As Lovers Go
by GreenleafCM

Summary

After a successful mission against a Covenant incursion alongside the rest of Blue Team, Kelly-087 feels the need to let off a very particular kind of steam with John-117. Doing so proves to be a little more complicated than she anticipated. Regardless, she and her partner always find ways to make things work...

Notes

I have been pecking away at this ridiculously long one-shot fanfiction for years...and now it is finally done. Its purpose is to serve as my in-universe examination of how John-117 and Kelly-087 manage the more intimate aspects of their romantic relationship (in accordance with my headcanons about their sexuality). I also wanted to make something that didn't just focus on the sex, but on the before and the after as well. Most importantly though I wanted it to be about the love and understanding that exists between these two characters - and how healthy their overall dynamic is.

Constructive comments/critiques are welcome and appreciated. :)
Kelly stepped down off of the platform where the engineers were still shifting the apparatus that they’d used to remove her MJOLNIR Armor. She didn't stop to ask any questions as she headed to the station in front of the special dressing rooms to get out of her black undersuit, stretching her arms over her head as she did so to relieve some of the stiffness in her shoulders. Considering the losses the UNSC had weathered recently, their last mission had gone exceptionally well. The Covenant had been successfully repelled from the small colony world of Tarit; while human casualties, military and civilian, had been relatively minor. These days it was a relief when any planet-wide engagement with the aliens resulted in the numbered dead coming to fewer than six digits.

Lessons learned from the Harvest campaign - which concluded nearly ten years ago - had been applied here. And applied to great effect. Though as was the case back then, there was still no guarantee the Covenant would never return someday with something more than the single Cruiser that had been the backbone of their incursion during this latest skirmish. The colony's major settlements were now all but abandoned as well. No word yet either whether the people who had been evacuated would be cleared to go back to their homes any time soon. Still, the planet had not been turned to molten glass like so many others. Kelly would gladly take any victory humanity could get right now.

There were bins filled with fresh laundry for arriving soldiers that needed it, and bins for depositing what was dirty. She selected a set of standard-issue fatigues as well as a pair of boots and socks that were labeled as being her size. The dressing rooms were barely large enough to accommodate someone with a Spartan’s dimensions, but Kelly managed to change quickly all the same. After she emerged from behind the partition, she flexed her arms again and then her legs in an effort to loosen up and relax. But something still seemed off. She felt cramped in her own skin in spite of being freed from the constraints of both her armor and techsuit. It didn't take her long to identify why, however, once she looked back out into the armory hangar.

John was up on the dais and the plates of his armor were being stripped from him piece by piece just as hers had been a few minutes prior. The Master Chief was a sight to behold in full MJOLNIR. Though in Kelly’s opinion the man underneath it was what was truly worth seeing.

Fifteen years of war had affected all the Spartans, physically and mentally. Though in terms of their constitutions and combat prowess they were undeniably in their prime. And John was no exception. Even from a distance Kelly could see how the dark undersuit cut a perfect silhouette of his powerful physique - from his broad chest and shoulders, to his square torso that tapered down to his waist and hips. John descended from the staging area and walked briskly in the direction of where Kelly was standing. As he approached she couldn't help but let her eyes take in every detail of his form.

John held his chin high, firmly placed each step, and his fingers curled and uncurled slightly in an unconscious reflex. The ridges and valleys of his sculpted musculature rippled with each motion he made. His brown hair was still short enough that it wasn't in need of a trim. The man’s face was bearing a contemplative expression, while his pale blue eyes were somewhat hidden in shadow by his browline due to the overhead lighting. And though his complexion was a bit palid from all the time Blue Team had spent in their MJOLNIR lately, his cheeks still had good color. Overall John emanated strength and confidence; which was only buoyed by his handsome features when out of armor.
Kelly felt a flush creep up her neck as she observed him. Plus a fluttering sensation in her gut. It had been weeks since she and John were last liberated of all their various full-body suits, and months since they’d been able to be alone together without the stress of their next deployment bearing down on them. This ship was large enough. She would have little trouble finding a secluded room they could escape to for a while. At this point it was quite clear to Kelly exactly what she needed. Now there was only the task of bringing this prospect up to John.

She waited for John to pick out his own change of clothes and get dressed. Once he reappeared he made a beeline for the exit into the main body of the vessel. Kelly moved to walk by his side without a word passed between them. They navigated the hallways together until they reached the vestibule in front of the lifts leading to the other decks.

"Going up?" Kelly remarked, finally breaking the silence, offering him a smile.

"Seeing as we're on the lowest level, I don't think there is any other way to go," John replied simply. But there was an easiness to his voice that indicated the small-talk was welcome. He tapped the electronic keypad on the wall in front of them to summon the elevator.

"I am still getting a handle on the fact that we didn't have to run away from that last battle," Kelly started. She was only half-joking though, as it really was something she felt hadn't quite sunk in. "You think the Covenant will ever come back to finish the job? Or just crawl off to wherever the hell it is they are from, lick their wounds, and then turn their attention somewhere else?" she asked more seriously.

"If they return to Tarit, we'll be ready for them. The UNSC now has an established presence in this sector." John's jaw was set in determination, but his tone was hollow.

Kelly didn't say anything aloud, only gave him a very skeptical look. She knew his response had been partially automatic. It was a token reply he'd formed after being asked similar questions many times. Typically by rookie marines who simply needed to be told what they wanted to hear. Even so, John should've known better than to regurgitate that kind of recruitment-poster-crap in front of her if he didn't really believe it.

John huffed a little as he recognized his gaffe. "This colony does not hold significant strategic value," he relented. "Nor is it inordinately rich in natural resources. If the Covenant were to bring a greater number of ships and troops to retake the planet, there would be no second attempt to intervene. Only a general evacuation. Anything beyond that would be cited as a waste of UNSC assets." His brow furrowed as he spoke. Clearly he was torn between accepting the ruthless calculus of warfare they'd come to know all too well by now, and staying true to his own moral compass.

"I don't like it any more than you do," Kelly reassured him.

"Even the Covenant can't be in too many places in full-force at once though," he added. "That worked to our advantage this time. The longer we fight them, and keep fighting smart, victories like this one will happen more often," he said with genuine conviction.

"Well, in that case I think we can afford to give ourselves a small pat on the back," she stated optimistically.

"Yes. It felt good to win today. Sometimes I almost forget what that's like." John let out a breath. His tone was somber, yet there was still a satisfied gleam in his eyes.

"Obviously it's only a small step, but it is a step forward nonetheless." Kelly smiled again as she continued, "Hopefully we can keep this momentum going to wherever we are headed next."
"Agreed," John affirmed as he nodded at her. "Every inch of territory protected from the Covenant is worth more and more each day. If our next series of deployments can manage to compound on our success here, that will be a considerable accomplishment for everyone. For the UNSC, humanity...and us too."

Kelly found it interesting how John had separated "us" from the previous two categories he mentioned. Did he mean the Spartans as a whole? Blue Team? Or just her and him, perhaps? However there were more immediate concerns on her mind that kept her from pursuing that train of thought.

"Speaking of," she segued, "I was wondering if you would be interested in reviewing something with me. It's been months since we last practiced the specific close-quarters maneuvers we developed for when we're reconnoitering an enclosed area. I thought both of us might be due for a refresher."

What she just said held no literal meaning to either of them. Though Kelly hoped the verbal cues she'd used would be enough to tip John off. Unfortunately there was no way for her to be overt with her partner about what she wanted. Not here. Not without taking an unnecessary risk. Because no matter how much she and John truly cared for one another, or how little it should have mattered in the grand scheme of things that they were in an intimate relationship, they were still subject to the same regulations that governed all enlisted persons. And after managing to skirt the rules for over a decade, Kelly was not about to have disciplinary action brought down on their heads now because someone overheard her propositioning John in the corridors.

To accentuate the point she was really trying to make, Kelly gently let her fingers brush against John's thigh as she spoke. Unlike the extensive repertoire of unique physical expressions shared among all the Spartan-IIs, this gesture was known to only her and John. It was one of several small signs they'd devised to wordlessly communicate more private sentiments. Both for purposes of discretion and their own comfort.

John looked at her intently for a second and Kelly was certain that he'd picked up on her signal. He knew she wasn't actually suggesting they meet to go over the finer points of CQC strategies. Though instead of responding in kind, he only gave a slight shake of his head.

"Maybe next time. I'm not particularly in the mood. I have to make my report to Command on the bridge..." he said, his words trailing off sourly.

