

The Ghost of the Past : A Scorpion Story

By Kate Simon

"Who drank the last of the coffee...Toby?" asked Cabe. He looked over at Toby's desk and watched him duck behind his monitor. "Damn it, Toby. How many times have I asked you to make a fresh pot when you take the last cup?"

Toby looked up and smiled. "Forty two." He pointed to his head. "Photographic memory."

"Jackass." Cabe shook his head and reached for the filters. He scrounged through the deli bag to find only the onion bagels that gave him heartburn. "And is it too much to ask for you vultures leave me one freaking egg bagel?"

He watched the coffee brew as he looked around the garage. Toby and Sly were at their desks working on their various projects. Happy was tuning up her Harley. Paige was working on the endless paperwork. Walter and Kate were upstairs working on another computer coding project he couldn't even pretend to understand. He couldn't believe how these people, these kids, his wife, had changed his life. He smiled as he poured himself a cup of the fresh coffee and added two sugars. He headed toward his desk to tackle some of the mindless paperwork working for Homeland Security generated.

Paige looked up at the sound of the opening front door. A petite woman with jet black hair and pale blue eyes walked toward Paige's desk. Her suit was as precisely tailored as her demeanor.

"Can I help you?" asked Paige.

She reached into her pocket and pulled out a badge. "Kathleen Ellsworth, AUSA with the Department of Justice. I need to speak to Agent Gallo."

"Which one?"

"Excuse me?"

She looked startled and Paige bet that was something that didn't happen often to this woman. "We have two, Cabe and Kate."

She appeared to collect herself as she said, "Cabe. I need to see Cabe Gallo."

Paige pressed the intercom button. "Cabe, you have a visitor."

"Be right there," he said.

Cabe hoped it wasn't another Homeland paper pusher come to review his files, again. Or worse, another tour for a visiting official. He walked toward Paige's desk and saw a woman standing with her back to him. She turned around and his heart nearly stopped.

"Cabe, this is..."

"Kathleen," he whispered.

"Hello Cabe."

He forced himself to walk forward. "It's been a long time."

She nodded and gave him a sad smile. "Yes it has."

He wrapped his arms around her and then kissed her cheek. When he looked up he saw Kate standing on the stairs. He would have some explaining to do. "How have you been?"

Kathleen straightened herself and resumed a professional demeanor. "I'm not here to reminisce. I need your help.

He led her to the small office they sometimes used for clients. It wasn't much more than an ugly room with an equally ugly desk, but the team knew if the door was closed to stay out.

"What's going on, Kathleen?" Only when she sat down on the small wooden chair did he notice the slight tremble in her hands.

"I'm an AUSA for the LA district. I've been working on the prosecution of Marco Calderone."

"Calderone cartel?"

"Yes, I've been building a case against his operation for a year. I was finally ready to file when I received a phone call." She placed her phone on the desk and touched the voice mail icon. "Drop the case or we'll send him back in pieces. You have twenty four hours."

"Send who back?"

"My son."

Cabe reached across the table and took her hand. "I'm so sorry this is happening but why are you bringing this to Homeland, to Scorpion?"

"Because I think there's a leak in my office. No one knew I was ready to file. The

office must be compromised. I've followed your career and Scorpion. You're the only one I'd trust with this."

"Where were the files?"

"My laptop."

"Someone could have remote accessed your computer. It doesn't necessarily mean it was someone from your office."

"It's air gapped. That means..."

Cabe smiled. "I know what it means. Working with Scorpion I also know anything is possible. We'll need to look at your computer. They'll be able to tell if it's been compromised." Cabe stood and moved toward the door. "I'm going to ask my wife to join us. She's also a Homeland agent."

"I don't want a bunch of people in on this."

"Kathleen, have you heard of The Ghost?"

"Of course. Everyone in the DOJ has."

"My wife, Kate, was The Ghost. She is a computer genius. She'll be able to analyze your computer better than anyone." Cabe walked out to Paige's desk and hit the intercom button. He assumed Kate had retreated there after seeing him hug Kathleen. "Kate, can you join me in the office, please?"

"Be right there," she replied. A moment later Kate was descending the stairs. She waited for Cabe. "Kathleen Ellsworth is an AUSA and needs our help." He headed toward the door but Kate grabbed his arm.

"And?"

He stared, trying not to answer.

"Cabe, you obviously know her. You can't keep me in the dark if I'm going to help."

"I knew her in college."

"Knew her?"

"We lived together during our senior year. She was twenty two and I was twenty eight, a returning vet. After graduation I went straight into Quantico. She was accepted into Harvard Law. We tried to stay in touch but..."

"Long distance romance."

"Exactly."

Kate nodded and they joined Kathleen in the office. Kate noticed her black hair and pale eyes, Black Irish. Her man did have a thing for Irish girls.

"Kate, this is Kathleen Ellsworth."

She shook the woman's hand and noticed it was cold and clammy. She may have appeared collected but she was nervous as hell.

"Kathleen was about to file charges against a drug cartel ring leader when her son was kidnapped. She's been told to drop the case for her son's return. I'd like you to review her laptop, see if you can ID any intrusions that might lead us to the kidnappers."

Kate nodded. "Of course." Kathleen reached into her large purse and pulled out her slim laptop. She slid it across the table toward her. She took the laptop but didn't take her eyes off the woman. Something was off. Yes, she was upset about her son and probably nervous about seeing Cabe after all these years. But there was something else.

"Where did they grab your son?" Kate asked.

"What?" asked Kathleen.

"From where was he taken? School?" she asked.

"From work."

"Where does he work?"

"Downtown. O'Mara Associates. He's an attorney."

Kate glanced at Cabe who'd gone pale. He knew where she was going.

"Show me his picture."

"What? Why?"

"We'll need it if we are going to find him."

"Well, I.." she hesitated.

"You have his picture on your phone. Show us."

Kathleen picked up her phone and tapped on the gallery. She slid the phone towards them. They looked at the picture of a handsome young man with brown hair and crystal blue eyes. Kate looked at the picture and then at Cabe. She pointed to the eyes, the jaw line, the cleft chin.

"How old is your son, Ms. Ellsworth?" Kate asked with barely contained fury.

She sighed and looked at Cabe, tears running down her cheeks. "He'll be thirty next month," she whispered. "Cabe, Jonathan is your son."

Cabe stared at Kathleen, unable to process what she'd said. He had a son, a thirty year old son. He stared at Jonathan's picture and saw himself at thirty staring back at him. Kate interrupted the silence and brought him back to the moment.

"I'm taking these to the team and bringing them up to speed. You have until I return to talk." Kate picked up the laptop and phone and put her hand on Cabe's shoulder and smiled. "Then we go find your son."

Cabe watched the door close behind Kate and then turned to face Kathleen. "Why?" he asked.

Kathleen sat up straight in her chair as she wiped the tears from her cheeks. "What do you mean, why?"

"Why didn't you tell me you were pregnant?"

"You were going to Quantico, I was headed for Harvard Law. We had our paths planned. We knew that going in."

"So you decided for me?"

She crossed her arms over her chest and made the same pout he remembered when she didn't get her way. "I had to take the semester off. My parents were furious."

"So that gave you the right to deprive me of my son? Deprive my son of a father?"

"He's my son," she shouted.

Cabe pounded the table with his fist. "He's my son too!"

Kate walked into the garage and wasn't surprised to find everyone waiting for her. "Alright gather up, people. We have a case." She handed Walter the laptop and explained what they were looking for. "She was ready to file on Marco Calderone when her son, Jonathan was kidnapped. We have to find him before tomorrow or they promised to kill him. She's due in court at one p.m."

"Kate, what else is going on here? Cabe obviously knows this woman," said Paige.

"They lived together in college." Kate bluetoothed Kathleen's phone to the monitor. She took a breath and hit the transfer button. "This is Jonathan Ellsworth." Kate heard collective gasps in the room. "He's Cabe's son."

"I love DNA," said Toby.

"Why didn't he tell us?" asked Paige.

"Because he didn't know anything about him until five minutes ago." Kate took a centering breath, trying to push the tornado of emotions she was feeling aside. "We have work to do so we need to focus. Happy, check all the cameras in a five block radius of O'Mara Associates downtown. That's where he was grabbed. Walter, comb through the laptop and see what you find. We need to know if there was an intrusion. Kathleen insists that no one has access to it but we know that doesn't really matter." Kate looked over at Sly who seemed frozen at his desk. Too much emotional turmoil could disrupt his thought process. She walked over to him and put her hand on his shoulder. "Are you okay, Sly?"

"Poor Cabe," he whispered. "He would have loved to have a son."

She gave him a small smile. "He already does. Four of them. And two daughters, and a grandson." She looked around the room. They looked like Kate imagined she did right now, shocked disbelief. "You people are his family and you know that. Biology has nothing to do with it. He loves all of you." She tried to calm herself or at least give the illusion of calm. "Sly, please assist Walter. Maybe you could do a phone dump and see what you find. They called her, maybe you can find from where. Paige, please call Cooper. Fill her in on what's going on. Tell her it's confidential because we can't be sure where the leak is. Also tell her the entire team will be unavailable until further notice."

"Excuse me?" asked Walter. "This is my company, not yours."

Kate drilled him with a look. She'd developed her own version of the Gallo Glare.

"Don't start, Walter. I guarantee you will not win. Paige, make the call." Paige nodded and returned to her desk. Kate walked toward Toby. He understood what she was going through and put his hands on her shoulders.

"What do you need from me?" he said quietly.

"Profile the suspects." She gave him a small smile. "Work your magic."

He nodded. "You've got it."

"And Toby, afterwards..."

"I know. I'll be right here."

They all heard a pounding and muffled shouting. Kate turned toward the team. "Get to work," she said as she headed back to the office. She opened the door and saw Cabe more angry than she'd ever seen. Kathleen was leaning over the table looking like a cat ready to pounce.

"What did you tell him about me?"

"I told him the truth. You left before he was born and never came back."

"So you let him think I didn't want him? That I abandoned him?" Cabe shouted.

"Alright that's enough," Kate yelled. Cabe and Kathleen turned, looking as if they only just noticed she'd returned. "There are more important things to deal with right now, like getting your son away from the kidnappers." Her heart was breaking for the pain she saw in her husband's face, but now was not the time. "Cabe, go talk to the team. See if they made any progress." He looked back at Kathleen, his anger frozen on his face. "Agent Gallo," Kate yelled. "You have your assignment. Get to it."

Cabe looked at Kate and nodded. He straightened himself and tugged at his suit coat. "Of course, you're right," he said.

Cabe went out the office door and Kate closed it behind him. She turned to face the advancing Kathleen. "Not yet. You and I are going to have a conversation."

"This is between Cabe and I," Kathleen replied.

"Not anymore." She looked at Kathleen crossing her arms and glaring. It was probably a look that terrified suspects. All it did for Kate was move her anger into hatred. She took a breath to calm herself and spoke slowly. "I'm going to explain how this is going to play out, so listen carefully. The team and I are going to find Jonathan. We will find the leak. We will make your case. You will be a hero to your department."

Kate noticed her stance softened only after she said they'd make her a hero, not when she said they'd find her son. Yeah, she really hated this bitch.

"Once we find Jonathan you are finally going to tell him the truth. You will explain how you've been lying to him his whole life. You will explain how you never told Cabe you were pregnant had how he would have never abandoned son."

"I can't tell him that. He'll hate me."

Kate gave her a small smile. "You've had your way for thirty years. What you want no longer matters. You will do everything Cabe wants so he can have a relationship with his son."

"You can't force me to do anything."

Kathleen reinforced her smug stance and Kate was glad her gun was in the loft. She walked up close to Kathleen. "I bet Cabe told you who I am. You're DOJ so you know what The Ghost has done. There is no computer I can't access, no system I can't hack." Kate moved even closer to her. "You will do what I tell you or I will destroy your life with a few keystrokes."

Kathleen blanched. "You can't do that."

"Don't bet on it. You have no idea of what I'm capable of or what I won't do to protect the ones I love."

Cabe stood in the center of the room, fighting a feeling of being disembodied. He needed to focus. Kate was right. The agent had a job to do. The man would have to wait.

"What have you got?" he asked. Everyone turned to look at him. He saw the emotion on their faces and he knew addressing it now would break him. "We have work to do people."

"I got the van that grabbed him," said Happy. Picked it up four blocks from his office. They grabbed him on his way out. They went south. Picked them up heading toward the docks. Got a pier location but there are five buildings and dozens of containers. We need to narrow it down." Cabe glanced over his shoulder to Kate and Kathleen leaving the office. Kathleen looked even more pale and the look on Kate's face said she was the cause.

"Excellent work, Happy. Any luck with the plates?" he asked.

"Stolen," said Toby. "But the location they grabbed the plates from is covered by home security cameras. We got the van's original plates."

"How could you get into home systems?" asked Kathleen.

The team gave her a collective, "Are you kidding me?" look and returned to their monitors.

"We have Cooper on stand by," said Paige. "She's ready to roll a team when we give the word."

"The Director of Homeland?" asked Kathleen.

Kate shot her a Gallo Glare. "Perhaps it's better if you just stop talking and let us do our job."

"I've hacked dock security and overlaid our thermal imaging," said Walter. He pointed to a small building at the edge of the perimeter. "They're here." He turned to Cabe and nodded. "I'm certain."

Cabe looked at Walter and gave him a small but genuine smile. "Excellent work, son. Call Cooper." He pointed to a building two blocks down from where his son was being held. "Tell her we'll meet the team there." He looked at the rest of his team, ready to back his play, no matter what. "Get your gear. We roll in ten minutes." He looked at Kate and nodded toward the office. She followed him and he closed the door.

"What happened?"

"What?"

"Now is not the time to be evasive. What happened between you and Kathleen?"

"We had a conversation."

He didn't like the look on her face. This was a Kate he'd never seen, and she frightened him. "What did you do?"

"I made sure she wouldn't be an impediment."

"To what?"

"To you having a relationship with your son. She wasn't going to tell Jonathan the truth. I disabused her of that notion. After we get him back she will explain how she lied and that you didn't know about him until today."

He stared at her, not quite believing what he was hearing. "Did you threaten her?"

"Hell yes I threatened her. I told her if she didn't comply I would destroy her life with a keystroke. She's caused you pain. I won't allow that to continue."

Whenever he looked at his wife he'd always seen a quiet, brilliant, passionate woman. Now he saw what truly made her the legend. The resolve, the purpose and a spine of pure steel. All of that was now directed into protecting him. He moved forward and took her in his arms. "You know it's dangerous to threaten a US attorney."

"Sweetheart, I'm a genius and one of the richest women in the state. Either way, she doesn't stand a chance against us."

Cabe tightened his embrace and whispered, "I love you, Katie girl."

"I know, boyo. I know."

The ride to the dock was uncharacteristically quiet. The team was reviewing Kathleen's files to see who they were up against. Cabe glanced over at Kate in the passenger seat. For a split second he smiled. The kids were in the back of the van, Dad was driving and Mom was checking her weapon. Just another day.

They approached the staging area just as the Homeland team was arriving. Kathleen followed in her car, at Kate's suggestion. He knew he'd have to keep a tight rein on his wife if Kathleen was going to make it out of this in one piece.

Cabe parked the van as a tall, dark haired agent in a flak jacket approached.

"Agent Gallo, I'm John Conrad. Director Cooper has put me and my team at your disposal."

He looked over to see four more agents exit their van, all in flak jackets and carrying automatic weapons. He'd have to find a way to properly thank their boss for her help. Kathleen pulled in behind Cabe's van and another agent approached her.

"I'm sorry ma'am, you'll have to move your vehicle."

"It's okay," said Cabe. "This is AUSA Ellsworth. She's also the mother of our hostage."

Conrad reviewed the thermal imaging and discussed the approach. "Agent Gallo, you can see we have limited options here. We're going to have to go in hot. Any idea how the hostage going to respond?"

Cabe shook his head, terrified he would be witnessing his son's death. He couldn't lose another child. God couldn't be that cruel.

"Jonathan will know what to do," said Toby as he approached them.

"How do you know that?"

"I was reviewing his history." He smiled at Cabe. "He was a Marine. Two tours in Iraq."

It should have felt like a gut punch, but it didn't. Maybe he was getting like Sly, frozen in an emotional overload. He looked over at Conrad. "Agent Gallo and I will need flak jackets. The rest of our team will remain here."

Conrad gave him a confused look. "I thought you were Gallo."

Cabe pointed at himself. "Cabe Gallo." Then he pointed at toward Kate as she

moved to his side, weapon ready. "Kate Gallo."

"Wife?"

"Yeah."

Conrad smiled. "Interesting."

Cabe managed a smile. "You have no idea."

He adjusted the straps of Kate's flak jacket and then turned around so she could adjust his. "Kate, when we go in..."

"I'll bring up the rear, guard your back."

He turned back around and smiled.

"Don't look so surprised, Gallo." She held up her weapon. "I may know how to use this, but I'm a hacker. You're the Marine."

"I love you, Katie girl."

"Yeah, I know, Gallo. Now break protocol and give your partner a pre-raid kiss." She leaned up to give him a quick kiss. "Let's roll."

Conrad's men led the assault. Cabe was directly behind them and, as promised, Kate hung back to protect their rear. As soon as they broke through the front door shots were fired. The kidnapers were subdued. One was shot, the other, in a surprisingly wise move, dropped his weapon and threw his hands in the air.

Just as Toby predicted, Jonathan knew what to do. When the shooting started he threw himself to the ground, taking the chair he was handcuffed to with him. He kept himself as low as possible until the scene was secured. The agents took the kidnapers into custody as Conrad released Jonathan and helped him to his feet. "Are you okay, Mr. Ellsworth?"

"Yeah, I'm good," he said as he stood and faced Cabe. "Thanks guys."

Cabe stood stock still, looking at his younger reflection. His son. "You're welcome," he said.

Jonathan walked towards Cabe. He was the same height and had the same sandy brown hair as Cabe. He was trim with broad shoulders. His eyes were pale blue, like his mother's. His jaw had the same line and the cleft chin Cabe saw every day in his own mirror. His son looked at him and tilted his head a bit.

"Do I know you?" he asked.

Cabe gave him a small smile. "Not yet."

All heads turned toward the open door as they heard Kate shout "Homeland Security" followed by first one shot, then two more in quick succession. Cabe pushed through the door first with his gun drawn. Just outside the door Kate stood over a prone, bleeding suspect with her gun pointed at the man's head. She'd kicked his gun aside and it landed next to a spilled pizza box. She nodded at the guy. "He picked a hell of a time to go for lunch."

One of Conrad's men cuffed the downed man and called for EMT to treated the wounded suspects. Cabe walked over to Kate and put his hand on her shoulder. "You good?"

Kate nodded. "I'm good. You?"

"I'm good."

"Liar." She smiled and gave him a kiss. She looked up and saw Jonathan closely watching Cabe. "Mr. Ellsworth, your mother is waiting for you at our staging area. One of the agents will escort you. Then we'll need to debrief you."

Jonathan acknowledged her as he moved past her. "Thank you Agent?"

"Gallo," she smiled.

"Thank you, Agent Gallo."

Cabe watched his son disappear around the corner. "What was that?"

"Didn't you notice? I ID'd myself as Gallo and it didn't register. Kathleen never told him your name."

Cabe put his arm around Kate's shoulder more for his own comfort than hers. They walked the few blocks back to the staging area in silence. He knew she was waiting for him to say something but he couldn't find the words. How could he find words for this?

When they got back to the van they saw Kathleen locked in her son's embrace. Cabe took note that Jonathan's eyes were tearing but Kathleen was pale yet calm. Maybe she was in shock. It had been an overwhelming day.

Cabe was surprised when Kate spoke up. "Mr. Ellsworth, you'll need to ride with us back to our office. Your mother can follow in her car. This way we can debrief you

quickly and get you back to your life."

Jonathan nodded as he wiped his cheeks. "Sounds good." He stepped away from his mother and smiled. "I'll be fine, Mom."

Kathleen touched his cheek and gave him a small smile. "Of course you will."

Cabe pulled Kate aside, helping her remove her flak jacket. "Why does he have to ride with us?"

"Because I want us there when she talks to him."

He turned for Kate to assist him with his jacket. "Do you think she's going to be a problem?"

"I'm not going to give her the opportunity."

Cabe smiled. He'd never had a partner go to such lengths to protect him. Kate always had his back. The fact that their partnership also included blistering hot sex was a definite perk. "Okay. Let's roll."

Jonathan approached them with his hand extended toward Cabe. "Thanks for saving my ass, Agent?"

"Gallo. Cabe Gallo"

He turned toward Kate. "I thought you were Agent Gallo."

Kate shook his hand. "Kate Gallo. I'm Cabe's wife."

He smiled and nodded. "Interesting."

She laughed. "We get that a lot." Kate made the introductions to the rest of the team, explaining their parts in his rescue.

Cabe climbed into the drivers seat, still unsure what to say or do next. He listened during the drive back to Kate's efficient questioning. Jonathan told them a few pieces of information, things he'd overheard that excited the team. Names on the other end of phone calls, the time of the calls, references to other locations. All of it would help narrow down the location of the man who'd ordered the kidnapping, presumably Calderone.

Kathleen was waiting for them when they got back to the garage. Walter unlocked the door and the rest of the team followed him. "Paige," called Kate. "I'm sure Mr. Ellsworth could use a cup of coffee. Would you make sure he's comfortable?"

Paige smiled and nodded. "Of course."

Kathleen tried to follow but Kate grabbed her by her expensive suit jacket. "Not so

fast."

"Cabe, do you see how she's treating me?"

He nodded and gave his wife a small smile. "I do."

"You listen to me, Kathleen. We're going to give you some privacy to talk to your son but you mark my words. You tell him anything but the absolute truth and there will be serious consequences." She moved closer, getting in her face. "Do not test me."

Kathleen wrenched her arm from Kate's grip. Cabe led them both back to the garage. He saw the team already glued to their monitors as Paige was bringing Jonathan a cup of coffee. Cabe opened the office door as Kate opened the blinds leading back to the garage. She was going to keep an eye Kathleen.

"Jonathan, would you please join us?" asked Cabe. He indicated to Kathleen that she join them too. Jonathan and Kathleen sat as Cabe and Kate remained standing. He was grateful as Kate stepped into the silence.

"Mr. Ellsworth..."

"Jonathan, please. You guys just saved me from some seriously bad dudes. I figure that puts us on a first name basis."

Kate smiled. "Jonathan. The team is using the information you gave us to narrow down the search for Calderone."

"Calderone?" He turned to his mother. "That's who's behind this? It wasn't for money?" Kathleen nodded.

"Your mother came to us this morning because she knew there was a leak in her office and she knew Scorpion's reputation." Kate looked up at Cabe. "She knew we could be trusted." She looked back to Kathleen. "There will be more about the case to discuss but for the time being, your mother needs to speak with you. Cabe and I will give you some privacy." Kate and Cabe turned and walked out the door. As she closed the door behind them, Paige brought Cabe a cup of coffee.

"I thought you could use this," she said.

"Thanks, kid." He took the coffee, trying to hide the trembling in his hand. He looked to see Kate staring through the window.

Cabe watched his college love talking to the son he never knew. He saw emotions rush across Jonathan's face. Confusion, shock and finally anger. Jonathan looked

through the window and stared at Cabe. He could see the moment when his son realized everything his mother was telling him was true. Jonathan turned and began yelling at his mother. He gestured toward the window and screamed. Despite the wall between them they heard "How could you?"

Kathleen stood and grabbed her bag, fleeing out the door. As she passed Cabe she yelled, "Are you happy now?"

Cabe watched Jonathan leaned forward in his chair, putting his head in his hands. He felt Kate push on his back.

"Go on. Talk to your son."

He grabbed her hand. "Come with me." She shook her head and tried to pull away. He held on tight. "Please. I could use the back up, Gallo." She smiled and nodded.

"Jonathan," said Cabe in a hoarse voice.

He turned toward Kate who smiled and whispered, "Go on."

"Jonathan I know how your feeling right now." Jonathan looked up from his hands. "You're confused and angry. So am I." Cabe sat in the seat Kathleen had vacated. "Jonathan, I swear to you I had no idea you existed until this morning. I would have never ignored or abandoned you." He reached for his son's hand. "Never," he repeated.

Jonathan sat back in his chair. "How could she have done this to me, to us? Whenever I asked about you she refused to say anything. She wouldn't tell me your name. It's not even on my birth certificate. She said it was too painful. I finally stopped asking. Why would she do this?"

"I don't know why. Your mother was always very driven, very focused."

Jonathan snorted a laugh. "That's an understatement."

Cabe felt himself relax just a bit. "Yeah, I guess it is. When we were together we knew we both had plans. I had come out of the Marines and was finishing my degree so I could go to Quantico."

"Marine?" Jonathan smiled.

Cabe showed him the ring Kate had given him for Christmas. "Semper Fi," he said.

"Semper Fi," Jonathan repeated.

"After graduation I tried to stay in touch. We had a few phone calls and letters, but eventually she stopped writing and answering my calls. I figured she'd gotten busy with

Harvard and moved on. Honestly, I gave up pretty quickly." Cabe looked down at the table feeling ashamed. "We knew going in we were moving in different directions." He looked up and stared at his son. "I did care for her, very much."

Jonathan stood quickly and started pacing. "What little she told me wasn't anything like that. She said you left her and never came back. It was too painful for her to talk about. I wanted to find you just to deck you for leaving us. She let me think you...Jesus, I sound like I'm still a child." He looked at his father. "I'm sorry."

Cabe stood and walked to his son. He put his hand on Jonathan's shoulder.

"She let me believe you didn't want me. She let me believe I wasn't good enough for my own father for thirty years." A dam inside him broke and Jonathan began to weep.

Cabe pulled him into his arms and hugged him for all he was worth. He tried to pour the love he was feeling, that he should have had for thirty years into one embrace. Cabe began to weep.

Kate closed the blinds and then closed the door behind her.

Cabe held on to his son until the both of them were cried out.

"I'm sorry," said Jonathan as he pulled away. "I don't know what came over me."

Cabe reached into his jacket and pulled out his handkerchief. He wiped his eyes and then handed it to Jonathan. "There's no need to apologize. We're Italian. Italian men are emotional." He managed a laugh. "Although the older I get more I'm becoming a weepy old woman."

Jonathan wiped his eyes and looked at Cabe. "I'm Italian?"

"Very. I'm second generation. My grandparents immigrated and settled in Brooklyn."

He smiled. "I'm Italian. Wow."

"Si, tu sei il mio figlio," said Cabe. He gave him one last hug. "Let's go see what the team has come up with."

