

Scorpion 2.0: The Inconsistent Solution

By Kate Simon

Cabe Gallo watched as his raggedy band geniuses were focused on their work. It had been six months since he pulled a mean trick to get them back together. It took them awhile to forgive him but he knew they were secretly glad he'd done it. He'd given them an excuse to come back together and still save face.

Sylvester had gotten back to where he had been. It helped that he was now dating Florence. She'd gotten over her crush on Walter very quickly and realized she and Sly were a much better couple.

Toby and Happy had each other to lean on. Toby was back to analyzing everyone. Everyone except his wife. Happy would smack him silly. She was tougher to read but then she'd always had been.

Walter walked down the stairs from his loft. Cabe watched as he awkward exchange with Paige. Ever since he'd gotten the team back together, Walter and Paige had a tenuous détente. Breaking up as a couple is what had broken up the team. If they were going to keep the team together Paige and Walter will have to sort this out once and for all.

Cabe poured himself a cup of coffee. "Hey Doc, do you have minute?"

Toby joined him and poured himself some coffee. "What's up?"

He nodded toward Walter running back up to his loft. "I'm sure you can see what's going on there."

"Classic avoidance behavior."

"What can you do about it?"

Toby threw his hands up in surrender. "Oh no! You're not getting me to walk into that minefield."

"You're a shrink. This is what you do."

"They're friends and Walter is my boss."

"I'm a friend and you helped me."

Toby put his hand on Cabe's shoulder. "Ahh. See, I told you I'd grow on you."

"Shut it, jackass."

He dropped his snark. "I tried to help him before and he didn't listen to me. He might listen to you."

"Me? I'm no relationship expert."

"True, but you are an expert at being a father to all of us. Walter won't listen to a professional but he might listen to a father."

Cabe tilted his head down. He was never comfortable with compliments. "I'll give it a shot."

Cabe climbed the stairs to Walter's loft. It was his job as the Homeland Security agent to protect the team but in the four years he'd been assigned here these kids had become his family. He loved these people and would do what he anything to protect family. He hated meddling in their personal lives but he'd given them no choice. He knocked on the door before he walked in.

"I'm very busy," said Walter without looking away from his terminal.

"No you're not. We have no pending cases."

"Homeland is not our only client."

"You're hiding."

Walter looked away from his terminal. "Excuse me?"

"You're hiding."

"From who or what am I hiding?"

"Paige."

Walter shook his head. "Ridiculous. Paige is my employee and a friend. Our relationship is exactly what it should be."

"If it was you'd work at your desk downstairs, not up here."

"I find the quiet allows me to concentrate."

"Bull. You're still in love with her."

"That's in the past. We've moved on."

"Walter, everyone is walking on eggshells because of the tension between the two of you. If you two don't work this out this team will not survive."

"That's ridiculous. Now if you'll excuse me, I have work to do."

Cabe sighed. This was going to be harder than he thought. He walked back down the stairs to Paige's desk.

"Hey, kid."

“Hey.”

“Can I have a moment?”

“Yeah, sure.” She gave him a concerned look. “What’s up?”

He nodded toward the small office where the saw clients. It wasn’t much but it had a door and they’d have some privacy. He closed the door behind him and sat down. Paige joined him at the table.

“Cabe, you’re scaring me.”

“I want to talk to you about Walter.”

“What about him?”

“You two haven’t resolved this thing between you. You just have an uneasy peace. That’s putting a lot of stress on the team, not just the two of you.”

“You make it sound like a war.”

“In a way it is. The question is how are you going to get a peace agreement that makes everyone happy.”

She glanced down, not making eye contact. “I don’t think that’s possible.”

“I am not blaming you for what happened but you have more real world experience than he does. You knew going in he would never be able to have the kind of relationship with you that you had with Tim. Walter would never be capable of that. I’m not going to question whether you’re still in love with him or not. That’s your business. If you’re not but you want the friendship to remain, you need to figure out how to make it happen. If you’re still in love with him then you need to figure out how to be happy with what he can give. You know how to fight for what you want. He doesn’t and never will.” Cabe stood and picked up his mug. He smiled at Paige, feeling almost as bad as when he tricked the team into getting back together. “Are we good, kid?”