Kelly was familiar with how uncomfortable John was on starships. None of the Spartans cared much for interstellar travel or lodgings. Having solid ground beneath their feet was always preferable. But like with everything else they had endured since the beginning of their service it was just something they had all come to accept as part of their lives. At least this issue gave her something else to focus on, and she instantly shifted gears.

"I understand. Is there anything I can do? Or orders I can relay to the rest of the team while you're giving your report?" Kelly squared her shoulders and straightened her stance, letting John know she was being sincere with her offer.

John gave her a single firm headshake this time. "Thank you. But until we get new orders from HIGHCOM there's not much to prepare for. We have our assignment to the barracks at 21-hundred hours, so until then you and the others are free to do as you please. Just keep an ear open for the intercom if anything changes." As he finished speaking a chime announced the arrival of the lift. John then afforded her a small smile, and saluted - both gestures Kelly returned. "I'll see you later, Kelly."

"Go on then. The faster you get there, the sooner you can be debriefed and get off the bridge," Kelly
said as she motioned at the elevator. John inclined his head at her one last time before turning and walking into the compartment, the doors closing behind him with a soft hiss.

While Kelly wouldn't deny the small ember of disappointment that burned in the pit of her stomach, she pushed the feeling aside. Much like the lack of control the Spartans had as passengers on a starship, sometimes certain aspects of her relationship with John were subject to things neither of them had any real power over.

The augmentations were a factor, for one thing. She and John may have undergone the same surgeries, but the ways their bodies' muscles, bones, and endocrine systems had adapted to the changes were unique. Apparently John's libido, or at least his awareness of it, had been blunted somewhat as a side effect. They'd pieced this fact together when they began to indulge in more sensual acts of affection in the years that followed the procedures. Whereas Kelly hadn't noticed any difference in her sex drive after she had fully recovered. Even now the hormone shots she received as part of her routine medical care had no effect in that area. Granted, the injections were only prescribed to her and the other female Spartans for the purpose of making them more efficient soldiers in the field. With their menstrual cycles terminated, all the inconveniences intrinsic to that aspect of womanhood were no longer an issue. This improved their combat readiness and overall performance. Though in Kelly's case, it provided the additional benefit of never having to worry that her and John's activities might result in her needing to request maternity leave.

She also knew there were occasions when John's duties and responsibilities as leader of the Spartans interfered with his ability to rouse his physical desires as well. Such was the case today - based on what he'd said to her and how he'd said it. It was at times like this Kelly pondered what it must be like for him and some of the others in her class. She had always felt her feelings very strongly. To this day she struggled to reconcile her emotionality with the stigma of what was "appropriate for a Spartan" to feel.

Because it wasn't a sense of duty to her fellow man, or some other nebulous rhetoric of that nature, that kept her staying the course. Not that Kelly didn't take pride in her work that saved innocent lives from the aggression of both the Insurrection and the Covenant. She did. But she simply wouldn't be with the UNSC now if not for the bonds of camaraderie she’d established with her Spartan-II peers. Particularly when it came to the family she had in Blue Team; and above all, her feelings for John.

When Sam died, the loosely held plan she'd kept a secret in her heart of eventually convincing her two best friends to run away with her died too. What solidified in its place was Kelly's resolve to remain a Spartan - to honor Sam's memory - and do all in her power to protect the people that mattered to her. Especially John. She wouldn't lose her dearest love to the madness of this war too. And when they finally put a stop to the rebels, the aliens, and anything else in between, there would be no need to run away. The two of them would finally be able to be together in whatever way they wanted. Or rather, Kelly would like to see the UNSC try and stop them at that point. That was the freedom she and John would be owed. That was the future she chose to fight for.

Kelly idly twined her fingers during her ride on the elevator as she made an effort to concentrate on something productive. Yet that proved fruitless. Thoughts of John's hands running over her skin as he undressed her, either quickly with reckless abandon or with slow tenderness...imagining his lips pressed against hers, being able to taste him on her tongue...recalling the feeling of his body merged with her own as they moved in unison, the heat and the pleasure of it...wouldn't leave the back of her mind all the way through her ascent and subsequent walk to the Spartans' assigned quarters.

When Kelly thumbed the access-pad that opened to doors to the barracks, she could see the rest of her current squad was already present. This snapped her back to reality for the moment. Fred and Will were talking quietly as they sat across from each other on parallel cots. Linda was cross legged
atop her own bed next to Will's at the end of the row. As soon as Kelly stepped into the room the three of them perked up and looked her way.

"Any orders from the Chief?" Fred asked, not bothering to beat around the bush.

"We finally get a minute to relax and you're ready to jump back in armor," Will muttered under his breath, though Kelly knew that he knew they would all be able to hear him anyway.

"None," Kelly replied in regard to Fred's question. "We just need to be paying attention enough to hear if we are called for anything over the ship's PA system. Mess and lights-out are at the usual hours."

She moved over to the cot next to Fred's and stripped back down to her underwear as she spoke, folding her shirt and pants neatly and placing them on the covers. As was the case with all the Spartan-II's, there wasn't much need for modesty among teammates. Kelly then opened one of the supply cubbies built into the wall. She pulled out a simple nylon bag with a drawstring containing a pair of generic ladies' workout clothes. Even the larger sizes fit a little snug on her due to her height. Still they would do fine for a session on one of the gym's treadmills. There were no track shoes available for her, but she had no problem with running barefoot. Kelly stored her socks in the bag for the time being. As she next swapped her underwear for the sports pants and bra, Fred and Will returned to their conversation - which now centered on what would be available for supper.

Kelly finished rolling up her folded clothes, gathered them into the sack, and closed the drawstring. "I'm going for a run. Don't wait up."

"Where's John?" Linda spoke up unexpectedly.

Kelly shrugged nonchalantly as she shouldered her bag and made her way to leave. "Relaying his mission report to the higher-ups on the bridge," she answered. "No idea when he'll be done." She was telling the truth. But when she glanced back at the red-headed sniper Kelly could have sworn Linda was looking at her with a very knowing gaze. At least, more knowing than usual. Since there was always very little that went on around her that escaped Linda's eagle-eye.

Kelly's walk to the gym was a blur. Once she got there she slipped off her combat boots and set up her machine with clockwork precision. Same as she had done hundreds of times before. She began her routine at a brisk jog, keeping count of her paces and the rhythm of her heartbeat. Her unshod feet made little sound as they hit the surface of the automated track. Time moved forward and the speed of the treadmill gradually increased. Kelly kept up with ease. All the while trying to banish her mind and body of the desires that plagued her.

She was a Spartan-II; she should have absolute control over herself at all times. Like John did. It should be easy for her to just let go of everything else and focus only on what was absolutely necessary for her survival - no matter what. It wasn't like she hadn't done this countless times in the midst of battle to compartmentalize her fear, her anger, her pain, and so on. Or barring that, she would at least redirect those emotions so that they became a help opposed to a hindrance. So why were these things proving so difficult to do right now?

She let out an annoyed sound at her inability to master her pent-up sexual energy, and started to run faster. Now the machine was straining to keep up with her. Kelly didn't slow down. The spinning track under her feet soon whirred in protest from being pushed to its limit. She put out one last burst of speed, but when the treadmill wheezed even louder she forced her legs to slow to a stop.

Hopefully next time she would have a real track to run on.
Kelly stood alone in the gym, breathing hard as her heart pounded in her chest. Though not entirely because of her workout. She considered moving on to the speed bag or free weights, but as she was doing so a group of marines entered the room. Their tank-tops emblazoned with the ODST insignia. When they caught sight of the female Spartan, the five men turned and started talking to each other in hushed voices. Kelly was unfazed by crewmen gossiping about this-or-that. However she wasn't feeling up to tolerating the kind of negative attention or comments Troopers often directed at her and her fellow Spartans specifically. It wasn't too hard of a choice to make to simply cut her workout short for today. She grabbed her shoes and stuffed them into her bag as she left the gym without further acknowledgement of the soldiers' presence. There was a good chance it was some sort of dress code or safety violation to move about the vessel without footwear, but she didn’t care.

Fortunately Kelly had pulled up the ship's layout on her HUD before her armor had been removed. She’d memorized the locations of where she was sure she would need to go: Blue Team's barracks, weapon and equipment maintenance and storage, the mess hall, the gym, and the locker room. Otherwise in her current haze of mental and physical frustration she probably would've gotten lost on her way to the lockers. Two female marines were exiting through the door when she arrived, carrying their own totes of personal effects. Kelly raised her hand in a silent greeting. After a millisecond pause they nodded politely at her in return and continued on their way. It was nice that she could at least expect a higher level of civility from other women when out and about on this ship.

