

Thursday, December 11th

Christmas was on its way and with it, a lot of work. People seemed not only be very busy with shopping and decorating, baking and cooking, but also with stealing, assaulting, breaking in and murdering. Not to mention abduction, abuse and fraud. The time of the year, when you were supposed to think of your neighbor, care for the others, look after them and give them some extra love, some people became more violent and vicious than they were the other twelve months. Maybe it was the pressure and the stress, maybe it was a sign of time, of the changes, that had been over the last decades. Life got faster, harder and at one point not everybody could take it anymore.

One of these people was Maxwell Powell. He sat on an old armchair in his little apartment, his eyes closed and his hands trembled. If Sofia had met him on the streets, she would have believed he's the friendly old man from next door, a loving grandfather and caring husband. For many years he had been exactly this, exactly what society saw in him. Today he had changed, changed his attitude, actions and life. As well as the life of his wife. In an ultimate way.

"Mister Powell?"

His eyes popped open and he looked at Sofia. "Yes?"

"I need your fingerprints."

"Why bother? I confessed, you don't have to build up a case against me. I killed my wife."

Yes he did. Marianne, his wife of fifty years, lay on the kitchen floor, a pan next to her. She had been killed with it, by her own husband, father of her children, grandfather of their grandchildren. It had been Mister Powell himself, who called the police, reported the crime. His crime. When Sofia arrived with the police, he had opened them the door, let them inside and showed them where his wife was. Then he confessed it had been him, who killed her.

"It's procedure. We need a complete chain of evidence."

"I won't change my testimony. I killed my wife, it was me and nobody else."

"Nevertheless I need your DNA and your fingerprints."

"All right then." He let her take his fingerprints and leant back again.

Sofia watched him for a second. He looked sad, lost. Not like her usual killer, then again, was there something like an usual killer? Only on TV and in movies they looked mean, were covered with tattoos and attacked law enforcement whenever they had a chance.

"Why did you kill your wife, Mister Powell?" It wasn't her job to ask questions, Don was here for that.

"Huh?"

"Why did you kill your wife?" She repeated her question.

"She annoyed me."

"Really? How?"

"She used skim milk in the coffee, I hate skim milk. A real coffee needs cream and not skim milk or worse, soy milk."

It was hard to believe somebody killed his wife over skim milk, but after over twenty years working crimes she knew, there was no reason people didn't kill for. Milk was new to her, at least she couldn't remember somebody had been killed over milk before, leave alone killed his spouse over milk. Today she learnt something new.

"When will you bring me to jail?" He looked at Kyle, who stood in a corner, watched him.

"After CSI Curtis is ready."

"I'm done."

"Okay, put your hands behind your back." Kyle stepped forward. "Will your lawyer meet us at the department?"

"I don't have a lawyer."

"You've been read the Miranda rights?"

"Yes, I understood everything and I confessed. You can arrest me and send me to jail."

Sofia and Kyle exchanged a surprised look. Usually suspects didn't ask to be send to jail, they tried to avoid everything to be transformed there.

"Okay, follow me. Sofia, I let the clothes pack for you."

"Thanks." She watched the two men leave the room and turned to get back to the kitchen. Cherry kneed next to the body of Marianne Powell. The medical examiner had started her work a few minutes ago.

"He confessed."

"Well, hello CSI Curtis, I haven't seen you in a while. How are you? How are your little boys?"

"They just recovered from a little infection, but are fine now, went to daycare today. Their first time." Sofia smiled. The last weeks had been hard, when she had been ready to go back to work, Sandy and Saloso caught an infection, needed to stay four days in hospital and then the blonde stayed at home to make sure, they were really fine. This had caused a delay in her return to work, she started on the first of December, mostly with paperwork and lab work, today was her first homicide, the first time she met Cherry since she left work in summer.

"Big day in the family."

"Yes. Like in this family. He admitted he killed his wife. With the pan." A big frying pan lay next to the victim on the floor.

"A confession, the murder weapon next to the victim, a slam dunk case, the best way to start work again."

"Yeah." Like a present and she was very suspicious when she got a present without a reason. Unless her wife got her a present, Sara did do these things sometimes. Who would have thought that years ago? Sara Sidle had become a domestic woman, a loving and caring wife and mother. Of four children!

"What do you see? If we didn't have a confession, what would you think did happen?"

"Somebody came into the kitchen and attacked the woman with a blunt force object. Hit her on the head. Either the object or the fall killed her, although I can't rule out suicide. She might have hit herself on the head with the pan."

"Hit herself? Why would she do that?"

"Why would he kill her?"

"She used the wrong milk in the coffee." Sofia offered the explanation Powell offered to her.

"Oh." Like Sofia Cherry looked irritated. Then again, she had been a medical examiner for many years and had seen weirder things.

"I can't see anything wrong with the milk they have here." Greg said. "We use the same one."

"She uses skim milk, he wants cream."

"There's cream in the fridge."

"Maybe she never poured cream in the coffee, it still is no reason to kill her."

"No defensive wounds." Cherry said. "If he hit her with the pan, she didn't see him attack her."

"Not too difficult. Come into the kitchen, take a pan, call her name, she turns, he hits her, she's dead." Greg said.

"Kill your wife of fifty years over milk." It still sounded unbelievable to the blonde.

"When you're married for so many years, there a lot of things you start to hate about the other and at one point you can't take it anymore. Usually people get divorced, yell at each other, in this case the man overstepped a few steps and went straight to murder. I confess, sometimes I feel like killing my husband too. Not over milk, but for other things, that might be just as small to other people, like the milk is to us."

"Please confess when we come to your house and your husband is dead, saves us a lot of work."

"Don't worry, I'll have a written confession and a complete autopsy ready for you." Cherry laughed.

"All you need is a sleigh and a famous Christmas song came to life." Shane laughed when he saw Sara. The brunette was covered in snow, her coat was white, her hair too and her nose was red. "Ruuudolph."

Sara wished she could show him her middle finger, the problem was, her hand, especially her fingers, felt so cold, she was sure, she couldn't move them anymore. How was she supposed to get out of her coat?

"Or was it: Frosty the snowman?" Shane sang.

"Shut up, help me out of my coat." Or she would find a way to kill him.

"Oh, she wants me to undress her. No way, I get you naked and your wife and her mother will kill me in a very painful way."

"I said help me out of the coat, not get me naked."

"You're no fun, Frosty Rudolph." Shane rose from the log fire and opened the zip of Sara's coat. Carefully he got her arms out and hang the coat on a hook. "That bad?" He touched her hands and squeaked. "Ice!"

"Really?" There was a reason why she looked like she did and asked him to help her. Her gloves had dropped into a

creek, were gone, she tried to save them, got her hands wet, which was the biggest mistake she made today and also stepped into the creek when she stumbled. Her feet felt like her fingers. Were her toes still alive?

"Sit down." He pushed her on the chair next to the fire. "I fix you a drink." He started the kettle. "Are your boots wet?"

"Not only the boots, everything inside too. I stepped into the creek."

"Clumsy Smurf." He pulled off her boots. "Can you move the toes?"

"I'm glad I can see I still have feet."

"Okay." The socks came off next. Reddish-blue toes appeared. "This doesn't look good." Shane placed Sara's feet on a stool, right in front of the fire. "Why did you not call me?"

"I can't open my coat, how am I supposed to dial?"

"Right." He got the boiling water into a mug, poured a huge shot of rum into the tea too and gave the mug to Sara. "Can you hold that?"

"Yes." She held the mug in her hands, felt the heat. "This feels great....where did you get the rum from? Don't tell me you drink alcohol at work."

"Have you seen me drunk?"

"No." But the rum in his bag made her wonder if she had missed something.

"See. We defrost you and when you're lucky, I don't take you to a doctor. Move your feet."

Sara moved her and even her toes a little bit. The first sip of tea had sent a rush of heat through her body, mostly because of the rum, which Shane had poured more than generously into her tea. When she finished the whole mug, she couldn't drive home.

"Aren't we lucky our boss is not here? You can stay in front of the fire, drink your tea with rum and I handle guests - in case somebody comes here. It's too cold and it snows like hell, nobody wants to be out in the forest in this weather."

"Snows like hell sounds wrong. Unless hell froze over."

"We don't know." He cocked his head. "You start to look more normal."

"Thanks."

"What have you been doing outside?"

"I checked if the people, who signed in four hours ago, had signed out already. They had. Then I saw a deer, which limped, tried to get a better look at it, dropped my gloves into the creek, stumbled, stepped into the water and came back here."

"Stay away from water in this weather; unless it's a hot pool."

"I'd love to be in one now."

"I'd love to be in one with you."

"Think about Sofia and Marie." She warned him amused.

"Right, the painful death. Will I get some credit for saving your toes and fingers?"

"Absolutely."

"Good." He looked out of the window, into the heavy snow. "If it goes on like this, I have no idea how we're supposed to go home." Their cars were further down, at the main ranger station, but he wasn't sure if they could drive with their jeep through the snow. It could be hard to see where the road was.

"It's a ten miles walk...let me tell you, it's cold outside."

"Was there anybody up here except us?"

"Not according to the book and I haven't seen anybody else around."

"In this case we should leave when you've finished your tea and can move your toes again. I make two more thermos flasks of tea and pack a few blankets, in case we get stuck."

"I let them at the main station know we'll leave soon and should be back...in an hour or so." When their colleagues knew they were on their way, they could send help in case Sara and Shane lost control over the jeep or got stuck. There was no cell phone cover at all parts of the way back, the radio could fail due to the weather condition too. It was always better to be safe than sorry.

Sofia and Greg had stayed another three hours at the Powell house, worked the crime scene in the kitchen and had a closer look at other rooms of the house. Pictures of the couple and their children and grandchildren stood in all the rooms, memories of family parties, vacations, first days at school, university.

"Have you found anything that indicates he was abusive? Or that they had problems?" Sofia asked when Greg came to her, all packed up and ready to leave.

"No, I see a house of an elderly couple, decorated with memories of happy days and family. It could be how Jules and I live in forty years, it could be how you and Sara live in forty years. From what I see and saw here, there's nothing that indicates murder."

She had the same feeling. Nevertheless, there had been a body, Mrs. Powell's body, in the kitchen, next to a pan and with a big, nasty bump on her head. The evidence said it was a murder case and so far they hadn't found any evidence of a third party being around. And why would Mister Powell say, he killed his wife when it was somebody else.

"The pan is heavy, one strike is enough to kill somebody. He seemed to be in a physical condition to lift the murder weapon and use it on his wife."

"So he says."

"I don't doubt he is physical capable of doing it, I don't understand why." The blonde sighed. "But that's just me, sometimes being stuck in a world of love and no understanding why people hate or kill the person, they swore to love for the rest of their life. Maybe the spirit of Christmas makes me sensitive and forget the fact, people have killed each other all the time and they don't need reasons I understand."

"Rookie mistake." Greg grinned and pulled her in his arms. "I think you're still a little bit on mommy mode. Give yourself a little bit more time and you'll be back on the cynic mode, you are famous for. Oh no, that's your wife. But you know, after a while you pick up the behavior of your spouse."

"Very funny. Will you become all shrinky?"

"The more I'm like my wife, the more your wife will love me."

"True. How about we get some late lunch before we go back to the lab? We can work for an hour or two and go home on time. We have a confession."

"Yeah, our wives will be delighted to have us back early."

"And we'll be delighted to be back with them and our kids. The only one, who loses, is your mother, who has to give up her role as a babysitter earlier."

"Right." Sofia laughed. Her mother loved the fact she had more babies to look after. The twins were at day care in the morning, same for Susan, in the afternoon they were with Marie and Mark, who enjoyed their time with their grandchildren every day.

"I hate snow! I want to go back to Vegas! Or even better: Hawaii. It never snows on Hawaii, the weather is great, warm, all year round. No snow, no cold wind, no cold rain. If we ever get back to civilization I will pack my suitcase and leave." Sara complained.

"No you won't." Shane pushed the foot mat under the front tires. They got themselves into a ditch and hoped that with the mat they'd get the jeep out of it.

"Says who?"

"Say I. Without your family you don't go anywhere. You need your wife and your four kids and I'm quite sure, you also need your in-laws around because you like them a lot. Not to mention a certain shrink and her husband and kids. Which means, you need a small plane for the extended family - and me."

"Okay, you might be right on that." He was. Without her family, extended family, she wouldn't go anywhere. "Lets get this thing back on the road, I want to go home."

"Same here." Sara went back into the jeep and started the engine. Carefully she accelerated while Shane helped by pushing. Inch by inch the jeep rolled up until it made one big jump and was back on the snowy road.

"Who's Frosty now?" Sara smirked when Shane came into the car, covered in snow, the mats in his hands.

"Funny. Try to stay on the road."

"Want to drive? Maybe you're a better driver."

"No, I hold on to whatever is around and pray for Hawaiian weather."

"In seven months again. First we'll have a cold and snowy Christmas; at least where I'll be."

"Your own fault you go up to Tahoe and not to Hawaii."

"A villa with a view over the lake, a sauna, a hot pool, a huge fireplace. Almost as good as Hawaii and best of all:

it's for free." They'd stay in Lou Lee's villa from Christmas Eve until the second of January. The movie star had given them the keys to his villa up in the north, as he planned to be with his maybe future parents-in-law. Sara and Sofia would go there with their children, Marie, Mark, Don, Tanya, Jules and Greg with their children would join them. It was also planned that Lea and Lauren came up there after Christmas. A big group, which promised a lot of fun and wonderful holidays. She had no idea how they were supposed to get all their stuff up there, just their Christmas presents needed a car for themselves.

"Yeah, rub it in. You and Mister Action Hero are buddies."

"Actually Mister Action Hero is a fan of my wife, slobbers over her and when he touches her, I'll break his expensive neck."

"He had no chance when you weren't a couple, he's not going to get a chance now that you're married and have four kids. How is the big boy doing? I haven't seen him here for a while. What happened to his voluntarily work?"

"His mother told him to concentrate on his school, he has a paid job, which demands some time too. In summer he'll come back."

"We need him now, he can shovel snow."

"No chance." Steve had a few more tests until Christmas and Sara wanted him to concentrate on school and not on work. It was bad enough he spent some time with Mel, helped her. As much as she appreciated the fact the other woman helped her son out, school was more important than work.

When Sofia got a text from Cherry, telling her, the medical examiner wouldn't start the autopsy of her victim today, the blonde knew, she could go home on time. So far the case seemed to work out just fine. She lifted fingerprints from the pan, compared them to Mister Powell and it was a perfect match. The skin tissue on the pan was in DNA and was more than likely to be Mrs. Powell's. The evidence worked for them, supported what they believed was true.

"Mommy!" Susan jumped up and ran into the arms of her mother as soon as Sofia entered the living room.

"Mommy! Mommy! Snow!"

"Hey Darling." The blonde picked her daughter up. "Where is snow?"

"Sara sent us a few pictures, they have a lot of snow up there." Marie explained. "Susan saw the pictures and is very excited, she wants to be in this much snow too."

"Well, we'll have snow at Lake Tahoe, you can build a snow man and we take a sleigh ride up the hill. As fast as the wind."

"Snow! Now!"

"Now? We can't get up in the hills, it's too late and dark."

"We'll drive up there tomorrow." Mark said. "When the twins are in day-care, it's too cold up there for them."

"How are they?" Sofia walked over to the big crib, where her sons were asleep.

"Good. The nurse was pleased with them, they ate, slept, played as far as it's possible for them." Which meant, they looked at their mobiles and tried to catch it or danced with their grandparents. Or, their grandparents danced with them on their arms, a sight that made Sofia laugh when she saw it the first time. Her sons loved it, it made them stop crying, when somebody danced with them and sang a song.

"How was your day, Honey?" Marie asked.

"Good. We caught a case, the suspect confessed before we started investigating." Sofia tried to give only a few details about her work when her children were around, Susan picked up what they talked about and murder was no topic for a little girl.

"Did you work with Greg?"

"Yes. He's home too, which will please his wife and children."

"There are a few more things to arrange before we leave to Tahoe. Have you decided how many cars we should take?"

"Sara and I take Susan, Sandy, Saloso and the dogs, which makes our car full. Steve takes one car, he'll have our clothes in there. You and dad have the you know what." It was how they referred to the Christmas presents when children were around. "Which makes your car full

too. Tanya and Don take some of Greg's and Jules's stuff in their car, as their car will be not enough for all five of them. Maybe we should rent a bus."

"We have the people and the luggage for that, but you don't want to drive a bus on narrow roads in snow. Lea follows us later?"

"Yes, on Boxing Day will she and Lauren come up. Maybe they can take a few things with them too."

"We don't have to take a lot of food and beverage with us, there are supermarkets in Tahoe. Take what we need for the drive, a few diapers for the kids, their toys."

"The way I know Lou, the fridge is stocked when we arrive." The last time they arrived in his villa, he had ordered the cleaning lady to stock the fridge with the most important groceries, so they didn't have to leave again for shopping. With kids the car was always full and this time they had two babies and four toddlers with them.

"How far are you and Sara with the preparation?"

"Uhm, we're working on it. The two boys keep us entertained a lot and...the big one also needs some attention."

"Still?"

"Yes, it didn't get better so far."

"Want me to talk to him?"

"No, he should decide himself when it's the best time to talk."

"Sometimes children need a little push."

"Mom, you don't do little pushes, you smash." The blonde grinned.

"I think it's time for you to leave."

"You're right. Suzy, get your coat and boots, we go home. Mommy might be home already and can tell you all about the snow."

"Snow! Snow!"

"Yes, maybe she has more pictures of snow."

"I give you a hand with the boys." Mark offered. When they were carefully they had a change to get the twins in their child car seat, covered with a thick blanket and not woke them up. When they tried to dress them up with their thick outdoor clothes, they'd be awake instantly.

"Why did Shane drop you off? Anything happened to your car?" Sofia asked when Sara came into the house after Shane dropped her off in front of the door.

"Nope, it's fine."

The blonde hugged her wife and when she was about to kiss her, she pulled off. "Wham, are you drunk?" The smell of alcohol was more than present. Her wife smelled like a bar or a drunken seaman.

"Not drunk, but not in a state to legally drive. Shane mixed me a mug of tea and a thermo with rum and I had it, so I wasn't allowed to drive anymore."

"He made you drunk? Why?"

"Because I came back to the hut slightly frozen..."

"Mommy!" Susan stormed towards Sara.

"Hey my beautiful daughter, how are you?" Sara picked Susan up and kissed her. "I missed you, how are you?"

"Good. Snow?"

"There was a lot of snow at the forest, yes. Did you see the photos?"

"Yes. Want snow too."

"My parents want to take her there tomorrow." Sofia said.

"Oh, that will be fun. Make sure you wear thick clothes, Honey, it's very cold in the snow." Sara kissed her daughter again. "Did you have dinner yet?"

"No, dinner with mommy."

"Dad gave me a container with chicken soup, he also made some vegetable soup for you, it's on the oven."

"Where are the twins?"

"In bed. Our eldest son is upstairs. Apparently he's not hungry."

Sara sighed. "Okay, then the three of us will have dinner. Did you catch a new case?"

"Yes, I did."

"One, that will keep you close to the desk tomorrow?"

Sara and Sofia went back into the kitchen, Susan on Sara's arm and sat down.

"No, I should be fine, so should Greg." Tomorrow was the third birthday of Jorja and Eric and they wanted to celebrate in the afternoon and evening. When Sofia and Greg caught a case, that made them work long hours, they'd miss most of the party. Sara herself had made sure,

she could leave the forest around two and be back in Silver Lake by three to help Jules with the preparation.

"Perfect."

"You owe me the story to the rum with tea."

"Tea with rum."

"The way you smell it was rum with tea."

"It can't be too bad, I drove from the hut to the main station."

Sofia covered her ears and started singing: "La, la, la! I can't hear you! La, la, la!" She was a member of the law enforcement team, she didn't want to know if her wife did something illegal, like driving under the influence.

"Want to arrest me? Or call a cop to arrest me?"

"No, I'd do that myself, same for interrogation." The blonde smirked. A lovely idea, her wife cuffed, no chance to escape and Sofia could do whatever she pleased - which would be an absolutely pleasure for Sara.

"Really?"

"Yes. So tell me, why did you need tea with rum?"

"I was a little bit cold." Sara told her what happened and when Sofia served the soup, she felt the same heat rushing through her body, that she felt when she had the tea. This time her body wasn't desperate for heat, but welcomed it anyway. After a day like today, any kind of heat was good.

The mood of her son had everything but good the last three weeks. He barely talked to them, kept his room door locked and stayed in there, only came out for dinner or to go to school. This wasn't the Stephen she knew. Not her happy and friendly son. There could be many reasons why he acted like this, but Sara knew why he did: Jenny. Her son and his first girlfriend split up and since that day his mood was bad. He didn't talk to her nor Sofia, kept everything to himself. Not even told them about the breakup. They figured it out by his behavior and the fact, Jenny didn't appear here anymore.

"Did he talk to you today?" Sofia sat next to her wife, took a deep breath and tried to relax. Their twins were in a bad mood today too and the blonde only spent over an hour to make them go to sleep.

"No."

"I want to go to him, make him talk to us."

"Me too. I want to pull him into my arms and tell him, everything will be fine, that a broken heart is painful, but it doesn't last forever. Lea is with him, she's the only one he talks to."

"What about Tanya?"

"Yes, he talked to her." Sara kissed Sofia gently. "She doesn't tell me what, but as long as they talk, I'm a kind of relieved."

"Every day I wonder what might have happened between them. They were so happy, it seemed to be perfect and out of the blue it's over. Then again, when I remember way back when I was sixteen, it wasn't much different. Absolutely in love, being high on a happy vibe and the next morning everything is over and you feel like you'll never fall in love again."

"Yeah, it's a disaster every time it happens. The thing is, they tell you it gets better and the next time you won't be that hurt anymore. A lie. It always hurts and when you're really in love, it doesn't get better for a long time."

"Tell me about it...there's a reason why I acted the way I did when you left me a few years ago."

"We never broke up."

"It felt like it. When Steve feels like I did, I hope Lea is his Jules to keep him sane."

"She's solid as a rock. I'm about to ask Jules to have an eye on him."

"Well, I think it's better he goes to her than the other way around."

"Why is there nothing we can do for him? I feel so useless, like we're bad parents. Did we do something wrong? Say something wrong? We must have messed up somewhere otherwise he'd talk to us."

"You didn't mess up, mom."

They looked up. Steve leant in the door frame, had overheard at least the last part of their conversation.

"Honey..." Sara started.

"You never messed up, mom!", he repeated. "You're both the best parents somebody could ask for. Never let anybody tell you something else, never believe anything else." He walked to them. Sara and Sofia made some space between them so he could sit down. "You never did

anything wrong." He took Sara's hand. "Stop blaming yourself for something that's not your fault."

"We worry about you and when you don't talk to us, keep us out, it feels like we did something wrong."

"Mom, did you talk to your parents...okay, bad example." He turned to Sofia. "Mom, did you talk to your mother when you broke up?"

"No, she talked to me. Most times she wasn't happy about my boyfriends, so when we broke up, she told me things like, it was the best thing I could do, the smartest thing to do and similar phrases. You know your grandmother, she doesn't hold back her opinion."

"No." He smiled a little bit. "I'm surprised she hasn't talked to me."

"We told her if she does, we won't let her see the little ones until Sofia goes back to work and we exclude her from our trip over Christmas."

"The captain doesn't respond very well to threats and blackmailing."

"No, but she knows when we're serious."

"Thanks."

"Do you want to tell us what happened?" Sara asked carefully.

"We broke up. It's nobody's fault or...maybe mine a little bit. I don't know. Being with Jenny didn't feel right anymore and she felt, something was wrong with me. Not sure what this is all about."

"Love can be a confusing thing, can't it?" The brunette pulled her son deeper in her arms. Her poor baby, all heartbroken and confused.

"I got told it's normal that your heart gets broken and it will happen a few times."

"True."

"Jenny and I...it was our first relationship. How likely is it to stay with your first lover? Isn't it more likely to win the lottery?"

"A good question. Maybe." Sofia took his hands. "I so hoped you could have a happy Christmas, with your girlfriend in your arms in Tahoe."

"So did I. How does mom's colleague always say? It saves money to be single over Christmas."

"I'd rather spend all my money before I have to be without Sara."

"Because you found your one."

"Yes." It felt like it and yet, Sofia was aware, no matter how wonderful their relationship was, no matter how much she loved Sara and Sara loved her, there was no guarantee it would be like this forever. They could hope for it, work on it, but it didn't mean, they'd live a modern day fairytale.

Friday, December 12th

After the rain early this month, the sun was not completely back in the city of angels. It was weird to know here in Silver Lake it was rainy and fresh while up in the mountains of Angeles National Forest there was snow. The heavy snow yesterday had been an exception, Sara never experienced this amount of snow so early in the winter before. For today the forecast promised more snow, as well as heavy rain for Los Angeles and more storm. It looked like the weather continued with the unusual wet and windy times. On the other hand, rain was much needed in the area, no matter what time of the year.

The crying of the twins got her attention back to reality, to her family. Sandy and Saloso were both crying in their cribs.

"Good morning, boys, how are you?" She picked them both up and rocked them softly. "No need to cry, I'm here, you're not alone. Or are you hungry? In this case we have to go and see your walking milk bar, she is in the bathroom, time for her to finish her vanity thing and go back to being a mommy of two very hungry and demanding boys. You know, girls are supposed to be more difficult, the two of you could be girls."

"I hear the sweet sound of our precious little boys." Sofia came into the room, kissed Sara and then took Saloso into her arms. "Are you hungry?"

"Hungry or cross, I think it's the first one."

"Me too."

"All right, I open the bar, can you prepare the bottles?" There wasn't enough milk for both boys, who seemed to be very hungry all the time.

"Sure."

The blonde sat down in the big armchair, they put into the room and opened her jumper. Carefully she placed Saloso on her left breast and with the help of Sara, Sandy got on the other side. Breastfeeding both babies, Sofia was busy and this gave Sara the chance to get into the kitchen and prepare two bottles of milk. It was only a question of time before Susan woke up and wanted her parents' attention too.

"The wind is getting stronger, today will be a stormy day." Sara came back with the two bottles and took Saloso in her arms. Before the boy could complain about being taken away from his breakfast, she had him on the bottle and stopped the protest. Sofia did the same with Sandy.

"My parents come over today, the twins don't have to get out in the storm. Maybe they keep Susan here too, when Greg brings Louise, Jorja and Eric over, Jules can prepare everything for the party without worrying about the kids."

"Six kids. I know the nurses in day-care have more children to watch, I wonder how they do it. Sometimes these two can be hard for both of us, imagine we had ten more of them, all crying at the same time, hungry, in need for a fresh diaper, in a bad mood." Sara loved her children, didn't want to be without them, but sometimes they were a handful.

"I have a lot of respect to women, who have twins and no partner. Or even a triplet. A full time job."

"Yes, they can be."

"Morning moms." Steve came in the room. "I thought you're feeding them, it was so quiet. Where is the princess?"

"Asleep. How are you?"

"Okay. It's windy."

"Yes, the weatherman said we'll have a storm today. Do you have any plans for after school?"

"Mom, it's Jorja's and Eric's birthday, I'll be there." He kissed Sara's cheek. "Your godchild turns three, I'm invited, so this is what I'll do on my Friday night."

"So not cool." She teased her son.

"That's me, family first." He knew most teenagers his age would rather go out on a Friday night than go to a children birthday party, but to him, a family event was still special. Fourteen years of his life he wished for a family, a real one, where people spend time with each other, celebrated birthdays together and were happy when they could be together. It wasn't not cool to him, it was, what he always wanted and for almost three years he had what he wished for.

"Will Lea come too?"

"She's invited, so I think she does. We're both not cool. How will you get to work when your car is in the forest?"

"Shane picks me up."

"Can you work in this weather?"

"We've closed the upper areas yesterday, if it's safe, we'll check if people didn't go there. Same for the rest of the forest, as long as the weather allows it we work, if the wind gets too strong, we close the forest down."

"Are you worrying about your mother?" Sofia asked.

"Sure, we need her, don't we?"

"Absolutely. Otherwise you had to feed your brother every time and look after your sister."

"No thanks. I prepare breakfast for the ones with teeth...any special wishes?"

"Scrambled eggs on toast with tomatoes and a fresh pressed orange juice." Sara ordered.

"Your wish is my command, mom. Mom?"

"It take the same, thanks."

"No extra bacon or so?"

"Nope, your brothers left a few pounds on me and when I want to have Christmas cookies and chocolate, I have to save up calories on something else. Like bacon. Or sauce." The blonde sighed. She hated being on a diet, but her clothes were still a little bit tight and she knew, when she spend a week with her father together, she'd eat a lot and for that, his food, it was worth cutting down a few things.

The wind picked up more and more, Sofia hoped her lover stayed clear of trees and...who was she fooling? Sara worked in a forest, there were trees everywhere. Boughs broke, trees fell and Sofia had to think of something else or she'd drive up to Angeles National Forest and get Sara out of there. One way or another.

"How is the preparation for the party going?" She asked when she saw Greg.

"Your mother picked the kids up, she said she wants to keep them at your place today. Jules is grateful, she took the day off to prepare everything. We're not supposed to come home late today."

"Lets cross our fingers we won't."

"Sara will be back on time too?"

"She finishes at two - if they keep the forest open this long. You don't believe what happened yesterday." She told him about how Sara dropped her gloves, stepped into the creek, almost froze off her toes, was medicated by Shane with a lot of rum and then taken home because she wasn't allowed to drive anymore.

"You'd think she acts responsible one day...nope, she loses herself in her job anyway. Glad the rum medication helped."

"It did. I married a rumaholic."

"Tea and rumaholic."

"Doesn't make it better."

