me."

She turned to him and gave him a weak smile.

"That's my girl. Now listen to me. You have faced much worse than a ballroom of overdressed people."

"I guess you're right," she laughed. "There was that Colonel at Ft. Hood who was not pleased I found his stash of money skimmed from funds meant to rebuild Iraqi roads and schools."

Cabe tensed. "Define not pleased."

"Three broken ribs and a fractured femur."

"What?"

"Oh, not me. Him," she shrugged. "I warned him not to try anything but he didn't listen."

Cabe started to laugh. "Well that's on him, isn't it? What happened to him?"

"He got forty years in Leavenworth. And a nasty limp."

He placed a soft kiss on her lips. "You see. You can handle anything."

Kate was right when she said this wasn't his idea of a fun Friday night. He'd been to plenty of functions like this, but always with a com in his ear and his nine mm on his hip while keeping an eye on foreign dignitaries. He slipped his hand in Kate's as they entered the ballroom. It was beautifully decorated room. Perfect art, perfect flowers, perfect people and cold as the crystals hanging from the perfect chandeliers.

"Kate! You're here!" a tall woman with dark hair gave them a big smile.

Kate smiled and gave the woman a hug. "Cabe, this is Carolyn Foster. She is head of Mercy General's fundraising."

"Nice to meet you," Cabe shook the woman's hand.

"Carolyn, this is my partner, Cabe Gallo."

Cabe was taken aback at the introduction and a bit proud. In their world partner meant work. In this world it had an entirely different meaning, as was evidence by the woman's shocked expression. To her credit, Cabe thought, she recovered quickly.

"You're Amanda's father?" she asked.

"Yes." Was all he could say. All he wanted to say.

Carolyn's eyes softened. "I am so sorry that happened."

"Thank you," he murmured.

"Kate, as you requested, only myself and the plaque designer know the name of the center. You'll be unveiling the plaque during your speech. Does that work for you?"

"That will be perfect. Thank you, Carolyn."

"Are you going to be in town for a while?" she asked.

Kate smiled, "Yes for the foreseeable future."

"Great." She leaned in close. "I have Springsteen tickets next month and wouldn't dream of taking these sticks in the mud ."

"Not even Winston?" Kate asked

Cabe smiled when the elegant woman snorted. "Hell no," she laughed. "Don't get me wrong. I love my husband to pieces, but for him, if it's not Puccini it's not music."

"That sounds great."

"Cabe, do you like Springsteen?" asked Carolyn.

"Hell yeah."

"Terrific! We'll make it a threesome." She gave Kate another hug. "I really have to check on the food. I promise we'll catch up later." With that, she retreated into the crowd.

"She seemed very nice if a bit of a whirlwind," said Cabe

"Yes on both counts. It's that whirlwind quality that makes her great at putting together functions like this."

Cabe pulled her aside. "What was that about not revealing Amanda's name?"

"I knew I would be introducing you tonight to a lot of people you don't know. I didn't want you to have to relive her death over and over with strangers. Was I wrong?"

He looked into her hazel eyes and wondered again how he got so lucky. "To hell with being in public," he thought. He pulled her close and gave her a warm kiss. "You were right, Katie girl."

"The center will do great things, Cabe. The best doctors, the latest research and help for those who can't afford treatment. It will be a great legacy for Amanda. I promise."

He leaned closer and whispered "I love you."

Cabe heard a voice say, "Kate Riley, is that you?" He pulled back from their kiss to see a bleach blonde standing in front of the. Cabe did a quick assessment, forty plus, way too much make up, dress meant for a girl in her twenties. Also half in the bag.

Kate forced a smile. "Hello Jessica."

"Well, well, well, look at you getting up close and personal with something other than a book." She ran her hand down Cabe's arm. He took a step back.

"Where's your husband, Jessica?" asked Kate.

Jessica waved her hand in the general direction of the crowd. "He's out there somewhere. You know what politicians are like, always glad handing. I'm married to Congressman Walter Fleming. He's a very influential man." She directed the last statement toward Cabe as if it was meant to seduce him.

"Yes," Cabe said. "I've met your husband."

"Oh are you a constituent?" she asked, notably slurring the last word.

"No, it was business."

"Really? What kind of business?"

He really wanted to get away from this bimbo. He opened his jacket enough to flash his badge. "Government business."

"Oh," she said with a smile. She slid her hand down his jacket to his pocket and put something in it. He glanced at Kate. He couldn't tell if she was embarrassed or furious.

Cabe slipped her hand in Kate's. "We must be going, Jessica. Have a lovely evening. He put his hand in his pocket and retrieved a business card. All it said was JF and a phone number.

"What's that?" asked Kate.

"I believe that would be her phone number."

"That bitch!"

Furious it was. "Sweetheart, she's not worth the effort." To prove his point he tossed the card on the floor.

"Do you really know her husband?"

"Yeah, he's a douche."

Kate laughed. "So you do know him!" She smiled. "I told you this would happen."

"What?"

"Women hitting on you."

"She into at least her third martini. She couldn't tell the difference between me and the busboy."

"You'll see, Gallo. This is a sport to some of them and you are fresh game."

Cabe had to admit it. Kate had been right. Women were treating him like he was fair game despite the fact it was clear he and Kate were a couple. He didn't tell her Jessica's card wasn't the only one slipped to him that night. If he were young and single he might be flattered. What he was, was furious. Some of the people he'd been introduced to were like Carolyn, nice people who wanted to share their good fortune with others. But quite a few others were condescending assholes who looked at him like he was something they would scrape off their shoe. Even that didn't bother him as much as the way they treated Kate, like she was the idiot child. Apparently never having married or given birth meant she wasn't quite enough. Worst of all, she was taking it.

"Oh, crap. Incoming," said Kate

"What?"

"Two o'clock. Woman in her seventies with perfect hair and unhappy look. Joan Williams, John's mother. She's been trying to push us together since we were kids."

"Kate." The woman said. Not hello, not how are you, not even a fake hug.

"Hello Joan."

The woman glanced at Cabe like he was a low rent crasher. "John told me you were bringing someone. You know he expected to escort you. He's very upset dear."

"I'm sorry Joan."

Cabe couldn't believe what he was hearing. The woman just treated both of them like crap and she was apologizing to her.

"Cabe this is Joan Williams. Joan, this is Special Agent Cabe Gallo from Homeland Security."

"A cop, Kate. Really? I just don't what to say. John's at our table I suggest you talk to him." With that the woman stormed off and Kate looked like a kicked puppy.

"I better get this over with." Kate said as she walked toward the front row of dinner tables.

Cabe grabbed her arm to halt her movement. "Kate I don't understand this. This woman is the mother of your estate's administrator, yes?"

Kate nodded.

"So, he works for you."

"Technically."

"No. not technically. Actually makes his living on what you pay him."

"Yes," she said quietly.

"So why did she treat you like crap?"

"Please, Cabe. I just need to get this over with."

"No. Come with me." He said and pulled her into the hall. He opened a door and found an empty conference room. "Okay start talking. I want to know why in God's name you could let people treat you like crap."

"You don't understand," she said quietly.

"You're damn right, I don't understand! They treat you like you're a pet to command. These people have no idea who you are or what you've done with your life. You didn't just work for the Agency you are a God damn legend! The Ghost, never captured or identified. Highest closure rate of any agent, ever!" He ran his hands through his hair. "I just don't get it."

"They were all I had!" she cried. The look on her face snapped his heart in two.

"I was twenty two when my parents were killed. I had no one. No siblings, no aunts, uncles, cousins, no one. All had were those people. A circle of my parents friends who made sure I had someplace to go on the holidays. They took me to dinner on my birthdays." Her voiced softened. "They may not have gotten me the right present, but they got me one. At least I wasn't alone."

All the fight drained out of him.

"You were alone at twenty two," she said.

"Yes." He said quietly.

"But you had your Marine brothers. Could you imagine what your life would have been like without them?"

Cabe couldn't stand it anymore. He folded her in his arms and held her close. "It would have been awful." He reached in his pocket for his handkerchief and dabbed at her tears. "I understand, sweetheart. Believe me I do. But you have to know I cannot, will not, accept you being treated with less than the respect you deserve, that you have earned." He gave her a soft kiss. "What I want you to understand is without a dime in your bank account, you are still worth more than all the people in that ballroom combined."

She looked at him and surprised him with a smile. "You really believe that don't you?"

"With everything that I am." He held her shoulders and her gaze, needing her to understand. "Kate Riley, you are everything to me. When I said I'm all in, I meant it. No matter where the job takes me, I will always be with you."

"I love you," she whispered.

"Ah, Katie girl," he said as he took her face in his hands and kissed her.

"I should get back in there," Kate said. "They'll be looking for me to make the dedication. Just let me find a mirror. I must be a wreck."

Cabe held her arm to stop her. He smiled and tucked a stray curl behind her ear. "You're beautiful."

She shook her head "I noticed you didn't say perfect."

"Nah. Perfect is boring."

Kate laughed and slipped her arms around his waist. "Ah Gallo what would I ever do without you?"

He lifted her face to his. "You'll never have to find out." Then he kissed her the way he'd wanted to kiss her all night.

"Well hello again." They saw Jessica headed straight for them.

"Ah, geez," said Cabe

"Looks like Gabe is showing you a really good time."

"It's Cabe," Kate said through clenched teeth.

"He looks like he can show a lady a really good time," said Jessica as she slid her hands up Cabe's chest.

Cabe would remember later the look on Kate's face as the moment the nervous girl he'd seen all night disappeared.

"Jessica...Back...Off..." Kate all but growled.

"You're no fun, Kate." she smiled at Cabe. "I'm lots of fun."

"That's it," Kate reached for Jessica's shoulder and applied pressure on either side of the brachial plexus. Jessica screamed and fell to her knees. "I told you to back off, bitch."

Cabe was stunned, and delighted.

Kate looked at him and nodded. "Shall we go?"

They made it back to the ballroom only to be ambushed by a tall man in his early fifties with a very angry expression marring his movie star looks.

"Where have you been?"

"Hello John."

"I have been waiting for you at the table. Mother said you'd be right over."

"Mother was wrong."

"Don't be flip."

Kate took a breath, "John, this is Cabe Gallo. Cabe, John Williams."

Just as his mother had, John ignored his presence. "Yes, mother told me you brought a cop as your date."

"He's not a cop." She turned to Cabe and smiled. "Badge him, babe."

Cabe smiled. He liked this Kate. She was hot. "Special Agent Cabe Gallo, Homeland Security."

"Great. A fed."

Cabe saw the man switch his mood so fast he was amazed he didn't get whiplashed.

"Kate, sweetheart. You know I expected to escort you tonight. You didn't have to scrounge up a date. I thought we had an understanding."

"John, we don't have an understanding. What we had was one awkward lunch a year ago forced on us by your mother. You know we would never have anything but a platonic relationship."

"Oh, don't say that, sweetheart. You know you and I have always had a connection." John reached for Kate's hand as Cabe wished he could reach for his gun.

Kate pulled her hand free." John really? You're going to hit on me in front of my man? A man who could render you unconscious with one hand." She turned and smiled. "Isn't that right sweetheart?"

Cabe chuckled. This was getting good. "That is true, Katie, but for that matter so could you."

Kate smiled, "Yes, Yes I could." She turned her attention back to John. "Cabe is not a date. We live together."

The facade fell away as anger flooded his face. "You what? Are you insane?"

"Yeah," Cabe thought, "This guy is really lucky I don't have my gun." He watched Kate as she handled this guy like the pro she was.

"A woman like you can't let some flat foot take advantage of you. You let this guy in and he'll clean you out in no time."

"What do you mean, a woman like me?"

Cabe could see she was seething. He thought "So this is what they mean by Irish temper." He almost felt sorry for the guy. Almost.

"My family and I have been protecting your whole life. We've kept you safe, just like your parents wanted."

Cabe saw her flinch at the mention of her parents but she didn't falter. He wanted to step in, but didn't. He knew she could handle it. Finally.

"Then this guy finds himself an aging spinster to latch on to and you fall for it."

Kate smiled and Cabe thought if this guy had an ounce of brains he'd know to be scared.

"You know John, you never asked how Cabe and I met."

She looked at Cabe and he knew what she was about to do. He just smiled. This was gonna be good.

"I assume it was the little job you insist on keeping."

"Well you did get that right. We met on the job." She opened her purse, pulled out her ID and flipped it open like she was showing it to a perp. "Special Agent Kate Riley, Homeland Security."

The color drained from John's face. "What the hell? You're a...a..."

"Cop."

"Special Agent," Cabe corrected.

Kate smiled. "Now John, your father and my father were best friends. He did very well for my family's estate as you have done since you took over."

John smiled and Cabe thought this guy is really an idiot.

"That being said," She continued "I will drop you in a hot New York minute if you don't keep a civil tone in your head. I doubt your partners will appreciate you losing your firm's biggest client."

The guy now looked like a caught bass gasping for air.

"Now, if you'll excuse us, John. I have a speech to make."

When they got far enough away Cabe whispered, "I'm so proud of you."

To which Kate replied. "Whiskey. Neat. Now."

Cabe smiled. He led her to the bar where he ordered her two fingers of Irish. She downed it in one gulp.

"Better?" he asked.

She smiled and squeezed his hand. "Much."

Dinner was a relief from the turmoil preceding it. Cabe had asked Carolyn to move them to a different table. Again, much to her credit she didn't falter. They were seated with a lovely young couple, a resident and his wife. The couple talked about how exciting the new center was going to be, not knowing who Cabe and Kate were. Tim wanted to specialize in pediatric medicine and his wife, Elaine was nurse and loved working with children. They were both hoping to get a chance to work at the center. Cabe saw Kate's smile. These kids would get their shot.

Carolyn approached their table and smiled. "Did everyone enjoy their dinner?"

"It was excellent," said Cabe as everyone agreed.

"Kate," Carolyn said. "Are you ready?"

Kate smiled. "As I'll ever be."

"Good. I have places for both of you on the stage."

"Both of us?" asked Cabe.

"Yes. Don't worry. You don't have to say anything if you don't want to."

Kate squeezed his hand. "I could use the back up, Gallo."

Cabe nodded and followed as Carolyn pulled Kate close to her. Despite her attempt at whisper he heard, "So you and Cabe?"

Kate nodded and smiled. "Yeah, me and Cabe."

Carolyn all but squealed. "Good for you. He's hot."

Kate giggled, "You have no idea."

Despite being embarrassed as hell, he decided he liked Carolyn. She was genuinely happy Kate was in a relationship.

He sat on the stage, looking out on the sea of people waiting for Kate's speech. Glancing toward a fabric covered stand, the real reason for the night came crashing back down on him. Amanda. His baby. She'd been gone for so long but it still felt like yesterday. He didn't want to share his pain with strangers, but he reminded himself what this would do for sick kids. Kate gave him complete access to everything related to the center. Doctors being recruited, doctors already on board. The research planned. The assistance for families who couldn't afford treatment. It was truly a legacy for his daughter.

Carolyn approached the mike. "Ladies and Gentleman, welcome to our tenth annual gala for Mercy General." She paused for the polite applause. "This year between our annual fundraising efforts and tonight's silent auction we have raised over ten million dollars. Tonight we will be dedicating our new pediatric care unit. I would like to introduce a woman who, carrying on the work of her parents, has year after year supported the work we've been trying to do here. Most of you know that personally as she has placed the bite on all of you at least once this year."

Cabe looked over at Kate who was smiling. He really would never stopped being amazed.

"Ladies and Gentleman, Kate Riley."

Kate stood and acknowledged the polite applause. Cabe noted John and his mother were hanging back, the only people not clapping. He wasn't the only one who noticed. Kate's face went still for a moment, then looked down at her notes.

"Thank you all for coming and being so generous. The work being done here..." She looked up at the crowd and then over at him. She gave him a smile. The smile that set everything to rights. She looked at the crowd and tossed her notes down. "Ten seconds in and even I'm bored." She smiled as everyone chuckled. "We all come to these events, at least half dozen times a year. We listen to the same boring speeches and eat the same boring meals," She glanced over at Carolyn. "Except for tonight, of course. The mushroom ravioli were amazing." She looked over the crowd. "We all come to these events, donate, do what we can, to make the world a little better. We want to make a difference." She looked over at Cabe and said with a smile. "We need to matter. So no speech tonight. Instead I'll tell you a story." She took a deep breath. "I've spent the last thirty years in law enforcement. First with the FBI and then Homeland Security." She paused for a moment, waiting for the smoke from her bombshell to clear. "For the last few months I've been working with Special Agent Cabe Gallo. In all my years of service I've never met a finer agent, or a better man. Cabe had a daughter, Amanda. She was a pretty little girl who liked My Pretty Pony and riding the carousel with her Daddy."

Cabe's heart clenched remembering holding his baby on the carousel pony, remembered her laugh. And he remembered that night in the dark when he held Kate in his arms and told her everything about his baby girl.

"Amanda was diagnosed with an aggressive form of leukemia when she was just six years old. They tried everything but she was gone in a matter of weeks." She looked over at Cabe but he could only see her through the haze of his own tears.

"No parent should feel the pain of watching their child leave this world before they do. That is a pain that would break most of us. Cabe found a way to go on. He honored his daughter by continuing to fight. His work has made a difference in more lives than I can count." Kate paused and revealed the plaque.

Cabe stopped fighting the tears. There was his baby girl in her first and only school picture. Pretty blond hair like her mom, his eyes. She was gone two months after the picture was taken.

"I'm here tonight to dedicate the Amanda Gallo Pediatric Center." She gave the crowd a moment for applause. "She was such a pretty little girl," said Kate, touching the picture. "I dedicate this center in her honor to remind us all, sometimes we don't win, but that doesn't mean we ever stop trying. Eventually, we will. Thank you."

Cabe heard applause but all he saw was her. He walked to Kate and took her in his arms. All he could manage was a whispered "Thank you."

She kissed him. "Let's go home."

Kate had been quiet on the ride home. It had been a difficult night for both of them. It was always painful to relive losing Amanda. Nothing in his life had ever been or would ever be as painful as holding his daughter in his arms while she took her last breath.

But his hurt was old, painful to touch, but scarred over. The hurt inflicted on Kate tonight was still fresh. As well as she handled herself he knew she would need time and he would do anything to help. Even confessing.

They kicked off shoes, hung up clothes, all the normal couple things you do when you're getting ready for bed. This night was anything but normal. Cabe noticed Kate had purchased new lingerie. Cut low to accommodate the cut of her gown he knew it was also meant for him. As much as she liked pretty lingerie, he knew she liked his reaction to it more. Despite the tension of the evening the black lace was having its intended effect. He felt guilty for a moment then reminded himself he was only human. Maybe now was a good time to tell just how much. He slipped his arms around her waist as she removed her earrings. "How are you doing?"

"I'm okay." She smiled.

"No you're not. Not right now. But you will be." He bent down and kissed her neck. He could see in the mirror how she closed her eyes and let herself enjoy the moment. He traveled down her neck to her shoulder kissing and nipping the way she loved. "Man up, Gallo," he thought, "Confess now while it can still do some good."

He kept his attention on her working his way to the other side of her neck and repeating the process. "Katie, I need to confess something about tonight."

Her eyes flew open. "You want to talk? Now?"

"I think I need to."

"I'm not talking about them now. Not tonight."

He knew who she meant. For the second time in her life, she'd lost her family. "No, not them. I promise. It's about something that happened."

She turned to face him. "What happened?"

He saw from the look on her face she was expecting the worst. "No, it's not what you're thinking. It's about when you stopped Jessica."

"What about it?"

Cabe felt nervous as a school boy, not sure how she would take what he was about to say. "When you stopped her, great move by the way, when you stopped her from getting handsy I got a glimpsed of just how badass an agent you are."

Kate smiled and he saw a slight blush. "Okay, thanks."

"No, what I mean is I saw you fight for me. I saw you fight for what's yours. I was really proud of you." He leaned in and whispered. "It was also really hot."

She slipped her hands around his neck. "Oh yeah?"

"Hell yeah. If I could have had you right there, I would have." He brushed her cheek with his hand. "I am yours, Katie girl. Never doubt that." Then leaned in and whispered something she'd said to him. "I'm here for you, only you. For what ever you want. How ever you want it. For as long as you want."

He looked into her eyes as saw they'd changed from hazel to emerald. He waited for her. Tonight would be about her taking control, taking what was hers. She pulled him close and her kiss was like fire. She pushed him back.

"On the bed." She yanked his boxers off in one move. She slipped on top of him, kissing, tasting, controlling the moment. She took him inside her and he saw a look on her face that was everything he'd hoped for. This was his woman, powerful, sexy, in control. It was the perfect way to end the night. It was the only way possible.

## Chapter Eight

Cabe was an early riser, a holdover from his life as a Marine. Kate however, was not. She always growled at him if he tried to get her to have an early workout. This morning he wasn't the first to get out of bed. He found her on the pool deck. She was wrapped in her robe her computer sitting in her lap. She looked so tired. He was suddenly worried last night had been too much.

"Hey, you're up early." He leaned over and gave her a quick kiss.

"Yeah, I couldn't sleep."

"Sweetheart, last night, did I push?"

She smiled. "God no. You were the only reason I got any sleep last night." She pulled him close for a deep kiss. "You wore me out."

"Now?"

"I've been reviewing my files, reports that have come out of John's office and Rimark."

"The company that your father started?"

"Yeah. I still own it."

"Excuse me?"

"Well, majority shareholder."

"How do you run an international software company and work for Homeland?"

"I don't. I hired good people and put them in place to run it for me. I review reports they send me make decisions when necessary." She sighed and leaned back in her chair. "At least I thought I did."

Cabe sat in the facing deck chair. "What's going on?"

"That's what I need to find out. I reviewed the documents I've been given. Then I hacked John's files. I think I'm seeing some anomalies."

"What kind?"

"Discrepancies. I thought I should check to be sure. Now that I'm outed as a fed, John may try something."

"He'd need time to move assets quietly. Any stock trades would take a minimum of three days to settle before he could get his hands on the money," said Cabe.

Kate smiled. "Exactly. It's Saturday morning. I figure I've got until Monday morning to prove it. I want to hire the team."

"Why? You seem to have a handle on the situation."

"Because I'm too close to it. I may miss something. I think between Sylvester head for numbers and Walter and Toby's heads for sneaky shit, they can put together what I need by Monday."

"I'll make the call."

It hadn't taken long to assemble the team, since they were already there. Kate explained what she wanted them to do and to Walter's credit he behaved like a professional. It didn't take long before they'd gotten everything they needed to confirm Kate's suspicions. By their estimation John had siphoned ten point two million dollars from her accounts funneling them into various accounts the team traced as belonging to John and his mother.

"Are you okay?" asked Paige.

Kate smiled. "This is difficult but I'll manage." She glanced over at Cabe talking to Ralph. "I have help."

"It's great to see the two of you like this," said Paige. Cabe sensed he was being watched. He looked up at Kate and shot her a wink. Paige laughed. "I never knew Cabe could be so adorable."

Kate leaned toward Paige and whispered "You have no idea."

"Then you're going to want to see this." Paige hit a few keys. Cabe's personnel file. Paige pointed to a date on the screen. His birth date. Today.

"How could he not tell me?"

"I doubt that he's celebrated in a long time."

"Can I count on you?"

"To do what?"

Kate gave her a conspiratorial smile. "We are gonna celebrate the crap out his birthday." Kate stood and said, "Let's move this back to my house." Everyone looked surprised, especially Cabe.

"We're working here," said Walter.

"Will you have everything you need for your report in, say, two hours."

Walter glanced at Sly who nodded.

"Great. Because I'm in the mood for some pizza and lots of people."

Cabe smiled at her and she felt a little guilty. He was assuming she wanted to occupy her mind until Monday morning and the meeting she was dreading. That was true, but she was going to surprise him if was the last thing she did.

"Paige is going to help me grab some pizzas and set up. When you're finished here go home and grab your swimsuits."

"Swimsuits?" asked Happy.

"I have a pool." Kate grabbed her purse. "And an ocean. See you all at three."

"I'll keep an eye on Ralph," said Cabe.

Paige started her car. "How are we going to get a party together in two hours?"

Kate smiled, "It's amazing what you can accomplish when you tell people money is no object."

"There's a great place around the corner. Cabe is addicted to their calzone," said Paige.

"Sounds great, put we need to go someplace else first."

Cabe admitted to himself he was enjoying the guys opened mouth reaction to Kate's home. He corrected himself. Their home. He could hardly believe he thought of this place as home. It wasn't the amazing view or the museum quality art collection or the kick ass man cave. The door opened and Kate smiled at him. That smile made this home.

"Great, you're all here. Come on in."

"Holy crap," said Toby. "This place is amazing."

Everyone spilled out on to the deck and Cabe stopped. Balloons saying 'Happy Birthday' were tied to all the deck lights. Tables were set up with boxes from his favorite Italian place filled with what he hoped were calzones. He turned to see the a smiling Kate and Paige. He pointed at Paige. "Let me guess, you told her."

"Are you mad?" she asked.

"No, its fine kid."

Kate slipped her arms around him. "Happy birthday, sweetheart."

He smiled and kissed her. "Are you sure you're okay with this? It's been a hell of a couple of days."

"Honestly, I think this is just what we both needed."

Cabe watched as everyone chowed down on calzone and sodas. They were all laughing and telling stories. Even Walter told a few stories from when they first met back in Ireland. Cabe smiled when he heard Walter's natural brogue creep back into his voice. It only happened when he was completely relaxed, which meant almost never. They were all relaxed. Even he had changed out of his suit into his jeans and the light blue t-shirt that Kate liked so much.

Ralph came up to him and handed him an envelope. "This is for you." Mom told me yesterday it was your birthday.

Cabe smiled. He heart skipped when he saw it was a homemade birthday card. It was a crude picture of him with a large badge on his jacket. It said, Happy Birthday Cabe. Love Ralph. He struggled to find his voice. "Thank you, buddy. This is great." Then Ralph did something no one could have expected. He hugged Cabe. He looked up at Paige, not ashamed of the his unshed tears.

The gate bell chimed, Cabe looked at Kate, "Are you expecting someone? Everyone I know is already here."

She smiled at Paige and said, "I'll take care of it." Those two were up to something.

Kate returned and pulled him to his feet. "Cabe, you know how I said I never go overboard?"

"Katie, what did you do?"

She smiled and handed him a set of keys. "I went overboard." She grabbed his hand and led him to the front door, everyone following behind. "Remember that Sunday we took the ride up the PCH."

"Yeah?"

"You said you'd never seen anything so pretty." She leaned back and said to the rest of them, "He wasn't talking about me." She opened the front door and led him outside. Sitting in the driveway was a brand new Harley Davidson Road Glide Ultra.

Cabe started walking around the bike, touching chrome and leather.

Happy was practically salivating. "Oh boss, that is one sweet ride."

Toby whispered to Paige, "That must have cost her twenty grand."

"Twenty seven. It was amazing. She walked into the showroom and asked if they had it. The guy showed it to her and she pulled out her black Amex card. She didn't even bargain with the guy. She signed the papers and told them when to deliver it. The entire transaction took fifteen minutes."

Kate approached him and touched his arm. "Is it okay?"

Cabe looked at her in amazement. It wasn't that the bike of his dreams was sitting in front of him. He had mentioned only once, in passing and she remembered. It was important to him so it was important to her. He took her in his arms and kissed her hard enough to make Toby yell "Eww...Mom and Dad are making out." They both laughed.

"I love it, sweetheart. I'm blown away." He could see her visibly relax. How could she have doubted how happy it would make him? He jumped on the bike and revved the engine. Oh it was a sweet sound. "What do you say? A quick spin?" She laughed and jumped on the back hugging him tight. "Wait, I should probably just keep it here until I get it insured."

"Oh , I took care of it."

He smiled. "Of course you did."

Cabe took off down the road with his girl hanging on tight. It honestly didn't get better than this. They road up and down the ocean front road until he finally pulled over. They sat there, staring at the ocean. "You know we left all those crazies alone in our house."

She smiled and hugged him tight. "That's the first time you called it our house."

He got off the bike and lifted her off to stand beside him. "Thank you for the best birthday I've ever had. It was already my best birthday before the bike."

"Oh, so I should send it back?" she smiled.

He pulled her close and kissed her.

"So we're keeping the bike?" she asked.

"We're keeping the bike."

They got back to the house to find Toby, Happy and Sly playing volleyball in the pool. Paige and Ralph were sitting on a lounge chair. Walter was in the house, reading the report. Kate looked at Cabe and pointed to Walter. "Seriously?"

Cabe shook his head and laughed. "I know."

Kate smiled. "We're about to fix that. First things first." Kate walked to the deck. "Ralph did you bring a suit?"

Paige stroked Ralph's hair. "He did but he said he would rather watch the ocean." Paige then mouthed "Can't swim."

Kate sat on the chair next to them. "Ralph, do you like me? " Ralph looked confused, but nodded. "That's good, because I like you too. I'd like to think that we're going to be good friends." He smiled and nodded. "Ralph, friends can be honest with each other because they know their friends respect them and always have their backs."

"Like Cabe does for the team," Ralph added.

Kate gave him a big smile. "Exactly. Ralph be honest with me. You don't know how to swim, do you?"

He shook his head.

"Ralph there is no reason to be embarrassed about that. I bet you didn't live anywhere with a pool. You couldn't be expected to know physics without opening a book could you?" Ralph shook his head again, looking less embarrassed. "Swimming is simply information you don't yet have. I grew up with a pool and I've been swimming as long as I can remember. I would be happy to explain the mechanics of it. Once you have acquired the knowledge I bet you'd swim rings around all of us."

"Water looks pretty deep."

"Only on this end. Down at the other end you'd can stand on the bottom. Of course I'll be right there. Think of it like a science lab. Practical application of information. That is if it's okay with your Mom?"

Paige smiled "Of course it is."

Cabe had watched the entire exchange. He'd thought he couldn't love her more. He'd been wrong. He sat down next to Kate. "I'll be there too, buddy. You know I'm scuba certified."

"You are?" she looked stunned.

"Yeah."

"Once again I find myself saying how do I not know this about you. Could you teach me? I've always wanted to scuba dive."

"Of course, sweetheart."

"Cool!" she turned her attention back to Ralph. "So what do you say, buddy?"

"Okay."

"Great, you go get changed and so will we."

Ralph dashed off and Paige smiled. "I've been trying to get him to swim for years."

"Don't worry, we'll take good care of him. And now you can go change into your suit and enjoy the sun."

Cabe gave her a quick hug. "We should get changed. Ralph will be back in a minute."

"Not quite yet. One more thing to take care of." She put her hand on Cabe's chest. "Hang back for a minute." Cabe walked to the kitchen for a bottle of water, knowing he'd be able to hear what Kate was up to now. She walked back into the living room and sat on the couch next to Walter. He was flipping through the report the team repaired. "I thought you said the report was ready?"

"It is. I'm verifying we didn't miss anything."

Kate pulled the report from his hands. "This is Scorpion. You never miss anything. You're hiding."

"I am not hiding. I'm devoted to my work." Walter waved toward the pool where Sly and Happy were playing keep away with Toby's hat. "I'm not interested in frivolous activity."

"Bullshit."

Cabe almost choked on his water.

"I beg your pardon?" asked Walter.

"Walter, I know you."

"We have had limited contact. You can't possibly know me."

"Walter, I know you. I AM you. I spent my entire youth immersed in academics. Then I was recruited for the FBI, then Homeland." Kate placed a hand on his shoulder. "I blinked and it was 30 years later. No family, no children, only the work."

"Your work was very important. You saved a lot of lives. And Ralph was right about your AI thesis. It was groundbreaking."

Kate smiled. "You read my work?"

"Yes. I assume your father based his company's encryption software on your work."

"Yes he did. The work did have an impact and I'm proud of it. But Walter my life before can't compare to my life since I fell in love with Cabe. Everything in my life, everything including the work is bigger, brighter, better."

"I don't have those type of emotions."

"Again, bullshit."

It was everything Cabe could do not to laugh out loud.

"Walter you have the emotions, you're terrified to let them out. I was too. I took a chance and opened up with Cabe and look what happened."

"Yes, you are both distracted from your work."

"Damn dude, you are a tough case. Let me break it down to the base code. A stunningly beautiful woman is about to come down those stairs in a bathing suit. If you go put on yours, you will be able to be closer to her...in a bathing suit." In an epic bit of perfect timing Ralph and Paige came down stairs in their suits. Ralph's suit was covered in Super Fun Guy logos. Paige was wearing a bright red bikini.

Walter looked at Kate. "I don't have a suit."

Cabe came out of the kitchen "I have a spare. I'll put it in the guestroom next to ours. "Kate, we better get changed. Ralph is waiting for us." He grabbed his extra suit from the drawer and handed it to Walter as he walked by. He closed the door behind him and grabbed Kate around the waist.

"Hey, you said hurry, Ralph is waiting."

"He can wait a minute more." He gave her a light kiss. "Kate Riley have I told you just how much I love you?"

"Not in the last hour."

"I must be slipping. Blame it on my advanced years. I do, I love you, sweetheart. So much."

Kate looked at him wondering what got into him. She knew he liked the party and the bike but something was up.

"I love you too, Cabe." She kissed him and then pulled back and slapped his ass.  
"Now move it, Gallo. A little boy is waiting for us."

Cabe smiled. "Yes Ma'am."

Cabe sat in the water on the pool steps and watched Kate. She explained the dynamics of a freestyle stroke. Ralph hung on to the side to practice his kick. She held him by the waist as practice his stroke.

"I'm going to let go this time and you swim to the opposite side of the pool. Go slow and reach your hand out so you'll know when you get to the other side. You can do this, Ralph."

Cabe smiled as he watch Ralph's awkward but effective strokes as he quickly reached the other side of the pool. He saw Ralph's small hand and reach for the edge as he pulled his head out of the water.

"I did it! Mom, did you see me? I did it!"

"I sure did, baby. I'm so proud of you."

"Cabe, did you see? How was I?"

"You did great buddy."

"I'm going again."

"Ok, Ralph. Cabe and I are going to sit right here and watch." Kate swam over to Cabe and sat down next to him.

Cabe leaned in and gave her a quick kiss before Ralph took off to the other side of the pool. "You did great, sweetheart. He really likes you."

"I really like him. What's not to like? He's adorable."

Kate leaned against him and he wrapped he arms around her. He took a moment to take it all in. Ralph was swimming back and forth across the pool, improving his stroke with each lap. Paige was sitting on the edge, feet in the water with a proud smile. Walter was laying in a deck chair. At least he wasn't hiding in the house anymore. He gave Kate a little squeeze. She'd done that.