Like the gym had been when she first entered, the locker room was currently devoid of any other occupants. Kelly’s bag swung by the cord looped over her shoulder as she padded between the rows of storage units. The silence mollified her agitation. It was peaceful. It also allowed her to become engrossed in her thoughts once more.

There was a time when Kelly had been among the tallest of her peers. A smirk crossed her lips as she remembered what it was like to have to tilt her head down at both John and Sam in order to look them in the eyes. Though that changed as they grew up. And while she was still a head taller than the average person thanks to the augmentations, Kelly was now shorter than most other Spartan-IIIs by about an inch or so. Not that it really mattered. She could run circles around any of them anywhere and at any time.

She moved over to one of the large mirrors by the grooming stations and took stock of her present self. Her body was well-muscled all over, but her figure wasn't that of an athlete's who only trained for show. Her trim waist flared out into robust hips and thighs that were a force to be reckoned with. Kelly had always been fast, but she had worked extremely hard over the years to condition her body in a way that would further enhance her inherent talents. All the Spartans had done likewise when it came to honing their own unique abilities.

Kelly loosened her dark brown hair from its configuration in a neat bun at the back of her head, forming a ponytail instead. She shook her head lightly and again examined her reflection. There wasn't an area of visible skin that was void of some sort of scar. Some of the marks were smooth and symmetrical, while others were jagged and uneven; etchings left behind by both surgery and injury. She tugged at the hems of her sports bra and pants, and vaguely wondered if John truly liked what he saw when he looked at her. Especially when she was without clothes - all her physical imperfections literally laid bare. He had told her she was beautiful more than once. She'd never pressed him for details, simply happy to take the compliment. But what was it about her he was referring to when he said that? Plenty of other Spartans had more striking features than she did. Perhaps if she had fairer skin, different colored hair or eyes, and less scars, it would be easier for him to want to...

Kelly squashed that train of thought as she clenched her fists at her sides. She wouldn't let herself think that way, because she knew John didn't think that way. Their attraction to each other was based on so much more than outward appearance. She knew better. Still, it was hard to keep such notions
from cropping up at a time like this when she was craving a very particular kind of release and couldn't get it.

Or could she?

It had been a relatively long time since Kelly last pleasured herself. Either she hadn't had the privacy and strong enough desire to do so, or because she and John had satiated those needs within her through their combined efforts. She walked to the far side of the room closest to the partition that led to the showers. There she ditched her gym bag on one of the small benches that were anchored to the floor. Kelly then moved to face the lockers up against the wall. She leaned forward and rested her forehead against the cool metal as she weighed her options.

It would certainly be awkward, and raise the curiosity of the rest of Blue Team, if she went back to the Spartans' barracks only to immediately leave again if the room wasn't empty. Same for if she returned to the room but then declined to go with them when they went to mess. She had no good excuse to stay behind. Kelly could still locate an information terminal and find a private cabin to use by herself - but going through all that would take more time than she had available. Her run, even though it had been brief, filled the gap where she would've completed that task if John had accepted her advances.

 Granted she could always wait until later tonight after everyone was asleep. But for some reason the thought of taking care of herself in her cot while John would be unconscious in his own bed right next to hers put her off. Not to mention with the way she was feeling, finding relief was going to take a concentrated effort. She would need to be able to let off a little more steam than having to be completely silent (so as not to wake any of her bunkmates) would afford her.

Kelly turned around and listened, glancing right and left. Her sharp hearing picked up no sounds of speech or movement. Odds were that most of the personnel not working on shipboard assignments were in their quarters relaxing before dinner was served. After that she could expect a spike in activity as people came to this deck to exercise in the gym and then wash up prior to lights-out. The truth of the matter was this: Kelly was going to find no better time or place to be alone than she did here and now.

She bit her bottom lip for a moment in contemplation, then made her decision. Moving to face the lockers again, Kelly closed her eyes and slowly ran her hands over her body. She started by gingerly squeezing her breasts a few times. Then she moved down all the way to her thighs, pressing her fingertips into the firm muscle and massaging herself. Even at these simple actions Kelly felt her face start to flush as her temperature rose. The stimulation wasn't quite as enjoyable as it was when John touched her, but that was to be expected. Kelly was simply hoping for a modest level of satisfaction when all was said and done.

Bringing her hands back up to her pelvis, she tested the waters by carefully running her hand over her Venus mound. She applied gentle pressure with her fingers through the fabric of her workout pants. Kelly rubbed back and forth, further egging on the tingling sensation that was building between her legs. She let out a sigh, elated that she would indeed be able to take the edge off her libido. Keeping John's face in her mind's eye, she continued to touch herself and started to rock her hips against her hand. Her other palm pressed up against the lockers in front of her as she leaned her forehead into them once again as well. A moan escaped her lips. Then another, and soon several more in succession. She was just about to take the next step and slip her hand down into her pants for better contact, when a noise that came from behind her snapped her out of her pleasure faster than even her lightning reflexes could account for.

"...Kelly?"
There was no mistaking that voice. Though she hoped against hope that it was merely her imagination playing tricks on her because of what she'd been fantasizing, Kelly whirled around to see John standing only a few feet away. Apparently he had just rounded the corner to where she had cloistered herself at the back of the room. How could she have gotten so distracted that she hadn't even heard him come in? In a flash Kelly righted her posture and tucked her hands behind her back. She must've looked as mortified as she felt, but that didn't mean she shouldn't at least try to save face and act as though nothing out of the ordinary was going on.

"John. I wasn't expecting you to be done with your meeting so soon. What brings you here?" Kelly's attempt to sound casual was terribly forced, even to her own ears.

"I was dismissed after I gave a summary of our operations. They already had enough officers providing rundowns of the battle that further input from me wasn't necessary." John tilted his head to the side, a mildly concerned expression on his face. "When Linda said you went to the gym, I thought you might want a sparring partner. But when I got there it was clear you had gone already. I figured this would be the next place to check for you, and then I heard..." John didn't finish the sentence and cleared his throat, looking away from Kelly.

There was no doubt then that he realized what she'd been doing when he'd found her. John could be oblivious at times when it came to matters of intimacy - emotional or physical. But he wasn't utterly naive either. Especially not since he and Kelly had committed to their romantic relationship.

Kelly could feel that her face was still red. Though now it was largely from embarrassment. "I'm sorry. You shouldn't have had to find me like this. I didn't..." Kelly trailed off as well. Honestly what could, or should, she even say? Why was she uncomfortable at all? It wasn't like John didn't know that she masturbated on occasion. Perhaps it had more to do with simple frustration at her lack of self-control than anything else.

John frowned slightly, but not in anger or disappointment in Kelly. "You have nothing to apologize for," he said decisively. His brows knit together as he thought for a moment. Then he looked back at her, "Would you allow me to help?" As he spoke he lifted his hand a little and reached out, palm up.

"You don't have to do that, John." She felt like adding something that would assure him she would be fine on her own. The last thing she wanted was for him to feel guilty for any reason. Yet Kelly couldn't lie to him either; she still yearned for his touch. So she said nothing more.

"I don't believe I'm obligated in this, if that's what you mean. I can help, and I want to." He flexed the fingers of his outstretched hand to punctuate his meaning. "You taught me how, after all. I only hope I'm not out of practice." John's lips pressed together in a minuscule smile that was almost shy.

The pointed reference to the various "skills" Kelly had helped John develop in the time after they'd first become physically intimate didn't do anything to abate her blush. Once again she thought about telling him that no action on his part was necessary. But John was no game-player. He wouldn't have asked to participate if he hadn't meant it.

Kelly took a breath, and sorted out her reply in her head before she spoke. "When I initially presented the notion of us engaging in sexual activity today, you gave me an answer that I want to respect." Her choice of words seemed overly formal, but John always preferred talk that was straightforward. "However if you feel that giving me a hand here—" she paused mid-sentence and smiled a little at the obvious double entendre, "—would be an acceptable compromise, I'll gladly allow it." Kelly saw the corners of his mouth twitch in amusement as well, which decreased the awkwardness of the situation.

"I do," John stated in reply. She could tell by the way he spoke those two words that he was resolute.
in his choice.

