

FORGET ME NOT
series

*safe
with
you*

REINA TORRES

SAFE WITH YOU

CENTER CITY FIRST RESPONDERS

REINA TORRES



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CONTENTS

Safe With You...

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

Chapter 13

Chapter 14

Chapter 15

Thank You & Mahalo

About the Author

First Responders

Contemporary Romance

Military Romance

Paranormal Romance

Historical Romance

Sweet Contemporary Romance

SAFE WITH YOU...

What happens when the one person you count on in your everyday life forgets who you are? And suddenly their life is in your hands. For Jacob Rafferty, his life would never be the same.

Detective Jacob Rafferty doesn't have time for a relationship, but he hates it when his coworkers joke that he's married to the job. He'd quit if that were the case. He's always wanted to be a police officer for as long as he could remember.

He wants to help people. He just didn't have the stomach for blood, so being a doctor wasn't possible and his heroes on TV were always cops.

For the last three years he's been a detective with the Center City Police Department and from day one he'd been working with Molly Ferguson, a transcriptionist who typed up all of his voice notes and reports.

Even though they live in the same city and talk almost every other day, they've never met each other face to face.

Until one night when Jacob gets a call from Molly. Panicked and full of fear, she asks for his help, but he may not get there in time. What would happen then?

Jacob isn't going to let anyone take Molly away from him. Not now. Not ever.

It was nearing the end of his ten-hour shift when Detective Jacob Rafferty's desk phone lit up with an incoming call.

He didn't have to look at the text on the screen to know who it was. There was only one person who called his desk phone in the wee hours of the night. Punching the call button, he was treated to the gentle voice of Molly Ferguson.

"Hello, Detective Rafferty."

"Hello, Molly."

He saw the raised brow of his sometimes partner, Harrison Jones, as he walked by with a hand 'phone' to his ear and a wolfish grin on his lips.

Jacob returned the gesture with a single finger in the middle of his hand before getting up from his desk to close his door. The long spiral cord attached to the handset nearly stretched to its limit as he moved. "Sorry, I needed to close the door for some privacy."

"Privacy?" Molly sounded a little breathless for a moment. "Oh, for your reports. Of course."

Jacob sighed and leaned against his desk. "That too."

He heard her breath catch in her throat and he continued on hoping that he hadn't upset or confused her. It wasn't Molly's fault that he liked the sound of her voice.

Really liked it to the point that he had to sit behind his desk to hide his overtly physical reaction to it or close his door like he'd already done.

“I sent you a few more voice files, but they’re notes from interviews that I did to exclude people as suspects. You don’t have to rush with the transcripts.”

“Detective Rafferty are you saying that I’m slow enough that I’d have to choose to push work to the side.”

“No.” He had to choose his words carefully. He was a detective and quite a bit of his professional life revolved around his ability to question someone else. And questioning involved quite a bit of talking.

Talking but choosing his words carefully.

“I just wanted to let you know the priority level for your workload.” He swallowed and felt his throat strangely tight. “I know you’re busy with other detectives’ reports. Center City has a lot of open cases.”

He heard her soft laugh and pressed the handset of the phone tighter to his ear. Jacob didn’t want to miss anything, especially her laughter. Some days, it was the only joy he was exposed to.

“Well, you don’t have to worry about the other detectives. I always put your reports at the front of my queue.”

“Yeah?” He didn’t expect his whole chest to warm at her answer. “That’s nice to know.”

“It’s a great way to start my workday.” Another soft laugh reached his ears. “Partly because I like the sound of your voice.”

Shit.

He reached up and loosened the knot of his tie at his throat. “Really now?”

His voice may have dipped down a little deeper in his throat, and the air conditioning in his office seemed to lose some of its power.

“Yes, really.” He swore he could hear her blush through the phone. “I shouldn’t have said anything.”

“No. No, Molly.” He leaned against his desk, shifting on his chair to give his dick some room in his pants. “I’m glad you did.”

There was a silence that fell between them and while he considered what to say, he heard her soft voice instead.

“Then I’m glad I said it.” Another laugh that made his heart beat a little faster. “I’m not usually good with words.”

He really didn’t believe that. At least he didn’t see it that way.

“You can practice on me anytime.”

Jacob bit the inside of his cheek while he waited for her to respond.

“It’s easier on the phone.” He heard a little gasp. “Talking, I mean.”

He desperately held back the laugh that her words inspired. It helped that he was also fighting off the visual fantasy of talking to her from under the covers of his bed. He’d never really understood phone sex, but Molly had inspired thousands of fantasies already. He could easily add that to the list.

“Well, I’m not trying to make things hard on you, *Mol*. That’s the last thing I’d want to do.”

He heard her soft laugh, and he was rock hard in his slacks.

Fuck me.

“Hmm? What?”

Jacob shook his head. He had to keep himself under control. He was a detective with the Center City Police Department, and she was Molly, too perfect for a guy like him.

“Anyway. I was calling to tell you that I’ve finished the transcription on the files you sent me so far. Including,” she must have a beautiful smile, “the files you said I don’t have to put a rush on.”

He blew out a breath. “You are amazing, Molly.”

He heard her soft exhale. “And you... are more than welcome, Detective. Let me know if you need anything else.”

Go out with me.

Let me take you to dinner.

Let me take you to bed.

“Yeah. Of course I will. Thanks.”

He was about to end the call when he heard her talking on the other end of the line.

“Molly?”

She was talking, but not into the phone.

“Hey! Stop that! What are you doing?”

A crash and then another. A shattering chair? A lamp?

Shit!

“Molly? Molly, can you hear me? I’m coming to help you-”

“Stop! Stay away from me... No! Let go!”

Fuck! He hated that he was on his desk phone. He couldn’t take it with him to the Records building a few blocks away.

But staying on the line didn’t do a damn thing to help her.

Not a damn thing.

He hung up and was almost to the door as he lifted his cellphone to his ear. He’d already dialed the inside line to dispatch.

“Rafferty, this is Irish. Go.”

“I need you to send the closest units to the records building. Molly... Molly’s being attacked!”

He heard a multitude of things in Irish’s quick gasp.

He heard a hundred questions that she didn’t ask.

He heard the outrage that someone was in trouble.

And he heard her determination, too.

“Okay. I have two units within three blocks of the building. Lights and sirens on. Jacob?”

He heard her cautionary tone clearly. “Yeah?”

Jacob slammed the staircase door open and barreled down the stairs.

“I think you’re the closest.”

He wished that wasn’t the case. He wanted someone there faster.

He wanted to be there ten minutes ago.

Fuck.

“Getting off the phone. I’m going to try to reach Molly. Stay on this.”

“You know I will.”

And he did. Irish and the other 911 Dispatch operators were the best. Knowledgeable. Dedicated. Determined. They were a formidable group on their own, but knowing that they had the entirety of Center City’s First Responders at their fingertips? They were a winning team that he was proud to be on.

He crashed into the ground floor door with his shoulder and unlocked his car at a run.

The phone to Molly’s office was busy.

He tried to ignore the image that popped into his head. The phone handset upended on her desk. Off the hook and terribly useless.

Jacob opened the door of his car, bouncing the edge of it off of the door of the car next to his.

Sliding into the driver’s seat, he tossed his phone down onto the dashboard and listened as his phone tried to ring through to her cell. A quick flip of a switch and the lights on his car flared to life. Red and Blue reflecting off of every surface around him as he put the car into gear.

It rang and it rang.

He took the corner with a furious twist of the wheel and continued down the street with the gas pedal full on the floor.

It rang again, and then it stopped.

“This is Molly. Don’t bother with a message. Just text me. It’s easier that way.”

Still, the phone offered up a quick BEEP and then went silent to accept a message.

“I’ll be there in a minute, Molly. Hold on. Please, hold on damn it! I can’t lose you.”

Then he swept the phone off of the dash with the back of his hand and heard it hit his passenger window with a dull thump.

He didn’t care if he’d destroyed his phone.

He’d destroy a thousand of them for her.

Anything, for her.

And how the hell had he waited so long to come to that conclusion?

He just hoped it wasn’t too late.



CALLING Detective Rafferty wasn’t planned. It was more of an instinct.

Okay, a compulsion.

She didn’t need any direction on what to do with his recorded notes. Molly knew exactly what to do when it came to Jacob’s records.

Jacob.

She bit into her lip to staunch the grin that she felt building up inside of her.

To say that she was attracted to the detective was an understatement.

It wasn't even just the sound of his deep, rumbling voice.

No, she'd seen him before. She just hadn't introduced herself.

As long as their relationship was kept to a safe relationship on the phone, she could keep her daydreams and bedroom fantasies to herself.

If she ever met him and he didn't like her, she didn't think she could handle it.

Oh, it wasn't that she didn't think she was pretty.

She'd been told she was.

You're pretty, but... you're so quiet.

You're pretty, but... you could smile a little more.

You're pretty, but... you're kind of... you know? Blah.

She wasn't worried that he'd think she was ugly, she worried that she'd be a bore. If that happened, she'd hate talking to him on the phone knowing that he would feel differently about her.

The way things were, they talked, they laughed, it was great.

She didn't want to lose that.

It was much better than nothing. So much better.

On the phone, she could be flirty. "Detective Rafferty, are you saying that I'm slow enough that I'd have to choose to push work to the side?"

"No..."

She bit into her lip and felt warm all over. Molly swore she could hear him thinking, trying to figure out what he could say without offending her.

Molly knew that she should tell him that he didn't need to worry, but it was nice to know that she could fluster a man as cool and collected as Jacob Rafferty.

He was a really good detective.

So many times as she typed up his notes and interrogation tapes for CCPD records, she got to hear just how good.

He had a knack for asking the right questions and eliciting the answers that he needed without a lot of extra talk and chitchat.

And there were times that she asked for the video recordings as well. She liked to watch him as he worked.

No one in her office knew how much time she spent on Jacob's records. She got all of her records done on time. Some ahead of time.

She had fast fingers that made the work easy, but it wasn't just the speed of her typing that made her work quick and precise.

She had what her counselor called an eidetic memory. And yes, when people heard that, they thought of Spencer Reid on Criminal Minds. It was, more ninety-nine percent of the time, a visual thing.

For her, it was sound.

All she had to do was hear something once and she could remember it.

Song lyrics. Yep.

Speeches? Sure.

Still, she didn't have that same memory when it came to words on a page.

If she read something out loud, that would work. But written words alone didn't have the same connection in her memories.

She didn't think it would impress Jacob to know that she remembered everything he'd ever said to her.

It was the reason she had a hard time getting to sleep every night.

Molly would lay down and pull her blanket up and close her eyes.

Only to have her head filled with his voice.

Even just the gruff tone of his voice saying “Hello, Molly,” was enough to get her warm all over.

No, not just warm.

Hot.

And later, when her cheeks were flushed and soft spasms fluttering between her legs, she could finally fall asleep with a smile on her face.

She fought down a blush as he continued to speak. “I just wanted to let you know the priority level for your workload.” She swore she heard him swallow and when he spoke again, his tone was a little rough. “I know you’re busy with other detectives’ reports...”

That had no effect on her work. Not that she wanted him to know that she was capable of doing their reports and more between her quick fingers and her hearing. “Well, you don’t have to worry about the other detectives. I always put your reports at the front of my queue.”

She winced a little. She hadn’t meant to say all of that. The last sentence was something that just got away from her.

“That’s nice to know.”

She let out a breath and smiled as she told herself to leave it there.

“It’s a great way to start my workday.” *Oh my god. Stop talking!* “Partly because I like the sound of your voice.”

Molly wanted to pound her head on her desk, but she had a feeling that Jacob would hear that.

“Really now?”

She listened intently and didn’t hear his tone change. It still sounded like he was smiling.

“I shouldn’t have said anything.” Why wouldn’t she just shut up?

“No. No, Molly. I’m glad you did.”

There was a silence between them and while he might be comfortable with silence between them, she found it... difficult. So she filled it with something she wanted to say, something quieter in tone but she felt it was bigger in meaning. "Then I'm glad I said it." She laughed softly. "I'm usually not good with words."

She swore she could hear him shrug off her disclaimer.

And then he spoke again. "You can practice on me anytime."

AS THEY CONTINUED TO TALK, Molly felt lighter inside.

Maybe this felt easy talking to him because the two of them were... connected. Maybe he was a guy who wouldn't think she was dull. Boring.

A quick flare of light on her phone screen told her that it was past the time that she should be going home.

Smiling to herself, she gathered the items she had on her desk and set them down into the records box and closed it, securing the tab lock so it wouldn't open up when she dropped it into the collection depository.

It was a procedure that she wasn't comfortable with, but she had no way to fix the situation. Putting the audio tapes and transcriptions, along with the video file media all in one box seemed like a disaster waiting to happen.

But it was a disaster that was only a possibility. When she'd mentioned it to her supervisor she was told to relax.

"We've never had an issue with this system," Kristin scoffed at her. "Don't borrow trouble."

Molly shook herself from the memory to focus on what was sure to be the last few exchanges in her call with Jacob.

"Well, I'm not trying to make things hard on you, *Mol*. That's the last thing I'd want to do."

Mol. She felt her cheeks flush with warmth. Every so often, he'd call her *Mol* instead of Molly. It felt good to her.

Special.

It felt like a term of endearment.

The only nicknames she'd ever had growing up were more criticisms or ways that others tried to hurt her.

She knew that wasn't the case with him.

Maybe he did feel something for her beyond what they were on paper. Co-workers.

She told him that she'd finished the transcriptions that he'd sent her, even the ones that he said she could wait on.

"You are amazing, Molly."

She'd replay that later when she was in bed. Sure, he was talking about work, but she had a good imagination at times.

Molly could barely concentrate on what else she was saying to him. She was exhausted and she knew that she should get up and get going.

She still had to drop the records box she had into the collection bin for the record keepers to file away in the morning.

As she ended their phone conversation, she couldn't help but smile. "Let me know if you need anything else."

Closing her eyes for a moment, she willed him to say something like.

Go out with me.

Let me take you to dinner.

Let me take you to bed.

If only dreams were reality, right?

The phone was on speaker, but as she reached out to tap the END button, she heard voices outside of her door.

Voices?

No one stayed this late at the records building. Not even the janitorial staff. They'd gone home hours ago.

Forgetting the phone call she was on, Molly got up on her feet and opened her office door.

Two men were dismantling the front panel of the collection bin. She saw one man holding a crowbar, while the other was using his to pry open the front panel.

“Hey! Stop that! What are you doing?”

Both heads turned in her direction and that’s when she realized that she’d spoken before thinking... again.

Only this time wasn’t going to be another social faux pas.

This one was dangerous and, given the look on the men’s faces, painful.

She reached for the door and pushed it closed.

Almost.

It clicked into the door frame, but before she could reach for the lock, it pushed her back. The door crashed into something as she tried to back up behind her desk, but that wasn’t going to do her any good.

Neither was the speed at which she moved.

Someone grabbed her and she kicked back, connecting with someone hard. Something that made the man shout, but he didn’t let go. He just dragged her backwards.

“Stop! Stay away from me... No! Let go!”

The last thing she heard as she was pulled into the hallway outside her office was Jacob yelling on the speaker phone. “I’m coming to help-”

Jacob did a few things as he drove up to the records building that he'd never done before.

He drove right up to the doors, past the line where the parking lot ended, onto the walkway, and stopped just shy of the cement planters protecting the front doors.

He didn't bother waiting for codes to unlock the door. Jacob fired his service weapon through one heavy glass panel and walked through the gap as pieces of glass continued to fall.

Taking the stairs up to the third floor, he opened the inside door and caught sight of two men dashing toward the stairway door on the other side of the hall. He didn't go after them. He'd find them later.

Doing all of that got him to Molly's office that much faster.

He went down on his knees and reached for her neck, searching for a pulse.

It was so delicate and subtle that he had to place his fingertips against the inside of her wrist. "Molly."

It was stronger there. Her pulse pushed back against his fingertip and he had a moment of relief.

But just a moment.

He looked at her face and saw how slack her features were. It didn't even look like she was asleep, it looked like she...

“Molly? Look at me.”

No.

He leaned over her. “Molly? Come on now. Look at me gorgeous.”

Fuck. He couldn't see her chest rising or falling.

That wasn't good enough.

He needed her to wake up.

He dialed 911 with a swipe of his fingers as he laced his fingers together to perform CPR.

“911. This is Miriam, Detective.”

“Molly's not breathing. She has a pulse, but she's out.” He started chest compressions. ONE TWO THREE

“Paramedics are at the building. Uh, they say the door is... gone?”

TEN ELEVEN TWELVE

“I opened it.”

FIFTEEN SIXTEEN

“Perpetrators escaped down the South stairway. Two men. Dressed in black. Bastards.”

TWENTY-FOUR TWENTY-FIVE TWENTY-SIX

How long does it take to get to thirty?

And where the hell are those paramedics?

THIRTY!

He moved over so one knee was near her ear and the other just lower than her shoulder. He tipped her head back to open her airway and hated how cool she felt against his fingertips.

“Two units have arrived on property, Detective. I've given them your description. One unit will search the parking lot, the other will go through the building and clear it.”

He drew in a breath as he leaned over and covered her mouth with his while he pinched her nose closed.

Exhale.

Jacob watched out of the side of his eye as her chest rose.

He broke away to breathe in another breath and leaned over to transfer the air into her lungs.

If wishes were horses... Shit. He'd never had horses, but he'd do anything to get her breathing on her own. If that meant buying a shit-ton of horses, he'd do it. He'd even clean out their damn stalls.

When he drew back she didn't start breathing on her own.

Panicked and trying desperately not to show it, he laced his fingers together and started compressions again.

ONE TWO

The elevator doors cranked open and he heard the wheels of the gurney catch on the stone tiled floor.

"Detective?"

"Faint pulse, neck and wrist. No br- breaths. I've been-"

Harmony Morgan, one of the EMTs from House Twenty-Nine, knelt down on the other side of Molly. "You're doing great. Can you keep going for a bit?"

"Yeah, sure. Whatever you need."

THIRTEEN FOURTEEN

Her partner, Vega, set the med kit down beside Jacob. "Excuse me, Detective."

Shit. Jacob moved a little lower, still keeping up his compressions.

Harmony took her hand away from Molly's neck and offered him a wan smile. "She has a pulse, but no breath sounds."

She shifted her gaze to Vega. "We need to intubate."

Jacob's heart clenched tight in his chest.

Harmony looked at him. "We're going to get her ready to transport to Cole Medical."

He wanted to say something to her, but as Vega handed her the laryngoscope to intubate Molly, he shot to his feet.

Jacob couldn't watch it happen. He trusted Harmony and Vega to take care of her. He'd seen them handle gunshot victims and people injured in horrifying traffic accidents.

She was in excellent hands, he just couldn't watch.

The elevator door burst open and Jacob drew his pistol.

Once he saw who stepped through the door, he lowered his pistol and shoved it back into his holster.

Officer Ashley was familiar to him as they both worked out of Station Four. Pilar holstered her weapon as well. "Crois started at the top of the building and is working his way back down. No sign of the men on the first and second floors, Detective."

He nodded and had to fight to speak. "No doubt the other unit has had the same amount of luck. I don't think they were planning to stick around."

Pilar reached out and put her hand on his shoulder. "You okay?"

He wanted to shrug her hand off on instinct, but he couldn't do it. The comfort she offered... it felt good. But there was something else they had to deal with.

He looked at the officer, his brow pinching over his nose. "Do you smell that?"

Pilar drew in a breath and her nose wrinkled in response. "That's some nasty stuff."

Together they started to follow the stench with their noses, but stopped when Harmony called out to him.

"Detective?"

He turned and stopped short when he saw Molly on the gurney with Vega manually pushing air into her lungs with the aid of a rescue ventilator.

Harmony started to turn the gurney toward the elevators. "Are you coming with us?"

“Yeah. Of course.” He started walking, but turned to look at Pilar.

She waved him on. “After Crois clears the upper floors, we’ll figure it out.”

He nodded and rushed toward the elevators, and squeezed in alongside the EMTs and the gurney.

Before the doors closed, he called out. “There’s another unit outside. Get them to help.”

The doors shut and he backed up against the wall so he had something solid behind him.

Vega spoke and Jacob would have drawn back in shock if he wasn’t already up against the wall. He’d never heard the man say a word before.

“I think you got to her in time, Detective.”

Jacob hoped he was right. He couldn’t begin to think about what it would mean if he hadn’t.



MOLLY WOKE SURROUNDED BY WHITE. For a moment, she thought she was dead. A few moments later, she reconsidered.

Did the afterlife have sound dampening tiles?

She sighed. With her luck, it did.

Shifting, she felt the cool sheets around her body and sat up. Well, she tried to sit up and that’s when she felt something tug her arm back. Molly tried to move the sheets away, but she just tangled herself up even more.

The soft beeps in the background and the fluorescent lights in the hallway brought her mind into focus. She was in the hospital.

Why?

“Looks like you’re up.”

Molly turned toward the doorway and saw a woman silhouetted by the lights in the hallway. As she moved forward, Molly saw her dark hair and her easy smile.

Some of the panic which had grabbed at her moments ago released her.

“I’m up... I’m confused.”

“I bet you are. You were unconscious when you came in. The detective told us a name, but we like to confirm just to make sure. Are you Molly Ferguson?” The nurse in her teal scrubs set her folder down on the table beside the bed and helped Molly untangle herself from the sheets on the bed.

“Yeah,” Molly felt like she was moving in slow motion. “The detective?”

The nurse’s brows raised a little. “Detective Rafferty came in with you on the ambulance.”

“On the ambulance?”

“He came in with you because he was at the scene. That’s all I know.”

Molly swallowed and winced at the pain. “Could I... could I have some water?”

“Sure...” The nurse picked up the container from beside the sink and put some water in it. She pulled a straw from a cabinet and dropped it into the container. “Here. Take a few sips, but slowly. Your throat is bound to hurt a bit.”

Once Molly took a couple of sips, convinced all too quickly that her throat was indeed hurt, she set the container aside and the nurse took a step back. “I’m going to let the on-call doctors know that you’re awake, and I bet the detective will be back in no time.”

“Where did he go?”