Kate was looking over Walter's shoulder as he was explaining something on his monitor. She looked up as she heard them entering the room. Her smile was the one thing in this bizarre day that grounded him. With her he could navigate everything he was feeling. She would be there for him, just like always.

She walked toward him and asked, "How are you two doing?"

Jonathan laughed. "I think I'm okay. You?"

Cabe smiled. "I'm good."

"I'm sorry for all this," said Jonathan as he ran his hand through his hair. "She's pulled some crap in her time but this? What my mother's done, to me, to the two of you. I don't know what to say."

"You have nothing to apologize for," said Cabe. "Your mother is a different story. I don't know how she could have done this. It's just so damn cruel."

"She's always been distant and self involved but this is a new low for her. I don't know how I can forgive her for this."

"What she did was terrible, maybe unforgivable," said Kate. "But it's done. Nothing can change it. Don't waste anymore time on what was." She slipped her arm around Cabe's waist. "You finally have the chance to know each other. Make the most of it."

Cabe looked at Kate and smiled. He kissed the top of her head. "She's right."

"Jonathan, we used the information you gave us to narrow down the location of who ordered your kidnapping but we're not there yet. Walter found the leak. It was your mother's assistant, Diane Ortega."

"Diane? I can't believe it. She's been with my mother several years."

"She also has a boyfriend who owes a lot of money to Calderone. By now he knows that his boys failed. We can't be sure he won't take another run at you before his court date tomorrow. I think you should come home with us. You'll be safe there."

"Do you think I need two Homeland agents to guard me?"

Kate smiled. "While Cabe and I will both be armed, our house has state of the art security, designed by Happy."

Happy looked up from the video she was reviewing. "You couldn't get a toothpick past my system without alerting Homeland and half the cops in LA."

Jonathan looked at Happy and flashed her a killer smile. "Impressive."

Happy leaned back in her chair and smiled. Actually smiled. She allowed her eyes to travel up and down Jonathan's trim frame. "Yes. Yes it is." Toby produced a loud cough, diverting Happy's attention back to her monitor.

"I want to review what the team is working on and then we can get going," said Kate as she returned to Walter's desk.

"How about a coffee?" asked Cabe.

"God, yes," said Jonathan with a smile.

Paige walked over to Happy's desk and sat on the edge. She looked over at Cabe and Jonathan pouring themselves coffee. "He's so..."

Happy looked up and smiled. Again. "He certainly is."

They watched as Cabe and Jonathan matched each others movements, pouring their coffee, adding two sugars and blowing on it before they took a sip. Like synchronized swimmers. Paige and Happy both shook their heads and quickly returned to their work.

"You know I've heard about Scorpion," said Jonathan.

"Yeah?"

"On the news. That kid in the sinkhole."

Cabe smiled. "That was a good day."

"So your wife, she's an agent but she's good with computers too?"

He laughed. "Saying Kate is good with computers is like saying Monet could paint a bit."

"That good?"

"Oh yeah. Actually they all are. Everyone on the team is a genius except me and Paige. She keeps them focused and I keep them safe."

"So she takes down an armed suspect in the morning and pours over code, figuring out who's responsible before lunch."

Cabe looked over at Kate who was now smiling and patting Walter on his back. "Yeah, that about covers it."

Jonathan shook his head. "She's kind of a badass."

He laughed. "You have no idea."

Walter came towards them with Kate close behind. "We have what Ellsworth needs to prove Calderone orchestrated Jonathan's kidnapping. Once Sylvester found Calderone's banking information it was fairly easy to follow the money trail." Walter made a dismissive noise. "I would have expected better firewalls of an organization this extensive."

"That's great, son."

"I'll call Ellsworth and give her the news. Cabe, who gets the bill on this?"

"Send it to the DOJ. Let them pick up the tab."

"Okay. Walter has everything under control. I say we go home and get something to eat," said Kate. "I'm starving."

"Holy crap!" Jonathan was wide eyed at sight of their home.

"Yeah," said Cabe with a smile. "We like it." He deactivated the house alarm and let Jonathan into his home. His son wandered through the living room until he saw the view.

"Holy crap." He turned toward Cabe and smiled, his cheeks pink with embarrassment. "I'm sorry. That was rude."

"It's okay, kid. It is pretty overwhelming."

"I'll get lunch together," said Kate. "Why don't you take him on the tour."

"Inside tour only," said Cabe. "At least for today."

Kate nodded and went into the kitchen.

Cabe showed him around their home. He smiled at Jonathan's enthusiasm for the home gym and especially his man cave.

"With a screen this big it must be like your right in the stadium."

"It is pretty cool. Maybe some Sunday you can come over."

Jonathan stopped in his tracks and looked at Cabe.

"I'm sorry, Jonathan. I don't mean to push."

"No it's not that. My father just asked me to watch a game with him. Such an ordinary thing."

"But for us, not so much," said Cabe.

"Exactly," he replied, his voice choking. "Ah jeez," he said as he wiped at his eye.

"It's okay," he smiled. "Let's see the rest. I'll show you where you'll bunk." Jonathan nodded and they continued the tour. He took him to the largest internal bedroom. He didn't want any clear shot through a window. He opened the door to the bathroom which featured a multi head shower.

Jonathan let out a long whistle, then turned to Cabe and smiled. "Trying to limit my number of "holy craps" per day." He pulled at his suit jacket and smelled it. "Hey, could I take a quick shower before we eat. Kidnappers are surprisingly bad housekeepers. I smell like a combination of day old fish and feet."

"Sure. I'll get you some clothes to change into. It looks like we're the same size."

Jonathan smiled. "How about that."

Cabe grabbed some khakis and a polo, fresh underwear and dry cleaning bag. He stopped and looked into the mirror, not believing this day. "You have a son, Gallo," he said to his reflection. "How about that?"

"Here you go," he said as he handed Jonathan his clothes. "You can use this bag for your clothes."

"Thanks, Cabe." He looked at him and smiled. "Thanks for everything."

Cabe smiled and beat a hasty retreat before he started crying again. He would not cry twice in one day in front of his son. He walked into the kitchen and saw Kate had put what seems like the entire contents of the refrigerator on the kitchen table. "There's only three of us, sweetheart."

"I wasn't sure what he'd like. Where is he?"

"Taking a shower. I put him in the green bedroom. It's internal, no view from outside."

"Good move."

Kate grabbed the chip bag and struggled to open. "Damn it! Why do they have to make these so difficult?" She threw it at Cabe. "Deal with this."

He set the bag aside and took her by the shoulders. Her face was flushed and she looked like she did when she had to talk to a room full of people. "Katie, what's wrong?"

"Nothing. I'm fine. I'm just trying to get this done before next week."

"Katie, stop. Take a breath." He held on until he saw her sigh. "Now talk to me, Katie girl. Is it the shooting?"

She looked startled. "What? Pizza boy? God no. He fired first and I hit him in the shoulder. He may ache when it rains but he'll be fine."

"Is it Jonathan?"

"He's seems like a great guy." She smiled and touched Cabe's cheek. "Just like his father." She tried to turn her attention to the chip bag.

He pulled it out of her hand and set it back down. "Katie girl, talk to me."

"Cabe, this is a huge day for you and Jonathan. Let's just focus on that."

He pulled her to him and kissed her, lightly at first then pulling her into a deeply passionate kiss. "Talk to me."

She looked down and whispered. "I'm somebody's stepmother."

Cabe felt like a complete ass. He'd been so overwhelmed by the news he had a son he hadn't given a thought to how it would affect Kate or for that matter the team. "Sweetheart, I'm sorry I didn't think about anyone except myself."

"No, it's okay. I wouldn't expect you to. It's all kind of mind blowing."

"What are you worried about?"

"I want you to have a good relationship with your son. You know I'm not good with normals. What if he doesn't like me?"

He pulled her into a tight hug. It was moments like this when she needed him the most. "Sweetheart he's going to love you. He already said he thinks you're a badass."

She pulled back and looked surprised. "No he didn't."

"Kate, you took down an armed suspect and worked your computer magic to find the bad guy. He absolutely said you're a badass." He gave her a kiss. "I think so too."

"Do you now, boyo?" she smiled.

"Hell yeah." He gave her a deep kiss as she slid her hands to his neck and pulled him close.

"I had no idea Homeland was such a friendly bunch."

They both turned to see Jonathan standing in the kitchen doorway. "It's a good group of people," laughed Cabe. He looked at Kate who was staring opened mouthed. "Kate?"

"He looks just like you," she said.

Jonathan smiled. "You think so?" He walked up to Cabe and put his arm around his shoulder. "I guess there's a family resemblance." Jonathan and Cabe smiled at her, twin smiles, twin features, twin frames.

Kate shook her head. "Okay, just go eat. You two are freaking me out."

They sat at the kitchen table, making sandwiches and passing the salads. "Can I get you anything, Jonathan."

"Ah, no thanks Kate," he patted his stomach. "If I eat any more I may explode."

"How are you feeling?" asked Cabe. "It's been a hell of a day. I should have had Toby check you out."

"The guy with the hat?"

"He's a brilliant doctor, psychiatrist actually. We occasionally put his other medical training to use."

"Huh," he said as he took a sip of his ice tea. "I'm fine. I'm going to have a few bruises but that's it. I've gotten worse falling off my bike."

"Bike?" asked Cabe.

"I do some racing. It's no Tour de France but it satisfies my need to occasionally kick some competitive ass. Do you ride?"

"Yeah, but my bike is a Harley Road Glide Ultra. I do some charity rides with a local club."

"Oh man, you have a Harley? Sweet. I always wanted to ride but Mom..." He set his glass down and picked up his napkin.

"Jonathan, you can speak freely," said Cabe.

"She said it was too dangerous and I would break my neck. It was easier to give her what she wanted than to watch her pout and growl about it until I did."

Cabe laughed. "That sounds like Kathleen. She wanted us to go to Vail with her parents over winter vacation. I wanted to go any place warm with palm trees."

"You went to Vail," said Jonathan.

"Oh yeah. Your grandparents hated me. They always referred to me as your mother's Italian boyfriend. I was a Marine from a working class neighborhood in Brooklyn. They were DC. social elite." He turned toward Kate. "Her father was a former congressman who had a successful law practice. Her mother," he paused and looked at Jonathan. He smiled and indicated Cabe should continue. "Her mother was a bitch."

"Cabe!" Kate said looking at Jonathan.

"Oh he's right. My grandmother was a bitch on wheels. If she didn't like something it was gone. That went for people too. They're both dead."

Cabe gave him a questioning look.

"I spent my whole life with people who said and did what was expected." He tossed his napkin on the table. "Not an honest emotion in any of them. I could never understand why they were like the way they were. Worse was that I wasn't anything like them and they never let me forget it. I was always the outsider. Whenever I did something they

didn't like they would say I was just like my father."

"That's probably when you started wishing you could deck me."

"Yeah, pretty much." He laughed. "You should have seen what happened when I enlisted. Mom was furious. Grandmother was apoplectic!"

"You were trying to get away from them?" asked Kate.

"Yes and no. Yes I wanted to get out but I needed to figure out who I was without them. My whole life I was that Ellsworth boy. Kathleen's son or John and Elaine's grandson. I started wondering if I should wear a name tag. So, in a way, I did. The Marines seemed like a good way to find out what I was made of." He smiled. "My grandfather used his connections to get me out. He was so mad I wouldn't take the out he'd worked so hard to get, he cut me off financially. Told me I'd learn my lesson living on a Marine's salary."

Cabe smiled. "Oh I can just see it. Did his face get all red and that vein in his forehead throb?"

Jonathan laughed. "God yes. I thought he was going to explode like that old horror movie."

"Scanners," Kate said.

"Yeah, that's the one. I guess you could say it eventually did. He had a stroke when I was halfway through my first tour. I didn't bother coming back for the funeral. Once I got out from under I decided I would never live like they did. I wouldn't pretend anymore."

"Did you like being a Marine?" asked Kate.

"Again, yes and no. The brotherhood was amazing. Everyone had each other's back. You knew who you could count on. But the rest of it. What I had to do. The things you see, the brothers I lost. Two tours were enough." Cabe nodded and covered Jonathan's hand with his.

"When I got out, I finished my degree and went to law school. Mom was working for the DOJ in DC. Grandmother was ill, cancer. She died about five years ago. When she died, Mom sold their place and everything in it. She moved out here when she was reassigned. I could have stayed in DC. but...I don't know. I came out with her."

"I can understand that," said Kate. "She was the only family you had left."

"Yeah. I like it here. I sure don't miss the snow. I've met some good people and I do some pro bono work with the VA."

"Anyone special in your life?" asked Kate with a grin.

"Katie, leave the boy some privacy," he said with a playful slap of her hand.

"Oh, that's okay, Cabe. I've dated, even had a couple of semi serious relationships but nothing that made me think I could be in it for the long haul."

Kate and Cabe gave each other surprised looks.

"What is it?" asked Jonathan.

Cabe nodded and smiled.

"That's what your father said to me when he asked me to marry him." She reached for Cabe's hand. "He said he'd known from the beginning that he was in it for the long haul."

The gate buzzer went off and Kate and Cabe switched from hosts to agents in a second. They both pulled their weapons. Cabe switched on the monitor screen. "Son of a bitch," he said as he punched the intercom. "Kathleen, what the hell are you doing here?"

"You aren't the only one with connections, Cabe. It didn't take long to find out you married a rich spinster."

"Bitch," Kate growled, then looked to Jonathan. "Sorry," she whispered. He put his hands up shaking his head and smiled.

"What do you want?"

"I'm here to pick up my son."

Cabe stopped, took a breath and punched the intercom again. "Jonathan is in protective custody."

"That's ridiculous. I have everything I need to file against Calderone."

"In the meantime Calderone and his people are still free. I'm not going to let them get another shot at him. But you didn't think about that did you? You didn't consider what would be best for Jonathan. You only thought about what you wanted. You haven't changed a bit Kathleen. Only this time it's not a trip or a couch or what restaurant to chose. It's highly likely that Calderone has people tailing you, in which case you led them right to Jonathan."

"I will not debate this with you Cabe. I am taking my son home."

Jonathan stood and walked to the intercom. "Mother, I'm staying. Turn your car

around and go. I will let you know when I want to speak to you again, but I've got to tell you Mom, it will probably be a while. Now go home."

"Jonathan, you've had a difficult day. We all have. I want you to come home and we can talk."

Cabe took Jonathan's hand off the intercom button. "The longer she stands there the bigger the target she paints on all of us."

"Step aside, boys."

"Uh oh," said Cabe with a small smile.

She indicated to Jonathan he should press the button again. "Kathleen, this is Kate. Turn around now. This is the last time I'm going to tell you."

"I'm really sick of you. I want my son and I want him now!"

Kate got that low voice that Cabe recognized as trouble. "Kathleen, I'm tired, I'm pissed off," She pulled the slide on her gun close to the speaker. "And I'm armed. I've already shot one person today. Care to make it two?"

Cabe smiled as he saw Kathleen jump back in her car and pull back onto the road.

"Damn, Kate," said Jonathan. "You are totally badass."

Cabe closed their bedroom door and leaned up against it. "Well. It's been a hell of a day." Kate walked towards him and slipped her arms around his waist, resting her head on his chest.

"Hell of a day," she whispered.

He tilted her face toward him and gave her a slow, sweet kiss. "Thank you."

She smiled. "For kissing you? That's actually on my list of favorite things to do."

"No," he smiled. "Thank you for today. Thank you for having my back, taking down the suspect. Thank you for how kind you've been to Jonathan. Thank you for defending him." He kissed her again. "Thank you for defending me."

"Always, Gallo." She kissed him deeply and he turned her around and pushed her up against the door. His hands traveled her body, caressing her, that is until he ran into her 9mm. "Ahh, maybe we should lose the guns."

"Good idea, but no gun safe tonight." She pulled her gun from its holster and placed it on her night table. Cabe placed his weapon on his table and stripped off the holster. "Do

you think they'll try something tonight?" she asked.

"I doubt it but if they do they won't get far." He turned and activated the security system from the pad near their bedroom door." He smiled and stripped off his shirt. "Now, I need some alone time with my badass wife." He took her in his arms and slid his hands under her blouse.

"Your son is right across the hall."

"So, we'll be quiet."

Kate laughed. "Well, there's a first time for everything."

A blaring alarm jolted them both out of their sleep. Each reached for their weapons and approached the bedroom door. Kate took up a position on the inside of the door as Cabe stood ready on the other side. He nodded and she turned the knob, opening the door slightly. He peered out to see Jonathan standing in the hallway.

"It's just me." He said. "I touched a wall and all hell broke loose."

Cabe smiled and nodded to Kate. She punched in a code on the panel and hit a button. The alarm mercifully stopped. "This is Mrs. Gallo. I'm confirming false alarm. We neglected to warn our house guest about the security."

A voice came through the speaker. "Okay, Mrs. Gallo. Confirmation number?"

"Confirming Alpha 147."

"Confirmed. Have a good night."

Cabe opened the door and was glad Kate had insisted he'd put on his gym shorts after they'd had sex. Kate was wearing her gym shorts and an old Caltech t-shirt. "Sorry about that. We should have warned you." Jonathan was wearing a pair of Cabe's shorts and nothing else. He was also glad he knew his wife so well. The kid was ripped. She might notice him, but that's all. He also spotted the tattoo on his upper arm, an eagle standing on a globe that was speared by an anchor. The Marine Corp symbol. Underneath it read Semper Fidelis. He nodded and smiled. "Nice ink, son."

Jonathan smiled and looked up and down at Cabe's tattoos. "Nice ink, Dad. You may be as badass as Kate."

Cabe tried to smile with his heart pounding in his ears. His son called him Dad. He was grateful when Kate jumped into his awkward silence.

"I'm sorry I didn't warn you about the system. If you get too close to a painting when the system is activated, it sounds like we're in a sub about to dive."

"I couldn't sleep and I was looking at the painting in my room. I thought it looked like a McClaren." He paused. "Wait. It really is a McClaren?"

Kate nodded.

"The rest of the art. They're all..."

Kate smiled. "My mother was a collector."

"Holy crap!" He looked at Cabe and smiled. "It's after midnight. I can reset my 'Holy Crap' counter. Just how rich are you two? Oh, God that's rude. I'm so sorry. Chalk it up to the late hour and the fact that it's been a hell of a day."

Kate smiled. "No problem. She leaned in and said, "I'd say we're somewhere between filthy and outrageously."

Jonathan smiled, glad he was off the hook for his remark.

"So, you enjoy art?" asked Kate.

"Yeah. The guys would rib me. When we were in a new city, they'd look for the bars and I'd look for the museums."

"Do you paint?" Kate asked as Cabe gave her a surprised look.

"No."

Cabe smiled at Kate's disappointed look.

"I have a sketch book. It's just a hobby, nothing much."

She laughed. "To quote Toby, I love DNA. Follow me."

"Kate, no."

"Gallo, when are you going to get over yourself?" Jonathan followed Kate down the hall and she opened the last door. When she flipped on the light Jonathan gasped. "This is your father's studio." He walked in and looked around the walls. Works in progress, some studies, a few portraits of Kate and the team.

"These are incredible. You should be in a gallery."

She looked at Cabe and gave him a smile full of pride. "He had his first show at the Pennington a couple of months ago."

"The Pennington? That's amazing." He looked at the covered easel next to the windows. "What are you working on?"

Kate walked to the easel and lifted the edge of the cloth. "I'm glad you're here. He never lets me see his works in progress. She pulled the cover to the ground and gasped. Her eyes filled with tears and she walked to Cabe, taking his hand in hers. "I'm sorry, boyo. I shouldn't have."

"It's okay," he whispered.

The painting was of a little blonde girl with crystal blue eyes. She looked like she was laughing, her hands, as if she were clapping.

"She's beautiful," said Jonathan. "Who is she?"

"That's Amanda," Cabe said. "Your sister."

Jonathan looked as stunned as Cabe felt. Painting this portrait was the most difficult thing he'd ever tried, putting his love for his baby on canvas. This painting would never be displayed anywhere but here. He would keep his baby with him.

"My sister?" he whispered. He didn't ask anything else. He understood.

"She was..." he started but couldn't get the words out.

Kate continued for him. "Amanda passed away when she was six. Cancer."

"Oh God," he said as he looked back at the face that looked so alive and happy.

"We've established a pediatric center in her name at Mercy General."

Jonathan looked at Cabe like he didn't know what to say. He walked up to his father and put his arms around him. "I'm so sorry."

Cabe let his tears fall, this time not embarrassed. When he pulled back he was surprised to see tears in Jonathan's eyes.

"Maybe sometime you can tell me about her."

"I will," he said. Cabe straightened and forced a smile to his face. "I want to see your sketch book."

"Oh, it's nothing like this," he replied looking around at his father's art.

"Lord save me," Kate said with fake exasperation. "Smart, gorgeous and overly modest. Apparently all Gallo men are alike."

Jonathan looked startled at the reference and then smiled at Cabe. "Your wife just said I'm gorgeous."

"Hey, she said I was too."

"I take back the overly modest part," she said. "It's late. I'm going to bed." She put

her arms around Jonathan and kissed his cheek. "Welcome to the family," she whispered. As she walked toward the door she heard Jonathan.

"She gave me a kiss. She does think I'm gorgeous."

"Lord save me," she muttered as father and son shared a laugh.

Cabe looked out at the ocean from the kitchen window. Normally he'd have taken his coffee on the deck. Today he was standing in his kitchen, wearing his gym shorts, t-shirt, and his service weapon. It wasn't over yet and he wasn't giving Calderone any opportunities. The sun had barely come up over the water and it looked so peaceful, just like the day before. But it wasn't like the day before. Today, he had a son.

"Good morning," Jonathan walked into the kitchen still in the gym shorts but with an old T-shirt of Cabe's. He smiled to himself. He didn't need to remind Kate what thirty years had done to him.

"I smell coffee."

Cabe handed him a mug. "Help yourself."

"Is Kate up?"

He laughed. "God no. She considers anything before seven a.m. the middle of the night."

Jonathan laughed. "Civilians." He joined Cabe at the window, sipping his coffee and watching the waves. "What are we supposed to do now?"

"Well, we're in a holding pattern until this Calderone situation is resolved."

"No. I meant what are we supposed to do?"

"Good morning."

They both looked to see a sleepy Kate standing in the doorway. Her hair was pulled back in a messy ponytail and she was still in her gym shorts and Caltech shirt. But she was also wearing her service weapon. Cabe smiled. His best girl was a great agent.

"Tea. Strong. Now."

Cabe laughed. "Yes dear." He added water to the electric kettle and turned it on. She walked to his side and he gave her a quick kiss. "What are you doing up so early?"

"You weren't there," she said quietly.

He nodded, understanding. Her PTSD could trigger when she was startled by his absence. He leaned over and whispered in her ear, "I'm right here, baby." He slipped his arm around her waist and pulled her close.

"Are you two always so, you know?"

"Like a couple of horny teenagers?" asked Kate. She laughed when she saw Cabe

blush bright red. "Yeah, pretty much."

Jonathan smiled. "Nice."

"I'll get breakfast started. How about omelets?"

"Sound great. What can I do?"

"I never turn down help in the kitchen. Take note, Gallo. There are peppers in the fridge you could chop up. Cabe, grab the ham and cheese."

Cabe looked at his wife scrambling eggs while his son chopped the peppers. It all seemed perfectly normal, but it wasn't. He couldn't imagine any of this just twenty four hours ago. Now he didn't want to imagine it ever ending. He wouldn't push. This was all too new. But what he wanted more than anything was to be a part of his son's life. He could only hope Jonathan would want it too.

"Hey, snap to it, Marine," said Kate. "Finish slicing that ham and cheese. I'm ready for some omelet creation."

"Yes Ma'am."

"She's a bossy little thing," laughed Jonathan.

"Oh, Lord. You have no idea. Don't mess with her."

"I saw. She's tough."

She turned and looked at them. "And I'm standing right here."

"Irish temper too."

Jonathan whistled. "Oh, that's trouble."

"Black Belt in Krav Maga," said Cabe as he finally handed her his part of the omelets.

"Ouch," he replied.

"And armed. Don't forget armed," she said.

"Yes Ma'am," they said in unison.

Kate burst out laughing. "Somebody start the toast and pour the juice."

The remains of omelets sat on their plates as Jonathan helped himself to another cup of coffee. He topped off Cabe's mug like it was something he did all the time. "Okay, I've gotta ask," said Jonathan as he looked around the expansive kitchen. "I'm guessing Homeland agents aren't paid quite this well, so?"

"Where did all this come from?" said Cabe.

"Yeah."

"Kate's father founded Rimark Computing Systems."

"Rimark? I have one of their gaming systems. It's a couple of years old but it still can run the latest games. It's amazing."

"No holy crap?" Kate laughed.

"It's implied."

She smiled and made a mental note to hook her new stepson up with the biggest of the big ass gaming systems Rimark made. "You like gaming?"

"Yeah. I got into during my tours. Nothing as advanced as it is now, but it was a good way to decompress."

"You should talk to Ralph. He's really into the latest systems. He's actually working with Rimark on the development of some new games," said Kate.

"Ralph?"

"Paige's son," said Cabe.

"Her son? He couldn't be more than..."

"I think he'll be twelve soon," said Kate.

"Twelve?"

"He's one of them," Cabe said pointing at Kate.

"Okay, I'm lost."

"A genius, like Kate. He's finishing his sophomore year at Caltech."

"Junior," said Kate. "He may graduate sooner than I did," she said reaching for her orange juice.

"Sooner? Okay I need a road map."

Cabe smiled. "Yeah, it can be a bit confusing. Kate graduated from Caltech at fourteen, masters at fifteen and her third PHD was when?"

"Twenty one." She stood and grabbed her glass. "More juice?"

Jonathan shook his head. "And this Ralph kid got a job at Rimark at twelve. Wow."

"Well, that was Kate's doing. She only hires the best."

"Wait. What?"

"Rimark was founded on encryption software Kate designed when you were how

old, sweetheart?"

"Sixteen. You sure I can't get you anything?"

"I could go for some more coffee, babe," said Cabe. She grabbed his mug and walked to the coffee maker.

"She still owns the company."

Jonathan sat back, wide eyed. "Okay, so that explains all this. How did you wind up at Homeland?"

"Twenty years at the FBI, then Homeland came calling."

"So, you did what? Computer analysis?"

"Yeah, pretty much."

Cabe smiled and shook his head. "My wife was one of the best undercover operatives the Agency has ever had. She'd go into organizations, hack the unhackable and get the evidence on the bad guys. They called her The Ghost."