“Yeah, yeah. We’re fine,” she said looking shell shocked.

“Paige, taking care of the team is what you do. You know how to talk to them, how to get their egos to mess and work as a team. You’re also strong enough to kick some ass, even mine, when it’s needed.” She managed a little smile. He put a comforting hand on her shoulder. “You can do this. I have faith in you.” As he walked out the door he heard her whisper.

“No pressure.”

Ralph came into the garage and tossed his backpack on his chair. He was doing so much work with Scorpion that Walter had given him his own desk. He powered up his computer to check his program.

“Hey, mister. Since when don’t you greet your mother?” asked Paige.

“Sorry Mom.” He got up and walked over to his mother’s desk. “Hi.”

“How was your day?”

“Good.”

“Should I even ask what you learned today?”

“Today was my coding lab.”

Paige smiled and sighed. “I miss the day’s then you school work meant coloring and learning your times tables.”

“Mom, I knew my times tables by the time I was three.” She smiled and gave him a kiss. “Can I go back to my desk?”

“Go on,” she smiled.

He sat down at his computer and pulled up the program he’d designed. He might tweak it a bit. The program had been running for nearly a year with no results. It may just be there had been nothing to find. He wasn’t sure. He opened the latest scans and his heart raced. “Oh my God! Yes!”

“What is it?” asked Paige.

“Mom, Walter, Everybody! Come here!”

Everyone gathered around his desk. “What’s going on, kid?” asked Cabe.

“I found him!”

“Found who?” asked Paige. He expanded the window and he could hear the gasps. “Is that...?” asked Walter.

Ralph smiled. “Mark Collins.”

“Where is this?” asked Walter.

“LAX.”

“What? He’s back?” asked Paige.

“It was just a matter of time,” said Toby.

“Why would he come back?” asked Cabe.

“Because he wants to get his revenge.”

“Wasn’t putting Cabe on trial enough?” asked Paige.

“No. He wasn’t convicted. Cabe going to jail would have hurt Walter and that’s what Collins wants more than anything.”

“How did you do this?” asked Walter.

“I developed a face recognition program that is much more sensitive. When Toby said he thought Collins would come back soon or later…”

“Knew. I knew he’d be back,” said Toby.

“I decided to check the incoming passengers from international flights.”

“Ralph, are you tapping into Airport Security? Homeland will come after us for that.”

“No. Nothing inside the terminal. I only tapped into the cameras at the exits nearest the international terminal.”

“When is this?” asked Walter.

“About an hour ago. Four o’clock this afternoon.”

“How do we find out what he’s up to?” asked Paige.

“I can task the traffic cameras to feed through my program,” said Ralph.

“Toby, what do you think he will do?” asked Sly.

“I don’t know but whatever it is, it will be big and designed to inflict the most pain on us.”

Walter sat in his loft trying to think of what Mark Collins could possibly have planned. They'd been scouring traffic camera, checking taxi services, looking for anything that would lead them to where he'd gone. All they knew was Mark had come out of LAX three days ago and disappeared.

"Hey."

He looked up and saw Paige in his doorway. "Hey."

"Have you eaten?"

"I'm not hungry."

"You need to eat. You can't function without food. Come downstairs. I ordered in from Kavelski's."

"I said I'm not hungry. Stop mothering me."

"I am not mothering you! I am being your project manager, making sure everyone on the team is functioning at peak efficiency. Now get your butt down those stairs and eat!" Paige turned on her heels and stamped down the stairs. He thought about what Cabe had said. Yes, he had no doubt he was still in love with her. Seeing her like this every day caused him pain he didn't understand. He knew they couldn't have a romantic relationship. It wasn't logical that he was still so affected by her. How could Cabe think they could ever work this out? His stomach growled and he realized, once again, Paige was right. He got up and walk downstairs.

