

Scorpion 2.0 : The Return

By Kate Simon

Paige Dineen threw her keys on the sideboard and flipped through the mail. “Ralph, I’m home.” She listened for her son’s reply. Nothing. She walked down the hall to his room and opened the door. He was on his computer and his headphones were firmly in place. She walked over and tapped his shoulder.

“What?” he snapped.

“Watch your tone, Mister.”

“Sorry.”

“I wanted to let you know I’m home.”

“Oh, okay,” he said and turned back to the screen. Paige couldn’t get into it again tonight, it had been too rough a day. Ralph had been surly ever since her breakup with Walter. Ralph and Walter were very close and she was trying to be understanding but an angry, genius son combined with teenage hormones would try anyone’s patience.

Today had been too long to deal with him now. She went out to the kitchen and began starting dinner. Toby and Happy were fighting again and Sylvester had backslid to where he was four years ago. All his phobias and insecurities had come to the forefront. He no longer had the same trust he’d developed. She didn’t blame him. Walter had saved his life and now he felt betrayed. She closed her eyes and let the tears fall. She knew how much of this was her fault but she didn’t know how to fix it.

Her phone rang and she glanced down to see a picture of Allie, Cabe’s girlfriend. She thought for a moment about not picking up but Allie wasn’t the one who broke her heart.

“Hi, Allie. How are you?”

“Paige?”

She heard a hitch in her voice. “Allie, what’s wrong?”

“It’s Cabe. You need to come. Bring the others. Please hurry.”

Walter O'Brien tried to focus on his latest job proposal. Scorpion 2.0 was low on funds and he needed to get this job. If Paige and the others hadn't been so unreasonable this wouldn't be a problem. Paige's Centipede company had beaten him out of three of the last four jobs he'd gone up for. Government work had dried up and he was close to desperate, although he would never admit it.

He had Florence working in her own office on her part of the proposal. He kept her at arms length, not wanting to encourage her crush on him. Florence was bright and attractive but he couldn't bring himself to think of her in any other light but professional. He'd allowed himself to fall in love with Paige and look how that turned out. He would not allow such irrational behavior to side track him again.

With the government work drying up, he saw Cabe Gallo less and less. Homeland Security had him working with other contractors. They still got together once a week for dinner but it was getting more like a obligation than what it used to be, family dinner.

His phone rang and he thought about letting it go to voice mail. He saw it was Allie. She wouldn't call unless it was important.

"Hello Allie. What can I do for you?"

"Walter, it's Cabe. I need you to come. Bring Florence. Please hurry."

"Where? Are you at the hospital?"

"No, Cabe's place."

Allie let Paige and Ralph in the apartment. "Everyone's in the bedroom," She led them into Cabe's bedroom. She looked at Cabe tucked under the covers. She hadn't seen him in a few months but he didn't look like himself. He was deathly pale. He reminded Paige of that time in the desert when he got hurt and they needed a miracle to save him. Paige looked around the room and saw Allie had assembled the whole team. This must be bad.

"Allie, what's wrong with him?"

Cabe's eyes fluttered open. "Paige, is that you?"

"Yes Cabe, I'm here. We all are."

"All of you?"

"Yes," replied Walter. "We came as soon as Allie called."

"Good!" Cabe popped up in bed and stood. He was dressed in jeans and a white undershirt.

"Cabe! What the hell?!" shouted Paige. "You scared the crap out of us. This is cruel to us, let alone Ralph." Ralph snickered as Cabe reached for a tissue and began wiping off a layer of pale makeup.

"Thanks for the idea about the makeup, kid."

"I thought that really sold it," Ralph smiled.

"You knew about this?" Paige asked.

"You don't think I pull something like this without warning the kid, do you?"

"And what you did to us doesn't matter?" demanded Happy.

Cabe threw down the tissue and turned to face them. "At this point, no it doesn't."

Paige turned on Allie. "How could you be a part of this? You sounded heartbroken."

Allie grinned. "I thought I played my part very well."

Cabe walked over and gave her a kiss. “You were brilliant, sweetheart. Why don’t you take Ralph into the kitchen for some ice cream while I talk to these knuckleheads.”

“I’m outta here,” said Toby as he and everyone else headed for the door.

“Stay right where you are!” Cabe bellowed. Everyone froze. Allie took Ralph out of the room and Cabe closed the door behind them. “I know this was a lousy trick but I knew it was the only way to get you all in the same room.”

“There is no point to this and I have work to do,” said Walter. He reached for the door and Cabe grabbed his hand.

“Don’t even think about it. Now, I’m going to talk and you’re going to listen. I’ve had it with what is going on with this family. This is not how a family behaves. I thought I’d give you time to sort this out but obviously you’re all too pigheaded to take the first step. So I’ll do it.”

“Walter, you felt guilty for taking Florence to the lecture. You thought by not telling Paige you were protecting her but the truth was you were protecting yourself. You were shocked by her response. You still can’t believe anyone could possibly disagree with your logic. Well, guess what Einstein? We do. And that foolishness blew apart this team.”

“It was Paige who...”

“Did I say speak?” He looked at Paige. “Now you, young lady, you knew what you were getting into with Walter. If you had a problem with the relationship you should have talked to him about it. That’s your specialty. Instead you blew up at him in front of everyone and humiliated him. You destroyed your relationship and Scorpion in one felled swoop.” Paige wisely did not respond. She’d never seen Cabe on a tear like this. “Happy and Toby, you two took the path of least resistance. Instead of staying and helping keep the family together, you bailed. Sly, you know Walter did nothing to encourage Florence. He treated her like any other member of the team. You, however, did nothing to show Florence your true intentions. It was easier to blame Walter for your failings. And Florence, you don’t really have romantic feelings for Walter. If you did you would have pursued them but instead you’ve been strictly professional, whenever we see you. Most of the time you

hide out in your lab. You were accepted into the group by Walter and for the first time you had friends that liked you and understood you. I understand how you could get emotionally confused. You have no point of reference. Neither did any of them when they first got together.”

“That’s actually a very astute observation,” said Toby. Cabe shot him a Gallo glare and he retreated behind Happy.

“You people are my family. I love all of you.”

“Even me?” Florence asked quietly.

Cabe gave her a small smile. “Even you, short stuff. I can’t stand to see us broken apart. Whether you can get over this is up to all of you but for now I need you to put it all aside.” He sat down on the edge of the bed. “I need your help.”

Cabe looked at his kids. It was the first time they'd been together in four months. He felt only slightly guilty for the way he got them together but desperate times.

"If you needed my help you could have just called," said Walter. "Instead you scared all of us."

"You're right. I did. If you're waiting for an apology it's not happening." He pulled out a file and started throwing pictures on his bed. The first was a man about Cabe's age with steel gray hair and a stern look. "This is Jake Martin. He and I trained together at Pendleton before we moved on to our assignments." We both left service as Majors. He threw another picture of a man with dark grey hair and brown eyes. He had a rugged face that looked like he'd lived a rough life. "This is Master Sergeant Chester Thornton" He looked at the picture with a sad smile. "Thorny taught us every thing we needed to know about being Marines we didn't learn in school."

"Thorny?" said Happy

"It's what we called him when he wasn't listening. We learned about honor and duty from him. He was the best man either of us ever knew. For him there was nothing more important than God and country."

"Sounds like a good man," said Paige.

"He is."

"What's the problem?"

"He was arrested."

"For what?"

"Harboring an enemy combatant."

"What? That doesn't sound like who you're describing."

"It's not. Jake came to me for help. We have to help Thorny before the trial. If he's convicted he'll lose everything. Thirty years of service to the country will be wiped out. He goes to jail and loses his pension which would devastate him and his wife, not just financially. Thorny and Nancy adore each other. We didn't dare tease him about it when

we were in training but we would see them together off base. They were always smiling. It was so great to see because he never smiled during training.”

“I don’t mean to cast aspersions but you haven’t seen him in, what, twenty years? How do you know he hasn’t changed?” asked Sly.

“No. Not Master Sergeant Thornton. He would never betray his country or his ethics. It’s simply not possible.”

“What do you need from us?” asked Toby.

“Jake came to me for help. “All we know are the charges. They won’t tell us the details. Even with my connections at Homeland, I can’t get anything. I can’t even get in to see him.”

“So you want us to do...”

“Whatever you have to get the answers.” Cabe stood and grabbed a black t-shirt and pulled it on. “I’m going to go visit with the kid. You all talk about your first steps to figure this out.” He opened the door and turned to face the team. “I’m counting on you, all of you. Please don’t let me down.” He closed the door and allowed himself a smile. He needed help and he needed his family. If that didn’t do it, nothing would.

They stood in silence for a few moments, staring at each other. “I resent the way he’s deceived us,” said Walter.

“Just for once, shut up Walter,” said Happy. Everyone was stunned. Happy never talked to him like that.

“Just because we used to be married...” Walter started.

Happy put up a hand, immediately silencing him. “Don’t start with me, O’Brien.” She looked the rest of the group. “The first thing we have to figure out is why Cabe can’t get access. With his clearance level, he should be able to get a meeting with the president if he wanted.”

“She’s right,” said Sly. “Someone has stopped Cabe specifically from getting access to his friend. We need to find out who.”

“I can determine that. I don’t need all of you to do that. You certainly decided you didn’t need me,” said Walter.

“Oh for Christ’s sake stop acting like a child!” Everyone turned to see Florence with her arms crossed. She walked over to Walter and poked him in the chest. “Here’s a news flash, Walter. The world does not revolve around you. This is our friend. He’s saved this team more times than you can count. He helped save the world from nuclear attacks, twice! You owe him. Hell, the world owes him. If you can’t put your petty differences aside long enough to see that, well, then you’re not the people I thought you were.”

“She’s right,” said Toby.

“Damn straight,” she muttered as she walked back to her spot against the wall.

“Okay, first step is?” asked Paige.

“We go to the garage and start looking for the person who’s blocking Cabe and why. That might give us an idea of what we’re dealing with,” said Sly.

“Are we ready to tell Cabe we’re going to work?” Everyone acknowledged her except Walter. She turned on him. “You listen to me, Walter. Florence is right. We owe Cabe. We owe him everything. So you’re going to leave your emotional baggage at the

door and we are going to do this for him. After this is done, you can have what ever childish snit you want.”

“Fine,” he muttered.

They opened the bedroom and saw Cabe and Allie eating ice cream with Ralph. Paige saw the expectation in Cabe’s eyes. “We’re going to the garage to get started.”

Cabe stood and gave them a smile. “Thank you.”

Cabe walked into the garage for the first time in months with everyone sitting at their desks. He felt like he could finally breath. "Have you found anything yet?"

"Nothing that isn't readily available on your friend," said Sly. "Chester Thornton and his wife, Nancy retired to Oceanside after thirty years in the Marines. Nancy Thornton does volunteer work at the local hospital and Chester works almost every day at St. Mark's Episcopal Church. He teaches Sunday school and he works with a growing immigrant population to help them adjust to life in America." Sly turned to Cabe. "On paper he is everything you said he is."

"He is in real life, too."

Everyone turned toward the voice they didn't recognize. Cabe smiled and pulled the man into a tight hug. "Jake, good to see you."

"I thought you said the team had broken up?"

"They came back together for this."

He drilled them all with a look with his clear blue eyes. "Thorny was, is, a good man. We need you to prove it," said Jake.

"We'll do what we can," said Walter. "The first thing we need to find out is who is stopping you from getting more information. Cabe's clearance should allow him access to the details of Mr. Thornton's charges. "We can't ask Carson."

"Carson?" asked Jake.

"Homeland director and liaison to Scorpion."

"Why can't we ask him?"

"He kind of hates me," said Cabe.

"There's no kind of about it," said Happy.

Toby stood up from his monitor. "Yeah, he does. He's hated you and by association us from the moment he met us. That's not rational. You're a bit rigid but nothing that should logically create that kind of response."

“So, who do we talk to?” asked Cabe.

Paige smiled. “Cooper.”

Walter pulled the van up to the local coffee shop and Toby slid open the van door. Katherine Cooper jumped into the van and slid the door closed. “Drive,” she said as she took up a seat. “I can’t be seen with any of you.”

“Nice,” said Happy.

“I assume you’re Jake Martin,” said Cooper.

Jake smiled and extended his hand. “and you are?”

She returned the handshake. “Katherine Cooper, Assistant Homeland Director, but I will be unemployed if Carson finds out about this.”

“Why, Katherine? asked Cabe. “Why does Carson hate me so much? I’ve never done anything to him but he’s out to get me and my team.”

“You really don’t know, do you?”

“No. I’m trying to find out what’s happened to a friend of ours but I’ve been stopped at every turn.”

“Chester Thornton.”

“Yes! What do you know?” asked Cabe.

“I know that Carson hates you and your team and will do anything to see you taken down.”

“Why?”

“Merrick.”