He then took a few tentative steps closer, and Kelly closed the remainder of the space between them as she reached up and wrapped her arms around his neck. John tipped his head down to rest his forehead against hers while his hands settled on her waist. They stood there for a minute in silence. She knew that, even though John had asserted pleasing her with his hands wouldn't be an issue, he still had to get himself in the right frame of mind before proceeding. Kelly then leaned up and placed a kiss on his cheek. Her lips barely hovered above his skin as she moved to place another kiss on the corner of his mouth. He held still for a fraction of a second, then turned his head enough to capture her lips with his own.

They kissed gently several more times. With each one John’s posture became a little less rigid. At that point Kelly knew it was all right to direct him to the next course of action. She took her arms from around John's neck and spun so that her back was to him. When she was situated he returned his hands to their previous place at the top of her hips. Kelly then braced her palms against the lockers in front of her and nodded to give John the go-ahead.

His chest brushed up against the back of her shoulders as he reached forward and ran his hands from her waist to the front of her legs. Just like how Kelly had done to herself, John used his fingertips to apply pressure as he moved his hands up and down. There was absolutely no question at this point which version was the most enjoyable. Kelly leaned back and breathed deep as he moved to work on the inside of her thighs; repeating the same steady, massaging motions. She didn't have to wait long for John to up the ante. As he pulled his left hand back to grip her hip again, his right hand slid to the apex of her legs and moved to her center.

She couldn't help the sharp intake of breath that came in response as he began to rub his hand against her. Kelly felt her temperature start to increase again. The familiar tingling sensation reemerged too. Same as he had with her thighs, John used his fingers as pressure points as he moved his hand forward and backward. Kelly allowed herself to sigh audibly at his touches, and John moved closer so that his body was fully pressed up against her own. Soon she could feel that the moisture of her arousal had seeped through the fabric of her workout pants. John needed no further prompting as he then took his hand and slipped it down in between the waistband of the garment and her skin. He didn't waste any time as he ran his fingers across the slick flesh of her core. Kelly was glad that she had forgone underwear when she'd changed in the barracks. John’s access to her was less restricted by the single layer of flexible exercise clothes. He employed the same technique he had used just a moment ago. But now that there was nothing in between his hand and Kelly’s skin the effect was so much more intense. Even though this wasn't the first time he had used his fingers to stimulate her, as was the case with Kelly's own prior attempt, it had been a while since he had done so to this degree. Her breathing quickened and her hips started to rock in synchrony with his movements.

When John started to rub gentle circles over her clitoris with his thumb, her knees buckled slightly and she leaned even harder against him to keep herself upright. Unperturbed, he returned the force in kind and kept hold of her waist as he continued to knead her sensitive tissues. Her whole body now flared with heat inside and out. It was difficult to control her own motions as every slight adjustment of his hand’s position caused a new shiver of desire to rush through Kelly.

Through the fog of passion blanketing her senses she felt John press a kiss to her neck. She began to whisper his name in place of the sighs and soft moans she had uttered up to that point. Her fingers had bent up against the metal of the locker, leaving vague print marks behind from the warmth and sweat of her palms. Kelly rolled her body against his more fervently as she squirmed in delight in his grasp. And her heart thumped so hard in her chest it felt as though the beats resonated through her
from head to toe. Finally she could restrain herself no longer and began bucking her hips against
John's hand, encouraging him to move faster. He obeyed without hesitation as his pace increased.
With each stroke he alternated which finger applied the most pressure to her sex while he still used
his thumb to tease her clit. Kelly drew in another deep breath, her head falling back against his
shoulder.

"John..." she murmured again. Her fingers curled in against her hands. Yet she hardly noticed how
her knuckles pressed into the unyielding surface before her as John continued to pleasure her.
Tension was steadily building in her low stomach, and Kelly was unable to withhold the gentle
whimpers of bliss that escaped her throat. Just a little longer and she would be granted the release she
needed.

Suddenly, everything came to a halt. Without warning John withdrew his right hand from her core
and rested it on her waist to mirror his left. The instant after he did Kelly halted her own body's
movements as well. She felt that both of his hands had a firm grip in her hips, and there was no
indication he was about to continue his previous actions.

"...What's wrong?" Kelly panted. "Why did you stop?" It took considerable willpower to resist the
urge to take his hand in hers and move it back to its former position, so she could finish what he'd
started.

John was silent for a few seconds that seemed to stretch on for far longer. Kelly could feel him taking
deep, measured breaths; as his chest was still pressed up against her back. "I would be willing to take
this further, if that's what you need." His voice was husky as he spoke softly into her ear, sending
another shudder of unfulfilled desire through her already eager body.

Kelly wanted so badly to acquiesce to his proposal without question. But no matter how much her
lust for him was commanding her to give in, she refused to compromise their relationship for physical
gratification purely on her part. "I thought you said you weren't in the mood?" she probed.

His hands gripped her hips a little tighter and he trailed his lips lightly along the line of her jaw. "I am
now," John replied. He offered no other explanation.

"Are you absolutely sure?" Kelly pressed him. She chanced a glance over her shoulder to let him
know she was serious. She didn't want him to try and force himself to enjoy this. Nor was it worth
risking the trust they had in each other to push John into doing anything his mind or his body wasn't
tuned for.

Fortunately for her, the look on John's face was one she knew well. It was the same look he often
had when they were alone, sharing a bed, with their bodies intertwined. His blue-gray eyes stared
straight into her deeper blue ones, and he nodded once. She had no more doubts as to whether he
was ready.

Kelly allowed John to use the hands he had on her waist to spin her around so that she was facing
him. Any lingering uncertainty between them melted away as they kissed. She let her hands lay flat
on his chest, and his thumbs drew slow circles over the ridge of her pelvis. After about a minute of
this, John's hands moved up along her torso, stopping at the middle of her ribcage once they reached
the hem of her exercise bra. He hooked his fingertips under the edge of the material and Kelly
understood his signal as she broke away from their kiss to raise her arms above her head. He
removed the garment from her in one swift upward pull. No sooner had he done so than Kelly had
her own hands busy unbuckling his belt. She slipped it free of his pants' belt loops, then deftly
unclasped the button and opened the zipper.

She was about to tug his pants down, but as she looked to the floor she realized that he still had his
combat boots on. It was clear that if he was to get undressed quickly it was going to have to be a solo task. Kelly placed her fingertips against John's abdomen and pushed him away from her just a little. She looked back up at his face to catch his inquiring expression. But a simple tip of her chin downward told him all that he needed to know.

When Kelly was younger, and her relationship with John was still in its early stages, she had never imagined that their ability to communicate and understand one another without words would be such a benefit in intimate situations. The way they used signs, gestures, and body language at times like this was essentially the same way they used them in the field. It was just a vastly different application of those skills than what they'd developed them for since training. Still, it was familiar and helped put their nerves to rest. They had experimented with talking dirty during foreplay only once before. Unfortunately it only resulted in Kelly having to try not to laugh, and John becoming so flustered it was more of a turn-off than anything. After that they agreed their physical interactions were adequate to get things moving - complimented by natural sounds of pleasure and occasional softly-spoken words.

John gave her a nod of acknowledgement and stepped away so he could use one of the benches in the center of the aisle to prop his foot on. He then started to undo the straps of his shoes. Meanwhile Kelly only had to peel off her workout pants. As she worked her remaining garment down her legs she focused on the heat pooled in the areas of her body where John had massaged her with his hands. She wanted to hold on to the arousal that had been stoked within her. At the same time she kept her gaze on her partner as he stripped. His pants stretched taut over the curve of his ass when he bent down to remove his boots. Socks and trousers came off next. The way the muscles in his back undulated as he removed his shirt was always a feast for her eyes, and this was no exception. Once John finally slid his underwear off she got a decent view of his buttocks until he turned to face her once more.

Kelly swallowed involuntarily at the sight of him unclothed. She had thought he was impressive when she admired his form in his techsuit earlier that day...Now how incredible his body truly was came back to her in full-force. She hardly even registered the pattern of scars that covered his skin. Though she was subconsciously aware of how several of the marks, namely those from the augmentations, mirrored her own.

She licked her lips - in a manner she hoped was at least somewhat seductive - and reached behind her head to pull the tie from her ponytail. Kelly slipped the elastic band around her wrist for safekeeping; she had others, but this cobalt blue one was her favorite. The strands of her hair tickled the top of her shoulders and she ran her fingers against her scalp to sweep her locks back so they wouldn't get in her face. John watched her, unmoving, as he waited for further instruction. A wild thought of tackling him to the ground and making love to him right there on the floor of the locker room raced across her mind, but she immediately dismissed it. They could do better than that.