The nurse gave her a smile that looked more like a friendly smirk. “That’s what you got out of what I said? Well, he was sitting in that chair since they put you in this room.” She pointed at the chair in the corner of the room. “He kept

nodding off and fighting it, so one of the other detectives took him to get some coffee in the cafeteria.”

“Oh. So he stayed?”

The nurse was all smiles at that. “Yes. He stayed and if you ask me, not that you have, I think he likes you. A lot.”

A soft knock at the door turned both of their heads in that direction. The doctor who walked in was tall and handsome, looking between them as he stood in the doorway.

“I was just going to come and get you, Doctor Ashley. Our patient is awake.”

His slightly serious expression melted as he shook his head. “It would seem so. Thank you, Thuy.”

She turned back to Molly and gave her a wink. “I’ll leave you here with Doctor Ashley and I’ll go see if I can find your detective.”

Your detective.

As the nurse left the room, Molly felt a little off kilter.

She still had so many questions that needed answers.

“Let’s take a quick look and see what’s going on.” He reached into the pocket of his coat and took out a penlight and waved it over his palm before lifting it toward her face.

She winced away from the light and dropped her gaze toward the floor. “Can you tell me why I was brought in?”

“I can tell you medically, but anything more and you’ll have to ask the detective.”

Detective. “Detective Rafferty?”

“Yes,” she looked up to see the doctor smile. “Detective Rafferty came in with you. He’ll have more answers about the situation, but someone finally dragged him off to get coffee before he dropped to the floor.”

“Was he hurt?” She pressed her hand to her chest, panicking at the thought.

“No. He was concerned about you. We almost had to get security to keep him out of the exam room when you first came in. He finally agreed to stand just outside the doorway.”

She dropped her gaze to her chest and saw the cotton hospital gown that she was wearing.

“No, he didn’t see anything, but he wanted to be close in case something happened. Now, let’s see how your eyes are doing.”

He lifted the pen light and he lifted her chin with his free hand so he could look into her eyes.

“So how long have you and Detective Rafferty known each other?”

“Known? I’ve been doing his transcriptions for a few years.”

When the doctor shifted to the other eye, he hummed a little. “So, how often do you two see each other?”

“See?” Molly blinked but opened up her eyes after. “I... we talk on the telephone. Text messages.”

“Hmm...”

Doctor Ashley put his penlight back into his pocket and lifted and turned her chin in one direction and then the other.

“Does your throat hurt?”

“M-my throat? A little when I talk, but otherwise... it’s alright.”

“Good. Good to hear it. It’s quite remarkable.”

She shook her head, pulling it away from his hand. “What happened to me?”

He narrowed his eyes at her in concern. “What do you remember?”

Her brow furrowed in confusion.

“Tell me the last thing you remember before you woke up here.”

“The last thing... I-”

“Hey, slow down!”

She turned to look at the door as she heard heavy footfalls in the linoleum tiled hallway.

“Here, hold my coffee.”

“Shit! I don’t want to get burned!”

Doctor Ashley shook his head and sighed.

Before she could ask what was wrong, Jacob was in the doorway, smiling. “Hey, you. You’re up.”

Molly looked at the doctor before she looked back at Jacob. “Yeah. Just a few minutes ago. The nurse said you were getting something to eat.”

“And burning his friends with coffee.” Another man walked into the room and Molly did a double take. If he was clean shaven, he would have been her doctor’s twin.

Holding one cup of coffee in each hand, he glared at the back of Jacob’s head. “I used to make fun of that lady suing McDonalds, but I get it now.”

Chuckling softly, her doctor spared her any more confusion. “That’s my brother, Walker.”

Lifting his head to smile at her, Walker Ashley grinned at her. “I’m the good-looking one.”

She remained quiet, but her gaze turned back to Jacob. “I... I don’t know what happened.”

The concern in his gaze made her heart seize in her chest, but it was what he did next that made the greatest impact.

Jacob walked to the side of the bed as Doctor Ashley stepped back. He gently cupped her face in his hands and placed a gentle kiss on her forehead. He moved back a step and met her gaze with his own. “I know you’ve got to be scared, *Mol*, but we’re going to get through this together.”

The look on Walker's face said he thought Jacob was acting crazy.

Maybe he was, but Jacob didn't care.

In the last few hours he'd gone from keeping his distance from Molly because he didn't want to chance messing up the 'friendship' that he believed they had, to a man on the verge of losing the woman he loved.

And no, that was no mistake.

He loved Molly.

That was the only name for the sheer panic and terror that he'd felt when he heard the loud noises on the other end of the call. The crashing sounds of furniture and the fearful rising tone in her voice.

He'd come so damn close to losing her and now, he didn't know what to do with the knowledge that he loved this woman.

Especially when Doctor Roan Ashley sat him down and explained what he thought was happening to Molly.

"We're going to have to do some tests," Roan spoke softly and looked between Jacob and Molly as he did, "but it seems like Molly's having a bit of amnesia. Which," Jacob reasoned that Roan must have seen the look in his eyes, "isn't all that uncommon with what she went through."

“That’s the thing, Doctor.” Molly’s gaze was on Roan’s face, but her hand reached out and took his hand into her own. “I don’t know what I went through.”

Molly turned to look at him, and Jacob did his best to keep his expression as neutral as possible.

“What don’t I know?”

Jacob swallowed and turned his head trying to release some of the pressure that had built up in his neck. “I don’t know everything that happened, sweetheart, but I can tell you what I know.”

“Maybe we should hold off on all of that.”

“Fuck.” Jacob swore under his breath.

“I didn’t just hear that, did I, detective?”

“If you did, it wasn’t about you, Sergeant.”

“Good.” She nodded and walked into the room. “I heard some of what was going on from Pilar and Irish, but I’m not sure how much Miss Ferguson should hear.”

“Sergeant Kate Turner.” Molly said the rank softly to herself before she looked at the faces in the room. “Detective Walker Ashley.” Then she looked at Jacob, nodding. “They’re siblings. I remember back from one of your files.”

Jacob looked at Molly with a curious grin. “You remember that? That must have been from...”

“Three years ago. It was one of the first group of notes that I transcribed for you.” She turned back to Kate. “Whatever this is,” she swallowed and cleared her throat, “it happened at work.”

Kate nodded and kept a neutral look on her face. “Right.”

Molly lifted her hand from his and reached up to touch her throat.

Jacob did what he could not to cringe when she looked at Roan again.

“Can I... May I have a mirror please?”

Jacob wasn't sure if the doctor said no because they didn't have one in the room, or if he was trying not to scare her, but Jacob was grateful for it either way.

Kate didn't seem to have any qualms. "Here. You can use my phone." Pulling her phone out of her pocket, Kate turned it on and opened the camera app. Then she turned the camera feed around, making it into a mirror.

She held it out so that Molly could see herself.

"Oh my g-"

Molly touched her throat on both sides with her fingertips. She turned her head back and forth as she touched the bruised skin, then tested the edges of the marks with gentle prodding touches.

"Someone choked me?" Molly's voice was higher than usual, but that was to be expected at the shock she'd just been given. "Why?"

She looked at Jacob, but her gaze shifted on to Kate's.

"Why would someone do this?"

Walker got up out of his chair and tilted his head toward the open door to the room.

Jacob nodded, telling his friend that it was okay to leave.

Walker wasn't involved in any of this, but later, Jacob would thank him for dragging his ass out of the room earlier. If he'd stayed, he would have looked like death warmed over when Molly regained consciousness.

At least now he looked human enough.

Kate leaned against the side of the hospital bed walking the tightrope between a mild interrogation and a confidant.

"Can you tell me what you were working on today?"

"Sure!" Molly's voice brightened a little too much, but Jacob could understand what it was to need some kind of control in a situation like this. "I was..." She pressed her lips together and her eyes narrowed.

He wasn't sure exactly what her expression was, he couldn't see it from where he sat, but he could see the way her eyes were moving side to side as her mind struggled to answer a question that she would normally rattle off without another thought.

“Kate-”

He knew he shouldn't say anything, but the man inside of him overrode the detective. And he wasn't the least bit sorry when Kate swung a wide-eyed incredulous look in his direction.

“*Detective?*”

After that single word, she pressed her lips into a thin line and raised an eyebrow at him.

“Jacob?”

There was so much in Molly's voice as she said his name, or perhaps he was just hoping there was. He looked at her and met her gaze.

The strength that he saw there humbled him.

“It's okay. I know why she's asking me these questions.” She drew in a shuddering breath. “Or at least I think I do.” She turned her attention back to Kate. “I don't remember what I was working on. I know that's not a good answer, but it's the only one I can give you.” Molly put her hands against her stomach. “I feel... I feel sick,” she explained, “having this... this gap in my head. I've never had anything like this happen before. **Never.**”

He heard the conviction in her voice and felt his own stomach twist in sympathy. As much as he knew about her, there were so many things that he didn't know. The only important thing that was in his head and his heart was helping her through this.

Being attacked wasn't something he wanted her to remember, but the part of her memory that was missing was really upsetting her.

He'd do what he could to help her either get it back or to ease the pain of losing that time.

He wanted to fill in the blanks that he knew. Like his notes from the witnesses that she'd transcribed. Maybe if he mentioned that-

"I see the cogs in your head working overtime, Rafferty." Kate's tone wasn't as hard as it had been on him a few times before. He knew that she was pulling her punches so Molly wouldn't be upset.

He owed Kate for that, even if she didn't know how he felt about Molly.

"I know you can fill in the blanks for her, but I have a feeling that there's more to this than just what happened tonight. And if I know my brother as well as I think I do, he's called in Doctor Webb to consult on this?"

She put a question at the end of her words, but when Jacob looked over at Doctor Ashley, he was holding his cellphone in his hands and giving his sister a long-suffering look that said she was right.

Molly winced and shied away from Jacob. "It can wait, can't it? If he has to come all the way here from home-"

A soft chime from his phone turned the doctor's attention back to the screen. "He'll come in first thing in the morning. Right now Kay, Doctor Hata's going to take Molly in for an MRI in a bit. We'll get a picture of what's going on and we'll take it from there."

JACOB FELT her sag against him, and she yawned even though he knew she was fighting it. He looked at Roan. "Are you taking her for the test soon?"

Roan looked at Jacob and then at Molly. "Are you okay with me saying this in front of the detective?"

Her answer was immediate. "Sure."

Roan waited another moment, but before Jacob could say anything, Molly added, "I trust him completely."

Her words and the surety behind them hit something deep inside Jacob.

Roan nodded. “We don’t see any signs of an aggravated brain injury. The only symptom is her loss of memory, but Kay... Doctor Hata has Molly next on the list for a scan.”

Molly nodded and tried to stifle another yawn.

Jacob felt himself stifle one as well. “After that scan is over, and everything’s okay. She can get some sleep, right?”

Roan looked at Jacob with a little bit of a curious smile touching his lips. “If everything turns out as we hope. Sure.” Then, turning back to Molly, his smile was easier. “When Doctor Webb comes in the morning, if things are still up in the air, he’ll be able to give us a better idea of what’s happening.”

Doctor Ashley gestured toward the remote on the bed. “I’ll be available if you need anything. Don’t be afraid to push the button if you need anything.”

Roan walked out into the hall followed by Kate. Jacob saw Kate hesitate near the door. He knew she wanted to talk to him, and he really couldn’t say no if she asked him outright.

He did like his job serving and protecting the people of Center City.

He just had to hope-

She lifted her hand and pointed at him, mouthing. TALK LATER.

He nodded and she rolled her eyes.

Jacob smiled as she walked out into the hallway. She might be what a lot of the guys at Station Four called a hard ass, but Kate had a heart of gold. It was just that she didn’t like to show it. Somehow, women who worked in law enforcement and had a gun strapped to her hip meant that people thought she was either a bleeding heart wuss or a raving bitch. So she rarely made overt gestures around people who didn’t know her well.

It was probably the same reason that she and Rock, one of the firefighters from House Twenty-Nine had just finally gone

public with their relationship.

Some guys, and women too, got crazy ideas when a woman who was high up in a 'male dominated' profession showed that she had a heart.

In her own way, Jacob was sure that Molly was just as much of a badass as Kate was. She needed to be comfortable enough to share it with others.

And Jacob wanted to be one of those people.

She swayed closer to his shoulder, but then forced herself to sit upright again.

"Hey," he wrapped his arm around her back and slowly rubbed his hand up and down her arm. "If you want to rest your eyes and get some sleep, go ahead. I can wake you up when it's time for your test."

For a moment, he wondered if she'd continue to fight her obvious exhaustion, but after a moment, she melted against him.

He'd never felt his heart so full of love as it was in that moment.

If there were any concerns or hesitations about how he truly felt, they were gone.

Her head lowered as her body grew heavier, drifting off to sleep. Her eyes were very nearly closed, and her lips parted on a soft exhale.

Jacob tried to ignore the darkening bruises on her neck, tried to focus on the fact that she was still alive and in a place where she could get immediate medical care. She might be missing part of her memory, but that was, to him, a small thing compared to the thought of losing her.

A lost memory could be recovered, but he still had Molly and now she was in his arms while she slept.

He couldn't ask for more after all of the scares that he'd had in the last few hours. It was more than enough that she let him close. That she reached out to him for comfort and let him touch her to soothe her worries.

He really was a lucky man at that moment. He was going to do what he had to to hold on to the gift that he'd been given.

Hold onto her as long as she let him.



WHEN SHE WOKE UP AGAIN, she wasn't sure where she was.

It wasn't her own bed. Her bed sheets were cool to the touch as she kept the air conditioner at nearly refrigerator temperatures, but the sheets against her cheek and palm were warm as if she was leaning against a heater.

Yawning, she lifted her hand from the heated sheets and wiped at her mouth.

She winced and wiped the back of her hand off on her nightgown.

Molly looked down, confused. Her night gown felt odd. The cotton was a little rougher than she recalled. The lights were dim, but she could see the large print on the gown. It wasn't one of her nightgowns.

“Molly? You okay?”

She froze and touched the warmth under her head.

It wasn't her mattress. It wasn't even a mattress.

“Jacob?”

She struggled to sit up, but then she had help and, as exhausted as she still was, Molly sat up on what she quickly identified was her hospital bed.

She sat crossed legged on the bed and dropped her head into her hands. “That's twice that I've woken up and forgotten where I was.”

“Hey.” She felt Jacob's hand gently rubbing her back. “Unless I missed another time that you got up, it's only one time that you've forgotten. That first time you woke up-”

“I didn't know where I was.” She smiled at him.

“I’m glad you didn’t try to kick me in my shins for my bad sense of humor.”

“We both share a rather odd sense of humor.” She lifted her head from her hands to look at him. “At least I remember that, right?”

“The important thing is that you’re alive, okay?”

She was prepared for him to try and coax her into a better mood, but she didn’t expect him to just say the words that she’d been trying to understand deep down inside.

“Now I feel about an inch tall. Whining about my memory when things so easily could have been worse.”

She started to turn away from Jacob, but he reached out and curled his fingers under her chin to hold her still.

Molly knew that if she wanted to, she could easily pull away, but she didn’t want to. She loved having him touch her.

She’d dreamed about it, but she didn’t want to look like a weak wuss of a person in front of him. It took a moment for her to realize that he was talking to her, which made it all worse.

Molly made herself meet his gaze and instead of disappointment or irritation, she saw him smile.

“There you are.”

“I’m sorry, I’m not good company.”

“I’m not here to be entertained, Molly. I’m here because I wanted to make sure that you’re okay.” He reached out a hand and she took it, letting him lift her up and onto his lap.

When he wrapped his arms around her, she was surrounded with his warmth and as he gently rocked her, he touched his chin to her shoulder.

“I feel like you’re worried about too much, Molly. So I’m going to tell you a few things and hope that you’ll understand.”

She closed her eyes lightly, soaking in the soft tone of his voice and the warmth of his body.

“I need you to know that I’m not just here because I was the first one to get to you after the attack. I’m here because I had to know that you were going to live. It’s not that big of a secret that I’m attracted to you, Molly Ferguson. My partner already teases me mercilessly about you.

“It only took Walker one look at me, pacing back and forth beside this hospital bed, to drag me out of here to wash my face and pour some caffeine down my throat. Everyone that sees me around you, even thinking about you, knows that I’ve got feelings for you.

“So don’t worry about trying to say or do the right thing around me. You don’t have to try. You just have to be you, Mol.” He brushed a kiss against her cheek. “You just have to be you.”

A tear rolled down her cheek and she lifted her hand to brush it away.

Somehow her world had turned upside down in just a few hours. She might not remember what had happened to her a few hours ago, but if she had to lose that to gain these beautiful moments?

She’d give it freely.

Held in his arms, rocking gently in the dimly lit room made her feel like her dreams and her real life had somehow merged into one.

She’d be a fool to give that up when she seemed to have everything she wanted.

It wasn't until she'd finished the light breakfast that the staff had brought to her room that she met Doctor Callan Webb. When he walked into her room, she was waiting for someone to bring her some clothes to change into. Her outfit that she'd worn to work had been cut apart in the Emergency Room.

Jacob got to his feet as soon as the doctor walked in, and Molly watched Jacob's expression closely before she turned to address the doctor.

"Good morning."

Wearing his white coat with his stethoscope around his neck, the doctor seemed a little bemused by the situation. "Good morning, Miss Ferguson." He turned to look at Jacob who was standing right beside her. "And good morning to you, Detective."

Jacob nodded but didn't utter a word.

Or move.

Doctor Webb picked up her arm by the wrist and gave it a thorough look at the top and bottom.

She thought it was strange, but from what she could see out of the corner of her eye, Jacob was breathing a little too hard.

"Is there something wrong, Doctor?"

“Interesting.” Doctor Webb straightened up and smiled at both of them. “Stereo.”

Molly smiled, but Jacob looked too tense for his own good.

“I’m wondering, Detective,” the doctor’s tone was a little droll, “is Miss Ferguson under arrest or being detained for some reason?”

Jacob narrowed his gaze at the doctor. “No.”

“Then, maybe you could take a step back so I could speak to her in private?”

Molly saw a muscle tick in Jacob’s jaw, and she bit into her bottom lip. “He’s protective.”

“Protective.” The doctor looked down at the chart in his hand. “I have your chart here, Molly, but I’m wondering if I should get the detective’s chart and do a full workup on him before he has an aneurism in my Emergency Department.”

Jacob almost cracked a smile.

Almost.

“Now,” the doctor sat down on the edge of her bed and took out a penlight from his pocket, “I’m sure Doctor Ashley did this a few times overnight, but I want to take a peek for myself.”

Molly nodded and then leaned slightly forward, opening her eyes so that he could see how her eyes responded to the light.

“I came in a little earlier, but you were sound asleep.” He moved the light in and out of sight of her left eye first. “And from what I saw, I might suggest to the billing department that they draft a bill for the detective here as he seemed most comfortable in his overnight accommodations.”

Molly laughed and then coughed when her throat started to hurt.

“Here. Drink this.”

Jacob put a cup of water in her hands with a bent straw in it.

“I’m okay, thanks.” She handed it back and looked at the doctor. “He’s been great. Please don’t joke with him.”

The doctor nodded. “I was just trying to keep things light.”

“I know, but I really just want to make sure things are okay so I can get out of here and go back to work.”

Doctor Webb turned to Jacob and wagged the penlight at him. “I saw that, Detective. You can try to argue with her after my exam, but for now, have a seat.”

Molly swallowed and suddenly wished she’d taken that drink of water that Jacob had offered her. Lifting her chin again, the doctor checked the response of her right eye.

“Has there been any change in your memory?”

She kept her gaze focused on the doctor because she’d been avoiding that very conversation with Jacob since she woke up.

Now, there was no hiding the answers she hadn’t wanted to give to anyone.

Even herself.

“No. No change.”

“Hmm.”

She smiled at what seemed to be the stock doctor reply to her answer.

“Well, I reviewed your tests that they performed overnight and I’m seeing no physiological reason for your memory loss, but the mind is a strange and wonderful thing.”

“Usually.” She added with a little smile of chagrin. “I’m not really comfortable with the loss of my memories. I’ve never had this happen before.”

“If you were comfortable with it,” Doctor Webb shook his head, “I’d be worried. That would mean we had other

problems, but I'm told that you're a smart woman so that worry is a healthy thing to have."

Molly gave him a weak smile. "That's one way to look at it."

"I like to think medicine is the answer for everything, that's why I became a doctor. But the more I try to find the cure for everything, I'm realizing that sometimes time and the body's natural healing ability can do wonders. And to that end..."

He gave Jacob a pointed look before turning back to look at her.

"I'm not happy with the idea of you leaving here and going right back to work. I'd like you to come back in for scans in a few days if it doesn't come back naturally."

She felt Jacob move beside her, pacing a few steps in a few directions.

Molly reached out her hand and turned to look at him. "Jacob?"

He took her hand and stood at the side of the bed, holding her hand. "You okay?"

"Sure." She gave him a smile that she almost felt. She was warmed by his concern, but her own anxiety made it hard for her to calm herself. "I need you to relax a little."

She watched as he drew in a breath and held it for a few seconds before letting it out.

He lowered his head, and she leaned in to touch her forehead to his. "Sorry."

"I get it," she spoke softly to him. "And I can't tell you how much it means to me, but I'm trying not to lose my mind here. I've never... never had this happen to me. And it scares me."

Molly felt her heart pounding in her chest and when she lifted her free hand to cover her heart in her chest, she felt Jacob lifting the hand that he was holding.

As she watched, he touched his lips to the back of her hand, keeping his gaze on hers.

“I’m sorry, Molly. I am. I... I was so worried-”

“I know.” She said the words and she meant them. Having someone care this much about her was a revelation. But she’d spent most of her life working things through on her own. It was hard to let someone else take the weight on their shoulders and still feel like she had control of her own emotions.

Having Jacob share in her worries made her feel like she was... off balance.

“How about... what if you let me talk to Doctor Webb and we can talk it out after he’s done?”

Jacob nodded slowly. “Whatever you want.”

Swallowing down another rising lump in her throat, she turned back to the doctor. “So, we’re going to see what happens for a few days and then if nothing changes, we’ll do a scan?”