“What? What about Merrick? He was a traitor to his country.”

“Merrick was Carson’s mentor and you killed him.”

“Ahh...he was trying to kill us,” said Happy.

“He doesn’t believe the reports. He believes you backstopped the reports to cover killing Merrick.”

“That’s insane,” said Walter as he pulled into a parking lot. “We were able to show the financial payments from Chinese operatives to Merrick for years. Homeland accepted the reports and cleared Cabe.”

“Homeland accepted it, Carson didn’t.”

“What do we do now?” asked Paige.

Katherine reached into her pocket and pulled out a flash drive. “This is what.” She handed the drive to Cabe. “This is everything Homeland has on your buddy Thornton and I’ve got to say, it’s not much.”

“Katherine, if Homeland finds out what you’ve done, that’s the end of your career.”

She smiled at him. “Carson thinks I’m an idiot. He calls me the politically correct desk. He dumps all the most mundane tasks on my team. Cabe, you and your team have saved our collective asses more than once. We owe you. I owe you.” She smiled at the team. “But don’t screw up and get me fired.”

Cabe reached over and gave Katherine a hug. “Thank you so much.”

Jake smiled and extended his arms. “How about me?”

Katherine gave him a sly smile. “Don’t get me fired and we’ll talk.” She opened the side door and got out.

“Don’t you want to us to take you back to your car?”

“No. I walked to the coffee shop and I’ll take a cab.”

“Thank you, Katherine,” said Cabe.

“Don’t disappoint me,” she replied.

“We’ll do our best.”

Cabe poured Jake a cup of coffee. “Do you think they can figure this out?” Cabe pushed the sugar toward him.

“Jake, this team has saved the world.”

Jake laughed and took a sip. Then he noticed Cabe wasn’t smiling. “You’re not kidding.”

“I can’t tell you about it but, no I’m not kidding. These guys can do anything.”

“So why did they break up?”

“Walter is one of the smartest men on the planet but he’s got the emotional maturity of a teenager. He and Paige...”

Jake nodded. “I got it. Boom.”

“Yeah. I knew it was going to happen and I warned him but couldn’t stop it.”

He laughed and put his arm around Cabe’s shoulder. “Just like every parent in the history of the world.”

Cabe chuckled. “Pretty much.”

“Hey, can I get in on this?” Allie walked through the door with Ralph.

Cabe gave her a quick kiss. “Hi sweetheart. What’s up?”

“I got called into work so I have to drop off Ralph. The Chem department’s new head can’t get into his system so I have to show him what I showed him yesterday and the day before.”

“Have fun.”

“Jake, will we see you for dinner tonight?” asked Allie.

“Ahh...”

“Sure, we’ll review whatever they came up with.”

“And I make a killer lasagna.”

“Sounds great.”

“Okay, see you tonight.” She gave Cabe a quick kiss and walked out the door. Cabe smiled as he watched her go.

“She’s sure is something,” said Jake. He slapped Cabe on the back. “Boy, you have it bad.”

“That I do brother, that I do.”

They looked back at the group working and Ralph was looking over Walter’s shoulder. “Who’s the kid or are you not telling me something?”

“Ralph is Paige’s son.”

“Are they letting a kid look at this stuff?”

Cabe smiled. “Ralph is helping.”

“But you said Walter was one of the smartest people on the planet.”

“He is. Ralph is smarter.”

“Damn,” he whispered. Walter stood as Ralph sat and hit a few keystrokes. Walter smiled and ruffled Ralph’s hair.

“Looks like they found something.” They walked toward the group. “What have you got?”

“Your friend Thornton has been arrested for hiding Farad Hasan and his family. They intend to hold him until they he reveals their whereabouts.”

“Farad? An enemy combatant? That’s insane!” said Jake.

“Farad was our translator in Iran. He did it at great risk to his own life. We eventually got him to the states. He was given a permanent visa in recognition of his service to the country,” said Cabe.

Walter continued. "Hasan came here in 1988 and married Azar Nazari ten years ago. They have a eight year old daughter," Walter paused and looked at Cabe. Their daughter's name is Amanda."

"I didn't know," Cabe whispered.

Jake put a hand on his friend's back. "Farad had great respect for you."

Cabe straightened his shoulders. "Why in God's name do they think Farad is an enemy combatant?"

"They don't. It's his wife. Her second cousin, Reza Nazari is a person of interest in a bombing of a café inside the green zone in Bagdad."

"A second cousin? Isn't that a stretch?" asked Paige.

"In this case, yes. "Azar is forty years old. She's been in this country since she was eighteen. According to records Reza Nazari is at most twenty five."

"That means if she knows him at all she hasn't seen him since he was..." Jake started.

"Three years old," said Ralph.

"Isn't that reaching?" asked Sly.

Toby looked up from his monitor. "Fifteen people died in that bombing including five Americans. Someone's got to answer for that."

"Agreed," said Cabe "but how do they get to a housewife in LA?"

Walter shook his head. "Carson hasn't had a win in awhile. He needs this."

"How did your friend get caught up in this?" asked Happy.

"From what I can see in the files Farad helps as a translator at St. Mark's. That's where Mr. Thornton helps new immigrants. From what I can make out they can't find the Hasan's so they picked up Mr. Thornton assuming he would know."

"Why would he know?"

“Because Mr. Thornton took five thousand dollars from his account the day before the Hasan’s disappeared.”

“Oh damn,” said Jake. “We need to talk to him but we can’t find out where he’s being held.”

Ralph spun around in his chair smiled. “I did.”

Jake looked at Cabe. “Can he do that?”

Cabe smiled. “The kid hacked a Japanese surface to air missile when he was nine, so I’m guessing yes.”

“He did what?”

“He saved the lives of two American helicopter pilots who were under attack and helped take down a major international arms dealer.” He smiled at Jake and slapped his back. “I find it best to just go with it.”

Cabe set down his things and went into the kitchen to give Allie a kiss. “Hi, sweetheart.”

“Hey, there cute stuff.” She looked around. “Where’s Jake?”

“He went back to his place to pick up his uniform.”

“What?”

“I asked him to stay over so we could go over what we’re doing tomorrow.”

“Do I want to know?”

“Not really but, you’ll find out soon enough.”

“How long before he gets here?”

“About an hour.”

Allie smiled. “Perfect.” She walked to the front door and made sure it was locked. She grabbed Cabe’s hand and started pulling him toward the bedroom.

“What are you doing?”

“Dinner is ready and we have an hour.” She pushed open the bedroom door and pulled off her top and slid her hands up his chest and began to pull off his tie. “I’m not about to waste time.”

“What if he’s early?”

“In LA traffic? At six o’clock?”

Cabe grinned. “Excellent point.” He pulled her into a deep kiss as he unhooked her bra. He unzipped her skirt and it fell to the floor. He ran his hand over her skin and slipped her panties to her feet. “Ummm, woman, you make me crazy.”

She rubbed her hands over his chest. “Right back ‘atcha, big guy.” She stood on her toes to give him a kiss. He scooped her up and tossed her on the bed. Allie giggled as he pulled off his shirt while he kicked off his shoes. He pulled his t-shirt off and got into bed. She rubbed her hands over his skin and he smiled. His girl had a thing for his tattoos,

which turned out to be a good thing, considering the number of them he had. He still remembered the first time he took off his shirt in front of her. Allie's eyes got wide as saucers. Then his quiet, modest girlfriend went crazy, but a good kind of crazy. A great kind of crazy. He traveled her body placing kisses where he knew it drove Allie nuts.

"Oh Cabe," she whispered. "Please."

"Begging are we?" he smiled.

"Revenge is a bitch," she grinned.

He knew better than torture her too long or she would take her revenge. But then again Allie's revenge could be a lot of fun.

Cabe opened the door to Jake who was carrying an overnight bag and his uniform on a hanger. "Hey Jake. I'll put this stuff in the guest room."

"Hi Allie."

"Hi Jake. You have perfect timing. Have a seat. Dinner is ready." Cabe walked back into the dining room. "Gallo, get yourself in here and give me a hand."

Cabe smiled. "Yes Ma'am"

"Damn, she's tough," Jake laughed.

"You have no idea." He walked into the kitchen and slipped his arm around her waist while planting a kiss on her neck. "What would you like me to do?" he asked with a grin.

She gave him a sly smile. "Get the lasagna out of the oven and set it on the table." He grabbed the heavy baking dish and set it on the iron trivet in the middle of the table. He caught a look from Jake.

"What?"

"I knew you had it bad, but I had no idea how bad."

He looked at Allie moving around the kitchen. He saw the slight redness on her cheek and neck from his five o'clock shadow. He smiled thinking about where else her fair skin was now pink. "Yeah, I sure do, brother."

They had a lovely dinner and Cabe caught up with Jake. "I can't believe you took up with this old coot, Allie."

Allie looked at Cabe and smiled. "Well, he has some excellent qualities in his favor."

Jake laughed and looked at Cabe. "Speaking of beautiful women, what's up with Cooper?"

Cabe looked at Jake like he had two heads. "You mean Assistant Homeland Director Katherine Cooper. A woman who can hold my future career in her hand?"

“Yeah, her. She’s gorgeous. Sexy voice.”

“Also one of the most important people in the intelligence community.”

“Yeah. Is she single?”

Cabe looked at Allie. “Can you believe this guy?”

Allie smiled. “She’s single and looking. She loves the Dodgers and the Rams, season tickets to both.”

Jake smiled and rubbed his hands together. “My dream woman. Hey, how do you know that much about her?”

“We have coffee, do a museum crawl, hang out.”

“You “*hang out*” with the Director of Homeland?”

“Assistant Director and yes, I do.”

Cabe smiled. “Who do you think called her and told her we needed her help? Okay, do you think we could table your love life until after we get Thornton out of a holding cell?”

“Yeah,” he pointed at Allie “But after I want her phone number.”

“Good Lord,” she smiled as she started clearing the dishes.

Jake sat back against his chair. “Are you sure this is going to work?”

“Not at all. We could all get arrested and thrown into the cells next to Thornton. But if you don’t screw up we’ll at least find out if he knows location of the Fazans.”

“Cabe, I was never an operative like you. I was an administrator.”

“You’re still a Marine, Jake. You know how to handle yourself. If you get stopped, do that think you used to do to the newbies.”

Jake smiled. “Oh you mean this?” Allie walked back into the room and stopped. Jake was shooting her an intimidating glare. Then she laughed.

“Is that where you learned that?” she asked Cabe.

“Ah geez, this is going to suck,” said Jake.

“What? What did I do?”

“He’s practicing looking intimidating for what we have to do tomorrow.”

“And what would that be?”

“Ahh, it’s probably better if you don’t know the details,” said Cabe.

Allie shrugged. “Fine.” She walked over and gave Cabe a quick kiss. “Just don’t get killed.”

“I’ll do my best, babe.”

She pointed at Jake. “You too.”

Jake held up his hands. “Yes, Ma’am.”

“Well now that’s settled, I’m going into the bedroom and watch some TV.”

They watched as Allie walked into their bedroom and closed the door. “You are a lucky man, Gallo. You should marry that girl.”

Cabe smiled. “If we survive the next few days, maybe I will.”

Cabe pulled the van into a parking lot about a mile from the holding facility where Chester Thornton was being held. He looked back at everyone. Walter, Sly and Ralph were looking at monitors. Apparently breaking into a secure military facility was an excuse for a day off from middle school. Happy and Toby were going through files. Paige was looking out the window. They were working but not interacting. Cabe spotted Jake pulling into the driveway. He got out of his car wearing his green fatigue uniform. They'd decided it would be less noticeable than a dress uniform. Cabe pushed open the side door and Jake jumped in. "Hey everyone. Ready to commit some federal offences?" The only one who snickered was Ralph. Despite having the highest IQ in the group Ralph had a normal EQ.

"Okay project manager, give me an update," said Cabe.

"What? Me?" she asked.

"Yes, you. That's what do you."

Paige closed her eyes and took a breath. "You're right of course." She turned back to the others. "Okay, what have we got?"

Walter hesitated before he spotted the look on Cabe's face. Foolishness would not be tolerated. "This is a Marine facility so Major Martin should not have a problem getting in"

"I've made him an ID to reflect active duty," said Happy as she handed it to him.

"I've been looking for any more information on the Fazan's possible location without any luck. They've dropped off the grid," said Sly.

"Not surprising," said Toby. "After his work in Iran he knows if he gets deported he will be killed. If they send Azar back, despite the fact that she's been an American for years, she'd be killed too."

"What about their daughter, Amanda?" asked Ralph. "She's only eight. She was born here."

"They'd take her away from them," said Cabe.

Ralph, genius team member, turned into the child he really was. “Mom? Can they do that?”

“I’m afraid so but let’s to work and make sure that doesn’t happen.”

Walter handed Jake a com. “Put this in your ear. You’ll be able to hear us and we’ll hear you and Mr. Thornton.”