Kate blushed as she pushed what was left of her omelet around her dish.

Jonathan tossed his napkin on the table and smiled. "Okay I'm going to need a higher limit on my Holy Crap counter in this family."

"Your father has done some memorable undercover work too. There was this time in Kazakhstan."

"Kate, no."

"You know the Super Fun Guy comics?"

"Yeah?"

"Your father had to dress up as Whimsical Boy. Short pants and everything."

Jonathan started laughing. "You're kidding. Please tell me you have pictures."

"Oh, I have pictures," Kate grinned at Cabe. "Really good ones."

"How did you get pictures?"

"Toby."

"That jackass."

Kate started laughing. "Don't worry sweetheart. You looked adorable."

Cabe tossed his napkin down and growled, "I'm never gonna live down those damn short pants."

Kate and Jonathan lost it, laughing until tears ran down their faces. They finally

stopped laughing when Cabe gave him his best Gallo Glare. Well, they stopped for a few seconds until they burst out laughing again.

"Okay," said Kate as she struggled to keep a straight face. "Let's have some mercy on dear old Dad."

"Yes, of course," said Jonathan before they burst out laughing one more time.

"Alright change of subject," declared Cabe. "Tell us about your practice."

"There's really not much to tell. It's a big firm. I'm a junior associate because I started school later than the others. The partners realized I had a talent for defense work so I get to defend LA's rich and famous for their indiscretions." He said taking a sip of his coffee.

"If you don't like it why are you doing it?" asked Cabe.

"It's a good firm, solid reputation. Mom thought it would advance my career. She said I'd never make Senator if I spent my career defending homeless people for vagrancy."

"Do you want to be a Senator?" asked Cabe.

Jonathan smiled at Cabe. "You know, no one ever asked me. It was just assumed I would wind up in politics."

"The family business," said Kate.

"Exactly." He smiled. "I also work at the VA a few times a month. Most of those guys can't hire their own lawyers and public defenders are overwhelmed."

"You like that work," said Cabe.

"Yeah. It feels great when you help a brother who needed it."

Cabe covered Jonathan's hand with his own. "I'm proud of you, son."

Jonathan closed his eyes and whispered, "Thank you."

"Jonathan, what is it?" asked Cabe.

He looked at Cabe, fighting for his composure, speaking quietly. "No one's ever said that to me before." Tears rolled down his cheek. "Ah, damn," he said reaching for his napkin to wipe his eyes. "It's the Italian thing, right? That's what you said, right? I'm holding you to that."

"Yes, son. It's an Italian thing." Cabe smiled. He looked over at Kate who smiled and nodded. She understood. He didn't have to say a word and she knew everything he

was thinking, everything he was feeling. And he wondered how he ever walked through this world without her.

Kate's buzzing phone interrupted Cabe's thought as she got up to answer it. "Yes, Katherine. What's going on? Any progress?"

Cabe saw Jonathan's questioning look. "Katherine Cooper, Director of Homeland Security."

"You call the Director of Homeland by her first name?"

Cabe shrugged. "She was a bridesmaid in our wedding."

"Yeah, definitely need a higher limit on that counter."

Kate gave them a smile. "Yes, everything is fine here. Oh, that's very generous, Director. Thank you for the update, Katherine." She shut off her phone and sat down. "Well, there has been an interesting turn of events."

"What happened? Is my mother okay?"

"It's about Calderone. Apparently he realized once his men were captured that it was a matter of time before they rolled on him. He tried to get at them in lock up, or more accurately tried to find them in lock up."

"Find them?" asked Jonathan.

"Normally they would have been taken to LA county lockup. But their firing on Homeland agents, namely Cabe and I, made it a federal matter. Director Cooper took advantage of the opportunity to put them in federal lock down."

Cabe smiled. "Much harder for Calderone to get to."

"Exactly. When Calderone realized he had no more aces to play he took off, headed for the docks where he had his yacht moored. Katherine had men on it and tried to take him into custody."

"Tried?"

"He and his men decided to go down swinging. Most of his men were captured. The rest are dead, including Calderone."

"Remind me to send Katherine a fruit basket," Cabe said.

Jonathan sat back in his chair. "Oh, Mom is gonna be pissed."

"Why?" asked Cabe. "Calderone's dead. You're no longer in danger."

"She's been working on this case for a year. She was convinced this was her big

break. A promotion and a reassignment back to D.C. Calderone dead means no trial. No publicity.

"Jesus," said Cabe.

Jonathan sighed, pushed back his chair and stood. "Well I better go face the music."

"What do you mean?" asked Kate.

"I bet she'll be waiting for me at my apartment when I get home."

Kate stood. "So don't go."

"The threat is over. I can't impose on you any longer."

"Jonathan, you're not imposing. You're family. You can stay here as long as you want."

Cabe stood, looked at Jonathan and smiled. "What she said."

Jonathan smiled and shook his head. "How can it be?"

"What, son?"

"How can I feel more comfortable, more accepted here after less than twenty four hours than I ever did in my own home?" Jonathan stood tall, almost like standing at attention. "Cabe I know it's only been a few hours and this maybe too soon, and that's okay, you can just say so, we don't know each other that well."

Cabe put his hands on Jonathan's shoulders. "Take a breath. Now just talk to me."

"Would it be okay if I called you Dad?"

Cabe pulled him into his arms. "That would be more than okay."

They both hugged and wept. It was an Italian thing.

Kate had given Cabe and Jonathan a moment to themselves. They found her on the deck, finishing her tea. "We're good?" she asked.

Cabe smiled and rubbed his hand up Jonathan's back. "Yeah, we're good." He pointed to the deck chair. "Have a seat. Now that we don't have to worry about Calderone you can enjoy the view." Jonathan sat but looked distracted. "What's wrong?"

"I was just thinking I should turn my phone back on and check my messages. I turned it off at the garage so my GPS couldn't be tracked."

Kate smiled and nodded approvingly. "Smart move, kid."

"You do know I'm nearly thirty. I'm hardly a kid."

Cabe laughed. "Son, to us everyone under forty is a kid."

Jonathan pulled his phone from his pocket and powered it on. He was greeted with multiple beeps and bells. "Ah jeez," he said. "Fourteen voice mails from my mother."

"I guess she doesn't like being told no," said Kate.

"God, no," Jonathan and Cabe said in unison.

Kate shook her head and laughed, pointing back and forth between them. "I'm going to have to get used to that."

Before he could check his voice mail his phone rang. He sighed and hit the answer button. They didn't have to hear the other side of the conversation to know what was being said.

"Hello Mother."

"I had to leave it off. My phone's GPS could have been used to track me."

"I'm not sure when I'll be home."

"No I haven't called my office." He threw his free hand in the air.

"Because they weren't my first priority. Not getting killed was."

"I only just found out it's safe. Calderone's dead."

"No, Mother. Dad did not have Calderone killed to spite you and blow your case."

Jonathan's face went beet red. He held the phone out and screamed. "Yes, I'm calling him Dad because that's who he is." He disconnected the call and tossed the phone on a side table. It rang again so he powered it down.

Cabe put his hand on Jonathan's shoulder. "Are you okay?"

He nodded. "She never asked me."

"Asked you what?"

"If I was okay. Not once." He smiled. "That's all you two have done. Made sure I was okay, safe. You asked me what I wanted. The hell of it is, I don't know what I want. So much has changed in the last day." He stared out at the ocean. "If you don't mind I think I'll go for a walk."

"Of course," said Cabe.

Cabe sat in the chair next to Kate while he watched his son walk down the stairs to the ocean. He was amazed that his son was such a good guy after being raised by

Kathleen. He remembered the day he's met her in their Ethics class. She was so pretty and petite. He loved her long black hair. He could admit to himself now that part of what attracted him to her was her social status. He wasn't proud of it, but it was the truth. She was very popular at college, introducing him to people and things he would have never otherwise known.

She was also a firecracker in bed. The sex had kept him in a fog for the first six months of their relationship. He'd been almost celibate in the Marines, never being stationed anywhere long enough to start a relationship. He wasn't a hook up kind of guy. After the fog started to lift he began noticing how she wasn't happy unless she was in control of everything including him. Eventually it got to be less trouble to give in than to argue. He understood how Jonathan felt.

He looked over at Kate, sipping her tea and watching the waves and he smiled. She'd was dying to question him but she'd wait for him to tell her himself. It had to be killing her.

"Go ahead, ask," he said.

She put her mug down and turned to him. "Kathleen? Really? Didn't you notice she was a complete bitch under all that hair?"

Cabe smiled. "It took me about six months to notice. I'd been alone for a long time and the relationship was supposed to be just two people having fun their last year of college. After I went to Quantico I tried to keep in touch. I thought I owed it to her. When she stopped writing and returning my calls I was actually relieved. It wasn't too long after that I met Rebecca." He paused, looking out at the ocean trying to sort through his tidal wave of emotions. "I can't believe she didn't tell me about him. All those years we could have had together." His voice choked. "I would have been a good father to him."

Kate got up from her chair and laid down next to Cabe. She slipped her arms around his waist and gave him a soft kiss. "You will be a good father to him. Sweetheart, as hard as it is, try not to focus on what Kathleen did. You're here for him now and from the sound of that conversation not a moment too soon."

He put his arm around her shoulder and kissed the top of head. "We're both here for him."

"There's something else you should remember. If things hadn't gone the way they

did, there would have been no Amanda."

It was more than an hour before Jonathan came back from his walk. Cabe and Kate were still in the same deck chair, her head on his chest, waiting. Cabe's heart broke when he saw Jonathan's red eyes. He looked at them and smiled. "Jeez. You too really are like a couple of teenagers."

"Yeah, well. Your father's so damn cute." She laughed and gave him a quick kiss before they both got up from the chair.

"Jonathan, we want to tell you that we meant it about staying here as long as you want. We obviously have the room. But if you choose not to we won't be offended. The last twenty four hours is a lot to process."

"For all of us," he said.

"Yeah, for all of us. We just want you to know you are welcome here."

"Anytime," Kate added.

"Thanks. The only thing I've decided so far is I need some time off. There's nothing about my case load that can't be passed off to another associate." He reached for his phone. "No time like the present." They tried to leave but Jonathan indicated they should stay.

"Jerry, it's Jonathan."

"Yeah, I'm alive."

"I'm sorry I haven't answered your messages. Things were a bit crazy."

"Oh. It was on the news? Huh."

"Look, Jerry. I need to take some time off. At least a couple of weeks."

"What do you mean for what?"

"I was kidnapped. I need a little downtime." He looked at Cabe and smiled. "I also want to spend some time with my father."

"My mother warned you about him?"

"He was a drunken mistake who's trying to get to my money?" He sighed and pressed his fingers to the bridge of his nose. "Not that I owe you any explanations, but I was not the result of a one night stand. My parents lived together for a year. She never

told him she was pregnant and only went to him now so he could help save her case. Not me, Jerry, her case. You know what I've learned in the last twenty four hours? Life is too damn short to waste. Jerry, I quit. I'll have Janice pack my things and send them to me. And one more thing. You should stop screwing my mother and go back to your wife." Jonathan clicked off his phone and gave them both a big smile. "Damn that felt good."

Cabe and Kate looked stunned. "Son, was that wise? Quitting your job like that? After everything that's happened it might be better to take some time before making such a big decision."

"I'll be fine," he smiled. "Grandfather may have cut me off but my grandmother didn't. She'd had a fight with my mother shortly before her death and changed her will. All my mother got was the house and its contents, which is why she sold every bit of it. Grandmother left me all the rest of the family assets. I can live comfortably on the income from the investments."

Cabe smiled. "Well, okay then. Now what?"

"I'd like to take you up on the offer to stay for a bit. It's really beautiful here and peaceful. It will give me a chance to sort some stuff out. I'll go home and get a few things but I'll need a ride." He blushed and tilted his head down just like his father. "I actually don't own a car. My apartment is only a few blocks from my office. It never seemed necessary."

Cabe walked back into the house, grabbed his key ring off the sideboard and tossed it to him. "You can take my car."

Jonathan smiled. "Thanks, Dad. I promise not to throw my beer cans in the back seat."

Cabe laughed. "Smart ass." He opened the garage door in the kitchen and pointed at the Camaro. "That's mine."

Jonathan looked like he'd seen an apparition. "Sweet mother of God, is that a '69?"

""68. All original." Cabe popped the hood and Jonathan all but drooled on the engine.

Jonathan looked up at Cabe and smiled. "It's a thing of beauty."

"God help me," Kate sighed. "Another gearhead."

Cabe closed the door to see Kate with her head in the refrigerator

"We don't have enough here to make dinner. I'm going to have to go to the market."

He turned her around, slipped his arms around her, and closed the fridge door.

"Sweetheart, I'll make reservations at Terra Nova or will order take out."

"I really should go to the market. What do you think he'd like? Who are we kidding he's a carbon copy of you. I'll just get twice what I normally get for you." She tried to pull out of his arms. "Where's my purse."

"Katie, stop. Breathe. Jonathan said he'd be a few hours. I think he wants to resolve a few things with his mother. When he gets back we'll decide about dinner." He pushed her up against the door and held her fast. "What we have is a few hours to ourselves," He kissed her deeply, her tongue instantly warred with his. He whispered in her ear. "A few hours to be as loud as we want. What's the color of the day, Katie girl?" She got the gleam in her eyes that told him he had her full attention.

"See for yourself, boyo. I shan't do all the work for ya."

He slid his hands under her shirt and pulled it up over her head. He stopped, amazed at what he saw. He slid her shorts down and saw it was a perfect set. It was a dark green panty covered with vines and flowers. The bra had vines wrapping underneath her breasts and up the straps. Flowers wove in and out of the vines, thinning toward the edge of the cups. It was his vision, the Irish Witch.

Kate smiled and released her hair from its restraint. "Can I assume from your loss of the power of speech that you like the color of the day, boyo?" All he could do was nod. "'Twas supposed to be a surprise for later," she leaned in and whispered, "but someone got impatient." She nipped at his ear. "You will have to pay a penalty for your haste."

"Damn, woman. You are so fuckin hot," he growled as he drove his hands into her hair and took possession of her mouth. She'd managed to drive him from ready for mischief to painfully aroused in seconds. Again.

Kate was curled up on his chest while he held the new bra in his hand. It really was an amazing piece of work. "You want to tell me how you managed this?"

"There's a shop downtown that will make whatever you want. I made some very rough sketches and had them make the material."

"It really is amazing." He looked at her and smiled. "Do I want to know how much this cost?"

She laughed and slapped his chest. "Lord no." She pushed herself up on her elbow and gave him a kiss. "But you may want to know there is more where that came from."

"I love you Katie girl." She smiled but he caught a look he didn't like. "Katie, why would you put this on today? It looks like something you would have saved for a special night."

"I thought the day called for it."

Thirty years of interrogating suspects and nearly two years with this woman told him something up. "Katie, talk to me. What's going on."

"Remember when I went undercover at Price?"

Cabe grimaced at the thought of Kate's beaten, bloody face at the hands of Trent Price. "Vividly."

"I changed my look for the job. Black hair and blue eyes. You seemed to really enjoy it."

"Yeah, still not there with you."

Kate tilted her head down, slightly blushing.

"Oh Christ, really?" he asked.

"She is very beautiful."

He flipped Kate over on her back, pinning her hands above her head. "Kate Gallo, have I ever lied to you?"

"No," she whispered.

"I honestly hadn't given Kathleen Ellsworth a single thought in thirty years." He kissed her, still not allowing her to move. "I thought you looked sexy and beautiful as a Black Irish. But I think you look sexy and beautiful in shorts and a t-shirt kicking my ass in the gym." He kissed her deeply and was taken off guard when she flipped him on his

back, straddling him.

"You have to admit you seem to have a thing for Irish girls."

He smiled. "Guilty as charged."

She smiled and slipped back into her brogue. "Well boyo, we still haven't resolved the matter of your penalty."

"I'm at your mercy."

Jonathan pulled up to his apartment and handed the keys to the valet. "Mr. Ellsworth, you got a car?"

"No, it's a loaner from my father so handle with care." He slipped the man a twenty.

"Sure thing, Mr. Ellsworth."

He walked into the front lobby only to be stopped by the concierge, Valerie. She was a petite woman in her late forties. She took care of everything for him from getting hard to get dinner reservations to making sure his dry cleaning got picked up. "Mr. Ellsworth are you okay? We were all so worried when we saw the news."

"Thank you, Valerie. I'm fine. Actually I'm going to take some time off and I'm not quite sure how long I'll be gone. While I'm away, please make sure no one lets my mother into my apartment." Valerie blinked in surprise, but being professional nodded an acknowledgement.

He unlocked his door and looked around the apartment. Everything looked exactly the way he'd left it the day before. Except it wasn't. Everything in his life had changed. He had a father. A man who seemed to give a damn what he wanted. A man who'd put his life at risk to rescue him. He smiled as he thought about badass Kate being his stepmother.

His apartment was in one of the best downtown areas LA. The view, especially at night was spectacular. The view, two bedrooms and state of the art kitchen he never used, cost more in rent than the average family of four's income. And he'd never liked it. It reminded him of his grandparents home in DC. That wasn't surprising since his mother had picked the apartment and decorated it.

Jonathan grabbed his duffel and one suitcase. He didn't think he'd need to bring too much with him. It didn't seem like Cabe and Kate were the type of people that dressed for dinner. He did pull out one suit, shirt, tie and a fresh pair of oxfords. He sometimes had got an emergency call from the VA and he'd have to run to court. He smiled to himself when he realized he'd no longer have to listen to Jerry bitch about costing him money every time Jonathan did pro bono work. He made sure to pack a swimsuit. Dad and Kate had an amazing pool. He looked forward to trying the hot tub.

His packing was interrupted by the banging on his door. He sighed, knowing full

well who it was.

"Hello , Mother." he said as she stormed past him.

"Are you insane?" she shouted.

"I'm fine, thank you and how are you?"

"Now is not the time to be glib. Jerry called me. I told him you were overwhelmed by the kidnapping and you didn't mean it. He's expecting you in the office tomorrow."

Jonathan didn't think he'd could be anymore angry with his mother. He was wrong. "How dare you," he growled. He saw his mother flinch at his tone.

She took a breath and softened her tone. "I'm just looking out for you. You've been through a difficult experience and you're not thinking clearly." She tried to run her hand down his arm but he threw it off.

"Difficult? Exactly what part of yesterday would you call difficult, Mother? Was it getting kidnapped? Was it finally meeting my father?" He moved closer. "Or was it finding out my mother lied to me for my entire life?"

Kathleen's anger flared. "This is his doing. He's turning you against me," she shouted. "He's a nobody from Queens. He's after our money."

Jonathan shook his head and gave her a small laugh. "You mean my money?" Her eyes grew wide. He knew being all but cut out of her mother's will was still a very sore point. "You have no idea how funny that is. The last thing Dad needs is more money."

"Dad!" she screamed. "I can't believe you call him Dad!"

He tried to keep his tone even. "Yes, Mother. I call him Dad because that's who he is."

Kathleen stopped and calmed her voice, realizing she wasn't winning her case. "Jonathan. I'm sorry things got so...complicated. Truly, I am. And I'm sorry for shouting, it's been a difficult day for me too. Needless to say my superiors are not pleased with the outcome. A year of work down the drain thanks to... But let's focus on you. You can't throw away your career on a whim. We've worked to hard to get you here. You need Jerry's connections if you're ever going to be elected."

He gave her a sad smile. "Do you know what Dad asked me? First, he asked me if I was alright. Then he asked me what I wanted. Two things you never did." He took a breath, trying to finally say the things to his mother he should have said years ago. "Mom,

I accept my part in how things are with us. Going along with you was so much easier than arguing with you. I've never wanted to be in politics. I never wanted to do the kind of work I do with Jerry's firm. I love my work with veterans. I think I may focus on that, at least for a while. And I'm going to get to know my father."

Kathleen threw her hands in the air and began pacing. "I don't know where I went wrong. First, the Marines, now this. You seem to purposely want to hurt me."

He realized she might never understand. He put his hands on her shoulders, forcing her to stand still and look at him. "Mom, I love you. I really do. But it's time for me to live my own life, not the one you want for me."

She shook her head. "I'll call Jerry and tell him you need some time off and hopefully he'll have you back."

"You haven't heard a word I said. I'm not going back."

"You have a responsibility. You're going to go back to and make partner like we've discussed. We'll start small with the elections, state senator."

"I'm not going back."

"Yes you are. You don't quit. You're an Ellsworth."

"I'm a Gallo."

She gasped and headed toward the door struggling with the knob. Jonathan reached for the handle and said. "Brooklyn."

"What?"

"Dad's from Brooklyn." Jonathan watched as his mother walked down the hall. He waited until she disappeared behind the elevator doors.

Cabe dried himself off and reached for some fresh boxers. He and Kate had made the most of their few hours of privacy but Jonathan would be back soon. He grabbed for a polo and a pair of khakis. He looked in the mirror and combed his still damp hair. Everything felt a bit out of sync. His life had taken a seismic shift and it would take some work to get used to their new normal.

Jonathan found Kate in the living room engrossed in a tablet. "Hey."

"Hey. How did it go?" she asked.

"How did what go?"

"We figured you would have to deal with your mom. That couldn't have been pretty."

"It wasn't."

Kate nodded. "You feel like some dinner?"

He smiled. Kate wouldn't press him for anything he did want to say. "I could eat."

"Cool. I'm starving. We like this place up the highway called Terra Nova."

He pulled at his polo shirt collar. "Will this do?"

She waved her hand dismissively. "You look great. Now let me see what's keeping your father." She walked to the stairs and shouted. "Yo, Gallo! Jonathan's home. Let's hall some ass, Marine. I'm hungry."

He gave Kate a smile and picked up his luggage. "I'll just take these up to my room."

"Oh, I moved you to another room. No more need to keep you away from the windows."

Jonathan followed her up the stairs. As she passed the master bedroom she yelled, "Any day, Marine!"

"I'm coming," he said as he opened the door.

"Just showing Jonathan his new digs and then we'll go."

Kate opened a door two doors down from the master and he was once again blown away by this house. Floor to ceiling and wall to wall windows faced the ocean. There was

a sliding door which led to the wrap around porch. The queen size bed was covered with a tropical print. If he wasn't mistaken, the painting above the bed was a Van Gogh. He approached the painting, carefully this time. Yep, it was the real deal. Kate grabbed the duffel from his hand and tossed it on the bed.

"Food now, admiring artwork later," she said as she headed out the door and back down the hall.

Jonathan smiled. "She's something else."

Cabe put his hand on Jonathan's shoulder and smiled. "You'll get used to it."

Terra Nova was crowded as usual but the host found them a table. "Will this do, Mr. Gallo?" asked the tall, dark haired young man with curly black hair.

"This is fine, Thomas. Thank you."

Cabe and Kate slid into opposite sides of the booth while Jonathan sat next to Cabe. "Their marinara is amazing," said Kate as she handed Jonathan a menu. A tall, older man curly black hair shot with gray approached their table. There was no mistaking this was the host's father. "Good evening, Mr. Gallo, Mrs. Gallo. So good to see you both."

Cabe extended his hand. "Good to see you, Antonio. How's Maria?"

"She's well. Still complaining I haven't taken her on that cruise I promised her."

"You should, Antonio. Remember, happy wife, happy life."

Antonio laughed, "Yes, sir." He looked at Jonathan. "I didn't know you had a son. A chip of the old block, just like my Thomas."

Cabe smiled broadly. "Antonio, this is my son, Jonathan."

"A pleasure to meet you, Mr. Gallo. I hope you enjoy your meal."

Jonathan smiled, "Thank you, Antonio." He resumed looking at his menu trying to decide between the marinara and the lasagna when he realized they were staring. "What?"

"You didn't correct him," said Cabe with a grin.

"Yeah. How about that?" he smiled.

A bottle of wine and an hour later had coaxed stories out of Jonathan he hadn't thought of in years. "I wanted to impress Marianne McIlhenny. I thought I looked dashing

for a eight year old."

Cabe was laughing so hard he could barely breath. "You took the old man's saber?"

Jonathan laughed. "He was not pleased."

"Oh I bet. The old coot was so proud of that thing. It was his grandfather's saber from his days in the Calvary."

"So what happened to it?" asked Kate.

"I traded it to Jimmy McCoy for his mountain bike." Jonathan gave them a mischievous grin. "It was a really nice bike."

Cabe and Kate were both laughing, Cabe wiping his eyes with his linen napkin. "Oh, I would have paid good money to see that."

"I would have paid good money to see that Gallo grin on an eight year old," Kate laughed as she got up from the table. "I'm going to visit the ladies. Cabe order me the..."

"Cannoli. Yes, I know."

Father and son watched Kate head to the back of the restaurant, stopping along the way to talk to Thomas.

"She's kind of amazing, your wife," said Jonathan.

"Yeah, she really is."

"Did you hear what she said when I got back to the house?"

"What?"

"She said 'Jonathan's home', like it was perfectly natural. Like she'd been saying it for years."

"Jonathan, look, I know this is moving fast, for all of us. If we cross any lines, if you need us to back off, tell us. This is new territory. I'll try not to push and there will probably be times when we butt heads." Cabe smiled. "In fact I think I can guarantee it. For right now all I can say is that I am very glad you're here. So is Kate. You can stay with us for as long as you want." Cabe covered Jonathan's hand with his. "You will always be welcome."

Jonathan looked at his father and whispered, "Thanks Dad."

Cabe went to the safe and pulled out his service weapon. After a quick check, he put it in his holster and looked for Kate. "Yo, Witch, where are you?"

"In the kitchen," she called.

He found her pouring coffee into his travel mug. She added sugar and turned to hand it to him.

She smiled and touched his tie. "Mmmm. I love you in this shade of blue."

He laughed and gave her a quick kiss. "You love me in anything."

She stroked his cheek and whispered, "I prefer you in nothing at all, boyo."

Cabe gave her ass a quick smack. "No mischief, witch. I have to get to the garage. Are you coming down later?"

She shook her head. "No, I think I'll stay here."

"I thought you wanted to get back to that project you and Walter were working on?"

"I do, but," She glanced out to the deck where Jonathan was having coffee. "I think I should stay here."

"He has been awfully quiet the last few days," said Cabe.

"He's spending a lot of time in the gym, beating the hell out of the heavy bag."

"Maybe I should talk to Toby."

"Good idea."

He looked at his watch and sighed. "I need to get going." He walked out to the deck to Jonathan. "Hey. I have to get to the garage. I'm taking the SUV so feel free to use the Camaro."