Kelly examined John again through a more objective lens. The pale skin of his cheeks and chest were tinted pink from his own budding arousal. However, a quick visual inspection of his lower region indicated he wasn't ready for sex quite yet. She suddenly felt a small shiver run through her body that had nothing to do with her desire. The room wasn't exactly well-insulated, which was all the more noticeable when standing there naked. Kelly assessed her surroundings. She hadn't remotely planned for any of this. Though surely there was a way to make things work.

Just then an idea struck her and she knew exactly what to do. By taking their activities into where the showers were, they could turn on the water to keep warm. It also provided them additional privacy as well as an alibi for their state of undress in the event anyone else entered the room.

She approached John and reached out to wrap her hand around his wrist. Kelly then headed for the
blocked off section of the room that separated the showers from the lockers. She pulled his arm gently for only a second before letting go, confident he would know to follow her lead. Sure enough he did, and kept pace behind her and they walked into the washing area.

"Enjoying the view?" Kelly remarked coquettishly, as she swayed her hips in a more pronounced fashion with each step. A little extra flirting never hurt.

John didn’t respond right away, and she didn't need to look back at him to know his face and neck were turning red at the tease. What happened next took Kelly totally by surprise; not an easy thing to accomplish. Perhaps it was because she had her guard down due to the fact she trusted John implicitly when they were being intimate like this. Regardless, when his arm snaked from behind her and wrapped around her torso, there was nothing she could do to react before John had her in a tight embrace.

"I always enjoy seeing you like this," he said, as he brushed his lips to the side of her temple.

His volume was quiet, but the growling undertone to his voice thrilled her. The tiny hairs on the back of Kelly's neck stood on end as her skin registered the heat radiating from him. The feeling didn't last though. John promptly disentangled himself from her and took the few additional strides necessary to reach the nearest showerhead. He adjusted the dial that was on the wall beneath it, and a cascade of water burst from the sprayer.

Apparently he hadn't needed her to lead him as much as she'd thought.

Kelly joined him under the stream posthaste. The hot water pricked her skin as her body adapted to the sudden change in temperature. She ran a hand over each of her arms and smoothed her wet hair back over her head. John shared the shower with her and rubbed his hands across his arms, torso, and face to get acclimated as well. After they'd both been sufficiently warmed and moistened by the water, Kelly stepped towards the wall so she would be out of the direct path of the most powerful part of the spray. John did the same, and she knew that from there he would wait for her to make the next move.

In spite of her speed being her most revered trait, Kelly had learned how to slow down and take her time when it came to certain things. Especially when it was most important for her to do so. And being with the one person she loved more than anything, in this special way, undeniably fell into that category. They stood facing each other in a mutually understood silence that felt almost sacred. Kelly allowed the stillness to linger as she committed every facet of the moment to memory.

The soft hiss of the showerhead contrasted the sound of water flowing into the floor drain. Tendrils of steam curled up through the air around them. Kelly reached up and ran her hand over John's short brown hair. Then she slid her grip down to the back of his neck and pulled him in for a simple, heartfelt kiss. John was the epitome of the word "solid", both in shape and in nature; but no matter what his lips always felt so soft. They separated, and Kelly sighed longingly while he stayed close and pressed his forehead against hers. John's hands slowly roamed over her wet skin. His left settled against her lower back, drawing her nearer to him. The right drifted to her front and teased the flesh of her breasts.

Kelly moved her hands over his shoulders and down his torso. She let her fingertips trace the outlines of his firm muscles as she tilted her head up to kiss him again. John returned the kiss in earnest, and she felt his hand press harder into the small of her back. As they parted she ran her tongue across his lower lip and then took it between her teeth, tugging gently, causing a soft rush of breath to escape him. At the same time John's other hand began to explore her chest more audaciously. He kneaded his palm against her skin and ran circles around each nipple with his thumb. This sent tingles up Kelly's spine as she pressed her lips back to his, opening her mouth and inviting him to taste her with
his tongue.

A low hum vibrated in John's throat as they kissed deeply and his hips pushed against hers. Kelly let out a breathy moan when they separated for air, as their bodies briefly continued to grind in an undefined pattern. The fingers of his right hand travelled back and forth across her bust as he squeezed and stroked each breast in turn. Meanwhile her own hands wandered over his chest, abdomen, and sides. Feeling every place where his smooth skin transitioned to being puckered or rough from scarring. John then dipped his head and kissed along the curve of her neck. In response Kelly tipped her head back and to the side to grant him greater access to the area. He proceeded to nip gently at her collarbone and leaned down to press a series of open-mouthed kisses to her chest.

Kelly was aware that if she let him get too focused on his favorite erogenous zone on her body, the risk of them getting interrupted before they'd finished would increase dramatically. Due to his earlier ministrations her arousal had begun to reach its peak as well. She started to rock her hips against him again in a more rhythmic motion, and moved her hands back up to his shoulders in an effort to raise his attention to her face. John got the hint and straightened up. Though not without bringing both his hands around to her front for a few final, soft touches to her breasts before he placed them on her sides.

Without prompting, John stepped closer and pushed himself against her. Kelly felt a rush of excitement as she allowed him to take the initiative. He gently forced her backward until her back was pressed into the shower wall. Contact with the cold metal made goosebumps arise on her skin, but she didn't tense up or utter a sound in protest. After a moment's pause, John advanced on her and kissed her fiercely. His hands caressed her body as he kept her pinned with his larger frame. Kelly let him hold her there, grasping his shoulders tightly as she closed her eyes and allowed herself to drown in his affection.

John gripped her hips, and once he'd ceased his kisses he slipped one hand down her thigh to her knee. Curling his fingers behind it, he lifted her leg and hooked it around his own thigh. As her sex opened up to him and pressed against his groin, John's rumble of approval reverberated through her body. She kept her eyes closed and focused on every pleasurable sensation that was caused by the friction between their skin. Kelly could feel that he was now fully erect as his dick brushed the inside of her leg, tantalizingly close to her core.

"Please, John..." His name lingered on Kelly's lips as all other words died in her throat. Everything seemed to be drowned out by the feeling of her heartbeat as it hammered in her chest and the sound of her and John's heavy breathing. Kelly writhed against him in an act of primal need, while John only groaned with desire in response and swept his mouth along her jawline. She rocked her hips into his a few more times and then decided to take things to the next level.

They'd never attempted to make love this way. Time was not on their side either as water continued to run from the showerhead and the door to the locker room remained unsecured. But Kelly hardly cared about those details. All that mattered now was that her body and John's body became one in an intimate dance until they both reached completion.

Kelly redoubled her grip on his shoulders. She used her forearms to stabilize herself then lifted her whole body and wrapped both legs around his waist for better purchase. As she did so, John reacted instinctively and slid his hands up the back of her legs to provide additional support. He cupped the firm, muscular flesh at the top of her thighs just beneath her buttocks. Once she was securely positioned, Kelly reopened her eyes. The first thing she noticed was how the height difference between her and John had been negated. Swiftly she leaned in to take full advantage of this and kissed him as passionately as she could. Water from the shower occasionally ran into their mouths as they vigorously tasted each other.
After they finally broke apart, Kelly rested her forehead against John's. The tip of his nose touched her own and all she could see in her primary field of vision was his eyes. He kept his gaze steadily on her as well. Kelly then signaled him to proceed with a nod—same as she had done when they'd first started. Both of them trembled in anticipation as John shifted his stance to ensure they were properly aligned. The closeness of his body kept her braced against the wall. He took a few steadying breaths, while Kelly held hers, then eased himself into her sex. Her body was fully prepared to receive him and John groaned through clenched teeth as her warm, slick flesh enveloped his length. Kelly exhaled a drawn-out moan as she felt him push in as far as their current position would allow.

With his cock sheathed inside her and Kelly's pelvis flush to his own, John kissed her once on the mouth. Then he slowly began to move. In the back of her mind, Kelly had expected that being taken vertically against the wall like this would be a somewhat difficult and strenuous feat. Both for John and for herself. But with her legs keeping their bodies in-line with each other and his hands holding her up as though she weighed nothing, she found that was not the case at all. Kelly leaned her upper body forward so she could nibble at John's earlobe, then kissed the side of his jaw. She angled her hips down a little more as well so that his thrusts reached deeper.