“Major, can I have your phone?” asked Ralph.

“Ah...I guess so.” Ralph popped open the back of Jake’s phone and placed a small chip inside. He closed it up and handed it back to him.

“Once I activate that, no one will be able to hear what you and Mr. Thornton say.”

“What about the earpieces?”

“They operate on a different frequency.”

“And if someone inspects it?”

“Don’t worry. No one will be able to tell the difference between this and any other data chip.”

Jake looked at Cabe. “I want this as much as anyone but I’m putting my future in the hands of a child?”

“I’m thirteen,” he said with no small amount of indigence.

Jake glanced at Ralph. “My apologies, sir.” He drilled his buddy with a look. “Cabe?”

“I’m not exaggerating the depth of his ability. I’d do it but I can’t get anywhere near Thorny.”

Jake sat back and sighed. “Okay, let’s do this.”

Jake Martin took a deep breath as he walked toward the holding facility. It had been nearly a year since his retirement but he didn't forget what it was like to have people salute him because of the insignia on his shoulder. Actually he kind of missed it. He may have been an administrator but what he hadn't told Cabe, or anyone for that matter, was he'd been in intelligence. That's how he'd gotten wind of Thornton's problem. All his old doors were closed to him. Everyone knew he was retired. They wouldn't give him squat. He felt a little guilty for not giving Cabe the whole picture, but he couldn't. He'd taken an oath. His secrets would go with him to the grave. Of course that little kid Ralph could dig them out if he tried, but he'd rather not think about that.

Jake saluted the sergeant as he entered the building. He flashed his ID. "I'm here to see Master Sergeant Chester Thornton."

"I don't have any information about an interview," said the sergeant. He called his lieutenant. A twenty something lieutenant introduced himself as Gaines.

"Major Martin, I have not been advised of any interviews."

The first rule of undercover is keeping things as close to reality as possible. "The Master Sergeant and I served together. I may get information that a stranger won't."

"I'll have to make some calls."

"Lieutenant..." he said in drawn out syllables and threw a glare in for good measure. "I have driven four hours for this ten minute meeting. Have your sergeant direct me to your interrogation room and bring me the Master Sergeant." He paused for a moment waiting for the whole plan to fall apart.

"Yes, sir," he said. "Sergeant, take the Major to interrogation."

He tried to remain calm as he sat down at the steel table. He looked around the windowless room and spotted the camera in the upper corner of the room. The door opened and Chester Thornton was escorted in. Thorny's eyes got wide but Jake gave his head a small shake. The lieutenant looked at Jake and nodded and closed the door. He nodded and waited for a moment.

"Okay, we can talk now."

“How the hell are you here?” asked Thornton.

“Hello to you too, Thorny.”

“Don’t call me that. Answer the question.” He leaned closer and whispered, “You’re not active anymore. I was at your retirement party.”

“We can talk. They can see us but they can’t hear us. We don’t have much time. We know you gave Farad five thousand dollars. Do you know where they are?”

“I don’t know. I told him not to tell me. Jake, they had to run. They threatened to take his child from him. I couldn’t let that stand. Jake you know Farad. He risked his life for this country. His wife has been here since she was a girl. She’s an American citizen. She loves this country. She hasn’t been back to Iran since she was eighteen. She’s never met Reza Nazari.”

“Okay, we figured that.”

“We?”

“I went to Cabe Gallo for help. He and his team are investigating.”

“Gallo?”

“Yeah. Look, I don’t have much time. Are you okay. Are you being treated well?”

“I’m fine. I have my bible. Let Nancy know I’m okay.”

“I will as soon as we can.”

“We’ll figure this out, Thorny. I promise.”

He smiled, “I believe you. And don’t call me Thorny.”

Cabe watched Jake pull back into the driveway and he got back into the Scorpion's van. "Well, at least we know he doesn't have any information," said Jake.

"So we'll have to find the Hasan's ourselves," said Walter.

"That's not going to help," said Ralph.

Paige saw Walter was about to speak so she interrupted. "What do you mean, sweetie?"

"We already have surmised that the Hasan's know nothing about Reza Nazari. The only reason they took off was to protect their daughter. If we find them all we'll be doing is handing them over to the same people who have Sergeant Thornton."

"What do you suggest, Ralph?" asked Cabe.

"We need to find Reza Nazari."

"The entire intelligence community has been trying to find him. No offense but how is a little kid, even a smart one, going to do what no one in the world has been able to do?"

"None taken. I have a idea." Jake looked doubtful.

Toby smiled. "Major, if Ralph has a plan, it's worth listening to."

"What's your idea, son?" asked Cabe.

"I've been working on face recognition software that will work off satellites."

Cabe shot Ralph a glare. "Son, are you looking for things you shouldn't?"

"No, I started to develop it after Norway. I was worried. I thought maybe I could find Collins"

"Norway? Did you see where Collins went?"

"I can't find him. I think he may be underground, literally."

"Ralph, sweetheart, why didn't you tell us?" asked Paige.

“Because I wanted to wait until I had a way to follow someone through anything. I think now I have it.”

“One big problem, we don’t know where to start looking with Nazari,” said Sly.

Cabe looked at Toby. “There’s only one way to get him to show himself.”

Toby smiled and nodded. “We need to give him a target.”

They sat around the garage as everyone fell into old habits. Paige set up the coffee, cinnamon free, thank God. “Okay, what’s first?” asked Cabe.

“We need to set up something that Reza Nazari and his associates would find irresistible,” said Toby.

“But it can’t be anything that would put people at risk,” said Happy. “How about a new power source?”

“How about my software?” said Ralph. “We let them know it’s been developed and is being kept in a secure location.”

“No!” shouted Paige. “I will not put you at risk.”

“We wouldn’t do that. We could say it’s a government project,” said Sly. “What about that place where the voting hard drives were. They moved them off site after their location was revealed.”

“It would be easily defendable,” said Cabe.

“We could fill the place with lots of monitors,” said Walter.

“Ah...Ralph, son, where are you storing your software?” asked Cabe.

“My laptop. At least the blue print for it. My research is in my bedroom?”

“Excuse me? Asked Paige. “Does this software work?”

Ralph shrugged. “Yeah. All I need is a picture of Nazari and I can start working on looking for him.”

Jake looked at Cabe, his eyes wide. “Seriously?”

“If he says it works, it works.”

Paige drove down the highway from LA to Oceanside. The first thing on their list of things to do was to find Nancy Thornton. It was also a way to keep Ralph out of LA for a while. As close as he worked with Scorpion she would never get used to the idea of her son being in danger. She still had the right to pull him off cases. Worse case scenario she could send him to Drew in Maine. He'd hate her for it, but it would be a live hate.

She'd volunteered to find Nancy Thornton and let her know her husband was okay. Ralph had pulled up a photo ID and her schedule at Oceanside hospital. Not exactly kosher but they were tracking her down for good news. They pulled into the Oceanside Hospital and Paige turned off the car. "Okay, you said she volunteers with kids so let's go."

"Mom, I can stay here. I'm running an algorithm that might help me find Nazari."

"Ralph, Walter and Sly are doing the same thing. I want you with me."

"But they didn't write the program, I did."

"Obviously I didn't make myself clear. Close the computer, put it away and come with me. You may be a genius but I'm your mother and you will do what I ask."

"You're not asking," he mumbled as he zipped up his computer case.

"Hey! Tone!"

"Sorry."

Paige got out of the car took a breath. She stopped Ralph and took him by the shoulders. "Ralph, I know you're smarter than me. You're smarter than just about everyone on the planet. That's not something that can change, nor would I want it to. But something you have to accept is I am your mother. I will tell you to do things you may not want to do. I will always try to listen to you, but you have to accept sometimes I will want you to do things you don't want to. I don't want you alone while we're working on this case. I'm your mother. Deal with it."

Ralph stared at her for a moment, then smiled. "Okay, Mom."

She nodded and fought the desire to smile. It was getting rare to win one with Ralph and she had a feeling he was letting her have it. But she'd take the victories where she could get it. They walked into the hospital and found their way to the children's center. Ralph nodded toward a slender woman with short, auburn hair and a warm smile.

"Oh Nancy, I knew I'd find you here," called Paige.

The woman looked up, obviously confused. "Ah, hello."

"I know it's been so long but it you were so kind to my son Ralph." She pulled the woman into a hug and whispered, "I have a message from Chester."

Nancy gasped but recovered quickly. "Of course, Ralph. It's so good to see you again. Let's go in here. We can have a visit." She opened the door to a empty conference room. "Okay, who the hell are you and where is my husband?"

"My name is Paige Dineen. This is my son Ralph. We are associates of a friend of you husband's, Cabe Gallo."

"Cabe? I haven't seen him in years."

"Major Jake Martin contacted us about your husband. We are working on the case?"

Nancy looked at Ralph and back at Paige. "We?"

"It's a long story. We are a part of a Team called Scorpion. We deal with situations that, well, are complicated. The first thing we did was check on your husband."

"Is he okay?"

"He's well. In fact his first concern was that we let you know that he is okay. He said he has his bible so he's fine."

Nancy clasped the cross hanging from her neck. "Thank you, Jesus," she whispered. "How does he look?"

"Major Martin met with him at the holding facility. Jake said he looked healthy and calm."

“Why are they holding him? He doesn’t know where the Fazan’s are.”

“They assume otherwise.”

“Where is he? I need to see him.”

“I understand but it’s better you don’t know. If you know where he is, they’ll know we are involved. We are trying to resolve this situation.”

“How?”

“The less you know the better. If you’re questioned, you honestly don’t know anything.”

“Okay.” She looked back and forth between the two of them. “I will pray for God’s wisdom to guide you all.”

Paige smiled. “Thank you.”

“But if anyone hurts my man they’ll pray Satan got to them first.”

Cabe held Allie close as they stared at the ceiling. “How dangerous is this going to be?” she asked.

“Probably, no more than any other case.”

Allie leaned up on her elbow. “Probably? That’s not terribly comforting.”

“I’m sorry sweetheart, but that’s the best I can say for now. You know the people working on it are the best.”

She leaned over his chest. “Especially you,” she whispered. She gave him a deep kiss. He pulled her tight against him when there was a knock on the bedroom door.

“Rise and shine, sleeping beauty,” called Jake.

Cabe growled. “Damn him.”

“Now Cabe, he is our guest,” said Allie. She got out of bed and tossed on some shorts and one of Cabe’s t-shirts. She tossed some clothes at Cabe. “Let’s go Marine. Time for breakfast.”

Jake was sitting at the breakfast table drinking coffee and reading the paper. “Coffee’s done.”

“Thank you, Jake,” said Allie.

He looked at Cabe and Allie’s all but matching shorts and Marine shirts. “Well, aren’t you two just the cutest things,” he smiled.

Allie set some Danish in front of him. “Thank you, Jake. You’re very sweet. “ She leaned in close and smiled. “But the second this case is done I will personally pack your bag and bounce your adorable but sarcastic ass out of here.”

Jake and Cabe both laughed. “Did you hear that, Cabe? She thinks my ass is adorable. Cabe picked up a Danish and shoved it in Jake’s mouth.

“Shut up, fool.”

Cabe and Jake were barely noticed as they walked into the garage. Everyone was gathered around screens. “What have we got?” asked Cabe.

“I’ve gotten Katherine to stock the empty bunker, monitors, printers, all manner of gizmos,” said Paige. “Sly is overseeing that.”

“Gizmos?” asked Jake.

“That’s what Katherine’s called them. They don’t actually have to work.”

“They don’t?”

“I’m setting up a transmission that will mimic the working software, but won’t actually work. Sly will make it look like it does,” said Ralph.

Toby walked over the coffee table. “Be prepared for a wait. We don’t know where he is in the world. He’s got to find out about it and then get here. He has to be on American soil.”

“Or American territory,” said Ralph. “I have an idea.”

“Let’s hear it,” said Cabe.

“I think he’s in Djibouti. It’s small enough that he can hide from us. But if we convince him he needs to get out of Djibouti and we can get him on the water...”

“What makes you think he’s in Djibouti?” asked Jake. Ralph pulled up several pictures on a monitor.

“Because this is Reza Nazari.”

Jake stared at the screen. “I’ll be damned. The kid did it.”

Cabe smiled. “I like it. If we can get him on a boat and in the middle of the ocean.”

“What? Throw him overboard?” asked Jake.

“Of course not,” said Walter. He looked at Ralph and smiled “We convince him he’s on a friendly vessel. When we get him out in international waters we can raise a homeland flag.”

“The problem is how do we get Nazari on the boat? We need boots on the ground in Djibouti. We didn’t exactly make any friends the last time we were there,” said Cabe.

Jake looked at them and gave them a half smile. “Yeah, well I can help there.”

“What?” asked almost everyone in the room, except Cabe who’s mouth was just hanging open.