Happy, Toby and Sly were running around the deck trying to hit each other with water balloons. "Hey, stop running," shouted Cabe. "One of you is gonna fall and break something. Take the running down to the beach."

"Ok Dad!" said Toby. "Hey Mom, got any more balloons?"

"I grabbed a handful of bags at the party store. Check on the kitchen table.

"Cool." He turned to the others. "It's ON Dodd as soon as I get back."

Cabe said softly, "He called you Mom."

"Yeah," she whispered.

"Do you mind?"

She turned to face him and smiled. "No. she said. I loved it."

This really was the best birthday ever.

Ralph had fallen asleep on the couch, exhausted from his new found activity. They sat around the pool, enjoying the ocean breeze.

"So, are you going to arrest them yourself or are you turning over to someone else," asked Walter.

"I'd love to arrest that ass myself but I doubt I could make a case for Homeland jurisdiction," said Cabe.

"Nobody's getting arrested," said Kate.

"Excuse me? I don't think I heard you. I couldn't have because it sounded like you said you're not prosecuting these thieves!" Cabe shouted.

"Shush, you'll wake Ralph. Let me explain."

"Do you still feel some loyalty to these people? They used you as their personal ATM."

"I'm aware!" she shouted back. Kate took a breath. "Walter, did you find any evidence that John's partners had any hand in this?"

"No. We traced the transactions. Williams made them from his own computer. Didn't even try to hide it." Walter put his hands up in the air like he couldn't believe it. "I ran a check on accounts managed by the other partners. No anomalies."

"Did John use anyone else's accounts?"

Walter looked slightly embarrassed. "No. Only yours."

"So they're clean but Williams is dirty as hell. If you won't have him arrested, I will!"

"No you won't!" Kate shouted as she ran past everyone, Cabe in pursuit.

"Oooo. Mom and Dad are fighting," said Toby. Everyone looked at him and said in unison, "Shut up, Toby!"

Cabe found her in the kitchen, leaning over the sink. He knew she was crying but he couldn't stop himself. "How can you justify not prosecuting this guy?" He pulled her around to face him.

"Back off Gallo."

He stopped and took a breath. He knew he was making things worse. He tried to level his voice. "Kate, I'm sorry. Really I am. But please make me understand why you're going to let him get away with this."

"Do you know how many people work there? Forty. I know. I checked. Some of them have been there for decades. The other partners, James and Michael, started the company with John's father. They did nothing wrong. None of them. We've proved it." Kate sat at the kitchen table. "Cabe, do you know what will happen to those people if I prosecute?"

"Nothing. They had nothing to do with it."

"True. But that's not the way the press or their clients will see it. The largest asset management firm in the city and one of the partners goes to jail for embezzlement. The company would be destroyed. All those people would be out of work."

Cabe joined her at the table. He covered her hand with his. He was going to have to work to make this better. "Tell me what you want to do."

"I'm going to meet with all the partners at seven Monday morning."

He nodded. "Too early for the markets to be trading."

"Exactly. John will think the meeting is just with him. I'll present the report to the partners."

"Then what?"

Kate smiled. "I get my money back."

Everyone gathered their things as Cabe carried Ralph out to Paige's car.

"Thanks so much for everything. Ralph had a great time." Said Paige.

"He's a terrific kid. He's welcome anytime." The rest of the team stopped and looked at her. "Okay, he can bring you guys with him." She turned back to Paige. "Seriously, anytime. Once I retire I'll have a lot of time on my hands."

Paige gave her a hug and waited until the rest left. "Are you two okay?"

Kate smiled. "Yeah, we're fine. Sometimes his protective instincts kick into overdrive."

They stopped talking when Cabe came back in. "Little guy is beat. Didn't even wake up when I strapped him in."

Paige gave him a hug. "Happy Birthday, Cabe."

"Thanks kid." He closed the door and looked at Kate. Her eyes were still a bit red from crying but she had a smile on her face. Okay, he wasn't going to get his ass chewed. "Sweetheart, are we okay?"

She slipped her arms around his waist and pulled him close. "Yeah, we're good Gallo."

He felt every muscle relax. He hated fighting with her.

"Look, I know you want the best for me. But sometimes you're going to have to let it go and trust me."

"I do trust you, Katie. I just can't stand anyone hurting you."

"I know. I'm going to need you with me Monday."

"Of course. Armed?" he smiled.

"Hell yes. Extra points if you get John to piss himself."

He laughed and gave her a kiss. "I'll do my best." He looked around at partially deflated balloons and empty pizza boxes. "Let's clear up this debris."

"It can wait." She pushed him up against the door and kissed him with such passion it took his breath away. She pulled away. "Happy birthday, baby."

He grabbed her hips and pulled her close. "Hmmm, Happy birthday to me."

She stopped him from kissing her again. She gave him a wicked smile. "You. Naked. Now."

He could only stare at her.

"Don't make me repeat myself." She turned and walked up the stairs to their bedroom.

He laughed as he pulled his t-shirt over his head while running toward the stairs. "Yes, Ma'am."

She was up early again. Normally Kate slept like a stone, especially after a night like last night. She had certainly made his birthday memorable.

The meeting was set for tomorrow and he knew she was still agonizing over her decisions. She was sitting on the deck in her robe, sipping orange juice. He patted his pocket even though he knew it was there. "Here goes nothing," he thought. "Good morning," he said and leaned over to get a kiss.

"Good morning. Want some juice?"

"Later." He took a deep breath. "I have something for you."

"Oh a present! I love presents. Whatcha get me?"

He had to laugh. She had the same reaction no matter what he brought her, even a bag M&M's. "I was going to give it to you a couple of days ago, but then things got crazy. This morning I realized there would be no perfect time." Kate sat back and listen to him stumble over his words. "You know I'm a traditional kind of guy."

She laughed, "That's like saying the Pope is a little bit Catholic, but go on."

"I love living with you but I'd like to make our situation a bit more traditional." He reached into his pocket and pulled out a small box. "Katie girl, I love you with everything I am." He opened the box and Kate gasped. "Will you marry me?"

Her hands trembled as she looked the most beautiful ring she'd ever seen. The setting had two different bands of yellow gold twisting together, ending in diamond covered leaves on each side of a magnificent square cut emerald. "Oh my God."

"Kate, please. You're killing me."

She launched herself at him, throwing her arms around his neck. "Yes! Oh God, Yes."

He kissed and whispered. "I love you."

"I love you too." She said, wiping tears with her sleeve as he slipped the ring on her finger. "It's so beautiful."

"Do you really like it?"

"It's the most beautiful ring I've ever seen."

"When I went looking for a ring they were nice but they didn't feel like you. I found this jeweler and I gave him a few sketches. It took a couple of months for him to make the mold and then find the right stones."

"You designed it?"

He nodded.

She reached out to kiss him and then stopped. "Wait. A couple of months?"

Again, he nodded and this time he smiled.

"That was before I asked you to move in."

"Yeah it was." He took her hand and placed a kiss in her palm. "I've known for a long time that you and I were meant for the long haul. I can't imagine the rest of my life without you by my side."

"All in," she whispered through tears.

"All in," he replied.

Cabe dressed for the meeting at Kate's investment firm. He wore his darkest suit, made sure he picked a power tie and tucked his Homeland ID in his pocket. He double checked his weapon and stuck it in his waistband. It wouldn't take much for anyone to see he was carrying. He found her standing at the deck door, looking out over the never ending ocean view. She looked every inch the button upped agent. Dark suit, crisp white shirt and hair pulled in a tight pony. The only thing that was changed from that first day in the garage was the emerald ring on her left hand.

"Hey. How are you doing?" he asked.

"I'm standing here trying to convince myself it's like any other day, any other mission. But it's not Cabe."

He walked to her and stroked her cheek. "I know sweetheart, but you can do this. I know you can. And I'll be with you."

Kate gave him a smile of false confidence and said "Okay Gallo, let's roll."

They walked into the offices of Aspen Financial and were greeted by two men in their late sixties. Silver haired and thousand dollar suits, said these were the other partners in the firm, waiting in the lobby to meet her. Each greeted her with a warm hug and a kiss to the cheek.

"Cabe, This is Peter Mitchell and James Morehouse, John's partners. This is Special Agent Cabe Gallo, my fiancé."

Both men had genuine smiles and they reached to shake Cabe's hand. "Kate, that's wonderful. Congratulations," said Peter. Tall and slender, he appeared fit despite his years. James on the other hand, hadn't seen the inside of a gym in years. Give him a red suit and he'd have a gig at Christmas. "Speaking of Homeland, what is this we hear..." he asked.

Kate smiled and opened her jacket displaying her shoulder holster. "It's true. I'd be happy to tell you all about it another time. For now, we need to discuss this meeting."

"Yes," said Peter. "John normally handles all your accounts."

"There are going to be some changes."

John walked through the front door and saw his partners standing with his biggest client. "Peter, James, why are you here so early?" He saw Cabe standing next to Kate. "What is he doing here?"

"Oh, have you met Kate's fiancé?" asked Peter.

"Fiancé!"

Kate stared him down. "It's time to begin the meeting. Cabe and I have assignments today."

They entered a large conference room and took seats. Cabe set next to Kate, which John obviously did not like.

"If you're here to give him access to your accounts I must advise against it," said John.

Kate put up her hand. "Stop talking, now." Cabe had never seen her like this. She opened her messenger bag and pulled out three copies of the Scorpion report. He saw a

small tremor in her hand and slipped his hand to her thigh. She smiled and nodded. They drew strength from each other.

Kate handed copies of the report to each man. "This is the documentation that will show you how John has embezzled ten point two million dollars from my accounts. The money was routed to accounts held by John and his mother. John flushed bright red while James and Peter blanched white. It told Cabe all he needed to know. They had no idea what John had done.

John flipped through the pages and threw it back at her. "These are lies! Did this guy give you these? I warned you about him. I'm telling you right now they're lies."

Kate pounded her fist on the table, scaring the shit out of everyone, including Cabe. "You forget who you're talking to. This is me, John. Have you forgotten what I've accomplished. Rimark is founded on MY work, John. Mine! For the past thirty years my 'little government job' you always referred to was as one of the top computer analysts in the FBI and Homeland. There was nobody better than me, John, not in the whole fucking country!"

Cabe was frightened of the state Kate was in, but knew better than to stop her.

Kate, maybe sensing his distress, sat back in her chair and took a breath. "I've compared the reports you sent me to the actual accounts on your system."

"Peter, James did you let her in?"

"Of course not," Kate said. "I hacked in."

"That's illegal. You can't do that." John sputtered.

She actually laughed. "John, I've hacked multi-national corporations, hell, I've hacked the systems of entire countries. I could hack your system in my sleep."

Cabe touched her arm and smiled. "Entire countries?" Kate nodded and smiled. He smiled. "Impressive, Agent Riley."

"These reports also show that Peter and James had no knowledge of what you were doing."

James hands were shaking. Cabe was afraid he'd have a coronary. "We didn't, Kate. We swear."

"I know you didn't. It was all John." She turned her attention back on John. "You and your mother blew through what your father left you so you looked for another source.

Me." She took a breath and looked toward Cabe. He smiled and nodded a silent 'I'm here for you'. "Here's how this is going to play out. If I have you and your mother arrested..."

"Arrest my mother?" It was John's turn to go pale.

"Yes. She received profits from your embezzlement. I could make a case against her. If I do that, everyone loses, including me. You'd be in jail but Peter and James reputation would be destroyed. They'd lose the company and everyone here would lose their jobs. So here is what is going to happen. John, you are going to liquidate your personal assets. Before you claim you don't have it remember I know to the penny what you're worth. You will liquidate, John. All of it. I want the entire amount in Peter and James hands by close of business this Friday."

It seemed like John had lost his ability to speak.

Peter and James what I need you to do is to immediately terminate your partnership with John. I don't want him messing around with anyone else's accounts. There is a clause in your partnership agreement which states if any of the partners are guilty of malfeasance the contract is voided and the offending party loses all rights to the assets of the company."

"They can't do that!" John shouted.

"Actually, they can." Peter and James looked at her with looks of confusion and hope. "Don't worry, it's in there. I checked. So John, you will turn over ten point two million dollars and I won't prosecute you and Joan."

"We'll make sure the money is in your account by Friday."

"No."

"No?" replied everyone including Cabe.

"Once you have the funds available you will transfer them to the Amanda Gallo Pediatric Center at Mercy General." Kate stood. "I believe that concludes our business."

Peter came around the table and stood next to her. "You could hold the entire firm libel. Anyone else would."

She smiled at both men. "I know you had nothing to do with this. It would be wrong for you to lose everything you've worked for because John's a thief."

John launched himself at Kate. "You bitch!"

Kate knocked him back in a practiced move while Cabe drew his gun and pressed it under John's chin. Cabe took a breath and fought the urge to pull the trigger. He spoke slowly to make sure his words were very clear. "If you ever touch her again, I will end you."

"He threatened me! You all heard it."

Cabe got even closer. "That wasn't a threat. It was a guarantee."

Kate nodded to the stunned partners as if this was a perfectly reasonable way to end the meeting. "I'm sure I'll be hearing from you."

"Of course," they both said quickly.

Cabe put a hand at the small of her back and guided her to the door. When he looked back he saw John watching them with a look of pure hate.

They got to the car and he opened her door, watching as her shaking hands caused her to fumble with the seat belt. He got in the driver's side and reached for her hands. "Kate, stop." She looked at him with tears in her eyes. "I know how hard this was for you, but I want you to know how proud I am." She seemed to calm a bit and whispered "Thank you."

"I do want to ask you one thing. Why give it away?"

"Cabe, he was able to skim the money because he knew I'd never miss it, and I didn't. If I kept the money it would just sit in another account. This way the money will go where it's needed. Where it will do a lot of good."

He wondered if she would ever stop surprising him. Probably not.

## Chapter Nine

It felt like they'd been waiting for this day forever. It was Kate's last official day as an agent. It was also the day the funds were to be transferred to the center. Peter would contact Kate the minute it was completed. She had been keeping an eye on John's accounts and he appeared to be complying. He had two mortgages on their home, and without the income from his job they'd have to sell. John and his mother wouldn't be poor by any stretch of the imagination. They would have enough equity to downsize their home and live comfortably. But their life would be nothing like it had been before. Sedans instead of limos. Public golf course, not the country club.

Cabe convinced her for one last bit of justice. If John continued to keep his trading licenses, he could set up shop and do it all over again. Cabe had done a lot of favors for a lot of people over the years. It only took one phone call to cash in one of those favors. John's licenses were revoked. Kate agreed he couldn't be allowed to continue but hadn't liked doing it. He, on the other hand, enjoyed the crap out of it. Justice and payback. Sometimes things just work out.

She was up before him again. He knew she was using more makeup than usual to cover the dark circles under her eyes. He didn't think she'd slept through the night since the gala.

"Hey," he said.

"Hey," she replied.

"You ready for today?"

"No, but let's do it anyway." She grabbed her bag. "It was nice of Cooper to let me run out the clock at Scorpion."

"I think she wants to get you hooked on the team, so you'll stick around."

She smiled and gave Cabe a kiss. "Don't worry. I'm not going anywhere. Cabe, I want to talk to you about something."

"What's up sweetheart?"

"I want to see Toby."

"Why? Are you ill?" He couldn't help but sound a little worried.

"Nothing like that. There's been so much upheaval in the last week. I know you realized I'm not sleeping."

He pulled her close almost more for his well being than hers. He couldn't bear seeing her like this. "Okay. Then that's what we'll do."

She raised an eyebrow and smiled. "We, Gallo?"

"We're in this together."

They arrived at the garage to the sound of Walter yelling at Toby for taking the last egg bagel. Cabe shook his head and smiled. "Some things never change. Yo, Doc! Front and center." Toby came down the stairs into the front room, remnants of the last egg bagel in his hand.

"What's up?" he asked.

"I need a few minutes," said Kate.

He put down the last of his bagel and put on his doctor face. "Sure. Over here." He led her to the office and opened the door.

She turned to Cabe and put a hand on his chest. "Please." It was all she needed to say. He grabbed a newspaper and a chair and sat down. Kate smiled. She knew he wouldn't read a word, worrying about her. She pulled a twenty out of her pocket and handed it to Toby.

"You know you don't need to do that."

"Yeah, I know." She smiled. He still put it in his pocket.

"What's up?" he asked as he reached for his medical bag.

"I'm sure you can tell I'm not sleeping."

"Yeah." He started taking her blood pressure.

"It's been a hell of a few weeks."

"That would be putting it mildly." He put down the cuff and started listening to her chest. "Breathe in."

She did.

"How are you and Cabe?" He moved the stethoscope.

She could help but smile. "We're good. Real good."

He set down the stethoscope and sat back. "What's keeping you up?"

"It's crazy. The matter with John has been resolved. The money is being returned. Nobody went to jail. Everything turned out the way I wanted it to. So why do I still feel so guilty?"

"You still have feeling for this family."

"They betrayed me. Frankly John and Joan treated me like an imposition, especially after John Sr. died. So why are they keeping me up at night?"

Toby smiled. "They may have been a crappy family, but they were still your family. Trust me, I know about crappy families. In my Harvard-trained opinion, your reaction is perfectly normal and reasonable."

"You think so?"

"I know so. The effect this is having on you will fade with time. I promise. I can write you a script for a mild sleeping pill if you'd like."

Kate smiled. "No, that's okay. You're sure this is normal? It doesn't feel normal?"

Toby put his hand on hers. "I promise you, Kate. You're completely normal. So is your blood pressure and your heart, although it does elevate when you talk about Cabe."

She smiled. "He does have that effect on me."

Toby reverted back to normal. "Eww. On that note, we're done." He stood and opened the door.

Cabe dropped the paper and looked to Kate and then Toby. "Well?"

Kate nodded at Toby. "Go ahead."

"She's fine. I swear. Just a little insomnia brought on by all the embezzlement nonsense."

Cabe reached for her left hand. "So it's not anything else?"

Toby put his hand on Cabe's shoulder. "I swear."

Kate saw Cabe take a breath and watched as he visibly relaxed. Toby could be a really nice guy.

"Ok," Toby said. "Follow me."

He led them up the stairs to the loft and they were both stunned to see a banner hung across the rafters that read "Congratulations" A table had been set with a full breakfast, not including egg bagels.

"You told them?" Kate asked.

"Are you mad I didn't wait?"

She smiled and gave him a quick kiss. "This is really nice, guys," she said.

Paige ran to her side and said, "Let's see it. I've been dying to see it since he told us." She grabbed Kate's hand and gasped. "It's gorgeous."

Happy wandered toward them, pretending she wasn't that interested. "Nice. Good job, boss."

"He designed it himself," Kate said.

"Oh my God, that's so romantic," said Paige with a large smile.

Happy gave him a slap on the arm. "You old softie."

Toby walked over to Cabe and shook his hand. "Congratulations, Cabe." Toby pulled him close for a quick bro hug. "I'm really happy for you."

"Thanks, Doc."

Toby reached his arms out. "What do you say, Kate?" She smiled and accepted his hug. He leaned in and whispered, "You're really good for him."

Sly walked over and gave them both his overly EQ hug. "This is great! Just great!"

Walter stood in front of them obviously searching for words. "A happy marriage can reduce stress related diseases."

Kate looked at Cabe and laughed. "I'll take it, she said and then made Walter uncomfortable with an enthusiastic hug. He looked at Cabe and extended his hand. "Congratulations."

"Thank you, son."

They were both surprised to see Ralph. "Hey buddy," said Cabe. "I thought you'd be in school today."

"Mom said it was a special occasion so it was okay."

"That's great," said Cabe. He felt a tug at his heart when Ralph stood in front of him with his hand extended like a proper little man.

"Congratulations, Cabe," said Ralph.

"Thank you, son."

Ralph moved to Kate and said, "Congratulations, Kate."

Kate's voice wavered as she said "Thank you, Ralph.". He surprised everyone when, for the second time, he hugged Kate.

"Will I still be able to come visit?" he asked.

Kate looked up at Cabe and smiled. "Ralph, you will always be welcome, anytime."

"For sure," said Cabe.

Paige said, "This isn't just an engagement party." She indicated a cake in the middle of the breakfast goodies. Half said "Congratulations" and was decorated with an engagement ring and wedding bells. The other half said "Happy Retirement" and had a badge and a computer .

"Cake and pastries are redundant," said Walter.

Kate smiled. "Walter it's cake. There is NEVER a bad time for cake. This is great, Paige. Thank you,"

"Mom, I left my backpack in the office. It has," he looked at Cabe and Kate, you know."

"Fine but hurry. I want you to eat your breakfast before it gets cold."

"Ok," he shouted as he ran out the door and down the steps.

Cabe pulled Paige into a hug. "Thanks, kid." He watched Paige gather put together plates of scrambled eggs and bacon. This may have started as a job. Now, it was his family. Crazy, loving, annoying, brilliant. He wouldn't have it any other way.

Kate reached into her pocket and pulled out her ringing phone. "Peter, yes. I've been expecting your call. Is everything complete? Good. No, I'll call Carolyn Foster and talk to her about the donation."

Cabe put his hands on her shoulders. "Are you ok?"

Kate smiled. "Surprisingly, yes. I am. I better call Carolyn now. The bank is sure to call her and let her know about the deposit. I'll go down stairs to the office. You stay here and have some breakfast. I won't be long." As she walked down the stairs she flipped through her contact list for Carolyn's number. Just as she got to the foot of the stairs she looked up. Ralph was standing frozen at the foot of the stairs.

"Hello Kate."

"John," she whispered. She'd known John all her life and this was someone she didn't recognize. He was disheveled and shaking.

And he had a gun.

"John, what are you doing here?"

"You aren't the only one with friends. I just made a call and found out the famous Agent Riley was working out of a garage with a bunch of computer freaks."

Kate tried to keep him talking as she inched over toward Ralph, who was hadn't moved a muscle.

"Stop moving!!" John screamed.

She looked at John and calculated the angle and distance between him and where Ralph was. She knew she couldn't risk going for her weapon. She'd never get to it in time. Her only hope was upstairs.

"John, let me get him out of here and we can talk."

"No! Nobody moves."

Cabe was taking a bite of sausage when he heard it. They all did. He indicated to the others to stay put as he drew his weapon.

"Ralph," cried Paige.

"Stay put. Toby, make sure everyone stays put." He went out the back of the loft, down the ramp, coming out on the other side of the stairs. It was as bad as he thought. John Williams was holding a gun on them. Kate had maneuvered herself between John and Ralph.

"Why John?"

"Why?! You took everything from me. Everything. I've lost my company. I'll lose the house, the house my father built. The house I was born in. It will be gone all gone."

Kate could feel it. She knew he was there without looking. He had her back. She tried to keep John's attention, hoping Cabe would have a shot. "John, you'll have enough to start over."

"How? You got my licenses pulled! How am I supposed to start over without a job!"

"John, we couldn't let you do this to someone else."

"Who the hell made you my judge, jury and executioner?!"

"You and Joan will be able to go on. You will have enough to start over."

"Where? In some suburban tract house? Get a job at the mall? And what was my mother supposed to do?"

"Your mother is the strongest woman I know."

"She's dead!"

"What? What happened?"

"You happened that's what. She said she wouldn't give up her house and her friends. She said she couldn't live with the shame. The shame of having a son being such a failure."

"Oh, John."

"She killed herself!" he screamed. "She took a bottle of pills." Then he got very still. "Don't think I don't know you're there, cop. You move and their both dead."

Cabe called out, "Williams, you're done. You know that. All you can do now is get out of here in one piece."

John turned his head to face Cabe, without moving his gun. "What makes you think I planned on getting out of here?"

And the world exploded.

Cabe fired, two shots, center mass. As John fell his hand contracted and the gun fired a wild shot. Cabe ran to John's side and kicked the gun away from John's body. "I told you it was a guarantee." He turned and saw Kate had fallen on Ralph, covering him with her body. He heard Paige screaming for her son and Ralph call out to his mother. Then he saw the red spreading across her back.

"Kate!" Cabe screamed. "Doc!" He was vaguely aware of the sound of feet running down stairs. He rolled Kate on her back to allow Ralph to get to his feet. Toby fell to his knees and began putting pressure on the wound.

"Ralph!" Paige pulled her son into her arms. She ran her hands over him to verify the blood on him was not his own.

Kate moaned.

Cabe threw his phone at Walter. "Call it in. Officer Down. Shooter dead. Scene secured. Got it?"

"Got it." He replied.

Cabe saw the blood pumping out of her shoulder. "Sweetheart, talk to me!"

"Ralph?" she asked.

He walked to her side a tear running down his cheek. "I'm here," he said in a weak voice.

"Are you ok?" she asked.

He nodded. "I'm so sorry, Kate. You got hurt because of me."

Kate gave him a strained smile. "It's not your fault." She turned to Cabe trying to squeeze his hand. "It's not your fault either." She gave him a soft smile and whispered "I love you." She closed her eyes and her hand slipped from his.

"Kate, no!" he screamed.

Toby check her carotid. "Crap!" He started chest compressions and yelled for Happy to start mouth to mouth.

Happy put a hand on Cabe's shoulder to move him aside. "Don't worry boss. We got this."

Cabe couldn't believe this was happening. He couldn't lose her. He watched Paige and Sly comforting Ralph, Walter calling 911 and then Cooper, and Toby and Happy working on Kate. All he was responsible for was the dead guy on the other side of the room. In his entire life, he'd never felt so useless.

Toby yelled at Kate while he pumped on her chest, "Come on Riley! You're tougher than this. Don't you dare do this!" He checked her pulse. "Now that's what I'm talking about." He pulled out his Swiss army knife and began slicing Kate's blouse from her

shoulder. Blood continue to flow from her wound. "Ah, geez. Happy, go get your blowtorch."

"What the hell are you doing?" Cabe yelled.

Happy lit the torch and Toby held the edge of his knife to the flame. "I think the bullet nicked the subclavian artery. I have to cauterize the wound or she'll bleed out before the ambulance gets here." Toby opened the wound wide enough to touch the heated knife to the artery. After what seemed like forever to Cabe but was probably less than a minute, Toby removed the knife. Cabe could see the flow of blood had slowed.

Cabe became aware of sirens, lots of them responding to the officer down call. For Kate, he would have called in an army. He heard doors slam and a few seconds later a team of EMT's ran into the garage with their kits and a gurney. Toby explained Kate's condition and the nature of the wound.

"We'll take it from here, doctor."

It was only then Toby let go of Kate and stood up. He was drenched in her blood. A detective asked Cabe what happened. He flashed his badge and gave them a cursory overview. Mad man threatens his partner and a child. He takes him out, but the shooter fired as he was going down. His partner was hit. Any more than that would have to wait. Cabe moved to follow Kate into the ambulance when the detective made the mistake of trying to stop him.

"I don't care if you are Homeland. I've got a dead guy and I need answers." Cabe was a split second from decking the guy when Walter stepped in.

"I'm Walter O'Brien. We work with Agent Gallo and Homeland Security. Assistant Homeland Director Cooper will be here any minute now. She said to tell you and I quote "Tell the locals if they touch anything before I get there, they'll work their next shift writing parking tickets." The detective released his grip and Cabe ran to catch up to the gurney. They too, tried to stop him. "Are you the partner?"

"Yes. I'm Homeland and I'm armed. I suggest you not try to stop me." He lowered his voice. "I'm also the fiance." They nodded and he jumped in the ambulance finding a spot where he would be as out of the way as possible in the tight space.

He ran with the EMT's through the Emergency Room entrance. A trauma team was standing by to take the handoff. He tried to follow when the EMT stopped him.

"This is as far as you can go. Agent?"

"Gallo." He said never taking his eyes off the door.

"Agent Gallo. Mercy is the best hospital in the city and she's got the best team working to help her. You have to let them do their job."

He nodded and whispered, "Thank you" before he found a chair and sat down. He replayed the scene over in his head. He hadn't had a clear shot until the last second, had he?" Rationally, he knew he hadn't, but nothing about this situation was rational. A crazy bastard thief robs Kate and then blames her when he gets caught. But Cabe was the one who pushed to get Williams licenses pulled. He'd had to convince Kate it was the right thing to do. If he hadn't pushed would she still be fighting for her life?

He couldn't tell how much time had past but it must have been at least an hour. The team came into the waiting room and sat beside him. Toby, Happy and Ralph had changed into shirts Cabe recognized as belonging to Walter. Ralph's shirt reached his knees. Cabe glanced at Toby. There were still blood stains on his jeans.

Paige touched a hand to his shoulder. "Any news?"

"They took her into surgery. It could be a while."

"Can I get you anything?" she asked.

He looked up and gave her hand a squeeze. "No thanks, kid." He looked over at Ralph hanging back behind his mother. "Are you ok, buddy." He nodded but slipped further behind Paige. "Ralph come here." Ralph didn't move. "Please."

Ralph inched out from behind Paige. "Are you mad at me?" he asked.

"Mad at you? Why would I be mad at you?"

"Because Kate wouldn't have been hurt if she hadn't knocked me down."

Cabe pulled Ralph close. "I want you to listen to me Ralph. None of this, none of it was your fault." Ralph hugged him and Cabe scooped him up into his lap and hugged him tight. He glanced up to see tears in Paige's eyes. Then he glanced over to see something truly amazing. Tears in the eyes of Walter.

She was calling for him and he couldn't find her. He called her name until finally she appeared before him, so pale, crying, and covered in blood. She reached her arms out to him. "Cabe, help me. Please, I need you."

He startled awake. Somehow he had fallen asleep sitting up. It must have happened when the adrenaline wore off. Everyone was still waiting with him, Ralph appeared to be engrossed in coloring. "Good," Cabe thought. "Let the kid be a kid, even in this nightmare."

They had been moved from the ER waiting room to the surgical waiting room. The ER was crazy busy, people coming and going, hurt, crying, yelling they'd been waiting too long. The surgical waiting room was still full of people, but it was quiet, save for a TV mounted on the wall delivering the noon news.

Paige sat next to him "Did you manage to get any rest?"

"A little. Have you heard anything?"

She just shook her head.

He looked at his watch. It was only noon. Three hours ago they were celebrating with his family. Now they were waiting to see if she was still alive.

A doctor in scrubs came through the waiting room door. "Agent Riley's family?"

Cabe stood. "Here."

She shook Cabe's hand. "I'm Dr. Hawkins." She pointed to a small room with three small chairs. A room where a lot have bad news had been delivered. "There's a private room over here."

"No thanks. They're all family."

"Agent Riley's surgery went well."

Cabe let out a breath he'd been holding, for what seemed like the entire three hours. "When can I see her?"

"As soon as we move her from recovery to a room. There is one thing I have to ask. Who treated her on site? What I saw wasn't the work of EMT's."

Toby stepped forward. "I did."

"This is Dr. Curtis, a member of our team," said Cabe.

Dr. Hawkins reached out and shook Toby's hand. "Excellent work, doctor. The type of wound she sustained," she shook her head. "She would have never made it."

Cabe couldn't believe how close he'd come to losing her. "So she's going to be alright."

"There is one thing I'm concerned about. She doesn't seem to rallying from the anesthetic as quickly as I would like. She's had a tremendous shock to her system."

"I have an idea," said Toby. "Do you have any extra wide beds for larger patients?"

"Yes, but why?"

"Put her in one of those beds and get her to a private room. I think I know what will bring her around."

"It may take a few hours to get a room."

Toby smiled, "Doctor, do you know who you just operated on?"

The poor doctor was obviously confused. "Agent Riley."

"Agent Kate Riley." Toby indicated to Cabe, "And this is Agent Cabe Gallo." He added with an emphasis on Gallo. Cabe looked at Toby. The doctor wasn't the only one who was confused. "Wait for it," Toby said.

They all saw the moment. "Holy crap, Kate Riley? The donor, Kate Riley."

Toby just nodded.

"And the new wing. Oh, God Agent Gallo. I'm sorry. I was at the gala last week but I didn't put two and two together."

"That's okay doctor. That meant you were concentrating on your work."

"I'll see what I can do," she said before leaving them behind.

They all let out a collective sigh. She'd survived the surgery. Cabe looked at Toby, "Doc, I...what I mean is...ah hell." He pulled Toby in for a tight hug. "Thank you."

All of them lined up for a hug. Walter approached and said, "You shouldn't worry Cabe. Kate has already beaten very heavy odds. Statistically, it's all downhill from here."

"Thank you Walter."

Doctor Hawkins came back into the waiting room. "Agent Riley will be moved into room 425 in the next fifteen minutes." She looked at Toby. "In the bed you requested."

True to her word, Kate was moved to the private room. She seemed small in the large bed. Her shoulder was wrapped with a large dressing. "Okay, Dr. Curtis what do you have in mind?" asked Hawkins.

"First give me a hand and move her to the side of the bed, next to the monitors."

"Toby, what are you are you doing?" asked Paige.

He held up a hand and smiled. "Please, let the genius work."

"Now what," Hawkins asked.

Toby smiled. "Cabe, take off your shoes."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"Just do it, please." Cabe complied. "Now get in bed with her."

The room resounded with many simultaneous "What?!"

"I've been treating Kate for months. Whenever she talks about Cabe her pressure rises, her pulse quickens. Every time. Dr. Hawkins, wouldn't you agree that right now could use a dose of endorphins?"

"Well, I suppose it couldn't hurt. But this is highly unorthodox."

"So is sticking a Swiss army knife in an open wound, but it worked."

Cabe pulled down the safety bar facing him. "Okay, Doc, but at this point I'm pretty ripe."

"Even better. The stronger your distinctive odor the easier it will be for her to sense it. Besides, you look like crap and could use the rest."

Cabe climbed into the bed and laid on his side, careful not to move any of the monitor wires.

"Now just hold her hand. Talk to her. Just the way you would if it was any other night. We're all going to leave." Toby pulled the up the safety bar and grabbed the call button. "Here, use this if you either of you need anything." Toby dimmed the lights and closed the door.

"Like any other night. Yeah right. Okay sweetheart, Toby said I should talk to you. You know what I want to talk about? Our wedding. I think we should have it at the house. Invite the kids, maybe a few friends. That Carolyn, seemed nice."

Cabe talked, whispered and even sang an old Conway Twitty song. He talked about everything he could imagine for an hour until his voice was raw. Until he heard her. It was barely a whisper

"White roses."

"What, sweetheart? Talk to me."

"White roses. I want white roses for the wedding. White roses with green ribbons."

Cabe never felt so relieved in his entire life. "Katie girl, whatever you want I'll see to it." He risked kissing her cheek.

"Ow, God damn this hurts."

He pressed the call button. "I'll get a nurse. They'll give you something for it."

"I'm in the hospital, right." She still hadn't opened her eyes.