"A little bit. Time to get started on the evidence. The prosecutor comes along later, he wants to know if we have a solid case and he can go to trial."

"From what I saw he can." Sofia put on her coat when her cell phone rang. "Good morning, medical examiner, how are you?"

"About to give you information about your case. Want to come down here?"

"I'm on my way." Cherry started early when she had already some information. Sofia didn't expect any big news from her friend, their case was solid, there were no surprises, they had a confession and so far the evidence backed this confession up.

Five minutes later she stood next to the doctor and the open body of Marianne Powell. Not exactly the way many people wanted to start their work shift.

"What have you got?"

"Something you won't like." Cherry said with an apologetic look.

"Like?" A strange gut feeling appeared. The way her colleague and friend looked, she had news, that would endanger Sofia's afternoon plans.

"Like COD."

"Blunt force trauma to the head with a pan." That was their COD, they had written it down yesterday, it was what the husband said, confessed to, and what their evidence told them so far.

"Cardiac arrest due a heart attack."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Look." Cherry lifted the heart of the dead woman. "Our heart muscle requires a constant supply of oxygen, in other words: rich blood to nourish it. The coronary arteries provide the heart with this critical blood supply. If you have coronary artery disease, those arteries become narrow and blood cannot flow as well as they should. Fatty matter, calcium, proteins, and inflammatory cells build up within the arteries to form plaques of different sizes. The plaque deposits are hard on the outside and soft and mushy on the inside. When the plaque is hard, the outer shell cracks, platelets come to the area, and blood clots form around the plaque. If a blood clot totally blocks the artery, the heart muscle becomes "starved" for oxygen. Within a short time, death of heart muscle cells occurs, causing permanent damage. The result, the heart attack, is what you see here. Mrs. Powell suffered from a heart attack, the head wound was caused after she was dead."

"I hate to say this: are you sure?"

"Absolutely."

When Mrs. Powell died of a natural cause, why did her husband confess to murder her? Why did she have the wound on her head? There was DNA on the pan and Sofia was sure, it belonged to the victim. All the evidence said something different from what Cherry told her.

"We have a man, her husband, who confessed he killed her."

"Then he lied to you."

Was that possible? Why would he do so? Why go to jail for a crime, he didn't commit? Who, in fact, nobody committed because it never happened. Usually people lied to her because they didn't want to be arrested, what made this case different?

"He didn't kill her?"

"Nope, nature killed her. He might be guilty of desecration of a corpse, I can't rule that out. All I can tell you is, she didn't die because of blunt forced trauma. It was a natural cause. No murder took place."

"This changes everything."

"Yes, you arrested an innocent man."

"Don did, but we didn't stop him. Okay, thanks Cherry."

"No worries. I send you my report as soon as I'm done with everything."

"Thanks." Slowly Sofia walked to the door. Before she opened it, she turned. "Why do you think he lied? Mister Powell."

"I have no idea, why don't you ask him?"

The why wasn't important, the who and how was, in this case the blonde wanted to know the why too. "I will." She went back to the lab, found Greg working on evidence. "You can lay that aside."

"Why?"

"Because it's irrelevant." She explained to him what happened, what Cherry found out. Like her, he couldn't believe it first, shook his head. Everything had worked out perfectly, how could they have it all wrong?

"She's sure?"

"Yes and we both know, she doesn't make this kind of mistakes. Everybody makes mistakes, but not such major ones."

"We have to tell Don. And the prosecutor."

"I want to know why he lied, why did he tell us, he killed his wife?" It had felt wrong from the beginning, now Sofia knew why. It had been wrong, all wrong.

"You must be kidding me." Don shook his head in disbelief. "Mrs. Powell wasn't killed?"

"Not by her husband, only by her own body." Sofia went over to the police department to tell Don the news in person.

"We arrested an innocent man? My captain won't be happy about that."

"It's not like it was a mistake you or we made. He confessed, the crime scene and the evidence we had supported what he said."

"I want to know why he lied." Don grumbled.

"Me too. Where is he?"

"In a holding cell, he'll be released immediately." Don shook his head again. This wasn't how he thought the case would end. He called an officer and asked to transfer Powell to interrogation four.

Fifteen minutes later the man, who confessed to kill his wife, sat on the other side of the table. He looked sad,

tired, his eyes were red. Most people didn't react good to their first night in a holding cell, when they were kept there innocent, it was worse.

"Mister Powell, how are you?" Sofia asked.

"Tired, I didn't sleep well. Guess I'll get used to this kind of beds, won't I?"

"Mister Powell, you said you killed your wife because of the milk, right?"

"Yes, she used skim milk all the time and I hated skim milk. I wanted cream in my coffee, you need cream for real flavor, she never understood this."

"And yesterday you had enough and did what?"

"I took the pan and hit her on the head."

"How did you feel when you did that?"

"I felt..." He swallowed, there were tears in his eyes. "I felt..."

"Bad because you hit her."

"Yes."

"Mister Powell." She took his hand. "The medical examiner called me earlier, she examined the body of your wife. It wasn't the pan, that killed her, it was a heart attack."

"No, I killed her, I hit her on the head with the pan. Because of the milk."

"You did hit her, yes, but when you did it, she had been already dead, isn't that right?"

"I killed her. I killed her. You have to arrest me, put me to jail."

"We can't send you to jail when your wife died of a natural cause. Her heart attack wasn't your fault."

"I need to go to jail, where else would I go to?"

Now they came closer to the truth. To the reason why he lied to them, told them he killed his wife. "Tell me what really happened."

"Marianne...she...she wanted to get coffee for us. One minute she talked to me, the other she is quiet. I went into the kitchen to see what was going on when I found her on the floor. She lay there, like she had to rest. I kneed next to her, tried to wake her up, but she didn't wake up. No matter what I said, what I did. I called her name for minutes, shook her gently, but...there was nobody in her body anymore. She had left me. Without saying goodbye."

What am I supposed to do without her? She has been my life, I can't be without her. I need her. We have only each other."

"What about your children? Grandchildren"

"They live on the east coast, we barely see them. Marianne is all I have. Without her I'm nothing. I can't live without her. We've been married for fifty-one years."

Sofia looked at Don. It was sad to hear the truth, maybe even sadder than the lie, they heard before.

"You hit your wife when she lay there?"

"It felt wrong and I...it took me five minutes to do so, I apologized the whole time. But...I don't want to be left home alone. There's no reason for me to be there when she's gone. I thought, when I get arrested, I can go to jail and there...at least I'm not alone there."

"Why don't you go to the nursing home?"

"I don't think I can afford that. We don't own the house, there are a lot of bills and debts. It was worth fighting for when Marianne was with me, now nothing make sense anymore. Please, can't you just send me to jail? I don't want to end up on the street, I'm too old for that."

"We can't arrest you, Mister Powell, you haven't done anything wrong." Well, hitting his dead wife with the pan was a crime, but she doubted the prosecutor wanted to press charges in this case.

"I hit her...isn't that a felony?"

"Nothing the prosecutor will send you to jail for. I'm sorry." Who would have thought she'd apologize to somebody that they couldn't send them to jail. It was the first time Sofia came across a person, who wanted to be arrested. There was always a first time for everything.

"I lied to you, doesn't that count? And I...I attacked my wife when she was dead. That can't be legal."

"You might get a few hours of social service, no jail time." Under different circumstance the prosecutor might have tried that, in this case jail was what the man wanted. As weird as it sounded, giving him jail time, was a favor.

"So I'm ... on my own? Have to leave?"

"Yes, you're free to go."

For the first time he looked at Don. "Is she right?"

"Yes Sir, she is right. We have no reasons to hold you."

"All right then." He rose and walked around the table.

"A patrol car will take you back to your ..." Don's sentence was ended by him falling forward. Mister Powell had pushed him hard and at the same time grabbed his service weapon. Now he was waving it in the air.

"Mister Powell!" Sofia starred at the man. She didn't have her weapon with her, didn't think she'd need it for her short visit here.

"What the ..." Don hold his nose, there was blood on his face.

"I'm sorry, but I don't want to go back home."

"Mister Powell, please, put the gun down. When somebody sees you with it, they will shoot you." Sofia didn't want her old colleagues shooting the old man. He was ... he was desperate, he could be a threat.

"You will cuff him and then you ... we ... I want money." Mister Powell pointed the gun at Sofia. He hadn't undone the safety, at the moment he couldn't fire the gun.

"Mister Powell..."

"I mean it! I have nothing to lose, you do what I tell you or I'll shoot you." Now he undone the safety.

Sofia took Don's cuffs and cuffed him, taking a closer look at his face. His nose didn't look broken, but it bled.

"Are you okay?"

"I'll survive. What now, Mister Powell?"

"We go out there and tell them, I want money. Otherwise I have to use the gun."

"You know, when you shoot or both of us, you take away the mother or the father of our three months old twin boys and our two year old daughter." Sofia said.

"You ... you are married?"

"No, we're not married, but he is the father of my three little children, the best father I could have wished for. The twins had been sick the last weeks, an infection, had to go back to hospital and he was there twice a day, like any good father. When I asked him to be the father of my children, I told him, he doesn't have any responsibilities when he agrees, but he takes them, looks after the kids, is a wonderful father. They all adore him."

"You ... you're telling me these things so I give up. I can't give up, I don't want to go home."

"But do you want to kill the father or mother of three little kids?"

"No ... but I have to go to jail."

"Okay, we go out there, you tell them what you want, but do me a favor: Don't point the gun at anybody, they will shoot you. Stand behind us, don't move abruptly, don't give them a reason to shoot you."

"Why do you care?"

"Because I don't think your wife would want you to hurt somebody or get hurt yourself."

"If she saw me like this, she'd be so mad."

"See, don't make her mad, she can see you from heaven. You want to go to jail, that's okay, but you can go there without hurting anybody, including you."

"Okay."

"I open the door, we step outside and you say, what you have to say." And Sofia hoped Don's colleagues would keep it calm and not go use their weapons. This didn't have to end with more blood, she didn't want anybody to be hurt or killed.

Slowly she opened the door and stepped a step out with Don next to her. "Hey!" She yelled to get the attention of people around her. A few looked at her, when they saw Don's cuffed hands, they reached for their weapons.

"I want money, a million dollar, or I shoot." Mister Powell yelled, lifted the weapon. Now they had the attention of everybody and a dozen weapons were pointed on them.

"Guys, do me a favor, lower your weapon." Don said.

"Mister Powell has my gun, he will use it if he has to, but he doesn't want to. So please, don't make him. Let this end without any bodies, please."

"Mister Powell, let them go and nothing will happen." Somebody said.

"Did you not listen? I want money or something will happen."

"Okay, just relax." Kyle stepped at the front, put his weapon back in the holster. "Tell me what you want, you don't have to hurt my friends."

"I want money, a million dollar."

"Any special wishes about the bills?"

"One hundred dollar bills."

"We can do that. What else do you want?"

"That's it." Mister Powell was irritated. He asked for a million dollar and people wondered, what else he wanted. Wasn't it enough when they had to pay this much money?

"What happened to detective Flack?"

"I pushed him, he fell and hit his nose on the wall. Maybe somebody has a tissue for him."

A kind kidnapper. Sofia relaxed a little bit.

"Sofia, how are you?" Kyle asked.

"I'm fine, we are all fine as long as nobody tries anything stupid. Mister Powell, you are on camera. Whatever you do is filmed and will be used in court, do you understand?"

"How long do I have to jail?"

"For assaulting a police detective on duty, holding him and another law enforcement member as hostage at gunpoint you can face at a state prison."

"Thanks. I'm sorry, but I need you to add assault with a deadly weapon to the list, so I can be sure to be send to jail." He mumbled before he hit Don with the gun and threw it away.

While Don was on the floor and Sofia next to him, two colleagues had taken Mister Powell down and restrained him.

"Damn it." Don swore.

"You stay on the ground, there's blood on your head."

"It's nothing serious." He got up.

"The headache will be serious."

"Detective Flack, how are you?" His boss had witnessed everything and came forward.

"Only a little wound. Or two."

"You go and see a doctor. Sofia?"

"I'm fine." She looked at Mister Powell, who was taken away.

"How did he get the gun?"

"We wanted to let him out of the room, he didn't kill his wife, she died of a heart attack. There was no reason to believe he was a threat, but when we turned, he pushed Don and took his gun."

"My mistake, I should have taken better care of it."

"He did this because he wants to go to jail."

"He wants to go to jail?" Don's boss asked in disbelief.

"Yes, he lied to us because he wanted to be prosecuted for murder so he doesn't have to go back to the house. They are in debt, he will lose the house, end on the street and he says without his wife, there's no reason to fight. Prison is better than living on the street. He must have figured, when he takes us hostage, he will be send to prison."

"Did he release the safety, detective?"

"Yes."

"So he was a threat to your and CSI Curtis's life. He will go to prison."

"I doubt he'll have a lawyer fighting this."

"Go and see a doctor, then we talk, detective. I want a report and one from you too, Sofia."

"Of course." She hugged Don. "Get a nice band aid and tonight you tell our children, how brave you are. I go and tell my boss what happened. And that we have a case after all."

"Yeah, send somebody over to secure the evidence, you are involved in the new case, can't do that yourself."

"Nope, I can only write a report." Something, she wasn't keen to do. When she told her boss what happened, he wouldn't be impressed. It wasn't as bad for her as it was for Don, her weapon hadn't been used, but she didn't take her weapon with her, like she was supposed to.

"We close the forest down for the day." Shane said. "The storm is getting stronger, it's too dangerous to be out there. All roads are closed already, the snow came back, up in Big Bear the roads are for vehicles with chains only."

"Are there any people around?" Sara asked. They hadn't been up at the hut, where they were yesterday. When they drove back to the main station, they had closed all roads due to the weather. The road didn't get cleaned, so even with chains they were hard to drive.

"I haven't seen anybody the whole day. Heavy rain, storm, people prefer to stay at home. Even when they own a dog, they take the short walk and not a big one up here."

"True. In this case I can go home earlier, you don't need me here anymore, do you?"

"Sara, I always need you."

"Suck it up." She laughed. "Keep those things for your girlfriend. And don't tell me you broke up because Christmas is around the corner."

"Nope, I love her, I won't let her go. In fact, I got her a present already and I want her to be with me on Christmas. No reason to break up."

"I'm glad you are an adult now." Sara smirked. "See you tomorrow."

"Yeah, enjoy the party. Three years old, your godson is a big man now."

"He's the cutest three year old boy I've ever seen." Until her sons were three she could stick to this. Then Eric had to share the title with Sandy and Saloso. Like Jorja was the cutest three year old girl she had ever seen until Susan and Louise turned three. Then she had to share the title as well.

It took her almost an hour to get back home, the storm got stronger and stronger, at one point she felt like her car was lifted for a second by the wind. Today she'd park in the garage and not in front of it, like she often did because she was too lazy to open the garage and drive in.

Marie and Mark were with the kids in the living room. Sandy and Saloso were asleep, the other four played on the carpet.

"Mommy!" Susan greeted Sara happily and tried to climb up her leg.

"Hey darling, how are you?"

"Play!"

"Yes, I can see you're playing."

"Sara!" Eric hugged her other leg.

"My big birthday boy, happy birthday to you." She got down on her knees and kissed her godson. "Three years, you're a big boy now."

"Yes."

"And you're a lady now, Jorja."

"No. Lady no fun." The little girl disagreed. "Am second cap'ain."

"You're the second in command? Wow." Sara laughed.

"How comes, Captain Curtis? Do you need back-up?"

"It's always good to have back-up available. They were rookies for a while, time to work their ways up."

"To second in command?"

"I want this little lady to rule our country one day, after her it will be Susan's turn and then our country will have had sixteen years of good leadership."

"Wow." Marie had big plans for the little girls. Sara wasn't sure, her daughter and Jorja could fulfill those plans, but why not? If the Bush family could have two presidents, why not have two of Marie's rookies rule the country? That would make Sara a first ... mother.

"Good afternoon."

"Mom!"

"Mommy!"

"Mama!"

Amazed Sara watched how Eric, Jorja and Louise dropped everything to greet their mother, each using a different name. Taking all three of them in her arms, Jules looked like a very happy woman, who was almost overpowered with the love of her children.

"I'm here to take you back home, do you want to come with me or are you on an important mission with Marie?"

"The mission is over when there's birthday cake involved. Everybody, who wants cake, has to put on a coat, boots, gloves and a scarf. Then you all get into a car, with the wind outside, we won't walk. You might fly away and won't get any cake at all. But first, you have to tidy up, only children, who tidy up their mess get cake. The others have to eat salad and watch the good children having cake and chocolate later."

Marie could make the children do things, their mothers sometimes had problems with, with her little speech now, she got them all busy in tidying up their toys.

"My favorite doctor." Sara pulled Jules in her arms. "How are you?"

"Thanks to your in-laws relaxed. It was good to have the place childfree while I prepared everything, I had time to have a cup of tea in between, didn't have to hurry or worry, somebody ruins whatever I just finished. My husband called earlier, he will be home soon, same for your wife. We can have a lovely afternoon with the family."

"Can I spend the afternoon in your arms?"

"Your wife and my husband might not like the idea."

"Do you like the idea?"

"How could I not like being with you? The good thing is, we'll be together because we'll be in the same room. You can sit next to me."

"What a lovely idea, next to you, Eric on my lap, Sofia on the other side....somehow we have to squeeze Susan and the boys into this picture..."

"Your oldest son won't like the idea."

"Yeah, I'm afraid not. Okay, let me get the milk for the twins, they'll need it later. Also some diapers." Taking the twins somewhere was like packing for a weekend trip. They needed a lot of things and since they had the infection, Sara and Sofia preferred to pack some medication as well, in case something happened. Of course, doctor Bendler would be around later, so there was a physician around. There was no better place to take Sandy and Saloso than to Jules's place: a physician, a psychologist, a cop, a CSI, a former cop and a former CSI. It had to be the safest private place in the city.

"Somebody held a gun to your head?" Tanya couldn't believe her ears. Her boyfriend was held at gunpoint and never bothered to let her know? "You didn't think I'd like to know about incidents like this?"

"I'm telling you now."

"Hours later. I meant right away."

"So? It's not like you could have done anything. The whole thing was over within five minutes."

"Did you tell her?" Tanya asked Sofia and pointed to Sara.

"Uhm...yes." She knew it was the wrong answer to support her friend, but she couldn't lie. Of course she let Sara know about what happened. The gun had been also pointed at her. Her wife had been shocked, but the fact the blonde called let her know, everything was fine.

"See!"

"Not like daddy?" Susan pulled the sleeve of Tanya's sweater down. There were traces of tears in her eyes. The dentist being mad with her father was something, the little girl upset and irritated.

"Honey." Tanya picked Susan up. "I love your daddy, that's why I'm mad. He was in danger today and didn't tell

me. You tell your partner when something happened to you."

"Daddy ouch nose."

"Yes, he hurt his nose and he didn't tell me. That's not nice. You tell people when you get hurt. Like you tell your daddy when you hurt your knee or arm."

"Tanya doc." Susan looked her father. "Can help."

"Tanya is a dentist, she helps people when they have toothache, I didn't have toothache."

"Auntie Ali help?"

"Yes, she can handle a broken nose."

"That's beneath my talents." Doctor Bendler wrinkled her nose. "A broken nose, baby stuff. I save lives, when somebody shot you in the face you can come to me. With a little thing like that you can waste the time of my assistants."

"You'd look after the boyfriend of your favorite niece, auntie Alison." Tanya grinned.

"Favorite niece? You don't want children, you can't be my favorite niece."

"I'm your daughter's favorite cousin."

"So? My daughter has strange tastes sometimes. She brought a man into our family, who is not a doctor. Although I have to say, he's a great scientist and a talented man, I forgive her for breaking the tradition."

"Thanks mom." Greg kissed Alison's cheek. He called her 'mom' when he felt like it. His own parents were supposed to arrive any minute, they had been caught up in traffic jams on their way up north from San Diego. It had been a while since they have been here the last time.

"You paid me with three wonderful grandchildren."

"And grandchildren are wonderful." Marie agreed. "I have to admit since I'm a fulltime grandmother my life is much better and I don't miss being a police captain at all. They could offer me to go back, be in charge again, I'd not take the offer. My three little sweethearts are way too wonderful to be left alone and when I get these three sweethearts to watch over too, life is perfect. Only my oldest grandson doesn't want me to look after him."

"With all due respect, that is not correct, Captain." Steve disagree. "I'm glad when you look after me, but I don't

like it when you try to manage my life. I take your advice, but I prefer to make my own decision."

"He has a much politer way to say stay out of my life than his mother had."

"In prison they taught me polite conversation, otherwise I was punished."

"Hah, your prison guards were a bunch of wimps. One phone call and they didn't dare to breathe anymore."

Sara grinned. She remembered the moment when Steve knocked Marie out with a can of coke. A shock back then, a funny memory now. He was her hero, wanted to save her from the trouble the police captain promised, not caring what it might meant for him.

"Sara play." Eric came with his new board game in his arms to Sara.

"You want to play your new game with me? Okay, we can do that. Lets see, shall we play with your grandmother?"

"Yes, nana too."

"All right, then lets see what we have to do." She and Sofia bought the board game for the little boy. It was made for children of three years and older, no dice, no counting. When Eric and Jorja liked the game, it could be a way to make them sit still for a while and concentrate on the game.

Sofia took Sara's hand and squeezed it. Sitting in between the people, they love, watching their children playing with new and old toys, sleeping, adults talking to each other and feeling a special spirit of family and love, was a perfect ending of the day. Marie, Alison, Susan and Louise played their version of the board game, Eric and Jorja sat in front of Greg's mother, who read a story for them. Sandy and Saloso were sleep in the arms of Mark and Don, the other adults sat back, enjoyed a conversation and the fact, nothing had to be done.

"I like big family parties." The blonde kissed her wife.

"This is feeling like Christmas, only the tree is missing."

"And your presents and the candy."

"We have a lot of candy and my favorite present sits next to me. I'm going to unwrap you later, when we're alone."

"Really? Interesting foresight. This is a lot like our Christmas trip will look like. Almost the same people, just Greg's parents won't be there." That was the main reason why they came up to Los Angeles for the weekend, they wanted to see their grandchildren and the drive from San Diego to Lake Tahoe, where they'd spend their holidays, was too long and they had to work too.

"Which is a shame. I mean, we're running out of space in the villa, but there'd be a solution." There were six bedrooms, two with king sized beds, four with two queen beds. She had no idea how to choose, who got which room, all she knew was, she would share her room and bed with Sofia. If it was a big or a small bed, wasn't important. One for Mark and Marie, Jules and Greg, Don and Tanya, Steve got his own room the way it looked and one was for Lea and Lauren, who would join them on Boxing day. Sandy and Saloso could stay with them, the other kids ... there was no solution yet.

"Our babies stay in our room, where will the others stay?"

"I thought about that too. Lou has this workout room in the basement. How about we make a Native American area out of it? Build up a few tents, sorry, tipis and they can stay there. It's something different."

"True. Much better than sleeping on a mattress in your parents' room. Hey Suzy, would you like to sleep in a tipi over Christmas? You know, a tent, like the Native Americans did?" Their daughter looked skeptical at them.

"I want sleep tipi!" Jorja called. "Tipi! Tipi!"

"Me too! Tipi!" Eric joined his sister.

"A tipi?" Jules asked Sara.

"Sofia and I were thinking where the kids could sleep in Tahoe, she had the idea, they could sleep in tipis, we build up in the basement room. It's much more fun for them and we don't have enough rooms for all of us."

"Interesting. There are mattresses on the floor, a few more blankets and they should be fine. Nice idea. Didn't you get feathers, Jorja?"

"Yes." The girl got a little box with a Native American costume. "I'm an Achee."

Sofia chuckled. When Jorja tried to say Apache, it sounded like she had to sneeze, adorable.

"Me cowboy." Eric said.

"A cowboy can also sleep in a tipi, tipis are good places to sleep. It will be like a camping vacation for you." Jules told her children. "Susan and Louise will also sleep in a tipi, you'll have your own little tipi village."

"This makes me almost want to sleep on the floor too." Lea said. "When I was a child, I built up a tent in the garden to play Native American."

"You can sleep in a tent too, but we thought you'd rather have a room with Lauren. That's more comfortable and private." Sara smiled.

"Oh, thanks mom, very considerate of you. Where will my brother Steve sleep?"

"He might get his own room, as the only one."

"What about Sandy and Saloso?" Steve asked.

"They stay with us, they're too small for tents."

"You can leave them with me, you and mom want privacy too and I don't care if they're around. When they cry they wake me up anyway, no matter if they're in the room next door or in my room."

"Now, don't we have a great son?" Sara pulled Sofia in her arms. "He wants us to have some privacy and offers to look after his baby brothers. We take your offer."

"Good. When they cry, I also don't hear the two of you. Or anybody else from another room."

"You'll regret your offer when you meet a good looking chick up in Tahoe and have no place to take her." Lea teased her best friend.

"Oh, I stay with her, this way I can be sure, you don't get your hands on her."

"Very funny." Lea grumbled.

"Very true." He blew her a kiss. It was not very likely he'd meet somebody in Tahoe. He was too young to go to clubs and most of the times, they'd all stick together, as a huge family. And he wasn't sure he wanted to meet somebody, the break-up still hurt.

"When the storm gets worse, we might all get blown away and nobody goes on vacation." Greg's father said. The drive from San Diego to Los Angeles had been especially difficult today because of the storm. Some streets were closed due to collapsed buildings and damaged power poles.

"It's the first time I've seen such a strong storm here. We do get some rain around this time of the year, the storm is ... new." Sofia agreed. "At one point I thought it could turn into a hurricane."

"We had some strong storms in Los Angeles, the last one was a long time ago." Alison remembered. "On the news they said there's also heavy snowfall up in the Santa Monica Mountains and the surrounding mountains. Big Bear is disappearing under a big white coat of cold."

"The snow was bad yesterday, I got worse today." Sara said. "We closed the upper part of the forest yesterday, today we closed the whole forest at noon. I know from colleagues around Big Bear, they have some problems with cars, that don't have chains. Some drivers don't understand, why they can't continue their ride without chains."

"Most people are not used to drive in snow, when I was in Switzerland, they have much more snow and yet, it doesn't bother anybody. They have special tires for the winter, as long as the road is only covered with snow and not with ice, they continue like nothing happened. Very amazing for a person, who doesn't deal with snow unless she wants to go skiing." Alison told them. "And their mountains looked much higher than ours. When the sky is blue, the sun shines and everything is covered in snow, it's an amazing sight. We've been to Aspen and around the Rocky Mountains, the Swiss Alps are special."

"Maybe one day, when the kids are big, we can go there." Jules took Greg's hand.

"You mean after we paid for their education? In like ... twenty-five years?"

"Yeah. We will be too old to go skiing, but we can watch the landscape and have a hot chocolate."

"Oh, hot chocolate, a good suggestion: who wants a hot chocolate?" Greg asked.

"You say chocolate, I say: me!" Sofia laughed. A hot chocolate was always a good idea, on a rainy, cold and stormy day like today, it seemed to be even better.

Saturday, December 13th

It had been a while since Sara and Sofia could sleep in. The twins started to sleep longer hours during the night, but they woke up early in the morning, which meant, Sofia had to get up too and feed them. Her parents helped them during the day, but in the night and the early morning they had to take care of their kids themselves.

"I love them, I really do but I want to sleep eight hours in a row again." The blonde yawned and held Sandy, who was on her left breast. "No crying, no little hands pulling away the blanket, only you in my arms and we can sleep without interruption."

"Ten more years and they want to sleep in too." Sara rubbed her eyes and took Saloso in her arms to feed him with the bottle.

"True, now we can't sleep because they keep us awake, later we won't be able to sleep because they're out and we worry. I doubt it will ever change, even when they're adults, live their own life and have their own places."

"Great, our life is ... blessed." Sara kissed her wife. "We knew this would happen before you got pregnant and we wanted it. This sleepless nights are not easy, but when they smile at us, when they laugh, we know why we did it."

"Absolutely." Sofia kissed the little fingers of her son. "I wonder when Susan wakes up."

"Lea stayed over, she'll go straight to her. Our daughter chooses her big sister over us because her sister is more fun."

"Yeah and when Lea doesn't react she'll wake Don up. Daddy always has a hug for her."

"Does daddy have a day off?"

"He does. Suzy and the boys can play with daddy all day long. Gives the grandparents a chance to prepare for Christmas. We need to do the same too."

"Tell me about it, I did some online shopping, but we can't buy all presents online, can we?"

"Why not?"

"I don't know. Doesn't it feel weird or wrong to order everything instead going into a shop and choose what you want?"

"You're Mrs. Online Ordering, what happened?" Sofia teased her wife softly.

"I wondered if we're not so good mothers when we order things online."

"Honey, our children don't care where we buy the presents as long as Santa delivers them on time and they're exactly what they want."

"You might be right on this one."

"I am."

"My Mrs. Always Right."

"It's something I inherited from my mother."

"Ha, you'd never dare to say these words out when the Captain is around."

"Luckily only my twins and my wife are around. Change of babies." She handed Sandy over to Sara and took Saloso on her right breast. There wasn't enough milk for both babies, but she could give both of them a fair share.

"Morning moms." Steve came into the kitchen. "How are you?"

"Morning Sunshine, how did you sleep?" Sara kissed Stephen's cheek.

"Wonderful, I had a lovely blonde in my arms."

"Did you? What does the lovely blonds girlfriend of your lovely blonde says about it?"

"She has to suck it up, like Jenny had to."

"Does she?"

"Lauren is way too tough to whine about Lea and me sharing a bed and she knew about our relationship. Can I fetch you some coffee?"

"Coffee and breakfast. I'd like to have..."

"Oats with fruits and yogurt." Sara completed the sentence for her wife. "You can add some dark chocolate sprinkles on top."

"Thanks Honey, you always know exactly what I wish for most."