Jonathan gave him a small smile. "Thanks Dad."

Cabe put his hand on Jonathan's shoulder. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm good."

He nodded and smiled, wary of pushing too hard. The last few days with his son had been amazing. Jonathan was the kind of man any parent would be proud of. He certainly was. He couldn't understand how Kathleen could cut ties with her own son. He knew she hadn't called him since their last confrontation. Maybe it was time he had a discussion with her about their son. He gave Jonathan's shoulder a pat. "I'll see you tonight." He walked through the kitchen and gave Kate another quick kiss. He glanced

back out at his son. "Call me if you need me."

Kate walked out to the deck and set her orange juice on the small end table.
"Morning."

"Good Morning."

"Want to go for a swim?" She slid off her shorts and pulled off her t-shirt, getting down to her navy blue tank suit.

"No thanks."

Kate smiled and then dove into the deep end of the pool. After thirty minutes of laps she got out of the pool and reached for her towel. She noticed Jonathan staring.
"What?"

"You have a tattoo?"

She smiled and pulled her strap down far enough to show it off. "Your father designed it for me." She ran her fingers over the ink. "I really love it."

Jonathan took a closer look. "It's really nice, but what," He stopped when he realized what was under the ink. "Oh, I'm sorry. I don't mean to get too personal."

"That's fine."

"Rotator cuff?"

She laughed. "Everyone who doesn't know me guesses that. It's a gun shot."

"What? What happened? I thought you said you worked with computers, not guns."

"This wasn't from an assignment." She grabbed her t-shirt and slipped in over her wet suit. "It was just a crazy bastard with a gun." She smiled as she saw Jonathan staring at her, waiting for her to continue, just like his father did. "I found out my estate administrator was embezzling from my accounts. As a result he lost his business, his licenses and the ten million he stole from me. He was not pleased."

"Holy crap."

Kate laughed and held up a finger. "That's one." She took a sip of her juice and leaned back against her chair. "He tracked us down at the garage. I couldn't get to my sidearm. He had a gun on Ralph."

"Bastard," Jonathan said.

"Cabe came down behind the ramp and waited to make his move. He got John's

attention and fired but John got off a shot before he went down."

"Kate, you're a good agent. If you saw the trajectory you could have...oh God. It was the kid. You were covering the kid." She took another sip of her juice. "What happened to the shooter?"

"Dead."

"Good." Jonathan stood and walked over sat on Kate's chair. He leaned over and kissed her cheek. "Dad's a lucky guy. You really are a badass, Mom." He saw the startled look on her face and scrambled for an apology. "I'm sorry, it just slipped out."

Kate gave him a warm smile. "That's just fine." She placed her hand on his cheek. "You're a good man, Jonathan. I'm really proud to be your stepmother."

Cabe entered the garage and went straight for the coffee. He was sure there'd be a mountain of messages and reports to sort through. Cooper had been terrific in giving him a few days off to spend with his son, but it was time to get to back to normal, what ever normal was now.

Paige greeted him with a hug. "So how are you doing, Dad?" she said with a smile.

"I'm good, kid. Jonathan's a great guy." He took up his seat and sighed at the stack of work waiting for him.

"He seemed like it. How's Kate handling it?"

"Good. She's taken to the stepmom role."

Paige grinned. "She's had a lot of practice with us." We knew you were coming in today and Ralph wanted to talk to you. He wouldn't tell me about what." Paige hit the intercom button to the loft. "Ralph, Cabe's here."

Ralph's small voice came through the speaker. "I'll be right there."

"I'd thought he's be in school."

"Spring break."

Ralph walk down the stairs from the loft and came over to Cabe's desk. "Hi Cabe. My Mom told me about your son. That must make you very happy."

Cabe smiled. Ralph was such a serious, little man. "It does make me happy, Ralph. I think you'll like him. He wants to meet you. He's into gaming and wants to talk to you about the games you're developing for Rimark."

"I would enjoy that."

Sometimes Cabe worried about Ralph. He had a loving, supportive mother and this crazy crew to rely on. But sometimes he was too serious, like now. Cabe wished Ralph could be a normal kid, at least for a little while. Ralph reached into his pocket and pulled out a box. Cabe gasped when Ralph put it in his hand. The box held his grandfather's ring. The ring Cabe had given Ralph for Christmas.

"When Mom told me you found Jonathan I thought you'd want to give this to him."

Cabe heart nearly snapped in two as he watched Ralph fight for his composure. Now, Cabe had to try and maintain his. He put the box back in Ralph's hand. "I gave this to you for a reason, and that hasn't changed because of Jonathan." As hard as he fought

it, his voice still cracked.

"But he's your real son."

"Ralph, you are my Nipote. This ring belongs with you. Biology doesn't change a thing."

Ralph edged a bit closer and whispered, "Does that mean I can still call you Nonno?"

Cabe stood and scooped Ralph into his arms. "Of course it does." He looked at this sweet boy's face and kissed his cheek. He held him close and whispered, "I love you, Ralph. I always will. Nothing and no one will ever change that." He set Ralph on his feet but still held on to his hand. He looked up to see everyone watching. Tears were flowing down Paige's cheeks despite her smile. The others were all watching and smiling. All except Walter, who was watching from the loft window.

"Alright people, listen up. This has been a hell of a week. Kate and I have spent the last few days getting to know Jonathan and he's a pretty terrific guy. I think once you get to know him you'll like him too. But I want to make one thing crystal clear. You people are my family. All of you. You drive me crazy, " He pointed to Toby, "Especially you," Toby tipped his hat and smiled as if he was accepting a compliment. "But I wouldn't change a thing about any of you. You all make me so proud. I've never known a better group of people in my life. We aren't family because of biology. We're family by choice." He looked at all these faces that meant the world to him and smiled. "Now will one of you geniuses find me an egg bagel so we can get back to work?"

Cabe sat down at his desk and pretended to go through his messages while he calmed himself. An egg bagel with cream cheese appeared in his vision. He glanced up to see Toby smiling. Cabe nodded his thanks. "Doc, I'm gonna need a conversation with you later."

"You know where to find me."

He glanced up to see Walter watching him. He needed to talk to Toby about both of his troubled sons.

Cabe spent a few hours wading through paperwork, getting down to a tolerable level. He glanced up at the loft. Walter had stayed there all morning. Enough was enough. He climbed the stairs.

"Are you going to stay up here all day?"

Walter barely looked away from the whiteboard. "I have a great deal of work to do, especially since your wife has decided to shirk her responsibilities."

Cabe struggled to maintain his calm. "Walter, you could FaceTime with Kate if you really needed her and you know that."

"It's not the same."

Cabe grabbed the marker from Walter's hand and pointed to his desk chair. "Sit."

"I'm working." He grabbed for the marker. Cabe tossed across the room.

"Sit. Now." Walter sat at his desk as Cabe took the chair beside it. "Walter, I know this has been a difficult for you."

"Yes it has. Your involvement with this team has become compromised by your personal life."

Cabe was hurt but tried to continue. "Walter, I understand you don't deal well with your emotions. You've been so hurt by people you trusted, especially me, that you've closed down to everyone. You see anyone in your life having focus on anyone but you and Scorpion as a threat."

"That's not true."

"It is, son. I'm guessing you've already run a complete background check on Jonathan." The look on his face told Cabe he was right. "What do you find?"

Walter sighed and pulled a file from his desk. "He seems to have done very well in school and received early admission to Harvard. Instead of continuing his education he enlisted in the Marines. He moved up the ranks quickly receiving multiple commendations including a Bronze Star."

Cabe gasped. Jonathan hadn't talked much about his service.

Walter continued. "When he returned to college he did finish his undergraduate work in three years." He nodded with grudging approval. "He graduated from Harvard Law at the top of his class. Despite that his law career has been fairly unremarkable." He closed the folder and looked up at Cabe.

"So what you are telling me is you found Jonathan is what he says he is."

"Apparently."

"You are letting your past impede your future. You refuse to take any emotional chances, with me, or with Paige."

Walter looked shocked but Cabe pushed on. "Walter, I know you heard what I said this morning. I meant every word. You are my family. But the family got bigger." Cabe stood and put his hand on Walter's shoulder. "You are letting your fear run your life while you call it wisdom or experience. It's just fear, son. You can trust that I love you and will always be there for you. Or you can keep trying to push everyone away." Cabe walked toward the door and reached for the handle. "And Walter, I'm not going anywhere."

Cabe walked out to the landing only to find Toby leaning up against the door.

"Let's talk," he said as he walked down the stairs and into the first floor office. He took his hat off and tossed it on the desk.

"Do they teach eavesdropping in Harvard?" Cabe asked.

"When necessary." Toby smiled. "You did good up there. It was what he needed to hear."

"I hope so because I've got my hands full right now. I don't want him going off the rails."

"How are you doing with all of this?"

"I'm okay, it's Jonathan I'm worried about."

"You're not okay but we'll circle back to that. What's going on with your son?"

Cabe sat in the chair opposite Toby. The same chair he'd sat in just a few days ago, when his entire life changed. "He seemed fine the first couple of days." Cabe smiled thinking of the late nights they'd spent talking. "He seemed happy to be with us."

"And now?"

"He's been quiet. That is when he's not in the gym beating on the heavy bag."

"Cabe, he's been through a lot this week. He found out his mother has lied to him his whole life. Even if their relationship was crap, it's still devastating. He's got to process what's happened and it may take some time."

"Would you talk to him?"

"Sure, but it has to be his choice."

Cabe nodded.

"So how are you and don't tell me you're fine."

"You're right, I'm not. I'm thrilled about Jonathan but..."

"You're angry."

Cabe sighed. "Yeah, I'm angry. How could she have done this to him? To me? She tried to make him into what she wanted, like what he is isn't good enough. I just don't understand."

"Maybe you should ask her."

He stared at Toby. He mulled the thought and realized it was just what he needed. "I doubt she'll see me."

"You have a badge. Use it."

Cabe smiled. "Thanks, Doc," he said as he walked out the door.

Toby put his hat back on and smiled. "This is gonna be good."

Cabe's badge had gotten him into the DOJ and up to Kathleen's office. He tried to steel himself for what would come next. He approached the secretary's desk and flashed his badge. "Special Agent Cabe Gallo, Homeland Security. I need to see AUSA Ellsworth." The young woman looked at his badge and verified his picture matched. The pretty blonde looked up and smiled. He always threw in the Special Agent tag when he thought he needed a bit more influence.

"Just a moment." The girl picked up the phone and hit a button. "Ms. Ellsworth, there's an Agent Gallo here to see you. What ma'am?" She looked at Cabe and smiled. "Male. Definitely male." The woman paused. "Yes, ma'am." She hung up and looked decidedly less pleased. "I'm sorry, Agent Gallo. Ms. Ellsworth can't see you."

Cabe took his sunglasses off, slipped them in his pocket and smiled. "Yes she can, sweetheart. All I need to do is open the door." He walked passed the protesting woman and opened the office door. Kathleen looked up from her monitor. "Hello Kathleen. Let's talk."

"Nancy, call security," she shouted.

He took a quick look around Kathleen's office. Perfectly designed high end furniture. Awards, diplomas and pictures with dignitaries lined the wall. Then he spotted it on a sideboard. a small picture of Kathleen and Jonathan. He turned backed to the woman and smiled. "Don't bother, Nancy. I'm Jonathan's father." Cabe closed the door in the woman's stunned face.

Kathleen jumped to her feet. "How dare you! You have no right..."

"No right? He's my son and I'm damn proud of that. Now sit down. We need to talk."

Realizing she had no choice, she sat down. "What do you want, Cabe?"

"I want to know why."

"Why what?"

"Why didn't you tell me? You could have found me easily enough. You know I would have come back. I would have wanted to marry you."

"This is a ridiculous conversation. It was thirty years ago. It's done."

"Kathleen stop. Stop posturing. This is me. You forget how well I know you. I know who you are behind the Ellsworth armor. You used to let it down, at least around me. You weren't always like this."

"Like what?"

"Like your mother." Kathleen gasped and sat back against her chair. "I want to know what happened, Kathleen. I need to know if I'm going to help our son." He was stunned when he saw her eyes well.

"It wasn't suppose to happen."

"What wasn't?"

"You, Jonathan, any of it. You were supposed to be an entertaining diversion, with the added side bonus of pissing off my parents. I had a plan, a focus and it was ruined. How was I supposed to know the antibiotic I was taking for a sinus infection would make my birth control fail?" She sighed. "You were already gone when I found out. My parents were furious. They blamed me for getting involved with you in the first place. But they promised to take care of me and Jonathan so long as I never contacted you."

"This was their doing?"

"They said they weren't going to have their grandson raised by a..."

"A what?"

"Low life from the streets."

Cabe looked at her and shook his head. "Sounds just like them. But they're gone. They have been for years. Why not tell me then?"

"I finally had a life of my own. I wasn't going to mess it up by bringing you back into the picture. Everything was finally going according to plan. I finally had a career. I'd finally gotten Jonathan back on track. He was suppose to go to Harvard and he would eventually run for Dad's seat in Congress. Then he had to go an enlist! The Marines, just like you. He had to go and ruin the plan! Just like you!"

"Kathleen, it wasn't his plan. It wasn't what he wanted."

She slammed her fist on the desk. "Do you think that was what I wanted? Do you think I wanted to be saddled with your bastard?"

"So you took out your anger out on our son. Made him feel unwanted his whole life." Cabe stood. "Kathleen, our son grew into a terrific man, brave and kind. And you

know what else? He loves you despite how you treated him. You didn't deserve him. If Jonathan chooses to keep his relationship with you I will support his decision." He leaned over Kathleen's desk. "But make no mistake. If you cause him anymore pain, you will regret it."

"You're just a cop. You can't touch me."

Cabe stood and smiled. "Don't count on it." He reached for the door. "You know Kathleen, my wife really doesn't like you." He saw her face go pale as he closed the door behind him.

Cabe watched his son doing laps in the pool from his bedroom balcony. It was barely six a.m. but the sound of Jonathan's laps had woken him thirty minutes ago. It had been a few days since his talk with Kathleen and he understood why his son was so angry. He was too. Kate came from behind and slipped her arms around his waist. "You're up early."

"Yeah. I misplaced this hot Italian dude who was supposed to be in my bed. I couldn't find him, but you'll do."

He chuckled and kissed the top of her head. They both watched Jonathan's steady pace, cutting through the water.

"What can we do?" she asked.

"He doesn't seem to be moving forward but I have an idea." He turned and gave her a kiss. "Just don't get mad."

"Ah, Jeez. I'm going to hate this."

Cabe threw Jonathan a towel from the cabinet. "Good morning."

"Good morning."

"Good swim?"

"Yeah, felt great."

"Do you have anything planned for today?"

"Not really, why?"

"I need to pick my bike from a shop in Glendale. There's a track close to the shop. I thought we could take the Camaro and open her up."

Jonathan got a 'kid at Christmas' smile. "Do I get to drive her?"

"Yeah, I'll let you drive."

"Cool. I'll get dressed."

"The shop doesn't open for a few hours. We have time for a decent breakfast before we go."

They were at the Harley dealer in Glendale just after opening. Cabe's new custom seat was embroidered 'Rosalita'. "Hey Benny, my bike looks great. Thanks." Benny was

about five foot seven, wearing a Lynyrd Skynyrd t-shirt and a blue bandana over salt and pepper hair. His age was hard to determine thanks to a lifetime in the sun.

"Rosalita?" asked Jonathan.

"Every great bike needs a name. This one's a sweetheart," said Benny. "Hey, Cabe. You didn't tell me you had a kid. Looks just like you."

Cabe gave him a smile as he put his hand on Jonathan's shoulder. "Yeah, we get that a lot. Hey Benny. I'm going to need another helmet."

Benny slapped Cabe on the back "You teaching the boy to ride?"

Jonathan looked up at Cabe.

"Thought I'd take him down to the track. I wanted to open up the Camaro a bit anyway."

Jonathan followed behind Cabe's bike to the track, five miles from the bike shop. He grabbed his new helmet from the passenger seat. Cabe came out of the tracks office and smiled.

"We have the track for an hour."

"You rented the entire track for an hour?"

Cabe smiled. "Yeah, well, sometimes having money doesn't suck." He got off his bike and let Jonathan get on. "I'm under explicit instructions from Kate not to let you break your neck or otherwise damage yourself."

He smiled as he put on the helmet. "Mom worries too much."

Cabe tried to focus on instructing his son while he wondered when Jonathan started thinking of Kate as his Mom.

Jonathan proved to be a natural on Cabe's bike. His skills with touring bikes gave him more stamina and a better sense of balance than most novices. Cabe watched as Jonathan finished a final lap on the bike and pulled in next to the Camaro. When he yanked off his helmet his smile went straight to Cabe's heart.

"That was amazing!"

"I'm glad you enjoyed it."

"We're still gonna run the Camaro, aren't we?"

"Yeah, kid. We still have thirty minutes." He threw Jonathan the keys. "Only this time I'm riding shotgun." They sped around the track with Cabe throwing out a minimum of instruction. Apparently there was a gearhead gene in the Gallo family. They didn't hit race car speed but Jonathan pushed the Camaro past one hundred ten. Cabe pointed to his watch and told him to pull over.

Jonathan turned off the engine and smiled at his father. "That was a blast, Dad."

Cabe smiled. "Yeah kid, it really was."

They pulled into a diner a few miles down the road from the track that Cabe promised had great pie and real coffee, not that overpriced hazelnut crap Toby drank. They sat at a booth and a thirty something buxom blonde with a name tag that read Annie.

"Hey boys. What can I get you?"

"My Dad said you have great pie here."

She flashed Jonathan a big smile. "That's not the only thing that's good around here."

Jonathan smiled and said, "Just the pie, for now."

"The lemon meringue is amazing," she said.

"That sounds good. Dad?"

Cabe smiled and said, "Two coffees and two lemon meringues."

"Coming right up."

Annie was right about the pie. Both of them cleaned their plates and were working on their second cups of coffee. Cabe set his cup down and looked at his son. The resemblance was truly amazing. His mannerisms, even what he took in his coffee, they were all him. So Cabe knew the depth of emotion Jonathan was feeling.

"So what's the plan?"

Jonathan looked at his father over his coffee cup. "The plan?"

"You know you can stay with us as long as you want. What I'm asking is what do you want to do? Have you any ideas about your practice?"

He set his cup down and sighed. "I know. I can't just sit on the deck and watch the ocean. I have been thinking. I might want to start my own practice, work for the people who really need it."

"That's a great idea. It sounds like something that would be very meaningful for you." He didn't look as excited about the idea as Cabe would have expected. "What's wrong?"

"Well, a practice like that wouldn't make much money. It probably never would."

"And?"

"I don't know. It feels like I should be aiming higher."

Cabe reached out and covered his son's hand. "What you described sounds pretty damn high to me."

"Really?"

"Of course. Serve and protect, that's what we do." Cabe knew he would always remember this particular smile from his son, on this particular day, over pie and coffee.

They were walking to the parking lot when they saw them. Two men hassling a woman wearing a hijab. One man was tall and wiry sandy brown hair and a beat up green army jacket. The other looked like a bulldog, wide shoulder and no neck.

"Come on, sweetie, let's see what's under there."

"Ah crap," said Cabe as he and Jonathan sprinted toward the men. Jonathan reached for Bulldog, Cabe grabbed Green Jacket. "That's enough."

"Are you alright ma'am?" asked Jonathan.

She nodded but was obviously shaken.

"Ma'am, why don't you go inside the diner for a minute. Ask for Annie. We'll be in directly," said Jonathan. He nodded and smiled. "The lemon meringue pie is excellent."

Cabe was about to lay into the guy when Jonathan stepped in. "What the hell is your problem? Hassling a woman like that."

"We were just having some fun."

"Yeah, well I'm not laughing."

"Who gives a fuck?" said Green Jacket. "All these damn foreigners are ruining our country."

"You should be grateful we don't have you arrested. Now turn around and go," said Jonathan.

"Who's gonna make us? You and this old man?"

Cabe and Jonathan gave each other a small smile. They knew what was coming. Bulldog took the first swing at Jonathan. Green Jacket swung at Cabe. Bulldog's right was surprisingly effective against Jonathan's jaw. Cabe took a hit to the stomach. Jonathan countered and he and Bulldog exchanged punches until Bulldog finally went down.

Green jacket was still swinging as Cabe countered. "Need any help, Dad?"

"Nah," he replied as he connected with an uppercut that put Green Jacket on the pavement next to Bulldog. "I got this."

Both men were on the ground bleeding from cuts on the cheeks and noses. "You pricks!" screamed Bulldog. "I have friends on the force. I'll have you arrested."

Cabe pulled out his badge and flashed it. "I wouldn't bet on it. Now get the hell out of here."

Cabe wrapped his arm around Jonathan's shoulder. "Nice work, son." He looked at Jonathan's bruised cheek and his bloody nose had made a mess of his shirt. "Ah man, Kate is going to kill me."

They pulled into the garage and parked the bike and the Camaro. Jonathan got out of the car and looked at his father and laughed. "Oh, God, you look like crap."

Cabe through his arm around Jonathan's shoulder and pulled him close enough to give him a loud kiss on the cheek. "So do you, Marine. So do you." They laughed all the way to the kitchen until they saw Kate.

"Uh oh, " said Jonathan.

"What did you do?" demanded Kate from her husband as she sat Jonathan on a kitchen chair. She grabbed a dish towel from a drawer and some ice from the freezer. She wrapped them together on placed it against Jonathan's cheek. She looked at Cabe and asked, "What did I tell you before you left?"

Cabe tried to hide his smile. "Don't damage him."

Kate made an impatient grunt. "Did you crash the bike?"

"No," replied Cabe.

"Not the Camaro?" She asked sounding more concerned for the car than him.

"They're both fine. I, however, am bleeding on the kitchen floor," said Cabe.

Kate looked up and one of his facial cuts had opened up and was, in fact, dripping

on the floor. "You know where the ice is."

Jonathan couldn't contain himself and started laughing. He took hold of her hand that was still pressing ice to his face. "It wasn't Dad's fault. There were these two guys hassling this Muslim woman. We stepped in."

Kate looked at Jonathan and Cabe and back again. She shrugged. "Oh. Okay." She looked closer at Jonathan's cuts. "You're going to bruise up nicely but I don't think you need stitches." She kissed his forehead and put his hand on the ice pack. "Hold this while I attend to your father.

Jonathan pulled Kate back and kissed her cheek. "Thanks."

Kate smiled and Cabe knew why his son called her Mom. "Hey. What about me?"

"Yeah, Yeah. Quit whining." Kate grabbed another towel and ice and pressed it against his wound more forcefully than she had to Jonathan.

"Don't I get a kiss?"

She got a wicked smile that told him he was going to pay for this. "You'll get rewarded for your gallantry later, boyo." She pointed at both of them. "I'm going for the first aid kit. Stay put, both of you. Don't bleed on the carpet."

Cabe smiled as he watched his Irish witch walk out of the room.

"What was with the brogue?" asked Jonathan.

He blushed through his bruises. "Ah, it's a thing." He shook his head, telling his son he was better off not knowing.

"Ah jeez, Dad. Nobody wants to think about their parents like that."

Cabe just smiled. Damn, this had been a good day.

"Toby, where is your case study on the Waring project?" asked Paige with her stern Mom face.

"Soon," said Toby as he didn't look up from his book. Paige grabbed it out of his hands. "Hey."

"You said soon two days ago." She held up his book as she walked back to her desk. "You'll get this back when I get your case study."

"Meanie," said Toby as he reached for the file.

"Where is Cabe?" asked Walter as he came down the stairs.

"He called," said Paige. "His meeting at Homeland ran long. He said he'd be here by four."

"Huh, well at least this time it's business," replied Walter.

Paige tossed Toby's book on her desk with a thud. "Alright, Walter. Talk. You've been picking at Cabe for a couple of weeks. What the hell is your problem?"

"My problem is his messy personal life is interfering with our work."

"He took some time off to get to know his son."

"Exactly," said Walter as he grabbed the last egg bagel from the morning and tried to go back to the loft.

Paige grabbed his arm. "Alright, I've heard enough. You come with me." She all but pushed Walter into the back office and closed the door. "You hired me to interpret the world for you, so that's what I'm going to do. You are being a first rate ass. The world does not revolve around you and your wants. Cabe found out he has a son. After all the pain that man has endured it's not just good news, it's a miracle. Cabe has protected you and loved you since you were a little boy. If you were any kind of friend you'd be happy for him." Paige opened the door and returned to her chair, leaving Walter staring at her holding a stale bagel.

The door opened to an unexpected visitor. He was dressed in a beautifully tailored suit that did not go unnoticed by Happy and Paige. Happy smiled. "Hey Jonathan. How's it going?"

"It's good, Happy. Thanks. Is my Dad here?" There was more than one surprised look at Jonathan calling Cabe Dad.

"He got hung up at Homeland. He said he'd be here in about thirty minutes," said Sly as he approached Jonathan. "We didn't really get a chance to say hello when we met, you being kidnapped and all. I just wanted to say I'm really happy for you and Cabe. Cabe is a really good guy. He's going to be a great father."

Jonathan smiled and shook his hand. "He already is. Thank you, Sylvester. I really appreciate that."

Paige turned around to Walter and gave him a 'that's how you do it' look. Walter approached Jonathan and extended his hand. "Yes, that was difficult meeting under those circumstances. I have noticed Cabe has been happy since he met you."

"Thank you, Walter. That's good to know."

Paige nodded at Walter approvingly. He then made a quick retreat to the loft. She took the small victory. "Were you in court?" she asked.

"Yeah. Actually that's one of the reasons I'm here. Toby, I could use some advice and Dad said you're the best."

"He's correct." He pointed to the wooden chair. "What's up?"

"I've done pro bono for the VA. DUI's, domestic violence, vagrancy. I'm noticing a lot of them have something in common."

"PTSD?"

"Yeah. Some of these guys are afraid to sleep with their wives on the chance they might hurt them in their sleep. They have nightmares, flashbacks. The VA has good programs, they're overwhelmed but they do try. What I need to know is how as their attorney can I help. I'm not sure when to push and when not to."

"That's a tough one. You can suggest treatment. I can get you the names of some local groups, veterans helping each other. They could be helpful for those who need support. It's trickier for those who need more intensive help. You can suggest programs and get the referrals but the bottom line is they have to want the help. You can't force it."

"It's just sometimes I feel so helpless with these guys. My case today was a vet who got into a fight with his boss. He decked him and the boss fired him and had him arrested. I tried to get him into an anger management program but he refused."