Jake hit a few buttons and said “Romeo, seven, two, four, alpha.” As he waited for a moment he spotted Cabe. “Close your mouth. You look like a carp.” He turned and laughed. “Tague, buddy. I see your not dead yet. Look I’m going to put you on speaker. Don’t worry. They all have clearance.” He hit the button for speaker. “Tague, this is Cabe Gallo and the Scorpion Team.”

“Scorpion? Holy Shit! No wonder they dragged your ass out of retirement.”

“Tague, ladies present.”

“Sorry, I’ve been off the grid for too long. I forget my manners.”

“Tague, we need to get someone out of Djibouti and into international waters so we can take him into custody.”

“It must be someone important to drag you away from your fishing cabin.”

“Reza Nazari.”

“Holy Shit!”

“Tague!”

“Sorry. We’ve been looking for him for three years. How did you find him?”

“I found him,” said Ralph.”

“Was that a kid?”

“Not just any kid. He designed software that found him from a garage in LA.”

“Holy...sorry.”

“I’ll get you the location. Do you have the back up you need to get him on the boat?”

“You get me the location of that bastard and I’ll get him on the boat.”

“How much time do you need to get a team in place?”

“Not long. I’ll get back to you when I’m ready.”

“Don’t take too long. We don’t want to lose him,” said Jake

“I won’t lose him,” said Ralph.

“Who is this kid?” asked Tague.

“You survive this and I’ll introduce you.” Jake smiled and hung up the phone. He saw everyone staring at him. “What?”

Cabe stared at him. “What happened to ‘I’m just an administrator’

Jake took a sip of coffee. “I was, for Marine Recon.”

“You ass,” Cabe smiled. “You could have told me.”

“You know we’re not supposed to tell. You want to tell me how this crew in a rundown garage saved the world?”

“Twice,” said Ralph as he was following Nazari on the screen.

“Ralph,” said Paige through clenched teeth.

“Oh right. Three times if you count Norway, which, really you should.”

“What the hell, Gallo?” asked Jake.

“Ralph. You know you’re not supposed to talk about these things.”

Ralph shrugged his hands in the air. “What?” He turned back to his screen Major Jacob Martin, Commanding officer of Marine Recon Units in the Iran and Iraq. He’s got a clearance equal to ours.”

Cabe laughed. "So much for being a desk jockey."

Ralph glanced indulgently over his shoulder. "Shall I continue? Cabe looked at his buddy who smiled and shrugged. "His clearance means he probably already knows about the nuclear weapon we blew up in Kazakhstan."

"Excuse me?" asked Jake.

"Maybe not," said Ralph.

"Stolen by an arms cartel. We disabled it before we shot it down an abandoned mine shaft," said Walter.

"All while dressed as Super Fun Guy characters. Cabe made a great Whimsical Boy," said Toby.

Cabe shot him his Gallo glare. "Jackass."

Toby tipped his hat and smiled. He walked over to the coffee table and refilled his cup. He leaned into Jake. "I'll show you the pictures later."

"So that's how you have the contacts with men like Tague," said Happy.

"Tague's a little rough but he's a good man. He's been out of the country too long. If I was still in charge, I'd pull him in, but he's too good at what he does."

"So run it down for me, Walter."

"While Ralph and I are keeping track of Nazari. Sly has gotten the fake transmissions up and running. Happy and Toby would you please join Sly, bring him up to speed and back him up on any problems he encounters."

Happy took a step toward Walter and Toby stopped her. "Sweetie," he whispered "He said please."

Happy looked at Toby and back at Walter. "Huh. Okay." Toby grabbed his keys while Happy grabbed her tools.

Happy drove while Toby rode shotgun. It was usually the way they drove. His manhood wasn't threatened by having his wife in control. His life however was a different story. "Watch it. We need to get there in one piece."

"Yeah, Yeah," she muttered, used to hearing her husband's bitching about her driving.

"It's kind of nice," said Toby.

"What? My driving?"

"No, that's potentially lethal. I was taking about being back in the garage."

"A falling down building versus clean office space. Yeah, it's a peach."

"You know what I'm talking about."

"We still have the same issues."

"True but I see a crack in Walter's armor. We might be able to work this out."

"You're just afraid of Cabe."

"That too. He can disable a man with two fingers." He noticed Happy being unusually quiet. No pithy response was not like his bride. It took everything he had to wait until she was ready to talk.

"I miss him."

"Walter?" Toby cringed thinking she missed her ex-husband, even if it was a marriage of convenience.

"No, dummy. Cabe. I like having him around."

"Me too." Toby smiled. He knew not to go too deep too soon with Happy. She'd be more likely to deck him than listen to him. He'd just let that sit for awhile.

They got to the bunker and found Sly engrossed in setting up a monitor. “Hey Sly, how’s it going?” asked Toby.

“Fine. Why are you here?”

“Walt asked us to lend a hand.”

“I’ve got this. I don’t need a hand.”

“Sly, he asked politely and remember, we’re not doing this for him. We’re doing this for Cabe.”

Sly sighed. “Fine.”

Toby put in his com as he handed one to each of them. “Walt, Happy and I are at the bunker and Sly has everything up to speed. How are things at your end?”

“Things are going well. Ralph’s software located Nazari and we are watching his moments in real time.”

“Ralph found him?” asked Sly.

“Yes. In Djibouti. His software is amazing. I’m sure he’d want to discuss it with you when this is complete.”

“Sure thing, Sly,” said Ralph.

“I’ve set up the ghost transmissions,” said Sly.

Happy was looking over Sly’s shoulder. “We might want to cover this area in Morocco and Spain. That’s usually a hot spot of activity.”

Sly nodded. “Good point.” Sly hit a few buttons and they could see the transmission complete. They brought Sly up to speed on the Jake and the Marine Recon mission. “We don’t know this Martin guy and we sure don’t know his guy.”

“I know Jake,” said Cabe. “I trust him and if he trusts Tague, so do I.”

“If this goes south, we all wind up in federal prison.”

“Sylvester, that was true on how many jobs we’ve done?” asked Paige.

Sly sighed. "A lot."

"Did we ever wind up in prison?"

"Well there was that time I had to go in as a serial killer."

"That was a few hours and you saved the lives of three federal judges."

"Fine."

Toby joined the conversation. "We've got a little while until this thing kicks off. Let's pull the coms and relax. I saw a taco place near here and it's past lunch. You can call me when things kick into gear."

"Sounds like a plan," said Paige.

Toby pulled out his com and stuck it in his pocket. "Sly buddy, Taco Grande?"

"Don't forget the extra salsa."

Paige looked around and saw everyone pulled their coms. Lunch was a good idea. The front door opened and Florence walked in with several pizza boxes. "I brought lunch."

Paige stood and helped her with the boxes. "Thank you, Florence. That was very nice of you." They set the food out on the table and gathered some plates.

"Well, nobody needs a chemical engineer for this so I thought I'd make myself useful." She set out paper plates and bottles of drinks. She glanced at Paige and looked down. "I'll be in my lab."

Paige put her hand on Florence's shoulder. "Please stay. Let's get something to eat and go in the other room. If they need us, they'll call."

Florence blushed and looked very nervous. "Oh that's okay."

"Please?"

Florence nodded. "Okay." She grabbed a slice of pizza and a bottle of water. Paige did the same. They walked into the small office and Paige closed the door and sat.

"I'm sorry, Paige. This is all my fault."

Paige sighed. "No. No it's not. I lost my temper at Walter and you got swept up in the fall out."

"Cabe is right about me. I've been hiding out for months." She wiped a tear from her cheek. "I didn't know what to do. I do care for him. I cared for all of you. I'd never found people like me, who accepted me. I got all turned around."

Paige put her hand over Florence's. "I understand. They were almost all like that when I started. That's why they hired me in the first place, to interpret the normals for them and to help the at learn to behave in a more socially acceptable manner."

"Like normals."

"Yeah," Paige said as she took a sip of water.

"Walter never quite got the hang of that did he?"

Paige spit her water across the table and looked at Florence's shocked expression. Then she started to laugh. "No, no he did not." She wiped up the water and took a bite of her pizza. "Mmm. I've missed this pizza. The stuff we've been getting isn't the same."

Florence smiled. "No it's not."

Cabe put a slice of pizza on a plate and handed it to Jake. He grabbed one for himself and they each grabbed a drink and sat down. Cabe watched his friend for a moment while he took a bite.

“What?” asked Jake.

“Marine Recon? You couldn’t tell me?”

“I wasn’t in it anymore.”

“What was that stuff about throwing Nazari overboard?”

“I wanted to see what kind of people I was dealing with?”

“Do you think that’s something I would be a party too?”

“No, of course not, but I don’t know these people.”

“You know me, Jacob. That should be enough.”

“You’re right. I apologize.” He took a sip of his soda.

“I don’t know this Tague character, but if you trust him I do. I’m putting all our futures in his hands. He screws this up and we all go to prison and Thornton is no better off than when we started.”

“Tague is the best. If you get a location, Tague and his people will get him to international waters.”

Cabe smiled. “A lot of people are counting on it.”

The door to the garage door opened and a young girl walked into the room. “Hi people. I hear there’s pizza.”

“Patty? What are you doing here?” asked Cabe. He waved Paige over.

“Ralph called me. It’s his turn to buy lunch.” Ralph walked over to the lunch table. “Hey Patty. Grab some pizza.”

“Ralph, sweetie, you didn’t tell me Patty was coming.”

“Hi Ms. Dineen. Ralph still owed me a lunch for the last time I kicked his butt at Proton Arnold.”

“You have a freaky hand eye coordination,” said Ralph.

“Why don’t you get set up in the other room.” Patty grabbed a slice and a soda and walked toward the small office. Ralph tried to follow her but Paige stopped him. “Ralph, what are you doing?”

“It’s going to be a while before we move on Nazari and Patty was in the neighborhood.”

“I thought she told you she didn’t want to see you.”

“She doesn’t want to date me.” He shrugged. “As much as I hate to admit it, she’s right. I may be a genius but I’m only thirteen and she’s sixteen. Right now that’s a pretty big difference. But who knows, the older we get the less difference it will make.”

“Ralph, sweetheart, I don’t want you pinning your hopes on what might happen.”

“I’m not, Mom. Patty and I had a long talk. I miss having her has a friend. We have a lot in common and we have fun together. So, for right now, I buy her lunch every time she kicks my butt at Proton Arnold.” He headed toward the small office.

“Ralph, you’re pretty good at Proton Arnold.” Ralph looked at his mom and smiled as he closed the small office door.

Paige picked up a slice of pizza, grabbed a soda and walked over to Walter's desk. "Here. Have something to eat. I'll keep an eye on the screen."

"Thank you," Walter took the slice and a sip from the drink. "That was very considerate of you."

"Walter, it's okay. You don't have to walk on eggshells with me."

"I just feel so bad about what happened between us."

"Walter what happened wasn't your fault, well, not all your fault. Cabe was right about me. I'd had a problem with our relationship before Florence and I should have talked to you about it."

"I'm sorry, Paige. I don't know what to say."

"You don't have to say anything. I knew what I was getting into when we started. And now I'm miserable and Ralph's miserable. Do you have any idea what it's like to live with a surly, thirteen year old genius?"

"I know what it's like to be one, but not about living with one."

Paige laughed. "Well, it's not very pleasant." She glanced at the screen. "Are we good here?"

"Yes Nazari is meeting inside that building." He pointed to a heat signature that was annotated. "That's him there. If he moves, we'll see it."

They both watched the screen and watched as people moved about the room. It looked as though they were eating a meal. "I've missed, this," said Walter. "Working together."

"So do I. We were doing fine with Centipede but it wasn't the same. It wasn't any fun. It wasn't this."

Walter looked at her and smiled. "It wasn't family."

"No, it wasn't. I love you, Walter. I really do, but as a couple you and I both know we don't work. Do you think we could go back to being friends?"

“I never stopped being your friend. I never will.”

Cabe watched as Paige and Walter talked. It was good to see them talking to each other without yelling. Maybe there was so hope for his kids after all.

“Keeping an eye on the kids, Dad?” asked Jake with a smile.

“They are like my kids, but the ‘family’ has been at odds for months. It’s tough with a team of geniuses. Mixing normals with geniuses and there are lots of conflicts.”

“Normals?”

“People like us. Normal intellect.”

“I think I’ve been insulted.”

“You haven’t been. Believe me, I’ve watched these kids for years. As brilliant and talented as they are, surviving in the normal world can be downright painful for them.” He took a sip of his soda. “What about your guy Tague? Why haven’t we heard from him yet?”

“We will. He’s as good at what he does as these people are at what they do. Tague speaks more languages than I can count, including the Arabic and French that are spoken in Djibouti.” Jake’s phone rang and he pulled it out of his shirt pocket.. “It’s about time.”

“Hello to you too,” said Tague.

“Do you have your team assembled?”

“Yes, are you going to fill me in or what?”