"I do."

"Sure."

"That would be lovely, Honey, thanks."

Sofia grumbled quietly. Her oldest son teamed up with her wife. Back in the years, like when they met Stephen first, he was on her side, got the junk food with her, didn't

rat on her when she ordered a second dessert. Now he prepared healthy food for her.

"Snickers or Mars?"

"Huh?" Steve's question got her out of her thoughts.

"Your dessert for lunch today. You need some fruits with your salad, mom." He smirked.

"You haven't changed completely, thanks."

"Mom, mom doesn't mind when you have a chocolate bar for lunch and she wants you to have all these boring healthy stuff because it's best for you and the twins. She loves you, like I love you."

"Nothing says I Love You like chocolate does."

"You prefer chocolate over one of mom's kisses?"

"No!" Gosh, he twisted her words like Sara did. Steve became more and more like Sara every day. It was almost spooky. And dangerous for her, she could get into trouble when he told Sara what she said.

Shopping was on their to-do list, like cleaning and preparing for their trip to Lake Tahoe. While Sofia and Steve stayed at home and started with the cleaning and the looking after the little ones, Sara took the car to the shopping center. She had two lists, one with items she needed the next days, one with items for their trip. It was likely Lou's housekeeper had stocked the fridge for them like the last time they were up there, but they'd be many people and needed a lot of food. At least for two days because when they arrived it was late in the afternoon on Christmas Eve and the next day, Christmas Day, all shops were closed. There were also a not small amount of candy and chocolate on her second list for the Christmas plates and socks.

"Hey lady, do you have a dollar or two for a musician?"

Sara stopped and looked at the young man, who talked to her. "Nope, sorry."

"Oh come, why not?"

"You only waste the money."

"Not true."

"Are you hungry?"

"Hungry is my second name."

"You play for my wife and when she likes it, you get a free lunch. How is that?"

"Playing for your wife is better than lunch. Hey Sara." Felix hugged Sara. "How are you? And the family?"

"They're fine, we're in the pre-Christmas craziness." What a surprise to find the young, ginger haired man here. Most times he played on Hollywood Boulevard, the Santa Monica Pier or other places, where a lot of people were.

"Like everybody else. Does Little Steven help you?"

"Of course, he's babysitting and cleaning at the moment. What are you doing here? Annoying people, who want to go shopping?"

"I thought I try to make some money, first here and later on Silver Lake Boulevard. I've got some songs in my repertoire, that are connected to this lovely area of the city."

"Did Lou not help you with your career?"

"He did, I get more money now, people recognize me more, but I'm not like ... a man, who goes to work every day for eight hours. I like my freedom. Which mean, when I've made enough money for my rent and food, I'm off. Although the last weeks I worked more."

"Christmas presents?"

"Yes, my own one. In front of you stands a man, who'll spend the next weeks on Hawaii."

"Seriously?"

"Yes. I hate the cold weather and it's nice and warm there. I can play there too, sleep on the beach, learn to hula and have a summer vacation in the middle of the winter. You don't happen to have a sexy blonde for me? It's the only thing that's missing, a sexy blonde by my side, who adores me and who I adore."

"No sorry."

"Liar. You know such a blonde."

"My wife is mine, you won't get her."

"A man is allowed to dream, isn't he?"

"Keep your dreams to yourself. Are you in the mood for some lunch later?"

"Sure. A barbecue?"

"It's a little bit too cold for a barbecue."

"Nothing wrong with an indoor barbecue. Can I help you with the shopping?"

"No, I'm fine. When you want to help, go and help the sexy blonde. She has a lot of work to do and also three kids to look after."

"Plus the big boy. Okay, I'm on my way, I haven't seen the twins in a while. Does Saloso still look like Sofia?"

"Yes." Sara smiled.

"You know, seeing him makes me wonder how Sofia looks like with brown hair. Do you have a picture of her as a brunette?"

"As a matter of fact I do. She's stunning as a brunette."

"Which color suits her better?"

"She's the most beautiful woman in the world, no matter what color her hair has."

"True words. I should write a song about her."

"You've written various songs about her, I heard you singing about the beautiful girl, the girl of your dreams and the cutest blonde on earth." Sara quoted a few of his song lines, she had heard him singing. To her, all these songs were about Sofia.

"Caught in the act. All right, I go there and see you later. Unless Sofia decides to leave you and run away with me."

"I see you later." Sara said dryly. Her wife would never leave her. Not for the young musician, who once saved the life of their oldest son, not for somebody else.

"Hey, call the wolves back, I'm not their lunch!"

"Felix, hi." Steve greeted his old friend. "What are you doing here?"

"Your mother send me, she says when I play a few songs for your other mother, I get a free lunch. The company of your blonde mother is the best payment, but I take the lunch anyway. What is lunch?"

"Stew, grandpa made a lot for us yesterday. And some fresh bread. But first we have to earn it, means, we have to babysit and clean the place."

"I do the babysitting, you can clean. Where are the little monsters?"

"Two are asleep, one is watching TV."

"Perfect, I take them."

"You might have to carry the twins when they wake up and cry."

"Building up some muscles, deal. You can be the housekeeper."

"At least nobody cries in my ears when I clean the bathroom. Make yourself at home." He went back upstairs to his mother.

"The postman?"

"Nah, a crazy musician with ginger hair, he was invited by mom for lunch, I told him to watch the kiddies so we can finish up here."

"Felix? Oh, we haven't seen him in a while, I hope he's fine."

"Mom, he gets grandpa's stew, of course he's fine."

"Right, I'm so hungry. We should skip the cleaning and start the oven for the bread."

"Mom, you know what mom says when we don't do our work. First we clean, then we eat and then we can do whatever we please. Remember the house rules? You told me all of them before you adopted me and I had to agree, sign it with my own blood, so to speak."

"Drama Queen."

"Thanks."

"Keep going with the bathroom, we have another room to clean before we can go downstairs and then we have to clean the stairs and dust the living room."

"I love me weekends. Either I have to work for Mel or I have to work at home. What about freedom? Fun?"

"Sure, you can study later."

"You didn't think studying was fun when you were my age."

"I didn't have Tanya as my teacher."

"Right." Steve's face lightened up. "She can help me with Spanish and some other things, a smart woman and so nice to ... work with."

"Yeah, go back to your crush on her, Don is cool with that and she thinks you're cute."

"Sometimes I don't like you so much, I think I like mom more."

"I knew that, you and her are very much alike."

"That's why you love both of us. Okay, I'm done with the bathroom, take the vacuum cleaner and work my way down to the kitchen. Sally will love it when I wake her up."

"It's time to get up, even for actresses."

"Unless she would be a very successful one, but then she had her own villa and not only a room here."

"Do you think a villa is cooler than living here?"

"I think living in Lou's villa with you guys would be cool, we'd have our own pool."

"Spoiled boy."

"I tasted the life of a movie star, I like it. At least the villa, I wouldn't like the paparazzi."

"They come with the fame."

"In this case I stay a nobody. Life is better then."

"To us you're somebody."

"Yeah, the cleaning boy." He grinned and started the vacuum cleaner. Last month Sara bought a new one, one they could carry like a backpack. It was much easier to clean the long staircase with this one, then with the ones before. Great, he cheered over a vacuum cleaner. He so was not cool!

"Tell us what you have been up to, Felix." Sara said when they all sat down for lunch.

"Not much, I play every day for a couple of hours, relax, enjoy my life."

"What about a career? Didn't get you a couple of offers after Lou's help?"

"Steve, these people forget you very fast. I did some studio work with a band twice, a radio station asked me to play the song, I played that day in the back, for their audience and that's it. Hollywood makes and loses stars every day. It's fifteen minutes of fame, not fifteen years."

"When you're good it's fifteen years."

"You also have to give up everything to become a star, including yourself. I like my freedom, I like to choose what I do the moment I wake up. No schedule, no appointments for the next years and no boss who tells me what to do and how."

"The life of a hobo."

"Jealous? With all your school and after school appointments?"

"Nope, I like them. Well, school not always, but I like my job for Mel, it's something I might want to do for the rest

of my life. Working law enforcement. Not sure if I want to be a jurist or a prosecutor."

"The way your mother looks, she wants you as a prosecutor, on the right side of the law."

"I don't want to be the one, who tells my mother, you'll defend criminals."

"Felix was innocent when he was arrested for murdering the woman."

"He was innocent about the murder case, yes, there are enough other things, he could have been arrested for."

"You have no evidence for your accusation, Sofia. In dubio pro reo."

"In dubio pro Captain Curtis." Steve grinned. His grandmother was always right and in case she wasn't right, the other person wasn't right neither.

"She rules the family."

"Absolutely. What are your plans for Christmas?"

"Well, while you'll be here, freezing your ass off, I'll be enjoying Waikiki beach. Sunsets like in the movies, sexy women, warm weather, cocktails and surfing."

"Seriously?"

"Yes, the tickets are booked, for three months I'll live in paradise. Maybe a little bit longer, depends on how life treats me there."

"Cool. Hawaii was a great place."

"Jealous?"

"Nope, we go to Lake Tahoe, a white Christmas."

"The six of you?"

"The six of us, Don and Tanya, Greg and Jules with the kids, my grandparents, Lea and Lauren. A full house, Lou Lee gives us his villa."

"Almost as good as Hawaii. I prefer hot weather over the cold."

"When a room with a heater and a fireplace in the living room waits for you, it's fun to be out in the snow for a couple of hours. I want to try skiing."

"Break a leg."

"Hopefully not."

"We have a doctor with us, two actually."

"A dentist and a shrink, not helpful for a broken leg. Lauren's mother would be better."

"What about your girlfriend? Is she not coming?"

Steve sighed. "We split up."

"Oh, sorry."

"Is okay. Not all relationships can last forever."

"A free man has more fun, believe me. You have the cute blonde by your side ... where is she?"

"Lea? With her parents. And we're only friends. Still."

"Something must be wrong with you."

"Nope, I'm fine."

"It's called friendship, Felix." Sara said.

"Men and women can't be friends. Did you never watch 'When Harry met Sally'? In the end, they were a couple."

"That's a movie. Don and I are friends for a long time, we were never more than friends. Same for Greg and Sara. And don't tell me that's only because we're lesbians because Sara and I dated men before. It's possible for men and women to be friends."

"Otherwise Sofia and I couldn't be friends with women. Which also works perfectly with Lynn, Sally and Jules."

"Okay, okay, I give up." Felix lifted his hands.

"Ands up!" Susan formed a pistol with her hand. "Bang!"

"She shot me!"

"Susan, you don't shoot people, who have their hands up. When their hands are up, they give up. Besides, it's wrong to shoot people, only bad people do that and then your daddy comes and arrests this person."

"Ison."

"Yes, they have to go to prison. You don't want to go to prison, do you? They have no toys there and no candy."

Susan shook her head.

"See, be a good girl and don't shoot anybody. They also don't have dessert in prison, no more ice cream. And you want ice cream for dessert, don't you?"

"Berry."

Sara chuckled. Her daughter liked ice cream, but she loved her berries, something Sofia didn't really understand.

Wednesday, December 24th

"This reminds me of one of the stories in the bible." Sara said after she checked in the review mirror if Steve was still behind me.

"How?" Sofia turned to see why the twins and Susan were so quiet; they were asleep. After a loud and nerve-racking hour of crying babies and a toddler, the silence was priceless.

"A long caravan on its way to a special place. We're not on the road to find a child, we're on the way to find a place for Christmas, to celebrate. With children."

"Three wise men...or in our case five white cars." Behind them was Steve with their luggage, followed by Don and Tanya, Marie and Marc and Jules and Greg with Louise, Jorja and Eric. On top of their cars was snow, as it had snowed heavily at one point of their journey. All cars were packed with people and their luggage and Sara wondered, if there would be a quiet moment in the villa.

"Our destination is a villa and not a stable. You'll sit in a whirlpool tonight and not next to a crib in a windy old stable."

"You know I'd rather spend Christmas in a windy stable with you than without you in a villa."

"Ditto." The blonde massaged her left leg a little bit. The last days she had some light pain in her stump. This time she didn't try to hide it nor ignored it, she went straight to her doctor, who checked the leg and found a small infection, prescribed some pills and Sofia was as good as new. Only every now and then she felt a little stitch.

"Is the pain back?"

"No, only a little stitch. Alison checked me yesterday, do you believe she'd let me go with pain?"

"Not a chance. How many pills are left?"

"None, they're all gone, perfect timing, I can have some wine tomorrow ... or not because there are two babies, who want their milk bar back. The doc said twenty-four hours after I had the last pill, I can breastfeed again. I might make it forty-eight hours only to be save."

"We have enough formula in the car, they won't starve."

"No, but they like me better than the formula."

"Of course they do, your milk is much nicer packed and delivered. I'd not waste a second on formula if I had you available."

"You have me available, all of me."

"Which I intend to use and savor. It's a shame I can't have you under the Christmas tree, as my presents, I unwrap you and ... I have to stop, there are kids on the backseat."

"Yes, you should really stop." Sofia sighed. "Or we have to stop somewhere and explain the others why we need five minutes alone ... or they won't need an explanation when they look at us. Not appropriate." One day she wanted a Christmas vacation with her lover alone. She loved their kids, more than her life, but a Christmas, where Sara could be her presents and she was Sara's presents and they unwrapped each other under the Christmas tree, had wild and sweet sex the whole night under the lights was ... she had to stop thinking about it, it made her horny.

"I can read your mind."

"How do you like it?"

"A lot. Maybe we can make some of the ideas come true tonight. Depends on how the kids behave and how tired we are."

"I see you undressed and I'm not tired anymore. Your naked skin works better than coffee."

"Sounds familiar to me." Sara took Sofia's hand. They were lucky to be together, to be on their way to a lovely Christmas spot. In Lake Tahoe, in a villa, with snow. A lot of people would never have the chance to experience this, they were allowed to be this lucky, it was a gift.

The last time they came to Lou Lee's villa the fridge had been stocked and saved them a shopping trip, this time smoke out of the chimney greeted them and told them, the place would be lovely warm when they entered the building. Not a cold place, where they had to walk around with a coat for a while, no, they could feel warm and at home right away. Lou's housekeeper was great, Sofia didn't know this woman, but she felt grateful for what she did for them.

"Wow, that's a nice place." Marc said. "A huge house and an amazing view. We can see the lake."

"It's a half an hour walk to the town, but it's great." Sofia agreed.

"We can take skies or a sleigh. Suzy on a sleigh." Steve kissed his sister. "Do you want to sit on a sleigh and I pull you?"

"Yeah."

"Then we'll do that." He let her down in the snow. Immediately the little girl touched the white, cold snow and held it in her hand, fascinated how it melted.

"Cold."

"Yes, very cold. You need gloves, my Dear." Sara put some gloves on Susan's hands. "Now you can touch it and it's not cold." A promise her daughter believed and tried right away.

"Snow!"

"We can build a snowman tomorrow."

"Now."

"No, look it's almost dark, we can't build one today, I'm sorry."

Susan's face turned sad and she looked like she was about to cry any second.

"Or, we build a small one, little sis, and the big one tomorrow. How does that sound?" Steve asked.

"Yes!"

"Good, Eric, Jorja and Louise, why don't you join us? The five of us build four little snowmen man tomorrow we can build the big ones."

"Yeah!" Eric cheered. "Snowmen!"

"This way they won't be in your way." Steve smiled at his mother. "You can unload the car, I take care of the four and by the time everything is in the villa, we have the four snowmen, they're happy, won't cry and we can unpack in peace."

"Smart boy." Sara kissed his cheek. "I'm proud of you. Make sure they don't end up soaking wet."

"Sure, only building, no diving or swimming. Leave the dogs out too, I'm sure they prefer to inspect the area."

"Absolutely. Have an eye on them, I don't want them in the woods."

"Sure." Steve looked at the four children in front of him, all of them eager to build a snowman. "All right, lets start. First you need to make a ball out of snow..."

"One day he'll be a great father." Sofia got her arm around her wife.

"Yes, the woman who gets him, is a lucky woman. Like we're lucky to have him as our son."

"Thanks to you and your big heart."

"And the rest of my family, who greeted him with arms wide open."

"Stop talking, there's work to do!" Don called. "The trunks don't unload themselves. Move it, lazy ladies."

"True gentlemen would carry the luggage for us ladies."

"There are no true gentlemen left."

"I can see that." The blonde sighed. "Care to explore our room?"

"Sure. First we make sure the action star didn't hide cameras somewhere for his private porn show."

"He has no idea which room will be ours."

"The one in the middle, first floor. The king size bed, Steve and the twins are next to us in the twin room, so are Greg and Jules. We have to be close to the kids." Sofia's parents had the king sized bed on the second floor, Don and Tanya a twin room and so did Lauren and Leah.

The warmth greeted them and made them feel at home right away. The kitchen and living room area looked like the last time they had been here, except for a seven foot tall Christmas tree in front of the big windows, that faced the lake.

"Wow, nice. Santa can't miss this tree."

"Nope, he has to stop here, I want my presents." Tanya smirked.

"Your presents is here, my dear." Don grinned widely.

"You can have it later, when we're alone."

"Somehow I'm having the feeling the presents will be more for him than for me."

"I'm sure you'll enjoy it too."

"Thanks God they stay not next to us." Sara said.

"As if you'd hear us, you have plans yourselves."

"Maybe."

"You do, I can see it in your eyes. You were undressing Sara while you were carrying the luggage and I'm sure when you're in your room, you throw her on the bed and will need some time before you come out there."

"A quickie? I like the idea - but may I remind you my parents are around and when the Captain realizes we enjoy our privacy instead of working, we'll be in trouble. So, no quickie." It was a shame there was no time for some sex. The kids were busy with the snowmen, the twins asleep and ... all these things didn't matter.

"Okay, we need to organize a few things." Marie said when they had all their luggage in the villa.

"Mom, don't turn this into a boot camp."

"A boot camp would have done you some good, daughter. We're a big group, we need some rules and I know better than anybody else, you don't like rules. We need them anyway. First of all, we are eleven adults in the house, which means, we can divide the work between us. Two of us will be in charge for breakfast every day, the next two are in charge for the clean-up of the breakfast. Two do the shopping, three make sure the kids are looked after during preparation for breakfast, which means, they're dressed and washed their faces and hands before they come to breakfast. And two lucky ones have nothing to do, have the morning up. As we'll be out during the day, we need another list for the evening. Three for the kids, three for dinner, three for the shopping, two have the evening off. Not the same, who had the morning off. I prepared a list, you write your name down where you want to be. I don't want any cheats on the off list. Every third day."

"She has to make a police boot camp out of everything." Sofia sighed.

"But she has a point, we do have some works to do, this way we all have a morning or an evening off. Want to be on the off duty list with me?" Sara nibbled on the earlobe of her lover.

"Absolutely. Where do you want your name for tomorrow?"

"How about breakfast? The twins will be hungry anyway, so you, as their milk bar, should be available."

"I feed them, somebody else has to change them."

"Yes, because you have to help me with the breakfast."

"That somebody else has to buy and bring everything to the villa."

"One day I want a lazy vacation trip. Sleep in, stay in bed, have breakfast served, some time in a pool, a nap, private time in the room, dinner, dancing date, more private time."

"In eighteen years, when the twins are old enough to stay a week without us."

"Unless I'll have another baby sister or brother in between." Steve smirked.

"No, four kids are enough, we're done with family planning." Sara answered. "We have a great teenager boy, a little princess and two baby boys. You'll keep us busy for a while."

"We will. Are we going out tonight?"

"Aren't you tired from the long drive?"

"Depends on where we'd go."

"I think we stay at home. You, my little son, are not allowed to enter the casinos or bars. All you can do is order a pizza and play video games."

"Which is perfect in my opinion. Surely Tanya and Don will join me. How about you, mom?"

"I think tonight you're on your own, I'll feed your brothers and then go to bed. Tomorrow Santa will come and I'm sure it will be a busy day."

"Yeah, all the presents."

"Only for the good children, Santa doesn't have to carry a lot through the chimney here."

"Yeah, he has to use the big door for my presents."

"In your dreams, my boy, in your dreams."

"I wonder who is his present in his dreams." Sara grinned. Steve rolled his eyes and got up. This was something, he didn't wish to discuss with his mothers. He'd rather find his favorite spots on the work list of his grandmother. Shopping and looking after the kids sounded good, also preparing dinner, especially when he could do that with his grandfather. He loved learning how to prepare new dishes with Marc.

"Are the twins asleep?"

"Yes." Sara sat next to Jules. She and Don had taken Sandy and Saloso to bed. They had left a baby monitor in the room and took the other one with them. Don joined Tanya, Steve and Sofia at the Playstation, Greg played

with Eric and Jorja the board game, they got from Sara and Sofia to their birthday while Marie and Marc played with Susan and Louise. Rantanplan and Scooby snored in front of the fire, they all settled down for the evening after dinner and little walk through the cold night.

"They like the tree, all the lights."

"All our kids like the tree, it's the place, where Santa leaves the presents. It's a magical place."

"A Christmas tree with all its lights and ornaments, is something magical. It makes you feel at home."

"Is there a psychological reason for that?"

"Of course, but I won't bother you with shrinky talk."

"You did five years ago." Sara smiled and shook her head.

"I can't believe it has been over five years that I came to Los Angeles. All I wanted was a break between two excursions and what did happen? I got arrested and ended in therapy."

"You fell in love, got married, became a mother of four and a godmother."

"While you broke some rules and became the friend of a former patient. After you let her wait for a year."

"Sorry, some rules can't be broken right away."

"Is it bad to have me as a friend? Do you feel like you're my therapist?"

"No, I feel like you're my friend."

"I do ask you for advice every now and then."

"Friends do that."

"True. And I don't like your doctor friends."

"Neither does Tanya and I like her anyway."

"I did like Tanya right from the start."

"Of course, you're quite alike."

"You did like Greg right away."

"I did. He was cheeky, he was cute and he cared a lot for you. The fact, he worried this much told me right away, this man was not selfish, he was a great friend, he was capable of loving somebody else and was a person, you could rely on."

"Your knowledge of human nature is amazing, doctor Weinberg. I wonder why you still waste time with the arrogant and ignorant doctors you call friends."

"Because they are my friends and I barely see them. Compared to the time I spend with you, they almost never see me."

"Your kids like us more than them."

"My kids, especially my son, adores you. Like you adore him."

"Yes." Sara looked at Eric and smiled. Her big boy, her godson. He insisted on sitting next to her during dinner, told Sofia, she could share a bed with Sara, but he wanted to sit next to her and Susan had to on the other side, so she could sit in between her mothers. Such an adorable boy.

"Did you have nightmares at any time or are they completely gone?"

"The ones I had back then are gone, sometimes I dream of Sofia's accident, which feels worse than the old nightmares." Three and a half years after Sofia's accident, the brunette still woke up and had to check that her lover was next to her, alive and well.

"Did you have one the last weeks?"

"Yes." Whenever Sofia had problems with her stump, it reminded Sara of the accident and her mind went crazy. She hated it, hated Sofia knew why Sara had the nightmares and felt sorry because her wife felt sorry.

"It's normal, Sara. Sofia's life was at risk, you feared for her, our minds are mean sometimes, they make us suffer."

"Do you have nightmares?"

"I do. When the children were abducted I dreamed for a while these people got me, cut the twins out of me, or abducted them after their birth."

"Right." Sara took the hand of her friend. The children kidnapper had been in Jules's house, her friend could have become a victim of them, could have died. Her children could have been abducted, sold to strangers somewhere on another continent. The case had been a hard time for Jules.

"We're all fine, but it could have been different. We were lucky, we are here, our families are fine, we can spend a few days in this villa, have a Christmas together."

"How sad are you because your parents are not here?"

"It's strange to be away, but both have to work. It's my mom's last Christmas as a doctor, I wonder what she'll do when she retires next year."

"I can't see her retired. She'll continue to work, maybe not fulltime, but she can't stay at home. Same for your father."

"Dad has some hobbies, my mother's hobby is her job. She wouldn't stay at home to look after her grandchildren like your mother-in-law."

"Well, Marie loves her grandchildren, she moved to Los Angeles for them."

"And because of you and Sofia. Sofia's accident was a big shock for Marie too. It showed her how precious time with your children is."

"It is. I can see it on my children, when they're all at home, with me, I'm happy. Steve will leave soon for college and university, I'll blink twice and Susan will follow ... they grow up too fast."

"Tell me about it. In a few years they don't want to spend Christmas with their old parents anymore. So not cool."

"Luckily Steve thinks family is cool."

"He doesn't take it for granted, knows life can be different."

"For years I was sure I don't need a family to be happy. I was so wrong."

"Sometimes we need some time to realize what we need, what makes us happy. You found out what you really want."

"Time with my family and my best friends."

"Looks like Santa fulfilled this wish already."

"He did and I'm glad he did. Come on, we join the gamblers."

"I don't play video games."

"Then it's about time you start it. We team up and show them how to play."

"Or how to lose."

"With you losing is like winning."

Jules laughed and kissed Sara's cheek. Half an hour couldn't hurt, then she had to take her children to bed - and herself too.

As soon as the door closed behind them, Sara pulled Sofia in her arms and kissed her passionately. Her hands ran

down the back of the blonde, slipped under the blouse and caressed the soft skin. A soft moan escaped out of both mouths, Sara began to kiss down the throat of her lover, sucked softly on the pulse point. Finally alone, finally there was nothing, that stopped her from having her hands all over her wife, feeling her.

"I think Santa dropped my presents off, how nice of him, I'll unwrap it with gusto."

"I think he did the same for me. The whole evening I waited for the right moment to say, I'm tired without being too obvious why I really want to leave the group and go to bed. With you." Sofia opened the blouse of her lover and felt like a junkie, who could lay eyes on his drug after a long time suffering. Sara's skin, Sara's body, she so wanted this body under her, on top of her, next to her.

"They know why we left them, it was written all over our faces."

"I so don't care. This is our Christmas vacation, I know as parents we don't have the kind of Christmas singles have, but I insist of unwrapping you and playing with you; in a way that makes us both very sweaty and leaves us breathless next to each other in bed."

"You want to go for a run?" The brunette teased.

"I know a better way to burn calories and make you sweat."

"Do you?" Sara pushed Sofia onto the bed. "I think you're way too overdressed for a sweaty date." She opened the button of the blonde's jeans and pulled the black fabric down. Conveniently she also pulled down the slip of her lover. Why bother with it separately when she could lose it together with the jeans? Fabrics were between her and Sofia, so they were in the way.

"Oh, you're saving time."

"Yes, I thought I can use the time for something else." She took Sofia's left leg in her hands and undid the prosthesis. Softly she stroke over the stump and kissed it. It had taken Sofia a while before she could relax when Sara did this. The idea her lover saw her stump, saw the scars, could realize how incomplete she was, scared Sofia. A lot of talking and kissing had been necessary to make her understand, Sara didn't care, that she loved Sofia for

what she was as a person and not for her body - although she adored the body of the blonde.

"I can smell your arousal." Sara grinned.

"Then why do you waste time?"

"Because I like to see you suffer - in this case." Sara moved up to kiss her lover, who used the chance to pull off the blouse and bra. Not only Sara could make two pieces of clothes disappear at once. Now they were even, Sofia was naked below her bellybutton, Sara above.

"Perfect, when you can do what I did to you and I do what you did to me, we're naked; just what I wanted the whole day."

"Tell me about it." Sara took the chance to pull of the blonde's blouse. "Now there's somebody happy to be free." Sara cupped the Sofia's nipple, which stood up high, with her lips and sucked on it.

"Gosh, that's almost perfect." The blonde moaned.

"Only almost? Let's see if we get it perfect." Sara's hand moved south and when she found the wet and heat between her lover's legs, the blonde moaned louder. Nervously Sofia tried to unbutton the jeans of her lover. Sara had clothes on, any kind of clothes was too much and in her way.

"I love you."

"Love you too."

"Get out of these jeans."

"Nobody wants to help me."

"I do, but I'm too weak ... don't stop."

"I have to or I'll never lose my jeans." Sara pulled the blonde on top of her, her hands only on the blonde's back now.

"Get out of them, I want you and I need and I'm not sure, which one is more urgent." Sofia ripped off Sara's jeans and as soon as her wife was naked, she entered her with two fingers and silenced her moan with a hot and furious kiss.

Thursday, December 25th

No children's crying, no little feet running around the bed, no nothing. Only silence. Silence and her wife in her arms. Sara kissed the blonde's hair. This was how Christmas Eve was supposed to be. Waking up in a cozy bed, the love of her life in her arms, naked, the sweat of last night's sex dried on their skin. A look on the clock told her it was almost eight o'clock. Why hadn't Susan been here? Why weren't the twins up and asked loudly for their milk?

"You are so beautiful." Sofia whispered. "I'm a lucky woman that I'm allowed to wake up every day next to you."

"Or I am the lucky one that I can wake up next to you every day."

"Lets settle with we're both lucky to have us."

"Deal." Sara pulled her wife into her arms and kissed her.

"We had ten hours of private time together."

"Our Christmas present?"

"Maybe. We need to get up, as far as I know we're on breakfast duty and breakfast time is in half an hour."

"I bet there are half a dozen of kids sitting all around the Christmas tree, with Christmas paper all around them, presents in their arms and not interested in breakfast at all."

"Sounds like a very possible scenario."

"Lets join them after a quick shower."

"A really quick one, we don't have time for some sweet shower sex."

"I know, what a pity." The blonde kicked the blanket with her right foot away and slipped out of her wife's arms. If they were late, they'd be in trouble with her mother. Maybe none of the kids cared about breakfast after Santa had been here last night, her mother would.

It took them fifteen minutes to be downstairs and dressed. Marie shot them a firm look while Marc only smiled and hugged them both.

"Merry Christmas, my dears. Did you sleep good?"

"Perfectly. It was so quiet, what happened to the children?"