He grabbed a sandwich and some chips from the table. He looked around at his team. He knew they were all on edge. They were as frustrated as he was that they couldn't find Collins. "Guys, we can't spend all our time worrying about Collins. We have other clients. Ralph's software is checking the traffic cams in a fifty mile radius. We can't let Collins control our lives. That's what he wants."

"Walter's right," said Cabe. "I've notified Homeland that he's in the area. We're doing everything we can to find him."

Happy stood. “Collins grabbed by husband and was going to pour acid on him to kill him! Do you expect me to forget that?” Toby stood and put his hands on her shoulders.

“It’s okay, babe.”

She shook his hands off and turned. “No it’s not. This guy has come back to get us and I want his head on a pike!”

Cabe came to Happy’s side. “Listen to me. We’re not letting down our guard. But Walter is right. We can’t live in fear.” Happy huffed and walked back to her desk. That was as close as she would get to “You’re right.”

Walter nodded to Cabe, grateful for the support. “Everyone, I don’t expect you to stop what we’re doing to find him but I don’t want us to lose focus on our other work. I’m the one he wants to hurt, not you.” Paige put a hand on his arm. He knew that look, the look that said I’m afraid. “Don’t worry. I plan on being very careful.” She nodded and gave him a small smile. “Also, Paige, I want to apologize for snapping at you earlier. You were right. You were doing your job.”

“Thank you, Walter.”

He forced a smile. “Everyone, enjoy your lunch and then back to work.” He walked back up the stairs and sat down at his desk. He took a bite of his sandwich and looked at his screen. He was reviewing all the work Mark had done while he worked for Scorpion trying to get an idea of where to look for him.

The tension in the office was palpable. It had been two weeks since Ralph's software had ID'd Mark Collins but there had been no word on his location. Cabe sighed as he hung up the phone. That was his daily call from Homeland when he told his superiors that Scorpion had no idea of Collins location. No more than Homeland did. His picture had been sent to every police precinct but they'd heard nothing. Collins had gone underground as soon as he hit town.

He looked over at Paige and saw the strain on her face. Between Collins and Walter this had been a very hard couple of weeks for her. He poured her a cup of coffee and took it over to her. "Here you go, kid. You look like you could use this."

"Oh, thanks." She took the mug and drank a big gulp before she set it down. "I didn't get a lot of sleep last night."

"You haven't been sleeping for a while."

"It's been a rough couple of weeks."

"We'll find him."

"I know but in the mean time I'm looking over my shoulder, checking around corners, making sure Ralph is safe. I just want this to end."

"Why don't you take off early. Go home, get some rest."

"I really shouldn't."

He put his hand on her shoulder. "Yes, you should."

Paige looked at her watch. "It's almost three. Ralph will be home soon. Maybe I could go home. I should tell Walter."

"I'll do it," said Cabe. "Just go."

She pulled her purse out of her desk and smiled. She walked around the desk and gave him a kiss on the cheek. "Thanks, Cabe."

"You're welcome, kid."

He watched Paige walk out the front door and hoped she'd get some rest. He looked up toward the loft. Time to check on that stubborn kid. He walked up the stairs and found Walter glued to his terminal. He looked as tired as Paige. "Walter, I just sent Paige home."

"What? Why? Is she ill?"

"No, she's exhausted, almost as exhausted as you. When was the last time you slept?"

"I'm fine and Paige should have checked with me. I'm her boss."

"No, you're her problem."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"I mean that you haven't resolved the tension between the two of you. Between this and Collins the two of you aren't sleeping and you're running yourselves into the ground."

"I am reviewing all of Mark's work for Scorpion to see if there is any clue to what he will do. I don't have time to handle employee problems."

"Paige is not an employee problem."

Walter turned back to his screen. "If that's all, I have work to do."

Cabe threw his hands up in the air. "There's no talking to you."