The heels of Kelly's feet pressed into the small of his back. Her toes curled as she sighed aloud in exhilaration at the feel of his heat reaching the innermost parts of her. She kept her arms around him and used that leverage to provide a slight up and down counterpoint to his thrusting. Kelly could feel her breasts rub against John's chest with each motion she made. Which was something she knew he would find pleasant. Her breath was coming harder and faster as John moved within her, his body weight still keeping her pressed firmly into the wall. Droplets on her skin cooled as air circulated through the open space of the shower area, but the chill would then be soothed by fresh rivulets of steaming water as she and John joined together under the spray of the showerhead.

She whispered his name under her breath again as she arched between the wall and his body, and he uttered her name in return. John bent his knees to give himself increased range and strength so he could thrust into her with greater force. Though his rhythm and technique remained consistent; the back and forth motion of his hips was punctuated by the intermittent grind of his stomach and pelvis against her own. John buried his face in her neck and kept up his steady pace. Kelly's previously soft moans grew louder in response to his actions. Her fingertips pressed hard enough into his shoulders to leave red marks on his skin.

The sound of flesh meeting flesh became part of the background noise around them. Kelly whimpered and panted while John nuzzled the space between her jaw and her collarbone. The pressure that had built inside her threatened to overflow as the figurative spring in her gut coiled to the breaking point. Her skin tingled all over and her whole body felt saturated with heat and moisture. Not just because of the shower water that poured over her, but also due to her own impending orgasm. John had also started to grunt in pleasure after every couple of thrusts—a sign he was near his finish. She knew neither of them would last much longer.

John's hands clenched at her backside as he pushed himself inside her over and over again. Kelly then slid her hands to the sides of his neck and pulled him into a kiss just as her inner muscles started to quiver uncontrollably. After a few more deep thrusts from John, Kelly moaned into his mouth as she finally felt her body achieve its much needed release. She pulled her lips from his to let out a husky, strained cry of euphoria as she clenched tightly around him. Kelly's eyes squeezed shut and her brow furrowed as she rode out the spasms coursing through her. It was like being hit with jolts of electricity, except instead of pain there was only pleasure. Pleasure, and a fiery heat that threatened to engulf her until it eased into a soothing warmth that seeped all the way down into her carbonized bones.
John slowed his movements as she climaxed, but didn't stop completely. As soon as the last roiling wave of Kelly's orgasm washed over her and subsequently faded away, she inhaled a few shaky breaths and finally opened her eyes again. The look on John's face was one of utmost concentration, and he exuded a level of intensity she'd seen in him on only a handful of occasions. Which had either been after particularly arduous missions, or during moments such as this: when they were in the throes of exceptionally passionate lovemaking. Once again she found herself drawn in by his eyes. To Kelly it felt like time ceased to exist as they stared not just at each other, but seemingly into each other as well.

It was in that singular moment of pure, soul-deep connection between just the two of them that John tumbled over the edge. He drove one final thrust into Kelly and she felt another burst of tension flare against her abdomen. A rough, unintelligible noise erupted from him and he dropped his forehead onto her shoulder as he convulsed inside her. Kelly clung to him, and gently flexed her hips to allow him in deeper still. John's breath was ragged and hot as it danced over her skin. He murmured her name again as waves of pleasure crashed through him, same as those that had befallen her not even a minute ago.

Kelly waited for the shudders of his own climax to taper off before she moved again. Her hand reached up to rest on the back of his neck. After a pause John lifted his head to face her. As he peered at her through heavy-lidded eyes, it was as if the icy blue was warring with the stormy gray for which color would dominate his irises. Beads of water had also collected on his lashes and browline. She smiled tenderly and leaned in to press a delicate, languid kiss to his lips. John kept his mouth near to hers even after the kiss had ended. They remained that way for a long moment, basking in their consummation and sharing breath.

It seemed all too soon before John's fingers bent against the back of her legs, signaling that it was time for them to carry on. Kelly supported some of her weight with her arms atop his shoulders as he carefully began to work his hands down her thighs. Slowly her legs slid over the side of his hips and straightened out as he lowered her to stand on her own, gently removing himself from her core at the same time. When Kelly's feet touched the floor she found her knees to be stiff and her legs wobbly. John must've been in similar straits, as he placed a hand against the wall behind her in order to steady himself. Though his other hand rested lightly on her waist. Kelly brought her hands down to his chest and steadied herself in turn as she leaned into him. Apparently their exertions had taken more of a toll on them than she thought.

If she weren't feeling so breathless, Kelly would have laughed at the irony of the situation. Two Spartan-IIs...members of the UNSC's most elite fighting force, surgically augmented to surpass any natural human capability, trained since childhood to endure any and all hardships on the battlefield...practically brought to their knees by a few minutes of foreplay and a round of really good sex.

She saw John reach over and turn the dial to the shower. He lowered the temperature of the water just enough so that their now-flushed bodies wouldn't overheat. Kelly inhaled deep to recoup as much of her strength as she could, then sidestepped away from John as she reached for the liquid-soap dispenser mounted on the wall. The device was nestled between their showerhead and the one adjacent. Its contents were designated hypoallergenic, and also served as both shampoo and bodywash. She pushed the pump a few times to get a decent handful of the faintly scented solution. John had shifted so that he was standing in the center of the jet of running water. He made room for her under the spray and Kelly took his hand to pass him a portion of the soap.

Before he could withdraw, she pulled his hand towards her and guided it to rest in the center of her chest above her breasts. So he wouldn't become confused as to what her intentions were, Kelly looked up at him and then placed her sudsy palm against his collarbone. She began to rub over the
side of his neck and shoulder area to work up a lather. John got the idea, and soon they were taking
turns washing each other front to back. This activity was not sexual at all, but in a way it felt just as
intimate. Kelly took special care as she massaged her fingers along his hairline and around the
neural-lace port at the base of his skull. When she'd finished her task she pressed her lips softly to
John's shoulder blade. It probably wasn't wise to do anything that might delay them from wrapping
things up here. But it was short and sweet, so no harm no foul. At least that was how Kelly justified
it to herself.

Their armor and undersuits may have protected them from grime and wicked away sweat, but it still
felt good to get thoroughly clean. Kelly and John stood together under the running water for an
additional minute to rinse themselves of any remaining soap bubbles. Then John finally shut off the
flow from the sprayer, which left the room seeming eerily quiet for a second afterward.

Without speaking, they both moved to the dry side of the shower partition. Towels were stored in
ventilated compartments that lined the wall. Kelly removed two, and passed one to John while she
proceeded to ring the excess water out her hair. After quickly running the cloth along her limbs, her
chest, and then finally her back, she rubbed it against her hair one last time before turning around to
face John.

He was just finishing scrubbing the moisture from his head as well. When he was done he let the
towel fall to hang loose from around the back of his neck and over his shoulders. This, combined
with his currently ruddy complexion plus how some of his short hair was sticking up at odd angles,
made him look boyish in a fashion that Kelly hadn't seen him in a long time. It brought to mind how
much had changed for them and about them over the years. Yet she was also reminded of all the
things that had stayed the same - including how much she adored him.

John quirked his eyebrows at her and opened his mouth to say something, but Kelly cut him off as
she grabbed both ends of the towel and lassoed him into a kiss. Once again she just couldn't help
herself. John reciprocated the action wholeheartedly as he put his hands on her upper arms and drew
her closer to him. They were both still warm from the shower, and obviously the afterglow of their
lovemaking hadn't yet dissipated.

Unfortunately they were already on borrowed time. So once they'd parted to take a breath Kelly put
her palms flat against John's chest and gently forced herself to take a step back. "I think we should go
dressed," she said. Her voice was barely above a whisper.

"Good idea," John replied, his tone hushed also. He knew as well as she did that it would be pushing
even his luck at this point to engage in any more...distractions.

They exited the sectioned-off washing area and walked back into the main portion of the locker
room. Their clothes remained where they had been discarded. Kelly scooped up her workout attire,
and held out a hand to John as a sign for him to give her his towel, which he did. She took their items
around the corner of the row of lockers and deposited them into one of the general purpose laundry
chutes. When she returned John was already pulling on his pants. Though she saw he had been so
thoughtful as to lay out the fatigues that had been packed in her gym bag for her. He'd also placed
her boots neatly on the floor by the bench. Kelly slipped on her undergarments, but stopped as she
reached for her shirt and pants. Since she was already washed up, she might as well finish her usual
post-armor-removal grooming routine.

She started to make her way over to the wash basins instead, when John's slightly anxious voice
sounded behind her. "Where are you going?" he called.