"As you can see they're busy with their presents and the twins were fed by your mother and me. We thought, when we're on kids duty, we can take care of their breakfast. It also gave me the chance to take a few photos of your mother with both babies in her arms in front of the Christmas tree."

"Since when are the kids up?"

"Up since five, up in the living room since half past seven. We told them, when they go up too early, Santa comes back next night and takes some presents away. He doesn't like it when children come up too early because that makes it more stressful to him. So they stayed downstairs, nervous, playing and looking at the clock every minute."

Sofia laughed. "Oh I remember that, you did the same to me back then."

"It worked with you, it works with your daughter."

"Apparently."

"Who was with the kids?" Sara asked.

"Steve. He woke up at six when the twins let him know, it was time for breakfast. We told him last night to let us know when they wake up so we could help him. Your son signed in for kids duty every day."

"Yeah, he loves his siblings."

"And his little sister adores him, her big brother." Marc chuckled.

"Her personal superman." Sara looked how Steve played with Susan and one of her new toys. Two happy kids between other happy children, whose only problems were, which toy they should try first.

"Okay, we prepare breakfast."

"Coffee is running." Sofia loved the big machine Lou had, all she had to do was pout water into the machine, add some coffee and a few minutes later the magical black liquid was ready to give them a boost.

"I take care of the eggs."

"Toast time." Sofia took the toaster and insert four slices of toast. She needed at least thirty slices, granola, fruits, yogurt and ... they should have gotten up earlier. Now they were running out of time because of the snuggling in bed and the kissing in the shower ... which was wonderful. Both of them.

"I put the kettle for the tea on. And the milk on the oven for the hot chocolate."

"When you also have an eye on the toast, I set the table."

"Okay."

"Merry Christmas." Jules came downstairs and hugged Sofia.

"Merry Christmas to you too. Sorry, I need to set the table."

"I see Christmas morning is a busy time. Merry Christmas, Sara.

"Merry Christmas doctor Weinberg, I love you." Sara kissed Jules. "How did you sleep?"

"Pretty good. What about you?"

"Wonderful."

"Let me give you a hand with the breakfast."

"You are on..."

"Honey, I so don't care. My children barely looked up when I greeted them, I can give you a hand with this, it's not like I'm needed somewhere else."

"I always need you." Greg said and kissed Jules. "And you." He pulled Sara in his arms. "Merry Christmas, my big sister."

"Merry Christmas, baby brother."

"I look after the toast and the tea, you can concentrate on the eggs."

"And I take the granola and fruits to the table. Maybe Sofia needs some help setting the table."

"Thanks."

"Hey, it's Christmas, you're supposed to be kind on Christmas Day. What did Santa get you?"

"A sexy blonde in my bed."

"Really? I got a sexy brunette in my bed. He was in a very good mood, I suppose."

"Yes." Sara laughed.

"Good morning and Merry Christmas." Don and Tanya had left the group of children and joined them, pulled in by the smell of coffee.

"Merry Christmas. How is it going under the tree?"

"Everybody is happy. It was kind of difficult to make them understand, not all presents are for them." Tanya chuckled.

"Yeah, poor kids, so less presents." Don agreed. "And poor me, my girlfriend wanted to get up at seven-thirty too, she was curious what Santa had gotten her."

"Oh, did you like your presents?" Sara asked and turned the eggs.

"Yes, it sparkles." Tanya lifted her hand and showed off a shiny golden ring with a even shinier diamond.

"Nice. Engagement ring?"

"I thought so, but the question was missing, so I guess not."

"Poor thing." Don smirked. "Maybe next year."

"He's lucky I don't want to get married any time soon or I'd ask him, or more correctly, I'd tell him to marry me. Next year, my friend. You better get started on a great idea how to propose."

"I ask you after you lost a game."

"One more comment like that and I kick your..."

"Hold it, no threats on Christmas." Sara stopped them.

"You can continue this conversation next year. Or tonight in your room, I'm sure you'll get a happy end there."

"He won't get anything there if I don't get my proposal."

"Blackmailing a cop is not a smart thing to do."

"Neither is displeasing your dentist."

"The two of you stop it right away or you can go outside, shovel snow instead of having breakfast with us." Marie ended the discussion. "Sometimes I wonder who are the children. The ones playing under the tree or the others."

"We're all kids, mom." Sofia hugged her mother. "Merry Christmas, be nice, enjoy your time and forget for a second, you're the greatest captain in the world."

"What do you want? Except me ignoring you were late."

"You being happy than I'm happy because I've got a wonderful wife, perfect children and the best parents in the world."

"Have you wished your daughter a Merry Christmas?"

"No, she's too busy with her toys, which is totally fine. We can wish each other a Merry Christmas when we're having breakfast."

"The eggs need two more minutes, the coffee too."

"The tea is ready, so are most of the toasts." Jules added.

"How about some bacon?"

"Yes please." Greg sighed. "I love bacon."

"Then you make it." His wife shot back.

"Your wish is my command." He kissed her. "Can I make anything else for you?"

"No, you're making me happy, that's enough."

"Awe, they're so cute." Sofia sighed and pulled Sara in her arms. She wanted love all around her, it was Christmas, the best day in the year for a lot of love.

"Merry Christmas, Honey." Sara pulled Steve in her arms.

"Merry Christmas, mom."

"Did you like what Santa got you?"

"Well, my presents today can't hold a candle to the present he made me two years ago, when he got me the two coolest mothers in the world." Two years ago he had become their son, to him still the biggest and best present, he ever received. A family, who loved him, respected him and wanted him. They chose him because they knew who he was, not because they wanted money from the government or did it for their personal ego.

"Your new smart phone is not as good as two old women?"

"You're both not old, you're perfect. I love you."

"We love you too and we're glad you're here with us instead at home."

"Why would I want to be at home? The presents are here." Steve laughed.

"True." She tousled his hair. "I assume you don't want to go out today? Stay inside and use all your presents?"

"No, I promised my little sister to go out with her and build a big snowman. Remember? She asked if we could also build a unicorn, she wants to ride on a unicorn, so we'll build that too. And we want to watch The Last Unicorn, if that's okay with you."

"Sure. It's a lovely movie, I'm sure all the kids will enjoy it. When you have Finding Nemo with you too, your mother will be happy too."

"We packed a huge Disney collection, we should be fine for a while."

"Perfect. In case the weather is bad or the little ones are not tired in the evening."

"Mom, there are a million presents, a lot of toys, they won't be bored for a long, long time. You spoil all of us."

"The best children in the world deserve to be spoiled."

"I love you, mom." Steve snuggled into Sara's arms. He was a lucky boy to have two wonderful mothers and he loved them both, but the relationship between him and Sara was special. Maybe because they both knew how life in foster care was, how it felt to be pushed around and not been wanted, or it was because she had been the first person, who gave him the feeling of being a real human being, somebody, who could do something good and not only screw things up.

Sofia felt like she was ready to burst into a million pieces - all covered with the lunch she had a few minutes ago. The look her mother gave her when she helped herself to dessert for the third time said everything, the blonde ignored it and now she had to pay for it.

"Happily stuffed?" Sara asked and kissed her wife.

"Yes. How come you didn't tell me off?"

"It's Christmas, one day in the year you're allowed to have as much dessert as you want. Your mother doesn't agree with this, but you're old enough to decide yourself."

"I feel like I can't move anymore. A walk would be a sensitive thing to do, but I can't get off the couch anymore. Sorry."

"It's okay. Susan plays with Louise, they're both happy inside, Eric and Jorja are out with Jules and Greg and the twins are asleep. We can have a few quiet minutes."

"Good." The blonde rubbed her belly. She had to admit, she looked a little bit like she was slightly pregnant again. Like in the second month. "Lets call home, see what they've been up to."

"Jon is at work, isn't he?"

"Yes, Tony should be home. As far as I know he has today off while Sally is at work."

"One day she'll find a job, that pays her enough to stop doing these waitress jobs."

"A lot of actresses say these words out loud to themselves every day. Most of them don't succeed. Maybe we have to ask Lou to give them both some help. Tony does go by with his IT work, in fact, he does more and more work in this area and less actor stuff. I think he realized being an actor is more a hobby than a full time job for him."

"Yeah. Hey, Kyle and Lynn had been there too last night, they wanted a party and a big house. I wonder if they could manage to get up this morning or are too hangover." "Their captain would tell them different." She dialed Tony's number. A few seconds later he picked up.

"Yo blondie, how's it goin'?"

"When you answer the phone with a bad Australian accent, say g'day at least."

"Sorry. Merry Christmas."

"Merry Christmas to you too. How are you?"

"I feel like a Thanksgiving Turkey. Stuffed."

"Welcome to my world. I'm lying on the couch and can't move anymore."

"The difference is, nobody sees in your case how much you ate, in my case it's obvious."

"Believe me, I can see it too, I look pregnant."

"Are you?"

"No! Don't be silly. How are you guys doing? Any damage on the house?"

"No, the house is fine." The way he said this told Sofia something else wasn't fine.

"Spill it."

"I'm not supposed to tell you..."

"Tony, spill it. I know something happened, what is it?"

"Actually, two things happened. One is good, the other is not that good. I think."

"What did you do?"

"Not me, your former colleagues."

"Kyle and Lynn? Are they all right? Hurt? Injured?"

"No, no, they're okay. Physically."

"But? Don't let me worm everything out of you."

"Well ... I start with the good news. You can plan a shopping trip, there'll be a wedding. Kyle popped the question last night. In front of the Christmas tree, which was damn romantic and Mandy said I DO. We had a very big engagement party then. It was a shame you guys weren't here, but he wanted to ask her in front of the tree, with the Christmas spirit all around."

"Kyle is getting married." Sofia cheered and made a little dance while she was lying on the couch. Okay, she looked like a whale, that was stranded on a beach, but who cared? Kyle and Mandy would get married. "I've to

tell Don! We need to organize a bachelor party for him, a big one, like Vegas style..."

"Uhm, a bachelor party is for male friends."

"BS, it's for friends, who like to look at naked women ... ouch." Sofia held her arm where Sara pinched her. The brunette took the cell phone away from her wife.

"Merry Christmas Tony, Sofia won't join you at the party, she has to look after the kids and she is not interested in naked women in Las Vegas."

Tony laughed. "Merry Christmas Sara. You have to keep your wife on a short leash or she'll be the first one, who stuffs bills into the strings of almost naked women."

"Only when she has the wish to lose her fingers."

"I don't think she does. How are you doing? Were the kids happy with Santa's presents?"

"Yes, they're busy and very excited. Louise and Susan are playing with their toys here in the house, Eric and Jorja are out with their parents, testing the sleighs."

"What did Santa get you?"

"A sexy naked blonde in my bed."

"Wow, that's a nice present."

"When is your flight to Florida? Or are you not going this year?"

"No, no trip into the sunshine. She's busy."

"He said something about other news, what else happened?" Sofia asked.

"You heard her, what else happened? Spill it."

"You won't like this a lot ... Jon and Lynn got very drunk last night, Lynn was mad with Dirk because he didn't come over and flew to Mexico instead. Anyway, they ended up in bed and I'm very sure Dirk won't like that. I think their relationship is over."

"Seriously?" Sara didn't believe her own ears. Lynn and Jon had sex together? Lynn and Dirk had been together for a few years, she expected them to get married next year and not ... her friend risked her relationship for a one-night-stand? For payback?

"Yes. Alcohol does a lot of things to your head, which is not an excuse."

"No, it's not. Lynn and Jon..."

"What?" Don looked up. "Are you kidding me?"

"Nope, they ended up in bed last night, so Tony says. Drunk as skunks."

"Idiots. You don't get drunk when you're in a relationship."

"Unless you get drunk with your partner." Tanya said.

"Then it's okay."

"What did Jon say about it?"

"Tony? What did Jon say about this?"

"I haven't seen him, she stumbled out of his room early this morning, half dressed. He must be still in bed, like I said, they drank a lot. Honestly I can't see Lynn working today."

"We leave the house for a few nights and they turn everything into chaos." Sofia sighed. "It's like you leave teenagers alone at home, although I don't think our son and his friends would make such a mess."

"No, he's too young to get married." Sara grinned.

"And has no girlfriend. Yet. I think." She looked over to the teenager, who was busy playing a new video game. With Don back by his side, they were in a battle against each other or against somebody else, Sofia wasn't quite sure which scenario was the right one. It didn't matter to her, all that mattered was, her son was happy. "What does Kyle say about this?"

"I have no idea if he knows what happened, he and Mandy went to bed around midnight and left before Lynn came out of Jon's room."

"That will be interesting."

"Hey when they were together did one of them cheat?"

"No."

"Good. Sally couldn't believe it neither. Maybe Dirk forgives Lynn and everything will be fine."

"We'll see. We left you alone for one night and you guys make a mess."

"Hey, it wasn't me, I was a good boy."

"We'll see what the others have to say about that."

"Look on the bright side, there'll be a wedding next year; just not the couple you expected."

"Yeah." Kyle and Mandy would get married, that was a surprise and something that made Sara and Sofia happy.

Oil lights in the garden set a soft light to the little collection of snowmen and other snow creatures, they had created in the afternoon. After the four little snowmen Steve had built with the four oldest children yesterday, they built a big snowman and a big snowwoman, as well as a dog, three unicorns (every girl wanted one) and a horse for Eric. There were also two big walls made of snow for snowball fights. All in all, they used the sleighs only for a short while today and were more busy with creating something. And because the snowman and the snowwoman got a carrot as a nose, the girls wanted the unicorns to have one too as a horn and Eric wanted a harness for his horse.

"We have our own army in front of the house, an army of snow creatures." Greg said.

"Yes, they have fun building castles in the sand, with snow you can do a lot more, I think our kids became big winter fans today." Don handed him a bottle of beer. After a hot coffee and some time around the fire in new, dry clothes, a cold beer was good.

"Give your sons two more years and they'll be busy building something too."

"Yeah, a car or a bike. Don't you feel like having more children when you see babies?"

"I do but three are enough. You can have a few more."

"Sara and Sofia don't want more and Tanya doesn't want any children."

"No chance to persuade her?"

"Did Jules not tell you about her cousin? About how stubborn she can be?"

"A few stories, yes." Greg laughed. "Well, you have three kids, enjoy the time with them. I can't believe how fast Eric and Jorja grew up, they are more and more independent with every day. Sometimes I feel like they'll tell me over breakfast, they're about to move out and go to college."

"In fourteen years, bur I know what you mean. I catch myself making sure no guys get too close to Susan, when she comes home with a boyfriend, it will be a hard time."

"She's a lot like you, she'll come home with a boy like you."

"That's what my nightmares are about." Don sighed. "I like Sara's plan, Susan marries Eric. No dating of other boys, no nightmares, no headache."

"We have no influence on that, it's something the kids decide without us. We didn't ask our parents when we were young."

"No and we made sure our parents had no idea what was going on, another thing that worries me. Maybe Susan will be more like Sara when she's a teenager, interested in books, studying."

"Even Sara had a wild time, although she barely tells us about it."

"Or never. What did she do?"

"I can't tell you, sorry."

"Come on."

"No way."

"He tells you about my sins and I'll never tell him anything about my past again." Sara said.

"Eavesdropping. Not fair."

"Don, we won't turn into nightmare parents when Susan wants to date. We lock her in her room until she marries Eric."

"Good idea."

"What if my son doesn't want to marry your daughter?"

"We lock him into her room until they agree to get married."

"Isn't that slightly illegal?"

"Yes. Slightly."

"Sara?" Eric came with his toy car up to her.

"What's up, big boy?" She picked him up and kissed his cheek. "Are you on a tour with Hook?"

"Yes. Sara play hide and seek?"

"Only the two of us?"

"Yes."

"Or we play police and burglar."

"What that?"

"It's like hide and seek but we have a police team and a burglar team. The burglar team hides and then the police have to find them. There's a treasure, when one of the burglars touches the treasure the police lost and the burglars won. But the police is not allowed to stand around the treasure all the time, they have to look for the

burglar. You have to be a very good detective to win against the burglars."

"Okay. Don and dad play too." The little boy decided.

"We ask Marie if she wants to play too and then she has to be a burglar." Don grinned. The Captain as a criminal, what a change of roles.

Friday, December 26th

"Eve! Play!" Susan pulled on the sleeve of her brother's pullover.

"Again? Don't you want to play with Louise?"

"No."

"Or Saloso and Sandy?"

"No. You."

"You're the big brother, you're the one she wants. Who wants a friend or baby brother when the personal hero is around?" Sara asked sweetly.

"Funny."

"Lea will be here soon, you can have a long video games night."

"If she's not too busy with her GF."

"The way I know my oldest daughter, she'll be very happy to be with you, spend some time with you. She called you once every day, she misses you and you're the reason why she comes up here."

"Or the villa."

"It adds a nice touch."

"Eve!"

"Yes, I'm all yours." He picked Susan up and placed her on his lap. "What are we going to play?"

"Drawn."

"Okay, we drawn a picture."

"Being a big brother is a demanding job." Greg got his arm around Sara.

"It is. Luckily her baby brothers are asleep. Like my wife."

"Yes, they're a sweet all snoring on the floor in front of the fire." They looked at Sofia, who lay next to the twin babies on a faked bear fur and slept in front of the fire.

"Where is your wife?"

"She builds an igloo with our kids. Your parents-in-law?"

"In a casino, watching a show."

"Holidays are so great, finally you have time to do whatever you want to do. I have you in my arm, something I always want and barely have the chance to do because most times your arms are occupied by your wife or children." He kissed her cheek. "I love vacations with you, Sara. Can we do that more often?"

"We had two vacations together this year."

"Not enough. My resolution for next year is to spend more time with you. Even my wife spends more time with you."

"Come home earlier, work less, come over more often, invite me more often and we'll spend more time together; especially when you invite my wife and our kids too."

"Deal."

"Stop hitting on my mom while mom is asleep." Steve complained from the table.

"She's a sexy brunette, when your mom leaves her out of sight, it's her own fault."

"I'll tell her and the captain."

"I'm not afraid of her nor the captain."

"Wrong answer. Now the captain will eat you alive."

"No she won't, she knows I respect her a lot."

"My son is so cute when he tries to protect me and my marriage, no wonder his sister believes he's a hero. Steve is Superman, isn't he Susan?"

"Yeah Eve Upaman."

"Thanks little sister." He tousled her hair. "You're my little princess."

Sara sighed. Yes, her oldest son was very cute, she was proud of him. "No wonder we adopted him, you can't get a better son."

"He couldn't get better parents, you're even."

"Maybe." Sara snuggled into Greg's arms. "We had a wonderful Christmas and I'm not sure New Years Eve can get better."

"Why does it have to be better? Why not make it equal? Different and good. We have this wonderful villa, no matter if we stay in here or go somewhere, it will be great because we're all together. In fact, we'll be even more."

"You're right. And you know what? We should all visit your parents next year. I haven't been in San Diego for a while and my children never have. We can enjoy the beaches."

"Nice idea. Steve, are you coming too?"

"Sure, somebody has to make sure you stay away from my mom."

"Your mom, who likes to flirt with my wife?"

"It's because of the therapy, she can't help it. Jules cast a spell on her."

"Somehow your mother is never the bad one, is she?"

"Of course not, she's my mom." Steve grinned at Sara.

"And I'm her favorite son."

"I don't have a favorite child, I love you all equally."

"Thanks mom."

The doorbell rang.

"Tanya and Don might be back from their walk. Or it's my oldest daughter. I'll have a look." Sara kissed Greg's cheek. "You look after the kids and my Sleepy Beauty." She got up.

"I could kiss her awake."

"No, let her sleep, she looks after the babies at night, she needs some sleep. And it's my job to kiss her, not yours."

"I'd love to do this work for you."

"Lips off my wife!"

"What a pity, I'm never allowed to do the fun stuff." He looked at Sofia and the babies. A cute picture, he took already a few photos of them. Perfect for the family photo album later. Like the photos of the blonde, Sara and their four kids, they took in front of the Christmas tree and in the snow.

"Susan, Lea is here."

"Lea?" Susan looked up and searched for the best friend of her brother. "Lea?"

"I'm here!" Lea stepped into the villa.

"Lea!" Susan dropped her pen and ran to the older girl.

"Somebody missed me." She lifted Susan up and kissed her. "Did you have lovely Christmas? Did Santa bring you many gifts?"

"Yeah."

"Very good."

"Did he bring one for me?" Lauren stepped next to them.

"Yeah."

"Really? Oh, that's so nice of Santa."

"Are you sure you deserve..." Steve stopped when he saw the third person, who entered the house. This wasn't somebody, he expected, nor had he any knowledge of the fact, this person was invited.

"Hi." Marlene smiled carefully at Steve.

"Surprise." Lea grinned. "We brought an extra."

"Obviously."

"Now you're four and can fight your video games battles much better." Sara said. She knew about Marlene's appearance, the girls had talked to her and Sofia and usually she wanted to stay out of the relationship life of her son, but in this case they agreed it was a good chance for Steve and Marlene to talk and maybe become more than friends. Their son still had a crush on Marlene, they were sure about this. But if and how it could work out, that was in the hands of the teenagers.

"And I heard there are a few toddlers camping alone in the basement, they need a girl scout to look after them."

"Aren't we like Santa's little helper?" Lauren dropped her back on the floor. "Good afternoon Sofia, did you sleep the whole day in front of the fire?"

"No." The blonde yawned and stretched. "It was a little nap next to my active sons. How was the drive?"

"It was interesting to drive in snow up in the mountains, it's the first time I did that. You really have to concentrate on the road."

"Yes."

"Mom and dad say hello and thanks for taking me in. It almost looked like they were happy to see me drive away. Like they want some days on their own."

"All parents do, no matter how much we love our children." Sara smiled and blinked at her wife.

"True. Oh, hello Sandy, you're awake. How are you?" She picked up her son. "Let me guess, you're hungry and you need a fresh diaper."

"I can do that." Steve took his brother. "My hero time is over, Susan is happy with Lea."

"Thanks Honey. You could also be a gentleman and carry the luggage upstairs for the ladies."

"Nah, they're young and strong, they can do that themselves. When you pack like a million shoes and clothes, you have to carry them."

"Nice, thanks for nothing." Lea grumbled. "Susan, do you help me with my luggage?"

"Yeah."

"Thanks. Can you carry this bag, please? And show me Lauren's and my room."

"Yeah."

"You're such a lovely little sister."

Sara watched Stephen leave the room with Sandy in his arms, trying not to look at Marlene. Was it the right decision to let the girl come here?

"Not a merry surprise Christmas?" Sofia whispered.

"I'm not sure. A happy surprise looks different."

"Yeah. Hopefully it wasn't a mistake." The blonde caught the look of Marlene, who looked insecure what to do next.

"Where can I leave my stuff?" Marlene asked.

"Uhm, bring it downstairs. The big room is the Native American tipi size. Did you bring your own tent?"

"Yes, but it's not a tipi."

"That's okay, the kids will decorate it for you." They did the same to their tents, enjoyed it and would enjoy to do it again. Sofia was sure, if Lou saw his room now, he would not recognize it anymore.

Stephen placed Sandy on a fresh diaper, smiling when his brother laughed at him. His little stinky brother liked him, although he always seemed to look for his twin brother. He knew that twins were close, but when he compared Sandy and Saloso to Eric and Jorja, there was a huge difference. Greg's twins were independent and were fine without each other, always have, while his brothers were attached to each other. When one was gone for longer than a few minutes, the other started looking for him, missing him. He knew identical twins were supposed to have this emotional connection, he didn't know this was also possible between fraternal twins.

"You're back with Saloso pretty soon, don't worry, he's fine. All we have to do is finish this diaper and then you can go back to your better half."

"Tanya told me they are very close, it's amazing."

Steve turned and saw Marlene, leaning on the doorframe, watching them.

"Yes."

"Steve if you want me leave, say it and I'm gone. It's okay."

"What are you doing here? Since when are you close to Lea?" Wasn't that the same like telling her to leave?

"It was a mistake to come here."

"That's not an answer. Why, Marlene?"

"Tanya suggest I should come along."

"Why did you agree?"

"Because ... I made a mistake and I wanted to say I'm sorry. For what I did, didn't do and the way I treated you. I should have cared more about your feelings."

"Yes, you should have." He finished with the diaper and took Sandy in his arms.

"Do you want me to leave?" Marlene repeated her question, not wanting to stay without an answer from him.

"Right now I don't know what I want, it's all a big surprise. I can't believe Lea knew about this and never said a single word."

"Well, it was supposed to be a surprise."

"It is one. What does Zoe say about your trip?"

"She thinks it's a stupid idea."

"Why?"

"Because I'm not supposed to run after you. There are a lot of great boys on campus, why chase after a high school boy."

He laughed sarcastically. Yes, why go after a nobody when there were somebodies? "You didn't make yourself popular coming here with your best friend."

"A best friend should support you and not tell you, you're making a mistake because you don't act the way people expect you to act. I'm sure Lea wouldn't do that to you."

"Until ten minutes ago I was sure Lea doesn't talk to you anymore, I learned I was wrong."

"Please don't blame her, she did what she hoped is best for you."

"I'm not mad at her."

"Good. You can blame me but not her."

"It was Tanya's idea, so if I want to be mad at somebody, it has to be her."

"Or you tell me to leave and can continue with your vacation in peace."

He knew he wouldn't be able to go back to half an hour ago. "I should feel flattered that you come up here only to see me."

"Or annoyed."

"Yeah." He paused for a second. "You're camping with the little ones?"

"Something new, I'm sure it will be fun."

"You miss out a lot of parties on the campus for sleeping on the floor between toddler."

"Crazy, isn't it?"

"Absolutely. Is there no great party for New Years Eve?"

"There are a few, I was also invited to some, but I'd rather be up here. You can't change the diapers all by yourself. Plus I want to know if you're still such a bad Street Fighter player or if your skills have improved."

"Bad? I'm going to kick your ass tonight. First Lea's, then it's your turn." Sandy started crying. "Oh dear, somebody is hungry and misses his brother. Time to get back to food and Saloso. And I think I could use some snacks too. What about you?" This was his peace offer, his to say, she could stay and he'd see what to make out of the new situation.

"Are there snacks around your grandfather made or is he on vacation too?"

"For grandpa cooking and baking is vacation, we have a few snacks left."

"Then I'm starving."

"Be honest, you came here because of his food."

"No, I came here because of you. Your grandfather's food is only the number two on my list." Marlene grinned and followed Steve out of the bathroom. Maybe they could work out a way of making this vacation good for all of them.

"Whose plan was it to invite Marlene?" Jules asked Sara while they sat in the sauna.

"Your cousin's."

"Of course, Misses Trouble."

"She wants him happy and after the first awkward moments it looks like he's not too unhappy about her being here. Or am I completely wrong?"

"No, they looked happy in front of the Playstation with the new games Santa brought them. All eight kids." Not only Steve, Lea, Lauren and Marlene sat in front of the beamer, also Greg, Don, Tanya and Sofia. Sara had no idea what games they were playing, video games weren't her world and as long as her beloved ones were happy, she was happy too.

"Do you think Marie and the kids are still doing yoga?"

"If somebody makes them stick to a plan it's her." Sara laughed. Marie wanted to do yoga in the room the kids camped and curious as they are, they wanted to join her. So Marc went downstairs with them to supervise them all. Sara had no idea how yoga for toddler could look like, but here the same rule applied like for the big ones: as long as they were happy everything was fine.

"Jules, give me your therapeutically advise..."

"I can give you a friendly advise."

"You're a therapist, you can do both. Steve and Marlene. Was it right? What did you see? In their behavior?"

"How would you react if you were in Steve's shoes?"

"Don't answer a question with another question, that's rude."

"Amuse me."

"Funny, that doesn't make me want to talk to you."

"I know you want to talk to me, Sweetie." Jules grinned.

"Come on, answer my question."

"Like I said, a therapist, she doesn't answer questions, only asks them. Unfair. Okay. He wasn't happy when she appeared, it's why he left with Sandy, to think about it. I have no idea what they talked about later, whatever it was, they were both more relaxed when they came back. Now it seems to be all right."

"Which doesn't mean he'll give her a second chance."

"Actually I think he will. He still likes her, I saw the way he looked at her. My oldest son still has a crush on her and the fact she is here, against the will of her best friend and that she is single for a while and didn't take the next best boy to entertain herself, gives her points. It tells him, she's not playing around."

"No, she has a huge crush on your son. Some people need more time to see what is good for them." Jules smirked.

"I got that hint, thanks doctor Weinberg." Yes, Sara needed longer to realize Sofia was the one for her. She had been lucky that the blonde thought the same, otherwise she could have been too late. After all, there were a few other people, who were interested in the blonde - for example a famous movie star like Lou Lee.

"Merry Christmas, baby brother." Lea pulled Steve in her arms and kissed him. "I wish you all the best and may all your dreams come true."

"Merry Christmas to you too, big sister. I should be mad with you for bringing Marlene here and not telling me about it."

"That bad?"

"I'm not sure. You told me to forget her, that she isn't worth a thought. Now you brought her here."

"According to Tanya she has changed and from what I can tell after a couple of hours in the car with her, it's true. I also met her twice before the trip, she's not the girl anymore, who runs after boys or men because they're successful. Zoe, by the way, hasn't changed."

"I wonder what that means for their friendship."

"It means, at one point they will continue their lives in different directions. Tanya also told me, Marlene's father wasn't happy with her lifestyle and told her, when she doesn't change back to the girl, he used to know, the girl, who uses her brain, he wouldn't support her the way, he does at the moment. Party all night, not paying attention at college, isn't the way to a successful career. Plus he never liked the boys she brought home, even when they had famous or rich parents. He worked for his success, still works hard, the boys didn't plan to do so, they wanted to live on their parents' money. Hollywood Dazzler, he called them."

"So she was forced to look for somebody else."