Paige pulled into her parking space and sighed. Cabe was right. She needed some sleep. Ever since Collins came back she hadn't slept well. The truth was she hadn't slept well for months, ever since she broke up with Walter. She had to figure a way to make this work. She shook her head. She couldn't think about that now. All she could think about was her bed. She dug out her keys and opened her front door.

"Ralph, I'm home." He didn't answer but he should be here. Sometimes he got lost in his work. She knocked on his closed door. "Ralph?" She opened the door and saw him asleep on his bed, still in his clothes and his arm hanging off the bed. "Poor guy, you must be so tired." She walked over and picked up his arm, trying to set it on the bed. In the attempt she banged his hand on the nightstand. "Oh sweetheart, I'm sorry." She looked at Ralph and he didn't move. "Ralph?" She touched his back. "Ralph?" She shook his back but he didn't wake up. "Ralph? Ralph!" She shook him harder but he didn't wake up.

"Don't worry. He's just knocked out."

Paige froze. She knew that voice. She whipped around and launched herself at Mark Collins. "You bastard! What did you do to my son?!"

Mark pushed her off. "Easy now. It's just a little thing I came up with. He should wake up in about a couple of hours."

"I'll kill you!" She tried to launch herself at him again when he put a cloth over his nose and sprayed an aerosol in her face. She tried to reach for his throat but the only thing she saw was the black.

Cabe came into his apartment and set down his keys. Every day was more exhausting than the last. He didn't know how much more the team could take, including him. He could smell something cooking and he smiled. Allie was making dinner.

"Sweetheart, I'm home."

Allie came out of the kitchen and smiled. Her curly hair was pinned up so it was out of her face. "Hi, honey." She gave him a quick kiss. "Dinner is on and..." He interrupted her by pulling her back into his arms and gave her a deep, passionate kiss. She pulled back and had a sad smile. "Work is that bad?"

He pretended to look shocked. "Can't I give my girl a proper kiss when I get home?"

"Of course you can, but you always do that when you've had a rough day at work. The harder the day, the more passionate the kiss. That was three alarm hot."

Cabe chuckled. "You know me too well. This whole thing with Collins is wearing on the team, especially Walter and Paige. They aren't sleeping. I sent Paige home early to get some sleep before she fell over."

"Poor thing. Oh, and Cabe, for the record. You can kiss me anytime, anywhere."

"Copy that!" She smiled at him and he felt better. He always felt better with Allie. "I'm going to change." He went into the bedroom and changed into his jeans and a sweatshirt. All he wanted tonight was to relax. He took his gun out of the holster and locked it into his gun safe.

They had a nice dinner of comfort food, pork chops, mashed potatoes and gravy. He'd have to do a few extra laps on the track but it was worth it. They were washing the dishes when his phone rang.

"Oh, Cabe. No. No work tonight. You need a night off."

"It's Ralph. He wouldn't call at this hour if it wasn't important." He clicked on Ralph's picture. "Hey buddy. What's up?"

"Cabe...Uh...Are you there?" His words slurred.

"Ralph, what's wrong?"

“Collins. He drugged me. I don’t know where my Mom is. Can you come?”

“We’ll be right there.”

“Okay...” His voice dropped off as Cabe heard the phone hit the floor.

“Ralph! Ralph! Can you hear me?” He disconnected the call and called Toby.

“Hey Cabe. What’s ...”

Cabe didn’t let him finish. “Toby, it’s Ralph. Get your bag and get to Paige’s now. Allie and I are on the way.”

“What happened?”

“Collins!”

“Shit! We’re on our way.”

Allie handed him his jacket but he ran into the bedroom and opened the gun safe. He didn’t know what he’d be up against. “Allie, you call Walter and Sly while I drive.” They jumped into the car and pulled out of the driveway.

“Walter? It’s Allie.”

“Put it on speaker. Walter? It’s Cabe. Ralph just called. Collins drugged him. Paige is missing. We’re on our way. I’ve called Toby. They’re on our way.”

“Oh God,” he whispered.

“Walter? Walter? Are you okay?”

“Uh, yes. I’m on my way.”