Toby sighed and tossed his hat on the table. "Honestly, this is the toughest part of what I do. I see those who need help and I know what to do, but they won't let me in. You

can't let it wear you down. I try to remember the victories."

Jonathan smiled. "Thanks Toby." He tried to stand but Toby reached for his arm.

"Stay a minute. How are you doing? This has been a hell of a couple of weeks."

"Yeah it has," said Jonathan as he glanced around the garage.

"You know what? I could use some fresh air. How about you?" asked Toby.

Jonathan nodded and followed him to the parking lot. He waited for Jonathan to begin.

"Everything with Dad is going great."

"You're calling him Dad. That was a big step."

"You know it really wasn't. It felt right. It's so strange. I feel like I'm waiting for the other shoe to drop. They are so great to me. Being with them is easy."

"They're good people but something about this isn't easy."

"My mother. I haven't seen her since right after the kidnapping. What she did, not telling him or me, it was unforgivable."

"What's keeping you up at night?"

Jonathan looked startled.

Toby smiled. "Dark circles under your eyes and your pallor suggests you're lucky if you're getting four hours a night."

"Wow. Dad said you were the best. Why am I feeling so guilty for cutting her off? I felt more at home with them than I ever did with her. It's like what I am is finally good enough."

"Whether she was a crappy parent or not she's still your mother and you still love her. You're having a normal response to the situation. What you need to figure out is what is best for you. Sometimes what's best for us can hurt like hell."

Jonathan reached to shake Toby's hand and pulled him into a tight hug. "Thanks, Toby."

"You're welcome. Anytime."

A car pulled into the parking lot and a small voice said, "Thanks Mrs. Goldberg."

"Hey buddy. How was school?" asked Toby.

"Good," he stopped and looked at Jonathan. "You must be Cabe's son." He extended his hand like the perfect little man he was. "It's nice to meet you, Jonathan."

Jonathan smiled. "You must be Ralph. I've heard a lot about you."

"Cabe said you wanted to discuss the games I'm working on for Rimark."

"I would love to."

"I would enjoy that. I need to go see my mother now," he said as he opened the garage door.

Jonathan looked at Toby. "Wow."

Toby laughed. "You have no idea."

Cabe tossed his keys on the side board and looked around for Kate. He'd had a long boring day and all he wanted was to relax. He pulled off his suit coat as he walked around the house listening for her. "Yo, woman! Where are you?" he shouted. He finally heard the unmistakable sound of pounding on a heavy bag. He opened the door to the home gym and stood in the doorway. Kate was a tight t-shirt and gym shorts. Sweat glistened off her chest as she struck the bag over and over. Her form had gotten pretty good since she'd started training with him. "You're still dropping your right."

She looked over at him and smiled. "I'm left handed. My left is stronger."

"We'll work on it," he said as he walked toward her.

"I thought Jonathan was coming home with you."

"I met him at the garage but he said he had something he had to take care of. Said he'd be here around seven." Cabe smiled. "When I got there he and Ralph were in a heavy discussion about multiplayer platforms or something like that."

Kate looked startled. "He was with the team? Alone?"

"Stop fretting Mama Bear, your cub was fine. Paige assured me that everyone, including Walter were on their best behavior."

She smiled. "That's good." She gave his arm a smack. "What's with the Mama Bear, Gallo?"

He gave her a soft kiss. "The second Jonathan came into our lives you turned into Mama Bear." He brushed her cheek and smiled. "You have to have noticed how many times he's called you Mom."

"He's just kidding, like Toby."

Cabe kissed her again. "I don't think he is. For that matter I don't think Toby is either. You're loving and caring and just what he needs." He pulled her close and whispered. "You're just what I need."

"Cabe, I'm all sweaty, I need a shower. I'll mess up your suit."

He pulled off her gloves and tossed them on the mat. "That's why God invented dry cleaners."

Jonathan took a deep breath. He couldn't put this off any longer. He approached the blonde at desk, smiled and extended his hand. "Hi, we haven't met yet. I'm Jonathan Ellsworth."

"Oh hi. I'm Nancy." She smiled and looked him up and down. "I met your father a couple of weeks ago. You look just like him."

He didn't know his father had talked to her but he put that aside. "Yes, we get that a lot. I need to see my mother."

"I'll let her know you're here."

"Oh, don't bother," he said as he opened the door. She was sitting at her desk reviewing a case.

"Nancy, I told you I didn't want to be disturbed."

"Hello Mother."

"Well so you're finally here. Are you ready to apologize for your behavior?" She leaned back in her chair. "I suppose I should write this off to his influence. He always was high strung."

Jonathan sighed and sat in the chair opposite her desk. "Mother, I need to talk to you about something. I wanted you to hear this from me."

"I'm listening."

Somehow he seriously doubted that it. "I'm going to ask Dad permission to add his name to my birth certificate."

"What?"

"You know it's always bothered me. My birth certificate says father unknown. He's not."

"You're doing this to spite me."

He took a breath, trying to calm himself. "No, I'm not. I'm doing it because it's what's right for me."

"You know this will give him legal rights to your assets."

"Damn it, Mother! This is not about money or spiting you. My whole life I been missing this huge part of myself."

"And you think he's the answer," she shouted. "This is her doing."

"Who?"

"That bitch he married. She hates me. She threatened me you know."

"What did she say?"

"She said she'd use her computer skills to destroy me, the bitch." Kathleen sat back in her chair, crossing her arms.

"Why did she say that?"

"Because she's a bitch. I tried to get her shield pulled for it but apparently she's a bitch with connections."

"Mother, why did she threaten you?" he repeated.

Kathleen uncrossed her arms and lowered her voice. "She said she wouldn't let me hurt Cabe anymore. She said if I didn't tell you about him she'd ruin me."

Jonathan sat back and smiled. "That sounds like Kate." The rest of what he was about to tell her suddenly got easier.

"You can smile about this? She threatened me."

"You know what I see when I look at Kate? I see the woman who used her computer skills to find me when your suspect kidnapped me. I see the woman who put her life at risk to save me. I see the woman who did everything she could to make sure I had a relationship with my father, including threatening you."

"I can't believe you'd defend that woman, after everything I've done for you."

Jonathan stood and started pacing. "Done for me? All you've done my whole life is try to make me into what you wanted. Everything is always about you. Where you want me to go to school, what career I have. All of it had to reflect well on you." He stopped pacing and looked at her. "There's something else I needed to tell you because, laughingly, I thought I owed it to you. I'm going to ask Dad permission to take his name. I will use Ellsworth as my middle name."

"I can't believe you hate me this much," she said.

"I don't hate you, Mother. I do love you but this is how things are now. I have a relationship with my father. My career is moving in a different direction. If you can support me in my decisions than we can have a relationship."

"You can't do this!"

He toward the office door.

"You're just like him!" she screamed.

Jonathan gave her a sad smile. "Thank you. Goodbye, mother."

Jonathan pulled up to the gate at Cabe and Kate's and punched in the code. He'd gone to his apartment after his encounter with his mother. A thirty minute shower had not completely rid him of his nervous tension. He pulled up in the driveway and turned off the engine of his rental car. He looked at the massive home, worth tens of millions, filled with an art collection that was worth ten times that. They had given him the codes and keys only days after meeting him. They trusted him. They loved him. They hadn't said it, they never pushed for anything more than he was ready to give. But he'd felt it. He just hoped they were ready for what he was going to do next.

He knocked on the kitchen door before he walked in. He still a bit embarrassed at the memory of walking in on them last week while they were making out, rather heavily, on the living room couch. "Dad, I'm here," he called. Gratefully, they were standing at the butcher block, getting dinner ready.

"Hey, perfect timing," said Kate. "You can get the salad together."

"Sure, but there's something I want to talk to you about."

"What's up, son?" asked Cabe as he dried his hands on a dish towel and tossed it to Kate.

Jonathan fumbled with the lock on his briefcase. "I know things have happened pretty quickly with all this," He pulled at the locked trying to force it open. "And I'm not trying to rush things but, Damn it. Why is thing stuck?"

Cabe walked around the butcher block and grasped him by the shoulders. "Jonathan, stop. Take a breath." He smiled when Jonathan paused and took a breath. "Now, just talk to us."

He smiled as he finally opened his briefcase. "You know my birthday is coming up." Cabe and Kate smiled and passed a look between them he didn't quite get.

"We're aware," said Cabe.

"It made me think about a lot of things. Something that has always bothered me is that my birth certificate say father unknown." Jonathan smiled. "You're not. Not anymore." He pulled a paper out of his case. "I would like your permission to add your name to my

birth certificate." He was relieved when Cabe gave him a big smile.

"Where do I sign?"

"Before we do that I want you to review this." He handed them the file and Cabe opened it.

"What is this?"

"You putting your name on my birth certificate has legal ramifications. This says I forfeit any claims on your estate. Take a look at it. Show it to your lawyers. We don't have to rush any of this."

Cabe looked at the agreement and then handed it to Kate. She looked it over and then set it down. "Why would you do this?"

"I don't want either of you to ever think the reason I wanted this was because of what you have." He smiled at them both. "I want it because of who you are. I love you, both of you. Look, I know this is a lot to take in. I don't expect any answers today. Take your time and think about."

Cabe took his son in his arms. "I love you too, son."

Kate came around the block for her hug. "Me, too."

Cabe grabbed the first paper and signed where it said name of father, with tears in his eyes. Kate grabbed the agreement and held it up. "About this." She looked at Cabe, who smiled and nodded. She tore the agreement in half and tossed it back on the counter. "We won't be needing this."

Jonathan look at both of them, thoroughly confused. "What? Why did you do that?"

Kate smiled. "Jonathan, I spent thirty years doing undercover work. I had to be able to read people fast." She looked at Cabe and smiled. "I knew the moment I met you were just like your father. All of this is of very little importance to you. You appreciate it, as we do, but it's not a driving force in your life." She gave him another hug. "Besides, we've already added you to the estate," she said "Everyone who was included before is still included. When you came along," she shrugged. "Our family got bigger."

Cabe smiled. "Okay, now that the paperwork is out of the way, let's eat. I'm hungry."

Cabe watched Jonathan through dinner. He was laughing with them but he couldn't get over the feeling that something else was going on. Once dinner was finished Cabe stood up and picked up his plate. "Sweetheart, you cooked, we'll clean."

"Great. I never turn down help in the kitchen." She smiled at Jonathan. "You're a good influence on him." She gave Cabe a kiss. "I'll be in the den. There's a Firefly marathon on."

"A jeez," Cabe said. "More sci-fi. She's such a nerd."

"Actually, Firefly is an interesting combination of the western and space genres. Think space cowboy."

"Oh, Lord. Another one," said Cabe with a smile. They loaded the dishwasher and washed up the few pots. Cabe looked at his son. They were doing such a normal task for a family. It was these images that were most profound for him. Jonathan was so much a part of their lives now. He handed Jonathan the last pot to dry and emptied the sink. "So. Are you going to tell me what else is going on?"

Jonathan set the pot in its proper place and hung up the dish towel to dry. "I went to see my mother today."

Cabe sat back down at the table. "Oh. Do you want to tell me about it?"

"Dad, why didn't you tell me you went to see her?"

"I'm surprised she told you."

"She didn't. The new assistant did. She took one look at me and said she'd met you a few weeks ago." He smiled. "She seemed particularly pleased about it too."

Cabe laughed. "Nancy, wasn't it?"

"Yeah." He sat down next to Cabe. "Why did you go?"

"I wanted to find out why. Why she didn't tell me, why she didn't tell you."

"What did she say?"

"Jonathan, the only thing I got from that meeting was an understanding of why you're so angry."

"I'm not that angry."

"Yeah you are. And from talking to her, you have every right to be."

"Did you love her?"

Cabe sighed and sat back in his chair. He thought about the girl he knew all those

years ago. The relationship had been so much fun, at least at first. She was so alive and ready to set the world on fire. "I cared very much for her, but no I wasn't in love with her. Your mom wasn't always like this, you know. When I knew her she wasn't living under her mother's thumb. She opened up, had fun, maybe too much fun, but we were a lot younger then. I had just gotten out of the Marines. I hadn't been in a real relationship since before I enlisted. Between the Corp, my studies and reassignments, it didn't leave a lot of room for anyone else."

Jonathan sighed. "I hear that."

"I'd finished a lot of the course work during my service so I only had my last year to finish. Our relationship was just supposed to be two people enjoying each others company. We both graduated and I went off to Quantico. I thought she went off to Harvard Law." Cabe looked at his son and shook his head. "I never knew."

Jonathan nodded. "I know."

"Why did you go?"

"I wanted to tell her about asking you to put your name on my birth certificate before someone else did. If someone from the courts, the county clerks office, got to her first. I didn't want to put her in that situation."

Cabe smiled. "You're a good man, Jonathan." He shook his head. "I bet she didn't take it well."

"That would be putting it mildly." He looked at his father and smiled. "Especially when I told her I wanted to take the name Gallo."

"What?"

"I talked to Toby today," he smiled. "He really is as good as you said. He told me I had to decide what was right for me. He also told me that sometimes what's right hurts like hell. Telling Mom about this was really hard. Dad, I've felt more myself with you and Kate than I've ever been anywhere except the Marines. I feel..." he stopped, his eyes tearing.

Cabe covered Jonathan's hand with his own. "You feel what, son?"

"I feel like I belong."

"You do son, you do belong here. You always will."

"I've been thinking about this since I first met you," he smiled. "When you told me

I'm Italian. You gave me an identity I didn't realize I was missing. I started thinking about what it would have been like to grow up a Gallo. How things would have been different."

Cabe laughed. "Well, you'd speak Italian, that's for sure."

"Really?"

"Assolutamente." Cabe sat straight and tried to compose himself. "First let me make it very clear. I am so proud to be your father and I would be honored for you to take my name," he said, voice cracking. "But I want you to do something. I want you to wait."

Jonathan was startled. "What? Why?"

"Because it's been a hell of six weeks. A lot has changed for you. I want you to give it a little more time before you make this change. Consider all the implications for your career. You've made a name for yourself as Jonathan Ellsworth. I want you to be absolutely sure before you do this."

"Dad, I'm sure now."

"I know. Give it a few more weeks. Say, around your birthday. If you decided to go forward, we'll go to the courthouse together."

Jonathan smiled and nodded. "Okay."

"How did you leave it with your mother?"

His faced darkened. "I told her I loved her."

Cabe nodded, never pushing for more than his son was ready to say. "You ready for the Firefox marathon?"

"Firefly, Dad. Firefly."

"Got it." They stood and headed toward the den. "Space Cowboy?"

"Yeah, it's really cool."

"There are no cows in space."

Jonathan laughed. "Just go with the flow, Dad. Just go with the flow."

"Oh my God, woman. Calm down," Cabe said as he watched Kate dart around the kitchen.

"Is the grill ready? Do we have enough? You know how Toby can plow through four burgers without blinking," said Kate as she opened the fridge. I think we have enough salads. I've set up a couple of coolers with sodas."

Cabe grabbed her around the waist and turned her around. "Katie girl, stop. Breathe. We have enough food to feed an army, even an army of Toby's. The cake you made looks terrific. Everything is perfect." Tears in her eyes stopped him cold. "Sweetheart, what's wrong?"

"Nothing. I need to make sure the deck is set up." She tried to side step him but he hauled her over to a kitchen chair and sat her down.

"What is going on with you? You're about to go off the rails."

"I've never thought I'd be anyone's mother. I know I'm not his mother, but I'm his stepmother. I'm making a birthday party for my stepson for the first time. I want it to be right."

Cabe leaned in and gave her a kiss. "Sweetheart," he whispered, "I love you."

"I love you too but what has that to do with it?"

"I told you I went to see Kathleen," he said sitting down in the chair next to her.

"Yeah, but all you said was it didn't go well."

He closed his eyes at the memory. The Kathleen he knew was long gone. "I wanted to know how she could have treated Jonathan the way she did, trying to force him to bend to her wishes. Ignoring what he wanted." He paused and shook his head. "She said it was nothing she ever wanted. I was supposed to disappear from her life after college. She never wanted to be saddled with my bastard."

Kate shot to her feet. "That bitch!" she shouted. "How dare she talk about him like that." She started pacing the kitchen. "I told her not to test me. When I get done with her the guys she's convicted with have better credit scores than she will."

Cabe smiled and grabbed hold over her shoulders. "Katie you are not going to mess with her credit."

"Ah, come on! One credit card, please!"

He placed a kiss on her nose and smiled. "No, Katie."

"Wait, I'm ready to eviscerate the bitch and you're smiling?"

"Yes I am. And that's why everything today is perfect."

"Okay, you've lost me. Draw me a map, Gallo."

"You had an immediate, visceral response to what she said. Your instinct is to protect him." He gave her another soft kiss. "Do you think Kathleen ever made him a party with burgers and hot dogs and a scratch cake? Do you think she ever worried what the exact right gift would be?" Cabe sighed. "She probably never worried what he ate for dinner. She had cooks and nannies for that. You love him."

"I do," she whispered. She brushed her hand against Cabe's cheek. "He's just like his father. How could I not?"

Cabe opened the door for the team as they piled out of the van. They were all carrying their bags. "Guys, come on. You have to help," yelled Sylvester from the inside of the van.

Toby looked at Cabe. "Did Kate have to put Sylvester in charge of balloons?"

Cabe grabbed a few of the bags while Toby, Sylvester and Paige pulled at least a dozen balloons out of the van. Cabe smiled at the high percentage of Super Fun Guy balloons in the collection. "Why don't you put them out on the deck." A few of the bags he hefted felt awfully heavy for swimsuits and sunscreen. "What did you guys put in here? Oh, you didn't bring books to a birthday party?"

Happy walked up to Cabe and smiled. "Of course not. They're gifts."

"You brought him gifts?" Cabe smiled.

Ralph looked at Cabe like he's said something utterly ridiculous. "It's a birthday party, Nonno. You have to bring gifts. It's an accepted social convention. Besides, we've spent some time with Jonathan the last few weeks. We like him." Ralph followed Happy into the house. Paige walked up to Cabe and put her free hand on his arm.

"We all do, Cabe."

He followed them into the house and found Kate directing everyone to the deck. She had them stack their gifts on a table as she helped Sly tie his balloon bonanza to chairs and tables around the deck.

"Cabe fire up the grill. Jonathan should be here any minute."

He looked and Kate saluted. "Yes ma'am."

Kate laughed. "Smart ass. Hop to it, Marine."

Twenty minutes later Cabe heard the front gate open. "Okay. He's here. You guys stay here and be quiet."

Kate was working in the kitchen when Jonathan opened the garage door. "Hey Mom, where's Dad?"

"Right here," He said as he walked into the kitchen and pulled Jonathan into a hug. "Happy birthday, son."

"Thanks, Dad. Thirty. God, I feel old."

Kate and Cabe said in unison, "Wanna trade?"

"Let's go out on the deck. I've fired up the grill." Cabe smiled at Kate as they led Jonathan to his first Gallo birthday. Jonathan stopped in his tracks when he saw the team on the deck. Everyone shouted "Happy Birthday." He looked at Cabe and Kate with his mouth hanging open. "Can't have a birthday without a party," said Cabe.

"At least, not in our family," said Kate. She gave Jonathan a hug. "Happy birthday, sweetheart."

"Thank you. Thank you everybody." Jonathan looked around the deck and smiled. "I love the balloons."

Sly smacked Toby's shoulder. "See, everyone likes balloons."

Cabe watched Jonathan as he ate his burger and laughed with the rest of team. The team had taken to him and he was grateful. He wanted all of his family to get along. Kate leaned over and kissed his cheek.

"He looks like he's having fun," she whispered.

"Yeah, he does," he said as he reached for her hand. The gate buzzer sounded and he looked over at Kate.

"I'll take care of it," she said as she walked back into the house. She returned a few minutes later and smiled.

"All good?" Cabe asked.

"All good," she replied as she nodded to Ralph.

Ralph set down his plate. "Okay Jonathan, it's time for presents."

Jonathan smiled. "Cool."

"I'll hand them out." He smiled. "I always get to hand out the presents."

"How come?" asked Jonathan.

"Because he's a kid and he's cute. He wins," said everyone at once.

"Give him mine first," said Walter.

Ralph looked at the table and picked up a long slim box and handed it to Jonathan. He opened the box and gasped. It was a nameplate for his desk. It read Jonathan Ellsworth Gallo, Esq. "Wow," he whispered.

Cabe told us of your intention to take the name Gallo. I thought you might like this for your new office."

"It's perfect." He looked at Walter. "Thank you so much."

Cabe caught Paige looking at Walter as she mouthed "Good job."

"Mine next," said Toby. Ralph picked a larger, heavier box and gave it to him. He opened it to find a large three ring binder. He started flipping the pages and smiled.

"I put together a reference guide for your PTSD clients. There are sections on different issues, lists of area programs. I've include a reading list of books you might find helpful. There's also a list of PTSD specialists. The check marked names have agreed to take referrals."

"Toby, this amazing. Thank you." He looked at his father with a big grin. "This is going to help me help them."

Cabe looked over at Toby and nodded. "Nice, doc." Toby tipped his ever present hat.

"Mine next," said Paige. Ralph handed Jonathan an oversized shirt box.

"Dad, this like yours," Jonathan held up a leather motor cycle jacket.

"Cabe mention you liked his," said Paige.

"That's really nice of you, Paige. Thank you."

"Mine next," said Sly. Ralph handed him a small square box. When he opened it there was a Super Fun Guy comic in a collectors bag. On the front of the comic was a tall figure that looked a lot like Jonathan wearing a tight navy blue superhero outfit and cape. There was a large L on his chest. "Last Christmas, Cabe and Kate gave me my own Super

Fun Guy comic, Super Sly. I mean they actually made me a character. Super Sly has become a popular character in the mythology. I've been helping with the character development. In the next issue Galactic comics are going to introduce a new character, Law Man. See the little brief case?"

Jonathan smiled. "This is incredible."

"My gift is next," said Ralph. He handed Jonathan a rolled up scroll. He unfurled it and saw a drawing of Jonathan in the center of a group. On either side of him were images of Cabe and Kate. Next to them were all the members of the team, including Ralph. "I do these for special occasions. "Nonno and Nonna had the one I did for them framed."

"Nonno and Nonna?"

"It's what Ralph calls us. Grandfather and Grandmother," Kate said with a smile.

"I love it Ralph. It will look great in my new office."

"I have another gift for you too," said Ralph. He handed him a small package that contained a copy of a new Rimark game. "I've been working on a Super Fun Guy game for Rimark. We're adding Law Man."

"That's just freaking cool," said Jonathan with a huge grin.

"Okay, I'm next," said Happy. Ralph handed Jonathan another large box. Inside was a large leather bound book. "Last Christmas Cabe and Kate gave me something I'd never had, a history. They gave me information going back generations. I thought you might like a Gallo history."

Jonathan opened the book and saw pictures of himself, some from his youth. He turned the page and saw pictures of Cabe, including a rather embarrassing naked baby picture. "Dad, you've got to see this. Cabe sat down next to him on the bench, looking over his shoulder while he turned the pages. There were pictures of his grandparents and the town in Italy where they were born. Page after page of Gallo history."

"How did you find all this, Happy. I've never seen some of these pictures," asked Cabe.

Happy smiled. "Mad skills."

Jonathan wiped at his eyes. "This is amazing, Happy." He looked at her and smiled. "Thank you so much."

"Ralph, give him the last box," said Kate. He handed him a briefcase sized box.

He opened it but it was no briefcase. He pulled a bright silver laptop from the box. It was had a sleek line with the Rimark logo in the center.

"No, it can't be. Is this the new T-1000 model? I've read about it. It's not even out yet." Kate nodded. "Holy crap! This thing has two terabyte hard drive and a video processor that is insane." He looked at Cabe and Kate and smiled. "Thanks."

"You're welcome," Kate smiled. Then she turned to Cabe and smiled.

"There's one more gift," said Cabe. He held up his hand and a keyring was dangling from his hand. He smiled and tossed the key ring to his son. Jonathan gasped when he saw the Camaro logo.

"You're giving me the Camaro?"

Cabe laughed. "Hell no. That's my baby." He smiled at his son's confusion. "Go look in the driveway."

Jonathan appeared frozen in his seat until Ralph took him by the hand. "Come on. They're always doing stuff like this. You'll get used to it."

"No I won't," he said as he allowed Ralph to lead him to the front of the house. There he saw a 1969 cherry red car Camaro with a big blue bow. "Holy crap," he whispered. He looked at his father. "I don't know what to say."

"Say you'll be careful and only race it on a track and not the PCH," said Kate.

Jonathan smiled. "I promise, Mom."

"There's also a parking pass for the garage next to your office." She held her finger up to him. "I don't want you parking that on the street. You'll be safer in the garage."

Jonathan tried not to laugh. "Yes ma'am." He threw his arms around his father. "Thanks, Dad."

"You're welcome."

Then he put his arms around Kate. "Thanks, Mom."

"You be safe, sweetheart," she whispered.

"Can we take it out?" he asked.

Kate pushed on Cabe's arm. "Go on. Just don't be too long. There's still the cake and ice cream after swimming."

"Yes!" shouted Jonathan. "Dad, shotgun?"

"Let's do it," he said as they headed toward the car. Cabe pulled off the bow as

they jumped in the car.

Toby walked to Kate's side and put his arm around her as they watched father and son pull out and roar down the road. "Good lord," she whispered. Toby placed a kiss on her cheek. "What was that for?"

He smiled. "You're a very good Mom."

Kate stood and watched as Toby grabbed Happy's hand as the rest of the team returned to the deck. In all her years of work, everything she'd accomplished, she had never had higher praise.

Jonathan gunned the engine at the traffic light. The guy in the Chrysler in the next lane smiled and nodded. "Dad this is amazing."

"I'm glad you like it."

He pulled up into a look out and turned off the engine. They got out and stood quietly for a few minutes, watching the ocean crash against the rocks below.

"Are you okay?" asked Cabe.

He shook his head and smiled. "I'm fine, Dad. It's just this day, all of it."

"Too much?"

"No it's not that. I love all the gifts." He smiled. "This car? Dad, it's incredible."

"Then what?"

"I guess I'm not sure how to take it all in. I've never had anything like this. Birthdays with my mother were small and catered, even when I was a kid. What the team did, even Walter. I'm just not used to stuff like this. And Kate, she's incredible."

Cabe smiled. "Yeah, she is." He looked at the perfect view. It was turning out to be the birthday he'd hoped for his son. It was then he noticed the tears running down Jonathan's face. He reached for his hand. "What is it?"