"Yeah, you're in Mercy."

"John?"

Cabe squeezed her hand. "Dead."

"You had no choice." She suddenly opened her eyes, "Ralph, how's Ralph?"

"He's ok baby. He's probably in the waiting room with the others."

"They're all here?"

"They have been the whole time."

"Oh, that's nice," she said. "Fuckin' A this hurts."

Cabe chuckled "Is that anyway for a nice Irish girl to talk?"

She managed a small laugh. "Today I get a pass. One more question. If I'm in the hospital, why are you in bed with me?"

"Toby's idea. He thought if I was next to you and kept talking you'd wake up."

Kate smiled. "Clever boy. Everything except the singing. Gallo, you really suck."

Cabe started laughing. He couldn't stop, until he started crying.

Kate squeezed his hand. "Cabe it's okay. I'm okay."

"I'm sorry Katie, so sorry."

"What are you sorry about?"

"I couldn't stop him."

"Cabe, I was there. I knew you were on the ramp. You had no shot, not until he moved. Otherwise you could have hit me or Ralph."

"I hate that I couldn't protect you, protect Ralph."

"You did. You stopped him before he could kill us both. That was his plan. Suicide by cop but not before taking as many of us as he could with him."

The nurse walked in as saw Cabe in bed with her new patient. "What the hell?"

Cabe looked at the nurse and smiled. "Doctor's orders."

Now it was Kate's turn to laugh.

Cabe left Kate while the nurse checked her vitals. He stood at the entrance to the waiting room. There they all were, waiting. "She's awake."

"That's great," said Paige.

"Can we see her?" asked Sly. He was holding several Super Fun guy balloons.

"I think a quick visit will be okay." They followed him to Kate's room, just as the nurse was leaving."

"I know she's in pain. Can you give her something?"

"Dr. Hawkins left orders. I'll take care of it."

Cabe opened the door and the all filed in.

"Hi guys," she said with a forced smile. She looked at Sly "You brought me balloons? Thank you Sylvester."

"How are you feeling?" asked Toby.

"All things considered, I'm okay." She noticed Ralph stand close to his mother. "Hey buddy. How are you doing?"

"I was upset for a while but Walter helped." Cabe and Kate both looked toward Walter, hanging back. "I was upset because you got hurt protecting me but then he explained biological imperative and I was better."

"Biological imperative?" asked Cabe.

"It's what's hard wired into us. The needs of a species to ensure its survival. In your case, to protect the young. He said you couldn't have changed what you did even if you wanted. Walter said he was sure you wouldn't have wanted to."

Kate smiled up at Walter. "He was right."

"We should let Kate get some rest," said Toby.

"Okay, but we'll be back later." Said Sylvester. He tied the balloons to her IV pole.

"Thanks everyone." Said Kate. "Toby, can you come here?" He walked to the side of her bed." A little closer." He bent down and she kissed his cheek. "Good work, Doc. Thank you." He smiled and took Happy by the hand as they left with Sly.

Paige came to her side, her eyes filled with tears. "You saved my son. I don't have words for this."

Kate smiled. "You're welcome."

Paige guided Ralph out the door leaving Walter alone with them.

"Kate, I know we didn't start off well, but what you did, you were willing to sacrifice yourself for Ralph. You are very brave."

"Thank you Walter. Could you do me a favor? Will you give Cabe a ride home?"

"Sure." said Walter

"No, I'm staying here."

"That nice nurse is coming back any minute with some first class drugs. I will be out cold."

"I'm staying. If something..."

"Nothing's going to happen except me sleeping. Walter can take you to the garage if you don't want to go home. You can get some sleep in the loft. It's only ten minutes from here."

"I don't know."

"Gallo, you look like crap. You're not doing either of us any good if you don't get some rest."

He shook his head and sighed. He knew better than to argue with her. "Okay, but if you need anything call me."

"I promise, now go."

Cabe leaned over the bed and kissed her. "I love you, Katie girl."

"I love you too."

Cabe closed the door behind him as he left. Kate closed her eyes. Now it was her turn to cry.

Cabe saw the aftermath in the garage. Remnants of the EMT's work on Kate. Happy's blow torch still on the ground. He smiled to himself. Happy must have been really worried if she hadn't put away her torch.

"I'm going to check the messages," said Walter. "Why don't you go upstairs and lie down. Kate's right. You look like crap."

Cabe nodded. "Ok kid." He climbed back the ramp and into the loft. Everything was still there. Of course it was. He didn't know what he expected. The impressive spread of breakfast food was ice cold. The cake was still there, as if nothing had happened. As if nothing had changed. As if he hadn't watched her die on the garage floor only to be brought back by Toby.

As if he hadn't failed.

It was his job to protect. He was what he'd spent his whole life doing, protecting people he didn't know. Today, when it mattered most, he failed. He'd pushed too far getting Kate to agree with having Williams licenses pulled. Williams snapped and took it out on Kate. And Ralph. Ralph was now burdened with a memory he should have prevented. He looked up and saw the sign. "Congratulations" He couldn't stand it anymore. He ripped the sign down. He pushed the food off the table, smashed the cake. He became aware of a sound. It was his own voice. He was screaming. He looked up and saw Walter standing at the door. He moved forward and stood in front of him. He saw a tear fall from Walter's eye. He said to him the only thing that mattered.

"I understand." Walter reached out to Cabe and pulled him to a close hug. Every last bit of control he had deserted him. He wept in the arms of his son.

"It was quite a day," said Paige going through paperwork trying to pretend it was just another Saturday.

"Yes, it was. How's Ralph?" asked Walter. He looked over at Ralph who was intent on coloring.

"He seems okay. What you said to him really helped." she reached out and touched his arm. "Thank you for that."

Walter nodded. "You're welcome." He looked up toward the loft where Cabe was still sleeping. "He had an outburst ."

Paige set down her papers . "What kind of outburst?"

"He trashed the loft. Threw the food on the floor. Ripped the sign down." Walter looked like he always did when he was embracing a new concept. "He started screaming."

"Was he okay?"

"Yes. I ran upstairs and he saw me. Paige, I don't understand my reaction. I started to cry. I haven't cried since Meghan died. It was as if his pain was causing me pain."

Paige went very still. "What happened."

"I hugged him and I told him I understood." He smiled at Paige. "And I wasn't just saying it. I think I do understand. She's quite extraordinary, isn't she?"

"Yes, yes she is."

Walter pulled her farther into the office and closed the door. "She threw herself on Ralph, knowing she could be killed."

"I know," Paige said softly.

He looked through the window and saw Ralph examining his art work. "If anything had happened to him...I just can't imagine it."

Paige brushed away a tear from her face. She had no words for him, so she put her arms around him and hugged him. She was surprised when he returned the hug. Then he ran his hands up her back.

"Paige," he whispered. He gave her the softest of kisses then pulled back to see her . All she did was smile. "Paige, I understand because of you."

Cabe had never been so tired, not even after Camp Lejeune training. He thought about last night and how he'd lost it. He thought about Walter exhibiting more kindness and humanity than he'd ever seen from him. He tried to help clean up the mess he'd made in the loft, but Walter insisted he go to bed claiming with a smile that he didn't want Kate to be angry with him.

Since he didn't have the energy to argue he agreed to lay down. It had been about four pm and he made Walter promise to wake him at six. He looked at his watch, it said seven.

"Damn it , Walter," he said to no one as he sat up and put his feet on the floor. He'd grab a shower and maybe steal one of Walter's shirts and get back to the hospital. The loft was clean and he hadn't heard a thing. "I must have been out of it."

Then he realized the light was all wrong. He looked at his cell phone to see if Kate had called. He couldn't have slept through her call, he'd have heard it. At least that's what he told himself. Then he saw the time. It was seven a.m. He'd slept for fifteen hours. He ran to the stairs. He was going to have to kill him.

"Walter, what the hell?!" I told you to wake me!"

Walter held up his phone. "You have a message." He hit play.

"Are you recording?" It was Kate. "Alright Gallo, listen up. You are in the process of yelling at Walter. Stop. He had strict orders from me not to wake you. I told him to let you wake up on your own. It was a hell of a day for all of us and you needed your sleep." Her voice softened. "Cabe, I swear if there had been a problem he would have woken you. Listening to this indicates that I have had an incident free night and right now I am probably eating a crappy breakfast."

Cabe had to smile. That was his Katie girl.

"Now get yourself some of the tar you call coffee, grab a shower and then come see me. I'm not going anywhere. Okay Walter, I'm done." The recording stopped.

"Damn that woman," he said with a bit of a smile. "She makes me crazy."

"And you love every minute of it." Said Paige

Cabe smiled. "More than I could ever say."

Cabe showered and searched the office for some fresh clothes.. He found some of his dry cleaning in the closet, and put on a fresh shirt and pants. He was met by Ralph at the foot of the stairs.

"Can we come too? I have something for Kate. And you too." He held a rolled up scroll of paper.

"Oh, sweetheart I think we should let Cabe have some alone time with Kate."

The look on Ralph's face just about broke his heart . "No, Paige. That would be great. I know Kate will love to see you all." He leaned down to Ralph. "I think you're her favorite. Don't tell anyone."

"Hey, where's everyone else?" Cabe asked.

"Happy and Toby are at the hospital. Sly went home to get some rest. He had the first shift."

Cabe smiled. They hadn't left her alone. He waved at Walter and Paige. "Come on, I'll drive but I have to make a quick stop first."

Paige gasped. Cabe got back in the car with a magnificent bouquet of white roses. The stems were wrapped with green ribbons. "Oh, Cabe these are gorgeous."

"Thanks." He had given the florist an extra fifty to stop what he was doing and put together the bouquet. If it made Kate smile it was worth it.

Happy and Toby were reading magazines, while Kate slept. "How is she Doc?" Cabe asked quietly.

Toby smiled. "I've checked her chart, monitored her vitals. She's good. It will take time and some bitchin rehab but she's going to be fine."

"Thanks Doc. And thanks both of you for staying with her. I really appreciate it."

Happy smiled. "No problem, boss."

"You two should go home and get some sleep." Cabe sat in the chair Toby had vacated.

"Do I smell flowers?" Kate asked in a sleepy voice.

"Hi sweetheart." He leaned down and kissed her forehead. "How are you feeling?"

"I'm fine." She said moving the adjustable bed so she could sit up.

"I'd thought I'd do a dry run for the wedding."

"Oh Cabe, they're perfect." She took a deep breath of the scent and fingered the long green ribbons.

"I have something for you too," said Ralph.

"Oh boy presents! I love presents!" said Kate.

Ralph stepped forward and handed her the scroll he'd been working on. Kate gasped. He'd drawn and colored a picture of all of them. Cabe and Kate were in the center and the team was lined up on either of them. Sly was wearing his Super Fun Guy costume, Happy had a welder's helmet in her hand. Toby was wearing his leather jacket and hat. Walter was curly haired and wearing a tie. Ralph was standing with Paige holding her hand. It was clearly the art work of a ten-year-old but it was beautiful. Kate had Monets, McClarens, even a VanGogh. No painting she's ever seen except Cabe's portrait of her, meant more.

Cabe looked at Kate with tears in his eyes. "I'm getting to be a weepy old lady," he thought. "Son, this is wonderful."

"I asked Mom if you got gifts at an engagement party. She said, yes but I didn't know what to get you. Mom said handmade gifts were appropriate so long as they were from the heart."

Cabe looked at the representation of Kate and himself. They were both wearing suits and badges. Kate had a ring. They were holding hands. He saw something around both of their necks, "What's this?"

"Oh, I added them today. They're capes."

"Capes?" asked Kate.

"You jumped in front of me to save me. And, well, Cabe is always doing brave things. So I made you superheroes. Superheroes have capes."

"Thank you, buddy." Cabe said.

"It's beautiful, Ralph. Perfect," said Kate.

They were rewarded with a big smile. "Hey Ralph, can you come closer. A little closer, I want to tell you a secret."

Ralph got close to the safety rail. Kate leaned over as best she could and whispered, "I love you, Ralph."

Paige, always the emotional barometer, knew they needed a minute. "Hey Ralph, why don't we go to the cafeteria. We could get Kate a milkshake."

"Oh God, yes," said Kate. "Chocolate."

"A milkshake?" asked Walter. "It's ten a.m."

Kate smiled. "Walter, just like cake, there is no wrong time for a milkshake. Trust me. I'm old, I know stuff."

"Cabe, coffee?"

"Yes please."

Cabe looked at Kate. They had both been overwhelmed by Ralph's gift. "This is amazing," he said.

"I don't know what to say." Kate started crying.

"Katie what's wrong?"

"I don't feel like a superhero. I brought this down on them. How can they forgive me? How can Ralph draw this for us after what he went through?"

He reached for her hand. "I know what you mean. I don't feel like a superhero either. But that's how he sees us and I guess that's pretty great." He put his hand to her cheek and turned her to face him. "I want you to listen up, Katie girl. None of this was your fault. None of it." He tried to find the words. "We've spent our careers putting ourselves at risk. We did the job because we loved it, because we wanted to make a difference. We weren't in it for the medals."

Kate smiled and nodded.

He touched the picture. "Well, I can't think of a better medal than this."

Kate finished her milkshake as Cabe said goodbye to the rest of the team. All they both wanted now was some peace and quiet.

"How are you feeling?" Cabe asked.

"Better. Once they got rid of that obnoxious surgical bandage it got a lot easier to move."

"Not too much." He said. "You don't want to pop any stitches."

A knock at her door had Kate rolling her eyes. "Now what?" she whispered. "Come in."

A tall grey haired man with a slender build came in an excellent tailor came in. "Kate. My God. It's true. I was out of town last week for my daughter's wedding. That's why I missed the gala."

Kate would introduce him, if only to get him to take a breath. "Cabe, this is Dr. Henry Wilson chief of staff. Henry, this is Special Agent Cabe Gallo, my fiance."

Cabe saw the flash of recognition when Wilson put his name together with the new pediatric wing.

"I got the report of an agent recovering from a gunshot wound, but I had no idea it was you."

Another knock on the door and this time Cabe turned so Wilson couldn't see his eyes roll.

"Dr. Hawkins, just the woman I want to see. I want to get out of here, today."

"Excuse me?" said Cabe.

Kate saw the look in his eyes and knew they were about to have a conversation. "Dr. Hawkins did you get the results of all those tests you ran this morning?"

"Yes. You're doing very well. You'll need physical therapy, but other than that I expect a full recovery."

"Is there any reason I can't recover at home?"

"Well, you will need to keep an eye on the incision, change bandages. I'll want you to start moving the shoulder as soon as possible. You'll need trained help for that."

Cabe looked at her as if to say, "See. You're crazy." She just smiled.

"Henry I need a favor. Can you find me a private duty nurse with the qualifications Dr. Hawkins and Gallo here would require?"

"Of course."

"I don't know," said Hawkins.

"Henry, you've been to my house. Can you reassure her that it is suitable for my recovery and that I have the resources to hire any help I require?"

Henry smiled at Hawkins. "It's a very nice house."

"Dr. Hawkins, a hospital is busy and loud. Not a very restful place. I live at the beach where it's quiet and peaceful."

"Well I suppose it would be okay. You must call me if you have any problems."

"Will do, doctor." Kate replied.

"I'll get working on that nurse," said Henry as Cabe closed the door behind both of them.

"Have you totally lost your mind, woman?"

"Henry and Dr. Hawkins think it's a fine idea."

"You just gave them ten million bucks. They'd let you skateboard in the halls if you wanted ."

"Henry's a bit of a tool, but he's also an excellent cardiac surgeon. He would never jeopardize a patient's health."

"This is crazy." He said "You were shot."

"I'm aware," said Kate.

"I watched you die! You died right there on the garage floor."

Kate reached over with her good arm and pulled down the chair rail. "Get in here."

"Kate."

"Please, Cabe."

He pulled off his shoes and climbed into the extra wide bed. "I watched you die," he whispered.

She pulled him close and kissed him. "I know this has been incredibly painful for you. But I swear I'm not trying to be difficult. I promise to hire a nurse to be there when you can't . I promise if there is a problem I will call the doctor or come back to the hospital. I just want to go home. I want to sleep in our bed and listen to the ocean."

Cabe sighed and Kate knew she'd won. "You're going to be the death of me woman."

She smiled and pulled him in for a kiss. Oh, no. I plan on keeping you very healthy. I have many enthusiastically decadent plans for you."

Cabe finally smiled. "Oh yeah?"

"Yeah. Starting with you marrying me."

"Marrying you is enthusiastically decadent?"

"It is the way we're going to do it."

## Chapter Ten

Cabe couldn't help but think something was wrong. They'd been home a week and Kate seemed to have better movement in her shoulder. She'd been true to her word and had followed her doctor's orders. She'd hired Kathy Morales, A nurse therapist to be with her during the day. There was every indication that Kate was fast on her way to full recovery. But something was wrong.

He closed the door and tossed his keys on the side table. He did a quick pass through the mail and found nothing that couldn't wait.

"Hi Mr. Gallo."

"Hello Kathy. How's she doing?" He saw Kate sitting on the deck. She was wearing shorts, a tank top and despite the warm weather, a hoodie.

"She's good. Working hard to get better," she said but did not look as pleased as she should.

"Tell me what's wrong."

"Medically, not a thing. Maybe she's pushing too hard. I'm not sure."

"I'll talk to her." He set his hand on her shoulder.

"Thanks Mr. Gallo." She grabbed her purse. "I'll see you tomorrow, Ms. Riley," she called out.

"Kate. The name's Kate." She replied.

She smiled and looked at Cabe. "I'll see you tomorrow."

He took off his jacket and walked out to the deck. "Hey there." He leaned in and gave her a kiss.

Kate pulled her beach jacket over her shoulders. "Hi. How's the team?"

"Fine. Quiet day. How about you?"

"I'm fine. I'm sure Kathy told you."

"She did. Hey, how about if I change and we go for a swim."

She tugged her jacket tighter. No. I'm a bit tired. I've been working the shoulder pretty hard."

"Okay. I'll just go change."

She smiled up at him. It wasn't his Katie girl's smile. It was false and strained.

"Tell me what's wrong."

"Nothing." She pulled her arms close to her sides.

"Bull." He looked at her and it suddenly made sense. He took her hand. "Come with me."

"I'm fine."

"Now, Riley. Move your ass."

She followed him into their bedroom and he closed the door. "It's the scar, isn't it?" he said.

Kate sat on the bed. The look on her face told him he was right.

"This is why you've been sleeping in pajamas. Kate Riley, don't you know this by now? I love you, not your parts."

A tear slid down her cheek. "I know it's vain but when I finally saw it was shocking. It's so red and nasty."

He sat down next to her and took her hand.

"It's not just that. When I look at it, I can feel it happening. I feel the pain all over again."

"Katie, I understand, believe me I do." He stood and started to strip off his clothes.

"What are you doing?"

He didn't speak until he sat back down next to her in nothing but his boxers. "Kate, I understand." He took her hand and ran it over a hairline scar above his left eye. "This was from a terrorist funding antiquities dealer in Djibouti. He had a wicked left hook and enjoyed using it." He moved her hand to rounded scars on his upper thigh. "These were from a sniper in Bosnia." He moved her hand to a burn on his arm. He took a deep breath. "That was from my last assignment as a Marine. We were on an drilling platform in the Gulf. The mission went south." He closed his eyes against the memories. "I made it. No one else did."

"Cabe, I don't know what to say."

"I don't want you to say anything. I know what it feels like. I know sometimes when I look at them it feel like it's happening all over again. But I also know that, in time, that feeling will fade, along with the scar." He reached for her jacket but she grabbed his hand.

"Kate, you never have to hide from me. Never." She released his hand and he slipped the jacket off her shoulders. She was right, it was nasty, ragged and red. He looked at her and smiled. "There's something else that happens. Sometimes when I look at my scars I can feel a little bit of pride." She looked like she didn't believe him. "We got these scars in service. We were protecting people. We were trying to do the right thing."

She finally gave him a small smile.

"And do you know what else I know? I know there is nothing, not this scar, nothing that would ever stop me from wanting you." He leaned in and kissed her. "I will never do anything to hurt you, never anything you don't want," he whispered. He pulled back and waited. Kate leaned in and kissed him.

"I love you," she said

"I love you too, baby, so much."

She kissed him again, this time deepening it, brushing her hand over his five o'clock shadow. "I've missed you."

He smiled and reached for the edge of her tank top. She hesitated. "I'll be careful, sweetheart. I promise." He unhooked her bra brushing his hand across her breasts. He slid down her shorts and panties. He and dropped his boxers." Lay down. I want you to be comfortable." She moved to the head of the bed and waited. He took it slow, kissing, tasting, nipping. He'd spent months learning everything that she liked and he would do anything to make this right. She started moving, gasping. He caressed her and knew she was ready. He kissed her. "Katie girl, you may still doubt what I said, but you can't doubt this." He took her hand and slipped it down. She could feel how much he wanted her. "You can't doubt that."

"I guess not," she smiled.

"I promise to be careful. Promise to tell me if you're hurting."

"I promise." She kissed him with more fire than she had since the shooting. "Cabe, I need you."

He positioned himself carefully. Took her slowly, letting her guide the moment. And they found what they needed, together.

Kate was curled on her good side as Cabe held her. He placed a soft kiss on her wound. "I love you, Katie girl."

"I love you too."

"Just one thing," Cabe said.

"What?" she asked.

"No more pajamas."

The sound of her laughter told him they were going to be fine.

Cabe came home from work and tossed his keys on the sideboard. He flipped through the mail to see if anything required attention. Kate was sitting on the couch so engrossed in her computer he didn't know he was home.

Kate had finished with the daily therapy visits but ramped up her swimming to continue her progress. She worked at home working on code projects that he barely understood. He went to work at the garage, keeping the team in check and monitoring the occasional government job. He thought how regular life seemed now. Or as regular as life could be in a house like this. A big difference from the two floor walk up in Brooklyn. What would his grandparents say about all of it?

Their life had become calm and orderly, that is if you didn't count the wedding plans. Kate had freaked at the idea of arranging everything. That was until Cabe suggested she call her friend Carolyn for help. Carolyn jumped at the idea and all Kate had to worry about now was her dress and the guest list. There was just one more hurdle to jump before the wedding and it was time he man up.

"I'm home," Cabe said.

She glanced up from her laptop. She wore a tank top and shorts, no makeup and her hair was twisted in a messy ponytail. She's jammed her bare feet under the sofa cushion. In other words, beautiful.

"Hey, is it five already?"

"Closer to seven."

"Oh crap, I'm sorry. I was going to cook, but I ..."

"Got caught up in the work, yeah I'm familiar with that." He smiled and gave her a kiss. "How about I order take out? Roberto's?"

"Ah! Perfect. Don't forget my garlic knots." She said as she went back to her work."

Cabe pulled out his credit card and place the order. Their usual, with garlic knots. He looked at his card and looked back at Kate. "Now or never Gallo."

"What are you working on?"

"It's a project Walter asked me to take a look at."

"Really?"

"Yeah, it's a fascinating code. Really beautiful."

"Lines of code are beautiful?"

"Oh, yeah. But you don't look like you want to talk code." She closed her laptop.  
"What's up, Gallo?"

He coughed and loosened his tie. "Damn it," he thought, "This shouldn't be so hard." He sat down next to her on the couch. "Ok, well, we're getting married in a couple of weeks.."

"Yes," she said "I have the dress to prove it, and?" Then she gasped. "Oh God. Are you getting cold feet?"

He covered her hand with his. "No sweetheart, it's just with all things considered, I thought there'd be paperwork you'd need me to sign."

Kate put her computer aside. "Actually, there is some paperwork I need to go over with you. I've been putting it off because I hate this stuff, but it needs to be done. It's in my office."

Cabe took a breath and followed her. He expected this so it was just a matter of getting it over with. She pulled a thick file from her desk and sat down on the couch. He sat next to her as she pulled out the first of what appeared to be several bound reports.

"This is a listing of all the assets and accounts."

Cabe looked at the cover page with its net worth total and blew out a long breath.  
"Wow."

"Rimark had a good quarter. Just take a look at it when you can." She handed him a second folder. "These are the charitable foundations. Of course the hospital is primary but there are a few others I've been active in."

She handed him a form with several sign here stickers. This was what he was expecting. "This form will give you access to all the accounts, authority to act on my behalf, all that sort of thing."

Okay, not what he's been expecting.

"I've already change my will and insurance policies making you the primary beneficiary. Those didn't need your signature."

He had a buzzing in his head but Kate continued like this was any other conversation. She handed him an envelope. In it was a black American Express card with his name on it. "This house and all that goes with it can be pretty expensive. I could never

maintain it on my agent's salary. Things come up. This card is for that, or anything else that comes up.

"I've never seen a black American Express card." He tried to lighten the conversation, at least for himself. He laughed. "What's the limit on a card like this?"

She reached for another document in the file. "Two hundred and fifty. Now this is.."

He cut her off. "I'm assuming that's not two hundred and fifty dollars."

She shook her head.

"Two hundred fifty thousand?"

She nodded. He set it on the coffee table like it was on fire.

Kate went back to the last document. She took a breath. "This is the deed to the house. Signing this will make you co-owner."

He just stared at her. "This is not what I was expecting."

She looked confused, then startled. "Oh, you thought I'd want a pre-nup?"

"Yeah!"

"Oh. Not gonna happen. Cabe, I know this is a lot of paperwork. Review it when you can."

He stood and looked around the room. There was a Monet hanging over her desk and a boy from Bensonhurst in her bed. He needed air. "I'm going for a ride."

"What?" said Kate as he bolted out of the room.

He'd changed into jeans in record time. He jumped on his bike and headed up the PCH. Air. He needed air. That's all. He just needed to clear his head. He rode for an hour before his brain would let him go back to what happened in Kate's office. He was prepared for her to protect her assets. He wasn't prepared for what did happen. He'd spent months with Kate. She wasn't like a lot of the pretentious country club types he'd met at the gala. She'd been a kick ass agent. She fought for the same things he did. She cared about his team as much as he did. She cared more for her charities than her art collection. "So what the hell is your problem, Gallo?" he said to himself.

He'd been driving about an hour when he spotted a diner and pulled in. It was one of the silver metal types, that specialized in hamburgers and fries and the blue plate special.

"Hey, what can I get you, sweetie?" asked the smiling waitress. Her name tag said Dorothy. Cabe guessed her to be in her early forties.

"Just coffee for now, thanks Dorothy."

"I'll be right back and you think on what else I can get you."

Cabe smiled. Flirting was probably how she made tips. Most waitresses made a lot less than minimum wage. He'd be sure to at least make her night. An old man came in and sat at the end of the counter. Under his ancient clothes he looked thin, too thin. His hands shook as he reached for a napkin to wipe his nose.

"Hey Sam, I'll be right there with your pie," said Dorothy as she brought Cabe his coffee.

"What's his story?" Cabe asked and nodded toward the old man.

"That's Sam. He comes in once a week for our lemon meringue pie. He's been coming here for years. He used to come with his wife but she passed."

"He looks like he could use more than a piece of pie."

"I think it's all he can manage. Social Security doesn't go that far."

"I'll be right with you Sam," Dorothy called.

"Who's that young buck flirting with my girl?" the old man smiled.

"Name's Gallo sir. And don't worry, I'll mind my manners."

"You better," he smiled.

Cabe lowered his voice. "Dorothy, get him a meal. Make sure he gets seconds if he wants, and his pie." He looked at her and nodded.

"Well aren't you the sweetest thing?"

"And don't tell him. Say it was because he's been coming here for so long."

"Will do," she smiled and winked. Yeah, he was going to have to give her a good tip.

He sipped his coffee and watched the pleasure on the old man's as Dorothy put a small strip steak in front of him. There were mashed potatoes, corn and rolls. She kept Cabe's coffee filled while he watched the old man demolish the meal. Then Dorothy brought Sam an enormous slice of lemon meringue.

She topped of his coffee and whispered. "It was a nice thing you did."

Cabe ignored the compliment. "How long you worked here?"

She stopped and sighed. "Twenty years. I don't know how time got away from me like that."

"Are you married?"

She gave him a cheeky grin, "You asking?"

He put up his hands and smiled. "Just making conversation."

She shook her head. She walked over to Sam as she brought him another piece of pie. "No, it's me and Sam. Isn't that right honey?"

"Is he flirting with you again? Do I have to put you in your place, young man?"

"No sir." Cabe stood and smiled. "Actually sir, I'm getting married in two weeks."

"Nice girl?" Sam asked.

He looked at the old man and nodded. "The best girl I know. And I should be getting home to her." He reached in to his wallet and handed Dorothy a fifty for his two dollar coffee. Her surprise turned to shock when he handed her a second fifty. "For Sam's tab. Keep the change."

He got on his bike and headed back down the PCH. He just hoped she didn't kill him before he could say he was sorry.

Cabe walked and found Kate asleep on the couch, her tablet glowing in her lap. He touched her arm. "I'm home."

At first she smiled. Then she remembered how angry she was. "So I see. There's some calzone in the fridge."

"Great I'm starving."

"Get a plate. I'll nuke it."

"You don't have to."

"Just sit down."

"She's really pissed." He thought. Kate put the reheated calzone and an ice tea in front of him."

"Thank you."

"You're welcome." She wiped her hands and sat next to him with her own glass of tea.

He ate in the awkward silence, "Kate, I.."

She held up her hand. "Finish your dinner."

When he was done she took his plate and put it in the dishwasher. He was surprised she didn't throw it at his head. She sat back down and sipped her tea. "You've been gone for hours. Do you know how worried I was?" Her voice was slow and quiet. He'd almost wish she'd thrown the plate.

"I'll try to explain."

"Take a shot."

"Those papers, the ramifications overwhelmed me. I grew up in a two bedroom apartment. Now I live here. Having me sign those papers would make me..."

"Rich. You can say it Cabe. It's not a dirty word. This is the elephant I was talking about." She stood and started pacing the kitchen. "I don't have to apologize for having money."

"Of course not.."

She put up her hand to stop him. "This is me talking, you listening." She was pulling out the Irish temper. This he could handle. Kate quiet was almost as bad as Kate crying.

"My software designs helped build an international company. I worked hard and I am allowed to enjoy my nice house. I can do what I want with my money. I get that it's a lot to take in. I get that. That's not why I'm so furious with you."

"It's not?"

"No jackass, it's not. I'm angry because you walked out. That's not us Cabe. We don't run. You told me I was to never hide from you. Well, I don't, not anymore. But you don't get to either. If we have a problem you stand there and fucking talk to me!"

He looked at her and smiled. She was fighting for him, again. God, he loved her.

"Why are you smiling?"

"Because you're right. I was wrong."

She stopped her pacing and stared, "Excuse me?"

"You're right, I was wrong."

"I just spent three hours working up this head of steam and that's it?"

He walked to her side. "Yeah, that's it. I'll sign the papers."

"Why? Why now and not three hours ago?"

"I stopped at a diner on the PCH. Nothing fancy, just coffee and burgers." He smiled  
"And pie."

"Pie? You're losing me here, Gallo."

"This old man came in, really thin, didn't look like he'd had a decent meal in forever.  
So I had the waitress set him up with a steak dinner."

"And pie?"

He smiled. "Yeah, lemon meringue."

"I told the waitress not to tell him it was from me. You should have seen him, Kate.  
He looked like it was Christmas." He wrapped his arms around her." I get it now."

"Get what?"

"Why you use your money the way you do. I never really thought about it before.  
It does good for people but it's also a hell of a lot of fun."

She smiled at him.

"I want to ask you why you did it, why you had the papers drawn up? Your lawyers  
must have hated it."

She laughed. "Oh, they think I'm insane. But they work for me, not the other way  
around." She looked at him for a moment. "Cabe, the shooting taught me that something  
could happen when we least expect it. All I'm doing is making sure if something ever does  
happen that there would be no doubts about my intentions or your rights."

"It's a hell of a lot of money."

"Yeah it is. Cabe, but I trust you, body and soul. Why wouldn't I trust you with  
money?"

"I love you Katie, girl."

"I love you too."

She got a wicked grin on her face and he thought "Oh, I'm in trouble."

"A fight this intense requires spectacular make up sex," she said.

"Spectacular?"

"Yeah."

He kissed his best girl and said. "Challenge accepted."

## Chapter Eleven

Cabe pulled into the garage after a long day at Homeland. Who spends three hours talking about electronic forms? Apparently a desk jockey named Fred did. Then an hour with Cooper reviewing cases and going over performance reviews of the team. He couldn't wait to pick Kate up and go home. He could feel the swim he'd been thinking about since hour two of his meetings.

Paige met him at the door. "Cabe, thank God."

"What's wrong?"

She pointed to the back of the room. The white board was filled with calculations in two different handwritings. Walter and Kate were standing in front of it debating a section of the work. "Walter had asked Kate to take a look at something he was working on. They haven't taken a break since you left."

"Rabbit hole?" he asked.

"Maybe rabbit hole adjacent. I've been trying to get them to eat lunch for three hours. They keep ignoring me."

He thought for a minute, then smiled. "I've got this." He walked over toward them. "Hey sweetheart. Whatcha doin?"

"Huh? Working." She used her marker to circle a section of numbers. "Here Walter, this is where the problem is."

Walter nodded. "You're right."

"Katie, you need a break." Cabe said.

"I thought you were going to Homeland," she said, never taking her eyes off the board.

"That was five hours ago." He looked over at Paige.

"See what I mean," she said.

Cabe got closer and whispered in Kate's ear. "You know, it's been a while since we've made use of the headboard."

Kate stopped and turned to face him. She had her Irish witch smile. "There's my girl," he said. Kate capped her marker and tossed it at Walter, which he failed to catch.

"I'm out. We can get back to it on Monday."

"What? Why? We're making progress."

"Walter I'm going home to," she smiled at Cabe "To live my life. I suggest you do the same." She nodded toward Paige. "Take a chance Walter." She smiled at Cabe. "You have no idea how good life can be."

Cabe had wanted to stop for food but compromised on take out. He got back in the car with the cheesesteaks and caught Kate on her tablet. "Work no, food yes." He handed her the bag and she reached in and grabbed a couple of fries. He laughed when he heard her stomach grumble.

"Mmmm. I guess I am hungry." She laughed.

"There's something I want to talk about."

"Okay, shoot."

"First, don't you dare eat all the fries before we get home. Again."

"Fine." She closed the bag.

"I want to talk about security. I was reviewing the insurance papers and saw the last appraisal on the art collection. It's worth millions."

She nodded as she snuck another fry. He gave her the Gallo glare and she put the bag down.

"I don't think the security is adequate for the value of the paintings. I'd like to make some changes."

"Okay."