"First she ignored her father, then she realized he was right. Tanya said, she and Marlene talked a lot when she helped at the surgery. Some people need longer to understand what is right and what's stupid."

"Strange, she isn't blond." Steve smirked.

"Funny boy." Lea bopped him. "I might take your Christmas present back home." She held up a little box.

"You couldn't find a bigger present for your favorite brother?"

"I haven't made up my mind if I like Sandy or Saloso more."

"Maybe I won't give you my present." He went to his suitcase and got a parcel out.

"Of course you do. Catch it!" She threw her present over and he was forced to catch it so it didn't fall on the floor. A light box, he wondered what was inside. "Open it." Carefully he opened the red paper and pulled out a black box. "If we were a couple, I'd say you bought me an engagement ring. Are you sure, you didn't mistake my present with Lauren's?"

"Pretty sure, your present cost twice as much as hers. The brother bonus."

"Hah, I knew you love me more." He opened the box. A golden necklace with a S and L pendant slipped onto his hand. "S and L? Steve and Lea?"

"Or Silver Lake. You can see in it whatever you want. It could be for us, our friendship, it can be for our home, the place, that changed your life."

"Cool, thanks." He kissed her. "I'll wear it every day, it's my new lucky charm. Now open your present."

Lea smiled and opened the parcel. Out came a big and heavy book. "Wow! Neutra works. You really bought me the book? Do you know how expensive that is?"

"As I bought it, yes I know how much it is. I've got only one best friend and when she likes the work of Richard Neutra, she needs the book, that covers his work. Get some inspiration and more importantly, take it as a hint what to do with your life. Get a job at an architecture office and see if you really enjoy creating homes for other people. Your drawings are great, use your talent!" The last couple of months Lea had been very interested in buildings, in the different architecture, they had in Los Angeles, especially in Silver Lake. She had spent hours of drawing her favorite houses and Steve had been nagging her to look for a job in an architecture office.

"Wow, thanks, you're the best."

"I expect you to create my future house, get some inspiration, I like the Neutra style, all the huge windows."

"Looks like I have some work to do when I'm back home."

"You do. A new job and then it's time to work towards your future. Means we'll have a vacation trip to Chicago, a place with a lot of great architecture, I've been told."

"A summer trip, we don't want minus forty degrees because another blizzard froze the whole north of the country."

"Sounds like a plan." Lea smiled. With the over four hundred pages book she'd be busy for a while. And she was sure, it was full of inspiration.

"The babies are in their beds." Marc came back into the big living room. "How about some dinner?"

"Perfect. We're starving." Steve said without taking his eyes off the Playstation.

"You're always starving. Luckily I prepared your dinner already this morning."

"Stew?"

"As if I could put a smile on your face with a stew. No, of course not. Pizza. The dough is ready, all I have to do is add the toppings. You could help me if you like."

"Sure." He gave Sofia the controller.

Surprised Mark looked at his grandson. He didn't expect Steve to leave the game.

"He's a houseman." Lauren grinned. "We'll keep him for our apartment, it's always handy to have somebody at home, who takes care of dinner, and you can only eat when you come back from college."

"Honey, you mean you're lucky when Steve and I let you into our apartment. Remember, he and I will move in together, you're only a guest."

"You pick him over me?"

"My best friend is always my first choice."

"Thanks Sis, I appreciate it." Steve called from the kitchen area.

"Aren't they wonderful?" Sara pulled Sofia in her arms and kissed her. "He loves her, she loves him, like in a movie. Just without kisses."

"He can leave the kisses to us, we can cover them for all of us." Sofia kissed Sara gently. "I love you."

"Mama kiss." Susan cheered. "Gain!"

"Your wish is my command." Sara kissed Sofia again. Their daughter liked to see her mothers kissing, they were the last ones, who would deny the wishes of their daughter.

"Gain!"

"Come here." Sara pulled Susan on her lap and both kissed the girl. "We love you, big girl."

"Love mommy."

"And you love your tipi."

"Yeah."

"Maybe we can go camping next in two or three years when your little brothers are bigger." Sofia suggested.

"Yeah."

"Then we'll go camping in two years. We all stay in one big tent." That was no question, it was a fact. She had read too many stories about children, who were abducted during a camping trip because they had their own tent. Unless Susan was twenty-one, she wasn't allowed to get her own tent. Not on a camp ground. Only in the basement of Lou Lee's villa.

"Mommy work?" Susan looked at Sara.

"Yes, we can camp at my work place or we look for a campsite on the beach so we can go for a swim in the morning."

"Yeah."

"She's enthusiastic, it's definitely her father's DNA."

"All the good DNA is from her father." Don called from the couch, where he played video games with the others.

"The gorgeous look is from her mother. The most beautiful woman in the world. Susan, who is the most beautiful woman in the world?"

"Mama."

"Exactly."

"She looked at you." Sara smiled.

"Only because she talked to me."

"You're both the most beautiful woman in the world." Steve decided.

"Christmas is over, I wonder if he tries to get points for a bigger birthday present." The brunette wondered. "So many kind words, something must be wrong. What is your plan, son?"

"You were the CSI, go and figure it out. And take the former detective with you, she can detect."

Sofia narrowed her eyes. "You! Are! Like! Your! Mother!" You're the detective, go detect! Sara's words, the first words she flirted with Sofia.

Somebody knocked on the door.

"We're complete, who is that?" Sofia wondered.

"You're the detective, go detect."

The blonde grabbed the collar of her wife, pulled her closer and kissed her hard. "That was what I wanted to do back then, when you said these words the first time. I'd add another word to it, but there are children around."

"Love?"

"Close."

"Kids." Marie got up and went to the front door. Whoever was waiting there for them to open the door must feel cold. It was snowing and freezing outside, you didn't want to wait in front of a door longer than you had to.

"Good evening." Lou Lee, his two sons and Cori came into the room. "Thanks for letting us in, it's so cold outside." His sons ran straight to Louise, Eric and Jorja and started playing with them. They all knew each other and as kids were, they didn't need a long time to say hello, they got straight to the point: playing.

"It's your place." Marie pointed out.

"At the moment it's your place. I hope we're not interrupting anything."

"No, you're not."

"Lou!" Louise ran to her godfather. "Lou!"

"Hello big girl, how are you?"

"You cold."

"Yes, sorry. Let me take off my coat."

"How comes you're here. I thought you were with Cori's family."

"We were. Four days with them was enough, we escaped Seattle and thought, we have a look how you are and wish you all a belated Christmas."

"Thanks, likewise. Everything is fine, your place is full. There's a Native American campsite in the basement."

"Wow? Really? Sounds exciting."

"It is. Our four Native Americans camp there and since today they've got a new big kahuna."

"That would be me." Marlene said, her eyes glued to Lou Lee like he was a mystical creature.

"Stop staring at him like he's somebody special, he's ego is big enough." Cori reprinted Marlene. "He's just a guy."

"He's..."

"A patient." Tanya interrupted. "Who missed his last appointment."

"Sorry doctor. I was busy filming."

"Not an excuse."

"I get you premiere tickets?"

"That's an excuse."

"Are you guys hungry?" Steve asked. "Granddad and I are preparing pizza. Four trays are in the oven, we have salad and garlic bread too."

"How could any sane person refuse food your grandfather prepared?"

"He didn't ask a sane person, he asked you." Sara said dryly.

"Lovely Sara, it's good to see you didn't lost your specific personality over Christmas." Lou grinned.

"She has a point." Cori backed Sara up. "A sane person doesn't tell my father, who is a vivid hunter, that he'll marry his daughter, no matter her father thinks or says."

"It is the truth."

"You're getting married?" Sofia asked.

"No, my father asked if I think this is a relationship, that is made for the future and if we really want to get married one day. He made it obvious he wasn't a fan of this idea."

"Oh."

"Yes, consider this conversation I think staying four days with my future in-laws was pretty heroic. Luckily my girlfriend doesn't let her daddy decide, who is the right man for her. She makes her own decision."

"Absolutely. When I think the time is right, you're allowed to ask me. With the full program of course."

"Of course."

"Don't you think you can chicken out on me, Mister Action Hero."

"I like this woman." Sara sighed. "I'd ask you to stay here, but all rooms are taken. We have only tipi places in the basement and I'm sure, you don't want to camp?"

"Why not? I love camping, the boys will like it too and Lou can handle sleeping on something else than a soft mattress, right?" Cori dared her boyfriend.

"You're the woman, when you say we stay, we stay. I learned not to talk back to you."

"Wise decision." Cori checked her watch. "It's six, there was an outdoor shop in the town, we can get some sleeping bags there."

"Before we had dinner?"

"Yes! They're not open until midnight, it's not a Wal Mart. Come on, move you lazy butt." Cori pushed Lou towards the door. "Can you look after the kids?"

"Sure, they're busy with the other kids...we're having three pairs of twins here. Amazing." Marie said.

"I can see her grandmother heart opening widely and feeling she has to pamper them all." Sofia whispered to her wife. "Look at her. She dreams that they're all her grandchildren and she can look after them every day."

"Okay, we'll be back with some equipment. Bye boys, daddy and I will be back soon and then you have a tent." The boys barely looked at their father and his girlfriend, they were too busy with their friends.

"Looks like the villa gets fuller and fuller. Amazing."

"Like your house sometimes." Sara kissed her wife.

"Tomorrow Kyle and Lynn might surprise us too and then we're out of space. Or the sauna has to become a bedroom. It's warm in there."

"I still wonder why I didn't join you and Jules in the sauna ... were you naked?"

"We wore towels. Big towels."

"Oh, how boring."

"Tell me about it, but Jules didn't want to drop hers." Sara sighed like she tried to recover from a huge loss.

"You want to see her naked?"

"I'm sure she's sexy."

"Honey, you're a lucky woman to have such an amazing wife, who isn't jealous and doesn't give you a hard time."

"There are more reason to be glad to have you." The brunette smiled. So many countless more reasons. She was lucky to be married to the perfect woman.

An hour later Lou and Cori were back with tents, two huge bags of snacks and more bags.

"You can't seriously want more food." Marie shook her head when Lauren's hand sunk into the chips bag.

"Of course, we're working out."

"You sit and the person in the video game does all the exercise."

"My hands are moving."

"Worst part of it, she's skinny like she never touches anything with calories." Lea complained bitterly. "I look at chocolate and all the calories jump on my hips, legs, ass and every other spot they can find."

"You're sexy, Honey, don't worry." Lauren stroke softly over Lea's hand for a second before she turned her attention back to the game.

"Honey?" Lou looked surprised up from his pizza. "Did I miss something? Lea, you're supposed to date Steo."

"Remember, he's not into blondes."

"And you're not into boys?"

"You turned me down, I replaced you with a future doctor."

"Somehow women I meet turn out to be lesbians. That explains a lot of break-ups." He observed Cori.

"I'm not planning to change teams, don't look at me like that. If you mess up, I break your bones and then I go to another man."

"Good to know, somehow. In a weird universe. Your parents will be glad you don't want to go to a premiere with me anymore, Lea."

"When my parents find out Lauren and I are a couple, they'll ground me for the rest of my teenager time."

"Then I'll save you ... hey, that could be a great movie."

"No, my private life isn't a movie and this relationship will stay in this house and not go somewhere else."

"Your parents must be pretty bad."

"When it comes to this, yes."

"Steve, you're a lucky boy to have cool mothers."

"I know, I got the best parents you could ask for. Are you really sleeping with the babies downstairs? In a tent in your own house?" It was his house, he could demand a room with a real bed.

"It will be fun. Actually we bought one tent and one hammock. Cori and I will sleep like we're on a Caribbean Island. We haven't done that in a while." Lou put his arm around Cori. "Remember the week on Bora Bora? When we slept the whole time in the hammock under the stars?"

"Yes, I never understood why you booked this expensive room when we slept outside."

"To impress you."

"Show off. You impressed me more with the hammock."

"I know that now." Lou checked his watch. "Boys, I think it's time to go to bed. Or to your tipi. What do you think?"

"No!" Dean disagreed.

"Yes."

"No!"

"Before you start another civil war, why don't we brush teeth first?" Mark asked.

"No!" Now Gabriel didn't like the idea of the adults.

"Okay, you don't have to, but tomorrow I'll make a huge chocolate cake, covered in M&Ms and only the children, who'll go into their tents on time and brush their teeth before will get a slice."

"Oh, I brush my teeth right away and squeeze in a tipi." Sofia squeaked. "I know this cake, it's great. Teeth brushing time. Come on, Susan, we have to hurry. I'm sure your grandfather makes you a lovely cherry sauce for the cake."

"Of course."

"Yeah." Susan jumped up and followed her mother.

"Do you want chocolate cake too?" Jules asked Jorja and Eric.

"Yes."

"Then go, follow them, brush your teeth or you don't get any cake tomorrow. You can eat as much as you want."

With big eyes they stared at their mother for a second, like they couldn't believe this offer and then they followed Sofia and Sofia fast, before Jules could change her mind, Louise right behind them.

"Looks like the only ones, who won't get any chocolate cake are you two." Cori said to the boys.

"Too."

"Then you better go and brush your teeth and get into the tipi. Hurry before it's too late." Now the boys started running. When the adults were serious and they wouldn't get any chocolate, they had to do what they've been asked.

"You get them all with chocolate, amazing." Tanya chuckled. "And I'm not surprised Sofia was the first, who jumped up."

"Me neither. You say chocolate she does whatever you want." Sara smiled. "As a dentist you should make them brush their teeth. Don't you have scary stories for children about rotten teeth, that fall out, a lot of pain, caries and drills?"

"I don't tell them those things, they're supposed to come to me without fear. You and your girlfriend are scared enough for them. Susan is brave, so is Steve and Dean and Gabriel are also pretty good. Better than some action hero I know."

"That was supposed to be our secret."

"Like she keeps the days you come and see her as a secret." Marlene complained. "I tried so hard to find out when your next appointment is, I have no clue and Tanya refuses to tell me."

"You have him here, isn't it better to stay with him in his villa than see him in the surgery?"

"True. How long will you stay?"

"How long are we allowed to stay?"

"At least until the first of January. You can't leave us before we celebrate the new year."

"Honey, do you want a white New Years Eve?"

"Sure, it's better than a warm one in Los Angeles."

"I could book us a hotel room..."

"We have a hammock, impress me again, show me you're not a rich prick, who needs luxury all the time."

"You start to sound like Sara."

"I like her."

"I like you too, Cori." Sara smirked. "You know how to handle him, it's why you and Lou are still together."

"He's afraid to leave or cheat on me. The best way to make a man stay with you is scare him."

"Are you afraid of me?" Jules cocked her head and looked at Greg.

"Honey, you're the nicest person I've ever met, I could never be afraid of you. But I do know you can read my mind, so I know what to do and not."

"Thanks. What about you, Don. Are you afraid of Tanya?"

"She's a dentist, every sane person is afraid of them. At least when you're unarmed." Don said, his arm caressing

Tanya's back. "I double checked she didn't pack any drills."

"I'm on vacation, I don't need a drill here. If one of you gets toothache, they has to go to a dentist on duty. Mark, are you afraid of your wife?"

"No, I leave that to all the other people. I married her for a reason and it wasn't because I was scared of her. I love how strong she was and is."

"She can be very scary."

"Only when you don't know her."

"I know her and I'm scared of her." Lea said.

"Honey, you're not afraid of me, you respect me. There's a difference."

"Ah, okay."

"Before you ask, I'm not afraid of you." Sara kissed Sofia's cheek when the blonde returned. "And I'm not leaving you because I love you."

"Good." The blonde snuggled into the arms of her wife. There was no way she would leave her wife, no threads needed.

"One day, when we're rich, we'll own a place like this ourselves." Lauren kissed Lea and snuggled into the arms of her girlfriend. A villa in Lake Tahoe, with a wonderful view, a lot of rooms, a sauna, hot tub. A little paradise.

"How are we going to get rich?"

"Well, we live in Los Angeles, there are different ways to make a lot of money. Or we do it the old-fashioned way. Work hard."

"You'll be a doctor, you make some good money. While I'll be ... I don't know."

"My lovely housewife?"

"No way, I'm not staying at home, I want to work too."

"Even better, our villa will be expensive."

"Yeah." Lea smiled. A nice dream, a villa with Lauren. And when she could really become an architect, she could design the building, make it just the way they want it.

"I can hear in your voice there's something that upsets you about this thought. Care to tell me what it is?"

"Nothing nice." And Lea wondered how Lauren picked up these things. She said one word and her girlfriend knew there was something, that bothered her.

"It sounded like it."

"It's only ... our villa together. How likely is it that we'll be together in - let's say ten years - when we finished university, work and earn some money? Do you know anybody, who stayed with their first love together? Because I don't. And I'm a horrible girlfriend, ruin the nicest dreams with cruel reality."

"You're realistic. It's unlikely we'll be together in ten years and I don't know either somebody, who stayed with their first partner together. Which doesn't mean it's impossible and I like being a dreamer and hope, we'll be one of the few exceptions. If I didn't believe this, I would be with you."

Lea kissed Lauren softly. Her girlfriend was cute. "I hope the same. Us in our villa."

"You never know, maybe we'll be lucky."

"Maybe." Lauren paused for a few seconds. "I've to tell you something, you probably don't like, won't be happy about."

"What is it?" There was fear in Lea's voice. Something, she didn't like, won't be happy about? It sounded serious.

"When I was ready to be picked up this morning and sat on my backpack waiting for you, my mom asked if you and I were a couple."

Lea knew that that meant. Lauren never told her parents about their relationship, she promised not to mention it. But it was different when her mother asked her about it. To deny the relationship would be a lie and Lea knew, her girlfriend didn't lie to her mother. She had been honest to her about what happened in their old hometown and being in love with another girl wasn't wrong. Not to Lauren's mother.

"You told her?"

"Yes. Sorry, I did promise not to tell her, but she asked and I can't lie to her, I never lied to her. I told her we're a couple and that your parents don't like the idea you date girls. It's why we decided not to tell them or my parents, although we know they're cool with it. Mom asked who knows about us, I told her the truth about this too."

"Will she tell my parents?"

"No. She will tell dad, they don't keep secrets, but she won't tell your parents."

"Was she mad?"

"First a little bit disappointed that I or we didn't trust her, but she understood you want to stay in the closet and that I didn't tell her because I promised you. For parents, they're both cool. Most times."

"They are. They let you date whoever you want, let you drink alcohol and go away with people, they only know for a few months."

"Believe it or not, there are things they don't allow. I'm not allowed to go into clubs, drink alcohol in public, use illegal drugs, smoke and I'm supposed to go to university and finish it with a good degree."

"Sounds like sensible rules."

"Most times. How shocked are you?"

"A little bit."

"Mad?"

"No. But it will be weird to see them the next time. They'll know why we're together in your room, why the door is closed and what we're doing here."

"They let me go anyway, wished me a great time will let me go away with you again. Like Sara and Sofia let Steve stay with Jenny and wouldn't tell Marlene to stay away from him, not in his room."

"Do you think she'll sleep in his room?"

"You're his best friend, you should know."

"Not tonight. He was shocked to see her first, when we all said good night, he looked cool about her being here. I'm sure they need a few more talks."

"I'm not sure if I believe she deserves a second chance from what you told me about her, but I give her credits for trying and she seems to be serious about it. This time. After all, it's not our decision."

"No." Lea wasn't sure neither what she wanted. It was not her business, she had to worry about herself. And get used to the thought the parents of her girlfriend knew about them. How long would it take until her parents found out? And what would happen then?

"The twins are in bed; again." Sara came back into the room.

"I hope they'll sleep until tomorrow morning." Sofia put the book aside, she was reading in before.

"Me too." The brunette slipped under the blanket. "It was quiet in the house, apparently everybody is in bed. No video games through the whole night."

"Lauren and Leah are tired from the long drive and Steve ... Marlene went downstairs to sleep, I wonder if she stays there."

"As her mothers we should hope she stays with the kids, Lou and Cori."

"Why?"

"Because she broke the heart of our son and when he takes her into his bed right away, I'm not sure we did everything right with him."

"We did everything right, he's a great boy. Who has still a crush on Marlene and I think, he realized it today. The question is not if he gives her a second chance but when. Do you approve of this relationship?"

"It doesn't matter if we approve or not, it's his life."

"Sara, he loves us, it's especially important to him to know you agree with what he's doing."

"I know."

"So?" Sofia kissed the hair of her wife. "You agreed when Marlene asked if she could come up here."

"I did and I won't tell him to stay away from her. All I want is that he's happy and when Marlene makes him happy, it's fine with me. At the moment it looks like she's serious and really feels something for our son."

"She better does or we'll let her body disappear." The blonde grinned.

"Nice idea. No, we should let Steve decide for himself. He's a smart boy and knows what's right and wrong."

"Of course he does. It's why we adopted him."

"He's the best child we could have asked for. I'll never forget the impression on his face when we asked him to become our son. First disbelief and then happiness. The look of a boy, who was rejected for years and finally realizes, there are people, who want him, who love him. It was of the most beautiful gifts of life."

"True."

"I love him and I'm so glad he's happy. Even when an arrogant movie star makes some this possible."

"Whose girlfriend you like."

"Yes, she's cool."

"So is Lou. I don't think another movie star would sleep in a hammock in his own villa because other people stay in the rooms."

"No, not very likely. I hope they stay until next year, it should be fun and Sandy can spend some time with his godfather."

"More babysitter, very handy. I plan to kidnap you tomorrow and spend some time with you alone. Ever had sex in the snow?"

"No."

"Tomorrow night your answer will be different to this question."

"What if I don't want to have sex in the snow?"

"Honey, when I kiss you on the right spots, you'll melt like ice in the desert." To prove she was right, the blonde kissed softly the spot between Sara's shoulder blades and made her wife moan. Okay, Sofia was right, when she kissed her like this, Sara wasn't able to resist her. And she didn't want to.

Saturday, December 27th

It was not even six in the morning when Steve woke up because somebody knocked on his door. For a moment he thought it was a dream. He listened to the evenly breathing of his little brothers when he heard the knock again. Quietly he slipped out of bed and opened the door. To his surprise Marlene stood there, dressed in sweatpants and a sweater.

"Did something happen?"

"No, everything is fine, I'm sorry to wake you up ... I ... can we talk?"

He looked at his brothers. They were asleep, the living room was empty, but it was only a question of time before the first one of their group woke up and came to the living room. It was not the best place to talk, neither was the outside, as it snowed heavily. Privacy was one thing, the villa didn't offer at the moment.

"Let us get some milk for Sandy and Saloso, they'll wake up soon and will be hungry. When we have milk with us, they won't cry, drink and go back to sleep after we changed them." This was the only way to have a private conversation in the house without being interrupted by somebody, who wanted to look after the twins. As long as it was quiet in the room, nobody would come inside.

"Okay." They walked into the kitchen and got the formula and prepared it. Because the boys were still asleep Steve prepared it hotter than usual to have it warm, when they woke up. Without talking they worked hand in hand, also prepared two hot chocolates for themselves and were back in the room a few minutes later.

Instead of the light Steve used the little bedside lamp and covered it also with a shirt. Now the light was dim, should not bother the babies. When they talked with a quiet voice they should be fine.

"When I watch you preparing everything for your brothers it's obvious you've done that before."

"Of course, twins mean a lot of work, my moms can need a hand. To be honest, sometimes it feels like twins are more than double the work of one baby."

"They're cute, one looks like your mother, Sofia, the other like Don."

"Yeah, I think it's perfect. Susan looks like Sara, Saloso like Sofia and Sandy like Don."

"How does it make you feel not to share any DNA with one of your mothers?"

"DNA isn't what makes family. My moms don't share DNA and they're family, Greg and mom don't share any DNA and they're close like brother and sister. I never had the feeling they love me less than Susan, Sandy or Saloso."

"Because they don't. They love you and they're very proud of you. It's written all over their face when they look at you, talk about you. And they have every reason to be proud."

"Thanks." He took another sip of his hot chocolate. "What would you like to talk about? You didn't come here to talk about the babies. Especially not at this time of the morning."

"No." Marlene paused for a second. "Steve, when you tell me you don't want me here, say it now, there's a bus to Frisco, I can leave now and when the others wake up, I'm long gone. No explanation needed."

"Tanya invited you, when you leave without telling them, they'll be sad and disappointed."

"I ask what you want."

"Marlene, I can tell you what I don't want. I don't want to jump into something, I might regret later. You hurt me, a lot, and I'm not sure I can trust you any time soon. Tanya told me you have changed a few things in your life, which is good, but I'm not sure it's enough. It's not that easy."

"Do you want me to leave?"

Steve thought about the offer. When Marlene was gone, things would be easier for him. Easier didn't always mean better. "No. I think we are mature enough to see, what happens. There are some feelings left for you, but..."

"We should take some time and I can understand when you don't trust me right away. I don't deserve your trust. Yet. When you tell me it's not impossible I might get a second chance, I know is something is there, I can fight and work for."

"It's not like I can control or guide my feelings, Marlene. There is a chance, I don't hate you."

"Good." She smiled. "I can work with that. But that doesn't mean I let you win when we play Street Fighter. When you fight like a wimp, I punch the crap out of you!"

"You're so arrogant, you'll eat dirt later."

"In your dreams."

"You got me out of my dreams and from what I can tell, Saloso has left his dreamland too. Get a bottle ready, he does not only look like my mom, he's also hungry all the time. According to my other mother, he inherited this from mom."

Marlene laughed quietly. "Your mothers are great."

"They're the best. The very best."

Two hours later everybody was awake and most of them were in the living room.

"I love sleeping in." Sara pulled Sofia in her arms and kissed her. "Our oldest son took care of the twins, our daughter was too busy playing to wake us up, it's beginning to feel like a real vacation."

"All we need is somebody to entertain our kids for the rest of the day and we go back to bed after breakfast. You could be my second breakfast."

"I don't don't to be a number two, sorry."

"You're my number one."

"Sorry, too late, you called me your second breakfast, you lost all chances I might be your breakfast, no matter which one."

"My hard-hearted wife. I love you."

"I love you too. And you." Sara picked Susan up. "How are you?"

"Playing!"

"Yes, you're playing, is it nice to have all your friends here?"

"Yeah. Snow."

"A lot of snow is outside. How about we have breakfast and then we all go out into the snow? We can take a sleigh and race down the hill."

"Doo and Plan too."

"They can run after us."

"Breakfast is ready in a minute." Don called. He and Tanya, were on breakfast duty today, Lauren and Leah on shopping duty, while Marie, Steve, Marc and Marlene had

to look after the kids. That left Sara, Sofia with a morning off, Greg and Jules with the clean-up after the breakfast. Lou and Cori helped with the children, as they added two children to the group. The plan Marie made worked out most times; except that the couple, who had a morning off, usually helped anyway. You didn't watch your friends work and waited for them to serve breakfast.

After breakfast they all dressed up in thick clothes, took the ski and sleighs and went to a meadow not far away from the villa, where they could have their own little races. It made no sense to go to the skiing areas, the kids were too small for a whole day there, there were too many people and it was too dangerous. Here there were only a few more, mostly local, kids, when one their kids felt cold, they could just go home.

"So, Santa was a good guy to you?" Lou got his arm around Steve.

"I can't complain, what about you? Happy with what you got?"

"Yes. Did Santa also bring you the sexy brunette?"

"I assume you're not talking about Tanya? Because she's Don's present."

Lou laughed. "You know who I mean."

"Lea and Lauren brought her, I had no idea Marlene was in contact with them, planned to come here."

"Do you mind?"

"No. She asked me twice if I prefer when she leaves, it's okay she's here."

"Your ex?"

"Ex crush."

"Not anymore?"

"No."

"Any chances she'll be more soon?"

"I'm not sure. She hurt me. I told her to give it some time, I want to be sure she changed and it's not like ... she needs somebody because she's bored."

"Yeah, they do that sometimes." Lou agreed.

"How often have you found out women only used you?"

"Too often. It happens when you're famous. To be fair, I also used some women because I could. The temptation is there, it's easy to get all the girls when you're rich and

famous, when your movie is number one. Some quick fun, nothing for a longer time."

"Cori is for a longer time."

"Yes she is. Sexy, smart, good with my kids - and I'm way too scared to mess it up because she'd kick my ass badly."

"You're lucky when she kicks only your ass."

"You got that right." Lou laughed again. "And Lea found herself a girlfriend. Interesting."

"It's more Lauren found her. She's good for Lea, very good for her self-esteem. And unlike other girls, she is interested in a real relationship. If she behaves, we take her with us to our apartment on campus."

"She's older?"

"A year. So she can check out the place for us, we follow the future doctor."

"What kind of doctor?"

"Pediatrician. She's pretty good with kids and loves them."

"In this case she's perfect here, we have a lot of kids here. Your brothers are huge compared to the last time I saw them."

"No wonder, they're hungry all the time."

"Their food is nicely packed, who could blame them?"

"Hey, it's my mother you're talking about."

"Both of your mothers are very good looking. And didn't you call Sofia a porn Barbie?"

"Don't remind me..." Steve closed his eyes. That comment was in a few years they'd still remind him of it. A stupid comment, he knew it, but back then he had been stupid. An angry stupid child.

"You're not into blondes, Sara should be more your type."

"If mom didn't dye her hair she wouldn't be a blonde. They're both brunettes."

"Have you seen Sofia as a brunette."

"I saw some old pictures, yes."

"And?"

"I'm a lucky boy, I've got two sexy mothers. No matter what they do with their hair." He grinned. "Best of all: their hearts are huge and they love me. What else can a boy ask for?"

"A sports car?"

"Not important, a family is more important."

"Is that why you join them? Other boys your age would rather stay at home."

"They had a family all their life, I didn't. I love family, I love being with people, who love me, who are always there for me. It's fun, my best friend is here, we live in a villa, why stay at home? This is better. Hey, even a movie star joined us!"

"The coolest one."

"Absolutely."