He disconnected and Allie called Sly. “Sly it’s Allie. We need to talk to you.” She put it on speaker.

“Sly, it’s Cabe. Ralph called. Collins drugged him. Paige is missing. We’re on our way to Paige’s now.”

“Florence and I will meet you there.”

Cabe ran up the stairs to Paige's front door with Allie following behind him. He pulled out his gun and signaled for her to stand back.

"What are you doing?" she whispered.

"Making sure Collins isn't still there. Don't come in until I clear the rooms." He held his gun in front of him and carefully walked from room to room. Nothing seemed out of place but it was too quiet. He made his way back to Ralph's room and found him passed out on his bed. "All clear," he shouted. "Ralph. Ralph. Can you hear me, buddy?"

Ralph moaned but didn't open his eyes. "Cabe?"

"I'm here, buddy. Everyone is on their way. Can you open your eyes?"

His eyes fluttered open. "Mom."

"We'll find her."

Toby came into the room and Cabe moved aside as he opened his bag. He pulled out a stethoscope and listened to his heart and his breathing. "Ralph, it's Toby. Can you open your eyes for me." Ralph managed to hold his eyes long enough for Toby to check his pupils. "Okay buddy, that's good." Toby looked at Cabe. "Call for an ambulance."

"I've got that," said Allie and she walked out of the bedroom.

"How is he?" asked Cabe.

"Whatever he gave him it was really strong. He's lucky it didn't kill him. He needs to be in the hospital now."

Walter rushed into Ralph's bedroom, quickly followed by Sly and Florence. Walter fell to his knees next to Ralph. "Ralph, can you hear me? Where's Paige? Where did he take her?"

"Don't know," he whispered. "In my room when I got home." He paused and licked his lips. "I need a drink"

"I'll get some water," said Florence.

"What else, Ralph? This is important. You need to wake up!"

Toby grabbed Walter's arm. "Easy. He's been dosed with a very strong sedative." Florence came back to the room with an open bottle of water. Toby took it from her and looked Walter. "Help him sit up." Walter propped him up and Toby gave him a sip. "Not too much." They laid him back down.

"Mom was mad. I heard her. She screamed at him. That's all I heard." Ralph sighed and closed his eyes.

EMT's came into the apartment with a gurney and their equipment. "Okay. Everyone out," Everyone went into the hall. The tall blonde twenty something male looked Toby. "You too, sir."

"I'm Dr. Curtis. This boy was attacked and drugged. We don't know with what but it was very strong."

"Okay. Thank you, doctor."

Toby came out to the hall. "I'll go with him to the hospital. Let me know what's going."

"Will do," said Cabe.

The EMT's started to roll Ralph down the hall. He was deathly pale and now there was an IV needle in his arm and an IV bag resting on his chest. Everyone moved to the living room and watched as Toby followed along. "Let us know how he's doing," said Cabe. Toby nodded and went out the door.

Cabe turned and looked at the shocked team. They needed to put their emotions aside to figure out why Collins had taken Paige and where. "Alright, we need ideas. Where would he take her?"

"We should check that abandoned warehouse he had Toby. It was huge," said Happy.

"Yes, that's good. I have the van and we can use the imaging software," said Walter.

"Why would Collins take Paige?" said Sly.

“Mark wants to hurt me. He wants me to suffer. He knows that hurting Paige would be the one thing would hurt me the most, because I love her.”

Cabe had to get them back on track. “Okay. I know we’re all upset but that won’t help find Paige. Let’s pull it together.”

LAPD officers came in through the open door. “Can someone tell us what happened here?”

He flipped open his badge. “Cabe Gallo, Homeland Security.”

“How is the kid a Homeland issue?”

“Look, we don’t have time for this. Allie, Florence will you stay here and fill the officer in with what’s going on? Then call Director Cooper and let her know what’s going on. We may need backup.”

“Hey, You can’t leave. I have questions for you,” said the officer.

Cabe ignored him. “Come on, people.” He turned to leave and the officer grabbed his arm. He gave him the Gallo glare, which terrified anyone with any sense. Apparently, the officer was sensible.