Kelly looked over her shoulder and saw the belt he was midway through threading between the
loops on his pants had seemingly been forgotten. She grinned at him, "What? You mean I shouldn't
go prancing around the ship in my skivvies?" His eyes widened and she couldn't help but laugh.
"Don't worry, John. I'm just going to take care of one more item of personal business while we're in
here."

Over by the sinks there was a tall, slim vending machine. On the front of it was a screen and a
keypad with buttons labeled with a list of travel-size, disposable hygiene products. With soldiers
often moving from one ship to another with little time to prepare their personal effects it was
necessary for the UNSC to make these amenities easily available. They weren't free, but Kelly never
paid attention to the prices. The cost of such purchases was a pittance when deducted from the pay
the Spartan-IIs had accrued over the years. The dummy bank accounts that had been set up for each
of them since their conscription were never sort of funds. Kelly finished making her selections, and
tapped in her service number to activate the dispenser when she saw John approaching in her
periphery vision. She turned her head to look at him and realized that he hadn't put on his shirt. Not
that she minded at all.

He smiled just a little and raised his hand to trace his thumb against his jawline; indicating the barely
visible stubble that had accumulated during the last legs of their previous deployment. John hardly
had the same hair growth rate some of their peers did. For instance Fred was usually battling a full
beard by the time he got his helmet off if he didn't get the chance to clean up during extended
missions. Kelly was half-waiting for someone to mistake him for "The Master Chief" one of these
days, because of how Fred's well-manicured goatee made him seem more stately. However she
would always be partial to John's clean-shaven look.

Once John had what he needed they walked over to the mirrors together and went about their own
rituals. Kelly ran a brush through her drying hair until it fell about her face in dark brown waves. She
let it trail freely around her shoulders as she moved on to shave her underarms and legs. Through the
loose curtain of her hair she could see John was watching her as she stretched this way and that to
reach parts of her body, and suppressed a chuckle. She discreetly checked if her bikini area needed
attention, but everything seemed under control so she let it be. John had never expressed a preference
in that regard anyway. He certainly hadn't minded a few minutes ago when they were in the shower.

They shared the bar of dual-purpose shaving and deodorant soap as well as a small tube of
toothpaste. John had combed his hair to lay smoothly against his head, and Kelly finally pulled her
tresses back into their usual ponytail. The blue hair tie had left a red line around her wrist, but it
would fade soon enough. Similar to the lingering marks on other places of her and John's skin where
their grip on one another had been firmest. When they had both finished their ablutions John
collected the assortment of used personal-care articles and tossed them into the slot of the of garbage
chute built into the wall.

He then took a step in the direction of where they left their clothes, but stopped and turned when
Kelly beckoned to him, "Hold up, Spartan." She closed the gap between them. "You are overdue for
an inspection," she added coyly as she trailed her fingers along the underside of his chin. The skin
was perfectly smooth and supple to the touch. Kelly nodded in satisfaction. "I'd say you've earned a
passing grade."

John said nothing in reply, but rather reached up to take her right hand. He raised it so that her palm
was pressed against his cheek, and covered her hand with his own for a just a second before sliding
his grip downward to her wrist. He then moved Kelly’s arm so that he could press his lips to the heel
of her palm. John released her a second later and turned to walk away as casually as could be.

Even after everything that had happened since he'd found her in the locker room, Kelly marveled at
how the simplest gesture of affection from John could still send a shiver down her spine.
They returned to getting dressed, and Kelly stole one last glance at John's chiseled pecs and abs before he slipped on his shirt. After that she wasted no time putting on her own fatigues. Kelly had just tightened the final straps of her boots when she felt a light touch on her shoulder. Unlike his touches from earlier though, this was merely John asking for her attention.

Kelly stood to face her partner and waited for him to talk first. The expression on his face, while not unhappy, seemed clouded. "There's something I want to say." John paused for a moment as he contemplated how to properly articulate himself. He may have been able to distill any complicated combat strategy into easy-to-digest commands when in the field, but when it came to personal matters like this he always had some trouble. She offered him a gentle, encouraging smile and remained silent. "About what I told you when we were leaving the hangar bay," he continued. "It's not that I don't want to be intimate with you. It's just that there are times when I...don't think I can."

"I know that," she replied. "We've dealt with this issue before, after all. And I doubt today will be the last. But don't believe for one second that I think any less of you for that. It's okay to be honest with me when you're not feeling up to making love. Physically, mentally, or both." John inclined his head in agreement at what she said, and Kelly was relieved that he understood. Just because her libido was stronger than his own didn't mean his performance in that department was inadequate. Far from it.

As though he had sensed her thoughts, John spoke up again. "I only want to be certain my limitations don't get in the way. It wouldn't be fair of me to lead you to expect something, and then be unable to fulfill your needs."

"My desires aren't the only ones that matter, John. What you need is just as important. And if necessary I can still take care of myself - as you saw firsthand." Kelly was over her bashfulness at having been witnessed masturbating. This was John she was talking to, after all. She had nothing to hide from him.

"Regardless, I'm glad that things changed. We were both able to get what we wanted." The barest smile then tugged at the corners of his mouth. "I can't promise we'll be able to do things that way again, considering how variable locker room conditions are. But the experience was worth it."

Kelly's stomach fluttered slightly to hear that it had indeed been a satisfying tryst for him as well. Though they were both still learning how to navigate the complicated landscape that was being in a romantic relationship (and a clandestine one at that), they had been together long enough now to have figured out some things too. Which included the various physical mechanics of what made for enjoyable sex - at least as far as the two of them were concerned.

"I'm curious. What was it that made you change your mind this time?" she asked, unable to suppress the query. Everything had been perfect once he'd come around. Yet what precisely triggered John's arousal was still something of an enigma. So if there was an aspect of today's rendezvous that she could employ in the future to make things better for him, she would like to know what it was.

"My name," John answered. It surprised Kelly that he was able to identify the reason right away, even if she didn't quite grasp what he meant. As she tipped her head to the side in mild confusion he promptly continued to clarify. "I mean, the way you said it when I was touching you. And how you kept saying it afterward. I like it when you say my name like that. It's..."

"Sexy as hell?" she interjected, smirking as she raised her eyebrows at him suggestively.

He let out a huff, but Kelly could see the spark of amusement in John's eyes. "Yes," he affirmed without a hint of sarcasm.

Her tease backfired on her somewhat. She hadn't expected such a candid response from him and it
caught her off guard. Now Kelly was the one left mildly flustered. "Well, I'll keep that in mind for next time," she said as she looked away from him in an attempt to make her blush less noticeable.

"Kelly." John reached out and just barely touched his fingertips to the side of her chin. With the gentlest pressure he turned her head so she faced him again. "Above all, I just want you to know..." He took a deep breath, and then looked her squarely in the eye. "That I—"

Just then the automatic whir of the main door being opened echoed through the rows of lockers. Immediately followed by the sound of several boisterous voices all speaking at once. Both Spartans' heads snapped around towards the source of the noise. More than likely it was the same group of ODSTs from earlier that had come to the gym, their own workout routines now completed.

When she looked back to John she couldn't help but notice he had dropped his hand and taken a few steps away from her to put a "safe" distance between them. Without any more delay, Kelly moved to grab her now-empty gym bag. Once she had it in hand she tilted her head to indicate the route that lead to the exit. "I think that's our cue to leave," she quipped.

"Right," John replied, his voice regaining its usual matter-of-fact tone. "Fred, Linda, and Will are probably waiting for us so we can all go to mess together."

They started making their way through the locker room and Kelly finally discarded the sack into another one of the laundry chutes they passed. She was about to make a friendly joke to John regarding Fred and Will's massive appetites, when someone spoke loudly in their general direction.

"Hey! You two sure you're in the right place? This is the washroom. I thought robots go haywire when they get wet?"

Snickering laughter rolled in on the heels of the comment.

Kelly fought every urge she had to turn around and see which of the soldiers was taunting them as she kept heading for the door. The men must've been in the row that was now behind her and John and seen them leaving.

"Nah. They weren't showering. They just needed to plug into the wall for a bit to recharge. Or maybe swap out their batteries."

More laughter.

"Isn't that something that should be done in the maintenance shop? These freaks must be haywire already."

Kelly barely turned her head to glance at John out of the corner of her eye. Aside from the fact his lips were drawn into a thin line, there was no outward sign he was bothered. She saw him subtly look her way as well and give her a nigh imperceptible shake of his head. Kelly's ire deflated. In spite of herself, she knew he was right. The Spartans reacting to their heckling was exactly what the Troopers wanted. Any retaliation on her part wasn't worth giving them the satisfaction of knowing they'd gotten to her. She tuned out whatever else the marines said and only focused on getting to the exit. In a few long strides she and John left the locker room side-by-side.