"Care to join me next year? I'll have some filming scenes in L.A. in February, you can watch if you like."

"Sure, I like hanging out with cool people."

"Bring your girlfriend."

"Lea? Of course." There weren't many place he'd go without his best friend. And no matter if he was in a relationship or not, Lea was his number one. Love could end, true friendship never ended.

They went back for lunch and put the little ones into bed. Sandy and Saloso were exhausted from the cold, fresh air, the other four had been busy with their sleighs and also dropped down like they had been tranquilized.

"How about you take your older sister and you join us for a walk?" Marie stood in front of Steve.

"Vegas style?"

"Nope, shopping style. We need some more groceries for dinner. Unless you don't want your grandfather to cook."

"For a dinner cooked by my grandfather I'd walk to a shop in Miami."

"Good, we take your blonde mother with us. A little family walk."

"Why not Sara, Susan and the twins?"

"Because then it would be a big family walk."

"Okay." Not an answer he understood, or he didn't understand the intentions, but he knew better than to question his own grandmother. Or, to question the request of the Captain. Unless of course, he had a coke can in his hands.

He got up and walked to Lea's and Lauren's room. Before he entered, he knocked on the door and waited until he was called in. Their first vacation together, it wouldn't be a good idea to walk into the room of the happy couple.

Unless he wanted a fair chance to see two girls in bed; which he didn't. Not when one of the girls was like his own sister.

"Come in."

"Hey Romea and Julia, how are you"?

"Happy." Lea kissed Lauren. They stood at the window and enjoyed the view on the forest covered in snow. "This is a my best Christmas present."

"Do me a favor, wait until you unpack her - again -, the Captain asked if we would join her, Marc and mom for a walk."

"A walk? Vegas style?"

"Funny." Steve laughed. "That was my first question too. A shopping walk."

"Well, when the Captain requests something, we don't argue. Sorry Honey, I'm off shopping and she didn't invite you, so you can't come."

"That's okay, I try to organize some sparkling wine for tonight, when we have our own private party. Lauren style."

"I'm glad my room is on a different level."

"Like you wouldn't like to peep."

"Nope Lauren, I'm not into blondes and she's kind of my sister, so if the two of you were two strange brunettesa sexy thought."

"You've got such a brunette fetish."

"Guilty."

"Give me a minute and I'm with you." Lea hugged him and kissed his cheek.

"You get two from me, I can't speak for the Captain." He blinked and left the room.

"Do you think the Captain takes you away because of Marlene? She and Steve go along, he doesn't mind her here, does she?"

"Maybe it's Marlene, maybe something else. You never know." Lea kissed her girlfriend. She'd know what this was all about after the walk. "You can warm yourself up on the Playstation, don't get too excited because of Lou Lee, you love me, not him."

"You're the one, who wanted to join him on the red carpet. I'd rather join his girlfriend. I love her humor and her body. Very nice muscles. A joy for every orthopedic."

"Hands off her too. Remember, she doesn't want to change teams."

"Which is fine, I've got a sexy girlfriend, one is enough. I'm looking forward to unpack my presents I got from you."

"You unpacked it last night."

"Yeah, it's an interesting presents, it wraps itself in clothes every day, which means, I can unpack it every night. One of my favorite things to do."

"It's the same with my present." Lea buried her face into Lauren's hair. It was so good to be with her girlfriend and when her parent's had an idea about them, they'd lock her away in her room until she was twenty-one or send her to a convent. Or one of these camps, that told parents they could un-gay their children.

"All right, who is up for a cuddle and read round?" Jules held up a book. "Any takers?"

"Me! Oh me! Pick me! Pick me!" Sara jumped up and down.

"Dory joins me, anybody else? Who wants me to read out a story?"

"Me." Susan lifted her arm.

"Me too." Louise agreed.

"Me three." Eric grinned.

"Me four." Jorja added. Since they had heard Steve, Lea and Lauren used these answers, they loved to repeat them whenever they had a chance.

"Then let's go upstairs, we cuddle up in bed and I read a story to all of you."

"Yeah, cuddle time." Sara grinned and took Susan in her arms.

Jules and Greg had pushed their two queen beds together, so that it was one very big bed. The children got their favorite stuffed animals and dolls and climbed onto the bed, where Sara and Jules waited for them.

"Okay, get yourself ready for a great and exciting story."

"Ready." Sara snuggled onto Jules's shoulder. "I can hide in your arms when I'm scared. Unless Eric is my hero and makes sure I have nothing to fear."

"Always hero." The little boy said and climbed onto Sara to get his arms around her.

"I know, you're my hero." She kissed his hair. "Get started Jules, we want to hear that story." Actually, Sara didn't care much about the story, she was here for the chance to listen to Jules's voice, lay back and relax. Having four children here meant, there were only the twins to look after and they were asleep the last time Sara checked on them. The perfect chance for the other adults to do whatever they pleased.

After the first sentences Sara realized how her mind drifted away, she didn't follow the story nor the words anymore, all she heard was the quiet and soothing voice of her friend. It wasn't important what she said, it matter how she said it and for Sara, Jules had a voice, she could listen to for hours. One day she'd ask her friend to record a book she read out loud for her.

A kiss on her forehead waked her up.

"Sleepy Beauty, wake up."

"Why?"

"Because our kids are asleep. Although you fell asleep first."

"I love your voice. It was what kept me in therapy."

"Not, you stayed because you knew it was important to you."

"No I stayed because I knew you can save my life. Without you I'd be somewhere else, unhappy and without a family."

"Honey, without you I wouldn't have a family neither. You introduced me to my husband."

"A sexy woman like you has enough suitors."

"Do you believe one of them is as good as Greg is?"

"No. Never"

"See."

"You know." Sara snuggled deeper in the arms of her friend. "This was the best Christmas in my life. I know your parents want you at their place at Christmas, a thing I understand, it's all about family. And if they don't have you over, it's Greg's parents, who invite you, the other side of the family. But having you and the kids here makes our family complete."

"Next year we'll be in San Diego. Enjoy the time with us."

"I do. Maybe we can have another trip like this in a few years, at a warm beach. When our kids are old enough to enjoy the beach. Like in four years."

"We can talk about it when it's time. Next year we see Greg's parents, you and your family are invited, so we'll have another Christmas together. And I mean the big family, not just the six of you."

"In the name of my family I take the offer." They should rent a big house for this event. With six bedrooms they didn't have enough space, ten would be better. Or they needed another Native American camp again.

"What when Sofia wants to go to her brother?"

"When my wife can decide between you and her brother, she chooses you because you're more fun. And so much cuter."

"You always have to flirt with me, don't you?"

"Yes." Sara kissed Jules's cheek and took a look around. Four children lay on the bed, with stuffed animals in their arms, all asleep. Eric had his arm around Susan, which made Sara's heart jump a little bit. Her secret wish for the future: Eric and Susan as a couple. They'd have amazing children.

"Why am I here and not in front of the fire? My wife in my arms, a glass of wine, the fire warms my feet and my toes. If I still have them, I don't feel them anymore." Instead she felt the weight of the backpack full with food and drinks on her back. Why did her parents come up with the idea of walking into the town for shopping? They had cars, they could drive. Okay, the dogs enjoyed the walk, but they also enjoyed playing in the snow around the villa.

"It's a wonder a wimp like you made it through the academy." Marie reprinted her daughter.

"I'm a sunny and warm weather person. That's why I was born in Las Vegas and live in Los Angeles now. Sunshine and warm weather."

"You organized the villa up here, stop crying like a baby."

"I did it for my babies." She wanted Susan to have the chance to play in snow, ride a sleigh, build a snowman. And a unicorn. And a castle. And whatever else they built up around the villa.

"Look on the bright side, Sofia, your father will cook a wonderful curry tonight. Or two, one vegetarian and one with chicken. Plus the dessert. It's worth getting cold feet and toes for."

"Plus you can have a whiskey when we're back, it will heat you up." Lea suggested.

"Talking about alcohol. Could it be a bottle of sparkling wine lost its way and stranded in your room?" Marie asked Lea.

"That's possible."

"Luckily it was a small one, otherwise I had to tell you, there is no sparkling wine for your girlfriend and you left. Your parents wouldn't like the idea of you getting drunk."

"They don't like so many things."

"Yes, but that's one of the few things they're right about. Understood?"

"Yes Captain, Sir. Ma'am. Captain."

"Hah, the shopping walk turns into a Vegas style walk." Steve chuckled.

"Lauren told Marlene, if she hurts you, we'll have a Tahoe style walk with her."

"What is a Tahoe style walk?" Marc asked.

"Well, we blindfold her, take her for a walk in the woods, steal her clothes and leave her behind; naked and without a clue where she is."

"I pretend I didn't hear that. A planned crime." Sofia covered her ears. "My son's best friend I a criminal."

"So is your son, he assaulted an officer." Marc grinned.

"Sorry, a captain." He couldn't hear the story of the flying Coke can often enough. Such a delight to have his wife defended by a boy with a coke can.

"Do you want me to file for divorce, darling?" Marie asked sharply.

"No, and you won't divorce me, you can't live without me anymore."

"Don't be too sure, Marc."

"Remember, you can scare suspects, you can't scare me. Although it's cute when you try it. I always liked it." And it never worked out.

"Bite me."

Steve grinned widely. His grandparents sounded like his mothers. So cute. He hoped when he was married one

day, his wife and he would have the same way of teasing each other.

"Got some change?" A figure on the ground stuck its hand out.

"First of all you forgot to say please, second, what do you need money for?" Marie asked firmly. Her reply got the attention of the person on the ground.

"Oh fuck, a cop." The person was about to jump up when Sofia stepped into its way.

"You run and the dogs chase you."

"Another one? Fuck."

"Your language is not very impressive. Stay." Marie ordered. She was back in captain mode. Sometimes her retirement was forgotten. "You haven't answered my question. I hate it when my questions don't get answered. So? What do you need the money for?"

"I never said I need money."

"Now you're insulting our ears. Why is that? Is panhandling prohibited in Lake Tahoe?"

"According to the internet, yes." Steve said, his smart phone in his hands. "I'm not sure I support this rule, Captain. It seems to be cruel and unfair to me."

"It's law, unless it's changed, you have to obey. And you get one more change to answer my question. What do you need money for?"

"Food and a bus ticket."

"Where are you heading to?"

"South, it's too bloody cold up here."

"Why did you come here? It's like it snowed overnight and was a surprise."

"The bus driver kicked me out when he realized I rode on his bus without a ticket."

"What other laws did you break?"

"Are you kidding me?"

"The Captain is always serious when she's talking about law. You better answer her question before she calls a patrol car to pick you up." Marc said.

"He snitched a couple of bags, stole from supermarkets and broke into warehouses to find a place to sleep, am I right?" Sofia asked.

"What kind of cops are you?"

"The best. Ever robbed somebody?"

"You think I'd answer that? Incriminate myself. Are you arresting me? If not, I want to go."

"I thought you were hungry. Where will you stay tonight? It's quite fresh."

"Not your business."

"Ah, so much like you, my son." Sofia kissed Steve's cheek. "What's your name?"

"For ten bucks you can choose one."

"Gosh, in L.A. you get more than to choose a name for ten bucks."

"Tell me, nameless boy, are you a reliable boy?" Marie asked.

"What?"

"When you give somebody your word, do you keep it? Or do you forget and break the first chance you have?"

"I live on the streets."

"Not for long." Steve said. "Your clothes are too clean for that."

"And you're the smart, rich expert? Learnt about it in school?"

"Nope, I learnt about it on the street, lived there myself a few times. Most times it was better than in the children's home. Although that dump was warmer in winter. My bet is, you're out of a house since Christmas."

"I'm eighteen, I can be wherever I please."

"That's true. You haven't answered the Captain's question. I live on the streets isn't a proper answer. Try better, she wants a yes or a no."

"Why do you care?"

"Pretty simple: you don't lie and you get food." Marc said.

"Now, are you hungry? Want some food? Yes or no?"

"Yes."

"And the answer to her question?"

"I'm not promising anything before I know what I'm supposed to promise."

"We provide you with a nice dinner, will you respect the house rules? Not steal anything or do any other illegal activity?"

"Why would I want to join you for dinner? A cop."

"Actually, you'd join a former Captain, a current detective, two CSIs, a former CSI, a therapist, a dentist and a former army soldier. You screw up, you're in

trouble. You behave the way you're supposed to, you won't be hungry and cold tonight. Your choice. You can also stay here, ask for money and hope, no cop on duty gets you." Marc looked at his watch. "We have to leave, otherwise dinner will be delayed. Nameless boy? What's your choice?"

"You're not a bunch of perverts, are you?"

Sofia laughed. "I don't think so, otherwise we'd be arrested and in therapy."

"Man, you get a warm dinner and believe me, grandfather knows how to prepare a perfect dinner. What is there to think about?"

"Okay. Dinner it is."

"Good decision. There's only one more thing." Sofia said.

"What's that?"

"You better get rid off that gun on your left ankle. Beside the fact I'm sure you don't own a license for it and carrying a concealed weapon without one does get you into big trouble, there are children in the house and we don't like it when guns are around them."

"It's not like I have a house, where I can leave it and when you sleep on the streets you want to defend yourself."

"You can leave it in my car. No guns around the kids."

"I heard about the mother, who was shot by her two year old son in a supermarket."

"Guns don't belong into the hands of civilians and they most certainly don't belong close to a child."

"Okay, we leave it in your car, but I want it back."

"You get it back." Sofia smiled. She didn't care if the boy, who still hadn't told them his name, carried a gun when he slept on the streets, but she didn't want anybody with a gun close to her children. Not even her own mother or herself.

"We brought an extra guest." Marie announced when they came back to the villa.

"Nana!" Susan ran into the arms of her grandmother.

"Hello Darling, did you play the whole time?"

"No, now. Unicorn."

"You played in the snow and built a unicorn? Amazing, you're a very talented girl. Say hello to our guest. He hasn't told us his name, maybe he tells it to you."

"Name?" Susan looked at the boy.

"I'm Vin, who are you?"

"Uzy."

"Her name is Susan, or short Suzy."

"That's a really nice name."

"Ta."

"You can have a seat, Steve can introduce you to everybody."

"Yes Captain."

"I thought you went food shopping and not people fishing." Sara smiled and helped Sofia with the backpack.

"My mother decided to take him with us. He asked for some change."

"Instead of change he gets a dinner? That's a great deal."

"We had Christmas two days ago, it's cold, you don't let people sit in the cold, hungry, with no place to go. This town doesn't look like they have a shelter and as long as he behaves he deserves a dinner." Marie said.

"Remember, they met in a soup kitchen around Christmas, my mother is a little sentimental today." Sofia whispered into Sara's ear.

"Right."

"Is it okay for you? To have a stranger around the kids?"

"Your mom checked him, I'm sure she threatened him, we are here, it should be okay. Plus she is right, it's cold and nobody should sit outside in the cold and feel hungry."

"True."

"Could the two of you stop talking like I don't hear every word you say?"

"Sorry mom."

"Yes, sorry mom." Sara hugged Marie and kissed her cheek. "I always knew you have a big, big heart."

"You were scared shitless the first time you and Sofia came over to Vegas."

"After that meeting I was fine."

"You were great, don't worry Honey." Sofia kissed her wife. "Where are the twins?"

"Two minutes ago they were in their buggy and played with the mobile. Or tried to touch it. You know you can entertain them with it."

"Yes, it amazes them. I think it's time for some milk, do you want to come with us?"

"See my wife topless? Always."

"The teenagers here are better behaved than you are."

"So? They're not married. Besides, all the holidays, the days off, the snow, it makes me want to be closer to Sofia even more. Don't worry, we feed the twins first before we lose ourselves in passion for a few minutes."

"These are not things you tell your mother."

"You know it anyway and we have the agreement that we don't lie to each other." Sofia got a bottle of milk out of the fridge and put it into the microwave.

"Hey, can I give you a hand here?" Their guest asked.

"Can you cook?" Mark asked.

"Depends on what you want to cook."

"Choose something that makes everybody happy. Bear in my we do have vegetarians here, we don't want to make two completely different dishes."

"Risotto. Spinach risotto. It's a perfect base, we can add salmon or prawns or chicken."

"Sounds like an interesting idea. We do need special rice for risotto, let me have a look if we have it."

"Arborio is the kind of rice we're after."

Mark smiled. "You know what's good."

"If you want to make an Italian dish you have to use the ingredients they use. Otherwise it doesn't taste the way it's supposed to be."

"True."

"My husband has a new kitchen hand, that means I've got the evening off."

"So do we." Sara pulled Sofia out of the kitchen. She had better things in mind than helping in the kitchen. There were better places for her hands to be.

"We're running out of chairs." Greg realized when he prepared the big table. It had chairs for twelve people, they were fourteen adults plus eight children. Plus the new guest.

"We can use the couch too. It's not the same height but it will work. Be creative, like you were years ago with your hair and clothes." Jules smirked and kissed her husband.

"By the way, Sara showed me a few more photos of you when you started in Vegas."

"My sister needs to think about her actions because I do have photos too."

"I'd like to see them too."

"Careful Greggo, there are a lot of stories of you, that haven't been told." Sara warned him. "We could use the billiard table, it's higher than the couch table."

"Too high for the couch." Greg disagreed. "We take the couch table. My wife is smart, her advices are the best."

"I wouldn't disagree to that." Sara grinned. "You know, I spent the afternoon in her arms, it feels so good to be there, have her kiss me awake."

"Sorry Honey, not jealous." Greg laughed.

"Why not?"

"Because, not matter how much I love you and I'm absolutely not homophobic, but even without Greg in my life, I'd never have an affair with a woman." Jules blinked at her husband.

"You have no idea what you're missing out."

"That's okay. Do we have enough plates and cutlery?"

"Yes."

"Perfect."

"If this was a crossword puzzle the answer to perfect would be: Sofia." Sara kissed her wife. She was perfect to her.

"You're so sweet. I love you."

"I love you more."

"And I love you both." Greg pulled both in his arms.

"Come on, team Vegas, we have to hurry otherwise dinner is ready and the table isn't."

"I bet our sons will start crying just the second we sit down to have dinner."

"Then they have to cry for a few minutes. We fed them three hours ago, they can't be starving and at one point they have to learn, that sometimes you don't get everything you want immediately."

"They'll think we don't love them anymore, that we left them." Sofia whined.

"Don't be ridiculous, we didn't run and check on Susan every time she cried."

"You should have, now she loves her daddy more." Don came with Susan on his shoulders up the stairs from the basement. He held his daughter tight while she held a

long toy block onto his forehead and called the whole time: "Uniorn!"

"Wasn't the last unicorn blonde?" Sara smirked and took a photo of the two of them.

"A sexy blonde when she was a human. She stole the heart of the prince, he was willing to die for her."

"Who wouldn't die for a sexy blonde? I'd die for my sexy blonde."

"I'd die for your sexy blonde too. She's the mother of my three children, they need her. Oh, by the way, my parents invited Tanya, the kids and me over for a week around Easter. Is that cool with you?"

"You know we'll whine the whole time, but as long as the pediatrician says there are no reasons why they shouldn't fly, you can take them away from us, rip our hearts out and let your parents have fun with their grandchildren."

"Drama Queen Reloaded."

"What am I supposed to say?" Steve joined the conversation, a basket full of beverages in his hands. "I get left behind because I'm not worth taking to New York."

"Look on the bright side, Honey." Sofia pinched his cheek softly. "You'll have a week without the little ones around. A lot of quiet nights without crying and no babies around your feet."

"And the possibility to watch my favorite action movies the whole day, on the huge screen in the living room. Nobody under sixteen will be in the house, there's no reason to wait until bedtime. A whole week of action movies, all computer games and a lot of chips. I have to tell Lea, this will be a great week for us; better than New York can ever be."

"Video games and fast food, all you need to make my son happy. I'm proud of you." Sofia said.

"Dinner is ready." Vin called.

"Our timing is the best." Lou and Cori walked into the house.

"Wow." Vin stared at Lou. "You're Lou Lee."

"I am. Who are you?"

"Vin."

"I had no idea we're one more tonight."

"We picked him up on the streets." Sofia explained.

"Oh, interesting story for dinner. Can I give you a hand with something?"

"No, we're fine. You came after all the work was done."

"That's what you do when you're the star."

"Don't let the captain hear this or you're in trouble."

"Right." He hung his parka on the hook. Time for dinner with friends.

Sunday, December 28th

Sofia got up early to get the twins out of Steve's room to give her oldest son the chance to sleep a little bit longer. When she picked the babies up, she took a second to watch her sixteen year old son sleeping. He had rolled himself into a ball, had the Minion in his arm, Lea got him for Christmas. And no sign of Marlene. Sofia always had an eye on her oldest son and the girl, who once broke his heart. She wondered if he would give her a chance or if the pain still was too big. Luckily she didn't have to make that decision.

With her twins on her arms she left the room and went downstairs. Evidence of the boys growing was that it was harder to carry of them at the same time every day. Soon they'd be too big for that. Not a nice thought, she loved to have them both in her arms and if she could fit them in, she'd get Steve and Susan in there too. All her kids in her arms at the same time, the dream of a mother.

"What a lovely photo."

Surprised Sofia looked up. Lou put the camera down and got his attention back to his two sons, who lay in front of the log fire, that looked like it had been started a few minutes ago.

"You're up early."

"The boys got hungry and I didn't want everybody to wake up, so I took them with me. I suspect you're having the same reasons."

"Yes. Can you look after them while I'm preparing the milk?"

"Sure."

"Thanks." She kissed Sandy and Saloso on their heads and got the milk out of the fridge.

"Just in time, Saloso is waking up."

"Oh yes, the hungry boy. According to his other mother he's this hungry because he has too much of my DNA."

"Certainly he has your eyes."

"Don's eyes are blue too."

"Your eyes are nicer, he has your eyes."

"And my appetite."

"Nothing wrong about that, they need to grow. Now Gabriel, are you hungry too? After Dean had his breakfast already."

"What about their mother? Will she see them too?"

"Yes, next year. I have no reason to keep her away from them, she gave birth to them. If I wanted a surrogate mother, who is out of the life of my babies after the pregnancy I had taken somebody I don't know. I'm sure some female influence can't be bad for the boys."

"Cori?"

"She is bad influence, she disagrees with me and argues all the time. How are my sons supposed to learn men are the kings of the house?"

"They have to learn life isn't a fairytale."

"Funny. Why is Saloso getting a bottle and not your milk?"

"Because you'd enjoy that too much."

"There's nothing sexy about a woman breastfeeding a baby, it's natural, it's what breasts are made for; even when we men like to forget that all the time. Breasts and toy trains are very much alike: both are made for children, but men love to play with them."

"Sadly you're right. But let me tell you, women like to play with them too."

"Now that's sexy."

"Men are all the same."

"That's why we're easy to predict."

"And not a challenge. For a woman, who likes challenges, most men are boring."

"What kind of challenges do you like most?"

"My wife, she's a challenge I love."

Lou laughed. "Yes, she can be a challenge but she loves you more than she loves her own life. You're her everything, it's obvious you're meant to be together."

"I won't let her go anywhere without me."

"Can you go somewhere without her?"

"I don't want to go somewhere without her."

"You go to work alone."

"And I come back in the evening, after way too many hours without her in my arms."

"What do I have to do to get you a few more hours out of her arms and spend time with me?"

"Why would I do that?"

"Because I make you an offer you can't refuse." Lou tried his best Al Pacino voice, which made Sofia laugh.

"Sure."

"Seriously, I'd like to offer you a job, a part time job."

"Lou, I have a job and I'm happy with it. If you have the idea I could be a kind of security for you, forget it, I won't do anything, that gets me away from Sara and the kids, no matter how much money you offer." The money and the idea of traveling were tempting for a second, then they became unimportant compared to the thought how much she'd miss her family.

"I'm not talking about a job offer, that will take you away from your family, it's a job you can do in Los Angeles. Mostly at your or my place, sometimes it requires your appearance in other parts of Los Angeles."

"Okay, tell me what you have in mind." She placed Saloso next to Dean in front of the fire. Her son wanted to protest but when she stroke softly over his cheek and belly, he felt his mother was still there and settled down. She kissed him and turned to see if Sandy was still asleep.

"I'm about to star in a movie trilogy, it's about a CSI, who used to be a cop. He works in Florida when he catches a case, that makes him work with the FBI. The movie is supposed to take my character and my FBI partner from Miami to Chicago in the first part. Part two is from Chicago to Las Vegas and the final starts in Las Vegas and ends in Los Angeles."

"You cover the entire Route 66."

"Yes. I can't tell you much about the movie, only that my character has this case and then follows the suspect with this FBI agent. He is not only professional involved in the case and in part it's getting very personal when somebody from his family is a victim."

"What do you need me for?"

"You were a cop and are a CSI now, just like my character. I would like to employ you as my personal consultant, have you shown me, how to do everything correct. A CSI lab isn't a playground, it's a place of science and I've never been good at science or anything like that. When they write something I have to say these words out loud, not knowing if it's right what I'm saying."

You know about these things, you can tell me if it's realistic and how to look like I've got a clue what my character is doing. You can also give me some advice for the flashback scenes of my time when I was a cop."

"I'm not a cop anymore. ask Don."

"You have been a cop long enough and if I have to settle for second best I'd ask your mother. She used to be a captain."

"And she hates to be second best."

"It's our little secret. What do you say? Can I get you to become my teacher?"

A part of her wanted to tell him straight away it was a bad idea, she had a job, that kept her busy, sometimes more than busy and she didn't want to be kept away from her family longer than she had to. On the other side a second job, a small one, meant extra money and they were still in debt with the house renovating. Sofia was still in debt, it was her house, Sara paid rent. Which was ridiculous but nothing her wife wanted to argue about.

"About how many hours are we talking? And when the movie is shot in Miami, how can I help you when I'm in Los Angeles."

"Like in most Hollywood productions all scenes inside buildings are shot in Los Angeles, most likely also some of the scenes outside. They used Marina del Rey for CSI Miami, we can do the same. I'd like you to read the script, tell me if there are mistakes, take a look at the set if it's correct."

"For how many hours do you need me?"

"Hard to say, it depends on how much I need your expertise. Maybe a couple of hours on your day off, an hour or two in the evening when you read the script."

"And how much do you want to pay me?"

"A hundred dollar per hour?"

"Ha, a personal fitness coach gets more per hour when she or he works for a star. They pay like five hundred dollar."

"More like three hundred per hour."

"We can settle on three hundred, it's in the middle of one and five hundred."

"Deal. Do you like cash?"

"Like in: without tax? We don't want to do something illegal, do we? Otherwise my mother might call one of

her active friends and we're both in trouble. You can write some of the money off when you do your tax return."

"Which means, you don't get the whole money because Uncle Sam takes his share."

"I know, but I'm a law enforcement member, I can't just take cash. Even when it's tempting and my accountant would love all the extra money. He'd also ask where I got it from and it's highly unlikely I find so much money on the streets."

"Depends on which street you're on. On some streets you find this amount of pocket money."

"To you three hundred dollar are a pocket money, to me it's a lot of money. Nevertheless Uncle Sam needs to know about it."

"Okay we tell him. And we're having a deal?"

She should talk with Sara about it, shouldn't she? Then, what could her wife possible not like about this? "We do."

"Do you need to clear it with Sara first?"

"No, I'm sure she doesn't mind me earning some extra cash this way. You could have asked her too, she used to be a great CSI."

"The problem is, she hasn't been a CSI for a while and doesn't know all the new machines."

"Actually she does, she reads the same science magazines she used to read."

"I like blonde better than brunette. Oh, you can bring the boys if you want, my sons are around all the time too. Their babysitter looks after them and I can see them in the breaks."

"My parents will tell me something different when I say I take the boys with me and have a stranger - which means not them - look after them while I'm working."

"Right, they're full time grandparents and don't like it when somebody takes their grandchildren away. But you don't have to fight to take them home every evening?"

"No, after ten hours they're fine with me taking them away." Sofia grinned. At one point her parents needed a break too. Whether they liked it or not.

An hour later Sara was awake and joined them on the sofa. Susan, Louise, Eric and Jorja had joined them half an hour before, still too excited about all their new toys to

sleep in. They weren't hungry, not interested in having some milk, all they wanted was to play with their toys. Cori and Marlene, who came upstairs with them, played with them in front of the fire, while Sandy occupied himself with a mobile.

"Good morning." Sara kissed her wife. "Why did you leave the bed?"

"Because I wanted Steve to sleep in."

"You could have wake me up."

"No, you looked so cute while you were sleeping. We're on vacation, we should sleep when we have the chance and I took the chance to watch you for a few moments."

"You didn't take photos, did you?"

"Not this time."

"Good. Were the twins nice?"

"Yes, Saloso was hungry - as usual. Sandy slept a little bit longer. Oh, Lou offered me a job."

Sara raised her eyebrows. Something inside her set up a red flag when Lou Lee offered a job to her wife. No matter how generous he was, no matter that he didn't give Sara a reason to be jealous, it just happened. "He does know you have a job, doesn't he?"

"Yes, he offered me another one, one I can do after my CSI job."

"And why would you take on another job? I had no idea our financial situation is this bad."

"It isn't. But his offer is good, he pays me three hundred dollar per hour."

Sara narrowed her eyes. Okay, she wanted details and then she had to get a knife to make a point to somebody, who had too much money and was too interested in her wife. "What kind of work does he have in mind?"

"Oh, I love you." Sofia pulled Sara in her arms and kissed her. "Nothing I have to take off my clothes or anything else for, or that gets me naked. He wants my expertise as a CSI for his new movie project. I'm supposed to read the script for him, tell him what is bullshit and teach him all he need to know about the lab. He plays a CSI, who was a former cop, and wants to know what he's talking about in the movie and if he says the right thing or if the writers messed it up."