"That's it? Okay?"

"Yeah. You're the security expert. I'm just the computer geek. If you want to make changes, go ahead. No razor wire or attack dogs, but other than that, I'm good."

They pulled into the garage and Kate jumped out with the bag of food. "You eat all the fries and there will be consequences."

She turned and smiled. "Oooo. Promise?"

He shook his head and laughed as he followed her into the kitchen. Kate grabbed plates while he poured them some ice tea. "I'd like to hire the team for the upgrade."

"Okay," she said as she took a bite of her cheesesteak.

"I know they have the skills. Happy's the perfect person build and install it."

"And we can trust them not to set us up for a robbery after they see what they're protecting." She reached for the last fry.

"Exactly." He took a bite of his food and marveled at how normal the scene was. A regular couple eating take out and talking about their day. Except they were talking about protecting a multimillion dollar art collection. "They could start the work while we're on our honeymoon."

"Sounds like a plan," she said.

"There's something else about Happy. I found out her birthday is Saturday. I thought we could do a little something for her."

"We'll have a party. Grill some burgers, cake, the works," she said as she put her empty plate in the dishwasher.

"Aren't you forgetting we're getting married the following weekend."

"And?"

"Isn't that a lot to take on? Don't you have wedding stuff to do? We're going to have fifty people in this house."

"Carolyn is taking care of everything. Her mad party planning skills are her gift to us. I told her what we want and where to send the bills. I've got my dress. Did you have your tux cleaned?"

He nodded and put his plate in the dishwasher.

She slipped her arms around his waist. "Did you make the honeymoon reservations? You still haven't told me where we're going or how to pack."

He placed a kiss on her nose. "I'm not telling until we get to the airport. Pack for warm weather and bring your bathing suit."

"So we're good to go," she smiled. "Tell everyone noon-ish and bring their suits."

"Okay, but I won't tell Happy it's a party for her. I'll call her dad and ask him. There's one more thing."

"Yes?"

"I'm thinking about going overboard."

Maybe this wasn't his best idea. He'd thought it was a good idea when he handed her the tie. Kate had thought it was a great idea judging by her wicked smile. That smile should have been a clue. She now was driving him insane. She was slipping up and down his body, kissing, tasting, nipping. She had taken him to the edge over and over only to pull him back.

"My God, woman. You're driving me insane."

Kate slid up his chest and gave him a kiss only to nip at his lip. "Are you begging, Gallo?"

"Hell yes!"

She gave him that wicked smile and said. "That's all I wanted to know." She finally took him in but moved slowly. Then she started whispering in his ear. Things no good Irish girl should know and no good Italian boy should enjoy. But God, he did. She escalated her words and motion until colors exploded behind his eyes.

Kate was panting, still on top of him. "Well, that was fun."

"You want to a..." He pulled at the tie.

She reached above his head and freed him. In a practiced move, he flipped her on her back, still deep inside her. "I love you," he whispered.

"I love you too."

He tried to move but Kate held him tight. "Oh, no don't move. I love it when we're like this."

"I'm a one hundred and ninety pound dead weight. I must be crushing you."

She kissed him. "No, you're not. You are amazing. You always make me feel so good. It's why I have such a hard time keeping my hands off you."

"I appreciate the sentiment, sweetheart but I'm a fifty seven year old man. This chassis has seen better days." He kissed her. "I'm no Superman."

She smiled. "Oh, baby you are SO much better than Superman."

He laughed out loud. "How's that?"

"Because during the day you fight for Truth," she kiss his neck, "Justice," she kissed his cheek "And the American way." She kissed his lips while she ran her hands down his

back. She whispered in his ear. "It's only when you come home to me that you turn into the Man of Steel." She flexed her internal muscles that still held him tight.

"Holy crap," he sighed.

"Oh, you like that, do you?" She flexed again and again.

"Woman, you are going to be the death of me."

"Should I stop?"

"Hell no!"

"Hey Gallo! Get your ass in here and help me with this cake."

He double checked the setting on the grill Kate bought for the occasion. "You know Riley, that grill is nothing like the hibachi I had on my patio."

"You're clever, you'll figure it out."

"I don't know why you had to make a cake. You could have ordered one."

"I didn't have time for your party but birthday parties have homemade cakes. It's a rule."

"A rule?" he laughed. He got the cooled cake out of the fridge.

"It's my Mom's rule."

He walked over and gave her a quick kiss. Kate really was amazing. Bossy, brilliant, sexy as hell. Here she was making a cake for a girl who probably hadn't ever gotten so much as a birthday card. He followed her directions and filled a decorating tube. She put the last of the icing on the cake. Damn she was cute. Green tank top, blue shorts and her hair in her usual ponytail. Very little makeup.

"Okay Gallo, have at it," she said pointing to the cake.

"Have what?"

"Write Happy Birthday Happy."

"I've never done this before."

She tapped his forehead. "Again, clever boy. You'll figure it out. I want to clean this up before Happy's dad gets here."

He struggled for a minute but got the hang of it. He'd never get a job in a bakery, but the letters were legible. He looked up to see her standing at the sink, watching him.

"What? Is the cake ok?"

"It's fine," she said.

"Then what was the look? Spill it."

She smiled. "I was thinking that you look better in a t-shirt and jeans than any man your age should." She ran her hands up his chest and gave him a quick kiss. She turned back to the sink "I'll finish the ..."

He interrupted her with a searing kiss.

"Not that I'm complaining, but what was that for?"

"For making me feel like Superman."

Patrick Quinn looked uncomfortable sitting on the deck. Cabe understood. It took a while for him not to feel out of place in these surroundings. "Hey Patrick, can you give me a hand with this grill? I just got it and it's intimidating the crap out of me. I can't get it to light."

Patrick smiled. "Sure."

Kate walked out on the deck to find Patrick on his back, examining the grill "Cabe, you're not supposed to make our guests work."

"Oh, I don't mind." He stood up and brushed himself off. "It was a loose fitting. It should be fine now."

"Hey, do you want to man the grill? I'm crap at this sort of thing."

"Sure," he smiled.

"Cabe, no.." Kate started

He pulled her aside. "Katie, he's uncomfortable as hell. He's in an intimidating environment, waiting to give his daughter the party she never had. It's been the only time I've seen him smile since he got here."

Kate smiled. "Okay." The gate buzzer rang. "It's show time."

Cabe and Kate smiled as the team piled through the front door loud and all talking at once. "Hi guys. Why don't you all go out on the deck and I'll bring out some drinks," said Cabe as he nodded to Toby. Toby's instructions were to get Happy to hang back while everyone assembled on the deck.

"I don't see where you're going to be able to put sensors in these door frames."

Happy pointed to locations for the new security system she designed would be placed. "Once I'm done, you won't be able to get a toothpick out of here without an alarm going off."

Toby smiled, "Impressive."

Happy stopped in her tracks when she saw balloons and presents on a table. "Happy Birthday!" they all said together.

"What?" she gasped.

Her father walked over to her and gave her a kiss. "Happy birthday, sweetheart."

"Dad?" "I, I,..." She ran back into the house.

"Let me," Paige said. She found her pacing in the living room.

"That's, That's..."

"A party, for you. Given by all your friends."

"I don't do...balloons. And cake. And presents."

Paige walked over to Happy and put her hands on her shoulders, forcing her to stop pacing. "What you mean is you've never done it before. I know you've never had anyone do something like this for you before, but Happy, you've had three years to get used to the fact that the people out there love you."

Happy looked at Paige as if she'd just told her aliens had landed.

"It's true. We all love you. Your talent, your leather jacket, your snarky comments, all of it. Happy Quinn, everyone on the deck loves you, especially your Dad and especially Toby."

Paige saw a bit of a crack in the emotional dam. "Now suck it up, buttercup and go out there and let those people give you a party."

The party was just what a birthday should be, fun and relaxed. Even Happy loosened up and let loose with some genuine smiles. When the time for presents came around Ralph made her sit in the center of everyone so he could bring her the gifts.

Toby's gift was a new leather jacket. "Sweet," she said. "Thanks Doc."

Walter's gift was a coffee table book detailing the history of Harley Davidson's. "I was unaware they had so long a history. It was interesting."

Happy smiled. Of course he read it before he gave it to her.

Sly gave her a helmet, despite the fact that she'd probably never wear it. "That one has the best safety rating of all helmet in its class."

"That's really thoughtful. Thanks Sly."

Paige gave her the boots she'd admired the last time they were at the mall. Ralph handed her a small scroll. It seemed he'd become fascinated with drawing. Paige was so surprised he was interested in a 'regular kid' activity, she encouraged it. She unrolled the drawing to see it was a drawing of her on her bike. She had to take a second before she

could say, "Thank you, buddy. I love it." She held up the drawing so everyone could see. "I'm sensing a theme."

Her father walked over to her and gave her a small box. Inside was a St. Christopher medal on a gold chain. "I know they demoted him from saint but I thought he might still keep you safe."

She looked up at her father with tears in her eyes.

"Happy birthday, baby."

Happy gave Patrick a big hug and whispered, "Thanks, Dad. I love it. Would you put it on me?" She pulled up her hair while Patrick secured it around her neck. Cabe realized why he'd been so nervous. He wasn't sure she would like his gift.

"Well Cabe, whatcha get me? A new horn for my bike?" She laughed.

Cabe smiled and opened up his hand. Dangling from his finger was a set of keys.

"No," she whispered.

Kate hit a button on her keychain and they could hear the garage door open. Cabe tossed Happy the keys. "Well," he said, "Go on." He pointed in the direction of the garage.

Happy stood and walked slowly to the front of the house, with everyone following behind. She froze in her tracks when she saw it. A brand new Harley Davidson Soft tail slim with a big red bow. She turned to Cabe and said "Are you kidding me?"

For a second he thought Happy was going to chew him a new one until she launched herself at him for a giant hug. "Happy birthday, kid."

"Thanks Cabe."

Then she gave Kate a hug. "Thanks so much."

Kate smiled. "You're welcome."

Happy ran to her new bike and did a couple of laps around it. "Dad, come here. Look at this." They bent down to exam the suspension and launched into a fast gearhead dialogue.

Kate put her hand in Cabe's "You know what, Gallo?"

"What's that, Riley?"

"I love it when you go overboard."

## Chapter Twelve

Cabe was relieved today was finally here. The tent was up, the chairs were set. The caterers would be arriving soon. He couldn't wait to marry Kate and go on their honeymoon. He hadn't told her where they were going or that he'd managed two weeks off instead of just one.

He took a moment to enjoy the quiet. He looked over at her, sleeping on her side. Her wound was still and angry red and he knew it still gave pain sometimes, but she'd never complain. He smiled because she had kept her promise to forget about pajamas. He placed a kiss on her shoulder, another on her back.

"Hmmm. It's the middle of the night, Gallo. I'm still asleep."

"It's six am and everyone will be here for the breakfast Carolyn will be setting up at seven.

"I'm sleeping," Kate grumbled as she put her pillow over her head.

"God, you're grumpy in the morning." Cabe thought he heard a muffled curse. He kissed her back, started trailing kisses down her spine. Kate groaned but kept the pillow in place. He used tongue to trace the path of his kisses. The pillow hit the floor.

"Okay, You have my attention." She rolled on her back and smiled.

Cabe just stared at her. Sometimes what he felt for this woman overwhelmed him. He brushed a stray hair from her cheek.

"What's wrong, babe?" she asked.

He smiled. "Not one damn thing." He kissed her softly. "I love you, Kate Riley."

"I'm pretty fond of you too. And in six hours it will be Kate Gallo, thank you."

He didn't know why he was surprised, but he was. "You're taking my name?"

"Of course. I'm proud I'll be Mrs. Gallo." She smiled. "Plus it should reduce the number of Jessica's I have to take down."

Cabe laughed and gave her a quick kiss. "I wanted us to have some alone time before everything gets crazy."

"Oh really?" she slipped her hands around his neck.

"Not that," he said. "Well, not only that. You know what a traditional guy I am."

She laughed. "I'm aware."

"Well tradition dictates that the groom should give his bride a gift."

"Presents? Yeah!"

Cabe laughed and reached into his nightstand. He handed Kate a velvet box. She gasped when she saw an antique cameo on a gold chain.

"Oh, Cabe it's beautiful."

"It belonged to my Nonna. She would have loved you, Kate. You're a lot like her strong, loving." He paused. "Kate, I never gave this to anyone else."

Kate smiled knowing what he meant. "Cabe, it's wonderful. Thank you." She kissed him. "And in the spirit of tradition," she reached into her nightstand and pulled out a black box.

"Oh, wow." It was a duplicate of the watch he'd had to surrender on a mission in Mexico. It had been for a good cause, but damn, he'd loved that watch.

"Paige told me about what happened and I thought you'd like to have it back."

"Thank you, sweetheart. It's great."

She pulled him tight for a kiss. "Now about that other thing,"

"Kate, we have maybe thirty minutes before the hoards descend."

She smiled. "I can make that work."

They sat around the dining room table enjoying the breakfast the caterers were serving. "Carolyn," said Cabe. "Join us."

"I've already eaten, thanks." She smiled. One of the caterers approached her.

"Excuse me, Ma'am. The florists are here."

"Excellent. Kate, I'll send the hairdresser and makeup artist up as soon as they arrive."

"I can't thank you enough, Carolyn," said Kate.

"Oh, you know this is me in my natural environment." She laughed and pointed to the chaos in the kitchen before she dashed off to find the florist.

Cabe turned his attention to the breakfast mayhem. Ralph was sitting to his left with Paige at his side dishing up some scrambled eggs for her son. Walter was on his right and was currently making conversational white noise. Happy and Toby were sitting on either side of Kate arguing about something. Kate raised her orange juice to Cabe in a silent toast. He returned the salute.

Toby leaned in to Kate and quietly asked, "How are you doing?"

She smiled at Cabe. "Oh, I'm good."

Toby looked back and forth between Kate and Cabe. "I was asking about the shooting, but really? Irritated cheek and neck from a beard, flushed cheeks, not to mention that goofy grin on Cabe's face, really? It's barely past seven a.m."

She turned to Toby and smiled. "And?"

"Ah geez. Is he chugging handfuls of blue pills?"

Kate laughed. "Nope."

Toby nodded. "Impressive."

She leaned in and whispered "You have no idea."

Cabe wondered why Toby was raising his glass to him in salute while Kate was laughing.

Paige knocked on the master bedroom door. "Kate are you ready?"

"Come on in."

Paige looked lovely in her tea length, emerald green gown. She made a lovely maid of honor. "Oh, Kate you look beautiful."

Kate was wearing a satin gown with an layer of embroidered lace from the bodice past the waist and sheer sleeves. She tugged at the shoulders. Her hair was pinned up loosely. She wore delicate gold drops earrings and Nonna's cameo. "Is it ok? Do you think he'll like it?"

Paige smiled. "He going to love it. That's a beautiful necklace."

Kate reached her hand to touch the delicate carving. "It was Cabe grandmother's. He gave it to me this morning." She tugged at the shoulder of her dress again. "Can you see anything?"

"No, it's covered. No one can see it."

"They all know what happened but I rather not have to talk about it today."

"I don't blame you."

Another knock on the door and Assistant Homeland Director Katherine Cooper came in wearing the same bridesmaid dress as Paige. She was carrying her own bouquet and Kate's. "Cabe asked me to give this to you."

"Thank you, Katherine." She accepted the bouquet into her trembling hands. Cabe had insisted on taking care of her bouquet design himself. Just like the bouquet he'd brought her in the hospital, this was full of beautiful white roses, but it was mixed with freesia, gardenia and white lilacs with sprigs of green leaves and the stems wrapped in a basket weave of green ribbons. She pulled them close to enjoy their glorious fragrance.

"I'm going to get Happy and we'll be in the hall whenever you're ready." said Katherine as she closed the door.

"Why did you ask Cooper to be a bridesmaid?"

"We need a woman to walk with Sylvester and she is the one who put us together. I was surprised she said yes. She assured me that no national crisis are on her agenda today." Kate smiled. "She's actually quite nice when you get to know her."

"Are you ready?" asked Paige.

Kate smiled, "Let's roll."

The string quartet began a wedding march and Katherine, started, followed by Happy, and Paige. She started her walk to down the white carpet and smiled. All the boys were turned out in proper tuxedos, including Ralph, their ring bearer. Normally he would have walked with the women, but he wouldn't have it. So Ralph was standing next to Cabe's best man, Walter. Toby and Sylvester were smiling and Toby had even left his hat behind.

Then there was Cabe. She saw him standing there waiting for her and suddenly everything she'd gone through, everything in her life made sense. It had all been worth it for this one moment.

Cabe was standing at the end of the aisle waiting for Kate. He wasn't nervous. He was never more sure about anything in his life than he was about marrying her. He saw the women start the walk down the aisle, taking their places opposite the men.

Then there was Kate. She looked like a perfect bride from a magazine. He looked at her and mouthed "Wow." She walked slowly down the aisle until she stood at his side. He went off script and took her hand and put a kiss on her palm and whispered. "I love you, Katie girl."

The judge who conducted the service had been an old friend of Kate's father who had been delighted to officiate. "I understand Kate and Cabe have their own vows."

Kate was trembling. She'd tried to stay composed, telling herself that she didn't pay all that money for a makeup artist only to have her work run down her face. Then Cabe whispered, "Katie, take a breath." She did. "Okay, it's just you and me, tell me."

"Cabe, you are the best thing that has ever happened to me. You are strong, steadfast, loyal." She paused, "Not to mention a hell of a kisser." She smiled as everyone laughed. "You are the only person who has ever seen the complete me. I'm not the Ghost anymore." Her voice faltered. "I love you with all my heart and will carry your name with great pride because of the man you are ."

"Kate, I never imagined I would find someone like you, have what we have, at this point in my life. But I knew the first time I saw you that everything in my life would change. And it did. You are strong and incredibly brave. And you're a pretty nifty kisser too, Katie girl." He smiled "My admiration for you is only topped by how much I love you. I will be honored to call myself your husband, because of the woman you are."

The judge called for the rings and Ralph stepped forward and handed each of them their simple gold bands. Inside the bands they'd engraved simply, "All in". Cabe touched his shoulder and said, "Thanks buddy."

They slipped the rings on each other's hand as she said the traditional part of their vows. Kate had purposely dropped the line about worldly goods because she said, "We're not inviting the elephant to our wedding."

"I now pronounce you husband and wife."

Cabe smiled and took Kate in his arms. He kissed until the applause turned to hoots and hollers. They both laughed as they walked down the aisle.

Thanks to Carolyn's military sense of precision and timing, everything was running according to plan. The photographer got his pictures in the allotted thirty minutes. The guests were being seated and the meal would be served soon. Cabe spotted Kate going into the house and followed. She was standing in the kitchen with a bottle of water and a pale look on her face. She was in pain and from the looks of it a lot of it. It had been only eight weeks since she'd been shot.

"Hey, there you are Mrs. Gallo,"

Kate smiled, "You're the first person to call me that."

"It's the shoulder, isn't it?"

"I think maybe I over did it. All the preparations and running around. All I need is some rest." She smiled "Will our honeymoon be restful?"

He slipped his arms around her waist. "Oh no you don't. No location intel until we get to the airport, but yes, you should be able to rest."

"In between sessions of enthusiastic decadence?" she asked.

"Absolutely." He gave her a soft kiss. "Sweetheart, you are such a beautiful bride."

She gave him a broad smile. "Gallo, that was the right answer."

"What was the question?"

"Did I get it right? I didn't want to seem like I was trying to look twenty five but I really wanted lace." She touched the sleeve. "It's so pretty," she whispered.

There it was again, the face of a shy, insecure genius. "Not today," he thought. He moved her to a corner of the kitchen hidden view. He leaned in and kissed her. "You look perfect." He kissed her again, deeper this time. He might have taken it further if he hadn't heard someone clearing their throat. Paige was standing in the doorway.

"Hey you two, there'll be enough time for that later. Everyone's looking for you. They can't start the meal without the guests of honor."

He took Kate's hand and followed Paige until she stopped and stared at the art over the fireplace. It was the scroll Ralph had given them framed and mounted on the wall like it was a Van Gogh.

"Cabe, wasn't there a McClaren there the last time I was here?"

"Yeah."

"You replaced it Ralph's drawing?"

Cabe smiled. "We like that one better. Now let's get this party started."

They took their places at the head table as the waiters poured everyone a glass of champagne. Cabe saw Paige nod to Walter, telling him it was time for the toast. He chuckled to himself when he thought of Walter's expression when he told him part of his duty as best man was to give a toast. Walter got to his feet and tapped on the champagne glass. He bet Paige had coached him.

"My name is Walter O'Brien. I was surprised," he paused and gave Cabe a rare smile. "And pleased when Cabe asked me to be his best man. I first met Cabe when I was eleven years old. That's when he arrested me for hacking NASA." Walter heard a few gasps in the crowd but forged ahead.

"Ever since we've been working together for the greater good. All my life I've only believed in two things, Science and Math. They were precise and consistent. I could always predict the outcome." He glanced at Paige. "Over the past few years I've come to consider things differently. Cabe has saved my life several times. He always has my back. With Cabe I can predict the outcome. Then he met Kate, a fellow agent, and they fell in love. I'm not very good at understanding those type of feelings so I gave Kate a pretty hard time in the beginning." He faced Kate "I apologize." She nodded and smiled. "I've been observing them for the past few months and I saw a change in Cabe. He was relaxed and happy in a way I'd never seen before. Kate became friends with the team. I worked with her on several projects. She's quite brilliant." Cabe and Kate chuckled. "But she is also incredibly brave. Kate has our back too. She saved Cabe and me and my team from a very dangerous situation. I watched her take a bullet to protect Ralph." He looked over at Ralph and he was smiling. "I watched Cabe's pain in the hospital when we didn't know if she would make it. I thought how can love be worth this much pain? But then I saw his relief when we knew she'd recover."

"I've spent time with both of them over these last few months and I can see how happy they are together. How much they defend and protect each other. They have each other's backs. I've also come to understand something in them that I never did before,

Joy. Seeing the two of you has made me reconsider. There maybe more things in life I can count on."

Walter turn to face Cabe and Kate and was surprised to see tears in their eyes. "To Cabe and Kate. I'm very glad you found each other."

Cabe stood to shake Walter's hand but then pulled him into a tight hug.

"Oh, Okay," said Walter.

"Thank you, son," was all Cabe could manage to say.

Kate stood and hugged too. "Thank you, Walter. That was beautiful." She pulled him close and whispered, "He loves you."

Everyone took their seats and the servers began bringing the meals. Cabe ate his filet on instinct thinking it was a shame he wasn't appreciating it more. He couldn't believe he had to dry his tears during Walter's toast. He prided himself on keeping control, of his actions as well as his emotions. This day was testing his resolve. "Ah, Gallo," he thought "You're definitely turning into a weepy old woman."

With the dinner and cake were finished and the wedding band started tuning up. Carolyn had arranged for a dance floor and they were about to have their first dance.

"Good evening. We are about to start so I'd like to ask the bride and groom to the dance floor." Kate and Cabe took the floor to the applause of their guests. "The groom has requested a special song for their first dance."

Kate looked surprised and Cabe grinned. The wedding singer started singing a fairly good cover of Norah Jones "Come Away with Me." It wasn't Conway Twitty, but it was easy to dance to. Cabe moved her around the floor in a very good waltz. Paige had helped him brush up on his rusty moves.

She looked up at him and smiled. "Great moves, Gallo."

"It was my Nonna. She made me take lessons. She said a real gentleman knows how to dance with a woman."

"Thank you, Nonna," said Kate.

"I wish she was here," said Cabe.

Kate glanced down at her cameo. "She is."

During the bridge the singer asked the rest of the wedding party to join them. Toby and Happy were fine together but Walter looked tense dancing with Paige. The look on Sylvester's face was pure discomfort as he tried to dance Katherine around the floor. To her credit, Cabe could see she was quickly compensating for Sly's missteps.

Paige knew how uncomfortable Walter was dancing like this so she tried to take his mind of it. "That was a wonderful toast, the things you said. I know it meant a lot to both of them."

"That's gratifying."

The song ended and was met with polite applause. The next song was a faster tempo and the guests could now join them for dancing. He used the moment to excuse himself.

Walter walked down to the beach and began to pace. He felt at odds with himself. He meant what he said in the toast, and that was the problem. It was all EQ and no logic. The past months watching Cabe and Kate was like have emotions fed to him with a fire hose.

Paige startled him when she touched his shoulder. "Walter is everything okay?"

"Fine."

"No its not. What's wrong?"

"Nothing. You know I'm not comfortable in these situations."

"You've been doing so much better about these things." She paused. "You've even been dating more. I know the Linda thing was difficult for you. There was that nice girl from Kavel'ski's. She seemed very nice."

"She was."

"Then what was the problem?"

"The problem?" he shouted. "The problem was she's not you!"

He closed the distance between them before Paige could say anything. He held her face in his hands and whispered, "None of them were you." Then he kissed her. Kissed her the way he had once. Only once. It wasn't enough. He was terrified because he knew it would never be enough.

He brushed her lips with his finger. "Paige, they didn't have your smile." He kissed her again. "They didn't have your heart."

He stood still watching and waiting. "Walter," she whispered as she slipped her arms and renewed their kiss.

However complicated and messy this would get, he couldn't think about that now. Tonight Walter O'Brien couldn't think.

Cabe and Kate stood at the top of the steps watching the scene below. "Well how about that?" he said as he wrapped his arms around his wife.

"What are you doing?" They hadn't seen Ralph come up behind them. He watched his mother and Walter for a moment and then turned back to the party. As he left he heard Ralph say. "It's about time."

Cabe and Kate mingled with their guests, a few well chosen friends and colleagues. He knew it was time they think about leaving. Kate looked a little too pale. He excused himself for a moment to find Toby.

Kate was talking to Carolyn's husband, Winston Foster who turned out to be a self made man and a pretty nice guy. "It's nice to meet you Cabe. Carolyn's told me so much about you."

"Thank you for being here. You're wife is a genius with all of this," said Cabe.

"We could have never put this together without her," said Kate. "She really should do it professionally."

Winston smiled. "That's what I've been telling her."

Cabe saw the genuine pride Winston had for his wife's talent. Yeah, he was a good guy.

"Oh Winston, there's Peter and Michael. We need to say hi," said Kate.

"Of course." Winston kissed Kate's cheek. "I'm really happy for you Kate." He shook Cabe's hand. "You've got a great woman, here."

Cabe smiled, "I sure do."

As they approached John's former partners Cabe asked, "Are you okay with this?"

"Of course. They had nothing to do with it."

He smiled "And in case anyone figures out what really happened with John, their being here will reinforce to the public at large that they are still welcome guests in our home." He pulled her close for a quick kiss. "You really are a great woman."

"Ahh, shucks Gallo," Kate laughed. "You'll make me blush."

He pulled her close for a kiss. "I'm serious, Katie. You make me so proud."

This time she really did blush.

"After we talk to them I want to start saying our goodbyes. The guests can stay but I want some alone time with my wife."

She gave him a quick kiss. "Sounds good."

Kate made her way upstairs to change only to find Toby rooting through their medicine cabinet. "Toby, what the hell are you doing?"

"No little blue pills," he said with a bit of annoyance.

Kate laughed. "Why do you find it so difficult to believe?"

"Biology dictates certain things slow down as the body ages."

She smiled as she took off Nonna's necklace and put it back in its velvet box. "Toby, can you ever imagine a day when you wouldn't want to be with Happy?"

"No."

"Maybe Cabe and I are making up for all those years each of us spent alone. Or maybe it's that passion knows no age limit."

Toby smiled. "Maybe it is." He reached down next to the bed and picked up his medical bag. "It's not the only reason I'm here."

"What?"

Toby nodded toward the door. "He asked me to check on you. He says you're in pain you're not admitting." Cabe entered their bedroom

"I'm not going to be able to talk my way out of this, am I?" she asked.

"I need to be sure you're okay. Indulge me."

"Oh I planned on it, but this wasn't what I had in mind." She turned around and Cabe unzipped her gown. "Face the wall, Toby."

"Excuse me?"

"Just do it." She slipped out of her gown and revealed a beautiful white bustier and panties. The only thing that marred the image was the scar on her shoulder.

"Wow," Cabe said.

"I'm glad you like it."

"Oh yeah," he said in his deepest gravel voice.

Toby broke the spell when he shouted "I'm still in the room!"

Kate laughed as she wrapped herself in a bath towel. Toby could examine her wound, but nothing else. He manipulate her shoulder and she tried not to wince. She failed. He examined the surrounding tissue, took her temperature and pulse. "Was all that necessary?"

"Who here went to Harvard?"

They both rolled their eyes.

"Your temperature indicates you don't have a fever, so infection is unlikely. This is relatively normal pain following a traumatic injury. You may have overdone it a bit but that's all. It's only been eight weeks. Frankly, I can't believe how far you've come."

He grabbed a bottle and needle out of his bag. I'll give you a shot of cortisone. It will help with the pain and any inflammation." He filled the needle and looked at Cabe. "You might want to distract her. This is going to burn like a mother."

"Is that the medical term, Doc?" asked Cabe.

"Close enough," said Toby.

Cabe held her hand and whispered in her ear. "Woman, I love your taste in lingerie."

"You know I can hear you," said Toby

Kate smiled and then said several creative curses as Toby injected her.

"All done. You should feel better pretty quickly." He started packing up his bag when Cabe asked the most uncomfortable question of his life.

"Uh, Doc. Should there be any restrictions on her movement?"

Kate smiled as Toby now rolled his eyes at them. "Just don't get too creative and you'll be fine."

Cabe escorted Toby out and locked the door behind him. Kate dropped the towel and smiled. He moved his hands over the satin as he gave her a kiss.

"I guess we should change so we can get going." Kate said.

He kissed her again "Good idea," he kissed her neck and whispered, but leave this on."

It took another hour for Cabe and Kate to make their exit from the wedding, making it close to seven when they finally checked into the St. Regis. They had a beautiful suite with a great view of the city. He'd made sure there were roses and champagne waiting for them. Despite Toby's assurances, he couldn't help but be concerned.

"The room is beautiful, Cabe. I love it. Oooh and champagne and flowers." She noticed a card and pulled it from the arrangement. "For my best girl."

Cabe saw she was crying. "What's wrong, Katie? Is it your shoulder?"

She swatted at his chest. "No you goof. It's this." She held up the card. "For my best girl," he whispered.

He grabbed his handkerchief from his pocket and dabbed at her tears. "You are my best girl, Katie." He brushed her cheek with his hand and wondered how the hell he ever got so lucky. "Sweetheart, it's been a long day and your shoulder's hurting. It might be a good idea if we got some rest."

Kate pushed back on his chest. "Cabe Gallo! In what universe do you live in where I would consider not making love to my husband on our wedding night? Have you just met me?"

Cabe laughed and pulled her back into his arms.

"You're not gettin' away from me tonight, boyo. I have plans for you."

He loved it when she slipped into her Irish brogue. He kissed her softly, "You're awfully demanding, Mrs. Gallo."

She gave him a wicked grin. "You ain't seen nothin' yet."

Their night together was tender and gentle, the way it should be. At least it was the first time.

Oh, my God I'm starving!" said Kate.

"Yeah, we should get something before our flight."

"You call room service while I take a shower."

Kate came out of the bathroom with her hair pinned up and wearing nothing but a towel. She was all pink from the shower. He was very tempted to help her dry off but kept his hands to himself. Anymore activity like last night and he'd be too weak to get on the plane. He smiled to himself. Her shoulder was doing just fine.

He unzipped his bag and pulled out their tickets. Kate dove at them like they were the last French fries in the bag before he snatched them away. "Where are we going? Please."

Cabe smiled. "Fine. Sit down." He handed her the tickets. "We're going to Molokai." He pulled out the brochure he'd gotten from the travel agent. "We're staying at Sandcastle Resort. I'm told they have a great food." He pointed to one of the cottages beyond the main building. "We have one of those, right on the beach, and very private. They also have excellent scuba diving available. You said you wanted me to teach you. I thought this would be a great chance."

"Cabe it sounds wonderful."

"I talked to Toby. He said your shoulder should be fine to dive but you have to promise me if you have any issues you won't hide it from me."

"I promise," she said as she kissed him. Her towel slipped off as he rubbed his hands over her warm skin. "Hmm." She purred. She squealed as he flipped her on her back and began kissing her neck, her breasts, losing himself again in her.

"Hmm, oh that's so good," she said. "Cabe, I don't know. You, me and a private cottage for a week. We may never see the water."

He smiled and held up two fingers.

"Two weeks?!"

"Turns out I have a lot of vacation time built up." He continued in his travels down her body.

"Won't room service be here soon?"

"About twenty minutes," he said as he kissed her growling stomach.

"Only twenty minutes?"

He lifted his head and smiled. "I can make that work."

He did.

Cabe was relieved when he saw the resort was as beautiful as the online pictures. He wanted this to be perfect for her. He knew she didn't need to be impressed but he couldn't forget this was a woman who had access to the best things in the world.

Their amazingly cheerful bell man, Freddie, escorted them to their cottage. It was round covered in dark wood, with windows all around for an amazing view. Palm trees and thick foliage lined each side of the cottage adding to the privacy. There was a sandy path from the front porch direct to the ocean. Their bags were already delivered and a bouquet of tropical flowers were on the dresser.

"Oh, Cabe. It's beautiful." Kate said as she checked out the view.

"I'm glad you like it."

Freddie point to a card of phone extensions. "If you need anything at all, press number five. That's the direct line to my station."

"Thanks, Freddie." Cabe slipped fifty dollars in his palm.

Freddie became even more cheerful. "Thank you, Sir, and congratulations."

Finally alone, Kate slipped her arms around Cabe's neck. "This is perfect," she said as she kissed him. She started slipping her hands under his t-shirt.

"It was a long flight. Do you want to get some rest? He asked.

"I slept on the plane."

He smiled and shook his head. Then he locked the door.

Exhaustion had claimed them both and they slept soundly. It was nearly seven p.m. when Cabe woke to the light of sunset coloring the inside of their room. After a quick shower he opened his bag looking for something to wear to dinner.

"Cabe? What time is it?"

He turned to see his sleepy and well loved girl. "Seven o'clock."

"No wonder I'm hungry."

He sat on the bed and gave her a soft kiss. "How's the shoulder?" "Okay, really. The shot really helped."

"Well alright then. So get your ass in gear and let's go. I need food."