They pulled up to the abandoned warehouse where Collins held Toby hostage. Cabe pulled out his gun while Walter fired up one of the computers. Happy leaned over and whispered in his ear. "If you get a shot, take it."

He looked at Happy and decided not to get into now. He understood what she was feeling. She'd been so close to losing Toby because of Collins and she wanted revenge. "Walter, do you see anything?"

"I see two people at about the same location where we found Toby."

"Okay, I'm going in. You stay here," said Cabe.

"I'm coming with you," said Walter.

"No. This is too dangerous."

"I'm the reason he has her. He'll want to see me. Maybe I can convince him to let her go."

"Alright but stay behind me." They all put in their coms as Cabe and Walter left the van. They opened the heavy metal door with care. They walked quietly as Cabe cleared each room. They approached the door they wanted and Cabe signaled Walter to stay back. He quietly opened the door a crack then he kicked it wide. "Homeland Security! Stay were you are!" Cabe lowered his weapon and sighed. "It's clear. Come in." Sitting before both of them were two frightened and dirty homeless men. Cabe touched his com. "It's not them. We're coming out."

They walked back to the van in silence. "Who was in there?" asked Sly.

"Two homeless men," said Cabe.

"What now?" asked Happy.

"I think we need Katherine and Homeland to rally the troops."

"We can't look over the entire city. He could be anywhere," said Walter as he plopped down in the passenger seat.

“Wait,” said Sly. “We didn’t know his plan before. Now we do. He’s got Paige and he wants Walter to suffer. He wouldn’t want us to find him too quickly but he would want us to find him.”

“Why do you say that?” asked Cabe.

“Because he wants to punish me,” said Walter. “He can’t do that if I’m not there for him to torment.”

“Exactly. Where is the last place we’d expect him to take her?” The last place we’d look?”

Walter and Happy smiled. “The garage!”

Cabe jumped in the driver’s seat. “I’ll drive.”

They pulled up to the garage and everyone jumped out of the van just as Toby pulled up. "Hold up! Hold up!" Cabe yelled. "We can't go in there hot. We don't know what were facing. He may have set traps."

"He probably did," said Toby. "He did it before."

"How's Ralph?" asked Cabe.

"He'll be fine. He'll be in the hospital overnight."

Walter turned to Happy. "What do you have in the van we can use to get inside?"

"I have a fiber optic camera I can snake through the transom."

"Good. Get it. Sly, monitor the screen."

Happy came back from the van with a length of metal cable with a penlight sized camera on the end. "Doc, boost me up." Toby clasped his hands and lifted Happy to the level of the window. She fed the camera through the window and it gave them a view of the inside.

"Oh, crap," Sly muttered.

"What is it?" asked Walter.

"Strings. Again."

"Oh, crap," said Walter. The last time he'd strung dental floss back and forth across the room he was holding Toby. It was attached to acid that was poised to kill him as soon as they cut the wrong string. At least this time they were only knee high. "Do you see Paige or Collins?"

Happy turned the camera to see the rest of the room. "No. They're not there."

"They have to be. Can you see the loft?"

She turned the camera up as far as it would go. "The door is closed."

"I see them," said Sly. "I turned on the thermal imaging. They're up there."

“Good work, Sly,” said Walter. He reached for the door handle. Cabe grabbed his hand.

“Whoa there. We don’t know what those strings will trigger.”

“Hold up,” said Happy as she moved the camera. “Sly, what do you see?”

“Ahh, jeez,” said Sly.

“What is it?” asked Walter.

“Enough C4 to take out the building and half the block.”

“We have to get in there and disarm the bomb without tripping the strings,” said Cabe. “Happy, can you?”

“Whoa, Whoa, hold on. You’re not going to blow up my wife,” said Toby.

“Doc, knock it off and Cabe, yes I can. I have the right tools inside. All you need to do is get me in there.”