"Why didn't she love me?" he whispered.

Cabe's heart snapped in two. Damn Kathleen for what she'd done to his son. "I don't know what to say. I wish there was something I could say or do to take this pain from you."

He wiped his cheeks. "I'm sorry, Dad. This is a great day. I don't mean to spoil it."

"Jonathan, you never have to apologize for being honest with me. I can't fix what happened. All I can say is you deserve to be happy. I really hope you are with me and Kate."

Jonathan pulled his father into a tight hug. "I am, Dad. I love you both so much."

"We love you too, son." Cabe wiped his eyes. "Ah damn. We can't let Kate see red eyes. She'll think you aren't happy with your party."

Jonathan laughed. "She did make a huge fuss, didn't she?"

"She does that. She made herself crazy decorating your cake."

"She made me a cake? Herself?"

"Kate has very strict rules about parties. Birthdays require a scratch cake. Speaking of which we better head back."

They got back into the car and buckled in. "Dad, does Kate mind when I call her Mom?"

"Nah. She loves it."

Jonathan smiled and started the engine. "Damn, she purrs," he smiled.

"Yeah, she does," Cabe smiled. As Jonathan drove them back home he thought about letting Kate fuck up one of Kathleen's credit cards.

Kate put the rest of the salads back in the fridge. She took the cover off the cake and smiled. It really was her best effort, a chocolate cake with fudge frosting. She'd even pulled off a couple of not bad icing roses. The 'Happy Birthday Jonathan' was passable. She always had trouble with that. She smiled at the memory of the first time she'd written on her dad's birthday cake. Her letters were barely recognizable and it frustrated her. She wasn't used to not accomplishing what she tried to do, even at the age of eight. She was about to scrape off the icing and try again when her father stopped her. "It's perfect just the way it is, Katie, just like you." It had been so many years since they were gone and she still missed them. She just hoped she could be the kind of parent for Jonathan that her parents were for her.

"There you are."

She turned around to see Cabe standing in the kitchen doorway, smiling. "Well,

hey there, handsome. Why don't you get over here and help set out the plates. She opened a drawer and started rifling through it. "Where are the birthday candles? I know I bought them." Cabe picked the box of candles off the butcher block and handed it to her. "Great, now get..."

He silenced her by pulling her to him and kissing her. "Thank you for making a perfect day for our son," he whispered.

"Ours?" she said.

He touched her cheek. "Ours." He kissed her again. This time she slid her hands up his chest and wrapped them around his neck. He deepened the kiss as he dropped his hands down her back. He cupped her ass, pulling her tight against him.

"Ahh jeez."

They saw Jonathan and Toby standing in the doorway. They were both in dripping wet swimsuits. Toby threw his arm over Jonathan's shoulder. "They're always like this. You'll get used to it."

Jonathan laughed, "I doubt it. Toby challenged me to a race and I thought you might want to see your son kick the skinny dude's ass."

"Don't count your chickens, Marine boy. I spent my early years running from bullies."

"Yeah, yeah, we'll see. We're taking it down to the beach."

"Fine, go now and stop dripping on my floor," said Kate.

"We'll be there in a minute," said Cabe.

"Okay," said Toby. "Let's go settle this, Marine boy."

Cabe looked at Kate and smiled. "You know what they sound like?"

She nodded. "Brothers." He pulled her in for another kiss but she pushed him off. "Our son is waiting for us," she smiled. He followed behind her just so he could smack her ass.

"We will continue this later, witch."

The hordes had finally gone home after what Kate thought was a very successful party. Jonathan had, in fact, beaten Toby in a foot race down the beach to the cheers of everyone. Toby actually shook his hand and patted him on the back. She put the last of the cake plates in the dishwasher and hit the start button.

"Hey, Mom."

"Hey, birthday boy." She smiled how calling her Mom seemed to be so natural for him now. "Where's your father?"

"He's cleaning the grill." He walked over and put his arms around her and kissed her cheek. "Thank you for the best birthday ever."

"You're welcome, sweetheart."

"You know you went a little crazy on the gifts. I wasn't kidding when I read up on the T-1000. I know the retail on that puppy is about ten grand."

She smiled and patted his chest. "I used my employee discount."

"And the car? I can't even guess what Dad paid for that." Kate just smiled. "I want to ask you something."

"Okay."

He sat at the kitchen table. "It's kind of personal."

Kate joined him at the table. "Okay, you can ask. I may not answer, but go ahead and ask," she smiled.

He sat at the kitchen table. "You and Dad. He's kind of...frisky."

Kate laughed. "You make him sound like an old man in a home pinching a nurse's cheek."

"It's just you two seem so, oh I don't know. I'm saying this badly."

"Physical with each other?"

"Yeah. It's kind of surprising."

"Your father is a passionate man, who, much to my great joy, loves his wife." She gave him a sly smile. "A lot." Jonathan shifted uncomfortably in his chair. Kate sat back in her chair. "It's hard for me to put into words what I feel about your father. I had spent almost all of my career working undercover. My code name was The Ghost. My specialty was disappearing into the woodwork. No one ever noticed me. After a while I convinced myself I liked it that way. Then I met your father." Kate smiled. "He dragged me out of the

shadows, convinced me I didn't belong there. I met him and everything changed."

"How could anyone not notice you? You're so pretty and all that red hair," Jonathan asked.

Kate smiled. "You really are just like your father. He said the same thing. I was giving a mission briefing. When I said no one ever noticed me I heard him say 'impossible'. I think that's when I fell in love with him. If not then it was during the mission. He looked like James Bond in his tuxedo. He's just so freaking handsome." She smiled at the memory. "The way he looked at me in my evening dress, he made me feel beautiful." She noticed Jonathan smiling. "What?"

"I'm so glad he met you."

"So am I," she said. "He is the best man I've ever known. Good, kind, loyal. And flat out the hottest," she said with an enthusiasm that made Jonathan shift in his chair. She smiled at him. "I think we bring out the best in each other. Maybe that's what your seeing. I know I'm more comfortable in the world because he's with me. Everything in my life is better because of him."

"It's not something I recognized," he said. "I've never seen it before."

"Jonathan, you are a good man, kind, like your father." She patted his cheek. "And you're very handsome. You will find someone when you least expect it. I know it."

"How can you be so sure?" he asked.

Kate smiled. "Trust me. I'm old. I know stuff."

Jonathan laughed and stood. He pulled Kate to his feet and gave her a tight hug. "I love you, Mom."

"I love you too, son."

Cabe stood next to the kitchen pass through and marveled at what a lucky man he was.

Kate opened the sliding door in the bedroom and went to the walk-in closet and tossed off her sandals. "It was a good party, wasn't it? Jonathan seemed to have a really good time."

"Yes, he did. It was a great party, sweetheart," Cabe said as he closed the slider and hit the button that automatically darkened the windows.

"What are you doing? I just opened that."

He walked to her and slipped his hands to her waist. "Our son is down the hall. We aren't going to want him to hear what comes next." He cupped her cheek in his hand. "Thank you."

"For what?" she smiled.

"For giving our son a perfect birthday, for taking care of him and the team," he paused and kissed her, then moved to her neck kissing and tasting. "Thank you for being everything I've ever wanted." He paused and looked at her. "You give me everything." He pulled her face to him and possessed her lips. Their tongues tangled in a familiar dance. He looked at her and saw her flushed cheeks, her darkened eyes. Her response to him from the very first was always immediate and passionate. "Tell me what you want." He nipped at her ear and whispered. "Take what you want, witch. It's yours to take." He stopped and waited. He saw the witchy gleam in her eyes.

"Take off your shirt."

He pulled his t-shirt over his head and tossed it aside, never taking his eyes off her. She smiled as she ran her hands over his shoulders and down his arms. "Umm. I love your arms. So strong. I love feeling your muscles under my hands. Her hands moved to his chest, stroking over his tattoos. She kissed the Irish Heart tattoo and ran her tongue down over his skin, tracing his nipple until she heard him gasp. She looked into his eyes, "So deliciously male." She placed more kisses on his chest, following them with her tongue. She looked at him possessively, with pride. "Sei mio," she whispered.

"Io sono sempre tua," he replied. He was forever hers.

'Sei tutto per me. Tu sei il mio mondo," she whispered before she claimed his mouth. When she pulled away she smiled at his stunned expression. She repeated herself in English, "You are everything to me, you are my world." She kissed his neck and

whispered in his ear, I've been studying a little." She nipped at his ear, then stood back and looked at him like she was admiring a statue. "Molto bello, very nice." She walked around him running her hands down his back, tracing the large tattoo across his shoulders with her fingertip, followed by her tongue. "Striscia!" she ordered.

Cabe fumbled for his belt. He couldn't believe she just told him, ordered him, to strip in Italian. He couldn't wait to hear what else she learned.

Kate stood still and watched until he was completely naked. He was also completely ready. She smiled as she peeled off her shirt and shorts. She delayed removing her lingerie because the color of the day happened to be Irish Witch. It was one of the sets she'd had made, mirroring his design. She pushed him on the bed and nodded for him to move up to the headboard.

He closed his eyes and lost himself to the feeling of her taking him in her mouth. "Oh God, baby. You're so good." He opened his eyes when he felt the loss of her mouth. Kate smiled at him as she got shed her panties and bra. She climbed over him and slipped him inside. She kissed him deeply as she began riding, moving up and down. She placed her hands on his chest and closed her eyes. He matched her movements rising to meet her. She grabbed his shoulders and pulled him over on top of her. She looked in his eyes and said, "Don't you dare go easy." He drove hard, matching her rough rhythm. "Sei cosi casso di caldo," she yelled as they climaxed together.

He buried his head in her shoulder. "I think you're pretty fucking hot, too."

She started laughing. "I thought I might learn a few phrases."

Cabe rolled over and pulled her tight against his chest. He kissed her forehead. "What language program taught you that?"

"It's amazing what you can find on the internet." She cuddled up against him. "Cabe."

"Um huh," he said ready to drift to sleep.

"Good call about the door."

Now it was his turn to laugh.

Jonathan's new office wasn't close to the downtown skyscraper where he once worked. No trendy lunch spots. No parade of thousand dollar suits. It was in a section of the city where renovated warehouses served as offices and condos. The closest Piedmont street came to a trendy lunch spot was Ben's Deli on the corner. He loved it.

He looked at the pile of folders on his desk and smiled. He'd only had his office open for less than a week but he already had a stack of cases to go through. Most were cases he'd had pending from his pro bono work. The rest were cases that were being referred to him by his contacts at the VA and other attorneys. Apparently the word had gotten out if you had a troubled vet as a client, send him to Ellsworth. Except after today, it wouldn't be Ellsworth. He'd officially be a Gallo.

"Jonathan, you have some visitors." Carolyn, his new paralegal was standing in his doorway. She was a trim, fifty year old retired Army sergeant who had just finished her paralegal training. Carolyn was five and a half feet of determination. After retiring from the service she worked full time as a secretary while putting herself through school. He knew as soon as her met her she was perfect.

"Thanks, Carolyn." He followed her into the outer office to see his parents admiring the art prints he'd chosen. "Hi Mom, Dad." He gave them both hugs and kissed their cheeks. This show of emotion would have never happened in the Ellsworth home. He was about to release Kate when he realized she was armed. "Mom?"

"I'm sorry sweetheart but your father and I have an assignment this afternoon. Cooper knows we won't be there until after the hearing."

"That's okay. Carolyn, these are my parents, Cabe and Kate Gallo."

She extended her hand to each. "It's a pleasure to meet you both. Jonathan has told me so much about you." She looked at him and smiled. "Your son is going to do some great things."

"We are, Carolyn. We are." He looked at his parents and smiled. "So, what do you think?"

"It's great, son," said Cabe."

"Come in my office. It's not big but it will do. It's close to the VA. I've already got a number of cases. I'm meeting with the DA this week. I want to see if I can get them to

route vet cases to me. The public defenders are overwhelmed to begin with. I don't think it will be hard to convince them."

Kate walked over to him and gave him another hug. "We're so proud of you."

"We really are," said Cabe.

Jonathan smiled and looked at his father. It was then he noticed Cabe holding what looked like a painting wrapped in brown paper.

"We brought you something for the office," Cabe said with a smile.

Jonathan opened the paper to see a beautiful seascape painted by his father. "Oh, Dad. This is wonderful." He looked at him and smiled. He looked around the office and held it against the wall opposite his chair. "Perfect. Hey, Carolyn. Do you think you could find something to hang this for me?"

"Sure Jonathan. The toolbox is in the closet and I'm sure there are some nails." She looked at it and smiled. "It's beautiful."

"My Dad painted it," he said with a big smile.

"Really? Wow."

Jonathan glanced at his watch. "We better get going. Don't want to be late."

Jonathan approached the judge's chambers and spoke with the assistant. Kate took Cabe's hand in hers. "How are you doing?"

"I'm nervous," he said with a smile.

She smiled. "You'll be fine."

"Ray will see us now," Jonathan said.

"Ray?" said Kate.

Jonathan smiled. "He's a buddy. We're on the same basketball team in the county league. He's got a wicked jump shot. He moved us up on his calendar. He's a good guy, ex-JAG. He smiled at his father. "You ready?"

"Let's roll," Cabe said following Jonathan onto the judges chambers, still holding Kate's hand.

"Jonathan, good to see you," said the judge as he extended his hand. He was a tall man with sandy brown hair and wire-rimmed glasses.

"Ray, these are my parents, Cabe and Kate Gallo."

He extended his hand to Cabe. "Damn, Jonathan. No need for a DNA test here."

Cabe smiled. "We get that a lot. This is my wife, Kate."

"It's very nice to meet you," said Kate.

The judge rubbed his hands together and smiled. "As much as I'd like to hang out with you and breakdown your son's weak ass hook shot, I have a case in twenty." Jonathan opened his case and handed the judge a file. He opened it and reviewed the forms. "Okay, everything's in order. Jonathan I assume you are prepared to do what you need to in order to change all your documentation including your law license."

"I am, your honor."

"Mr. Gallo are you aware if the legal ramifications of this action?"

"I am, your Honor."

"Okay," the judge smiled. He signed the papers that added Cabe's name to Jonathan's birth certificate. Then he flipped pages and signed the documents that named him Jonathan Ellsworth Gallo. He extended his hand to Jonathan. "Congratulations Mr. Gallo."

"Thank you, your Honor." He pulled him into a bro hug. "Thanks, Ray."

"You're welcome, dude. Your hook shot still sucks."

He turned to Cabe and shook his hand. "Congratulations."

"Thanks so much your Honor."

Cabe pulled into the garage lot and turned off the engine. Kate put her hand on his. "Are you okay?" she asked.

He smiled. "I good, real good. It's just so amazing."

"I know sweetheart. Your whole life changed in the last two months."

He took her hand and brought her palm to his lips and kissed it. "Our lives changed." He pulled her close and kissed her, soft at first, then deepening it. He reached his hand under her jacket, caressing her waist, moving up toward delightfully familiar territory.

Kate pulled away laughing. "You do know our boss is probably waiting for us."

"She can wait another minute." He tried to pull her back to kiss her again.

"Cabe, didn't you get enough last night?" she laughed. "And this morning."

He brushed a stray hair behind her ear. "I will never get enough of you."

Cabe and Kate walked into the garage to find his desk covered with blue balloons that read 'Congratulations. It's a boy!' The balloons were tied to coffee mugs that read 'Dad' and 'Mom'.

Paige walked toward them and gave each a hug. "I'm so happy for both of you."

Cabe smiled. "Thanks, kid."

"We all are," said Toby. Toby, Sly and Happy all took turns giving Cabe and Kate hugs. Walter approached and extended his hand. "Congratulations, Cabe. Jonathan seems to be a good guy and I recognize this makes you happy." Then, Walter did something no one expected. He smiled. "I am happy for you, for both of you." And in a moment to be forever etched in everyone's memory Walter O'Brien initiated a hug.

Cabe managed to return the hug despite his shock. "Thank you son. I really appreciate that."

Walter hugged Kate and said, "Congratulations."

"Thank you, Walter."

"Hey, can I get in on this?" They looked to garage entrance to see Katherine Cooper walking towards them. She walked to Cabe and gave him a hug. "Congratulations."

"Thank you, Katherine."

"What am I missing?" said the man who entered with Cooper. He was mid fifties, trim and thinning brown hair.

"Hey, Bob," said Cabe. "Kate, you met Bob at Katherine's party."

Kate extended her hand. "Yes, of course. Nice to see you again." Once again, he held her hand a little too long.

"You too," he smiled. Kate pulled her hand back and shot Cabe a look.

"Team, this is Bob Packer. We used to work together," said Cabe.

Bob pointed to the balloons. "What's all this?"

"Long story. I'll fill you in later."

"Yes, Let's get down to business," said Cooper. She handed Walter a flash drive and he brought up a picture of a handsome, dark skinned man in his early forties wearing a red and gold sash across his chest.

"Hey," laughed Cabe. "That's Alex. I haven't seen him in years."

Cooper nodded. "This is Crown Prince Alexander Umbuto of Wadata. His father, King Simeon, died two days ago. The prince had been in the US negotiating a trade deal. We have been tasked to getting him safely back to his country. We will meet his plane at LAX and Agent Packer will travel with him. "

"Doesn't he have his own security detail?" asked Walter.

"He does but the Agent Packer got a tip that there may be an attempt on his life."

"I have a few contacts in Wadata from when I was part of the team that trained their security forces," said Packer. "There is a small but vocal anti-monarchy group. It's led by an ex-general named Nmabi from the Wadata army."

"Who, let me guess, believes he would be a better leader," said Toby.

"Exactly. Prince Alexander has always been a friend to the US. Wadata is strategically located in Eastern Africa. The president would like that relationship to continue," replied Cooper.

"Cabe, how do you know him?" asked Kate.

"He was one of my first assignments at Homeland. I spent two weeks guarding him in New York. He's good guy," He laughed. "And a hell of a poker player. We had some fun together but his focus is on the welfare of his people."

"He remembers you too," said Cooper. "That's why he requested to see you when he heard that Homeland would be involved. I've provided you with the information we have. I want Scorpion to go over anything and see if you can find anything. We know who's behind this but we can't prove it. We don't even know from where the threat will come. But I will need you to do what you do from the van. The prince's jet arrives at LAX in ninety minutes."

"Sylvester, you monitor from here with Director Cooper. The rest of you, get your gear," said Walter.

"Cabe, a moment." Kate smiled and nodded toward the office door. She closed the door and smiled. She rubbed her hand up his arm.

"Kate, what are you doing? The blinds are open."

"I know, just follow my lead."

He smiled and put his hands on her shoulders. "What's going on?"

"Something's off with Packer. I don't know what, but it is."

"I know he's a little handsy with you but you can deal with it."

"Yes I can but that's not what I'm talking about. You have to trust me. Something's off. I'm going to brief the team when we get in the van. You take Packer in your car. Put in your com but don't give Packer one."

"I really think your overreacting."

Kate smiled through gritted teeth. "And I think I'm listening to thirty years of experience."

"Okay. We'll do it your way."

This time she gave him a genuine smile. "Now kiss me and watch out for Packer. I'll be on your six."

Cabe kissed her a bit more deeply than he should have in the office, but it made the point for Kate.

Cabe pulled his car into traffic with Packer in the passenger seat. Kate seemed awfully sure about Packer. He'd never been particularly friendly with the man but he seemed to be a solid agent.

"So what was with the balloons? You adopt?" asked Packer.

"No. I recently found out I have a son. Today he changed his last name to Gallo."

"Wow. That's amazing."

Cabe smiled. "Yeah it is. He's a great kid. He's an attorney."

"Nice," Packer replied as he looked out the side window.

Kate was in the van and called for a com check. Everyone answered except Cabe, but she expected that. She knew he could hear them. "Something's not right with Packer."

"Explain." demanded Cooper, who was still back at the garage with Sly.

"Just a feeling but something's not right. We need to vet everything we have on the prince, Nmabi and Packer. We need to do it in the next seventy minutes." Kate looked at Walter. "Cabe's riding with this guy." Walter nodded. Kate knew even if he thought she was wrong, he'd back her play if it meant protecting Cabe.

Sly hit the money trail, Walter and Kate reviewed history of the main players, Toby profiled them. "Prince Alex appears to be exactly who Cabe described," said Toby. "Degrees from Harvard and Wharton. Lives modestly despite his status. Nmabi is a classic sociopath and aspiring kleptocrat. There is a history of his opponents disappearing. Packer doesn't have much of a social imprint. Never married, no kids, his superiors refer to him as solid but not a creative thinker. He's facing forced retirement by the end of the year."

"I can't believe you hacked Homeland personnel files." said Cooper.

"I can't believe you're surprised," replied Toby.

Kate used her badge to get them into the secured parking lot for private planes. Happy parked the van and grabbed her laptop. "I'll see what interior cameras I can access."

"Cabe, I know you can hear me. We're still working on it. Watch your back."

"I don't know why your team came with you," said Packer as they entered the private terminal. "You're only here as a courtesy to the Prince. Cabe shot him a surprised look. "No offense," he added.

"The team will monitor surveillance, traffic flow, anything that could indicate a possible attack while he's at LAX. They will also provide support during the rest of the trip, alerting you to any possible threats."

Packer nodded and looked out the window, watching the planes taking off and landing. Cabe walked to the counter to check on the prince's plane and flashed his badge. The terminal had been cleared in anticipation of the prince's arrival. The only other person in the terminal was a young girl in a uniform from the private carrier who checked her screen. "It looks like flight 476 is in a holding pattern waiting for clearance to land."

"Please let me know when it starts its descent." He watched Packer as he stood at the window. He seemed quieter than he remembered. It was painful to imagine a fellow agent going bad. He hoped Kate was wrong.

Twenty minutes later the prince's plane landed. The security detail of four exited the plane followed by Prince Alexander. He approached the private terminal as two of his security peeled off, taking positions outside the door. The door opened and the prince broke into a broad smile.

"Cabe! How the hell are you?"

"I'm fine, your highness, it's good to see you again."

"Hah. This is me, Cabe. Alex. Drop the your highness crap." He shook Cabe's hand. "I wish we had time for a game. I haven't found anyone who came as close to beating me as you did."

Cabe smiled. "If you ever give up the royalty business you could make a living in Vegas." He put a hand on the prince's shoulder. "I'm really sorry about your father, Alex."

He sighed. "As am I but he'd been sick for a very long time. I didn't want to take this trip but he insisted. He said the welfare of our people was far more important." His eyes welled and Cabe pulled him into a tight hug.

The two remaining guards approached getting closer to Cabe. "Oh for God's sake, back off boys. Cabe is an old friend. I only have a few minutes to convince you to fly with me to Wadata."

Cabe smiled. "Alex. I'd loved to but I bet my wife would object." He heard a "Damn straight," through his com.

"A wife? I want to meet her."

"I'm sure she'd enjoy that but the plan is Agent Packer to accompany you to Wadata."

"You must promise to visit and bring your wife. Wadata is a beautiful country with amazing beach resorts."

"I'd love to Alex."

One of the guards approached. "Your Highness. We will check on the refueling. We should be leaving in a few minutes. I would rather you not stay on the ground too long." Alex nodded and the guards left them in the terminal.

"Have you found anything?" Kate called.

"I found a money trail. Money being funneled into an offshore account belonging to Packer. I haven't found the origin, but he's got a balance over one million dollars."

"That in itself is suspicious but not proof," replied Walter. "But this is. He turned the screen around. On the monitor was a twenty year old picture of Packer during his time in Wadata training security forces. Packer had his arm around a man's shoulder and they were both laughing. Walter pointed to the other man. "This is Nmabi."

"Cabe! It's Packer and Nmabi! Get out now!" screamed Kate as she threw open the van door. She drew her weapon and sprinted toward the terminal.

Cabe turned to see Packer had his gun drawn. "It was your wife, wasn't it? Shit. I'm really sorry Cabe but it's just business."

Cabe threw himself in front of the Prince just before Packer fired.

Kate threw open the terminal door to see Packer standing over Cabe and the prince, weapon in hand. Packer turned at the sound of the door and Kate put three shots in his chest. She kicked the gun away from Packer's body. "Toby!" she screamed. "Cabe and the prince are both hit. Get in here." Kate was vaguely aware of Cooper barking

orders, one of which was for Toby to attend to the prince first. She rolled Cabe over to see a massive red spread on his chest. "Cabe, God no." She heard the prince moan and saw a what appeared to be a bullet wound in his shoulder. "Your highness, can you hear me?"

"I'm fine. Take care of Cabe," he said.

Toby burst through the door with his med bag in hand. He looked at the prince's wound. "It hurts like hell but you're in no immediate danger," he said.

"Take care of Cabe," the prince repeated. "He threw himself in front of me."

Toby pulled opened Cabe's shirt to see a hole in his chest, in the middle of the Irish heart tattoo. "God help me," he muttered.

Kate gasped at the sight of Cabe's wound and the desperation of Toby invoking a deity he didn't believe in. "Toby, is he...?"

"He's alive but it's bad. Alright Gallo, you listen up," he shouted as he pulled rolls of gauze from his bag. "I have a perfect record in Gallo saving and you will not screw that up for me. Do you hear me, Cabe?" He pressed the gauze to Cabe's chest and looked up at the pale, shaking attendant behind the desk.

"Ambulances are on their way," she said.

"Kate, does Mercy General have a chopper pad?" She nodded. He looked back over at the girl. "Get us a medivac, now! Cooper, you on?"

"I'm here. Give me an update."

"Prince Alexander has a shoulder wound but should be fine." He sighed and took a breath. "Katherine, Cabe's in bad shape. I've ordered a medivac. Can you get them a clear path to Mercy General?"

"On it."

Kate took Cabe's hand in hers bent down to his ear. "You do not have permission to stand down, Agent Gallo. Do you hear me Gallo? You will continue the mission, Gallo. You will not stand down," her voiced choked as tears ran down her cheeks.

"He saved my life," said the prince. He nodded towards Packer's body. "I take it he was on Nmabi's payroll as apparently were my detail."

Kate nodded having almost forgotten he was there. "More than likely his exit plan was to escape with your detail on your plane."

"The detail would have disposed of him over the ocean," said the prince. "Thank you for taking down him out before he could finish the job, Agent...?"

"Gallo. Kate Gallo." She nodded toward Cabe. "I'm his wife."

Kate sat huddled in the corner of the military medivac, watching the EMT's working on Cabe and the prince. She didn't hear the rotors, or the voices of the pilot or EMT's. All she heard was her pounding heart. Less than twenty minutes after the shooting, they landed on the roof of Mercy General.