The travel agent had not exaggerated about the food. They had the freshest seafood and tropical mixes of vegetables and fruits. They'd decided to walk off their decadent deserts with a walk on the beach. It was still over eighty degrees despite the fact that was after nine p.m. Cabe was okay because he was wearing a light Tommy Bahama shirt and cargo shorts. Kate was wearing a sundress and a long jacket. He could see the perspiration on her forehead. "Sweetheart, you're too warm. Here let me take off your jacket."

"No" she said quickly as she pulled the jacket tight.

"Kate, what's going on?"

"Nothing."

"Bullshit." He startled her. He almost never swore. He could see her face in the light from a solar lamp on the walkway. He'd seen this face before. He'd thought they were done with this. "It's the scar. You're hiding."

"Cabe, please."

"Tell me why." He softened his tone, knowing this was still difficult for her.

"Tell me you didn't notice all those beautiful people with their perfect clothes, and their perfect bodies. Everyone in the place was checking out that supermodel in the corner booth."

"No Kate, I didn't." She looked doubtful. "Kate, I honestly didn't. We were busy talking about the wedding and the food and whether or not the kids would destroy our house while we were gone." He saw her eyes tear but he couldn't back down. "You listen to me, Kate Gallo, there was no one in that room, no one, who was more beautiful than you."

Now she really didn't believe him.

He took a breath. "Do you think any of their scars came from saving the life of a child? No their scars are from face lifts and tummy tucks." He slipped behind her and removed her jacket. "Katie, this scar will fade and be less noticeable. But the truth is it isn't ever going to disappear completely. We live in LA, the land of tank tops and swim suits. Somehow you're going to have to learn to deal with people noticing it." She grabbed the jacket from his hands and ran down the path to their cottage.

"Kate," he called as he chased after her. He caught up with her in front of their cottage, at the ocean.

She put her hand to his chest. "Back off, Gallo. Just leave me alone," she said through tears.

He brushed her hand over her cheek. "I will give you some privacy, but let me absolutely clear, I will never leave you alone. Not ever." He turned and walked into their cottage. Sitting on the bed gave him a clear view of Kate pacing back and forth at the water's edge. The sound of her crying carried through the open patio door. It took every bit of self control not to go to her. Eventually the sound of her crying faded. He saw her take off her sandals and walk into the surf. Kate always said the water was healing for her, soothing and peaceful. He hoped that would work for her now.

It seemed like hours but was probably no longer than about thirty minutes when he saw Kate turn and walk up the path. She closed the slider behind her and then walked to him sitting on the bed. Her eyes were red from crying.

She handed him her jacket and said, "I'll try."

Cabe found Kate on a on the sitting on porch. She'd fallen asleep quickly last night and he tried not to disturb her. "Good morning," he said.

She smiled. "Good morning." She poured him some juice from a carafe. "Here try this. Freddie swears it's the perfect drink. Some orange, pineapple, mango concoction."

"Hmm, good." He sat next to her. "Katie, are we good?"

She brushed her hand on his arm. "Yeah, we're good." She took another sip of her juice. "Cabe, last night I was so angry with you for pushing me like that."

"I'm sorry."

"No, let me finish. As mad as I was I kept thinking about what you said. That you'd never leave me alone." She took his hand in hers. "You meant that."

He nodded.

"You were right." She stood and smiled. "I can't let it affect me like this. Cabe I was the nerdy bookworm for a hell of a long time. I may slip into old habits from time to time."

She pulled him to his feet and slipped her arms around his waist. "But since apparently I'm never going to be alone, I think I'll be okay."

Cabe kissed her and whispered. "Yeah, you will."

"I'm going to get my sandals and let's go get some breakfast."

They were looking over the menu when the waiter came to the table. "What can I get. You." Cabe realized the kid hesitated when he saw the scar. Kate noticed too. "Oh, I'm sorry ma'am. I didn't mean to be rude. It's just mine looks like that. Did you blow out your rotator cuff too?"

Kate paused then said. "No, I was shot." The kid's eyes widened. "My husband and I are federal agents."

"Wow," the kid said. "Awesome." He took their order while apologizing twice more for staring.

Kate reached for her napkin and saw Cabe smiling at her.

"What?"

"Well done, Katie girl."

Kate did well in her scuba training class and now they were on the boat that would drop them at the nearby coral reef.

"Do you have any questions?" asked the guide.

Kate shook her head. "No, we're good," said Cabe. He hadn't needed to take the course in the hotel's pool since he was certified but Kate had paid close attention and blew through the operation manual. He was sure if he asked her she'd be able to quote it.

Cabe double checked Kate's equipment. "You ready?"

Kate smiled. "Can't wait."

"Remember to keep me in sight and if you have any problems, pointing up means we're going to the surface."

"Got it."

They sat on the edge of the deck, crossed their arms over the chests and fell back into the water. The reef was twenty yards from where they dropped anchor. Kate swam quickly to the reef, stopping to see the tiger fish, yellow tangs and a rainbow of other fish.

Cabe swam to her side and even through her mask he could see the joy in her eyes. They swam for thirty minutes before Cabe pointed to the surface. She put her hands on her hips and cocked her head. Cabe shook his head and pointed up. Thirty minutes under water was plenty for a rookie. Especially a rookie who been through what she had.

The guide helped them get back on the boat and remove their tanks. "That was amazing!" Kate said. "We have to do that again."

"I'm sure we can make a few more dives."

Kate proved a natural for scuba. Her years of swimming gave her more endurance than the average rookie. She bought an underwater camera and photographed subsequent dives and was getting some great shots.

One day the waters were too choppy to dive so they went for a long walk on the beach. Cabe smiled at himself. Here he was walking on the beach, holding his best girl's hand like a lovesick boy.

"This really has been a perfect trip," Kate said. "Promise me we can come back."

He gave her a quick kiss. "I promise."

They continued their walk until they came across some hotel guests and hotel employees hold the reins of two horses. "Looks like they're giving lessons. Want to give it a go?" said Kate.

"Sure. It's been awhile but why not?"

Kate stopped in her tracks. "You ride?"

"Like I said, it's been a while, but I did enjoy it."

She shook her head and smiled. "Amazing."

The other guests had finished their rides and the class was over but Cabe asked if the two of them could have a go. A tall boy about twenty looked at Kate and obviously noticed the scar showing under her tank top. He smiled and said, "I think we can make an exception." He leaned closer and said, "My dad's a cop too." Apparently a federal agent with a bullet wound made the grapevine.

"Thank you, son," said Cabe.

After a few instructions, Cabe and Kate took their horses on slow trot up the beach and back. They returned to the starting point and the boy helped Kate down.

Cabe patted his horse's neck "Hey, son. You mind if I open it up a bit. She feels like she could handle it."

"Yeah sure. She's a great horse but doesn't get to go full out often."

Cabe turned his horse around and clicked his tongue. "Come on girl. Let's see what you've got." He took off down the beach at a full gallop. He covered the distance down the beach and turned back.

Kate was stunned. He flew down the beach on the horse. His jeans and t-shirt added to the impact. All she could think was "Now that's a man."

He looked at the kid and asked, "One more time?"

"Sure."

He took off down the beach again . He had drawn the attention of the guests, particularly the female guests. A woman in her forties with bleached blonde hair and terrible taste in t-shirts tried to step in front of her. "Wow," the woman said. "What is his name and can I get his number?"

Kate turned and resisted the very strong urge to take out the way she had Jessica. "His name is Married and no you can't."

Cabe pulled up on the reins and dismounted. "Thanks son."

"Anytime sir."

He smiled at Kate "That was fun." She grabbed him by the hand and pulled him off the trail into the foliage. "Katie, what are you doing?" She pulled him further into the cover when she spotted a sunny clearing surrounded by palm trees.

She pushed him against the tree and gave him a deep kiss. "That was SO hot."

"You like riding a horse that much?" He smiled. "I always heard that's why women like riding but I didn't believe it."

She slapped his chest. "Not me, you idiot. You! Watching you gallop down the beach," she ran her hands up his chest. "You looked so damn good. I kept thinking, "That's my man."

She gave him another passionate kiss while she slipped her hands under his shirt. "Katie. Here?"

"Hell, yes here."

"We do have a very nice cottage."

"All the way on the other side of the resort. I need you now." She walked to the center of the clearing and stripped off her tank top and shorts. She shed her lingerie and stood naked in the sun, smiling. "Well, boyo, whatcha gonna do about this situation?"

"You're crazy," he said. But he was smiling. He walked to her and took her in his arms. He tried a soft and gentle but she wasn't having it. He knew full well when she got like this there was no stopping her. Not that he ever wanted to. He thought he'd have some fun and stoke the fire. He whispered in her ear "Tell me what you want, baby." He swore he heard her growl.

"You, naked."

"You're the boss."

He stripped off his clothes and stood in the clearing with her, naked.

"Lay down," she said.

He laid on the ground and she joined him slipping up and down his body, kissing, tasting, licking, biting, until he was aching for her.

She whispered in his ear. "Remember that night when you when said If I did believe your words, believe this. And you had me touch you."

"Uh huh."

"Believe this." She took his hand and pushed it down her body until his eyes widened. He believed.

She took him inside her, first slowly, then sped her pace. She was riding. He caressed her skin, running his hands up and down her body until he held on to her hips. Her breathing became shallow until she let out a deep moan and he felt her muscles contract around him. Her back was arched, perfect sunshine on her skin, the sweat on her brow. It was possibly the most beautiful sight he'd ever seen. He would paint her like this, but no one would see it. Only the two of them.

He flipped her on her back and took control. He pulled her legs tight around him and rode her hard. Some part of him thought he should be easier, but he couldn't stop. She didn't want him to. He let out a guttural noise he didn't recognize. When his heart stopped racing he caressed her face and kissed her. He whispered, "I love you."

They both passed out after their trip to the woods but Kate was still sleeping. He grabbed a bottle of water and sat down on the top steps of the cottage. The sun was just setting and it was an image he'd never be able to justice. Just like Kate in the clearing.

"Hey." Kate said.

"I'm sorry, did I wake you?"

"No. Is there room for me?"

He reached for her hand. She sat on the second step and sat between his legs. For the longest time all they did was sit and watch the sun.

"I'd do it all again," said Kate.

"Do what?"

"All of it. The pain, the heartache, the loneliness, all of it, for this one perfect moment with you."

He placed a kiss on the top of her head and continued watch the retreating sun. Thanks to her he'd found the one thing that had eluded him for most of his life.

Peace.

## Chapter Thirteen

Cabe pulled into the driveway of his oceanfront home and hit the button for the garage. He smiled when he looked over at his Harley. Kate had given it to him for his birthday and he'd been having a blast taking it out. She would go for short rides with him but confessed she rather not take extended rides. Maybe he'd ask Happy.

He found Kate in the kitchen making dinner. He watched her for a moment. She was wearing a small pair of jean shorts, pink tank top and she was barefoot. The scar on her shoulder from the gunshot wound had faded considerably in the past six months. She was plugged into her earbuds, most likely listening audio book. She bent over to check on a something in the oven. He enjoyed the view of her ass as he thought "Damn she's cute." She startled when she turned around.

"Damn Gallo, you scared me." She pulled out her earbuds and gave him a quick kiss. Lose the jacket and get the salad together. The lasagna is almost ready."

He pulled her close "You're a bossy little thing."

"Ah, you love it."

"Yeah, I do." He kissed her deeply and snuck in a grab of her ass.

"Mmm. Very nice," she said, "We will continue this after dinner."

Cabe tossed his jacket over a chair and grabbed the lettuce and tomatoes out of the fridge.

"I have to go to New York for a meeting at the UN."

"UN? Impressive. When?"

"Not so impressive. I was told it was to establish a viable interface between UN and Homeland. Addressing threats without violating sovereignty."

"Told?"

"I think they may just want to rake me over the coals. The team and I broke into the General Assembly last year."

Kate froze with a dinner plate in her hand. "Say what now?"

"We captured an MI-6 traitor and an Ambassador with a gun running empire."

"That sounds like a good thing."

"They were okay with that since we took them into custody off international territory. I think they're still pissed about bombs in the basement."

"Wow, Ok. Details later, dinner now. When's the meeting?"

"Monday."

"Okay. I'll miss you but I will soldier on." She smiled and gave him a kiss. Grab the dressing and let's eat."

He sat down and dished the salad into individual bowls." I was hoping you'd come with me. I thought we could spend the weekend in the city, take in a show, maybe hit a few museums."

"That sounds great! I'd love to. When do we leave?"

Cabe looked at his watch. "In about five hours. I booked us seats on the red eye."

"What? I have to pack!"

She jumped up from her seat when Cabe caught her hand. "Sit, eat. We have time. I can always use the lights and siren to get us through traffic."

Kate laughed. "Cabe Gallo offering an abuse of power."

He smiled. "Not an abuse of power. I'm going to a meeting at the UN. I'm just going a little early."

They checked into the Westin near the UN. It was a nice hotel but not extravagant. "This was the only thing I could find at last minute."

"The room is fine. It has everything we need. Fridge, microwave, walk in shower," she smiled "And a king size bed." Kate grabbed her bag, unzipped it and began unpacking.

Cabe hung the suit he'd brought for the meeting and turned to watch her. She'd changed into jeans and a t-shirt for the trip. She turned and tossed her jacket at him.

"Hang this up for me."

He watched as she put her clothes in the dresser and smiled when he saw an assortment of colorful lingerie. A lifetime of swimming had left her with toned legs and tight, round ass. Walking behind her he wrapped his arms around her waist and kissed her neck. He could see her skin flush in the reflection of the dresser's mirror.

"I'm trying to unpack."

He pretended not to hear her as he began nibbling on her neck. He knew that was her sexual kryptonite.

"You don't play fair, Gallo."

"I know." He began rubbing his hands slowly up and down her body. "Tell me, what's today's color?"

"Pink," she whispered.

"Open your eyes." He pulled her t-shirt over her head to reveal a lacy pink bra. He rubbed his hands over the lace, cupping her breasts. "Look how beautiful you are." She smiled and unzipped her jeans, stepping out of the to reveal the matching pink panty. They looked like someone had taken a roll of lace and wrapped her in it. She told him once they were called shorties. He just thought they were hot.

He nodded toward the bed. "Get comfortable." He tugged at the panties and whispered. "Leave these on." He stripped off his clothes and got on to the bed. He started tasting and nipping at her through the lace.

"Cabe."

"Humm?"

"It was a long flight and it's five a.m. It's okay if you want to just sleep."

He was running his tongue up her thigh when he looked up and smiled. "Oh, sweetheart. That horse is out of the barn."

Cabe checked his watch and saw it was after nine a.m. Kate was curled up against him still sleeping. He put a kiss on her forehead and pulled her close.

"Hmmm. Good morning," said Kate.

"I'm sorry sweetheart. Did I wake you?"

"No, your growling stomach did."

"Let's get dressed and get something to eat," he said.

She cuddled tighter to him. "Order room service. That way we don't have to get out of bed."

He swatted her behind. "Come on lazy bones, you are going to have a proper New York breakfast. Real bagels, with schmear of cream cheese. Maybe some lox."

"The bagels in California are real and what is a schmear?"

He gave her a quick kiss. "How can Mrs. three PHD's not know what a schmear is?"

"That's Dr. Mrs. three PHD's, and schmear wasn't in the curriculum."

"It's Yiddish for a spread. Now get your ass up and get dressed. I'm hungry."

Cabe enjoyed the look on Kate's face when she took a bite of her bagel. She'd gone for the cream cheese but passed on the lox.

"Oh my God, this is amazing, not to mention enormous."

He smiled as he dug into his blintz. "What would you like to do today?"

"This is your town, you tell me."

"The Met isn't that far from here. We could catch a cab."

"Sounds great."

Cabe looked around the busy deli. They had one of the few tables, which were crammed in so tight it felt like coach in an overbooked flight. They were less than a mile from the UN, and even though it was Saturday, the deli was filled with people speaking a number of different languages. He picked out some Arabic, Farsi and even some Urdu. There were times he really missed this, the activity, the variety, even the noise. He glanced back at Kate to see her smiling at him.

"What?"

"I love you, boyo."

He grimaced and glanced at the old couple sitting next to them who were now snickering. He saw a gleam in Kate's eye which always meant trouble.

"Excuse me, sir, ma'am," she said. "My husband is embarrassed I told him I love him in public. Were you embarrassed?" she asked.

"Oh, Lord, here she goes," he thought.

The old woman smiled. "Oh, no dear that's wonderful. I do the same thing to Norman. Sixty five years and he still blushes." Norman proved her truthful by turning a lovely shade of pink.

Kate laughed. "So does he!"

"I'm Esther."

"I'm Kate and this is my husband Cabe."

Cabe nodded to both, "It's very nice to meet you. Sixty five years is amazing. Congratulations."

"How long have you been married?" asked Esther.

"Six months."

"Oh Norman, newlyweds" Esther leaned over and gave Kate a kiss on the cheek.

Norman extended his hand for Cabe. "Mazel Tov."

"Thank you, sir."

"How did you two meet?" asked Kate.

"Norman had just gotten home from Korea." She leaned toward Kate. "He was so handsome in his uniform."

Kate smiled and laughed like Esther was an old friend. "I bet he did."

"The USO held dances for the soldiers and me and my girlfriends went. He asked me to dance and we've been together ever since."

Norman looked at his wife and smiled. "She was the prettiest girl there."

Cabe gave Esther a smile.. "I bet she was, sir."

"So, where did you meet?" asked Esther.

"Through our work," said Kate. "Cabe is an agent with Homeland Security. I was too, but I've retired."

"Oh, how exciting. Do you have a badge?"

She nodded toward Esther. "Show her your badge, Cabe."

He pulled it out of his jeans and flipped it open with a little extra flair.

"Oh Norman, look at that."

The waiter came with both tables checks. Cabe was surprised when Norman reached for them both. "We have this. A little something for the newlyweds."

"Oh sir," Cabe started but Kate drilled him with a look that said no.

"Thank you so much," Kate shook Esther's hand. "That's very sweet."

Kate stood and Cabe did his best to squeeze out with causing the rest of the tables to domino. He extended his hand to Norman. "Thank you sir. It was very nice to meet you."

Esther took Kate's hand. "You're a lovely girl. We wish you all the best."

When they got outside, Cabe reached for Kate's hand. "Sixty five years. That's amazing."

"Yes it is."

"Why did you let them pay for our meal? I'd have been happy to pay for theirs."

"If you'd refused you'd have insulted them."

"They were very nice."

"They're lonely."

"What?"

"They're lonely. Either they have no children or the children are gone. They come to this deli, probably every Saturday, to talk to people."

"Are you turning into Toby?" he laughed.

"You forget, I was Toby before there was a Toby. I don't do all the psycho babble he does. But I had to learn to read people fast."

Cabe turned to her and smiled. "Can you read me?"

"Of course. You're a kind, honest man. You want to make the world a better place. You enjoy your work and you love your wife."

"Okay, but you did get one part wrong. The "You love your wife" part comes first." Then he kissed her, right there on Fifth Avenue.

They were wandering the Met, going from room to room in a reverent silence. It was almost like being in church. The power and beauty of art, some of it hundreds of years old, was overwhelming. These artists had created beauty that lasted. All these years later they were respected and admired. Cabe wondered what kind of mark he'd made, if he would be remembered.

Kate had lived with art her whole life. Her mother had created one of the most admired private art collections in the world. He had only seen things like this in magazines. Now he lived with them too. They stood in front of the work of Cabe's favorite artist. No one would believe that the guy who loved John Wayne movies and Harley's also loved Monet.

"It's so beautiful," whispered Kate as she admired 'Morning on the Seine.'

"Amazing," said Cabe.

Kate didn't know when she was out he would study the paintings in their home. They'd converted a bedroom with good natural light into his studio. At first he wasn't able to paint anything in the shadow of the masters. Finally he had to put his vision on canvas overcame his insecurity and he'd begun painting again.

He smiled when he remembered the moment happened. When he was packing to move in with Kate she'd stumbled across the portrait he'd done of her. He knew it was the best thing he'd ever done because it had been inspired by a profound love. He's never displayed any of his art but she'd loved it so much he had it framed. She'd wanted to hang it in the living room but Cabe vetoed that. He was uncomfortable with anyone but Kate looking at his art but he'd be a hell of a lot more uncomfortable with anyone seeing a portrait of his near naked wife. Kate agreed to hang the portrait in their bedroom. He was shocked when she'd pulled a Monet off the wall and left it on the bed while she replaced it with his work.

"Kate what are you doing?" he'd asked.

"What do you mean? I'm hanging your painting."

He pointed to the canvas on the bed. "That's a Monet."

She smiled at him. "And this is a Gallo. It means more."

It means more, he remembered. That was all it took. It had never been about comparing his art to anyone else. It was about his vision, what it meant to him.

Kate tugging on his arm brought him back to the moment.

"Cabe, isn't that?"

"Water lilies, yes."

"But don't we.."

"Yes, we have one too," He smiled. "Damn, I can't believe I just said that. Monet painted several versions of this from different angles on the pond."

Kate smiled, "Cool. You must have loved coming here when you were a kid."

"I was only here once on a school trip when I was ten."

"Really? You lived so close."

He smiled. "Brooklyn may only be ten miles from here but it's a world away."

"Cabe, how about you buy a girl a drink? I saw a cafe downstairs and I could use a soda."

"Sure."

He got them sodas while Kate found them a table. "This is an amazing place," said Kate.

"Yes it is."

"Cabe, what's going on? Talk to me."

"What?"

"I can read most people but Gallo, to me you're transparent as glass," she smiled. "Tell me."

He took a sip of his drink. "Monet, Van Gogh, Rembrandt, still remembered all these years later. I can't help but wonder how I'd be remembered if at all."

Kate took his hand. "Truthfully, a hundred years from now the world won't know either of us anymore than it does now. That is other than stories Paige and Walter tell their great grandchildren."

Cabe laughed.

Kate looked around to see if anyone was close enough to hear her. "Cabe, look me. You know I've read your file. All of it. I know what you've accomplished. That mission in Kazakhstan, you stopped a nuclear missile from falling into terrorist hands. By the way, you looked adorable as Whimsical Boy."

He was startled at the reference.

"I saw the picture. You, a missile and short pants." She smiled. "The nuclear plant meltdown, saving LA from the gas leak after the quake. You've been an integral part of saving millions of lives. One of those people is the next Monet, or Jonas Salk or Marie Curie. That's your legacy."

Kate was shocked to see tears in his eyes despite his smile.

"I could never show you how much I love you," he whispered.

"Yes you do, every day."

He took another sip of his drink, trying to rein in his emotions.

"Cabe, could we go to Brooklyn? I'd love to see where you grew up."

He was stunned at the suggestion. He hadn't ever considered going back. "I don't know. It's been a long time."

"How long?"

"Forty years."

Kate took his hand and smiled. "Then I'd say it's time."

They hopped the subway and got off in a retail area of the Bensonhurst section of Brooklyn. His grandparents had a small but tidy home on 78th street a few blocks from the subway. Some things had changed, some buildings gone, others exactly the way he remembered. He took Kate's hand as they walked down a street that had been a huge part of his youth. There was a jeweler's where there'd been a clothing store. The grocery was still in the same place and so was the bakery.

"Holy crap, Deluca's is still here," said Cabe. "Old man Deluca was a miserable cuss but he made the best cannoli in New York." He pulled her across the street. "Let's see if they still do."

The sound of the bell and the smells of the fresh pastries sent him back to his youth. "Nonna used to send me down for fresh breads and I would get a cannoli. I had to eat it on the way home so Nonna wouldn't know I thought Deluca's were better than hers." He rang the bell on the counter. "You have to have one."

Kate smiled at his excitement. This is what she'd hoped for.

"Alright, I'm coming. You kids are so impatient." A man with silver hair came out of the back room wiping his hands on his apron.

"Mr. DeLuca?" Cabe asked.

The man stopped and looked Cabe up and down. "I know you." He looked at Kate. "You, I don't know."

"No sir," said Kate.

He looked back at Cabe and gave him a slow smile. "Gallo."

"Yes, sir. It's good to see you."

"You got old."

Cabe laughed. "Yes sir, I did but you look great."

The man made a dismissive wave of his hand. "No I don't, but I'm eighty three years old and still on the right side of the dirt. So Gallo, how long since you've been back?"

"Forty years."

"Humph. You joined the army?"

"Marines."

"What brings you back?"

"My wife wanted to see where I grew up. Mr. DeLuca this is my wife, Kate."

Kate extended her hand and was surprised when he kissed. "Che Bello."

"Mr. DeLuca I was telling Kate you had the best cannoli in Brooklyn."

"Still do. Sit. I'll bring you some." He pointed to a small cafe table and chairs. "Sit, sit. I have some I just finished in the back."

Cabe watched until he disappeared through the door. "I can't believe he's still here."

Kate laughed. "You do realize that since he's eighty three, that means 'Old Man DeLuca' was forty three the last time you saw him."

He rolled his eyes. "God, I'm old."

DeLuca set two plates in front of them each with the crispy shell filled with creamy ricotta and chocolate drizzled on top. "Eat," he commanded.

They both closed their eyes and enjoyed the sweet flavor. "This is amazing." said Kate.

"Just like I remember," said Cabe.

The bell rang and DeLuca went to tend to the new customer. "Hi, Mr. DeLuca. I'm here for the order."

Cabe's face drained of color. "Oh my God," he whispered.

"What is it?" Kate turned to see an attractive woman, tall and slender in her late fifties with dark brown hair.

DeLuca pointed to their table. "Look what the wind blew in."

The woman turned to see them and she became noticeably pale, despite her dark coloring. "Cabe," she whispered.

He recovered his shock enough to stand and move toward the woman. "Hello, Angela. How have you been?"

"Fine, good," she said. "What are you doing here?"

"I was in town on business and my wife wanted to see where I grew up." He tried to smile. "I told her about Mr. DeLuca's cannoli."

Angela smiled, "Best in the city."

"Kate," he called and reached his hand to her. "Angela, this is my wife, Kate. This is Angela Savino."

She extended her hand. "Peluso."

"You married Jimmy?"

Angela's look was almost defiant. "I did. Thirty five years."

"That's great, Angela."

"We have four kids and six grandchildren."

Kate got the feeling Angela was making a point.

DeLuca interrupted with a huge box. "Here's your cake, Angela. Give Tommy and Elaine my best."

"Tommy and Elaine? Falcone?"

Angela nodded. "We're having an fortieth anniversary party at St. Francis tonight. You remember they got married the week after we all graduated."

Cabe nodded.

"You should come. Everyone will be there. I'm sure they'd love to see you."

"Oh, I don't..."

She picked up her box. "I'm sure Tommy and Elaine would love to have you there." She smiled at Kate. "Both of you."

"We'll think about it."

Angela smiled, "It was good to see you, Cabe."

"You too." He held the door for the her. "Eight o'clock, St. Francis."

Cabe closed the door behind her and returned to his seat, praying he'd get there before his legs gave out. He looked at his half eaten pastry and had no desire to finish it. He looked at Kate, knowing she would wait until he was ready. "We dated in high school."

"I assumed as much," Kate said.

"She was my first serious girlfriend."

"First?"

"The first."

They left the bakery and walked down the street in silence. He was walking down these streets like he had so long ago. Trying to get the nerve to tell Angela he'd joined the Marines. Telling her she shouldn't wait for him even after she'd offered to follow him. Listening to her sobs through the front door as he walked down her front steps and out of her life.

Kate grabbed Cabe's hand and pulled him to a bus stop bench. He knew what was coming. He couldn't hide anything from her.

"Talk to me," she said.

He took a deep breath. "I'd known Angela since I was a kid. Same neighborhood, same school, same church. We started dating in our junior year. We got serious pretty quick. That summer, well, it went to a different level." He looked at Kate and she was smiling. She gave him a nod to say 'Go on'. "Senior year we were inseparable. Everyone assumed we'd get married."

"Like Tommy and Elaine," said Kate

"Exactly. Then, right after Christmas, Nonna died. I had just turned eighteen and I was alone in my house. It was paid for and Nonna had left it to me so staying wasn't a problem."

"You didn't want to be alone."

Cabe nodded ashamed even now that he hadn't had the strength to stand on his own two feet. "Her family took care of me. I had dinner with them every night. Her parents were great people who loved me like a son."

"What happened?" Kate asked.

"I looked at all the great people who were making all these plans for my life. They started talking about wedding plans. Talking about working with her dad at the plant. How many kids we'd have. But the truth was I didn't know what I wanted. I was still a kid and they had my whole life mapped out. One day I wandered into a recruiting office and listened to what the Marine had to say. It sounded challenging as hell and it would be all me, succeed or fail, my choice. Telling Angela was the hardest thing I'd ever done."

"What did she say?"

"She was shocked but she wanted to marry me anyway and go with me. I knew she'd never be happy away from her family." When he looked at Kate saw no judgment." I think I knew on some level that Angela and I didn't have what it took to make it work. I told her not to wait for me." He sat back against the metal bench. "I've never told anyone about this," he whispered.

"She's the reason you never came back."

He nodded.

Kate threaded her hand through his. "Cabe, you have to forgive yourself. Yes, what you did caused Angela and her family pain, but in the long run it was the right decision." She put her hand to his cheek and made him look at her. "You made the right choice, for everyone."

Cabe gave her a smile. She understood.

"I think we should go tonight." she said.

"What?"

"There will be a lot of people there you'd love to see."

"So will Angela."

"She invited you. Plus you will give her the opportunity to lord her long, happy marriage and passel of children over your head."

"Are you sure? I don't want the situation with Angela to cause anymore pain, especially to you."

She smiled and gave him a soft kiss. "I pretty sure I know who you're going home with, so I'll be fine."

He found himself smiling. "It would be kind of nice to see the guys again."

Kate checked her watch. "It's five thirty now. Is the church far?"

"A couple of blocks from here."

"We could get some dinner and then go to the party."

"We should see if Romano's is still here. They made the best gnocchi."

"What?"

Cabe laughed. "Woman, there are gaping holes in your extensive education."

She leaned in and gave him a kiss more passionate than belonged on a street corner. "So educate me," she whispered.

He brought her to her feet. "Let's go." Kate started heading across the street but he held her back. "Romano's is the other direction."

She pointed at the jewelry store. "We can't go without a gift."

The gnocchi was just as good as he remembered. Fortunately they didn't run into anyone he knew from the neighborhood. He'd have enough of that soon. Right now Cabe was walking hand in hand with his best girl. They had some time before the party and the he'd offered to take her by his old home. She'd been so good for him today, dealing with things that he thought he'd offer.

Before he knew it, there he was, standing in front of the house he'd spent some of the best times of his life. His mother had moved them in with her parents after his father was killed. Mom did her best for him and everything was fine until the cancer. He had no idea what acute leukemia was. All he knew as a twelve year old was Mom hadn't been feeling good so she went to the doctor. Three weeks later they were at her funeral.

His grandparents were amazing people. Alfonso and Sarafina Asaro had emigrated to the states from Italy right after World War II. Alfonso used his skills to start a small masonry company. He had planned for Cabe to take over the business but his death forced Nonna to sell the it to one of the masons who'd worked for him.

All these years later, he still missed them. His Nonno had showed him how to tie a tie and how to throw a half decent spiral. He also taught him how to treat a woman. "Nipote, always be a gentleman. If you treat a woman with respect, she will always respect and honor you." He behaved like Nonna was still the most beautiful woman in the world, coming up behind her to steal a quick kiss or just smiling at her over dinner. He knew what real love was because of them. Maybe that was the reason he'd left Angela. He knew he would never feel about her the way his Nonno felt about his wife.

Cabe hadn't seen his home since the day he left for the Marines. He'd had a broker handle the sale and wire him the money. They were still comfortable, if small, brick homes lined up side by side. Each had small yards and of course the front stoop. Stoop sitting was a favorite occupation during the summer. He would sit and wait for one of his friends to come by, or he would go find them on their stoop. The old house had changed some,

a different front door, and flowers where Nonna used to grow basil. Some things hadn't changed, like the sounds and the smells of his neighborhood.

"Are you ok?"

Kate's voice brought him back. He took the hand he was still holding and kissed it. "Yeah sweetheart. I'm fine." He paused. "I still miss them."

"Of course you do. From everything you've told me, they were wonderful people."

Cabe just nodded.

"I can imagine you here as a little boy. Did you play stick ball?"

"Of course," he said.

"I'd love to see pictures of you from then."

"I have them somewhere. I promise I'll dig them out when we get home."

"I bet you were an adorable little boy."

"Oh yeah," he smiled. "I was cute as hell. All the girls thought so."

Kate gave him a little shove. "Smart ass." Her voice softened. "Cabe, they would be very proud of the man you've become. I know I am." Kate smiled at him and he knew Nonno had been right.

"Come on," he said. "We have a party to go to."

The vibrations from an amplifier said the party was already in full swing. Cabe led Kate to the entrance of a hall behind the church. He reached for the handle and hesitated.

"It's going to be fine, Cabe."

He opened the door and saw a sea of faces from his past. Tommy and Elaine were standing in front of a banner that said Happy Anniversary. Angela and Jimmy Peluso were laughing at something Johnny Amano said when Angela noticed they'd arrived. Jimmy noticed too, and did not look pleased. Angela approached Cabe and kissed him on the cheek.

"I'm so glad you both came. I didn't tell anyone but Jimmy you might be here."

"Obviously," thought Cabe.

Angela led them over to the guests of honor. "Tommy, Elaine, look who's here."

"Holy crap! Gallo? Is that you?" said Tommy as he pulled him into a bear hug.

"Hi, Tommy. It's good to see you. Hi, Elaine. Congratulations."

"Ah, thanks sweetie," said as she gave him a kiss on both cheeks. "It's been too long." She smiled, "And who have we here?"

"This is my wife, Kate."

"It's very nice to meet you," said Kate as she pulled a small wrapped gift out of her purse. She'd found a sterling picture frame at the jewelry store declaring it appropriate but not over done for a last minute gift. "Happy Anniversary."

"Oh, you didn't have to. That's so sweet." Elaine laughed. "I like you already." She handed the gift to Angela. "Could you put this on the table for me." Angela nodded and retreated. "So...How long have you been married?"

"Six months," said Cabe.

"Oh My God! Newlyweds!" she said. "Cabe, you catch up with the boys. I'm sure the team is going to want to run over every play they ever ran."

Tommy laughed. "Nah, we're gonna talk about the cheerleaders, like you." Then he swatted her ass.

"Tommy, stop it. You're so bad." she turned back to Kate. "He's so bad. He was a football player and I was a cheerleader and well you know how those things go. Forty years later here we are."

"That's wonderful," said Kate.

Elaine looked over at Cabe. "Oh My God, she's adorable!"

Cabe smiled. "I think so."