“We have a lot of ways to help rebuild connections in the brain. Sometimes when it gets jarred around inside the skull, the swelling makes it hard to reach our memories. When the swelling goes down, the memories come back. Now, it could be a rush with everything at once. Or,” he gave her a smile that had her smiling in return, “sometimes it comes back in bits and pieces. Everyone’s brain is just as unique as the person it’s attached to. So there’s no way to know what’s going to work for you. And if it doesn’t come back with rest and time, we’ll do everything we can to recover your memories, but I have to caution you, Miss-”

“Molly,” she smiled at him, “please call me Molly.”

“Alright, Molly. I have to tell you that there is a chance that you might not recover your memories that were lost. Sometimes it’s a physiological thing and sometimes it’s an emotional thing.”

She nodded slowly. “That my brain would try to protect me from remembering what happened.”

Doctor Webb nodded. “That’s right. So I think the most important thing to remember is that we only have so much control over the biology, but medical advances give us incredible options to help.”

Molly thought through his words, milling over his comments before she nodded and smiled at him again. “I understand what you’re saying,” she began, “but I’ve never had anything like this happen to me before. I’m willing to bet that I’m more worried... more upset than I’m letting on.

“That’s probably because I’m not much of a... of a communicator. I spend most of my days and nights in front of a computer screen. I hardly talk to anyone face to face or on the phone. So I’m not sure how much you can tell by the tone of my voice or... or the look on my face, doctor. I just want you to know that I’m scared.

“But I don’t know much about the brain or injuries I have, so you’re the guy who knows all of this stuff. I’m going to go with you on this.”

He gave her a look that seemed amused by her words, but he wasn’t laughing at her or discounting what she said. His expression was also thoughtful.

“For someone who says they aren’t good at communication, Molly, you certainly impress me in the way you are communicating with me. I hear what you’re saying. And thank you for putting your trust in me. I think together.” He turned and looked at Jacob for a moment before looking back at her. “And that looks like it will include Detective Rafferty. We’ll get you through this.”

He reached into the pocket where he’d returned the penlight and pulled out a card. Doctor Webb put it in her hand and smiled. “That’s my card. The number on it goes straight to my service. It will get the message to me within minutes, unless I’m in surgery. If you feel dizzy or drowsy or anything other than your usual self, *please* contact me and we’ll get through this.”

Her eyes welled up with tears as she nodded. “Than-thank you, Doctor Webb.”

“Anytime, Molly. Anytime.”

He stood, but before he moved toward the door, he looked at Jacob. “Is there anything you’d like to ask me?”

Molly smiled when Jacob held out his hand to the doctor and the two shook heartily.

“Thank you, sir.”

The doctor nodded in approval. “You might just have to keep this one, Molly.”

He started toward the door but stopped just a few steps away. Turning around again, Doctor Webb snapped his fingers. “You,” he pointed at Jacob, “I’ve seen you at The Square.”

Molly waited for Jacob to make the connection. It didn’t take long.

Jacob grinned and gave her hand a squeeze. “You’re in the west building like me. Something above the second floor.”

Doctor Webb grinned, and it made his silver fox look even more appealing. “Sixth floor.”

Nodding with approval, Jacob told her. “That’s like the penthouse level in my apartment complex.”

Doctor Webb opened the door with a chuckle. “Not ‘like,’ Detective. It is.”

Molly laughed softly and it seemed as if the door had just barely closed when it opened back up again.

“Good morning, Molly. I’m Doctor Hata.”

“I remember you.” Molly and the female doctor shared an easy smile.

“Let’s see if we have any additional notes here.” While Doctor Hata looked at the screen of her iPad, Molly took the time to admire the doctor. Likely a bit older than she was, Doctor Hata was a beautiful woman of Asian descent. Her jet-black hair was pulled back from her face in a low ponytail, but it did nothing to strain or hide her gorgeous features.

A little on the petite side, Molly could easily see her features in the half light of the room.

“I just saw Doctor Webb in the hallway, and he gave me the okay to send you home from here. Do you have someone to drive you?”

Startled a bit, she answered the question. “I don’t drive.”

“I’ll take her home, doctor.”

Molly looked at him and almost rolled her eyes.

Okay, maybe she did roll them a little.

Doctor Hata looked between the two of them and smiled. “I see. I’m going to give you a prescription for headaches, but if you don’t want to take the pills, you don’t have to. My concern is that the pain might make it more difficult to relax and rest, but you can do what you feel is best.”

Molly nodded, happy that both doctors were on the same page.

“And,” Doctor Hata move a step closer, lowering her voice, which wasn’t all that loud to begin with, “if you’d like, I can prescribe a cream to help diminish the visibility of your bruises.”

Molly paused for a moment.

She’d basically forgotten about the bruises on her neck. That in and of itself made her feel a little worried and more frustrated, but since the room didn’t have a visible mirror in it, and the lights had remained low for the most part, she hadn’t thought about it.

As far as she was concerned, she didn’t care about the medication, but maybe...

Molly looked at Jacob. “What do you think?” She lifted her free hand and touched the side of her neck. “Does it look horrible?”

She hated that she was so concerned about what Jacob might think. And what he might say.

“If you think I should... if it’s ugly-”

“You’re beautiful.”

His denial was strong. The look on his face said that she wouldn’t be arguing with him.

“If it will make you feel better, Mol. Go ahead. I’ll help you put it on if you want but understand that I don’t see bruises when I look at you. I see strength. I see you. It kills me that you were injured but it doesn’t change how I see you.”

Molly didn’t know what to say, but she heard Doctor Hata let out a whistling exhale.

“I wish someone would say something like that to me and mean it as much as he does.”

It was hard to believe that Doctor Hata didn’t have someone who loved her like...

Molly turned back to look at Jacob before she turned back to the doctor again.

He cared, that much was obvious. But he’d never said the word love. And there was no way he could feel like that for her.

But you know you feel that way about him, right?

She pushed down her annoying inside voice and looked at the doctor again. “So, I can go home?”

The doctor’s lips pressed together in a thin line before she spoke, making Molly hold her breath.

“That’s why I was asking if you had a ride home. I was also going to ask if you had someone that could stay with you for a few days. You might need someone to keep an eye on you and make sure that you’re healing.”

Molly nodded slowly. “You mean that I’m not passing out in my Cheerios.”

Jacob cringed. “You eat Cheerios?”

Molly and Doctor Hata looked at him.

“Sorry,” he offered.

Doctor Hata didn't look away from him when Molly did. "Am I right to assume that you're going help Molly for a few days until we can be sure that she's healed?"

It was a kneejerk reaction on her part. Molly pulled her hand out of his and spoke just as he did.

"You don't have to-"

"Absolutely. I-"

"Jacob, really-"

"Molly, I'm going to stay with you."

The door opened again, and Molly turned to look, hoping that it was someone who could help her out.

"What did I just walk into?"

Molly looked at Sergeant Kate Turner who held Molly's weekender bag in her hand. "You brought my clothes. Thanks."

Kate moved closer to the bed and set the bag down. The way that the mattress dipped said that Kate had packed more than just a change of clothes in it.

She put on a smile, but by the tension that bled into the room, no one bought that her smile was genuine.

"Molly," Kate fiddled with the straps on the bag, "I'm wondering how you would feel coming to stay with me and Rock for a little while."

"I'm sorry," Molly shook her head, "stay with you?"

Kate looked at Doctor Hata. "Sorry for interrupting."

Doctor Hata shook her head. "Not a problem. Actually," she gestured toward Molly and suddenly Molly felt like a bystander in the room, "I was just asking if Molly had someone to stay with her for a few days, just to be on the safe side."

Kate grinned. "Well, I've got that covered, Kay."

Doctor Hata nodded and turned back to Molly. "Should I leave the prescriptions at the nurse's station, or do you want to

fill them here at the pharmacy?”

Molly opened her mouth, but Jacob answered.

“Here, please.” He gave Doctor Hata a nod. “We’ll get them on the way out.”

Molly stared at Jacob, who artfully avoided her eyes.

When the doctor left the room, Kate looked back and forth between Molly and Jacob and suddenly Molly was wondering what she was missing now.

Kate drew in a breath and filled her in.

“Eddie Simons’ body was found this morning.”

“Eddie Simons.” Jacob shook his head. “He’s the only eyewitness in the Berringer shooting.”

Molly’s head was hurting and she didn’t have headaches. Not ever. Or maybe she should say not *before* her attack.

She heard someone talking, but she didn’t know about what, so she lifted her head and saw both Kate and Jacob looking at her.

“I’m sorry. Did I miss something?”

Kate worried her bottom lip with her teeth, leaving Jacob to explain.

“While they were looking through the damage done in the records building, Pilar found notes on your desk about the records that you were transcribing for me.”

Molly’s brow furrowed as she tried to call up the memories of what he was talking about. All she could find in her head was a whole lot of nothing. “I... I don’t remember.”

Kate and Jacob shared another look and Molly pulled her hand free of Jacob’s as she wrapped her arms around herself and squeezed.

“You transcribed the notes of my interview with Eddie before those other interviews I did. Eddie was the one who saw the murders happen and he *was* going to be our star witness.”

Kate picked up at that moment. “The transcription you did and the recording of the interview. All of the information we had was in the drop box.”

Molly shrugged, hating how cloudy her head felt. “Okay?”

“The same men that attacked you,” Jacob’s voice had deepened into an angry growl, “they broke into the janitorial storeroom and poured caustic chemicals into the drop box. All of the records are gone.”

“Ruined,” Kate added as if wasn’t already clear. “So while we’re looking for the guys who hurt you, we’d like for you to be safe. I’m going to have you come and stay with me and Rock at our place.”

“She’ll stay with me.”

Molly looked at Jacob in utter shock. “No.”

“Yes.” He gave her a look that told her he wasn’t going to change his mind.

Well, too bad.

“No, I can’t ask anyone to put themselves in possible danger. I’ll just stay in my house and I won’t go anywhere. Which is what I normally do. So, no danger, right? Unless the Grubhub guy doubles as... whatever it is that you think is going to try and hurt me. So-”

“You’re coming to my place. There’s a security desk and fobs to access the elevator.” Jacob reached out and picked up the handles of her bag. “You’ll come and stay with me and if the Grubhub guy is an asshole, I’ll kick his ass for you.”

Kate held out her hands like the dealer at a Vegas blackjack table. “It’s up to you, Molly.”

She blew out a breath. “I don’t think it really is up to me, but I’m not going to be the third wheel at your place, Kate, and I don’t think that Jacob’s going to take no for an answer.”

When Molly looked at Jacob he gave her a big satisfied grin.

“That’s right. Now, let’s get your prescriptions and I’ll take you home.”

Jacob didn't regret the offer to bring Molly to his apartment, but that was before they were in the elevator, and he remembered that he barely spent time at home.

Meaning that he'd probably left a fucking mess behind.

Holding her bag in one hand, he fished out his keys with the other, sneaking looks to the side at Molly.

"Are you feeling okay? Do you want me to get you a chair?"

Molly's smile knocked him off kilter. "I'm guessing you have a chair inside."

He shook his head, smiling. "I'm a little nervous."

"Nervous?" Her smile faltered a little. "About my staying here?"

"No," he knew he was messing things up. "Not about that. About my apartment." He found the right key and jammed it into the lock, twisting it quickly to open it. He paused a moment before opening it. "I barely spend any time here, so it could be a complete mess when I open this door."

Molly's relief was palpable. "I can clean."

God, his head hurt. "You are *not* cleaning my apartment."

"What else am I going to do?"

He really didn't have an answer for that, did he?

“Well, we’ll see how bad of a mess I have before we figure anything out.” He pushed open the door and took a quick sniff of the air.

Nothing bad that he could smell, but just the fact that he had to do that made him question his life choices.

“Let me turn on the lights.” He leaned in and reached for the switches along the wall. With a quick flip, the lights came on and he pushed the door open wide. “Come on in.”

As Molly walked into his apartment, he was worried about a whole lot of things he normally didn’t care about. His grandmother would have said he was more nervous than a cat in a roomful of rocking chairs, but there was something more than that inside him.

He wanted to see what she saw.

He wanted to know what she was thinking.

For a guy on his own, the furniture was enough.

Clean. Comfortable.

The couch and chairs wiped clean.

The coffee table didn’t hurt too much when he cracked a shin on it.

And there weren’t any plants anywhere in his apartment because he couldn’t guarantee that he’d be able to keep them alive.

Molly stood in the entranceway of the apartment, her head turning one way and then the other. When she turned halfway around in a circle she looked at him. “Do you want me to sit down somewhere?”

“Uh... yeah. That would be a good idea.”

What an ass, he told himself. Say something intelligent, jerk.

Yeah, well, he wasn’t sure he could do intelligent at the moment. Not when he was struggling to figure out what to do now that he had her in his apartment.

It made sense, he told himself. Having her there was the best thing to protect her. Then again, he hadn't asked her about her house. It might have been easier on her to protect her somewhere she felt comfortable in.

But there were too many variables in a home.

His apartment had one door in. And there wasn't a way for anyone to access his windows to get inside. He had things buttoned up here.

"Go ahead and sit anywhere you like," he said the words as she was already lowering herself onto the closest couch cushion. "There's a remote there in front of you, not that I'll be all that long, but I'm going to look through the apartment and I'll be right back."

She didn't say a word to him, and that was okay.

What did he have to say to her beyond what he'd already ground out?

First things first. Check the bedroom.

Lord help him if he had his crap on the floor and let her in there. He took a couple of steps from the door, only to turn back and lock it. *Good job, idiot.*

He also set the second security lock above the first.

He didn't usually use it, but Molly was in his apartment, and he'd do whatever it took to make her safe.

The linen closet creaked open and he hated to think of the last time he'd changed the bedding on his bed. Sheets? Sure. Pillowcases. Of course. The rest of it?

Grimacing, he pulled out a whole new set of linens and moved into the bedroom.

He flipped the switch on the bedroom lights with his elbow and dropped the new linens on his chest of drawers. Toeing off his shoes he worked quickly to strip the bed of the old linens and with them all gathered in his arms he stopped in the bathroom doorway.

Shit. His hamper was nearly full and there was no room for a whole set of linens on top of his dirty clothes.

He was really starting to wonder what he was doing with his life.

“Fuck.”

Shaking his head, he moved back into the bedroom and dropped the linens in the corner just in front of the mirror that had been on the wall since before he'd moved in and then turned back to the stripped bed.

First things first. Fitted sheet.

He bit into the inside of his cheek to keep from swearing under his breath.

“Oh, this is your room.”

He turned, the fitted sheet half unfurled in his hands, and looked back at her. “Yeah. I’m changing the bedding for you.”

Her eyes widened at his words. “Me? This is your bedroom.” She walked right up to him and took hold of one side of the fitted sheets. “Is this the long side?”

Jacob looked down at the fabric in her hands. “I don’t know.”

Laughing softly, she backed up toward the foot of his bed, stretching out the sheet. “It looks a little short, but this is... a king bed?”

He nodded and licked his lips. Talking about his bed with Molly was a bit of a mind fuck. After all, how many times had he stroked himself in bed until he came all over his stomach and hand thinking of her?

Too many damn times.

He couldn’t manage to talk with her hands on his sheet and her gaze settled on his face.

“Well, I have a twin in my house, but I’m guessing this is a King. So I think I have the wrong side.”

Again, he really didn't need to think of Molly on a bed, any bed. And thinking of her tucking herself in on a twin bed brought up images he really didn't need. He was supposed to be her protector, but he couldn't stop the images of her spooned tightly against his front. Or her making room for him on top of her, her legs wrapped around his waist as he plowed into her on that tiny ass bed.

“Jacob?”

He blinked at the sound of her voice and saw that she was standing right in front of him instead of on the other side of the mattress.

She was smiling and tugging lightly on a corner of the sheet that he held in his hands. “Jacob, you need to let go so we can get this on the bed.”

He felt like his world tipped off of its axis.

Molly was in his apartment.

His bedroom.

Helping him put sheets on his bed.

He looked down at her hand and saw the way she was grasping his sheet. Her nails were cut short, shining with some kind of polish that looked like it was just gloss.

Jacob wondered what it would be like to have her drag those nails down his chest.

Over his stomach.

And when her hand wrapped around his dick-

Fuck.

He didn't care about his sheets.

He had to know what she tasted like.

Jacob let go of the sheet and wrapped an arm around her body. His other hand cupped her cheek and tilted her head to just the right angle. There was a moment of surprise in her eyes before she closed her eyes and lifted her chin.

He kissed her.

He tried to be tender, but she was kissing him back, pressing her lips against his. That didn't help his restraint. It didn't help him at all.

He'd kissed her on impulse, but that didn't mean it was a bad decision.

It would be if she didn't want his touch.

That didn't seem to be the case.

He could feel her hands between them and somewhere in the back of his head, he remembered that they'd been about to put new sheets on the bed.

That thought was lost when she opened her lips under his and he heard a soft word escape her lips. "Wait."



THE INSTANT SHE SAID IT, she regretted it.

Jacob moved back, the arm he had around her loosened, and his hand settled at her waist. He still had his other hand on her cheek, but it was slowly moving down along her neck. "Should I apologize?"

She shook her head, unsure of what to say to him.

Or if there was something to say at all.

Still, she had to try because if they lapsed into silence while he was stuck protecting her, it was going to be difficult sharing space with everything unsaid between them. "I think we should talk."

She saw the instinctual grimace on his face and she was a moment away from wrapping her arms around his neck and kissing him again.

Why did she have to ruin that moment?

And what a moment it was.

How long had she dreamed of being in his arms?

That was exactly where she'd been. Wrapped up in his arms, pressed tightly against his chest, she was moments away from... something.

Then she told him to stop.

Told him that she wanted to talk.

Now, she was just standing there, looking at him, still holding a fitted sheet in her hands.

Molly cleared her throat and moved toward the bed.

It wasn't until she got a good look at the massive bed that he slept in that her cheeks decided to flame with heat. With a little bit of a tug, Jacob moved with her toward the bed, adjusting his hold on his end of the sheet.

When Molly bent over to hook one corner of the fitted sheet over the mattress, she managed to say something. "A lot has happened in the last few hours."

She almost expected a little laugh at her humor, dark though it was.

"I mean, I don't remember a whole bunch of it, but I think that it might be a good thing to... to wait."

As she moved along the side of the bed, she spoke a little more. "I think I'm going to need some time to wrap my head around what happened. And I'm still trying to get my thoughts together."

"I understand."

She looked up and saw him across the bed from her.

He spoke again. "I can't imagine what it's like missing a chunk of time like that." Jacob shook his head as he leaned over to put the corner of the sheet over the top corner of the mattress. "I know how much you manage to fit into a day. I bet you do hand-over-fist more work than the other transcriptionists in the records department."

Hearing his words made her smile.

She turned around to grab the pillowcases from the top of the chest of draws near the door. When she turned back

around, she saw that he had his arm held out toward her.

Molly tossed one of the pillowcases to him, grinning even more when he caught it in midair. “I take pride in my work.”

“I know you do.” He lifted the pillow from the bed and held it awkwardly against his chest as he wrestled the pillowcase over it. “You’re incredible. Walker’s threatened to find a way to switch with me. I told him he’d get you over my cold, dead body.”

He was smiling and even chuckling at his joke, but his words put a visual in her head that she wanted to forget.

Her hands were cold, her fingers stiffening at that disturbing thought.

“Hey.”

She heard him call to her, but she pretended that she was too busy with stuffing the pillow into the pillowcase to notice.

“Hey, Molly.” She heard him sigh and she dipped her chin down a little more. “*Mol*. Please. I didn’t mean it like that.”

Her head snapped up and while she saw the concern in his eyes, it only brought the image in her head into sharper focus.

“I know you didn’t mean anything by it. You’ve never been mean or harsh with me. I just need you to understand that I’m not asking you to protect me.” Her throat was scratchy and painful as she fought away the nightmare in her head. “The last thing I want to happen is you getting hurt trying to protect me.”

He dropped the half-stuffed pillow on the bed and made his way around to her side.

Molly finished inserting the pillow by gripping the hem of the pillowcase and giving it a good shake.

Jacob reached her side at that moment and pulled the pillow out of her hands and tossed it down on the floor.

“Jacob!” She turned her head to see where it had landed. “It’s on the floor!”

“Forget the pillow.” He waved off her concern and sat on the edge of the bed, drawing her toward him. “I need you to understand something.”

She felt as though she was standing on the edge of a cliff and the only things keeping her on solid ground were the hands he put on her hips, anchoring her.

“I don’t care if things get dangerous.” He shook his head. “No, I do. Because the last thing I want is you in danger. I’m talking about worst-case scenario here, Mol. If they come after you. I’m going to do anything and everything to keep you safe. I don’t care who I have to-”

“You don’t have to hurt anyone. That’s what I’m saying, Jacob. The last thing I want is for you to get hurt if someone does come after me. I couldn’t stand it if something happened to you just to save me.”

Jacob shot to his feet and instead of stumbling back, she felt his arms reach around her and pull her flush with his chest.

His chest and his... oh wow.

He was hard.

He was hard down there, and every inch of her body ached and heated up just being that close to him.

Jacob gave her a hard look and his hands... his fingers gripped her butt and pulled her closer.

“I’ve never,” his voice was thick and deep and gravely, “never wanted to hurt someone before, Molly. But if someone comes after you and tries to hurt you, I wouldn’t hesitate to kill them.”

She must be asleep. Maybe even dreaming if she only counted the parts where Jacob Rafferty had his arms around her and lips on hers.

But his lips weren’t on hers.

Well, she could fix that.

She wrapped her arms around his neck, and they fell back to the bed, laughing.

Molly smiled the second before his lips touched hers, because Detective Jacob Rafferty was in her arms, and she was awake to enjoy it.

Holy shit. He had his arms full of Molly Ferguson and he'd never been happier.

A moment ago, she was basically ready to walk out of his apartment to save him from getting hurt protecting her, as if he would have let her do that.

He let her kiss him because damn, it felt good to have her show him that she wanted him. He'd dreamed of that for almost three years and now, she'd just pushed him down on his bed and was kissing the hell out of him.

It was fucking magical, but he had a few things he wanted to say before he made her come all over his fingers and his dick.

Jacob wrapped his arm around her lithe little body and flipped her over onto her back.

She gasped when her back touched the bed and looked up at him with wide eyes.

"Your eyes," he growled and smiled, "they're so dark."

Her brow furrowed a little. "But they're not."