“We are going to transmit some data to you. It’s a new facial recognition software that can find anyone, anywhere. You’re going to convince him it’s worth meeting you for the exchange. Once you get him, get him out of the country and into international waters as fast as you can.”

“Are you sending the entire software? I don’t want something like that falling into the wrong hands.”

Cabe waved Walter and Ralph over to them as Jake put his phone on speaker “Can you send enough of the software to make it look good, but not be all of it?”

“Yes. The transmissions that Sly is sending will be easy enough to follow with what we send to your man,” said Ralph. “Ah, hold on for a moment.” He walked over to Patty who was talking to Florence. “Patty, I’m sorry but we’re about to get pretty busy here.”

“Sure, no problem. We still on for DragonCon on Saturday?”

“Wouldn’t miss it,” smiled Ralph. “Neither would Sly.” He escorted Patty out the door and nodded to Jake and Cabe.

“Did I just listen to the kid make a date?”

“The kid who designed the software,” said Cabe. “Let’s get back to it.”

“We have Nazari’s location,” said Walter. “We’ve been following him for about four hours. He seems to travel with two other men who are bigger and appear armed,” said Walter. “He’s been stationary for the last hour. We believe it’s his safe house.”

“Can you transmit me the coordinates?” asked Tague.

Walter extended his hand to Jake and he handed him his phone. He hooked Jake’s phone to a flash drive and pushed a few buttons. “You should have it now.”

“Copy that.” They listened to street noise for a moment before Tague came on. “Okay, I’m about twenty minutes from that location.”

Jake took the phone back. “Tague, tell me. Do you have this?”

“Yes sir, Major, sir.”

Jake shook his head. “Shut up jackass. Go get me a terrorist.” Jake hung up his phone and looked at Cabe. “Now what?”

“Once your man gets far enough into international waters he’ll be met by a cruiser.”

“Where are you getting a freaking cruiser?” asked Jake.

Cabe gave a sly smile. “Scorpion does still have some supporters in the government.”

Jake smiled. “The hot brunette? Dude, you totally have to hook me up.”

Cabe shook his head. “How old are you? Katherine is one of the top intelligence operatives in the country. She could authorize missile attacks.”

Jake’s eyes got big. “Like I said. Hot.”

Tague gathered his men together. He'd take Remington in with him to see Nazari and he'd have Akeem and Jamal would keep watch on Nazari's guards from a distance. Akeem and Jamal were locals they had worked with before. They were experts at blending in. If they weren't, they'd be dead. Remington was a fellow Marine who had the dark coloring of his Pakistani mother rather than his English father. He could pass for a local. The fact that his Arabic was flawless, thanks to Tague, helped. Tague let his dark hair grow long, his salt and pepper beard grow out. The one thing he couldn't hide were his bright blue eyes. Those could bust his cover faster than stumbling over the language. As much as he hated them, he had to wear brown contacts.

He had the file on a flash drive. All he had to do was walk in unannounced on one of the world's most wanted terrorists and hope some kids in a garage he'd never met could make the flash drive look as good as they said. Jeez, he was getting old for this shit. He hadn't been back in the States for a year. After this was over somebody owed him a vacation.

Tague nodded to Akeem and Jamal, who took up positions in the street while he took a breath and knocked on the door.

"What?" demanded the flunky.

"I need to see Nazari," said Tague, matching the flunky's territorial accent.

"No one here. Go away." He tried to close the door but the Tague stiff armed the door.

"I know he's here and the reason I know is why he'll want to see me."

A voice came from the back of the room. "Let him in." Tague walked in with Remy behind him who the flunky tried to stop.

"I don't come in alone and then you will never know how I found you." Tague looked Nazari up and down. He couldn't believe the man he was looking at was only twenty five. But then this life aged everyone. He could attest to that. He may only be forty eight but there were days he felt ancient. Nazari indicated where Tague should sit and he took up a seat opposite.

“You have five minutes before my man kills you. Convince me why that is not necessary.”

Tague smiled and pulled out his cell phone. He pulled up the fake program that would show only Nazari’s location. “I have access to a new program. It can find anyone, anywhere.” He pushed the button on the program and prayed the garage geeks knew what to do.

Sylvester finished his taco as he looked at the computer screen. “When is this agent going to request transmission? I’m getting claustrophobic in this bunker.”

“You’ll be fine, Sly. It won’t be much longer,” said Toby.

“Shut up. You have no way of objectively knowing that. It could be hours.”

“You heard Cabe, Major Martin’s agent was twenty minutes from the coordinates.”

An angry voice came over their coms. “Do I have to come down there and kick some ass? Sly, stop whining. It’s beneath you. Toby, stop being a jackass. Happy? Where’d you get to?”

“I’m here boss, trying to stay out of the line of fire.”

“Yeah, well too bad. We are after one of the most wanted terrorists in the world. He may have taken credit for the Green Zone café bombing but he’s suspected in the death of hundreds. So I need everyone on their A game, including you, Happy. If that means getting in between Sly and that jackass husband of yours, do it. You’re better than this. You all are.”

Cabe was sitting in the garage as he heard multiple, “Yes, sirs” come over the com. He looked over at Walter who was still monitoring Nazari’s location. Florence was cleaning up in the kitchen while Paige was review Scorpion’s books. From the look on her face she understood how much trouble the company was in. Reuniting the team was the only way to save it. That is if they didn’t kill each other first.

“Doc,” said Happy as she nodded toward her husband. Toby came over to where she was sitting.

“What’s up, sweetie pie?”

“Sit down, shut up and listen.” The smile dropped off his face and he sat down next to her. “Cabe’s right.”

“About what?”

“Everything. We took the easy out. We tried to get Walter to do the right thing with Paige and we failed. We couldn’t handle it. Now everything has turned to crap.”

“Excuse me? We’re making a good living, we moved into a nicer apartment, we work with people who don’t make us crazy. Explain to me, if you would, how is that crap?”

“Because we hate it. The family is split up. We’ve both had enough of that our whole lives. We didn’t have control over it when we were kids. Now we do. You know I’m right.”

“Isn’t it great not having to listen to Walter’s giant ego?”

“I have you for that. Look, Toby. I love you. I wouldn’t have married you if I didn’t. But we aren’t happy and you know it.”

“Sweetheart, you are the love of my life. You know that, don’t you?”

“Yes, and ditto. But you know something is wrong even if you don’t talk about it. We haven’t talked about the adoption in months.”

Toby glanced down. “Well, the process can take a while.”

“Stop it. I’m not blaming you. I haven’t talked about it either. We don’t want to bring a child into our family until our family is together.”

Toby took her hands in his. “Okay. Once we get back to the garage we try and get everyone to sit down and talk about it. That is after we catch the deadly terrorist.”

“That’s it? Just like that?”

He gave her a little kiss. "I have learned never to argue with my bride, especially when she's right."

Happy gave him a rare smile. "Smart man."

"Hey if you two are done playing kissy face I've got a transmission from Major Martin's agent," said Sly. He tapped on a few keys while Happy and Toby looked over his shoulders. "Okay, that's it. Whoever is looking at the other end of this will be duly impressed."

Toby patted Sly's shoulders. "Good job, buddy."

"Yeah, nice one."

Sly touched his com. "Can you confirm transmission?"

"Yes," replied Walter. "Transmission confirmed. Excellent work, Sylvester."

"Thank you," he growled. "Now can I get out of this concrete bunker?"

"Yes, we're clear. You can come back to the garage."

"You don't need me there."

Walter's tone soften. "Yes, we do. I do. Please."

Sly stared at Toby and Happy for a moment. "Fine."

Sylvester sat in the passenger side of Happy's truck. The thought of seeing Florence again made his stomach jump into his throat. He wanted to see her but he didn't. He didn't want the rejection. Cabe had said nothing had happened between Walter and Florence and he believed him. Cabe wouldn't lie to him about something so important. But that didn't mean Florence didn't still have feelings for him.

They pulled into the garage parking lot and he thought he'd be sick. He got out of the truck and stared at the building for a moment. Some of the best moments of his life

had happened there. He'd had great, personal successes and been supported through his failures. He'd learned to interact with the world. He'd met his wife, Meghan there. Now he was back where he started, full of phobias and anger. Meghan would tell him that's a 'you' problem and to pull it together. She'd be ashamed of him. He was ashamed of himself.

He walked into the garage and felt a sense of déjà vu. Everyone was sitting at their desks. Cabe was pouring himself a coffee. It all looked so normal but it wasn't. Paige looked up and smiled. "Hey Sly. We have some pizza."

"Thanks, Paige." He walked into the kitchen area and stopped when he saw Florence.

"Hello, Sylvester."

"Florence."

"Why don't you sit and I'll get you something to eat."

"You don't have to."

She gave him a small smile. "I want to. It's not like I'm needed for anything else on this one."

Sly nodded and sat down at the table. She put a glass of ice tea in front of him and when the microwaved dinged she took out two slices of pepperoni and gave it to him. "Wow, I'm surprised there's any pepperoni left. Cabe usually hogs it."

"I remembered you like it so I hid some for you."

"Thank you, Florence. That was very nice of you."

"You're welcome." She nervously brushed at her skirt. "Would you mind if I joined you?"

"No, of course not."

She sat down opposite and remained quiet. He took a sip of tea and looked over at her. "I'm sorry," she whispered.

“For what?”

“Everything. For coming between you and Walter. I know how close you are, were. Sly, I didn’t know how you felt.”

He sighed. “I know. It was my fault. I should have said something. Well, I tried but not well enough.”

Florence smiled. “I’m listening now.”

“It’s just that I thought you were so pretty and smart. You seemed to get me. You’re the first girl I’ve met since Meghan that made me even think about dating. But we didn’t get a chance before you fell for Walter.”

“Sylvester, I thought I had. I could talk to him and he didn’t treat me like a freak because I’m smart. Cabe was right. I’d never had a place where I fit before. I never imagined you had any feelings for me.”

“Why not?”

“I know the story of you and your wife. I know how much you loved her. You still wear your wedding ring.”

Sly looked down at his hand. White hospital tape was all Meghan and Sly had to represent wedding bands during their quickie wedding in the hospital. Once Meghan died he tried to keep the tape on his finger but it kept coming off. Happy encased the tape in Lucite. He spun the ring around his finger with his thumb. “You’re right. I loved my wife very much. But when I met you I realized I was ready to move on.” He looked down and brushed at his sweater vest. “If you would be interested, maybe sometime we could go for coffee.”

Florence tilted her head so she was looking in his eyes. “I’d like that.”

Sly’s heart pounded. “You would?” he smiled.

“I would.”

Tague looked across the table at Nazari. "Two million Euros and the software is yours."

"What makes you think I have access to those kinds of funds?"

"Don't insult me."

Nazari gave a small smile. "You want two million Euros from this small demonstration?"

"The Americans have been looking for you for years and they couldn't find you. I found you in a few hours." Tague sat back. "But I expected you'd want a bigger demonstration." He pushed a paper across the table at him. "Be at this location in two hours. I will give you a full demonstration. Have the funds available to transfer to my account and I will hand over the software."

"Why?"

"Why what?" asked Tague.

"Why do you do this?"

"Because this fight has made old men of us all. I'm too old and tired to be of any more use. I will take this go somewhere and live out my days in quiet."

Nazari nodded and waved his hand. Tague knew he'd been dismissed. He stood and Remy followed him out the door. They walked a few blocks in silence before Akeem and Jamal joined them. "You know Nazari plans to kill you," said Remy.

"Of course he does." Tague slapped him in the chest. "How about you make sure he doesn't."

"I'll do my best but you are old and slow," he said with a smile.

"Shut up."

Jake disconnected his call and looked at Cabe. "That was Tague. He's met with Nazari and the exchange is set for two hours. Walter, Nazari's going to want another demonstration. Are you set for that?"

Walter looked at Sly. "You've set up a remote transmission at the bunker, of course."

Sly looked at him like he just asked if the moon was made of cheese. "Of course."

Walter turned to Jake. "Sylvester has everything set so no matter who Nazari targets we will be able to provide a credible location."

"Credible, but not accurate."

"Of course not," said Sly. "If we were to give a terrorist like Nazari accurate information and the capture doesn't go as planned, well I've already done enough time in prison."

"Twelve hours," said Ralph.

"That was enough."

Walter looked up from his screen. "So long as we have some time, Cabe could I see you for a minute?"

"Sure son." Cabe followed Walter upstairs to his loft. "What's up?"

"I want them back."

"Paige and Ralph?"

"No, Yes, I mean all of them."

"Why?"

"What do you mean, why?"

"Why do you want them back? Is it because Scorpion is in trouble?"

"No."

"Really?"

“Really. I want them back because I...I miss them. You’re right. They’re my family. It’s not right we’re split up.”

“I saw you talking to Paige. How did that go?”

“I think it was okay. There was no yelling.”