"I'm going to steal her for a hen party. You boys go, do." Elaine waved her hand dismissively at her husband. Kate shot Cabe a panicked look as Elaine led her to a corner full of woman she didn't know. "I'm going to owe her big for this," he thought.

Kate was pulled into a group of women who all appeared to be about the same age. Most had dark hair thanks to their hairdressers.

"Girls, I want you to meet Kate," said Elaine.

Some of the women said hi and nodded but most ignored her because they had their eyes glued to Cabe.

"Oh, My, God, is that Cabe Gallo?"

"What's he doing here?"

"Does Angela know?"

"Damn, he's still hot."

Elaine interrupted the free floating conversation. "Ladies, this is Kate."

"Yeah, Yeah so you said. I wouldn't kick him out of bed for eating crackers," said a woman in tight jeans and a tiger print top.

A woman in tight red skirt laughed. "Hell, I wouldn't kick him out at all."

"Girls! This is Cabe's wife," Elaine all but shouted.

They turned to her the once over. "So you're Cabe's wife."

Kate forced a smile. "Yes I am. To answer your questions, Yes, it's really Cabe. I asked to see where he grew up, Angela is the one who invited us and most important, Yes, he's damn hot."

They looked stunned and Kate thought she's made a misstep until Elaine burst out laughing. Kate decided she really liked Elaine. Her skill at reading people was being put to the test. Some of the women seem relaxed and welcoming but a few were suspicious of her.

Elaine took a protective lead and steered the conversation. She asked the tiger print woman, Janie, to get her a glass of wine. Apparently having a soda was out of the question. "They're newlyweds. Only six months!"

Most of the women offer congratulations but there were still a couple of holdouts. A woman in with a plunging neckline and badly bleached hair spoke up. "Frankly I'm surprised he had the nerve to show his face after what he did to Angela."

"Sharon, Don't be rude. If Angela wasn't okay with it she wouldn't have invited him," said Elaine. So, tell me how you met."

"We met through work."

"What, are you like a secretary?" asked Sharon.

"Snarky bitch," thought Kate. "No, we're federal agents with Homeland Security. Well, Cabe is. I retired." Kate answered and was gratified to see Sharon at a loss for words.

"You mean like badges and guns and stuff," asked tight red skirt.

"Yes, badges and guns and stuff," said Kate.

"That's amazing," said Elaine.

"Do you have guns now?" asked tiger print.

"Not at the moment." Kate heard Cabe laugh and looked over to see him surrounded by a group of boisterous men. He looked so relaxed and happy. He looked over at her and shot her a wink. Kate thought she heard tiger print Janie sigh.

"Do you have any kids?" asked red skirt.

"No I was never married before Cabe."

"Ah, such a shame," said red skirt.

"Sara, behave yourself," said Elaine. Red skirt had a name.

"I have three children."

"That's lovely. Do you have any pictures?" Kate knew from years of experience if you asked someone about their lives, they forget about yours.

Sara pulled out her phone and pulled up a shot of her with a round, balding man and two boys in their late twenties and a daughter about thirty.

"What a handsome family. I see your daughter has your long legs."

Sara smiled. "She does look a lot like me."

The flood gates opened and they all pulled out their phones, showing Kate pictures of children and grandchildren.

Kate pulled out her phone. "I have some pictures you might like." She pulled up a picture of Cabe riding his Harley, leather jacket and boots. Totally badass.

"Oh, wow," said Elaine. "Do you worry about him on that thing?"

"No. Cabe is careful. Let's see if I can find something tease worthy." She pulled up a picture of him cannonballing into the pool. "This is a good one." She knew the picture would also give them a good view of the house.

"Oh that's priceless," said Elaine. "Was that on your honeymoon?"

"Ah, no," she said. "That's at home." It was a cheap trick but it was worth it for the look on Sharon's face.

"I need a drink," said Sharon as she headed toward the bar.

"I'm empty too," said Elaine.

Half the group followed them to the bar at the back of the room. Kate followed even though she didn't want any more wine. She figured she was better off staying close to Elaine.

She heard someone come up behind her. "So this is Gallo the Great's wife," said a tall man with a bad Tommy Bahama shirt and a beer in his hand. It was obviously not his first, or his fifth.

"Frank, knock it off."

He ignored Elaine's request and leaned in closer to Kate. "Your husband was quite the ladies man in high school. He could've had any girl but he had to have mine. Well maybe it's time for a little payback." He grabbed at her breast. Kate heard gasps from the women, but dead silence from the group with her reaction. In one move Kate had him turned around with his arm pinned up high in his back.

"Ow, that hurts."

Kate leaned in and spoke slowly. "Now Frank I want you to listen to me. Are you listening?" When he made no response she pushed his arm a bit farther up his back.

"Okay, Okay, I'm listening."

"You've behaved very badly. Now you have two options. Option one, you can apologize and go back to the party. Option two, I can exert just a little bit more pressure and separate your arm from your shoulder. I suggest Option one." He nodded.

"Good choice. I'm also going to do you a very big favor. I'm not going to tell Cabe what you did." She leaned close and whispered in his ear, "Because if he knew what you did, he wouldn't have given you an option." She moved away from his ear and the smell of too many beers. "I'm ready for my apology now."

"I'm sorry."

"I accept." She release his arm and smiled. "Now why don't you go back to the party."

She checked to see Cabe and his buddies engrossed in conversation. She was glad he had missed the confrontation. She was pretty sure Frank would never mention it. To anyone. Ever.

She turned back to the women who were still in stunned silence.

"Wow, you really are a cop." said Sharon. Kate smiled.

"I'm so sorry, Kate. He gets like that when he drinks."

"It's not your fault, Elaine. What was he talking about 'his girl'?"

"He'd always had a crush on Angela, still does. But she never had eyes for anyone but Cabe."

Kate turned to the women. "Ladies, please don't mention it to anyone before we leave. Cabe's having such a great time. I don't want to spoil it for him." The women nodded and left the bar to join their men.

Elaine smiled, "I like you , Kate. I'm glad Cabe has someone like you. He always was a really good guy."

"He still is."

Cabe had really missed this. Hanging with his friends, laughing, joking felt like it all was just yesterday, and at the same time, forever. He had grown up with these guys. Football, girls, ditching class to sneak into a movie. Standing watch while your buddy stole a kiss behind the statue of St Francis in the courtyard. He never realized how much he'd missed them.

Tommy Falcone had been one of his best friends. He'd written to him a few times when he enlisted, but they'd lost touch over the years. He'd been a stocky kid with jet black hair, making him a contrast to Cabe's tall, lean frame. Now he had grey hair and had shaped up considerably since those days.

"Tommy, what are you doing these days?" asked Cabe

"I'm retired. I was a teacher at Central for thirty years. English and football."

"That's terrific. I bet you got payback for all the crap we pulled there."

"Like you wouldn't believe."

"Marco, what about you?"

"I'm a clinical psychologist. I work out of a mental health clinic but I go to schools, hospitals, where ever I'm needed."

Cabe was floored. Marco had always been a handful as a kid. Still built like a linebacker, he'd had a knack for stirring up mischief. "Wow. What a great thing to do."

"You still a marine?" asked Marco.

"No. I'm with Homeland Security."

"Holy shit! You're a cop?" said Tommy

Cabe smiled. "Federal agent."

"No way," said Tommy. "You were always the best one at sneaking over fences to go swimming or into the movies without the usher catching you."

He reached into his pocket and pulled out his badge.

"Holy shit," said Tommy in an almost reverential way. "Special Agent." He smiled at Cabe and patted his back. "How cool is that?"

Tommy nodded toward the women at the bar. "Looks like our wives are hitting it off."

"It's really nice of Elaine to introduce her around."

Marco laughed. "You always did have a thing for Irish girls. Is she as fiery as Rowan was?"

"Hell yeah."

The boys laughed. "Serves you right, Gallo." said Marco. "So how'd a nice Irish girl wind up with a lug like you?"

"We met through our work. She was a Homeland agent too until she retired a few months ago."

"You wife's a cop too! Hah!" cried Tommy.

"Special Agent," Cabe smiled.

Tommy leaned in. "I bet she can kick your ass."

"She has on several occasions. She has a black belt in Krav Maga and in a pinch, she's a nasty little street fighter." He leaned into his buddies. "Irish temper and all that skill, you never want to piss her off." Cabe laughed as the boys stared across the room at Kate.

It really was a great party with most of the music coming from their high school years. He heard Frankie Valli start "My Eyes Adored You" and said, "Boys, I think it's time I go dance with my wife." He crossed the room to Kate who was still surrounded by the women. "Ladies," he nodded. "I'd like to steal my wife away for a dance." Cabe took her by the hand to the small dance floor. A few others joined them as they moved to the music. "How are you doing?" he asked.

"Fine. Elaine is really nice."

"She always was a good kid." He glanced back over at the women who were watching them dance. "I see Janie and I think that's Sara. Oh lord, is that Sharon?" The look on Kate's face told him what he needed to know. "I'm going to owe you big, aren't I?"

"SO big. I plan on collecting later. Are you having a good time?"

"A great time. I never realized how much I missed those guys."

"I'm glad." Kate smiled at him as the dance ended. They held their embrace for a few moments after the music ended. They both saw Angela across the room, watching them. She had tears in her eyes.

"You should go talk to her."

"What?"

"She needs this and so do you."

He nodded at Kate who moved back towards Elaine. He walked toward Angela who was desperately trying to smile.

"Are you having a good time?" asked Angela.

"Terrific. I can't thank you enough for inviting us."

"I'm so glad. Well, I should go see if Jimmy..."

Cabe took her hand. "Angela, can we talk for a minute. Please?"

She nodded and he steered them to some folding chairs against the wall. It was far enough away from the crowd for a private conversation but not hidden from view. The last thing he wanted was for anyone to think he'd snuck away with her.

He held her hand and took a breath. "Angela, I want to apologize for the pain I caused you and your family. I don't expect you to forgive me, but I need to apologize."

"It was a long time ago."

"Yes it was, but that doesn't mean I don't need to apologize. Angela, I did love you, very much." He saw her catch her breath. "But I knew I needed to go, to figure out who I was outside of this place."

"I would have come with you."

"I know and you would have been miserable. Leaving your family, your friends, everything you love, would have been torture for you."

"You're right it would have and I knew that even then," she said. "But I loved you so much..."

He held her hand tighter. "And I loved you, but it would have never been enough. It would never have been what you have with Jimmy."

Angela gave him a sad smile. "He's a good man and a good father."

Cabe smiled. "And all those kids, and grandkids."

"They're good kids. All keepers," she laughed.

"Do you have any pictures?"

Angela pulled out her phone and showed him a gallery of pictures. Three boys and a girl all in their late twenties or early thirties. Several of the kids held their own kids. She proudly told him of their accomplishments, from the oldest boy with a full ride to Harvard Medical to youngest grandchild's first steps just yesterday.

"You have a beautiful family."

"Thank you. Do you have children?"

"I had a daughter, Amanda."

"Had?"

He pulled up the pictures Kate had loaded on his phone for him. "I was married once before Kate." He showed her several pictures. "She was the sweetest little thing. A real Daddy's girl. She died when she was six. Cancer."

"Oh, Cabe. I'm so sorry."

"Thank you." He tucked his phone away. "After she died I lost myself in the work and it cost me my marriage. For the longest time, all there was for me was the work."

"And then you met Kate."

He smiled. "I never expected someone like her at this point in my life. Angela, we found our right paths, both of us."

"You're right. We did." As they stood Angela hugged him. "I forgive you," she whispered and kissed his cheek. "I need to find Jimmy. He promised me a dance."

Cabe looked at her as she blended into the crowd. He's finally closed the door. They both had.

He had to get his bearings before he went back to Kate. He walked through the open door and took a breath of the crisp night air.

"Well if it isn't Gallo the Great,"

Cabe turned to the voice. "Hello Jimmy."

"Why did you come back? Do you know how much you hurt her?"

"I know Jimmy, believe me I know."

"What the hell were you doing in there with her? You have a wife. For God's sake leave mine alone."

Cabe was stunned. Jimmy wasn't angry, he was terrified. "Jimmy, I was apologizing. I know how much pain I caused her and I've felt horrible about it for forty years."

Jimmy took a sip of his beer. "I've spent the same forty years living in your shadow, the one that got away."

"Jimmy, Angela loves you. You know what's more, she's proud of you. She told me what a great man and a great father you are."

He looked like he didn't believe Cabe.

"I loved her, Jimmy. I won't insult you or her by denying it. But truth of the matter is I never could have been the man you are. You gave her everything she ever wanted, a home, children, Sunday dinners with the family. Those were the things that mattered most to her and I would have never been able to give that to her. Only you could."

"I don't know how to compete with her memory of you."

"Time has a way of softening the edges of our memory. It takes the edge off all the unpleasant details, making more out of what was. But you don't have to compete with me. You never did. All you need to do is tell her how much you love her, don't assume she knows. Show her that she is the most important person in the world to you."

Jimmy whispered, "She is. I don't remember a time when I wasn't in love with her, ever since we were kids. But there was always you."

"I left. You were there for her. You will always be there for her. Tell her that."

Jimmy tossed his empty can in the trash. "I think I'm going to go dance with my wife." He headed towards the door but turned around. He extended his hand. "Thanks Cabe."

Jimmy walked back into the hall, passing by Kate standing in the doorway. "Well," she said "That was unexpected." she said.

Cabe ran his hand through his hair "Tell me about it."

Kate slipped her arms around his waist. "Are you mad?"

"About what?"

"Telling you to talk to her."

"No, you were right. It was what we both needed."

"Do you want to talk about it?"

"No."

"Okay."

"Okay?"

"Yeah."

"No using your feminine wiles to get the information out of me?"

"First, thank you for thinking I have feminine wiles. Second, you have a right to privacy. If you want me to know, you'll tell me."

He held her close and whispered, "I love you, Katie girl."

"I love you too, boyo."

"I think it's time we start saying our goodnights."

"Okay," she released him and started toward the door.

He grabbed her hand. "But first there's something I want you to see." He pulled her further into the courtyard toward a statute in a corner of the building. "This is St. Francis."

"I'm sure it's a wonderful statue, but it's pitch dark out here. I can't see it."

He leaned in and whispered, "Yeah, how about that." She squealed as he pulled her further into the corner behind the statue.

"Cabe! What are you doing?"

"This is where we used to sneak off with a girl to steal a kiss."

"Oh, yeah?"

"Yeah. I had my very first kiss right here with my very first girl." He gave her a soft kiss. "Now I want to steal a kiss from my best girl." He kissed her again. "My Katie girl."

Kate slipped her hands around his neck. "Cabe," she whispered.

He lost himself in her arms. The passion she had for him amazed him. He kissed her deeply, slipping his hands under her blouse.

"Who's back there? Darn you kids. I've warned you over and over. Come out from there."

They rested their heads on each other and laughed. "I guess we're busted." He led her out holding her hand to find an elderly priest standing on the walkway.

"Sorry father," they both said.

"Aren't you two a little old for this nonsense?"

"Well father, I wanted to show my wife where I had my first kiss." He pulled her hand towards him and kissed it. "And when you have a girl as pretty as this, you're never too old for such nonsense."

"Ah, you kids never change." The priest waved a hand at them as he walked down the dark path.

Cabe and Kate waited a respectful amount of time before they burst out laughing.

They got back to their hotel and Cabe locked the door. "Well, that was a hell of a day."

"Sure was," said Kate as she opened the small fridge. "You want a water?"

"Yeah thanks."

"Think fast? She tossed him a bottle. He caught it in mid air and she laughed. "Great hands, Gallo." She gave him a wicked smile. "But I already knew that."

He sat on the edge of the bed and watched as Kate got ready for bed. She stripped off her clothes and folded them back into her suitcase. He smiled at the lingerie color of the day, green. He loved her in green. Hell, he loved her in anything. Mostly he loved her in nothing.

Cabe couldn't understand it. They'd had a long day, been all over the city and not to mention the party. He should be exhausted but all he could think about right now was his wife's lace covered ass and his now painfully tight jeans. He knew she had the same reaction to him. He could see in those moments when her eyes grew dark that her passion for him was just as strong.

"Kate I want to ask you a question."

She closed her case and walked towards him, "What's up?"

He slid his hands around her waist and then slid them down to cup her ass.

She smiled. "If that's the question, the answer is yes."

"While I'm happy with that particular answer, that wasn't my question." He smiled and gave her a quick kiss. "Do you ever think about what this is between us."

"What do you mean?"

"What's between us is intense. I'm a fifty seven year old man. I shouldn't feel like a horny teenage boy but I do around you, all the time! I thought after we settled into married life, we'd settle down, but we haven't." He fingered her lacy bra." Right now I should be dead tired but all I can think about is ripping this off you."

Kate kissed him. "I know what you mean. Every time I look at you I have the urge to do this." She ran her hands of his pecs.

He laughed. "You do seem particularly interested in my chest."

"Also your ass. You have a spectacular ass."

"So what is it. Why are two people in their fifties acting like teenagers."

"I don't know, Cabe. Toby finds it incomprehensible. The morning of our wedding he couldn't believe we'd already had sex and it was barely seven a.m."

"How the hell did he know?"

"My brush burned cheek and the goofy grin on your face. When I went to change I found him rooting through our medicine cabinet for Viagra."

"What?"

Kate laughed, "Sweetheart, I don't know what it is. Maybe it could be explained scientifically with our pheromones being in perfect alignment. Maybe it's the universe rewarding us for all we had to go through to find each other." She leaned in to give him a deep kiss. "Or maybe it's just because we love each other that much. No matter what the reason. I'm grateful."

"So am I," he said pulling her into his lap. He kissed her deeply, tongues fighting for dominance. He nipped at her lip, her neck. "Sweetheart, we need to get me out of these jeans because they're killing me."

"Well we can't have that," she smiled. "I have plans for you." She reached for his belt while he ripped his shirt over his head. She was reaching for his zipper when he grabbed her hand. "You're going to need to let me do that, or we'll be done before we start." He pulled off his jeans and Kate saw why he'd been in pain.

"Yup," she said. "Really grateful." She slipped back on the bed propping herself up on the pillows. "Now I remember someone saying they owed me big."

He looked down and then back at her and smiled.

"That's a start."

"A start?"

"Cabe, I spent an hour with Sharon."

He climbed on the bed next to her and began tracing the curves of her body with his finger. "Paying this debt off may kill me." He replace his finger with his tongue.

"Don't worry, baby. I'll make sure you die happy."

He began nipping at her flesh through the lace.

"Hmmm that's good," she whispered. "They were drooling over you."

"What?" he asked as he continued his mission, transferring attention from one breast to the other.

"The women, Sharon, Janie, Sara, they all talked about how they wanted you in their beds."

He lifted his head. "Excuse me?"

She stroked his cheek. "It was before they knew I'm your wife. They said how hot you still are," she whispered in his ear before she nipped at it. "I kept thinking, yeah go ahead girls and dream. He's all mine." He kissed her deeply. "I watched you too. Standing with all your friends, laughing. You were the center of attention. You looked so damn good in your t-shirt and jeans, better than any man there." She rubbed her hands down his powerful arms. "Not to mention the gun show. I was so proud." She pulled him in for a fiery kiss.

"You were watched, too," said Cabe. He kissed her neck, nipped at her shoulder. "They wanted to know how a someone like you wound up with me." He kissed her and whispered, "They thought it was hot you're a cop too and you could kick my ass." He placed a kiss on her breast. "I saw you standing there with all those women, most trying way too hard to look like what they were. You looked so beautiful, natural." He kissed the other breast then covered them with his hands. "You looked sexier in your top and jeans than any of those plunging necklines. I was proud to say you're my wife." He kissed her. "I could see from their faces they envied me, though none would dare say anything." He saw a look he didn't understand. "What?"

"Nothing," she said as she kissed his neck.

"You aren't the only one who can read people. Did something happen?" She sighed. This was something she didn't want to tell him.

"You know a guy named Frank, paunchy guy, pretty drunk?"

"Yeah," he said not liking where this was going.

"He was rude. I pointed out the error of his ways."

"Specifics. Now."

"He was drunk off his ass. Apparently he has no great love for you. He copped a feel."

"He did what?! Why didn't you tell me? Why didn't someone?"

"Calm down. I told them not to. You were having such a good time and I didn't want to ruin it. I was standing with the women when it happened and they were all shocked at his behavior. So I explained to him how his behavior was unacceptable."

"How?"

"I pulled his arm behind him up to his shoulder blade. I told him he was rude and he could or apologize or I could separate his arm from his shoulder. He chose to apologize. I also told him that I wouldn't tell you because if you knew what he'd done you wouldn't have given him a choice."

"You were right about that. "He couldn't help but smile. "Damn, woman. I bet you were quite the sight." He kissed her neck. "Strong," he whispered. "So beautiful," He held her gaze. "And all mine."

"All yours," she whispered.

He slipped his hand under her to unhook her bra. He pulled it off and tossed it to the floor. His hands touched each curve. "You have such beautiful breasts." He worshipped them with his mouth.

"Cabe," she moaned.

He slipped the lace panties down her hips and touched every spot he knew drove her crazy. She writhed under his touch. He loved how she was responsive to him. He stopped for a moment and remembered the image that first day in the garage. The beautiful, shy woman who proved more passionate than his wildest imagination. He touched her. She was on fire.

"Please, Cabe," she begged.

He had taken her to the edge. He answered her plea, slipped inside her. She wrapped her legs around him.

"Please baby," she whispered. "You know what I need. You always know."

He lost what little control he still had, going hard and fast, until they both found what they needed.

Cabe turned to his side and wrapped his arm around Kate's waist. Reality finally caught up with both of them and they fell into deep sleep around midnight. It had been quite a day. Seeing all the guys from his old neighborhood brought back great memories. Resolving things with Angela brought him a sense of peace he hadn't realized he'd been missing. Kate had known. He placed a kiss on her wounded shoulder. His brave girl. He would have loved to see her teach Frank his lesson, but she was right. He'd have beaten the crap out of him.

He rolled to grab his watch from the night stand. "Holy crap," he said. He patted her ass. "Hey lazy bones, time to wake up."

"Hmmm. I'm sleeping. You're annoying me, early bird."

"It's past ten."

Kate rolled over. "What?"

"We've been asleep for more than ten hours."

She pat his stomach. "That would explain the growling."

Cabe laughed. "It seems like the laws of time finally caught up with us."

She pulled him in for a quick kiss. "But it was SO worth it."

"Agreed. How about today we take it easy. Let's order room service then maybe take a walk. We're on fifth avenue, there's plenty to see. Central Park isn't that far from here."

"That sounds perfect."

It was a perfect Sunday for a walk. Not too warm or too crowded. They walked down Fifth avenue, past boutiques and small galleries. Kate stopped in front of Tiffany's to look in their window.

"Wow. These are beautiful," she said.

"I thought jewelry was your mother's thing, not yours."

"This isn't jewelry. This is Tiffany's."

Cabe smiled. "Well then I guess we should go in."

"What? No. I was just looking."

He grabbed her hand. "So we'll just look inside." Cabe had to admit that even he could see the beauty of these pieces. Some of the pieces were crafted like small works of art. Kate gravitated toward the color stones, not the diamonds. He'd been right when he chose her engagement ring.

"They're beautiful," she whispered.

Cabe noticed a pendant on a display neck. It was a yellow gold design with a large emerald tear drop. "That's nice."

"Magnificent is more like it."

He waved to a saleswoman. "Try it on."

"Oh no. It's beautiful but that's something you wear to a gala. She pointed to a smaller display neck with a small oval emerald mounted in a swirl of gold wires. "That's gorgeous."

A very tailored saleswoman greeted Cabe with a smile. "Can I help you?"

"My wife would like to see that necklace."

"Cabe, we said we were just looking."

"We are. Now we're looking at it around your neck." The woman leaned over the counter to secure the pendant around Kate's neck.

"How does it look?" Kate asked.

Cabe turned a mirror on the case to face her. The look on her face told him what he wanted to know. "We'll take it."

"Are you sure?" she asked, but couldn't hide the smile on her face.

He gave her a quick kiss. "I'm sure." He reached in his wallet and pulled out his charge card. He had a hard time adjusting to not worrying about money. Despite Kate making him a very wealthy man, he never bought anything now that he wouldn't have bought before their marriage. Buying something for her was different.

Kate watched the saleswoman give Cabe a big smile. "I'll be right back sir."

She slipped her arms around his waist. "Thank you, I love it." He gave her a quick kiss. "You're welcome, sweetheart." The saleswoman returned with his card and the receipt and GIA certification papers for the insurance company. The necklace wasn't new car expensive, but it was more than he paid for his first used car.

Cabe took the receipt but Kate reached for the certs. "I'll put the those in my bag." She set her purse on the counter and fumbled for her wallet. In the spillage from her purse was her Homeland ID, badge facing out. "Oh here it is." She took the papers and secured them in her wallet, before picking up her things from the counter. She smiled at the saleswoman. "Thank you for your help."

Outside the store Kate gave him a kiss. "Thank you so much, sweetheart. I love it."

"Oh, no you don't Katie girl. I know when you're up to mischief." He pulled her to the entranceway of a store that was closed. "First question, why are you still carrying your ID?"

She took a breath and pulled it from her bag. "I tried not to, but it was so much a part of me for so long." She rubbed her thumb over the ridges in her shield. "I thought it would make my transition easier."

"Okay, I get that. But why did you flash it to the salesgirl?"

"Well, that was necessary."

"Excuse me?"

"I was letting her know I knew what she was doing and she should be more careful."

"Is there something wrong with the stone?"

"No." She smiled. "You really didn't see it did you? She barely looked at me but she couldn't take her eyes off of you. If I hadn't been right there she'd have slipped you her phone number."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"Sweetheart, the desk clerk at the hotel, the saleswoman just now. Women are drawn to you."

Cabe laughed and gave Kate a hug. "I appreciate your confidence in me but the saleswoman only noticed my credit limit and the desk clerk, she's a kid. Can't be older than Paige. I'm just one more old guy."

"How do I explain this? Yes, there are men who are younger, men who are better looking. But do you know what these women see when they look at you? I mean besides the strong jaw, spectacular ass and those amazing blue eyes." She lowered her voice. "They see a real man. There aren't very many of you out there. They see someone who's strong and loyal. Someone who protects his woman."

"Kate...I," he stumbled for words.

She got closer and whispered to him. "They also sense your power. You have a sexual energy that commands a woman's attention. You are an amazing man, Cabe Gallo. I'm not the only woman who knows it."

He moved closer, leaning her against the marble entrance. "Ah, Katie girl, I don't know if any of that is true but I'm kind of glad you think it is."

Cabe and Kate took a cab back to the hotel after a long walk around the park and a quick lunch at an outdoor cafe. Cabe was admiring a small painting he'd purchased by a young artist who had a display at an outdoor show. It was a landscape of the park with bold colors and an almost impressionist feel.

"This is really very good," he said.

"I agree. You also made the girl's week when you handed her twice what she was asking."

Cabe smiled. "She has real talent and paints are expensive."

Kate kissed his cheek. "You're a good man, Cabe Gallo."

They got back to their room and Cabe secured the painting in his case. "What would you like to do tonight?"

"What I'd really like to do is stay in, cuddle up on the bed and watch pay per view."

"That sounds great."

Cabe put on his sweatpants and an old FBI t-shirt. Kate put on shorts and a shirt from Cal-Tech. He propped pillows against the headboard as she pulled up the on-screen guide. "Look, it's the Western channel. John Wayne is on in five minutes."

"Fine, so long as we do Space aliens after."

"Deal."

After John Wayne, Cabe ordered them some burgers from room service. Kate was currently stealing French fries from his plate. "Damn, woman. You have your own."

She smiled. "It's more fun when I steal them from you."

Cabe watched her as she talked about their weekend, his old home, his friends. She was so animated about the experience, he had to smile. Sometimes it scared him how much he loved her. In a very short time, she'd become the most important thing in his life. More than the job. More than the team. He wondered if he was making him less effective as an agent.

"Hey," she called. "Earth to Cabe, come in Cabe."

"Sorry, what did you say?"

"I was wondering if you'd like to invite Tommy and Elaine out to the house. We have plenty of space and I think you'd like to spend time with them. I really liked Elaine."

He smiled. "I think that's a great idea."

"Oh, it's time for Space Aliens." She grabbed the remote and flipped to the science fiction channel.

"Fine, but nothing with creatures bursting out of stomachs. I just ate."

## Chapter Fourteen

Cabe straightened his tie in the mirror. His meeting with the UN security chief was in an hour and he wanted a few minutes to review his notes. He glanced over his shoulder and saw Kate still asleep, with a pillow over her head. "Lord this woman hates mornings," he said before he walked over and swatted her ass. "Hey lazybones! Time to get up."

"Ugh, what time is it?"

"Nearly eight."

"Okay, okay. Did you order breakfast?"

"Should be here any minute so you might want to put some clothes on."

Kate opened her eyes and looked Cabe up and down. Then gave him a slow smile. He was wearing a navy suit with a light blue shirt and tie. He always smiled when she looked at him like that. He never saw what she did, but so long as she was smiling that was all that mattered.

"You're looking mighty handsome there, boyo."

"Uh oh, trouble," he thought. "She's breaking out the Irish."

She slipped out of bed, still naked, and put her arms around his neck. "Mighty fine, indeed," she whispered as she kissed him.

He kissed her and slid his hands down her back to her ass. "Oh no you don't Katie girl. I have a meeting with the UN security chief in one hour. You will not distract me."

She stepped back and smiled, still in her Irish persona. "Very well, boyo. But get back to me quick enough and I will demonstrate my high opinion of your taste in clothing." Kate's mischief was interrupted by a knock at the door. "Room service."

Cabe grabbed her t-shirt and shorts off the floor where she left them, or more accurately he'd tossed them after the Space Alien movie. He handed them to her and pointed to the bathroom. "Now." She smiled as closed the bathroom door behind her.

They spent the next twenty minutes reviewing his notes while Kate devoured an egg bagel. Cabe thought she'd miss the bagels more than anything about New York.

"I guess I'm ready," he said as he gathered his things.

"I don't envy you this assignment but I think you've come up with the only way to make it work. Consult with the law enforcement representatives of the various countries and do your best to cut the politicians out of the equation."

"I hope you're right. I'll call you when I'm done." He gave her a quick kiss and headed out the door.

Cabe was an hour into his meeting with John Carey, the UN security chief. Carey had his doubts about Cabe's plans but to his credit was willing to listen. They made notes on which agencies Carey felt would cooperate and which would put up the most resistance. That's when they heard it, loud cracks of gunfire and yelling in the hallway.

"Are you armed?" asked Cabe. Carey shook his head. "Damn. Neither am I. The best we can do is get word out we need help."

Carey picked up the conference room phone and set it back down. "Dead."

"What's the layout on this floor?"

"All conference rooms. Used for meetings like this." Carey's shoulder sagged. "Oh shit."

"What?"

"The Ambassador had a meeting scheduled in room three. The Ambassador along with state department reps including the Secretary of State."

"Why aren't you there?"

"Because the Ambassador felt our meeting was too important. My people were coordinating security with State and he felt it was more than adequate. I was to join them after we finished."

Cabe opened their door a crack. There was a man down in the hall and yelling from where the meeting was taking place. "You stay put, I'm going to check on the downed man." He slipped into the hall and checked the man's pulse. He was dead. He was searching the man for anything useful, a weapon, ear piece, when he heard a familiar sound. His head exploded in pain before everything went black.

Kate dried off from her shower and began to get dressed. She thought maybe she take a swim in the hotel pool. Maybe she walk back down Fifth and do a window shopping

and find something for Cabe. She pulled on her jeans and a lightweight top. She dug under the bed for her sneakers as she flipped on the TV. The hotel had a channel of local events she wanted to check before hitting the street. She looked at the screen and her world stopped spinning.

"Breaking news from the United Nations. Shots have been reported fired at an office building adjacent to the General Assembly. The General Assembly is in lockdown as a precaution. Police are on site."

Kate grabbed her phone and flipped through her contacts. Having Katherine Cooper as a friend meant having her personal cell number.

Cooper picked up immediately. "Kate."

"Fill me in."

"I'm getting details now. We believe a fringe militia group has taken the Ambassador and Secretary of State hostage. They're a radical isolationist group and are demanding the US withdraw from the United Nations. There have been several fatalities including the catering crew they replaced."

"Cabe."

Cooper paused. "His meeting was scheduled on the same floor."

"How many actives?"

"As best we can tell only three."

She started rooting through Cabe's luggage. "I'm headed down there now."

"Kate, you can't. You're not an agent anymore."

"I have my ID on me. You've got the time it takes me to run five blocks to reactivate me and tell the team on site I'm coming. Have someone prepared to give me a sidearm." She hung up, not giving Cooper a chance to argue. She started yanking things out of Cabe's luggage. "Come on, Gallo. I know you have it." She found a bag containing two coms. She placed one in her ear and activated it. "Walter, Toby, anyone. Are you on?"

"Kate? What's going on. We're seeing it now on the news," said Walter.

"Cabe's meeting was on the same floor. Radical isolationist group who wants us out of the UN have taken the Ambassador and Secretary of State hostage. Cooper's already on it. Have her fill you in. I'm going to need all the information you can get. Toby, are you on?"

"I'm here, Kate."

"As soon as you know who they are I need you to profile the crap out of them. I want to know for certain what they're going to do."

"You got it," he replied.

"How are you going in there? You retired," said Paige.

"Yeah, well that's a story for another day." Kate pulled on her sneakers and threw on a jacket, stuffing what she might need in the pockets.

Part of Kate's mind told her to be careful. She was running full out down a crowded street. The rest of her brain was screaming to run faster. She had to find him. Local NYPD tried to stop her at the barricade until she flashed her badge. She ran toward a group of suits standing next to a tactical response command post. "Who's in charge?"

A man in his mid thirties approached, "I am. Special Agent Robert Price, Homeland."

She flashed her badge "Special Agent Kate Riley. Homeland out of LA. I have a man inside. He was meeting with the UN security chief."

He stepped aside for her to walk up the trailer's steps. "Director Cooper brought me up to speed." Price waved to another agent who handed her a nine mm.

Kate nodded and tucked it in behind her back, "Thanks. What have you got so far?"

"Not a lot. They cut most communications in the building but had radios of their own to transmit their demands. We've cut power so they can't use any elevators and those sealed rooms are going to get hot quickly."

Kate tapped speed dial for the garage and put him on speaker. "Walter do you have Cooper linked?" "I'm here, Kate." Cooper answered.

"You got anything?" Price looked confused. "My team in LA."

"We've tapped into the command post's feed. We can enhance their data with our software. Just a second,"

"They did what?" asked Price.