Smiling, Jacob moved them up the bed until the back of her knees met the edge of the bed. "Eyes dilate."

Her eyes narrowed as she frowned.

That only made him smile even more.

“When aroused, eyes dilate, meaning that the dark centers of the eyes widen. It’s an involuntary reaction. And your eyes, Mol. They’re dark. It’s like I can see myself in your eyes.”

“Let me see your eyes, Jacob.”

He rose up over her, the front of his pants stretched by his thickened cock, grazed her belly. Molly moaned and her hands roamed over his back and shoulders. “Can you see my eyes, babe? Can you see how much I want you? How much I want this?”

It was sexy, almost too damn sexy, the way her eyes searched his.

It made him harder, which he didn’t think was possible, but three years of dreaming hadn’t done anything to prepare him for the reality of feeling Molly against him.

“I think...” She bit into her bottom lip and wiggled under him, making his dick swell against his zipper. “I think I can feel it.”

He squeezed his eyes shut and felt a tick in his jaw muscle.

“When I get inside you, Molly, you’re definitely going to feel it.”

Her breathy gasp nearly made him cum in his pants.

It was the kind of sound he’d imagined night after night. “I don’t want to scare you.”

“Scare me?” She laughed and he could feel her belly moving against him.

He set his hands beside her and pushed up to get a better look. “I want to make sure that you want this.”

A frown line formed between her brows. “Why would you say that?”

“You’ve been through a lot in the last day, and I don’t want you to think I’m trying to take advantage of you.”

She shook her head and put her hands on his chest, grasping the cotton with her fingers. “You’re not. Now-”

“You can always say stop and-”

“Jacob!” She swallowed and his gaze had to follow the movement because damn it, she was beautiful all over.

He leaned down and kissed her throat. “I can’t believe that I get to kiss you.”

“Yes,” her hands fisted in his shirt, holding him close.

“But while I’m doing this,” he turned his head to gain him access to the narrow space between her neck and shoulder, “there are a few things we have to get straight between us.”

He started to move away, but she pulled heavily on his shirt, and he smiled.

Moving lower, he touched his nose at the bottom of the V of her blouse and drew in a breath of her skin. “You smell so damn good.”

“The hospital soap.”

“It’s you, Molly. It’s all you.” He lifted his chin and placed a kiss against her skin, feeling her wildly beating heart against his lips.

She wriggled beneath him and plucked at the shoulders of her blouse, so it came off of her shoulders and that gave him a little more access to her.

Access that he wasn’t going to waste.

He touched his nose to her skin and drew a line down between her breasts.

Jacob felt her tense under him, her breath catching in her chest.

A quick peek showed him the way her nipples had pebbled under her blouse, pushing at the fabric.

Putting his weight on his knees, he sat up and looked at her. Her hair was wavy, and he’d like to wrap it around his fist.

Later.

If she liked that kind of thing.

He smiled, thinking that she just might.

“Can I take off your blouse?”

Molly’s tongue swept out over her bottom lip as her hands reached down for the hem of her top. “I want to see you too.”

A moment later, she dropped her blouse from her fingers, and he was left staring at her beautiful breasts. He was a lucky, lucky man.

“Jacob?”

He swallowed, but the lump in his throat kept him from taking a full breath. “Hmm?”

“I want to see you too.”

Her words were so earnest that they reached right inside of him and squeezed his heart like a vise.

Jacob worked at the buttons starting at his neck, but damn it, his hands were shaking more than a little.

Even when Molly helped by tugging his belt free from its buckle, he only went halfway down his chest before he reached both hands back behind his head and pulled his shirt up and worked them off of his arms.

The buttons at his cuffs were lost somewhere. The sound of ripping fabric made him smile, but it was the feel of Molly’s fingers on his cock that made every nerve in his body come alive.

Oh, god. He looked down and saw her draw his cock out from the front of his boxer briefs.

He moved his knees higher, closer to her ribs, and she shifted her hold on him, wrapping her fingers around his shaft.

“Your hand, Molly.” He felt his balls draw up and a distinctive tingle in his spine told him that he was dangerously close to losing himself, like he was back in his teens. “It’s so pretty holding me like that.”

“You like it?” He heard the wonder in her voice, and it brought him closer to the edge.

“I like it too much, sweetheart. If you keep touching me and squ-squeezing me like that, you’re going to end up

with...”

Her gaze was fixed on his dick, her lips pressed together in a thin pale line.

Jacob squeezed his ass cheeks together to hold off his release, but he felt the warm drip of precum slide down the head of his cock. With his hands fisted at his side he didn't have a way to stop her, or at least that was what he told himself, when she slid her hand up toward the tip and wiped the pad of her thumb across it.

She put her thumb in her mouth, and he had to shut his eyes and gently pry her hand from his cock.

“I didn't finish what I was talking about.”

The concentration it took for him to reach down and move her higher on the bed only proved how much of a masochist he was.

He used her new position to reach his hands up and hook his fingers into the elastic waistband of her pants to draw it down over her hips and then her legs.

“Wait.”

He held still until Molly moved her hands to grasp the thin strap of her bikini briefs and pushed them down toward him.

“I want them off too.”

Like he'd argue.

He pulled them off of her feet and dropped both pants and panties somewhere off the edge of the bed before he slid off after them and stripped off his pants and boxers too.

“I want you to know a few things.”

He heard her sigh, as if his talking was bothering her.

He couldn't lie, it bothered him too, but he wasn't going to cross this line before she understood what all of this meant to him.

“I need you to hear this.”

She stilled, and he saw the way her gaze focused on his face. It made it somewhat harder to have her intense gaze on him, but he was grateful for it.

“I’ve wanted this for years, but I’ve never acted on it, afraid that if you didn’t feel the same way, you wouldn’t want to work with me anymore.” He got up onto the bed on his knees and moved closer to her.

Molly brought her arms up behind her, propping herself up on her elbows so she could look at him.

He felt hot all over as her gaze met his.

“And I’m pissed that someone tried to hurt you last night. That they came close to... to taking you away from me. That’s why I know I couldn’t wait another minute to show you how I feel and hope... that you feel the same way.”

He grasped her ankle carefully and brought it up to bend her knee and place her foot flat on the bed.

“And when I said I wanted you here in my apartment, I meant it. My only worry was you seeing the mess I’d likely left behind and go running for the hills.”

He moved her other leg until it matched the first.

Jacob looked up at her and saw she had one eyebrow raised. “No hills around here.”

He was such a lucky man.

“Yeah, well, I didn’t want you running away, but you need to understand that I’m not going to leave you, no matter how dangerous this could get. I’m going to protect you.”

“Well, I want to protect you, too.”

She sounded so fierce, and the look in her eyes was blazing with determination. In another life, she might have been a warrior queen. And he? He would have done anything to be with her.

“Then stay with me, Molly. Stay here in my home. I want you to feel like you belong.”

He knelt between her thighs and leaned forward, putting his palm on the soft curve of her belly.

“You’re so damn beautiful.”

She took a breath, her body moving slightly under his hand.

“I am?”

He didn’t nod. There were other ways to show her just how beautiful he thought she was.

“I think you’re incredible.” He leaned closer and set his other hand beside her ribs as he trailed his fingers up her chest. Lowering himself down to his elbow, he kept his eyes on her as he gently traced the curve under her breast with his fingertips.

Her breaths were shorter than they’d been before.

Shallower too.

Molly watched as his fingers traced circles around her breast, moving closer and closer toward her nipple.

His gaze moved between her breast and her face, just as eager to see her body’s reaction as he was to see her expressions.

Neither disappointed.

A second before he reached the deep peach of her areola, he stopped his hand and looked at her face. It took a moment for her to lift her gaze to meet his.

Jacob saw the raw and naked hunger in her gaze and felt his heart throb in his chest.

“Have you made love before, Molly?”

He watched her lips try to form an answer, but she shook her head and then nodded it.

She looked a little confused.

Jacob smiled, knowing that he’d done that. “Have you?”

Molly swallowed and watching her throat move made his dick twitch. Any movement only fed his arousal.

“I’m not a virgin,” she sounded a little sad. Depressed maybe.

But before he could assure her it didn’t matter to him, she gave the rest of her answer.

“I’ve had sex before, but it wasn’t all that great.”

Note taken. He gave her a wink. “And you’re willing to try with me?”

The look in her eyes and the expression on her face told him that she was completely bare before him.

“Just kissing you,” her cheeks and the bare flesh across her breasts warmed with a blush, “I came closer to... to you know, than I’d ever been.” She looked away and tried to laugh, but he didn’t buy her laughter. It was too tight and didn’t ring like her laughter usually did. “Not that a woman has to-”

She gasped in a breath and turned to look at him as his fingers gently pinched her nipple.

Jacob rolled her nipple between his fingers, and he felt her move underneath him.

Molly was so responsive to his touch that he might have to touch her all day long.

“I think we’ll be just fine, you and me, Molly. I think if you got closer to an orgasm, just with my kiss, I’m going to get you all the way there in just a little while. I just need you to focus on how I make you feel.”

His fingers gave her nipple a little slow pinch again and just as he started to release her, he leaned over and closed his mouth around the tip of her other breast.

“Oh!”

He tried to smile at the pleasurable gasp he heard, but his mouth was a little busy.

And after swirling his tongue around her nipple and mimicking his movements with his fingers, he pulled back to meet her heated gaze.

“Do you like that, Molly?”

Her eyes widened at first, and then she bit into her bottom lip and nodded.

“You want more?”

Molly’s eyes were so dark he didn’t think there was any color left to see, and when she spoke, he wondered if his eyes matched hers.

“I want everything.”



“I WANT IT ALL.”

What had possessed her to say that?

Oh, she didn’t really have to ask.

She knew.

It was curiosity, plain and simple.

When he moved to the other side of her body, bracing himself on his other arm and suckled at her breast, his hand playing with her other nipple so that the sensations were spread out between the two.

Molly didn’t know what to do with herself.

She wanted to brace herself on her elbows to see what he was doing to her. His dark head covering one breast and seeing his fingers plying her flesh with such expert precision would have made her jealous wondering who had been the beneficiary of his skill before her, but he teased her to the point that all she could do was feel the sensations he was making her feel.

And then he lifted his head, pulling away from her breast with a soft pop of sound.

The heat building between her legs ached and she squeezed her thighs together, purely on instinct and what she felt against her skin was Jacob’s skin, hot and kissed with sweat.

She rolled her hips against him and felt his voice vibrating against her, sending waves of sensation to her core.

“What do you need, *Mol*? What do you need to make you come?”

She opened her mouth, but all that came out was a soundless exhale as her hips curled against Jacob, needing more intimate contact.

“Let me touch you... Here.”

Molly almost laughed herself into the air at his first touch, but with his body laid over her belly and holding down her hip, all she could was seek out even more of him.

His fingers made another pass over her folds, the tips barely slipping between them.

It was a delicate, fluttering touch that had her chasing those sensations.

“More.”

“More?” he questioned, and she felt his fingers moving a little faster. “Like this? Or like this?” His fingers delved deeper between her thighs, making her eyes drift closed and her head fall back on her neck.

“That... more of that.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

She lifted her head and gave him a withering look. “Ma’am?”

“Yes, Molly.”

She grinned, feeling some amount of female satisfaction at how she’d managed to make a coherent comment when he had nearly turned her into a panting mess.

Something changed in his expression and a heartbeat later she was flat on her back, one arm reaching for his shoulder, the other grasping for purchase on their new fitted sheet.

He plunged his fingers inside her. Filling her. Stretching the walls of her sex.

In and out, he stroked his fingers inside her and the sensations that rolled over her left her nearly speechless. She lifted her head and looked right into his eyes.

“More.”

Nearly speechless.

“How about this, baby.”

She had one last moment of conscious thought to wonder what he intended to do and then all she could do was feel. Her eyes started to drift shut.

His fingers plunged inside of her again and again, heating her skin from the inside out.

Digging her fingers into his shoulder, she was at least holding onto something when she heard him say her name.

“Molly. Look at me, gorgeous. Let me see you.”

She forced her eyes open. It was the least she could do to thank him for the fire he sent racing through her veins.

“Keep your eyes on me, Mol. I want to see you when you come.”

Was she that close? She hoped so, because she didn't think she could take the pounding of her heart much longer.

While she'd stirred herself to orgasm with her vibrator, she'd never reached that level of ecstasy with someone else.

“You amaze me, Molly.”

She was stunned into silence.

Hearing his words humbled her.

The look in his eyes was everything she'd ever wanted to see. Deep, aching need.

It was exactly what she felt for him too, but before she could say a word, he took her breath away.

He drew her breast deep into his mouth, his tongue lashing at her nipple.

She felt her skin prickle with heat and awareness all over her body, but it was fixed in two places. As his fingers worked at her core, he worshiped her breasts.

Worshipped.

That was the only word that she could come up with as he drove her higher and higher toward heaven.

With his mouth seducing the tender flesh of her breasts and his fingers plunging into her pussy, all it took was his thumb sliding through her curls and rubbing against her clit to send her over the edge.

She was floating and yet still grounded by his touch and the weight of his body. He spoke to her as her body shook and her mind soared a mile above in bliss.

Jacob held her against his body, stroking and soothing her as she came back to her senses. She was wrapped around him, her head on his chest as his fingers combed through her hair.

Molly could hear the strong rhythm of his heart beneath her ear, and as much as she wanted to return the favor to Jacob, he soothed her to sleep with his voice and his touch.

She couldn't remember a time when she'd felt so cared for and so treasured. Molly couldn't wait to shower the same attention and affection on him.

She woke up and froze, her breath caught in her throat. The light coming through the window was still sunny, so she hadn't been asleep that long.

Turning her head, she could see that the bed beside her was empty. Molly took a moment to stretch her arms out on the bed and smiled when she couldn't reach the edges of the bed.

Wow. This is what a king bed is like.

Not bad.

Closing her eyes, she remembered him touching her just a little while ago and just the thought of it made her cheeks and the rest of her body tingle.

Moving her hands over her body, she felt the butter-soft cotton under her hands. Molly sat up and looked at the t-shirt she was wearing.

CCPD Station 4 Softball Team

Jacob's t-shirt.

It was well worn and smelled like his shirt from the night before. Before she went back to her house, she'd have to find out what kind of laundry detergent and softener he used. She liked the scent.

No, she loved it.

She tipped her chin down to look at the boxers she'd pulled from his drawer in the dark.

“Hey. You’re awake.”

She lifted her gaze and barely held her mouth closed at the sight of him in the doorway.

A tight white tank-top and grey sweatpants.

She finally understood the comments she’d seen on social media.

It was... eye opening.

“Molly?”

Startled, she sat up and tried not to look as awkward as she felt. “Sorry. I’m still trying to get my bearings.”

“I bet.” He smiled, lifted his mug to his mouth, and took a sip. “I came to see if you wanted to come out and I can make you something to eat.”

That got her attention and her stomach grumbled in her belly, *almost* silently.

Jacob lowered his coffee mug. “You can take anything out of my closet that you want, or I can bring your bag in.”

Swinging her legs off the side of the bed, she almost laughed at the pair of boxers she’d scrounged from his drawers. The green boxers said ‘KISS ME, I’M IRISH’ across the butt and where the boxers opened in front, a large four-leaf clover. “Do you really wear these?”

Jacob walked closer to the bed and held out his hand.

Molly took it and stood up, walking beside him toward the hallway.

“I wear them if I haven’t gotten a chance to do laundry and I’m down to the bottom of my drawer.”

She turned her head to the side and smiled at him. “I would think these weren’t really your style.”

He glanced at her and nodded. “Our station did a Secret Santa thing the first year I was assigned there. Someone thought it would be a good idea because I’m Irish, I guess.”

“I am too,” she blurted out and then shook her head, “that’s all I know of my family history. Most of it is pretty vague as far as where my ancestors come from, but with a name like Ferguson...”

He laughed and she did too. “Same with my family. My grandma told me that once you know you’ve got Irish blood, it doesn’t matter what else you have running in your veins.”

They stopped in the kitchen area of the apartment, and he pulled out a chair for her at the table.

Molly put the heel of her hand to her chest over her heart and felt the way her heart was throbbing under it.

It felt all too easy to be in his space.

There didn’t seem to be any awkwardness on his side after what they’d done together. She was still trying to come to terms with it. The limited experience she’d had before seemed like a lie of sorts.

It certainly hadn’t prepared her for the magic of Jacob’s touch and the way he’d so easily coaxed her into an orgasm.

Now, she knew that she had some things to learn about sex and she hoped that Jacob wanted to teach her.

“You have that look on your face, *sweetness*.”

Sweetness.

She liked the sound of that. “That look?” She smiled up at him and lifted her hands to touch her cheeks. They were warm and tingling. “I’m still thinking of you and me. What we did.”

“And what we’re going to do later when you’re up to it?”

Molly nodded, just a little embarrassed at the idea. After all, she’d never really been all that interested in it. “I feel like I slept for days. Did I?”

He smiled at her. “Not days, but off and on for a little over a day. I called Roan and he said you were likely just exhausted. I... I didn’t tell him that we’d...”

“Yeah,” she blushed hot in her cheeks, “that was a good idea to keep that between us.”

“Yeah, uh...” He looked at the counter and turned back smiling. “Coffee?”

His utterly normal question made her laugh a little. “Yes, please.”

“Do you want anything in it? I have creamer in the fridge and sugar, just let me know.”

“Black is fine for now.”

She honestly didn't want to make him do much more than the basics. She didn't really trust herself not to miss the cup entirely if she tried to pour it herself.

As she watched Jacob pull a second mug from the cabinet, she closed her eyes and drew in a breath, wondering if any of her missed time had come back.

Normally she could just call up her memories, searching for the sounds and words that went along with them as if she was searching for a station on the radio dial.

She heard the soft thunk of a mug on the table in front of her and she opened her eyes.

Jacob was looking at her with a measure of concern. “Are you in pain? Can I get you something?”

She shook her head but didn't speak for a moment. “No. No pain. But also, no memories. I've never had this happen to me.”

Molly put an arm on the table, her other hand playing with the crisp edge of the boxers she was wearing. It was something she did when she was nervous and kept her fingers busy, so she didn't drum them on the wooden surface and making a lot of annoying sound.

“I bet it's disconcerting at the very least,” he nodded. “I've taken a few good hits to the head over my years. I've heard ringing in my ears. I've had headaches where I've seen stars. I've even been knocked out a time or two, but I've never lost my memories. I don't know how to help you get them back, but I need you to know that I'm here for whatever you need.”

She couldn't help but smile at his kind words. "That's... It feels good to hear it."

Jacob turned away and walked to the fridge. When he opened it, he leaned into it until his head and shoulders were hidden by the door.

He stood up a moment later and gave her a grimace as he swung the door closed. "I guess I'm not going to be making you anything. Along with me not being the best housekeeper, that also extended to getting supplies to stock my kitchen, but," he held up his index finger and then pointed it at the end of his counter, "I have takeout menus and a couple of delivery apps on my phone. What are you hungry for?"

She shrugged, again conscious about taking up too much space in his home or making too much of a demand for anything. "I'm good with anything."

His eyes narrowed for a moment, and she wondered if he was using some of his detective skills to learn things about her. "Ohhkay. How about we start with menus? They're big enough for the two of us to see them at the same time." He picked up his coffee mug for a sip and she copied his movements, taking a sip of her mug at the same time.

It was a little too hot for her liking, but she'd forgotten to blow across the surface of the coffee to cool it down.

"What about Italian?" He placed the menus in front of her. "Or burgers. Or sushi."

She reached for that menu. "You like sushi?"

He shrugged. "I like fish."

She opened the menu and looked over the items. "Why don't you order what you normally-"

"Molly?" He sat down beside her and placed his hand over hers. "Get what you want."

She worried her bottom lip. "I'm sorry. I-"

He pressed a kiss to her lips, stunning her into silence. When he broke away, she felt like she was dreaming.

“I know this whole thing between us might seem like we’re on a runaway train, but I think we’re on the right track.”

“This...” she hesitated, unsure of how to continue.

“This... you and me? Or this ordering takeout like we’ve been together for years and haven’t had a good date night in ages?” His thumb rubbed at the back of her hand. “It feels like we’re going backwards on this. Moved in before our first date, but just like working as a detective in Precinct Four, we’re just going to jump into things headfirst and-”

“Sink or swim?”

He shrugged. “Sure. That’s one way to look at it.”

“And if I don’t know how to swim?”

“Then I’ll teach you.” He leaned in and pressed a kiss to her cheek. “Now, go ahead and figure out what you want to eat before your stomach gnaws a hole right through you.”

His words eased some of her worries, but she was still a little off kilter. Having that gap in her head wasn’t going to make it any easier to navigate what could be a great relationship.

Having a possible target on her back wasn’t making it any easier.

There were just too many questions in her head to relax or enjoy much of anything.

“Hey.”

She looked at him and then he touched his forehead to hers.

“You and me,” he explained, “I think we would have gotten here on our own, but this whole thing sped up the clock. When I heard you on the phone, I had the scare of my life, but I’m trying to focus on the one good thing to come out of that attack. I have you here, with me.”

“And me feeling like a fish out of water?”

“What is it about you and water?” He shook his head. “Well, it’s going to be a little awkward between us at first, but

I think we'll figure things out soon enough."

"I've never lived with anyone." She felt heat flare in her cheeks again. "I feel like I'm going to make a lot of mistakes."

"Mistakes can be fun. It's not like I've lived with a woman before. But as far as things go, I think we'll make the best of it."

It was the confidence in his tone that affected her the most and gave her hope that this might actually work out between them.

"Like this morning," he leaned back and grinned at her, "you hadn't had an orgasm with a partner before and it turned out okay."

She gave him a wide-eyed look. "It was more than okay."

"Glad to hear it." They both had a little chuckle at that. "And besides," he smiled to assure her, "practice makes perfect."

Molly lowered her head and nodded.

"Also," he continued, "you can practice on me anytime."

Molly gasped in a small breath and braced as the world around her suddenly felt like she was underwater.

At first she heard nothing, but then she heard his voice echoing in her head as if the sounds had to move through air that was thick and heavy.

"You can practice on me anytime."

He said that before.

When did he say that?

Molly squeezed her eyes shut and wracked her brain for a connection.

For someone who remembered sounds at the speed of light, this change... this struggle... was frustrating at the very least.