Walter looked around the door frame. He need to pushed his fear for Paige aside and think. He needed to get Happy inside without stepping on the strings. Over the strings, over, “Think,” he said to himself. Then he smiled. “Happy, I remember when you swung over that ravine when we rescued those hikers. Your upper body strength was impressive.”

“It still is,” she said. He pointed up to an ancient O ring above the door. She smiled as she looked up. “I’m picking up what you’re putting down. I have some rope in my truck.” She ran to her truck and pulled a length of rope out of the toolbox.

“I don’t like this,” said Toby as he boosted Happy up to the ring.

“You don’t have to,” she said. “Hold still.” She threaded the rope through the O ring and pulled it down. She tied it into a knot and tested it by putting her foot in it. “Yeah, that’ll work.”

Walter reached for the door handle and carefully opened it. He held it open while Happy put one foot in the loop. “Doc, give me a good push.”

“I hate this,” he whispered as he pushed his wife as hard as he could. She sailed over the strings and leaped out of the rope, landing on her feet. She ran to her work bench and grabbed a few tools. She knelt down and looked at the bomb.

“What do you see, Happy?” asked Cabe.

“It’s fairly straightforward. Give me a minute. She unscrewed a plate on the top and carefully lifted out the blinking timer. She took her time examining it, then unscrewed one wire. The contact slipped away from the screw and the lights went out. “We’re good,” she smiled as she pulled the strings away from the door.

Cabe rushed in with his gun drawn. He headed for the stairs when Walter stopped him. “No, Cabe. It’s me he wants.”

He nodded. “I’m coming with you. End of discussion.”

“Fine, but hang back.” They walked up the stairs and Walter knocked on the door. “Collins, I’m here. I’m coming in.” He slowly opened the door and tried not to panic when he saw Collins holding a gun on Paige.

“A gun, Mark? That’s so unlike you.”

“I didn’t have a lot of time once I got in. I had to improvise.”

“Paige, are you okay?”

She nodded. “I’m fine. You need to get to Ralph. Collins drugged him.”

“We already did. He’s in the hospital but he’ll be fine.”

“I have to admit, Walter. I am a little impressed you got here so fast. Let me guess. Happy disarmed my little welcome surprise.”

“Save it. Let Paige go. I’m the one you want.”

“Oh no. You gave her my place on the team. She’s got to pay for that. You’ll get to watch me kill the woman you love.”

“Why are you doing this? You know after this you won’t escape.”

“Why?” he laughed. “You know damn well why. You destroyed me when you had me committed. We could have been the greatest team the world has ever known but you threw that away, threw me away. I’m not afraid to end it here.”

Walter knew Mark meant everything he said. If he didn’t think of something, they’d all die here. “What do you want, Mark?”

He looked a little confused. “What do I want? I want you to suffer.”

“I am suffering! Please don’t hurt her.”

“Admit it, you put her on the team to have a sex life.”

“No! I put her on the team because she brave and strong and she can keep us all in line. We needed her! He looked at Paige and she had tears In her eyes. “I needed her.”

“Walter,” she whispered.

Mark chuckled, “It’s worse than I thought. You actually think you’re in love with her, a normal. I’m very disappointed in you.”

“Yes,” he said. “I’m in love with her. I have been since the first day I met her. It took me a long time to realize what I was feeling, but I finally understood. It’s love.”

Mark rolled his eyes. “Oh, I’m putting end to this just so you will shut up.” He pointed the gun at Paige and Walter felt pure terror.

“No!” He screamed as he body slammed Mark. They both fell to the ground and the gun flew out of his hand. Walter reached for the gun and held it on Mark. He glanced at the door. Cabe was standing there holding a gun on Collins but he was too close to Mark to get a clean shot. “Mark, it’s over.”

“No!” Mark screamed and lunged at Walter.

Time slowed and Walter fired. He was too close to miss. A blood stain bloomed on Mark’s chest. He scrambled to his feet as Mark hit the floor. “Mark, no!”

“Doc get up here! Collins is down!” Cabe screamed. He went to Paige and freed her.