Cabe smiled. “I noticed.”

“Do you think they’ll come back?”

“I don’t think they’d come back to the old Walter, but you’ve done some growing. I think you know what you want to do, you just want me to say it’s okay.” Cabe thought for a minute Walter looked the way he did that first day. He smiled. The day he first arrested him. “Yes, son. I think it would turn out okay.”

Walter smiled and looked out the loft window. He saw Sly sitting at a monitor. “I know who I need to talk to next.”

Cabe put his hand on Walter’s shoulder. “Don’t call him up here. Go to him.” Walter nodded and went back down to the garage. He looked at his kids, milling about doing what they normally did, that is before they imploded. He needed them to get back together almost as much as they needed it themselves.

Walter stood at his desk, watching Sly. He was monitoring transmissions, doing his job. Just like he always had. Seeing him now reminded him how much he missed seeing him and not just because what he added to the work. Sly was his brother-in-law. He'd made Meghan happy in her last days when all Walter could do was focus on what he wanted. He couldn't accept Meghan's illness was not a problem he could solve. Sly never blamed him. He understood, like a brother would.

"Sly, could I have a word with you?"

"I'm sitting here, you're speaking. The odds are in your favor."

"I meant privately."

Sly looked up at him. "I'm monitoring the screen."

"Happy could cover the screen for a few minutes." Sly nodded and called for Happy to monitor the movements. He followed Walter into the small office and closed the door.

"What do you want, Walter?"

"To apologize." Walter could see Sly was surprised. "I'm so sorry for what happened between us. I swear I didn't know how you felt about Florence or how she felt about me. Even so, I should have talked to you. I should have fought to keep us together." He put his hand on Sly's shoulder. "You're my brother. You have to know I would never let anyone stand between us." Walter relaxed when he saw Sly's defensive posture drop.

"I know, I mean I should have known. I was just so hurt. I've talked to Florence and she explained everything to me. She's a lot like we were when we started. She never had a place to fit in before."

"She is an awful lot like us."

"Yes she is." Sly smiled. "I asked her out for coffee. She said yes."

Walter smiled out of happiness and relief. "That's excellent, Sly." He decided not to push. Maybe once this job was over he could figure the rest of this mess.

Tague's men had done a sweep of the dock and found nothing out of the ordinary. He made one last call to Major Martin for reassurance that this Scorpion team was ready for what ever Nazari could throw at them. He watched as Remy cleaned and reassembled his 9 mm. "You ready?"

Remy looked at him like he had two heads. "Just how nervous are you?" he asked.

"I'm not nervous."

"Bull. What's wrong?"

"Do you have an exit plan in place for Jamal and Akeem?"

"Yes. Once we are met by the cruiser, they will take our boat and head to Australia. We've already gotten their families out."

"If Nazari comes up with the two million they will be set to start their new lives."

"What about you?"

"What do you mean?"

"Tague, I've worked with you for two years. You're done, aren't you?"

"Yeah. I think I've given all I can to this."

"I can't say I'm surprised, but you need to know when to walk away, while you still can. You ready for Nazari?" asked Remy.

"Hell yeah, I'm ready."

"Well, if this goes off like we planned, you'll be going out on top." Remy's phone beeped. He looked down at the message. "It's show time."

Tague sat at the table and sipped some lukewarm coffee. He tried not to show his anxiety as Remy answered the knock at the door. He opened the door to Nazari's flunky. "Where is he?" Tague demanded.

"You can deal with me."

"No. Get out." He nodded at Remy who grabbed the man by the shoulder.

“Enough.” A voice came from the doorway. Nazari walked in and his man backed off. He sat down in the chair opposite of Tague.

Tague decided to go on the attack. Operate from a position of strength. “If you are here to waste my time we can end this now.”

“You show me a demonstration I can believe, we will do business.”

“Fine.” He opened his laptop. “Who do you want me to find?” He tried not to gasp as Nazari slid a picture across the table. It was a picture of General Charles Gaines, current head of military operations in the Iraq and Iran. This was the man who’d put a bounty on Nazari’s head for the Green Zone bombing. This would not be a strategic hit. It was revenge. Revenge made Nazari twice as dangerous. He took the picture and took a shot of it with the laptop camera and loaded it into the program. Now he had to hope Scorpion knew what the hell they were doing.

Sly leaned into his screen. "Heads up, people. We have a transmission." Cabe and Jake looked over his shoulder. "Who is he asking to find?" Sly pulled up the picture.

"Holy shit," Jake whispered.

"Who is it?" asked Paige.

"General Charles Gaines, head of operations in the Middle East," said Jake.

"Ralph where is he now?" asked Walter.

Ralph hit a few keys and turned to the group. "He's in Washington, at the Pentagon."

Cabe put his hand on Ralph's shoulder. He could see the inside of a highly secure area of the Pentagon. "Okay Ralph, that's enough." Ralph hit a few buttons and the images dropped off the screens.

"I copied enough of his movements to put him anywhere else. Just tell me where."

"Morocco," said Jake. "It's a central meeting and planning location for U.S. and United Nations officials."

"Give me a location," said Ralph as he pulled up a street map of Marrakesh.

Jake looked and pointed. "Here." Ralph began hitting the buttons on his laptop.

"Speed would be appreciated," said Sly.

"Done!" yelled Ralph. Sly hit a few buttons and sent the false location to Jake's man.

Cabe looked at Sly's transmission. It looked like the General was walking the halls of a Moroccan building. It looked so real he couldn't tell difference. He prayed Nazari couldn't either.

"You did amazing work here, Ralph," said Walter. "I really proud of you."

Cabe looked at Walter and nodded. They'd all done well.

Nazari nodded to his flunky who pulled out his phone. He hit a few buttons and looked at Nazari. "There is a meeting scheduled for the La Sultana in Marrakesh. The entire top floor has been reserved and I'm seeing blocked off streets. It is a known meeting place for the UN officials."

Back in LA everyone was listening through coms. They looked at Ralph. "It was logical to assume they would want to verify the information. It didn't take much to hack the hotel's system."

"And the blocked streets?" asked Cabe.

"Reported gas leak."

Jake looked at Cabe and shook his head. "Damn," he whispered.

"You never get used to it," he smiled.

Nazari smiled and nodded toward Tague. "It appears you are truthful. This is good for both of us. Now give me the software."

"Not before you transfer the funds." The flunky pulled a gun. He had to admit he was a faster draw than he would have expected. Luckily, Remy was faster. "That's not very sporting," said Tague. "Now transfer the funds before my man kills yours." Nazari turned and looked at his man, who was standing stock still with Remy's gun in his back. Nazari pulled a pistol from his sleeve and shot his own man. Tague felt sorry for the man's shocked expression as he slumped to the ground, dead.

"Now, you were saying."

"You really are a very poor sport, Nazari." Tague shoved the desk into Nazari's belly as he leapt over the table. Nazari backed up as Remy took aim. "No. We need him alive for the transfer."

Nazari smiled. "You have less than thirty seconds before the rest of my men break down that door."

He smiled and touched a button on his phone. "Are we clear?"

"Clear," called Jamal through the speaker.

He couldn't help but smile. "You were saying?" Nazari took aim and Tague kicked the gun from his hand and swept his leg under Nazari's, knocking him to the ground. He stood with his foot on his throat. "Now I believe you owe me some money." Nazari let out a string of curses until Tague pressed harder on his throat.

"Fine, Fine. Let me up."

He did so and passed the routing information to Nazari. He waited until his phone beeped to confirm the transfer. He pressed the speaker on his phone. "We're a go." Jamal and Akeem entered the room. They barely acknowledged the body on the floor as they took positions on either side of Remy.

"Now, my software," said Nazari.

"Here's the thing," Tague said in English. "I'm not a very good sport, either."

"American!" he shouted.

Tague tipped an imaginary hat then pointed to a large steamer trunk. Jamal opened it as Akeem put a gag around his mouth. "Get in." Jamal and Akeem pushed him toward the trunk. "Get in," he repeated. Nazari tried to fight his men until he went up and put his arm around Nazari's shoulder. "We get paid whether you're alive or dead. Frankly, I prefer alive because transferring a dead body a great distance is a nasty business. But I can be fair. You choose." Nazari stepped into the large trunk and sat down. "Good choice." The men closed the lid and Tague took Remy's gun. He switched back to Arabic so Nazari would have no misunderstanding. "I've drilled enough holes for you to breathe but they are also wide enough for the barrel of this gun. If you make noise I will not hesitate to kill you." To emphasis his point he shove the barrel through one of the air holes. When no sound came from the box he accepted he'd made his point. "Okay, get this thing on board and let's get the hell out of Dodge."

Jamal and Akeem picked up the trunk and carried out of the small room to the nearby dock. Tague leaned down and picked up the flunky's phone. "They're going to see

what software he had on this phone that could see a hotel's schedule and the activity on surrounding streets."

Remy closed up the laptop and held the door for Tague. "You know you weren't so bad with that move, old man. Very Kung Fu."

"Not Kung Fu, idiot, Shotokan karate."

"Yeah well. Still, not bad for an old dude."

"Shut up," he laughed.

They walked up the dock and got on to the boat. Jamal already had the engine started and Akeem cast off. Akeem joined them on the deck. "He's secured below. I suggest we not let him out until we are several miles out to sea."

Tague nodded. "Agreed. Jamal. Let me know when we hit international waters."

"Will do, boss," he replied as he pulled away from the dock and out to the channel.

Tague touched his phone and opened the still active call to LA. "You got all that, Major? Nazari is secured and we are headed out to sea."

"Excellent work, Tague. I'll see you in LA."

"Copy that." Tague sat on a small bench, looked out at the black water and thought, "I really am getting too old for this shit."

“I can’t believe it, but you did it,” said Jake.

“Ralph did it,” said Walter. “We were the back up.”

Ralph smiled. “Scorpion did it.”

Cabe picked up his phone and tapped a contact. “Hello Katherine.” He put it on speaker so everyone could hear.

“Please tell me you’re calling with good news.”

“Yes, I’m calling with good news. We’ve captured Nazari and you can dispatch the cruiser to the coordinates .”

“Congratulations, team. Well done.”

She heard a chorus of “Thank you, director.”

“Ah, director. Jake Martin, here.”

“Yes, Major. Your operative did an excellent job.”

Jake shot Cabe a look. “Nothing gets past Director Cooper,” said Cabe.

“Well, I have two American operatives accompanying Nazari and two locals who aided in his capture. Will the cruiser be able to refuel their boat? They have an alternate destination. We owe them, Ma’am.”

“Yes, Major. We will refuel and restock their boat. Australia is a long trip.”

Cabe smiled at Jake’s dumbfounded expression. “Like I said, nothing gets past her. Director, how long before Nazari is on American soil?”

“About twelve hours. That should give me enough time to get things straight on this end.”

“What about...” Jake started. Cabe shook his head.

“What about Carson?”

Katherine laughed. “Well, I can’t wait to see that pencil necked dweeb’s head explode when he realizes that my team caught Nazari. I will have to do an end run around Carson to make sure he doesn’t take credit for this.”

“Are you going to be okay, Katherine? Carson is a powerful man.”

“Thanks for the concern, Cabe. I’ve got this. I will meet everyone at the garage at nine tomorrow. I will also want a complete briefing on this new software, Walter.”

“Director, I didn’t develop it. Ralph did.”

“Ralph?”

“Yes Ma’am,” Ralph replied.

“I will expect a briefing from you tomorrow.”

“Ah, Director,” said Paige. “Ralph has school in the morning.”

“Algebra can wait. His country needs him and I need that software.”

“Yes Ma’am,” said Paige.

Cabe disconnected the phone and put it in his pocket. “You heard her. We have to be here for a briefing by nine. That should give us all time to get some rest.”

Everyone started packing up as Cabe grabbed his keys from his desk. “You ready? Allie will be glad to have me home before midnight.”

“Aren’t you forgetting something?” asked Jake.

“What?”

“What do you mean what? Thorny! He’s the reason we’re doing all this.”

Cabe smiled and put his arm around Jake’s shoulder. “Trust Katherine. She knows why we’re doing this.”

“What about Farad and his family?”

Paige was leading Ralph to the door when he stopped and looked at Jake. “Once all this is settled and your friend is released we can use my software to find the Hasan’s. Then you can tell them it’s safe to come home.”

Jake looked at Cabe then back at Ralph. “Uh...thanks kid.”

“You’re welcome.”

Cabe smiled at Jake as Paige led Ralph out of the garage. “Don’t try to understand. I gave that up years ago. Just go with it.”

Cabe and Jake pulled into the garage. He'd picked up a supply of bagels and cream cheese. He hoped that Toby had made the coffee. He loved Paige but she always either putting cinnamon in it or was brewing some fancy schmancy blend. He snickered when he looked at Jake. Knowing Katherine would be present for the briefing, he'd changed from jeans and a t-shirt to chinos and a tailored button down shirt.