Kate waved her hand. "Don't even bother. They could tap into your brainstem if they wanted."

"I've enhanced their heat signature software, I'm reading three people pacing back and forth, probably the bad guys."

"Who are these guys?" asked Price

She just shook her head. "There are four people seated at the conference table and one person on the ground. From the signature, I would say he's injured." Sly paused.

Kate's heart skipped at the silence. "Sly. Talk to me!"

"From the size and shape, mass distribution,"

"Just tell me, damn it!"

"I'm pretty sure it's Cabe."

Kate closed her eyes and took a centering breath. She refused to believe she could lose him. She wouldn't let that happen. "Do you have any ID's?"

"Yeah we do. They avoided the surveillance on the building feeds, but not the cameras three blocks west.," said Walter. "I'm transmitting the data now."

Pictures popped up on the command post computer screen. Walter identified the men. "Avery Bruner, age forty five, dishonorable discharge from the army for crimes against Iraqi civilians. Founder of The New America. Organization dedicated to stopping all immigration and deporting all non-native born Americans. John Fredrick, age twenty two, removed from his home when he was seven because of extreme abuse. Bruner is his foster father. Frank Murphy, age thirty five. Spent most of his adult life in and out prison until he shared a cell with Bruner when he was in jail on gun violations. He became a true believer."

Price looked at her. "How reliable is their information."

"Scorpion is never wrong."

"Scorpion? Holy shit," he whispered. Apparently the team had a rep.

"Toby, what have you got for me?"

"These guys are devoted to their cause, which means they will not compromise." He paused. "Kate, they're not wearing any protective gear."

"Damn," Kate said.

"What?" asked Price.

"It means they never had any intention of coming out of this alive."

"They want to be martyrs for the cause," Toby added.

"Yeah, well I'm going to grant their wish," said Kate.

"Kate, you're a hacker not a sniper." said Paige.

She ignored Paige and told the tech to get Cooper on the screen. "Katherine, you have all that?"

"I do. What are you planning?"

"Price needs to contact them and tell them we are willing to broadcast their demands, but not until an EMT treats the wounded man. Then I'll go in."

"Kate, this is incredibly dangerous. Are you sure you can pull this off?"

"No one is going to look at me and think agent. No one ever does. I'm a ghost."

"You're the Ghost?"

"Another time, Agent Price," said Cooper.

"Katherine, do I have your authorization to take the shots?"

"You do. Come out of this alive, Agent Riley. That's an order."

Kate managed a small smile. "Yes, Ma'am."

Cabe's head felt like it was going to blow off his shoulders. Getting shot will do that to you. He'd felt around and the wound wasn't too bad, a graze. He'd heard the click a second before the shot and hit the floor. Now he was laying on the floor of the conference room with the three shooters pacing back and forth. The other hostages, the Ambassador, the Secretary and their assistants were all in good shape for the moment. He knew that wouldn't last long if something didn't change fast. These guys were spiraling out of control spouting their diatribe and taunting their hostages. Cabe knew these guys never intend to surrender. He just hoped whoever was out there knew it too.

The radio crackled and he heard the agent in charge offer to broadcast their demands if they allowed an EMT to check on the hostages. Cabe knew this would be the move. He stayed down, in part due to the pain, but to have the shooters think he was more injured than he was. They would perceive him as less of a threat.

"Yeah, fine. One EMT and no tricks."

"They're on their way."

Cabe scanned around the room. He was far enough away from the table that the agent he assumed they were sending would have a better line of sight than if he was near the other hostages. There was a knock at the door.

"Emergency Services."

"Oh Christ, no." he thought. The door opened and there was Kate in an EMT uniform carrying a med kit. The youngest shooter pulled her in the room and started patting her down.

"Hey, watch 'ya hands," said Kate in a convincing Brooklyn accent. The shooter opened her kit and looked through it. He nodded to the others.

"Why'd they send an old woman to do a man's job?" asked the leader.

"Hey! Watch who you're calling old. I don't want to be here anymore than they do."

"So why are you here?"

"Do you know the kind of hazard pay my union will get me for this? It's sweet. You guys are paying for my trip to Ocean City next week." She knelt down next to Cabe. "How you doin', sir?"

"I'll live," he said through clenched teeth. He couldn't believe she was doing this or that anyone would let her do it.

"Well, I'll be the judge of that," she said as she opened the case.

Cabe heard the click. She'd released a false bottom and reached her hand deep in the case. For a moment Kate looked at him with a love that took his breath away. A look that said she was willing to die for him.

"Yeah, this time next week I'll be on a beach drinking a Pina colada."

"I hate the ocean," the leader said.

"That's too bad," she said in her normal voice. She pulled a 9mm from the bottom of the case and fired. First shot at the leader, second, the flunky and last, the young kid. It happened so quickly Cabe barely took it all in. She'd caught them off guard. She stood and approached the shooters and kicked each of their guns away from their bodies. She reached for their radio. "This is Riley. Threat is neutralized. Hostages and scene secure." She dropped the radio and turned to the hostages. "Are any of you injured?"

"No we're fine," replied the Ambassador. "Thank you agent."

Kate nodded.

Cabe struggled to his feet, fighting nausea from his injury. He walked over to the shooters and his breath caught. He looked at Kate, not believing what he'd seen. Three head shots.

Agents filed into the room but he couldn't take his eyes off Kate. She was chalk white and he saw the gun tremble in her hand. An agent who appeared to be in charge approached her and she handed him the gun.

"Good work, Agent Riley."

Cabe worked his way through the room full of people to Kate.

"Are you okay?" she asked.

He put his hands on her shoulders, in part to steady himself. "What the hell were you thinking?"

The concern in her eyes turned to rage. "What was I thinking?" She turned back to the agent. "Agent Price, Agent Gallo is injured. See to it the EMT's treat him."

"I'm fine."

"I don't care if you have to handcuff him to a gurney, Price. See to it!"

"Yes, Ma'am."

Kate turned on her heel and was out the door. Before Cabe could go after her Price grabbed him by the arm.

"Oh no you don't Agent. She wants you checked out and I will handcuff you if needed. I don't want to get on her bad side. She's kind of scary."

Cabe sat down, unable to stay upright any longer.

"You don't seem to be her favorite person. What did you do to piss her off?"

"I married her."

Price smiled. "That'll do it."

Cabe walked back to the hotel, the fresh air helping to clear his head. People were looking at sideways or clearing a wide path around him. His head wound, even though it had not been severe, had made a mess of his jacket. He thought he must be quite the sight.

He entered the hotel lobby and approached, Sherry, the desk clerk who reminded him of Paige.

"Oh my God, Mr. Gallo, are you okay."

"I'll be fine, Sherry. Thanks. Is my wife in our room?"

"Yes, I saw her come in about an hour ago. She didn't look too good."

Cabe pulled out his badge and showed her. "Sherry, my wife and I are Homeland Security agents. We were involved in the UN incident this morning. We aren't in any shape to travel right now so I'll need to extend our stay for another day or two."

"Of course, Mr...Agent Gallo. I'll see to it. If you need anything at all please call me." Sherry gave him a smile that made him think for a second Kate may have been right about her.

Cabe took a breath before he stepped through the door to their room. She was staring out the window.

"Are you ok?" she asked without turning around.

"Yeah. EMT said there were no signs of concussion despite my killer headache. I promised to go to the ER if anything got worse."

She turned and grabbed her purse off the chair. She pulled out a bottle of aspirin and handed it to him.

"Here, take these." She looked at him and saw the shape he was in. Blood soaked clothes, bruising on his head around the wound. "You look like crap."

"Yeah, I know. I'll clean up in a minute." He approached her and put his hands on her shoulders. He could feel her muscles tighten. "I was worried about the situation this morning but when you showed up I was downright terrified."

"Why?"

"I knew I was going to have a difficult time with the shooters, but when you came in, the risk went up. I couldn't imagine what the hell you were thinking putting yourself in the middle of all that?"

"So you thought you could take out three armed men while you were injured and unarmed without getting yourself or the hostages killed." She shoved at his chest nearly knocking him flat. "You were afraid you couldn't handle the situation with me in the room?! That was your take-away?!" she screamed. "You know what I was thinking? I was thinking

I would do anything, absolutely anything, to get you out of there. And you know what else I'm thinking, Gallo?! I'm thinking about the three people I just killed to keep your sorry ass alive."

She pushed past him and sat on the bed, burying her face in her hands. Cabe looked at her and knew what a complete ass he was. He hadn't given a single thought to what she went through today. Her first thought was always him, now and this morning. Just as he should be for her.

He sat down next to her and put his arm around her shoulder. Instead of tensing she leaned against. "It's the first time. I've never had to do it before. I wouldn't change what I did, but I wish to hell I hadn't had to do it."

"I know, Katie. I've felt what you're feeling. You did what you had to do. You saved everyone in that room, including your sorry ass husband." He ran his hand up and down her arm, feeling her shiver. "Kate, this is a difficult question, but I have to ask it. We're trained for to go for center mass. Why didn't you?"

"I saw the angles." she whispered.

"Angles?"

"The angles, it was geometry. From where I was if I went center mass I might hit a hostage or they'd go down but not stay down. I had to make sure none of them could respond." She pulled tighter to his chest. "It was angles. All angles."

He saw she was tapping three fingers into her palm, a nervous habit she had when she was struggling with a code. Then he caught a whiff of something. She'd been vomiting. "Come with me."

He led her in the bathroom and started stripping off her clothes.

"Cabe, no."

"Trust me," he whispered. He handed her a toothbrush and a motel bottle of mouth wash. "You use this while I get out of these clothes. It's a shame, really. I liked that suit."

Kate spit out mouthwash and said "I'll buy you a new one."

Cabe smiled. There was his Katie girl, fighting to get back. He turned on the water and made sure it was not too hot. He led her into the shower and began washing her. He scrubbed her back, her legs. He turned her to face him so he could continue. As much as he loved her, there was nothing sexual in this moment. This was him caring for his woman.

He tilted her head back and washed her hair. As he massaged her scalp she closed her eyes let herself enjoy his attention. When he finished taking care of Kate he scrubbed himself quickly, washing the dried blood from his hair.

Kate reached for a towel and he took it from her. "Let me," he said. Cabe dried her as carefully as he'd washed her. He toweled off her hair and reached for her wide tooth comb. He pulled the comb carefully through her hair until it was straight.

He toweled himself off and led her back to bed. "Let's both rest for a bit. I think we both could use it." As they pulled back the covers his phone pinged a message. "What now?"

"Did you talk to the team?"

"I text them and told them we were safe and we'd contact them later." He looked down at the text. "It's from Katherine. She wants us both on FaceTime in five minutes. I guess we better put something on."

He handed her a t-shirt and shorts as he grabbed some for himself. Neither bothered with underwear. Kate powered up her laptop and waited for the connection. Punctual as always, Katherine's call opened.

"Hello. Good to see you both. Cabe, you look like crap."

Cabe smiled. "That has been pointed out to me, Director."

"We'll talk in a minute but first there is someone who wants to talk to you. We're ready for you, sir." The screen split and facing them was the President of the United States. Kate reached for Cabe's hand and held it tight. "Agent Riley I'm calling to extend my personal thanks for resolving a situation that could have been an international nightmare. If we couldn't protect our own leaders, how would foreign leaders ever trust us to keep them secure?"

"Thank you, sir," said Kate.

"Agent Gallo, you look like crap."

Cabe laughed. "Yes sir. But I'm alive, thanks to my wife."

"Agent Riley, or should I call you Agent Gallo?"

"I prefer Gallo, sir."

Cabe squeezed her hand.

"Very well, Agent Gallo. I followed the progress of your career for years. Every agency in town knew about The Ghost and wanted to recruit him. I would have never guessed."

Kate smiled. "That was the point, sir."

"Indeed. You've been an valued agent for our country for a long time, Kate. I understand why you'd want to stand down. But your continued work with Scorpion will put you in situations where you'll need the legal authority to act. This will give it to you." He sat back in his chair. "Don't think I'm not aware of your record, Cabe. You've done some amazing things. The world will never know what a debt they owe to both of you."

"Thank you, sir," they both said.

I've approved Director Cooper's request to reactivate you. If you choose to accept it you will answer directly to her. I don't expect an answer now, just consider it."

"Yes, sir. Thank you sir."

"Well, I have matters to attend to. Director Cooper will handle it from here."

"Thank you, Mr. President," said Cooper as he signed off.

"Well, that was unexpected," said Cabe.

"This really could have been a nightmare. I'm very grateful. Now, Kate what I'm offering it to keep you active but only when needed. I don't want nor would accept an answer today. Just think about it. Also I don't want either of you in the office for a week."

"That's not necessary, Katherine," said Kate.

"I'm the boss."

"Thank you, Director. I've already informed the hotel we'd be staying longer."

"Good. Now go get some rest. Both of you. That's an order." Katherine disconnected and the screen went black.

"You heard her, let's get some rest."

"You extended our stay?" she said as they stripped off their clothes and got under the covers.

"I shouldn't fly until this headache is completely gone. I don't think it could be longer than a day or two. Do you want to leave?"

"No," she said. She brushed his cheek with her hand. "I was terrified of losing you." She gave him a soft kiss. "I love you."

"I love you too, Katie girl." He pulled her close and held her as exhaustion claimed them both.

## Chapter Fifteen

Cabe and Kate had been back from New York for a few weeks. Things had settled into a peaceful routine. Cabe went to the garage every day and on the occasional assignment with the team. Kate usually worked from home, deciphering code and analyzing potential undercover operations sent to her by Director Cooper.

This morning they had both been summoned. Kate paused as she reached into the gun safe for her weapon.

"Are you good?" ask Cabe.

"Yeah, I'm good," Kate smiled.

He gave her a kiss. "Let's roll."

They arrived at the garage in time to get an egg bagel before Toby scarfed them all. "Kate, it's good to see you. How are you doing?" asked Paige as she gave her a hug.

"Thanks, Paige, I'm good. You and Ralph need to come out to the house soon. We could continue his swim lessons.

"He'd love that. He's been asking about you."

Kate smiled, "Okay everyone, heads up. I appreciate your concerns after what happened in New York, but I'm good. Toby, we've talked. What is your medical opinion of my mental state?"

"My medical opinion is you're solid. Normal response to the events in New York but working through them with the help of your oh so loving husband."

"Shut it, jackass," said Cabe as he poured himself another cup of coffee.

"Thanks. So, everyone, let's just get back to normal."

Cooper came in to the garage with a tall woman in her late forties. She had a dark complexion, short black hair and dark brown eyes. "Good morning everyone. This is Agent Sophia Rigetti of Interpol."

"Hello," said Sophia. "I'm very glad to have the chance to work with Scorpion. Your work has been impressive."

"Interpol follows us? Okay, that's just cool," said Toby.

Cooper handed a flash drive to Sylvester he queued up a presentation. A picture of a beautiful woman in her late forties flashed on the screen. "This is.."

"Elena Marcos, Greek shipping heiress," said Paige. Everyone shot her a surprised look. "What? I read the news. Her father, Niko, died under mysterious circumstances. Many suspected she had a hand in it but it could never be proven."

"Exactly. I've been following her for two years. There are two things this woman loves, money and men. She has lots of both. We know she's been supplementing her company's bottom line by smuggling contraband mixed in with legitimate shipments. I've never been able to get the proof I need but matters have escalated."

Katherine interjected. "We've received chatter at Homeland that ISIS is expecting a shipment of surface to air missiles and launchers. Sale price eighteen million euros, twenty million US dollars. These are a new generation of armament that could easily shoot a passenger jet out of the sky or destroy a city block from much greater distances."

Sophia moved to the next picture, an office building in downtown LA. "This is the American headquarters of Marcos Shipping. Elena has been in town for a week in preparation for this shipment. Our intel says the shipment is scheduled for Friday morning. We need to get the evidence and stop her before then."

"This is an infiltration and retrieval operation, which is why Kate will be running point on this," said Katherine.

"Excuse me?" said Walter. "Scorpion is my team and I run the operations."

"Kate is an expert in exactly this type of work. My decision is final. Moving on. Kate what are your thoughts?"

"Do you have any pictures of inside the offices?"

Sophia clicked through several pictures showing a total of twenty people working at various computer stations.

"May I?" Kate asked for the control. She zoomed in on the faces. It looked like any other office in any other company. "How did you get these?"

"Lunch delivery guy."

"You need someone to Ghost them."

"I was hoping you'd say that," said Katherine.

Cabe spoke up. "Kate, no."

"Cabe, it's the only way to get the information. I go in as one of the computer techs, look for what I'm sure are heavily encrypted files and get out."

"I'll do it," said Walter.

"You could but they would spot you in a heartbeat. You're not a normal IT guy and I couldn't teach you what you need to know in such a short time."

"We have tried to hack her before but she has a security software that will notify her if the files are accessed."

Kate smiled. "Let me guess. Rimark Security 4000."

"Yes," said Sophia. "Can you crack it?"

Everyone smiled, surprisingly, even Walter. "You wrote it didn't you?" he asked.

Kate nodded. "It was our best seller four years ago."

"Our?" asked Sophia.

"Kate owns Rimark," said Katherine.

"Excuse me?!"

"Another time, Agent Rigetti. We need to get her out of the office when I'm there."

"That's going to be difficult," said Sophia. "Despite her tabloid social life she spends a great deal of time in the office."

Cabe looked over at Kate. She was running the meeting just the way he would have. It was obvious she knew what she was doing and what would work to complete the mission. He should be proud, and he was. He knew when she was reactivated this could happen. Cooper had been good about letting her work from home. Kate got the work done while Cabe didn't have to worry about her safety. But now she had a look in her eye. It was the look that usually preceded mischief. In the bedroom, that was great. On a mission it could mean trouble.

"I could sabotage her car," said Happy. "Leave her stranded."

"That would only work temporarily. An hour at best. We need her gone for several hours."

Kate looked at him and smiled. "Ah crap, I don't like this already," he thought.

"Cabe, you need to seduce her."

"What?" said a chorus of surprised people.

"I don't mean actually sleep with her of course. Just let her believe it's a possibility. Go in as a potential client and insist you take her to lunch. Then keep her out of the office until I get the proof."

Cabe glanced around at the team. Toby was smiling but the rest of them appeared to be in shock. He wasn't sure if it was at the suggestion or who it was coming from.

"I don't know," said Sophia "Seems risky."

"Agent Gallo, introduce yourself to Agent Rigetti as if you wanted to seduce her."

"Kate , this is getting out of hand."

"I am very serious, Agent Gallo. I'm running this op and in my opinion, this is the best way to handle the situation. Now I would like you to demonstrate to Agent Rigetti why I'm correct."

Cabe stood and took a breath. He gave Kate a look that said, "We'll talk about this later". He approached Agent Rigetti and held out his hand. She took it and he gave her his best, 'I have mischief in mind smile.' "Cabe Gallo, it's so nice to meet you."

"It's nice to meet you," she replied sounding a bit breathy.

He held her gaze and didn't release her hand. Then he pretended like he didn't realize he was still holding her hand. "Oh, I'm so sorry," he said but still didn't release her. "It's just that you have such beautiful eyes," he said in his best gravel voice. "I got a little lost."

Sophia gasped, then dropped his hand. "Okay," she said trying to recover. "He's got this."

Cabe turned and heard Happy mutter, "Wow." Paige was grinning and Sly and Walter just looked confused. Toby looked at Kate and put his hands up in surrender. "Okay, I get it now."

"Assignments. Walter will interpret what data I retrieve. Sly, you trace the money. I assume Agent Rigetti wants to not only stop Elena, but also the people who are funding her operation. Happy, I'd like you in the van to keep on whatever cameras you're able to hack. Inside, on the street, get whatever you can. Toby and Paige I'd like you also in the van. Toby you watch to see if anything goes south and Paige, please keep Cabe from killing me for this. Okay, are we good?"

Everyone nodded except Cabe. He couldn't believe what just happened. He stood to get another cup of coffee so he could walk away and take a moment.

"Kate, I need to get back but Agent Rigetti will stay and review the case with you."

"Thank you, Director," said Kate.

Kate looked at Sophia and realized she was staring at Cabe. "Elena will fall for him in a heartbeat," she said never taking her eyes off him.

She smiled. "Probably."

"You know how you can look at some men and know they are all show and no go?" asked Sophia.

"Yeah?"

"That man is all go. At ninety miles an hour. On a Harley."

Kate laughed. "You're absolutely right, even about the Harley."

Sophia looked stunned. "How do you know?"

"I'm his partner," she replied. "I'm also his wife."

Kate tossed her keys on the kitchen counter and looked at Cabe. "Are you ready to talk to me?"

Cabe grabbed a bottles of water from the fridge and tossed one to her. "Kate, I can't believe what you've done."

"Cabe, I understand that you've never been in this position before, but you've done undercover before. Correct?"

He took swallow and then nodded.

"Have you worked with female agents undercover? When the mark was a man, did they wear something flattering? Did they flirt with the mark?"

He nodded again.

"Cabe this is no different. You heard Rigetti. Elena has two weakness, money and men and we are offering her both. I honestly believe this is the best way to accomplish our mission."

"By pimping me out?!"

"Do you think I like this idea?! I hate it. Do you think Toby or Walter would be able to do this? You are the only man who could attract the attention of a woman like her."

"I may have to get close to her to make it believable."

Kate sighed. "I know and I hate it. But I hate the idea of terrorists getting their hands on those weapons more. And so do you." She walked to him and slipped her arms around his waist. "Cabe, I trust you will do only what's necessary to keep her interested and away from the office so I can get the information."

He pulled her tight against him. "Kate, the hell of it is, I know you're right but I'm concerned."

"About what?"

"That I can pull it off. Elena Marcos is a jet setting socialite. I'm a cop."

Kate smiled. "Special Agent. You had Agent Rigetti convinced. She was disappointed when I told her I'm your wife."

Cabe looked at her with a crooked smile. "Really?"

"Really." She reached up and gave him a kiss. "Remember what I told you about your energy. Elena will sense it. Agent Rigetti certainly did."

He leaned in for a deep kiss. "Can you sense my energy?" he whispered.

"Oh, yeah," she said.

"So maybe I should practice my technique."

"Practice makes perfect," she said as he nibbled on her neck.

"Dinner can wait," he said as he pulled her up the stairs to their bedroom.

Cabe was getting ready for the mission today. Normally he'd be concerned with weapons and logistics. It seemed absurd that he was worried about his tie. Once they got back to work last night they reviewed their cover stories. Cabe was Frank Antonelli, an importer looking for a shipper to move his goods from China. Kate was Jane Morgan, security tech, brought in to run an analysis of their system and to shore up the company's firewalls.

"No, not that tie," said Kate. She went through his closet and pulled out a light blue tie that matched his shirt. "There, perfect. It brings out your eyes."

Kate was wearing a pair of black slacks with a white pinstriped shirt. Her hair was pulled back in a ponytail and she was wearing no makeup and horned rimmed glasses.

"I thought you're outfit would be more...frumpy."

Kate smiled. "That would get me noticed just as quickly as dressing well." She grabbed an ID badge on a lanyard. "Happy is a genius with counterfeit IDs."

He laughed. "The girl has skills. How are you going to convince the staff Elena brought you in and didn't tell them?"

"I'll let them think I'm checking the employees for any security breaches. They'll be too nervous about their browser histories to give me any problems." She picked up her briefcase and adjusted her fake glasses. "I'll hang back in the van until you get Elena out of the office. I'll want at least three hours to work."

"Got it." His phone beeped and he looked down at the text. "My contact set up the meeting, ten am. We better hustle."

"How did you get this guy to do it?"

"He owed me. I let him slide on a minor weapons violation. If I'd pressed it, he'd have lost his security clearance at the Port of LA. That would cause him to lose all his best contracts."

"Nice."

"You ready?" he asked.

"One more thing. I'm not going to keep the com in."

"Kate, that's risky."

"The team will be outside the whole time. So long as you keep Elena away, I'll be okay." She grabbed her case and walked toward the bedroom door.

"Stop right there, Katie girl. I know when you're keeping something from me. Spill."

"If you know I'm listening to you it could affect you."

He put his hands on her shoulders. "Affect me or you?"

"Okay. Me. I hate that you have to do this. I hate that I'm the one sending you off to do it. If I'm listening to you romancing Elena I'll never be able to focus on what I need to do."

Cabe sighed. "Fine. But you will check in with the team every thirty minutes. Then I won't have to worry if your safe."

Kate nodded and then gave him a smile. "Let's go, James Bond."

Cabe and Kate rode in the front of the team van while Walter, Toby, Happy and Paige sat in the back. Sly was back at the garage to link between them and Cooper.

"What camera's do we have?" asked Cabe.

"Three external camera's and three, no four internal," said Walter.

"Impressive," said Kate. "How did you get into the internal system?"

"We didn't. Most people plug in their phones at their desks to keep them charged. We hacked the phone cameras."

"Wouldn't the phones be flat on the desks? All you'd get is a view of the ceiling," asked Cabe.

"True. But a few people will use their case kickstand, keeping the phones upright."

"Well done, O'Brien," said Kate.

Cabe took a breath and reached for the door handle. "Okay, let's get this party started."

Kate grabbed his arm. "One more thing." She pointed at his left hand.

"I hate this," he said as he pulled off his wedding ring and handed it to her.

"So do I."

Cabe walked into the lobby of Marcos Shipping and introduced himself to the young girl behind the reception desk. "Good morning," he said with his best smile. The receptionist replied with one of her own. "Frank Antonelli. I have a ten am with Ms. Marcos."

The receptionist picked up her phone and pressed a button. "Mr. Antonelli is here for Ms. Marcos." The girl smiled and stood. "Please follow me, Mr. Antonelli."

Cabe heard Toby in his com. "Voice a little breathy, I can practically hear her smile. Super Gallo is off and running."

"Toby, hush," said Paige.

Elena Marcos came out of her office to greet Cabe. She was a trim, elegantly dressed woman. Tall, with jet black hair and deep brown eyes, he could see why she was such a photographer's favorite.

"Mr. Antonelli, please have a seat."

Cabe sat in the leather chair opposite hers.

"Vincent Grosso speaks highly of you."

"That's nice to hear."

"He said you have some issues I can help you with."

Cabe smiled at Elena but didn't answer.

"Mr. Antonelli?"

"I'm sorry," he said. He dropped his voice "It's just the photos in the paper really don't do you justice." He noticed Elena's blush and realized Kate was right. Damn her.

"Thank you, Mr. Antonelli," she said.

"Frank, please," he said.

"Elena," she smiled. "So, what can I do for you, Frank?"

Cabe heard Toby snickering.

"I'm currently using Trans Continental shipping to move my goods from China and Indonesia. In the last year they been consistently behind schedule, more than bad weather would excuse. Goods arriving damaged or not at all. My contract is up with them at the end of the month and they had the nerve to raise their rates. Vincent moves my goods from the dock to my warehouses. He recommended you."

"What kind of volume are we talking about."

"Some months are bigger, some smaller, on average two thousand containers a month." Cabe saw Elena's eyes dilate. Yeah. Kate was right.

"Elena, I saw a nice little cafe around the corner. Why don't we take this discussion there. I could use a coffee."

"Well, I usually don't leave the office."

"I'm sure you've had meetings over dinner?"

"Yes."

She smiled and Cabe knew they were all but out the door.

"So you are having a business meeting in a coffee shop. Sounds totally appropriate." Cabe gave her what Kate called his 'I'm aiming to misbehave' smile.

"Very well." She stood and reached for her purse.

Kate watched Cabe leave the building with Elena, his hand placed on her back. She felt her stomach flip but pushed the sensation from her mind.

"Walter, have you finished putting my cover on their system?"

"If anyone pulls up Elena's calendar, you'll be there for her ten thirty appointment."

"Have you uploaded a site for my company?"

Walter never looked up from his computer. "Don't insult me."

Kate smiled and reached for the door. "My apologies."

"Stay safe," said Paige.

Kate approached the receptionist and introduced herself. "Jane Morgan. I have a ten thirty with Ms. Marcos."

"She didn't mention it."

"Ms. Marcos called my company last night and asked me to run an immediate analysis of the system."

The receptionist checked her computer. "I see you on the calendar but Ms. Marcos isn't here." The girl smiled. "She just left with this hot guy."

Kate wondered if braining the girl with her briefcase would adversely affect the mission. "Fine. I had to reschedule one of my best clients to fit her in. I'm getting paid whether I do the job or not. I'll take my ten grand and go."

"Excuse me?"

"Fine, I'll just send her the bill." She picked up her case and turned towards the door. "If she wants me to come back it'll be another ten."

"Let me see if someone can help you." The receptionist ran into the office and came back with an officious looking man in his late thirties.

"I'm Robert, Ms. Marcos assistant."

"Ms. Marcos called me last night for an on site inspection of your computer system and its security. She said it was urgent."

"She never mentioned it to me. I make all her appointments."

"She is on the calendar," said the receptionist.

"Look, Skippy, I don't care whether you let me in or not, but like I explained to this nice young lady, I get paid no matter what."

"Ten thousand," said the girl.

"Fine," said the assistant. "Come with me."

He led her to the main office area but she needed access to Elena's hard drive. "No, this won't do. I need privacy." She turned toward Elena's empty office. "I'll work there."

"Oh no, that's Ms. Marcos office."

"And she's not in there now. Look, we could stand here and argue until she comes back. Or I can go do my job."

"Fine," said the assistant. "Just be quick about it."

Kate settled into the office and activated Elena's computer. She put her com in. "Ok, I'm in. Do you have a visual, Happy?" she whispered.

Happy adjusted the zoom on the phone camera directly across from Elena's office. "Yeah, your good."

Kate could hear Cabe. "Here, taste some of mine."

"Ok. I'm taking this out."

"He's talking about a croissant," said Happy.

"Still taking it out." Kate took a breath and tried to focus on the task at hand, not the fact that her husband was romancing a beautiful woman.

Cabe was trying to imagine this elegant woman he was talking to as a cold blooded killer. That's what the research said could never be proved. She'd been in a power struggle with her father over control over their shipping empire. He no sooner won control over the board of directors when he had a mysterious boating accident. This was no little skiff, it was a one hundred foot floating hotel with a crew of ten. No one knew why Constantine Marcos would have been on deck at that time of night, let alone how he fell overboard.

Cabe reached across the small table and took her hand. "Elena, let's get the business out of the way so we move on to more pleasant matters."

She smiled. "That sounds like an excellent idea."

"You know how things work and I'm tired of losing so much of my product. What can you do to stop it?"

Elena expression changed. He could see a look in her eyes he'd seen before in some of the worst targets he'd ever taken down. "Oh, Frank. Don't you worry. I can handle

any issues I might encounter." He had no doubt she would conspire with the devil to make money or push her father overboard.

"Money?" he asked.

"You'll pay me what you paid Trans Continental and you'll have all your product, on time."

"Then we have a deal."

"You make a deal that quickly? Don't you have a board to answer to?"

"God, no. I built my company from nothing. I make all the decisions."

The waitress came to their table with the check and Elena reached for it. "Since this is a business meeting I'll take care of this."

Cabe took the check from her. "No," he said firmly. "Elena, I am an old school Italian man. If I were to let a woman pay my Nonna would come back from the grave just to smack me."

He let her see the hundred dollar bill he gave the waitress for the twenty dollar check. "Keep the change." He reached for Elena and smiled. "Shall we?"

Elena slipped her hand through Cabe's arm as they walked out the door.

Kate stared at the lines of code looking for the way in. She knew it was there. The basic security code she'd written four years ago was there, but there was a layer of additional precautions. Passwords only Elena would know. "I can't believe this," She thought. "I need help." She put her com in and turned so as not to be seen from the office.

"Toby, you there?"

"I'm here Kate."

"I need you to profile this woman for me. There were layers of passwords. I broke them most of them but there is one left. I could get through eventually but the encryption is too heavy. It would take longer than we have. What would she most likely use?"

"She's definitely a narcissist, but I doubt she'd use her own name. Same for her father's name. If she hated him enough to kill him she wouldn't want to use his name on a daily basis."

"Pets?"

"Not that we've found."

"Lovers?"

"That's a lot of passwords."

"Not helpful," Kate said through gritted teeth. She heard Cabe in her ear, talking Elena. It sounded like they were on the street. "So, Elena, why isn't a beautiful woman like you married?"

Elena took a few steps then said, "Not every woman wants to be married."

"Did you hear that?" Toby said. "She paused before she answered. She's lying. There was someone, probably when she was a lot younger. Someone she wanted to marry."

"Got it," yelled Walter. "Stavros Sanna. She was eighteen. He was thirty. Daddy didn't approve of the age difference. Gossip magazines speculated Daddy bought him off. Two months after he ended it with Elena he married someone else. Huh."

"What?" asked Kate.

"Sanna and his wife were found shot to death in their home less than six months later."

"Holy shit," whispered Toby. "He wasn't just her first love. He was her first kill. Try Stavros."

Kate entered the name and the screen opened up. "Got it." She pulled out the com and went back to work. She copied file after file, looking in others to check their relevance. That's when she saw it. A picture of a man and a woman lying on the floor, covered in blood. The man had been shot in the groin and chest. The gunshot to the woman had obliterated her face. Kate checked the individual file history. It had been accessed hundreds of times. Toby was right. They were her first kill. And she admired her handy work every day. Time was now even more a factor. She needed to get her husband away from this psychopath as quickly as possible.

"I really should get back to the office," said Elena.

He'd heard Toby's analysis of Elena and he knew it was more important than ever to get what they needed to take her down.

"Not yet, Cabe, said Walter. "Kate only just broke through the last encryption. Give her at least an hour to be safe. We'll let you know if things change."

"Oh, walk with me some more. I'm not ready to be without your company." He took her hand and kissed it, an old school gesture she seemed to appreciate. During his preliminary scan of the neighborhood he realized there was a small, but well respected art gallery on the next block. He could easily kill an hour there. They were nearing the entrance to the gallery when he pulled her into a doorway. "When can I see you again?" Cabe asked.

"You say that as if it's a given," Elena smiled.

He got close and whispered, "You know it is." He kissed her cheek.

"Holy crap," Happy said. "Boss has skills."

He'd almost forgotten they were listening. He was very glad Kate had chosen not to.

"We'll see," said Elena.

"Here we are," said Cabe. "I've been meaning to see if they have anything that interests me. You could help me decide."

"You like art?"

The first rule of undercover was stick to the truth as much as possible. It made the performance that more convincing. "I have a small collection."

"Really? Who do you collect."

"I have Van Gogh, McClaren, Renoir, but my favorite is Monet."

"How surprising. I would think you'd like the dark color of a Rembrandt."

"Rembrandt is magnificent, of course, but I prefer the Impressionists."