With in minutes Kate was standing outside an ER station, watching a team of doctors and nurses working on her husband. Toby came up from behind her and put his hands on her shoulders. "He's in excellent hands, Kate," he said. All she could do was nod.

"Oh, Christ. I have to call Jonathan," she said searching for her phone.

"Do you want me to do it?" he asked.

"No. This needs to come from me." She tapped Jonathan's picture and the phone dialed.

"Hey, Mom," said Jonathan. "What's up?"

Kate took a breath and tried to steady her voice. "Jonathan you need to get Mercy General right away. Your father's been shot."

He gasped. "Oh God."

"Come straight to the ER entrance. There will be police but I'll make sure you're expected. Sweetheart, hurry."

"On my way, Mom."

Kate hung up the phone and handed Toby her phone. "The place will be crawling with police and Homeland any second. Show them Jonathan's picture. The team's too. Make sure they can get past the security."

"Will do," he said as he leaned in and kissed her cheek.

As Toby left a doctor approached her. "Mrs. Gallo?" Kate nodded. "Your husband has lost a lot of blood and is in critical condition. The bullet penetrated his lung after being deflected off a rib. It penetrated his back and hit Prince Alexander. We need to get both

men into surgery immediately. Prince Alexander's surgery won't take long. It's a simple extraction of the bullet and closing the wound. Your husband will be in surgery much longer."

"Who's operating on my husband?"

"Dr. Hawkins," she's already scrubbing up. "We'll be taking him up in a moment if you'd like to be with him now."

She walked toward Cabe and took his hand in hers. It was so cold it frightened her. She placed a kiss on his lips. "You listen to me, boyo," she said in her brogue. "I have not released you from my spell. You do not have permission to leave. Do you hear me, boyo? I have plans for you." She tried to smile through her tears. "I have many enthusiastically decedent plans for you, boyo. "Do you hear me, Cabe?" she cried in her own voice. "You can't leave me. You promised me I wouldn't have to go through this world alone. You promised, Cabe. Keep your word, Cabe. Stay with me." She collapsed weeping on his chest. Then she felt it, a slight squeeze on her hand. "Cabe?"

She barely heard him whisper "Witch." She laughed. "You're right Cabe. I'm a witch, but I'm your witch." An orderly appeared behind her.

"I need to take him to surgery, ma'am."

Kate kissed Cabe and whispered. "Ti amo. Ti amo." She released his hand and watched him being wheeled down the hall. The further down the hall he got the more her vision blurred until everything went black and she collapsed on the floor.

"Kate. Kate," called Toby.

She opened her eyes to see Toby leaning over her. "Ow."

"You hit your head when you fainted. I want you to get a scan."

"No, I'm fine. Help me up." She stood and forced herself to focus. "I'm okay. Just find me some aspirin."

"Fine, but promise me you'll tell me if your vision blurs or the pain increases."

She held up her hand in surrender. "Promise." Toby led her to a conference room that had been set up as a private waiting area. Two Homeland agents were stationed outside the door. Both were men were late twenties or early thirties. Newbies.

"Agent Gallo," we are here for anything you might need. Director Cooper has made us available to you for as long as necessary."

"Thank you agent." She nodded as he opened the door for her. Normally she would have taken the time to learn their names but today was anything but normal. Inside the large room was a conference table and chairs. A stack of pillows and blankets were piled on a corner chair. A large coffee cart was being set up by Henry Wilson, Mercy General's chief of staff.

"Kate," he said as he walked toward her." I'm so sorry this is happening but you know Hawkins is the best. I thought this room would be more private for you and your family. I've given Dr. Curtis my cell number and you have it too." He took her hand in his. "Whatever you need from this hospital, anything, I will make it happen."

"Thank you, Henry," she said.

Henry closed the door behind him and Toby sat Kate down In a chair. He opened his bag and pulled out a bottle. He grabbed a bottle of water from the coffee cart, twisted off the cap and handed it to her. "Take these."

"Just aspirin, right?"

"I swear."

Kate swallowed the pills and chased them down with the water. The door opened and the team came into the room. Kate could see red eyes on all of them, even Walter. She stood and held out her arms to hug each of them.

"How is he?" asked Paige.

"Still in surgery. It's going to be a while."

"How's the prince?" asked Sly.

"Shoulder wound. He's in surgery to remove the bullet but they said he'll be fine."

"Jonathan?" asked Happy.

"On his way."

Walter pointed to the TV, which was on but muted. A live news feed was running from outside Mercy. "It's getting pretty crazy out there. An assassination attempt on a Crown Prince is a big news story."

The door opened again and Jonathan stood in the doorway, pale and crying. "Mom?" He walked toward Kate and he wrapped his arms around her. "How is he?"

"He's in surgery, It's going to be awhile."

"What's with all the cameras outside?"

"There was an attempt on the life of Prince Alexander. Your father put himself between the gunman and the prince."

"Did they get the guy who did it?" he asked. She looked at him with expression that startled him.

"He's dead." She started pacing the room.

"Mom, please sit down."

"I'm fine."

"No you're not. Please, Mom. For me." Kate nodded and sat on the couch. He glanced at Paige and nodded toward the pillows and blankets.

"Kate, why don't you put your head down for a few minutes. Rest for a minute. Cobe will need you when he comes out of surgery." She walked to the couch and set down a pillow.

"Maybe just for a minute." Kate laid her head on the pillow and closed her eyes as Paige covered her with a blanket. Jonathan indicated to Walter and Toby they should follow him outside.

"What the hell happened?" asked Jonathan.

"Kate suspected something was off about the Homeland agent we were working with. She was right," Walter said. "Before we could stop it, he fired on the prince. Cobe

shielded the prince and took the hit."

"I don't think I have to ask who took down the gunman."

"Kate got there right after the shot. He turned on her and she killed him."

"Oh my God," he whispered. "Toby, is she okay?"

Toby hesitated before he answered. "After they wheeled Cabe into surgery she fainted. Not surprising considering the situation."

"What aren't you telling me?"

Toby looked at Walter and shook his head. "Toby can't say anything to you but I can. I think he's worried about Kate's PTSD."

"What? Neither of them said anything about that."

"Kate has had some difficult experiences in the last year, most notably the UN incident. Several months ago three militia radicals took the UN ambassador, the Secretary of State and several others hostage."

"I heard about that. It was on the news."

"Cabe was also taken hostage after being injured. Kate talked her way into where they were being held dressed as an EMT. She killed all three men."

"Dear God," he whispered. "She's a computer specialist. How did she wind up taking down three terrorists?"

"Kate will do anything to protect the people she loves, especially Cabe." Walter nodded. "Mom is very brave."

Toby smiled at Walter and put his arm around his shoulder. It was the first time he'd ever referred to her as Mom.

They sat quietly in the conference room, not wanting to disturb Kate. The TV was on mute and closed captioned. Sly had read all the magazines in the room in the first fifteen minutes of the last hour. Toby and Happy sat together on the floor so he could keep his arm around her while she rested her head on his chest. Paige and Walter sat at the conference table, flipping through magazines. Jonathan poured himself another cup of coffee that he didn't really need. At least it was something to do.

"Any news?" asked Kate. She was sitting up tucking a stray curl behind her ear.

"Nothing yet," said Toby.

There was a soft knock on the door before Henry Wilson entered. "How is everyone?"

"We're fine, Henry. Is it Cabe?" asked Kate.

"No I just checked on the progress. It's going as expected. Dr. Hawkins exact words were 'He is one tough son of a bitch.'"

Kate smiled. "So true."

"Prince Alexander has come out of recovery and is asking for you. Are you up to it?"

She nodded. "Of course. Jonathan, come with me."

Henry led them to a large private room on the top floor of the hospital. Two armed Homeland agents stood guard at the door. She pulled her badge out of her pocket and flashed it. "Agent Kate Gallo." She nodded toward Jonathan. "This is my son. Prince Alexander has asked to see me." The guards stepped aside and opened the door.

"I'll leave you to your visit," said Henry. "Please call me if there is anything you need."

"I will, Henry. Thank you."

Kate and Jonathan entered the room and found Prince Alexander talking animatedly in his native language. He smiled broadly when he saw them and hung up the phone. "Agent Gallo, please come in."

"Your Highness, this is my son, Jonathan."

"How are you feeling sir?"

"I will recover quickly thanks to your parents," he said. "And please call me Alex." He reached for Kate's hand. "How is Cabe doing?"

"He's still in surgery, but so far so good."

"I'm glad to hear that. I wanted to thank you again for what you and Cabe did for me."

"No need, sir."

"I disagree. I also wanted you to know that the information your team provided gave us the evidence we needed against Nmabi. He's been arrested and will be tried for crimes against the crown. As for my traitorous security detail, they will be dealt with when

they are found."

"That's good know," Kate tried to smile. "If you'll forgive us, Alex, we're going to get back downstairs."

"Of course. Please give Cabe my thanks. You will all be in my prayers." He reached for Kate with his good hand, pulling close to kiss her cheek. He reached for Jonathan's hand and shook. "I'm very happy to have met you, Jonathan. Your parents are very brave. You should be so proud."

Jonathan put his arms around Kate's shoulder and smiled. "I am."

They got back to the conference room to strained looks from the team. "What is it? Cabe?" Kate asked.

"No," said Walter. "We haven't heard any more but," he sighed. "You need to see this." He turned the sound up to see a news conference being held in front of the hospital by Kathleen Ellsworth.

"Earlier today there was an assassination attempt on His Royal Highness Prince Alexander Umbuto of Wadata. Prince Alexander was seriously wounded as was the Homeland Security agent who was tasked in protecting him. The injured agent is Cabe Gallo." Kathleen inserted a hitch in her voice. "Agent Gallo is also my son's father so you can imagine this is a difficult time for all of us."

Kate's pale face went bright red. "I'll kill her. I'll fucking kill her!" she screamed as she headed for the door.

Jonathan grabbed Kate by the shoulders and held her still. "Mom, stop. I've got this." He placed a kiss on her forehead. "Trust me. I've got this." He turned and walked out the door.

He walked out to the parking lot and made his way to Kathleen's side. "Jonathan, sweetheart," she said extending her arms, which he ignored.

"I have a statement for you. My name is Jonathan Gallo. My father, Special Agent Cabe Gallo was seriously injured protecting Prince Alexander. My father is still in surgery. My family and I would greatly appreciate everyone's prayers for his recovery."

"Is it true Prince Alexander died?"

"Most definitely not. I was speaking with His Royal Highness less than ten minutes ago. He is alert following surgery and is expected to make a full recovery." Jonathan took a breath and looked at Kathleen. "One last thing, AUSA Ellsworth does not speak for my family. If you have any further questions you can direct them to me. Thank you." He turned and walked back into the hospital. He heard the emergency doors open immediately after him. He didn't have to turn around to know who was behind him.

"Jonathan Gallo?," she screamed.

He turned to face her. "My name has been legally changed."

"You really are a bastard. How could you humiliate me like that? How am I

supposed to explain that?"

"Honestly, I don't give a damn what you do, not anymore. I never want to lay eyes on you again." He signaled for one of the Homeland agents guarding their waiting room.

"Yes, Mr. Gallo."

"Please make sure this woman is escorted out. She is to have no access to me or my family."

"Yes sir."

He turned his back on her and walked down the hall, listening to her screaming as she was removed. The remaining guard opened the door to the room where his family was waiting for him.

They were well into hour four of waiting when there was a knock on the door. The Homeland agent opened the door to admit Dr. Hawkins, still wearing her surgical scrubs. Kate stood quickly. "How is he?"

"Surgery went well. He's in recovery and should be moved to his room shortly. The bullet missed his heart but there was still a lot of damage to the chest wall. He's going to be pretty weak for a while." She paused and smiled. "The fact that he is in such excellent shape is a big factor. The average man his age might not have survived, but he is not an average man."

"That's for sure," said Jonathan.

She looked at Jonathan and back at Kate.

"This is our son, Jonathan."

Dr. Hawkins smiled. "I love genetics." She extended her hand. "I'm Stacey Hawkins. Please take care of yourself. I'm getting tired of stitching up Gallos."

"I'll do my best, Doctor."

She smiled. "Stacey."

"Stacey." He flashed her a smile and Kate saw her exhale quickly. She couldn't blame her. Gallo charm was a powerful force. She turned her attention back to Kate. "I will have someone come get you as soon as he's in his room. If you'll excuse me, I'm going to check on him again before he's moved."

Kate nodded and extended her hand. "Thank you." She pulled her into a tight hug. "I could never tell how grateful I am. We all are."

She smiled. "You're welcome."

Doctor Hawkins left the room and Kate's knees buckled. "Mom!" yelled Jonathan as he grabbed her arm. Toby sat her down and grabbed his med bag. He checked her eyes, listened to her heart and checked her pressure.

"Okay, your pressure is low. You didn't faint, but you came close. I know it's pointless to ask you to go home but you need some rest. I'm going to make a call. Jonathan make sure she stays seated until they call us for Cabe. Happy, would you please get her some water?" Happy grabbed a bottle, opened it and handed it to Kate. "You need to keep hydrated." He tossed his equipment in his bag. "I'll be back in a minute."

"Are you okay?" asked Walter as sat next to her on the couch. "Do what Toby tells you to do. You need to take care of yourself. Cabe needs you." He placed his hand over hers. "We need you."

Kate kissed his cheek. "Thank you, Walter." She looked around the room at her family. The concern, the love she saw on their faces lightened her burden. "I could not ask for a finer family than all of you. I love you all." For the first time today she felt like she could survive this nightmare. So would Cabe.

Henry Wilson arrived fifteen minutes later to escort them to Cabe's room. Normally this parade of visitors would never be permitted for a post-surgical patient put nothing about this situation was normal. "Everything you requested is in place, Dr. Curtis."

"Thank you," Toby nodded.

Once again Kate was escorted to the top floor of the hospital. Cabe had been placed in the same large private room he'd been in when he was recovering from his appendectomy. Just like then, there was a second bed in the room. Unlike Cabe's bed it had thick pillows and was covered in a thick comforter. Kate barely noticed. All she saw was her husband, pale and linked to blinking monitors. "Toby?" she said, knowing he'd understand what she was asking.

He checked Cabe's vitals, the monitors, even the pallor of his skin near the bandages. "Hawkins is right. He's going to be weak as a kitten and I think I can guarantee he's going to be a giant pain in the ass while he recovers." He turned to Kate and smiled. "But he should be fine."

Kate smiled and placed a kiss on his cheek. "Thank you, Dr. Curtis." She walked to Cabe's side and gave him kiss. "Hey, sweetheart. I'm here. We're all here, the whole family. You're going to be fine, Cabe."

His head moved slightly. "Katie?" he whispered.

"I'm here, Cabe."

"Alex?" he asked.

"Shoulder wound. Recovering across the hall. Ready to name a school in your honor," she said.

Cabe chuckled. He opened his eyes and looked at everyone staring down at him,

tired, eyes red rimmed, exhausted. "You people look like crap," He smiled as best as he could. "And I've never seen a better sight." He squeezed Kate's hand. "I love you all. Now go home and get some rest. I'll still be here in the morning." He looked at Kate.

"He's right," said Toby. He walked to Cabe's side. "Get some rest."

Paige and Happy took turns kissing his cheek. Sly looked at him and smiled. "Tomorrow I'll bring balloons."

Walter stood at Cabe's bed. "Cabe, I..."

Cabe grabbed his hand. "I love you too, son. I'll see you tomorrow." Walter nodded and moved toward the rest of the group. Jonathan moved up to his bedside and took his hand. "Hell of a first day as a Gallo," Cabe smiled.

"Hell of a day, Dad." He leaned down and kissed his father's forehead. "I love you," he whispered.

"I love you too. Now go get some rest."

"No. I'll stay," Jonathan said.

"No," said Kate. "I want you to go home and get some rest. I assume the other bed is Toby's doing."

"I knew you'd never go home tonight," Toby said.

"You're correct."

"Kate Gallo, you are officially under doctor's orders to get some rest. If you don't follow orders I will have you admitted and sedated. Clear?" Toby took Kate's hand. "I'm serious, Kate. Promise me you'll rest."

"I promise," said Kate. She looked at her son. "Jonathan, I really want you to go get some rest."

"No, Mom. What if you need me? I should stay close."

"You could stay with me, in the loft," offered Walter. The couch is a fold out, there's room. The garage is only ten minutes from here so you could be back here quickly if you're needed."

"Thank you, Walter," said Cabe. "Please Jonathan. Go with Walter. We promise to call."

Jonathan nodded. "Okay, but I'll be back first thing in the morning." He gave Cabe another kiss and hugged Kate. "Mom, call me for anything, promise."

"I promise sweetheart."

Kate watched everyone leave and then closed the door. She saw Cabe flinching and realized what pain he must be in. "I'll get the nurse to give you something."

"Yeah. I could use something."

She pressed his call button and a nurse's voice came over the intercom. "How can I help you, Mr. Gallo?"

"This is Mrs. Gallo. My husband needs some pain med."

"Dr. Hawkins left instructions. I will be right in."

Kate leaned over and kissed him, taking his hand in hers. "You'll feel better soon."

"I'm sorry, Katie."

"For what?"

"For putting you through this."

"You have nothing to apologize for. I should have figured out Packer's connection to Nmabi. Thank God Walter did." Tears ran down her cheeks. "I'm so sorry Cabe. It's my fault. I should have known."

Cabe pulled on her hand and made her look him in the eyes. "You listen to me, Kate Gallo. None of this is your fault. If you hadn't known something was off with Packer, Alexander would have been assassinated. A civil war would have broken out. Millions could have died. Do not regret what happened today." He pulled her hand to his lips and kissed it. "Is Packer in custody?"

"No."

"What? Oh God, Kate."

"I wasn't quick enough. I got there after the first shot. He drew on me and I fired."

"Katie, I'm so sorry."

The nurse came in with a syringe and injected it into his IV. "This will help you sleep. If you need anything else just hit the button. Mrs. Gallo, Dr. Curtis left orders for you too. He mentioned you hit your head earlier. He's prescribed a mild pain killer and a sleeping pill if you require them.

"Thank you, I'm fine." The nurse smiled and left the room.

"You hit your head?" he asked.

"It's nothing,"

"Katie, please."

"After they took you off to surgery I fainted. Toby checked me out. I'm fine."

"I'm so sorry, baby," he said, his voice slurring a bit as the drugs.

"Cabe, how long can our luck hold out?"

Walter had fallen asleep quickly after the long, difficult day. He was satisfied with the outcome. The prince would recover and a likely civil war had been averted. All in all a good day. A repeated thumping sound had awakened him. He looked to the fold out couch and found it empty. His watch read four a.m.

Jonathan was downstairs in the garage. He'd found the stash of boxing gloves and was beating the hell out of the heavy bag. Noting the sweat pouring down his face and chest, Walter estimated he'd been doing it for at least an hour.

"Hey," said Walter.

Jonathan grabbed the bag to stop it from swinging. "I'm sorry. I woke you."

"It's okay. This does seem to be an usual hour for cardio."

He gave him a smile. "I guess it is. I couldn't sleep. Sometimes this helps."

"If you're worried about Cabe you don't need to. Both Dr. Hawkins and Toby are excellent doctors and they said he's going to be fine."

Jonathan nodded. "He was very lucky."

"Luck had little to do with it. Your parents combined skills saved Prince Alexander and a civil war has been averted. Potentially millions of lives saved. Your father put the principle of the greater good into practice. He knew we were backing him up and he would likely recover from whatever injury he sustained. So you see, it was experience and training, not luck."

He pulled off his gloves and set them down. "When you put it that way," he smiled. "It wasn't luck."

"Jonathan, people like me with high IQ's have low EQ's, emotional quotient. That means I don't process emotions like normals."

"Normals?"

"People like you. Even with my low EQ I can see something else is bothering you. Was it what your mother did?"

Jonathan smiled. "For someone with low EQ you have me pegged." He ran his hand through his hair. "She's been doing this my whole life. Arranging everything around what she wants, my schooling, my career, my life. Today was the last straw. That she could use me, what happened to Dad like that."

"I don't understand your response. If she's always reacted this way why are you surprised?"

"I'm not. Not really. She got to me after I spoke to the press. She was furious that I'd embarrassed her. Not a word of concern for me or Dad. I decided I'd finally had enough and I told her I never wanted to see her again. Then I had her thrown out of the hospital."

"I see how that would be upsetting to you. Do you regret what you said?"

"No, and I that's what's bothering me. I never want to see my own mother again. What kind of person does that make me?"

"Logical."

Jonathan looked at him with a stunned expression. "Excuse me."

"You were being hurt repeatedly by her but you never disavowed her. That made you a loyal son, even though she never deserved it. It was only when she was hurting our parents that you wouldn't allow it to continue. You weren't just protecting yourself, you were protecting them." He paused and looked uncomfortable. "I hope you don't mind me referring to them as our parents."

Jonathan walked over to him and smiled. "Why would I? That's what they are."

"Cabe and Kate are good people, honorable. They selected us as their family. Biology had nothing to do with it. They have taken care of us, protected us, sometimes risking their lives to do so." Walter gave him a small smile. "You have a family that wants you now, who cares about you. I think you were being very logical to protect that."

"Thank you, Walter. I really appreciate that. You know if they are our parents that makes us brothers."

"Yes, I guess it does."

"I always wanted a brother," he said as he gave Walter a hug.

"Oh, okay," said Walter. "You know if you want to improve your technique on the

bag we have a program to analyze your punch."

There was only so much EQ Walter could muster in one day.

Cabe opened his eyes and snapped them shut again. The pain in his chest was signaling it was time for another shot. He looked carefully to his side and saw Kate asleep in the bed next to him. He could only imagine what this was doing to her PTSD. He'd have to talk to Toby. What about Jonathan? His first official day as a Gallo and he gets shot. Kate was right. How much longer could their luck hold out?

"Good Morning, Mr. Gallo. How are you feeling?" asked a way too cheery, and too loud nurse.

"Like I got shot in the chest. Please lower your voice. My wife is sleeping."

"No she's not," said Kate as she sat up in bed.

She was wearing a Mercy General sweatshirt and her hair had slipped loose from her ponytail. On most mornings seeing this sleepy eyed Kate would have led to at least another hour in bed for both of them. This was not most mornings. "How are you Katie?"

"That's my line," she said.

"You'll be fine once I set this up," said the nurse. "It's a pump that will let you control your pain killer." The nurse finished setting up the pump and plugged it into his IV. She demonstrated how to use it but he stopped her from pressing the button. He needed to be clear headed at least for a little while.

Kate had slipped out of bed and into the bathroom while the nurse took his vitals. When she came out her hair was brushed and she was smiling but he knew his Katie girl. She was struggling.

"How about a kiss, Katie girl?" She smiled and gave him a quick kiss. "Witch, I know you can do better than that." She proved him right by giving him a kiss that made him forget his wound, at least for a few moments. "Um, much better. Now, tell me. How are you doing?"

"I'm okay, Cabe. Really. I'm not going to pretend this didn't trigger things. I've been working with Toby long enough that I know how to refocus my mind. Yesterday it was pretty difficult. Today is another day." She took his hand in hers. "You're here. You're going to be fine. I'm focusing on that." She leaned in and whispered, "Now press the damn button."

"Sometimes living with a genius is a pain in the ass." He smiled and hit the button.

It was only a few seconds before he felt his muscles relax and his brain begin to fuzz.

"Yeah, but you love me anyway," said Kate as she gave him another kiss.

"More than you will ever know," he whispered as he drifted back to sleep.

Kate looked at Cabe and smiled. "I know, boyo. I know."

Jonathan got out of the small shower and toweled off. It was nothing like his shower in his room at the beach house but he didn't mind. This shower would've been considered a great luxury during some of his assignments in the Marines. Walter had loaned him some fresh khakis and a polo so he didn't look as scruffy as he did last night. He felt better too. Their talk last night had really helped. He still hated what happened between him and his mother but he didn't feel quite as guilty. Walter was a good guy. A little odd, but good.

"Jonathan, I'm back," called Walter.

He went downstairs to find two extra large coffees and a large bag with what smelled like bacon. He opened the bag and smiled. "Perfect. I'm starving."

"So am I. We forgot to eat last night." Walter set the food out on his desk. As Jonathan grabbed his container he knocked a picture over. He grabbed it to set it back up and saw Walter with a pretty girl with the same dark hair and dimples. "She's cute. Didn't I see her picture on Sly's desk too?"

"That was Megan, my sister."

Jonathan set down his fork. "Was?"

"Megan died last year. She had MS. Shortly before her death she and Sly were married." Walter's eyes darkened as he spoke.

"I'm sorry," said Jonathan.

"It was a difficult time," said Walter as he took a sip of his coffee. "Have you heard from Kate?"

He nodded, not wanting to push. "She text me this morning. Dad woke up and seemed good. He's sleeping now so she told us to take our time." He took a bite of his omelet. "This is good."

"Yes, Kovelski's has a fairly consistent menu."

Jonathan smiled to himself. "Good to know."

"Do you have court today?"

"No. I do have something tomorrow. I need to call my assistant and let her know what's going on. After that I'll be clear for the rest of the day."

Walter pulled into the emergency room lot next to Jonathan's car. "I need to move it before they tow it. I'll see you at the front door." He followed Walter to the regular visitor's parking lot and parked. He popped his trunk and found his briefcase. There was something he wanted to show his Dad.

Jonathan knocked softly and opened the door. He was surprised to see his father sitting up in and looking pretty good. His Mom, was sitting in a chair next to him enduring a western playing on the TV. "Hi Dad. You got Mom to sit through a John Wayne?" he asked as he set his briefcase on the dresser.

"Clint Eastwood. Now both of you get over here."

Jonathan leaned over and kissed his cheek. "I love you, Dad," he whispered.

"I love you too." Cabe smiled and waved to Walter. "Get over here, son. I've been shot and I'm mildly buzzed from the painkillers. You're getting kissed whether you like it or not."

Walter bent over and Cabe placed a loud kiss on his cheek. "I love you, son." He was surprised to see Walter's watery eyes.

"I love you too, Dad," he whispered.

"Did you two get any sleep?" asked Kate, rescuing Walter from a painfully EQ moment.

"Yes, actually we did. And Walter sprung for an excellent breakfast from Kovelski's."

Kate stood and kissed Jonathan and then Walter. "Thank you," she whispered, then asked, "Have you talked to team?"

"Yes. they are going to come visit in shifts. Toby and Happy first, then Sylvester. Paige wants to bring Ralph, if that's okay?" said Walter.

"I don't think that should be a problem," said Kate. "All things considered, you look pretty good." She gave him a quick kiss. "Your color is much better."