And a true pain in her head.

Her thought came out as a fevered whisper. “Come on... Come on...”

Her words echoed in the void where her memories should be.

Is that where she’d heard his words?

Was that part of what was missing?

“Molly?”

She heard him saying her name, but she was struggling to breathe.

“Molly, is something wrong?”

She flinched as if someone was about to strike her and then she slipped out of her chair and collapsed.

His heart stopped like a car engine hit by a train.

When Molly fell from the chair, he dove for the ground and barely got his hand under her head so she didn't hit it against the hard floor.

"Molly?"

Her eyes were closed, and she was unconscious, but he could see her eyes moving quickly behind her eyelids. Back and forth, left and right, as if she was looking at something in front of her.

Working himself up onto his knees, he cradled her head in his hands. "Mol? Come on, sweetheart. You're scaring me."

Jacob turned his head, looking for his phone. He was afraid he was going to have to call 911 if she didn't open her eyes soon.

He'd left his phone on the kitchen counter and he didn't want to let go of her head in case she ended up having a seizure or something. He didn't know a damn thing about medicine or head injuries besides the knocks to the head that he'd taken during his life.

"Come on, Mol. God, I wish I knew what you were going to say before you—"

"I shouldn't have said anything."

"No. No, Molly."

"I'm glad you did."

His brow furrowed as he listened to her.

He didn't know what she was talking about, but it sounded like she was reading a transcript of a court hearing or something.

Or something? His mind argued. *She's saying her own name.*

"Then I'm glad I said it." She laughed softly. *"I'm not usually good with words."*

Her words. But not her words.

As he listened to them, his mind working overtime to figure out where he'd heard them before.

"You can practice on me anytime."

What? Wait.

You can practice on me anytime.

Hadn't he just said that?

"It's easier on the phone." A moment of silence. *"Talking, I mean."*

His brain was working overtime, making it ache in his head, and then something sank into the pit of his stomach. When she spoke again, he spoke at the same time, blending their voices together.

"Well, I'm not trying to make things hard on you, Mol. That's the last thing I'd want to do."

It was uncanny and made him feel more than a little confused.

"What's happening with you, gorgeous?" He shook his head and used his thumbs to gently stroke the gentle rise of her cheeks. "Come on, Molly. Look at me."

Her eyes fluttered open, but she squinted and turned away from the light. "Hurts."

Jacob moved his hands and loosely cupped his hands around her eyes.

Molly sighed. "Better."

“Close your eyes, sweetheart. I’ll take you back into the bedroom.”

While her expression barely changed, her hands reached out and grabbed his forearms. “Sorry.”

“Babe? You don’t have to apologize. I feel like I should since I can’t figure out a thing that I can do to help you.”

She tried to sit up, but she was struggling.

“Let me help, Molly.”

Jacob felt the moment she allowed herself to lean on him. It eased the strain in her muscles and the tension in her face relaxed as well.

He scooped her up in his arms, gently shifting her so she could lean her head on his shoulder as he moved her from one room to another.

The bed groaned a little as he braced his knee on the edge and climbed up onto the bed. He laid her in the middle of the bed so that he could go in the other room and pick up her purse.

Jacob knew that he could call the hospital and badger someone into getting him Doctor Webb’s service number, but he remembered that Molly had tucked the doctor’s card into the zippered pocket of her purse.

It only took him a second or two to locate the card, and he snapped up his cell phone and made the call.

“Cole Medical Call Service Center. How may I help you?”

“I’m looking for Doctor Webb. This is about Molly Ferguson. Something’s happening... I’m on the 2nd floor and-”

“Detective Rafferty? I’ll let the doctor know. Would you like me to call an ambulance to transport, Detective?”

“No, not until the doctor’s seen her. Shit, I don’t know. What if he says I should have sent her and-”

“Detective Rafferty, I have a message from Doctor Webb. He’s in the building and is heading to your floor. Room

number please?”

“Apartment 2A.”

“Apartment 2A,” she repeated. “Message delivered.”

While he waited for Doctor Webb to come to his apartment, he sat beside Molly and gently brushed her hair back from her face.

She was sweating, her breathing shallow but quick. Too quick to be normal.

“What’s going on in that beautiful head of yours, Molly? It sounds like you’re reading dialogue from... it sounds like you’re reading the lines of a play.”

He didn’t go out to see plays or anything like that. Every so often, he watched a movie, but that wasn’t in the theaters, he watched them on his TV. Given how many hours Molly worked, both at the office and at her place, he doubted she saw many movies or plays either.

“I wish you could look at me and tell me what you’re saying, Molly. Can you? Please? Can you tell me what you’re talking about?”

Her lips kept moving, but she wasn’t speaking aloud anymore.

Leaning down toward her lips, Jacob turned his head so he could get his ear as close as possible to her.

But even when he felt her breath against his ear, he couldn’t understand.

Turning his head again, he placed a little kiss on her cheek. “I wish I could do more to help you.”

DING DING

Sliding himself to the edge of the bed, he made it to the door in record time.

When he yanked the door open, Doctor Webb pushed in, almost physically moving Jacob out of the way.

“Where?”

“Left. Bedroom.”

Jacob wanted to push ahead of him, but what the fuck was he supposed to do? He couldn't help her the way she needed most.

By the time he got to the side of the bed, Doctor Webb was already examining her.

There were a thousand questions in his head, but he kept them silent as he watched.

Waited.

Doctor Webb grumbled to himself, talked to himself, and nodded to himself. Huffed out a breath.

“Tell me what happened before she lost consciousness.”

Jacob paused and Doctor Webb turned to look at him.

“What?”

“I don't think she's unconscious. Not really. She was talking-

“Reciting.”

The doctor lifted his eyebrows.

“Like, she's reciting things we've said to each other.”

“What exactly is she saying? You mean in general?”

“No...”

He turned to look at Molly and found her eyes open.

“It's not in general,” she answered, wincing, “it's exactly what we said.”



WAKING UP, listening to Jacob and Doctor Webb speaking over her and the nearly familiar give of Jacob's mattress at her back, Molly was beginning to put together a picture of what had happened to her.

Putting a hand to her head, she winced as she tried to look at both men. She was trying to gauge their reactions to her words.

She hadn't said much, but she was just beginning.

Struggling to sit up, she gave Jacob a grateful smile when he helped her sit up so she could lean against the headboard of his bed.

"I feel kind of stupid saying this," she began, letting out a breath, "it sounds kind of silly outside of my head. I have a version of an eidetic memory. But, unlike most people with this kind of memory skill, I don't remember visuals. I remember sounds.

"Words. Conversations. When I was a child, I would often get in trouble for copying people. Teachers in particular found it irritating that I could repeat their words verbatim."

She looked at Doctor Webb first and saw a bit of shock, but also a curious interest. It didn't shock her.

"I don't have any clinical proof of it. I've avoided actually identifying myself in such a way. When I've suggested the existence of someone who could do what I do, I'm treated to a long and exhaustive list of tests they'd like to run on 'my friend.' I wasn't interested in becoming a lab animal and begged off, saying that I was only joking."

Doctor Webb shrugged. "I can see how that would be annoying. I can also say that it would be something worthy of study."

Molly sighed. "I like working. I like doing what I'm doing. I can help people doing what I do. Sitting in a lab taking tests isn't something I'm interested in at all."

"It wouldn't necessarily be a drudge," the doctor offered, "but that's not something we're discussing right now."

Jacob's thumb was rubbing over the back of her hand, and the soothing gesture made her smile. "So that's why what you were saying sounded so familiar?"

Her gaze shifted up toward the ceiling, even though she didn't tilt her head back very far. "I like to remember our conversations most of all. I don't have much of a social life. When I'm home alone and not working on transcriptions, I remember things we've talked about."

He shifted, holding her hand in both of his. "You could always call, or I could come over."

Molly felt her cheeks blush at his words. "I can't say that we've ever been in the same room with each other that I can recall. I wasn't going to ask you over or show up at your door."

Doctor Webb brought them back to their current situation. "So that's why you're so concerned about regaining your memory?"

Molly nodded. "With the transcriptions and audio files destroyed, I would be able to recreate the files if I had my memories of listening to them."

"Don't worry about that, Mol. We can work the case without it."

"How?" She turned to look at him, but the sudden turn of her head added to the pain she was feeling. "Sergeant Turner said that your witness is dead. The District Attorney won't be able to put them on the stand to testify. If you still had the tapes, you might be able to introduce them as evidence."

"Without the tapes, someone could argue that I'd just typed out whatever I wanted to, or whatever would help you the most."

She could see that possibility sinking in for Jacob. "I just feel like it's my fault. If I hadn't stayed late in my office, continuing to work on your files, they wouldn't have been sitting in the collection box for them to destroy."

Jacob's hands around her own hand went still and she could tell by the look on his face that he was thinking about what she'd said.

And if she knew anything about Jacob, his thoughts weren't happy ones.

“I’m so sorry.”

His head snapped up and his gaze focused on her face. “It’s not your fault.”

“It is,” she insisted, “didn’t you hear me? If I hadn’t stayed late, the files would have gone into the collection box when someone was there to log it in. They would have been safely locked away and wouldn’t have been destroyed by those men.”

A grim smile touched Jacob’s mouth and his hands tightened their hold on hers. “Criminals always make mistakes, Sweets. I think it’s something about the endorphin rush they get from breaking the law. It’s like adrenaline and too much of it makes them stupid and sloppy. That’s why we say there’s no perfect crime.

“There are just crimes that people get away with. And I’m not going to let these men get away with it. And I’m certainly not going to let the original crime go. You don’t have to worry about it.”

“Really?” Molly felt an emotion welling up inside of her. Frustration. “Is that it? I can just wash my hands of this whole thing?”

“Sure. It’s not your job to catch these guys and bring them to justice.” Jacob smiled at her and she wanted to... she wanted to... pinch him on the leg or something like that.

“Oh? It’s not? I’m not needed? I can just quit and walk away.”

“I’m not saying that, Mol, but you don’t have to let this get to you.”

“Uh... Detective?” Doctor Webb took hold of her wrist and looked at his wristwatch.

“No,” Molly continued on, “don’t stop him. Let him keep talking and telling me that what I do doesn’t have anything to do with the prosecution of criminals and their victims getting justice. I want to know just how worthless my work is.”

She saw Jacob draw back and knew that she'd hurt him with her words.

She felt horrible about it.

She was striking out at him, but she just couldn't make herself stop.

She'd been shaken up so much over the last few days and yes, Jacob had been so supportive of her, but now he was doing the exact opposite.

Could he be right?

Of course he could.

She just didn't want to believe it.

She wanted to do something with value in it and here he was telling her that she wasn't at all important.

No, that her work wasn't at all important.

That's when it struck her.

She didn't have much outside of her job.

Over time, she'd spent so much time doing her job, she'd taken on extra responsibilities as a court reporter for certain judges.

All of it because she felt like she was making a difference.

"I... I need to go." She pulled her hand free of Jacob's and looked at the doctor who was staring between the two of them with a rather pained expression on his face.

"Excuse me."

The doctor stood and stepped to the side.

When she put her feet on the ground, she pushed herself up onto her feet, but she swayed, her head swimming with the rush of emotions inside her.

Doctor Webb reached out and took her hand in his. "Miss Ferguson-"

"Do you think, I really hate to ask," she explained, feeling her words bubbling out of her throat like the fizz of a soda

desperate to rise up into the air, “but do you think I could sit in your apartment while I find someone to come and get me.”

“Molly.”

She refused to look at Jacob.

Was it childish?

Probably.

Oh, it absolutely was, but she needed space to think.

And in Jacob’s apartment, just where was she supposed to find that space?

“*Mol*, please.”

“Please, Doctor? I promise I won’t be there long.”

He seemed to gather himself in that moment. “You can come up to my apartment. Miriam is there and would love to meet you. The two of you have something in common, and it will give you and the detective a chance to relax and think.”

“I don’t need any time.” Jacob came around to stand between her and the door. “Molly. Please. Let me explain.”

“I’m...” She shook her head and noticed that her hands were shaking as well. “I’m not ready to hear it. And I need time to think about things and understand my own feelings. I think some time separate from you would be a good idea.”

She saw the look on Jacob’s face and knew that she’d hurt him. She just couldn’t find the words or thoughts to work things through. Her head was full of sounds like buzzing bees or wasps in her ears and her heart felt like it had swollen in her chest and she was having a hard time getting in enough air to breathe.

She wasn’t familiar with these odd feelings and needed to put some space between them.

When she looked up at Doctor Webb’s concerned gaze, she had a feeling that he might just know what she was feeling.

He turned to look at Jacob as he took her arm gently in his grasp.

“She’ll be safe with us, Detective Rafferty. Miriam will be curious to hear about Molly’s talent and Molly will have the quiet that she needs to think this all through. I think you might benefit from that time yourself.”

The look that Jacob gave the doctor said volumes about what he thought about the other man’s words, but he stepped aside and moved to stand against the wall.

“I’m trying, Molly. I really am, but I’m not... I have no practical experience with relationships. I hope you’ll give me a chance later to explain, but the doctor is right. I need time to explain this to myself first.”

Some of the tightness around her heart eased and Molly tried to smile at him. She wanted him to know that his words, these words, meant a great deal to her.

“Thank you, Jacob. I’ll... I’ll talk to you later.”

“Soon.” He amended her answer. “We’ll talk soon.”

She nodded, even though she wasn’t sure it would be all that soon.

As they walked out the front door together, Molly leaned against Doctor Webb’s side. Her legs felt like rubber.

At the elevator, she tried to pull away to get her weight off of him, but Doctor Webb gave her hand a gentle pat. “You can lean on me until we get upstairs and then I’m sure Miriam will take you in hand.”

“I have a horrible headache.” She closed her eyes. “I don’t know how good of a guest that I’ll be.”

“You don’t have to be anything,” Doctor Webb explained. “If there’s anything I learned while I was falling in love with Miriam, or rather getting her to fall in love with me, it was patience.”

He wanted to follow her, but he didn't think it was a good idea.

Molly was dealing with a lot at the moment and if he thought it was a good idea, he would have asked to go with her.

He was pretty sure that she needed a little time away from him and if she was safe at his apartment, she would be doubly so at the Doctor's apartment.

Jacob wasn't joking about the penthouse floor earlier. If Doctor Webb lived on the sixth floor, it was better than a penthouse, it was almost a fortress. To access anything on the sixth floor, you needed a special key to insert into the control panel of the elevator. And even with that, there were special elevators for the different sections of the sixth floor. Someone on the East side of the building couldn't access the sixth floor from the North or West parts of the building.

It would take an elite strike team to get to the Doctor's floor.

That left him alone in his apartment.

And he didn't like the quiet.

He didn't like it at all.

That didn't use to be the case.

After working his long shifts with Center City PD, he'd come back to his apartment, kick off his shoes, loosen his tie,

and put his feet up on the coffee table.

Sometimes with a beer in his hand.

Sometimes with the TV on.

Sometimes, just to tip his head back and close his eyes.

Silence, he remembered his grandmother's voice and her pearls of wisdom, is golden.

Well, it used to be.

Until he had Molly in his apartment.

He liked hearing her move around his place. Loved hearing her quiet breaths while she slept beside him.

Just looking at the couch made him feel antsy.

Picking up his cell phone, he decided to call Kate.

Calling Walker wasn't going to happen. The asshole would get hung up on the wrong parts of his Molly situation. Ever since his brother had fallen head over heels for an officer on the force, Walker saw any hint of romance or love as a problem.

Walker didn't have a problem with a man and a woman getting involved, he just didn't see taking it beyond sex. Having his brother, Roan, and his sister, Kate, fall in love in quick succession made him even more wary of the idea.

So, Jacob dialed Kate even though his situation was a complex mix of emotion and a victim of crime, he knew that Kate would have a better take on the situation.

She was always more easy going to deal with, even if she was in a different wing of Precinct Four.

He dialed Kate's cell phone and sat down on the arm of his sofa.

The phone rang twice before it was picked up.

“‘llo?”

Shit.

“Rock? Sorry.”

Jacob looked over at the clock, it wasn't all that late.

"I was hoping to talk to Kate. Ah, sorry to wake you."

"Hold on... Kate? Babe? You've got a call."

Oh shit. If she was asleep...

"ello?"

"Kate, it's Jacob. I'm sorry if I woke you."

"sohkay. Gimme a minute."

Jacob heard some hushed conversation and he pushed up off of the arm of the sofa and walked over to the windows that overlooked the entryway into the apartment complex.

There were some people milling about in the courtyard in the center of the complex. A couple of business people on their way in.

A family of three heading out toward the street dressed for an evening out.

And passing the family on their way in, an elderly couple, holding hands. They were moving slowly beside each other and before that day, he would have assumed that they were walking that way because one or both of them needed to slow their speed for the other.

But now, after just a couple of eventful days with Molly, he wondered if they were walking slowly so they could enjoy their walk together.

"Jacob? Is that you?"

"Yeah. Sorry for waking you up." He did feel sorry about it. Jacob knew how difficult it was for Kate and Rock to find time together, since they both worked long and exhausting hours at their jobs. "I have some information that I wanted to run past you, but if you want to call me later--"

"No. We can talk now, I'm up. Rock and I were just... getting some rest."

Jacob thought he heard a smile in her voice.

She was happy.

Good for her.

“I closed the bedroom door.” Her voice was louder, easier to hear. “So I can talk and not wake him back up.”

Jacob nodded.

“Okay. I’m making a cup of coffee. Tell me what’s up.”

“Molly had... well, I guess I could say that she had some kind of episode and passed out.” He heard Kate swear and rushed to continue on. “I call Doc Webb to come down to my apartment and when he got here, she came around.”

“Did she get her memory back?”

“No.” He ground his back teeth together. “But I have a better understanding of why her memory loss is stressing her so much.”

“Like losing time wouldn’t freak anyone out?”

He let out a long breath. Kate had a point.

“When you were a kid or a teen, how did you sing along with your favorite songs on the radio? Did you read the lyrics?”

Kate laughed, but the sound was a little rough given that she’d just been asleep a few minutes before.

“Not that it’s any of your business how old I am, but when I was a teen, we didn’t look up the lyrics on the computer. If we were lucky to buy the album in the store, we could read the lyrics on the album liner in a cassette or the booklet in the front of the DVD. What’s your point?”

“Sometimes you had to listen to the song to learn the lyrics, right?”

“Well, shit, Jacob. I love this trip down memory lane, but-”

“Kate? Answer the question.”

“Wow, you’re grumpy and I’m the one you woke up. Yes, I would hear the song on the radio and listen to it a few times and maybe I’d learn a good amount of it. The chorus and some catchy lines, but-”

“When Molly hears a song, she memorizes the lyrics right then and there.”

“Ohhhkay.” He heard the soft sound of coffee dripping into the pot on her end of the phone.

“The reason she’s so fast on her transcripts is that once she’s heard the tape, she remembers the words.”

He heard Kate try to stifle a yawn.

“So this is like a line by line thing? Or a chunk of words? I’m barely awake, so you might have to spell this out.”

“Not one line. Not a *chunk* like you think. The thing. The whole thing. Like she can listen to one of my interview tapes and just type it all out.” He shook his head at the words he was saying. Even though he trusted what Molly said, his brain was still trying to wrap itself around her amazing talent. “One time through. That’s why she’s so fast.”

“Well, she works as a court reporter. She probably just types along as it goes, right?”

“No, I’m talking about memorizing. When she... I guess I could call it *fainted*. She was talking. She, word for word, went through a conversation we had. At the moment it was happening, I didn’t realize what it was. It wasn’t until I had a chance to think about it that I realized she did have that kind of memory.”

Jacob heard Kate blow air across the phone, it was likely over her coffee cup.

“So, if I’m hearing you right, part of what she lost when she was attacked was your whole interview with Eddie Simons.”

“Yeah.” Saying it out loud felt strange to Jacob, but it felt damn good. “She could remember it... if her memory comes back.”

“Okay. I don’t know how the District Attorney- Fuck, I don’t know what the defense attorney would say when they find out that the only record of Eddie’s interview with you was in someone’s head.”

Yeah. He knew that was going to make things really difficult.

“Can I talk to Molly?”

Jacob shook his head and let out a breath. “Molly’s not here right now.”

He swore he heard a heavy coffee mug hitting a hard surface.

“What the fuck? Did you lose her somehow?”

“Not really. She’s upstairs with Doctor Webb and Miriam.”

“And *why*,” Kate sounded really irritable, “is she upstairs with the doctor when you’re supposed to be keeping her safe?”

“Well, he’s on the rooftop floor. Security to get up there would give SWAT a run for its money. And I think I hit a nerve when I was talking to her about staying after hours in the building.”

“Let me guess. You opened your mouth and stuffed both left feet in your mouth.”

“Two left feet?”

He swore he could see Kate smile in his head.

“I’ve seen you try to dance, Jacob. You’ve got two left feet. What did you say to her?”

“To be honest, I don’t remember it exactly.”

“Well,” she huffed through the phone, “you’d be quite the pair. She’d remember every stupid thing you’d ever say to her and you’d be clueless.”

“Look, this is all completely new to me. I messed up and hurt her feelings. What the hell can I do to fix it?”

“What?”

Okay, he definitely heard her laugh.

“You want my advice on how to make up with your woman?”

He almost smiled at the question, but he didn’t.

He really did want an answer. “Yeah. I do.”

“You should ask Rock,” she sighed. “I’m not the romance type. Not really.”

“Well, somehow it happened, right?”

“Somehow?” Her laugh sounded more like a snort. “He wore me down with sex. What can I say,” she yawned again, “I’m a simple woman and he gave me what I needed.”

“Sex?” He felt a little awkward talking about this with any woman, let alone his boss. “I’m not going to ask Rock about how he... about how he-”

“Fucked me into loving him? It wasn’t like that exactly...”

“What are you talking about, Katie?”

Jacob heard Rock’s voice close to the phone.

“Jacob messed up with Molly. She hightailed it up to Webb senior’s apartment and now he wants to know how to get her back.”

Rock’s laughter kind of hurt, but his words weren’t all that bad.

“Did you try saying you’re sorry?”

Ah. No.

“I didn’t try that. No.”