Okay, that sounded better than what she had on her mind when Sofia named the hourly rate the movie star was willing to pay. Consulting, fully dressed, was fine. "When will you do your other job?"

"Being a CSI is my main job, I'll do this new one after work or on my days off. Although I won't want to work longer than you do so we have some time together. And the script reading is something I can do at home, while I'm sitting on the couch in your arms."

"That sounds much better. You in my arms and away from him."

"You are okay with me doing this, aren't you?" Maybe she should have talked about it with Sara first before she accepted.

"I'm sure your account likes the extra cash and as long as you don't travel all over the country or the world with him I'm fine."

"The first thing I told him was, I won't do anything that gets me away from you. I have to be in your arms at night."

"Good."

"Family first." Sofia kissed her wife again. "We can spoil the kids and ourselves with the extra money, it won't be all for my accountant. He gets one hundred fifty dollar from the three hundred, Uncle Sam wants his share too, the rest is for us."

"I bet when the Hollywood producers see you, they want to hire you as their new female star. You have a Hollywood Oscar winning smile, a absolute sexy swagger and the camera will love your deep blue eyes. I'd book you for every leading female part in my movies if I were a Hollywood producer."

"You says so because you're my wife. They can choose from young and sexy women, they don't want me. They want somebody half my age."

"Why? They want Lou and he is not half your age."

"For some reasons it's different with men, they don't look old, they look maturely."

"Bull...s eye."

"Hollywood truth." As a woman over forty she had no chances in Hollywood. It was obvious whenever they watched a blockbuster, ninety percent of all women in

these movies were young, no matter how old the men were. It was absolutely fine to pair a man in his forties with a woman in her twenties. It wasn't okay to pair him with a woman his own age.

"I know why I don't like the fuss about them and I'm glad you decided to move to Silver Lake. It's much nicer there, relaxed, friendly, with real people."

"You are aware that there are a couple of Hollywood stars living in our neighborhood, aren't you? Not as much as in Bel Air, Malibu or in the Hollywood Hills."

"The few times we met them and talked to them because our dogs got along, they were nice. I guess the snobby ones don't take their dogs for a walk. Which reminds me: do Scooby and Rantanplan need a walk?"

"They do. The problem is, their mommy is so lazy, she likes the couch and the fire."

"That's okay, I take them for a walk, I wanted some fresh air anyway. Our kids look like they're fine with being inside."

"Wait until my mother is done with her breakfast, she'll kick them all out. The sun is shining, children are supposed to be outside when the weather is good and they can play with their new toys in L.A., but they don't have the snow there."

"That's for sure. How is your leg?"

"Fine, I'm really just lazy and not in pain."

"Good." Sara kissed her wife. Every now and then she had to check if her wife was fine, she didn't tell her every time when she was in pain.

"Only the two of us, like in the good old days." Greg got his arm around Sara and smiled. He had decided to join her on the walk with the dogs. Mark gave them a list of things, they could pick up at the store on their way back, they were a lot of people, some things were always empty or almost empty.

"We never shared a walk in the snow."

"We did have cases that involved snow."

"Not the same. Look at this lovely weather, the blue sky, the snow everywhere. If I wasn't a beach girl I could get used to this and move to Alaska."

"I'm not sure your wife will like this idea and you surely won't go anywhere without Sofia by your side."

"True. No long distance relationship."

"No, they're hard, I know what I'm talking about. The time when I lived in Vegas and Jules in L.A. was horrible. I missed her so much."

"Sometimes I wonder how we can make sure our love stays and not leaves. There's no guarantee, I know that, but I'm sure there are ways to keep your love fresh and alive. I might have to ask your wife about that, get some therapeutically advices. Again."

"Why don't you ask your best friend? He is married to the shrink, he knows these little secrets too because she uses him as a guinea pig."

Sara laughed. "Does she feed you well? Or only uses you?"

"Oh, she feeds and pays me well, don't worry. You know what we did two days ago when the kids were in bed and we had some time of our own?"

"I'm not sure I want details out of your bedroom, Greggo."

"We were dressed, don't worry, you don't get any details of us without clothes."

"Okay, bring the advice on, baby brother."

"We sat down, each got a sheet of paper and had to write down twelve things, he or she wanted to do next year with the other one. Activities you do with your partner alone, for some you could involve the kids too, but the main goal was to find something I want to do with Jules alone. When we were done with the lists, we compared them and made a plan, which one of these twenty four suggestions we want to set in practice every month. Now we're having a list of things we want to do next year, things that keeps our life interesting and gives us the chance to see us more than as parents."

"Good idea. We love our children but sometimes we forget that we're more than parents."

"Exactly. Let me know what your favorite twelve ideas are."

"Now?"

"Sure and you know what I absolutely like?"

"What?"

"The Silver Lake Sara does think about my advice and tells me what she figures out, while the old Las Vegas Sara would have told me to mind my own business."

"Sometimes I feel like people didn't like me before I came to Los Angeles. Not the nicest feeling."

"I always liked you, but now you make it me much easier to love you." He kissed her cheek.

"You have to earn my love." Sara linked her arm with his.

"Twelve things I want to do with Sofia in the next year? I want to take her to a candle light dinner, want to book a night in a hotel for us, have a picnic on the ocean with her, learn a new skill like horseback riding or diving with her. What else? I want to go out dancing the whole night and sleep in the next days, want to take her to a national park and do a overnight hike with her, so we can watch the stars above us when we lay in our connected sleeping bags. How much more do I need?"

"Six more, you're only halfway through the year."

"Doesn't it make more sense when I come up with six and leave the other six for Sofia? The year has only twelve months, when we come up with different ideas, we can't do them all."

"It depends on the ideas, sometimes you can have two in one months and the way I know you two, you want almost the same things. Give me the other half, Sara-Sunshine."

"I want a day on the beach with the same people I'm spending my time with now, a garden party at least once every two weeks, take my family to a ranch for a week so the kids can see how the country life is. Oh, I want to go for two or three days back to Vegas and meet our old colleagues. And visit all Californian Channel Islands. One more ... I want a photo book of my family, one for each year since I'm in Los Angeles. Greg, I've been in California for over five and a half years."

"And almost this long with Sofia."

"Yes, five years. The best years of my life."

"I thought those were the years we worked together."

"No, I like these years more. We don't work together anymore, but we spend a lot of quality time together. How could the Vegas years be better? My little Eric wasn't with us, my cute little prince."

"You're right, I didn't have my kids and Jules in Vegas."

"Oh yes, your wife, I most definitely love her too."

"More than your wife?"

"No, but a lot. Don't you ever dare to divorce her!"

"That's not my intention, I love her."

"Good. How does the calendar of you two look? Which suggestions did you choose?"

"Like you we want candle light dinners, nights to ourselves. We'll have one night every month away from the kids. Either in a hotel or we let my in-laws look after them and have the house to ourselves. We'll also have dinners alone, two short trips alone and Jules will spend one evening every two weeks without me and I'll do the same without her. This way we have the chance to miss each other, savor the time together more."

Sara stopped and looked at Greg for a few seconds.

"You've really grown up, Greg."

"Even I got older."

"You did and you matured. It suits you good. Especially when you wear messy hair with it." She bent down, got a handful of snow and ruffled it through his hair, so it looked spiky. Just like in the good old times.

With Greg's suggestion on her mind, Sara waited until she and Sofia were alone again. Which took some time because when she and Greg came back, the others were out in the snow with the kids and it took a while before the little ones were tired and wanted to get back into the house. Sara and Sofia prepared two bottles of milk and went with the twins upstairs in their room.

"You and Greg did a long walk or did you get lost shopping?"

"No, we walked for a while, talked about a lot of things. He gave me a relationship advice."

The blonde rose her eyebrows. "I had no idea you need them." Was this still because of the job offer?

"Of course I do, I want our relationship to be good all the time, you won't get everlasting love when you don't work for that. My little brother is involved with a therapist, he learnt a lot from his wife and can put it into geek friendly words and advices."

Now Sofia had to laugh. "How? Did he come up with a formula?"

"No, only smart words." Sara held the bottle up so Saloso could get the rest of the milk. The way she knew her little son, he wanted more. At the moment his other mother was occupied with his brother, so he had to wait a few more moments before he'd get the breast and Sandy changed to the bottle.

"Will you tell me the words or was it a secret advice?"

"No, no secret. In fact I want us to take his advice as soon as the twins are asleep. Susan is busy with Lauren and Lea playing, we have a few minutes to ourselves."

"Oh, that sounds very promising."

"Sorry to disappoint you, you'll keep all your clothes and so will I. We'll sit down, each with a notepad and a pen."

"That's it?" This didn't sound like a lot of fun. Definitely not as much fun as the things Sofia had in mind.

"Yes."

"Can I sit next to you?"

"No, because then you can see what I write. You can sit opposite to me, we can link out feet."

"Better." The blonde said. "And then?"

"Then you're supposed to write down twelve things you want to do with me next year. Try to concentrate on activities without the kids, although you can also write a few with them. When we both have twelve, we compare them and see, if we can permute one or two of them every month. We prepare an activity calendar for ourselves."

"Can I write one thing twelve times?" The blonde smirked sly.

"No, you have to come up with twelve different things and not twelve different positions. Otherwise I believe our relationship is nothing else than sex to you."

"Who said anything about sex? I didn't!"

"I know you." Sara chuckled. "Or is it so hard to come up with twelve things you want to do with me? Am I only bearable when we're having sex?"

"I don't answer stupid questions. Baby change!" Sofia pulled the protesting Sandy away from her breast and cleaned first his mouth and then her breast.

"Good, this one gets moody, he's still hungry." Sara handed Saloso over to her wife and lifted Sandy up from the bed. As soon as he had the bottle in his mouth he was quiet and continued to eat.

"You know, I think from the new year on I stop breastfeeding them. My milk isn't enough for two babies and they're not happy when they have to stop drinking. A big bottle is easier and they take it without a problem."

"True. I'm sure they'll miss the nice wrapping."

"I don't think they care for the wrapping."

"What a waste." Sara kissed her wife. "Where shall we sit to work on our form?"

"Here, with the babies. It won't take long for them after their meal to fall asleep." And they could enjoy the time on their own. Even when it wasn't for some sweet sex between the duties of the day. When her wife wanted to make a plan with her what they could do together the next year, it was a good thing too. There were a lot of things she wanted to do with Sara, a lot of included the children as well, but some were only for the two of them. She wasn't a bad mother because she wanted some time with her wife alone, away from the children.

"All right, tell me what you want." Sara had told Sofia her list, the same things she had told Greg before. Now it was time for the blonde to let her wife know, what she wanted to do with her.

"First of all, I want to go Vegas with you. For two nights, meet the old gang, visit some places we've been together before we were together. Turning the nights into days again and that time not because a baby is crying."

Their first match. Surely Marie and Marc would look after the kids for two nights. The nights didn't have to be the weekend, it could be any two nights.

"Then I want to rent a convertible and drive from San Francisco to Los Angeles with you. The ocean in sight all the time, plenty of stops for picnics, kissing, swimming, photos. I think it will be an overnight trip too."

"Number three, I want us to get a license for a Harley. The idea of you in leather on a Harley was as close to sex as I could go without writing down I want to see you naked."

Sara laughed and kissed her lover. "There's no rule you can't include things, that will get us naked."

"Not? Then I've to rewrite my ideas." Sofia laughed.

"Number four, a long weekend hike in Kings Canyon

National Park. I'd like to have an experienced ranger by my side, who explains me all the wonders of the nature."

"I think I can be this ranger."

"Good. I want to see you in your uniform."

"It's not my work time, I won't wear the uniform."

"What if it's part of my plan?"

"Then you'll be sad not all of your plan will become reality. When I asked for a day on the beach with you, I didn't say you have to wear a red bikini and be my Baywatch girl. Although I like this fantasy a lot. So would dozen people around us."

"And you're the only one, who gets mouth to mouth."

Sofia threw her hair back and pursed her lips. "Number five, a candle light dinner with following passionate night in Palm Springs. I haven't been there in a while. Number six, barbecue parties in the garden every second week because I love them and we got married in our garden, which makes it a very special place."

Sara also proposed to Sofia in their garden, on her own birthday, it was a special place to her too. "Approved."

"Number seven, a weekend with the kids in Disney Land. Number eight, a night out in the clubs of West Hollywood, a lot of dancing, celebrating and no going home until the sun comes out. The weekend I want for this is Pride weekend, it's a big party anyway and the best reason to turn the night into day."

"We'll miss the parade." Sara pointed out.

"No, we'll only be tired because we barely slept."

"Most of our suggestions mean we won't sleep much. We might be in bed some hours, but sleep isn't what's on the agenda for the night."

"You got that right, my dear." Something Sofia looked forward to a lot. "It doesn't mean our relationship is only about sex, it means, I like having sex with you."

"Honey, if our relationship was only about sex, we hadn't made it through the time when you tried to get pregnant and were pregnant the first two weeks."

"True" Sofia thought about those times for a second.

"These weeks were horrible. I so missed your touch. It's wonderful and priceless to hear you say you love me, but sometimes I want to feel your love too. Well, you can replace the sometimes with often."

"How about a kiss?" Sara bent over and kissed her wife gently.

"Also very nice."

"Good. Give me your number ten."

"I want to watch a Lakers match with you. Number eleven is a concert at the Bowl with you and the last one is parasailing with you." Sofia looked up. "Are you sure we can do all these things next year?"

"Depends on how we organize our life. It would mean we're off every second week, which won't be easy unless your parents and our oldest son look after the little ones. Any idea which one of these things we can do first? In two weeks?"

"The candle light dinner with the night in a hotel. We've got a lot of outdoor activities on our list, which have to wait until it's warmer." Sofia slipped onto Sara's lap and nibbled on her earlobe. "I can already feel how excited I'll be when we enter our hotel room. Your clothes will be gone the second the door is closed." The hand of the blonde found itself under her wife's shirt, caressing soft skin.

"We should go back, the others might worry where we are."

"Let them worry another ten minutes. Talking about all these romantic things makes me a little bit horny."

"You're constantly horny." Sara smirked and with one last look if their sons were still awake, she decided to forget about everybody else and give Sofia and herself ten more minutes. Or twenty.

Wednesday, December 31st

New Year's Eve had always been a big party in their family, but Sofia couldn't remember they had ever been so many people. It looked like the living room of Lou's villa was overflowing. Christmas it had been full, New Years Eve was even fuller.

"So many civilians, we need to have an eye on them." Marie got her arm around Sofia's waist, observing the others with her daughter.

The blonde chuckled quietly. Civilians. Her mother slipped back into cop mode, serve and protect. Some things you didn't lose, no matter if you're retired or not.

"Anybody specific we should have an eye on, captain?"

"The teenagers, they're always trying to get their hands on alcohol. One glass of sparkling wine for midnight, nothing else. Also have an eye on the teenage boy, I'm not sure he and the brunette girl are looking each other too often."

Sofia found Steve and Marlene, standing together with Lea and Lauren at the pool table. With every day that passed by, her son seemed to be more comfortable with Marlene around. There were no signs of they were together, or have kissed, their body language was just more open and friendly when they talked than on the first days. Also they were able to laugh together.

"I think it wasn't a mistake to allow her to come here."

"Time will show, at the moment they are getting along. Lea and Lauren take some time out from the rest every now and then, which is normal, they're in love and weren't or aren't able to show their affection for each other at home."

"Lauren told her mother about them because she asked."

"It's noble she didn't lie to her. Her parents aren't the problem, Lea's parents are and I'm afraid, when they find out about these two, there'll be problems. From what I've heard they are not very open-minded and won't allow Lea to see Lauren."

"I know. Sara and I have been thinking about talking to them, they had dinner with us a couple of times and didn't have any problems with us being married."

"There's a difference between somebody else and your daughter. Mothers have certain expectations of their daughters, when your daughter decides to live a life, you don't want for her, believe it's wrong or not good for her, you're likely to do whatever is possible to get her back to the right path. Even when your own right path isn't her right path."

"You never told me not to date women."

"I know your stubborn head, any word I had used would have been used against me. Besides, you were fast to tell me, that dating women didn't change your wish for a child. Smart move, by the way."

Sofia grinned. "Thanks. I knew you wanted grandchildren and with telling you, you'll have them, I got you on my side. Or at least quiet enough to cause no trouble. You weren't happy about most men I dated, you didn't act any different to the women. Until Sara came into the picture."

"She carried about you, I knew her from Vegas as a hard working and honest CSI, not as good as a cop, but close enough and she knew about the hours you pull as a cop. Plus she made you happy, it was obvious."

"She is still making me very happy."

"We all know that, you've been in your room often enough the last days. Are you sure you're not one of the teenagers?"

"They behave better than we do."

"True."

"It's only ... we have some more time for ourselves with you guys around looking after the kids and we don't have to work. It's nice to realize you're more than a walking milk bar and feel like a woman, who is adored again."

"Did she ever give you the feeling you're not a woman, who is adored?"

"No. But we had no time to show each how much we adore the other, how much we're in love. Now it's possible and we're trying not to leave the kids alone or be away from you guys too often."

"Your kids are happy and we're happy when you're happy. As long as you don't forget your duties."

"Of course not, captain." Sofia hugged her mother. How could she forget her duties when she knew if she would,

she'd earn the fury of her own mother? She was smarter than risking this.

"If Vin knew what he's missing out he'd kick himself in the ass." Steve said and bid in another slice of pizza. His grandfather had outmatched himself. Marc had spent the whole day in the kitchen area, preparing dozens of dishes, with various helper. Now they had the biggest buffet Steve had ever seen and he already felt sorry for himself because there was no way he could try everything before he was full. Luckily there would be another day tomorrow, he had only to make sure to try all his favorites before they were gone.

"He said here are too many people for him and he wants to be in warmer weather." Marlene tried the mixed salad.

"We would have given him a lift."

"You can't catch a free spirit."

"I like him, he was cool. I wonder what is his story, he didn't share much."

"Coming with you, staying two nights with strangers was a lot. I wouldn't have done it."

"You'd run away from home?"

"Believe me, sometimes I want to. Then I remember how comfortable my bed is and decide to stay where I am. My family isn't that bad; most times."

"So you're the black sheep of the family?" He rose his brows.

"Funny." Marlene slapped him. "No need to insult me only because you lost at Street Fighter and pool."

"You were cheating at both games."

"Sure."

"We were better, that's all." Lauren grinned. She and Marlene had played against Steve and Lea. "Honor the queens."

"Dream on." He got his arm around Lea. "You okay?"

"Yes. Only too full to eat more and I want to try the tarte."

"Welcome in the club. I'm stuffed too."

"I think I'm going to have some mouse au chocolate." Lauren rose.

"Sometimes I hate her." Lea grumbled. "She eats twice as much as I do and doesn't gain a tiny gram of weight. So

not fair. We should punish her for it tomorrow. Tie her to a tree and throw snowballs at her."

"True love." He laughed.

Lea's cell phone beeped. "My parents wish us fun and say next year we should celebrate at our place. Right, I don't think so."

"Wouldn't be the best idea." Steve agreed.

"Why?" Marlene asked.

"Because they don't know about Lauren and I and if they did, they'd lock me away."

"They don't know you and Lauren are an item? Are they this bad?"

"Worse. I feared they would insist on meeting Lauren before we drove up here, ask her a million question and in the end see, we're in love. You kind of saved me, it wasn't that important who the third one in the car is after they met you."

"My pleasure. They do know about Sara and Sofia, right?"

"Of course. None of them is their daughter, so it's acceptable."

"If two women in are were our biggest problems the world would be a great place to be."

"Not for the two women but I understand what you mean."

"Hey kids." Tanya joined them.

"Teenagers." Steve corrected.

"Oh come on, you're my favorite baby Steve." She sat on his lap and tousled his hair. "So cute."

"When I'm your baby, when will you breastfeed me?" He shot back sly.

"Sorry, I don't do such things." Tanya slapped the backside of his head. "Get yourself out of the gutter."

"Hey, you're the sexy Latina, who made herself comfortable on my lap. How am I supposed not to think about ... all these things in the gutter."

"You got this from Sofia, definitely."

"No, it's a male problem." Marlene said. "They're all the same."

"Yeah, I remember Don back before we were together. Yes, they are all the same, which makes it so easy for us

to subdue them. Did you see how Cori made Lou clean up after her? She trained him very well."

"When is he coming to the surgery again?"

"Nice try, Honey. You're not going to tell all your friends Lou Lee is at the surgery and demand an entrance fee from them to see them."

"I'd like to assist."

"You're not an assistant."

"I've watched often enough, I could assist you. Clean up after you."

"How many pictures of you Lou have you uploaded to Facebook the last days? How many selfies with him did you take?"

"I didn't upload a photo of him and I never mentioned somewhere in the internet he was with us. What he's doing on his days off is nobody's business and we don't want people to come here to see him. As for the selfies, I did take a few photos of and with him. Can you blame me? He looks great on photos."

"She can't, she took photos of and with Lou herself." Steve defended Marlene. "Lou doesn't mind as long as these photos don't end up online. Especially photos of his kids."

"It should be prohibited to publish photos with children of stars. They've a right of privacy too and it's been violated all the time. Having famous parents is nothing they chose. Yelling paparazzo and other people, who follow them everywhere, are horrible."

"As long as there're magazines, which pay a lot of money for these kind of photos, there'll be people, who don't care about the children. When everybody stops buying these magazines nobody needs the photos anymore."

"We can throw them out of the surgery and come up with something better to read. Like short stories or, if have to, books with recipes. We print both off the internet, create little magazines ourselves and place them in the waiting area. No more money for paparazzo."

"Nice idea, that's what you can do and not assist me."

"So mean."

"Why don't you ask Lou when he's at the surgery?" Steve asked. "When he tells you, you know and there's nothing Tanya can do about it."

"Are you playing against me, baby?"
"You don't want to breastfeed me."
"I'm going to tell your mothers what you want."
"Mom will understand me, she likes dark haired women too."
"Then I'm going to tell Don."
"Don't forget to mention you sat on my lap, not the other way around."
Tanya got up and pulled his hair. "Shut up."
"So girlie." Steve giggled and hid behind Lea before he was slapped again. This was the reason why he was here and not in Los Angeles. Why stay away from your family when you had so much fun with them?

"Another year is over, what was your highlight?" Sara embraced Sofia and kissed her earlobe.
"The birth of the twins. Yours?"
"I agree with you. It was a stupid question, it was obvious this was our highlight. What else were highlights?"
"That we arrested the baby kidnapper. Or the police, I don't arrest anybody anymore. I was so happy we could get some babies back to their parents. And I also liked working with the FBI. With some of them."
"Oh yes, your back double. How is she? Did you hear from her?"
"She's fine. Pregnant again."
"Cool. Her son is a cuties, these longish blond hair."
"Our children won't have longish blond hair - unless we dye it."
"They've no blond mother. No real blond mother." Sara chuckled.
"Do you want me to be a brunette again?"
"I've to say you're very sexy as a brunette, the pictures you showed me are more than nice, but I like you as a blonde more. The combination of your endless blue eyes with the blonde hair is amazing. Plus, people don't see your gray hair as long as you dye it blond."
Sofia took a deep breath. "Sometimes I want to give you a high five - in the face. With a chair."
"I love you too, Darling." Sara laughed.
"You're lucky I love you too. What were your other highlight of the year?"

"This vacation is one. The other one was one too. Actually, all the time I can spend with my family is a highlight."

"You're so busted as a romantic, Sara Sidle." Sofia turned and kissed her lover passionately. "So what do you wish for for next year?"

"Health for my family and friends. Happiness. And that we can make at least ninety percent of the list, we've created, come true. You?"

"I want to marry you again. We don't have a wedding picture with all our children, we need one."

"Any special wishes where you want to marry me?"

"Depends on how much money I can make with this job Lou offered me. If we're lucky we can go somewhere, have a vacation there. Otherwise a small ceremony on Malibu beach will do it too. It's more important that you and the kids are there, not where it is."

"I like New Orleans."

"Me too. On a Mississippi steamer. Unfortunately Louisiana hasn't recognized or legalized gay marriage, so it won't be an official wedding."

"I know." Sara sighed. "We can have a great time without that, can't we?"

"Absolutely. We could let Steve play the minister. We won't get new rings, it's all symbolic. Imagine how cute it would be if we ask our kids if it's okay that we're getting married, they agree, representing the rest of the world."

"Susan loves it when we kiss, I'm sure she'll be delighted to see us tie the knot."

"Probably she'll be jumping up and down, cheering, calling: again! Again! Again!" Wasn't their daughter the cutest? Sofia felt like hugging her baby girl so tight that they were one and not two bodies. Could it really be that this gorgeous girl came out of her?

"Yes. We are lucky to have her."

"Like the other three. Oh, I also want a nice girlfriend for our oldest son and that our oldest daughter stays as happy with her girlfriend as she is now."

"I did see the photo you took of Susan and Eric cuddling on the bed, you are not trying to manipulate them into a relationship, are you?" Sofia cocked her head. When she found the photo on her lover's cell phone her grin was

almost wider than her face. She bet as soon as they were back in Los Angeles, Sara would get a copy of this photo, place it in a frame and have it on her nightstand. Susan and Eric, her dream couple of the future.

"No, destiny will do this for me. You were on my phone again."

"I need to make sure there are no hidden love messages from somebody else."

"Because I'm so distant and barely spend a second with you."

"Well, you don't spend enough seconds with me." Were there ever enough seconds? Probably not. "I also took a photo of Sandy and Saloso in front of the tree with the dogs for you. The boys of the house together. Steve told me, he's not a boy anymore, so I didn't make him sit there too."

"Right, he's a young man. Next year will be the last one he's going to celebrate with us, after that it's college time, which means, he'll be too busy for us."

"Nevermind, we'll unload the little ones on him every weekend, it will keep him busy."

"Nice idea. We can make another list of private activities next Christmas."

"In San Diego. I'd so like for Susan to see Sea World but it would mean we support captivity of whales and dolphins. It's better to take her on a whale watching tour and wait on the beach for dolphins to show up. Even when it takes longer and the animals will be farther away."

"I'd appreciate if we don't go there." Sara agreed.

"We won't. Like we don't got o the zoo."

"Most zoos have too small cages for animals. In fact, animals shouldn't be kept in cages at all. Keep them where they belong, build a long and high fence - if you have to - around the area and visit them there."

"We go to the national parks, you can see animals there too. And sexy ranges, especially in Angeles National Forest."

"Shane will be delighted you think he's sexy."

"I thought more of his work partner. Care to show me what you're wearing under your uniform?"

"No, it's almost midnight, we won't leave the rest."

"One day I want to have a New Years Eve with you alone and make sweet love at midnight. It's the best way to start a new year, when you come into it."

Sara rolled her eyes. It was only for protocol, otherwise she really liked the idea and supported it. Not it was likely to happen the next fifteen years.

Saturday, January 3rd

The whole group arrived back home in the late afternoon. The drive from Lake Tahoe to Silver Lake got easier with every mile they drove south. After the snow was gone and the streets were free, driving was much easier. A little stop in the middle of nowhere to let the dogs out and to stretch their own legs and off they went again.

"Stop. Sit. Talk." Sofia pulled Lyn on a chair. Her friend had come over to see the twins and before she had the chance to go anywhere, Sofia wanted a couple of minutes with her alone. There was something they had to talk about.

"I'm happy to see you too."

"You and Jon."

"Who was the gossip girl? Don't tell me Jon told you."

"No, he has been avoiding me since I'm back from Tahoe. What the hell was going on?"

"Too much alcohol."

"Obviously. What did Dirk say about it?"

"I'll stay in Mexico. Fuck you, bitch."

"You deserve this."

"I know." Lyn sighed. "You can throw everything in my face, my mother did already."

"How about you tell me how you're feeling." It wasn't Sofia's job to tell her friend off or blame her for something. It was between Lyn and Dirk, not Sofia's business.

"Do you really want to know?"

"Absolutely."

"I don't feel guilty. Which make me feel guilty. I betrayed the man, I thought I'd marry. With somebody I barely know. A younger man, much younger. I wasn't thinking at all, I was doing what I felt like doing. And I'm sorry to say, the sex with Jon was much better than it ever was with Dirk."

"You were drunk."

"Imagine how great it is when we're both sober."

"I'm not sure I want to imagine. Did you talk to Jim afterwards?"

"No, not really. I thought I can talk to him tonight."

"End up in his bed again."

"To be honest, I wouldn't mind. It's highly unlikely it will be something for longer, but I'm allowed to have some fun too."

"Yes you are. Would you like to have more fun with Jon?"

"Why not? Something casual. Unless it does interfere with our work, we do see each other at work sometimes."

"You do. It's something you should talk about."

"Enough of my sex life. How was Tahoe?"

"Great, we had a lot of snow, the kids loved it and we were more than planned. Lou and Cori visited us with the twins and stayed until yesterday. My mother brought a homeless boy home, who stayed for two nights and I think I've gain five kilo. My dad cooked so many dishes, it was hard to something else than eating all the time."

Lyn smirked. "There were a lot of people to look after the twins and Susan, I'm sure you did something else than eating. Something, you did with Sara and nobody else."

"Oh yes, we surely did. When I feared first we won't have any time for ourselves because of all the people around us, we were taught it's the opposite. We don't have this much time for each when we're here."

"So it was a satisfying vacation. Any surprises?"

"Marlene surprised Steve."

"Who is that?"

"The girl, who broke his heart."

"Oh right, I remember. He took her back?"

"No, but they're talking and it looks like he forgave her. Or at least doesn't rule out there might be something more at one point."

"Other boys his age would jump the chance to have sex without caring about the rest."

"My son is a smart boy."

"Unlike your friend. I got it. Anybody pregnant? Any drama?"

"No, we were way too relaxed. Oh no wait, Lou Lee offered me a job."

"He needs a CSI?"

"No, he needs me."

"What does Sara say about this?"

"I make three hundred dollar an hour, she's fine with it."