"I'm surprised to see you sitting up," said Jonathan.

"They mostly likely want to facilitate your breathing and prevent blot clots," said Walter.

"Yeah, they want me to get up and walk around."

"I'll scare you up a decent bathrobe." Kate smiled. "No one but me gets to admire your truly spectacular ass."

Walter blushed and Jonathan cringed and Cabe started laughing.

Walter got to his feet. "On that note, I'm going back to the garage. I will be back later this evening. Coffee from Kovelski's?"

Cabe smiled. "God, yes. I think they nuke the stuff here. And a mushroom burger, extra cheese."

"Just the coffee," said Kate. "You're still on a liquid diet."

"Spoil sport," said Cabe.

Jonathan stood and reached for Walter's hand, then pulled him into a tight bro hug. "Thanks for everything, brother."

Walter smiled as he reached for the door. "Call me if you need anything."

"Will do, son. Thank you Walter," said Cabe as he walked out the door.

"Well, you two seem to be getting on well," said Kate.

"Yeah, he's a good guy. A little odd, but a good guy," he smiled.

"That's Walter in a nutshell," said Cabe. He reached for his son's hand. "How are you doing?"

Jonathan shot a glance at Kate. She shook her head.

"Someone better start talking," ordered Cabe.

"There was an incident yesterday, with my mother."

"What did she do now?"

"She tried to hold her own news conference about the shooting."

"She did what?!" He looked at Kate. "What did you do?"

"Mom was ready to pull her gun," he smiled. "I intervened. I introduced myself to the press as Jonathan Gallo. Then I told them the facts and that she did not speak on behalf of my family. If they had any questions they should direct them to me."

"It was broadcast live, nationally. The assassination attempt is big news." Kate reached for Jonathan's hand. "He was very professional. I was so proud." She gave him

a smile. "He also stopped me from shooting her, so that was good too."

"Oh I bet that went over like a lead balloon." He saw Jonathan pause, trying to collect himself. "What happened, son?" Cabe said in a softer tone.

"She followed me back into the hospital screaming that I'd embarrassed her. No concern for you or me. It was the last straw, Dad. I told her I never wanted to see her again. Then I had a Homeland agent throw her out of the hospital."

"Jonathan, why didn't you say anything," asked Kate.

"You had enough on your mind."

"Sweetheart, you can talk to me about anything, you know that."

"I know, Mom, but honestly I didn't know how I felt about it. Walter helped me figure it out."

"Walter?" they asked in unison.

"Yeah. We had a good conversation."

"I'm really glad, son," said Cabe, knowing Jonathan wasn't ready to tell them any more. "Now are you going to tell me what's with the briefcase? You don't look dressed for court."

Jonathan reached for his briefcase and opened the lid. "You asked about this and I was planning on showing you last night at dinner, but well." He pulled out a large book bound by multiple round rings. It was his sketch book. "I work on it to relax. It's nothing like what you do but, well, you said you wanted to see it."

Cabe smiled as he reached out his hand for the book. Kate moved to Cabe's shoulder so she had a better view. He flipped the book open and gasped. These were not doodles, they were portraits. People on the street, sitting at outdoor cafes, kids in parks.

"Jonathan, these are terrific."

"You're prejudiced." he smiled.

"I'm serious. These are really good. You have a gift."

"They're beautiful, Jonathan. And no, I'm not saying this because I love you."

"Thanks, Mom," he said with a smile. Kate smiled when she saw Jonathan tilt his head down to hide his blush, just like his father.

"Oh, my God," Cabe whispered. It was a portrait of him. He'd never done a self portrait so seeing himself like this was a unique experience. It wasn't a typical portrait. His

hair was mussed, his cheek bruised, there was even a small cut on his lip. And he looked happy. It was the day they'd gotten into the fight at the diner. He looked at his son and smiled. He turned the page and saw a portrait of Kate. He'd captured her beauty, but he'd also captured something Cabe had never done. He'd captured Kate's Mama Bear fierceness. On these pages he saw his son's love for them. He turned to the next page and heard Kate gasp. It was a portrait of both of them, laughing as if they'd told each other the funniest joke. The next page had the two of them sitting on the same deck chair, looking out to the ocean. It was the day they'd waited for him to come back from his walk. Underneath the portrait it read simply, Mom and Dad.

Cabe glanced at Kate and the tears were running down her cheeks. She put her arms around Jonathan and whispered, "I love you."

"Come here," said Cabe as he held his hand out to his son. He pulled him in for a hug and kissed his cheek. His voice cracked. "I am so proud you are my son."

Jonathan looked at them as if he didn't quite understand what they were saying. "I'm glad you like them."

"You really don't understand just how good you are, do you?" asked Kate. "Good Lord, Cabe. He is just like you. I never knew he painted until we moved in together and I found a portrait he'd done of me. Even then he'd rarely show me what he was working on. It was only after Patrick Pennington saw his work and forced him into a showing did he start believing in his talent."

"Jonathan, your work is wonderful. Yes, your work is different than mine, but it is no less important. This is how you see the world. You have a wonderful perspective and I am honored that this is how you see us." Cabe looked down at the picture of them in the chair. "What do you think, Katie? Living room or bedroom?"

"Definitely the living room," she replied.

"What are you talking about?"

"Where we're going to hang this." answered Cabe.

Jonathan looked stunned. "You want to hang up one of my sketches. In the living room Where you have two Monets and a Van Gogh."

"We could move the Van Gogh to the den," Kate said to Cabe.

"Yeah, that'll work."

"I don't get it. You're talking about moving a Van Gogh to hang up one of my doodles."

Cabe closed the book and looked sternly at his son. "First, you will never again refer to your art as doodles. These are beautiful and deserve respect." He reached for Kate's hand and kissed her palm. "Second, I'm going to tell you what Kate told me when she pulled down a Monet to hang the portrait I did of her." He put his hand on the book and smiled. "These mean more."

Jonathan and Kate watched Clint Eastwood growl his way through the rest of the movie while Cabe dozed. "How are you doing, Mom?" he whispered.

"I'm fine, sweetheart," she smiled.

"Walter told me about your PTSD."

She sighed and reached for Jonathan's hand. She thought about Cabe's edict of no hiding from him. That should also include their son. "I won't lie. Yesterday was really tough for me. That's why I'm so grateful you and the team were there. I knew I had support. It made it a little easier to fight my way out of the fog."

"I'm so sorry you're going through this."

"I won't tell you not to worry. You're too much like your father for me to believe that would be possible. I will tell you I've put in the work with Toby. He's been treating me since last year."

"Since the UN?"

She smiled, "He told you about that?"

"He told me you saved all the hostages, including Dad."

"I've hit a few rough patches since then but I've worked to control it. I can also tell when I need help and I ask for it. Toby calls it my excellent sense of self-preservation."

"Mom, I hope you know how much I love you and that I'll always be here for you. You can count on me."

Kate's eyes welled. Her emotions felt too intense to give them words. She would always remember this as the moment she became, in her heart, Jonathan's only mother. She reached over and kissed her son's cheek and whispered. "I know."

"Hey can I get some of that?" said a groggy Cabe.

"I'm sorry sweetheart. Did we wake you?"

"No, my stomach woke me. I'm starving. When is the doctor coming so I can get off this damn liquid diet?"

Kate looked at Jonathan and laughed. "Yeah, he's fine."

"I'm also still waiting for my kiss, woman."

She smiled. "He's so pushy." She bent over and gave him a kiss. She tried to pull away but he cupped her cheek and pulled her close.

"You can do better than that, witch." He gave her a kiss deep enough and long enough to make Jonathan fake a coughing fit.

Kate laughed and whispered in his ear. "Later, boyo. Your patience will be amply rewarded."

"Why do you call her witch?"

Cabe pulled her hand to his lips and gave it a kiss. "Because from the first moment I met her I was under her spell."

"Horny teenagers," he laughed. Jonathan's discomfort was interrupted when his phone dinged indicating he had a text. "Yes!" he declared.

"What is it?" asked Kate.

"Okay, I need you to sit, Mom. I want to talk to you both about something."

"Am I going to hate this? I am, aren't I?"

"I hope not, Mom. You know I love staying with you and I hope I'll always have a room at your house."

"But?" asked Cabe.

"I'm starting to move forward with my life. I've opened my office, new clients. It's time I have my own place."

"What about your apartment?"

"It never felt like home. It was convenient, that's all. I've put a bid in on a house. The text said it was accepted."

Kate forced a smile on her face. "That's wonderful. I'm very happy for you."

Jonathan laughed. "No your not."

"No I'm not. I'm supposed to have at least eighteen years to get used to my child moving out. Not a few months."

"That would make me forty eight."

"I'm okay with that."

Jonathan pulled her into a tight hug and kissed the top of her head. "I love you too, Mom."

"So what's the house like?" asked Cabe.

"It's really nice, not as big as yours of course but it's got a great pool and the ocean."

"Where is it?" asked Kate.

"2021 Oceanside Drive."

Kate broke into a huge smile. "That's..."

"About a half mile up the beach." He looked at his parents and smiled. "It took me thirty years to find you two. I didn't want to go too far now." Kate squealed and launched herself back into her son's arms.

"Son, the neighborhood is pricey. You said your practice might not earn that much. The mortgage alone could be daunting," said Cabe.

"Don't worry, Dad. I made a cash offer."

"Excuse me?"

"I told you grandmother made me her primary beneficiary. She came from old money, and that money came from even older money. She left me around fifty million."

Cabe let out a long whistle. "No wonder Kathleen's so pissed." He saw Jonathan's face darken at the mention of her name. "Do you have a deck?"

"Yes I do. Big enough for everyone."

Cabe smiled. He knew he meant the whole team. "Good. Then as soon as I get out of here I expect a proper party. Hamburgers on the grill."

"I'll make a cake," said Kate. "It will be fun." She brushed her fingers over his hair. "Jonathan, I know you don't want to talk about her, but I have to ask. You are so much like your father, mannerisms, attitudes," she smiled at Cabe. "Talent. How are you nothing like her? I see nothing of her in you. How is that possible?"

Jonathan sighed. "There's a lot more of her in me, than I'd like. I get incredibly impatient when things don't go my way. I've been fined more than once for arguing with a judge's ruling. I think a lot of who I am came out of my teenage rebellion. I was so

determined not to be like them I went in the complete opposite direction. Despite having every advantage, everything that should have made them happy, they were miserable. I didn't want that for my life. I almost didn't go into law because she's a lawyer."

"But you love the law," said Cabe.

"Yeah, I do. I don't have any illusions that it's not a flawed system. When I'm able to defend the rights of someone, help see to it the system works the way it should, it feels so damn good."

"Kate, help me get this bar down." Cabe and Kate pushed down the safety rail on his bed. He swung his legs around and sat up for a moment until his head cleared. He pushed himself to his feet and walked to the end of his IV tether. "Jonathan, I know I've said this to you before but I want you to understand how much I mean this. I am so proud of the man you are and I love you very much." He extended his arms and Jonathan gave him a careful hug.

"Thanks, Dad. I love you, too," he said through a choked voice.

"I'm glad to see you're on your feet," Dr. Hawkins said as she walked through the door "How are you feeling?"

"Pretty good, all things considered. I'd be better if I could get some real food."

"You want to have a seat while I check out my handiwork?" She helped him sit back down on the bed. She looked back to Kate and Jonathan. "I need to remove his dressing so you might want to wait in the hall.

Kate shook her head. "I'll stay."

"Me too."

Dr. Hawkins slipped Cabe's hospital gown off his shoulder revealing the massive baggage. She peeled it back showing the yellow staining from the betadine. She pulled it further and revealed her incision. When Kate gasped Jonathan reached for her hand. The bullet had gone through Cabe's chest at the center of his Irish heart tattoo. Dr. Hawkins examined her work and smiled. "It looks good. No sign of infection. Healing as I would expect it to be at this point, maybe even a little better." Dr. Hawkins looked at him and smiled. "Your being so fit is going to be beneficial in your recovery. I want you to get up and start walking. Today, just around the floor. Tomorrow, try for a longer walk."

"Tomorrow? When Kate got shot she got out the next day."

Dr. Hawkins looked at Kate and smiled. "Is he always this whiny when he's injured?"

Kate rolled her eyes. "God, yes."

"I don't envy you the next few weeks." She turned her attention back to Cabe. "The bullet I took out of your wife was a much smaller caliber. The one I pulled out of you was a big mother that shattered on impact with your rib. That's why the surgery took so long. I was pulling pieces of bullet out of you for hours. The fact that you are sitting upright and talking to me today is a testament to my skill and the man upstairs." She glanced at Kate and Cabe. "So suck it up buttercup and count your blessings, Marine. If you behave yourself I'll let your son get you a milkshake."

Cabe smiled. "Yes, doctor."

"I'll send a nurse in for a fresh dressing. Call if you need anything but otherwise, I'll see you tomorrow."

Kate and Cabe thanked Dr. Hawkins. Jonathan smiled. "Do you call all your patient's buttercup?"

"Just the Marines. I saw his tattoo. My dad was a Marine. Tough as nails and stubborn as a mule. You can get him that milkshake if he behaves himself. Nothing too heavy."

Jonathan extended his hand to her. "Thank you, Stacey. My family and I are very grateful."

"You're welcome, Mr. Gallo."

"Jonathan, please."

"Jonathan," she said as her breath hitched. "I'll see everyone tomorrow," she said as she beat a hasty retreat.

He turned to see his parents smiling. "What?"

"You might want to dial down the Gallo Grin a bit," said Kate.

"What are you talking about?"

"The Gallo Grin is a lethal weapon. No woman can resist it." Kate looked at Cabe and smiled. "Trust me. I know."

"I was just being nice."

"She was melting, son," said Cabe. "She ran out of here like she was on fire."

He looked the closed door and back at his parents. "Really?"

Kate nodded. "Really."

"Huh. Maybe I should find out if she's single. She's cute."

Cabe laughed until he noticed Kate staring at his wound, her eyes tearing. "What's the matter, Katie. You heard her. I'm going to be fine."

She held her hand just above the Irish heart tattoo. "It went right through the center. It's ruined."

He glanced down to see the stitches that were holding his chest together. Scars would cross right through the heart. "It's not ruined, Katie girl. It just proves how strong it is."

Jonathan backed out of the room to give his parents some privacy. And just maybe he'd ask around about that cute surgeon.

Jonathan went to the cafeteria and ordered two chocolate milkshakes. He'd had a big breakfast but he doubted Mom had eaten. It looked like the girl was making it with real ice cream, not pumping it out of a machine. He thanked the girl and grabbed a couple of straws. He looked up and saw Stacey having a late breakfast.

"Hi Stacey."

"Hi Jonathan. Shakes for your parents?"

"Yeah, " he smiled. He nodded to the empty bench across from her. "May I?"

"Of course."

"Thank you," He smiled as he sat down. "I wanted to thank you for helping my parents the way you have."

"They're good people, your parents. They've done a lot of good, especially at the center." She looked at him like he was someone she was trying to diagnose. "Can I ask you something?"

"Sure."

"I haven't seen you here before. Not when they were hurt before, not at the center. Why now?"

Jonathan smiled. "I didn't meet my father until a few months ago."

"Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to pry."

"It's fine," he smiled. "My mother would never tell me who he was. I was kidnapped and they rescued me. It was only then I found out who he was."

"Holy crap, kidnapped? Are you ok?" she said.

"Yeah, I'm fine now."

"You call Mrs. Gallo, Mom."

Jonathan rolled the straws in his hand. "In the few months I've been with them, they have both become my parents."

"What does your mother think about this?"

"Did you see the press conference after my dad was shot?"

"Yeah. It was on every channel."

He couldn't bring himself to say her name. "I only recently took my father's name. My full name is Jonathan Ellsworth Gallo."

"Oh, so that woman. I see."

Jonathan set down the straws and smiled. "I didn't mean to bore you with my life story. What I wanted to know is, are you single and if so would you like to get a coffee sometime?"

Stacee smiled, "Yes I am but you do realize I'm at least seven or eight years older than you are."

"I'm thirty."

"Make that ten years," she sighed. "My schedule doesn't leave much time for...coffee."

"Mine is usually pretty crazy and right now I'm opening a new practice but I'd still like to get a coffee."

"Practice? Doctor?"

"Lawyer." Jonathan smiled and reached into his pocket for a his business card. He reach toward her and snatched the pen attached to the pocket of her white coat. He flipped it over and wrote his cell number on the back. "Stacee, here's my number. If you find yourself with some free time and you feel like a coffee, or a movie, give me a call." He slid the card and the pen back in her pocket and smiled.

"Jonathan, one last question." She held up his card. "Is this because I've helped

your parents?"

"Stacee, you've saved my parents, but no it's not. I just think you're cute."

Stacee laughed and shook her head. "Well then, just maybe the next time I'm in the mood for a latte I'll give you a call."

"Great." He held up the milkshakes. "I better get these upstairs. My father gets really grumpy when he's hungry. I'll see you soon."

Stacee watched as the incredibly adorable Jonathan Gallo walked out of the cafeteria and giving her a very nice view in the process. She shook her head and smiled. What the hell just happened? She took another sip of her coffee and noticed a group of ER nurses smiling and looking over at her from their booth. No matter whether she ever went out with the handsome young man or not, she had the feeling her street cred with the staff had just skyrocketed.

Cabe was losing his mind in this hospital. Walking up and down hallways was the only activity he was allowed. If he didn't get out soon the intensity of his growling would start scaring the villagers. The kids had been great in looking after Kate. She'd gone home after the second day, swearing she was fine. He wanted to be home with her where he could be sure.

The door opened and Jonathan came in looking very dapper in a tailor made suit and a big smile. "Hey Dad. How are you doing?"

"I'm good. Were you in court?"

"Yeah."

"From your smile I assume you won the case."

"Yes, I did. First one for my new practice."

Cabe extended his hand. "Congratulations, son."

"Thanks, Dad. So, any word on when you're getting out of here?"

"Not yet and I'm getting pretty frustrated. I'll be much more comfortable at home."

"Have you done your walk yet?"

"No, I was waiting for you." Cabe sat up and stood up with what Kate was calling the Gallo Growl. He was in much less pain than in first few days, but it was still a bitch. "I was wondering if you'd like to walk with me down to the center. I could show you what we're doing there."

"Yeah, I'd like that, if you're up for it."

Cabe grabbed his bathrobe from the foot of the bed and slipped it on. "Let's move out, Marine."

Jonathan didn't know what he'd expected, but this wasn't it. They stood in the entrance to the playroom noisy with half a dozen kids coloring and playing with toys. One young man was building a rather impressive Lego tower. It looked like a perfectly normal scene, except the cute blonde girl coloring was also wearing a surgical mask. Two children playing a board game in the corner were so pale he thought they must not have seen the sun in months. The young engineer was bald.

"Dad, how do you do it?"

"Do what?"

"Come down here. It must be so painful because of Amanda."

"It was at first but then I got to see the kids who got better. They're doing some cutting edge work here." His voice cracked. "It's hard when a child you've gotten to know doesn't make it. But there's nothing better than seeing a child go home."

Jonathan rubbed his hand on his father's back, overwhelmed by what his father had to endure.

"Come with me." Cabe led him down the hallway to the main entrance of the center. There on the wall was a large plaque naming The Amanda Gallo Pediatric Center. Under the letters was a picture of a pretty little blonde girl, his sister.

He watched his father kiss his fingertips and place them on the picture. "Hello, sweetheart."

He'd never pressed his father for details, not wanting to make him relive such pain. Mom had told him what she knew. His grief had cost him his first marriage and he lost himself in the work. He thought about what he could do to make this moment better for his father. He kissed his own fingers and placed them on the picture. "Hello Amanda. I'm your brother, Jonathan. I'm going to help Dad watch over this place for you."

Cabe smiled and put his arm around his shoulder. Unlike his mother, Jonathan's natural tendency was kindness. It amazed him that this fine man was his son. "Thank you," he whispered.

"Hi, Mr. Gallo," said a young nurse. Both men turned around. She stopped in her tracks, looking back and forth between the two. "Holy Crap."

Cabe and Jonathan both laughed out loud.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Gallo. I didn't mean it."

"It's okay, Elaine. We get it all the time. This is my son, Jonathan. Elaine and her husband both work in the center."

"It's very nice to meet you, Elaine," said Jonathan as he extended his hand.

"It's nice to meet you too, Mr. Gallo."

He flashed the nurse a smile. "Jonathan, please."

"I should get moving. Please let me know if there's anything you need." She looked

up at Cabe and smiled. "You're parents are really good people, Jonathan."

Jonathan smiled. "I think so too."

Cabe turned back to Amanda's picture mounted on a large gray wall. "You know I've been thinking of doing a mural for this wall. What do you think?"

"Yeah, it is kind of flat. Everything else is pretty colorful."

"What do you think about working on it with me?"

"What?"

"I'll do it out the house. I don't want it directly on the wall. I don't want something that would eventually get painted over."

"You want me to work on it? I've never done anything like that. I've only done stuff in my sketchbooks."

"Why?"

"What?"

Why did you confine yourself to a sketchbook?" He saw the look on Jonathan's face and knew the answer. "Kathleen." He shook his head. "Bitch," he muttered.

"And my grandparents. They said I needed to spend more time on my books and less time doodling."

"Alright. forget everything they said. You're good. Really good. I'd like to work on the project together. Since we'll work at it in my studio, there's no time frame. Please think about it."

He nodded, "Okay, Dad. I'll think about it." Jonathan's phone beeped. He glanced down and smiled. The text read, "Heard you're in the hospital. In the mood for a latte?"

"What's up?"

"It's Stacee. She wants to have coffee."

"Stacee as in my surgeon, Stacee?"

"Dad, it's just coffee. I won't be long and I'll see if I can get to authorize you a mushroom burger."

"Don't forget the extra cheese."

Jonathan spotted Stacee sitting at a booth. "Hi. I'm so glad you called. How did you know I was here?"

"Every female in the hospital goes on high alert when you're here."

He laughed. "Unlikely."

"Oh, please. You have a mirror. You're just as charming as your father but he doesn't see any other woman but your Mom."

Jonathan smiled. "He really is crazy about her."

"It looks mutual."

"Yeah, it is."

They talked for a few minutes about his father's recovery and he managed to get clearance for that mushroom cheeseburger. It was then he saw Stacee glance up at a doctor standing in the cafeteria line. He looked to be in his early forties with sandy brown hair and a goatee. He knew the signs. "What's his name?"

"What?" she snapped her attention back to Jonathan. "Who?"

"The doctor you're staring at."

"I am not staring."

He smiled. "Yes you are and he's looked over here at least three times since he walked in."

"Really?" she asked.

"Really. Now who is he?"

"Derek Brown. He's an orthopedic surgeon."

"And you like him."

"Jonathan, you make it sound like I'm twelve. I'm forty."

"And you like him." Her blush answered his question. He looked over at the reluctant Romeo and waved him over.

"What are you doing?" she gasped.

"Stacee, I like you but I can see when I don't stand a chance."

"I don't know what to say."

"It's okay." He smiled and reached for her hand. "I always have room for one more friend." He stood just as Derek got to their table.

"Hello Stacee."

"Hi Derek."

Jonathan extended hand. "Derek Brown, right? Orthopedics?"

"Yes."

"Jonathan Gallo. My parents do a lot of work with the hospital."

"Gallo?" he said.

"Yes. Stacee, I'm sorry I have to run but it was good catching up with you." He leaned in toward Derek and whispered, "If you don't take my seat right now, you're gonna hate yourself later." Jonathan smiled as he got in line and ordered a mushroom cheeseburger and fries.

Jonathan's new home was beautiful and much to his parent's delight, a short walk down the beach from their home. His father had made the trip for coffee every morning since he'd been released from the hospital. Mom, on the other hand, thought any activity before seven a.m. was uncivilized. Sharing a cup of early morning coffee with his father on the deck had become one of his favorite things.

The house was not as big, only three bedroom and two baths but it felt warm and inviting. Unlike his apartment, he decorated his house himself with tropical greens and blues. Most importantly it had a deck around the pool, big enough for family parties. He had everything set for the family. Deck chairs, soda's in coolers and enough burgers to satisfy Toby's bottomless pit. He hadn't fired up the grill yet since Dad said that was his job.

Jonathan looked out over the ocean was thought about how different his life was now. He was more content with his life than he'd ever been, but he still hanging over him was the last shadow. Kathleen. He didn't think of her as Mother anymore. Maybe he never had. He'd never known what the word meant until he'd met Kate.

He looked down to the beach and spotted his parents walking up toward his home. They walked up the few steps to his home, Dad still moving a bit slower that before the shooting.

"Hi, sweetheart," said Kate as she gave him a kiss.

"Hi, Mom," he said. He took a container from her hands. "You made me a cake!"

"Special occasions demand a cake."

"Hey Dad, how are you doing?" he asked as they walked into the house.

"Good." Cabe held up a leather portfolio. "Brought you a housewarming present."

Jonathan smiled as he opened the portfolio. It was another one of his father's paintings. It depicted people around a dining room table relaxed and happy. It was a portrait of the three of them together. He smiled and hugged Cabe. "Thanks Dad," he whispered.

"Okay, let's get this party started," said Kate. "The kids will be here soon."

The party was a typical Gallo gathering, boisterous and fun. Following the theme

present protocol, all the housewarming gifts were pool and beach related. Pool toys, a volleyball set and grill accessories. Toby had demanded a rematch from Jonathan for their foot race. Cabe and Kate watched from the deck as Toby got his ass kicked again while the rest of the team cheered them on.

"They really have become a family," said Kate.

"Yeah, they have," said Cabe. "I've been thinking a lot about what you said in the hospital."

"What?"

"How long can our luck hold out?"

"I didn't think you heard me. I'm sorry, Cabe. I didn't mean it, I was upset."

He put his arm around her shoulder as they watched Jonathan and Sly play keep away with Toby's hat. "I've been thinking about it too. I thought it might be time to retire." He turned and looked at her. "I really gave it some thought. I did." He looked into her eyes and smiled. "I can't." He looked back out at the beach. Toby had retrieved his hat and was now chasing Happy down the sand. "Look at them. I can't walk away from them. I have to stay." He looked at Kate and saw tears in her eyes. "I'm sorry, sweetheart."

"I know you can't leave them. Neither can I. I tried to retire." She gave a small laugh. "It didn't take. I can't leave them to someone else anymore than you can."

Cabe gave her a kiss. "It's not what we do, it's who we are."

"Yes, it is."

"I love you, Katie girl."

"I know boyo, I know."