Rock laughed again. “Get your shit together in your head. Go up and talk to her. TALK. TO. HER. And then if that doesn’t work-”

“Sex?” Kate chuckled, and then she laughed out loud. “Hey, baby, watch where you put those hands!”

“You like where I’ve got my hands.”

Jacob lifted his gaze to the ceiling as if he was worried he might see something he shouldn’t.

“You okay, Jacob?” Rock’s voice was still gravelly from sleep. “Because I’m about to put Kate over my shoulder and take her back to bed.”

“Fireman’s carry? God, I love you, Rock.”

“Yeah. I’m fine. Thanks.” Jacob managed to get that through the phone line before the call went dead on Kate’s side.

He set his cell phone down on the kitchen counter and laughed silently.

Like Rock said, he had to get his shit together and then go up and talk to her.

He might have heard a little too much from the couple on the phone, but what Rock said really made sense.

It was logical. Which he didn’t think about when he was trying to figure things out with Molly.

With her, he’d said what he said because he was afraid.

It wasn’t something he was used to acknowledging. Working for the police, he was used to being in danger. Not just being in danger, but dealing with it. Doing what he needed to do at any given moment.

But Molly?

Fuck.

He liked the fact that she worked in that building.

Up until he heard her afraid on the other end of the phone. Then seeing her hurt and unconscious on the floor.

It made him crazy.

And that was probably why he’d been such a jackass to her.

Thinking of losing her...

Knowing that she wasn’t safe at work...

He’d said stupid things.

Now he just had to apologize to her and hope she accepted his apology.

She didn’t have to welcome him into her life, she just had to trust that he’d keep her safe until they figured out how to

bring her attackers to justice.

Then she could go if she wanted to.

It would hurt. It would hurt deep. Right through his heart.

But this wasn't about him.

It was about her.

Nodding to himself, he picked up his phone and made a quick call.

She was fairly sure she'd overstepped.

Even though Miriam had welcomed her with a gentle squeeze of her hand before a welcoming hug, Molly felt like she'd completely invited herself up into their home.

"I'm sorry." She blurted out the words when there was a lull in the conversation.

Miriam canted her head to the side, turning her ear in Molly's direction. "For what, Molly?"

Molly looked at the other arm of the sectional where Doctor Webb was seated with Miriam at his side. Doctor Webb had been a bit... daunting when she'd met him and again when he'd come to Jacob's apartment, she'd been a bit in awe of him, but here, in his apartment... his rooftop palace, he was just a man.

A man completely in love.

He looked at Miriam as if the sun shone from her face.

When he touched her arm, it was a gentle nudge before he put any real pressure on her arm. It was likely because she was blind, but his caution was a gesture of love.

Miriam soaked it in.

It was incredible to see their bond even when they were barely touching.

"I basically ran away from Jacob's apartment. I invited myself over here and my mother would've had a few choice

words if she ever heard that I'd done that.”

Miriam laughed and it was a beautiful throaty sound that made Molly smile from ear to ear.

“Here,” she held out her hand, “come and take my hand.”

Molly looked at Doctor Webb.

He just gave her a knowing look with one raised brow.

Molly moved to the center block of the sectional and put her hand in Miriam's.

The other woman smiled and squeezed her hand, lowering both down to her knee.

“I think your mother and mine would have been fast friends or mortal enemies. They sound very similar.”

Molly smiled in reply.

“If you ever want some pearls of wisdom, you can borrow my mother. She'd be happy to have another daughter to boss around.”

“Uh... that's not exactly a ringing endorsement. Sorry.”

“No,” Miriam laughed again and Doctor Webb smiled at Miriam. “It's not. My mother is a bit of a bear. She was overprotective. It didn't help that I was blind. I think it just made her even more fiercely protective. I didn't really get my feet under me until I went to school and learned that I could be just like everyone else.”

“Better.”

Molly saw Doctor Webb lift his hand and caress her back with a gentle sweep of his arm up and down.

“You're incredible, sweetheart.”

Miriam tilted her head back in his direction. “He's hardly unbiased.”

“He loves you.” Molly pursed her lips together after she said the words, wondering if she'd again, overstepped.

“It's true, love. I'm head over heels for you.”

Miriam rolled her eyes. “He started off high-handed and a bit of an ass, but he evened out. A little.”

Miriam’s eyebrows rose and fell, and then she laughed. “But enough about my once-Grumpy Gus. He mentioned that you and I have something in common.”

“Well, he thinks we might,” Molly began. “He came to examine me at the hospital when I lost a few hours of my memory.”

The naked concern in Miriam’s face touched Molly deep in her heart.

Miriam reached for Doctor Webb’s hand, and he took it immediately. “Callen?”

“Don’t worry, sweetheart. I have every hope that it’ll come back.”

Miriam sighed in relief and Molly took heart from her easy acceptance of his words as truth.

Miriam turned back to Molly. “What happened?”

“I was working late when some men broke into the records building and I surprised them. They didn’t think that I’d be there. They certainly seemed surprised. Later, I found out that they were there to destroy records in the collection box.” She explained the rest of what they’d discovered and how she’d ended up at Jacob’s apartment. Including how she’d revealed her odd talent.

“Oh, that’s why Callen thought we were similar.”

“No one is like you, love.”

Molly felt like she should leave, the way that Doctor Webb looked and talked to Miriam felt so... intimate.

She couldn’t help but feel like she was intruding on their time together.

Miriam waved him off and leaned closer to Molly. “So you remember things that you’ve heard? Verbatim?”

Molly nodded. And then realized what she’d done. “I mean, yes. It drove my teachers mad. If I didn’t remember to

keep my memories to an inside voice, they thought I was mocking them. I ended up in a bit of trouble.”

Miriam clapped her hands together. “I bet you did! Did you tell them?”

“Once.” Molly sighed. “And that teacher thought I was lying. She didn’t give me a chance to prove it. She sent me to detention and when I was done with the week, she told me to never fib again, or she’d make sure that I was sorry.”

“I’m sorry that happened.”

Molly shrugged and felt horrible again. “It’s okay. It was a long time ago.”

“But it taught you to be careful, right? You didn’t feel comfortable sharing your talents, at least that they existed.”

“That’s true.” Molly felt some of the strain on her shoulders ease, it seemed that Miriam did understand. “I would use it, but be very, very careful about how I would. It was on a school field trip to the town court building that I found out about court reporters. That got me interested in the job. I could use my natural skills and help people.

“Once I started there, I heard about the records division and how they were looking for help to transcribe notes for detectives.”

“Was that a better fit for you?”

“It was the same kind of work, really. Just a different keyboard.”

“That would be a nightmare for me.” Miriam flexed her hands. “I couldn’t switch back and forth like that.”

“It was actually easier to go to transcription instead of court reporting, since transcriptions are done on QWERTY keyboards and I was used to using those. A steno machine is like learning short hand and I wasn’t very good at learning that in school. I guess using both hands was better than using one hand to scratch on paper. The other reason I was eager to work in the records department... now this might sound silly, but...

I liked the idea that my work would help the detectives catch the people who were harming others.

“As a court reporter, which I still do off and on as the need arises, I feel like I’m only on the back end of it where I’m just recording the outcome instead of being involved in the investigation.” She winced, knowing how stupid that sounded to her own ears. “I mean... I know I’m not involved in solving crimes, but-”

“You don’t have to justify it, Molly. I think what you do is amazing.”

“I feel silly. You’re working in the 911 Call Center. You’re directly involved with things. You get people where they need to go and help others. You must think I’m so silly to think I’m making a difference.”

Doctor Webb’s phone rang, and he leaned over to look at the screen. “It looks like Detective Rafferty is ready to grovel and beg your pardon.”

Molly felt her heart kick against her ribs and she stayed still as the doctor answered his phone.

Miriam held out her hand again and Molly put her hand in hers. Miriam, still holding onto Molly’s hand, stood and moved to sit down beside her. “Breathe, Molly.”

“I don’t think I can. I’m not expecting him to apologize. I should be the one to say I’m sorry. I invited myself up here. I knew that I should stay and talk to him.”

Miriam leaned her shoulder against Molly’s. “You should do what you need to, especially when you’re feeling overwhelmed. I can see why you were upset. You’ve already had something messing with your head. You’re in uncharted territory here, Molly. I felt the same way when Callen and I were struggling to see eye to eye when we were starting out.”

Molly pulled back a little, unsure if Miriam had used the phrase intentionally or if it was just something she’d heard over the years.

“Anything worth having is worth fighting for.” She added, “Sometimes love happens even when we have to fight with the

ones we love.”

Molly smiled. “You can say that again.”

Miriam shook her head. “No, I’m sure you’ll remember it, right?”

Molly laughed and squeezed Miriam’s hand. “You’re right. I do.”

The doctor ended his call and moved so that he sat on the edge of the sectional. “Ladies, you were half right. Jacob is coming up a little later, It seems that there’s someone in Center City who gets to speak to you first.”

Molly felt her forehead furrow with concern.

“The District Attorney is here to see you, Molly.”

Molly knew exactly who he was talking about. She’d been a court reporter during several cases where DA Wielding was the prosecutor. The woman was as elegant as she was formidable in a courtroom. And she oozed elegance.

Turning toward Miriam, she swallowed at the sudden knot in her throat. “Why do I feel like I’m about to be put in detention?”

Miriam held tighter on to her hand. “Just let her try. I’ve got your back, Molly.”

Molly smiled and felt some of the tension settling into her spine fade away.

Doctor Webb stood up and headed toward the door, but before he passed by, he leaned in to place a kiss on Molly’s upturned cheek.

Then he turned to look at Molly and he walked backward a few steps. “We mean that, Molly. We won’t let anyone make you do something you don’t want to do.”

“Yeah,” Molly drew in a shaky breath. “Miss Wielding is very skilled at the art of persuasion.”

“And I,” Doctor Webb answered back, “can be a first-class asshole when I want.”

Miriam sighed like a fan girl and put her free hand over her heart. “I love that man.”

Molly felt her shoulders lift as more of her tension fell away. From a girl who rarely ventured out into the world to someone who now had friends she felt she could count on. She would hold on to that when she met with the District Attorney.

She didn't feel so alone anymore.

MOLLY HAD SEEN the District Attorney, Valerie Wielding, in court and seen her surgically dissect the lies of one witness and nearly reduced a defendant to tears, as his crimes were proven one by one in front of him.

But... She'd also see the District Attorney do everything she could do to protect the innocent victims in those cases. She was like a fierce mama bear with elegant clothes and pumps with three-inch heels that looked like she could be at home on a Paris runway.

After nearly an hour of conversation at the doctor's posh dining table, Molly was feeling a little like a Christmas lawn decoration in the light of day, deflated and motionless on the grass.

“I know this is all hard to hear, but I'm telling you what will likely happen.”

Molly nodded. “Even if I do recover my memories and can reconstruct the transcript, without the tape to corroborate the statements by Eddie Simons, they won't accept the transcript as a faithful record.”

Valerie reached out and set her hand on Molly's. “It would already be difficult getting the transcription in on its own. The defense team would offer up a challenge based on the Sixth Amendment.”

Molly's gaze dropped to the tabletop and listened to the words in her head in regards to the United States Constitution. She'd have to remember to thank her eight grade teacher Mrs. Witchy. “The right to confront witnesses against them.”

Nodding, Valerie gave her an almost-smile. “And without the tape giving his words in his own voice, they could argue that you were making up the transcript. And,” Valerie shifted slightly on her chair as she leaned in a little closer, “they would certainly dig up what they feel would be a relationship between you and Detective Rafferty. Then they could argue that you’re doing this for him. To help his investigation or career. If that were to happen and the public believed that there was bias on your part-”

“I wouldn’t be able to work for the courts, the police department... or anything like them, every again.”

“That’s something we’d have to consider, but it would come down to you, Molly.”

Molly hated this. She hated it with a passion that she didn’t know she had the energy for. “I don’t want to lose my job. I like doing it. I like helping people. Especially because I can do it hiding away. Being alone and in that quiet is what I’ve craved forever.

“But you’re right. There is something between myself and Jacob. Or, at least I think there is. That would make any testimony I give biased because of that.”

Valerie shrugged, but it was a look that belied how on-the-nose her comment was.

“The amount of time that we’d spend trying to prove otherwise would take the focus off of the other evidence. Which,” she sighed, “we don’t have a lot of at this point.”

Molly shook her head. “I feel responsible for this happening. I dream about that night, or rather the big dark empty space where my memories should be. It’s... it’s terrifying, being locked away in the dark when I’ve lived my life both hating and counting on my odd skill. And now when I really need it, it’s gone.”

The District Attorney gave her hand a squeeze. “You had nothing to do with this, Molly. You did your job and did it well. I’ve never had a complaint from the court staff when

you've been a court reporter and your coworkers count you as one of, if not the best, in the office."

Molly smiled and still she heard the unspoken words from the District Attorney, or perhaps it was her supervisor who had omitted the words on her own. There were a couple of people in the office who didn't like Molly's speed and/or her accuracy. They saw it like it was a competition between the people who did transcriptions.

Molly saw it was doing her job and helping the innocent.

Still-

There was a knock at the door and Molly sat back in her chair, her head turning toward the doctor, who made his way across the room. He turned his head back over his shoulder as he neared the door. "Molly, that's going to be Detective Rafferty. Do you want me to tell him to go away?"

"No. No..." She stood up, gently extracting her hand from the District Attorney and then settled her hands at her sides. "I need to talk to him." She turned and looked at the District Attorney. "Do you need anything else from me?"

Valerie stood and shook her head. "I'll keep in touch as the investigation continues. I am sorry that this happened to you."

Molly managed a smile. "I was in there after hours. I don't blame anyone."

Nodding her head, the District Attorney spoke one last time. "Security has already re-evaluated the situation in the records building. When you come back, they'll walk you through the additional security measures that they've put in place."

The front door opened and Molly heard Doctor Webb's voice rumble through the room. "You might as well come in, Detective. We've found ourself with an open house somehow."

The District Attorney reached out and gave her shoulder a squeeze before turning around toward the door.

Jacob stood just inside the doorway on the left and Miriam was standing beside Doctor Webb, her arm wrapped around

his and her hand held gently in his hand as well.

The District Attorney moved first.

She stopped beside Miriam. “Goodbye, dear.”

“Thank you for helping Molly, Valerie.” Miriam grinned. “It’s always good having you over.”

“Just sad this time is business,” she sighed and leaned in to give Miriam an affectionate kiss on her cheek. “You keep him in line.”

Miriam laughed as her shoulders shook.

The District Attorney turned to the doctor. “Be nice.”

He didn’t look at all shocked at her words, but he did look offended. “I’m always nice.”

Miriam’s laughter bubbled up and the doctor smiled and pressed a kiss to the top of her head.

“Glad you think this is funny.”

“I do, too.” Valerie walked out with a wave at Jacob. “Same for you. Treat Molly well, or I’ll kick your ass.”

Molly followed behind Valerie, murmuring to Miriam before she took her hand in a farewell greeting. “Thank you for everything.”

Miriam held her hand tightly. “I hope I’ll see you soon for better reasons than we met.”

“That would be wonderful. When I’m allowed out, we should go out for lunch.”

Miriam nodded. “Or you could just come up for fun and we can kick back and enjoy the incredible surround sound that Callen installed for me. It’s like being at a concert. We’ll order in snacks and act like girls at a sleepover.”

“That sounds marvelous.” Molly turned her head and looked at Jacob who was watching her intently. Turning back to Miriam, she smiled at the soft smile on her face. “I need to talk to Jacob about the developments with the case and we’ll see what happens after that.”

“That sounds lovely.” Miriam gave her hand another squeeze and let go.

Molly moved over to the doctor. “Thank you for letting me invade your private space.”

He shook his head. “Happy to have you. Especially because Miriam was happy to have you. You’re welcome up at any time.”

Then the doctor looked over her shoulder for a second before meeting her eyes again. “But if the detective acts like a jerk, you come up here and I’ll take him to task over it.”

“Oh no,” Molly smiled. “I can handle Jacob if he does anything like that. But, I thank you for letting me come up and get my mind off of everything.”

“Before Valerie stopped by...” While he continued to speak, her mind was caught on an aspect of his voice. There was something about the way that the doctor spoke about the District Attorney and the way that she’d spoken to him on her way out that said they had a history.

Not anything untoward, but something that was history.

It was... interesting.

“I’m glad I had a chance to talk to her. I just hope that we didn’t take over too much of your time and space.”

Doctor Webb shook his head. “This is the most excitement we’ve had in weeks, right?”

He turned his gaze toward Miriam and Molly saw her blush.

“Oh, I don’t know, Callan. We have enough excitement on our own.”

As Molly stepped back, she tried to ignore the heated look in the doctor’s eyes. He was a man deeply in love. They were a wonderful pair together and amazing people on their own.

Even if this was the only contact she had with them, she would consider herself lucky.

“I’ll take that as my cue to head downstairs with Jacob. Thanks again.”

Molly linked her arm with Jacob’s and they walked outside.

The door shut behind them and Molly couldn’t help smiling.

Jacob pushed the button for the 2nd floor and as they waited for the car to arrive, he gave her his own hesitant smile. “I think you’ve had your mind on work more than enough for the last few days and I think it’s high time that you had a little fun. I spoke to Doctor Webb and he thinks it’s a good idea that we take your mind off what you’re missing. So tonight we’re going to have some fun.”

Molly felt herself relax as the elevator doors open and they stepped inside.

The idea sounded like just what the doctor ordered.

They could have started talking on the elevator, but both of them seemed to find different spots in the elevator vastly interesting for the time it took to travel down to the second floor. Only then did their eyes meet, and Jacob was pleased to see that she met his gaze with a soft smile. And when he reached out his hand, she took it and they walked to his front door, hand in hand.

He opened the door and followed her inside, locking the door before turning around to see where she was.

She was leaning against the counter, her hands at her sides.

Jacob looked at her and drew in a breath. “How did things go with the DA?”

Molly smiled and his heart swelled in his chest. It was amazing how much of an effect her smile had on him. That and how she looked in his space.

How she felt in his space. Or rather, how he felt having her there.

“The DA doesn’t mince around with words. Which is something I appreciated. Honestly, a lot of people treat me like I’m delicate somehow.”

Oh boy. He laid his keys on the counter next to the door and trailed his hand down her arm to her wrist. He lifted it up and turned their hands so that her palm was pressed to his.

“I wouldn’t say you’re delicate, but you are a little smaller than I am.”

“I thought guys say that size doesn’t matter.” He saw her smile deepen. “I appreciate what you’ve done for me, Jacob. If you hadn’t dropped everything to come and help, I don’t have any idea what would have happened to me. I could have been there for hours or they could have had the chance to-”

“Don’t. Please.”

He felt a weight on his shoulders and in his chest over his heart.

“I don’t want to think about what could have happened.” He bit the inside of his cheek and his hands moved up her arms, past her elbows, and rested on her shoulders. His gaze moved up to her delicate chin, the soft arch of her cheekbones and those ridiculously feminine wisps of hair curling at her temples and her ears. “I just want to stand here, looking at you, and be so damn thankful that you’re still here.”

With me.

He wanted to say that part.

He wanted her to know that she belonged there with him.

“I should probably tell you what DA Wielding said about this whole thing.”

Jacob nodded. “Okay.”

“It’s all a bit of a wash.” Her smile turned down in one corner into a rueful smile. “Even if I were to recover the memories of what he said in the interview with you, trying to prove that what I remembered was the truth, verbatim, it would come down to how believable I was. Working for the city government, even though I spend some time as a court reporter.

“Most of my time is spent transcribing notes and taped interviews by police officers. So the defense could say that I’m remembering... No. They’d say I might be hiding behind what I see as my skill and creating something that would help the CCPD, and...” She moved away from the counter and placed her hands against his chest, leaving them there so that her heat bled through his shirt and into his skin. “They’d find out that

we're... that we've been together and that will only make things worse."

As she moved closer, her eyelids closed and her lips parted, until he felt her breath against his chin.

"Jacob?"

He filled his lungs with air and still felt breathless. "Molly?"

"This is something, isn't it? This thing between us?"

His hands moved from her shoulders and down her back, skimming lightly over her clothes until he reached her lower back.

"Well," he grinned even though she couldn't see his smile, "I should admit that I don't like to have anything between us. That I don't want anything between us."

Jacob leaned closer and pressed a kiss at the center of her forehead.

"Secrets definitely. I want you to feel like you can tell me anything."

"No secrets." She nodded her head slightly and that brushed her skin against his lips. "Definitely."

"And I'd like to have nothing between you and me... physically."

Her eyelids fluttered open and he couldn't mistake the heat in her eyes. It was plain to see and perhaps amplified by the reflection of his own hungry gaze in the dark centers of her eyes.

"Wait," she licked at her lips, but the simple and likely unconscious gesture only stoked the flames inside of him, "the DA had more to say about this."

Jacob's eyebrows lifted slightly, in concern or curiosity, he didn't really know. Maybe just surprise.

"About us?"

Her cheeks flushed hot and she was close enough that he swore he felt the heat rolling off of her skin. “No. About the murder case, she-”

Jacob leaned in and kissed her, sealing his lips against hers.

He felt her still for a moment before she tilted her head slightly to the side to ease the tension between their lips, but also freed her lips to part beneath his.

Jacob leaned back and smiled at the length of time it took for her eyes to open under his searching gaze. He also enjoyed the slight part of her lips, as if she was waiting for him to kiss her again.

“Molly,” his voice purred out of his throat and the pulse in her throat jumped in response, “we can talk about murder after I’ve made love to you.”

The hazy look in her eyes sharpened, and even though she looked a little confused, her voice was strong and steady. “If you’re going to make love to me, I don’t think I’m going to want to talk about...” Her eyelids lowered and her tongue teased itself across her top lip and then her bottom. “What were we just about to do?”

Jacob once overheard Kate talking to Josephine in the break room at the precinct. He’d thankfully remembered that he’d bought a sandwich on the way into work and was about to step into the room to have it for lunch when he’d heard the two women talking about things more personal than CCPD business.

He didn’t really know Joe’s boyfriend, Jon Lee from the firehouse, but what she said wasn’t so much about him as it was what happened between them.

“It’s like one minute we’ve got the whole world on our shoulders and everything is going crazy, but he’ll give me this look, or I’ll touch him in some kind of way and we go from fully dressed to...”