"Oh, are those from Kaplan's?" asked Toby as he grabbed the bags from his hand.

"Good morning to you too."

Toby opened the bag and inhaled. "Ah, the only the about New York I miss." He glanced over at Cabe. "Coffee's strong, regular and plain Columbian."

"I hope everyone got some rest," said Cabe.

"Ralph didn't sleep well," said Paige. "He was wandering the apartment half the night."

He sat down next to Ralph who looked equal parts worried and tired. "Buddy? What's the problem?"

"I'm worried about briefing Director Cooper."

"You've met her lots of times. Why are you nervous?"

"I've never given a briefing before."

"Just explain it to her the way you explained it to us. The Director is a brilliant woman and a great agent. She's more concerned with justice than with reputation. You'll see. You'll do fine."

"Why, thank you Agent Gallo."

They turned to see Katherine Cooper standing in the doorway. Standing next to her was Chester Thornton. "Thorny!" Cabe shouted as he jumped to embrace his friend. Jake followed quickly behind.

"Don't call me Thorny," he growled through a smile.

“I had him released this morning. I thought he’d like to meet with the team that sorted out that mess.”

Cabe laughed. “Did Carson’s head explode?”

“No but it turned a satisfactory shade of red when he was told he was suspended pending review.” Katherine looked at Thorny. “He tried to use men like the Master Sergeant and Mr. Hasan who’d served this country at the risk of their own lives to forward his agenda. There are some things that won’t stand, even with the most political of bureaucrats.”

“The fact that we brought in Nazari didn’t hurt.” A man walked in behind them. His hair was dark and scruffy and his beard was in need of a trim. His clothes looked like he’d slept in them and smelled like the sea.

“Tague!” shouted Jake. He took his hand to shake it but stopped before giving him a hug. “Damn dude, you stink.”

“Good to see you too, Major.”

“Everyone, this is Tague,” said Jake.

“I’ll take care of the introductions,” said Cabe. The team stood to meet the man who’d only been a disembodied, snarky voice. This is Walter O’Brien, the head of Scorpion. Dr. Toby Curtis, Happy Quinn, Sylvester Dodd, Florence Tipton, Paige Dineen and her son, Ralph Dineen.”

“You’re the kid?”

“Yes, sir.”

Tague shook his head. “Damn. I’ll save the handshakes until I scrub off some of the desert and sea. You wouldn’t by any chance to have some place I can do that, would you?”

“Yes,” said Walter “My loft is upstairs.”

“Oh that would be great.”

Cabe noticed as all the women watched Tague following Walter upstairs. Toby and Sly noticed too. Happy walked toward Paige and Florence. “He looks like a pirate.”

“Yeah,” said Florence with a broad smile.

“Uh huh,” said Paige with a glint in her eyes.

Toby came up behind Happy and put his hands on her shoulders. “Ah sweetness, hello?”

“Huh?” she muttered, still looking up the stairs.

He leaned in and whispered. “I still have my pirate hat.”

Happy snapped to attention. “Cool.” She walked back to her desk with Toby whispering decadent promises in her ear.

Sly stood in front of Florence, blocking her view of the loft. “Florence, can I get you some coffee? Cabe brought egg bagels and they go fast.”

Florence looked at him and smiled. “Thanks Sly. That would be nice.”

Cabe looked at Paige and caught her attention. She smiled and shook her head, following Florence and Sly to the bagels. He turned to his old friend. “How are you? Did they treat you okay?”

“Yeah, they got bored asking me the same question over and over so they said they’d leave me in my cell until I told them what they wanted to know. Since I honestly didn’t know anything I prepared to wait them out. One of my guards was a nice kid from Marietta. We started a game quoting bible verses. Then he brought me a bible to read when he was off duty.”

“Have you talked to Nancy?”

“Yes, she’s on her way here now.” Jake brought him a cup of coffee and he took a sip. “I don’t know how you two fools cooked up this cockamamie plan, but I’m grateful. It still doesn’t help the Hasan’s. They’re still on the run.”

Ralph walked over to the men. “Don’t worry, sir. After I brief the director I’ll use my software to locate them. Cabe and Major Martin have said they will go tell them.”

Thorny looked at Ralph, then Jake and Cabe, then back to Ralph. “Who the hell is this kid?”

“Ralph Dineen, sir,” he said, holding out his hand.

Thorny took his hand and shook it. “Ah...nice to meet you.”

“If you’ll excuse me, I want to grab a bagel before their all gone. Toby can be a bit of a bagel hog.” Ralph turned and pushed his way past Toby to grab a bagel.

“Someone want to explain?”

Cabe smiled. “Ralph designed the software that found Nazari. He’s one of the smartest people in the world.”

“The kid?”

Cabe nodded. “The kid.”

“Chester?” They turned to see Thorny’s wife, Nancy standing in the doorway with tears in her eyes. She ran to him and gave him a tight hug then a kiss long enough to make Cabe and Jake cough. “Are you alright? Did they hurt you?”

“No sweetheart. I’m fine. Are you okay?”

She slapped his chest. “Am I okay? Of course I’m not okay. My husband is taken away in the middle of the night and I don’t know what’s going on until a woman comes with a boy to tell me they were working on getting you released.”

Thorny pointed to Ralph. “Is that the boy?”

“Yes and that’s the woman,” she said pointing at Paige. She walked over and shook Nancy’s hand.

“Hello Mrs. Thornton. I’m sorry I couldn’t tell you more than I did but Cabe and Jake said you’d be worried sick and we should tell you as much as we could. By the way, you were very good at covering. I was very impressed”

“Thank you. I think it was nerves more than anything.”

“No, you struck me as a pretty sharp cookie.”

Thorny smiled and pulled her tight to him. “She sure is.”

“Can we go home now?”

“Let me see,” said Cabe and he pulled Katherine away from a conversation with Florence about her plan to eliminate plastics in the sea. “Nancy, this is Assistant Director Katherine Cooper from Homeland Security.”

“She’s the one who got me out.”

“Oh, thank you so much.”

“Ma’am, do you need me for anything? I didn’t know anything before and that hasn’t changed.”

“No, Master Sergeant. You’re free to leave.” She extended her hand to Thorny. “And let me apologize on behalf of Homeland to you and to your wife.”

“Thank you,” said Thorny. He gave Cabe and Jake each a hug. “I can’t thank you enough for what you did for me.”

“It doesn’t touch what you did for us,” said Cabe.

“Well, we’ll start with a barbeque at our house this Saturday,” said Nancy. She looked around the room. “Bring everybody.”

“Yes Ma’am,” said Jake. “We’ll see you Saturday, Thorny.”

“You better,” he said. He turned and walked toward the door with his arm still around his wife’s waist. “And don’t call me Thorny!”

Cabe walked over to Katherine and smiled. "That was well done, Katherine."

She nodded and smiled. "Thanks, Cabe."

Jake coughed and gave Cabe a nod toward Katherine. "Assistant Director Cooper, now that you can officially be seen with us, I would like to formally introduce Retired Major Jacob Martin, formerly Marine Recon and avid sports fanatic."

Katherine gave Jake a sly smile. "I'm very aware of Major Martin's record."

"You looked into me?" he smiled.

"Of course," she said, still holding his hand. "I fully research all my operatives." Her phone rang and she looked at the screen. "Excuse me, while I take this." She walked outside and closed the door behind her.

"You are a unbelievable," said Cabe.

"What? I'm retired. Now I have the time for my two favorite hobbies now, fishing and chasing women."

Cabe smiled and shook his head. "Unbelievable."

Katherine returned carrying a box and set it down. "I got a call. Carson's out, I'm in."

"Congratulations, Director," said Cabe as he extended his hand to her.

"Thank you," said Katherine.

"Congratulations, Director," said Jake as he shook her hand but didn't let go. "Allie told me you're a big sports fan."

Katherine laughed and pulled her hand back "I just tell you I've been made Director of Homeland Security and you still have the stones to hit on me?,"

Jake grinned. "Why yes, Director, I do."

She laughed and pulled a business card from her jacket. "Here. The Dodgers are playing the Padres Saturday. Call me and I'll give you the address." She smiled at Cabe as she walked toward the group. "Where is Tague?"

"Coming, Ma'am." Tague walked down the stairs wearing one of Walt's polos and a pair of his chinos. His beard had been trimmed and tamed and his hair was still wet but was combed straight back. The women noticed the biggest difference. His eyes were now a bright blue. Florence smiled, "Weren't your eyes brown?" Tague walked over to the table and grabbed a bagel.

"My job is to blend in and my eye color makes that difficult in the Middle East so I wear brown contacts."

"Wow. I'm mean, that's very logical."

"Can I get you some coffee?" asked Paige with a bit too broad a smile.

"That would great. Thank you," he replied with an equally broad smile.

"Tague, is that your first name or last name?" asked Florence.

"Just Tague is fine." He smiled as he accepted the coffee from Paige.

Cabe wasn't the only one who was watching the exchange. He saw Walter watching then hitting several keys on his keyboard. He saw a dangerous smile come over his face. He wrote something on a slip of paper and handed it to Sly.

"Percival?" asked Sly. "Your name is Percival?" Cabe caught the women trying to suppress a laugh. Tague's tough guy demeanor slipped a bit.

"My mother was English and she named me for my grandfather. It's tradition."

"There's a lot to be said for tradition," said Cabe.

"Can we get started?" asked Katherine. "I have an agency to run."

A number of "Yes, Ma'ams," replied.

"Okay, Tague, will I have any issues with how you got Nazari out of the country?"

“You shouldn’t. He was willing to participate in espionage. He murdered his own man in front of us. I turned him over to an agency that held a legal warrant on him. I didn’t injure him. In fact I fed him and made sure he was comfortable, once we got him out of the box.”

“Box?”

“We put him in a steamer trunk until we got into international waters.”

“How long was he in the box?”

“About an hour.”

Katherine shrugged. “I can work with that.” She looked at the team. “Explain how you provided the location of this terrorist.”

Ralph took a deep breath and looked at Cabe. He nodded and smiled. “I began to develop this software to identify people through buildings. I recently finished it.”

“Why did you develop it?” asked Katherine.

“After what happened in Norway I thought I might be able to find Mark Collins.”

“I take it you haven’t found him yet.”

“No Ma’am, but when Cabe told us what was happening to his friend I thought the only way to solve Mr. Thornton’s problem was to find Nazari.”

“It’s pointless for me to ask how the software works. I will have you brief our software experts at a later date. Tague, how did you get Nazari to come out of hiding?”

“We offered him the software?”

“You what!?”

“Not the real software, Ma’am. We altered it to appear to locate who he was looking for,” said Walter.

“Who was he looking for?”

“General Charles Gaines.”

“Holy crap! You didn’t tell him where he was did you?”

“Of course not,” said Walter. “Ralph found him at the Pentagon and copied his movements. Then he put him a hotel in Marrakesh which is known for United Nations meetings.”

“Oh that reminds me,” said Tague as he pulled a phone out of his slacks. “This belonged to the flunky Nazari killed. It has some kind of software that allowed him to confirm the data from the fake software.”

“Let me get this straight. Your software could see into the Pentagon and copy the movement of a four star general.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Ralph said quietly.

“Have you been looking places you shouldn’t?”

“No, Ma’am.”

Paige stood next to her son. “Director, my son found the most wanted terrorist in the world.”

“Don’t worry. I’m believe him.” She looked at Ralph and smiled. “You’ve done your country a great service.”

Ralph smiled. “Cabe asked me to help.”

“Well, I am very grateful. You’re a minor so I can’t put you on the payroll but I can do this.” She picked up the box and handed it to him. He opened up the box and squealed.

“Holy Cow!”

“Ralph, what is it?”

He pulled a sleek, sliver laptop from the box. “It’s the T-1000! It’s the latest laptop from Rimark. It’s the top of the line. It’s super fast.”

“I had them preload a few games.”

The computer booted up quickly and he saw the gaming icons. “Sly, check this out! Kingdom Quest Five!”

“What?” he said as he looked over Ralph’s shoulder. “That’s incredible. Quest Four isn’t even out yet.”

“Patty’s gonna love this.”

Sly tapped his shoulder. “Hey.”

“Don’t worry. We’ll play too.”

“Director while this is very nice of you, are there any other programs I want to know about?”

Katherine smiled. “You mean like spy software to watch what he’s up to? What would be the point? If anyone could find spyware it’s Ralph.”

Ralph looked up and smiled. “That’s true, Mom.”

“Ralph, I do want the real software.”

“Huh,” he looked up from his new game, “Oh yeah, here.” He reached into his shirt pocket and grab a flash drive. “It’s on here but you’ll need me to explain how to run it.”

“Fine. We’ll set something up for later in the week.” She looked at Paige and smiled. “The most advanced recognition software in the world in the pocket of a thirteen year old boy.” She looked over at Tague who was smiling too broadly at Florence. He was ignoring the death stare Sly was giving him. “Major Tague, if I could have your attention for a moment.”