"You're aware how this sound, aren't you? So, as we both know you'd never cheat on Sara because you adore her, what does he need you for?"

"He's playing a CSI, who used to be a cop, in his new movie and want me to check the script for mistakes. Also, he wants me to show him how to act natural in a lab, do things, that make sense. I'm his personal trainer."

"Wow, not bad. Does he need another cop as well? I could also train some other scenes with him, now that I'm single."

"You don't want to mess with his girlfriend, she'd kick your ass."

"I'm a cop."

"She does kick boxing. Is a champion. You have no chance to win against her. Believe me. Even the bimbos stay away from Lou since Cori is around. And he loves her, she's a great woman and he'll marry her. He told so her father, who doesn't like Lou and is a hunter."

"Mister Action Hero likes some action at home too. Will you be invited to the wedding?"

"I don't know. Why?"

"Can I be your date?"

"No, my wife is my date."

"She doesn't like Lou Lee."

"She loves me and I want her around her."

"Life is not fair." Lyn got up. "Let me see your twins before they are in bed."

"They didn't have dinner yet, without food there's no way we'd get them to sleep." Especially Saloso, who, according to mean people, were like his mother and therefore always hungry. Such a lie, Sofia wasn't hungry all the time, she just liked to eat.

It was after ten when the house went quiet and Sara and Sofia retrieved to their room. Susan had been excited to be back, to find places for all her new toys. The twins were too small although Sara thought, they knew they were home too. Hand in hand they were fallen asleep, like they wanted to make sure, nobody took the other brother away.

"That was a long day." The brunette dropped backwards on the bed. "As great as it was in Tahoe, I'm glad we're back home. Our bed is better than the other."

"It is, it's bigger, we've more space to ... sleep."

"Or other activities."

"Or other activities." The blonde repeated and lay next to her wife, looking into her eyes. "I'm so glad to have you. Every day when I wake up with you in my arms or in your arms I wonder what I did right to deserve you."

"I ask myself the same."

"Why I deserve you?"

"No, although, yes, that too." Sara laughed and kissed her wife. "We're so lucky to have each other. Our relationship is the best evidence that you can change. Your life, your feelings, basically everything if you want and have something, that's worth changing for."

"Who said we've changed? Maybe we developed. When we met in Vegas we weren't ready for a relationship, there were other things we needed to do first. We had to go separate ways to see how much we missed the other one. We needed a new city to start all over again. I don't think our life would be as great as it is now if we had stayed in Vegas."

"We had never met Steve, so no, Los Angeles is essential to our happiness. So is Don, so no Los Angeles, no children."

"And a life without our children is nothing I want to imagine."

"Me neither." Sara closed her eyes. They had tomorrow off, a whole day to find back into their rhythm and prepare for work. "I wonder what Lyn and Jon are talking about." Sara had only briefly talked to Lyn, as she had been busy with Susan and their luggage.

"If they're talking at all."

"Look on the bright side, Lyn will be here more often."

"Yes." Sofia stretched and slipped on top of her lover.

"You know, we could use this big bed."

"Believe me, I have no intentions to be somewhere else this night."

"Any intentions of what you might be doing?"

"Yes, sleeping." The brunette shrugged the blonde off and turned on her belly, buried her face in the pillow.

"Sleeping? Objection!" Carefully Sofia pushed the shirt Sofia wore up and covered the skin with little kisses. When Sara didn't react she moved higher and kissed the neck, pulled the shirt aside to kiss the shoulders as well. When her lips sucked on the one spot on the side of her lover's throat she knew was very sensitive, Sara turned and embraced her before she captured Sofia's lip with her hungry lips.

"You want to play, we play."

"What are we playing?"

"Hide and seek. I." She pulled Sofia's shirt over the head of the blonde and threw it away. "Hide your clothes and you can go and look for them. That's if you can manage to escape my arms."

"What if I'm doing the same to your clothes?" And the shirt of the brunette was gone.

"Then we're both naked and playing hide and seek."

"Believe me, when we're both naked, I'm going to play something else with you."

"Are you? Now I'm curious, which game will it be?"

"It has the same name like an old Beatles song."

"Yellow Submarine?"

"Come together." And with that Sofia's mouth cover the left nipple of her lover and sucked on it. Any idea of playing hide and seek was gone in this moment.

Thursday, January 22nd

It was after five and normally Sofia would be on her way home from the lab. There was no urgent case on her desk, no open work to be finished, no results she was waiting for. All in all, there were no reasons to keep her away from her family. Except one. Her new job. Today she was driving to Hollywood, meeting with Lou at the set of his new movie. The Hollywood actor had sent her the script a few days ago, she had checked it, corrected little mistakes and sent it back to him. Today she would see how good he was pretending to be a CSI and a former cop.

The guard at the entrance let her in without any problems after she showed him her ID. He gave her a map of the studio and told her how to get to Lou the easiest way. In this case it wasn't the shortest way, as the road, which would have taken her straight to her friend, was blocked due filming.

"Hello gorgeous, thanks for coming here." The trailer he lived in had the size of an apartment. A spacious living room with connected kitchen lay in front of her. At both ends of the room were a door. In the middle of the living room area were Dean and Gabriel sitting and playing with their nanny.

"Hey boys." She greeted them.

"Where Sue?" Dean asked.

"Susan is with Sara, I'm here to work with your daddy. Have you watched him working?"

"No." Gabriel shook his head.

"They think it's boring what I'm doing. They're too small for the action scenes, watching their daddy saying weird words and standing around with strangers is boring."

"Especially when daddy says something, that makes no sense."

"Yeah, thanks for the correction, I brought them to the script writer. He changed everything. How about we're having a coffee before we go over to the set and you show me how to look professional and like I know what I'm doing."

"Do I get paid for drinking coffee with you?"

"Your work time started the second you entered the trailer." He laughed.

"Perfect."

"I do have your first check, what are you going to buy from it?"

"Half of it goes to my accountant, I want to pay off my debts for the house. The rest will be saved for family activities. Somebody want to go to Disney Land again."

"Disney?" Both boys asked unison. That was something they understood and what got their attention. "Going to Disney Land? Dad?"

"Soon, boys." Lou gave Sofia her coffee. "I'll be flying to Florida next week, we'll shoot there for a week before we go to Chicago."

"You or all of you?"

"All of us of course. Unless you want to look after the boys." He joked.

"Let me check with my mother, if she wants two extra kids to look after, you can leave them here."

"I was kidding, it's Florida and Chicago, I can take them there. If they sent me further away, or to a place, where it's not safe or perfect for them, I call you back on this offer. Your mother is amazing with kids, no wonder you became such a wonderful woman."

"Cori is so busting your rear end if you don't stop."

"You want to tell her?" Shock was written all over Lou's face.

"You never know what I might do." Sofia finished her coffee. "Come on, lets get started. Even when you pay me good money, I want to go home to my family. This is not supposed to take longer than three hours."

"Okay let's get started. Do you have a nice saying before you start work?"

"No."

"Oh. What a shame. I thought there was something like a line to make yourself ready for everything."

"Sorry, you have to rely on your writers for one."

"Something like: I'll trace you! I'm going to get you."

"It's a good thing other people are writing the lines for you, Lou. Otherwise nobody would want to watch a movie with you." The blonde chuckled.

Three and a half hours later she was back home and tired.

"Hello stranger." Sara pulled her in her arms and kissed her. "How are you?"

"Almost a thousand dollars richer. Minus tax."

"Yeah, you're a good catch. How was it?"

"Mommy!" Susan came running to her and jumped into Sofia's arms. "Hey my big girl, you are still awake?"

"Missed mommy."

"Oh, I missed you too." Sofia kissed her daughter, feeling her heart making somersaults. Was the money worth staying away from her family? She could have been here four hours earlier if she hadn't gone to see Liu.

"Mommy worked?"

"Yes, I worked with Lou this evening. Dean and Gabriel were missing you."

"Lou boom!"

"She has watched a trailer of a movie of Lou and when Lou jumped off a roof the building explored. After a little shock and asking three times if he was all right, she thought he is cool. A hero." Sara rolled her eyes. Way too many people believed Lou Lee was a hero, why had daughter be one of them?

"He's a movie hero, nothing you see is real, Honey. They're just playing, like when you're playing with Louise, Eric and Jorja."

"House boom."

"Yes, they've a lot of money to make it look like a house explores." Sofia kissed her daughter again. "How about I take you to bed? It's late and you need to sleep otherwise you'll be too tired to play tomorrow."

"Play boom. With captain."

"I'm sure the captain will enjoy this game." With Susan in her arms the blonde went upstairs and took her daughter to bed. She read a short story to her while Sara was leaning on the doorframe and watched them and when Susan's eyes were closed, she switched off the light and left the room. Her little angel was in her own world now, probably jumping off exploring buildings.

"So how was it at the set? Did you meet somebody famous?" Sara asked, got her arm around the blonde's waist and pulled her with her on the couch.

"You mean except Lou? No, his co-stars were somewhere else, we had the set for ourselves."

"Was it fun?"

"Yes, he is not too bad. There are some of the typical Hollywood moves he does, especially when he pretended to be the cop. So much macho attitude. That he didn't try to let the run roll over his finger a couple of times, like they do in the old wild west movies, was everything. A big kid happy to play cop."

"Don't expect Hollywood to come up with a real story. The real life of a cop is too depressing for a movie. Nobody wants to see what cops are really have to do."

"True." Sofia kissed Sara gently. "I missed you. It's nice to know we can afford a little more thanks to this job, but it keeps me away from you and the kids. I didn't get to see the twins going into bed."

"Sometimes when you work overtime you don't have the chance to do so neither."

"No. It sucks."

"They don't anymore." Sara grinned. Since they were back from Tahoe Sofia had stopped breastfeeding the twins. It was strange not to have them this close anymore, but her milk wasn't enough and when she was away, they needed the formula anyway.

"It seems to be unfair to change them to formula already. I breastfed Susan much longer."

"She was your only child, the milk was enough."

"Now my breasts are useless now."

"I wouldn't say that." The brunette smirked and got her hands under the blonde's shirt. "I know a few things I could do with them. Which would really excite and satisfy me. And I think you as well."

"You have such a dirty mind, Mrs. Sidle."

"Because you're so irresistible, Mrs. Curtis. Don't we have some house duties to do? Cleaning, washing, checking the books? Things, responsible mothers do."

"Let's see. The three little ones are in bed, the teenager is with his best friend, so the kids are taken care of. Your mother did the laundry, your father cleaned the kitchen after he prepared dinner for us. The books don't need to be checked at the moment, there's no cleaning here upstairs urgent, so no, we could lose ourselves in fun strictly for adults." Sara's hands cupped the breasts of her wife and

her thumbs started circling the nipples softly, which made Sofia moan quietly.

"I'm trying to be an adult. How does it look when I come home, take our daughter to bed and then have passionate sex with you instead of ... I don't know, doing whatever housewives are doing."

"Housewives have sex, a lot of sex. Didn't you watch *Desperate Housewives*?"

Sofia's nipples responded to the attention, they were getting from Sara's thumbs. Since she had stopped breastfeeding, her nipples were more sensitive when touched than before. It was like they remembered, they were for more than feeding babies.

"How about socializing with friends?"

"You did, you saw Lou."

"That was." The blonde had to swallow because it was getting harder and harder to talk. And also her nipples were getting harder and harder. "Business."

"Sure. In this case I've to reward you for being such a great worker today, for bringing home so much money. Want me to strip for you and give you a lap dance? You could reward me with a dollar bill."

"You'd do a striptease and a lap dance for me?"

"Honey, I'd do even more."

"Like what?"

"Get on my knees for you."

"Forget about housework, books or socializing, I want you in our bedroom. Now!" Before one of the kids woke up and ruined the sex show she was about to receive from her more than willing wife. If that was what happened every time she owned almost one thousand dollar, she'd see Lou every day!

Wednesday, January 28th

"Grandma ... Lea ... Lea is ... is in ... troub... trouble." Steve could barely speak, he was out of breath from running to his grandparents' house. The short, yet steep hill to their residence was more than his fitness could handle. He was sweating, huffing and puffing hard and tried to get more air by bending forward and supporting himself with his arms on his thighs. This made it obvious, he had to spend less time in front of the Playstation and more outside.

"Take a couple of deep breaths." Marie said, not sure what to make out of the exhausted and visible scared teenager in front of her. "Is she injured?"

"No."

"Good." No reason to call a doctor. She guided him into the house and pushed on the couch. "Now tell me what is going on?"

"I ... she ... I tried to call her, she doesn't answer the phone."

"Honey, I hate to tell you, some people are not like Siamese twins with their cell phone."

"No, we were supposed to meet an hour ago, wanted to go to the movies, there's a movie on, she wanted to watch for weeks. When we separated after school she told me to call me when I'm ready so we could meet halfway. I tried over and over, she never answered. Then I called her parents and father told me, she's at home and has no time to go to the movies with me. His voice was ice cold, like I did something wrong."

"Grounded?"

"If so, he's so mad that he doesn't tell me why. Before he ended the call, he told me, she won't be around for a while."

Marie looked surprised. Teenagers were grounded every day for various reasons, she couldn't figure which one had gotten Lea into this trouble. "He didn't say anything else?"

"No. Grandma, I'm afraid they found out about Lea and Lauren. Lea will be grounded until she turns twenty-one."

"That would be truly ridiculous."

"For most people, yes. She overheard a conversation of her parents with somebody from their church group,

saying they'd send her to one of these 'un-gay your child camps' if they ever suspected Lea to be too close to a woman. They're nice people unless it comes to homosexual love. What if they really send her away to one of these camps? You know they're abusing children and teenager there. The documentation I've seen about one reminded me a lot of The Exorcist."

"He's right about this." Marc had been quiet until now, only listened to his wife and his grandson.

"These camps are crap, you don't send somebody to a camp to change the color of the eyes, it would be the same, you can't change who you are, who you love."

"They believe different."

Marie grumbled. "I think you should go home, Steve."

"And tell my moms? Maybe they can talk to them, make them understand, nothing is wrong with Lea and isn't doing anything bad."

"They won't listen to your mothers, quite contrary, they might accuse them to get Lea into her position. I'm going to talk to them, I'm a mother, who has a lesbian daughter. And you." She looked at Marc. "Will join me. Please."

Marc smiled. His wife changed into captain mood and remembered the last second, he wasn't one of her subordinates. "Absolutely my dear. Let us handle this, Steve."

"Can't I come too?"

"No, this is something which has to be solved from parents to parents. And maybe some police force. Your grandfather will make sure I'm not falling into the captain act too much."

"You don't have to act like a captain, you are the captain, no retirement can take this away from you."

Marie smiled slightly. "You've got that right, my dear. Anyway, go home, or better, go and talk to Lauren. Tell he what you're suspecting, it's possible Lea's parents will reach out for Lauren's and it can't hurt when they're prepared for it. The contact could be rather unfriendly, depending on the reaction of Lauren's parents."

"They know about their relationship and approve. Completely."

"Good. get them in the boat." Marie grabbed her coat from the rack. "Go!"

Steve hugged both and stormed out of the house. Marc sighed and got his coat. "This was going to happen sooner or later."

"Yes, we knew it, they knew it too, yet it will be a shock when Steve isn't mistaken. Any suggestion for the special operation?"

"Go in slowly, make a point, if there's too much resistance, make your point more clearly and use your weapons."

"Right." She knew he wasn't talking about her guns. Side by side they left the house, got into the car and drove over to Lea's house. The lights were on, so they knew somebody was at home. People were moving behind the closed curtains.

"I've got your back." Marc said after Marie rang the bell. It was better to let his wife speak, she wasn't good in listening and letting other people something, she wanted to handle herself. He was used to stay in the background, observe and step in when needed. In fact, he preferred his strategy, it gave him time and opportunity to study the other party and come up with a strategy to overpower them. Literally speaking.

The door was opened and Lea's father appeared. His face was deep red.

"Good evening." Marie said politely. No point in introducing herself, they had met twice at Sara's and Sofia's house.

"Mrs. Curtis, what are you doing here?"

"Our grandson informed us, he worries about Lea."

"I doubt your grandson worries about our daughter the way we do."

"Is she all right?"

"She will be when we're done with her."

"Mrs. Cardwell, you know my husband and I like Lea, we'd like to see her."

"There's no reason for that."

"Marie! Captain!" Lea called from the inside.

"Shut up, Lea, this is not your business. You had your chance to come clean."

"Lea, I'd like to see you."

"She's not going anywhere."

"Anthony." Lea's mother appeared at the door. When she saw Marie and Marc she added surprised. "Good evening Captain Curtis, Mister Curtis. What are you doing here?"

"Steve worried about Lea, we told him we'd come here and check on her."

"This is not a good moment."

"It's family business."

"My daughter treats Lea like her own daughter, Lea was with us for various holidays and other days." Marie said.

"That won't happen again." Lea's father grumbled.

"May I know why?"

"Your daughter and her wife are not what Lea needs in her life."

Out of the living room a drenched in tears Lea stormed into Marie's arms before her father could stop her. Marie held on tight to the teenage girl and gave her father a hard look over. Time to change strategies.

"Get back into the living room, Lea. Now!"

"What happened?" Marie's voice was soft when she talked to the girl.

"They snooped around my cell phone."

"We're your parents, we've got every right to know what's going on in your life. Especially when you're hiding things."

"My relationship is not your business."

"Oh, you got that wrong, young lady. It is our business, we're your parents and until you're twenty-one, you'll do what we tell you to do. This nonsense will stop and you won't see this person anymore, otherwise you'll spend the rest of your days in your room. Am I clear?"

"You're her father, you got that right. It doesn't give you the right to hold her like a prisoner." Marie said.

"Stay out of this, Mrs. Curtis."

Marie felt how Lea held her breath. It was one thing to call Marie Mrs. Curtis and not Captain Curtis, a completely different thing was to tell her what to do.

"Mister Cardwell, we should not talk about this outside." Marc stepped into the conversation. "Why don't we go inside and talk like adults?"

"This is not your business."

"We're not Lea's blood family, but she is like a granddaughter to us. We've spent a lot of time together

and we love Lea. It hurts us to see her like this and you can't be happy to see your daughter crying and afraid of you, her own father. No child should be afraid of her parents."

"Anthony." Lea's mother got her hand on her husband's arm. "Let's get into the living room."

Lea's father stepped aside to let Marie and Marc into the house. Lea stayed in Marie's arm and sat next to her on the couch, almost hiding behind the older woman.

"Okay, how about you tell us what happened." Marc said to Lea's mother.

"We found Lea's cell phone and decided to check, if everything is all right with her. She had been a little bit away with her thoughts the last weeks and seemed to spend less and less time here. Her marks in school are good, they didn't give us a reason to worry, but her withdrawal made us wonder. We found a message from another girl, telling our daughter, she loves and misses her. There were also several photos of our daughter and this other girl on her phone."

"Her name is Lauren, don't act like she's a disease with a name you can't pronounce." Lea said angrily.

"We don't want to know what her name is, you won't see her again. Whatever she did to you, it's over."

"She doesn't do anything bad to me, in contrary to you she loves me."

"You've no idea what you're talking about, Lea."

"You're mad because your daughter is in love with another woman?" Marie asked the obvious.

"She's not in love, she doesn't do such things, she's a normal girl. She's confused because this girl manipulated her." Anthony Cardwell corrected Marie.

"Have you met Lauren?"

"Don't tell me you know her? Did you also know what she did to Lea?"

"The only thing Lauren did to Lea was she made her happy. Yes, I am aware of their relationship and I can assure you, your daughter is not at risk nor is anything wrong with her. She's in love, which is absolutely normal for a teenager."

"She is not in love with a woman!"

"Yes she is and Lauren loves Lea. They're both very happy and I don't think it's a good idea to prohibit your daughter to see her."

"Lea will see a therapist, who will make her understand her feelings, she believes to have, are wrong."

"Lea has spent over a week with one of the best therapists of the city after Christmas and doctor Weinberg didn't say once something is wrong with your daughter. In fact, she left Lea alone with her toddlers, you don't leave your toddlers with somebody, you think isn't absolutely reliable and sane."

"Lea, I don't understand you." Her mother started. "You always said you want children. Why are you doing this to yourself?"

"Loving Lauren doesn't mean I don't want children. Sara and Sofia have children and love each other. You don't have a problem with that."

"They're not our daughter."

"So this is about you and not about me? You want me to be the way you want me to be, no matter how I feel about it."

Marie placed her hand on Lea's shoulder to stop her. Accusation wasn't a good idea. "I think my husband and I can rely to your situation. We too weren't that happy when Sofia told us, she wanted to date women. It made us believe we won't get any grandchildren. As you know, we've got four wonderful grandchildren now and a daughter, we've never seen more happy than since she met Sara."

"We want our daughter to marry a man and have a family the way it's supposed to be."

"But it's not what Lea wants. Not at the moment. It can change. Sofia dated men for years. I never understood how she could change to women, it was a mystery for me, as I never had any romantic feelings towards a woman. Oh, there were women we absolutely didn't like, wanted out of her life as soon as possible, but there were also men, we thought the same about. In the end we came to the conclusion we had no right to tell her who was good for her, she had to decide it for herself. We did tell her our opinion, which usually didn't impress her much. In the

end we decided to support her because otherwise we had lost her."

"You can make Lea stay at home, not see Lauren anymore." Marc added. "But by doing this, you'll make her hate you. When you take away the freedom of a person, take away her love and make her feel like you don't care about her at all, she'll leave and never come back the second she has the chance to. Which is her eighteenth birthday. You can't keep her locked up until she's twenty-one. You can make her decide between you and her lover, but you should think really about this. It can make you lose your daughter."

"She's a child, she can't just leave."

"She's not a child, she's a teenager and yes, she can leave. Either go and live on the streets or go to a shelter for teenagers. We work in soup kitchens, you have no idea how many teenagers are living on the street because they fought with their parents. When you don't want to lose your daughter, you don't lock her up, don't forbid her to see the one she loves. It's not like she's in love with a criminal. Lauren is a nice girl, she's going to be a doctor and her mother is a doctor."

"She's the reason my marks at school are this good, we're studying together. She helps me out with all the subjects I've got problems with." Lea sniffed. "Without her I couldn't be this good."

"You can go to a study group." Her father said. "And why knows everybody this girl while you didn't bother to tell us?"

"Because I knew you'd act like this. You're both so up in your church shit, so much stuck in the medieval that you'd rather sell me to a creep, who keeps me like a prisoner, than see me happy with somebody, who loves me. Do you think I don't know about your plans for me? Marrying a man from your church, become a housewife, have children and wait for my husband to come home in the evening. Guess what, I want to marry a woman, have children with her and have her take care of the same things I have to take care of. Your dreams are not mine."

"You'll ruin your life."

"Sara and Sofia don't look like they've ruined their lives. Unless a ruined life looks like their lives. In this case I

want to ruin my life because they're in love, have kids, work and have parents, who support them. Well, the latter one will be the difference between their and my life, my parents don't care about me and my feelings."

"Honey, they do care about you." Marie disagreed.

"Locking me away from the one I love is caring?"

"They're not locking you away."

"You heard what they said, it's exactly what they're planning. I'm not going to stay in my room until I'm eighteen, I'd rather live on the streets." She looked at her parents. "You can't control me all the time, when you keep me away from my friends, my girlfriend, I'm going to run away. And don't think I'll ever come back to you."

"Lea." Marc said, his voice softly. "Don't say such things."

"Why not? They're threatening me! Well, if they don't want it any different, this is what they'll get. I'm not letting them take my life and Lauren away from me."

"Threatening each other doesn't help anybody." Marie looked at Lea's parents. "Do you really want her to run away? Is it worth to lose your daughter because you believe you need to decide what's right for her?"

"Children need their parents to decide what's good for them."

"She's not a child anymore, she's seventeen."

"She's our responsibility."

"And nobody will say you are irresponsible when you let her be with her girlfriend. As a cop, a former cop, I know who is trouble and who isn't. Lauren is no trouble, she loves your daughter, cares for her. I bet if she knew about what's going on here, she'd be here in front of your door to support Lea, not caring what you might do or say to her."

"I just want to be happy and she makes me happy. And people like you are the reason why so many teenager commit suicide, because they feel like they're doing something wrong and are a huge disappointment. I'm not a criminal, I'm not crazy and I'm not a freak of nature, I'm only in love with somebody, who loves me as much as I love her." Lea buried her face in Marie's shirt and cried.

"Doesn't it break your heart to see her like this?" Marie caressed softly Lea's shoulder and looked at her parents. It

broke her own heart to see the best friend of her grandson like this. She wanted to rock her softly, tell her everything would be all right, but it was up to Lea's parents to make everything all right. Or at least better.

"Why does it have to be a woman?" Lea's mother sighed.

"It's like asking why do you have blue, green, brown or gray eyes or the shoe size you have. It's nothing you can decide, you fall in love with somebody and can't control who it is. Or did you make a rational decision to fall in love with your husband? I didn't, I he swept me off my feet and believe me, I wasn't happy about it first. He wasn't a cop, I wanted to marry a cop, they understand the hours I worked. Fate had other plans, fate wanted me to fall in love with a former army soldier and then future professor at the university. A civilian, who worked normal hours and had no idea what it meant to be on the job. My parents weren't also happy first, they were both cops too and a civilian in the family didn't sound right. Until they met Marc and saw what we had."

"My family was also not happy I wanted to marry a cop, they were afraid I'd get a call one day that Marie won't come home from work. Took some work to make them change their mind. In the end both of our parents were happy we got married. And so am I. Most times." Marc smirked. "Not when she tries to boss me around, but it's up to me to ignore it."

"Have you ever met Lauren?" Marie asked.

"No." Lea's mother said.

"Why don't you meet her and her parents before you worry she's bad for your daughter? You don't have to invite them over, don't have to go to their house, you can meet somewhere else."

"It doesn't change the fact it's against nature." Lea's father said stubbornly.

"There are animals, which are in homosexual relationships. I doubt that animals, who are a part of nature, can be against nature. It's against what religion teaches us, but a religion is something you believe in. People are entitled to believe different things and it would be wrong to force your beliefs on somebody else. And even if it was against nature: I'd rather see my daughter happy than nature."

"Why don't you want to date Steve?" Her mother tried. "You said you like him."

"I love him, he's like a brother. My best friend."

"Believe me, my daughter wanted them to be a couple too, I remember how she told me over and over again how cute they are together and how happy they're making each other. Steve feels the same for Lea, he loves her like a sister, she's his best friend. I doubt they'll ever be lovers, but they're got something, which most people will never experience: a love that is stronger than other things. Lea would never forget about Steve over Lauren and Steve never let Lea down because of a girl." Maria smiled. Love was more than attraction and sex. Love was about trust and it was absolutely possible to love somebody, you never felt having sex with.

"How is Lea? Is she all right?" Steve asked as soon as his grandparents entered the house. "You were there, weren't you? You talked to her."

"Yes, we talked to her and she's okay."

"Her parents found out about Lauren?" Sara asked. Steve had told his mothers what happened, or he thought, what had happened.

"Yes. They were very mad."

"How did they find out?"

"They found her cell phone, checked it, found a message from Lauren and photos of them."

"Seriously? They sniffed around in Lea's phone?" Steve was angry and looked at his mothers.

"Don't look at us like that, we're not touching your phone." Sofia defended them. "And I don't agree with what Lea's parents did. What did they say about the two?"

"They wanted Lea to stay away from Lauren. All three got quite heated at one point, Lea saying, she'd rather run away and live in the streets than being a prisoner for a year."

"Could you talk sense into her parents?" Sara asked.

"We tried. They believe it's wrong to love a woman when you're a woman."

"They were here, had dinner with us."

"It's different when it's your own child. Sofia."

"They're not going to lock Lea up, are they?" Steve asked carefully.

"No. We could talk them into meeting Lauren and her parents. I doubt Lea's parents will change their opinion after a meeting, but if they can start to accept their daughter and her feelings, it's a good start."

"When they see Lea and Lauren together they must understand it's love and nothing wrong. Lauren makes Lea so happy, it can't be wrong."

"Don't expect too much, Steve. Lea's parents won't change overnight. If they don't forbid Lea to see Lauren it's a start. Of course they'll be suspicious when Lea wants to stay somewhere else, I can't see them agreeing on that the girls stay the night together, they might even not want her to stay here anymore."

"That sucks."

"Language please." Marie reprinted her grandson.

"Sorry. I'm just so sad because Lea suffers for no reason. I want to help her and Lauren."

"This is something she has to work out with her parents. Did you talk to Lauren and her parents?"

"Yes. Lauren was about to drive over and get Lea out of the house. Her mother had to stop her."

Marie smiled. "I thought something like this."

"Is there anything we can do?" Sara asked.

"No. You and Sofia are not exactly the two people Lea's parents want to see now. You won't see much of her the next days or weeks, but she'll go to school, Steve can visit her and I'm sure she can see Lauren too. Not at her place, not as often as before, but they will see each other."

"Did she get her phone back?"

"Yes."

"Good." Steve knew there was no point in calling her now. If Lea was alone in her room, she would be talking to Lauren. He had to wait until they had talked about everything, then she would call him. As her friend he knew when it was his time to step back without being mad.

"I guess we're lucky you and Marc don't think like Lea's parents." Sara said.

"I told them I can understand them to a certain degree. When Sofia told me she wanted to date women, I wasn't

all too happy. I feared there wouldn't be any grandchildren. Then she told me she still wants them, it made it easier for me. When she brought you home, I knew she found the one. Lea and Lauren are far away from finding the one, but they found each other, they love each other, they make each other happy. As a mother, who had two dating children, it does make a difference when you know, your child is loved and happy."

"Sara makes me more than happy." Sofia took Sara's hand and kissed it. Sara was her life. Her everything. As long as she had her wife, there would always be a solution. Life would always go on as long as they were together.