“The complete opposite.” Kate had finished for her making both of them laugh quietly to themselves.

And now?

Now he understood Joe's words.

One moment she had her hands burning a hole through his shirt and suddenly that shirt was gone.

And his hands? Well, they were cupped around the sweetest ass he'd ever held and the last one he'd ever touch like this.

Shit, he had her sitting on the dining table with what felt like her panties caught around her ankle, rubbing against his calf.

"I've imagined taking you on this table," he lowered his gaze to meet hers and saw her smile up at him.

"I'd like to try that some time."

His dick jumped at those words, and her gaze dropped down between them.

"But right now," she bit into her bottom lip, "I just want to feel you inside me."

Jacob picked her up off of the table and pulled her against him. He groaned as all of her slick heat rubbed up against him. He swore if they were any more hungry for each other, they'd sizzle.

"Let's get you somewhere soft, comfortable."

She wrapped her arms around his neck and held on as they moved down the hall to the bedroom. "It seems counterintuitive."

Jacob leaned in and pressed a quick kiss to her lips. "How so?"

"That you'd want me on something soft while I'm pretty sure you're going to push into me hard."

He laid her back on the bed and saw her cheeks and breasts pinked with a blush.

Molly started to cover her face with her hands. "That was stupid, wasn't it?"

Jacob crawled up onto the bed beside her and reached for her hands, moving them away so he could see her and she could see him. “Nothing stupid about it, Mol. It does sound kind of odd when I think about it, but the first few times I’m inside you, I don’t want to have to worry that you’re going to get bruises. So no table.

“No wall.”

Her eyes widened. Just a hint. “But later?”

She was going to drive him nuts and he loved it.

“Yes, later. Whatever you want.” Jacob gently moved her legs so that her knees bent up before sliding his hands between her thighs toward her sex. “Now let me see.”

Molly opened up before him and he was amazed at how pink and perfect she was.

He kept his gaze fixed at the apex of her thighs for what seemed like a second.

“I’m starting to worry about what you see down there.” He heard the light laughter in her voice, but he also heard her worry.

“No need to worry, Molly. I’m just enjoying the view.” He smiled as he drew both of his hands up to meet just a scant inch from her. “Have you ever looked at yourself before?”

She shook her head and he saw her dark strands of hair spilled back against his sheets.

“You’re glistening like there’s liquid sugar all over you.” He drew two fingers between her folds and he felt the sudden rush of heat against the tips of his fingers. “Hot. Sweet.” He lifted his fingers to his mouth and licked her arousal off of them. “And delicious.”

Jacob smiled when she pressed the back of her hand to her mouth. “Something wrong, sweets?”

He saw her throat tighten and work as she swallowed, but it was the wide-eyed look that she gave him that told him how aroused she was.

“I can’t wait to get inside this sweet, wet pussy.”

Jacob slowly pressed two fingers into her folds, sliding them in as he bent over her body.

He saw her eyes widen even more, but instead of watching her, he bent down and pulled her taut nipple into his mouth.

A ragged indrawn breath reached his ear as her hips rose slightly.

As he circled his tongue around her nipple, he slid his fingers out along her channel and just before his fingertips broke free, he slid them in again and his lips closed around her nipple, suckling on the hardening nub.

One of her hands came to rest on his shoulder, her fingers biting into his flesh.

“Feels good, doesn’t it?”

Her hips bucked up a little, but he didn’t move his fingers and she groaned, her nails biting harder into his shoulder.

“Yes,” she gasped as he began to move again, “I thought that was a rhetorical question.”

“Not yet, Molly,” he whispered the words against the slight curve of her breast, “someday, when I know more about what sets you on fire, then maybe I won’t ask you questions.”

He kissed his way from the peak of one breast and across her sternum to her other side. Jacob changed hands, smiling when she moaned softly at the loss of his fingers. And this time, when his fingers slid into her, he used his fingers, wet with her arousal, to paint a circle around her nipple as he took the other into his mouth.

“How about that, love?” He rubbed his cheek against her breast and felt her body coat his fingers with more heat where they were tucked away inside her. “Can you come on my fingers so I can get myself inside you?”

Her eyes opened wide, her gaze focusing on his face as he looked up at her.

“Those beautiful eyes,” he murmured under his breath, before he drew her nipple back between his lips and hummed against her tender flesh.

“Oh.” Her hips bucked up against his knuckles and now she had two hands on his shoulders, her close-cropped nails biting down against his skin. “I feel like I’m about to fall.”

“Then fall, Molly. I won’t let you go.”

“Ah-”

He turned his head to see her face and it felt like the way he tugged on her nipple held just enough tension that it pushed her over the edge into her release.



IT WAS A STRANGE, floating sensation, as if the bed against her back was more of a cloud than a mattress. Either way, she wasn’t going to argue.

Twice she’d found her release, but he hadn’t.

And Molly Ferguson had never been a selfish person.

But before she had to figure out a way to tell Jacob to ‘get a move on’ without sounding like a bossy woman, he seemed to figure it out on his own.

Planting one hand down on the sheets beside her shoulder, he reached into the nightstand and pulled out a wrapper.

Molly, wanting to seem a little less of a silly girl and more of a worldly woman, lifted her chin. “Just one?”

It was his turn to be surprised, raising his eyebrows before lowering them over a big, satisfied smile. “I’ve got more. Let’s start with one.”

She wasn’t sure if she should watch as he put the condom on, but there was no way she wasn’t going to.

Molly knew what everything was going to look like. She’d seen pictures and maybe even seen a few guys in movies, but up close and personal?

This was Jacob, and she'd spent more than her fair share of time imagining what this would be like. For once, she wished that she had the other kind of eidetic memory. What would it be like to save these memories in her head?

When he was done, he reached for her thigh, but she had anticipated the need for space and brought her knees up again, opening her legs to fit him in between.

Braced on one elbow at her side, Jacob fit himself at the apex of her thighs and moved closer.

At first, it just felt like a bit of a stretch, but the further he pushed in the more she had to drop her knees down toward the bed. She parted her lips on a slow, shallow groan as he shifted and braced his hand on either side of her body.

Sweat beaded on his forehead and she lifted a hand to wipe it off with her fingers.

Jacob turned his head and placed a kiss on the inside of her wrist and hitched one leg under her thigh.

"Oh." Her hand clasped at the back of his neck and held tight as he sank into her and bottomed out. "That's tight."

"Yeah." He smiled, but it was a little thin and she felt a droplet of sweat fall from his forehead to her breast. "It's a tight fit, but it's going to get better. I promise."

Her smile held no reservations. "I know."

Jacob shifted again and she exhaled on a "Wow." The tiniest bit of friction sent lightning through her veins.

"Is that?"

She swore that Jacob almost laughed, but she didn't blame him.

"Oh, it's way better than that."

Molly shifted against him, squeezing her thighs against his hips. "Please, I want to know."

"Give me a little room, sweets, and I'll show you."

That's what he wanted? That's what she'd give him. Relaxing her hips, her thighs spread open and before she could fathom what he was doing, he was pulling back.

Instinct had her reaching for him, wanting to hold him close, but with his eyes on hers and a determined look on his face, she put her hands on his arms and kept her gaze on him.

He flexed the muscles in his thighs and she felt the air in her lungs pushed out as he filled her again.

"Good?" He waited for her answer, and all she could do was nod and smile.

From there, he repeated the same deep thrusts, slow at first and deep at the end.

There was a delicious pressure building up inside of her body, but she still felt like there was something missing, like an invisible wall that was stopping her from reaching the same heights on his fingers.

While she didn't say anything, somehow Jacob knew something was wrong.

He stopped at the end of one thrust and looked her square in the eye. "What's wrong, Mol?"

She started to shake her head and tell him that everything was fine, but his hand closed around her chin. "Tell me, Molly. Help me."

Molly couldn't find the words. Shaking her head, she tried to avoid his gaze. "I don't know. It feels good, really good, but there's just something... missing."

Her cheeks felt hot with shame and tears gathered on her lashes.

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

Jacob leaned over and kissed her, passionately slanting his lips across her own. With his body filling hers and the strange new pressure of his body pressed tightly against her own, that same little thrill worked its way through her veins.

"That," she gasped. "That feels... amazing."

“Then how about this?” With a little shifting so his legs straddled one of her and his hands roaming over her legs and her backside, Molly found herself with one leg curled around his thigh and his hand grasping the full curve of her hip.

The next time he stroked his cock deep into her body, she saw the beginning of stars at the edge of her vision.

“Yes,” grasped the sheets near her cheek with both hands, “Just like that.”

“It feels like heaven for me, too.”

Molly arched her back as he sank into her again and again. Her hands restlessly grasping the sheets and then one hand reached for her breast.

With her nipple gripped tightly between her fingers and Jacob thrusting over and over into her aching sex, she felt as if she was flying higher and higher.

“I can feel you pulling on me, Mol. I can feel your sweet, wet pussy-”

She nearly jumped as every single nerve in her body burned with sweet, hot fire. Molly wondered if her skin had somehow become incandescent with light as she heard him shout with his own release.

Molly felt his cock flex over and over inside of her and knew that he'd found his own release inside of her.

It felt like joy and wonder coursed through her veins as Jacob wrapped his arm around her and rolled heavily to the side, bringing her along until she ended up on top of him.

His hands were in her hair before roaming over every inch of bare skin that he could reach.

“I think I might sleep for another day or two.” She sighed and used her fingertips to trail across his skin. “I had no idea that sex could be so good.”

“Sex is fine,” Jacob combed his fingers through her hair, fanning it across his chest and shoulder, “but I meant it when I said I wanted to make love to you, Mol. We're starting something special here. I hope you know that.”

“All I know,” she turned her head slightly so that she could look up into his eyes, “is that I feel at home in your arms, Jacob. I think being here with you, having you show me what love is like? It doesn’t get better than this.”

She was asleep a moment later.

Jacob realized very early on that he was outnumbered.

Between Sergeant Kate Turner, District Attorney Valerie Wiending, and the most important of all, Molly Ferguson, he knew that he didn't really have a chance to argue and win.

He would just have to white-knuckle it and see this whole ridiculous plan to the end.

Oh, he wouldn't tell any of the women that it was ridiculous.

He was a man in love.

He wasn't stupid.

Well, maybe stupid in love. That was a distinct possibility, but his main concern was Molly's safety and if they left things the way they were then there was a distinct possibility that the men who broke into the Records Office might just come back later to finish the job. This time, focusing on Molly.

The District Attorney sat back against the couch in his apartment, giving him arched eyebrows and pointed looks as they walked through the plan one last time. "Calm down, Detective Rafferty. It's not like we're putting her in stocks and pillories in the middle of town and leaving her unattended."

He tried not to glare back at her. "Well, that's reassuring."

Molly reached out her hand and without looking in his direction, set her hand on his. "I appreciate how quiet you've

been.”

Valerie grinned at him. “He’s white-knuckling his way through this whole conversation.”

Kate sighed. “Play nice, Valerie. He’s doing his best.” Kate then zoned in on him. “You’ll just have to get used to this, Jacob. Too many strong and independent women in one room. If Rock was here and this was about me, he’d be grinding his teeth by now.”

Valerie turned toward Kate on the sofa and tucked her leg up on the sofa cushion. “Even though he knows what you do for a living?”

Kate rolled her eyes. “He knew what he was in for from the moment we met. It doesn’t stop him from caring.” She turned her smile on him. “So, it may seem like we’re trying to drive you up a wall, but we’re not. We’re trying to lighten the mood. If I didn’t know you better, I’d be worried that you’d jump out of the window just to get some air.”

Trying to put the women at ease, he smiled. “I’m not about to jump out of a second-floor window. If we were at ground level, maybe. But I’m pretty sure the landscapers would slit my throat for rolling through their flower beds.”

Kate sighed. “You’re funny.” She leaned in toward Molly. “You might consider keeping him.”

Molly turned to look at him and damn it, he fell in love with her all over again. The concern in her eyes made him feel about an inch tall for causing her concern, but the way she leaned against his shoulder made him feel like he could jump on the couch a time or two.

Well, maybe not.

When Tom Cruise did it, he looked like a nut.

Molly’s smile made his heart ache. “I think I will keep him.”

Thank god.

“Okay, you two lovebirds are making me a little ill.” Valerie’s acerbic tone was softened by her smile. “Let’s go

over this one more time and then we'll get out of their apartment before I melt from all the sugar in here."

Kate's shoulders shook, but she didn't laugh out loud.

"Okay, then..." Kate's smile said she was enjoying Valerie's momentary discomfort, "We're not going to address Molly's marvelous memory, or in this case, the missing part of it, we're just going to hold a press conference--"

"You mean, I get to hold a press conference and I hate those fucking cameras. I keep getting older, every damn year."

Kate leaned back and looked at the District Attorney. "You're gorgeous and you know it. It's those damned lights. They outline every wrinkle- Not that you have any."

"You're damn well right I don't."

The women laughed and Jacob felt Molly lean back against him. He could tell she was smiling even if he couldn't see her face. He swore he could feel it in the way that she leaned into him and how her hand felt on his.

Kate continued. "We'll let the good people--"

"And the bad, especially the bad guys so we can kick their asses," Valerie interjected."

"Right," Kate's snort of laughter had them all smiling. "We'll let the press know that while one of our employees had received minor injuries during a chemical fire at the records building, she's rested and eager to get back to work."

"And," Valerie nudged Kate with her expectant tone, "while the transcription file was lost, the voice file was found on a digital drive that escaped the chemical burn and--"



"WHILE THIS DEDICATED employee has been offered a week off to recover," Valerie looked out at the crowd of reporters with her normal charismatic grin, "she's tough as nails and will head right back to work."

Molly watched the press conference on the television in the bullpen of Precinct Four. The reporters seemed to be hanging on every word that Valerie spoke.

“It’s so weird to know that she’s talking about me.”

Officer Crois St. Cyr shrugged. “I don’t think people know there is a Records Department. Folks in Center City are learning something today.”

Officer Josephine “Joe” Swan stood and buckled her duty belt on. “Well, I won’t say it’s got a beat as good as Schoolhouse Rock, but no one can beat Schoolhouse Rock.”

Kate, standing beside the television stand, turned to look at them. “I think Weird Al could give them a run for their money.”

Josephine nodded thoughtfully. “I guess so, but what can we learn from ‘Tacky’ or ‘Amish Paradise?’”

Crois turned around on his chair and looked at the other officer. “Word Crimes. I learned a few things from that video.”

“Not that he’d ever admit not knowing it.” Pilar grinned at her partner.

Crossing his arms over his chest, Crois rocked the chair onto its back legs. “Nope. I’d take the fifth on that.” He winked at his partner. “I’ll bet you think there’s an X in espresso.”

Pilar raised an eyebrow at him. “There is when you say it like that, but no, Spelling Champ of Precinct Four, there is no X in ‘espresso.’” The beautiful woman looked at Molly. “He orders it at Starbucks, but he couldn’t spell it to save his life.”

“Well, if the baristas at the Siren still can’t spell my name right, I have a reason to turn it right back around on them.”

Pilar gave his shoulder a nudge. “Well, come on, whiner. We’ve got to get on the streets.”

As the officers made their way to the staircase, Molly listened to the rest of the press conference.

A reporter asked a question. Someone from a local radio station. “Of the records that were lost, are any of them about any high-profile cases?”

Molly drew in a breath and waited for the answer.

“Thanks for the question, Mark, but you know that I’m not going to comment on any current investigations, as that’s not my responsibility.”

A quick flash of red hair had Molly standing up to watch.

Kate leaned toward the open doorway to the detective offices and gave a sharp whistle.

It was only a moment before Detective Walker Ashley pushed into the room and sat down in one of the many empty chairs. “I was hoping I wasn’t going to miss this.”

“You were supposed to be here before the press conference started.” Kate’s tone had an edge to it, but she was smiling from ear to ear at her brother’s sour comment.

Reporter Kennedy Heart from WCCN Channel 12 managed to work her way to the front. “District Attorney Wielding, sources inside the Center City Police Department say that the records that were destroyed might be salvageable.”

The District Attorney leaned against the podium and nailed Kennedy with a look. “Who said that?”

“Now you know I can’t reveal my sources.”

“Then I have nothing to say.”

Valerie started to gather her things from the podium’s surface, but Kennedy pressed on. “So you’re not going to confirm that the records that were destroyed are connected to Eddie Simons’ recent death?”

Covering the microphone on the podium, Valerie leaned closer to Kennedy, as if she wasn’t holding her own microphone wrapped with the call sign of her local TV station, WCCN. “You shouldn’t go around talking about things like that, Miss Heart. Especially if you’re not sure about what you’re saying.”

Turning the microphone back toward her own mouth. “I’m quite sure that there’s something more to this whole situation, District Attorney. Including the fact that the existence of another set of records involving what could be entered as testimony in court is most definitely a situation that I’ll keep digging into. Perhaps you’ll allow me to sit down for an interview with the transcriptionist who stumbled upon the vandals.”

“No.” Valerie looked about ready to lose her customary composure. “Our *transcriptionist*,” she put emphasis on the word, “is eager to get back to work this even... When she is able. Thank you all for coming today.”

Kennedy stepped forward. “What about-”

“That’s all. Thank you.” Valerie turned and walked back into the court building with her heels the only sound coming from the TV.

“Well,” Walker turned around to look at his sister, “that went well.”

Kate grinned in return. “Valerie missed her calling. Maybe we can get her a guest role on Law & Order: SVU. That was a great performance.”

“Now it’s my turn,” Molly blew out a breath.

Kate nodded. “It won’t hurt to let people think that this whole thing has shaken you.”

“Because it has, but normally I’d just try to soldier on anyway.”

“But now,” Kate agreed, “you don’t have to hide it. We want to know if there’s someone on the inside who revealed that the files would be done that day.”

“If you can’t get them on the actual charges, you can still bring them to justice for their actions to stop the trial.”

Walker got up from his chair. “We’ll have an eye on you at all times. Irish in the 911 Call Center can... commandeer the camera feed and show us what’s going on. I’ll be part of the

duo stationed above your floor on the east side, and Jacob will be on the west side.

“Either way, we have you covered.”

“Of course.” Molly smiled but she felt her stomach twist and turn inside her belly. “I know what I have to do.”

Walker gave her a smile and a wink before he headed back into the detectives area across the hall. He paused in the doorway when Kate called out to him.

“When will you get over this macho thing and ask the girl on a date?”

Molly looked between the two siblings, confused.

“I’m not going to talk about this, Kate.”

Kate zinged back. “You’re going to break down eventually and make your move with Kennedy.”

Detective Ashley and Kennedy Heart? Goodness.

“You’d make a cute couple.”

Walker looked over at Molly before he pointed a finger at his sister. “See? Cute? That’s not going to happen. Kennedy’s a pain in my ass. And now I owe her, since you asked me to call and get her involved.”

Kate shrugged. “You’ll thank me when you’re finally settle down with her.”

“Settled?” He swore under his breath. “Let me know when you and Rock settle down, Sis.”

He walked out in a huff, but when Molly looked at Kate, the CCPD Sergeant was smiling like the Cheshire Cat and looked just as mysterious.

“He’s been trying to avoid the truth,” she explained, “but someday he’s going to have to realize that the reason why she annoys him so much is that it would only take one kiss and he’d be wound around her little finger.”

“Why do you push him like that when he gets so upset?”

“It’s because I know he loves me and I’m his big sister, so I can kick him in the ass if he really wants a fight.”

Molly almost mentioned the height difference and the weight that Walker had on his sister, but she kept her mouth shut.

Kate may look petite and delicate, but she had no doubt that if the moment required it, she could put her brother on the floor.

“Okay. I’m headed back to my place to get dressed and ready for work tonight.”

Kate reached for her keys. “I have my personal car in the parking lot. I’ll drop you off at your place.”

“Thanks.” Molly picked up her purse and put it on her shoulder.

As they walked, Kate gave her a quick look. “Can I ask why you’re not going back to Jacob’s place to get changed?”

Molly blushed. “He needed his sleep.”

Kate grinned and her shoulders shook with silent laughter. “Ahh. I get it... If I got some free time at home with Rock before a situation like this evening? Yeah, we’d get distracted in our free time. Good call, Molly. Really good call.”

Kate reached for the back door in the precinct.

“I’m going to look forward to getting you out of this trouble so you can get to the good parts in life.”

They stepped outside and Molly let out a long breath.

The time she’d had with Jacob certainly qualified as good parts of her life. Molly wanted more of them, so she’d just have to get through this evening and hope that all the pieces of the puzzle fell into place.

Kate turned the key in the ignition and the engine started to purr.

“Alright,” she nodded at Molly, “here we go.”

When Molly reached the doors to the records department, she put her hand on the doorknob and stopped.

There was a paper taped to the wall beside the door.



It was just so much to deal with.

“Welcome back, Molly.”

She nearly jumped at the sound of a voice behind her.

Turning with her hand flat against her sternum, Molly looked at Barbara Han, one of the other women who worked in the office.

“Barbara, sorry.”

Barbara lifted a foil covered plate in her hands. “I brought some lemon bars thinking that you’d need something to celebrate your return.”

Molly felt tears gathering on her lashes. “That’s sweet. Thank you so much.”

Barbara put the plate in her hands and then opened the door for her. “You come and get me if you need anything.”

“Thanks, Barbara.”

Before she could wrap her mind around it, Barbara reached out and gave her a quick hug.

“It’s so good to have you back.”

Molly put her mind to work thinking of a proper response instead of some kind of cliché throwaway, but it didn’t work. Before she could wrap her mind around the concept, the door to their supervisor’s office swung open as if someone had pushed it open.

“Miss Rafferty?”

Barbara leaned back and gave Molly a pointed look that told her to be careful.

“I’d like to speak to you,” came the next phrase. “Now, Miss Rafferty.”

Barbara gave her a little wave and walked off down the hall.

Molly crossed over to the open door and stepped inside. “Hello, Stephanie.”

“Miss Chase.”

“Miss Chase.” Molly wondered what had happened since she’d been at work. “You wanted to see me?”

Stephanie rose a perfectly arched eyebrow. “Have a seat.”

Molly moved a few feet to the left and drew the chair that was against the wall over to the space in front of her boss’ desk. When it was situated and she’d managed to catch her breath, she sat down in the chair.