Elena looked at him as if she were studying him like he was one of the paintings on the wall. "You are a fascinating man, Frank Antonelli."

"You are a very beautiful woman, Elena." He brushed her cheek with his hand. "And I am a man who appreciates great beauty." He leaned in and gave her a soft kiss. He pulled back and smiled. He wouldn't think a stone cold killer could blush.

They wandered the museum, discussing each painting in detail. Elena had a surprisingly wide breath of knowledge of art. Fortunately, so did he. He knew they'd been in the gallery for over an hour when he heard Kate on the com.

"Cabe, I've got everything we need . You can wrap things up."

He looked at his watch and said, "Mio Dio is that the time? It's past one."

"My God, really. I must get back to my office."

"Of course, I understand. It's my fault, I kept you so long."

He walked her back to the office and took her hand. "Elena, this has been a most wonderful business meeting."

"Yes it has."

"What time should I pick you up tomorrow for dinner?"

"You're so sure I'll say yes."

"You know the secret to my success, Elena?" he leaned close and whispered, "Persistence. I'll see you here at seven." He smiled as she walked into her building, then he made a dash for the van. He jumped behind the wheel and slammed the door. "Please tell me you got enough to have her in jail by six."

Kate looked at him and nodded. "I think Cooper may want to call in the Greek authorities. I found enough to prove she murdered Stavros and his wife. If they dig in these files they'll probably find evidence why she threw Daddy over the rail."

"Won't we want to prosecute for supplying terrorists?"

"Even with the manifests and transfers I've found it would be hard to prove she didn't know they weren't legitimate arms sales. Proving she's a killer is a slam dunk, but not our jurisdiction. We still have what Cooper really wants which is to stop the weapons and I'm sure the team will be able to trace the source of the money to find the buyers."

"Can we get the hell out of here?" asked Cabe.

"Yeah," said Kate. She saw his teeth were clenched and he was weaving through traffic like he had a bad case of road rage. She reached over and touched his thigh. "What?" she asked.

"Don't ever make me do that again," he said, never looking her way.

They walked into the house after another near silent ride home. Cabe hated it but didn't know what to say. Everything in his brain was tangled up. Kate setting him up in such an assignment, finding out just how ruthless Elena was. Most confusing of all was Elena herself. He was honest enough, at least with himself, to admit she was the type of

woman he found attractive. Beautiful, intelligent, strong. If he'd met her when he was single he might have pursued her. What troubled him most of all, even though he'd known who she really was, he didn't mind flirting with her. He didn't mind kissing her.

"I'm going to take a shower," he said as he heard her phone beep.

"Yes, Katherine?"

Cabe closed the bedroom door and stripped out of his clothes. He tossed everything into the bag for the cleaners, despite the fact that the suit had just been cleaned. He turned the shower on full, making sure it was extra hot. Breathing in the hot steam, he ran the events of the day over in his head. He'd completed his assignment. The mission would be a success. Cooper had probably called Kate with what would happen tomorrow, what agencies would be involved, who would make the arrests.

It was by any measure a successful operation. So why did he feel like crap? He knew why and what was worse he knew he had to tell Kate. She always told him to her he was as transparent as a pane of glass. She'd know something was wrong and there was no point in hiding. He dried off and reached for some shorts and a t-shirt. There was also no point in waiting. Cabe found her in the kitchen setting out some dinner plates.

"Hey, I was just heating up last night's ziti," she said. "Do you want a salad?"

"Nothing for me."

She looked up from the dishes "You have to eat. What's wrong?"

Cabe smiled. "Pane of glass," he thought. He took her by the hand and sat her down on the tall kitchen chair.

"Gallo, you're freaking me out."

"I need to talk to you about today."

"Okay."

"I know we accomplished our assignments. We're responsible for taking down a major player in illegal gun running."

"Not to mention a psychopathic killer," added Kate.

He smiled a bit. "Yeah, that too." He paused and took a breath. This was his Katie girl. She wouldn't be mad. Or he'd have to duck and cover. Either way he wouldn't have to carry it with him. "You know I hated being put in that position, being a distraction for Elena."

"I know. And?"

"When I was talking to her, trying to flirt with her, some of it, I forgot myself. When I kissed her..."Cabe saw Kate's eyes flare but she held her tongue. "A quick kiss, a peck, but I..."

Kate sighed "You didn't hate it."

"No! and I feel like crap about it. How could I so easily be swayed? What does that say about me?"

"It says you're a normal man who had the rapt attention of one of the world's most famous beauties, so kissing her was pleasant." She smiled. "If you hadn't found her attractive I'd have to check your pulse."

"How can you take this so lightly?"

"Oh I don't take it lightly at all, Cabe. If I'd witnessed it I probably would have pulled my gun. Probably hell, definitely. But I understand what happened and why." She took his hands in hers. "I want you to give yourself a break. You're human. You had a very human reaction."

He pulled her hands to his and kissed them. "Katie, you know I'm all in."

"I know, boyo, I know."

He leaned in and kissed her, taking his time, enjoying the sensation. "There will never be anyone else for me, Katie girl. Never," he whispered.

She brushed his cheek with her hand. "There never will be anyone else for me." She smiled. "Oh, I forgot something." She grabbed her bag and retrieved his wedding ring. She took his left hand and slipped it on whispering "With this ring,"

"Come with me."

"What about dinner?"

"Later," he reached for the remote and pulled up YouTube on the big screen.

"You want to watch videos? Now?"

He smiled. "Hush, woman." He pushed play and Cyndi Lauper appeared on the screen in a black strapless gown. Music started and she began singing 'At Last'. "May I have this dance, Mrs. Gallo?"

Kate gave him that smile she had only for him, the one that always set his world to rights. "You may, Mr. Gallo."

Cabe took his wife in his arms and danced with her in their living room. He would remember this moment forever, as one of the best of his life.

## Chapter Sixteen

It was a gorgeous day to sit on the deck and watch the ocean. Actually, most days in southern California were good days to watch the ocean. Cabe sat on a lounge chair with an ice tea, waiting for Kate to join him for a swim. He knew she was probably still absorbed in the latest code she and Walter were working on.

"Yo! Gallo," he shouted. "Put down the tablet and your ass out here."

"Okay, Okay," she said as she walked out on to the deck, tablet in hand.

"No tablet. Put it down."

"Fine." Kate set her tablet down and finally looked up at him.

"For a woman who was SoCal born and raised you are looking a bit pasty there, girl. Time to step away from the work and get some fresh air." He stood and tossed off the towel from around his neck. Kate gave him a slow smile and he laughed. He was always more than a little amazed when his wife looked at him like he was the dessert she'd skipped dinner for.

She approached him and ran her hands up his chest. "You wanted me to get exercise."

"Oh no you don't. Water. Laps. Now."

"Spoil sport," she pouted before she launched herself into the deep end.

He dove in after her and chased her up and down the length of the pool before he finally grabbed her by the waist. He sat on the shallow end's stone steps and pulled her onto his lap. He kissed her and whispered, "I love you, Katie girl."

"I love you too, boyo," she said in the Irish brogue she knew made him a little crazy. When she started nibbling on his neck, he knew he was done with swimming.

"Irish witch," he muttered as he took possession of her mouth and she surrendered it to him in glorious fashion.

He was so focused on getting Kate's swimsuit off he didn't hear the gate bell until the third ring. "Are you kidding me?!" He smacked her bottom as she adjusted her suit and climbed up the steps. "Whoever it is, get rid of them."

She hit the intercom button. "Yes?"

"Kate? It's Patrick. I'm here for the inspection."

She took her hand off the buzzer. "Damn! I forgot he was coming."

"What inspection?"

"The art. The insurance company sends him around once a year to check and make sure it's all here and still real." She hit the button. "I'll be with you in a minute." She grabbed a towel from the cabinet for herself and tossed one to Cabe which he caught one-handed. "You'll want to meet him. He's a bit pretentious but he's also one of the leading experts on Impressionism."

Cabe glanced down at his lap and looked back up. "I'm going to need a minute."

She burst out laughing as she walked through to the living room.

"Witch!" he yelled after her. She laughed louder.

"Patrick, come in." Kate closed the front door behind him. Patrick Pennington was a slight, balding man wearing light colored jacket and slacks.

"This is the first I've seen you since your marriage. He pulled out an envelope from his jacket and handed it to her. "Congratulations Mrs. Gallo."

She gave him a quick hug. "Thank you." She opened the envelope and found a rather large donation had been made to the Amanda Gallo Pediatric Center. "Oh, Patrick, thank you. That's so generous. Don't you think the insurance company would have a problem with us being friends?"

He waved a dismissive hand. "Don't be ridiculous. They know my reputation is as impeccable as my taste in clothes."

Cabe walked into the living room with a towel around his neck and another tied around his waist. Kate fought a snicker as she introduced him. "Patrick, this is my husband, Cabe Gallo. Cabe, this is Patrick Pennington.

"The Pennington Gallery?" asked Cabe as he reached to shake Patrick's hand.

"You know about my gallery?"

"We stopped in just a few weeks ago. You have some amazing pieces."

"So do you," Patrick smiled.

Kate stifled a laugh, knowing Patrick wasn't talking entirely about their art collection.

"Patrick, why don't you start in here while Cabe and I change."

Patrick noticed Ralph's painting over the living room couch. "Kate, darling. Wasn't there a McClaren there the last time I was here?"

"Yes, we moved it to the dining room. That is a Dineen." Kate smiled.

"It's lovely," he said with a not too convincing smile.

"I better deactivate the sensors," said Cabe. "I've updated the security and if you get too close when they're still active, well, it's very loud."

Patrick nodded, duly impressed. He started inspecting the Monet on the far wall as Cabe and Kate went to their bedroom. Cabe tossed his towels into the hamper and stripped off his suit. He looked up to see Kate standing still and smiling. "Not now, witch. We have company."

"Fine," she said as she tossed her towel in the hamper. She handed him the envelope Patrick had given her. "He gave us a wedding gift."

"That was nice," He opened the card and was stunned. "Ten thousand? Wow. That's very generous."

"He's a sweet man."

Cabe and Kate, now dressed in shorts and t-shirts, rejoined Patrick as he finished up in the dining room. "Everything's in order, as always."

They followed him upstairs as he verified the pieces on the walls versus the insurance company's list. They followed him into their bedroom for the last of the collection. It was then Cabe realized what else was hanging on the wall, the painting of a nearly naked Kate. Not a moment later, Patrick saw it.

"What is this? It's not on the list. Is it a new acquisition?"

"Not really," said Cabe.

"Wait? Kate is that you? Oh my God! When did you pose? This is magnificent."

Kate was smiling as Cabe was stunned into silence. "It's very beautiful, isn't it Patrick?"

"Who's the artist and why are they not hanging in my gallery?" Patrick got closed to the corner of the painting. 'Gallo'?" He faced Cabe. "You?"

All Cabe could do was nod.

"You must let me hang this in my gallery."

"No," Cabe and Kate said in unison.

"Patrick, this is a very personal painting. I'm sure you can appreciate that," said Kate.

Patrick waved another dismissive hand in their direction. "Fine. You have more. Show me." He walk past them and stood in the hallway.

Cabe looked toward Kate and she shrugged.

"He's very persistent. You may as well show him."

Cabe led the way to his studio, two former bedrooms they'd converted when he moved in. The wall to wall windows gave him an unobstructed view of the ocean and perfect light. It had also given him a perfect spot to do a few studies of stormy days.

"Patrick I appreciate your interest but I'm a cop, not an artist. This is a hobby for me."

"Show me."

Cabe pulled out his ocean studies, thinking they would be the safest bets. He had four ocean studies completed, two views from sunny days, two views of storms. He set them on his work table against the windows.

He never showed anyone his work let alone a gallery owner. He felt Kate slip her hand in his, giving him her strength. She understood how hard this was for him.

"You're gifted, truly." Patrick said as he continued to look at the paintings.

"You're very kind."

Patrick looked at him as if he'd told him his tie didn't work with his shirt. "I don't do kind. Now, you have more. Show me."

Kate shrugged and grinned. He went to his closet and pulled four more paintings from their storage slots. They were all of Kate. He heard her gasp.

"Cabe, why did you never show me these?"

There was one of Kate on the deck, reading. Her red hair was blowing in the breeze. The next was Kate walking down the beach, in shorts wearing a straw hat. One was head study. He'd tried to capture that smile she had only for him, the one that always set his world to rights. The last was the most personal, though anyone looking at it wouldn't understand why. It was another head study in light and shadow. He knew Kate would

remember the moment. They'd been making love and he'd asked her to keep her eyes open, no matter what. He'd hoped he captured the passion he'd seen in her eyes.

He shook his head. "I don't know. We have great masters on our walls. This is just me trying to put a few moments on canvas."

"Stop talking, both of you," ordered Patrick. He turned to Kate. "My God, he loves you. You're his muse." He turned toward Cabe. "I want these and everything else you have hiding in that closet in my gallery. I'll set up a show."

"Oh, I don't think..." Cabe started.

Patrick held up his hand. He dropped his art gallery owner pretension and just talked to him. "Cabe. I get it. You've only ever done this for yourself. You haven't even shown most of them to your wife. You can't imagine that you are good enough to hang in a gallery. Well, you are. Damn good. No one can teach you that. I don't say that because Kate's a friend of I want to broker your masters collection if you ever sell it, which I do, by the way. I would never hang anything in my gallery that didn't belong there. You belong there, Cabe. You're an artist and a damn good one."

"Patrick, can you give us a minute?" asked Kate.

Patrick left them alone and Kate walked over to the paintings. "I can't believe you never showed me these. He's right you know. These belong in a gallery."

"A lot of them are just you. Would you mind?"

"Of course not. Patrick was right about something else." She pointed to her various portraits. Her voice cracked a bit with emotion. "I can see in each of these just how much you love me." She slipped her arms around his waist. "I would be proud if the rest of the world saw that too."

"He's going to want to sell them."

"Even Patrick needs to make a living."

"It's not like we need the money."

"We could set it up as a fundraiser for Amanda's Center."

Cabe smiled, not believing what he was about to say. "Okay. I guess I'm having a showing."

Kate walked into the garage carrying bagels and the invitations. "Hey guys, fresh bagels!" she yelled. She set them on a long table as the team descended like ants at a picnic.

"Cabe's at Homeland this morning," said Paige

"I know. That's why I'm here." She set out the cream cheese spreads and grabbed a few knives. She waited until they were all seated until she made her announcement.

"Okay people, listen up." She pulled invitations out of her bag and began handing them out. There is a gallery showing Friday night at the Pennington Gallery. It's a fundraiser for Amanda's Center. I want you all to be there."

"It's at best thirty or forty dollars of paint and canvas with no intrinsic value. I have work to do," said Walter.

Paige opened her invitation. She gasped and then smiled. "Is this for real?"

"It is, which I want you all there."

"Holy crap," said Sly "Featured Artist Cabe Gallo."

"The Pennington Gallery is one of the most prestigious in the city which is another reason Cabe is terrified," she said.

"Another reason?" asked Paige.

"He's never shown his art to anyone. I've only seen a few pieces so I'll be seeing most of them for the first time along with everyone else."

"How did the gallery find out about them?" asked Happy

"Patrick Pennington does the insurance inspections for our collection. When he came by the house he saw the one painting of Cabe's that is displayed."

"The one in the bedroom," said Toby.

Kate gave him a confused look.

"The day of your wedding, when I was taking your vitals."

Kate nodded.

Toby smiled. "It's a very nice painting."

"Alright Poindexter that's enough. It starts at eight. Dress up. Suits and ties, cocktail dresses, Ralph too."

"Ralph's invited?" asked Paige.

"Of course." She smiled at the group. "You people are his family." She walked closer to Walter. "I need you there, not because it's thirty dollars of paint, not because you owe me a ton of favors, not even the fact that I could delete the latest project we've been working on and make you start from scratch." Walter looked at her with a stunned expression. "I want you there because you love and respect Cabe and you want to show your support."

"Of course we'll be there," said Paige. "All of us."

Kate heard each of them agree and finally Walter looked her and nodded. "We'll all be there."

"Great," said Kate. "Don't tell him you know about the show. He's nervous enough." She grabbed her keys. "I'm going before he catches me here." She stopped her exit and smiled. "Thanks guys. See you Friday."

Cabe wasn't this nervous the day he got married. He fussed with his tie, not sure if it was right for an art show. Kate had told him to wear whatever made him comfortable. He'd selected a black suit, crisp white shirt and a black tie. It wasn't quite a tux but it wasn't his usual suit.

"You look terrific, boyo," said Kate.

She came out of the bathroom wearing a black cocktail dress, falling just below her knees. It was a simple but elegant design, the only color in evidence was her emerald necklace and engagement ring. He wondered for a moment what lace fantasy she was wearing.

"Are you sure this is okay?" he asked.

"Positive. I've been to a number of these things and I guarantee you will be the best dressed and definitely best looking man there."

He laughed as he continued to fuss with his tie. "You're prejudiced."

She walked to him and reached for his tie. "Very true, but I'm also correct. There. It's fine. Now stop fussing with it and let's go."

They arrived at the gallery thirty minutes before the scheduled start. He and Patrick had worked for the last two months getting ready for tonight. He deferred to Patrick's taste

in framing his paintings. He had more of a saying in naming the paintings. He took a breath and reached for the gallery door. "Here goes nothing."

"Cabe, there you are. And Kate darling," Patrick greeted them at the door, kissing Kate on the cheek and shaking Cabe's hand. "This is go to be a wonderful night. A tall man with dark black hair and the brightest smile he'd ever seen approached them.

"Is this the amazing Cabe?" he asked.

"Kate, Cabe this is my husband, Mark."

Cabe shook the man's hand. "Nice to meet you."

"Everything is ready for tonight," said Mark. "The silent auction is set up."

"Silent auction?" asked Cabe.

"There are several tables set up with small pictures of each painting. There's a bid sheet in front of each picture. Buyers make a bid on each one they want. The bidding starts at eight and closes at nine."

"It sounds like you have everything ready," said Kate. "If you'll excuse us, I've been promised a private showing from the artist," she smiled.

Kate slipped her hand through his arm as they walked into the gallery room. The left side of the room featured his landscapes. The four seascapes he'd shown Patrick the first day plus six more. Paintings of the California coast lines, some views from their home, some from his trips up the PCH on his bike. He'd infused the paintings with a life of their own. Some were peaceful images that made you want to lose yourself in them. Others were rough terrain, dangerous and forbidding. Cabe watched Kate as she looked up and down the wall, taking them all in.

"Cabe," she whispered. "These are amazing. I don't understand why you never let me see these."

"I guess I never imagined anyone but me would be interested in them."

She smiled and gave him a kiss. "Cabe, this is one of the few times I get to tell you that you were wrong."

He took a breath before he led her to the other side of the gallery room. This is where the portraits were hung. The first four were the portraits of her she'd seen, now properly framed. The next were portraits of the team. Happy's portrait was done in few

colors, dominated by her long, curly black hair. There was no trace of her emotional armor. Toby's portrait showed him lost in thought, staring out the garage window. Cabe had stripped away his arrogance to reveal the man. The next portrait was Paige and Ralph. The painting was the definition of her fierce mother love. The portrait of Walter was different than the others. It seemed shadowed, layered, complicated.

"Cabe," she said. "I don't have words for these." She squeezed his hand. Kate moved on to the final portrait. She gasped. It was another one of her, but not like the others. She was sitting hunched over on a curb with her face buried in her hand. Her red hair was the only feature that could be easily identified as Kate. She was wearing the dark uniform of a New York City EMT and her badge was hanging at her hip. The background suggested the red and white lights of emergency vehicles. This was the aftermath of the UN mission. The title of the portrait was "The Job".

Cabe looked at Kate, dying to know what she thought. He was stunned to see tears running down her cheeks. "Sweetheart what's wrong?"

"Excuse me," she whispered as she ran out of the room.

He followed her into Patrick's office. "Sweetheart, what's wrong? He gave her his handkerchief. "Do you want me to have Patrick take it down?"

"No, I don't." She took a deep breath. "You did it."

"Did what?"

"That was the moment it all came crashing down on me, what I'd done. Killing three men." She gave him a slight smile. "You captured that moment."

"I'm sorry if I upset you. I didn't mean to."

"No, Cabe. You've created something wonderful." She kissed him. "I'm so proud of you."

Cabe escorted Kate back to the main floor and got them both a glass of champagne. "Sweetheart, before things get crazy I wanted to thank you."

"For what? I didn't do anything."

He leaned down and gave her a soft kiss. "For having such faith in me." He whispered in her ear. "For making me feel like Superman." People started filing past him,

the waiters circulated with their glasses of champagne. He glanced toward the door and saw the entire team, including Ralph, file in.

"Did you do this?" he asked Kate.

"They're your family. They should be here."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"You were nervous enough."

He placed a kiss on her forehead. "True."

Paige led them to where Cabe and Kate were standing. She gave him a big hug.

"Congratulations, Cabe. This is really wonderful."

"Thanks, kid. You all look great, especially you, Ralph." He smiled when he looked at Ralph's dark blue suit, light blue shirt and tie. He looked like a mini-Cabe. Ralph approached and extended his hand. Cabe tried to not to smile too broadly.

"Congratulations, Cabe."

"Thank you, son."

"Mom explained what an achievement it is to have a showing. I researched the gallery and found they specialize in Impressionism. Interesting concept, focusing on emotion instead of an accurate representation of the subject."

"I hope you like the show," Cabe said.

Each of them came up to offer their congratulations. Kate signaled for the waiter who distributed champagne to each. Paige tried to stop him when he handed a glass to Ralph. "Don't worry, Ma'am. It's ginger ale. I saw the young sir come in."

"They're right through here," said Cabe as he led them toward the landscapes. He didn't say anything to describe the paintings, preferring to allow them to decide what they meant. At the moment they mostly looked surprised. Walter looked confused, which was his normal response when he was faced with something he couldn't quite grasp.

"Wow," said Happy "Amazing work, boss."

Cabe smiled. "Thanks, kid."

He looked over at Sylvester, who looked overwhelmed by the storm scenes. He remembered Sly's overactive EQ was sometimes triggered by works of art. He put his arm around Sly's shoulder. "Are you okay?"

"They're so powerful."

Cabe patted his back. "Thanks buddy."

He took a breath and led the team to the other side of the room. He wasn't sure how they would respond to seeing themselves on the wall.

"Hey, Mom," said Ralph. "That's us."

"Oh my," she whispered.

Cabe took Kate's hand and stood back watching their reactions. Each was staring at his own portrait, except for Sly, who was searching the wall for his face. He stopped when he saw it. It was a painting of a small, frail hand on a blanket and a larger, stronger hand resting on top of it. Both had white bandages around their ring fingers. The title of the painting was 'Courage'.

He heard Sly gasp and saw tears running down his cheek. Sly turned to him and threw his arms around him. "It's perfect," he whispered. Cabe knew even if he became a famous artist, he would never get a better review.

Happy was staring at her portrait as if she didn't know the subject. "Happy, don't you like it?" asked Cabe.

"No, boss it's a great painting. I've just never seen that girl."

Cabe took her by the shoulders and placed a kiss on the top of her head. "I have," he whispered. Happy gifted him with one of her rare smiles. Toby looked equally disturbed by his portrait.

"What do you think, Doc?"

"You son of a bitch," he muttered.

"Excuse me?" he said with the authority of a father about to correct his child.

"All those years in school I spent trying to understand people. Trying to figure out what they're hiding and who they really are. All those years and I still haven't found the answers." He faced Cabe. "You found it in one painting." Toby took Happy's hand and walked off to join Sly at the reception table.

"Walter, you haven't said anything," said Cabe.

"I'm not sure what to say."

"Do you like it?"

"It appears to be an accurate representation of my appearance."

"I sense a 'but' coming on."

"It feels complicated."

Cabe smiled. "In that case it is an accurate representation."

Walter turned and extended his hand. "While I still don't understand art, I feel..."

Walter paused and smiled. "That's the point, isn't it? I feel."

All Cabe could do was smile. Walter walked off to join the others. "Paige, Ralph, what do you think?"

Paige put her arms around Cabe for a hug. "Cabe, this is amazing. I had no idea." There were tears in her eyes as she glanced back at the portrait of her and Ralph. "That's love on canvas," she whispered. She kissed Cabe's cheek. "What do you think, Ralphie?" she asked.

"I think it's a very nice painting of you and me, Mom."

"Anything else?" she asked.

Ralph looked up at Cabe. "I makes me think you must like me a lot."

Cabe looked at Kate and squeezed her hand, trying to hold back the tears that wanted to fall. He bent down to match Ralph's height. "I love you, Ralph."

Ralph launched himself at Cabe for a hug. He whispered in Cabe's ear. "I love you too, Cabe."

Patrick's voice came over the speaker. "Ladies and Gentleman, thank you for coming to my little gallery, everyone snicker appropriately at my false modesty." Everyone did. Cabe hadn't noticed how full the gallery had become in the last thirty minutes.

"Tonight's event is a fundraiser for the Amanda Gallo Pediatric Center at Mercy Hospital so I know you'll all be even more cutthroat than usual when it comes time to bid." Everyone laughed again. "Our feature artist tonight may not be known to you but that is a temporary state. After tonight, everyone will know him, Cabe Gallo." Patrick indicated to him and everyone applauded. Patrick waved him over to the small platform. He would have remained frozen to the spot if Kate hadn't literally pushed him.

"Go on," she said. "It's your night. Enjoy it."

Cabe approached the stage and shook Patrick's hand. Patrick handed him the small microphone. "Damn," he thought. "Better think of something."

"Thank you everyone for coming out to support Amanda's Center. I would like to thank Patrick for insisting I show him my work, my wife Kate, for inspiring my work," He

paused and looked out at the team, "And I want to thank my family here tonight, for making my work worthwhile." He handed the microphone back to Patrick and beat a hasty retreat back to Kate's side.

"Well done, Gallo," she said as she kissed his cheek.

"Alright everyone the bidding is now open. We will announce the winning bids in one hour."

Cabe saw a familiar face making her way through the crowd. "Katherine, I didn't know you'd be here."

"Kate made sure I was on the list. Even my badge wouldn't have gotten me in here tonight. Your work is amazing Cabe."

"Thank you, Katherine."

" 'The Job', that was after the UN, wasn't it?"

Cabe nodded.

"It's stunning." Katherine took a sip of her champagne. "I'm going to let you greet the rest of your adoring fans."

"Thanks for coming, Katherine," said Kate.

"Wouldn't have missed it for the world."

The next hour flew by in a press of people didn't know and would have a hard time picking out of a line up. They were all exceedingly kind with their praise of his work. He took a moment and shut out the sound and focused on the crush of people, moving about, laughing, drinking. He reached out for Kate's hand without looking, knowing it would be there in this moment that he needed her. She was his anchor. She was what kept him grounded in the most turbulent times. This last year with Kate had sometimes seemed surreal, like he wasn't living his real life. Sometimes the big house, the fancy bike, the art collection on his walls, it all seemed so foreign. Then all he had to do was look at his Katie girl's smile, that smile she gave only to him and he knew he was where he was supposed to be.

Patrick returned to the microphone with a big smile. "Ladies and gentleman the bidding is now closed. I am happy to report that we have sold every painting and raised a half a million dollars for Amanda's Center."

Kate nearly missed Cabe's gasp for all the applause. "What did he say?" asked Cabe.

"He said you're a hit."

He turned to her and smiled. "How many did you buy?"

"Just one. Paige and Ralph's portrait. I thought she'd like to have it."

He pulled her hand to his lips and kissed it.

Patrick continued from the podium. "The best selling painting was " 'The Job' " The winning bid was seventy five thousand dollars. Would number 714 like to come to the stage and meet the artist?"

Kate pushed him again toward the podium. He turned to see Katherine coming forward. "Katherine? You bought it?"

"You two know each other?"

Cabe laughed. "She's my boss."

"Nice boss," said Patrick. "Would you like to say a few words?"

"I'm Katherine Cooper, Director of Homeland Security. Cabe and Kate Gallo are both agents who work for me." She paused for the collective gasp of the few who didn't know. "I've never seen a better representation of the enormity of the job than I have in this painting. I intend to hang it at Homeland so desk jockeys like me can be reminded the real cost of what we do."

Cabe gave her a hug and thanked her. He moved back to Kate's side. "It's getting late and it's been a day. We should call it a night."

"Good plan," said Paige. "Ralph's starting to drag."

"Before you go," Kate motioned to Mark who brought her a wrapped painting. "This is for you."

"What? Is this? No," said Paige.

Cabe nodded. "It belongs with you."

"Thank you," she whispered with tear filled eyes.

He watched as the last of the team left the gallery. "Do you think it's okay if the guest of honor leaves early?"

"I think it's fine."

"Good. Because I want to spend some time with my best girl."

"Well, that was a hell of a night," said Cabe as he pulled off his tie.

"Yes it was, replied Kate as she kicked off her shoes.

"I still can't believe they sold for that much," said as he shrugged off his jacket. "Of course it was for a good cause."

Kate put her shoes on the rack in the closet and turned to face him. "You listen to me. I know these people. You know why they have so much money? Because they're cheap. They don't spend a penny they don't have to. The charity might have bumped up the price maybe ten percent, but no more." She walked to him and slipped her arms around his neck. "Face it Gallo, you're a star." She gave him a deep kiss.

"Is that right?" he said as he reached for her zipper and pulled it down to her waist.

"Uh huh," she smiled.

"So does that mean I can expect star treatment?"

"Definitely."

"You know, I've been wondering what the color of the day is." He slipped the dress off her shoulders and let it pool at her feet. It revealed an emerald green lace confection, a barely there bra and the smallest of thongs. "Hmm, very nice."

"You do seem to like me in green, boyo," she said in her brogue. "Even though you call me an Irish witch."

He gave her a deep kiss. "But you're my witch."

" 'Tis true, boyo. I am yours. Forever and always."

## Epilogue

September 20, 2066

LA Museum of Fine Art

The young boy was absorbed in his pad. The speed of his rapid eye movement caused the pages to flip so fast the screen froze. "Dang, it! Dad, my screen locked again."

"Cabe, I've told you before the eye movement interface can't keep pace with how fast you read."

"Put that away now. You can read that later. This is important."

"Ah, Nonna please. My robotics project is due next week and I haven't figured out how to compensate for the power drain when I stepped up the remote interface."

"Put it away and I'll help you with it later."

"Thanks, Nonno. But I still don't see why I had to come to a museum. It's full of the past. I'm focused on the future," he said with very bit of confidence that an ten year old working on a degree in robotics could muster. Which was considerable.

"Normally I would agree with you, but this is part of your past you need to understand, and maybe appreciate," said his Nonno. He pointed to the plaque on the wall that identified the Gallo collection.

"Hey, that's us, Dad."

"It is. Come with me. I want to show you something." He led the boy to a display pad mounted on the wall. He waved his hand in front of the screen and a series of pictures began to display. Pictures of a tall man appeared. He was smiling and standing next to a woman with dark red hair.

"This was my Nonno Cabe and Nonna Kate. You were named for him,"

"I thought I was named for you, Dad."

"You were, but I was named for him. He was a very good man so I passed his name to you. I hope one day you might give the name to your son."

"Walter, remember when he came to see the baby. I'll never forget the look on his face when we told him his name was Cabe Gallo O'Brien."

"I think it was the only time I saw him cry." He took Paige's hand in his. After all these years, he still loved her to distraction. He never could properly analyze love, never understand why it existed. But after more than fifty years together he simply accepted that it did exist.

"You know some of the story, don't you?" asked his father.

"Yeah, they were spies, or something like that."

"Not spies," said Paige. "He and Kate were Homeland Security agents. Nonno and I worked with them."

The boy's eyes got wide. "You were spies?"

"Not spies, but well, sort of."

"Cabe arrested me when I was eleven. That's how I met him," said Walter.

"What?" said Cabe

"That's a story for another day," said his father. "The point is they became a very important parts of your Nonno's and Nonna's lives. And your Uncle Ralph too."

"Kate saved my life."

Cabe looked up at his Uncle Ralph. He was fifteen years older than his dad but he knew they were very close. Uncle Ralph was a lot like Cabe. He went to Cal Tech too when he was ten.

"How did she do that?"

"I was the same age you are now. There was this crazy guy in the garage we worked at. He fired a gun at me and Kate through herself in front of me."

"Did she get hurt?"

"She nearly died."

"But Uncle Toby saved her," added Paige.

Walter stepped forward and looked at the pictures flashing on the screen. Cabe as a young man, as a Marine, as an agent, as the artist. "This Cabe was very brave. He risked his life over and over to keep the rest of us, the rest of the world safe. That's why we gave your dad his name."

"But they weren't really your grandparents," said Cabe.

"They were," said Ralph. "They chose to love us. That made them family."

Paige noticed Walter wiping his eyes. "Walter?"

He took his wife's hand. "After all these years I still miss them."

"Me too," she said.

Cabe's father continued. "After they retired from Homeland Nonno Cabe became a very famous artist. People from all over the world wanted his painting in their collections." He pointed to the main gallery hall. "In there are some of the best of his paintings. It's time you see them."

They led the boy into the room and stood before a wall of landscapes. They weren't like photographs, Cabe thought. Somehow he thought they might be better. Photographs didn't feel like these did. "Hey, that's your house, Nonna."

"Actually it was their house. They left it to us," said Paige.

They led Cabe to another room with paintings of people. They were different too. It wasn't like looking at a person. It was like looking at more than the person. He didn't really understand but he would talk to Nonna about it later. She was good at explaining confusing stuff like that.

Then he saw paintings of his family, Nonna and Nonno, only they were young, younger even than his dad. There were paintings of Uncle Ralph when he was young like him. There were a lot of paintings of a baby he figured must be his dad. Uncle Toby and Aunt Happy, Uncle Sylvester, they were all there. And they were all so young.

His dad took his hand and sat him down on a bench in front of a painting of Nonno Cabe and Nonna Kate. "Cabe, I wanted you to know about why you're named for him. He lived his whole life trying to protect the people he loved. He said he wanted to leave the world a little bit better because he'd been here. All the money he made from his painting went to fund a pediatric cancer ward, named for his daughter, Amanda. She died when she was just six years old. Now that I have you, Cabe, I can tell you I don't understand how Nonno could have survived losing his child. I don't think I could. But he did. Thousands of children recovered thanks to the work they did. So you see, I want you to understand a little about what it is to be a good man, like he was. You need to remember him.

Cabe looked at the painting of the man in front of him. Cabe could see what his dad was talking about. He didn't know how, but he did. It was in his eyes. This was a very good man.

"I'll remember, dad. I promise."