Their walk back to the elevator was quiet. Kelly had a moment of déjà-vu as John once again keyed in the code that would summon the lift. It was hard for her to believe that a little less than two hours ago she was sure she and John would not be spending any time alone during this respite between missions. And yet, somehow, things couldn't have worked out any better. Kelly didn't like to credit every instance of good fortune they had to John's knack for being lucky. But today she was
incredibly grateful for whatever cosmic alignment it was that may have had him in its favor.

The flush of their passion had long since faded from their skin. Though the warmth and contentment Kelly felt throughout her whole body remained. As the door pinged and opened to let them step into the compartment, she also noticed a lightness to John's gait. Which was something that hadn't been there when she'd observed him in the hangar after his armor was removed.

Both of them stood at ease as the lift activated. Kelly didn't try to stop herself from gazing at John for the duration of the ride. The overwhelming ache of desire she'd felt earlier had definitely been quelled. She was just making the most of this opportunity to enjoy looking at him without worry of rousing suspicion, since they were still away from prying eyes. Kelly entertained the idea of asking John what he had been about to tell her before they'd been interrupted by the ODSTs entering the locker room, but a second later she let it go. The moment had passed. There would be a better time and place for that conversation some other day.

As if on cue, John turned his head towards her and gave her an examining look. "Everything all right?" he inquired.

"Everything is fine," she said in her most reassuring tone. "Thank you, by the way."

"For what?" he asked. Though his eyes communicated something else entirely. Kelly could tell that, while John was being discreet with his words, he was wondering if she was referring to their most recent dalliance. And if so, why.

Kelly shook her head once in response to his underlying question. "Just...Thank you. For everything. For just being you." she replied. Probably not the clearest answer. But she meant what she said. It wasn't possible for her to condense her appreciation for John into one category. Or express it for any one reason. She loved him for all that he was, all the time.

The lift slowed to a stop as they reached the deck where Blue Team's quarters was located. Kelly quickly reached over and gave his fingers a gentle squeeze. She felt John's thumb brush against the back of her hand before they separated when the door of the elevator slid open. Kelly allowed herself a small sigh: time to get back to business as usual.

Undoubtedly the pair looked every inch the super-soldiers they were to every other person they passed in the corridors. As she often did when returning to her duties after a private escapade with John, Kelly mused over what people who considered the Spartans nothing more than killing machines - like those ODSTs - would think if they knew what had transpired on this ship. What would they say if they were aware she and John had just come from having an amazing lovemaking session? And in the showers, no less? She was certain that the way John satisfied her was worth bragging about as well. The flickering remnant of the rebellious spirit that remained within her always grew a tad stronger at the thought.

At the same time though, having something that was a secret from everyone aside from John and herself was not a thing she would ever give up. At least not willingly. All the other aspects of her day-to-day existence were managed by the UNSC, and the Spartans were constantly scrutinized by ONI. So potential punishments aside, she'd be damned if she lost one of the precious few things she truly had control over in her life. In a way, keeping her fraternization with John under wraps was the most defiant thing she could do. The UNSC would continue to believe they owned her body and soul...Whereas she would continue to love, and be loved in return, right under their noses. On top of getting paid for it all the while.

Kelly was shaken from her reveries as she and John entered the barracks. Like John had presumed, the other three members of Blue Team were there and appeared just about ready to head off to
Fred confirmed Kelly's assessment as he smiled and raised his hand to wave at them. "This is perfect. We were hoping you two would finish up your workout in time to meet us for mess."

"Of course. After having nothing but field rations for so long there's no way we'd miss being first in line for a hot plate of real food," Kelly said, her voice bright and jovial.

"Well I don't know about you, but I'm getting two plates. And that's just to start," Will joked, flashing a grin. "I'm not afraid to take full advantage of our unlimited-meal-portion clearance today."

"Seconded," Fred said.

This prompted a chuckle from Kelly. Linda rolled her eyes and huffed, though her expression was one of mild amusement. John allowed himself a small smile and shook his head bemusedly.

John then straightened his shoulders back and looked to each of his teammates as he spoke up, "No sense in tarrying then. Blue Team, fall out." His words resonated with the same authority they carried when he issued commands in battle, but Kelly could hear the minor difference in his pitch that indicated he wasn't being 100% serious. Obviously the others did too, as no one snapped to attention or saluted.

Kelly fell into step with her comrades as they all headed for the dining room. She heard a swift intake of breath from beside her and looked over at Will, who was obviously the source.

"You shower off already?" he asked her directly. It was an innocent question. Clearly he'd picked up the scent of the soap she'd used for washing and grooming.

"John and I both did," Kelly said as she nodded at her friend. "Sorry for not waiting to go with the rest of you after supper. But with it being a while since our armor was last removed, after working out it seemed prudent to just get cleaned up - given that we were already in the vicinity of the locker room." It was a stretch of the truth for certain. But neither was it a total lie. And not like she could've told Will the full story of what happened either way.

"That was smart," Will said after a moment's consideration. "By the time we get down to the showers there's liable to be no hot water left. What with everyone else on the ship probably looking to wash off around that time as well."

Kelly only shrugged apologetically in reply, and Will turned to face forward in order to say something to Fred. She didn't pick up what it was though, because Linda's voice sounding from her opposite side caught her attention next.

"So John located you without any trouble, I take it?" Linda's tone was casual. But unlike with Will, there was something more beneath the surface of this query that Kelly couldn't quite decipher. Linda was like a sister to her, yet even after all these years she was still unable to fully read the sniper's speech and body language. Which was an ongoing issue of both envy and fascination for Kelly due to her own expressive and open nature.

"Yes," she replied, trying not to sound too guarded. Kelly then recalled how John had mentioned Linda was the one who had told him where to find her after she had initially left the barracks to go for her run.

Before Kelly could say anything else, however, Linda's lips curled upward in an uncharacteristically clear smile. "You're welcome," she said coolly. Her green eyes held a glint of smug satisfaction. With that comment Linda looked forward once again as well, and Kelly knew better than to press the
She’d long suspected that Linda was aware of what the exact nature of her relationship with John was. But Kelly wasn't about to ask for clarification either. Because if Linda did indeed know about their furtive romance, if she intended to do something with that knowledge she would've by now. Odds were that she simply wanted to remind Kelly that nothing went unnoticed by her. Kelly had no problem letting Linda have that personal victory if that was the case. For now she was content to let sleeping dogs lie.

The rest of the evening was pleasant and uneventful. Blue Team sat together at dinner and talked among themselves. The fare was nothing spectacular. A limited selection of protein, vegetable, and carbohydrate options to choose from was the usual menu on starships like this. Still, all the dishes were flavorful and filling enough. There was also something comforting about seeing a tray of ingredients that had indeed come straight from actual plants and animals. Opposed to their usual spread when in the field, where everything was processed down into nutrient-dense bars.

Fred and Will made good on their claims and put away several more helpings of food each than what was typical even for most Spartans. Though they chatted fine in between bites. As usual Linda and John were the quietest of the group, but listened attentively to all that was said. Kelly seated herself next to John. She played her role of being liaison between everyone so that the conversation flowed smoothly.

After finishing their meals the team split up, and Kelly returned to the Spartans' quarters with John in tow. They both went about setting up their sleeping spaces to their liking, trading benign comments here and there. Kelly knew the others would be back soon so she saw no reason to start anything, and by John's behavior she could tell he concurred. Not that there was much else for them to do or say to each other at this point anyway.

Kelly hummed quietly as she made herself comfortable on her cot. It was an old tune native to Reach. One that she'd learned from Jorge back during their training days. Out of the corner of her eye she could see that John would occasionally look in her direction, and he would smile that smile he only gave to her when he was completely relaxed. She wasn't sure if he knew he was doing it or not. But regardless, it made her heart swell to see that he was feeling at peace too.

This was one of those exceedingly rare times when everything was as it should be. Blue Team had emerged from their previous operation unscathed. They helped secure a victory for the UNSC by beating back the Covenant swarm. Plus a planet was spared from imminent destruction. Not only that, Kelly had been able to fully express her desire for the one she loved and share that feeling with him in the most intimate way possible. No matter what the future brought to bear, she was positive the memories she made on days like today would be what sustained her through the harrowing fights that surely lay ahead. She and John were partners - in every way possible. So long as that was the case, Kelly knew that she could not fail.

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