Walter hovered over Mark as he held pressure on the wound. “Why did you make me do this?”

Mark looked at him and gave him a small smile. “To make you finish what you started.” He closed his eyes and sighed. Toby rushed in and knelt at Mark’s side. He checked the wound and then checked his pulse. He sat back on his heels.

“What are you doing?!” Walter yelled. “Help him.”

“I can’t. He’s dead.”

“No! Do something!”

Toby put his hand on Walter’s shoulder. “He’s gone. The bullet hit him square in the heart. Even if I was in a hospital and took him to surgery, I couldn’t save him.”

Walter looked at Mark for the last time with tears in his eyes. He stood up and looked at Cabe. “Would you please brief Homeland?”

“Of course. Walter, he gave you no choice.”

“Yes. You’re right. Paige, are you injured?”

“No, I’m fine.”

“Toby, please check on Paige. She was drugged like with Ralph.” He looked down at his hands. “I need to wash up.” He went into the bathroom and locked the door. He washed Mark’s blood down the drain. He covered his hands in soap over and over until he realized they were hurting. He dried his hands and reached for the door. His hand was shaking. “Get it together, O’Brien. You heard Cabe he gave you no choice.” Somehow that didn’t make it better. He lost what little control he had left and began to weep.

Paige looked up to the loft. They'd barely seen him since the shooting. Homeland had cleared them from any responsibility. Both she and Ralph were fully recovered from Collin's drugs. They were all trying to get back to normal, and failing miserably. They hadn't talked about what happened.

"What's going on, kid?" asked Cabe.

"Nothing."

"Bull. You've been watching the loft door for the last half hour."

Paige looked up at him and gave him a sad smile. "I'm worried about him. We haven't talked about what happened. I thought at first I'd give him some time to sort it out but it's been a week. That's enough." She stood and marched up the stairs. She knocked on the door but didn't wait for him to answer.

"Paige, I'm busy."

"Too bad. We have to talk." He opened his mouth to speak but she held up her hand. "I'm not here to talk about what happened with Collins."

"Well that's all I can think about. I killed someone who was my friend. I thought I could talk him down. I thought I could find the answer. I failed."

Paige put her hands on her hips. "You saved my life. I wouldn't call that a failure."

"No, of course not. But I can't figure out how to live with what happened. It's an inconsistent solution."

"A what?"

"It's a problem that has either multiple solutions or no answer."

She sighed and sat down next to his desk. "I don't have an answer for you. All I can tell you is I will be here for you."

"Thank you. Now if that's all," He turned back to monitor. "I'm very busy."

"I want to talk about what you said to Walter. This is a yes or no question. Walter, are you still in love with me?"

“Well, it was..”

“Nope. Yes or no.”

He dropped his head. “Yes.”

“Okay, good. I’m still in love with you.”

“Paige, we’ve tried. You and I, we couldn’t figure out the solution. Our relationship, there is no answer.”

“You said an inconsistent solution was something that could have multiple solutions. Every relationship is different. That was our mistake. We tried to shoehorn us into a traditional relationship. There is nothing traditional about us.”

He gave her a small smile. “That’s true.”

“We can define what our relationship is. I won’t expect you to fit the norms of a traditional relationship. You don’t expect me to be excited about every aspect of your work. I only have one requirement. We will never lie to each other and that includes hiding the truth.”

“You seem to have given this a lot of thought.”

“I have. When Collins kidnapped me I knew you would find me. I also knew that when you got me out of this, I wanted you back in my life.” Her eyes teared. “I’ve missed you so much. On the few dates I’ve had since we broke up I was comparing them to you and no one could measure up. That’s when I realized no one ever could.”

“Wow. Um, I don’t know what to say.”

Paige stood and took his hand. “I have another question. You were brave enough to face down a mad man with a gun for me. Are you brave enough to take another chance on us?”

He smiled and stood. He wrapped his hands around her waist. “I’m not an easy partner.”

“We never do easy.”

Walter smiled and pulled her into a passionate kiss. Maybe they could find their own solution.