“Major?” asked Jake. “When did that happen?”

“Could we play catch up later?” asked Katherine. “Now, Major, your commander was gracious enough to loan you out to us for an unspecified length of time but I think two years is long enough. I’m pulling you in.”

Tague gave her a big smile. “Thank you, Director.”

“Thank you? I expected you to fight me on it.”

“No Ma’am. Once I report in I’m putting in my papers.” He looked over at his Marine brothers. “You have to know when it’s time to walk away.” Jake and Cabe both nodded.

“Well then, I guess we’re done here.” She looked around the room and met each one’s eyes. “You all doing amazing work but you’re better together.” Each person awkwardly shifted and moved. “You know I’m right. All I’m saying is consider it.” She grabbed her bag and turned. “I’ll be going.”

Tague stood. “Director, may I impose on you for a lift?”

“Of course.” She looked at Jake’s panicked expression and smiled. She leaned down and whispered, “He still technically works for me. You don’t.”

Jake watched as Katherine and Tague walked out of the garage. He clapped his hands together and smiled. “Hot damn! This is gonna be good.”

Walter looked around at the room and saw the team packing up. It was now or never. "Before you go, if I could have a moment? Please?" Everyone stopped at the rarely heard word. He relaxed a bit when he saw everyone stop. "I'd like to talk to the team."

Jake stood. "I'll go get a coffee but first I want to thank all of you for what you've done. I know normally you get paid..."

"Some things are more important than money," Walter smiled at his team. "A lot more."

Jake nodded and turned to Cabe. "I'll be in the office. Tell me when your ready. I'm sure Allie misses my smiling face."

Cabe laughed. "Shut up, jackass."

Walter waited until Jake left the room. He looked over at Cabe who nodded and smiled. "We did great things today, together. These last four months have taught me a lot, mostly that I have a lot more to learn. Although Scorpion has been doing well..." Cabe interrupted him with a cough. Walter looked down and took a breath. "Scorpion is not what it was, but still we have had our successes. None of it felt like it felt today. I want the team back together. All of you. Not because the company isn't doing as well. The truth is, you people are my family and I want my family back." He paused and glanced at his shoes. "I love you."

"Excuse me?" said Toby. "We couldn't hear that last part."

He looked up at Toby, knowing he was being pushed. "I love you. Alright? All of you. Even you, you giant pain in the butt."

Toby smiled. "That's what I thought you said."

Walter flipped over a whiteboard to show a pie chart. "I would like to revisit the issue of shares in Scorpion. I would still be primary shareholder at fifty one percent. Florence, you've only been with us a year so I've given you one percent. Everyone else," he looked at Cabe, "Everyone will get eight percent." He looked at the team. "We've built this together. Without all of you, it's not the same. It's not Scorpion." He looked around

the room at the stunned faces. “All I ask is you think about it.” He watched Toby and Happy whisper to each other. Happy looked at him with her typical stoic expression.

“We’re in.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, I miss my work bench. The new office is too...sterile. I guess I miss the sound of raccoons in the rafters.”

“And I go where she goes,” said Toby.

“I’m just happy to be included,” said Florence.

“Paige?” Walter asked.

“I don’t know. What do you think, Ralph?”

Ralph looked at his mother and smiled. “I’m good with it if your are.”

Paige nodded at her son. “I’m good with it.” She looked at Walter. “We’re in.”

Walter sighed with relief. “Cabe, what about you?”

“As much as I appreciate the percentage, I work for Homeland. You’re my assignment. I don’t think I can take it.”

He pointed at Cabe and spoke quickly. “I looked into it. There’s nothing to stop you from investing in a private company.”

“But I haven’t invested in the company.”

“You buy the bagels,” Walter replied. “Any profits from your share can be invested in a 401K. I’m sure Paige could help you set that up.”

Cabe smiled. “Well, seeing how you’ve done the research, I’m in.”

Walter clapped his hands together. “Yes!” He turned to Sylvester. “That just leaves you, Sly.” He walked over to where he was sitting. “The team needs you. I need you.”

“I thought you replace me with enough computing power.”

“Nothing and no one can replace you. You’re my brother.” Sly looked up at him and Walter could see he was wavering. He leaned in and whispered, “I gave you Percival.” He leaned back and formed his hand into a fist. “What do you say?”

Sly smiled and fist bumped him. “I’m in.”

“We’re back!” yelled Toby.

Walter looked at Cabe and smiled. “Yes we are.” He looked around the room and felt better than he had in months. Even though he and Paige were no longer together, they were friends. And maybe, one day. “Look we’ve all had a long day. Tomorrow we’ll find the Hasans and...”

“Oh, I already did that,” said Ralph.

“You did?” said everyone in unison.

“Yeah.” He pulled a post-it out of his pocket and handed it to Cabe. “Here’s the address. It’s in the mountains.”

“Thanks, son. Jake and I will start out in the morning.”

“Great job, Ralph,” said Walter. “Maybe when you have time you can explain the software to me.”

“Sure thing.”

“Well, considering Ralph has completed our mission, I suggest we take tomorrow off and start fresh on Friday.”

“Sounds like a plan,” said Paige.

“Okay, I’ll see you all on Friday,” said Walter. He was relieved when they all said yes. Cabe walked up to him, stood still for a moment, then extended his hand.

“Well done, Walter.”

“Thanks, Cabe.”

Cabe and Allie arrived at the Thornton's home about noon and it looked like most of the team had already arrived. "Cabe, don't dare tell anyone my macaroni salad is vegan. If you don't they'll never know."

"I promise. Hey, I like it. I'll make sure they see me eat it."

She leaned over and came him a quick kiss. "Thank you."

They walked around the back of the house where they heard all the noise. Thorny was already firing up the grill and Nancy was passing out drinks. Thorny saw him and smiled. He looked a lot less tired than he did the last time he saw him. He was wearing a 'kiss the cook' apron. "Cabe, you made it!"

Cabe gave him a hug. "I wouldn't have missed it. Thorny, this is my girlfriend, Allie Jones."

Thorny shook Allie's hand. "What's a pretty thing like you doing with an old coot like Cabe?"

"Just lucky I guess. It's very nice to meet you, Mr. Thornton."

"You can call me Thorny. Hey Nancy, Cabe's here."

Nancy came over and gave Cabe a hug. "Thank you," she whispered. She looked at Allie and smiled. "So, introduce me."

"This is my girlfriend, Allie Jones."

"It's very nice to meet you. I brought some macaroni salad."

"Excellent. Thank you." She took the salad from her and smiled. "Come with me and I'll tell you some stories from the back in the day."

"Ah jeez," said Cabe.

Thorny patted his back. "Give it up. She'll know everything before the end of the party. Even that time in Dubai." Thorny got quiet for a moment. "You put everything on the line for me. Thank you." Cabe just nodded. It's what you do for a brother. Thorny knew that.

“Okay, now the party can get started.”

Cabe turned around to see Jake with Katherine. Following behind was Tague. “I thought you two were going to a ball game.”

“It’s a night game,” said Katherine. “I wouldn’t miss a good barbeque.”

“Thank you for coming, Director,” said Thorny.

“Today, it’s Katherine.” She looked at Jake and smiled. “I’m going to greet our hostess. You boys play nice.”

Cabe laughed at Jake’s expression as she walked away. “Damn, Jake, you just met her.”

“Yeah but she’s a hell of a woman.”

“She is that.”

Tague stepped in and joined the conversation. “I would have to agree. Speaking of beautiful women, who is that lovely creature with all the curls?”

“That would be my girlfriend, Allie,” he growled.

“Really?” Tague slapped Cabe on the back. “Well done, Major. You need to forgive me. I’ve been undercover for two years. My manners are a bit rusty.”

“Yes, well curb your enthusiasm around my girlfriend and the Scorpion women.”

“Don’t worry. I took the hint in the garage. They may be computer nerds but I have the feeling that they’d tear me to shreds if I made a move on any of them.”

“Or shred your credit rating,” Cabe smiled.

“Hello, Major Cabe.” He turned to see Amanda Hasan standing there with her parents. They’d been frightened when Jake and Cabe pulled up to their cabin but opened the door when they identified themselves from the safety of Cabe’s SUV.

“Hello Amanda. It’s very good to see you again.”

“Are you sure it’s safe?” she asked.

Cabe hated that jackass Carson for a lot of reasons but this one most of all, frightening a little girl. “Amanda, I’m sure your father told you what Marines are like.”

“Yes, he did. He said you were good guys and you protected him.”

“We also never lied to him. I promise you, as a Marine, you are safe.” He pointed to Katherine chatting with Paige. “See that lady over there with the long hair.”

“Uh huh.”

“Her name is Katherine Cooper and she is the Director of Homeland Security.”

Amanda gasped and ran to her father. “Papa!”

“Amanda I swear you’re safe.” He waved Katherine over to him.

“Hello, you must be the Hasan’s. I’m Katherine Cooper.” Amanda buried her head in her father’s shoulder.

“Katherine, Amanda is afraid of us.”

Katherine moved a bit closer to the Hasan’s and spoke softly. “I understand, Amanda. What happened to your family was terrible. I want to apologize to you and promise you that you and your family is safe.”

“How can you be sure?” she asked.

Katherine pulled her badge out of her jeans pocket and showed it to the little girl. “Because I’m the one who makes those decisions now.” Katherine held out her hand to Farad. “Mr. Hasan, your work as interpreter saved countless lives.” She smiled at the little girl. “Your Papa is a hero.”

Amanda smiled. “I think so.”

Katherine waved over Tague. “Major Tague, this is Farad Hasan, his wife Reza and their daughter, Amanda. Major Tague is the man who captured Nazari.”

“Thank you, Major,” said Farad. “You saved my family from a life of hiding.”

“You’re welcome,” he said with a smile. He looked at Amanda and smiled. “Hello, princess.”

She looked at Tague with fascination and said with a broad smile. “You’re pretty.”

Tague laughed through his blush. “Why, thank you, Miss Amanda. I think you’re pretty too.”

Farad set Amanda down and Reza took her by the hand. “Come on you. Let’s go say hi to Mrs. Thornton.” Amanda turned around as her mother pulled her away and waved at Tague. He smiled and waved back.

Jake laughed and slapped his back. “You do have the touch with the fairer sex.”

Thorny smiled. “Your reputation proceeds you, Major. Don’t worry. My wife invited some of her friends from the hospital.”

“Single, female friends?”

“Go say hi to Nancy and leave the rest to her.”

He clapped his hands together. “Now it’s a party!” Tague walked over to Nancy who was introducing Allie to her friends.

Cabe looked at Thorny. “This should be interesting.”

Cabe sat at the picnic table and watched the goings on. The party was in full swing and everyone was having a great time. Walter had even relaxed enough that some of his Irish accent slipped through. Toby was dancing with Sly much to the amusement of Happy and Florence. Jake and Katherine were deep in conversation about the Dodgers stats. Tague was chatting up a pretty nurse from Nancy's hospital. Thorny and Nancy would catch each other's gaze from across the yard. Cabe could see the love in their eyes. It was the same look he'd seen all those years ago. He looked over at Allie as she talked to Paige. Allie had changed everything in his life. He felt a peace he hadn't known in years. Just then she caught his gaze and smiled. He really was a lucky man.

Walter sat down next to him on the bench. "It's a good party, isn't it?"

"Very good," Cabe smiled. He looked at the team, finally together again.

"Despite how you got us together, it was a good outcome."

"Desperate times," he said.

"Do you think it's going to work this time? Will I be able to keep them together?"

"You've learned a lot in the last four months, mostly that you need them. If your going to do something that effects them stop and think. Is it something old Walter would do?" Cabe patted Walter's back. "Or is it something new Walter would do? Don't let yourself fall back on your old habits."

"If I can't decide what to do can I come to you?"

"Of course son."

Walter looked at the team. "I don't ever want to lose them again."

He looked at Walter and he saw the same frightened boy he had all those years ago in Ireland. "You won't. Not that you know now what's at stake."

Walter looked surprised. "You really think I can do this?"

Cabe smiled. "I do. I'm really proud of you, son."

The smile on Walter's face was one he hadn't seen in far too long. Ralph came over and grabbed Walter by the hand. "Come on. We're going to play horseshoes. Toby and Sly challenged us."

Walter stood and started to walk away. He turned and said, "Thanks, Cabe. For everything."

Allie came over and joined him on the bench. "Hey there, handsome." Cabe smiled and gave her a kiss, something he rarely did in public.

"I love you, Allie."

"I love you too. What's going on?"

He put his arm around her shoulders and pulled her close. "I'm just appreciating what a lucky man I am." He looked over at the rowdy game of horseshoes where Walter and Ralph were apparently winning by the sound of the cheers. "I'm a very lucky man."