“I wonder,” her boss began, “since you took your sweet time to come into the office today, that you saw the press conference?”

Molly quickly wet her lips and tried to smile. “I did see it on the television.”

“Really? How lovely.” Scooting her chair forward, Stephanie braced her elbows on the surface of the desk and touched her chin to her folded hands. “I don’t suppose you’d like to tell me why the District Attorney... or for that matter, someone at CCPD knows more than I do about your work and what files may or may not have been destroyed? Any choice bits of information you’d like to give me?”

Oh no.

With all of the anxiety and worry, about everything, had it really slipped her mind to tell her boss?

Yes, it had.

“I’m... I’m so sorry, Ste- Miss Chase. I’ve been a little off my game since the... the incident in the hallway.”

Her boss leaned back in her chair and lowered her hands into her lap. “I heard that you were at the hospital for a few hours as well.”

Molly swallowed at the knot in her throat. “I blacked out for a bit and the officers felt it was best to go to the hospital for a check.”

Stephanie’s face eased into a softer expression. “I hope you’re all better now? I won’t have to worry that you won’t be... fit to work?”

“No... I mean yes. I’m fine now.” Molly felt her stomach drop again. It was hard enough that she was still missing that period of time in her memory, but she took pride in her work.

“Now, I’d like you to know that the files you put into the collection bin were all destroyed. I know that in the past you’ve been allowed to work in the evenings as you have,” she flipped through a file folder on her desk, “had quite an impressive record with your work. I’m also aware that before I

became your supervisor, the person who was in charge of the office treated you like the favorite child.”

Molly felt a muscle pinch between her shoulder blades and she pushed her shoulders back hoping to ease it away.

It didn't work.

“I know that you've also been here for a few years, right, Molly?”

Molly wanted to answer back that she had, but it was in her personnel file, so why even ask? Molly nodded.

“While we have been allotted funds to make security in the offices tighter, I don't think that we should just allow our employees the ability to pick their own hours.”

Before Molly could start to speak, her boss powered through.

“I'm afraid that you're not going to be allowed much latitude anymore. We're going to close the offices at a decent hour, for *all* of our employees.”

Stephanie flipped to the back of Molly's personnel folder and pulled out a sheet that looked more like a spreadsheet from her vantage point.

Molly barely felt it when Stephanie put the paper in her hands.

When Stephanie had first taken the position a little under a year before, she'd met with all of the employees separately. She'd been nice and shown appreciation for her hard work. When she'd seen that Molly was also on the rotation as a court reporter, she'd also expressed a little interest in learning about her work inside the courtrooms, but apparently all of that had disappeared.

Looking down at that paper, she saw that it was an official reprimand.

Molly read it over and then read it again.

The words ate at her like acid.

...failure to protect work product...

...dereliction of duty...

...should this egregious conduct happen again...

Molly felt sick.

She wondered if it showed on her face.

The instant she looked up at Stephanie, she knew it did.

There was an anger in her supervisor's face, but there was also just the hint of triumph as well.

The letter said that she could... no.

The letter said that she *would* lose her job if something happened because she was in the office after hours.

Molly swallowed, but the knot in her throat was firmly in place.

"I'm," she took in and let out what should have been a calming breath, "I'm not sure I understand."

Stephanie's eyebrows raised, making her look even more pleased than she had been a moment before.

"I think... I think this is saying that I won't be able to work outside of normal office hours."

Sitting back in her luxurious desk chair, her boss smiled. "It's saying that we all need to be more responsible. The destruction of records caused by your carelessness is a terrible loss that I'm sure I will have to appease the District Attorney when I meet with her later today.

"You must realize that there will be a cost for this office, including those new safety measures that we'll have to adopt now that everyone seems to think that they have a right to look down on us. Look at us like bugs under a microscope. I think you'd understand what this means for all of us, including your coworkers.

"I doubt any of them will appreciate the additional scrutiny this has put us under. Would you?"

Molly cast a look through the glass walls of Stephanie's office and saw a few heads turn in her direction.

She couldn't read their expressions, not when her stomach was turning and churning with worry and anguish.

The last thing she wanted to do was hurt her coworkers.

Maybe she had enjoyed too much latitude from their old supervisor.

She'd just blissfully gone along with her work and hadn't realized that she was negatively affecting anyone else. No one had said anything until now.

Until she'd come upon those men destroying her work.

"Is... is there anything else, Miss Chase?"

Molly didn't recognize her own voice.

It sounded thin.

It sounded small.

Just like how she felt.

"No. I think you understand where I stand, Molly. You can leave."



JACOB SAW the security footage as Molly left her supervisor's office. She looked like someone had taken a sledgehammer to her mood.

Picking up his cell phone, he waited until Molly walked into her office and shut her door to call.

He kept watching as she rounded her desk and sat down, hard, in her chair.

He could see the light flare in her purse as her phone rang again and again.

Jacob could hear it on his end, but see it on hers.

Molly lifted her gaze toward the security camera and he felt like someone had just sucker punched him in the kidneys.

She looked positively destroyed.

“Come on, baby,” he whispered, “pick up the phone.”

He saw her shoulders slump as she reached down and pulled her phone out of her bag.

Jacob breathed in a sigh of relief as she held it in her hands and looked down at the screen.

“Please, baby.” He let out a loud exhale. “Talk to me.”

She touched the screen and his phone stopped ringing.

Jacob looked down and saw that the call had ended. When he looked back up at the feed from the security cameras on the screen, he saw her looking at the camera again.

Molly shook her head and put the phone back down into her bag. On top of it, she placed some kind of paper and sat back up in her chair, studiously ignoring the security camera.

His phone rang and he looked down at the screen.

WALKER CALLING

Jacob picked up the phone and accepted the call.

“Yeah?”

“Uh... okay. I guess you’re looking at the security footage.”

“You think?”

“Whoa there, grumpy. You want to send someone in to check on her?”

Jacob shook off some of his frustration. “I don’t think that will be a good idea. She’s stressed and I don’t blame her. Still, I think if we send someone in, it might make things harder.”

“She didn’t take your call?”

“No. But if she needed someone, I think she’d call.”

God, he hoped he was right.



EVERYTHING WAS WRONG.

She'd started another tape to transcribe and it just made her head hurt.

Pressing her fingers to her temples, she tried to massage away the pain, but that didn't work either.

A soft knock reached her ears and she managed a half-hearted smile to Barbara.

"Come on in."

Barbara set down a can of soda and a wrapped straw from the snack bar on the ground floor. "I passed by your office a little while ago and saw that look on your face. I know a tension headache when I see one. I thought a little caffeine might help."

Just her words gave Molly a boost and she reached for the soda can, popping the top and holding it under her nose to breathe in the scent.

She almost laughed when she felt the fizzing bubbles tickle her nose.

Molly smiled up at Barbara. "You're the best."

Barbara leaned on the edge of the desk and grinned. "Naw, but I was just trying to help. When news went around the office, I was so frightened. I stopped by your place but you didn't answer, so I bit the bullet and asked 'the boss' about it.

"She said that you were holed up with a police officer or something."

Molly blushed and reached for the straw and started peeling the wrapper.

"Oh, so there is a story here."

Molly's hands shook with her laughter and she nearly missed the trash can beside her desk. "There's something..."

"I knew it!" Barbara clapped her hands and then they both froze, listening to the room and beyond. When no one seemed to notice, they both smiled at each other. "Look, I know you're swamped with stuff that needs your attention, but someday soon we'll go out and get some drinks and talk, okay?"

“Someday soon,” Molly assured her.

“Good.” Barbara grinned. “I hope it’s that guy you talk to on the phone.”

Barbara had her hand on the doorknob when Molly spoke again.

“Why do you think it’s Jacob?”

Barbara let go of the doorknob and turned around with a big grin, showing a lot of pearly teeth. “First, whenever you got off the phone with the detective, you’d always have that... that *floaty* look about you.”

“Floaty?”

“You know,” Barbara nodded at her, “like your feet don’t touch the ground when you walk.” Barbara winked at her. “And second, you just called him Jacob and not Detective Rafferty. So we definitely do need to talk and soon. Okay?”

“Okay.” Molly felt some of the tension fall away from her shoulders.

If Barbara was still talking to her, maybe it wasn’t so bad in the office.

Meaning, that the opinions of her co-workers weren’t all set against her because of this.

“Bye now.” Barbara turned the knob and started walking through the door. “I wish I had someone who made me float like your ‘Jacob.’”

And then she was gone, and Molly found a little bit of a smile touch her lips.

Jacob hated feeling... useless.

Stuck in a commandeered supply closet on the floor above Molly, he felt like he might be bouncing off the walls soon.

No, he didn't hope that someone would take a shot at Molly. He would much rather be back at his place, holding her close.

Stripping her naked.

Listening to her pant and moan in his ear as he...

On the screen, Molly got up from her desk and moved to the door. She opened it and stepped just outside her office.

From the other security cameras, he could see her coworkers doing the same.

Their supervisor, Stephanie, was standing in the center of the room talking and then she waved to the women in the office before she walked out on what looked to be three or four-inch heels.

"Huh."

Before Molly stepped back into her office, she looked up at the camera and smiled.

A real Molly smile.

With that, she walked back to her desk and sat down.

His phone rang again, but he touched the red icon and put in his earpiece instead and spoke.

“Jeez, Walker. It’s like we’re best pals and you just want to call to shoot the shit. We’re friends, but we’re not that kind of friends.”

“Well, something sweet crawled up your butt since our last little chat.”

Jacob laughed. “You should try it sometime, Walker. Having a beautiful woman sleep in your arms makes for a good night’s rest.”

“If all you’re doing is sleeping, Jacob.” Walker almost snorted a laugh. “You’re not doing it right.”

“We’ll talk about that later.” He paused, thinking of Molly and how special she made him feel. “Actually, no. I’m not going to talk about her with you.”

“What the actual fuck, Romeo?”

Jacob stood up to stretch his legs. “Shut it, asshole. Don’t jinx me like that.”

“Jinx you? Really, J? Romeo is like the OG in romance, right? What’s wrong with that?”

Jacob looked up at the ceiling and remembered that he couldn’t kick his friend’s ass. At least not at that moment.

“Romeo,” he quietly informed the other detective, “dies in the play.”

“Oh? Shit.”

Jacob could almost picture Walker shaking his head.

“In the movie too?”

He started counting so he didn’t kill his friend.

One

Two

Three

“Yes, in the movie, too. I’ll get you a copy of the play.”

“Fuck you, Jacob. You can waste your money, but I’m not going to read a play.”

Jacob could almost hear Walker smile. And that wasn’t a good thing.

“Then again, my kitchen table is rocking a bit. How many pages is the play?”

“Keep your head in the game, asshole.”



WAITING WASN’T A BAD THING. That’s what she had to tell herself as she waited at a cafe across the street from the records building.

She could see everyone exiting from the building.

Those ‘additional’ safety measures that she’d started implementing that day made sure of it.

Everyone had to exit the building through the front door. It left them in full view of the security cameras and the cafe that she was sitting in.

Tapping the screen of the new POS cellphone she bought at the corner market across town, she watched as all of the ladies left.

All, except one.

She’d left Little Molly Sunshine a stack of work. And even as fast as she was, it guaranteed that she’d be the last one in the office. It was part of the plan that she’d come up with Declan.

One last hurrah for the over worker in her office.

Quite literally one last hurrah.

Molly might not remember what happened that night, but she’d seen Declan’s men, and he didn’t want to leave any chance that her memory might come back and bite them all in the ass.

She touched her cheek and winced at the memory.

Declan had been furious with her.

Sure, Molly stayed late, but she'd *never, ever* stayed that late. Nosy Nellie wasn't supposed to be in the office that night, but she'd stayed to work on Detective Rafferty's files.

Of course she did.

Tap.

Tap.

Tap.

Her acrylic nails made a soft sound against the plastic flip top of the cellphone she'd bought just for this one night.

There!

Barbara and Connie were leaving. The last... almost the last two out of the office.

Lifting the top of the phone, she sent one simple text message to the sniveling maintenance worker that Declan had paid off.

NOW



SITTING at her desk with her headphones in, Molly was in what her old tutor called 'the zone.' Focused on her work, even without the headphones on that were piping her last transcription of her workday.

Her fingers flew over the keyboard, thankful again to her tutor for drilling her in the touch-typing method.

Some people could get away with other methods of typing, but Molly knew she could really fly because she'd been drilled so much in using her home keys to settle herself and going hell-bent for leather on that.

A quick look at the electronic file readout told her that she had six more minutes of audio. That was only going to be six

minutes of typing.

She was so thrilled that after the soda from Barbara she'd been able to dig into her work, as if she'd never been away.

It was so good to be back to herself because-

What was that?

The lights.

The lights!

She reached for her phone, but in her haste and the darkness that had suddenly enveloped the office, she felt her nails hit the edge and then heard it hit the ground on the opposite side of the desk.

“Jacob?” She whispered the word as a prayer knowing that she might just need the help. “Jacob, be careful.”



WELL, fuck!

The door to the stairway was jammed.

How that had happened... he didn't know.

No, he did.

The security cameras in the building weren't in the stairways.

Well, fuck him sideways.

“Your door stuck?”

Fuck and a half.

“Yeah, Walker, I'm jammed here.” He grit his teeth together. “But not for long.”

Stepping back, he slammed his foot against the door, near the lock.

He heard a little groan, and it gave a little.

“Looks like they’ve got something jammed in the lock. I’ll have it open in a second.”

“Huh,” Walker growled, “that’ll be a second behind me.”

Jacob let loose another fierce kick near the lock and heard an echo of Walker’s efforts through the earpiece and didn’t say anything when his door’s lock gave way first.

He just pushed through it and headed for Molly.

“Stay safe, *Mol*. Stay safe for me.”



IT WASN’T MORE than a moment after the lights went out that Molly dropped down to the floor and crawled under her desk.

Breathing in and out through her nose, she listened to the room around her and tried to hear outside.

That was one thing that made this whole plan difficult. Every room in their office was pretty much soundproofed so that people didn’t bother each other.

Now it was working against her.

The only thing working for her was that she was used to walking around the office in the dark. When she was working late, she didn’t leave on any unnecessary lights. She didn’t even leave on some necessary ones.

But she knew that Jacob and Walker were coming. She just had to trust that they would get there in time. That was what she’d been told.

And when it came to her safety and theirs, the last thing she would do would be to go against her instructions.

The crash of glass she heard made her tighten up into a little ball, trying to make herself as small as she could be. Maybe she’d survive this somehow.

The door to her office rattled, but it wasn’t Jacob.

If it was, he would have knocked to tell her that it was all over.

No, she knew who was outside her door.

Again, someone pushed against the door. It rattled in the frame, but that was about all.

That's when she heard the metallic crack of something hitting the glass.

Molly tightened her arms around her legs and prayed.

Begged and prayed.

“Please... Please get here...”



NIGHT VISION GOGGLES.

It was crazy that he'd have to thank Detective *Jerkzek* for buying them on CCPD's dime. The man had been convinced he could collar a petty crime ring using the goggles, but he'd only ended up catching himself in his trap.

The goggles had fogged up on the other detective and while he went to look for a cloth to clean off the lenses, he'd walked in on those thieves and they'd knocked him out cold and still made away with the high end electronics in the store.

He'd never been able to nail the gang either and locked the goggles away in his desk.

Walker had liberated the goggles earlier that day, and now they were coming in handy.

The assholes had left the door unlocked behind them. He hadn't had to break the access door. Another clue that Kate had been right. These guys had someone on the inside working for them.

Jacob pushed the door inward, but kept a low profile, hoping that the men in the office would be overconfident and keep their minds on finding Molly.

That would leave their backs exposed.

Like the man standing in front of him with his own night vision goggles.

Fucking criminals.

“Hey, Chris. I found her office. Get over here.”

The man across the floor turned in their direction, and Jacob could only hope that the darkness would hide his silhouette behind the potted artificial ficus tree long enough.

Chris took a few steps in their direction and went down in a heap on the floor.

Walker stood in his place and the man in front of Jacob stepped out to look.

“What the fuck, Chris? Keep the noise down.”

Walker shrugged and the other hitman cursed under his breath. “Fucking asshole.”

He turned back to Molly’s door and lifted his hands.

“Better get this over and done with.” He put a shot through the glass door and Jacob saw red.

He put his gun back in his holster and reached out.

He felt the man’s neck constrict under his hands as Jacob drove him to the ground.

Once he was down, Jacob grabbed the man’s wrist and slammed it into the hard linoleum floor.

He managed to keep hold of the gun, but not for long.

“J, let go.”

Listening to Walker, he pulled his hand back, but before the man could lift it off of the ground, Walker slammed his foot down and the gun leapt from the man’s grasp and skittered across the floor.

Jacob replaced Walker’s foot with a handcuff and together they turned him over and pulled his other arm around to his back and cuffed his wrists together.

“I’m not gonna tell you shit, shit for brains.” The man grunted when Jacob put his knee in his back.

“Good,” Jacob answered him. “Then we’ll get a deal for your friend there when he wakes up.”

“Chris won’t say shit either.” The man under his knee swore a blue streak.

“Don’t worry too much,” Jacob dug his knee in a little bit more, “we already knew his name when you said it a few minutes ago. Both of you are going to jail for a long, long fucking time.”

“Got him, J.” Walker announced from across the room. “He’s out and cuffed. You want me to call in the cavalry?”

“Be my guest.”

Walker came back across the room and together they got the one shooter and dragged him over by his ‘friend.’

That’s when Walker took custody of both men and waved Jacob off. “Go hug your woman.”

Jacob gave him a smile.

He didn’t ask if Walker was sure. That would have gotten his ass kicked. Instead he gave him a mock salute and crossed back to Molly’s office.

He took a handkerchief out of his pocket and pushed the door open. He whipped his night vision goggles off of his head.

“Baby?”

“Jacob?”

“It’s over, Molly. Walker’s watching the men and-”

She nearly knocked him over when she grabbed onto him, but he found his balance and wrapped his arms around her, too. He held her tight because he wanted to feel.

He wanted to remind himself that she was safe.

He wanted to remind himself that-

“I love you, Jacob.”

Ah shit. His Molly really knew how to rock him off balance.

And pull him back, too.

He leaned back and held her face gently in his hands. “I love you so damn much, baby. The whole way down here, I just kept holding onto one thought.”

“Oh?” Even though he couldn’t see her, he felt the gentle weight of her gaze on his face. “What thought was that?”

He smiled and wondered if she could tell.

“Just how quickly we can move your stuff into my place or mine into yours.”

“Oh?” She sounded shocked. “Really?”

“Really,” he leaned in and gave her a kiss that landed unerringly on her lips, “because I want to come home to you. And I want you to come home to me every day.”

“And every night,” she whispered back to him before she placed a kiss on his lips. “I like the sound of that.”

“Good.” He dropped his arms to hold her tight against him again. “Because I was going to find a way to talk you into it if you said no.”

“I doubt I’d ever say no to you, Jacob. Ever.”

“Well,” he grinned, “that sounds good to me, too.” He drew her tight against his body and kissed her until she began to melt.

Somewhere in the darkness he heard Walker curse.

“Damn it, J! Come on, man. I don’t need to hear that!”

They broke apart and he felt Molly’s almost silent laughter against his neck.

Yeah. He was happy. In love. And it was only going to get better from there, especially when he had her in his arms.

Molly was awake before Jacob climbed into bed behind her.

Her mind had been tumbling over and over the whole night, well, except when Jacob was making love to her.

She thought about everything that they'd found out after officers from the CCPD swarmed into the records office.

The two men who'd come after her were working for Declan Ferguson. Thank goodness he wasn't related to her, but it was a strange and random happenstance. He was trying to build his criminal 'empire' in the shadows of Center City, but now he was going to be arrested and hopefully brought to justice.

Her boss had been caught when Irish had followed the cell phone signal to her throw away phone which she'd hadn't dumped as fast as she should have. It turned out that her work ethic and criminal ethic were almost the same. She put it off when she should have done it straight away.

Secretly, Molly hoped that when the dust settled that they'd promote someone like Barbara into the role. Barbara knew the office inside and out and really cared about the people who worked with her.

If that happened, Molly would be happy to follow any rules that Barbara set down.

Strangely, her world which had turned upside down was back to being right side up. Sort of.

She still couldn't remember what happened on that night, or the interview that she'd transcribed. For the first part, it might have been better, she didn't want to remember what it was like to nearly die of strangulation.

But she knew she'd ended up where she'd belonged.

With Jacob.

She felt him cuddle up close and wrap his arm protectively around her and press a kiss to her bare shoulder.

"You, okay?"

Molly swore she felt him smile against her skin.

"Yeah," he sighed, "I'm okay."

She laughed softly as he managed to pull her even closer. "Where did you go?"

"I walked around the apartment," he confessed, "making sure the doors were locked and the windows... Well, making sure that the windows were sealed shut."

Molly wiggled around until she could lay her ear against his chest and heard the fierce beating of his heart in his chest. "Were you worried?"

She heard his harsh exhale as she was tucked up against him.

"I think it's a little bit of disbelief rather than worry," he explained. "I have you here with me and part of me still thinks about all the horrible things that had to happen to bring us here together."

It wasn't his words so much that bothered her but the tone of his voice. She didn't want him to worry so much.

"I don't see it like that."

"You don't?" He turned his head, and she felt his late-night scruff against her temple.

"No. I think of everything that happened and I realize that when I was in danger, you came. When they tried to finish it, you were there.

“I think of what happened to bring us together and realize how lucky I am that it didn’t drive us apart.”

“I think I like the way you see it, *Mol.*”

She smiled and lifted her chin so she could place a kiss against his throat.

He went hard against her thigh and his hand skimmed over her back and grasped her hip, pulling her closer.

“And I know,” she placed another kiss against his throat, this time finding the place where his pulse was the closest to his skin, “that I’m always going to be safe with you.”

THANK YOU & MAHALO

I am so grateful that you choose this book to read! I hope that you've enjoyed it and will continue to read my books. Since I was a child, books have given me thousands of worlds to escape into. Thousands of places to curl up in and find joy and peace!

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Reina reads like she writes:

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Military, First Responders, & More!

Always with an HEA because we all deserve it!



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